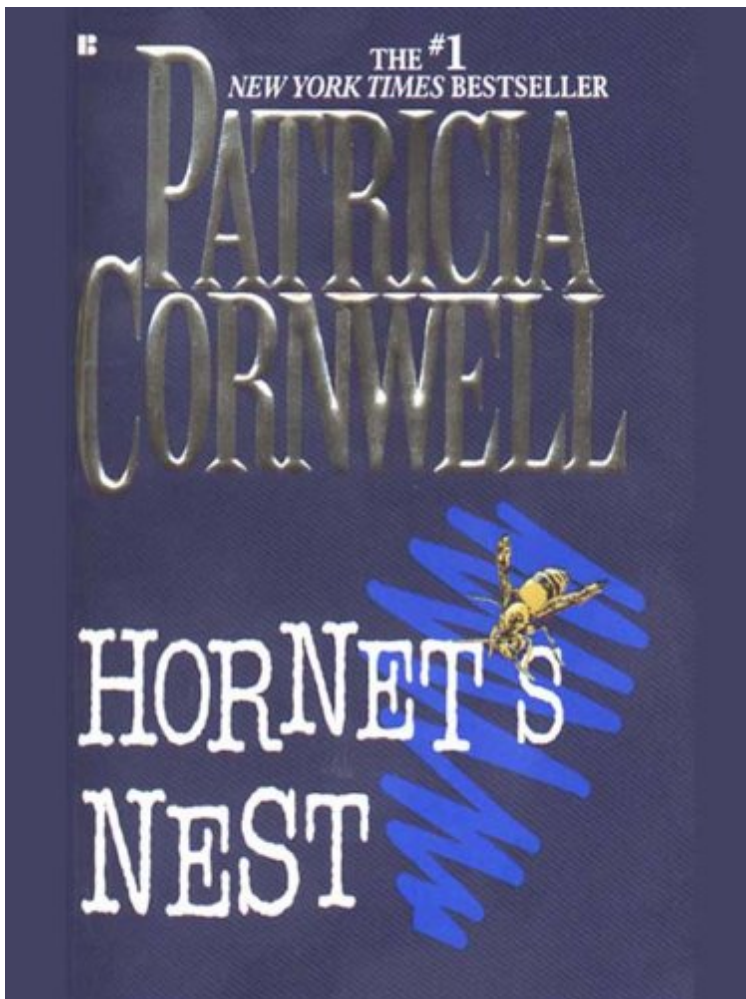


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# Hornet's Nest



*Par Patricia Cornwell  
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**Description :** Description du produitMysteryLarge Print Edition\* A New York Times Bestseller\* Literary Guild Main Selection\* Mystery Guild Main SelectionCharlotte, North Carolina has been dubbed the hornets nest of America, and with Charlotte as her simmering background, Patricia Cornwell propels us into the lives of a dynamic trio of heroes: Andy Brazil, an ambitious young reporter and volunteer cop; Police Chief Judy Hammer, the strong but troubled guardian of the law; and her deputy chief Virginia West, a ravishing beauty whos married to her job. As we walk the beat with Brazil, Hammer and West, we learn about police work the excitement and the tedium as Patricia Cornwell strips away the facade of the badge to show what motivates the lives of ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances.

Prsentation de l'diteurPatricia Cornwell turns from forensics to police procedures in her latest novel, Hornet's Nest. This book is less a thriller than a character study of the main characters: Judy Hammer, chief of police in Charlotte, North Carolina; Hammer's deputy, Virginia West; and Andy Brazil, a young reporter assigned to ride with the police as they go about their jobs..comPatricia Cornwell turns from forensics to police procedures in her latest novel, Hornet's Nest. This book is less a thriller than a character study of the main

characters: Judy Hammer, chief of police in Charlotte, North Carolina; Hammer's deputy, Virginia West; and Andy Brazil, a young reporter assigned to ride with the police as they go about their jobs. Chapter One That morning, summer sulked and gathered darkly over Charlotte, and heat shimmered on pavement. Traffic teemed, people pushing forward to promise as they drove through new construction, and the past was bulldozed away. The USBank Corporate Center soared sixty stories above downtown, topped by a crown that looked like organ pipes playing a hymn to the god of money. This was a city of ambition and change. It had grown so fast, it could not always find its own streets. Like a boy in puberty, it was rapidly unfolding and clumsy at times, and a little too full of what its original settlers had called pride. The city and its county were named for Princess Charlotte Sophia of Mecklenburg-Strelitz before she became George III's queen.

