

Path of Totality, a novel – synopsis (Tysa Goodrich)

In August of 1978, along a Southern Minnesota highway, a wounded Vietnam Veteran of mixed heritage—Ojibwe and White—has just crossed his *line of demarcation*: ten-year anniversary since his return from Vietnam, the day a soldier realizes to the core it's never gonna get any better. **John Goodsky** is on his way back from a funeral, returning to the secluded retreat where he and four other Vets live. Following an impetuously decided detour, John is abruptly reunited with a childhood friend—a Caucasian girl he'd known for seven days in the summer of 1962—when she crashes her car into the same roadside rest stop where he's holed up.

Inside **Cindy Mitchell**'s car, a photograph has just traveled a beam of light and materialized on the front seat—an imperfectly delivered intervention through the crosswinds of space-time by two unlikely women dwelling in a Montana otherworld, developing and teleporting photographs from Cindy's long-lost childhood camera. The boy in the photograph is John.

He recognizes Cindy when he pulls her out of her wrecked, 1973 Dodge Dart—where ten more photographs would later continue to materialize. John and Cindy's reunion is disrupted by the local sheriff who forces John to leave at gunpoint. John shouts a code word from his 1966 Chevy Impala to Cindy, directing her to meet at the cabin where they'd gotten to know each other as children (12 and 9). John and Cindy grapple with implausible, resurfacing memories, while also trying to come to terms with their relationship in 1978—at 29 and 26—adult feelings emerging.

In 1962, Cindy's father had pulled the plug on the Mitchell family vacation, and confiscated Cindy's camera after she and John had run away to see **Emery Eden**'s last movie—upon hearing of the Hollywood movie star's death. The camera was never seen or heard of again.

Who dwells in this Montana otherworld? **Elizabeth Goodsky** (Beth), John's Ojibwe mother, who died in 1960; and Emery Eden (Emma), the Hollywood movie star. These women had met in 1949 when Emery traveled by train from LA to Chicago for her first publicity tour. An extraordinary pact was made between them inside a Rockford movie house—that one day, they'd come together again in the land of mountains and tall pines.

Jim Bailey, a Paiute Medicine Man from Pyramid Lake, Nevada—where filming took place for Emery's last movie—is the go-between and deliverer of supplies to Beth and Emma's mystical ranch house. Jim's red, 1954 Dodge truck—which played a role in Emery's movie—is the supernatural transport that had whisked Emery's spirit away after she completed her climactic scene on camera. John and Cindy had witnessed the whole ordeal as children on the movie screen inside the Gem Theatre.

One day, beyond the Montana Otherworld's boundary, wild mustangs run through a newly formed vortex which also sucks in a Crow Indian girl named **Faith Medicine Horse**, and a *ghost horse* that Emma already knows—a casualty of a too-close, plane-guided aerial filming of galloping mustangs during the 1960 movie, *Lost in Reno*.

Later in the story, other objects are teleported into moving vehicles. A Montana newspaper announcing the upcoming solar eclipse appears in John's Chevy as he and his friend **Tripp Barkley**—also a Vietnam Veteran—are leaving their hideout for good. They are coming from a funeral. One of the Vets, **Marty Lock**—John and Tripp's friend—committed suicide.

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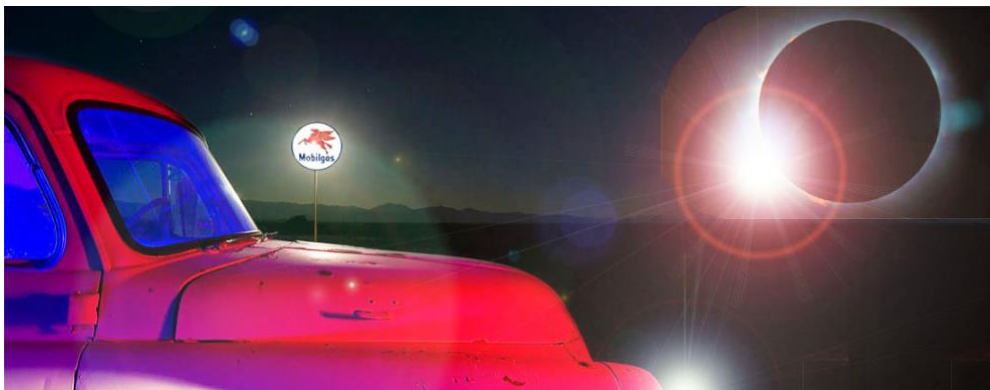
A Montana postcard sent to Emery Eden in 1955 from **Marvin Butler**, the Pullman Porter who met Emery on the Super Chief train in 1949—and who later loses a son in Vietnam—swoops in through the sun roof of a VW Bug belonging to **Desi Butler**, Cindy’s friend who happens to be Marvin Butler’s niece.

A tapestry of timelines and characters converge during the two-minute-forty-nine-second *Moment of Totality*—the February 26, 1979 solar eclipse under a Montana sky. John has a vision of the future, enters the artist’s architectural drawing of the Vietnam Memorial. The dead and missing take their place among the names on The Wall. Tripp and John talk with their deceased friend Marty about the names not on the wall. John sees his mother again in the tunnel of light. Marvin Butler and his wife see their son, brought to them by Emery Eden.

Epilogue: Photograph #12 backtracks to four days before the solar eclipse. A postman retrieves three picture postcards from a collection box. They’d been mailed by Jim the last time he and his red truck appeared in the story. Then, the timeline jumps to June 1990, at the Vietnam-era Veteran Intertribal Powwow in Lame Deer, Montana. Faith and her grandfather, **Henry Red Hawk**, take John and Cindy to the newly reopened doorway of John’s mother’s sacred world at the edge of Crow land. Under a tarp near a dilapidated ranch house is Jim’s red 1954 Dodge truck, its glove compartment containing two journals, and the last photograph from Cindy’s camera: Beth and Emma sitting on their porch swing in front of the house, the way it had looked when they resided there. There’s something else inside that glove compartment: key to the ignition.

Path of Totality – the line drawn by the moon’s shadow
across the earth’s surface during a total solar eclipse.

It is also a path of healing.



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