

SEAN DAVID MORTON


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BASED ON AN INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY

SANDS OF TIME

PRAISE, ADULATIONS AND EXALTATIONS FOR SANDS OF TIME

“EPIC!” “HISTORIC AND SWEEPING!” “WOW!” “GRIPPING!” “FANTASTIC!” “A TOTAL THRILL RIDE!” “STUPENDOUS!” “JUST AWESOME!” “GLORIOUS!” “A BEHIND THE SCENES MEMOIR FROM A MAN IN BLACK!” “GRIPPING!” “IT FREAKED ME OUT!” “JUST GREAT!” “TRULY WONDEROUS!”

*

“Truly a work of genius! This book will define a generation for those that have been seeking the truth since the Roswell crash in 1947!”

~*Michael H. Bara~author of THE CHOICE and DARK MISSION~*

*

“SANDS will change the worlds of physics and science. We have all suspected this black arcane world of super-science has existed just behind the scenes. Sean Morton finally pulls back the curtain!”

~*Richard C. Hoagland~Author Dark Mission, Pyramids of Mars~*

*

“Goddamn if this wasn’t the best thing I have read in years!”

~*Jim Marrs~Author of ALIEN AGENDA*

*

“From page one it grabbed me by the throat and I could not put the damn thing down. One of the greatest novels I have ever read.”

Danny Romero~ American Freedom Radio~

*

“You will never be the same after being pulled into this world.”

Kerry Cassidy~Project: Camelot

*

“Something this genius deserves a TV mini-series. It is the true history of America’s science and technology which has been criminally hidden from us for over 70 years. Let’s just hope its revealed in time to save us!”

Jackie Stander~ Stander & Associates Productions

*

“OFF THE HOOK! It blows the lid off everything and proves what so many have suspected for so long. I didn’t want it to end! Now I can’t wait for the sequel! It answered so many questions about...well...everything!”

Dr. Susan Shumsky~Author of “Ascension”

*

“Politics, government conspiracy, UFOs, super-tech, action, adventure, SANDS OF TIME quite simply has got it all, written in a superb style that hits you in the head, heart and the guts all at once! Bravo, Sean-David!”

Dannion Brinkley~ Author of Saved By The Light

*

“Sean-David Morton has become the fantastic new master of the intelligent, modern day, conspiracy thriller. Sean, the first to film AREA 51 and drag it screaming out of the shadows into our global consciousness, has done it again with SANDS OF TIME. The revolutionary science presented here will change our lives, but I guarantee that after you read this book you will never look at our world, or our universe, the same way again!”

Rick Barber~ National Radio Host. KOA RADIO

“SANDS OF TIME was one of those books that I wanted to shout from the roof-tops **‘YOU GOTTA READ THIS!’** It was so gripping and compelling that it made real for the first time the world that I have been telling people for years existed beyond the media and beyond the government. If this book breaks out it could totally change the game as we know it!

I am buying a case to give every single one of my friends.”

CHRISTIE APHRODITE~Hostes of TRUTH BRIGADE RADIO

*

“Sean-David Morton has been telling it like it is for so many years and **SANDS OF TIME** puts it all in one place. He explains the ‘conspiracy’ that we have all long suspected, but from the other side of the mirror. Who would have thought the life story of a Man In Black, who sheperded so many dark government projects, would be so compelling?”

Kimberly Jagger~ Radio Hostess

*

“I have been involved in top secret government programs and projects for most of my life, and I cannot believe that Sean-David Morton has had the courage and the sheer guts to finally publish the whole truth about everything that has gone down in the last 40 years. **SANDS OF TIME** is not just a fantastic, spellbinding read, it is a scientifically accurate and truly historic document of what, someday, will be told to Mankind as the true history of this planet.”

The Late Dr. Fred Bell~ Author of Death of Ignorance, Rays of Truth and Crystals of Light and Inside Track

*

“Sean-David Morton has been my friend and the top speaker at my Expos in New York for going on 20 years now. Being in the New Age business for most of my life, I have met hundreds of metaphysical speakers and “gurus” and Sean is the only one that truly ‘walks the walk’ and doesn’t just ‘talk the talk’. The dedication and devotion of his fans is truly something. He is a genius and awe inspiring speaker. Who knew he was a genius writer as well? This book is just fantastic!”

Mark Becker~Producer/Owner, The New Life Expo

*

“I was one of Sean-David Morton’s biggest fans from his days on Coast To Coast AM long before we met when I took the job at USC. Since then I have come to know what a truly special and dynamic person he is. **Sands of Time** is just one more example of his drive to get the real truth out to the world, and he has done it like he has done everything else in his life: with style and a smile. Extraordinary stuff!

Pete Carroll~Head Coach, Seattle Seahawks.

SANDS OF TIME

BASED ON AN INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY

Other Books To Love by

Sean-David Morton

BLACK SERAPH

(Book I in *The Black Seraph Chronicles*)

THE DARK PROPHET

(Book II in *The Black Seraph Chronicles*)

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO ASTRAL TRAVEL

THE PSYCHIC GAMBLER'S GUIDE

THE VAJRA CHRONICLES

THE GULF BREEZE PROPHECIES

THE MILLENIUM FACTOR

THE DELPHI ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER Vol. 1-12

(Published monthly from April 1993 to January 2009. R.I.P.)

A complete list of books, materials, lectures, videos, spiritual excursions and radio show information and previews of upcoming projects and events is available at
www.SeanDavidMorton.com.

SANDS OF TIME

BASED ON AN INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY

A NOVEL

SEAN-DAVID MORTON

STARLOCKE PUBLISHING



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SANDS OF TIME

Book I in *The Tempus Fugit Chronicles*

By Sean-David Morton

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Character names have been changed to protect living relatives and active personell.

All referenced history is real, correct and exhaustively researched, and names of various real leaders, political figures, locations, research projects, cutting edge science, technology and mathematical equations are used.

Dedications

The author wishes to thank his darling and devoted wife,

Melissa,

*without whose love, caring, grace and infinite patience,
this book would never have seen the light of day.*

*Without your hard work, dedication and perseverance,
nothing would ever get done.*

I love you deeply and beyond words.

Thank you for sharing this crazy, dangerous journey with me.

*And to all the unsung heroes, those brave men and women
who have labored in the dark for so many years on every Above Top
Secret, Classified, Black Operations*

*government project and program, working to protect us
from all threats "Foreign" and Domestic. Know that this book,
in some small way, shows what you have all
been through to protect our country and our world.*

*Thanks to your efforts, someday soon,
peace and love will reign throughout the galaxy.*

Let us all pray that day comes soon.

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago a powerful, mysterious man approached the author. He had lived virtually all his life as a top director and high-level scientist involved in the Above Top Secret “Black World” of shadow government projects and research. He said he admired the service of the author in his undaunted quest to bring the truth to light and began a feed of crucial inside information to be released to the public.

When certain circumstances presented themselves he wanted to get the truth out to the world, “*Before it was too late*”, as our planet was, he said, “*In grave danger!*” But he could only tell the whole story after he had “*moved on*” to use his exact words.

Two years ago his estate made available documents which were the basis for the book you now hold. This only being done with the agreement that this memoir change the names to protect still living family and active personell.

So, after decades of silence, this truly incredible tale can finally be told. This story explains and clarifies practically all the mysteries researchers have struggled with for years, putting all the puzzle pieces together of dark science, Black Ops and secret government conspiracies that have baffled those seeking the truth for many years.

I hope this will shed light on these for everyone.

I also present the completed *Unified Field Theory* upon which much of this remarkable science is based, and on which I now have a pending US Patent and Trademark. Call it a gift to mankind from our friends in the future as a preperation for the coming shifts.

The story you are about to read is true. There are still forces out there that would literally stop at nothing to silence anyone who comes forward with what you are about to experience. But the persons, places, projects, science, history, events and experiments are all frighteningly real.

SANDS OF TIME was novelized from the original notes for your enlightenment and entertainment, and for the author’s additional protection, so “*The Powers That Be*” will not find it necessary to put a bullet through the author’s head, allowing you to write this all off as a quaint little

“science fiction fantasy fairy tale” if you so desire. So Be It.

I assure you it is not.

SANDS OF TIME



SEAN-DAVID MORTON

PART ONE

SAND DOWN THE HOURGLASS



CHAPTER I

It all started with my father, Doctor Theodore Humphrey, Senior, PhD, somewhere back when the sands of time in the hourglass of all of our lives was far fuller than it is today.

A strange way to begin things really, as the more I reflect on it all in the disparate dark and bright corners of my memory, it's truly a story about me, Dr. Theodore Humphrey, PhD, Junior. Or really just "Teddy" or "Ted" which was much more common with about everyone I ever knew. One of those great names that ages well, where you're Teddy as a kid and to your close friends all your life, Ted as an adult with your business associates and Theodore as an old man, or 'The Beaver' to every bully on earth if you grew up in America in the 1950s, like I did. That name alone made you tough and self-reliant as I pretty much grew up an orphan that raised himself. But I'm getting way ahead of the order of things in linear time, which, in and of itself, is a stunning illusion, as you, gentle readers, shall soon learn. Because Time, as Einstein once said, "Is just God's way of not having everything happen all at once."

But over all the years and in all the time that has passed through the narrowing of the hourglass, falling past me like grains of sands taken from the bleak desert where I grew up, I realized my father was the Alpha and the Omega of this allegory.

God, how I hated him in those days! I'd just started high school. I had a comfortable, riotous, fun-loving, well-established routine and the unimaginably cool lifestyle of a teenager in 1950's Los Angeles. We were the very center of the musical, fashion and entertainment universe. My jerk of a dad moved us away and out onto the planet all that was furthest from: the desert, literally and figuratively, of Barstow, California. We traded one life for...well...I thought it was the worst downhill deal any teenager had ever been dealt. But like so many things in life, also just the lot of being a kid, I didn't have any choice or say in the matter, so I made the best of the move, the new location and the fact that nothing between my father and I ever changed for the better.

He was still obsessed with his work. I was just more aware of it, because now instead of having any friends to go to the park, or the movies, or the beach, or Pacific Ocean Park, or Marineland or anywhere any healthy teenage would go to have an actual life I was now relegated to being near him all of the time. Or at least I was always in the same general environment he was, since he spent most of his time in the small laboratory behind our house so I was either inside watching one of the two stations that came in through the jauntily bent and askew rabbit ears on the our good old Zenith TV or outside avoiding the heat. So the only acceptable alternative I found was working hard at school and playing sports. I got really good at both.

The only thing I really wanted from Ted, (that is what I called him...Ted, being my dad), since the term "dad" or "father", never seemed to fit, was his acceptance of who I was and what I was interested in. I wanted to have a 'dad' like the other guys. Someone that would come to the games on Friday nights and sit up there in the stands with the other fathers and yell and raise holy hell if we got a call against us. Then be there after the game to have pizza with, talking about how we should have won. But

that wasn't the way he was. I guess he wasn't a bad man. Just...different. Quiet. Wrapped up in his own little world. I'm sure...now...that he loved me, as much as he was capable of loving anyone I suppose. But love was an abstraction that couldn't be put into an equation and those were the only things he truly cared about. Those endless chains of white chalk marks on the blackboard that hung in the small office cum bedroom in our home.

We lived out of town in the desert, in a house Ted built over a six-year period. He'd built a simple but nice two-bedroom place in a canyon beyond the far end of the county road. It was made of cinder block and cement and he had painted it in a camouflage desert tan, to blend in with the environment. A secret house, to house his secret life. Blending in, never exceptional, never standing out for fear of being found out or cut back down to size.

At that time there was no bus service into town and I wasn't old enough to drive. So there was a mixture of Ted carting me into school or to the edge of town where I would finish the journey on foot, or, many times, I would catch a ride with one of the other guy's folks that were hauling them around. It was difficult, but we got by with the exception of game nights. When it was time for Friday night football at the high school I would just stay after class and wait around until game time. He wouldn't come into town for just a game. I knew that, but still it would have been nice. I tried not to hold it against him, but being young and thinking that everything should revolve around you, there was a certain degree of resentment on my part.

He was lost in his world of whirling electrons, meters and oscilloscopes. I didn't know at the time how important his work was, but in the years that followed I developed a greater appreciation for his brilliance. When you're sixteen and trying to figure out who you are and what you need to do with your life, you want your parents to occupy the role that you prescribe for them. I just wanted him to be there for me and take part in my world, with all of its self-centered importance.

When you're a kid, you don't know a lot about how most things work. Other guys talked about their dads working at Sears or over at the Twenty Nine Palms Marine Corps Base. When it was my turn I just kind of shrugged and told people my father did research, which was true, but I am sure that everyone thought he worked in a laboratory or for some big outfit where he wore a white lab coat and had horn-rimmed glasses, the kind of guy we saw in Sci-Fi films, always holding a test tube of some chemicals and lecturing about it, that type of researcher they presented to us in class in films and slide shows.

Ted worked in a little shop behind the house filled with electronics he bought in LA and trucked out to Barstow. He repaired almost all of it himself and set it up in his mad scientist "lab". He'd spend from mid-morning until two or three at night in there, working on his "projects." The air conditioning running hard like a wheezing old mare up a steep hill as it dripped water out the back vent onto the single plant struggling to flower next to the window of the lab. His only comfort and companions were the steady hum and throb of the electronics and his own deep, dark murky thoughts.

Mom had left just after Ted returned from Europe at the end of World War Two. He had been there since '42, working in England at a place called Bletchley Park. Ted didn't talk much about what he did there and I think my mom was ashamed that he had not been in the service, but rather was a civilian employee. She'd lost two brothers in the South Pacific serving with Marines and her older brother had been permanently disabled from the Navy. Her view of anyone not being in uniform was they were a sickly weakling or, worse, a draft dodger of some kind. I was six or seven when he got back and within a year I heard them arguing one night. The next day, I found out that she had left to go up to Portland and stay with her sister who ran a dress shop downtown. We were still in Los Angeles at the time and most of what I

remember was going to the desert, around Barstow, every weekend and Ted working on the house and shop. For me, well, I played with the lizards and tried to avoid the big rattlers that slithered down the hill to drink from the hose that was always running while he mixed mortar. I would go up for a couple of weeks in the summer to see mom in Portland, but that stopped after the second year. We talked on the phone, once a month, but even that after three years became calls on birthdays and Christmas. By the time we moved out to the desert, I hardly spoke to her if ever at all.

Ted wasn't a bad father. He never yelled at me or beat me. Hell, he just wasn't there even when he was. I pretty much didn't want to go out to the desert to live when he moved us out there in the summer of 1952. I was getting ready to start Santa Monica High School and then one June morning he told me he'd sold the house and that we were going to be the newest residents of Barstow. I considered moving to Portland with my mom, but after a ten minute phone call when she explained that she had gotten married again and that Jack, her new husband, a retired Army Sergeant, probably wouldn't be inclined to take in a teenager, I got the message. So, reluctantly, I helped Ted load up the station wagon and drove out to the middle of the Devil's own special Hell in the middle of summer, with no air conditioning. "Terrible" was the only word I had for it when we got there. He had someone move our furniture, what sparse little we had, and we had to go through boxes to find everything. It took weeks to put things away and get organized as the summer slipped away in a haze of blistering heat and a maze of boxes and clutter that slowly took shape into what would be the confines of our existence, but by then it was time to start high school. And not the cool, hip, happening scene of Santa Monica High, with surfing and beach blanket bashes and girls with blonde hair that made it seem like they were made out of pure gold, but high school in...Barstow...and all the glamour that implied.

The only interesting thing about old Barstow High, and I do mean the only one interesting thing, was the fact that most of the families from the Marine base at Twenty-Nine Palms had kids going there. So it was nothing at all, and was, in fact, the rule rather than the exception, to have a new kid show up and start school. It made it easier than I was expecting it to be. There was no jockeying for social position, or deciding which click to be in, or beating or hazing the new kid, because we were all new kids. Military brats had a special understanding that we were all orphans at the whim of mean ol' Uncle Sam, and it was us against the world. Everyone develops that grinning thousand-yard stare that laughs through a special kind of pain and makes friends easily but is always detached and distant. Never getting too close, because you know you are going to bug out to somewhere new at a moments notice and whatever romance, or connection or friendships or security you had was all going to be ripped away and you would have to start all over again.

I had a natural talent, which is what Coach Bender called it, for football. I was taller than all of my classmates and no one likes the idea of a freshman playing on the Varsity. But old blood and guts Bender was going to use me as a tailback and no one was going to change his mind. I lettered my first year and every year after that. Ted never made it to one game in four years. He would tell me that he would try to make this one or that one, but I know his mind would get wrapped up into something he was doing and that by the time I was walking up the driveway at ten at night, he would be just looking at the old black clock on the wall and trying to figure out if it was AM or PM.

Ted did come to one of the awards dinners on a late January evening, during my senior year. It was a Friday night. I still clearly remember it, because it had such a shattering effect on my life. He walked into the room in a hounds tooth hat and a checkered sports coat that was ten years out of style and too big for his tall, lanky frame, a buttoned tweed vest, a pair of pleated pants that were three sizes too large and a spotted bow tie that looked as if it had been knotted during an epileptic seizure. He

was in full mad professor mode and this was the night that I first knew something was truly different about my own father. We were there about an hour. The dinner had been served and the waitress's were picking up plates, when one of them, a really good looking young woman by anyone's standards, stopped and stared at Ted for almost a minute. The other guys were all looking at her and my dad and then over at me, poking each other in the ribs with their elbows as I got embarrassed and turned away.

"Doctor... Humphrey... Theodore Humphrey, isn't it?" She put the plates down quickly on the table and wiped her hands on her small black apron.

"I am." He replied absently, but looking right at her and cocking his head as if he were thinking or about to ask a question. My dad had a thin face, with a slightly receding hairline on both sides, a thin moustache just below his nose. He always had a pale whitish pallor from being in the lab so much, but his features were strong, striking and noble and I guess he would have been considered, by some, a very handsome man.

"Ann Corbett." The waitress stuck out her hand in a sudden thrusting gesture. Ted looked down at it for a long moment as if deciding what to do or contemplating its structure and anatomy.

"I have been wanting to speak to you for months!" Ann Corbett said, sounding relieved and hopeful, speaking in that overly loud tone women used in the America of the 1950s. "Do you think that you can spare some time for me?"

"Ah! Simon's friend?" My dad finally took her hand and shook it, rising up to properly greet her in the process, but still looking worried and uneasy.

"Yes." She flushed and then looked around realizing how strange this must have looked to the fifty people in the room. "I am sorry. I need to get these off the table and get back to work. It was just that I recognized you and I so wanted to meet you..." She trailed off, picked up the plates and hurried out of the room, but only after handing him a note that he quickly read and put into his vest pocket with a nod.

My dad sat back down and went off into that undiscovered country inside his head. I wasn't sure where he was, but I knew he sure the heck wasn't sitting next to me for the rest of the evening. I didn't see the waitress anymore that night and we didn't mention it on the way home as it would have seemed like bad manners to interfere in grown-up affairs, which made little sense to me anyway. When we walked into the house, I dropped my bag and letterman's jacket onto the chair. He was still standing in jam of the open door holding his keys.

"Would you mind if I went out for a while?" I stood for a moment in shock that he was asking me for permission to do something. Like we never were apart or something. For four years I felt like he wasn't there even when he was.

"Um...yeah...No. It's fine Dad. You should go out and have a good time." I couldn't figure out what was going on, but he turned to go then stopped and turned back looking at the floor and then up at me as he took a long breath.

"You know that I am...very proud of you." He said haltingly; as if they were words he had thought about for a long time, but could only, just now, bring himself to say. "You have turned into a fine man. Any father would be pleased and proud to take the credit for the way you have turned out, but I know that you have raised yourself for the most part. My work has consumed me over the years. I don't think it has been fair to you. But sometimes things aren't always fair. There is a paper over on the desk." He raised his head ever so slightly in that direction. "It is your acceptance to the University of Southern California. It's the best college in the world." He thought for a moment, lost again in the swirling mist of his thoughts. "Trojans. Tough."

And that was the last thing he said. He turned, put on his hounds tooth hat and that oversized checkered coat and walked out of the house, disappearing into the night as the door closed behind him.

I walked over and looked at the envelope with the cardinal and gold logo on it from USC. I opened the letter and it said I was to be enrolled in the fall classes in Los Angeles. My tuition, room and board had been paid up for four years in advance and all I had to do was show up for the first day of class. It was a full ride, all expenses paid, and it went on to say there was even a special account set up with the USC bookstore with funds on deposit for books and supplies or anything else I needed.

I stood dumbfounded.

Normally one has to apply for entrance to a major college with grades, test scores, personality profiles, extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation from your teachers and all the falderal and pomp and circumstance that goes with all that stuff, sorting through letters of rejection and acceptance and campus visits with your family. Heck, I didn't think I had actually been anywhere long enough to even get to know a teacher well enough for them to have any impression at all, much less have anything nice to say about me. I didn't think I could make it into even a state college or some crummy public UC school like UCLA, let alone one of the best private universities in the world.

But apparently Ted had made all the executive decisions and applied for me. Looking back he must have pulled some hefty strings with some very heavy people along the way. I suppose I should have been mad that I didn't get to decide for myself, but USC was fine by me. If you've lived in Southern California for any period of time you can't help but become a fan of USC as I had been since I was a kid no matter where I was. The football team. The colors. The Tradition. The Horse. The Band. The Fight Song. The power of the Alumni and the Trojan family was a very real thing here.

The weight of exactly who my father was and what he had just done for me began to emboss itself upon me. I finally sat down, mostly from shock and confusion, and held the letter tight in both hands, looking at it as if it were a miraculous religious icon from the distant past, like it was about to sweat or cry tears of blood any second. I wanted to thank him, but that would have to wait until later.

Much later.

After the events of three nights ago I made a fateful decision to write down a record of the events of my life in the hope that someone, somewhere out there, would finally read it and make sense of it all.

In fact, if you are reading this now, it means that I am already dead or moved ahead to a much better place or time. The heroic men I have entrusted my story to will literally risk their lives to tell the world what I never could while I was alive, on Earth or in this timeline. But now, more than ever, everyone needs to know the true nature of the situation on the planet on which they live, because time is running out for all of you.

Someone might say, not seeing your father for a while and then bumping into him is no big deal. The only problem with meeting him again was that I hadn't seen him since that night he left the house and told me to open that letter.

That was more than forty years ago.

So, with tears in my eyes, as I watched him walk out of my life again, into the thick mists of that foggy night, I thought back on all the time I had spent without him, wondering if he was dead or alive.

My work had led me down many different paths that few men on this Earth have ever travelled, but even that hadn't prepared me for the events of these last three days. That part of this story I will get to, but first I need to tell you what has happened in the intervening years and all I have done, which somehow makes my father's story and mine, almost, as Dr. Carl Jung would say, synchronistic.



CHAPTER 2

Early Saturday morning I was up about 8:00am. Sleeping in this one day of the week, especially after a hard fought and won football game on a Friday night, was the single luxury I allowed myself and dad never seemed to mind. Usually he was already out in the lab behind the house to let me sleep in, so I wasn't too concerned.

That was until I saw our station wagon pull into the driveway, followed by county Sheriff Phil Hampton. He'd been the sheriff for more than ten years, being reelected every four years. He was cool, low key, liked by everybody and a hometown hero football star. His attitude about law enforcement was a measured response that was firm and fair. Sheriff Phil didn't tolerate anyone breaking the law, but, equally, he would come down really hard on any of his men that he found abusing their power. The Sheriff had been part of the booster club at the high school for years and in the hallway up by the principal's office was a glass case of memorabilia of past teams. There, in the 1932 through '34 football photographs, our team had won the divisional championships back to back, the State championship in '34 and Phil Hampton had been an All-American crashing right guard. He had a knee injury on the last play of the State Championship game getting our guy in for the winning touchdown that kept him from going pro, which just added to his legend and myth. When WWII came he was deferred from service because his knee and his role as a deputy sheriff so they made him the liaison between the Marine Corp base and the county. This made him a very well known and respected person at all levels of government within our isolated little desert community. I'd met him dozens of times at rallies and meetings of the boosters. He was big, amiable and always friendly.

But not today. This morning he looked really official when he got out of his black and white Crown Victoria cruiser. I opened the door and watched as another man parked our station wagon under the carport. Phil walked up and stretched out his hand to shake mine.

"How are you?" His grip was firm and as solid as the man himself.

"Good." I said cautiously. "What's up and why is somebody else driving our station wagon?" I looked at the man getting out and didn't recognize him. He was in some kind of green and tan uniform and looked like a Marine from the base.

"Well," Sheriff Hampton said hitching up his belt. "To tell you the truth I don't know what's going on. I was hoping you might help me, oh, well, maybe fill in some blanks this morning." He pointed into the house and I stepped aside as the Sheriff cautiously stepped in. I gestured to the other man to come in out of the sun as well, but he just waved me off, preferring to lean up against the police car with his arms folded across his chest.

"When did you last see your dad?" Phil was looking around the living room and stuck his head into both bedrooms.

"Last night, after the football awards dinner. We came back here and he said he needed to go out for a while. Why all the questions, Sheriff?" I was confused and didn't understand what was going on.

SANDS OF TIME

“The military found his station wagon out on Higgins Road by the old steam plant. It had this inside, stuck under the horn ring.” Phil handed me a menu from the restaurant that we had been at last night. I looked at it and then turned it over.

There, on the back, was a note that could only have been penned in my father’s precise handwriting:

Teddy,

I need to go away and you probably won't see me again for a very long TIME. Call Uncle Bob. He will help you with everything. Sell the house and move in with him and Judy. They will take care of you until you get on your own. The profits from the house and the bank account are yours to help set you up when you graduate college. USC is all taken care of.

Make something of yourself! You have what it takes!

I wish I could tell you more, but I just don't have the...TIME.

I love you more than my own life.

I am sorry for all that I could not be for you.

We will see each other again...someday. In TIME. I promise.

~Dad~

I stared at it, rereading it a few times and finally looked up at Sheriff Phil for answers. My face flushed and my eyes stung like I’d been slapped, still hoping this was nothing.

“This is really a bad joke, Sheriff. You know that?” I didn’t want to believe it. It couldn’t end this way, but then again, why should it be any different from the rest of my life up to this point? A life always bordering on a whole universe of the strange and bizarre. That signpost up ahead...you’re entering...*The Humphrey Zone!*

“I’m afraid it’s not a joke, son.” The Sheriff took off his hat and rubbed his hand through his hair. “I had half the department out scouring the desert with the help of the military. They sent over a couple of choppers and ran a search pattern out 50 miles. No tracks in the sand leading away from the car, no blood trails, no footprints no...nothing.” He threw up his hands in defeat, and then got to the point. He looked really hard at me for a long while tilting his head down to look directly into my eyes.

“Ted. Did you have anything to do with this?”

I understood the question but I couldn’t believe he was asking it.

“Wh-what?” I couldn’t imagine that anyone could even think such a thing, showing just how naive I was. “A-are you asking me if I...*murdered* my dad?”

“You fellas have a fight or something?” Sheriff Hampton put his hat back on and wrapped his thumbs into his belt, the palm of his right hand resting on his gun, which was not lost on me.

“Sir...Sheriff...Phil!” I sputtered. “We hardly ever talked! He spent most of his time out in his lab working on God knows what. Last night, before he left, he told me I was just accepted to USC. Then he walked out of here to...do something...or go somewhere! That’s all I know. Now, between you telling me he’s missing and grilling me like I’m Lana Turner’s kid, I don’t know what to think.” I needed to call Uncle Bob. I knew that. He could make some kind of sense out of this.

“Well I think you probably should come with me down to the station. Just until we get some of this sorted out.” Sheriff Hampton opened the door and handed me my letterman jacket.

“Are you...arresting me?” I looked at him as I took the coat.

“Hell no!” I could tell he felt the frustration of the situation as well. “I just think it’s better if you’re with me, down there, than being here all alone.”

A voice boomed out, startling us both.

“I don’t think he has to go anyplace, Sheriff.”

We turned and standing in the door was Uncle Bob with his wife Judy standing behind him. My uncle, Robert Humphrey, was a dead ringer for Marshall Matt Dillion on *Gunsmoke*, or, you could say, James Arness looked like my Uncle Bob, with maybe a little George Reeves tossed in. He had the face and body of a classic 1950s hero, like the kind of man you would find in comic books or movie serials. He was 6’4 with wavy jet-black hair tinged slightly gold from California sunshine, piercing blue eyes, a jutting lantern jaw and was two hundred and thirty pounds of solid, rippling muscle. Bob was physically everything that his brother, my dad, was not. Ted was one of the quietest men anyone could ever want to meet. Bob was out-going, loud, abrasive and one of the best cops in the Los Angeles Police Department and he let everyone know it. Judy had been some kind of starlet that didn’t make the big time in Hollywood, but when she got a chance to tie the knot with a guy that was always in the papers she did it in a heart beat. He was pulling out his well worn black leather ID case and with a flick of his wrist flipped open the cover to flash that huge world famous shining badge emblazoned with the magnificent ziggurat topped obelisk of the City Hall building that was the symbol of Southern California that said to everyone who saw it, “I am a cop and proud of it!”

“Detective Bob Humphrey. L.A.P.D. Homicide.” He said in a booming voice as he held it out for the local yokel to gawk at, but it had little impression on good ol’ boy Sheriff Phil.

“Little bit out of your jurisdiction, aren’t you?” He noted the badge and the identification card that went with it.

“Teddy is my nephew. Dr. Theodore Humphrey is my brother and when he called us last night at 3:07 AM, he said something like this might happen. Are you all right son?” I nodded dumbly. Bob took a sharp, crisp step aside and shot out his arm, which was Aunt Judy’s cue to come into the house and put her arm around me. She looked sad, sadder in fact than the rest of us, and I remember she smelled nice, like crushed roses and lavender scented hairspray, and that she was wearing a soft pink fuzzy cashmere sweater clipped with a small chain around her neck, a gentle touch of feminine style and civilization which you never saw much in the desert badlands of Barstow. I think shock had just opened up my awareness to all the details of what was going on around me, like it was all happening to somebody else in slow motion.

The Marine that had been leaning on the car outside came into the house to see what was going on, and maybe to offer back up for the sheriff. He stood at ease just inside as the screen door closed behind with a thump.

“Doc Humphrey called you last night?” The Sheriff asked.

“He did.” Said Bob, putting his fists on his hips as if an American flag was waiving in a stiff wind behind him. “He told me he had to leave on top secret government business and that we needed to come out here and make sure Teddy didn’t get some kind of rail job done on him.” Bob walked around and looked at the small cluttered house with his normal disapproving glances, like a detective gathering evidence for use later on.

Sheriff Phil took exception to my uncle’s demeanor almost immediately. “We don’t do rail jobs in my county.”

“Yeah, well I am here to make sure of that.” Bob said jamming his thumb toward his chest. “I received the call and will swear in a court of law under oath to what he told me. And where I come from, my oath is pretty well accepted as gospel.”

Bob was really good at making friends quickly, I could tell that already.

"Now," Bob jutted his chin up and turned his glaring heat vision down on the Marine, "what have you done to find my brother?"

"Sir," the Marine began, visibly stiffening to attention, "we combed the desert and didn't find a trace of him out there. We found the car and brought it back here. We..."

"Did you dust it for prints?" Bob interrupted.

Bob was used to having people jump when he spoke and being here was obviously the last place he wanted to be and it was showing.

"No, we didn't." The Sheriff jumped in testily. "We didn't think we had a crime scene. There's no law against someone walking away from home. Well, at least not in this part of California there isn't." Phil stood his ground.

"Should have dusted it first. Any blood or anything out of the ordinary in it?" Bob stood there looking down at the man. I was relegated to the status of onlooker at this point.

"Only this menu." Phil reached out and took it out of my hands and handed it to him.

Bob read it and sighed. "Crazy bastard!" Bob said under his breath as he shook his head. "I told him not to get mixed up with that bunch of quacks." He handed it to Judy. She looked at it and her eyes went wide with worry and concern then handed it reverently back to me, like it was a family heirloom.

"What bunch of quacks are you talking about?" Phil said, now looking really confused.

"Oh, when he was in LA he worked for a gang of government types from back east. All super hush-hush. Security clearances, background checks, Manhattan Project level stuff. I told him to go back to academia where he was before the war, but he wouldn't hear of it. Then four years ago he up and quits and comes out here to the middle of nowhere to...fiddle with his goddamn gadgets." Bob was clearly a man of opinions that much was clear.

"Do you think he was working on something that got him into trouble?" Phil's interest was peaked now, as I could see the gears turning, and he was no stranger to government cloak and dagger intrigue out here in Barstow.

"No. It's been too long. Four years is a long time out of that kind of activity. Listen," Bob came at me suddenly, getting very close, "did he ever speak about anyone from Los Angeles, Teddy?" I could tell he was running down his list of possibilities as well.

"Last night at the awards dinner," I said, swallowing hard from fear, "a...waitress...that I've never seen before, spoke to him and they seemed to know each other through some kinda mutual friend. That was the only weird thing that happened." I didn't think it mattered but since it had such a strange effect on dad, I thought I would mention it.

"Did she say her name?" Bob looked carefully at me. There was something in his eyes I didn't like.

"Yessir, she did." I stood there for a minute trying to remember what she said exactly. "She said her name was...um...Ann...and then dad asked her if she was a friend of, um...Simon...or something like that." I tried hard to pull it back, but at the moment I had just been embarrassed by it and wasn't really paying much attention.

"Ann...Ann..." Bob crossed his arms and stroked the razor-sharp line of his chin deep in thought for a minute and I could see the gears in his head working. "Ann...not...Ann Corbett, was it?"

"Yeah! That was it! Why? Do you know her?"

It was like all the air came out of this heroic man. Suddenly, sadness swept over him like a crashing wave and he walked over to the couch and sat down putting his hands over his face. I felt like I had just hit him in the gut with a kryptonite sledgehammer. I'd never seen my uncle look this bad.

“Do you know her?” The Sheriff asked Uncle Bob. Judy walked over and put her hand on his shoulder to raise him from his stupor.

“What?” Bob looked at Phil as though he was seeing him for the first time. Phil noted the change in my uncle as well.

“I said do you know this Ann Corbett woman?”

“No. No, I don’t. But it was just that four months ago Ted called and asked if I could check our records for a woman named Ann Corbett. He said he really needed to know anything about her that I might be able to find out.” Uncle Bob got one of those far off looks in his eyes; the same one dad would get now and then when he was thinking about something really hard.

“Did you find out anything?” Phil sat down in a chair across from him and took out his notebook and started to make some notes.

“We have the largest R and I center in the country.” Bob looked up at Judy and I. “Records and Information. Really modern. We have the very latest in punch card computers and can run through tens of thousand of them in a half hour or so and pull up all kinds of information about anyone ever involved in a police case of any kind.” He sounded like Joe Friday on Dragnet. Actually, he kind of was.

Phil looked up from his notebook. “We use a similar system, just not as big as you city boys, I’m sure.” A wry smile crossed his lips.

“Sorry Sheriff. Bad habits go with the job.” Uncle Bob actually laughed and was regaining his composure. “We didn’t find anything. I took it on myself to call a friend over at the federal building and asked him to run her through their system.” Bob sighed. “Well that was a real joy filled day, I need to tell you that. All holy hell came down from on high, with my boss chewing on my butt for even asking the feds for a favor. The guy I asked to look her up got reassigned to Bismarck, North Dakota and wouldn’t ever talk to me again. In the end”, he threw up his hands, “I still didn’t know a thing about her.” Bob sat back deflated and looked at each of us. “So when you tell me Ann Corbett shows up here disguised as a waitress and then Ted goes missing, well, two plus two still quacks like a duck to me, Sheriff.”

Phil flipped his notebook closed and stood up and Uncle Bob stood up with him.

“Sheriff, if you have no objections we’ll take Teddy back to LA with us.”

Bob’s whole appearance changed to me. He looked like the quarterback that had just lost the big USC versus UCLA rivalry game of the season and it was his forward pass that had missed the receiver in the end zone.

“I have no problem with that. Is there something else we can do?” Phil had caught something as well in the whole body language thing and knew there was more to this story than anyone else knew.

“No. He’s gone.” Bob said with total finality. “We will probably never see him again.” Bob got up and put an arm around me and tried to act a little more cheerful, but I could tell it was just a masquerade. He knew something and it didn’t seem like he was going to share it with anyone. “Besides, there’s no law about just walking away from everything is there, Sheriff?”

“No sir. There’s no law. There oughta be, but there isn’t.” Sheriff Phil Hampton just shook his head and handed Bob his business card with the number of the department on it and mumbled something about keeping in touch.

My Uncle Bob nodded and with that nod everything in my life changed.

Everything.



CHAPTER 3

Days became weeks, weeks became months and before I knew it, I was in my freshman year at the University of Southern California at what seemed like the center of the universe. I was majoring in physics and mathematics, as USC had no minor programs at the time, so I put in the extra class time and effort to get degrees in both. Thanks to my dad, money was not an issue whatsoever at one of the most expensive schools in the country, and I took full advantage of the situation. No matter what I wanted to do or which classes I wanted to take, mysteriously, the University paid for it all. And all I had to do was submit my schedule of the classes I wanted, and no matter how hard they were to get, or how full they were, I always got priority and they were always approved. It was like some invisible hand was guiding and protecting me every step of the way.

It had taken about three months to sell the house in Barstow and by then I was tied up in school. Uncle Bob arranged for the sorting and cleaning to be done. He had gone out there and taken care of things like selling off the laboratory equipment and getting rid of the furniture. To tell you the truth it was a blessing for me. I really never wanted to go back out there ever again, after the day they told me my dad was gone. It was like I blamed the house and that laboratory out back for somehow taking him from me. I wanted to burn the place to the ground, but obviously selling it and saving the money was what I needed to do for my future. I don't know what it was, but I just sort of closed that whole chapter of my life and went on.

Uncle Bob and I talked once about it just before I moved to the Marks Hall dorm at USC on campus. But the more I asked him questions about what my dad had been involved with, the more reluctant he became to talk to me at all. Judy knew nothing. Her life was about shopping, keeping the house in her perfect anal-retentive fashion, being pretty and constantly adding polish to her fingernails, which all made perfect sense in my universe, with Uncle Bob as the ultimate dominant Uber-Mench Alpha Male then Aunt Judy was the ultimate submissive hyper Uber-Frau Alpha Female. I was sure that she let out an epic sigh of deep relief when I moved out to go to school five months after moving in with them. She would literally follow me around with a sponge and a roll of paper towels in the anticipated horror that I would spill or dribble or drool on anything in her home. She probably spent a week with a rented steam vacuum cleaning every room I breathed in and after that had the place tented, fumigated and finished it all off with a military Haz-Mat team.

Finally, with a month's prior notice, on a long weekend, I went back to visit, knowing, with a certain evil satisfaction, that my Aunt would no doubt spend a week cleaning the house to prepare for my visit and another two weeks cleaning up the place after I left.

As we were talking on the couch, Uncle Bob got up, left the room and came back and handed me a stack of bound books. I could tell he was torn as to whether to give them to me or not, but in reality they were mine now, by inheritance. They were my father's journals from the past four years of research in the desert. He told me I should

probably just burn them, since he couldn't make any sense of them at all and they were probably the insane, demented ramblings of a mad man.

I took those journals with me that day and bound them with an old thick brown leather belt, like Huck Finn coming home from school. I kept them by my bed no matter where I was, right next to my head, and did not open them for almost six years.

Time moved. I learned that being a scientist was a lot more cool, and had much more of a future, than being a jock. I gave up playing football in my second year of college to work full time on my graduate scholarship, a decision that I have never regretted to this day. By the time I was in my senior year, I already had a full scholarship for graduate school at Cal-Tech in Pasadena. A simple move up the 110 and Arroyo Secco freeways and up into the stratosphere of theoretical physics. It was the late 1950s and the space program was just starting to heat up and I wanted to be in the forefront of that race to the stars. The subjects came easy to me and the math was a breeze. I quickly moved from the didactic aspects of grad school to the practical hands-on in the laboratory stuff. This was really the meat and potatoes of the field. Between spending long hours at a chalk board and pushing a slide rule back and forth until I had worn out the tracks on four of them in a year, I was making progress for myself and my mentor.

Before graduating with my PhD doctorate, I had published seven papers on time compression and the uncertainty principals of Heisenberg. The equations of Maxwell Plank were my closest friends during those happy salad days. The teaching positions and job offers were pouring in by the bushel and I had my pick of places to go off to work.

That was when I met Leonard Bates.

Dr. Leonard Bates was a man in his sixties. He was small, wiry and never sat down for more than a few minutes at a time. His field was the emerging science of automated calculation machines or as some had started to call them...computers.

Bates would talk about the movement in the future from analog modalities to something called "digital". I had heard about all of this at college, but the programs were still in their infancy and most of my professors said it would be years before anybody could make the breakthroughs necessary to create the machines that could do what we did everyday in our labs with a slide rule, a calculator and a chalk board. But Bates was insistent that I listen to his pitch about going to work for him.

He was running a new facility for the government out on the end of Long Island, New York and wanted the brightest and best to be there working with him. He wasn't really clear about what they were working on but it had a lot to do with time envelopes and distortion of space and time in the continuum. Headly and theoretical stuff. It was exciting and mysterious and made me want to know more.

But the idea of being buried out in some facility where the mail was delivered by horse wasn't my idea of what I should be doing with my life. Bell Laboratories was at the head of my list of private firms I wanted to look at and see if they had what I was looking for. Behind them, RCA, Radio Corporation of America was a strong second. A new agency was being formed in the government called the National Aeronautics and Space Administration that looked like it was offering some promising opportunities as well. When Bates made an appointment to see me on a July afternoon in my lab at Cal-Tech I was less than excited. My mentor and advisor for my doctorate had told me to see him and that was enough to convince me I could spend an hour with the old guy and then get on with my work and my search for a new home. I would have my doctorate in less than two months and I was ready to go out and carve a place in the Brave New World for me to stand.

Bates came into my lab about three in the afternoon. The first thing he did without even saying hello was look at my chalkboard, spending a good five minutes going over what I was working on. I was used to stodgy old crazy professor types by now, so I

leaned back in my chair with my fingers clasped behind my neck and watched while he had his fun.

He nodded at some things humming approval and then frowned at others with a shake of his head and a tch-tch of his tongue and a few 'that-will-never-dos'. I wasn't sure how to read him at all. Bates was adorned in the traditional dress of the old-school scholar: a tweed jacket with elbow patches, striped tie and checked shirt. His shoes weren't polished well at all and if he owned a comb, he hadn't used it for a month.

Walking over to the place where I sat going over some notes and basking in the afternoon sunshine through the large windows, he flipped a chair backwards and sat down straddling it, leaning forward supporting himself by his forearms on the back of it. He smiled up at me and spoke through clenched teeth, an unusual habit that was annoying at first, but later became part of his...charm.

"Pretty bright." He jerked his thumb toward the chalkboard. "Your advisor told me you're way up there in smarts. He also told me you're probably one of the most arrogant pricks he has ever had the honor of sponsoring." He laughed in a short, sharp staccato.

I didn't like him. I knew that instantly. If my mentor had said that to him, it was meant as an aside between two old cronies and not intended to undermine the character or confidence I had for my advisor. I cut the time for his interview down to thirty minutes at most.

"I do all right." I said curtly. "I'm working on a new way of showing how uncertainty will affect atoms at the quantum level inside a rocket motor." I'd spent months on this little beauty and was really proud of it.

"So what?" Bates' mouth at the corner came up when he spoke and he sounded like a New York longshoreman.

"It will revolutionize the way fuel is packed into canisters to optimize usage in space." I defended my position. I was certain of what I was doing and some creaky old has-been wasn't going to come into my lab and downgrade my work.

"If you modify the co-efficient of your first derivative by a factor of six, you will increase your Mach number by a factor of two." He sat there leering at me. Bates then pulled out an old briar pipe and lit it. Puffing blue smoke high into the air with his head tilted back, he added, "If you modify the second derivative by six, you will get an explosion that blows the ass off any dumb bastard that tries to fly that thing." He chortled with that staccato, machine gun laugh of his, which was now beginning to grate me right down to my balls.

I walked over to the chalkboard and tried both changes while he puffed away grinning like some great Cheshire cat in a tree leery down at a little English girl in a blue dress. It took a good ten minutes to work through the process and I scribbled down a dozen different notes while working through it. I stood back and looked at the board.

He was right. God Damn it to Hell. He was right.

"How in the fuck did you do that?" The expletive was warranted due to my agitated mental state and I wish I could have thought up a better swear word, but I couldn't.

"Simple." He got up and walked over to the board. He thumbed on it with the back of his fingers and looked at me. "We built it four years ago and it killed a dumb son of a bitch who had more balls than brains. Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha!" Rat-ta-tat-tat! Grrr...!

I looked at him carefully as he stared up at me. "You...built it?" My disbelief was outrageous at this point. I was betting my whole future career on this model and no one in the country knew how far I had taken it yet.

"Do, Done, Did! For sure and for damn." He walked over to the door and opened it. "I thought I might be interested in having you work for me. I was told you were way

out in front of the pack and that you had The Right..." he paused, not wishing to invoke the unspoken idiom, but finally shook his head with disappointment.

"Kid, you're good but I have better."

He opened the door and started to leave. Suddenly, I felt sick to my stomach and I felt the floor slipping out from under me. I leapt over to the door covering the space in a desperate bound and grabbed it by the edge.

"Hold on!" My mind raced with my future at stake. "I thought you...wanted to talk, I mean, discuss, some openings or...about a position at your facility?"

"Yes, we were. But you think that maybe you are too good to work with a bunch of has-been's don't you?" He turned in the hallway and looked back at me.

"We all make mistakes, doctor!" I was shamelessly groveling now.

He looked me up and down for what seemed like an eternity, his lower jaw raking back and forth making the pipe in his mouth jerk up and down. Finally, with a loud sigh, he took the briar pipe from his mouth and looked at the floor, then fumbled through his pockets.

"Here." He handed me his business card, and his entire tone and demeanor changed. "Call to set up an appointment, then get your ass out to Long Island. You pay for your flight, hotel, transportation and expenses. I ain't picking up the bill for a looky-lew. You come out and make your case as to why I should hire an arrogant prick like you that doesn't know shit from Shinola and maybe, just maybe, we can get past your ego and my nastiness."

He turned to leave then stopped and turned on his heel.

"Your dad was an arrogant prick too when he worked for me. Walked out in the middle of our project! Did you know that?"

My jaw just hung loose. I would never have expected to hear anything like that from anyone. I just blinked in utter disbelief.

"Yup! 1952! Got up one day and told me to kiss his ass and walked out. Brightest sonuvabitch I ever met in my life, I will tell you that for nothing. Where is he now? Rich, I would imagine." Bates stood there looking at me while I tried to regain my composure.

"H-he disappeared. In 1957..." I finally stammered. "Walked out into the desert. Nobody ever saw him again." It wasn't a story I liked to tell or even think about anymore, but there it was. I watched Bates' mouth come up at one corner into the slightest hint of a smile.

"Bright, but daffy." Bates snorted. "He could have stayed but he wanted to go out on his own. Shame. Call me and set up an appointment. I'll see if I can use you."

Bates walked away and turned the corner leaving me standing in that college hallway, my knuckles turning white as I clutched his card in my hand.



CHAPTER 4

After Bates left, I sat on the lab bench in a fugue state, staring at the changes on the chalkboard. These were nothing less than quantum leaps. The late afternoon turned into evening as the streaming sunlight through the windows went from bright white to yellow gold, the darkness moved across the campus and the thumping normal noises of the school hallway reduced to near silence.

Sometime around 6:30 the custodian backed into the room pushing open the door with his behind and dragging a utility cart with a grey trash can and a rack armed with plastic bags, brooms of various sizes and cleaning supplies. He reached over with his free hand and flipped on the lights, and it was only then I realized I had been sitting there in the darkness. He looked up to see me with a start and the whites of eyes went large in a comical contrast against his coal dark skin.

"Sweet Lord!" He exclaimed putting his hand to his heart. "What 'cho doin' sneakin' up on people in the dark! Almost give an old man a heart attack!"

It barely gnawed at the edge of my consciousness how bizarre I looked sitting there in the dark staring at the chalkboard, but I didn't flinch or even acknowledge his presence I was so caught up in my own mystery. The old man quizzically cocked his head, mumbled something about crazy white folks, and went back to rolling his cart into the center of the room.

Slowly his presence started to register as he began his cleaning routine. He was an older black man I had never seen before until he walked in. He picked up the waste paper basket and dumped it into the gray waste bin that collected the trash from each adjoining room. He had salt and pepper hair and his gray uniform only set off the contrast between his ebony skin and hair. As he pushed the dry mop across the floor and moved the dust from one spot to another he stopped by the window looking out, then turned back toward the view I had been transfixed on for hours. An old red cloth hung out of his back pocket. The keys on his side jangled musically as he wiped down the windowsills and closed most of them, locking them in succession as he moved methodically along. Finally finished, he organized all the brooms and supplies on his cart, touching each item affectionately to put them in their perfect place as if to let them know they were all loved equally. He swung open the door and pulled the cart to him from the side then blocked the door with it as he got behind it to push it out into the hallway. Then he stopped with one hand on his cart in the hall and the other on the door. He took a deep breath, then turned and looked directly at me.

"If you move the co-sign and replace the second variable with a sub-notation of lambda, the result will override the loss encountered at the initiation of the firing sequence...Doctor!"

He stood staring at me half in and half out of the room, as if hung between dimensions. His words brought on a flicker of ignition behind my eyes. The old man stood there watching the engine in my brain turn over in the stark winter that had become my thoughts. I leaned into the equation. The co-sign...lambda.... overrides the...OH...MY...GOD!

BAM!! I stood straight up and the chair clattered to the ground behind me. What he said struck me like an electric blue flash! The missing component! I grabbed the chalk and started to replace the variable and suddenly there it was! The missing key that Bates had not provided during his few moments sniping at me in my lab. I stood back for a better view. It was truly beautiful!! A work of sheer art and genius! I was panting with excitement and exhilaration!

