

PAUL KANE

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THE GEMINI FACTOR

Introduction by **Peter Atkins** - Author of *Morningstar* and
Moontown, screenwriter of *Hellraiser II-IV* and *Wishmaster*

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PAUL KANE



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Dedicated to Steve Harris

INTRODUCTION

by
Peter Atkins

Here's how it goes.

Somebody asks you to scribble a few words of introduction for their new book and you say yes for all the usual reasons. They're nice. They're talented. They always stand their round. And, best of all, they must think you're terribly clever and important, or why else would they ask you?*

So you're happy to oblige. More than happy. Full of bonhomie and good intent. "Delighted," you find yourself saying. "Send it over, me old tosh," or words to that effect. And they do.

And then you read it.

And—at some point between the perfectly good first sentence and the perfectly good last—you find yourself slapping your idiot forehead and wondering why the hell this always happens to you. "Shit," you might well say, or some witty variation thereof.

Because you realize it's one of *those* books.

No, don't be stupid. Not a bad book. A really good one, in fact.

But one of those that can't be talked about without giving away certain things that in a perfect world would remain as surprises within the book itself. So suddenly, despite your best intentions, you're the spiritual brother of the arsehole who tips off his mate that said mate's girlfriend isn't just cooking dinner that night but has arranged a surprise birthday party for him. With cakes and jugglers. Or cocaine and hookers. Depending on the nature of the mate and the girlfriend.

It's a drawback specific to our field, I suppose, that catch-all field of mystery and suspense and fantasy and horror where nearly all the

* Well, actually, the usual answer to that is that the seventeen people they asked before you were too busy. But let's not go there.

stories (and certainly nearly all the good ones) rely to some extent on misleads and surprises and the judicious (but never unfair) withholding of certain information from the reader. I'm convinced it must be very much easier to write non-spoiler introductions for mainstream fiction. If I knew people who wrote books that were handy little slices-of-quotidian-life, I probably wouldn't have this problem. But then if I hung around with tossers who wrote crap like that, I'd have shot myself in the head long ago.

No, I hang around with people who think up really weird shit and then, no doubt giggling to themselves, hide it like land-mines in what at first glance appears to be a perfectly straightforward thriller. People like Paul Kane.

So anyway, long story short, I'm asking you to consider this a signpost. One which reads *Caution: Spoilers Ahead*. Please drive carefully.

The Gemini Factor begins with a nasty little killing in the nicely-named Fagin's Row area of Norchester, a fictional town somewhere in the middle of England. The town may be fictional but there's very little doubt that the story takes place in our world, a world which Paul establishes smoothly and easily with the invisible skill of a canny writer who never pauses for omniscient description of the *look at all the research I did* variety but instead lets us see and feel things always through the eyes and the thoughts of his characters, characters whom we recognize as people very like ourselves, with very real lives and very real concerns.

The chief investigators of what soon proves to be a series of killings are Detective Inspector Roy Mason and Detective Sergeant Deborah Harrison. It's not long before Deborah, the novel's heroine, mother to Izzy and daughter to Wendy and survivor of an abusive marriage, meets Jack Foley, a former historian, potential romantic interest, and—more disturbingly—someone who seems to know just a little too much. Not only about the current murders but about the several that have preceded them over a course of many years. Because we eventually learn that Norchester is simply the latest—though perhaps for many reasons the final—killing ground of a terrifying serial murderer whom the media soon dub “Twinkle” but who prefers to think of himself as The Gemini, partly because of his choice of victims—who are invariably one sibling of a pair of twins (whether they know it or not).

It's not only the main characters of the novel who are brought

convincingly to life by its author. Paul peoples his story with a supporting cast of characters who seem just as real, just as full of virtues and vices, of dreams and desires. He has that enviable knack of encapsulating entire lives and personalities into a few brief paragraphs so that we learn to like them. You know, just before they're killed.

In some ways—and I mean this only as a compliment—*The Gemini Factor* is deceptively conventional: It moves along like a well-structured thriller—moves like a fucking rocket, in fact—but what's fascinating to me (and will be, I trust, to you) is how it's actually something else at the same time.

In an extremely well executed example of form imitating content, the novel itself is “twinned”. The surface narrative has a secret brother walking constantly alongside, hiding its footprints in those of its sibling, keeping always to the shadows of subtext and carefully delineated implication.

