

## CHAPTER 1 — CASE FILE OPEN

FOUNDATION INTERNAL / RESTRICTED ACCESS: Level 3 / Site-Δ Forest Annex (Remote) FILE: ΔF-SRS-118 “FOREST STRUCTURE / RECURRENT SITE” STATUS: OPEN (Legacy) → REOPENED (Current) HANDLING: Do not duplicate. Do not read recovered text aloud. Do not replay Appendix audio in shared spaces.

At first glance, the folder looked like every other folder that refused to die.

The cover was the same dull gray. The corners were soft with age. The stamped title had been replaced twice—once with a clean, bureaucratic label, then again with a more recent sticker that didn't quite sit straight, as if someone had slapped it on in a hurry and regretted it immediately.

ΔF-SRS-118.

Below that, in the smaller block reserved for human errors disguised as metadata, was a note in pen:

If you can't explain what it is, stop trying to. — unknown, attributed to “Field Lead 02” (unverified)

The duty officer who carried it into the room didn't look like he wanted to be the person holding it.

He placed it down anyway. Because the Foundation, for all its myths about control, still ran on people doing the unpleasant thing at the right time.

The meeting room at Site-Δ was narrow. Not cramped—just narrow, like it had been built for conversations that weren't meant to go wide. The overhead lights were too white. The coffee was too honest. The air-conditioning had a slight, irregular click that made the room feel like it had a heartbeat it hadn't asked for.

A handful of personnel sat around the table, all of them Level 3 or above, all of them wearing that particular version of calm that came from having already seen too much to flinch at a file name.

Dr. Havel—acting liaison for anomalous environments—opened the folder without theatrics.

The first page was a cover sheet that had been updated so many times the header looked like it had been overwritten by history.

### FOUNDATION SUMMARY

Designation: ΔF-SRS-118 Common Descriptor: “Cabin Site” (deprecated) Type: Structural Residual Site (SRS) Primary Feature: Persistent structure; unstable interpretation.

Location: [REDACTED] Access Route: [REDACTED] Nearest Settlement: [REDACTED] (population < 300) Terrain: Dense mixed forest; poor satellite resolution; inconsistent acoustic profile.

Known Hazards:

None confirmed as direct physical threats.

High incidence of non-shared perception.

Document drift / inconsistent archival integrity.

Audio anomalies (Appendix A, B).

Linguistic/semantic sensitivity suspected. (See Handling Notes)

Containment: Not applicable (site-based). Mitigation: Route denial, local cover story, repeated “clean” sweeps. Effectiveness: Low.

Current Recommendation: Re-open / re-evaluate. Deploy specialized assets.

Dr. Havel didn’t make eye contact with anyone as he read.

“Before we do anything,” he said, voice careful and ordinary, “I want the handling note to be understood by every person in this room.”

He flipped the page. The next sheet had a single line centered in bold.

**HANDLING NOTE — VOCALIZATION** Do not read any recovered text aloud. Do not repeat unknown phonemes. Do not “test” the effect of spoken language on-site. If vocalization has already occurred, halt operations and withdraw.

Someone at the far end of the table let out a soft, involuntary laugh—more reflex than humor. It died immediately. Nobody joined it.

Dr. Havel looked up then, finally, as if checking whether the room had absorbed the same reality.

“This isn’t new policy,” he added. “It’s old policy. That’s the problem.”

He tapped the folder.

“This file predates a lot of you. It’s been reopened six times across four decades. Each time, we tell ourselves we’re being cautious. Each time, we act like caution means running the same playbook more carefully.”

He paused.

“ΔF-SRS-118 doesn’t respond to that. It doesn’t respond to anything. It persists.”

He turned another page.

#### WHY THIS FILE IS HERE

Pattern Flags:

Structure reappears in consistent coordinates after each sweep.

Interior dimensions remain consistent across separate teams, separate years.

Descriptions of the interior—furniture, objects, markings, “feel”—do not match.

Photo documentation is incomplete, corrupted, or contradictory.

Foundation Concern:

The site behaves like a “fixed point” with variable semantic content.

Repeated attempts to describe or interpret the site appear to correlate with increased drift.

Operational Impact:

Conventional containment is meaningless.

Conventional documentation may worsen the condition.

The site is currently understood as an archival hazard as much as an environmental one.

Dr. Havel exhaled through his nose, the way people did when they were trying not to show irritation at the universe.

“You see the key phrase,” he said. “Archival hazard.”