The Germans, who wanted the same freedoms the Scotch-Irish did, were one thing, The English were another. When Lord Cornwallis decided to come to town in 1780 and occupied what became known as the Queen City, he was met with such hostility by these stubborn Presbyterians that he dubbed Charlotte "the hornet's nest of America." Two centuries later, the swarming symbol was the official seal of the city and its NBA basketball team and the police department that protected all. It was the white whirling dervish against midnight blue that Deputy Chief Virginia West wore on the shoulders of her crisp white uniform shirt with all its brass. Most cops, frankly, had not a clue as to what the symbol meant. Some thought it was a tornado, a white owl, a beard. Others were certain it had to do with sports events in the coliseum or the new two-hundred-and-thirty-million-dollar stadium that hovered downtown like an alien spacecraft. But West had been stung more than once and knew exactly what the hornet's nest was about. It was what awaited her when she drove to work and read The Charlotte Observer every morning. Violence swarmed, and everybody talked at once. This Monday, she was in a dark angry mood, ready to really stir things up. The city police department recently had relocated to the new pearly concrete complex known as the Law Enforcement Center, or LEC, in the heart of downtown on Trade Street, the very road British oppressors long ago had followed into town. Construction in the area seemed endless, as if change were a virus taking over West's life. Parking at the LEC remained a mess, and she had not completely moved into her office yet. There were plenty of mud puddles and dust, and her unmarked car was new and a striking uniform blue that sent her to the carwash at least three times a week. When she reached the reserved parking spaces in front of the LEC, she couldn't believe it. Occupying her spot was a drug dealer's set of chrome mags and parrot-green iridescent paint, a Suzuki, which she knew people flipped over in more ways than one. "Goddamn it!" She looked around, as if she might recognize the person who had dared this perpetration. Other cops were pulling in and out, and transporting prisoners in this constantly moving department of sixteen hundred police and unsworn support. For a moment, West sat and scanned, teased by the aroma of the Bojangles bacon and egg biscuit that by now was cold. Settling on a fifteen-minute slot in front of sparkling glass doors, she parked and climbed out, doing the best she could with briefcase, pocketbook, files, newspapers, breakfast, a large coffee. She slammed her door shut with a hip as the dude she was looking for emerged from the building. He was jailing, jeans at low tide in that cool lockup look of six inches of pastel undershorts showing. The fashion statement got started in jail when inmates had their belts confiscated so they wouldn't hang themselves or someone else. The trend had crossed over every racial and socioeconomic line until half of the city's pants were falling off. West did not understand it. She left her car right where it was, fought with her armload as the dude mumbled good morning, trotting past. "Brewster!" Her voice halted him like a pointed gun. "What the hell you think you're doing parking in my space!" He grinned, flashing rings and a fake Rolex as he swept arms open wide, the pistol beneath his jacket peeking out. "Look around, Tell me what you see. Not one damn parking place in all of Charlotte." "That's why important people like me are assigned one," she said to this detective she supervised as she tossed him her keys. "Bring them back when you've moved my car," she ordered. West was forty-two, a woman who still turned heads and had never been married to anything beyond what she thought she was here on earth to do. She had deep red hair, a little unattended and longer than she liked it, her eyes dark and quick, and a serious body that she did not deserve, for she did nothing to maintain curves and straightness in the right places. She wore her uniform in a way that made other women want one, but that was not why she chose police blues over plain clothes. She supervised more than three hundred wiseass investigators like Ronald Brewster who needed every reminder of law and order West could muster. Cops greeted her on her way in. She turned right, headed to offices where Chief Judy Hammer decided everything that mattered in law enforcement in this hundred-mile area of almost six million people. West loved her boss but right now didn't like her. West knew why she had been called in early for a meeting, and it was a situation beyond reason or her control. This was insane. She

