

## Synopsis for “*Oblivion*” by Michael Delving

Arnie Kenn is an experienced computer temp who is given an unusual offer: to work for a top-secret grand jury trial on a special proprietary computer system – at double his normal rate. Arnie gets his wife Jane’s reticent approval (who works at home, also on computers, but work that she never shares with Arnie).

Arnie undergoes testing on the advanced computer system, which not only calls up files using brain waves, but also can erase the operator’s short-term memory after each use. During the testing, Arnie discovers the real subject of the trial: a special Grand Jury is going to debate releasing fifty-plus years of Government information about UFOs, and then decide whether or not we should cooperate with Them. As he leaves, he notices the secretary is working on some unusual hieroglyphic shorthand, apparently transcripts involving the trial.

He keeps a dentist’s appointment before leaving, and is secretly drugged and questioned by his dentist, who reports afterward in a private phone call that Arnie doesn’t remember a thing.

At the airport, Arnie climbs onboard, and is shocked to realize he’s the only passenger, until a single other man arrives. During the flight, Arnie gets up to talk to him, and finds the man is almost an exact duplicate of Arnie!

While Arnie flies westward, we overhear a phone conversation. A daughter out West is calling her mother, who helps out at the Church of the End Times. The connection is unclear, though the Reverend of the Church knows of the call, and seems to be aware of its significance, and fully in agreement with what the mother says.

The plane lands in KC, where the Other Man disembarks. The plane continues on, eventually arriving in Seattle, where Arnie is met by a security specialist named Falconetti. He drives Arnie deep into the Olympic Mountains of northwest Washington State. As they leave the highway for a smaller back road, they pass Merle’s Service Station. Outside, bearded old Merle sits with his legs propped up on a railing; unseen inside are four black-uniformed guards who watch Falconetti’s car on a bank of monitors that see everything approaching the Lodge.

They arrive at secluded Lake Quinault Lodge, where the real trial is to be held. Falconetti explains that Kansas City is only a blind, in case people get curious. Arnie asks to see the real computer equipment, and after checking in, Vrass takes him to a special room, built secretly by the Government.

The trial room is hidden beneath the Lodge, is heavily guarded, and entrance can only be gained after hi-tech eyeball scans and voice checks. In the partially-illuminated courtroom, Arnie meets the heads of the legal team, retired Senator Jefferson Dean Claren, and the counsel for the opposing side, ex-’Company’ man James Vrass. During their conversation with Arnie, the scene fades into the fully-occupied courtroom the following day.

As the Jurors calmly file in and take their places, they put on special glasses and are shown a prepared file with a bizarre collage of UFO commercials, real UFO files and weird psychedelic colors and flashing lights. This is part of the computer ‘mind control’ program that not only conceals the memories the Jurors carry from day to day in court, but also amplifies their hidden personalities.

Claren begins the proceedings with a brief review of Roswell and the obviously phony ‘Alien Autopsy’ video footage. Claren explains how successful that particular piece of disinformation was to the Jurors, who are identified only by their Juror Number. The ‘real’ autopsy footage is shown next with questions following, and we discover that the rules of a Grand Jury are different than a regular trial. For instance, this Jury can ask for evidence whenever they like. Arnie is challenged to call up as much info as he can on how many people have been permanently ‘silenced’ by the Government. Claren loudly warns them to “Wake up!” to the war that he feels is underway.

That night at dinner, Claren and Vrass call Arnie over to join them. Claren is called away to an urgent phone call, during which Vrass warns him to be careful of Claren; he can’t be ultimately trusted. Claren returns and sends Vrass away, so that he can surreptitiously warn Arnie about Vrass. Arnie winds up unsure who to trust.

During subsequent trial sessions, the Jury is exposed to one challenging UFO revelation after another:

- A NATO sergeant, his identity electronically hidden, describes how UFOs in the 60s nearly caused several nuclear launches, through intimidating overflights of the Soviet Union.
- Much of what we consider the greatest inventions of the 20th century – computers, microelectronics, fiber optics – are the result of reverse-engineering from crashed or ‘borrowed’ alien ships;
- Vrass explains how we received many of the ‘borrowed’ craft: by trading some human volunteers for them, all of whom have never returned.
- As many as a dozen sites worldwide are currently inhabited by aliens and used as permanent bases;
- Claren then lists for them seven subjects that are the subject of intense controversy and wild speculation, and challenges the Jury to decide which are true. Juror Twelve realizes it doesn’t matter, that the public will never let go of their cherished beliefs, no matter how wrong.
- Claren also divulges the real reason aliens are frightened of us: the speed at which we evolve.