The old Negro smiled and winked as he pushed his cart and closed the door behind him.

“Wait!”

I lunged for the door. It took a split second, a literal twinkling of an eye to reach the handle of the door where the shank had just hit home as I slammed down on the curved handle and flung it open.

I stared into empty space.

I hurled myself into the hallway, slipping and crashing into the far wall, swiveling my head back and forth looking up and down the darkened empty corridor. Nothing. I couldn't even see any lights in anyone else's room. I picked myself up and ran to the end of the hall and looked at the door. It was already locked. I sprinted to the other end with the same result. The janitor's closet was closed and locked as well. I hurried to the second floor and found the same thing. The building was seemingly deserted. But as I ran up the stairwell the third floor door was propped open and down the hall a single door stood open with the sound of trash being dumped into a bin.

AHA! GOTCHA!

I rushed into the room with an accusing finger knowing I'd cornered the prankster only to find a stooped little old white haired man with a large white moustache in his institutional gray uniform replacing the wastepaper basket on the floor. His embroidered name badge said “Scruffy”.

“I am looking for the other custodian.” I said between gasps of air.

The man looked up at me with a strange look.

“Who?”

“The older colored man...on the first floor.”

“I'm the only one here.” He looked at me for a moment and then recognition set in. He pulled the small white plug out of his ear connected to a beige wire. The latest technological advancement graced his shirt pocket in the form of a small battery operated transistor radio made in Japan. “You're that PhD grad student fella with the lab on the first floor ain't you?”

“Yes.” I panted, truly annoyed that these people were playing me. “Someone was just in my office talking to me! An old Negro fellow!”

“In a custodian's uniform?” The man leaned on his broom tilting his head in thought.

“Yes!” Oh this guy was a great actor! “Just like yours!”

“No, sir! Couldn't be. McPherson is the only Negro fella working this area and he's over in Life Sciences. Doesn't have a set of keys for this building. No sir! I saw your car out front so I knew you hadn't left for the day. I just passed your office bye when I was working downstairs. Didn't want to bother you. I'll come down and clean it up now...” The man started to move his bin toward the door.

“No! Somebody was already in my office!” I was feeling like a nut case. This would go over well at lunch when the custodial staff got together and talked about all the weirdoes that worked here.

“Couldn't have been.” He walked out and turned off the light and went over to the elevator and pushed the button. Emerging on the first floor we walked over to my lab and opened the door. The waste paper basket was still filled with papers I had tossed in it during the day and the windows were still open. I quickly turned to the

chalkboard and looked to see that the equation still had the changes on it. It did. Thank God! At least that was real!

“See, pal, no one’s been in here yet.” He walked over and picked up the trash, closed the windows and walked back out. “Have a good night, sir, but I suggest you get some fresh air. You mighta been cooped up in here just a mite too long.” He walked out leaving me standing there, looking at the board and wondering what had just happened.

Taking my journal off the desk, I opened it and copied down the equation. These changes would take months off the process to solve this problem and provide a virtually fool proof method for gaining acceleration on the new rocket engine design I had been working on. Essentially, it wrapped up my project at Cal Tech. That hit me hard. Suddenly I realized I could fly back East, take Bates’ invitation and see what he was working on. A loose-leaf piece of paper was jutting out of my journal and I pulled it out and unfolded it. In a clear and concise handwriting was a note:

“Look at your father’s notes from January to March, ‘53 before you go back East. It might help with any decision you plan to make. A friend.”

I stood and looked at it over and over again. A message from a ghost? A note from The Phantom Janitor? Whatever! I shook my head, tucked my newfound stolen brilliance in my journal, jammed the journal under my arm, turned off the lights and walked out of the lab. I found myself in the long dark empty hallway. A strong gust of the Santa Ana winds rattled the windows like lost souls begging for entry or the damned pointing accusatory spectral fingers. Two small ghostly emergency exit lights glimmered at both ends of the corridor. I stood for a frozen moment listening to my own breathing. There was something in this hallway with me, I knew it, but as I looked for movement or some sign of life, it was devoid. Suddenly, aware of my own mortality, I was terrified of the unknown and all those things science rails against. I was overcome and really, truly frightened for the first time in my life. I sprinted down the hall busting out the doors into the crisp night air. A couple of passing students saw me as I hurtled past them into the darkness. Looking at one another, they laughed at the antics of the man running from the brink of madness as I dashed past them across campus and into a wild blue future.



CHAPTER 5

When I got back to my small off-campus apartment, I sat in the darkness for about an hour just shaking. I had never had an anomalous event occur in my life up to this time, with the exception of the disappearance of my father many years before. But even that had so many possible explanations. It was something he obviously prepared for with great planning and foresight. But tonight. This episode was a little too much for me to handle. Having Bates show up and make one set of corrections was one thing. He was a highly respected published physicist with multiple doctorates and degrees, but to have some old Negro custodian tell me how to finish my project, then vanish into thin air? It was simply above and beyond what my brain could manage at that age in my life and at that moment in time and space. It was like an episode of that new Rod Serling show *The Twilight Zone*, and somehow I had become the star.

I tried to convince myself it was a fabrication of my own muddled mind and I had figured out the problem on my own. Or I had hit my head when I fell in the hall or I was being influenced by drugs or drink, or desperation or some freshman organic chemistry experiment gone wrong had somehow seeped up through the air ducts. But I was a trained scientist who made his living off observations and recording data and telling the difference between what is real and what is not. If my senses were going then it meant the end of my career. But in the final reality, when all was stripped away, I knew better. Someone had been there! Some ONE handed me, like a cup from a cloud held by the hand of God, an answer that I would never have reached on my own.

After about an hour in the dark, knees to my chest, rocking back and forth, I snapped out of it and finally turned on the side table light next to my chair. I flipped open my notes again to the page with the new equations. Why would anyone think I still had all my father's research? How would anyone KNOW? Dad spent all his time working in the area of time delineation. My crazy old man believed he could find a way of making ships and planes invisible to radar by wrapping them in gaussing coils and pulsing high frequency energy through them. Apparently he'd worked on a similar project during WW II and wanted to continue his research after the war, but peacetime labs were only interested in building new cars, or kitchen technology for the Home Of Tomorrow, and not interested in his nutty ideas on arcane weapons and invisible planes. After five or six years working on advanced electronics he'd had enough and dragged his family out to the desert to try to build his "gadget" as he used to call it.

I opened the closet and found the box that was sealed tight and taped shut and had been since my first year at USC. Once I had looked through them, but they were way beyond a freshman's understanding. Tearing the brown butcher paper and Manila hemp wrapping off the package, I looked at the books for the first time in over eight years. My old brown leather belt was still wrapped around the set and I unbuckled it as I rubbed my hands across the leather bindings of his journals and stared at them as if they were the original Ten Commandments or the lost treasure of some pharaoh's

tomb. I didn't know what was inside these tomes, but someone must have, since the note said I should look at them. There were four total. Each about two hundred and fifty pages, all filled in his small, crisp, anal writing style. Very clear and easy, to read.

I opened the first one and started to read. It was about the work he'd done while stationed in England during the war. Every page was annotated with dates and times. He had signed every page at the bottom, as if there was ever going to be questions as to who wrote them. I set them aside and got up and made a pot of coffee. My nerves were starting to calm as I decided to work my way through them for a while to see if there was anything I might find helpful.

Two pots of coffee, four stale doughnuts and three trips to the bathroom had led me to the third book. Each was a masterwork of understanding of the nature of time and its relationship to the world. I had started to make notes myself in another book, since many of his conclusions were bordering on either brilliance or raw insanity. I worked some of his equations to find that he had learned ways of bending electronic beams in a way that no one would have suspected. He referenced two people numerous times in the journals: Bates was the first and the other was T. Townsend Brown. I remembered in upper division classes 'Browning In Motion' studies that were attributed to T. Townsend Brown and understood where my father had used the basics of his work to continue the investigation of wave modification to create null spaces in the time/space continuum. Virtually creating an invisibility shield that could cloak anything from radar. In the early 1940s he was working in an area that was at least ten years ahead of anything anyone was currently doing in the field. That meant he was nearly twenty years ahead of his time while working in isolation in the desert, without government or university research grants, money, equipment, support staff, interns, help or the input of colleagues or others to review his work.

In his fourth journal, started about three months before he disappeared, he added comments to the side margins. Little square boxes precisely drawn with a straight edge on the side of the page where he added comments that didn't make any sense to me at all. He was talking about being visited by someone. I don't remember anyone ever coming out to the house to see him. But almost every page had a notation on it about his nocturnal visitor. The mysterious "A.C." It seemed AC was aiding him in working his way through a series of problems that didn't deal with invisibility but rather actual movement through the space and time of solid matter. I had to put the book down and give my eyes a rest. I rubbed them and walked into the kitchen to get something else to drink besides my horrible coffee that now felt like battery acid burning a hole through the lining of my stomach.

It was clear he was finally losing it at the end; like maybe I was starting to as well, but I was only at the beginning! Maybe he had created an imaginary friend to help him and in his own mind he must have believed that someone else was there with him. I had never thought he had slipped over the edge into insanity, but that is what it was starting to look like to me as I read page after page filled with notations about this mythical AC person visiting him and telling him how to perfect the system he was working on. I stood in the kitchen looking out the window thinking about it. If only I had known at the time, I might have been able to get him help. Surely, Uncle Bob knew what was going on. My thoughts traveled back to that day in the desert house, the Saturday morning when Sheriff Hampton showed up with Dad's car and Uncle Bob came because Dad called him the night before and told him he had to go away.

The taste of the milk in my mouth was thick and I needed to brush my teeth and gargle out the taste with some mouthwash. I was standing in the bathroom looking into the mirror remembering the football awards dinner the night before and being there with...

The WAITRESS! What was her name? Arrgh! I remembered Uncle Bob's reaction when I said it. Like he'd been punched in the stomach, or her name caused

him to lose all hope of my dad ever coming back! Oh my god! What...was...*HER GOD DAMN...NAME?* I walked back into the living room and threw myself onto the couch. Automatically I swigged the half warm cup of wretched coffee and destroyed everything I had just done by brushing my teeth. Piece by piece now. I closed my eyes to reenact the scene. She was Simon's friend. Dad knew Simon, and Simon had introduced them. Simon. Simon...she reached out to shake his hand and introduced herself and said....

CORBETT! YES! ANN CORBETT! HA-HA!

Dad acted like he didn't know her, or like he'd never seen her before, then he drifted into that mesmerized haze. What was that all about? I sat there wondering why I was going over this and looked back at the page of the journal I had the book opened to. The small box now amplified in size and description when I saw the letters "A.C." written in the margin. A.C.? Ann Corbett? I couldn't believe it. No, no! None of this was adding up to what I knew (but then there was so much about everything I didn't know!) Was my father having an affair? With some...waitress...in Barstow? How was she helping him with problems that would have taken multiple PhDs to even understand? It made no sense. It had to be just another random coincidence. That is all it could be. But then, how did Uncle Bob know about her? That was clear. Dad was getting really close to...something...something important, which was more and more evident from his journals, but it was missing the last essential components and equations that went with them. It was like he had found all the doors but couldn't figure out which key went to which door. I turned the pages to the next...

They were gone! I desperately flipped pages backwards then forward. I turned the journal over and shook it. Four pages were just gone. Four pages that had been very carefully cut out. Nobody does that. No scientist would ever remove notes from his journals. It was unheard of. It flew in the face of all science, which was all about recorded data and would invalidate an experiment and possibly years of painstakingly hard work. You would make a note that something was wrong on the page, making sure your mistakes were transparent, but you would never, ever, NEVER remove the pages. That was a cardinal sin for any researcher. I flipped through the rest of the book and looked at the empty pages. What had been on the last four pages? What did my dad find that was important enough to rip out and take with him when he disappeared? I sat there and watched the first lights of a false dawn shine through my windows but I was still more in the dark than ever.

PART TWO

TIME IN A BOTTLE



CHAPTER 6

It had taken a week to put all my notes together and get an appointment with the board of review for publication in the department. When I presented my findings, and I say mine because there was really no one else I could list as a researcher on the paper, since the custodian had receded into a vague memory. What happened in my laboratory was no one else's business at this point in my career. I had been overworked and my mind had played a trick on me, that's all. Well, at least that's the story I finally convinced myself of after I finished all the calculations and understood what happened was going to be considered a major breakthrough in the field.

The other scientists sat listening to my explanation of the process and studied the equations. When I was through with the presentation, I noted them glancing at one another over the rims of their glasses. One even managed a hoary smile. The Dean never looked up from the blue-ink Xerox copy. He quietly excused himself and asked all of us to remain in the room until he returned.

A good half hour passed until he walked back in and resumed his position at the head of the table. While he was gone, the mood had turned positively jovial. The professors had come down from their seats to shake my hand, and pat me on the back with a round of hardy well dones, and good shows. They knew this would bring in millions in research grants to the college, shoot the department to the forefront of the field and put them on the cutting edge of the space race, where all the money was, shortening it by several years. It would make me a celebrity in the field as soon as it was published. One of the stodgier old doctors went so far as to proclaim my findings worthy of a Nobel Prize!

As the Dean sat, calming the accolades from my brethren physicists, he looked grave as he cleared his throat, steepled his fingers and leaned forward on his forearms.

"I have just gotten off the phone with the Department of Defense and they have informed me we cannot publish your paper Mister Humphrey. I am truly very sorry."

I stood in disbelief, leaning menacingly on the long table separating my fist from his white, puffed out, doughy face.

"What do you mean...I can't publish it?"

There was a rousing round of outrage and support from the other professors in the department. They knew all too well what was at stake here.

"It is understandable," the Dean continued in his smug style everyone had noted over the years, "when you presented it, I was very aware that this information is just too important to allow it to be seen by certain...other groups... around the world. Yes? The responsibility to the government program exceeds your personal need for glorification and this, Mr. Humphrey," he waved my paper above his head, "is something that our government wants very badly. As a responsible member of the academic community, I had to clear this with Washington before we would dare to release it into any journal that could be read by certain scientists in other countries."

"You're talking about the Russians, aren't you?" I was fuming. The biggest discovery in years and it was being withheld because of political consequences.

"The Russians. The Chinese. Communist elements within our own county. We live in a very dangerous world, Mr. Humphrey, where many wish us harm." He got up and collected the papers. "You have done very well on this, there is no question about it. But considering the amount of funding we receive in this department to conduct governmental research, we cannot afford to bite the hand that feeds us, now can we? Especially when that hand is our own country!" He collected all the papers from the men in the room and put them into a large portfolio.

About the same time, two men came into the room in bad black suits, white shirts and thin ties. Everyone on campus knew these bumbling idiots were connected to the Feds but most everybody ignored them as a joke. They were not joking now and were as serious as a heart attack as they passed out a series of documents to each member of the board as well as me. It was a security form stating any transmission or revealing of the contents of my document would be treated as a breach of law under the National Security Act. With penalties running into multiple life sentences on bread and water at hard labor if anyone spoke about this paper.

"Each of you will sign one of these. No one leaves this room until they do. I must remind all of you even though we are scientists we are also sometimes required to assume the role of patriots as well. These are not the times we want to cause our government concern. Your PhD degree is granted without exception, *Doctor* Humphrey, but your dissertation will be sealed. Gentlemen." He got up and walked out with the papers and the two men stood there glaring at each of us.

After signing the documents that stated that I couldn't talk about my own research, something that had occupied my life for the last four years, I walked out, grabbed an old empty file box and went back to my lab. I collected my few sparse belongings and headed back for my apartment and a telephone to call Dr. Bates. If I was going to lose out on the biggest breakthrough of my career, I might as well work for someone that would at least appreciate my talents.

Four hours later I was on the tarmac at LAX climbing the steps to board a TWA flight heading for New York City.

* * * * *

Montauk sits at the far north end of Long Island and the drive out spans the entire length of the island. The lush verdant green of the northeastern part of the country was in stark contrast to the semi-arid environment and sandy deserts of Southern California, where I had spent the majority of my life so far. The communities gave way to quaint little towns, which rolled into pastures and farms that dotted the landscape as we moved from one-type of roadway, to a narrower alternate that made random turns at corner markers of farmsteads as we moved into an area that was less populated with each passing mile. Bates had me picked up at the airport and I sat in back of the black Buick sedan as we worked our way out to the site. The driver was not big on conversation and the two times I tried to start one, he ended them as quickly. So I decided the wisest move was to sit back and enjoy the pastoral and bucolic vision passing outside my window as we traversed the island.

Montauk was an old coastal artillery station that had been active since the days of the Civil War. Fort Hero was the official name, but everyone called it Montauk after the name of the point where the tip of Long Island points out into the North Atlantic marked by a famous lone majestic lighthouse that had become a symbol of the community. The Montauk Indians believed it was the navel of the world and that all the universe was created outwards from that point. The Montauk Indians also spoke a unique dialect that was, for all intents and purposes, long dead ancient Egyptian that had died out 3,000 years earlier. Thomas Jefferson spent many years of his life trying to decipher and catalog their language and was fascinated by their wisdom and culture,

thinking it a link to a far distant Masonic past. From mystic Montauk Point traveling due east, the next stop is the French coastline, almost three thousand miles away.

The old fort proper had fallen into disuse and disrepair after the last war but a small contingent of soldiers were still assigned to it to protect the facility, which everyone thought was senseless since few foreign countries were going to sail down next to the island to cannonade New York City. The aircraft and the missile had put places like Montauk out of business for the most part. But there was still one section of the facility that was used. This was the part assigned personnel spent a good amount of their time patrolling and protecting. The sign stated that it was the High Altitude Radio Propagation Monitoring Station for the Department of Defense. That was a lie.

Montauk, also known as Camp Hero, was one of the best-protected secrets within the United States, but I did not know any of this as we approached the main gates.

Montauk was a rabbit warren of underground labs that housed some of the most sophisticated and unusual equipment the mind of man had ever conceived. No one that didn't work on the base or who was associated with the research being done at the facility really had any idea what the facility was truly about.

After entering the main gate and going through forty-five minutes of procedures to actually get inside the fenced area, I was underwhelmed by the simple two story building that sat back away from the water's edge. The driver pulled up to the main entrance and turned to look at me and pointed at the front door of the building. I got the impression this was where I was suppose to get out. Grabbing my overnight bag, briefcase and topcoat, I thanked my driver in my most sarcastic tone for being such great company and such a brilliant conversationalist and walked into the main lobby.

It was there my life changed.

* * * * *

Bates stood there in an ink smudged, oversized white lab coat with a striped tie that didn't match his plaid shirt at all. "Glad you took me up on the offer." Bates said as he vigorously pumped my hand. "Leave all your stuff here. No one will bother it. One of the most secure places in the world, don't you know it."

He indicated an empty chair sitting in the lobby. There was no receptionist or anyone else for that matter to be seen. I shrugged and followed him as he walked down the hallway all done in early American Institutional green and dirt gray tile flooring. Each door was made of heavy wood, with smoked glass windows painted in gold leaf letters spelling out things like, Conference Room, Library, Administrative Office and finally, our destination, Director's Office.

Bates opened the door and ushered me into the anti-room. Behind the front desk was our first sign of life; a sassy little blonde bombshell wearing far too much hot-rod red lipstick with a spectacular cleavage fantastically well displayed in a plunging frilled hot pink blouse and a hair-do that had to take a girl hours to get it right. She was deliciously smacking at a huge wad of pink gum.

"Ya got twenty minutes, B-Man." She said in a Lon-gaa Island twang. She didn't look up while handing me a plastic badge emblazoned with a large V.

"All visitors must wear a badge and be accompanied by a staff member at all times. Sign in please." She handed me a clipboard and magically pulled a pen from her perfectly quaffed mountain of hair.

"I'm Ted." I tried to make eye contact with her extending my hand. She never looked up from her papers after her first glance at me while entering.

"Whatever. You're just another F.N.G. until the B-Man says otherwise." Her accent sounded like Long Island mixed with Flatbush or the Bronx. I signed with the date, time and who I was seeing and handed her back the clipboard and pen.

"F.N.G.?" I asked smiling, still attempting to be charming and make eye contact.

“Fucking New Guy.” She took the board and noted the time and countersigned it and made a gesture to wave me away like an irritating insect.

“Don’t mind Sally.” Bates motioned toward the next door that led to his office. “Her role in life is to bring enlightenment to the darker regions.”

“Yeah, whatever.” She pointed threateningly and gave me the Bronx stink-eye. “And don’t even think about leaving without signing out, FNG.”

Her eyes were liquid limpid blue and I could have fallen into them. On direct contact with them I was swimming. She might have used too much lipstick, but that face should have graced the cover of Vogue. I couldn’t think fast enough for a quick comeback or come on, so I nodded lamely and walked sheepishly like a shy school boy into the dark paneled office so crowded with books there was no place to sit.

“Clear a spot. We’re pretty informal around here.” Bates walked behind his desk and bent over. Upon sitting down, he had a huge, incredibly fluffy blue-eyed white cat in his hands that must have weighed about 25 pounds. He was rubbing and scratching the animal, cooing gently as it purred with a sound like a small motor.

“This is Shalu.” Bates said proudly introducing us. “He is a world champion blue-eyed white Norwegian Forest Cat. Very rare!” The cat, as if he understood, let out a meow that sounded like “Naaa”, more like something Edward G. Robinson would say than a feline. “His name means ‘Guardian of the Realm of Golden Light’ in Tibetan, which is apropos for around here.” Shalu continued to purr mightily as Bates continued his massage and Shalu simply curled up in his lap and drifted back into the sleep he was momentarily pulled from.

“I hear you got burned pretty badly at Cal-Tech.”

“Four days ago they decided to slam the whole project under the NSA.” The mere thought of it made me angry again. “That pompous bastard, Criswell, did it without consulting any of the other members of the review board. He just got up and called someone at DOD and it was a done deal. After four years of hard work I got my doctorate, but nothing else. The process was mine but Criswell didn’t hesitate to tell me if I said anything to anyone I would be in big trouble. I figure he’s taking credit for it and working his ass up the line with the political hacks in D.C.”

“Happens more than you know in physics. Anything worth while is shuffled out of researchers offices and off into places like this.” Bates motioned with his free hand to the surrounding disaster that didn’t look like it had been dusted in ten years.

“What exactly do you do here?” I asked

“Good question!” He put the cat down who sauntered across the desk and in one dazzling jump of about 15 feet, leapt up on a carpeted green and tan tree in the corner where he sat and stared at me, suddenly interested for some unknown cat-like reason.

“We conduct research!” Bates exclaimed like a stage magician.

“I know that.” I felt the same frustration I had just encountered at Cal-Tech. “What kind of research and..well..why me?”

“Another fantastic set of good questions! And I don’t have easy answers to any of them.” He sat back and appraised me for a moment, looking exactly like his cat, considering his answer. After a long pregnant pause, he spoke:

“We are involved in highly secretive work that involves the movement of objects through the ether.”

“The ‘ether’? Seriously? That’s clear as mud.” I said, disgusted. “So’s Skunk Works or McDonald Aircraft.” I paused, suddenly realizing I had no idea what I was doing in this man’s office. “Dr. Bates, look, you asked me to come. Here I am. I don’t want to go through again what I went through earlier this week. That’s my reason for coming here. If I can do research and not be silenced then I’m your man.”

“You would do research!” Bates said excitedly, throwing up his arms. “Out on the cutting edge. But...” He stopped for a long considered moment and thought through his words carefully. “You won’t ever be able to publish. Nor win a Nobel Prize or even

be listed in any records of people working in the field.” He stopped again and thought for a moment, holding up a hand to stop me from interrupting him. “What I will and can tell you is that what we are doing here, is not being done in any laboratory in the world. We are moving into unknown areas of science and in doing so are free to try things that no university, college or private research lab would dare do.”

“Well,” I said folding my arms, still singularly unimpressed, “in reality, there doesn’t seem to be much happening here. Except for that gorgeous blonde, I didn’t see anyone out there in the hallway or even on the grounds.” I wondered if I was chasing my tail right now out of anger over the denial that I had just dealt with in California.

“Oh, no my boy. This place isn’t the lab. This is for visitors and governmental types that want to know why they’re allocating millions of dollars and not seeing the results.” He again motioned in general to the building around us.

“Can I see the lab?” I asked, now losing my patience.

“No.” He looked out his window that hadn’t been cleaned in years either. A film of dirt and dust almost obscured the view completely. “Not until you are hired, signed the proper papers and go through the process required before you can even walk toward that hill back there. However, I can tell you that the brightest minds in the country are inside that pile of dirt working away right now on something that will change all of mankind in a very few years.”

“Secrets! More secrets!” I rubbed my face slowly stewing in my frustration.

“Of course!” Bates continued, his enthusiasm not dimmed a bit by my recalcitrance. “That is precisely what is so interesting about it. The fact that we do things without the constraints of orthodoxy makes this a great place to work. Do you know what your father was working on when he worked for me?” He opened his desk and pulled out his briar pipe and an old leather pouch. Filling and lighting his pipe, he blew a cloud of blue smoke at the ceiling.

“Anti-radar systems?” I remembered dad talking about that once or twice.

“That was part of it. But when he left, he had started a project on manipulating...” Bates took an extra long puff and the blue smoke curled and eddied around his face for dramatic effect “...time waves.”

“Time waves?” I could hear the dripping sarcasm in my own voice.

“Exactly. The same thing he decided to do on his own out there in, um, west rusty nut...that awful place....in the desert?” He motioned with his free hand.

“Barstow.” I added just because I had liked the desert.

“Ah! Barstow. Yes!” His eyes took on a dreamy look for a moment as if he was remembering something in the past.

I asked a question that had been brewing since I was 17.

“Did you guys have anything to do with him going missing?”

“No we didn’t. Probably should have, but I liked him too much. No, in fact after he disappeared we spent months trying to find him. We sure the hell didn’t want him to end up working behind the bamboo or iron curtain, I will tell you that.” He came back to the now and stared at me. He relit his pipe and puffed away.

“Do you have any idea where he went?”

“Do you know what he was working on, at all?” Bates asked.

“I know he thought he could control some element of time. He believed it was something that could be manipulated, like an electrical field. I’ve read some of his notes and realized he was way out there with what he was trying to do.” I sat watching for a reaction, but he was as inscrutable as that darned white cat that had not taken his eyes off me. What are you staring at fur-face?

He turned pointing to the hill behind the office building. “He wasn’t so far off.”

“You’re kidding me?” I couldn’t believe it.

“I didn’t say a thing to you. I just sat here and listened to the son of an old friend and a noteworthy scientist asking me for a job. Now, do you want to find out if time

can be modified or not?” He got up and looked at his watch and the cat got up as well and did a long luxurious stretch. I was processing everything thinking I might be able to find out more of what my own father was about and what led up to his disappearance.

It seemed so simple at the moment. I just sat there and answered one question more out of anger and frustration than actual scientific curiosity, and my life changed.

“Yes.”

“Well, it is not entirely up to me.” Bates said smiling as he turned to the great white cat. “What do you think Shalu?”

The cat finished its stretch and sat, then looked me up and down several times like he not only understood everything we were saying, but like he was actually thinking about it! Finally he turned back to Dr. Bates.

“Maaa.” Shalu had passed final judgment.

“Splendid!” Bates beamed. “Shalu has some reservations about whether or not you will actually work out, but his first impression is you are very bright and talented and that he generally likes you, and that is fairly rare, and good enough for me. He is an excellent judge of character, y’know! Never been wrong!” Bates lowered his head, and Shalu pushed his forehead against his in what would pass for a feline kiss.

“So!” Bates said clapping his hands together, “Sally will set you up. It will take a week to go through all the paper work and all the other stuff. She will arrange housing and have your stuff moved out from California. But do us all a favor. Please don’t try to get into her pants. It makes things extremely hard around here when she is dicking one of the researchers and everyone else is running green on jealousy.” He got up and motioned toward the door again.

“Doctor Theodore Humphrey...”

“Ted, please.” I protested.

“Ted...is all yours Miss Jennings. Be gentle with him.” He swept from the room with a flourish and waved a good-bye over his head. I sat down and Sally Jennings rolled a form into her Royal typewriter.

“So, Shalu liked you, I guess?” Sally asked, deadly serious.

“Yeah. Sheesh! What is up with...?”

“Hey! The last guy Shalu didn’t like nobody never heard from again.”

“What? Are you kid...?”

“Married or single?” Sally interrupted.

“Um...is that always the first question on the form?” I asked.

“Nope, but it is *my* first question...FNG.”

She finally looked up, fixed me like a target in her gaze and one of those huge, perfect, liquid, limpid blue eyes...winked.



CHAPTER 1

Montauk is near the area of Long Island known more famously as the Hamptons. It has been a place of summer fun since the middle of the eighteen hundreds for the more affluent members of society in and around New York City. The area is dotted with summer homes, but for a good part of the year it was virtually empty. The town of South Hampton was the cultural watering hole for the remaining residents of the area during the long, dark winters when sea winds, rain and snow pelt the island. It was here that Sally Jennings had arranged for a small bungalow that would serve as my new home.

Sally took the time to show me the few, if not very interesting sights in and around the small town and introduce me to the local gentry of the area. It was clear from the beginning that once anyone knew you were working at “that place” as it was known, the invitations to dinner or bowling, or any social interaction whatsoever, dried up.

Most of the staff at Montauk kept pretty much to themselves and didn’t try to break the barrier that had been imposed on those governmental workers that were out at the end of the point. Sally was incredible and a true anachronism on the inside. She was a mixture of East Coast wit and sarcasm as well as a wonderfully warm and charming companion that was always willing to help with everything from wading through the mountain of paperwork required to obtain the necessary clearances to work at the lab to helping me open boxes from California and set up my place to make it more homey than I could believe.

Her energy was absolutely boundless. She set up a small work station in the library for me to fill out all of the forms and required paperwork and then piled stacks of unclassified material in front of me and told me to read it and familiarize myself with the work that had been done so far. Afterhours she’d drive me back into town in her show-room cherry perfect 1946 Chevy coupe. She’d then change out of her dress into a pair of pedal pushers and a bandana and would spend until nine at night sorting and putting books up on the library shelves that graced my small living room. At work I was the FNG but at home, here, to her, I was...TED...Master of the Universe! The night we unpacked the last box and sat down to finish the last of the coffee in the pot, I looked at her and noticed again how really attractive she was.

“What am I going to do now to lure you back here, now that all of this stuff is put away?” I half joked with her.

“That’s easy. Ask me over for drinks and dinner. Hell, I will come over, make the drinks, cook dinner and clean the bathroom.” She set the cup down and smiled at me. It was warm and beguiling in a seductive way.

“I can’t believe you don’t have a lot of better things to do than be with me all the time?” I responded.

A strange sad, melancholy look came over her. “Right now, Ted, you can’t think of anything else but getting me between the sheets for a little fun. But after you go down

into the pit, you'll find spending time with me is something you will think about, but probably won't make time for. I've seen it before. And besides..." She trailed off.

"Besides what?" I couldn't imagine anything that would pull me away from her. I found that I was falling into an emotional state, which would probably be somewhere between sheer infatuation and love.

"Besides, everyone I have ever been with eventually hates me. They tell me I mother them and that I am suffocating to be around. Heck, if I was an oriental or something, everyone would think that I was doing the normal cultural thing by caring for somebody. But because I am a round-eyed blonde I'm supposed to be different somehow. Good to look at, but no one can conceive that I have this loving heart". She got up and took the bandana off her head and shook out her hair. She smiled her sad smile at me and then grabbed my hand. "Come on! Let's take a shower."

"You first. Then I'll buy you dinner." I wasn't sure what she meant at all.

"No, dummy. Together and get past all this preliminary dancing around."

She pulled me up and led me into the bedroom, dropping her blouse and bra on the bed.

* * * * *

Four days later I rode the bus out to the laboratory at seven in the morning, far earlier than I had ever been there before. Bates called and told me to show up early, that there was something going on he wanted me to see. As I strolled into the Admin building, Sally Jennings was at her desk, already typing.

"Badge is on the desk. Sign for the keys and never take off the dosimeter while you are inside the pit. Got it champ?" She looked up and smiled.

"Good morning. How are you?" I offered up in defense of my guilt for the amount of unabated pleasure she had provided me the last few days.

"Small talk is to be kept to a minimum, Dr. Humphrey." She said officiously. "We got a job to do here and yours is over there in the pit." She winked and placed my plastic identification badge on my jacket pocket.

"When you get inside on the first floor, ditch the sport jacket and grab a lab coat. Remember to take both of these with you." She handed me the dosimeter and the keys. "Lose those keys and they will be serving your balls for lunch as the Blue Plate Special."

"Got it." I stood for a moment trying to think of what else to say.

"Get out of here FNG! Bates wants you over there like yesterday! RFN! As in Right Fucking Now! He's been calling every three minutes to see if you're here." She waved me out of the office and I headed for the entrance to the facility. Two tough looking Marines were at the entrance. It was the first time I had seen anyone in uniform here and they surprised me with their knowledge of me as I approached the giant steel doors that separated the outside world from the pit.

"Humphrey, isn't it?" Asked the older of the two men, who was about my own age, looking at a clipboard then up at me.

"Yes sir, I am." I replied.

"Don't call me sir, goddamn it! I work for a living. I'm Gunnery Sergeant McClean and this is your new personal attaché Corporal Matthew Reilly. When you enter this facility, Dr. Humphrey, you will find a dressing room on the right side just past the second door. There are lockers in there and one of them has your name on it. Place all metal objects inside it as well as all personal effects. Take nothing down the elevator that has not been issued to you. You have your ID badge, keys and dosimeter. Keep them with you at all times. You have a green strip on your badge. That means if you are found by any of the security personnel inside the laboratory in any area that is not correspondent to that color, which is clearly indicated by the floor color, or in the

presence of someone that has a higher color, which is yellow, red or black, you will be immediately shot on the spot. Do you understand what I have just told you?" He looked up from his clipboard and there was no question that this man had no intention of repeating himself. I looked at the decorations on his chest for bravery and service and knew this too was a professional in every sense of the word. Growing up in a military town like Barstow had instilled within me a respect for men like McClean and he didn't suffer on the illusion that he felt less than anyone that worked in this place. This was his spot of the world and if one was wise they would respect it.

"I understand Gunny and thank you." I added just to make sure he didn't see me as one of those pricey stuffed shirt scientists that ignored everyone that was above them on the food chain.

"You are very welcome, Doctor." He shot me a half salute that I awkwardly nodded to and also to the hard-eyed corporal standing next to him at parade rest. Then he snapped the salute and extended his hand. I took it and he shook it vigorously in a vise-like grip. "Welcome aboard!"

All I can say is that my introduction to "The Pit" was less friendly than I had expected, but once inside I understood why. I had supposed I was about to witness a capsule being transported or "jumped" into the heart of a nuclear explosion to gather data on time dilation and then back to the lab again. That much I think I had figured out.

McClean opened the door and pushed it aside for me.

I walked into the laboratory and almost fell over.



CHAPTER 8

I stood in the gallery, overlooking the area called “The Pit”, and looked down for the first time at the electronic marvel these men called “The Gadget”. It was huge. There were three visible parts to it. The main control room reminded me of my first trip to Hoover Dam years before as a kid, in those few years when my family was still all together. There were four rows of consoles, each with several individual monitoring stations located at different places along the aisles. At least twenty men worked in the area, hunched over their screens. Each station had meters and dials that were always being watched, monitored and adjusted by the personal assigned to them. I noticed the huge elevated racks at the end of each row and the enormous serpentine of cables came from the rows and traveled into the Pit looking like long, thick, Anacondas. Each station in every row was arrayed with flashing lights on the consoles and multiple meters. The stern, haggard men looked eerily demonic, as the multi-colored light show bounced off their faces and glasses.

The Pit itself had been chiseled and hewn directly out of the native rock of the mountain. Attached to the edge of the cutout area was an extremely fine mesh screen I instantly realized was just part of a much larger Faraday cage. It was a system preventing any electromagnetic signals from entering or leaving the Pit, with the exception of a small opening into the control room and another massive bank vault-like door which went somewhere into the bowels of the earth, running at a tangent from the Pit.

Bates beckoned me to follow him and we descended down the metal staircase onto the control room floor. We walked directly through the control room into the Pit I felt like Jonah being swallowed by a whale.

“It’s safe right now, Ted.” Bates said, lifting his arms, gesturing to the device all around us. “The system is in maintenance mode. These men are just checking circuits and connections. We have a tendency to burn up a lot of wires when this thing is working. Each system has a back up and that back up has another back up. It’s the only way we can control this monster. If it were to go critical, we’d have the same problems the Germans had with a runaway system. We can ill afford another USS Eldridge disaster.”

I followed Bates as he walked behind the Faraday screen. I had a lot of catching up to do and I made a mental note to find out what exactly had happened to the USS Eldridge. I’d heard the name used somewhere before in hushed whispers and I knew it was related to something that happened during some kind of radar invisibility test during the war, but I didn’t immediately connect the two. Maybe Sally would have a file on it.

Bates held the double mesh gate open as I entered the room. The Pit was freezing cold and Bates took a heavy overcoat from a rack on the wall, put it on, then handed me one.

“We must keep this room as cold as we can.” He said with little clouds of fog coming from his mouth, accentuating his words. “When the Gadget is operating the

control room out there will get up to almost one hundred and twenty degrees, much like the desert you were raised in.” He laughed to himself and continued to walk to the center of a large red circle painted in the middle of the gray cement floor. “Malcolm, please turn on the overhead lights for me.” He spoke to some unseen worker at the edge of Pit. There was the loud clack of switches being thrown and the room was immediately flooded with bright, high-intensity lights, much like my old high school football night games.

“The power used during a single test firing will pull about half the electrical load of the Eastern Seaboard from Niagara Falls.” Bates walked to a grey box on the wall and opened it with a key from his pocket, revealing a set of marked red buttons. He hit them in sequence then looked up.

From out of the darkness above us a set of cranes, built directly into the mountain rock, moaned to life with a metallic hum and the grinding of some grand gears. The Gadget slowly lowered from out of the inky void like some monstrous beast as three giant rings descended into the Pit. At the end of the transit as it clacked into place, the main coils rested on twelve huge concrete and steel pillars built into the floor. They were connected to each other by a lattice structure of what I thought was metal, but I had literally never seen anything like it before.

Bates motioned for me that it was safe to come over and as I approached the inner edge of the coil I put out my hand and ran it along the strapping. It felt organic and alive, like the cool, slick skin of some gigantic snake. It was relatively thin, but I could tell in an instant it was made of something exotic I had never seen before.

Bates smiled at my reaction. “That is made of a material that we got from some new...friends...of ours. It is stronger than the hardest carbon steel and very expensive. It has a base within it of something that we are calling a ‘polymer’, a new advanced sort of plastic. But when it is exposed to radiation, it changes and mixes with the steel to form a material that is thousands of times stronger than anything in existence today. You can hit that with an .88 millimeter shell at close range and not damage it. It might bend but it would never break. It is the only thing that will hold this monster together when it is running.”

He walked up next to me as I examined the three huge tubes. Each had a massive electromagnet wrapped around it spaced about four feet apart. The tubes were nearly twelve inches in diameter and seemed like they were made of the same material as the framework.

“Are these filled with copper coils as well?” I asked.

“Oh good God, no!” He said with a look of mock horror. “The Germans tried that and the power melted the copper into ingots at the bottom of the tubes. The embrittlement of the copper would occur within two or three seconds of powering the unit up and then there would be no control at all. In the top and bottom tubes we use a revolutionary process of vaporized mercury as the conductors. The middle one, which is the local dampening field coil, uses liquid sulfur. It absorbs most of the highly radioactive particles when it’s in operation, like a giant sponge. The only thing we are having a problem with is we don’t know what to do with the sulfur when it’s reached full absorption. For the moment we are shipping it to Area 13 in Nevada to a very large hole in the ground after encasing it in glass and lead shielded boxes. The Nazis were losing eight to ten men a test at first just to radiation poisoning. They came up with the idea for the dampening coil. They just incinerated the bodies of some highly respected men, not realizing that the isotopes were just floating into the air all across Europe.”

I walked around the whole circumference of the unit, touching it here and there in sheer wonder. Bates waited patiently with a genial smile for me to complete my inspection and when I got back to his side I was, well, flummoxed and speechless,

which seemed to delight him to no end. Dr. Leonard Bates officially had the coolest toy on Earth.

I rubbed my jaw looking up at the Gadget and back to the floor, trying to wrap my mind around what it did and what it was. "So..." I said, making my best guess, "you are creating two opposing magnetic fields inside this chamber. One of them runs clockwise and the second runs counter-clockwise. The dampening field absorbs the radiation from the outside of the coil. Therefore, the effect is contained within the area of the field, inside the rings."

Bates smiled and bounced up on his toes pointing at me like a promising student. "Very good! But, only partially correct. When we place a capsule, or an object, or whatever, at the center of the effect of the three rings, technically the object never actually moves. We bend and fold space around the object, so it only appears to be jumping somewhere else when, in reality, somewhere else becomes the space within the rings. So literally, why go anywhere," Bates smiled a big Cheshire cat grin, "when the world comes to us."

I was utterly nonplussed. This was revolutionary science and so far beyond any current frontier that they were in a wilderness so vast I wondered how they would ever find their way out.

"So, you bend the space around it? Space, like say, the air around us, has various properties and is malleable to electromagnetic fields?"

"Precisely. We are able to jump by folding space, or the ether, like origami, then move the object through the space/time continuum. When we turn off the field space/time snaps back to its original shape and, *poof!* You are where you want to be. At least in theory, because most times the object comes right back to where it started when you turn off the generator. But the heat generated is immense and still presents some major problems."

Bates was thoroughly amused by my wonder and bewilderment. Crumpling up the space/time continuum like so much waste paper actually didn't break any of either Newton's or Einstein's laws or theories. It also fit perfectly in with so much of the bizarre phenomenon around electromagnetic fields and why time dilations occurred within the heart of explosions, especially those that were nuclear in nature.

"The effect of the field is greatly reduced on the outside." Bates continued with his tutorial. "We have learned to control the radiation field, but have not figured out how to completely control the secular field. We've detected three rings of temporal time distortion. The primary is inside this area," he pointed to the middle ring. "That is called the driver. The secondary one effects the control room and the surrounding environment, but to a lesser degree. The third ring function is less powerful, but still causes some distortion in the time/space continuum."

"What kind of distortions?" I asked.

"Oh small ones. Clocks, for example, will lose time in the adjoining areas, people will feel slightly sick, things like that, but nothing to worry about."

Bates walked over and patted and rubbed the machine like a man comforting a beloved, sturdy old horse, and just stared at it for a moment, thinking. He then suddenly dipped down under the bottom tube and hit the reset button and the unit rose, slowly and majestically, like a duchess leaving on a balloon ride, back up into the depths of the ceiling. I watched the unit disappear into the darkness above the lights.

"The mercury must be traveling at super high speed inside of this thing when it's energized."

"Almost the speed of light." Bates said, still looking up at it. "At that speed, the mercury acts almost like a photon. It has heavily increased mass though. This unit, when it's not running, weighs about twenty tons. When it's at full operating speed, you can increase the weight factor by a power of three."

The old scientist closed the door to the utility cabinet where all the buttons lived and looked for me to follow him back to the coat rack, talking over his shoulder. "We have only tested at lower power levels and we can only turn it on at night when the load on the electric grid is way down."

"The size of those coils are huge," I said still marveling at it all. "Each one of them must be putting out millions of gauss of power." I still just stood in amazement peering into the darkness above me.

"Each of those coils have over three miles of copper wire in them. Keeping that fact secret and off the books of the American taxpayer was no easy job, I can tell you that. We have a series of tubes that run liquid oxygen through them for cooling. Right now, we can only keep the Gadget online for maybe three or four minutes at most, otherwise we just can't keep it cold enough. Shall we?"

Bates was over by the door motioning for us to go, and I finally snapped out of it, and tore myself away from my mesmeric fascination, and joined him. He closed the door carefully behind us.

Dr. Bates put his hands behind his back and walked among the rows of controls and spoke to several men working there, nodding, making jokes and comments and corrections, but never bothered to introduce me to anyone. It was obvious he was popular and extremely well liked and respected here. He was, after all, really the father of it all.

We finally left the control rooms and started moving in the direction of the administration buildings when he abruptly stopped and turned on me.

"Your father found his way around all this," he said without preamble and with a sudden deadly seriousness. "That is one of the reasons you are here, so you are somewhat of a legacy. Plus the fact you *appear* to know more about the mathematics of time than anyone outside this facility. Two or three other scientists, beside myself, reviewed your work at Cal Tech and gave you the big green E-Ticket to this little Tomorrowland ride, Dr. Humphrey. You're here to make this thing work... *properly*."

Bates placed his emphasis on that last word. "Properly". Which meant something was wrong. It also meant I was the F.N.G. here to unscrew whatever was screwed-up with that Satanic leviathan machine. The underlying menace in his tone made it crystal clear that I wouldn't be here long if I couldn't succeed where everyone else had, apparently, failed.

Without waiting for a response Bates went on.

"You are good on paper, Doctor Humphrey. Now we will see if you are as good in real life." He tilted his head down and looked at me from over the rims of his glasses. "I hope for all our sakes you are."

With that, he spun on his heel and walked away, leaving me to find my own way back to the administration building and the outside world.



CHAPTER 9

I was lost, and actually fairly surprised I was allowed to wander about the facility, but I guess my badge gave me a high enough clearance for an all access “backstage” pass so I could see what was going on behind the scenes. I tested it a few times on a couple of guards, who immediately became very helpful. I didn’t really see or learn much more than I already had, so I finally made it back to the Administration Building and back to Bates’ office, who was nowhere to be found. That was fine with me because it gave me a chance to chat up his delicious secretary, Sally Jennings.

She was typing at her desk when I came in and didn’t even look up as I leaned against the doorway in my attempt to be suave.

“So, I got the two-dollar tour.” I said, mustering up as much debonair as I could.

“Which you should keep to yourself, if you know what’s good for you.” She said without looking up. She blew a little pink bubble with her gum, which popped and she sucked it in and snapped it at the back of her jaw.

“So, do you like working here for...”

“Dr. Humphrey,” she said, still typing and not looking up, “this is a place of business, and only things of a business nature should be discussed, as we are both on the clock, so my time and your time is not our own.”

“But I do have a few questions...”

“Which, again, I would not ask,” she finally looked up at me in exasperation, “if I was you.”

“Well, I just needed some background on a few things, just to plug a few holes in my knowledge base if I am going to be of any use around here. Dr. Bates mentioned something about a disaster on a ship called...” I snapped my fingers trying to remember.

“The Eldridge!” Sally said, now totally losing patience with me. “The USS Eldridge.” With an exasperated growl, she shoved her chair away from her desk and rolled back to the bank of file cabinets behind her. Without getting up, she bent over, pulled out a drawer, plunged her hand into the files and came up with one like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. With one fluid motion, she kicked the drawer shut, which rolled her chair back across the floor, and she spun, with her toe pointed like a dancer, and did a pirouette as she spun, landing right back in position at her desk as she plunked down the file in front of me.

“Project: Rainbow,” she said as she held out her hand and wiggled her fingers. “I need your badges.”

“But I thought...” I said not understanding.

“There is an empty office to your right down the hall, last door on the left. Read it there. That file comes right back to me when you are done, and I need your badges so you cannot leave this floor and so that file doesn’t grow legs and walk out of here. Sign these.”

She pulled out a clipboard with a pen attached and pointed to the places I needed to sign. When I was done, I handed her my badges and she waived the back of her

hand at me like I was some pesky insect being shooed away. I found the empty office at the end of the hall, with all the accompanying furniture of a military issue desk, chair and lamp. To my delight an ashtray was the only accessory. I sat, turned on the light, lit a cigarette and flipped open the ABOVE TOP SECRET file on the disaster that had become PROJECT: RAINBOW, better known as The Philadelphia Experiment.

* * * *

It appeared as though at the same time Project: Rainbow was going on from 1942 to 1944, Robert Oppenheimer was running his crew out at Los Alamos developing the atomic bomb as head of the Manhattan Project. But the scientists working on Rainbow, made Oppenheimer's guys look like helmet wearing retarded school kids taking the short bus to school. There was T. Townsend Brown, who I was familiar with, but there were also luminaries like Dr. John von Neumann and Dr. Vannavar Bush, who was on the cover of TIME magazine in 1944, for Pete's sake, and co-founded Raytheon (which means "*Light Of the Gods*"). These were the men that seemed to be doing most of the heavy lifting. They were all sharing time between the Rainbow and Manhattan projects. Bush was named as the titular head over all wartime science programs. He was the American version of Hitler's *Ubur-Gruben Fuher* General Dr. Hans Kammler, head of all the Nazi super-science programs and who had built their entire heinous concentration camp system. These were the very same men that made up the "Military Industrial Complex" Eisenhower warned us all about in his farewell address. Bush was the director of O.S.R.D., The Office of Scientific Research and Development, from 1941 to 1947 and later co-founded the National Science Foundation, which was really just a covert way of the Feds keeping track of everything in the field.

But what really shocked me was the involvement of Albert Einstein and, of course, Nikola Tesla. Tesla seemed to be at the heart of everything we were working on.

Einstein for years wrestled with what became known as the *Unified Field Theory*. It was the Holy Grail of physics and science's ultimate prize. This formula became his nemesis, his Dr. Moriarty. It was a mathematical equation that, theoretically, would connect all the disciplines, schools and theories of science together. Linking energy, mass, light, time, space, gravity and all the maddeningly inexplicable goblins, gremlins and leprechauns, in between. The challenge was, it seemed, as though the Newtonian laws of the universe just stopped working under certain circumstances, such as at the quantum atomic level, or near massively high sources of gravity. This was Einstein's brilliant work to come up with ways to explain the universe under those anomalous conditions through things like the theories of General and Special Relativity. But even back in the early 1900s, working as a lowly clerk in the US Patent office, Einstein postulated that a *Unified Field Theory* could only be worked out if one had a belief in, accepted, and was able to extrapolate out to, at least ten dimensions. This was in 1905, for God sakes!