walked into Hammer's outer office, where Captain Fred Horgess was talking on the phone. He held his hand over the receiver and shook his head in a there's nothing I can do way to West as she walked up to the dark wooden door, where Hammer's name was announced brightly in brass. "It's not good," he warned with a shrug. "Why is it I didn't need you to tell me that?" West irritably said. Balancing her burdens, she knocked with the toe of her Bates hi-gloss black shoe and nudged up the door handle with a knee, coffee almost spilling but caught in time. Inside, Hammer sat behind her overwhelmed desk, surrounded by framed photographs of children and grandbabies, her mission statement, Prevent the Next Crime, on the wall behind her. She was early fifties, in a smart houndstooth business suit, her telephone line buzzing relentlessly, but she had more important matters on her mind at the moment. West dumped her load on one chair and sat in another one near the brass Winged Victory award the International Association of Chiefs of Police had presented to Hammer last year. She had never bothered to get a stand or give it an honored place. In fact, the trophy, which was three feet high, continued to occupy the same square of carpet next to her desk, as if waiting for a ride to someplace better. Judy Hammer won such things because she wasn't motivated by them. West removed the lid off her coffee, and steam wafted up. "I already know what this is about," she said, "and you know what I think." Hammer gestured to silence her. She leaned forward, folding her hands on top of her desk. "Virginia, at long last I have gotten the support of city council, the city manager, the mayor," she started to say. "And every one of them, including you, is wrong," West said, stirring cream and sugar into her coffee. "I can't believe you've talked them into this, and I can tell you right now, they're going to find some way to screw it up because they don't really want it to happen. You shouldn't want it to happen, either. It's a damn conflict of interest for a police reporter to become a volunteer cop and go out on the street with us." Paper crackled as West unwrapped a greasy Bojangles biscuit that Hammer would never raise to her lips, not even back in the old days when she was underweight and on her feet all day long, working the jail, juvenile division, crime analysis, records, inspections, auto theft, all those exciting assignments women got back in the days when they weren't allowed in patrol. She did not believe in fat. "I mean, come on!" West said after a bite. "The last Observer cop reporter screwed us so bad you sued the newspaper." Hammer did not like to think about Weinstein, the worthless wonder, a criminal, really, whose M. O. was to walk into the duty captain's office or the investigative division when no one was around. He stole reports right off desks, printers, and fax machines. This collaborative behavior culminated in his writing a front-page Sunday profile about Hammer, claiming she commandeered the police helicopter for personal use. She ordered off-duty cops to chauffeur her and do domestic jobs around her house. When her daughter was picked up for drunk driving, Hammer had the charges fixed. None of it was true. She did not even have a daughter. Hammer got up, clearly frustrated and disturbed by the mess the world was in. She looked out a window, hands in the pockets of her skirt, her back to West. "The Charlotte Observer, the city, think we don't understand them or care," she starts her evangelism again. "And I know they don't understand us. Or care." West crumpled breakfast trash, and scored two points in disgust. "All the Observer cares about is winning another Pulitzer Prize," she said. Hammer turned around, as serious as West had ever seen her. "I had lunch with the new publisher yesterday. First time any of us have had a civilized conversation with anyone from there in a decade, at least. A miracle." She began her habitual pacing, gesturing with passion. She loved her mission in life. "We really want to try this. Could it blow up in our faces? Absolutely." She paused. "But what if it worked? Andy Brazil ..." "Who?" West scowled. Very, very determined, Hammer went on, "completed our academy for volunteers, highest marks we've ever had. Impressed the hell out of the instructors. Does that mean he won't burn us, Virginia? No, no. But what I'm not going to have is this young reporter out there screwing up an investigation, getting the wrong view of what we do. He's not going to be lied to, stonewalled, hit on, hurt." West put her head in her hands, groaning. Hammer returned to her desk and sat. "If this goes well," the chief went on, "think how good it could be for the department, for community policing here and around the world. How many times have I heard you say, 'If only every citizen could ride just one night with us?'" "I'll never say it again." West meant it. Hammer leaned over her desk, pointing her finger at a deputy chief she admired and sometimes wanted to shake for thinking too small. "I want you out on the street again," she ordered. "With Andy Brazil. Give him a dose he won't forget." "Goddamn it, Judy!" West exclaimed. "Don't do this to me. I'm up to my ears decentralizing investigations. The street crime unit's all screwed up, two of my captains out. Goode and I can't agree on anything, as usual ..." Hammer wasn't listening. She put on reading glasses and began reviewing a memo. "Set it up today," she said. Andy Brazil ran hard and fast. He blew out loudly, checking the time on his Casio watch as he sprinted around the Davidson College track, in the small town of the same name, north of the big city. It was here he had grown

