

THEY CHOSE FOR YOU

FILE 07 / THE THIRD DOOR

What if the place you turned to
question the system had been
prepared by the same people?

An excerpt from the opening of File 07.

Original text and book pagination preserved.

FILE 07

The Third Door

The folder was on the approved reading list. I did not steal a key or discover a wall that opened when a book was moved. Its presence among ordinary materials made the first pages easier to misunderstand.

I had been asked to review how the project's findings were represented in a proposed application. Three response paths were listed. The first supported the proposed service arrangement. The second opposed it while recommending specified changes. The third was intended for people who distrusted both.

The third path contained language about independence from institutions. It invited participants to question the motives behind the first two. It also directed their questions toward a separate forum whose briefing material had been prepared by the same operational team.

I looked for a note saying this was a simulation. The research examples were clearly marked as exercises. This section was described as an operational proposal with named responsibilities and a preparation schedule. It had not necessarily been implemented. That distinction mattered. The proposal alone was serious enough without turning an intended use into a completed event.

The third forum was not instructed to agree with the first. It could criticize it, publish objections, and demand explanations. Its proposed boundaries concerned the questions it would keep returning to and the alternatives it would treat as practical.

People could be angry inside it without reopening the premise the operation wanted preserved.

I began a list of what the document actually established. The same unit had developed materials for apparently distinct positions. One position was intended to appear independent of the sponsoring process. The purpose included keeping distrust inside an anticipated channel. These were not conclusions I had inferred from the tone of a public debate. They were statements in a proposal assigned to me for review.

Mara read the pages in the records room. She asked who had approved them. The cover carried a routing list and a space for approval. The space was blank.

"Then we know what is being proposed," she said. "Now find out what has been done."

Her caution irritated me because the proposal seemed to explain months of uneasy language. I wanted the explanation to be complete. She wanted the claims to remain attached to their evidence long enough to survive a person who did not already agree.

We requested the version history and implementation status through the review channel. The answer said the material drew on workstreams outside our unit and was subject to separate oversight. It did not identify an implementation date.

Vale called us in before we could ask again. He said we were interpreting the document as a scheme to manufacture opposition when its purpose was to understand how communication failed among people with different levels of trust.

"Why does the third group need to appear independent?" Mara asked.

"Because someone who distrusts an institution may not listen to its representative."

"Then the representation is part of the intervention," I said.

Vale did not deny it. He asked whether all mediation required the recipient to know every relationship behind the mediator.

The question was broad enough to contain innocent examples. We had a specific document. I returned to its wording and asked whether a person entering the third forum would be told that the material originated with the process they were being invited to question.

He said the disclosure would defeat the exercise.

For a moment none of us spoke. He had used *exercise* again. I asked whether this remained a bounded research task with appropriate participation conditions or a proposed intervention involving people who would believe they were joining an independent discussion.

"You are not cleared for every operational detail," he said.

That was an answer about access. It did not make my concern disappear. It did remind me that my appointment to assess risks had boundaries defined by people whose work I might question.

I said I could not endorse an account of voluntary participation that omitted this arrangement. Vale said no endorsement had been requested. My review role was advisory.

I had spent years accepting the authority implied by being consulted. Now its limits were stated precisely at the point where consultation became refusal.

After the meeting, Mara asked whether I intended to resign. I said I did not yet know. Leaving could protect my distance from the work while making it easier for the work to proceed without my questions. Staying could become the excuse by which I participated indefinitely. Neither decision acquired a good meaning merely from its name.

We wrote a joint objection to the proposal. It identified the third path, the missing disclosure, and the difference between understanding distrust and providing a concealed destination for it. We asked that any operational use be suspended pending a review of those issues.

The response acknowledged our concerns and said the relevant authority would consider them. It did not say the use was suspended.

The file continues.

Lorian has raised his objection.
The response has acknowledged it.
What happens to the operation?

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