It was his $E = MC^2$ equation that eventually led to his entrance into academia, the mathematics Chair at Princeton, global fame, near canonization and to the atomic bomb. The discovery of a *Unified Field Theory* would mean a massive quantum leap in the evolution of all mankind. Einstein said it would explain "the thoughts of God Himself" and, of course, lead to near limitless power for those who had it. It would be the code key for teleportation transport, faster than light speed travel and superluminal communications systems that could transmit unlimited packets of informational data instantaneously anywhere in the universe. It would truly unlock, and allow Mankind to travel through, all of time and space. If we didn't all kill ourselves first.

The legends went that Einstein did, in fact, finish the formula, and was horrified at this own handiwork. He had seen that $E=MC^2$ was used to build terrifying weapons

of mass destruction and murder hundreds of thousands of people. *The Unified Field Theory*, in the wrong hands, could bring unlimited power and destruction. With this in mind, he burned it, vowing never to reveal it to anyone. This story seemed unlikely though, as he died in his office at Princeton surrounded by papers and chalkboards filled with equations all trying to solve the Unified riddle. If he had already figured it out and recognized the dangers why devote the last years of his life to it. One last legend says he awoke from a nap at his desk, finished the equation, then, upon seeing he had solved the Universe's ultimate mystery, fell over stone dead and that someone stole it from his office from right under the great man's head.

Then there was the Grand Old Man, Nikola Tesla, who no doubt will be finally heralded as the greatest inventor and scientist of the 21st Century, as it would take us that long to figure out everything he was up to. Tesla did stunning things with electro-magnetic gaussing coils and, again, his work seemed to be more myth and legend than actual fact. People said he was teleporting things from place to place, and that, in one test, exact duplicates of everything he placed inside his device were appearing some distance away outside his laboratory in Colorado.

He "officially" died of malnutrition, penniless, using his last few dollars to feed his beloved pigeons on January 7, 1943 at the age of 86, on the 33rd floor of the New Yorker Hotel on 34th and 8th in Manhattan. But notes in the file claimed a double of Tesla was put in place long before to fool the Axis powers during the war and he was taken into a number of top-secret programs well after the staged death of his doppelganger. This was much like using Patton, arguably our best general, as a decoy to fool the Germans while the Allies were planning the invasion of Normandy. Tesla's double, publicly shunned by the US government, was taken to a number of bogus projects and that information was then leaked to Germany and Japan. They figured the stupid Americans could not be working on anything of importance if Tesla, probably the greatest scientific genius the world has ever seen, was not involved. It was the perfect cover for projects like Manhattan and Rainbow.

With all that said, Project: Rainbow began as just a way to use electro-magnetic gaussing coils to fool enemy radar, basically creating a huge blur on a radar screen instead of giving the position of a ship or airplane away using electrical static. This all started in the summer of 1942. Brown, Bush, von Neumann and Tesla, using Tesla's electrical engineering genius, his previous research with gaussing coils and working off formulas from Einstein, began running field tests on full-fledged naval vessels to see if any of it worked.

The initial experiments began in 1942 in simple radar invisibility using a web of degaussing coils around the hull of a ship. There were two tests with a moderation of success that caused a major rift between the scientists on the project. The first was on an unmanned PT boat, and apparently got the results they wanted, which was radar invisibility, a huge static field on the screens, and the ship vanished from view for a brief period. At first this was not even believed and was mostly chalked up to the massive EM fields affecting everyone's mind and vision, or even that it was bending light around the ship to achieve true invisibility.

The second test was run on a minesweeper, but with cages filled with test animals on board. This time, to everyone's surprise, the ship disappeared and teleported a small distance, but all the animals came back dead. This was written off to hysteria on the part of the animals, and it was concluded by the military that they had, literally, "died of fright."

Due to what the Navy considered successful tests, this led Bush and von Neumann wanting to use human test subjects on a full sized ship with a crew aboard. This may seem reckless and hasty by modern standards, but remember this was 1943 when America was in the grip of a bloody, nightmarish war. Hitler had Fortress Europe locked airtight, Japan controlled the South Pacific, America was surrounded

on all sides and US servicemen were fighting and dying by the thousands everyday. Any risk was considered acceptable to shorten the war and win.

But it was here the team broke ranks. Tesla, who was publicly “dead” by this time, and Einstein vehemently objected to a test with human beings. They knew the power of the forces they were playing with and both quit in protest. Using the crude computers of the day, called Turing Machines, after inventor Alan Turing, Tesla and Einstein argued that the computational power did not yet exist to do the calculations for a jump through space/time for the ship AND the men aboard. Dr. Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, was brought on board to replace Tesla and Einstein, and he had no qualms whatsoever about wasting human life.

I took a break from reading the file, rubbed my face and ran my hands through my hair, vigorously scratching my scalp to get the blood flowing and ease the tingling of the hackles on the back of my neck. I lit up another cigarette. There was something...wrong...with all this. One major anomaly here was that Bush and von Neumann were brilliant in and of their own right, working with arguably the greatest collection of brainpower ever assembled in the history of Man, with equally huge egos. Granted, most of that was set aside due to the war effort, but they kept referring back to a mysterious “Advisory Committee” they seemed to be obeying with an almost slavish submission called “The K Group.” I mean, who was smarter than them? Who did Tesla and Einstein go to for advice? It was all just very weird. And it was this same K Group that insisted, in fact demanded, the experiment be performed on that specific date of August 12, 1943, whether they were ready or not, and they clearly were not. This ultimatum from on high issued by the K Group proclaimed that it was only on this date circumstances would be “optimal” for the experiment’s success. Without question, rhyme or reason, Bush, von Neumann and Teller just did as they were told.

So, fulfilling the demands of this K Group and with the moral and argumentative Tesla and Einstein gone, the experiment proceeded. In the early morning hours of August 12, 1943, the USS Eldridge, Destroyer Escort 173, moved slowly into the light of dawn out of the Philadelphia naval harbor with a skeleton crew of about 40 aboard and sailed into history.

When the order was given to engage the special machinery jury-rigged to the ship, it vanished without a trace. Apparently, a short time later the Eldridge reappeared outside the Norfolk, Virginia naval harbor, teleporting over 300 miles.

Horrifically, 18 men had been phased directly into the decks, plating and bulkheads. The arms, legs and torsos of the men melded directly into the steel plating. Many of the men on board had been driven mad by the overwhelming electromagnetic energy, which had short circuited their brains. Only the men below deck throwing the switches at the center of the effect had been completely spared.

For years later, stories of terror about the survivors came to light. The center of the galaxy has a ZERO TIME POINT (Z.T.P.) upon which the entire axis of every galaxy spins. In fact, every spinning object develops this Z.T.P. center of gravity, which is why physics equations are different for spinning objects as opposed to objects at rest. Apparently human beings also have a sort of universal Z.T.P. within them upon which the complex layers of not only the physical form but the causal, etheric, astral, mental, emotional and spiritual bodies all hang like a hook. Call it a “Piece of God” if you will. In this case, apparently, the survivors ZTPs came back to this continuum out of phase and their various subtle inter-dimensional forms got “stretched” across the time stream with a series of truly nightmarish effects, like a man clinging for dear life to a rock in a raging river of time.

Interacting with anything electromagnetic seemed to trigger the episodes. One sailor was carrying a ship’s compass across a naval yard when he froze, shaking wildly in a supernaturally rapid manner, as a sparkling violet glow sprang up around him.

Courageously, other sailors grabbed onto the man, and their touch, possibly

bringing the seaman back into phase with this time frame, brought him back from the brink and out of what they called the St. Elmo's Fire effect. But eventually this stopped working, as the horrific tug of the time stream became more intense.

In another case, a man sitting watching TV in his home years later, began to glow and shake, staying that way for over a week. Suddenly, the glow faded and he got up and walked straight through the wall of his house, disappearing completely.

And in the most horrible event, a sailor started to shake and glow, went "out of phase" and about a dozen men grabbed onto him, only to be drawn into the field effect with him, like trying to detach a man from a live electrical wire. The Navy erected a housing around the men to study the effect and see if anything could be done for them. They stayed this way for 18 days before vanishing forever.

It was after this disaster that Edward Teller seemed to have taken over much of the project. The key gist went from radar invisibility to actual teleportation. Teller's test was to teleport a US vessel to a previous point in its space trajectory by encapsulating the boat in a highly specialized, three- phase "electromagnetic bottle". This would allow a ship to "blip" out of the way of enemy fire, as incredible as that sounds. He proposed that the experiment's intent was to give a US vessel, at the flip of a switch, the instantaneous ability to be "excised" from the universal space/time coordinate in which it had detected the presence of an enemy mine. The creation of such a separated space/time field, can be done by engaging the principles of what he called, "Divided Space".

Strong nuclear force lines energetically connect all atoms in universal space, literally holding the universe together like glue and functioning as a medium for the transmission of all frequencies. A means of intentionally disrupting these strong force lines is via the manipulation of neutrino fields. A bubble of "divided space" can be created by the application of a vortex of neutrinos within a given area. The neutrinos in this vortex must be rotating at the same rate as that of the fundamental resonance of the planet Earth. This phenomenon occurs haphazardly in nature as "ball lightning".

Neutrinos interpenetrate all matter in the cosmos and they are the smallest subatomic particles yet measured. Stars are constantly creating new neutrinos, which speed throughout the universe in all directions, becoming modulated by, and carrying information about, the bodies through which they pass. These tiny neutral particles possibly have no mass and have an incredibly weak nuclear force, rarely impacting upon matter, which they, more often than not, pass through. Telescopes to measure neutrinos are constructed beneath huge granite mountains, to reduce background radiation signals, which mask their weak signal. Neutrinos have an infinite information handling capacity, bandwidth and function as the "voice and the power of the universe".

All the work on Project: Rainbow discovered that a space divided from universal space can be created by causing a small percentage of neutrinos passing through the space to travel in a vortex rotating at a frequency in the order of 7.83 Hertz. Strong force lines at the boundaries of the space are interrupted so long as the vortex exists. This twisting field is necessary to break the field of strong force lines between all matter in universal space/time and to create an inner space separated from universal space.

If a rotating magnetic field is operated in synch with the Earth's 7.83 Hz fundamental resonance, objects within one such space can be moved with respect to our "universal space" when power is applied. The divided space is then free of the forces of inertia or gravity. Once the space is divided, objects within the space may levitate, teleport or move in time. Divided inner space can pass through universal space but is dependant on the drag and surface sharpness between spaces being low enough to prevent piercing the shell of the missing strong force lines. Electromagnetic

waves, including visible light and infrared heat can pass through the boundaries of the divided spaces.

So, in the Teller tests in 1944, they rigged up an IX-97 minesweeper called the USS Martha's Vineyard with a full crew compliment. Three phase currents were pulsed through the huge tubes of wires at a low frequency. This was most likely the 7.83 Hz fundamental frequency recognized by Tesla and first measured by Winfred O. Schulmann later named for him as the "Schulmann Resonance".

As they gradually eased the power up, they found that lower power levels had no noticeable effect. Suddenly, like bringing water to a boil, a frequency threshold was crossed and: WHAM! They traveled back two weeks in time instead of the desired 15 minutes or so needed to move out of the way of a mine or torpedo. Once separated, the inner space containing the ship apparently moved back to a time when the ship was berthed at Newport News, Virginia.

As the current level in the three cables was increased, force lines began to tear between the ship and universal space. Only when the level reached the point that all the lines were broken, was the USS Martha's Vineyard untethered and free from the dock of the pull of the Earth and the space/time continuum of the present.

The Martha's Vineyard was suddenly free to go wherever it is that things within a divided space go. In the case of the IX-97, that place was two weeks back in time, to the place where it was at berthed in Newport News. When the Skipper saw what had happened, he turned off the power and space/time, which had folded around the ship, snapped back to its original "size and shape", reconnecting the divided space to universal space, jerking them, and the Martha's Vineyard, back to the Philadelphia Navy yard harbor. The return of the IX-97 minesweeper to Philadelphia was within seconds of the time it left.

OW!

I'd been so engrossed in the file my cigarette burnt my hand. I sucked at my fingers for a moment and flipped the folder closed. These were kids playing with guns and fire at the same time. All this power, but no control, ripping open massive holes in the space/time continuum they had no idea how to close. And some very nasty things lurked on the other side of the fence.

In fact, without Einstein's Unified Field Theory to explain all the forces and dimensions we were dealing with, it was all useless and stunningly dangerous. We needed another $E = MC^2$ that would revolutionize our understanding of how the entire universe worked or we would be trapped on Earth forever. Everything here at Montauk was shooting in the dark and it might take years of hit and miss experimentation that could literally destroy the world. But that was something I was here to fix; to find a way to saddle and ride the dragon.

It seemed ironic that we were only one small mathematical equation away from breaking free from all time and space.



CHAPTER 10

The next fourteen days were a blur. I let Sally know I was getting deeper into a project that needed my full attention and once we were resolved to the fact that I would only do this kind of thing occasionally we were fine. I worked, ate and sometimes even slept in my office on an old leather couch Sally found in the Admin building. She had it moved in, with full knowledge of the snickers and jokes about its ultimate purpose, but she was a true sport, knew boys would be boys, and let all of them go bye without reproach. Which was lucky for them, as her wrath was legendary and you did NOT want to come down on the wrong side of a thin line with Sally Jennings.

My attaché, Matthew Reilly had just been promoted from Corporal to Sergeant. He put a cot across the hall in one of the old unused labs, even over my objections. In those two weeks Matt and I became closer and we started to share a lot about our lives as people often do when thrown into close proximity to one another and I found he had a good mechanical understanding of the universe around him.

He told me stories of how he worked with cars back in Alabama when he was big enough to hold a wrench. Several times over that period I would ask him how to put something together in regards to nuts and bolts and he would sit at a table in the hallway and work on the drawings for hours without getting up. He'd walk back into my office and hand me a design that would have put any Ivy League doctorate draftsman to shame. With a pencil, slide rule, and a protractor Sally gave him and one straight edge he produced detailed designs that anyone who used a lathe or mill could have taken and fabricated the needed object without question.

During this period, Dr. Bates, or "The B-Man" as everyone now called him thanks to Sally and her penchant for New York-style nicknames, passed Matt and looked over his shoulder, not really liking to have a military person being so obviously involved with the project. That was until Bates looked at his drawings, which were more like works of art than mere structural diagrams. He excused himself, reached across Matt's table, picked up the drawings, walked into his office to get the most lighting from the sunlight streaming through his window and pondered it for a good ten minutes. Upon returning it he said nothing. Less than three hours later, the room Matt used across the hall was completely converted into a full dorm room with an excellent bed, complete drafting table and all the tools of the draftsman's trade compliments of the B-Man. Nothing else was mentioned about it, ever.

By the time I finished and with Matt's help, we had a set of drawings prepared that numbered twenty two sheets and a complete write up for the idea. Sally used half a ream of paper to type it up for us. I asked Matt to come with me to see Dr. Bates, but he deferred in his quiet humble southern way, feeling that he had no right to be in the room with his betters, or that it would be seen as him not knowing his place. All this time Murray was fuming out at the Marine Base. Sally kept me informed on that issue, since McClean and her talked almost everyday. Seems the Gunny Sergeant and

her had known each other since she first started working for Bates, almost seven years before.

It was during this period that I had also rewritten the general standing orders of the facility and gave the draft to Bates. I wanted to make this a friendlier place to work and get rid of the class distinctions between Marines and Lab Techs. I didn't know whether Bates had done anything with the requests until Sally dropped a printed copy of the new set of orders on my desk, which had been circulated to everyone on the base, and went into effect immediately. Attached to my copy was a hot pink note from Sally that my recommendation was pushed through central Marine command in DC, unwillingly, as a trial balloon. Murray was being shipped out to some godforsaken hell called Diego Garcia in the middle of the Indian Ocean and Gunny Sergeant McClean was being advanced two ranks and made head of the contingency group at the lab. The day this information was delivered, Matt stepped into my office with a giant grin from ear to ear.

"Doc, you have just given a bunch of grunt Marines the finest Christmas present they could ever get! And here it's February." I waved him out of my office and went back to work, smiling to myself.

"Are you joking?" Doctor Bates almost came out of his chair, when he read the conclusion of the project recommendation. I could hear him from in my office. "Sally get him in here!"

"Who boss?" Sally got up and walked to my door and motioned for me to put on my jacket.

"Who do you think? That A.D. of mine and his assistant." No one had ever heard him yell like this. Sally was shocked and wondered if this was going to be the end of a prefect relationship.

"What assistant, B-Man? He doesn't have one." Sally was looking around for Matt.

"You know perfectly well who I am talking about! That young sprat of a defector from the Corp that has become Humphrey's shadow."

Every one of us could hear him fuming in his office.

"Okay, just a minute I will find him." I looked at her and she made a sign of her hand running cross her throat, like something out of an old pirate movie. I walked over to the office and looked in. Bates was standing at the window talking to himself. Matt walked up behind me, physically shaking.

"You wanted to see us?" I asked standing just outside the doorway.

"You know goddamn good and well I want to see you! Everybody on this base knows it by now! Get in here and close the goddamn door goddamn it! I don't need our receptionist hearing the words I am about to say to you two."

Matt and I entered the room like bad children and closed the door, thudding solidly shut like a medieval dungeon sealing our fate.

"Sit down, Matthew." Bates had started to refer to the younger man by his Christian name as well as Sally and I. But now he was using our full names, always a sign of trouble.

"Do you two know what you have done?"

I looked at Matt on the edge of his chair, ready to bolt from the room for a foxhole to hide from the shrapnel, which I didn't think was a bad idea at the moment.

"No. " I said shaking my head. "I thought we were doing the job you wanted done." It sounded so lame I couldn't believe it myself.

"And you did it. I have never seen a design that incorporates as much detail, understanding and potential. I am truly pleased with that part of it. You, Theodore, have proven that you are everything I thought you were and more. And you, Matthew, I am requesting you be permanently assigned to us for our use, if you will agree to that for the duration of your tour. When your enlistment is up, I am sure there is a position

here for you, probably as Dr. Humphrey's Assistant, if you want it?" He waited looking at Matt who swallowed a couple of times before answering.

"You mean I won't be a body guard and driver no more?" He looked at me.

"No. You won't be. We will get someone else to drive the A.D. around. You are of more value here working with him. While you're in the Marines, keep your side arm, you may need it, but otherwise, with your agreement Theodore, Matthew goes on detached status today. What he has learned out of reading Popular Science and Mechanics Illustrated beats a four year graduate program in Mechanical Engineering in my opinion." Bates turned to me.

I just nodded in agreement. Bates looked back at the young man and Matt smiled, not completely understanding what was going on but he followed suit and nodded as well with a quiet "Yes, Sir," just to make sure that everyone knew he understood, which he didn't, but that was alright.

"Now," Bates stated emphatically, finally coming to the point, "the conclusion of your report. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! I have to take this to DC and try to sell them on the idea. They will, no doubt, send you back my head on a platter!"

Suddenly, it was clear what the problem was that made him lose it for a moment or two. I sighed and out of the corner of my eye I saw Matt sit back in the chair, relief untensing his muscles. We had been prepared for this and hadn't put it in the report. Uncontrollably, a smile spread across my face, which bubbled up into a laugh, followed by Matt.

"I am glad that you two find this so goddamn funny! Because I sure the hell don't like the idea of trying to talk to those thick headed bastards into giving me another capsule to try your crazy stunt! Those things cost about a million and half each in parts and we put them together, right here, which represents another two hundred thousand in time and manpower." He wasn't amused.

I raised my hand, like a student in class. Bates nodded and sat still fuming.

"Boss, look we tried to put seven of those capsules inside the dust cloud of the Russian's atomic bomb test. What we brought back was bits and pieces, most of it worthless, so that is proof that we need a different design for the probe. The radiation inside the bomb blast is overheating the cases and draining the batteries. We can't make the shielding any heavier, because it will never leave the chamber without us draining most of the energy off the New England grid as well as what we produce here. We need it to be super cool before we place it inside the cloud. If the case is below minus two fifty six going in, we'll have probably seventeen to eighteen minutes of recording. That way the guys at Lawrence/Livermore Labs can have what they want to analyze the molecular structure of the blast and then know what causes their chain reactions to be greater than ours. Right so far?" I waited for him to digest the information.

"Correct." He looked at me pushing his lips together really hard. I couldn't tell if it was the conversation or a physical pain inside his body. "Go ahead."

"Matt and I took apart three of the spent units and had Haskett over on Seven work to reassemble the usable parts. I started the Fab guys on making a new case, just slightly larger for the new configuration. Besides, all those parts are already paid for with taxpayer's dollars. Why not use them again? The Fab guys have finished and we're about 70% through...with the addition of the new equipment." I paused for a moment to collect my thoughts.

"What new equipment?" Bates looked at both of us.

"The cameras." Matt spoke up for the first time. "It was my idea. Doc liked it so much I incorporated it into the design. I placed a sixteen millimeter Bolex and eight millimeter Kodak spring wound motion picture camera into the design, with a timed release control on the units that can be set for anywhere from one hour to two days. All we need to know is when it is going into the cloud."

Matt sat back. I'm sure he was hoping he hadn't overstepped his bounds with his comments. For my part he hadn't, but the look on Bates' face was revealing.

"Why did you pick that time frame?" I knew where that question came from.

"Doc told me the time frame. I had no idea why, but that didn't matter. I worked out the details of it pretty quickly." Matt was so open and honest I couldn't believe it.

"That is good." Bates turned back to me and I saw the gears spinning. "What is the total cost in men and material right now?"

"A little over fifty grand." My best estimate on something as unclear as how you bill someone's time that you are paying full time and during that period they are just sitting around playing with their own ideas.

"And what about this super-cooler idea of yours, how am I going to explain that?" He was back on track and trying to stay mad, even though the scientist in him was getting the better of him.

"We don't move through space. We jump, first here, then there, then back to here. All we are doing is adding one more jump spot in there. At that point the physical properties of the unit will be super-cooled, so when it hits the cloud we'll have at least eight additional minutes to gather data. The guys at Lawrence said they only need us to gain two minutes to get their counters working right and abstract the information they need. This will be all gravy for them." I was more confident than ever this was going to work.

"And the cameras? Why put cameras on board? They can't work in the middle of a flash of intense light inside the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb." Bates looked at the report and proposal again holding it and feeling its weight.

"They're for the super cooling site." I waited until that sunk in. I just sat there and then it hit with the effect of a blockbuster on a wooden house.

"Oh shit!" Bates rolled his head back. He took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. He pulled out the bottle of Old Bushmill's he kept in the bottom drawer of his desk and poured three glasses. Matt was afraid to take it, but I handed it to him and Bates held his glass up to toast.

"Well, it looks like Project: Heron is going to be the first to go to the moon, boys. Gentlemen. To our genius!" The glasses rang as they clinked. Bates put his down and pulled out his pen, signing the proposal on the front page approving it for implementation.

With that signature, the nightmare began.



CHAPTER II

From the time Bates signed and approved the plan we worked almost around the clock to get everything ready. I explained what I was doing to Sally and she understood, her joy for me and us was bountiful. She wanted a spring wedding sometime in May, so I let her plan it. There would be some folks from the base and a few distant relatives and friends coming to the Little Congregational Church in South Hampton. She reminded me I needed to find a best man and off the top of my head I couldn't think of anyone I wanted there next to me except Matt. I asked if he would do me the honor and you would have thought he was just nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor. He asked if we could invite his folks up from Alabama where his dad was a farmer. Matt wanted them to see him standing next to the man that was not only his boss but had turned into his best friend. Sally had no problem with that at all and put them on the list. We spent our nights together and explored our love, her and I. She never ceased to amaze me with her vitality and desire for the warmth of lovemaking.

The atmosphere around the base changed as word spread of the upcoming wedding and even McClean was more than candid about the rightness of the match. One morning while going into the Pit, McClean excused himself for not being proper and took off his hat holding it in his hand. A sign I had learned at Twenty Nine Palms meant the conversation was off the record in his regard.

"Doc, I wanted to thank you for the boys and myself for the changes you have made around here. They are greatly appreciated by everyone and I thought I would let you know that some new relationships have been formed between some of the staff and some of my boys. It is nice to be part of this operation instead of outsiders that aren't trusted."

I looked at him and extended my hand in friendship.

"I am just damn glad we've got you guys here, let me tell you that, Jack." I don't think anyone had ever referred to him by his first name and it came as a shock to him I am sure.

"The other thing I wanted to offer up," he seemed slightly embarrassed by his own words. "is that every one of us are wishing you and Miss Sally all the best. She is a great gal and if it would be alright with you two, the boys and I would like to come to the wedding in dress blues, swords and all."

This was a true mark of friendship for anyone that knows anything about the Marine Corp. Swords are normally only worn when a Marine gets married. I was taken aback by the mark of respect of this living hero standing in front of me.

"Without a doubt, Miss Jennings and I would be honored by that more than words could express."

He stood for a moment nodding his head up and down looking at the ground, then put his hat back on and picked up his clipboard with pride filling him up like air.

"Thank you, sir!" He motioned for the other Marine to come over and open the door into the Pit.

I went in, changed into the regulation garb for the lab complex and headed down to the seventh floor. As I went into the machine shop, I couldn't believe the number of people standing around the workbench. Don't think I am talking about some dirty, grease covered place here. This machine shop you could eat off the floor and never get so much as a cold. This was a spot that was immaculate in every way, with lathes and mills and all the tools shining from being polished when not in use. The head of it, Hasket, was a mechanical engineer that delighted in building things that were complex and difficult to machine. He was one of those guys that you just know had a complete machine shop in his basement and built 1/64th replicas of old steam locomotives; with the exception that Hasket would probably have a working model knowing him. I pushed my way past a couple of looky-lous and saw what all the bother was about.

"Oh A.D. Thanks for coming down." Hasket was reaching inside the capsule and tightening something with a small box end wrench. "We wanted to see if this thing really worked right the way you intended it to." He stood back and wiped off the wrench, even though there wasn't a trace of grease or oil on it and placed it carefully back into the red roll around chest next to the workbench with all the tools arranged in a certain order. Matt was kneeling next to the table and working on a single screw, very carefully.

"Whatcha got?" I looked down inside the capsule and saw two cameras had been mounted in the new recess that Hasket had engineered inside the existing unit.

"Take a look and see the aperture work." Matt got up, wiped his tool and handed it back to Hasket who wiped it again before setting into the chest.

"Watch this!"

Hasket picked up the forty-pound package and then set it down again on the workbench. Suddenly a whirling noise came from inside the case. I looked into it and realized that both cameras were working at different angles. The eight-millimeter was taking a picture out one side and the sixteen-millimeter was shooting out of the other. Both had partial mirrors installed in front of them so they would reflect the faces of two clocks that Hasket had added inside the case. He pointed to the case for me to watch underneath and then picked the box back up. The noise of the cameras stopped and the shutter-like arrangement closed off the camera housings to protect them from heat. Putting it back down, the shutter opened again and the camera started running.

Matt stood back and offered it to me but held it up high enough so the crowd in the room could see. "This way, we can reference how long the record tells us that the unit is in place against the clocks when we move it from the 'super cooler' ", (the name we were all using now for the lunar surface), "into the cloud and then back out again. I thought we might want to take it back to the super cooler, before we jumped it back here, so we don't have the thermal bloom issue."

I stood there and thought about it while everyone watched me. I didn't realize this was the one fact I'd missed in the whole process and Matt had cleverly put it together. We would have timing, signature of event on the super cooler, and a retrieval that wasn't going to fry us all when it bounced back.

"I like it." I said finally. "We need to set up the coordinates on the jump boxes to make this happen just that way."

Next to me stood Doctor Otto Craig, a big, blonde Swede I hadn't had a lot of contact with during this three-month period. But from all accounts and reports he seemed competent and committed to the success of the project. He handed me a printout of the details he'd been working on with the new IBM computer we had just installed over in the Admin building. They told me it took almost a year to put into place and that it contained sixteen hundred miles of wires. When it was running we couldn't turn on the machine in the Pit, because both of them would drain our power plant completely. It used a new punch card arrangement that not many knew how to

use yet, but it would appear that Dr. Otto Craig was way ahead of the curve. His thick Swedish accent made him hard to understand sometimes, but not today.

"The coordinates and lock positions for the jump consoles are there." He handed me the printout and I looked at them. This process would have normally taken us all working on it for six or seven days to figure it out. I looked at the sheet and it stated the computer, that is what they called the thing, had only taken fifteen hours of processing time to complete the task. Amazing new stuff.

"How long did it take you to set this up?" I asked more out of curiosity than anything else.

"Oh four or five days of punching cards. I am not a good typist, I made a lot of mistakes, and so I had to do some of them over again."

"Could we," I said, looking around the room and wondering out loud, "get a pool of women to punch these cards instead of you guys? Would that be helpful at all?"

They looked at one another and then everyone considered it, nodding their heads.

"Yes, that would have saved me maybe a day or two." Dr. Craig added.

"Let me see what I can do about that. In the meantime, when will 'Alvin' be ready to fly?" Alvin was our pet name for the capsule.

"All we need to do is load the tape recorder and put film in the cameras." Hasket looked around the room to see if anyone had anything else to say. It was Jackson who had come down from the fourth floor to watch who made the most revealing comment.

"And wind the watches." Jackson added.

Everyone laughed. I headed back up topside to get Bates approval for the jump. It was the fastest that any jump had ever been planned, prepped and readied.

It would also be the last.



CHAPTER 12

Dr. Bates looked grayer than I had ever noticed before. I'd seen that he was taking more of the small white pills from the vial he carried with him all of the time. I didn't know if it was for his pain or just to keep his mind clear from the effects of the painkillers he was on. I sat quietly while he reviewed my documentation. He went back and forth between a couple pages comparing figures and some other items. Finally he put down the papers and looked up at me. He took off his glasses and set them down on the desk.

"So when do you want to try it?"

"I thought we would have to wait until someone told you they had information on when the Russian's were going to set off their next blast." I was still under the assumption we could move things in space, but the time component of the system had never been explored in any great depth. The time shock I had experienced my first day here was some side effect of the spatial movement through the framework of space.

"We know the date of their last test. We dial that factor in and push the big red button that says launch. That doesn't seem too complicated does it?" He wasn't being sarcastic, it was just he assumed that I understood everything about this machine in the Pit. I realized that I didn't.

"We can move in both time and space frames together?" I tried to pose the question in the best way I could so that I wouldn't seem like a total idiot.

"Yes, Ted. The first jump you saw was targeted at an explosion that happened two months before we jumped. I thought you understood that?" He was picking up his glasses and looking at the document again.

"They don't know that in there, do they?" I pointed at the general direction of the Pit and the machine in the hill.

"No. They think the time delay or 'overlay of time' as we like to call it; is a side effect of the instantaneous movement of the capsule. It has been traded off as a side effect. Only two or three others outside of you and me know that we can move through time and space simultaneously. That has been our most guarded secret and why you have not come across anything about that in reading the filed reports." He opened his desk drawer and pulled out a small black book and handed it to me. I thumbed through it.

There was a name at the top of each page. A direct phone number or two or three phone numbers in some cases, and a set of code words for each person. The coding indicated a success, an abort or a complete failure.

"After every jump, I have gone down that list of names and called each one of them. There are twelve in all. When you add the President's advisor that makes thirteen. They are the most powerful men in this country and yet almost no one knows they work for the government, or, more specifically, the President directly. They are the ones that make sure this place gets it's funding and that you and I have paychecks every month. Right now and for the past nine years they have wanted us to concentrate on monitoring atomic events in Russia and soon in China at Loc Nor. But that is only the beginning. When this system proves itself, we will be asked to do a

great deal more. I presented your project to them three weeks ago and after careful review I was told to give you a copy of that book. You now hold in your hands the most secret and powerful list of names ever assembled in the history of mankind.”

Bates paused, took a breath and leaned forward to give gravitas to his words.

“Ted, if you do this jump and are successful you will be able to write your own ticket.” Bates looked old, like a used rag that had been wrung out from dealing with all of this. I couldn’t tell if he was already resigned to his fate in his own mind or if he was failing faster than he had expected.

I held up the book between my thumb and forefinger, shaking it like an angry animal trying to bite me. “What am I supposed to do with this damn thing?”

“Well, the first thing is don’t lose it.” He got up and looked out the window. “The second thing to consider is what you want to do next. I warn you, if you do this jump and are successful, there is no way out of here for you and that means Sally as well. You’ve come to a crossroads now, my friend, whether you like it or not. Right now you can still put the pin back in the grenade. You give me back that book and get married and you and Sally can go back to the academic world. You can teach, do research, raise kids, have an idyllic Ivy League life out there in the ‘real world’ with fame, recognition and the respect and admiration of the public and your peers. With all you have set up here, others can move the ball forward and you go back to a beautiful life with your beautiful girl.” He turned towards me with a sad, tired smile.

“Or go back in there and take your capsule through its paces and see if you are right. If you do that, though you are committed for the duration. Once you prove the system works they will never take their hooks out of you.”

“Is that why my father left?” I realized it had been months since I had thought about him being tied into all of this. “Before that thing was operational.”

“He wanted to go faster and farther than the men in that book wanted to go. So he got out and left before it had been proven. He knew it would work and told me so, but he couldn’t spend the time to do all the small, petty steps, to prove the science. Much like you.”

Bates sat back down and picked up Shalu, his great white Norwegian Forest cat, and started to rub his jowls. The animal closed his eyes and purred mightily and that seemed to give Bates some peace and calm.

“I asked you to look at a battery drainage problem and you handed me a complete new system. The way I am going about this, that step would have been two or three years down the road. I know it, you know it and those men in that little black book know it. So they are waiting to hear whether you are successful or not. If you are; the briefing will be handled by you. You will put on your best suit and snappiest tie, one of the Marines will escort you and you will be in a room in the basement of the old Executive Office Building across the street from the White House and you will tell them everything we learned on this jump and how we did it. They won’t say anything. They will politely thank you for your time and you will come back here not knowing if this place is going to be here next week or if we are going to be given hundreds of millions dollars to expand the research.”

“Why would I be giving the briefing instead of you?” I held my breath not wanting to hear what I expected to hear any second.

“Because, Dr. Theodore Humphrey, Jr., from this moment on you are the new head of Project: Heron. You are the new director as of. . .” he looked at his watch and then at the old school regulator clock on the wall, “...3:00 PM today.”

“And where exactly will you be, Dr. Bates?” It was the first time I had addressed him that way in months.

“Oh, here to assist you. Fill in some blanks, make sure they don’t eat you alive if I can.” He paused for a moment. “I need to prepare to walk my daughter Sally down the aisle and get her married off.”

I had learned what was probably the worst kept secret on the base: that Sally Jennings was Dr. Bates' daughter, but she purposely used her mother's maiden name to avoid any hint of nepotism and to create a further separation between her work and personal life.

"I have things to do before I die, don't worry about that." Bates continued cheerily. "But this is the right decision, if you are ready to commit yourself to this place and the program."

I didn't have to even think about it. "B-Man, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else!"

Bates looked around the room considering, when Shalu looked up at him and gave one of those strange Edward G. Robinson meows of his.

"What was that?" Bates asked.

"Maaa-aa." Shalu replied.

"Well you are going to have to ask him yourself. He is the boss now." Bates said, and with that Shalu actually turned to me, came to the edge of the desk and looked up at me with those amazingly wise blue eyes.

"Maa-aa. Maa." Shalu said to me.

I never knew if it was just my imagination or not, but I heard Shalu's question with a deep resonant crystal clear voice in my mind: "I want to stay with Bates in this office because it has been our home and our favorite place for so many years." The question was also tinged with sadness. "I love my friend very much and his time is ending soon. May we please spend the little time we have left together, right here, where we have always been?" The great cat blinked, awaiting my reply.

"Hey," I said, still a little shocked by what I was hearing and feeling, "why don't we keep our offices and just have the names switched. Would that be alright with you?" I asked Shalu. I leaned forward and he gave me a head butt kiss that lifted him up off his front paws, and he purred and meowed with delight, licking my face as I rubbed his thickly padded stud jowls.

Bates looked up at me with a warm but distant smile.

"We would like that very much. We've grown used to this drafty old place." He got up and shook my hand. "Just put my name on the window. Nothing else, please."

I got up and walked out, gently closing the door behind me and leaned on the bookcase next to the doorway taking in the enormity of everything that had just gone down. Then I turned and looked down at Sally at the desk where she had been when I first laid eyes on her. She'd been crying, with raccoon eyes of mascara running down her face, but she continued to type bravely without looking up.

I wanted to say something to her, but not here and not now.



CHAPTER 13

Doctor Otto Craig, our big jolly Swede, was also the mission control specialist. He had spent some time in the early days of the missile program in White Sands, New Mexico, before taking a position here. “Crazy Otto”, the staff had dubbed him, it seems, had been responsible for setting up the protocol for launches, a responsibility that had defaulted to him since he was the only one of these guys that had ever actually launched a missile. The effects of the launches had required a different set of procedures and equipment, but they had worked most of that out over the three years of actually doing jumps in the Pit. The only major problem was that the success rate was not high enough to warrant continued funding and the results were marginal at best. Since I had been here, which now accounted for the past six months of my life, I had heard the various remarks about closing the base down and getting rid of everyone and everything. Since the first month when I changed the general standing orders and made it alright for people to talk to one another and got the floors painted one color, so anyone could be anywhere (and disposed of that prick Murray who was running his own little fiefdom here at everyone else’s expense), things had improved. But the whole team knew we needed a win and a big one.

The current jump was approved, but that was really only because it wasn’t costing anyone in that black book anything since we had scavenged this unit together with spare parts, bailing wire and Bazooka Joe bubble gum.

Otto Craig told me that for first time since he had been here the place seemed like it was running on some camaraderie and team spirit. He also asked if some colleagues could come to the Pit and watch the jump, since there were guys here that hadn’t ever seen one. I had the maintenance guys build an observation room off to one side of the main floor and install two-inch plate glass. It had the space for about thirty people to stand and watch.

On launch day, fifty-two people packed into the room, as well as the thirty-five I had with me on the floor. I asked Bates to join me at the control console, more for my sake than his, but he declined, wanting everyone to see me do the jump without him present. He felt it would be better for the transition of power to occur, if he was not perceived acting as a nursemaid. I appreciated his concern, but the idea of doing a jump alone was daunting, but I wanted to see if the super-cooling site was going to be successful as well as the monitoring of the mushroom cloud.

As the countdown continued on the Pit floor, I walked to where Matt was standing and handed him a small piece of paper. He read it and laughed to himself. He folded it up and put it in his pocket. Patting it as he made eye contact with me as I went back to my station. It was nothing more than a joke between us at this point but I had to give it to him.

The noise had increased as the whirling gaussing fields accelerated up to speed. There were two minutes to the jump and the decibel level increased to the point that everyone put on their noise canceling headsets to make sure communications were clear. From this point on, everyone stayed right where they were and watched the

meters pulse in front of them. At T-minus ninety seconds, the four Marines in full fire protection gear carried “Alvin” into the chamber and turned to leave it. One of them kissed his hand and patted the case as a blessing and to wish Alvin good luck. That one small gesture made it clear to me that our troops knew we were going for the gold on this shot and its success or failure would decide all our futures.

At T-minus sixty seconds, Otto’s voice took over and called for last minute checks of all telemetry and systems. It sounded like a well-oiled machine from where I was listening. The sound pressure in the cave was increasing as the magnetic field went into the red and the noise was unbelievable even through the specially designed headgear. I’m sure without noise suppression headsets we would have all lost our hearing in seconds. Otto’s voice came into my head clearly.

“We are approaching maximum power and the system is stable. Prepare for insertion.” Came the booming voice over the Com system.

I took my aluminum key, designed not to be affected by the massive power of the electromagnetic gaussing field and inserted it into my control panel.

“Key inserted and ready!” I responded.

“On my mark, Dr. Humphrey, we are passing it all to you.” Otto said in his lilting Swedish accent, as he handed control off to me. When I felt it was right I twisted the key on the console one-quarter turn to the right, checked the chamber one last time, and pushed the “B.R.B”—The Big Red Button.

All hell broke loose.

That was the moment I expected to see lightening and green suppression vapor flood the chamber behind the leaded six-inch thick glass. Taking one final look around, I double-checked the meters bleeding murderous red all over my console. I was certain we couldn’t pump even one more volt of power into that chamber in front of me without blowing us all straight to Perdition.

“You have got the ball, Ted, I mean...Director!” The big Swede said with tense apprehension. I was stunned to hear my new title with the realization that it now, for better or worse, applied to me. I didn’t know if everyone was as yet aware of the change in my position as their new boss, but right now it was clear they all knew, every one of them, that it was up to the “F.N.G.” now and they were all waiting with bated breath for the rookie to do the honors, or kill them all. I scanned the testing area one last time, taking in their hopeful, but anxious, looks.

“Twisting. Ignition on!” I took a breath with a muttered prayer. “Engaging jump!”

I hit the B.R.B. There was one single intense flash of electrical blue energy. I gazed into its blazing heart through my welder’s goggles. No green vapor, no lightening and the sound in the room, after an imploding sucking sound, like someone vomiting in reverse, was suddenly reduced to almost nothing.

Okay, Director Ted Humphrey, so far so good. At least everyone isn’t dead.

Yet.

I quickly glanced down at my console’s decibel monitor and it read in the low sixties. The chamber was whirling but not making any noise. I saw one person’s head prairie dogging, popping up to look around and reach for his headset.

“Do not take off your headsets! Anyone!” I yelled into the silence. The prairie dog head jerked around, gave a thumbs up and popped back into his hole.

“Director?” Otto’s accented Swedish voice came through my headphones, clearly confused by this change of events. “Do you know what is happening? Where is the capsule?” Otto didn’t have our American penchant for nicknames, and ‘Alvin’ was what we affectionately called our brave little ship now hurtling through the great beyond.

“Telemetry! Where the hell did ‘Alvin’ go?” I called out.

“Nothing. It’s showing Alvin is sitting right in front of us in the chamber.” The telemetry was responding. Everyone got up cautiously and looked into the chamber from their consoles and could see that the pathway through it was clear and open.

“Check your systems Telemetry. Alvin’s gone AWOL!” I looked around at the gallery of faces watching from outside in bewilderment. This was blue sky for all of us.

Then I saw it.

Jackson was standing in the upper gallery, sneezing. But he hadn’t finished sneezing yet. He was frozen in the middle of the sneeze, as if someone had taken a life size portrait of him sneezing with every detail caught and suspended in time. The facial grimace, his eyes squeezed shut, lips blowing outwards, droplets of vaporized mucus floating in globules in mid-air, as if he had been flash frozen in a block of crystal clear amber.

“Matt!” I yelled, still not sure what I was looking at. “Is your console clock still working?”

“Yes sir, it is.” Matt replied. “T-Plus two minutes and counting.”

“Otto?”

“Ditto, boss.” Otto called back. “T-plus two minutes, twelve seconds and counting.”

“Everyone look at the gallery above us and to the left.” I said starting to panic. “Look at Jackson!”

I watched as the entire colony of prairie dogs popped up and looked around. It took a moment or two for the whole ‘town’ to focus on what was happening, and then it registered with a collective gasp. A dozen voices started chattering all at once, all speculating on what was happening. Otto stopped the cacophony with a gruff yell.

“Director, do you think that is affecting the out jump?” Otto asked barely hiding his concern.

“No. The normal time delay has gone out farther than expected and we are inside the vortex itself right now. That’s why Telemetry’s showing the capsule still here...I think.” I paused, perplexed. Matt came on the Com. His soft, steady Southern drawl had a calming effect on everyone.

“Director...Ted...if I may?”

“Go ahead. Listen up everyone!” I didn’t know what he was going to say but if he was going so far as to interrupt a jump, it had to be good.

“I think it is the fact that, for the first time, we are jumping the capsule so far into space. All the other tests have been inside Earth’s atmosphere haven’t they?” I listened to him as I was calculating the event horizon myself.

“Otto? Have we only bounced Alvin inside the atmosphere?” I asked Mission Control.

“Affirmative. We only targeted terrestrial sites.” Otto answered.

“You got two waves coming at you, Ted.” It was Matt again speaking very quickly in his Southern accent, which meant he was excited. “The first is when the capsule comes back into the atmosphere from the nuclear cloud monitoring and the second will be when it comes back into the Pit. And Alvin will have one helluva head a steam comin’ in.”

“Give me a mark someone. When does Alvin leave the super cooler on the moon?” I yelled into my headset.

“Twenty seconds.” Jump control responded.

“Hang on! If Matt is right this is going to be like riding the wild mouse at Coney Island.”

It hit right on the second. Green safety vapor exploded out of the chamber and washed over the control room. It was much more powerful than the one I had first experienced. The intensity inside the chamber was unbelievable as well. The lightening was much more powerful and there was a constant flow of stringer bolts

flying toward the grounding copper balls at the edge of the cave. Squinting and shielding my eyes, I forcibly turned to see the gallery. Most of the people had turned their backs to the window, as the pulsing was too brilliant even with the dark protective goggles. This time the pulse had collapsed back into the chamber. The people in the gallery were moving again. Jack, finally unfrozen in time, finished his sneeze and gobs of snot covered the face of the man next to him.

“How long until the jump to the super cooler again?” I asked in my mic.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven....” I listened to the countdown and then everything went silent again.

Immediately I turned and looked at the gallery, the whole group was frozen again.

“Matt, call security at the top of the elevator and see if you can get them.” I looked over at him and motioned for him to head for the side tunnel. I was hoping our phone system was all inside the time ring we were generating.

“Otto, what’s the count before jump back to here?”

“T-plus two minutes, five seconds.”

“I need a volunteer, RIGHT NOW!” I yelled. “Somebody to walk into the gallery and see if they freeze! Or if you can walk through it and then back here. A volunteer only!”

“One minute thirty seconds.” Otto spoke again.

“I’m on it, sir!” I turned to see Phillips, one of the young Marines assigned to the chamber by Sgt. MaClean, unplug his headset and sprint toward the gallery. I watched hoping I would see him running through frozen people, but he just vanished in a flash of blue light.

I had just sent my first man to his death, but there was time for remorse and recrimination later.

“We are down to thirty seconds and counting.” Even Otto with that Swedish accent sounded worried at this point.

“Have the recovery team ready to get in there before this bastard superheats.” I called watching the gallery. Suddenly, Phillips stumbled back into the room, gasping and sputtering covered in a clear viscous slime. The other Marine at the door grabbed him and pulled him to a sitting position on the wall and hooked up his headset. I think the other Marine’s name was Sanders, but I wasn’t completely sure.

“Is he okay?”

“He’s shaking like a dog shitting prunes, Director, but he’s alive and vitals are high.” Sanders answered. I gave them both thumbs up. Great. A new problem. Just what my first jump should give me. Matt plugged back into the console.

“We got nothing at the elevator phone, it just rings. Nothing in Admin at Sally’s desk. I talked to the front gate and the guard says for the last four hours no one has relieved him and nobody is answering any phones on the base.”

“Ten...nine...eight...seven...” Otto continued in his monotone.

“Everyone hold on! This is going to be one helluva landing.”

The electric blue flash must have been a hundred million volts of pure energy when it collided in the chamber. Two consoles in the front row exploded like in a bad Sci-Fi movie as both men were tossed back in a cascade of showering sparks, scrambling out of the way so not be crushed underneath the flying machinery. The recovery teams were in before the fireworks had stopped and they were out with Alvin and down the side hallway. The power had been turned off to the chamber and it should have been winding down but the pressure sensor on my console said it was increasing, which was...impossible! Unless...oh no...!!

“Otto!” I yelled, “Everyone! We got something else coming in behind Alvin.”

“What are you talking about?” Otto yelled back, now totally losing his mind and famed Swedish cool.

“Look at your pressure gauge, man!” Matt yelled into his headset.

“Oh shit, boss! What do we do?” Otto could handle the normal but this wasn’t in the book yet.

“Flood the chamber with positive ions, right now!” It was all I could think of.

“Ground the field, boss.” Matt said quietly to me over the private link.

“Ground the field as well, Otto.” I repeated, trusting Matt, why I don’t know, but it seemed like he had better instincts in a crisis like this than mine.

“Grounding. Pressure holding. No...it’s dropping!” Otto was reading gauges instead of looking up.

“Does anyone else see that?” I called into the intercom.

“Oh my god! What is it?” Some woman screamed.

The voices were a demonic choir in my head.

“SHUT UP!”

The blurred figure of a man wearing headphones and a khaki US Marine Corp uniform could be seen in the green vapor that filled the center of the chamber. He was moving in slow motion, as if underwater, holding his arm up, positioning his hand to shade his eyes against the intense white light. I whirled around to look at where Phillips was propped up against the wall seconds before and he was gone.

How could he be in there when he was just...?

I turned back to the chamber, calculating all the variables, as the uniformed figure started to fade and realization punched me in the mouth.

“MATT! That’s Phillips! Look at Phillips RIGHT NOW!” I screamed.

“He’s not there!” Matt was starting to rattle. “Where the hell did he go?”

“Matt, watch the spot where he was! That EXACT SPOT! DO NOT take your eyes off that exact SPOT! Don’t even FUCKING blink!” I calculated quickly, yelling at Otto. “Ground the chamber now! Full range! Dump it! Dump the whole goddamn thing!”

Otto got the message. He’d been going easy trying to save the coils from the backlash electricity that would fry everything like summer bacon, but hearing my desperation, no doubt matching his own terror, and now realizing that a man’s life was at stake, he pushed the panic button and dropped the entire system. The room filled with the smell of ozone, melting plastic and burning wires. The pressure inside the chamber plunged to zero.

“He’s here!” I heard Matt on the private channel. “Phillips is here! Confused as hell, but here!”

“Get him to the infirmary. Do everything to be sure he’s all right and then I’ll be up. Move your ass, Matt! It’s important!” I ripped off my headset and sprinted for the side chamber, where the recovery team was decontaminating and cooling Alvin, our intrepid little capsule.

It was May 24th, 1961. Little did anyone else on Earth know, or could even imagine in their wildest dreams, that we had successfully teleported a recording capsule into the heart of a Russian nuclear explosion, then to the surface of the Moon and back to our top-secret base in Montauk, New York.

Also that, as an unexpected side effect of our efforts, Corporal Alexander Phillips, United States Marine Corp, had been the first man in history to officially travel in time.