Reading *The Gemini Factor*, you will feel you are reading a first-rate example of the realistic Police Procedural, one with an adorable and admirable heroine and many other characters about whom you could actually give a shit. All the time, though, you will have a sense that another story is taking place, one that you can't quite see, one that is being told only in whispers, one that is a supernatural echo of the main narrative, its shadow self, its dark brother. You might tell yourself you're imagining things. But you're not. You don't have to. Paul Kane got there first and has imagined it for you. And—once the stories converge in the tension-filled and well-staged climax in a series of subterranean cells hidden deep beneath the modern city and long lost to history—you'll be grateful that he did. Grateful and impressed. Grateful, impressed and, just a little bit, appalled.

Peter Atkins, January 2010

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,

How I wonder what you are.

Up above the world so bright,

Like a candle in the night.

PROLOGUE

It is a miracle, pure and simple.

And in these times of scientific wonder and technological achievement, it remains a natural marvel. Something that cannot be explained, that probably never will be. It simply is, and has been since humanity was young.

This event depends upon many factors, the odds against it. But still it happens, time and time again. If two eggs are released during ovulation, and then fertilised, the resultant embryos will be linked but in a different way. One may be female; the other male. These are known as the dizygotics (literal meaning: two eggs), or more commonly as the fraternal. They will be close. Closer than any normal siblings can possibly be.

Though not as close as some.

If only one egg is released that month, the usual amount for a healthy adult woman, and this is so seeded, the consequence is life. A single living organism, either male or female. A person.

But if this egg should divide, then that's when the miracle really occurs.

If the split comes at the end of the first week after conception, or into the second, the embryos become a mirror image of each other. A reflection. If one should turn out to be right-handed, the other will be left. If one happens to have a hair parting on the left-hand side, the other will be granted a parting on the right. If they should look at each other face to face, it will be like looking into a three-dimensional mirror.

If the separation is somehow delayed and comes during or after the second week, it will never be complete. The embryos will be linked, not only mentally, but also physically. Attached to one another at the chest, the side, the head ... Depending on the circumstances this may be operable. Or it may be permanent. Two

bodies – two people – destined to live forever as one. In the more extreme cases, one may even have to be sacrificed so that the other can live, resulting in a great many moral and religious ramifications. They are known as the conjoined or the Siamese, the latter after the famous nineteenth century performers Chang and Eng Bunker, and account for around five percent of babies born this way.

But if the division appears during the first week, exact duplicates will emerge just under nine months later, genetically identical. The same in appearance, in looks if not in personality ... even as infants they will display very different characteristics. However, the fact remains that no matter how “individual” they grow up to be, they started off as a single entity. And, whether they like it or not, they will be alike in just as many ways as they are distinct.

Inside the womb, the developing foetuses interact.

They kick and nudge each other, perhaps trying to get back that which they’ve so recently lost. To meld together again. To share existence. Or are they possibly just communicating with the being they will come to call their “other half”? A secret code only they can decipher, only they can understand. Some might say these are merely reflex spasms, the same ones most babies have from time to time. The jolt a mother feels as her child lets its presence be known.

One thing is for certain: there *will* be a dominant baby. One that takes more sustenance from the parent, and is accordingly that little bit heavier on delivery – seven pounds as opposed to six pounds eleven ounces, for example. Of the two sharing part of their blood supply, this will get the most, in some senses feeding itself on the less assertive child. This explains why most births of this kind are premature, delivered early, sometimes by caesarean section.

And occasionally the first to be delivered might seem inert, a stillborn. Only to wake up screaming as soon as its double eventually surfaces. As if waiting to take that vital breath together, to start *their lives* together. They share a bond that can never truly be broken; neither by time nor by distance.

Not by anything.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

The city has two faces.

This thought had often occurred to him and seemed especially relevant tonight. Two faces. One: respectable, happy, smiling. Carefree. At times even beautiful – on the right day, in a particular light, usually during the summer when the parks and streets were filled with families, children. Or even at this time of year as its residents geared up for Christmas and the shop fronts were plastered with decorations.

Then there was the other face. Ugly, contorted, vicious. Half hidden by the shadows – it had teeth, crooked and sharp. And it could bite. This was the face it hardly dared show to the world, made up of drug pushers and vagrants, prostitutes, muggers and rapists.