A junior analyst—Level 3, young enough to still look like he wanted the job to make sense—raised a hand.

“Doctor, if it’s an archival hazard,” he asked, “why reopen it at all? Why not seal the file and cut access permanently?”

Dr. Havel’s answer was too quick, as if he’d been waiting for the question.

“Because the file won’t stay sealed,” he said. “And the site won’t stay forgotten.”

He slid the folder toward the center of the table, then reached into a second envelope and pulled out a thin stack of printouts. Not pages—excerpts.

“These,” he said, “are the last three reopenings. You’ll notice the same rhythm. Someone reports the structure. Someone clears it. Someone writes something down that they shouldn’t have been able to write down.”

He didn’t say and then we clean up—because everyone here knew what “clean up” meant. It meant sedation. It meant memory work. It meant leaving a gap in a person and filling it with a narrative that hurt less.

He placed the first excerpt on top.

EXCERPT 1 — FIELD REPORT (1994-11-03)

TEAM: Sweep Unit 12 / Site-Δ LEAD: Agent [REDACTED] SUMMARY: Routine structural confirmation; no anomalies observed. NOTES:

The structure is present at expected coordinates. Exterior matches prior photographic record. No active hazards.

Interior is empty. No furniture. No debris. No markings.

Audio: Tape recorder recovered from prior sweep (per inventory list) is not present.

Recommend file closure. Site appears inert.

ADDITIONAL: Handwritten addendum appended in non-standard ink:

“We left. We came back. The door was open. It wasn’t open when we left.”

Addendum unsigned.

A silence settled after the excerpt, the kind that wasn't for dramatic effect. The kind that happened because the brain didn't like loose ends.

"An unsigned addendum," the junior analyst murmured.

"Yes," Dr. Havel said. "And a door that behaves like a liar."

He set the next excerpt down.

EXCERPT 2 — FIELD REPORT (2007-06-18)

TEAM: Recon Unit 03 / Linguistic Hazard Support LEAD: Dr. Kline (Visiting) SUMMARY: Structural confirmation with semantic instrumentation.

Exterior confirmed.

Interior contains table, chair, shelving. Dust layer present consistent with abandonment.

Objects: One bound volume observed on table. No title visible.

Attempted photography produced 14 images. 14 images corrupted upon upload.

Attempted transcription of markings on interior wall resulted in inconsistent readings between observers.

Audio Appendix: On-site recorder captured low-frequency vocalization. No personnel recall hearing vocalization in real time.

HANDLING NOTE: Dr. Kline recommends: "Do not vocalize any recovered text until semantic stability is confirmed."

The junior analyst frowned.

"Bound volume?" he asked. "Was it recovered?"

Dr. Havel shook his head once.

"No," he said. "The same report that says it was there also lists it as 'non-recoverable due to absence upon re-entry.'"

He didn't bother hiding his dry disdain.

"It's a polite way of saying: they looked away, and it stopped agreeing to exist."

The room didn't laugh.

Dr. Havel placed the third excerpt down.

EXCERPT 3 — INTERNAL MEMO (2019-02-02)

FROM: Archival Integrity Unit TO: Site-Δ Director SUBJECT: ΔF-SRS-118 Document Drift / Unauthorized Edits

The ΔF-SRS-118 file has exhibited anomalies consistent with “document drift.”

We have identified text that appears to have been written and removed without standard redaction markers.

We have identified discrepancies in the file header itself (designation, date, “common descriptor”).

Notable: A line reading “Structure remains. Interpretation does not.” appears in three separate versions of the file, each attributed to different authors and dates.

We recommend limited access and a moratorium on further field sweeps until specialized assets are deployed.

Dr. Havel let his fingertips rest on the paper. He didn't tap. He didn't want to create rhythm.

“Now,” he said softly, “you understand why this file is here.”

He leaned back and looked at the people around the table.

“This isn't a monster problem,” he said. “It isn't even a ‘site’ problem in the conventional sense. It's a question of whether the act of observation is part of the hazard.”

He paused, then added something he clearly didn't enjoy admitting.

“And whether our methods are making it worse.”

A different voice spoke up—an older agent with a scar that curved from jaw to ear like someone had once tried to erase him with something sharp.

“We've pulled teams out before,” the agent said. “We've run denial operations. We've burned the structure, collapsed it, sealed it. We've done the whole catalog.”

“And yet,” Dr. Havel said, “it persists.”