“How long?” I spoke to the lead technician.

“Hour, seventy minutes max and I’ll have it ready to open for you.” I slapped him on the back and smiled with relief.

As I walked through control, I looked at Otto who was visibly shaken. He looked at me and shook his head like we had just let Frankenstein’s monster escape into the unsuspecting village.

“How in the hell are you going to write this one up, Boss?”

“You didn’t see all of it, Otto. It just got better and better. Get everyone to the conference room three for debriefing, now.” No one had ever done this before. Everyone normally went home and then the next day wrote reports for review on their particular part of the jump. That ended today. I went out into the side hallway and grabbed a phone to call Sally.

“Honey? Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I think so. It is just that I don’t know what happened. It is eight o’clock and I’m stilling sitting here in my office and I don’t know what I have done.” She sounded confused.

“Listen to me. If the B-Man is still there, bring him over to conference room three and bring a note pad. No, bring twenty note pads...and some chalk. We got some work to do tonight.” I hung up and walked out looking up at the gallery. There were still some folks lingering around talking. I walked in and told them to get everyone that was in the gallery into conference room three. They nodded and went off in different directions to find the others.

I stopped in the hallway and checked my pulse. It was racing. I needed to slow down, but I knew, if I was right, I had found what the old man had been looking for all these years. What all those people on the USS Eldridge and that Varsity A-Team of big brain super scientists had never figured out. The excitement of this moment was unbelievable.

But it wasn’t going to last.



CHAPTER 14

Bates stopped me in the hallway and pulled me to one side. He corralled me into an empty office on the third floor. He jammed his finger into my coat where he knew I always kept the black notebook in my pocket.

"Are you sure you want to do this before you call those other men?"

"Yes. I am very sure." I said, pushing his hand away from me. "These people all saw something and I don't want to wait until tomorrow when they have had time to rearrange their thoughts and change their minds about what they think occurred in there." I told him with conviction. "It is like a dream. If they go away now they'll lose part of it and we can't afford that this time."

"I noticed something happened at the Admin building as well, did you know that?" Bates was looking around in a conspiratorial way.

"Yes. I asked Sally to come over and bring you. Both of you have something to contribute." He looked at me strangely and then shrugged and took my arm as we walked toward the conference room.

"The wise men in DC in your little black book would not like to hear that they are the second group learning of this information. Just a note of caution for you." He patted my arm.

"They will be first. But this group was there and saw what happened. I need a full and thorough de-brief now, not tomorrow when they have either forgotten or rationalized all of it, which is what the mind does especially when it is faced with the fantastic."

I realized that the B-Man was talking out of his usual view. He didn't know what had happened yet with Phillips and his little jaunt back and forth in time, so this all seemed like a lot of window dressing to him for a simple jump.

"Oh good heavens!" Bates was taken back as he walked into Conference Room 3 on the third floor of the complex. Eighty-one people sat in all chairs, the corners and stood along the walls of the room. Technicians, scientists, researchers and Marine guards. Bates looked at me with disbelief that I would be so frivolous as to have a debrief with all these people in one room at one time. I could tell he thought this was a mistake that would be the undoing of his beloved project.

I started slowly figuring once this got going it would build to speed.

"Alright, Sally, may I impose on you to make your notes as close to the exact words as possible?" She nodded and without a word she crossed her legs, flipped open her steno pad and poised her pen ready to take dictation as fast as we could talk. Before I could start, Jack McClean stuck his head in the room.

"Mr. Director? Can I see you for a moment, please? It's important." I walked out motioning for everyone to stay put.

"What is it, Jack?"

"We got a hot holy mess up there, sir. My switchboard Op is going nuts with a flood of calls asking if we know anything about what the hell happened for the last four hours. People are calling from the city. I mean New York City, asking us if we are

messing with the power grid and what the hell are we up to. I slammed the place shut about thirty minutes ago and kicked our operational condition up to full alert, just in case we got problems I don't know about. When we go to a full alert the locals think the fucking Ruskie's are landing, excuse my French, sir." He stood awaiting my instructions.

"No worries, Jack. For the last hour I've been cursing my head off too. Okay, keep the place shut down until this meeting is over. Tell your switchboard operators to have the callers try and reach Conn Edison and the tell them it's their problem." I winked at him.

"Got it sir. Sorry for the interruption." He looked around and spoke quietly to me. "By the way, did you get it on the Moon?"

"That is supposed to be a secret, Jack." I hesitated and then looked around as well. "I think so, but I think we did...better than that."

"Holy shit, Doc!" He straightened up and nodded putting his stern face back on. "I mean, holy shit, Sir!" He saluted and headed back topside.

I went back into the conference room and called Matt over. He was lingering in the back of the room as usual for him, not wanting to be noticed. I looked around for Phillips the young Marine, who was sitting in a set of our surgical scrubs, since I think his uniform was ruined. He was also still looking pretty green around the gills.

"Okay, hold all the questions. I want to do this in a quick and orderly fashion since what we did today had effects that extended far outside of this facility." I knew that bit of information would impact the entire room as I intended. Bates was the first to try to say something, raising his hand, but I motioned him to stop, which he contritely did, lowering his hand to his lips, showing everyone exactly who was clearly now in charge.

"Hold your questions and comments. We've got a lot of information to go through very quickly and I do not want to waste time with speculation right now. Question one: is someone with Alvin and is it being taken apart to see if he got the recordings?"

"Yes. Two of my groups are on it right now. A third member is pulling the film and processing it as we speak. I told them to bring it here when it dried. I hope that was O.K." I could not connect a name with the man who answered, but that didn't matter right now.

"That's fine. Next, Dr. Bates, how long were you out of phase in the Admin building?"

Bates looked confused and then noticed his watch and compared it to the one of the wall of the conference room and he visibly flinched with surprise. "It must have been six, maybe six and a half hours." He thought for a moment. "Why did it affect the Admin building? That has never happened before."

"We will get to that." I clipped along officiously. "Otto, how long was Phillips in the chamber?" I watched out the corner of my eye as Bates tensed, looking lost and confused. Otto checked his clipboard.

"Forty seven seconds start to finish."

"Phillips, where did you go when you ran in to see if you could get through the gallery?" I looked directly at the man, who was squirming in discomfort not wanting to answer this, or any other question.

"I don't know Doc." He sputtered.

"I need more from you than that, Marine! You got slimed out there. How did it happen? Report!" I snapped, holding my stare.

"I just don't...remember." He looked to be on the verge of tears.

"Bullshit!" I yelled. "We saw you and you know we saw you, don't you?" I had to get him onboard quickly or I knew his brain would slip right off the plate.

"I ran out of the room towards the gallery," he said haltingly, trembling and rocking back and forth, "and I was in the middle of the chamber of the

device...covering my eyes because of the flashing lights. I could see all of you, but there was no sound in there. Like...space. I yelled, but no one called back at me." He broke and started to cry shaking his head with frustration. This was a battle hardened Marine, so whatever he had gone through was certainly more than any of us civvies could have handled.

"Matt, get him a drink. He's earned it." Matt nodded and left for a few minutes returning with a glass of amber liquid that he handed to Phillips who drank it down in one gulp then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. I whispered to Sally, asking his first name and she whispered back.

"Ralph, you did one incredible job in there. Ladies and gentleman, this man volunteered for a mission that could have meant certain death, and he risked his life unflinchingly, without question or hesitation, to save every single one of us. There is no greater love than a man who is willing to lay down his life for his friends. I am recommending Corporal Ralph Phillips, USMC, for a promotion and for the Medal of Valor. Come on everybody, let's hear it for him!" I clapped my hands and everyone rose and joined in. They applauded him though they didn't know why. Bates broke the reverie.

"I do not wish to in any way diminish this soldier's accomplishments, but may I ask why we are recommending such accolades to this young man?" Bates looked around the room with a raised eyebrow over the rims of his glasses.

"Because, Dr. Bates, he is the first person in the recorded history of mankind, that we know of, to have traveled through time and successfully back again." I continued to clap believing that it would keep the young man's head on his shoulders.

"Holy shit!" It was Otto. He was standing there when someone handed him the results of the Alvin test. They'd run the tape and pulled off the results. "Boss, you are going to want to see this."

He handed me the printout and I turned page after page looking down the columns of numbers on the print out. I handed it over to Bates who looked through it and shook his head in amazement.

"It looks like a prefect report. Alvin was on station and collected everything we needed. Would you concur with that assessment Dr. Bates?" I turned to him. All he did was nod somberly. I was sure he was being overloaded by what was going on.

"Alright." I took a breath and leaned forward on the table. "Start the report process. Everyone works in teams. Make one report from each section then give them to Miss Jennings. Nobody goes home until we're done. Got it?"

I looked around at a bunch of happy engineers and technicians that were no longer flying in the dark. They were now a team all part of something bigger than themselves and I had made it that way. I patted Bates on the shoulder and walked back towards the elevator. I needed to get ready to head for DC.

But first I had some phone calls to make.



CHAPTER 15

It was almost midnight when I picked up the phone and dialed the first number on the list in the black book. I was surprised when a woman's voice answered asking who was calling. I announced myself and was placed on hold for two minutes and then a man's voice came on the line.

"Thank you so much for calling, Dr. Humphrey. How may I help you?" The voice was warm and sounded like a man in his late forties or early fifties. I looked down the list of code words.

"Alfalfa." I spoke it as if it meant something to me.

"Dr. Humphrey," the voice said patiently, "the code is only an identifier to tell me that you completed the test and you were successful. That's good. Now tell me how long ago you finished the test?" I looked down the list and didn't find any code word for this question.

"I am at a loss here, since there is nothing on the page to tell me what to say." I was being honest, maybe stupid, but honest.

"There is no code word. It is a simple question, doctor. When did you finish the jump?" The voice took on a little more stern quality as time went on.

"That is hard to say. We had three separate events happen within the period of the jump, two of which were unexpected and one of which bordered on phenomenal. The time curve spread to encase nearly half the island." I stopped and waited to hear the results of my appraisal.

"So I have been led to believe from others that happened to be monitoring the situation. Dr. Humphrey, do not call anyone else. I will take care of that. Prepare your report and be at the Embassy Hotel tomorrow night at nine o'clock and be ready to present all pertinent information to The Group. We will be there and have everything set up. When you get there ask to see Mr. Radcliff, room 7734. The hotel receptionist will take you to where we will be meeting. Come alone. Do you have any questions?" I thought for a moment and considered carefully.

"Yes, I do. But I don't think you're the one I need to ask right now." I hung up the phone without another word. Whoever these men were they controlled this program and ground Bates up in it. That was not going to be my fate in this. I already knew that.

When I got back to my place, Sally's car was parked in front. Part of me was glad she was there, but then again I had my own regrets since she'd want to talk or make love and all I wanted right now was a complete nights sleep. Tomorrow was going to be a bear of a day, trying to pull all the loose ends together and be prepared for the meeting tomorrow night with the twelve men that controlled this program. I realized she needed some time as well, but this wasn't one of those times that I had the energy for her as well as everything else I needed to do.

I said good night to Matt who still insisted on driving me around and I went into the bungalow. To my surprise Dr. Bates was sitting in my living room. Great. No rest for the weary. I dropped my coat and briefcase from exhaustion and looked in the kitchen and bedroom to see if Sally was there with him but we were alone.

“Well,” I said, doing my best to contain my sarcasm and frustration, “to what do I owe this honor,” I looked at my watch, “at one in the morning, Dr. Bates?”

“Sit down Ted. We need to talk and I didn’t want to do it in front of anyone else.” He looked perplexed. Part of that I could understand. The test and jump had gone better than anyone could have imagined, but it all reflected badly on him both as a scientist and an administrator. He should have been the one to try this scheme months, if not years ago and to have the FNG pull it off in record time wouldn’t go down well with those black Book men in Washington, I already knew that, deep down in my soul.

Without prologue he started in. “Ted, in 1943 your dad and I were involved in a project under the control of the Navy. We worked with a man named T. Townsend Brown. He was a premier scientist and theoretician.” I started to say something and he held up his hand to stop me. “I know you are aware of that name. Just let me finish uninterrupted and then I will go.”

He paused for a moment gathering his thoughts.

“We were working on a project called Rainbow. Sally told me you read the file so you know most of this. It was a magnetic gaussing system for naval ships to give them invisibility to radar and the ability to pass over magnetic mines and not set them off. Brown was head of the project. What we didn’t know was that he had other orders. His superiors wanted him to see if he could alter the flow of the ether in such a way as to move objects through space and time to a different location, instantaneously. We were building a test bed and your dad was the first to pick up on the fact that what we were building was different than the stated plan. He shared that belief with me. I talked to Brown, thinking our conversation was off the record. Turned out it wasn’t. The next day Brown had your father shipped off to England to work on code-breaking, something he had absolutely no talent for whatsoever. Brown had gone to his bosses and they in turn made the arrangements to get rid of your father and had him kicked off the project. He was forced to leave you and your mother in California. That is only part of the story, but not all. Could I have a glass of water please?”

He pulled out his little plastic vial. I brought him a glass of water, he took two pills and sat back closing his eyes, then continued:

“When they found the device in Germany, your dad was the closest scientist that anyone had over there with a knowledge of highly sophisticated systems. Someone called someone and he got moved quickly into the spot. I was called but by then I was back at the University of Chicago working on taking care of the problems that Rainbow had caused us. I don’t know if you are aware of the history of Project: Rainbow but halfway through the project, Brown fell apart. Damn near died. He quit. That was the bottom line. He couldn’t handle the stress. So others were brought in and they continued his work. On August 12, 1943, they fired up the system. It was supposed to cloak a destroyer escort called the USS Eldridge in a shield of magnetic ions that would not bounce back radar waves.” He paused again, looking at me carefully.

“I know some of this from the file, but not all the details.” I added to make the silence between us a little more comfortable. He leaned forward, getting very close, and put his hand on my knee and gripped it tight.

“We were tricked!” He said with whispered desperation. “There were...visitors...beings...not of this Earth, that forced them to perform the experiment on the August 12th, 1943 date. It was a 60 year low point in the bio-rhythmic cycles of the planet, a period when the veil between dimensions and universes was especially thin. We ripped a hole in the fabric of time and space.” His eyes went wide with what I couldn’t figure was excitement or terror. “Right through it! And from then on we have watched every kind of off world craft you can imagine drop through the holes we created. It was as if we had breached some great barrier, or torn a whole in a fence. A

rift in a fence that was meant to protect us and keep some very nasty things out. The first two craft crashed in Roswell and Corona in New Mexico. Then in Socorro and two more crashes in Texas, less than a month apart. Small ships dropping through these rips. They didn't know where they were or what was happening to them. They got sucked inside our atmosphere and their systems wouldn't work right. Bam! They are on the ground. The Army spends so much time picking up pieces of busted spacecraft out there and spreading the gospel of 'no such thing' that they are hiring civilians to help them. We started this project to see what we could do to close the holes in the space/time continuum. That is what this was originally about. But then some bright guy thought we might be able to use our system for spying. Fine. We tried. Whether it worked or not didn't matter. The real reason was plugging up the holes that those idiots...including me...made in '43 and '44."

He leaned back and closed his eyes. I just sat there waiting for the next series of revelations to emerge today.

"Your dad didn't know what had happened. He still wanted to work on the device to make it a time runner, moving back and forth in time, that was his interest. When I continued to hamper that, he went off on his own. He was getting ready to fire up that 'thing' he built out in the desert when I contacted him and told him the truth about Rainbow. God he was mad. I have never seen him so pissed off in all the years that I had known him. He finally told me he felt I had betrayed him and, in fact, by going to Brown, I had. But not for the reasons he believed. But now that is neither here nor there. What you did today, you think is wonderful and so does everyone back at the lab. But what you don't understand, is that those men that you are going to see tomorrow morning will take what you have done and pervert it. They will twist it all around and by the time they are through with it, you will be looking on a mangled and misshapen thing that you won't even recognize. These men are about power, greed, wealth and control. They care nothing about science or the purity of research."

Again he sat back, his breathing labored. For a while he sat with his eyes closed and then he opened them, fixing me intensely in his gaze.

"I tried to get you to leave. But you wouldn't. I told you if you made this jump they would own you. But still you did it. You had to prove them right and me wrong. Just like your father. Stubborn!" He spat the words out. I was shocked at his reaction.

"I thought you wanted me here?" I couldn't believe his reaction.

"I didn't want you anyplace near this pit. I never wanted to see you again in my life! They wanted you. They arranged everything to bring you here. They are setting the stage for you to be the front man for them, while they call all of the shots from the shadows. And you walked right into it! And now you're taking my daughter right down with you!" His hatred bristled as he rose. "There is nothing I can do to prevent it. But I am not going to stay here and watch it. I told Sally I needed her car for a few days. I am heading down to Florida. I'll make arrangements to get it back up here in a week or so."

He turned and looked at me with fire in his eyes.

"If you were half as smart as your father, you would have made sure that device ended up a smoking melted piece of junk. Now you have called down the thunder and the lightning and I pray to God, for my daughter's sake, you can handle it."

With that Dr. Leonard Bates walked out of my life.

I stood in the middle of my living room trying to fathom the cryptic message he'd just dropped on me. It made no sense at all, but I knew for a fact I could handle this project and the men that thought they ran it. I just traded Bates off as a tired old man. He was done with his life here and was going to Florida for his just rewards.

Good riddance, I thought.



CHAPTER 16

I only got a few hours of restless sleep, so I went to the lab early. The security officer at the front gate greeted me and told me Sally had already called and told him she wouldn't be in until later. She was not feeling well. I could bet nobody was after what went down last night. I could only imagine that she and Bates must have had a similar discussion late into the evening. I felt bad for her being in the middle of all of this, but if Bates had been so worried, he should have sent her away a long time ago. As for me, I can't believe what he said. I traded most of it off to frustration and, unfortunately, envy and professional jealousy on his part, but I had never known him to be so petty before, as that envious former boss theory belied all his previous actions.

He had never gotten the device to work at the level I had produced yesterday, and I did in a few short months what he was never able to accomplish in years. But, all in all, I was probably just as glad that he was gone and I hoped he didn't have second thoughts about coming back at this point. It was sheer unabridged hubris on my part, pride going before my inevitable fall. Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad.

Matt was already working, bent over a drawing on his desk torquing his slide rule, when I walked in.

"Good morning." I'd taken the bus and when he looked up, his first reaction was to look at the clock on the wall and make a face.

"I'm sorry. I would have picked you up if I thought you were going to be at work this early." Matt got up and walked over to the coffee pot and poured two cups black and followed me into my office. I dropped my coat on the chair and he handed me a mug.

"Thanks. No problem. If it wasn't so cold out there I would have walked. I needed the air and the time." This marked the first time I had ever lied to him. It would certainly not be the last.

"Haskett has some stuff he says needs to be reviewed by you right away." I looked at him and wondered if everyone was in early.

"He's here already?" I sat and tried to get myself organized for the day. It was going to be a long one, I was already sure of that.

"No." He looked out the window. "Him and about six others spent the night, apparently tying up all the loose ends. He just now left to go home and get a shit, shower and shave and change clothes."

"Wow! Now that is what I call dedication." I said jokingly.

Matt looked serious and handed me a sealed buff colored envelope.

"I think he was frightened. He dropped this by for you. They ran a duplicate of the films and then made still shots from several of the frames. I don't know what they show, but he was shaking when he handed them to me," Matt shrugged, "then he asked me if I was armed. Kinda weird."

"Let's take a look and see what we have found." I tore the envelope open and dropped the six pictures on the desk. They were 8x10 blow-ups of frames taken from the sixteen-millimeter film from the capsule. On each you could see the small clock

in the upper right corner and then the black and white image in the middle, surrounded by the darkness of the aperture chamber. I looked at the first one and held it for a good minute, just staring at it. There, on the side of the frame, was a fuzzy object, slightly circular in shape, resting on projectile legs inside the crater on the moon that we had used for the super cooling position for the capsule. The second was a slightly different angle of the same craft, this time more clear. By the clock I could tell this was taken seconds after the capsule had come to rest. The third and fourth were the same but more evident details. The fifth photograph was the heart stopper. Beside the craft, someone, or some thing was standing next to the craft looking at the capsule. The sixth was the same location on the back trip that showed ten minutes of capsule time had elapsed. The same spot where the capsule was the first time and now there was nothing there.

I handed them to Matt, who looked at them in order then looked up at me with a hard, stern look, clenching his jaw. I could see a vein pulsing on his forehead. Without a word, he dropped the photos on my desk and strode purposefully out of the room. He returned in a few moments carrying the two film canisters tucked under his arm and he had stuffed his service issue .45 Colt automatic into his belt.

"Do you know what we have here?" He asked, poking the pictures like a hornets nest.

"I think so. And if the films show them this clearly as well, I think there are going to be some very impressed men tonight."

"Who do you mean?"

"Reserve a car for us and suit up. We have a meeting tonight in New York City. The men that fund this place want to see me and I want you close by to answer any technical questions that might arise. If that's alright with you?" I figured it would be, but I still wanted to give him an opportunity to bow out if he was feeling any kind of discomfort about the situation.

"Fine," although he was far from fine. "What time?" Matt placed the films on my desk and clutched them like a small animal that was going to jump away.

"Oh Twenty-One Hundred." I took the photos and locked them in the small safe I had installed in the corner of the room a couple of months before. "How did the data from the blast check out?"

"In the nines. Straight across success, but it seems like nobody really cared about that, they were more interested in the side effects of the event and what happened to Phillips." Matt started to leave.

"What did happen, Matt? In your opinion." I had mine but I wanted too hear someone else's that I respected. Matt hung in the doorway and took a slow measured breath.

"It appeared to me that he went out of phase with our timeline and ended up in the tunnel of the device. Some place in between those two points as though he was hit by a..." he searched hard for a word, "spiritual...field of some kind." Matt looked down as he talked, and his soft southern drawl gave gravity to his words and made his fantastic theory seem steady and plausible. But still I couldn't believe what I had just heard.

"A what?"

"A spiritual field. What my old Mema would call the astral world." He still didn't make eye contact, like he was shamed by his observation.

"What are you talking about?" I was not sure where he was going with this at all.

"That gooey stuff he was covered in that looked like snot and clung to him?" He was picking up speed and gaining the force of his conviction. "It's called ectoplasm, Doc. That's only something that would happen if he traveled through an area that was filled with. . ." He trailed off, thinking better of it and he looked up at the ceiling before looking back at the floor, avoiding eye contact with me.

I started to laugh then stopped. “Go ahead and finish. You’ve gone this far, I want to hear the rest.”

“Souls, Doc!” He said, finally glaring right at me. “Dead people! Ghosts! The ones that come back at séances and haunt houses and stuff like that. He got slimed with ectoplasm. We went to wash it off and before we got him to the shower it was already gone, it had turned to vapor. That is pretty much the description I’ve heard about in the past.” Matt crossed to my desk and leaned in towards me, as if not wanting anyone else to hear. “I know you think that sounds crazy. It’s just I don’t think anyone can give you a scientific reason for it, besides the fact that we are way out in front of anyone in the scientific community, doing what we are doing. I personally think we are way outside our depth and are fucking with things we do not understand.” He only swore when he wanted to drive home a point or when he was scared.

“Matthew!” I said, laughing in his face. “Just hold yer horses thar pardner!” I started to go into my normal scholastically skeptical response to anything unusual, then I stopped dead. I suddenly remembered something so obscure that it hadn’t even made a ripple in my consciousness in years.

“Wait a minute. Maybe...just maybe...” Like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a top hat, I pulled open a drawer in my desk and produced my father’s journals. They had literally not been more than arm’s length away from me for most of my adult life. I flipped open Journal Three and quickly but carefully flipped through the pages of dad’s precise cursive handwriting, trying to find the notation I remembered. Finally, I stopped at the entry that had jogged my memory. I jabbed my finger at it and traced the lines as I read.

“Ah-ha! ‘During one experiment, I sent a glass bowl out and back. It took eighteen minutes, but it must have passed through an astral zone.’” I paused for emphasis and pointed at Matt. “Upon its return the bowl was filled with a sticky glue like substance that vaporized over the next hour.’ ” I slammed the book shut victoriously and put it back into the drawer. Matt had never seen my father’s journals. No one had. I keep them close and never shared them with anyone.

“What is that?” he asked.

“My father’s lab notes from his experiments. I thought he’d cracked up when I read that. Now I see where you are going with all of this. A dimension inside another dimension? A pocket universe?” I polished off my cold coffee making a face at its now acidic taste.

“Could be. Just could be.” With that, with a small feeling of vindication still mixed with trepidation, Matt left and headed back to his own office. I started to prepare myself for the meeting, trying to think how I was going to explain the ship and the ‘being’ in a crater...on the Moon!

Somehow I knew this was not going to be any fun at all.

* * * * *

Sally finally came in during the afternoon. She looked green around the gills and plopped down hard with a loud skwoosh in one of my overstuffed leather office chairs. Bates’ great white cat Shalu followed her in and jumped up on my desk, stretching and making himself at home, shoving a pile of papers on the floor as he glanced at me for a moment, not really caring if I approved or not, and sat down, blinking as he turned toward Sally, then fixed his steady gaze on me.

Sally’s eyes belied evidence of a pretty good amount of crying. I figured it was from last night’s trauma and stress, and Bates’ rapid departure under some stormy terms, or whatever women cried about, which, right now, I felt was pretty much everything and anything in the world. I was still putting information together for the

meeting. I knew she wanted to talk, but I just didn't want to redress the whole issue of Bates again. She was no longer spending every night with me anymore, for one reason or another, and there were times I was sure she was going to call our whole marriage thing off. Right now was not one of the times I wanted to have that discussion. I made a couple of quick, slanted remarks when she came in trying to be funny and ease the tension, but they'd flown with her like a lead zeppelin. I finally stopped fiddling and leaned back with my hands behind my head to take her in. I noticed puffiness around her chin of late and wasn't sure if she was putting on weight or not. It didn't matter, but it was just a passing mental note.

"So. What is going on, Sally? I have a million things to do before that meeting in DC." I could feel the frustration, besides having to put up with Bates leaving and I tried to make her feel better and assure her that everything was alright between us and right now what I really needed was someone that could type 100 words a minute for the next four hours straight and never look up. I didn't think I was going to get that out of her right now.

"My father is dead."

Her face was blank as she stared right at me, unblinking.

"Why-what?" I cocked forward in my chair, slamming into the desk. I wasn't sure I had heard her correctly. "H-h-he left for Florida. Last night!"

Sally went on in a low, bland monotone, obviously in utter shock.

"He killed himself this morning at Rockaway Beach. He ran a garden hose into the car from the tail pipe and suffocated on carbon monoxide. He's dead and I don't know why. He talked to you last night and said he would be back about two in the morning to drop off my car and...he never came back." Tears began to roll down her blank expression as the façade began to crack and the shock started to fade. "I've been throwing up all morning and you tell me he was going to Florida?"

She took a deep sobbing breath and screamed, "IS EVERYONE CRAZY AROUND HERE?!"

She got up and ran out of the office. I didn't go after her. I couldn't. I was frozen solid by the news. I could hear the feminine tippy-toe staccato clip of her heels on the marble floor running down the hallway and out the main doors. Shalu looked up to watch her go, then looked back at me.

"Maaa" Shalu said.

"Yes! Thank you!" I answered him in exasperation, because, apparently I spoke fluent Norwegian Forest Cat now. "I know I should run after her and fix all of this but..."

Matt walked in looking at me and back towards the door. He must have heard it, or at least the last part she was screaming at me and the rest of the world. Matt stood there wanting to know what to do. I was still in the denial phase hoping this was some girlish prank for attention.

"Are you talking to...the cat now?" Matt said with a queer look.

"Yes!" I said. "And could you go check with McClean to see if any of what she was screaming about is true?" I still had to finish all this paperwork before going to DC and I wasn't about to try to re-arrange this meeting for anyone. Not even for Sally, which just showed how skewed and sick my priorities were becoming as I was more and more infected by the incurable virus of this place and this job.

"Um, Teddy..." Matt stood over me with a reproachful look on his face and made a gesture towards the door that said he believed I should go after Sally to console her. I stood up and slammed down a stack of files on my desk.

"WHAT, SARGEANT REILLY?" I yelled. He involuntarily snapped to attention as if I had slapped him in the face. "NO, I can't worry about my girlfriend's feelings RIGHT THIS MINUTE, because I am dealing with issues just a little more GODDAMN IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW! How about YOU find out what actually

happened to Doctor Bates! Then get some Betty from the steno pool to wiggle her ASS over to my office because my secretary DOESN'T FEEL LIKE WORKING TODAY! AND FIND SOMEONE TO FEED MY CAT BECAUSE HE TELLS ME HE IS HUNGRY NOW! You have your orders, SARGEANT!"

"SIR, YES SIR!" Reilly smartly saluted, turned on his heel and strode from the room.

Great, I thought as I sat back down with my hands over my face, one less woman and now one less friend.

"Maa-aaa!" Shalu sympathized as he butted his forehead against mine, and I felt a wave of sorrow come from this amazing animal, who knew, and had even told me, his master was going to die.

* * * * *

I hadn't seen Matt until later that day. Shalu was perched on his cat tree, which I had moved over from Bates's office (*at Shalu's request...don't even ASK!*) imperiously taking in the goings on. I was dictating to the stenographer some of the details I needed typed up in triplicate for the meeting. He came into my office and stood at attention and saluted, while I was walking around reading my handwriting and dictating as fast as she could take it down. I didn't see him at first and left him standing at attention for several moments until the secretary looked over at him. I stopped and lowered my papers.

"Matt," I said shaking my head, "cut it out. I'm sorry I lost my temper earlier."

He finished the salute. "Nothing to apologize for, sir. I overstepped my bounds, sir." He lowered his head and shot a glance toward the secretary. We stepped out into the hallway and I closed the door so she couldn't overhear our conversation. He still looked up and down the hall suspiciously.

"It's all true. McClean confirmed it. Local police called to tell the duty chief since he had all his passes and paperwork on him." Matt spoke in a hushed tone.

"Did he have the twin of my book still on him?" A flash of fear ran through me as to what he might have been carrying with him.

"No. Apparently he gave it to McClean last night and told him to give it to you." Matt handed me an envelope that I tore open to find the twin black book and I flipped through it and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw all the pages were intact.

"Important?"

"Very." I put it back in the envelope and tucked it under my arm. "How is Sally?"

"The pastor from her church is over there right now and some uncle is coming in to help her with the arrangements. She's pretty bad, but that's to be expected, I guess." Matt turned to leave.

"Matt, I need to be there, but. . ." I turned and looked at the stenographer and the desk full of papers.

"I know, Ted. I asked McClean to head over later and see if he could help with anything and he agreed. Word has gotten out, so pretty much everybody wants to go over and see her and help out. What do you want done with the crew in the Pit? They're all still on standby." Matt was always handling the little things that eluded me.

"Just tell them. . ." I was thinking about what to say that would be 'Director-like' and proper and inside the guidelines. But that approach just made me out as an even bigger asshole than I already felt like.

"How about the truth? We had a tragic death in the...family...of our facility and we'll talk about it tomorrow. You did the debriefing after the jump so nobody really has

anything to do anyway. I'll tell the Pit crew to stand down and that everyone can take the rest of the day off. Then they can all go over to help out Sally if they want." Matt put it all into words so easily. Simple. Elegant. Problem solved. I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Great. Brilliant! Make it so." He looked at me, hesitated, hung in space for a moment, then nodded and turned to leave.

"What?" I said in exasperation, forcing him to tell me what was on his mind.

Matt stopped and turned, looking worried. "There is no way Bates did this to himself. Somebody did him in, and I wouldn't doubt it has something to do with this 'Group' you are going to meet in DC. Just be careful and watch your back."

I weighed the gravity of his words.

"Matt, check up on Sally and be back here by seven. And...are we good?"

"Yessir, we're good." Matt smiled that easy slow Southern grin of his and walked away heading for the Pit to dismiss the crew.

I should go see Sally, and talk to the Pit crew and officially announce to everyone the death of their former beloved director and personally give everyone the day off. Woulda, Shoulda and Coulda; the three Greek goddesses of Regret.

I was way behind on getting this presentation completed and right now that was all that was important to me. It was the logical thing to do. Not the *Right* Thing to do, but the *Logical* Thing to do.

Always beware of *The Logical Thing*.



CHAPTER 17

It was a quiet drive into the city. I sat in back and read through all of my notes and checked all the exhibits I had with me. I wanted this to come off really well tonight. Everything seemed like a windfall to me all at once. Being the director of the project, having improved the capsule design, doing the super cooling processing, keeping the capsule on station for a longer duration, seeing the surface of the Moon and showing the “anomaly”, which is what I decided to call it for right now. All of this proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that I could handle the responsibilities these men had given me. There were a couple of things I wished were different, but as someone once said, nobody can have their cake and eat it too, whatever that means.

“You might want to listen to this. It’s a repeat of Kennedy’s speech today.” Matt said from the front seat as he drove.

I was a little annoyed. I didn’t follow politics at all, but something had caught Matt’s attention, and I could just make out the soft droning of a Boston accent wafting up from the radio.

“Oh, is this that Kennedy guy? Joe’s kid? The senator from Massachusetts?”

“Yeah, Ted. They elected him president. Y’know, of the United States? Last November?”

I looked at the date on my watch. May 25th, 1961. Might as well have been Ground Hog’s Day for all the effect it had on me and the people I worked with.

“Huh. Alright, go ahead, turn it up.” I still had papers on my lap. It came on and sounded like it was half way through but we seemed to have caught the good part.

“We don’t do this thing because it is easy...but because it is hard. But we will place a man on the moon by the end of this decade and bring him home safely again.”

Matt turned down the volume and continued to weave through the traffic.

“They’re calling it the ‘Space Race’ since they say the Russians are already ahead of us with Sputnik and all. Huh. Little does anyone know we’ve already been there and back.”

“And they probably won’t either. Not for a long while.” I finished everything I could and finally gave it a rest and looked out the window. We were in downtown Manhattan pulling into the garage under the Embassy Hotel. Matt parked the car, got out and helped me with the two bags I had filled with copies and data.

“Dr. Humphrey?” A man was standing next to a service elevator in a black suit, white shirt and thin black tie, wearing sunglasses. Funny. Middle of the night. Underground garage. Steel frame mirrored sunglasses? Really?

“Yes.”

“This is the one you will want to use.” He opened the elevator door and motioned for us to enter. He stopped Matt and patted him down removing his Colt .45 auto. “I will return this when you come back.” It was neither a statement, a question or a comment, but just a flat intonation of words that took me a moment to understand. It was almost like he didn’t know the language, just the words.

Matt nodded and got in behind me. I looked for a panel of buttons on the inside and quickly figured out that somebody was making a fortune building elevators that didn't have controls. As we started to move, I noticed we were traveling downward as opposed to going up like I thought we would.

"Feel that?" Matt said.

"Yeah."

"We're dropping fast. This thing is running on air pressure." Matt continued with stifled amazement. "It sure isn't on cables or hydraulics." Matt touched the side of the car with his free hand. "Boy! We are down a ways, maybe a couple hundred feet."

I cleared my ears from the pressure change in the car as the door opened onto a wide room that had a reception area and single desk with one man in a pale blue sport coat sitting behind it. He was gray haired and tan. His eyes moved across both of us quickly and then he got up to greet us.

"Gentlemen, you are on time. Excellent. Please follow me." He walked over to a panel on the wall, hit a set of buttons that opened a pressure-operated door and showed us into another large room that looked like an ultramodern waiting room. Danish modern couches and chairs with matching coffee and end tables. The light was indirect and diffused. The floor had some kind of institutional carpeting that was both non-attractive and tough. He stepped out of our way as we walked in.

"Someone will call for you shortly and will show you where to go. If you need anything please use the intercom." He motioned to it and left, with the door sliding quietly into place.

"They must use this place a lot. Seems to me that they have other interests beside us." Matt walked around placing his hand here and there on the walls trying to sense movement, vibrations or surface structure.

"Notice?" I raised my hand to the walls.

"No, what?" Matt asked.

"No pictures. No clocks. No plants." I walked over to the coffee table and looked down. There was a single clean glass smokey brown ashtray. "No magazines. Not even old ones. Not like most waiting rooms, is it?"

Matt just shook his head, finally realizing he wasn't going to feel anything but the hard surface of the wall. He sat down and waited.

An hour and a half passed with very few words exchanged between us. I settled in to do some final tuning on the papers and he pulled out his own notebook and was writing down some of his thoughts. It seemed uncomfortable between us, but the surroundings were not conducive to a good old heart to heart discussion about anything. It gave us both the creeping paranoid feeling we were being watched.

Finally, a door slid open and another large framed man in dark sunglasses stepped out and motioned to me to come with him. Matt got up and started to cross the room, when the man stopped him with a gentle but firm set of fingertips on his chest. He reached down and took the bag Matt was holding and then politely but firmly motioned toward the couch again.

"It's OK. If I need you I'll have someone come and get you, Sergeant Reilly. Thank you." Matt nodded but I was sure not happy about this clown's actions. It has been my observation that Marines are not really quick to warm up to people that try to manhandle them, no matter how gentle they may approach the subject. Matt was no different. This guy was not winning points with my friend and associate right now or with me. We walked down what seemed like an endless set of corridors all of which had doors with no signs. At the far end of one of them he stopped and turned. I looked around and waited for him to do something.

The door opened and another older man came out and took the bag from the large man and ushered me inside into a darkened room illuminated only by ceiling lights shining down on a huge table with people sitting around it. The man directed

me to the end of the table and the large comfortable leather swivel chair. The lights created small luminous pools on the table where I could see papers and the hands of the men that were sitting there as well. Each wore a dark suit and tie. They were older and seemed to be appraising me as I sat. The man at the far end of the table was rail thin with silver gray hair and had a slight problem with his eyes since he was wearing what looked like the bottoms of Coke bottles in a huge set of black horn-rimmed frames. His body was constantly in motion shifting from side to side and stacking and re-stacking the papers in front of him.

I smiled and nodded to the other men, took a deep breath and braced myself for the sheer weight of the praise, adulation and accolades about to be heaped upon me.



CHAPTER 18

"Would you mind telling us, Dr. Humphrey, who gave you permission to pull off that colossally and stupendously stupid little stunt of yours yesterday?"

The man at the far end of the table fired the first salvo. It landed on me like a mortar shell, shocking me into stunned confusion. The blood rushed to my face and a low ring began in my ears. The rest of the shadowy heads along both sides of the table turned as one and stared me down, like I was a caged specimen or some new virus in a Petri dish.

I said, "So, you people have no idea of my astounding genius, or any appreciation whatsoever of the history I have now made by jumping an object to the Moon and back and sending a man through time, so I will be going now. Good day, Gentlemen! I said, GOOD...DAY!"

On the inside.

On the outside I said, "W-why...w-what?" Sounding slightly less sophisticated and professional than I would have hoped.

"Yesterday", the voice at the end of the table boomed from out of the shadows, now seeming very large and menacing, "you put our entire program at risk by moving one of our capsules into space and onto the surface of the Moon. I presume we are now on the same page?" He said while stabbing at a sheet of paper in front of him with a staccato tapping.

"That...ah, would be...correct?" Another sparkling answer. I'm supposed to be briefing them on what occurred and they're already telling me what happened.

Bates! Dammit! He must have called them.

"Did that dim-wit Bates give you permission for this little...exercise?" He spat out the last word with contempt as he passed the paper to the man next to him with a flick of his wrist, which twirled for a moment in the air before it slid and landed perfectly. The next man read it then slid it back to the first man who sat staring at me through his Coke bottle glasses that reflected the pool of light on the table making his face look like a preying mantis with huge glowing eyes, or something out of a '50s monster movie.

"Um...well, yes. Bates approved it. But. . ." My mind was racing but the wheels just weren't getting any traction. For a moment I wondered if they knew or not. No! They had to, I was certain of that. If they knew about our little "success" then they had to know about the ultimate fate of Dr. Lawrence Bates. Or maybe they had something...

"But what, Dr. Humphrey?" The man at the end of table snapped, seeming just angry in general. I was sure it wasn't my presence that had set him off...yet.

"Dr. Bates is dead." I blurted, hoping to deflect the line of fire somewhere else, but it only began the assault in earnest from every quarter as everyone had a go.

"When did he die?" "What happened?" "Who knows about this?" "Under what circumstances?

All of them started talking at the same time, becoming suddenly animated. The Chairman, which was only what I supposed he was, simply raised his hand and silence fell instantly.

"Gentlemen!" The Chairman clasped his hands in front of him and leaned into the pool of light and I could see the shine from his huge forehead spilling up on the horseshoe bald pattern up onto his scalp. "Dr. Humphrey, please tell us what you mean by this statement."

"Surely." I said relieved my ploy had worked and that I finally got to explain something they didn't know. "He came to my home last night, told me he was through with the project and wanted out. He was tired, apparently dying of cancer and had only months to live so he was retiring to Florida to spend his final days. He left and today I saw his daughter, Miss Sally Jennings, my fiancé, and she told me they found him in Rockaway Beach. The local police said it was suicide. He stuffed a hose in his car window and ran the engine." I sat back and watched the wave of disbelief run round the table with members of the council speaking to one another, shaking their heads in what I interpreted as saddened shock.

"Who knows about this?" The Chairman barked.

"Everyone at the complex. The local Rockaway authorities and, I believe, a handful of civilians in South Hampton. I don't know the full extent as I have been...preoccupied." I gestured down at the report.

"Number Two," the Chairman said sharply to the man at his right hand, "get some of our people on this, right now. Number Six, handle the media." The two men he addressed rose and left the room without a word. Oh my lord, I thought, these people have numbers instead of names? Like something out of a novel by that new British writer, what was his name? Ian Fleming. This wasn't a board of scientific enquiry, it was SPECTRE. And I'd left all my cloak and daggers back home.

The Chairman sat back out of the pool of light back into the shadows and looked at me as he took off his glasses and set them on the table, now looking almost human with close set beady eyes on either side of a thin, aquiline hawkish nose. There was menace in his tone.

"Why did you not call us immediately?"

"I...I" I hadn't even thought about calling them, "didn't think it was my place to call about a tragedy like this."

"Anything," he said slowly and deliberately, "that involves our projects; we expect our people to call and let us know if there is any kind of problem." He said this more in the fashion of enlightenment rather than talking down to me, which was his previous tone. He spoke again quietly.

"Cancer you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Five," he rubbed his eyes, "did you know anything about this?" A large man with a receding hairline leaned forward into the light looking at me and then back to the head of the table.

"There was nothing in his most current medical charts. Bates was the picture of health." He looked back at me with a look of disbelief or something akin to having stepped on something unpleasant in an alley on a hot summer day. "That was six months ago."

"Why would Dr. Bates," the Chairman pondered, putting his glasses back on as if to see the truth more clearly, "lie to you?" He put a finger to his lips. "That, in and of itself, is interesting. Dr. Humphrey I think we need to adjourn this meeting and reassemble in a few days." He glanced around the room to adjourn the meeting and started to rise.

I panicked, not wanting all the work I had done and this entire trip to be a total waste of time. I also did not want to leave this room with the foul odor that I was some

incompetent cowboy yahoo that had screwed up their multi-million dollar project and somehow concocted some lie about one of their colleges having cancer.

“Don’t you want to see the pictures we took of a flying saucer and an alien on the Moon?” I blurted, not phrasing that question in the concise scientific terms I had hoped. I was hoping the outrageous tabloid headline nature of it would grab their attention by the throat and redirect it towards what we had accomplished at Montauk.

The Chairman sat back down tilting his head forward with piqued interest.

“What pictures?”

I opened my brief case and handed the closest man the envelope that contained the six photographs taken from the sixteen-millimeter film onboard the capsule. Each man on one side of the table handed them down without looking at them to the Chairman. He looked through them perfunctorily with no expression.

“Hm. Interesting.” He replaced them into the envelope with no reaction and handed them back.

“We will talk about this at our next meeting. Thank you Dr. Humphrey. Good night.”

The man who had escorted me in was standing behind me and helped me gather my bags as we walked back out and finally into the waiting room where Matt was visibly unnerved from the pins and needles of the long wait. I walked out into the room, the man handed Matt the other case and pushed the button that slid the door open that led to reception. The man in the pale blue sport jacket got up, smiled, went over and pushed the pad next to the elevator.

“Have a good evening gentlemen.”

We were ushered in and started for the top of the shaft. Matt was looking at me.

“What...?” I shook my head to silence him then looked at the floor. I didn’t know what had happened and I wasn’t going to try to explain it to Matt or anyone else. At the top of the shaft the door smoothly slid open and out we walked into the parking garage.

The man with the dark glasses was there holding out Matt’s 45. Colt, butt first. He nodded and we walked toward the car. I got in the back and slumped down in the seat. Matt started the engine and looked at me in the rear view mirror, waiting.

“Where to, boss?”

I breathed a long, defeated sigh. “Back out to the Hamptons, I guess. But Matt? Do me a favor? Take the long route and don’t ask me anything for awhile?” I was feeling really confused with the whole day right now.

“Sure. Mind if I pick up something to eat on the way?” Matt turned and leaned over the front seat to look at me. “You could use something too.”

“Probably, but you go ahead and get yourself something. I am just going to sit here and think for right now.”

With that I went into a silent state of mediation and contemplation, mixed with that nagging twinge of fear and horror that had now somehow become my life.

PART THREE

THE ADMIRAL



CHAPTER 19

I was up early in the morning. The day was clear and I wasn't sure what I needed or even wanted to do. Matt dropped me off late last night taking almost four hours to drive back out to South Hampton. He had asked me if I wanted to go by Sally's, but I made some lame excuse about it being too late or something, like it mattered. I didn't want to see her last night and even less this morning.

I decided to walk downtown and have breakfast while considering my options. After that Chinese fire drill mixed with a simian orgy in a barrel last night at the Embassy Hotel, I was debating whether my father had the right idea in getting out and working alone. He'd done it and probably enjoyed himself, if he ever enjoyed himself, a hell of a lot more than I was at present. The morning was clear and crisp. So I bundled up in my topcoat and walked to the center of town, something I had done only a few times in the last several months. I had not been here a year yet and I already hated this place.

I passed a couple of people on the street who nodded and said something that sounded like a greeting and I acknowledged them, but didn't really care much about making new friends at this point. I stopped at the newspaper stand and picked up a couple. Kennedy's speech was on the first three pages talking about the 'Space Race' and the other wonderful stuff America would be doing. I thought there was going to be a lot of openings for guys that understood physics and if I played my cards right I could probably get into one of the new agencies or with a private contractor. Hopefully in Florida or California, places where it was at least warm.

I thought about my upcoming marriage. It was like the ringing in my ears was the sound of a cage door being slammed shut on my life. I had never been much of a "dating guy" in college, but this morning marriage was the farthest thing from my mind. Especially to Sally, someone that would just drain every living bit of strength I had left after a day at that place. A sponge soaking up my every human emotion, that is what she had become to me. The sex was fantastic and epic, but the rest of the psychic baggage was just wearing me out.

I needed to get away before I broke the relationship off. I knew that. Otherwise, everyone would just see me as the "cad of the lab", who'd taken her father's job and position, who then went out and killed himself as he now had nothing left to live for. Now Dr. Ted Humphrey, Jr. comes along, kicks her in the stomach while she's down and grieving the loss of her last living relative, leaving her an alone, unloved orphaned spinster. Yeah, I should put all that in gilt block letters on my office door: DR. THEODORE HUMPHREY, JR.: P.D.K.A. PROFESSIONAL DREAM KILLING ASSHOLE...PHD.

Sally was beloved and indispensable. I was just another schmuck scientist cog in the Great Machine. The place just would not function without her, and that would not make for a good working relationship with anyone. Maybe Murray wasn't that wrong with his petty dictator rules about fraternization. Hell, it should have applied to all staff members as well.

I went into the coffee shop and found a booth in the back next to the kitchen open. Every villain needs a liar to hideout in. I slid in and started to read the newspaper, looking for something about Bates before ordering breakfast.

"Coffee?" The waitress was standing looking down at me like she knew me.

"Ham with eggs, please." I looked back down at the paper.

"You're Sally's friend aren't you?" The waitress was chewing gum and popping it. Oh, and everyone in town knew and loved Sally too, so I could be stoned by my professional colleges then poked with pitchforks while the villagers dragged my semi-conscious body naked in a barrel of nails through the town to finish off the job.

"Oh, you know Sally?" I looked back up and smiled.

"Yeah, we went to high school together before she went off to college in Rhode Island. I see her now and again. She's got that picture of you in her wallet, she showed me. The one where you two are all cheek to cheek in the one of those funhouse photo booths." She smiled a crooked smile at me. "You the guy she is marrying come May, yeah?"

"That's right." I was hoping somebody, anybody needed something in this place beside's me.

"I would like a cup of coffee, too."

A tall immaculately dressed Negro gentleman appeared from out of nowhere, standing just behind the waitresses' left shoulder.

"Black will be fine, and keep it coming please. Dr. Humphrey and I have some talking to do." He slid into the booth across the table from me and I looked at him with my jaw slacked open.

"You might not want to be in here. You know the owner," she was twisting her head toward the man scowling behind the counter at the man who had just joined me, "he don't take kindly to uppity niggers."

"So we have no problem, then do we." He said evenly. "I don't take kindly to people that break the law..." he looked up at her nametag and continued, "...Marge. So why don't you put in Dr. Humphrey's order and be a lamb and get us...some coffee."

"No you don't see. Jack doesn't like. .." she thought about her words., "your...kind of folks...being in his restaurant."

About then I noticed the owner coming around the end of the counter with a Louisville Slugger, thumping it against his left palm. At that same moment a large broad shouldered Caucasian man with a butch waxed crew cut in black suit with dark sunglasses stepped in front of him and flipped open a small leather case with some kind of badge in it. It froze the owner with confusion as the suit took him by the arm and spun him around heading towards the back of the building. I listened to the fading protests of the café owner as the two disappeared out the back. The waitress hung in space for a moment, mouth wide open, then looked back at the huge Negro smiling up at her.

"Coffee?" He spoke gently, quietly and kindly to her. "Please."