up and gone to school on tennis and academic scholarships. He had lived at the college all his life, really, in a dilapidated frame house on Main Street, across from a cemetery that, like the recently turned co-ed school, was older than the Civil War. Until several years ago, his mother had worked in the college food service, and Brazil had grown up on the campus, watching rich kids and Rhodes scholars on their way in a hurry. Even when he was about to graduate magna cum laude, some of his classmates, usually the cheerleaders, thought he was a townie. They flirted with him as he ladled eggs and grits on their plates. They were always startled in a dense sort of way when he trotted past in a hallway, loaded with books and afraid of being late to class. Brazil had never felt he belonged here or anywhere, really. It was as if he watched people through a pane of glass. He could not touch others no matter how hard he tried, and they could not touch him, unless they were mentors. He had been falling in love with teachers, coaches, ministers, campus security, administrators, deans, doctors, nurses since he could remember. They were accepting, even appreciative, of his unusual reflections and solitary peregrinations, and the writings he shyly shared when he visited after hours, usually bearing limeades from the MM soda shop or cookies from his mother's kitchen. Brazil, simply put, was a writer, a scribe of life and all in it. He had accepted his calling with humility and a brave heart. It was too early for anybody else to be out this morning except a faculty wife whose lumpy shape would never be transformed by anything but death, and two other women in baggy sweats breathlessly complaining about the husbands who made it possible for them to be walking while most of the world worked. Brazil wore a Charlotte Observer tee shirt and shorts, and looked younger than twenty-two. He was handsome and fierce, with cheekbones high, hair streaked blond, body firm and athletically splendid. He did not seem aware of how others reacted to the sight of him, or perhaps it didn't matter. Mostly, his attention was elsewhere. Brazil had been writing ever since he could, and when he had looked for a job after graduating from Davidson, he had promised Observer publisher Richard Panesa that if Panesa would give Brazil a chance, the newspaper would not be sorry. Panesa had hired him as a TV Week clerk, updating TV shows and movie blurbs. Brazil hated typing in programming updates for something he did not even watch. He did not like the other clerks or his hypertensive, overweight editor. Other than a promised cover story one of these days, there was no future for Brazil, and he began going to the newsroom at four in the morning so he could have all of the updates completed by noon. The rest of the day he would roam desk to desk, begging for garbage-picking stories the seasoned reporters wanted to duck. There were always plenty of those. The business desk tossed him the scoop on Ingersoll-Rand's newest air compressor. Brazil got to cover the Ebony fashion show when it came to town, and the stamp collectors, and the world championship backgammon tournament at the Radisson Hotel. He interviewed wrestler Rick Flair with his long platinum hair when he was the celebrity guest at the Boy Scout convention. Brazil covered the Coca-Cola 600, interviewing spectators drinking beer while stock cars blasted past. He turned in a hundred hours' overtime five months in a row, writing more stories than most of Panesa's reporters. Panesa held a meeting, gathering the executive editor, managing editor, and features editor behind closed doors to discuss the idea of making Brazil a reporter when his first six months were up. Panesa couldn't wait to see Brazil's reaction, knowing he would be thrilled beyond belief when Panesa offered him general assignment. Brazil wasn't. Brazil had already applied to the Charlotte Police Department's academy for volunteers. He had passed the background check, and was enrolled in the class that was to start the following spring. In the meantime, his plan was to carry on with his usual boring job with the TV magazine because the hours were flexible. Upon graduation, Brazil hoped the publisher would give him the police beat, and Brazil would do his job for the paper and keep up his volunteer hours at the same time. He would write the most informed and insightful police stories the city had ever seen. If the Observer wouldn't go along with this, Brazil would find a news organization that would, or he would become a cop. No matter how anybody looked at it, Andy Brazil would not be told no. The morning was hot and steamy, and sweat was streaming as he began his sixth mile, looking at graceful antebellum buildings of ivy and brick, at the Chambers classroom building with its dome, and the indoor tennis center where he had battled other college students as if losing meant death. He had spent his life fighting for the right to move ahead eighteen miles, along I-77 to South Tryon Street, in the heart of the city, where he could write for a living. He remembered when he first started driving to Charlotte when he was sixteen, when the skyline was simple, downtown a place to go. Now it seemed an overachieving stone and glass empire that kept growing. He wasn't sure he liked it much anymore. He wasn't sure it liked him, either. Mile eight, he dropped in the grass and began plunging into push-ups. Arms were strong and sculpted, with veins that gracefully fed his strength. Hair on wet skin was gold, his face red. He rolled over on his back and breathed good air, enjoying the afterglow. Slowly, he sat up, stretching, easing himself into the vertical