The older agent's gaze narrowed.

“Then what changed?” he asked. “Why reopen now?”

Dr. Havel's eyes flicked to the folder as if it had whispered something.

“Because it's no longer staying quiet,” he said.

He slid out another sheet—a single-page incident summary, fresh ink, no age to it. The kind of paper that hadn't learned patience yet.

RECENT INCIDENT — 2025-12-19

SOURCE: Civilian Emergency Call Transcript (Sanitized) LOCATION: [REDACTED] County SUMMARY:

Two hikers reported finding an “old cabin” off-trail.

One reported “weird book on the table.”

One reported “recording on a device.”

Both later retracted statements.

Both exhibited stress symptoms consistent with acute dissociation.

Local authorities found no structure at reported location.

Satellite imagery shows terrain consistent with presence of a structure for 48 hours post-call, then returns to baseline.

#### FOUNDATION RESPONSE:

Witnesses amnesticized.

Route denied.

No field sweep conducted.

File reopened.

The junior analyst stared at the page like it had teeth.

“Civilians,” he whispered.

“Yes,” Dr. Havel said. “That’s the escalation. Not the site doing something more violent. The site becoming... discoverable.”

He used the word carefully, like it might bite him if he sharpened it.

“Discoverable means the structure is leaking into the map,” he continued. “And if it leaks into the map, it leaks into the world.”

He closed the file for a moment, palms resting on it as if keeping it from opening itself.

“Which brings us to the deployment recommendation,” he said.

He opened the file again, flipped to a page near the back—newer paper, crisp edges.

#### DEPLOYMENT PROPOSAL

##### ASSET REQUEST: TRIAD (Operational) COMPOSITION:

Ace — Close-quarters anomaly engagement, pressure-resonance sensitivity

Mai — Ritual-systems analysis, anchor stabilization

Shamaterazu (“Shammy”) — Atmospheric vector control, environmental drift detection

RATIONALE: ΔF-SRS-118 exhibits characteristics consistent with layered reality drift and non-shared perception. Standard sweep teams and linguistic hazard units have produced contradictory records and potential document drift. TRIAD is the only asset group with proven operational cohesion under reality variance and “meaning instability.”

#### OBJECTIVE:

Confirm structural persistence.

Establish baseline shared reality parameters.

Identify threshold conditions (what escalates drift).

Withdraw without triggering semantic completion loops.

CRITICAL: Success condition is not “resolution.” Success condition is limit definition.

The older agent made a sound that could have been approval or irritation.

“Limit definition,” he repeated. “Meaning: figure out what we can’t do.”

“Yes,” Dr. Havel said. “For once.”

The junior analyst swallowed.

“So we’re sending them in,” he said, “to not solve it.”

Dr. Havel’s expression tightened at the corners.

“We’re proposing,” he corrected, “to do the one thing we should’ve done years ago: stop poking it with the same stick.”

He slid a final sheet across the table, face-up, like he was laying down a card he didn’t like.

OPERATIONAL HANDLING — TRIAD (PROPOSED)

Do not read any recovered text aloud.

Do not repeat unfamiliar sounds, even as a test.

Do not attempt “consensus verification” through forced interpretation.

If perception is non-shared, prioritize withdrawal over clarification.

If a bound volume is observed, do not touch. Do not photograph as primary objective. Mark and move on.

If audio is captured, do not replay on-site. Do not replay in shared quarters.

NOTE: The phrase “Structure remains. Interpretation does not.” appears in multiple archival iterations. Do not discuss this phrase on-site. Do not repeat it aloud.

A new silence fell. This one had weight.

Somewhere in the room, the air-conditioning clicked again. Irregular. Like a finger tapping in a pattern it wasn’t meant to repeat.

Dr. Havel closed the folder.

“You’ll notice,” he said, voice lower now, “how much of that handling is about language.”

The older agent leaned forward.

“You think it’s a linguistic hazard,” he said.

Dr. Havel's eyes narrowed in a way that was more tired than sure.

"I think," he said, "that every time we've tried to pin it down with words, it's slipped. And every time we've pretended that slipping is just 'data variance,' it has cost us people."

He looked around the room.

"I don't care what you call it," he added. "I care that it doesn't start appearing on hiking blogs. I care that we don't wake up to a world where an empty cabin becomes a meme and the meme becomes a doorway."

The junior analyst opened his mouth, then closed it, as if his brain had decided it didn't want to supply the next question.