Without a word she walked back behind the counter, poured two cups, pushed the order up on the cook's turnstile in the first position, jumping everyone else, then returned with our coffee and went about her business. The Slugger wielding owner had simply disappeared.

"I am Charles Montgomery Daniels." He sipped his coffee. "Does that mean anything too you, Dr. Humphrey?"

"Can't say it does. But then again, I'm just horrible with names." I folded my paper and put it to one side. "That little spectacle was...interesting...but it probably won't endear me to the owner of this cafe, which is, by the way, the only one in town that serves breakfast."

"Do you have a problem sitting with colored people, Dr. Humphrey?" It was still the early 1960s and the euphemisms like "Black and Afro-American" had not yet come into vogue over "Colored" and "Negro" and half the country still used plain old "nigger." I had hoped upstate New York would have been far more enlightened.

The man sat back and I noticed the diamond encrusted gold Rolex on his wrist and the gold chain on his other. He wore a massive graduation ring with a red stone gracing his right ring finger. I couldn't make out the school, but it spoke volumes about him.

"No." I answered. "I grew up in the California desert near a Marine base. A third of my class was made up of guys that were not white, mostly Mexicans or Negroes. I played sports with seven colored guys, two of whom were my best friends, and we won a State championship. I also know Asians, American Indians, Indian Indians, a couple of Republicans and at least one twitchy Pentecostal." I figured the way things were going recently I might as well swing for the bleachers in the ninth inning. "The only people I have any real prejudice against are people that start out a relationship by fucking up my life by, like, making sure I can never eat breakfast again in my favorite coffee shop! And you are now number one with a bullet at the top of that hit parade."

He laughed and snickered for a moment.

"Oh yeah, I like the part about being in the same column with Republicans." He held up his cup without actually looking at the waitress who was now trying to keep her distance from the table. "So it sounds to me like you are a man that is open to all kinds of possibilities, would I be correct in that statement?"

I looked at him for a moment and then laughed myself. "Are you selling something here, Hoss? Like vacuum cleaners, encyclopedias or some other crazy thing at eight in the morning?"

"No. Just having a friendly conversation." Marge poured more coffee and tossed my plate of food in front of me with a clattering bang. "Please eat your breakfast while it's still hot. I wouldn't want to disturb you from that, Doctor." I pushed the plate away now not hungry at all as I imagined the horrors the kitchen staff had performed on my defenseless breakfast.

"You already have. But thank you for your consideration." My sarcasm was starting to show since I was growing tired of all the cat and mouse crap. I sipped at my coffee. "So Mr. Daniels, what can I do for you?" I sat back holding my cup in my hand.

"I think you have that the wrong way 'round. It is what I can do for you." He smiled again and then turned and looked at another suit at the counter who was watching us so intently. He nodded and the man left. "I believe this conversation would be better had someplace less...public." He got up and dropped a \$100 bill on the table. "Let me buy you breakfast." He motioned toward the door and I just sat there looking at him.

"What would even give you the slightest deluded inkling of an idea that I would just walk out of here with you?" I finally took a bite of the toast that was now soggy and limp.

The Negro rose to his full height, looked around and took a deep breath. "In the black book in your pocket, look under the name 'Jacobs'. You will see three code words

The first is 'Griffin', the second is 'Nova' and the third is 'Excalibur'." He pulled on his topcoat just as the man that had escorted the owner out walked back into the room wiping his hands on a towel. Nodding he went to stand by the door.

I pulled my book out cautiously and looked down the list. He was absolutely correct. "You have my undivided attention, Mr. Daniels." I got up and pulled on my topcoat.

“Let’s go then, shall we? Keep the change, Marge.” He walked ahead of me and waved a good-bye to the waitress and out the front door to a waiting limo that was idling in the street with the rear door open.

I slid into the cavernous back of the car and the two suits got in front and we drove off toward the highway. After we started I looked at the man next to me. I wasn’t sure but I would have imagined him to be in his late forties, early fifties. Fit and from several scars on the side of his face, small and discreet though they were, I could see him being a force to be dealt with.

“So are you Daniels or Jacobs?” I finally broke the silence.

“Neither. My name doesn’t really matter right now. Just call me Max. Everybody calls me Max. That will make it easy for all of us.” He picked up the phone and said something I didn’t understand to the driver and we took a hard turn onto a secondary road.

We pulled up next to a dock with a long white yacht that had to be at least one hundred and thirty feet long tethered to the pier. A crewmember was at the gangplank. We got out of the car and were immediately ushered onto the ship and showed into the spacious lounge toward the rear. I followed Max not knowing what was going on, but being intrigued enough to find out what all of this was about. By the time I took my coat off the yacht was underway heading south out into the Atlantic. A steward came in with a tray of coffee and cups for us and I sat down in one of the oversized chairs looking out the rear window at the coastline falling behind us. Max handed me a gold cigarette case and offered me a smoke, which I took.

“Ah! So good of you come, Dr. Humphrey. Thank you.” An older man in a double breasted brass buttoned navy blue blazer, light blue shirt, white slacks and a silk ascot at his throat walked into the lounge and slapped Max on the back. “And thank you my friend for fetching him for me. I hope there were no problems this morning.”

“None, sir.” Max nodded and started to walk away. I got up to hand him back his cigarette case and lighter.

“Keep them.” He smiled warmly and bowed slightly. “A gift. From me to you.” With that he descended a stairway and was gone.

I was left with a man that looked to be in his early seventies, gray haired, thin with cold steel blue eyes and a penetrating gaze. The man got himself a cup of coffee and sat down in the large chair across from me looking as if he could see right through me.

“He is so nice, Max. I just love having him around. His grandfather was a member of the old tenth cavalry riding the border between the Arizona territory and Mexico. Max’s father served with me in the Pacific during the war. A highly decorated individual. Max made quite a stir at West Point when he came into the class with a Presidential appointment.” That solved the mystery of the red ruby class ring for me. Impressive. “Being a Negro and having that kind of recommendation put a lot of old timers in a spot of difficulty I must tell you. After retiring from active service, he came to be with me. I could not have a better friend.” The man held his cup for a moment thinking. “Oh my! I am sorry, Dr. Humphrey!” He rose and extended his hand. “My name is Jacobs.” I rose to meet him and pumped his hand then sat back down.

“I have already been given all the code words by Max so I guess I don’t need to ask them again?” I sat back and wondered about the nostalgic journey we had just been on.

“No, no you don’t have to worry about that here. I think last night was enough for any kind of introduction to our little group. I am sure you were less than overly enthusiastic about your reception.” He put his cup down and sat back folding his hands on his lap and fixing me in the gaze of those eyes, behind which a well oiled machine was working in high gear.

"I don't remember seeing you."

"Oh no! I wouldn't be in on one of those sessions. Those are the managers that handle the day-to-day activities of our organization. Most of them are fairly dull in their view of life I must admit. They go by numbers if you didn't notice. Number One is the fellow that looks like something out of a Washington Post cartoon. My god is he self-centered and thinks the world revolves around him. No." He drifted a moment in private speculation and then returned. "How long did they make you wait for them?"

"Hour and a half." I realized this man was exceptionally well informed.

"Pity. We need you bright young guys doing what you do so well. They are all old hacks that have been at this business too long and don't realize talent when they see it. They are known by the wonderful and mysterious title of the Majestic Twelve. Truman started them back in '46 or so and they have been mucking about in unusual things ever since. They think they are the only ones that report to the President on matters of national importance. But that is just not true." He got up and poured more coffee. "Ah, good. Rolls?" The steward came back in with a silver server with enough pastries for a half of dozen people. "I understand your breakfast was...interrupted...this morning."

"That's an understatement." I took one of the offered pastries and sunk my teeth into it. Grand.

"Good. All right let's get down to the matters at hand. Your jump the other day was highly successful and you found something out you should not have, do you realize that?" He took one of the doughnuts and sat back down with another cup of coffee.

"I didn't." I wiped my mouth and wanted to have another they were so good, but thought better of it. Eyeing the platter Jacob's must have noticed my zeal.

"Heavens, have as many as you like. You haven't eaten much lately. You, of course, know Miss Sally Jennings, Dr. Bates daughter?"

I had stuffed almost an entire pastry in my mouth. "Of course." I took a sip of coffee to wash down the Danish.

"She is pregnant." Jacobs said flatly.

I choked and sprayed the coffee and spit up most of the pastry. After I stopped coughing I sat and looked at him utterly nonplussed.

"Yes. Two months along." He continued matter of factly. "She has been having terrible morning sickness and with this horrible stuff about Leo." He shook his head sadly.

"Leo?" I didn't know what the reference was to and felt like I had just walked into class late again.

"Oh, sorry! Leo. Leonard. Bates. Dr. Leonard Bates. I knew him for a lot of years. Familiarity and all that stuff." He set his cup down and sat back in the chair. I turned and looked out at the boundless sea around us. We were far outside the sight of land and I had no idea where we were going.

"That put's a new wrinkle on things doesn't it." I spoke before my mind was engaged, still, literally stunned.

"Oh my yes, doesn't it? You know, doing the right thing and all of that." He smiled at me, but there was no humor in his eyes.

"Why hasn't she told me?" I was suddenly more concerned about this issue than I was about the fact that I was in the middle of the ocean with people that I had no idea about who they were or what they wanted.

"She is probably scared she will lose you. She talked to Leo or rather Bates about it and he was furious with her. They had a couple of verbal knock down and drag outs, as they say. He wanted her to get an abortion even if she had to leave the country. Oh my, he was upset! Then being pushed out of his job by the new guy, that being you, of

course, old Leo couldn't handle all the stress." There was something behind this conversation I hadn't caught up to as of yet, but from the way it was going I was sure Jacobs was going to let me know what part I was supposed to act out in this play of his.

"You're telling me something here, Mr. Jacobs, but I am not sure what." I pushed ahead fearing the response.

"Leo needed to...go away." He said darkly. "He had become a liability in this whole matter. Fortunately for us, he chose to handle the problem himself. Do you have any idea that we are in the middle of a war we have already lost?" He sat back and watched as Max walked back in and picked up a doughnut and poured a cup of coffee.

"Excuse me?" I turned my head watching Max and trying to figure out the last sentence all at the same time.

"A war, Doctor Humphrey." Jacobs continued like he was speaking to a child. "A matter where people try to change other people's views through force."

"I understand what a war is, sir. I just didn't know anyone had actually declared one."

"Max, would you do the honors and bring our young friend here up to speed."

Jacobs held up his cup, while Max poured coffee into it. Max offered me some, but I declined, fearing my shaking hands couldn't even hold the cup.

"Yes, Admiral. I will."



CHAPTER 20

Max removed his jacket, revealing a leather shoulder holster cradling a mother of pearl handled heavy frame automatic. He neatly laid the jacket over the back of the couch and sat down next to the Admiral. He held his cup in both hands and looked into the coffee for a long moment, obviously clearing his mind of other thoughts.

"Some of this you probably already know, so the preliminaries I'll cut short, for the sake of not overloading you. Just bear with me and let me tell you the whole story. Jump in any time and ask questions and I will answer them as best I can, if that is alright with you?" He waited. I got up, took off my jacket and rolled up my sleeves, while pulling out my pen and notebook.

"Go ahead, I want to hear this." I smiled at the man, who didn't respond in kind.

"Before the beginning of World War II, the Germans happened upon a crashed extraterrestrial ship in the Bavarian Forest. It was small and designed for three inhabitants. It was what we call a scout craft. They're attached to a mothership that carries literally hundreds of these devices. The crew was dead when they found it and in a pretty advanced state of decay. The group that discovered the craft thought they'd found a downed experimental craft, so they called the local military unit, who responded. The young major in charge was named Kammler. Hans Kammler."

"You're talking about flying saucers, aren't you?" I choked out the words.

"Yes, I am." Max said calmly and evenly as he sipped his coffee. "Kammler was head of special projects by the end of the war, wasn't he? He was also a Major General in the Army, I think." Jacobs nodded. I had read his name in my father's journals. "SS. That wasn't the army. Kammler was the guy that set up most of the logistics for the concentration camps during the war. But he was also a really good physicist, holding a doctorate in the field. His work on the camps was the mechanical part. Anyway, Kammler knew what he'd found and got hold of someone way up in the Nazi party. So they got this craft to a special site, an airfield in Friedburg, and quarantined the whole area around for ten kilometers. Kammler had his buy in into the biggest game going. Being a good party member, they decided they wouldn't kill him, so they did the next best thing; they made him a colonel and put him to work on retro-engineering anything that he could figure out on the ship. Dornberger and Von Bruan and those guys in the space program were pretty much kept away from it. This was a one trick pony and they wanted to see if they could develop some stuff that would be mind-blowing for the world. Hitler, of course, being, well, Hitler, took this as a sign from God that they were the chosen ones whose destiny it was to rule the world, so the crazy bastard starts the war three years earlier than his entire general staff wanted. Lucky for us."

Max took another sip of his coffee and set the cup down. I felt a slight roll on the ship as it moved out farther into the Gulf Stream.

"Kammler worked day and night and one of the things he found was a small device that did much of what your device in the Pit at Montauk does. The only difference is that it did it without ripping a goddamn hole in the fabric of space and time."

“That was Project Rainbow, right?” I interrupted. “The Navy tests in ’43 and ’44? With the Eldridge and the Martha’s Vineyard?”

“Ah...that is the one. You know about it?” Max looked carefully at me. I wanted to make sure I was on firm ground here.

“I would say that I am acquainted with it as opposed to knowing about it. I do understand that T. Townsend Brown and Bush and von Neumann and Einstein and Tesla worked on it and some others. But beyond that the only thing I have heard is vague references to radar invisibility and stuff like that.”

I was playing dumb. I didn’t want to give up everything just yet as I needed a few hole cards to see where this was going.

“Good.” Max said, seeming satisfied. The statement meant nothing to me at this point, so I waited for him to continue. “By 1944 Kammler had built that beast in the caves outside Friedburg. It took millions of Reich marks to complete. The thing was huge, bigger than yours and that was the only way he could do it, since the technology used on the unit from the crashed craft was way beyond anything he understood at the time. By then the brass were screaming for results. He had taken two or three sojourns in crematorium construction, so he had spent all the time he wanted to on the device. But they got it up and working; at least in principal. They must have killed a thousand slave laborers putting them into the unit and just tearing their molecules apart. Horrid, simply horrid.” Max stopped for a moment and looked out the window.

“You were with the group that originally found the cave and the equipment then?” I spoke more out of a guess than knowledge.

“Yes. I was in charge of the recon team that found it and isolated it. The Admiral here was placed in charge of the evaluation program.”

A spark hit suddenly and I looked over at the older man. “You were a captain then attached to OSS Europe under Wild Bill Donovan?” I remembered the name now from my father’s journals.

“Very good.” Jacobs said. “That means your father either talked to you or left you something that explained what he did in this process.” The Admiral nodded slowly.

“His journals after he disappeared.” I confirmed. “I didn’t even read them until I was almost out of grad school.

“Good, then there should be a lot of this which is unnecessary to explain to you.” Max looked at the Admiral who was watching me closely.

“Tell him the effects. I think that will make the doctor understand our problems.” The Admiral turned sideways in his chair and looked at Max. “I will excuse myself for a moment and see how the captain is doing on the bridge.” As he got up, Max also stood and waited until he left the room.

“He was first in his class at Annapolis and went on to obtain a Masters and Doctorate at MIT. The man has been involved in this program since the very first, just to let you know what his involvement is in all of this.” Max said with obvious admiration.

“Thank you for that.” I responded.

“When the Nazis were pumping that device full of innocent victims they thought they didn’t accomplish anything. Just like the guys under Brown with Rainbow, but in reality they were widening two huge separate holes. Both of them were operated at different frequencies so the holes led to two alternate dimensions or universes, we are still not sure which. All we do know is that we opened a gateway that has been used now for years by beings from a different space/time continuum than us. Ever since ’43 we have seen more and more ‘flying saucers’, as Ken Arnold so aptly named them. The government, the elected one, ran hundreds of disinformation campaigns under several code names trying to keep the public from knowing what was really going on.

“In 1956, Eisenhower met secretly with a group of Visitors from one of these dimensions in an effort to appease them and gain some kind of peace accord. It was

called the SIGMA treaty and it was a total fiasco. They met at Edwards Air Force base and what was supposed to be a peace treaty turned into a demand session. More like conditions of our surrender. Ike tried to keep his cool, but all hell broke loose when they demanded unlimited supplies of genetic material. What they are doing with them, no one knows. We don't even understand DNA or RNA or any of that stuff, yet. Those guys at Oxford built a model of it, but that doesn't do a lot of good in explaining why the stuff works in us the way it does. But they wanted a free hand to gather samples otherwise they were going to come in force and wipe this planet out. I figured if they could do that they would have done it by now. Finally, they agreed to limited access to our...human resources...so long as the people they took were unharmed, had their memories wiped and then were put back where they found them. This was in exchange for some of their technology. But they have been giving it out in bits, pieces and parts very slowly. We have a lot of people at various places working on it, but it's a slow go."

He got up and poured himself more coffee and took another doughnut. Without any other comment he continued.

"When Kennedy was elected, we thought everything was going to blow apart. Nixon was well aware of the treaty and even told some close advisors he was going to go public with it and 'see what that snot nosed rich kid would do about this once the public knew the truth.' Well, cooler heads prevailed and everyone calmed him down with a promise of future greatness." Max stopped and looked at me waiting for a reaction. I knew the way colleges worked and it didn't surprise me that governments had the same spin about who would rule and who would serve.

"A friend at a large non-profit government organization across the river from DC got word about the space program speech Kennedy was going to give months before he addressed the nation. He'd been collecting data and asking questions as to our capability. It has been considered the correct action to keep him out of the loop."

Max stopped and waited again for my reaction.

"You have decided not to tell the President of the United States some of the strategic information about what we do." I mused. "Now that is interesting. In telling me this, you have decided that I am ready to enter this little select club or I am going to be fish food and nobody will ever see me again. That about the size of it, Max?"

I looked at the other man and his facial expression never changed and he held my eyes with blank menace, then he smiled and the tension broke.

"Nothing so harsh, I promise you Dr. Humphrey." The Admiral walked back in, wearing a heavy turn out jacket.

"It is getting cold out there." The Admiral reported. "We have maybe forty minutes." He sat back down without taking his coat off.

"If we found it necessary we would wipe your mind clear of this meeting and you would wake up in your bed with the recollection of only a pleasant dream." Max said, matter of factly. "Secondly, you would be offered a fine teaching position at some college or university tomorrow and you would take it. In months you would forget about all of this and never even think about this project. That seem fair?" Max actually smiled.

"Sure!" I said, smiling, slapping my knee. "You fellas are great! Just all one big happy family now, aren't we?" Then the grin dropped off my face. I was through playing games with these murderous bastards convincing themselves they were heroes out to save the world with their bullshit made up sci-fi stories of invasions of little green men. If they wanted me in they had a reason and a use for me, which was the only reason I wasn't dead yet. Now it was time to deal from the top of the deck.

"So," I said accusingly, without preamble, "why did you kill Dr. Leonard Bates?"

The Admiral looked at me, incredulous. "Who said we killed Bates?"

"I said you killed Bates. You brought me here, I assume because I am smarter than the average bear, so don't play me like some idiot rube! Look, gentlemen, and I use that term loosely, it's clear that I am already in at a level Bates never got near. That little obfuscation of last night made it crystal clear to me that those guys are not in control. They think they are, but they didn't know about Bates and they weren't even interested in what I had done at the Montauk lab. Then you two show up this morning playing Tarzan and Cheetah. Something happened yesterday or the day before that made it important that you make contact with me outside normal channels, those channels being that group of old farts in that cloak and dagger Mickey Mouse club that think they represent the President. What part did I miss?" I looked at both of them. Max was fuming. The Admiral leaned forward to add impact to his point.

"That 'Mickey Mouse Club' is called Majestic Twelve and was started by Harry Truman and continues to this day as the cover for the whole UFO problem. They have their role to play and they keep pressure off of us. But not bad, Ted, not bad at all. You're very quick on the uptake. Much sharper than your father." The Admiral smiled and then looked at Max who continued the story.

"There are a few of us that work in a tight group with the Admiral here as our head." Max said, nodding at Jacobs. "We have access to unlimited funds, facilities and intelligence, which is most important. The Group advises certain political leaders, businessmen and financiers. We represent no government, but rather work throughout the world. By joining this cabal, you are disassociating yourself from country and nationality. Some would believe that we have committed acts of treason. The end result is all we care about. That is the patching of those two holes in space/time and killing every last one of those alien sons of bitches that are left here after the hole is closed." Max was animated and speaking louder than I had heard him before.

"Great, more stories about Martians. So...why did you kill Bates?"

"He was going to go public." Jacobs finally confessed in exasperation. "He realized that the man you know as Number One on the Majestic Twelve board was not informing the President of what was happening at Montauk. Bates couldn't go around him, he had tried. So he was going to tell his story to someone at the Times and give them the documentation to prove it. We couldn't have that, could we?" The Admiral's blue eyes dug deep into me as he waited for an answer.

"You murdering swine!" I spat with disgust. "I know full well you could have made him the same offer you just made me! Cleaned out his brain, parked him in a teaching position. Happy life. No one dies. Easy Peasy Japanesey." I countered. "But you just couldn't help yourselves, could you? That thirsty for blood are ya?"

"We could have done that, but we chose not too." The Admiral never twitched a cold-blooded muscle.

"And then there is me." I said throwing out my arms wide, leaning back in my chair, emboldened by the dawning realization that these might be my last moments on Earth and there was nothing I could do now but go down swinging. "Why do you want me?"

"You are the key to finishing our work and closing those doors and sealing those rifts. The stuff you did at Cal-Tech proved that to us. Nobody could get to the point you did in so short a time without grasping what we need to know. Then you proved it again, with that stunt with the super cooling and the cameras on the capsule. No, Dr. Humphrey, you are very much the man we need for this position."

The Admiral waited again for my next response as if my life depended on it, which it did. I bit my lip for a long moment and looked back and forth between them. The villain and his henchman, the Jungle Jim animal trainer and his hungry tiger, the master and his murderous slave. They had killed my friend, my fiancée's father, my future child's grandfather, because he had become "inconvenient". But I wasn't going

to get closure, or revenge, or anything but dead if I played the wrong card in these circumstances, and we all knew it. But they needed me, so I wasn't done yet. I had the inside straight.

"I want full disclosure." I said at last. "And I want out of Montauk. The project needs to be someplace else, preferably in a desert where we won't scramble the brains of the neighbors or black out the whole East Coast every time we test. Full control. That is my deal."

The Admiral raised an eyebrow archly.

"No compulsion about doing the right thing? No recriminations about us killing your mentor and friend and soon to be father-in-law?" He was reading my mind, but the situation was all pretty clear.

"I need out of my marriage, but I do not want Sally hurt or killed." I couldn't believe what I had just said.

"Understood and agreed." Max said, obviously the action part of this duo. "With the Admiral's approval, I would like to offer you the position of head of research for us." Max turned and looked at the other man who nodded. "Do we have a deal, Dr. Humphrey?"

I sat thinking Doctor Faustus must have found himself in similar circumstances. I wondered if he thought about his life and his choices up to that point as Mestopholes extended his hand. After all, what is a soul worth exactly?

"I'm in."

"Splendid!" Jacobs said clapping his hands together. "Max, get Dr. Humphrey a heavier coat if you would, it will be cold on the runabout." Max nodded and headed down the stairs.

"Why are we getting on a runabout in the middle of the Atlantic?" I looked outside. It was still clear, but a slight chop ran along with the sea.

"We are taking a ride to meet some of your counterparts." The Admiral indicated the stairwell heading down off the deck. "We should be just about there."

I walked out onto the boat deck to see a completely enclosed twenty-five foot craft being lowered into the water. Most people would see this as their personal pleasure craft, but the Admiral called this his 'runabout'.

I looked around and didn't see anything on the horizon in any direction. But when indicated I descended the ladder and clamored onto the boat.

I was on board now in more ways than one.



CHAPTER 21

Sally sat in her darkened living room. She had been crying for several hours. The last two hours she had been calling Ted's number at the house, ever since the guard at the lab told her that Dr. Humphrey had checked in and told them he had to be in Washington, DC for a few days. She didn't know anything about that and thought Ted would have at the very least called to tell her what this was all about. She had finally reached Matt Reilly and he said he would be over in awhile, but that seemed like an eternity. Right now she just didn't want to be alone. She was sad and angry and lonely and scared, her only comfort being her father's huge blue-eyed white Norwegian Forest cat, Shalu, who she inherited from her father, or more like Shalu had inherited her. Shalu loved spending time at the base and everyone loved him and thought of him as their good-luck charm, but she couldn't trust anyone there to take care of him, and certainly not helpless Ted.

She went from rage to deep depression and the crying came in sobbing waves that racked her body. She had gone so far as to fill the bathtub and taken out the razor blades and would have committed suicide had it not been for the overwhelming guilt of also killing the baby growing inside her. Still, she was in the tub with the blade at her wrist, when Shalu pawed at the opaque plastic door in a panic, knowing what she was doing. When she slid open the door, the cat jumped into the tub with her, giving no heed to the water it hated so much, and curled up on her chest, smothering her with love. She clutched the wise animal to her naked breast, thanking him for saving her life. But she was literally on the verge of a nervous breakdown or worse unless something different in her life happened soon.

When the doorbell rang, she presumed it was Matt and that he had gotten off early at the base. She ran to the door and flung it open, overjoyed to finally see a friendly face but instead, on her porch she found a short, plump, middle aged man in a rumpled tweed vested suit standing there with a medical bag in his hand.

"Miss Sally Jennings?" He took his hat off and held it in his chubby hand looking at her over his glasses.

"Yes?" She said suspiciously.

"I am Doctor Lloyd from over in Clifton. Dr. Marks was called away to the hospital and I am covering his rounds. He asked me to drop by and see you. May I come in or is this not a good time?" He took a step back on the porch as if to leave.

Something queasy and uneasy turned in Sally's stomach. There was something about this man. Something bad. She knew him. She had seen him before but she didn't know from where, and it started to prick at her brain, like the uncomfortable feeling she would get upon meeting some long lost relative whose name she had forgotten. Every fiber of her being was telling her to slam the door, get out her gun and come back out on the porch and shoot this man dead. But some switch in her mind flipped, and unbelievably she found herself saying:

"No, I'm sorry. Please come in." She heard herself say the words as if she was very far away. The doctor nodded politely and walked in. He set his bag down on the

hallway table and moved immediately into the darkened living room as if he had been in the house many times before.

Shalu was curled up asleep in a chair by the window, but when the doctor came in he opened one great blue eye, then sprang up on all fours, the hackles raised all along his body. He hissed and growled at the man with an unearthly noise deep in his chest.

"Shalu!" Sally scolded him. "That's weird! He usually loves everyone. Come here you!"

She went to pick up the cat and he leapt across the room at the doctor's face, hissing and spitting. Sally plucked him out of mid jump as he growled ferociously and clawed viciously at the air, twisting and spinning in a crazed attempt to escape Sally's grip to get at the face of his prey. Sally wrestled with the animal and managed to get him by the scruff of the neck and hold him close to her body, as she ran out of the room and threw Shalu in the bathroom and closed the door. Shalu continued to hiss and now clawed helplessly at the door, trying desperately to save his unsuspecting mistress from a man he knew to be a threat and had seen before.

"I am so sorry!" Sally apologized. "He has never behaved like that!"

"Oh, not a problem, my dear. Animals just don't take to me for some reason. You know you should open these curtains and get some light in here, my dear. After what has gone on you don't need to sit here in the dark thinking about it." He flung back the curtains in a sweeping gesture and pulled up the shades. "There! Isn't that much better? A little more light will help."

"How will it help?" Sally said angrily. "Will it bring my father back? Or explain why he killed himself?" She started to cry again and slumped into the chair by the window, blinded by the streaming sunlight, holding the dainty handkerchief to her rough red nose and puffy eyes. "Or get Ted to love me again, like he did when he first came here?" She began to sob again uncontrollably.

"Oh my dear," the doctor said sympathetically, "those are all just transitory emotions. They will pass in time." He sat down on the footstool, which didn't look like it would hold his weight, near her legs and touched her arm and gently stroked it.

"You know that everything will be alright, don't you?" He continued to stroke her arm in a steady syncopation with the raising and lowering of his voice. "You have to understand that everything is going to look different in the morning. It always does." He got up and opened his bag and pulled out a hypodermic syringe and loaded it from a small bottle he pulled from his pocket.

"What is that?" Sally asked sleepily. His voice had lulled her into a lethargy.

"Something that will help you through this time." He rolled up her sleeve and swabbed the area with an alcohol dipped cotton ball. The injection was just a little pinprick. That is all she felt and before he could put his equipment away, Sally was sitting in the chair in a deep drug induced hypnotic sleep.

"Now Sally, we are going to talk for a few minutes. Do you understand me?" He took her pulse and looked carefully at his watch.

"Yes." She answered from a place in a heavy fog.

"Good. Now first, you must understand that everything that I say to you, you won't remember when you are conscious. However, these suggestions will be in your mind and they will be with you and you will act upon them without question. Do you understand?" He felt her pulse and lifted one lid and looked deeply into her eye.

"Yes I...understand." She answered again.

"Good. That is very good. You are a very good girl Sally and your father would be very proud of you. You have gone through a lot and now you deserve to be rewarded. Sally you loved your father, but you didn't understand him. So don't be concerned as to why he is dead. He would have died of cancer very soon and it is better this way."

He sat back and watched the internal fight within her mind between what she knew and felt to be true and the new ideas being introduced. But he knew the drugs would overcome all the normal obstacles. They had been repeated hundreds of times and were proven to do so.

"Sally. You will forget that you ever worked at Montauk. You worked for your father on his writing that he never finished and then burned before his death. You won't remember anything about them. Also, you are not in love with Ted Humphrey. He was just something you did a couple of times because you were bored. You have never loved Ted Humphrey. Do you understand that?" He took out his notebook from his breast pocket and looked down the page at his notes.

"I...love...Ted!" Sally said through heavy lips, fighting desperately to hold on to her feelings, which had been her only hope for a better and happier life.

"No, you don't, Sally. You never loved Ted. You just used him and you now feel bad that you used him so badly for your own pleasure. He meant nothing to you, Sally." Her will was impressive, but she then suddenly slumped and the doctor smiled, knowing the battle within her was over.

"He meant nothing to me. I feel bad because I used him out of...boredom." Sally repeated back.

The doctor read the other name on his list. Time to transmute, transfer and redirect the female emotional drive.

"Sally, you love Sergeant Matthew Reilly now. You are carrying Matt's baby. You want to be with Matt forever. Do you remember telling yourself that? I want to be with Matt forever." He waited and her head started to nod up and down.

"I love...Matt." She said, now with true belief. He felt her pulse again and noted the time.

"When next you see Matt, you will want to make love to him and nothing will keep you from doing that. You cannot think of anything else but being with Matt, making love to him and then going away with him. You two will start a new life a long way from here. Do you understand what I am saying to you Sally?" Again he waited.

"I do. I want to be with Matt." Sally twisted in her chair.

"That is good. Now listen very carefully to me. Put your hand inside your blouse and under your bra to your naked flesh. Feel its warmth. Squeeze your breast. Play with your nipple. Touch it, squeeze it and pinch it. Feel your sexual pleasure rise. Feel the wetness in your vagina as you become more and more excited and aroused."

Sally squirmed in the chair roughly working her breast up and down and from side to side. Her other hand went down her thigh, hiked up her skirt then dove between her legs as she work herself into a frenzy.

"You will think about Matt." The doctor continued. "Every time you touch your breasts and your nipples you will want him more and more. You won't be able to get enough of him." He stopped for a moment, thinking he could really screw this up. If he told her she was to bang him like a rabbit morning, noon and night. the guy wouldn't last six months before she sexually killed him. But he would certainly die happy. The chubby man smiled to himself at the thought.

"Sally, now you won't remember me or the fact that I was here. You will sit here and awaken when Matt rings the doorbell. When you see him you will want him so badly you won't even make it to the bedroom, but you will make love to him right here on the living room floor. Then you will talk to him about leaving Montauk and going to his new job in Denver."

He sighed to himself.

This was the third damn time he had twisted the inside of this poor bitch's head. She was a beautiful, loving girl and she certainly deserved to be happy and deserved far better than to be mentally mangled by the likes of someone like him on the orders of

men who cared about nothing and no one. He was hoping that, for her, this would be the last time. He walked over, picked up the phone and dialed a local number.

"She's ready. Your end? On his way? Good. Thank you." He hung up and walked to the door. A sedan was just pulling up behind his car. A young man jumped out in an ill-fitting suit and bounced up the walkway. The doctor walked out on the front porch and waited. Sergeant Matthew Reilly passed him without noticing him at all. Reilly hit the doorbell and Sally flung open the door and threw herself at him, covering his face with lipstick and kisses. The doctor thought they might not make it to the living room and do it right there on the front porch.

"Oh Matt!" she said breathlessly between devouring his face. "I've been waiting for you." She panted, her blouse unbuttoned to the navel.

The young man's excitement could be seen in the front of his pants. "Oh, Sally!" Matt held her at arms length and she squirmed like a cat trying to get back at him. "I wanted to tell y'all the good news. My discharge came through from the service and I got a new job in Denver." He pushed her into the house.

"Later, darling. Later!"

Those were the last words the doctor heard as the door slammed shut and he heard muffled moans and lamps and furniture being smashed inside. He shook his head with a wish that maybe now she would have the happy life that she so richly deserved after all the abuse she had endured that she now wouldn't even remember. A life away from this awful place and these terrible people. All thanks to Uncle Sam and the wonders of modern medicine. Bastards. Goddamn bastards.

He walked back to his car and slumped behind the wheel. He headed back toward the interstate highway where he met the beltway and headed south toward his office in New York City.



CHAPTER 22

The man handling the runabout stopped its engine about a half mile from the yacht. We sat there and bobbed up and down in the water for a while, just waiting.

“Contact, bearing two five zero, Admiral.” The man with the binoculars called out without turning and looking.

“Very good, carry on.” The Admiral, Max and I sat in the comfortable cockpit area at a small table. There had been no conversation between any of us, since embarking on the smaller craft.

I believed they did not want to discuss their business in front of any of the crew, so I sat and just waited. Off the port side, I noticed a black hull in the water that looked like a whale, with the exception of the a long conning tower jutting above the surface. A large black submarine was moving slowly toward us. I looked at Max who had a thin smile as he handed me a life jacket.

“Put that on, please doctor. We don’t want to lose you.” I complied and waited. It took only a few minutes for the captain of the gig to put it right along side the submarine. Lines were quickly tied off and bumpers were placed to keep the two craft from rubbing on each other in the moving ocean. Max slapped me on the back after he had tied a rope around my waist and chest.

“When I tell you to, jump. Push off hard and those boys will do the rest.” He pointed to the sailors on the deck of the submarine that held the end of the ropes in their gloved hands.

“Go!” He yelled in my ear and I pushed as hard as I could off the freeboard. I spun and flailed and it seemed like I was flying as I hung in space for a moment with the crewmen pulling quickly and expertly on the ropes. I landed on the deck of the submarine without ever touching water and strong hands stabilized me as I watched the other two men make the crossing with the ease of years of experience at sea under their belts. All three of us were herded down the hatch in the conning tower after the Admiral waved off the gig and saluted the captain.

The interior was cold and dimly lit with red lights as we went down a ladder like Jonah into the bowels of the Great Fish. Past the last hatchway on the pressure hull, it became very bright and the inside of the boat was all shining chrome and brass. I looked around to get my bearings while moving out of the way for the other men to come down the ladder and into what had to be the bridge. A young hard looking man stepped forward.

“Captain Leon Pavol Patrovich at your service, Admiral Jacobs. Gentlemen.” He saluted Jacobs, and nodded to us, speaking in a thick Russian accent. Jacobs returned the salute and then extended his hand as if to greet an old friend.

“Leon this is Dr. Ted Humphrey our guest and of course you know Max?” The captain shook my hand and looked directly into my eyes. His gaze was neither hostile nor friendly, but mostly curious. He turned to Max and smiled.

“Well, have you brought some more American money that I can take from you in that game you call poker?” He slapped Max on the arm and turned to his crew.

"Diving stations, Chief take her down and prepare for silent running. Course is laid in. Lets get going." He turned back to us. "Our accommodations are not as good as your yacht, but they should suit you for this journey. Follow me please. Oh, here, put this on also, please." He handed each of us a dosimeter to be worn at all times.

"This ship is nuclear?" I asked in surprise. He turned back looking first at me then at Jacobs, who nodded to him. We were all part of the same happy club now.

"Yes, Doctor, it is." The Captain said with pride. "It is known as a 'November Class' boat by your NATO organization. She is three hundred and sixty feet long. Powered by a nuclear reactor and has a steam turbine engine of 22,500 horsepower. She can travel at twenty-five knots submerged. And does not need to surface except for food and to get her sailors laid now and then. Unfortunately, the Soviet Submarine Service is the only part of the Soviet military that does not have female comrades on board their vessels. And, sir, it is referred to as a boat, not a ship." The Soviet captain smiled and showed the gold inlay on his front tooth. As he walked us forward I noticed the boat was spacious, much more so than in the old movies I'd seen like *Run Silent! Run Deep!* or the boats used in World War II and before. Everything was immaculate by any standard.

"This area has been set aside for your use. It is off limits to the rest of the crew unless we have an emergency of some kind. Sergei is your steward and will provide whatever you need while we are underway. Hopefully," he said with a grin, "we can play a little cards latter. I have been practicing." He looked directly at Max and winked. With that he saluted and walked back toward the bridge and closed the watertight door behind him.

"Home sweet home, doc. Let me show you your cabin." Max pulled open one of the doors that led to a small but exceptionally well-furnished room. It had a bunk, a small desk built into the wall, a small lavatory and a closet. I opened the locker and found clothing in it in exactly my size.

"Those are for you." Max continued. "Nice part about nuclear boats is you can take a shower anytime you want. You may glow a little afterwards, but that's no big thing." He pointed to the two boxes of files on the bunk. "Your reading material for the next three days. Your assignment is for you to learn as much as you can before we get to where we're heading."

I turned around and dropped my jacket and other effects on the bed. "And where are we going if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Sure you can. We're heading for a small island off the north coast of Iceland, called Mount Grace. It's an extinct volcano that's been blasted out on the inside and serves as a sub pen for this boat and a couple of others."

"All this may not seem strange to you," I said apprehensively, "but we're on a Russian submarine. That seems a little strange to me. Does any of this seem strange to you?" I was being slightly sarcastic but Max let it go by without offense.

"Not at all when you consider that we are in this fight together. What the politicians," he pointed up, "do up there is not our concern. They do not understand the importance of what this is all about. Those that do, like yourself, are willing to offer any assistance that is needed to get this job done. Anything else?"

"What is this about a poker game?" I was just interested and wanted to know why all the references to it.

"These are good men. But their government pays them about a third of what a boot recruit in our service makes. So whenever we take a ride we always manage to lose at cards. I've dumped a thousand dollars on this boat in one night. You would have thought that Captain Leon had busted the bank at Monte Carlo he was so happy. That will pay for food, clothes and braces on his kid's teeth back in Archangel where this boat is out of. So if you do get into a game with them, do the same and I will reimburse you later. Think of it as international diplomacy and working for world

peace.” He winked and closed the door. I still had a hundred questions but I figured I could wait until they were ready to answer them.

* * * * *

The files were a collection from at least four different locations that were running the same experiments. Each told a story of attempts at dissimilar methods of trying to close the rip that had occurred in space/time. Page after page of calculations and equations had been tried and mostly failed. It was abundantly clear a lot of good people had worked on this project, but they were all working on it from the outside in. They looked at what had caused the rip and tried to work through the problem of healing it from ground-based facilities. After reading for three hours I started to thumb through the documents and they were all the same. They would never get their hands wrapped around the problem without getting inside it. I already knew that. Poor old Bates tried that approach and failed. As I looked around the small cabin, I realized this was the reason I was here. These guys knew I had done something no one else ever did and they wanted to know how I did it. I sat there thinking about Leon and his kids with braces on their teeth. Well, the same type of poker game was going to be played by me, only I wasn't interested in winning a grand off Max. I wanted to clean these people out, win all the chips, break the bank, then buy the casino. I wanted blood.

I tossed the file into its proper box and walked out into the corridor that led to the small lounge that had been put at our disposal. Max and the Admiral were sitting with their heads together talking quietly.

“What does a fella have to do to get a drink around here?” I walked in and plopped down next to them. Both men were suddenly taken back by the harshness of my edge.

“I am sure we can find something to drink on a Soviet submarine, Doctor.” The Admiral looked at me reproachfully.

“Good!” I said slapping him on the back, raping his personal space. “I need a good stiff drink and something solid to eat. Then we're gonna talk about all those files.” Jacobs sat back and looked at me with his holier than thou attitude.

“Did you find something interesting?”

“Interesting?” I chewed the word over in my mouth. “That wouldn't be the word I would use.” I sat back and anteed up, tossing two white chips out there on the table. The black ones would come later.

“What would you call them, Dr. Humphrey?” The Admiral still looked down his nose at me condescendingly, not yet realizing he had already lost all his power and position. It was time to raise the stakes for these guys.

“Why don't we get past all the nicey nice crap, shall we? You call me Ted, I call you, well, Admiral, I guess, 'cause you never gave me your first name, Jacobs. I call him Max, he calls me Ted and we all try to be friends since what I just read made me understand that we are going to be spending one hell of a lot of time with each other.”

I sat back and waited.

“And why would you think that Doctor Humphrey?” The Admiral was clearly not used to subordinates and inferiors dictating terms to him.

“It's Ted. Let's try Ted. T-e-e-e-d.” A smirk danced on my lips as I watched Max, a very dangerous man, get madder and madder.

“Alright...Ted.” He said like it caused him pain. “What did you find out that suddenly makes you so indispensable to us?” The Admiral was quicker than I had given him credit for. I had underestimated him and I wouldn't make that mistake again.

“The fact is Admiral,” I leaned in close getting uncomfortably far into his personal space, “that stack of papers in there? You can hand them to your Commie pal Captain

Leon and his Commie crew to wipe their asses with.” I waited for him to call, raising all the bets around the table.

The Admiral started to smile, and for the first time it was genuine.

“You are correct, Ted. That represents nearly a billion dollars of research and they never got even near the mark.” The Admiral turned and looked at Max. “Why don’t you get us all a bottle of that frozen antifreeze they call vodka on this boat and we will have use some drinks together.”

“Admiral? You too?” Max looked serious again.

“Yes, Charles Montgomery.” The Admiral said with a jovial smile. “If I am going to work with this asshole I just hired for life, then I am going to drink with him.”

The Admiral stuck out his hand and shook mine, this time with feeling.

“Welcome aboard, Ted.”

“Thank you, sir.” I stood up and reached out to Max with my hand, he took it. “And thank you for not shooting me just then, which I am sure was your first instinct...Charles Montgomery.” Max shrugged.

“Old habits die hard. But don’t push your luck too often. I’m still an old dog. But you call me Charles Montgomery again and all bets are off.” He smiled and walked forward to find a bottle and some glasses.

“So you are taking me to meet someone, that much is clear. They can’t come into the US, so that means they’re a little, shall we say, controversial, and you got him stashed in one of the most inhospitable places in the world and they stay there. So I was thinking, who did you have locked up that was so important?” I just wanted to take a flying leap and see if I could read the situation right so far.

“On the nose...Ted.” The Admiral walked over and opened the door to his cabin. He pulled a file out of his briefcase and walked back into the room and dropped it on the table between us. “Have a look.”

I opened it and looked at the black and white picture. I read the four onion skin sheets of paper and handed the file back to him, shaking my head.

“When all those missile scientists were brought in the back door under Operation: Paperclip, we couldn’t get him in. Holy hell would have broken out in Washington and someone’s head would have been lopped off and put on a pike at the traitors gate, let me tell you. So we compromised some old friends in Red Square and got them to house him and provide equipment on that hellhole of an island up there, that nobody is supposed to know about. Oh, we bring him whatever he wants. Books, magazines, booze, candy. God, the man eats a ton of candy and never gains weight. The Russians have been good enough to station an equal amount of women to men on the island so he can flirt and have a little fun now and then, but as he gets older the old libido just isn’t up there as much. One of the girls gives him a hand job now and then and that seems to suffice and keeps him going. But he’s still working the problem as much as he can. Oh, he knows the answer to the problem, I absolutely believe that, but as long as he doesn’t give it up, he thinks we’ll protect him from the world. The truth is, he’s right and that, Ted, is where you come in. You are the only one I have seen that can match him pound for pound in sheer brainpower. I want the answer and you are going to get it for me out of that thick German head of his.”

The Admiral looked up as the steward walked in behind Max with two bottles of ice-cold vodka and a small tray of cheeses and Beluga caviar with dry toast wedges, capers, onions and chopped boiled eggs.

“You told him?” Max sat and looked at me.

“I did. He deserves to know. It’s the least we can do.” The Admiral took a piece of toast and slathered on the caviar and relished it as he chewed.

“I can’t stand that stuff.” Max commented. “Well, Ted welcome to the club. What do you think about spending the next two years with the second most wanted man in the world?” Max poured drinks in everyone’s glass.

"First most wanted man...at this point." The Admiral corrected.

"I thought Eichmann was number one?" Max asked.

"Until two weeks ago. The Israelis kidnapped him out of Argentina. Now, Hans Kammler has the singular distinction of being the most wanted man on Earth. Cheers!" He raised his glass and drained it.

I opened the folder and looking at the picture of the man in his uniform and death's head cap, the cold eyes of killer looking back at me. Hans Kammler, or, more specifically, General Doktor Ing. Hans (Heinz) Friedrich Karl Franz Kammler. The Uber-Grüben Führer of the Nazi Third Reich, Hitler's second in command and the most powerful man in Germany and all Europe anywhere outside of Berlin and Hitler himself. Kammler started out as a brilliant civil engineer and high-ranking SS officer. Kammler had over 14 million people working, or more accurately, enslaved, under him, at one point or another throughout the course of the war in the concentration camp system, which he had set up and designed. He was put in charge of the V-2 missile program towards the end of the war when they couldn't get the more advanced technology he was working on into mass production.

Kammler was the Monster of the Warsaw Ghetto who oversaw its demolition in retaliation for the Polish Revolt in 1943.

Kammler was also charged with constructing facilities for various secret weapons projects, including manufacturing plants and test stands for the Messerschmitt Me 262 and V-2. Following the Allied bombing raids on Peenemünde in Operation: *Hydra* in August 1943, Kammler was assigned to moving these production facilities underground, which resulted in the Mittelwerk facility and its attendant concentration camp complex, Mittelbau-Dora, which housed slave labour for constructing the factory and working on the production lines. The project was pushed ahead under enormous time pressures despite the consequences for the slave laborers employed on it. Kammler's motto at the time was reportedly, "Don't worry about the victims. The work must proceed ahead in the shortest time possible!" Sweet!

Albert Speer made Kammler his representative for "*special construction tasks*", expecting that Kammler would commit himself to working in harmony with the ministry's main construction committee. But in March 1944 Kammler had Goering appoint him as his delegate for "*special buildings*" under the fighter aircraft program, which made him one of the war economy's most important managers, and robbed Speer of much of his influence.

In 1944, Himmler convinced Adolf Hitler to put the V-2 project directly under SS control, and Kammler replaced Walter Dornberger as its director. From January 1945, Kammler was appointed head of all missile projects and in April 1945 was named "*The Fuehrer's general plenipotentiary for jet aircraft*" by Hitler.

In March 1945, as US forces were advancing through Germany, the slave workers housed in the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp were to be executed as security risks. That order for their murder was received by Kammler, but, in a rare mysterious act of mercy, he did not comply with it.

Most of that was just the cover story for the "history" crowd, these files were obviously far more extensive. What Kammler was really working on was an insidious device called *Die Glocke*, The Clock, or the Nazi Bell because of its shape. It was the pinnacle of the SS General's occult and super secret SS Wonder Weapons Empire.

The Bell, or The Clock, was basically the original prototype for the Beast we had in the cave at Montauk. It was 9 feet in diameter at its flared bottom and 15 feet tall. It was comprised of two counter-rotating cylinders, rotating a purplish liquid-metalllic highly radioactive substance called Xerum 525 at high speeds in lead lined cylinders about 12 inches thick. It required massive amounts of electrical power and it could only be run for two or three minutes at a time as it gave off a murderous radiation and electromagnetic field. But Kammler must have known that one of these radiation fields

was the time distortion waves we'd found at Montauk, which is no doubt why they called it the Clock.

The first time Kammler turned *Die Glock* on it killed most of the scientists on the project. In subsequent tests, which included plants, animals and no doubt a Jew here and there, they all decomposed into a blackish goo in a matter of minutes. The chamber where they did the tests was lined with ceramic bricks and rubber mats that would not conduct the gigantic bleed off of electricity. The mats all had to be removed and burned after each test and the whole chamber had to be washed down with brine by inmates from the adjacent concentration camps, who then all died. But then again, all the scientists and witnesses who saw or worked on the Bell were murdered by the SS as the war neared its end anyway.

The upside of all of this in the cosmic karmic sense and scheme of things was he'd shown Hitler all these amazing Wonder Weapons. It was Gen. Dr. Hans Kammler that convinced Hitler that Germany was invincible, that no one could stand against them, and the whole world was their oyster. Had Hitler simply waited, biding his time by two years, a year, or even six more months, he could have brought all these weapons online into mass production and we'd all be eating schnitzel and sauerkraut in our leiderhausen sporting tiny little mustaches. It was ultimately Hans Kammler's ego, braggadocio and hubris that had lost Adolph Hitler the Second World War.

In May of 1945, Hans Kammler, and the Nazi Bell, simply vanished from the face of the Earth. There were planted disinformation stories that he'd committed suicide with a cyanide pill, or that he shot himself, or had his aide, Zeuner, shoot him, or that Zeuner shot him just for good measure because he hated his guts.

"Two years with this monster?" I looked up at Max.