position that meant getting on with it. Andy Brazil trotted back to his twenty-five-year-old black BMW 2002 parked on the street. It was waxed, and shellacked with Armor All, the original blue and white emblem on the hood worn off forever ago and lovingly retouched with model paint. The car had almost a hundred and twenty thousand miles on it, and something broke about once a month, but Brazil could fix anything. Inside, the interior was saddle leather, and there was a new police scanner and a two-way radio. He wasn't due on his beat until four, but he rolled into his very own spot at noon. He was the Observer's police reporter and got to park in a special spot near the door, so he could take off in a hurry when trouble blew. The instant he entered the lobby, he smelled newsprint and ink the way a creature smells blood. The scent excited him like police lights and sirens, and he was happy because the guard in the console didn't make him sign in anymore. Brazil took the escalator, trotting up moving metal stairs, as if he were late somewhere. People were statues coming down the other side. They glanced curiously at him. Everyone in the Observer newsroom knew who Brazil was, and he had no friends. The newsroom was big and drab, filled with the sounds of keys clicking, phones ringing, and printers grabbing fastbreaking stories off the wire. Reporters were intense in front of computer screens, flipping through notepads with the paper's name on cardboard covers. They walked around, and the woman who covered local politics was running out the door after a scoop. Brazil still could not believe he was a player in this important, heady world, where words could change destinies and the way people thought. He thrived on drama, perhaps because he had been fed it since birth, although not generally in a good way. His new desk was in the metro section, just beyond the glass-enclosed office of the publisher, Panesa, whom Brazil liked and was desperate to impress. Panesa was a handsome man, with silver-blond hair, and a lean look that had not become less striking as he had skated beyond forty. The publisher stood tall and straight in fine suits dark blue or black, and wore cologne. Brazil thought Panesa wise but had no reason to know it yet. Each Sunday, Panesa had a column in the Sunday paper, and women in the greater Charlotte area wrote fan letters and secretly wondered what Richard Panesa was like in bed, or at least Brazil imagined this was so. Panesa was in a meeting when Brazil sat behind his desk and covertly glanced into the publisher's transparent kingdom as Brazil tried to look busy opening notepads, drawers, glancing at old printouts of long-published stories. It did not escape Panesa's notice that his boyish, intense police reporter had arrived four hours early his first day on his new beat. Panesa was not surprised. The first item on Brazil's agenda was that Tommy Axel had left another 7-Eleven rose on Brazil's desk. It had the sad, unhealthy complexion of the people who shopped in establishments that sold dark red, tightly furled passion at the counter for a dollar ninety-eight. It was still wrapped in clear plastic, and Axel had stuck it inside a Snapple bottle filled with water. Axel was the music critic, and Brazil knew he was watching this very minute from not very far away, in features. Brazil slid a cardboard box out from under his desk. He had not finished moving in, not that the task was especially formidable. But he had been assigned nothing yet and had finished the first draft of a self-assigned piece on what it had been like to go through the volunteer police academy. He could add and cut and polish only so many times and was terrified by the thought of sitting in the newsroom with nothing to do. He had made it a habit to scan all six editions of the newspaper from wooden spools near the city directories. He often read the bulletin board, checked his empty mailbox, and had been meticulous and deliberately slow in moving his professional possessions the very short distance of forty-five feet. This included a Rolodex with few meaningful phone numbers, for how to reach television networks and various shows, and stamp collectors or Rick Flair, was of little importance now. Brazil had plenty of notepads, pens, pencils, copies of his stories, city maps, and almost all of it could fit in the briefcase he had found on sale at Belk department store when he had been hired. It was glossy burgundy leather with brass clasps, and he felt very proud when he gripped it. He had no photographs to arrange on his desk, for he was an only child and had no pets. It entered his mind that he might call his house to check on things. When Brazil had returned from the track to shower and change, his mother had been doing the usual, sleeping on the couch in the living room, TV loudly tuned in to a soap opera she would not remember later. Mrs. Brazil watched life every day on Channel 7 and could not describe a single plot. Television was her only connection to humans, unless she counted the relationship with her son. Half an hour after Brazil appeared in the newsroom, the telephone rang on his desk, startling him. He snatched it up, pulse trotting ahead as he glanced around, wondering who knew he worked here. "Andy Brazil," he said very professionally. The heavy breathing was recognizable, the voice of the same pervert who had been calling for months. Brazil could hear her lying on her bed, sofa, fainting couch, wherever she got the job done. "In my hand," the pervert said in her low, creepy tone. "Got it. Sliding in, out like a trombone ..."