If you were lucky you never got to see this face. But then Roy Mason had never really believed in luck.

He cast his eyes over Norchester's streets tonight. This Sunday night. The endless sea of tiny lights, the people out and about ... the traffic, of which he made up only the tiniest of proportions in his dirty, silver Granada. Mason slid the steering wheel through his hands, breaking off from the main procession. He turned left down a narrowing road.

I'm staring into the eyes of that ugly face right now, he thought.

Fagin's Row, so called because thieves were everywhere, picking more than just a pocket or two, was a collection of old flats and office buildings that should have been torn down long ago. As it was, people still lived in over half of the flats and a handful of small businesses continued to run from the office buildings, mostly ones involving pornography or buying and selling stolen goods.

Fagin's Row also contained its fair share of derelict buildings, boarded up places that were simply not fit for human habitation. It was to one of these that Mason was speeding now, a building just off

Arndle Street that used to be a fudge-making factory way back when – quite a famous one, too, if Mason remembered his history. He wondered what had happened to its owners after the company went bust. Perhaps they were still living here somewhere, hiding *their* faces behind locked doors and listening out for any noises on the landing-ways.

Even if he hadn't known this city as well as he did, Mason would still have been able to find the place quite easily just by following all the flashing blue lights. The next corner yielded a picture he'd seen so many times in his career; there weren't many who hadn't. Orange and white squad cars, men and women in uniform flitting to and fro. A crowd contained behind the cordon, peering past the people dressed in black and white. A TV camera crew with a reporter doing a piece into the lens, standing off to one side. Newspaper reporters were jotting down notes on pads. Photographers were clicking away, one flash following another. Mason tucked his car in by the side of the road and sighed.

Climbing out, he locked up the vehicle and readied himself.

The television people were the first to see him. The male reporter intercepted Mason on his way to the building. "Excuse me ... Excuse me, Detective Inspector Mason. It is D.I. Mason, isn't it? I wonder if we could have a word."

Mason grimaced. A word: there were quite a number of words he'd like to give him. "I have nothing to say at this time."

The other reporters could sense blood in the water. *Feeding frenzy*, thought Mason. They joined the TV crew and pointed Dictaphones and Pentaxes at him.

"Is it true there's a dead body in there, sir?" asked the persistent TV man.

"If you'll let me get by, I'll have a look and tell you."

"Do you think this might be a gang-related killing?" This question came from one of the print reporters.

"No comment."

Mason pushed past them, a little too forcefully. A young constable could see he was having difficulties and called over some of his colleagues to deal with the situation. They let Mason through, and he immediately strode towards the building, grumbling under his breath.

Mason was handed a pair of disposable, elasticated slippers and he quickly put them over his own shoes. The side-door was already

open and he could hear voices coming from inside. With another loud sigh, he entered the crime scene.

It was dark inside the old factory, in spite of the temporary lights that had been set up for their benefit. Mason saw a smattering of people in white suits – Scene of Crime Officers – gathered a bit further in, and the police photographer’s flash blitzing the zone. Then he spotted the person he was really looking for. She was a little over five feet tall and wore a dark grey overcoat. Her chestnut hair was cut quite short, coming to a stop just shy of her shoulders. When she turned, he saw she had on a trouser suit beneath the coat. What little of her blouse was exposed shone a brilliant white in the glare from the lights.

“Sir,” Deborah Harrison said by way of a hello.

“So much for the day of rest, Sergeant,” said Mason. “What’ve we got?”

“It’s probably best if you see for yourself.”

She led him to the reason why they were all out here on this chilly late November evening. There, in the corner of the room, next to a wall with broken bricks spilling out of it from several different wounds, was a body. It looked like it was asleep, propped up, with its head lolling on its chest and legs taking on the shape of an inverted “V”. At first glance it could have been mistaken for a wino who’d had too much turps, or a drug addict who’d overdosed on heroin. But the man, for as Mason came closer he discerned it was a man, was missing his right hand. And there was a massive patch of red staining the wall behind him. Blood, dried now and glued to the brickwork.

“Shit, what a mess.”