"Or until you get him to tell you what exactly he did or you figure it out without him." The Admiral poured another drink for each of us.

"So, in effect, I'm a prisoner as well?" I laughed at the thought as it hit me. Max shrugged and the Admiral toasted me again. "Maybe I can get that Russian girl to give me a hand job." I finished my drink then filled the glass to the brim and downed it. It hit my stomach with the explosive force of rocket fuel.

I stumbled back to my cabin and laid down. My head was already reeling. The dreams that came that night were of Sally, who I was only now beginning to understand how much I truly loved, standing naked in front of me in the doorway to my bedroom, bathed in the light from the bathroom.

But that show was being played for another man and would be for the rest of my life.



CHAPTER 23

By the second day both Max and the Admiral were tag-teaming me full tilt. One of them would brief me for two hours straight and then the other would tap in to fill in more of the gaps. I realized I needed to keep notes and everything got recorded. Times, dates, occurrences and everything they already knew about Kammler's work. The Admiral emphasized the point that the old German had a key they needed. They didn't know what it was, but everytime an experiment went bad somewhere else in the world he could go through it and find the cause quicker than anyone else. His knowledge was wide, deep and vast and was the only thing that had kept him alive so long, that much was clear. Neither man liked him, or anyone on the planet for that matter. In fact Max was waiting for the day he could put a bullet in the man's head, or, more to his liking, choke him with his bare hands.

From everything I could piece together, it appeared that in 1943 he had done an experiment that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt he understood "The Gateway Process", or the opening and closing of the holes in the time/space continuum. He'd caused a rift to occur and then, within hours, shut it back up. They knew this because of some of the work that old T. Townsend Brown had done on the incident. Brown was convinced that Kammler knew how to make the system function properly. That opinion, coupled with the Admiral's almost manic belief that aliens were going to drop out of the sky and incinerate the globe, were the two reasons the old Nazi was allowed to continue his studies and do some minor experiments. It was clear no one was going to allow a full-blown laboratory to be built where the Russians could get their hands on it. They worked together on some of this but certainly not all of it.

Max never relented for two straight days warning me to watch my back in regards to Kammler. He believed him to be a psychopath of the first order and given the slightest chance he would try to kill anyone that got his secret. It was his only lifeline and the single reason for his wretched continued existence. They'd hoped I would be able to work around the problem and find the answer without him knowing I had done so. By the third morning, I was tired of listening to both men ramble on, either through ego or self-delusion, about a bunch of stuff about which they had no idea. They thought of themselves as experts in the field, but, truth be known, they were no further ahead than Bates had been. That was when it hit me; these were the two top guys in this whole process and neither one had read or even seen my report on the last experiment with Alvin in the chamber. They didn't know that I'd jumped not only a capsule but a person as well through both space AND time, as I'd never put what happened to Phillips, the young Marine, in my report. That was my hole card and what gave me power over these people.

We were finally fast approaching the Mount Grace station, when the captain ordered the boat to the surface and they gave me the first chance to see the island. I was standing on deck with Max, wrapped in a great coat, looking at the bare rock face of a mountain that starkly breeched out of the sea like some great whale frozen in a moment when it hung in space before splashing back down. The morning was slate

gray and the wind out of the northwest. The whole island had to be no more than two miles around and the top was a good three thousand feet high. There was not a living thing to be seen on the gray landscape. No greens or browns at all. Only slate rock and flocks of circling gulls landing on small outcrops they used for rookeries. Dismal was the only word that came to mind as we stood watching our approach and even that word was too happy for the landscape we were approaching.

"We're well above the ice patrol flight lines. Iceland has this place marked off limits on all of the navigation charts and we have a couple of patrolling submarines out here to warn off anyone stupid enough to come near this place." His voice was muffled, as he spoke into his jacket front huddled down inside his coat like some great black turtle. Ice formed in a white sheet over the close-cropped cut of his kinky jet hair. The cold was making him clearly miserable.

"How long do you think I'm going to be here?" I asked without looking at him like a condemned man.

"Ted, that is entirely up to you." Max said glumly, feeling almost sorry for me. "You find the key this old bastard has and I will have you off that rock in hours and back in the States in days. You're our best shot to learn what he knows. God knows we've tried everything else."

I could only imagine what "everything else" must have meant. The stakes were getting higher in this game and I wanted to make sure I came out a winner...oh...and alive. The sailor motioned for us to go below, because we were going to dive again.

Back in the lounge the Admiral was reading something from his briefcase. A document of some kind that didn't pertain to me. I sat down and waited until he decided to look up and acknowledge me. "Yes Ted. Is there something you want?"

"Yes, there is. When this is done." I waited again and he studied me with his ice blue eyes as cold as the glaciers outside.

"And what would that be?" He didn't seem as menacing this morning as he had been for the last couple of days.

"My own laboratory and a full staff to continue my research when I get off this island." I wondered what kind of cogs were running inside his head. Money was clearly no object. He sat the report down and looked at me for a long minute, studying my face.

"Right now," he said at last, "Montauk is being shut down. The staff is being debriefed and reassigned to various other locations where their skills can be put to better use. The old Pit will be cleaned out and all of the equipment sold for scrap. We have been designing and preparing to build a new site in the Nevada desert near a town called Fallon up by Reno. There is a small Naval Air Station there that does training close to the Dixie Valley Test Range. It should be ready to come on line in about two years. It is going to be fourteen floors straight down and the pit there will be so protected and insulated that no time waves will spread beyond the actual chamber. We have learned a thing or two in this whole process."

He paused and thought some more, deciding what to tell me and how far, exactly, he could trust me, then continued.

"When this is done, and it will be done within the next two years, Ted, if you still want it, that facility will be completely under your direction and command. I couldn't think of anyone better to run it." He stopped and looked at me.

"What is going to happen to everyone I was working with?" A feeling of remorse, regret and lonesome longing passed over me, mixed with a stabbing at my heart of my own despicable betrayal. "What about...Sally?"

"Miss Sally Jennings is now Mrs. Sally Reilly. She and your friend Sergeant Reilly eloped a couple of days ago. By now they are on their way to their new home out west in Colorado. Matt will believe the baby is his and that it was just born premature, or,

he will convince himself of that, and Sally will smother him with love and care.” He managed a thin smile.

“That easy, huh?” He noted my sarcasm and realized the effect of his comments.

“Oh dear boy! Don’t be upset. It was your choice. And, my god, that man has a terrific and satisfying job that he couldn’t lose now if they found him smoking dope in the women’s bathroom while fucking a girl scout. We should all be so lucky. Sally was important to all of us for many different reasons and she needed, and deserved I might add, to be rewarded with a happy life. You, I am sorry to say, were not that reward.” He sat there looking smug again. “You have a much greater destiny, doctor, and greatness is a harsh and lonely mistress.”

I had listened carefully and realized there were other options that could have been used and this one seemed the best to me as well. I shook my head and shrugged.

“Thank you. I guess.” I got up to go.

“Ted.” I stopped and turned, looking down at him. “You will find as we go along that there are many decisions we make that are not always comfortable or fulfilling to us. But we must make them. If we can bring a little joy along the way to someone as part of our greater plan, even if it is only temporary, we need to do that. We are not monsters. We are flesh and blood humans fighting for all of humanity. If we lose the essence of what we are along the way, then what is the point? You are concerned that when this assignment...” he paused again, “and this is what this is, an assignment, just as if you were in the service under my command. When this assignment is over that I will have you killed or your mind erased or worse. Don’t bother yourself with those types of thoughts.

“Look at me Ted. Look long and hard. I am seventy-one years old and have been a serving officer for fifty of those years. I have served my country in peace and war and never once asked what is in it for me. But that was my choice. You have been drafted, because of who you are and what you know. I understand this is not your choice all together and for that there are some of us that feel, and I am among that number, that you should be greatly compensated. Your biggest reward will be something that no one will ever know about and that is the saving of this planet. For yourself and future generations. Besides that, for all the bullshit you are going to have to endure dealing with this Nazi prick of ours that we keep chained up on this hellhole out here, you will have a great reward coming. Think about this in the wee hours of the morning when the world has closed in and you are alone in your bed on that slab of rock out there. Who do you think I want to replace me? Max? I don’t think so. He’s a good man, but he is an adjutant, a blunt instrument. Has been and always will be. He knows that, so it wouldn’t come as any great revelation to him. People like you saw a few nights ago in the bottom of the Embassy Hotel? Those puffed up ‘*Majestic 12*’ monkeys? Self assertive, proud, arrogant men? No! I want someone that can stand the watch quietly with dedication and devotion. Your father was one of those men. You are one of those men, Doctor Humphrey.” He stopped and got up.

“So far, it may seem like this is all one great big joke, but this is deadly serious business and that man,” he pointed towards the island, “I believe holds at least part of the key to it. I need someone that speaks his language that is not a goddamn German. You two share that language and it is physics. That is why I picked and groomed you and now I am exiling you to this Saint Helena of the intelligentsia. Break him, bribe him, and threaten him or anything else you need to do, but find out if he has the answer. If not, we need to move ahead, but if he can shorten our work by years, then we need that answer.”

I stood there not knowing what else to say. I had a choice to believe him or not, which was no choice at all, as my fate for the moment was sealed. At this point it was going to be easier to face the future believing he would hold to his word and I wouldn’t

be just one more casualty in his war, like Bates, a situation that put the lie to everything he had just said.

"I will need my father's notebooks and journals. They are in the lower right hand drawer of my desk in Montauk." I went into the other room and tried to arrange my things.

"You know how to use one of these things?" Max was standing in my door holding a small black automatic. A Walther PPK, like that English spy had. Maybe I could read all those new Ian Fleming books in my island exile.

"I do." He handed it to me along with two full spare clips.

"Keep it hidden, but remember that you are not on sovereign territory and we are here by secret agreement. If they get too close or if anything else happens you got something there that will serve you as back up. Sorry buddy but that is the best I can do." Max shrugged and wrapped his bear-like paw around my hand and shook it.

"You could stay here with me." I smiled at him.

"Can't stand Russian food. Bad for my stomach." He rubbed his belly and turned, walking back up the companionway.

"Now that you mention it, I don't like Russian food either, but what the hell." I finished putting my stuff in the bag Captain Leon had given me after I lost eight hundred bucks to him last night. It was an old bag but it would serve my purposes.

PART FOUR

THE ISLE OF DOCTOR HANS HAMMLER



CHAPTER 24

Climbing back out of the conning tower hatch, I was overwhelmed by the size of the cavern. It was enormous. On both sides of the cave were stone quays carved out of the native stone. The top of the cavern disappeared into the blackness above me. Lights were swung on a series of cables that illuminated the chamber and there, sitting by one of the stone piers, was another Russian submarine. The rear deck hatches were open and large cables ran out and up along the cave wall. Leon was on deck and saluted us as we went ashore. He shook my hand and thanked me for the card game two nights before and with a wink told me that he would be seeing me again soon. I was now officially his favorite American.

We went through a double set of doors then up an old metal staircase that must have traversed at least a hundred and fifty feet up a shaft that had minimal lighting. At the landing, Max punched in a series of numbers on a code pad next the door.

"7734. Remember that. This is the only doorway down to the sub pen."

"7734," I repeated, then shook my head with the realization. The numbers flipped upside down and inverted spelled the word "hELL". That was one helluva mnemonic to remember it.

We went through a long corridor that seemed to have no purpose, since there were no doors leading off it and then through another set of doors. This led into a large open area. Several desks were set up with lamps and some paper work, but no personnel in sight. Max looked at the Admiral who shrugged and we followed Max down a side corridor. A young Russian officer, with sandy hair and the roll of a seaman in his gate, came toward us. He looked up to see Max and the Admiral and stiffened to attention.

"Admiral, I did not know you were here yet." He spoke a formal, if broken, English.

"The tides were right, Alexei. May I present my friend, Dr. Humphrey. He will be your guest for the next little while." Alexei stepped forward and shook my hand, which I wanted to wipe off since it felt like I had just picked up a dead codfish. His lips were too big for his face and they were a mixture of red and a slight purple. His eyes were dull and showed a total lack of interest in anything that was going on here. The cordiality was formal at best and without feeling.

"When do you recycle out of here?" Max asked being his normal pleasant self to all people that didn't matter.

"Another month, thank all the stars, then it is back to the fleet. They have told me that I am going to the Black Sea Operations Fleet. At last some warmth." They all laughed. The admiral made some small talk and explained that I was going to work with their guest and I was to be given full access to everything and whatever I needed I was to be given. His response was nonchalant at best as if there was nothing much here in this place that everyone didn't have free access to. The Admiral told Max to show me my room, give me the two-dollar tour and then come back. He wanted to speak with Alexei for a few more minutes.

We moved on down a side hall. "This is the living area. Dining room, recreation room, dorms are over there. They mostly double bunk everyone, but you got your own room, which is spacious by these guy's standards." Max pulled open the door that led into a room that was about 12 x 14. It had a bed, chair, sofa, some library shelves, a small table, refrigerator and hot plate next to the small stainless steel sink. Another door led to a bathroom, huge by European standards, and a dressing room. New clothes in my size hung in the closet. All of which were warm and comfortable looking. "Come on. I'll show you the work area."

We went out and down the corridor the opposite way we had entered the dorm area and then through another set of double doors. "They originally took this over from the Germans after the war. No one knows about it at all. It was used as a staging base for an operation that never happened. The Russians came in and opened up the bigger landing area down at water level and put in some additional equipment, but the vast majority of this was built by the buddies of our principal guest." He opened another door that led into a large room where black chalkboards covered the walls surrounding three tables and stacks of books.

"This is where you are going to spend your time. It's Kammler's workshop, which you'll be sharing. He's still at lunch so in a little while you'll have the thrill of meeting him." Max looked around with disgust.

"No equipment? No test stands? No coils? Not one resistor?" I turned and looked at him. "What I am supposed to do to prove anything he says?" I was boiling inside.

"You give it to us and we build it someplace safe and test it there. Then we give you the results. That's the way it works. Could you imagine if we gave this guy access to a whole system? First thing you know, he'd be gone in a cloud of green vapor heading back to '39 and telling the Fuhrer where he made all his mistakes. Not a chance." Max turned and motioned for us to walk back to where the Admiral was.

"Where do they get their power from?" I had been looking around for the source of the lighting.

"They use the nuclear reactor of the other submarine. A limited engineering crew is aboard that sub and never leaves it. They're on station for four months and then a new crew comes onboard. They never come up here either. This whole place has a staff of fourteen people, all under Alexei's command. Two cooks, housekeepers, storekeeper, a couple of maintenance men, a doctor, not much of one, but the best they can do, four guards, that basically have nothing to do but make sure that the naval personnel don't come up here and change light bulbs, a couple of others and Irina. She is your personnel assistant. She's been here for three months and will be here until you leave." Max motioned toward the hallway.

"What was this place built for anyway? It's huge!" I followed the man who knew his way around.

"Surprisingly, Kammler designed it to house the device we found in Friedburg. He wanted to move it someplace where the time waves won't effect the surrounding community, just like you want to put it out in the desert. Well, this was his idea of a desert." Max walked back into the front area where the Admiral and Alexei were just finishing up. Shaking hands Alexei walked off to his office, where I later found out he spent most of his afternoons drinking and looking at pictures of goats. He wanted to take his promised bonus, leave the service and start a goat farm in the western Urals.

"See the place?" The Admiral turned and I could see some vapor from his breath. That meant it wasn't just me that thought it was cold in here, it was cold in this place.

"I did. Where did you get this Russian girl, um, Irina?" I looked at Max then back to Admiral. "And what qualifications does she have?"

"I will let her tell you about all of her qualifications, but I promise that you will not disapprove of her to assist you. Graduated at the top of her class in physics, speaks

four languages beside Russian, which includes German and English. So she should be helpful when you and Kammler start talking. She knows about you and the work we do, so don't be afraid to take her into your confidence." The Admiral walked toward another area. "Come on Ted, let's go meet the captain of the team taking the kick off." We moved down a hallway and into another large area.

The room was right out of studio B at MGM, all actually cut out of the native rock. A highly polished rock floor, with various oriental carpets thrown about, three large leather sofas and two chairs graced the area near the fireplace where an electrical fireplace acted like the real thing. Two long tables, one containing a silver tea service already laid out for tea and coffee, the other held stacks of papers and a wine decanter set. But it was the picture over the fireplace that made it all just perfect: a four foot by three foot oil painting of Adolf Hitler, decked out in his party uniform leaning on a globe. His sparkling blue eyes followed you accusingly everywhere in the room. I shook my head in disbelief.

An older man was sitting by the fireplace reading a book, listening to the crescendo of that last movement of a symphony. Something from Wagner. He held up his hand to keep everyone from speaking, pumping his fist with the final thrust. The phonograph finished and the arm automatically returned to the holder and the turntable stopped revolving. He rose stiffly and turned looking at the three of us like we were all lab specimens. He was in a long white laboratory jacket. His vest and tie were old, but perfectly sculpted to his small, thin frame. Bowing from the waist, he clicked his heels.

But now the truth, as living history, stood before us in the crisp, parchment like, skull headed flesh.

"Gentlemen! Welcome to my home!"

Hans Kammler motioned to the davenport and walked over to pour some coffee for each of us. "So good to see you again Herr Admiral, with a new friend I see. And of course what meeting would be complete without your Negro manservant."

Max bristled all over. Kammler handed a cup to me and one to the Admiral. Picked his up and sat back down, clearly snubbing Max, who went over and poured his own.

"Well, to what do I owe this pleasure, Herr Admiral?" He was an old man, up around the same age as Jacobs. His hair was white and receding. The skin on his face pale as parchment with the veins clearly visible under the skin. It was the face of death waiting to happen. A thin leathern scroll of flesh covering a skull with two large blue eyes looking out at us.

"Well, as I told you I brought a friend of mine here to work with you." Jacobs nodded toward me. "This is Dr. Theodore Humphrey."

"This is not Doktor Humphrey." The German protested. "I know Doktor Humphrey! I worked with him after the war in England. I am not that old to be fooled by some young pretender you are trying to deceive me with." He spoke with the arrogance and hostility that belied his calm mood of a second before.

"Ah yes, that is right, you did work with Dr. Humphrey in England, I almost forgot. No, this Dr. Humphrey is the son of the man you worked with. He, like his father, is a physicist of merit and of a skill level that has gone a lot farther in our field than anyone at present." Jacobs nodded again to me, so I could say something erudite and illuminating. The silence hung for a minute while I considered all of the possibilities. It would be important to gain parity quickly here and this was not a man to be subservient to under any conditions, whether he was a prisoner or not.

"Well that sets the stage just fine doesn't it?" I said contemptuously. "I told you Admiral this old man had nothing to offer us and that he has far out lived his usefulness. We can accomplish what we need to do elsewhere if he is going to act like someone with a secret. I have no time for him and his antics." I got up and walked

toward the doorway, putting the coffee cup down and stood there for a theatrical moment. "If I were you Admiral, I would just have Max shoot him and be done with it. He knows nothing that can aid me." I turned again and waited.

Jacobs looked at Max and both of them had on their best poker faces, understanding instantly what was happening. Jacobs got up shaking his head.

"I just thought you might still have some usefulness, General. But, as Dr. Humphrey points out, if you have nothing left for us, then we are paying an awful lot for this pleasure palace of yours."

Jacobs walked over and slapped Max on the shoulder. Max rose slowly, his jet ebony lips curling back across his brilliantly white teeth into a wide vicious grin. He reached inside his jacket and pulled the warm mother of pearl handled Colt .45 from its custom leather holster. He cocked the hammer and pointed it with overwhelming glee at the old Nazi's head.

From my vantage in the doorway, I watched the change in the old man's face. The sudden realization that his race could be run, hit him hard. A man that was responsible for millions of deaths was now afraid to die himself. The great mystery held no favor with him. A philosopher he was not, and certainly not a psychologist.

"Wait!" He was truly terrified of Max anyway. "Herr Admiral! All of these years we have worked together and been friends. You would end that here and now with your trained ape murdering me in cold blood?"

"Oh, please give the word, Admiral. Please!" Max pleaded. I was afraid we would not be able to stop him even if we told him to stand down! "No, you have not learned the secrets yet, you couldn't have. I am still working on them. It is just that it has taken a long time to put all of the notes back together. It is not easy to remember everything." Kammler was stuttering and now clearly pleading for his life.

"I can work with Dr. Humphrey if he gives me a chance. We can make a good team together, perhaps he knows more than I think he does about the device and how it works."

I pulled the pin and tossed the grenade.

"You mean like the fact that when the time wave extends outward beyond the chamber that someone can approach it in the opposite direction and retrograde back into the chamber?" There it was. I played the ace up my sleeve.

I stood there watching all of them. Even Jacobs didn't know about the last experiment or Corporal Phillips making the time jump, and the shock on his face was clear. Max looked from me to him and then at Kammler who was standing there with his hands up and mouth actually hanging open. It took a hard effort to close it. Squinting he shot me a hard, dangerous look.

"And the results were?" He was testing me now. He knew.

"He was covered with a slime. Probably an inter-dimensional ectoplasm from flying through a secondary field." I looked directly at the German, who suddenly stood up straighter and walked out of the room out of the range of Max's gun.

"How do you know that?" Jacobs hissed in anger.

"You didn't do your homework Admiral. You've been so busy talking at me that you didn't seem interested at all in what I could do or what I had to say. I'm a lot farther down the line than you can even comprehend."

I turned as Kammler walked back in and dropped his notebook on the table. Picking up a pair of reading glasses he ran his finger down the page then turned a couple of more pages. He looked up at me.

"Schlankheitskur?" He spat.

"That is correct." A female voice came from behind me. "You are both talking about the same thing."

I turned to see a young woman a few years younger than me, walk into the room. She was in a Russian army uniform of brown, with red tabs on the collar. Her body

moved gently as she glided toward me and extended her hand. Her hair was the color of a raven's wing. Jet black and placed in a bun at the back of her head. She wore little make-up and didn't really need any at all. Her ice crystal blue eyes were what transfixed me. She held me directly in her gaze like an arctic she-wolf and spoke again.

"Captain Irina Tolsky at your service, Dr. Humphrey. Graduate of Moscow University, with a Masters in Theoretical Physics." Her grip was firm and warm. "Admiral Jacobs, good to see you and Max, my friend. Did you bring me chocolates and nylons, you great brute?" She touched his arm in a coy familiar way.

"Not this trip darlin'. This was a quick one. We gotta scuttle out pretty quick, thanks to Leon. But next time I promise." Max smiled and placed his hand in the small of her back as good friends often do.

"I object to this woman being here at all, Herr Admiral! She is disrespectful to me and doesn't help the cause, in fact, she is a hindrance!" It was clear that neither Irina or Kammler liked each other at all.

"She is not here for you, Herr Doktor!" I snapped, putting him quickly in his place again. "She is my assistant and she is staying. So that ends that conversation. Am I clear?" The Nazi seethed at me. "Am...I...CLEAR!" I barked. Max took a step towards him and he flinched in terror.

"JA! JA! We are clear."

I turned and motioned for Irina to follow me with a quick flick of my wrist, which she did and we walked out of the room that was becoming more oppressive by the moment.

"I'm Ted." I spoke to her wandering aimlessly down the hallway, not having the slightest clue where I was going.

"Let's go this way to my office. Irina." She touched her jacket to indicate the name and the person as one.

"A pleasure to meet you. But I thought that you would be older, like that murdering German pig in there."

"He thought my father was coming here, but no chance of that. He gets the kid instead." I walked into her office that had pictures on the wall of a grassy countryside, an old house, and pictures of different breeds of rabbits.

"You like him a lot, I can tell." I looked around at the institutional furniture and her sparse few simple personal effects.

"Pardon?" She looked at me questioningly.

"Herr General Doktor Eric Joseph 'Hans' Kammler, late of the SS and Nazi Party. He is on your top ten hit parade isn't he?" I smiled at her.

"You are joking with me. You are playful like big lug Max." She smiled and I saw her set of perfect white teeth. She was lovely and she was probably going to be the only part of this job that I would enjoy.

Max leaned into her room and pointed at me to come with him.

"The Admiral would like a word with you." He waved at Irina as we left. "Balls, my man! Big brass ones! That's all I got to say about you. Brinkmanship is a game for politicians, hustlers and card sharks, but Ted you put a new spin on it in there. You are in a whole 'nother league, my friend."

As we walked I listened to him and nodded. "He had to believe I brought something to the party and that I was not someone less than him. He's still trapped in all that old crap from the Fatherland. If I'm going to work him, I have to be his equal or better. What do you call that in your world, Max? Rules of Engagement?"

"Yeah, but for one moment I thought I was going to finally get the chance to blow that motherfucker's head off. Just the thought was enough to make my juices flow." He spoke with feelings that were deep and powerful. "In here, Ted." He motioned at another door that led to a secluded room off the main hallway.

Admiral Jacobs sat on the end of the desk, waiting. When he saw me he began to applaud. "Bravo! If ever anyone deserved an Oscar, you are it!"

"Thank you Admiral, but as I was explaining to Max..." He raised a hand to interrupt me.

"I got the picture when you did it. But tell me, how did you know about the slime?" He looked carefully at me. This was one of those defining moments in someone's life when they make a choice. If that choice is right, somebody hands them the Nobel Prize. If it is wrong they end up in the back seat of a Chevy beaten half to death with an exhaust hose stuffed in the window. I knew that and right now I felt like my whole world revolved on this one answer.

"I read it in a book about time travel, written in the 1930s, or a Marvel Comic. That Jack Kirby is a genius!" I wondered if this was the right answer or not. Jacobs smiled and looked at Max.

"You just told me to go to hell didn't you, Ted? And then smiled at me."

"I will get what you want from this guy, but I still want to be in this game. I know more than anybody else with the exception of this old fart that should be in a museum, but I want to stay with the winning side, Admiral." I waited again to see the reaction.

"You got it!" The Admiral said with finality, slapping the desk as he rose. "We need to get out of here. Max, brief him on the security arrangements and what to do when the three little cherries come up on the centerline of the slot machine. I will head down and make sure Leon got all the stuff off the boat and didn't steal half of it to sell on the black market." The Admiral got up and shook my hand. "Finish this up and come home soon. We have got work to do Ted." He said enthusiastically.

"Yes, sir. I plan to." I watched him leave and felt as if a part of me had just died. I was stuck here in this frozen hell-hole and they were leaving. The last time I felt this way was when my father and mother left me at summer camp at Lake Arrowhead in the mountains east of Los Angeles when I was eleven to become a Woodcraft Ranger.

I hated it then and I hated it now.



CHAPTER 25

Max was getting ready to leave as well when he took me into one additional room in the complex. He closed the door and locked it. On the wall was a gray box. He put a key into it and twisted to the right. The door swung open and inside was a telephone.

“This is your life line, Ted.” He handed me the keys. One for the door to the room and the other to the phone. They were on a chain. “Put that around your neck and never, and I do mean never, take it off! Nobody has access to this room. None of the Commies here. That is the way we want to keep it. Look at those keys, they are tubular and can’t be duplicated very easily, so we think we got at least one safe way to communicate. But don’t kid yourself, they probably have this line tapped at some point along the route. It is directly linked to a NATO base in Iceland. You pick it up and somebody will answer. You give them the code name on this card and they countersign you. You give them the next one that matches the countersign and then identify yourself. You are ‘Iceman’. I am ‘Turner’. The Admiral is ‘Brass Hat’. Call anytime, day or night. The person on the receiving end will alert us and tell you how long it should be before you call back. On the second call they will patch the call to us, wherever we are. Supplies, operational stuff or personal needs goes through me. Technical stuff, call the Admiral. If everything turns into a fecal blizzard, which it could out here real quick, tell Iceland that you are ‘in the water.’ That will alert them to the fact that they need to send a recovery team from their base. That will take about an hour unless you decided to pull the pin in the middle of an arctic gale and then it could be two weeks.”

“That is reassuring.” I let my sarcasm emerge again.

“Yeah, well kid, that is the way it goes sometimes. We are on shaky ground here anyway. A change in governments in Moscow or one of our friends suddenly ends up in a Gulag and these guys will not be your best buddies anymore. If that happens, get to the white launch down in the moon pool by the subs. Get it out to sea, head south and east to a cove on that side of the island. That will be the one spot the storms won’t rip you apart. Old fisherman used it when they worked these waters. There are stories that it was raging at force twelve out on the open ocean and they were sitting pretty drinking coffee and playing dominos for days in thirty footers while tankers were going to the bottom from being swamped. It’s about a mile out and around the point to your left as you leave the cave. The boat has a wireless on it too and the same keys open it. There is food, water and a med kit under the seat. If you think it’s going to go bad, get out of here and someone will come a running, Ted.” He paused for emphasis. “Do not be a fucking hero! We need you alive and not trying to hold this place for flag and country.” Max closed the door on the telephone and it locked automatically. He touched my chest with his index finger. “Don’t lose those keys and don’t take them off that chain! Is that understood?”

“Got it, Max. When will I see you again?” I was feeling more alone like a Woodcraft Ranger again and didn’t like the tone and nature of the conversation.

“Oh I don’t know. If you break that old bastard it could be a few days after that. If not, I normally try to get here once every three months to check up on how things are going.” Max looked away and around the room.

“Who was here before me? There was someone wasn’t there?” I had a bad feeling about this.

“Yeah,” Max nodded sadly, “there were a few others over the years. Most gave up in frustration, not understanding what he was talking about. The Admiral still believes we can get it out of him before he croaks, but, hey man, I ain’t so sure.” He turned to leave.

“What happened to the last one Max? The one just before you decided to put me in the game?” I waited not really wanting to hear this but knowing that I needed all the facts.

“He was an older guy. Good in his field. We picked him up when all of his grants ran out and no one would hire him because of his crazy theories about time and space. He was right on in a lot of ways. We spent about a year working with him getting him up to speed and then brought him here. In six months he had gotten to the point that he and the Grubbin Fuhrer up there were talking pretty much like colleagues and then we got a phone call from Iceland. A panic call came in and he wanted off the island, like, yesterday. I sent a recovery team up here and they found him in his room. He had shot himself in the head. The suicide note went on for pages. It all boiled down to making the choice of either killing himself or killing Hans up there.” He pointed up. “The man was too ethical to take a human life, even one as repugnant as Kammler’s, so he had no other option in his mind. He snapped. The shrinks told us that much after examining his note. They said he was suffering from a deep-set anxiety and morbid depression to the point of psychosis. This place; the isolated nature, the reluctance of the Russians to interact and Kammler was enough to put him over the edge.” Max shrugged again. “He was a nice man.”

“Did he ever work in the Pit at Montauk?” I waited again while Max considered his answer.

“Yes he did, why do you ask?” Max looked at me with those large inquiring and intelligence eyes of his.

“Something happens around the time waves, Max. Something goes funny in people’s heads. It’s a side effect I noticed working with a lot of those folks there. Paranoia is the first stage. They think they are being watched and monitored all the time and then it gets into obsessions. Little things like always wearing the same pair of socks or having to have all the pencils on the right side of the desktop. We need to look at that fact and find out what happens when people are exposed to the long term effect of time waves.” I had wanted to do some of this research myself but realized that I wasn’t qualified to fumble around inside the human mind. I was having enough problems with physics right now. Max thought about it.

“Interesting point. I will mention it to the Admiral. Do you need anything else before I leave you here at the Coney Island of the North Atlantic?” Max shook hands again with me for the third time.

“Nope. I will be talking to you I am sure of that.” I wasn’t sure of anything right now.

“Yeah. Oh, by the way. Irina? Huh? A little nicer than the cooks at giving you a hand job, right?” He laughed his big hearty laugh, which echoed off the walls as he left.

I listened to the door close as he exited the complex. I was sitting in a room without any furniture except a desk and a chair, looking at a gray box with a phone in it that only went one way. The only warm bodies were a half mad mass-murdering scientist I needed to dig a secret out of upstairs, a bunch of Russians that seemed cool

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at best and a very attractive assistant that someone had decided would be good for morale on this bleak expanse of nothingness at the top of the world.

There were times I thought I should have just stayed in Barstow, got a job with P. G. & E. as a meter reader, drinking beer on Friday nights with the rest of the dads waiting for the high school football games. I put the keys around my neck and tucked them under my shirt. I needed to find a place to hide my gun and the extra ammo clips as well. Somehow it seemed to me like I had seen this film at the Roxy and it ended badly, with Richard Burton running for the rear of a truck that was driving away, only to be shot in the back. What was the name of that movie?

Oh yeah, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*.



CHAPTER 26

The days became weeks on the island and a subtle truce was formed between the inhabitants and I. A rhythm set in amongst the chapters of the Dumas novel I was trapped in that found me working many hours for lack of anything else to do on my own isle of Monte Cristo as I had taken to calling it. I found out quickly that I needed to spend my time with Kammler in the mornings when he was still sober. By late afternoon he would be sloshing his way through another bottle of the cheap Russian vodka that Alexei had smuggled in. By 3:00PM on most days the General would be in his cups enough to talk about the old bygone glory days of the Third Reich and his love for its leader. After the first couple of sessions like this, I decided to work with him in the morning when he was in ill temperament but at least alert enough to answer my questions. Ours had become a relationship I felt must have been similar to any jailer and inmate. The only problem I had was distinguishing which role I was playing from day to day.

The staff was a distant bunch to say the least. Most spoke only Russian and pretty much kept to themselves. It seemed they all took this assignment for the extra money put into their paychecks when they got them. It came out to be about fifty US dollars more a month. This, of course, was manna from heaven for most of them, since their brothers in arms in the Motherland were having an even harder time on their salaries. Everyone seemed pleasant on the surface, but they would nod and pass without any further exchange. Alexei would have *Voice of Moscow* broadcast into the dining commons during the evening meal so they could listen to the wonders of what their government was doing for them and how awful the Americans were, with their degenerate lifestyle and movie stars who were always in scandals. After the first week I started to take my meals in my office where I could work and not be subjected to both Nazi and Communist propaganda.

Every two weeks or so a new submarine would show up with mail, parcels, provisions for their home away from home and then take back the mail, letters, reports and alike to be read and censored in Archangel by members of the GRU for all naval staff and KGB for everyone else, or some other military or secret police group. I learned most of the personell on the island renewed their contracts, since here at least they knew they'd make pretty good extra money, have three guaranteed square meals a day and no commissar snooping into their political beliefs or scrutinizing every word they said.

Irina was the wild card. Besides being incredibly physically attracted to her I was always wondering why she was at this godforsaken place? She hated Kammler's guts with an intense visceral loathing, didn't associate with any of the other members of the complex team and, when not doing something directly for me or Kammler, kept to herself in her small office or living area. She continued to translate documents for me that Hans gave her and then explain some of the nuisances of the languages, but she'd never step across that line of familiarity one thinks occurs when two people work so closely and intimately together.

That's what made the start of my fourth week so interesting. I finished reading what everyone said they'd learned from the General and completed reading all his journals. At least the ones he'd given Irina to translate. There was nothing new for me in any of it. I was still at square one and not hoping to make any great progress in the near future. It was looking like I was going to be here for a very long time.

A soft knock on my door changed all of that.

"Come." The door swung open and I looked up to see Irina leaning against the doorway with a bottle of vodka and two glasses. She was dressed in a tight black skirt hugging her hourglass hips and a ruffled white blouse unbuttoned just enough to see the beginnings of the cleavage of her spectacular breasts. She'd put on some make up, not that she needed any with her porcelain alabaster skin, but it was just enough to give her some blush to her cheeks, and some eyeliner that made her crystal blue eyes pop like sparkling diamonds. Her hair was finally freed from her tight military bun and it fell like a frothy cascading waterfall of raven winged night down her shoulders. She tilted up on her toes in her sensible brown low-heeled shoes and made a pouting face.

"Oh! You are busy. I come back later." She spun away like a ballerina.

"Don't you dare tease me that way!" I leaned back in my chair, clasping my hands behind my head and soaking her in. She spun back around and came in softly, like a cautious cat. It was the first time I had seen her in anything except her uniform and she was radiantly beautiful.

"I wanted to come have drink with you, if you do not mind?" She closed the door gently and sat down.

"I am glad about that. For the most part I feel like a ghost around here." I sat forward and cleared off my desk and dropped the files on a side table.

"Pardon? Ghost?" She looked at me without understanding.

"Like I am not here. A ghost, you know, something like vapor that people walk by in the hallway and don't notice. A spirit. Oooooooo!" I waved my hands in the air, wiggling my fingers, as if that would make things more understandable.

"Oh yes, like me! A non-person. I see, yes!" She laughed and covered her mouth.

"A non-person? Now that's a new one for me." I liked her laugh as it made her seem younger somehow.

"A non-person is someone inside the Soviet Union that government has declared not to exist and then...they don't." She turned her head to the side and I watched her hair dangle over her shoulders. She had on small cheap gold earrings as well.

"They do that?" I asked to keep the conversation going. She set the glasses down and poured two healthy shots of vodka. I could smell the gasoline like fumes across the desk.

"Of course. They can do anything. They are the government." She empathized her comment by puffing up her chest and swaying back and forth. I realized Irina'd been into the cooking sherry by herself already and that's what probably gave her the courage to walk in here.

"So, what are we celebrating today?" I took one of the glasses ready to toast and, without ceremony, watched her empty hers in one pull. I wasn't even going to try to match this girl at proving who could drink the most, 'cause I already knew I'd lose.

"Today," she announced, "is my birthday! Today I am twenty-eight. It is a good day to have a birthday, da? Summer is a nice time to enjoy the day that one was born, don't you think so?" She poured some more, sat back this time and sipped it a little slower.

"I never thought about that. Is it summer outside?"

"It is where I spent my summers with my family and lived for a few months of the year around Odessa. The fields will be golden with wheat and barley. The sun will be hot and everyone will be down by the river, swimming, drinking and enjoying themselves. If I were home, I would be swimming in the river naked and then lay on

the grass and let the sun dry my skin.” She giggled out of giddiness. “How shameful of me to say such a thing to you. When is your birthday?”

“October. The first day. Fall. The start of the time when leaves turn color and squirrels go crazy trying to stock up nuts for the winter. Those first few days when the high wind comes down through the pines and there is that crispness in the air, telling you that winter is coming and with it snow and skiing.” I finished the drink and she poured me another one.

“I don’t ski.” She thought about that for a moment while she kicked her shoes off and tucked her feet under her in the chair. “I used to ice skate when I was younger. I was pretty good at it. But I never learned to ski.” Memories were passing through her. I looked at her and she seemed vulnerable to me, like someone hiding from life but didn’t want to.

“Why are you here?” I asked.

“I didn’t want to drink alone and I thought we could be friends for today.” She looked at me as if I had two heads.

“No. I understand that. But why are you here, in this place. This Monte Cristo type rock.” I used my favorite metaphor for Mount Grace.

“I like that!” She exclaimed. “Monte Cristo! Yes, with the count that escapes and goes back and hunts down all that harmed him and destroys them. Very good! Dumb Ass, wasn’t it?” She poured some more vodka and drank it.

“Dumas.” I smiled. “Alexander Dumas. Correct.” I waited.

“My father was a mathematics professor at the University of Moscow. He came from a small provisional town before the last war. Earned his degree and taught out in some oil town in the Caucasus. The war came. Someone called him to come to Moscow and work in one of the bureaus. The one that deals with aircraft design. So we went to Moscow. After the war he received a teaching position for his service to the State. We had a nice flat in the center of town.” She thought for a moment and then went on. “We had heat. My God in those days if you had heat you had friends. Everyone would come over to my parent’s home. They would bring food, vodka and music. They would sit up and sing all night some times. Old Russian folk songs. I was hurried off to bed and would lie there listening into the wee hours of the morning to morose and melancholy songs of privation, loneliness and lost loves. No one can suffer greater than Russians!” She said with pride. “Well...maybe the Jews, but no! Russians do it better, you must know this, we are masters of it, with possibly the exception of the Russian Jews that do it from birth and that simpering idiot upstairs that stopped living on April 4th, 1945, when his beloved Fuhrer did mankind a service and blew his brains out and bumped off that dumb bitch girlfriend of his.” She filled her glass again and then mine. She motioned for me to drink more. So I obliged her and drained one full glassful and almost died as it hit the bottom of my stomach. She immediately filled my glass again and went on with her story.

“Anyway. Things were pretty good. I was in college in the mid-fifties when things started to change. Politics are strange in my country. Today’s hero is yesterday’s villain and versa vicca” She slurred her words.

“Versa vicca?” I asked.

“Whatever...you Americans call it, anyway you want, it is fine by me.” She ran her hand through her hair and sat back sighing. “My father was found to have ideological contradictions in his views, or some words like that. He was questioned by the KGB and then members of the Third Directorate and then members of the Standing Community on Social Values and finally they declared him a non-person and shipped him to Siberia where he teaches Eskimos how to count to five on their fingers.” She sat back and looked at me like now I knew the rest of the story.

“But that doesn’t explain why you are here.” I thought that much was clear but it was apparent the fact was lost on one of us in the room.

“No, that is the story. My father is non-person. I have Master’s degree, I can’t go get my Doctorate, since my father is non-person. I am, what would you call it? A pariah. Socially unacceptable even to talk to. The butcher down the street that I know for fifteen years, I went into his store one day and told me he was all out of meat. I looked at his counter and it was covered with lamb chops and roast. The milkman wouldn’t sell me milk from the cart since we were on the don’t distribute list at the main plant. They turned off the heat and we had to move out. My mother didn’t want to go to Siberia so we went to Gasnie. What a pit! Then your Admiral Jacobs came along. Said, ‘listen! I got a deal for you and you don’t even have to take your clothes off for it. Not those exact words but the meaning was the same. I get to do my work, get paid, hold a commission in the Soviet Army as long as I am not in the motherland and my life is back to a reasonable semblance of reality. I got heat, vodka, food and money to get me the hell out of Russia when this is over with and I work for you. What could be better? Good night and thank you for listening.” She got up wobbling, then suddenly leaned across the desk and kissed me hard on the mouth. She then licked her mouth with her tongue. It was the sexiest thing I think I had ever seen any woman ever do.

“Mmm. You taste good! Good night.”

She walked out and bounced from wall to wall as she headed back to her room, humming what I could only imagine was an old Russian folk song.

I sat there with a strange feeling of being in a play, something by Ibsen that was going to have a bad ending if I didn’t take the time to re-write the last scene myself. I liked her. She wasn’t overt and brassy like Sally, but had the dark aura of someone that was meant to play out her part in a Russian tragedy penned by someone whose name I couldn’t pronounce, set against a bleak winter scene of gray and filled with snow.

At this point, I knew if I was going to leave this island, I was taking her with me. A prize or a trophy or a deeply involved friend, I didn’t know which, but that didn’t really matter. I was determined to save at least somebody’s soul from this icy Nordic hell, even if it wasn’t my own.



CHAPTER 27

As I was walking upstairs to talk to Herr Doktor Kammmler for the thirty-third time in as many days, my mind was in a different place. Alexei approached me in the hallway and looked around in a conspiratorial way to make sure no one was around and listening.

"I understand that Comrade Tolsky was inappropriate with you last night, Dr. Humphrey." He nodded to himself. "I am going to write up a report to the security officer at Archangel about this breach of protocol." He was not making any eye contact with me at all.

"I wouldn't do that." I said while continuing to read the papers in my hand. "It was nothing."

"It was something and I will not be told what I should or shouldn't do here, remember you are guest here only." The arrogance flared up in this subset of a subset. What little power he had he wanted to exercise, that much was clear. I smiled coldly at him putting my papers down to my side.

"You are right, Alexei. I am a guest." Then I leaned really close to him to be certain no one could possibly hear me. I almost whispered, but loud enough to make sure he would understand every word. "But if Irina's name is placed in any report, if her name is written on a piece of paper, if her name is mentioned or even thought about too loudly, I will pick up that secret phone of mine and make a phone call. A single phone call. In turn, someone else will make a phone call and there will be at least five of your comrades from the GRU and the KGB at the office of Central Security and the Politburo asking 'Why? Why has Captain Alexei been taking US dollars and smuggling forbidden items onto that island?' And I will guarantee that the closest you ever get to a goat, or a farm, will be in a Gulag in Siberia. Do we understand each other...Comrade?" I leaned back and smiled broadly, poking him in the chest as if I had told him an off color joke. He stared at me with red hate in his eyes. His teeth clenched in a grimace.

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, try me, sport. You think this place is a pit? Wait until you see the place they will put you for causing me the slightest discomfort." I got close enough to kiss him on the mouth, raping his personal space. "Do you have any idea who I am and what I represent? I don't think so. I work directly for Admiral Jacobs. That is who I report to." I smiled again and with it let him think about the effects of what Jacobs had already done inside Russian territory. The connection suddenly made sense to him. Someone perceived by him as a weak lackey, some geek scientist, was quickly elevated to someone in command over him, and that did not go down well at all.

"I am sorry for even mentioning anything, Dr. Humphrey! I was out of line and I shall make sure that it never happens again. As far as Captain Tolsky, I mean Irina, I have heard nothing or see anything. Forgive me for my...improper thoughts." He turned and walked very quickly away back toward his office. They thought of the world differently, I realized now. The mere thought of authority was frightening to

them as Russians in authority had murdered, what? 100 million other Russians? Goddamn savages. And of course Irina and I must be lovers if I was defending her this way. He saw his whole dream go up in a puff of smoke and if there was anything he didn't want to lose, it was the dream of that stupid goat farm. I turned and walked up the stairs to get to Kammler. Let see if I could work the same magic on him this morning.

I was feeling lucky.

* * * * *

I was half way up the staircase when it hit me. I stopped and looked at the papers and tried to remember what my father had written down in one of his journals. Dad spoke of reversals as the secret to the universe. Alexei had just done a reversal from everything that he had been indoctrinated with for years. Self-interest will always prevail over ideology or training when it comes down to the individual. Self-sacrifice is only an option when all other options are exhausted or when one's own surrender will pay benefits to one's memory or those left behind.

It had not made sense when I read it, until that very moment and then suddenly another piece fell into my personal puzzle.

I walked back to my office and looked at the blackboard and the equations scrawled on it. Of course my father would know what it was about and dad didn't leave Bates out of frustration or of what they were doing, he left because he had a different answer. I sat there looking into a distant fog. Considering all that work in the desert was not about dad being a lone inventor or a mad recluse like T. Townsend Brown had become. It was that my father didn't want to share the truth with them.

Irina walked into my office in uniform and sat down across from me. She didn't speak until I looked at her. "What did you say to Alexei?"

"I told him you worked for me." I looked back at the blackboard as if it was a whirlpool that was devouring me. "Was I wrong?" I said, totally detached from this conversation.

"Wrong? I don't understand what you mean." She placed her hands in her lap to keep from fidgeting. I turned and looked at her again.

"Where are they building the other device?"

"What device?" She was clearly getting upset. "What are you talking about?"

"Do you ever go down to the submarine that powers this facility?" I was more certain now than ever before.

"No!" She said, irate, then crumbled immediately and looked down at her manicure. "Well yes, once. But that was months ago. What does that have to do with talking to Alexei?" She was becoming frustrated.

"I want to tell you a story. May I?" I got up, poured two cups of coffee and handed her one, refusing to board her train of thought. She was flustered now, but knew her answers would come later and she knew her place here was as comfort and support, which was the role she slipped back into.

"Of course, Dr. Humphrey." She took the cup and nodded her thanks.

"When I was a young boy, unlike you, that spent summers by a river, I lived in a desert, a long ways out of town with my father. He was a scientist as well. We built a little lab on the property for him to work in. I spent one summer in a hundred and ten degrees of heat digging the foundation for that place. And what I never told anyone was that we dug a secondary pit under the foundation structure. It was a hole six feet by six feet and two feet deep. He lined it with sand and concrete. For years I didn't know what it was for until my third year in high school when I was collecting lizards for an experiment at school. An exceptionally big one ran under the lab and I wanted that lizard. My actions now, in retrospect, were stupid, but I climbed under the lab. I

could have been bitten by a rattlesnake or a scorpion or a dozen other nasty desert dwellers that like to stay in cool, dark places. But I wasn't. Instead I found my father had put three boxes of dynamite wrapped in waterproof sacks in the pit. A line ran from the boxes up into the lab. Later when I asked him why he had done that, he told me it was a precaution against the wrong people getting hold of his work. I traded this off later to paranoia, but as I worked deeper into the realm of this black world of special projects, clandestine cabals and secret governments, I understood that there are a lot of people that have the same view. To keep a secret only one person needs to know it." I stopped and watched her. Not a muscle twitched in her face or neck. She sipped her coffee and sat there waiting.

"Where are they, your bosses, building the device?" I asked again.

"I don't know." She looked away from my intense gaze. I could see her chewing on the side of her lip.

"They promised you what? Your father returned to his position at the university? You can work on your doctorate? A flat with heat again? Or is all of that just part of the cover, Irina?" I waited. She didn't turn and look at me. The debate was raging inside of her. "Is that why you threw yourself at me? All part of your sleazy little plan?"

"You are wrong you know?" She finally turned and looked at me with a hardness in her eyes. "They don't want to build this device to stop some, imagined invasion of space men from Mars or something. They are building it to launch it against my country and kill us and you are helping them!" She spat out at me.

"The submarine! Of course! How could I be so stupid? What did you see in it that gave you the answer?" I sat there considering that the next two or three minutes were going to be the difference between life and death for me.

"I don't know what you are talking about." She went back to her stoic self, setting down her coffee and crossing her arms across those ample breasts. The good little school girl that was supposed to charm the young doctor and gain access to his most secret thoughts, probably in bed.

"Let me tell you what you saw. Inside that submarine is one ballistic missile with a live warhead on it. Oh, it's not designed to launch out of the tube, but go off inside of it and take this whole place with it. The island, the staff, Kammler, all of it, will be vaporized as if it didn't exist. There will be apologies galore to Jacobs and the secret little deal will go on. The only difference is that someplace in the Urals your German scientists that you guys kidnapped after the war will be ahead of our German scientists that we kidnapped after the war. But here is the hard part Irina." I got another cup of coffee and offered her one of my cigarettes, which she took. I lit it for her and she tossed her head to one side as she blew the smoke out. This was chess or Russian Roulette of a different sort, and it was a game she was certainly used to playing by now.