Brazil dropped the receiver into its cradle and shot Axel an accusing glance, but Axel was talking to the food

critic. This was the first time in Brazil's life that he had ever gotten obscene phone calls. The only other situation to come even close was when he was blasting his BMW at the Wash Shine in nearby Cornelius one day and a pasty-faced creep in a yellow VW bug pulled up and asked him if he wanted to earn twenty dollars. Brazil's first thought was he was being offered a job washing the guy's car since Brazil was doing such a fine job on his own. This had been wrong. Brazil had turned the high pressure wand on the guy for free. He had memorized the creep's plate number and still had it in his wallet, waiting for the day when he could get him locked up. What the man in the VW bug had proposed was a crime against nature, an ancient North Carolina law no one could interpret. But what he had wanted in exchange for his cash had been clear. Brazil could not fathom why anyone would want to do such a thing to a stranger. He wouldn't even drink out of the same bottle with most people he knew. Brazil was not naive, but his sexual experiences at Davidson had been more incomplete than those of his roommate, this he knew. The last semester of his senior year, Brazil had spent most nights in the men's room inside Chambers. There was a perfectly comfortable couch in there, and while his roommate slept with a girlfriend, Brazil slept with books. No one was the wiser, except the custodians, who routinely saw Brazil coming out of, not going into, the building around six o'clock every morning as he headed back to the second floor of the condemned building he and his roommate shared on Main Street. Certainly, Brazil had his own small private space in this dump, but walls were very thin and it was difficult to concentrate when Jennifer and Todd were active. Brazil could hear every word, everything they did. Brazil dated Sophie, from San Diego, on and off during college. He did not fall in love with her, and this made her desire uncontrollable. It more or less ruined her Davidson career. First she lost weight. When that didn't work, she gained it. She took up smoking and quit, got mononucleosis and got better, went to a therapist and told him all about it. None of this turned out to be the aphrodisiac Sophie had hoped, and their sophomore year she stabilized and slept with her piano teacher during Christmas break. She confessed her sin to Brazil. She and Brazil started making out in her Saab and her dorm room. Sophie was experienced, rich, and premed. She was more than willing to patiently explain anatomical realities, and he was open to research he really did not need. At one P.M., Brazil had just logged onto his computer and gone into his basket to retrieve his police academy story, when his editor sat next to him. Ed Packer was at least sixty, with fly-away white hair and distant gray eyes. He wore bad ties haphazardly knotted, sleeves shoved up. At one point he must have been fat. His pants were huge, and he was always jamming a hand inside his waistband, tucking in his shirttail all around, as he was doing right now. Brazil gave him his attention. "Looks like tonight's the night," Packer said as he tucked. Brazil knew exactly what his editor meant and punched the air in triumph, as if he'd just won the U.S. Open. "Yes!", he exclaimed. Packer couldn't help but look at what was on the computer screen. It grabbed his interest, and he slipped glasses out of his shirt pocket. "Sort of a first-person account of my going through the academy," Brazil said, new and nervous about pleasing. "I know it wasn't assigned, but ..." Packer really liked what he was reading and tapped the screen with a knuckle. "This graph's your lead. I'd move it up." "Right. Right." Brazil was excited as he cut the paragraph and pasted it higher. Packer rolled his chair closer, nudging him out of the way to read more. He started scrolling through what was a very long story. It would have to be a Sunday feature, and he wondered when the hell Brazil wrote it. For the past two months, Brazil had worked days and gone to the police academy at night. Did the kid ever sleep? Packer had never seen anything like it. In a way, Brazil unnerved him, made him feel inadequate and old. Packer remembered how exciting journalism was when he was Brazil's age and the world filled him with wonder. "I just got off the phone with Deputy Chief Virginia West," he said to his protégé as he read. "Head of investigations ..." "So who am I riding with?" Brazil interrupted, so eager to ride with the police, he couldn't contain himself. "You're to meet West at four this afternoon, in her office, will ride with her until midnight." Brazil had just been screwed and couldn't believe it. He stared at his editor, who had just failed the only thing Brazil had ever expected of him. "No way I'm being babysat, censored by the brass!" Brazil exclaimed and didn't care who heard. "I didn't go to their damn academy to ..." Packer didn't care who heard for a different reason. He had been a complaint department for the past thirty years, here and at home, and his attention span tended to flicker in and out as he mentally drove through different cells, picking up garbled snippets of different conversations. He suddenly recalled what his wife had said at breakfast about stopping for dog food on the way home. He remembered he had to take his wife's puppy to the veterinarian at three for some sort of shot, then Packer had a doctor's appointment after that. "Don't you understand?" Brazil went on. "They're just handling me. They're just trying to use me for PR!" Packer got up. He towered wearily over Brazil like a weathered tree gathering more shadow the older it grows. "What can I say?" Packer said, and his shirt was untucked again. "We've