Dr. Havel gathered the excerpts with measured movements.

"TRIAD will not deploy off this room's discomfort alone," he said, and there was something deliberate in the way he said it—like he was drawing a line for the benefit of the people listening.

He tucked the file under his arm.

"This goes through Dr. Bright," he continued. "As it should."

No one challenged that. Not because they feared Bright—though some did—but because procedure was the last honest thing the Foundation had left when meaning got slippery.

Dr. Havel paused with his hand on the door, then looked back at the table one last time.

"And if anyone here finds themselves wanting to be clever," he said, "I want you to remember this: the file has been reopened six times."

He held up the folder, the dull gray cover, the crooked sticker.

"ΔF-SRS-118 doesn't need us to believe in it," he said quietly. "It just needs us to keep trying to understand it."

He left the room.

Bright's office was not an office in the normal sense. It was a space the building had surrendered to him, the way old structures surrendered to persistent pressure: by letting it happen and pretending it was always meant to.

The door sign read DR. JACK BRIGHT in clean print. Someone had once tried to add a joke beneath it in marker. The joke was gone now, scrubbed off so thoroughly the paint underneath looked newer than the rest of the door.

Dr. Havel knocked once. Waited. Knocked again, the second time with less patience and more compliance.

"Come in," Bright called, voice bright in the wrong way—like a smile used as a tool.

Havel stepped inside and closed the door behind him without looking at the room too closely. He had learned, over years, that some spaces were healthier when you didn't let your mind inventory them.

Bright was behind a desk that did not match the rest of the furniture, as if it had been stolen from a different building and forced to make peace with this one. He looked up from a stack of papers and gave Havel the kind of grin that made people decide they didn't like him before they knew why.

"What's this?" Bright asked, though his eyes were already on the folder.

Havel set ΔF-SRS-118 on the desk. He didn't slide it. He placed it, careful, like the act mattered.

"Reopen," Havel said. "Civilian contact. Document drift. Non-shared perception spikes. It's getting discoverable."

Bright's grin thinned.

"Oh," he said softly. "That one."

Havel didn't react to the familiarity. He wasn't sure if it was real familiarity or Bright performing the concept of familiarity for the room.

"It requires TRIAD," Havel continued. "But I'm not pushing them out the door without your sign-off."

Bright lifted the folder with two fingers, as if it might leave residue. He flipped the cover open, scanning quickly—too quickly for someone reading, which meant he was looking for something specific. A phrase, perhaps. A pattern. A known smell in the shape of words.

His eyes paused on the handling note about vocalization.

He shut the folder again.

"I don't like cases that punish curiosity," Bright said. "They tend to make the wrong kind of people curious."

Havel's mouth tightened.

"And yet," he said, "we don't have the luxury of ignoring it. Not if civilians are starting to stumble into it."

Bright leaned back in his chair, still holding the file.

"TRIAD's a good choice," he said, and it sounded—almost—like sincerity. "They know how to stop. Most people don't."

He looked at Havel.

"You're not asking me if they can handle it," Bright said. "You're asking me if you're allowed to send them."

"Yes," Havel replied. "That's the point."

Bright's gaze held for a beat longer than necessary, as if enjoying the discomfort. Then he opened a drawer, pulled out a pen, and signed the deployment proposal with a practiced flourish.

He stamped it with a small seal Havel hadn't noticed before—because Havel hadn't wanted to notice the objects in this room.

Bright slid the file back across the desk.

“Dawn,” Bright said. “Minimal personnel. Minimal equipment. No heroics.”

Havel nodded once.

“And, Havel?” Bright added, too casually, as if remembering it late.

Havel paused at the door.

Bright’s grin returned, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“If anyone finds a book,” Bright said, “tell them to admire it from a respectful distance. Like a museum exhibit. Like a loaded weapon. Like a bad idea wearing leather.”

Havel didn’t smile.

“Understood,” he said.

He left Bright’s office with the file under his arm, now properly signed, properly authorized, properly doomed to exist in the world again.

In the hallway outside, the air-conditioning clicked—irregular, not rhythmic.

Havel walked without matching his steps to it.

And somewhere deep in the archive system, ΔF-SRS-118 sat a little more comfortably in its own existence, as if the Foundation’s attention had just given it exactly what it wanted.

Not belief.

Not fear.

Just the continued insistence on understanding.

Kun sanot “go”, jatkan Chapter 2: Approach samalla sävyllä.—

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