"After you make that call from your super secret telephone that nobody is supposed to know about, they will send the signal for the technicians to get on that white runabout down there and head out of the cave, after setting the sequence into operation to detonate the missile. But they won't be taking you along. That is the reason they are never to come up or have any dealings with anyone from this facility. What they don't know is that they will never make it off the boat either."

I sat back and waited. Irina Tolsky's color had changed to more of an ashen gray as the freshness of youth I had seen last night, drained out of her. She thought about other stories she had heard that she didn't believe about facilities being sacrificed for the good of the collective. She sat her cup down, ground out her cigarette in the glass ashtray, got up, straightened her uniform by tugging at the bottom of her coat and walked out of the office without saying a word.

I sat drinking my coffee, smoking my cigarette, waiting for her or Alexei to come back into the room and point a pistol directly at my head. But even that didn't matter

SANDS OF TIME

right now. I picked up my papers and decided to go talk to the good General on the next floor up.

While I still had the time.



CHAPTER 28

I walked into the kitchen where Bolga was working by herself, peeling potatoes. She was a fresh faced country girl, fifty pounds overweight but had large amounts of that baby fat spread across her chest in two huge pendulous breasts that pulled apart the buttons of her working smock most of the time. She was always smiling and showing the silver inlay in her teeth. During the time I'd been on the island, I had seen her drifting around in off hours to various quarters of some of the staff and I figured it wasn't her charming conversation that anybody was interested in.

I laid down two American dollars on the counter right in front of her. She looked up at me smiling and wiped her hands on a towel. She stuffed the money into her pocket as I turned to see if anyone else was coming into the kitchen. In a single sweeping move, both of her gorgeous naked milk white breasts exploded from her smock, and as I turned back to her, she had them pushed up in my face, grinning and giggling like a forest witch.

"No! Nah! Neagh!" My Russian hadn't improved since I'd been here. She looked at me questioningly and with an exaggerated frown of disappointment she pulled her smock back up, but smiled again and pointed at my groin and then to her mouth. I shook my head and acted out like I was drinking something. Making chugging sounds with my throat. She laughed, buttoned herself back up and while looking around to make sure nobody was watching, she walked into the freezer and came back with a bottle of vodka and handed it to me. I leaned down to peck her on the cheek and she grabbed both my ears and practically ate my face in the wettest, most lugubrious kiss I had ever experienced. Finally she let me up for air.

"Next time," she said in broken English, "you let me please you." She grinned a wonderful open friendly smile and swayed back and forth, giggling.

"Ah...yeah...Okay...I promise." I raised my hand and crossed my heart. She giggled and waved for me to get out and went back to peeling her potatoes. She was probably the only real person on this whole damn island, I thought. I walked up the staircase and into Kammler's living room *cum* office.

"I don't wish to talk to you today. It is not good day for me." He was sitting in a large leather chair listening to Wagner playing some morbid piece of Aryan crap on the phonograph and remembering the twilight of the Gods, I was sure.

"This will cheer you up, Herr General." I put the bottle on the table and got two glasses wiping them out with my hand. "I don't know about you, but I need a drink."

"You have found that money buys things on this '*Insel Un Elend*'." Kammler took the drink and finished it in one gulp.

"*Island of Misery*. Yeah, that fits. How long you been here, Hans? If I may be so bold as to address you as Hans, and as...a friend." I almost choked on my own words.

"That is fine. My rank, position and entitlements are long gone. Destroyed with the bombs these subhuman Slavs rained down on my country. I have been on this island since 1952. They moved me a lot before that, here and there. Trying to get me to help, but..." He took the next glass I offered him and finished it as well in one pull.

"They were always afraid that someone would find out I was still alive. But by then they had forgotten. Nobody remembers anymore. Now I am a forgotten prisoner because they won't dare show me in the light of day off this island. There would be too many questions. Von Braun and that bunch were treated like royalty. Missiles! Bah!" He had another drink.

"You were head of the special and secret projects program, yes? If I remember my history you were pretty good at it." I filled his glass again.

"I was. I was very good at it. My tank designs crushed everything we came up against. If those idiots at IG Farbin would have perfected the fuel designs and made the amount of artificial diesel I needed, I could have driven the Russians off the map." He drank and his eyes grew fuzzy with memories. "They were beautiful! Huge, but elegant! I mean huge by any comparison. Five inch thick armor on each side and the canons I designed for them were very powerful."

"When you took over the missile program they said you were stopped from using them for almost two years." I sipped my drink and listened carefully.

"The Fuhrer's faggot astrologer had a vision that our own missiles would come down on German cities and he was believed. By the time I started to launch the Vengeance Two, it was too late. Ah, the whims of men! I had that little psychic queer taken out and torn into pieces by four horses after the Fuhrer decided to leave us." He was back there again, in those disastrous last days of the Thousand Year Reich. He looked up at me from out of the past. "You are a lot like your father. He was a man that listened very well and enjoyed the tales of the old days. We spent a lot of time together...in England...drinking and talking late, late into the night. But that was also a very long time ago. I miss him and our conversations. Where is he now?"

"He disappeared. Twelve years ago." I said, the memory still stinging. "He just drove off into the night and never came back. They found his car by the side of the road. At least that's what they told me." I drank a little more, this time for myself.

"They got him too, didn't they?" Kammler said grimly. He sat his book down and got up stiffly, the years weighing him down. He walked over to the old bookcase on one side of the room and took out a thick, leather bound novel. Sitting back down he opened it to expose a hidden compartment hollowed out in the pages. "They didn't find these yet." He laid out on the table a Knights Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords, the highest decoration the Third Reich could bestow. He placed it gently and respectfully next to his red Nazi party armband with the swastika sitting like a black spider in the circle of white on the field of bloody red. These small, precious objects were what this man's entire life had boiled down to.

He then took out an old faded photograph, looked at it nostalgically for a long, fond moment, and handed it to me. I sat, transfixed, looking at the picture. It was taken in the snow. Kammler was younger and looked to be in his late fifties. He was smiling, bracketed by two men. I was looking at a picture of my father standing next to this man.

"That was taken in 1947. Outside Friedburg. We were working together and all of us went for a walk in the season's first snow. It was thick and deep we ended up almost freezing our asses off out there." He laughed and took the picture back looking at it again.

"Who's the other man?" I asked while filling the glasses back up.

"Ah! That man is Doctor Simon Ratterman." He said with true admiration. "One of the greatest geniuses I will ever know or who has ever been! I had the brief honor of having him work for me, though it should have been the other way around. We should have all been working for him. But he, like your father, disappeared one night. I think your military police took him out and probably shot him. He was too hard for them to handle. Simon was always going off and making things in the cave that we had the device in. Little things. Nobody knew what he was building, ever. So they started to

keep someone with him all the time and that was your father's job after Bates showed up. He and Simon got along very well. They liked each other and talked physics all night long. Ratterman was not a good Nazi though. He could never dedicate himself to any greater cause or purpose other than his own quest for power. He was much more interested in the theoretical side of things than in practical applications. Yes, a great scientist but a bad Nazi." Kammler said fondly.

"You know they monitor this room with microphones all the time. It is why I play my music so loud and why that prick of a Captain complains and tells me to turn it down, because he can't hear everything going on sometimes."

"When Bolga comes up?" I smiled at him and he laughed.

"Yes." He smiled with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "She makes a lot of noise." Kammler's eyes reflected distant thoughts. I got up and walked over and put Wagner back on and turned it up half again as loud. He watched me and smiled.

"Ratterman disappeared when?" I asked him as I sat close to the table and poured him another glass of vodka.

"Fifty-three, just before they moved me here." He answered and waved his hand to the music.

"Did he take the little device when he left?" I stared at him. He stopped waving his hands and sat them down on the table between us.

"I don't know what you are talking about." He said stubbornly.

"Did you know the Israelis got Adolf in Argentina?" I waited for the effect to set in.

"Eichmann? They got Eichmann?" He winced as if in pain.

"The Jews are going to try him. In Israel. They'll probably hang him publicly. Can you imagine what that will look like?" I sat back and watched his reaction.

"Someone had to have told them where he was. The Organization would never have given him up for anything." He sat shaking for a moment then finished the next drink.

Suddenly, Alexei burst into the room through the door without knocking.

"I have told you to turn that music. . ." When he turned his head and saw me it was like I had slapped the man in the face. "Doctor! I didn't know you were here. I...have been told to..."

But Alexei saw the hollowed out book and the Nazi medals and the notepad and pen on the table between us, and his beady, rat-like eyes glimmered with cunning intelligence, understanding and recognition. He knew I had finally cracked this man, and that it would be only moments before I had every thing I needed. We were all entering out final gambit.

"Get out!" I barked and turned back to Kammler as if Alexei was some dog like slave or meaningless subordinate. The older man watched the Russian officer back out of the door, his eyes darting back and forth, and scurry down the hallway.

"He fears you. That is good. But they are dangerous people. If he gets the chance he will stick a piece of steel in your back." Kammler turned the pad around on the desk and picked up the pen. "I don't want to hang and especially not in public by the Jews, with my bowels letting go and messing all over myself. I have seen too many people die that way. I have thought of how I could end all this, but as long as I keep Jacobs believing that I can give him something, he will protect me."

"They think they need two maybe three more equations from you to make that piece of junk work, don't they?" Before he could answer I went on. "So you give them bits and pieces and parts of it, but never the whole thing. And besides, we both know it won't do any more than the one I worked on in New York at Montauk."

"What do you know, young professor Humphrey?" He stuck his chin out, looking arrogant again.

"I know you never intended to build a device that would transport an army of troops to a distant battlefield. I also know you were more than willing to give Jacobs, and all the others before him, the fruits of your misfortune. See, you learned the hard way. You put millions of *Reichmarks* into the *Die Clock* 'Nazi Bell' program before you realized it wouldn't work. But only Ratterman knew the truth and did what no one else could. He back engineered and built the device that corresponded to the little man portable one you found in the crashed spacecraft in Bavaria. Then...when the time was right...he used it. Successfully. Now Dr. Simon Ratterman is lost in the timestream, either in our future, or our past."

I sat back and finished my drink in one hard swallow, then laughed out loud. I walked over and turned the record over and played the other side even louder. I walked to the door and looked down the hallway. There was no one there, but I was sure that little Alexei was burning up the phone lines to the headquarters of the Northern Red Flag Fleet Command and asking what to do right about now. He knew I had figured it all out and that Kammler had cracked but just didn't know it yet.

"How do you know all this?" Kammler looked at me as I sat back down and filled his glass again.

"Because I have always known it. I just didn't put the pieces together until a little while ago." I closed my eyes and sat back listening to the sweeping movement of the music for a moment. It took some getting used to, but Wagner really was beautiful and I was just now getting an ear for it. And it took figuring out Wagner to puzzle out Kammler. "You were a weapons builder, not a strategic planner. Moving troops was the easiest problem to solve. The trick would be to move a bomb through space/time and have it explode in London or Moscow or DC or wherever you wanted. The big machine with the three giant gaussing coils sends out such strong waves it makes it impossible to move things without jumping them to various locations and then, and only then, can you pinpoint it. The problem is, one miscalculation and baby comes running right back home and BLAMMO! So what do you do? What do you...do?" I sat there imagining the conversations that occurred around this little problem, like movements in a symphony. "You build a strap-on unit that's small, compact and carries the bomb with it. One way, one jump and it can take anything to anywhere without going through the fifth dimensional interchanges that will just screw everything up with ectoplasmic goo and God knows what else that lives in that astral dimension of the damned." It was so clear.

"*Sehr gut!*" Kammler said slowly. "Now, if you know that you should also know that if you build that device you will be handing whoever gets it the power to control the world. Can you imagine someone like Jacobs with a nuclear bomb and that little device hooked to it? He could force anyone to do anything. Think very long and very hard on this my friend. Who are you going to give that power to, Dr. Humphrey? I would not and *did not* give it to Hitler, nor any of the men that worked for him. The war was hopelessly lost but if I had finished it, they would have bombed everything until there was nothing left to call a prize!" Kammler sat there looking like an old man that needed to find some kind of atonement for his sins.

"Simon Ratterman used it, didn't he? But he used it to get away. I would imagine into the future somewhere?" I said and Kammler nodded his agreement. "So our tomorrow, is his yesterday." I mused darkly, thinking what kind of implacably, unbeatable enemy I would be facing some time soon...assuming I ever got out of this ice palace prison alive.

Irina burst into the room and strode quickly over to the phonograph. With an ear shattering scratch she took the needle off the record. She turned and was shaking, her face white as a ghost.

"Alexei is on the special phone!"

“I figured that. How much time before he gets through?” I looked up at her and wondered if this was part of the play or if it was genuine concern.

“Twenty minutes. Maybe thirty.” She looked at Kammler who was drunk by now and weaving in and out with the music, and down at the hollow book and medals on the table. She knew what the last moments of someone’s life looked like. She was, after all, Russian. “Alexei is not going to let you get off this island. He thinks you know too much and have learned something important.”

“So?” I sat back and looked at her. She had to be well trained or she wouldn’t be in this game.

The equation now before us: how far would she go?



CHAPTER 29

I stood up and looked at Irina clenching my jaw. She was trembling. Kammler came around the desk and picked up the bottle, walked back and sat down. I took the note pad and wrote three lines of an equation and turned it toward him. He looked at it carefully, then up at Irina and I.

"I presume from this little exchange between star-crossed lovers that our friend Alexei is ordering the death of all of us, is that correct?" Kammler said, raising an eyebrow on that death's head skull.

"I would say that in less than an hour this island will be no more and all of us on it will be but regrettable losses to our families and friends. A nuclear mishap of our modern era, General." I laid it out as clearly as I could for him. "They don't want me to get off this island with the rest of that equation and what you know. And they are willing to incur the wrath of Jacobs and Majestic 12 and everyone else tied up in this, including going to war with the United States, to make sure of that fact."

Kammler looked at me for a long, sad, meloncoly moment. His long heroic and horrible life moving through his mind. His lower lip trembled slightly as a blue vein on his forehead pulsed under that parchment-like skin. He knew he was at the end and wanted to make his life count for something.

"If I finish that for you," he said at last, pointing down at the notepad with a clipped, certain gesture, "will you let me have what I deserve? What any honorable soldier that has served his country and his cause deserves? Will you give me back my honor and my dignity?"

Hans Kammler stood there, now just a man who had always been only a soldier. I pulled the small black Walther PPK automatic from its place tucked in my belt at the small of my back, cocked the slide back and forward to house a round in the chamber and laid it on the table between us.

Kammler spread his hands out on the table and leaned the weight of his frail body on them. Slowly, one by one, he drank in the weight and meaning of each of the sacred objects before him. With a heavy, relieved sigh, he handed me the photograph. He proudly, ceremoniously, put the red sash of the Knights Cross over his head, adjusting the medal in the exact center of his chest, then slid the Nazi armband up his sleeve to rest properly on his right bicep.

Leaning over the yellow notepad on the table he wrote three quick additional equations, just below mine. There was no doubt or hesitation. They fit perfectly. He made one minor correction to my work and stood up grinning happily that death's head smile. Relieved his long ordeal was finally over, and that he had cheated death in so many ways for so many long years. Overjoyed in his final victory that he would go out with the honor and dignity that was denied all of his countrymen.

I read and reread the equations. That was it. He did know. He knew all along. It was not exactly the Unified Field Theory that everyone had been seeking for so long, but it fit my purposes exactly and plugged all the holes I needed staunch. It was simple and elegant as genius always was.

I turned away taking Irina under my arm over to the corner of the room. She grabbed her ears and bent over as grim laughter filled the cave and was suddenly stopped by the reverberation of the shot that echoed on the cold stone around us as General Doktor Eric Joseph “Hans” Kammler ended his life, in much the same fashion as his closest friend and Fuhrer had done...or so they had told the world. Cheating the hangman out of his due, and dying with honor like the noble soldier he always saw himself as. It was far too good for him, but a deal is a deal. He had given me exactly what I needed and, in the end, made his positive contribution to the annals of science. Frankly, I was more worried about my own skin right about now.

I picked up my Walther, pushed the safety back on, wiped it on the chair and tucked it into my belt again. The barrel slide was still warm. I straightened the medal so it lay over his heart and closed Kammler’s eyes, now fixed on whatever hell he would righteously spend eternity in.

“If what you say is right, they would rather incinerate this island than let you off of it with that information.” She pointed to the notepad. I tore off the page and several underneath it so no impressions could be traced and ignited them with my Zippo.

“You’re right. For you, it’s decision time. Do you, A, want to wait here to get blown to bits? B, stop me? Or, C, defect and come with me to work on this...” I touched my head indicating where the formula was, “...in the West? In America?”

“My mother always told me that my sentimentality would keep me from being successful in this work.” She reached up under her uniform skirt and pulled out a small Russian army issue automatic of her own. “Do you have any idea how far it is to swim to Iceland?” She ran to the door and looked down the corridor.

“No, but we got some help. First, we need to get to my office.” We moved quickly along the hallway and then down the staircase. I heard loud voices coming from the end of the living quarters corridor. Apparently, not everyone on the island were loyal Communists today.

“Alexei is trying to make sure everyone helps him in finding you and stopping you from leaving. No one understands what is happening and are more concerned with not getting their next payments!”

“Besides Alexei, who else do we have to worry about?” I pushed up against the wall getting ready to make my next move.

“‘Beside Alexie...and me?’ Is that not what you should be asking?” She looked at me and I could see the doubt in her eyes, as her gun floated in the space between us like a swaying cobra, as if the little black weapon was trying to make up its own mind. Irina was used to a world where everyone spied on, and betrayed, everyone else. It was the standard of living where she came from.

“We got a saying where I come from: ‘play me or trade me!’ It means you are either in or out. If this is our swan song, Irina, you had better use your little gun on me. Otherwise, I’m leaving and never looking back. I can get us out of here. Alive, I think. My preference is to have you with me, but it’s your call.” I ignored the gun and walked the fifty steps to my office. I pulled the keys from around my neck and inserted them into the lock on the phone. I was just hoping no one had axed the line. I pulled my Walther and flicked the safety off with my thumb. Irina watched my action and started to bring up her own gun in an involuntary response. “Cover the door and watch my back!” I felt the sweat running down under my collar. This was Truth or Consequences being played with live ammo in this little room and I was hoping I was right about a woman for just this once in my life. So far my track record had not been so good.

“Jorge!” Irina said at last. “He is the only other one you must worry about. He is secret police to make sure the employees and crew don’t steal anything that belongs to the State.” She lowered her gun and looked out the door.

“The janitor?” I fumbled with the keys, finally getting the right one.

"Yes. He is a Major back home. Here he cleans floors." She laughed. "He tells me he loves me and when we got back to Russia we got married. Man is pig." She spat. "That's what I like about you, Irina. Not opinionated at all." I hit the code set and listened.

"Iceland Control. Identify." Said a cold female voice through thick waves of static.

"Ice Man!" I yelled. "This has got to be quick. Tell Max, I mean Turner, I have the package. Repeat: I HAVE THE PACKAGE! And get me the hell out here, pronto!" I listened to the phone hearing only static for what seemed an eternity.

"I need a code reference, Ice Man." The voice at the other end was so nonchalant about all of this.

"Here is your goddamn code reference!" I screamed, now starting to panic. "In about two minutes I'm going to be in a running gun battle and I need a scramble team in the air. I am heading to the southeast end of this island for pick up! And it better be there!" I exploded down the wire.

"Ice Man: repeat. I need a code reference..." The voice seemed only slightly more annoyed.

"Fuck your code reference, lady! Get Turner! Tell him to come running." Realization flashed through my mind. I fumbled desperately through my pockets and grabbed the card Max had given me and scanned the list for the panic code series.

"Warpath-Delta! Warpath Delta!" I screamed into the phone.

"Roger that, Ice Man. Considering we have got a full Arctic blow out there Iceland Control suggests that you stay put for your evacuation in...forty-eight hours." The voice was talking to someone behind her as well as me.

"WHAT?!" I yelled, about to lose my mind. "Iceland Control, I got less than three minutes to get out of a heavily armed Russian submarine base and try to get to the southeast side of this piece of hell! In less than one hour this island is going to probably blow up in a large thermonuclear cloud. What part of that don't you understand? I need an evacuation immediately! R.F.N! RIGHT FUCKING NOW!" Another voice came on the line, masculine and even.

"This is Commander Kendall, operations Ex-O for Iceland Control. I got Turner on the other line. We can't patch him through because of where he is, but he wants to know if you have the bacon? Whatever the hell that means."

"YES! Tell Turner, yes! And it is sliced and sizzling but about to get turned extra crispy by a fucking nuclear BOMB!" I turned and looked at Irina. She motioned for me to hurry. It seemed that the Politburo Commissars were still meeting down in the dining commons deciding our fate by a democratic vote no less.

I could hear a discussion going on at the other end with Kendall telling Max just how bad it was outside and he couldn't get anything in the air.

"Ice Man, Turner says run for the goal and he will get you picked up. I don't know how the hell he expects us to do that but all I can say is good luck, whoever the hell you are." There was true feeling in his voice. That meant if a seasoned commander of a near Arctic base thought it was bad out there, that would mean that it was actually worse.

"This will be my last call. Tell Turner to get his ass here or I will never believe him again!" I waited while Kendall relayed the last message.

"Ice Man, the clock is running. We have it at fourteen thirty-one, local time. Flash traffic from Pentagon. Clear transmission authorized. Jesus! That's a new one! Admiral Jacobs says; *'Stay alive, Ted, and we will be there.'* Son, you got some friends in very high places. Anything else you need from us?" Kendall waited at the other end and I thought as quickly as I could.

"I will probably be broadcasting on an HF band transmitter if I get out of here. I don't know if it will reach you, but I'll try." I thought about anything else important

like having someone say good-bye to my mom or sending my best wishes to Sally and Matt. But none of that really seemed important at the moment.

“Roger that, Ice Man, we will be listening. Good luck to you son. God knows you’ll need it. Iceland Control out.” The line went dead. I reached up and ripped the phone off the wall and tossed it in the corner.

“Let’s go, Irina. I would say we are now officially fugitives.”

I sprinted towards the door and the blast hit me square in the face. It jerked my arm around and I went down on one knee hard. Before I could get up and turn I heard two more shots at close range. Struggling to get up I picked up my automatic and turned.

I was not in a million years expecting what I saw.



CHAPTER 30

“Murphy, you have got to be kidding me!”

Captain Daniel O'Bannon stood there looking at his executive officer.

“No sir. That is the flash traffic that just came in on the long wave system.”

Executive Officer Commander John Marlow had served with O'Bannon and three different boats in the last seven years and they had a good working relationship as EX-O and Captain, as well as a friendship.

O'Bannon rolled off his bunk in his small cabin aboard the USS Shark on patrol on the GIUK line, an invisible coordinate that was the demarcation line where US submarines on patrol were supposed to shadow Soviet submarines heading into the deep waters of the Atlantic off the East Coast of the United States.

GIUK stood for Greenland, Iceland and United Kingdom intercept line. He rubbed his eyes to get them clear so he could read the cablegram for himself. He whistled out loud and handed it back to Marlow. “How long before we can get on station?” He got up and started to button his shirt.

“At normal cruising speed. Three hours max.” Marlow didn't want to hear what he knew was coming next.

“What if we run in the red at a hundred and twenty five percent?” O'Bannon asked while combing his salt and peppered colored hair.

“Ninety minutes. But boss, we're going to make so much noise even the Irish Navy could tag and bag us.” Marlow knew very well the secret of all naval submarine operations was stealth and silence under water. They had just come off a three-day run shadowing a missile sub heading home for port in Archangel, Russia. The Soviets never even knew they were in its baffles, directly behind it. They had recorded hours of internal machine noise, known in the sub boat trade as signatures, so the next time this particular boomer came out of the barn they could identify it again.

“Sounds to me from that message we are supposed to do just that. I thought they just had a football team. Do the Irish have a navy now?” O'Bannon turned and smiled at his friend and colleague.

“No, but if they did they would hear us.” Marlow turned and swore silently to himself. The Russian boomer would know they were there and they would run a track on their noise signatures as well, so in the future they would be able to identify the Shark. Another loss in the battle of the Cold War.

“Is the situation board up with this information yet?” O'Bannon stepped into the gangway and grabbed a cup of coffee from the perpetual urn that was constantly brewing an everlasting amount.

“It's there, waiting for your call.” Marlow took a step back to let the Commander go by him on the way to the Conn. O'Bannon reached over and grabbed the microphone off the intercom unit in the hallway. “This is the Captain. Nav on the line.”

“Navigation, Captain.” The voiced answered back.

“You got the plot laid in for...” He looked at the cablegram again and shook his head in disbelief. “Mount Grace, southeast coastline?”

“Affirmative. All set for your call.”

“Make it so, mister, and notify the engineering section. I want a hundred and twenty five percent power on the main shaft before I’m on the bridge.” O’Bannon knew without question the men in the command station would be looking at each other and wondering if we just went to war or not. “Did you copy, Nav?”

“Aye, sir. Engineering is making it so.”

O’Bannon set the microphone back in place. “Well let’s go play errand boy for some nabob shall we, Johnny?” O’Bannon could feel his boat lurch forward as somebody down there in engineering jabbed the spurs in her sides.

* * * * *

“Shit that hurts!” I hissed through my gritted teeth as Irina wrapped a piece of cloth around the underside of my arm, where the bullet had ripped through the skin and muscle. No bones were broken and it didn’t hit an artery, but besides that, it felt like somebody had swung a baseball bat and hit it directly on the elbow. The whole thing was numb.

“It should. It was meant to. Actually it was meant to kill you but let’s be thankful that she wasn’t a good shot.” I turned and looked into the hallway to see the bloody body of dear sweet Bolga lying there, two small round red holes blossoming from her forehead, a small automatic still clutched in her dead hand.

“Everyone’s favorite tart just tried to kill me?” I wasn’t feeling really very kind at the moment.

“She must have been GRU or somebody’s special security to watch the General and Jacobs coming and goings.” She stepped past the body and we headed for the descending staircase. I tucked my arm into my jacket just for support, hoping I would get some movement back before long. I held my own gun in my other hand.

“Great that means you only have two more to kill to get us out here.” I found my sarcasm was not received well.

“Or just one and be a hero to the Motherland.” She turned and glared at me.

“Irina stop bouncing back and forth on me! Schizophrenia is not becoming in someone like you...or anyone, for that matter, with a gun!”

“Then don’t make bad jokes about killing someone I did not have a thing against, in fact, someone I like very much.” She turned and glared at me again. “She was sweet girl, not a tart like you call her. She was just lonely and wanted to be loved like everyone does. She just did not have words or body to attract men, so she used what she had to get bye.”

Being completely rebuffed I decided it was better to just shut up and see if I could get out of here and stay alive long enough to reflect on my less than acceptable choice of words for someone’s friend who had just put a bullet through me.

The noise in the facility had leveled off to almost nothing with the exception of the heating ventilators running over our heads. I felt bad for Alexei as he stepped out of his hiding place and saw Irina with a gun in her hand and had not known what to do. As I stepped over his dead body and looked down at him and the place I had shot him, I felt nothing. Not good nor bad, not even sadness. The goat farmer had been an obstacle to what I had devoted half my life to so far and he had made a fatal error in looking into her eyes rather than at my hand. Pity.

Once past the blast doors we started down the long staircase to the gated entrance to the sub pens at sea level. The wind was howling into the cave from the sea and even inside the tunnel the waves were breaking on the quay.

“My God! Storm is like nightmare! We do not dare leave here!” Irina yelled over the sound of the wind cleaving in circles around the inside of the old sub base.

"We can't stay here." I kept prodding her on down the staircase. She had grabbed a heavier coat, as had I, at the blast doors, but I could feel the stinging pain of the cold in my legs, protected only by my wool slacks. I could only imagine the pain she was in with nothing but nylons and a skirt. The sting of salt must have been awful for her. At the gate she stopped.

"I don't know the lock sequences!" She had to scream to be heard above the sound of the wind in the cave.

"7734!" I yelled into her ear. She pushed the button and the gate swung open. She smiled with the simple pleasure of getting out from behind what most certainly was a death trap in the grilled staircase. I wasn't so sure.

* * * * *

"Are you serious?" O'Bannon turned and looked at his meteorologist. The small Chief wore thick glasses and was balding under his dark blue USS Shark cap.

"No sir, Captain. It's running at force ten or eleven out there. Damn near lost the surface array when we put it up. Waves are running twenty-five to thirty feet freeboard right now. We surface and we'll porpoise sure as hell." The meteorologist handed him the clipboard. The Captain read it and grabbed the microphone.

"Engineering section, answer up."

"Aye sir."

"What do you have in reserve, Clifton?"

"Twelve to fourteen more points but at that I can only run it for thirty minutes until the core reactor starts to melt."

"Fourteen on the money. Engineering, make it so."

"Aye sir. Clocks running. Thirty minutes and counting."

"Understood." O'Bannon slammed down the microphone into its cradle and looked at the second message that came in. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph this had better be worth it." He spoke to no one in particular and no one answered him, but kept their eyes glued to the instruments. No one in the Navy had ever run a nuclear reactor at one hundred and thirty nine percent. Well, maybe they had, the Captain thought, but they never lived to tell the tale.

* * * * *

I felt my face. The cement had flaked off and pieces of the aggregate had lodged in my cheek. Irina was behind a barrel on the dockside, trying to stay down as the bullets screamed over her head and splintered the rock wall behind her. For all that Alexei wasn't, Jorge was. A trained expert and with the exception of not accounting for the wind in the cave, his first shot would have split my head wide open.

Irina and I were separated by a dozen paces, as the wind made it impossible to communicate to form any kind of plan. Fifty to sixty meters away Jorge was hiding in the darkness of the rear of the cave waiting for his next opportunity to drill one of us.

He had time, darkness and the freezing elements on his side.

We had fear on ours.



CHAPTER 31

I cowered behind a rock formulating some kind of plan, when I looked across the moon pool and saw a figure emerge from the conning tower of the submarine. Hooded and wrapped in heavy clothing, someone was checking the lines on the boat to make sure that everything was holding with the swells storming inside the sub pen. Irina watched carefully and when the hooded man turned towards us she suddenly stood up and ripped open the front of her down jacket so the sailor could see her uniform. She then ducked back down as Jorge took another shot that ripped into the barrel she was hiding behind. Irina made a pleading gesture for help and yelled something in Russian. The figure on the deck disappeared inside the hull. I held my breath as Jorge poured another fusillade of hot lead into our immediate area.

A second sound of gunfire, lower and more staccato, echoed through the cave. I looked at the submarine and saw one of the sailors pouring round after round of submachine gun fire into the darkness where Jorge was hiding. The men in the submarine now mistakenly thought Jorge was the enemy trying to breach the sub pen to no doubt sabotage their nuclear missile launch. Irina was a genius. Short bursts of flashing fire lit up Jorge's face and gave away his position. I watched as the figure on the bridge deck dropped down as the ricocheting lead hit the conning tower in brilliant showers of sparks.

Jorge was now far more occupied with the sailor and his burp gun than he was with us. I turned and waited. Holding my breath, I leaned slightly out of the rock outcropping and sighted down the barrel of the small Walther PPK. It was more of a woman's gun really, and was probably useless at this range but was easier to carry and conceal than the standard military .45 Colts. I wished I had one now and kicked myself for not thinking about grabbing a rifle or stashing one for just such an occasion, but then again I had Max to thank I was not holding a stick or trying to hit him with a rock.

The next flash from Jorge's muzzle was my target and I saw his grimacing face strobing out of the dark as he hit the sailor and in my peripheral vision I saw him go over the top of the conning tower, first hitting the deck and then rolling into the sea with a muffled splash. I squeezed the trigger and watched intently to see if my shot had any reaction. Jorge stumbled dramatically out into the light holding his throat and spurting blood. Out of just dumb and blind luck I think I nicked his carotid artery. Irina ran towards him. The light load of the Walther was a round that couldn't kill quickly from this distance, but the three shots from Irina's Markov fired into his head at point blank range finished the job and Jorge twitched and sprawled in his death throes on the ice covered quay and then went limp.

We both turned and ran in the opposite direction toward the rear of the sub pen. I felt bad for the young sailor, but he was probably the one initiating the firing sequence of the ballistic missile inside that steel coffin of a submarine. We found the white runabout and I just shook my head, not liking our chances. This was a Watson-type lifeboat only made at the Stalin Sewing Machine and Life Boat Company. The

Watson was thirty feet of the best fowl weather boat the English had ever made and I hoped and prayed that the Russians had stolen the plans and built it to the same rigid specifications the English put into theirs. But it was also nearly twenty-five years old and didn't look to be in the best shape.

I dropped into the enclosed cockpit and, using my good arm, got out my key and opened the trunk under the pilots seat. Sure enough, there was the radio and the keys. Great, now all I had to do was get the engine going, take it out in the open sea with an Arctic storm running full tilt and maneuver around a mile of razor sharp jagged rock points that were hungry to rip the hull apart. That would be a great effort for someone with two hands and arms working well, let alone a half crippled scientist who had sailed once taking the wheel on a friend's boat in good weather between Long Beach and Catalina Island.

I hit the starter and listened as the small diesel engine coughed and sputtered to life. I quickly checked all my gauges and instruments. Irina waited in the freezing wind until the boat was running and then cast off the lines fore and aft. She was inside and had the hatch closed shivering.

"Does this thing have a heater?" She spoke through chattering teeth.

"Sure does! Right behind you on the seat! It's called a blanket." I moved the wheel sharply in both directions to make sure I knew the turning radius of the boat and she would respond when I needed her to.

"Whereever we are going, make me one promise!" She pulled the blanket around her and stood looking at the breaking waves at the mouth of the sub pen.

"Anything!" I fought the wheel and twisted the craft into the surge that was running into the underground base and circling around forming eddies. The craft was heavy and wallowed at slower speeds. This was not going to be pretty!

"Just bury me someplace warm!"

* * * * *

"Engineering to Bridge. Clocks in the red, sir. Shutting down the pile to eighty percent." The voice boomed into the conning tower of the Shark.

"Engineering this is the Captain. Keep it up there at maximum, we're still twenty miles from our target." O'Bannon waited. The Engineering officers could override him unless they were at war. Even the Captain was not allowed to endanger the ship and the crew otherwise.

"Skipper, on the private line." Marlow handed him the closed circuit phone officers used when they didn't want the whole crew to hear the exchange.

"This is the Captain." O'Bannon waited.

"If you want me to keep her in the red I will, you know that, but the seals are starting to melt right now on the inner level and in ten minutes she is going to be blowing gaskets that we can't fix at sea. So tell me Captain, if we are at war I will melt this thing down for you, but otherwise I got to pull her down a level or two at least and let some part of this beast cool down." The voice sounded concerned. The Captain took a deep breath.

"Lance, bring her down to eighty percent and get her cool and tell me when I can take another run at it." O'Bannon didn't want to risk his boat and men, but he read the message from DC and Admiral Jacobs very carefully. If he failed to accomplish this mission, he'd be lucky to captain a garbage scow in Puget Sound, if he ever got a command again.

"Aye sir. Boss? Are we at war?" Lance was right to be on the private line.

"It looks like one guy has taken on the whole Russian Navy and we are his only way home. That's about all I can tell you, Lance." O'Bannon trusted his men's discretion on many matters, especially when he was asking them to risk their lives.

“Guy with balls that big has to be saved, Captain! Give me fifteen and I will see what I can do.” The line went dead and O'Bannon hung the unit back on its cradle with a bleak grin.

“Nav, where are we by dead reckoning and bottom soundings?” O'Bannon turned to the man working the large underlit chart table where three men standing around it worked on slide rules and wrote down numbers.

“North Iceland gulf, Skipper. We got a hell of a drift we are having some problems accounting for, but I would say that we are within fifteen miles off the island, give or take two.” That was the best they could do, O'Bannon knew that and didn't need to brow beat anyone for a more precise answer.

“Metro, what have you got?” He turned to the man with the heavy glasses.

“Strong sounds on the surface. It would seem we got a lot of wind up there. Launched a buoy ten minutes ago and it was ripped right off the static line.” He went back to the instrument panel and grimaced.

“Great!” O'Bannon spoke quietly to Marlow. “We got us a storm off the Arctic, waves the size of skyscrapers, a Russian base dead ahead, a place that ships avoid at all costs because of the basalt spears that project out underwater that can fillet a sub in seconds, some guy out there waiting for us and the possibility of a nuclear blast taking out the whole damn island and us along with it. Does it get any more fun than this?” Marlow handed him another cable from the long wave station in the Com room.

“It just got more fun, didn't it?” O'Bannon looked at Marlow who wiped his hand across the thin mustache below his nose.

“Read it boss. You are going to love who it's from.” Marlow waited.

O'Bannon read it, looked up, shook his head, read it again and looked up. “Has this been confirmed?”

“Twice before I brought it up here. That took about fifteen minutes total turn around time on long wave.” The underwater long wave communications network was dependable but slow since each character had to be transmitted individually and it took a full second to receive it on a submarine anyplace in the world.

O'Bannon picked up the general purpose mic. “All Compartments and Stations. Now hear this. By authority of the President of the United States, the members of the Attack Submarine USS Shark are placed on a full war footing and it is my direct order they are to take whatever actions necessary to complete their mission, including, if necessary, the engagement of any or all military vessels in our operations area and shall consider any interference by any nation in this matter as an act of war.” The Captain replaced the microphone and looked out at Marlow. “Who the hell is out there? Bobby Kennedy?”

“It's the ocean skip, it must be Teddy. But if were going to war it must be Marilyn.” Marlow hit the red flashing light for all compartments indicating the ship was now at battle stations. O'Bannon hit the ship wide intercom again so everyone heard his next order. “Lance, you heard the order. Make it so.”

“Engineering, pushing into the red all the way, Skipper. 150%.”

O'Bannon stood there looking at his crew and said quietly to himself, “God help us all! And a special prayer to the General Electric Atomic Sub Division, please.”



CHAPTER 32

The first fifty meters out of the sub pen were filled with mere fear. When that ended, real terror set in. Clearing the stone jetty put us directly into the sea. The lifeboat was surging up one side of a wave and then plowing down the other, with below freezing green water rushing back and hitting the front of the cockpit housing with such force I was waiting for the whole bulkhead to give way and flood the compartment, drowning us both. A swamper hit us abeam and we almost turtled over. The little craft pulled forty-seven degrees over to port. With my good arm I hung onto the wheel for my dear life and I watched as Irina fell through empty space and hit her head on the bench on the lower port side. She was bleeding badly from a gash on her scalp at the hairline, but there was nothing I could do to assist her. If I let go of the wheel, we would be driven directly up and onto the rocks in the channel. As I looked out I saw the angry sea combing in front of us. We were still in the protective channel leading into the sub pen. I was watching to port to see when I could swing the craft around and run in front of the storm toward the cove. That was going to be tricky, as I had to get out far enough to pass the channel without gutting this boat right out from under us then tack into the cove I was aiming for. Irina tried to move and I yelled at the top of my lungs to be heard above the gale force winds whipping past us.

“Stay down on the deck! Put pressure on the bleeding!” I yelled and she looked at me with a strained expression, trying to understand, but out of a haze that was most likely a concussion. I pointed to her head and motioned again. She looked at the blood on her hand and realized she was far more damaged and injured than she first thought.

A second wave hit us in the rear quarter and ran under us. We pin-wheeled on the top of the crest with our propeller out of the water running free. It whined from the increased revolutions and I had to pull the throttle back hard before we dug back into the water, since I had no idea which way we would be facing when we stopped acting like a top. The next slam pushed us right over the rocks of the port channel and washed us in the direction we wanted to go anyway. I drove the power control to the firewall and twisted the wheel to give me steerage away from the rocks that lined the coast of the island. We now had the sea at our backs and were running downhill, hard. If I could keep it between the waves I thought I could round the point in about two minutes. This all seemed so futile to me. What would it matter if we got into the cove? Then what? Just sit there until our molecules were scattered all over the God forsaken universe by an atomic bomb?

My arm was bleeding again from the hits I took inside the cockpit. Between Irina's blood, and her vomiting, I was having a hard time keeping my balance on the rollicking deck. I saw the rocky point just off to my side in the growing darkness and wanted to clear it with some room to spare if that was humanly possible. We lurched to starboard as a wave hit, pushing the boat back pointing us toward the island again. I was quick enough to retard the power setting and when we hit the water again, we were flying toward the island. I spun the wheel hard over and we were almost swamped again as green water rushed down the deck. Our gunwale on the port side went under

as I pulled her out of the death throe and we crossed the point with a final jolt as the starboard side scraped the hungry rocks. I whanged back on the power setting and slid the boat into the safety of the cove. Remarkably, the water was like a placid summer millpond as we moved into the center. Two hundred yards out I could see in the growing gloom, waves the size of mountains moving past the island heading for the north coast of Iceland, but in this cove we were sheltered by the massive granite cliffs that towered in the blackness above us which would protect us for as long as they were there.

But by my reckoning, they could vanish at any moment.

I finished bandaging Irina's head and replaced my own on my arm. It was black and blue around the bullet hole and I didn't think that was from the gunshot. It felt like my arm had hit everything I had even glanced at for the past two and half hours. The pain was gone, replaced by just enough feeling returning to it so it no longer hindered my movement. I washed the deck down getting most of the stink of blood and puke out of the cockpit and left the engine idling to pull heat off the recyclers on the block. The temperature in the cabin was just above freezing. I found more blankets and wrapped them around Irina who was rapidly going into shock. Her eyes were not responding at all and I was getting more worried about her than the rest of what should have concerned me. I pulled the small transceiver out, hooked it into the surface antenna, which somehow had survived our ride over the channel wall and into the cove and turned it on. Since it was crystal controlled, I didn't have to find a working frequency. The one marked in red said "Iceland Control". I moved the setting knob and hit the talk button.

"Iceland Control, this is Ice Man. Iceland Control this is Ice Man, over." I listened to the static and hum, getting nothing. I called again and waited.

"They can't hear you from here, but I can." The voice boomed on the frequency. I almost jumped out of my shoes. "Now tell me where the hell you are!"

"This is Ice Man, who is this." I waited. Nothing.

"This is Ice Man calling Iceland Control. Over!"

"Ice Man, shut up with the Iceland Control bullshit and push the talk button and hold it down for ten seconds so that we can get a fix on you." I listened to the voice and didn't know if I should do this or not. It sounded like an American but I wasn't sure who the hell it was. I took my chances, grabbed at the straw and depressed the red button on the side of the microphone and held it for a long count of ten, then let it up.

"Got it!" The voice yelled. "If you have running lights put them on! It's darker than a tomb out here and I need something between waves to sight on to get this three thousand seven hundred and fifty tons of steel whale near you." The voice stopped again.

Crap! There was another ship out there. I looked around for a panel that had some kind of controls or breakers on it. It was in a box under the pilot station to keep it from being flooded. Something about electricity and water not mixing is the first rule you learn in physics. I hit every switch and had running lights, boarding lights, interior lights and cabin lights on. I prayed to Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior this guy was friendly because now we looked like a Macy's Christmas tree. The voice crackled back up.

"How much water do you have under you, Ice Man?"

"I don't know! I'm not Mark Twain!" I found the more the voice failed to identify itself the more angry and afraid I got.

"Cute. Look above the pilot station, there should be an electronic device that runs in a little circle and shows a pretty light next to a depth marker." I noted the American sarcasm, which actually made me feel better, and looked up and there it was, pinging away. I hit my button again.

“Eighteen fathoms.”

“Got it! Don’t go anywhere! Ha-ha!”

Okay, now I knew this guy was an American! I found binoculars and peered into the darkness to make out a ship, but all I saw was the rolling mountains of waves passing, their crests white with gnashing foam.

I knelt by Irina to get her ready to leave. She was in bad shape. Her breathing was shallow, short and ragged, her eyes were glazing and her pupils dilated. I pulled the blankets tighter around her and lifted her up onto the settee and held her close, squeezing her tight, and waited for either rescue or Armageddon.



CHAPTER 33

“Get her to sick bay, now!” O’Bannon yelled over the wind circling the conning tower.

“Careful with her, Chief.”

Four men had Irina on a stretcher and carried her through the boat to Sickbay in the rear section. I followed down the hallway, with a blanket wrapped around me and moved into the small confined space. The four seaman walked out passing looks to one another, which spoke volumes about their appreciation for her looks even with a face covered in dried blood.

The surgeon pulled the blankets off her and was taken aback by her uniform and the gun still clutched in her blue, frozen hand. He worked it loose and handed it too me, for some reason, then hit the intercom.

“Captain, if you will join me in Sick Bay, sir?”

“Can it hold for a few doc, until I get us out of this coffin and back into deep water?” The voice sounded more nervous than when he’d been talking to me on his approach.

“Aye, sir.” The physician went back to work on the cut and cleaned it out. He checked Irina’s reaction to a light in both eyes and gave her an injection.

“OK, doc, what’s happening down here that is so...” The Captain froze in the doorway when he saw Irina’s Russian Army uniform. Turning on me he looked down at her gun in my hand, grabbed it away from me and tossed it to someone in the corridor who I couldn’t see.

“Sir, would you explain to me why you have brought a member of the Soviet Navy aboard my boat?” He glowered down at me while I looked at Irina. “Mister, I am talking to you!” He barked opening and closing his fist.

“Where is the deepest water canyon near here?” I asked without looking up.

“With all due respect, that is irrelevant to my question, sir. This boat is now being compromised by the presence of a Russian national and the fact that she is an officer in the Soviet Navy doesn’t help matters much.” The Captain was fuming.

“It will be a moot point,” I continued calmly, “if you don’t get this boat below a geological structure that can protect your hull from a nuclear blast I have been expecting for the last three quarters of an hour, Captain.” I finally looked up at him. “Her name is Irina Tolsky. She just killed two of her own people, one of whom was her good friend, to get me off that island and accomplish your mission. I would take it as a personal affront if you were not gracious enough to extend to her the same hospitality you are showing me.” The fact that we were off the island and onboard an American submarine fell into place. I had gone from just facing death with no hope at all to suddenly feeling safe and with the kick of adrenaline running through me again, I wasn’t planning on dying just yet.

“Now, if you have problems with what you are supposed to do, I suggest you call someone and ask them to tell you who the man is that sent you here to get me. Do I make myself clear?” I was screaming at a naval captain on his own boat.

"Gentlemen! Take it in hallway, if you please." The surgeon had seen this type of reaction before from men under stress and tried to mediate the situation the best way he knew how.

"Why should we be running for a canyon, if I may ask?" The Captain leaned up against a bulkhead and gathered his composure. Someone handed us cups of coffee.

"Sorry about that. I just witnessed a lot of people die today and I don't want to see anymore injured or killed." I had grabbed back my form a little bit. I wanted to fuck, go to sleep or get drunk, any and all of which would be unacceptable at the moment.

"Ok, let's start this off again. I am Captain O'Bannon. This is my boat the American Attack submarine the USS Shark." He extended his hand and I wiped mine on my shirt as best I could and shook it.

"Call me...Ted." He looked carefully at me and let it go by. In the world of black operations, I would imagine, there is not a lot of truth coming from people who get on submarines in the middle of the night with guns.

"Okay...Ted...why do I need to head for a deep water canyon?" He spoke slowly and distinctly so that there could be no misunderstanding between us.

"A Soviet submarine, November class I believe, is preparing to set off a thermonuclear warhead in a sub pen on that island. The majority of the explosion will be a surface blast, however there will be enough underwater shock to cause a pressure wave to hit this boat at about four hundred miles an hour." I drank the coffee and handed the cup back to a tough looking chief standing with a sidearm on.

"Why in the hell would they do that?" O'Bannon looked quizzically at me.

"I presume it's a little overkill," I answered quietly, "but they don't want me leaving this island alive."

"So a Russian submarine is blowing off a nuke, killing themselves, blowing up their secret base, this island and possibly starting World War Three...just to kill...you?" The Captain said incredulously.

"Yes. Think of who sent you and what it took to get here. Does that make it clear enough?"

The Captain's eyes narrowed, he looked me up and down, then they went wide as a series of realizations hit him. A combination of this mission, almost melting his engines to get here, the communications he had received, the sources they had come from and my summing it all up just then. Suddenly he sprang into action and leapt toward a Com control.

"This is the Captain! Battle stations!" He yelled. "Everybody to damage control stations! Right now people! This is not a drill! Repeat: This is NO DRILL!" He flicked a second switch on the Com station. "Nav! Find us a hole in the bottom of the sea we can crawl in. Bridge, I'm on my way." He was running up the corridor and over his shoulder he shouted back at me. "Don't go away! We still have some things to talk about." The chief was still standing there holding Irina's gun in his hand. I reached down to take it back and he looked at me like that was the wrong choice. I shrugged and walked back into sickbay. Irina had been moved from the exam table to a bed and was covered with a thin blanket. Her shoes sat beside the bunk and she was still dressed.

"There were no other injuries on her body with the exception of some nasty bruises, so it would be best to leave her in uniform until she can change into something else herself." He was younger than most of the physicians I had met and seemed like a really nice and caring person. I had forgotten recently that they existed.

"You need some sleep, pal." I remember feeling a tiny pinprick and watching him go sideways in my vision and it got dark. The last thing I remember was the large chief from the hallway lifting me onto the surgeon's examination table and someone yelling for blood plasma.

PART FIVE

SCOTCH and VODKA



CHAPTER 34

It was the smell of disinfectant that first let me know I wasn't dead.

It was strong and overpowering. I opened my eyes to see I was no longer on a submarine but in a room that was old by the looks of the ceiling. It had to be at least fourteen feet high and no one builds that way any more. I attempted to get up and thought much better of it. My head ached badly from the morphine. I knew the feeling well. During my years of football I had two major injuries and both times they put me on morphine and both times I had this same type of headache. It's interesting how something like that can come back to you now and then.

"I would not try to do that without help." I rolled over to look at the point where the voice had come from. Max sat in a suit sucking a lollypop. He motioned to it and added, "they won't let me smoke in here, so I need something."

"Max. How are you?" I smiled at him.