“That’s one way of putting it.” Mason spun around at the sound of another familiar voice. Standing behind and to the right of him, crossed hands holding a leather case, was pathologist Rosy Lim. She smiled a smile that seemed most inappropriate given the circumstances, twin dimples forming in her cheeks. Mason remembered her telling him once that she was only one-third Chinese, but it was a very telling third. Rosy’s oriental looks gave her aspect a beautiful, and extremely powerful, grace. Mason noticed her hair was tied back in a pony-tail which meant that she’d probably already given the body a cursory examination; Rosy always made sure her long black hair was out of the way before getting down to business. “Although I doubt if I’ll be putting that down in any of

my reports."

Mason nodded. "Miss Lim."

"I won't keep you in suspense, Inspector. I've given our man here the once-over, and cause of death is probably a puncture wound to the lower back ... or I should say the consequent loss of blood. However, only a fraction of that blood is actually on the wall and floor, which means he was almost certainly killed elsewhere and dumped here afterwards. At a guess I'd hazard he's been dead for several days. The hand was most likely removed after his death. A clean cut; nothing sloppy."

"Any sign of the hand?" Mason asked his sergeant.

Deborah shook her head. "Not yet, sir. But the Scene of Crime boys are far from finished. It's quite a large area to cover."

"What can you tell me about the wound itself, Miss Lim? Are we talking gunshot here? Knife?"

Rosy looked from Mason to the corpse. "I'll know more once I've conducted the autopsy, but if you pushed me I'd have to say it was some kind of spiked instrument."

"What do you mean, like a needle?"

"No, larger. There are holes in the back of his shirt, quite large holes. But no slits. I don't believe it was a knife."

"Right. Well, thank you, Miss Lim." Mason turned to Deborah. "Who found the body?"

"A group of homeless people, sir. Broke in looking for shelter against the cold I expect. Found more than they bargained for."

"I'm surprised they called it in. Where are they now?"

"Back at the station, giving their statements. I thought it was best not to let them wander about out there," said Deborah.

"And, of course, they get to spend the evening in a nice warm nick being fed tea and biscuits. You're too soft for your own good, you know that, Blondie?"

"Sir."

"But you're right about one thing, we don't want them gabbing to the press about all this. Not yet, anyway. Which reminds me, someone had better speak to those arseholes out there."

"And tell them what?"

"You'll think of something."

Deborah cocked her head and gave him a scornful look. "And what are you going to do in the meantime, Sir?"

"Talk to a higher authority, Sergeant."

“I don’t think praying’s going to do much good,” commented Rosy, who’d been listening to their conversation.

“I was thinking of a much higher authority than that, Doctor.” Mason took out his mobile phone and flipped it open. “Hello,” he said into the mouthpiece, “could you put me through to Chief Superintendent Bingham, please ...”

Deborah was pretty pleased with how she handled the collective media outside.

Professional, and yet understanding. Detached, and yet candid. She gave them a few crumbs to broadcast on the news that evening and put in their rags tomorrow morning, withholding pretty much all of the valuable information, as Mason would expect her to do. She fended off the precarious questions to the best of her ability, and sent “the arseholes” away with what they thought they wanted. *And everyone’s a winner*, she thought. *Apart from that poor devil back there.*

It was still the worst part of the job for her. Murder investigation. Anyone would’ve thought she’d be used to it, especially after all she’d seen. But they’d be wrong. You never got used to seeing death up close and personal like that, staring it in the face. Never. What was even more disturbing, though, was the notion that somebody had done that to another human being. Out there, somewhere, was a murderer. Perhaps even *murderers*. The capacity for violence was almost limitless when it came to some people. Nothing was taboo. Not setting a person on fire, not placing a gun up to their head and pulling the trigger, not rape and strangulation. Nothing.

Deborah rubbed her eyes. It had been a long day; trust her to be on duty when something like this happened. She’d started off that Sunday morning questioning two teenage youths about a spate of burglaries in the Partington Lane area of the city, a quiet, well-to-do spot crammed with big, expensive-looking houses – each one boasting a lengthy driveway and enormous garden. Deborah couldn’t help feeling envious when she’d visited them, first to go over the crime scenes, then to make enquiries door-to-door. What a place to live. She could just imagine herself in one of those houses, sitting on the patio sipping cocktails in summer, watching as some stripped to the waist Diet Coke man mowed her garden. When she won the lottery, perhaps. In the meantime she’d managed to crack the case in hand by tracing some of the stolen items to a well-known fence called Bernie Hastings, who’d willingly given over the names

of his suppliers in exchange for a leniency she promised but knew she couldn't deliver.