never done this before. It's what the cops, the city, are offering. You'll have to sign a waiver. Take notes. No pictures. No videotapes. Do what you're told. I don't want you getting shot out there." "Well, I've got to go back home to change into my uniform," Brazil decided. Packer walked off, hitching up his pants, heading to the men's room. Brazil slumped back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling as if the only stock he owned had just crashed. Panesa watched him through glass, interested in how he was going to turn this around, and convinced he would. Systems analyst Brenda Bond blatantly glared at him from a nearby computer she was fixing. Brazil never paid her any mind. She was repulsive to him, thin and pale, with coarse black hair. She was hateful and jealous, and certain she was smarter than Brazil and all because computer experts and scientists were like that. He imagined Brenda Bond spending her life on the Internet inside chat rooms, because who would have her? Sighing, Brazil got up from his chair. Panesa watched Brazil pick up an ugly red rose in a Snapple bottle, and the publisher smiled. Panesa and his wife had desperately wanted a son, and after five daughters it was either move to a larger home, become Catholic or Mormon, or practice safe sex. Instead, they had gotten divorced. He could not imagine what it must be like to have a son like Andy Brazil. Brazil was striking to look at, and sensitive, and though all the results weren't in, the biggest talent ever to walk through Panesa's door. Tommy Axel was typing a big review of a new k.d. lang album that he was listening to on earphones. He was a goofball, sort of a Matt Dillon who wasn't famous and never would be, Brazil thought. He walked up to Axel's desk and clunked the rose next to the keyboard as Axel boogied in his Star Trek tee shirt. Surprised, Axel pushed the earphones down around his neck, faint, thin music leaking out. Axel's face was smitten. This was the One for him. He had known it since he was six, somehow had a premonition that a divine creature like this would overlap orbits with his when the planets were aligned. "Axel," Brazil's heavenly voice sounded like a thunderclap, "no more flowers." Axel stared at his lovely rose as Brazil stalked off. Brazil didn't mean it, Axel was certain, as he watched Brazil. Axel was grateful for his desk. He scooted his chair in closer and crossed his legs, aching for the blond god walking with purpose out of the newsroom. Axel wondered where he was going. Brazil carried his briefcase as if he wasn't coming back. Axel had Brazil's home phone number because he had looked it up in the book. Brazil didn't live in the city, sort of out in the sticks, and Axel didn't quite understand it. Of course, Brazil probably didn't make twenty thousand dollars a year, but he had a bad car. Axel drove a Ford Escort that wasn't new. The paint job was beginning to remind him of Keith Richards's face. There was no CD player and the Observer wouldn't buy him one, and he planned to remind everyone there of that someday when he landed a job with Rolling Stone. Axel was thirty-two. He had been married once, for exactly a year, when he and his wife looked at each other during a candlelight dinner, their relationship the mystery of all time, she from one planet, he from another. They, the aliens, agreeably left for new frontiers where no person had gone before. It had nothing to do with his habit of picking up groupies at concerts after Meatloaf, Gloria Estefan, Michael Bolton, had worked them into a lather. Axel would get a few quotes. He'd put the boys and their winking lighted shoes, shaved heads, dreadlocks, and body piercing, in the newspaper. They called Axel, excited, wanting extra copies, eight-by-ten photographs, follow-up interviews, concert tickets, backstage passes. One thing usually led to another. While Axel was thinking about Brazil, Brazil was not thinking about him. Brazil was in his BMW and trying to calculate when he might need gas next since neither that gauge nor the speedometer had worked in more than forty thousand miles. BMW parts on a scale this grand were, in his mind, aviation instrumentation and simply beyond his means. This was not good for one who drove too fast and did not enjoy being stranded on a roadside waiting for the next non-serial killer to offer a ride to the nearest gas station. His mother was still snoring in front of the TV. Brazil had learned to walk through his decaying home and the family life it