In between trial sessions, Arnie gets to know Juror Thirteen, whose real name is Sarah. She seems interested in Arnie, even flirts with him. But soon we learn she is the woman who made the phone call to the End Times Ministry, and that her 'mother' there is really a cover, so that she can secretly report on the trial to the Reverend.

During the following weekend, Jane makes the trip out to visit Arnie, so that she can spend her birthday with him. They make love late that night, then bump into Claren in the main lounge the next morning. He and Arnie engage in a spirited chess game, which eventually ends in a draw. Jane drags Arnie for a walk in the dripping rain forest outside, where they meet Falconetti on the trail. Falconetti discusses how much he misses his wife, and Arnie wonders how much of his comments are a subtle warning to steer clear of Sarah.

While Arnie spends the weekend with Jane, Sarah calls in to the Ministry, and suggests through a previously arranged code that they move on to Plan B. The Reverend then places a private call to a reporter in LA, who travels up the coast to investigate the trial. But just as he gets close to the Lodge, he's intercepted by three pale-skinned humanoids in a dark Cadillac, the infamous "Men in Black," better known in Government circles as "Silencers."

At the beginning of the third week, the trial hosts two visitors who appear like beautiful Nordic humans. But instead of treating the Jurors in a friendly way, they berate them (and Claren) for the way humans have destroyed our planet and its resources. They are about to condemn all humans because of our mistakes, until Arnie slips in a pre-recorded collage of family images and specially-chosen music, that sways the aliens' hearts. "You have until 2012 - but that's it!" one of them says, as he leaves the trial room.

The following morning, as we hear Claren apologizing for the rudeness of the previous day's visitors, we see the reporter's body lying in his car, the victim of an apparent heart attack.

During that day's session, Arnie volunteers to try out a special artifact (along with Sarah), that sends them three hundred years into the future. The Washington State they visit is a desert, a dry wasteland that nonetheless is inhabited by etheric figures that resemble dust devils. The Artifact explains who these creatures really are: former inhabitants of Mars, who find our devastated planet still far superior to their own bitterly cold and terribly dry world.

The next morning, Sarah tries to convince Arnie to join their group's resistance to the Government cover-up. Arnie's reasoning is that they're too powerful; who are we to try and stop them?

She manages to steal one of Arnie's transfer disks, as part of a plan to release a computer virus into the system and forcibly download all the files. But she comes to respect Arnie's beliefs, and decides at the last moment to go against the Church's wishes, and not use the disk. But Falconetti steals the disk from her, and for his own hidden motives, places the virus-laden disk in with Arnie's regular disks.

Eventually, Juror One calls for a vote, on the day when Sarah is not present. The Jurors explain their individual reasoning behind voting the way they do. The vote splits six to six, and Claren steps up to declare the trial deadlocked. But during a heated argument about his right to do this, Arnie puts in the disk that Falconetti had slipped in with the others. Instantly, a virus spreads throughout the system, searching for a modem with which to download all the secret files. As the room automatically locks down, Claren warns of the danger of the virus: there is a security system in place that will kill all of them, if any of the files begin to leave the room.

Arnie works furiously, first delaying, then trying to reroute the virus. He finally hits upon an ingenious idea: he reprograms a local house phone to imitate an outside line, hoping to fool the virus. But will it fool the security system as well, or will they all die? Arnie wryly offers to refund his fee if this doesn't work.

The room goes deathly quiet as the virus shoots forward...then the phone rings! On the other end is the sound of a modem, trying to download! It worked, and everyone is ecstatic. It takes a while to get out from lockdown status, during which Claren offers another assignment to Arnie, who respectfully declines.

Back home, Arnie greets his wife warmly, but somewhat forcefully demands to get on their home PC. While Jane is out, Arnie connects to a brand-new email account, which informs him he has over 816,000 new files, which he begins downloading in background. He goes to bed, while Jane returns.

She sits at the computer, clicks open a special file, enters a long password, and begins doing her at-home transcription work. But soon, she gets a computer warning: the file she's trying to open is already open on her machine! She checks Arnie's downloads, and discovers he's downloading those same forbidden files! The ending Credits roll, with deep, ominous music.

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