No sooner had she caught up on the paperwork for that investigation, than the call had come in about the discovery of a body on Fagin's Row. Not a particularly surprising occurrence in itself, but apparently this one was missing its right hand and had blood all over it. She'd driven down there as fast as she could, leaving a string of messages on Mason's home answerphone. Deborah had spent the rest of her day – what was left of it – coordinating the operation. It was now almost eight-fifteen. She'd been up since six and was shattered. There was no such thing as shift work in the Criminal Investigation Division: when they needed you, you had to be there.

Deborah looked up. She suddenly had the strangest feeling. Like someone was watching her. Someone *was* watching her, of course. Lots of people were staring at her from behind the cordon, including most of the press who'd decided to hang around a bit longer in case anything else developed. But no, this was something else. One set of eyes. Deborah felt an iciness that had nothing to do with the freezing winter climate. She twisted her head, looking this way and that.

There.

She saw him, at the back of the crowd. Eyes fixed on her and her alone. A man with wavy hair and a beard. His stare was boring into her; she felt ... Deborah made a move in his direction, slow at first, then more urgent. She didn't know why but she needed to speak with that man.

"Debbie?"

Deborah willed herself not to turn, not to lose sight of the bearded man; *not to break contact*. But instinctively she responded to her own name, and felt the connection fracture, then sever completely – like the dead man's hand back in the dilapidated building behind her.

"Debs? Is everything okay?" Once she'd found out who was speaking to her, Rosy Lim's face blotting out her view, Deborah swung her head back round to search for the stranger in the crowd. As she'd suspected he would be, the man was now gone.

"You all right? You don't look so good."

"What? No, I just thought I saw ..." Deborah realised what she was about to say would sound incredibly stupid and stopped herself at the last moment.

"Thought you saw what?"

"Nothing. It was nothing." Deborah gave Rosy a shrug. "Anyway,

what's up?"

"Message for you from Mason. I quote: 'Tell Blondie she can get going once she's sorted the media out. Tell her to go spend some time with that kid of hers.'"

"Gee, *thanks* Roy. I do all the hard work and he steams in at the last minute," Deborah laughed quietly to herself.

"Isn't that what inspectors are supposed to do?"

"Maybe it's just his way of telling me I look like warmed-over dog crap."

Rosy smiled her dimpled smile. "You do look tired."

"Yeah, well I'm not complaining if his lordship wants to take command of the troops."

"Hey, by the way, there's something I've been meaning to ask you for a while now ... Well, ever since you came to work in our pleasant little city, really," Rosy said as they moved away from the cordon. "Why does he keep on calling you Blondie? Is he colour-blind or something? Your hair's brown."

"It's just a stupid nickname that's followed me around. Mind you, he's the only one with the balls to use it."

"You used to bleach, right?"

Deborah let out a snort.

"Really. Come on, give."

"All right, but don't say I didn't warn you. What's my name?"

Rosy thought for a second or two, then a look of enlightenment dawned on her face. "Ah, I get it. Deborah Harrison. Debbie Harry. Now *that* is lame."

"Told you it was stupid."

"Oh, I don't know. It could have been worse." Rosy smiled again. "I can think of a few—"

Deborah held up a finger. "Don't even go there, Miss *Lim* the pathologist. I mean, who ever heard of a doctor with a name like that? It's like becoming a banker when your name's Mr Cash or something."

Both of them laughed softly. It seemed a strange thing to do, almost disrespectful considering what they'd witnessed that night. But in a way it made sense; humour was a good way to relieve the tension and helped them forget about it all ... for a couple of blessed minutes.

As Rosy waved her on her way, she called out to Deborah, "See you tomorrow, '*Blondie*'."

"You will?"

"The autopsy's at ten-thirty. Mason's booked you both ringside seats."

"Great."

Deborah waited as one of the female Constables let her through the cordon so she could get to her car. And while she waited, she found herself looking over again at the place where the mystery man had stood. Wondering just who he was and what significance his arrival held. But then she shook her head, said thanks to the policewoman, and made her way to the car she'd parked just down the road.

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please consider purchasing the book!

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