represented without seeing any of it. He headed straight to his small bedroom, unlocked the door, and shut it behind him. He turned on a boom box, but not too loud, and let Joan Osborne envelop him as he went into his closet. Putting on his uniform was a ritual, and he did not see how he could ever get tired of it. First, he always laid it out on the bed and indulged himself, just looking for a moment, not quite believing someone had given him permission to wear such a glorious thing. His Charlotte uniform was midnight blue, creased and new with a bright white hornet's nest that seemed in motion, like a white twister, on each shoulder patch. He always put socks on first, black cotton, and these had not come from the city. Next he carefully pulled on summer trousers that were hot no matter how light the material, a subtle stripe down each leg. The shirt was his favorite because of the patches and everything else that he would pin on. He worked his arms through the short sleeves, began buttoning in the mirror, all the way up to his chin, and clipped on the tie. Next was his name plate and whistle. To the heavy black leather belt he attached the holder with its Mag-Lite and his pager, saving room for the radio he would check out at the

LEC. His soft Hi-Tec boots weren't patent leather like the military type he had seen most of his life, but more like high-top athletic shoes. He could run in these if the need ever arose, and he hoped it would. He did not wear a hat because Chief Hammer did not believe in them. Brazil inspected himself in the mirror to make sure all was perfect. He headed back downtown with the windows and sunroof open and propped his arm up whenever he could because he enjoyed the reaction of drivers in the next lane when they saw his patch. People suddenly slowed down. They let him pass when the light turned green. Someone asked him directions. A man spat, eyes filled with resentment Brazil did not deserve, for he had done nothing to him. Two teenaged boys in a truck began making fun of him, and he stared straight ahead and drove, as if none of this were new. He had been a cop forever. The LEC was several blocks from the newspaper, and Brazil knew the way as if he were going home. He pulled into the parking deck for visitors and tucked his BMW in a press slot, angling it the way he always did so people didn't hit his doors. He got out and followed polished hallways to the duty captain's office, because he had no idea where the investigative division was or if he could just stroll in without asking permission. In the academy, his time had been spent in a classroom, the radio room, or out on a street learning how to direct traffic and work nonreportable accidents. He did not know his way around this four-story complex, and stood in a doorway, suddenly shy in a uniform that did not include gun, baton, pepper spray, or anything helpful. "Excuse me," he announced himself. The duty captain was big and old at his desk, and going through pages of mug shots with a sergeant. They ignored him. For a moment Brazil watched Channel 3 television reporter Brent Webb, perched over the press baskets, going through reports, stealing whatever he wanted. It was amazing. Brazil watched the asshole tuck the reports into his zip-up briefcase, where no other journalist in the city would ever see them, as if it were perfectly acceptable for him to cheat Brazil and everyone trying to report the news. Brazil stared at Webb, then at this sergeant and captain who did not seem to care what crimes were committed in plain view. "Excuse me," Brazil tried again, louder. He walked in, rudely ignored by cops who had hated the paper so long they no longer remembered why. "I need to find Deputy Chief West's office." Brazil would not be ignored. The duty captain lifted another plastic-sheathed page of hard-boiled mugs up to the light. The sergeant turned his back to Brazil. Webb stopped what he was doing, his smile amused, maybe even mocking as he looked Brazil up and down, assessing this unfamiliar guy playing dress-up. Brazil had seen Webb enough on television to recognize him anywhere and had heard a lot about him, too. Other reporters called Webb The Scoop, for reasons Brazil had just witnessed. "So how do you like being a volunteer?" Webb was condescending and had no idea who Brazil was. "Which way to investigation," Brazil replied, as if it were an order, his eyes piercing. Webb nodded. "Up the stairs, can't miss it." Webb studied the way Brazil was dressed and started laughing, as did the sergeant and duty captain. Brazil helped himself to the TV reporter's briefcase and pulled out a handful of purloined offense reports. Brazil smoothed and shuffled them. He perused and stacked them neatly, taking his time, while everyone watched and Webb's face turned red. "Believe Chief Hammer might like to see The Scoop in action." Brazil smiled at him. Brazil's boots were quiet as he walked off. Reprinted from *Hornet's Nest*, by Patricia Daniels Cornwell by permission of Berkley, a member of Penguin Putnam Inc. Copyright 1998, Cornwell Enterprises, Inc.. All rights reserved.

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