"I'm fine. The question is how are you? You have alarmed all of us with your little antics." He laughed trying to use understatement for a very bad situation.

"Where's Irina?" I was able to push myself into a sitting position. My ribs were wrapped and the arm bandaged. I touched my ribs and wish I hadn't.

"Pushed one of the those right into a lung. Took that Navy surgeon a hell of a lot of time to get you fixed up, while you guys rode out the worst storm in a hundred years up there." Max laughed again.

"Did they blow the island?" I asked him.

"To kingdom come. Not a trace of it left. Somebody claimed it was a subterranean volcano that set the Richter scales off and a couple of days ago a Navy ice patrol plane out of Scotland reported that Mount Grace had disappeared. 'Geological Phenomenon' is how they are putting it down. Of course that doesn't explain the extremely high radiation readings across the northern side of Russia all the way down to Vladivostok on the Pacific." He dropped the lollypop into the garbage. "Irina is next door and doing fine. Hell of a head ache but she is O.K."

"I need to thank O'Bannon for saving our butts. I presume you had something to do with that as well." I looked at him and he looked down at the floor for a moment.

"No one rightfully knows how that happened, Ted." He looked up with concern. "Jacobs thinks you're working both sides of the street and you are in contact with people we don't know anything about." He let that hang in space for a moment. I tried to make sense of the comment out of the fog in my head, but I knew I didn't like the sound of it.

"What exactly is that supposed to mean?"

"The second flash traffic message O'Bannon received was from the White House and nobody there will admit to sending it. The Shark was placed on a war footing. All hell could have broken loose and all the fingers point back to you. Jacobs is in DC right now doing a jig to somebody else's tune and he isn't comfortable with it at all." Max got up and poured me a glass of water. "That's why my black ass is sitting here waiting for you to wake up instead of being there having it flame broiled over the same fire Jacobs is being barbecued on right now."

"I don't think I can help you with that one, Max." I wondered who was pulling the strings this time and why.

"I will leave that one alone for right now. Did you get the information from Kammmler?" Max sat back down pulling his cigarette lighter out and fondling it.

"Yeap." I took a sip of the water and looked around the room, it looked like an old hospital that was built before the start of the century. "Where the hell are we?"

"Scotland, Edinburgh to be exact. We're on High Street and this is the Honorable Soldiers Retirement Home and Hospital. A very quiet place where most of these guys can't even get up the staircase leading to the third floor now used exclusively for you and Captain Tolsky. By the way, why did she help you?" Max put the lighter back into his pocket.

"A change of heart I would imagine, or my boyish charm. When can we get out of here and head for home?" I started to get off the bed and felt the sharp pain in my ribs.

"When you are able to travel the doctors say you can leave. Until then we are staying right here. I'll get a wheel chair and we can visit your girl friend." Max seemed pretty light-hearted for someone whose friend and boss was getting the going over by guys that apparently knew how to do it.

* * * * *

"So, do you want to tell me, Admiral, how this all got so out of hand?" The four men sitting on one side of the large conference room table were all older and senior members of the government. Each had a file in front of him that detailed a certain aspect of an operation that was never supposed to see the light of day.

"I cannot sir. I am as completely in the dark as you are." Jacobs was watching fifty plus years of dedicated service heading south.

"Well I, for one, cannot understand what happened. When we put this matter in your hands you told us there would never be any sight of it." The man at the end of the table was wearing a tweed jacket and smoking a pipe. "Now we got this young captain, what is his name? O'Bannon. He filed a report with the base commander at Holly Lock where he stumbled in with two burned out turbines and a core reactor about to go into meltdown that is going to need a major refit. Two years! The USS Shark, our best and most advanced submarine, will be laid up in dry dock at Groton for two years before we can even get it home." The man read the report in front of him. "The base commander sent this up to Atlantic Command at Norfolk and all hell broke loose. No one knows anything about this rescue operation and the Post and the Times are running all kinds of stories about secret attacks on Russian subs and midnight commando raids." He put his pipe down and cleaned his small round glasses. "Admiral, we just can not afford this kind of publicity."

"I understand that fact, sir." Jacobs wanted the same answers they did and wished he was getting them and wringing some necks instead of being here.

"Well, that is reassuring." The other man said with enough sarcasm to sink another submarine. "Great, explain it to us then. We got a National Security Advisor for the President wanting to know how we interdicted into their secure communication lines and transmitted out that order under the President's signature. The CIA," he motioned toward the end of the table, "tell us they know nothing about this operation and the guys that work over at NSA have the doors closed, locked and bolted until they find out if they got a mole working inside. Now, you tell me, Admiral, how you understand any of this?"

"I meant, that...that... I understand the Senator's concern. I don't have the foggiest idea how any of this happened. I sent a man to find out some information on a facility controlled by the Russians, that part is correct. He is not a trained agent. Or

at least we didn't think he was until he made his escape under fire and brought out a Russian intelligence officer with him." The man at the end of the table with the pipe interrupted him.

"We will want to talk to this Captain Tolsky in depth." He relit his pipe and blew blue vapors toward the ceiling.

"I am not sure about that, sir. The man we sent in has made it clear to us that no body is to talk to her." Jacobs could hear this one come out and expected the resulting broadside.

"Are you telling me that a field agent of yours is making decisions of who gets to talk to our captured asset, Admiral?" The man squinted at Jacobs.

"No. First of all he is not a field agent. Secondly, we have used certain methods you are not privy to nor are we willing to discuss. But I can tell you this: that little explosion in the North Sea will be nothing in comparison to the blast that would happen if we screw with this guy." Jacobs had read one report from Max and was waiting for the next. The first one made him understand that no one should try anything right now until he had a chance to talk to Ted.

"You're telling us that this one man is that dangerous?" Another man looked at the file and looked up in disbelief.

"I am telling you that this one man can make the difference between this planet being inhabitable and it being a burnt out cinder." Jacobs didn't want to use that punch but it was necessary.

"I don't believe it." The man with the pipe threw his hands up. "I think you're running a shell game on us, Admiral."

Jacobs had had enough.

"Is that why this man has risked his life and sanity spending the last three months in the company of Doktor Hans Kammler?" The name shattered outwards around the table, hitting them all like a blast of shrapnel. Before the shellshock faded Jacobs attacked. "Someone your people couldn't even find! This man got to him inside a top secret Russian submarine base hidden on a secluded island." He rose ominously, stabbing his finger on the table. "Tell me, to my face, you would not be scared of someone that can do that! Gentlemen," he gathered his files into his briefcase, "I am needed elsewhere. This is going no place and I can't see any reason to continue. Good day!"

Jacobs spun on his heel and strode from the room as stunned silence washed over the men in his wake. Once outside he leaned up against the wall then punched it with his fist to calm himself down. He hadn't wanted it to go this way, but he had to protect the project. He walked out of the old Executive Office building across from the White House and headed to his office on Connecticut Avenue.

* * * * *

Irina laid in bed looking out her window onto the Royal Mile, watching the people go by. She turned and looked at me when Max rolled me into her room.

"Hey! Brought you someone to keep you company for a little bit." Max rolled the chair up close to her bed.

"I thought you were going to bring me nylons, chocolates and movie magazines from America, Max?" She laughed and then winced. Her head was bandaged up and she was black and blue down one side of her face.

"Next time, darling. Right now this old man is going outside to get a smoke while you two love birds chat with each other." Max touched Ted on the back and winked at Irina.

"Hey, cowboy." Irina looked dreamy laying there, beaten up and battered. She had that certain vulnerability again about her.

"Why cowboy?" I asked.

"Max tells me that Bar Stool is in your American Southwest in the desert and everyone from the west are cowboys." She reached out and took my hand.

"It's Barstow, not bar stool." I added with a laugh.

"Bar Stool, Barstow, same thing. How are you?" She held on to me and looked deeply into my eyes.

"I'm sore. I got a hole in me. And just damn glad to be alive and with you." I kissed her hand gently.

"Me too." She tightened her grip.

"Me too what?" I had to ask.

"Me too, I am sore, got a hole in my head and me too glad to be with you."

"What do you mean you got a hole in you?" I wondered if I had missed something in the exchange in the moon pool bay during the firefight.

"They opened my head up to pull out small pieces of bone that was lodged against my brain. They couldn't do that on the submarine, so they did it here. They tell me that I will be fine." She drifted a little bit and I let her. I hadn't realized that the blow had been that bad. I sat there holding her hand and looking out at the gray city wondering what I should do next. One thing was sure, I wasn't going to let go of her hand.

* * * * *

Max stood in the hallway talking to a short, plump, middle-aged man in a rumpled tweed vested suit with a medical bag in his hand, who handed him a pair of files.

"It is all in there. Under regression I found she is in love with him and I re-enforced that as instructed. She is committed to helping him. Beyond that she is as clean as the driven snow."

Max nodded his head and looked at the other one. "And Ted?"

"He is a different animal completely. That man has had some kind of conditioning done on him that we are not responsible for. You try to go in there and you hit an unbelievable brick wall. Either he is not what you think he is or he is so well disciplined that our drugs won't work on him. Either way, you are going to have to deal with him straight up. There is absolutely nothing I can do." He nodded and turned to leave.

"Doctor Lloyd, one moment." Max followed him. "Could someone else have programmed him and could you find that out?"

"Could have." The fat little doctor put a finger to his pursed lips. "Yes. That would explain a great deal. But the technique would have to be so advanced that we can't even get near it. As far as breaking into that part of him to find out if that happened it would do as much good as talking to the wall behind you. Listen, I got a train to catch back to London if I want to make my flight." The man waved good-bye and walked out of the building. Max flipped through the reports, wanting a cigarette very badly.

"Nothing." He said to himself with worry and doubt. "Same thing again with him, just nothing." Max walked outside to have a smoke and find a pay phone.



CHAPTER 35

As Gregory Bateson said, “The map is not the territory”. This was true about the equations Herr Uben-Gruber Fuher Doktor Hans Kammler had finished for me. The equations gave me two points of contact on a two dimensional surface. Point A to Point B. It also provides the cardinal points of the compass showing you which way to align the map. But the features, the hills, valleys, rivers and elevation, are all part of the fill in work that must be done by experimentation. I knew this, but looking at the equation, in it’s simplicity, as I wrote into my new blank journal I bought earlier in the day, with money I had to borrow from Max, was beautiful. The mathematics supremely elegant. The old German had learned the secret of the flowing universe and had held it close to his heart to the very last minute of his life.

There is a story told among scientists about Einstein at the end of his career. He worked on a problem of unifying all the fields in physics into one large set called the Unified Field Theory. During the development of that theory, legend says he stumbled onto a series of equations called the Tensor Group. After carefully analyzing them, he realized the power contained within them was so great that he did not believe mankind was ready to handle them. He then did what is inconceivable for any research scientist: he burned his own notes. There has been speculation about what they contained for years, but no one will ever know since the mystery of them died with him.

As I sat there looking out the window at the sparkling universe of lights that make up Edinburgh, writing by the single lamp on the small desk, I wondered should Kammler’s equations face the same fate? Was I prepared to hand the world something that could change the whole course of mankind forever?

I wasn’t sure. It had taken four days of work, but I had translated that equation into all the parts I could think of that would be necessary to conduct the experiments to prove the theorem.

It was a hundred and twelve pages of small notes compiling everything I had learned over the last few years. I needed to finish this for my sake if nothing else. I still needed one answer I could only obtain through this process.

It was 0300 when I finally turned off the desk light. I sat in the darkness looking out at the streetlights now shrouded in fog coming up from the Firth of Fourth. Heavy duck egg sized drops of condensed moisture fell from the lamps onto the cobblestones with an otherworldly rhythm about them.

Suddenly, everything around me became bright and crystal clear as my perceptions skewed to a world that seemed like a super high definition of reality. I noticed movement to my left side as someone sat down on the bed. The door had not opened and no one had been in the room with me, but somehow I didn’t feel annoyed or frightened. The air in the room went still and hazy as if that room had somehow suddenly intersected with another world where time ran at a different speed.

“Hello Ted.” The voice was low, with a slight European accent, and held no malice. “I have been waiting for you so we could finish our talk.”

I started to turn to look at the darkened figure sitting on the bed, but stopped. I somehow didn't want to know who he was. "Have we met before?"

"Yes. But that does not matter. I want you to understand a couple of things that are very important." There was a pause and I felt a chill from the window as the wind outside moved through the room again. "You are going to need to work on two projects in cooperation with each other. The first one you have there in your book, but the second one is here." A hand reached out and handed me a set of four or five pieces of paper. I set them on my book and waited.

"You will know what to do and when to do it. But I must warn you there are those that would stop this project if they could. You cannot let them do that. It is very important that you finish this project. It may take you several years, but I will be around to aid and help you whenever I can, do you understand?" The voice was a soft hiss and now I could make out that his accent was German.

"I do. But why are you telling me this?" I dreamily noticed the wonderful glow of the lights up around the old castle on the hill.

"Did you know they are trying to get inside your mind and find out what you know?" The voice asked.

"Yes. They are using some kind of drug and trying to use hypnosis, but it doesn't work. It frustrates them a great deal." I watched the fog move like a living thing around the lights and whirl in the different heat gradients produced by the lamps.

"It's called MKUltra. They've been trying to develop it for years. It allows them to alter someone's thoughts. There's a small implant in the base of your neck on the spinal cord that prevents it from working. I've also attached one to Irina's neck, so they won't be able to go into her thoughts anymore. You need to keep her with you. When you have finished the project I have given you in those papers, at some point in the future she will fill in the three missing blanks for you." The foreign voice seemed to be getting up and moving away.

"Who are you?" I still wanted to turn but I couldn't move, paralyzed in my chair.

"A friend that means you no harm. Let's leave it at that, shall we?" The voice moved toward the door.

"Will I see you again?"

"Not for a good length of time. But then I will come to you again. Ted, use what I have given you wisely. It is important." The voice was gone and the room phased back into this world as I sat for the rest of the night in the darkness, staring out at the fog.

* * * * *

The Edinburgh morning was bright for a change. I was still sitting at the desk. I looked at the clock and it was 10:00am. The bed was still made up and I was still dressed. Something had happened last night, but I could not remember fully what had transpired. Looking at my notebook I opened it and thumbed through the pages, remembering, writing down my notes. That is when I saw the whole new section with a drawing done in my hand. It was a small device, the large one reduced down to something a person could carry with them. I looked at the equations and the notes that went with it and wondered how I had come up with this.

I needed to see Irina and I wanted to go home. There was work to do and we weren't getting any of it done sitting here in Scotland. I called downstairs and asked if someone could get me a stenographer and a typist for the late afternoon as I needed to prepare a paper and if anyone could locate Max because I needed to talk to him as well.

Irina was up and having some tea when I went to her room. She was dressed in a simple suit Max picked up for her and the bandages were off her head. The bruises

had cleared up and she looked radiant. I walked in and sat down on her bed as she finished her toast and jam.

“How are you?” I asked looking into her eyes.

“I am doing good, physically, but I have been having the strangest dreams.” She sat back and wiped her mouth.

“So have I.” I looked out at the view. “This afternoon...would you like to get married?”

Her mouth dropped open as she studied my face. “You are not joking are you?”

“No.” I held my breath.

“Do you understand the complications it will cause to everyone, especially those people think you work for them?” She poured another cup of tea and handed it to me.

“I don’t really care what they think. I don’t care what anyone thinks about this, except you.” I enjoyed the warmth of the tea.

“Where?” She looked around and pointed out at the city.

“There is a little church on the edge of town called St. Giles. It was for those who were unacceptable in the community, lepers, beggars and thieves.” I said very quietly.

“That would be us.” She smiled. “I would need a ring. I can not get married if I do not have a ring.” I pulled off my college graduation ring and handed it to her. She handed it back. “You are supposed to put that on my finger at the ceremony.”

“Is that a yes?”

“That is a yes, if you will have me.” She walked over and put her arms around my neck. “But you already know that I am a bitch of the worst sort. I will demand a house with a kitchen and a huge heater for the winter.”

“I think I can arrange that.” I turned my face up to hers and she kissed me gently on the mouth.

“I dreamt last night that you would ask me to marry you, but I didn’t think it was anything but a silly girl’s dream.” She moved back away and looked at me. “Do you expect me to keep house as well for you? I am not very domestic.”

“I expect you to work with me. We have things to do and I need you with me, I will hire someone to keep house for us.” I had never felt this way about anyone, not the girls I had dated in high school, college or even Sally when I was engaged to her.

“When?” She ran her hand through her raven wing black hair and tilted her head to one side in the same fashion she had done on the island the night I fell in love with her.

“How about now?”



CHAPTER 36

Both of us were a little tipsy from the amount of ale with which we had celebrated our wedding. We walked back in a light, misting Scottish rain to the old soldiers home acting as our temporary honeymoon chateau. Irina kept holding her hand up and looking at the ring. It was beautiful on her finger and meant something great and important to both of us.

By five o'clock the ale had worn off and I was walking around the room, talking as fast as I could while the stenographer took down page after page of notes. I was just finishing when I saw Max cross the street, below the building. "How long will it take you to get that typed up for me?"

"'Bout twenty minutes, sir." The young woman took her notes and went to the room across the hall that I had taken over for her to use. Almost immediately I heard the little portable typewriter go to work and I sat back down at my desk and finished up the rest of my notes. I put the journal in my coat pocket and laid it on the bed. Looking out at the afternoon I noticed the rain had turned into little flurries of snow. I heard Max's deep voice in Irina's room, greeting her.

"You what!?" He yelled, out of his normal ultra-controlled attitude that he seemed to meet most circumstances with. "You can't do that!"

"We can and...we did!" I strolled through the open door and leaned on the doorframe. "Couldn't wait for you to be best man, Max. So a nice old captain out of an artillery regiment stood up with me." I smiled at Irina as she sat in her chair with a book on her lap making sure her new ring was in clear view.

"Oh this is just great! Why don't you add a few more complications to this mess, Ted?" Max was now frustrated beyond words.

"Oh, I plan to, when that young lady across the hall finishes what she is typing for you." Max looked around me at the room beyond and noticed the typist.

"Don't tell me she is typing up something we would normally have done in a secure facility under the tightest security?" Max winced.

"Yup. But that's okay. You could give this to anyone and they wouldn't understand it without the key, which is a higher degree in physics than anyone on this island has." I walked over and sat down on the bed between Irina and Max.

"You know we have ways of doing things. There are protocols that some of us have to adhere to. We have rules." Max was retreating to his training. I have always enjoyed watching someone on thin ice, tap dancing.

"We need to get back to the States. We are doing no one any good here. Irina and I have a lot of work to get to and we need somewhere to do it." I told Max who was turning blacker from the blood rushing to his face.

"There are complications right now. CIA is demanding to debrief Irina. The Admiral is under heavy fire and the Committee is thinking about replacing him and that means I'm the next to be booted out the door. They've canceled plans for the facility at Fallon Naval Air Station outside Reno and the whole project is being tossed into a state of limbo." Max was rambling and putting it all together. I made sense of

most of it, but it didn't matter. I walked over and looked down at the secretary that had just finished typing the papers and was putting them together. Max stood in the doorway of Irina's room watching me. Ever vigilant.

"May I have your notes as well, please?" I reached out and she handed me her steno pad that had nothing in it but my notes she had taken. I turned to Max and asked him for some money to cover her costs. He pulled out his wallet and handed me twenty dollars. I wiggled my fingers and he huffed and handed over \$100. I told the woman to keep the change and her eyes went wide. She quickly loaded up her typewriter, pulled on her coat and headed downstairs, very happy, having done well for herself today.

She had made me a set of duplicates using carbon paper. I kept the originals and handed Max the carbon copies after placing them in an envelope.

"Get those to the Admiral as fast as you can. He'll need the aid of someone from Brookhaven Labs or Los Alamos, but once he gets them translated, I think that your problems will be over." I walked over, picked up my coat and touched my pocket to make sure my notebook was still in place. Coming back to Irina's room I picked up her coat and put it on her. "We are going to dinner so if you will be so kind as to provide me with another advance on my paycheck."

Max pulled out the rest of the bills and handed them to me just shaking his head. He looked at the envelope and shook it at me. "Are you sure?" That question could be interpreted in a half of a dozen ways.

"Beyond sure, Mr. Daniels. Get those to him and he will be the lord god king of the hill with you upon his right hand, my son." I placed my hand on his chest and patted it. "Max, don't worry! No one has lost sight of the goal." I took my new bride by the arm and walked down the stairs and we wandered the streets of Edinburgh until we found a quiet little place to have our first private dinner in months that didn't taste like something out of a can in a Russian cafeteria.

* * * * *

It had taken almost forty minutes for the wire service facsimile machine at the local American Air Force base in Scotland to transmit the copies of my document to a similar center just outside Washington DC. In less than two hours, Admiral Jacobs was sitting at his desk looking at the documents Max sent over. He picked up the phone and called one of his other assistants to find him Ritter, the resident bright guy in the department that held degrees in four different fields. It took them another hour to get him into the office in the middle of the night but as he walked in to the Admirals office, he nodded and Jacobs handed him the papers.

Dr. Malcolm Ritter sat there and looked very quietly at the table in Jacob's office and read the papers over and over again. He took out a pad and pencil and did some calculations. He got up and walked around the room, scratching his head. Down again writing more things on his pad. Up again, mumbling to himself. Writing again then up, leaning against the wall. Jacobs watched the man work without interrupting him.

Jacobs called the duty officer downstairs and got someone to find an open bakery to pick up some doughnuts for the whole crew. He had a duty officer, a situation officer, two security guys and his own backup for Max all working overtime, where normally only a duty officer was in the building. So he thought the least he could do is get them all some kind of breakfast at five in the morning.

One of the security guys brought in a pot of coffee and some pastries for both Jacobs and Ritter and looked at the Admiral and then Ritter who was muttering to himself like some asylum inmate, rocking back and forth staring into the Adams fireplace. The security officer put another log on the fire and left quietly. Ritter

picked up a doughnut and took one bite then set it back down on the tray and went back to mumbling and making more notes.

"Holy Christ! That can't be!" Ritter worked through the rest of the notes again. "Where is the rest of this? Where is the last part of it?" He got up and looked around as though he had dropped a page. "Admiral, are you sure there were only four pages?"

"Yes. They are marked one of four, two of four, etc." The Admiral sat back and waited for Ritter to get around to his explanation in his own time.

"Admiral, there is another part of this. This is brilliant! No one understands this up to this level, but you need the rest to make it work. For Christ's sake! Where is the rest of it?" Ritter was getting really angry. "I can't finish the series without the rest! It would take me five years to finish this without the other key! Where the hell is it? TELL ME!" He was yelling now. The security officer from the hallway stepped in and looked at him shaking the papers in his fist and cursing like a dockside sailor. Jacobs motioned the officer to stay where he was. Ritter was screaming and now raving mad. He picked up a coffee cup and smashed it down on the table.

"You bastards! You can't do this to me! This is the secret of the whole goddamn thing! Who did this?" He turned and looked at Jacobs with fire in his eyes. "Who did this?" He was holding the papers in his hand. "They pushed this beyond where we have gotten at the laboratory. They jumped three of our steps we spent three years proving! Two lines on this document just blew all of that away, Admiral. Tell me, please! Who did this? Is this that Russian prick's work, Gretachuziv? I told you they were ahead of us! Oh my God! I tried to tell all of you they would beat us!" Ritter had spittle at the corners of his mouth and his eyes were wide, his nostrils flaring. His job had been to work the bugs out of what Bates was doing at Montauk and to have his system operational before Bates did. It seemed to the Admiral someone had beaten all of them. He motioned to the security man to take the doctor home. The officer literally dragged him from the room, as he screamed about us getting beaten by the Russians, and that we were all doomed if they had the rest of this formula. DOOMED!

Jacobs took his notes and the pages from Max back from him and placed them into a file and he had the duty officer place a call overseas. The night had closed down all around him by the time he finished his report and waited to meet that bunch again that had held his feet over the coals a couple of days ago. The phone rang and he picked it up.

"Admiral?" It was Max.

"Get Humphrey and his new bride back here in the most expedient way you can. I don't care who you have to bribe, threaten, or kill, Max. I want them safely here in my office in twenty-four hours."

"It was that good?" Max asked hopefully.

"We are back in business and we have your young friend to thank for that and I want to do it in person." Jacobs looked at the papers and patted them.

"Got it Boss. We'll be there." The line went dead and Jacobs picked up the phone again and called a secret number that no one knew he had. The voice answered and he told them that he needed a meeting.

"Now?" He repeated to the voice. "I am en route."



CHAPTER 37

It took two days for Max to arrange for all of the paperwork from the embassy to the Court of St. James in London. When he returned to Edinburgh to pick us up he had a batch of documents that no one could believe were produced in two days. He handed Irina her US citizenship papers, a social security card and a US passport. Irina Maria Tolsky Humphrey was an American citizen with all rights and responsibilities. She had sat in her room and cried for an hour just holding them. One door had closed and another opened.

The flight back was on a C-97 military Globe Master normally reserved for VIPs of the first order. The crew had made sure we were comfortable and then left the three of us alone. Max had my father's journals brought over on the flight in case I needed them. I was sure someone had copied them completely and that at least one duplicate set existed somewhere in the maze of the secret government that I was involved with and in. The flight was nine hours of boredom broken up by two small meals that a young corporal WAC had served us.

I slept a good portion of the way, while holding Irina's hand. She varied her activities from sitting quietly trying not to bother me, to reading a book I had bought for her on the places to visit in the United States. After landing at Andrews Air Force Base we were whisked away in a waiting limo, heading for the old part of the hub of the federal government.

The three of us walked into Jacobs' office in mid-afternoon. I was still working on European time and the grogginess of a fitful sleep. But things were moving right along, that much was clear.

Jacobs hugged Irina and congratulated both of us. There was some small talk about joining him and his wife in Florida at their home down there for an extended honeymoon when we were ready for one. Max took up his position in the side chair and looked a little tired. I didn't know everything that he had done in the last seventy-two hours, but I don't think, with the exception of the flight, that he got much sleep.

"Well, Ted, I presume your stay on the island was even more successful than the prize you brought back with you." He motioned at Irina who smiled and I held her hand at the conference table.

"I would say so. And from your expression, I would say you got someone's attention from that little piece of calculation I sent back to you." I waited and wondered just how hard he had dropped it on the table and shoved it in their faces.

"You have put a bunch of people into tail spins. The guys at Brookhaven are ripping their hair out and want to talk to you, first. The folks at NASA are calling everyone they can get to, trying to have some time with you and those idiots that control the budget, just handed me a blank check and asked me for a time table to operational capability." He looked at the growing file on his desk.

"What about Fallon? The new laboratory?" I asked.

"That had to be scrapped." Jacobs spoke slowly to make sure he was covering the subject very carefully. "Some people think this is too big to be handled at a backwater place like that. They want us to move to a highly secure base in lower Nevada known

as Area 51. The complex they are handing over to us is called the Groom Lake Laboratory.” Jacobs thought for a moment and then shrugged to himself. “They are going to let you in on the biggest secret this country has. With the understanding you now have of all of this, they think that you will be of more service working hand in hand with a program called Black Light.”

I sat for a moment thinking about what he had just said. I let go of Irina’s hand, took out a cigarette and held it considering the possibilities. “Are we still in control of our own destiny?”

The Admiral looked over at Max and then back to me. “In a manner of speaking, yes.”

“There have been several programs running in sequence, Montauk was just one of them, wasn’t it?” I asked him after lighting up.

“Yes.” Jacobs went back into his stoic bureaucratic form expecting a fight from me.

“Have they gotten any farther than us?” I just wanted to make sure.

“No. No one has gotten this far. That is why the Committee wants it, and you, to put it under the umbrella of Project: Black Light.” Jacobs waited again for the next objection.

“Are you still head of the section I will be running?” I phrased it exactly the way I wanted to, so there would be no misunderstanding of what I expected. Jacobs sighed and looked at Max again. “You are telling me that you want control of the whole project aren’t you?”

“There is no one else in the world that can make this work. I know it, you know it. I don’t want to deal with these jerks here that you have the expertise in handling. I am also not going to work under another Bates or anyone like him. The deal is simple: I get the lab, I choose the personnel, I lay out the timetable. You are the head of it, until such a time that you want to retire and then Max takes over as chief. No one asks when or how long. When it is ready we will show them the results. But I am not going to tolerate anyone using hypodermics and bug juice to determine if someone is doing their job or not. I am sure not going to have someone else taking my work and trying to see if they can improve upon it. It is all or nothing, Admiral. In or out. Play me or trade me. My way or the highway.” I crushed out my smoke to emphasize the point, sat back and waited.

“I don’t understand what you mean by bug juice?” Jacobs wanted to walk away from this meeting with some feeling of power, I knew that, but this was the issue for him to win on.

“MK-Ultra. You know perfectly well what I mean.” Irina looked at my profile and tried to understand what was happening.

“How do you know about that?” Jacobs almost launched out his chair. “That is one of the closest guarded secrets in this country.”

“Not that well protected. Oh, and as you have discovered, it doesn’t work on me, nor will it be effective on Irina.” I held her hand again. “If you think I am going to tolerate anymore of that kind of spook crap in my world, you had better think again. I just played out a chapter of Ian Fleming out there on Mount Grace in Blofeld’s secret lair and I don’t expect to ever do that again. Straight up, Admiral, that is how this hand gets played. No more Max rolling in his pseudo-quacks and their little black medical bags. No more half answers or direct lies. I run it and I make it work. If that is not good enough, I will head back to academia and write up my notes and someone will hand me the Nobel Prize and barrels of money and I will get Einstein’s office at Princeton.”

I waited again for a decision that would alter the path of history. The phone on his desk rang and he picked it up without saying a word. He shook his head and nodded twice as someone was speaking to him.

“Yes sir, I understand.” He hung up and sat back, grinning, all of his anger just washing out of him. “Can I take all of you out to dinner?”

Irina perked up, reached into her purse and thumbed through to a page she had folded down. “Does this mean that we can go to Sherman’s?” She asked like a little girl on holiday.

“Of course. Max have them bring the limo around will you. You’re going too Max.” The large black man nodded and walked out to get the wheels rolling. Someone would have to call and make arrangements to get us into a place that normally took weeks for reservations, but knowing Max he would have it done by the time we got there. I got up and helped Irina with her coat.

“I presume we have an accord, Admiral?” I asked as we walked from the office. He looked at me and a trace of a smile crossed his face.

“More than that, Ted. We have a done deal.” He slapped me on the back and we went out into the afternoon light of DC. I watched the black limo pull up and two men got out and opened the doors. He turned and looked at me once we were outside where no one else was listening. “I wanted it the same way, but some folks didn’t think you would demand so much.” He looked at Max who was holding the door open for us.

“That man on the phone convinced you it was the right move?” I asked him.

“No, he told me it was an order to make it all happen just the way you called it.”

We got in and headed for our celebration dinner at Sherman’s.



CHAPTER 38

The months passed, while I prepared the complete working plan in DC. I had to put together the sequence of actions that were going to be necessary, the personnel list that would be needed and what each position would have to perform, the budget for the whole project and the time schedule before we could do the first full power test. All of this took up seven, two hundred page binders. Almost fourteen hundred pages of documentation, explanations and the costs to do it all. Six months of concentrated work where Irina and I worked on the third floor of the brownstone. When not working we would see the sights of our nation's capital. Several weekends we took off and went around the adjoining areas and introduced her to the flavors of the East Coast. The Admiral was constantly coming and going, with new requests for more details and providing additional information as to how we needed to incorporate our work with another project, which he just referred to as "Y". I didn't know the basis of it and yet realized it had something very much to do with my new device design.

After six months it was all done. The completed set was duplicated and prepared for presentation before the Committee and I still had no idea who was on it. This was Jacobs' power hold over the project. As long as he was the go between he had a function important enough to keep him in the big office downstairs from us.

One morning about nine, I'd been working since seven when Irina walked in from the rented house we had several blocks away. She was wearing a sundress and sandals. She had let her hair grow longer which was the fashion presently in this country and some, on seeing her, would never believe she hadn't been raised on the James River or up in the Adirondacks. She brought me some fresh pastries she picked up and looked at the papers I worked on.

"When are we heading out to Nevada to live?" She asked, finishing her pastry.

"Probably in about two weeks if they approve our latest re-write on the planned schedule. Jacobs didn't like the fact that we were pushing the test out for five years, but they are going to have to live with it if they want us to get it right." I looked up as she sat in the large armchair holding her legs up against her body.

"Is Nevada nice?" She pronounced it the way it was spelled empathizing the 'vada' syllable instead of the way people in the West pronounced it.

"It is, but it is...different. Las Vegas, the place we will be living, is about one hundred and thirty miles from the lab site. It's a town full of men in loud shirts, white pants and they talk about gambling all the time. One armed bandits that take everyone's money. But it is in the desert and it'll be nice to be back out there again." I looked up at her and she was smiling.

"Will their one-arm bandits take all our money?" She looked at me carefully.

"Not if you don't get hooked and drop those quarters into them." I laughed at her.

"A one arm bandit is machine, yes? That is right, the slot machine." She looked really surprised that she had made the correlation.

"Slot machine. Sluts are women of low moral characters and what men want to meet at one in the morning before last call." I picked up the papers on my desk and

put them to one side, realizing I wasn't going to get much done with her in this mood. She laughed at my little joke. Since she had been in the country she had started to understand Western men's secret obsession with sex. It was a secondary issue in her world and she thought that there was too much interest shown in something that should be a secondary and expected issue. Whatever anyone wanted to say about Communism, they had a good view of sexuality, at least in my mind.

"Do you like the name Alexander Theodore or Theodore Alexander?" She asked me, pulling out another pastry from the bag and munching on it. Something she never did, until this morning.

"I don't know. Why?" I watched as she stuffed her mouth and then licked her fingers.

"You should be concerned with what your son is going to be called." She sat there and watched for the reaction. I suddenly understood the sundress, the pastry and the question.

"What if it's a girl?" I asked.

"Oh, that is easy. Alexandra Irina Theodora." She laughed and touched her belly.

"And what will we call her?" I got up and walked over leaning on the desk in front of her. "Pasha, of course. What is wrong with you? Why don't you know these things? Sure you can make things go 'whish' and gone." She moved her hand like an airplane, "but you don't know what to call your daughter." She was laughing again. "Of course. Pasha. Makes perfect sense to me." I watched her as she nodded her head up and down as though it was something that everyone should know. I couldn't believe how she had changed, from the cool, hard captain, who I saw drill holes point blank through the head of a would be killer into this giddy girl sitting here being excited about having a baby. "Why don't we go out and have a picnic in the park?"

"Good, I need to eat. I am hungry!" she said.

"You just finished two doughnuts." I pointed at the bag.

"Three, I had one while I was walking to the office, but I am eating for two now. You wouldn't want our child to be under fed would you?" She got up and put her arms around me.

"You're not going to turn into one of those babushkas that, after having a child, balloons out to three hundred pounds are you?" I held her out at arms length and looked her up and down, smiling.

"If I did. Would you still not love me?" She tilted her head and looked at me in that special way.

"Oh I would still love you, just at a distance I'm sure." We started to walk out into the morning sunshine.

"Like how far. Alaska or Hawaii?" She jabbed me in the ribs. "I was thinking like India, but that is just an idea, mind you."

We went out and had a great day.

PART SIX

FIVE-ONE



CHAPTER 39

The Groom Lake Facility, also called the Dock Town Strip, was another hole in the ground. Rather, it was a huge cave dug into the side of a mountain in the desert of Nevada. Above ground was a runway stretching 7 miles with the world's largest aircraft hanger and a smattering of what appeared to be a campus of rundown buildings. It sat in what would later become famous as Area 51, which was the number associated with the U.S.G.S. quadrangle map of the area. The entire red square on the map had been handed over to the folks at Nellis Air Force Base, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Defense Advanced Research and Planning Agency or DARPA.

Somewhere within this whole set of agencies was a little known group referred to jokingly as the Hemispheric Defense Command or HEDEC. HEDEC was the group under which I was now the deputy director of operations with Jacobs still being the visible head in DC. It seemed like the Central Intelligence Agency had, at one time, wanted to be part of HEDEC or actually be in control of it, but wiser heads prevailed inside the beltway and left them to their efforts of trying to topple heads of state in Southeast Asia and work on their Pacification Program for Viet Nam.

The time passed quickly and by 1968, I was working nearly around the clock to finish the project that was for the eyes of the guys who funded this whole facility. They had an emphasis placed on the size of the new device and after several aborted attempts I was finally getting the unit into the constraints they needed. Still, no one had come forward with the reason for the specific size limitation. My own project was working as well. It had taken the five years in the desert to work through all of my bugs as well as the one's for the big project.

Irina no longer worked with me at the facility, since her time was taken up with our little girl Pasha. She was a good mother and I enjoyed the times we spent together even though they had grown less and less as the project moved along. Pasha was now four going on five. She could do her numbers and her alphabet in both English and Russian. So, when I was home on weekends, I had a lot of fun with the two of them yakking away in Russian and telling jokes about me to one another and me looking stupid. We had bought a small house in Henderson, which was well outside of Las Vegas itself. It was up on a new side street that offered this wonderful view across the valley and the schools in the area were all new and well funded. Irina still worked on the project, but mostly on the mathematical parts that she could do from home.

I found that once at Groom Lake it was too far to go to on a daily basis, so I chose to work for five or six days straight and then take three or four off. It seemed to work out well for all of us, but I did miss sleeping next to Irina when I was at the facility in the small cubicles that provided dormitories for those of us that did this part time bachelor routine.

It was that summer, when no one wanted to go outside in the heat of the day, that the first truck pulled into the parking area next to the huge service bay doors on the north side of the facility that everything changed. Max walked into my office and hooked his thumb toward the area and said, "Come on, let's go see what the Admiral has sent you?"

I looked up from my desk and placed my new set of reading glasses down. Walking out into the service bay, I noticed there were now soldiers guarding the doors and the bay itself. I looked around and noticed it was only Max and I, as well as the military personnel.

"What's going on?" I looked at each door in the service bay and noticed it had a military guard on it, which seemed just ridiculous for way out here. It was like guarding cheese on the Moon.

"The place has been closed down and everyone herded up to the conference room for a speech about some health and safety issues while we unload these." Max pointed at the flatbeds that pulled into the service bay with tarpaulins over them. "This is what you have been working on for this past five years, Ted. The Admiral finally got them to give them to you to help speed up the process."

"What are they?" I spoke as a half a dozen soldiers pulled the first tarp off a silver, circular disk that was held down to the bed of the truck with strong nylon webbing, so as not to damage the metal. I looked at the first one and it hit me. My jaw went slack.

"You have GOT to be kidding me!"

"Nope. They had them at Wright Patterson in Dayton, Ohio for years. That one since '47 and the next one since '48. They tried everything to back engineer the operations systems, but they got nowhere. Hell, most of them they couldn't even open. Seems like Jacobs finally got to the right guy this time and they decided to give you a chance of using what you already know with what's inside those things." Max stood there and watched as the next truck waiting at the service bay came in.

"How many do we have?" I looked out covering my forehead against the glare.

"Seven in all. That includes the one Kammler had in Germany that we brought back." Max looked around at everyone and shuttered. "The other six we recovered with Project: Pounce. Our 'Opposition' doesn't know we got 'em."

"How could the Soviets not know?" I couldn't believe that at all after seeing the way they worked on getting information.

"Oh, the Soviets know." Max grinned. "But our 'Opposition', doesn't." He pointed toward the sky and I realized I had forgotten for the moment about the coming Great War, that had brought us together with our supposed greatest enemy, which was all these guys promoted to get the funding for this kind of research. I still wasn't convinced about the nature of the paranoia concerning the alien invasion and the idea of a military force from space landing and destroying our planet. I had been so immersed in my work of getting the device to work properly that I had almost at times forgotten why I was doing it. Or should I say, was supposed to be doing it.

Max watched them crane the units off and onto predetermined spots on the floor of the bay. They seemed extremely lightweight and once on the ground a couple of the guards could lift and move them into their exact spots.

"This area is now off limits to everyone, but you, me and those we appoint to enter here." Max handed me a brown envelope. "You might want to read that."

I opened it. The Admiral was retiring from the project and had named Max as the new head of the program on the political side and I was named as head of the scientific aspects. The letter had compliments and exaggerations as to our capabilities with glowing remarks of credit for the project being exclusively mine in many ways. I closed it and handed it back to Max. It was a good thing for all of us.

"When is he delivering this to the Committee?"

"Already has. It's a done and done, my son. The only thing he wanted to do was make sure we got these little beauties before he pulled the pin." Max walked over to the first one and lifted a hatch on it, exhibiting a very small cockpit.

"What happened to whatever was in here?" I looked at the cockpit and realized that it held three 'things'.

"They were taken to another secret base for biological evaluation." He looked at me and thought about everything we had been through these last few years. "It's in New Mexico at a place called the Dulce Archeleta Mesa. It's a biological and experimental lab where they're trying to figure out how their physiology works. They're also doing some really creepy stuff with genetics that I want nothing to do with."

"How much more do you know that I don't, Max?" I walked back to the door that led into the blissfully cool air-conditioned hallway.

"Oh a few things, but not much. You have most of it. I need to keep a couple of things close to my chest, so you won't run me over down the road." He laughed and followed me, sweating profusely in the desert heat.

"I'm sure that's what I want to do. Get rid of you and I end up talking to those idiots the Admiral was so happy to meet with in some basement or another." We walked back to my office and sat down, enjoying the coolness inside the building.

"Yeah, well, a lot of that has changed. The Committee has been reduced in size to just three people. No, don't ask. I won't tell you who they are or who picked them. That is the real secret, isn't it? How does someone end up getting selected to be on the Committee that is supposed to answer to no one." Max laughed to himself.

"Do you get along with them alright?" I wondered.

"Yeah, okay. It's just every time I meet with them, they're always in a hurry and seem to be concerned with other issues. Now think about it: we've got the biggest project in the country right here in the basement. We just took over the most secretive items that this country controls and we know," he hesitated for a moment and then looked directly at me, "we know about what they are doing at Dulce. That leaves only the White Mountain Project that I know about cursively, on the edge of it. It has to do with a laser guidance system. So what is so important that we don't know about?"

"This isn't a good conversation for two humble civil servants like us, you know that don't you?" I understood exactly what he was saying and had thought about it many times but had never spoken it to anyone.

"I know, but now that I have the reins, I wonder how all of this fits together. I feel like one of those Germans who thought he was building baby carriages that turned out to be machine guns, or some such shit." He sat there for a moment and then went on. "Do you remember that day about five years ago after we came back from England?"

"Sure. It was just after Irina and I were married." I answered. "What about it?"

"Do you remember when you presented your demands and the Admiral sat there and he got a phone call? Someone said something to him and suddenly it was finished and you got what you wanted." Max looked really serious right now.

"Yes..." I answered suspiciously.

"Who was on the phone?" Max asked rhetorically. "Who was the voice that told the Admiral to comply and how did he know what the conversation was about? I had that office ripped apart looking for a microphone or any kind of bug. There wasn't one."

"What are you trying to say Max?" I had an idea but didn't want to put it into words.

"I don't know Ted, I just know that I want to make the best decisions I can as long as I am in this position, but I am no longer sure that we have control of our own destinies. You know all that stuff about the SIGMA treaty and the landing out at Edwards Air Force Base in California and between the boogies and Ike?" Max stood up.

"Yes, I remember the conversation." I watched him move toward the door.

"I don't know anymore if it ever happened. I don't remember a lot of things any more as to how we got this far in this project. A project director not being sure why we

are working on the project in the first place. Ain't that a bitch?" He walked out without waiting for an answer.

I sat for a long, dazed while thinking about the exact same thing. The dream had come back into my head at night, while I was alone on the base. The dream about the night in Scotland when someone with a German accent had been in the room with me, telling me something...I just don't remember what it was he said.



CHAPTER 40

It must have been one in the morning when I finished reading all of the details about the little craft that now lurked in the hanger bay at Groom Lake in their new home. They wanted to know how they worked and if they were connected to anything we were working on. No one at Wright-Pat could make them do anything. They tried to take them apart and found nothing on this world would even mark their paper-thin skin. Diamond cutters, blowtorches, high intensity lasers, small packets of nitroglycerin. Nothing. The inside was worse. They couldn't distinguish between the mechanical parts and the hull structure.

Jacobs wanted them here for some reason. He was aware that my staff wouldn't have the foggiest idea how these things worked any more than the guys at Wright-Pat did. But Max told me Jacobs had spent the last two years in constant lobbying to get these things moved to Groom. Now they were my puzzles to solve.

The lights were out in the bay with the exception of one next to the only door that was not double locked now. A security guard was assigned to a desk on the outside of the door and was not to allow anyone in without Max or my approval in writing. No one was really aware yet what he had been bequeathed, so it seemed funny to me to have someone sitting there that had absolutely nothing to do. I walked up and showed him my badge and signed in on the new form. He got up, opened the door for me with two different keys and noted the time on his clipboard. Walking inside he was going to flood the place with lights from the bank of large breakers near the door. I stopped him and told him all I needed was for him to turn on just the one at the end. He hit the switch and went back to his desk. I presume he had something to read or work on and do a job that required no mind whatsoever to do.

The smallest of craft, got my attention first. Someone in one of the documents nick-named it "The Sport Model". It was about sixteen feet across with room for two occupants under its clamshell hatch cover. I sprung it and looked inside. It was small, yes, but I thought that I could probably slip inside and see what the damn thing felt like. I dropped my white lab coat and glasses on the ground, kicked off my loafers and got up on the edge, hoping I wouldn't dent the metal. Surprisingly it was very firm under my stocking feet. I dropped into the control unit that looked most like the command position. It wasn't right or left handed as in most single engine aircraft, but a tandem set-up like an old fighter plane. I squirmed into position and then sat back.

In a moment the seat started to actually conform to my body. It was a soft plastic that had the ability to readjust into any form necessary to accommodate the host pilot. As I felt it start to fit around me like a glove, I noticed a single raised panel in the console between my legs that was no different than the rest of the ship in color or configuration, only that it was raised. I laid my hand on it and there was a low gentle purring that started somewhere behind me. I listened to see if I could make out what was running in the hanger bay at this hour of the night. Looking back down I noticed the panel had lit up showing various symbols that somehow seemed familiar to me. Pushing the symbols in order, the clam lid came down, then, almost immediately, it went transparent, with an optical shift into the infrared spectrum. The whole bay was

alive with heat now displayed as light. I could look in any direction for about two hundred and sixty degrees around me and see every detail of the bay.

I hit the next symbol and saw a change in the altitude of the craft, though I felt no movement at all. I looked at the edge of the disk and realized I was actually floating higher than the other ships in the hanger. I was off the ground! Could it be so easy to take this thing out for a test ride? The temptation was overwhelming. See the Earth from space? Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars, see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars. Remembering the Frank Sinatra song that was the unofficial anthem of the NASA space program made me smile, but it also brought me back to my senses. I hot rod around in the coolest car in the universe, but then what? I would have thousands of people who had been involved with this craft for years screaming that I had figured out how to make it work in a few days when they couldn't even get the door open. Wouldn't that be just great for Max and me? Another little fun time. I could hear my father's voice telling me to do the right thing and not be the stupid teenager from Barstow. And there was another sixth sense at work that was warning me something was not right at all and that this was all far and away more dangerous than it looked.

So I decided to put it back down on the ground. I pushed the symbol again and it lowered back into place. I felt the gentle touch of the landing gear on the cement floor and then I pushed the next descending symbol that opened the cockpit and then the final one that turned the control port off. I worked my way out of the cosmic comfy chair that returned to being an anamorphic blob. I slid off the side and put my shoes and lab coat back on. This was interesting and I needed to talk to Max about this before I went any farther. I grabbed the door and it was locked. I knocked and waited. Finally, the guard flung open the door crouching low with his gun in my face holding his flashlight beam in my eyes.

"HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!" He commanded then saw it was me. He lowered his weapon and flashlight and took a step back. "Dr. Humphrey? How in the hell did you get in there?"

"What are you talking about? I signed in on your clipboard ten minutes ago."

I picked up the board and looked at it. Nothing. No name, no signature.

"Sir?" His reaction was one of confusion and relief. "You came in last night and no one has seen you since. The Director has torn this place apart looking for you, sir. They're still searching the building. We thought you'd been murdered or kidnapped." The man picked up the phone to call, but I took it and replaced it on the cradle.

"I'll find the Director and make sense of this for him. What time is it?"

"0400, sir." He answered.

"What day is it?" I held my breath. He looked confused.

"It's Thursday." He answered. "The 28th." He added.

"And I walked in there on the 27th, is that correct? At 0100?"

"That is correct, sir." He stood back.

"Thank you. Thank you very much..." I read his nametag, "...Hutchinson. I'll make sure you get a commendation and I'll find the Director right now and clear this up." Fat chance of that I thought. This was going to be a lot of fun trying to explain this one to Max or anyone else.



CHAPTER 41

“Where in the hell have you been?” Max was standing in the hallway near his office with his hands on his hips in utter exasperation. His white shirt was stained badly under the armpits and his sleeves were rolled up.

“Max! Max! Calm down! I can explain...I think.” I walked up to him and he looked down at me with a mixture of anger and relief on his face, like finding a kid who wandered off in a supermarket you find in the vegetable isle that you want to hug and spank at the same time.

“I certainly hope so. Let me call off the dogs. I have people out there in the desert looking for your dead body or for whatever dragged you off and ate you!” He walked back into his office and picked up the phone, told someone to call everything off and then sat down.

“Do you have any idea what time it is?” He rubbed his face with both hands. It was clear that he was exhausted and hadn’t slept during the search.

“No.” I unhooked my watch that Irina had given me for Christmas the year before and handed it to him. He looked at it and shrugged.

“So what? This isn’t even the right time. You want me to buy you a new watch now? After what you put me through? Screw you, man!” He threw it back at me.

“No, Max! It is the wrong time. For me.” I handed it back to him again and waited while he looked at it. It had a small date window on one side. He looked carefully at it and then picked up the file on his desk and opened it. The paper inside was the sign in sheet for the hanger bay.

“This corresponds to the sign in sheet by...twenty-three minutes.” He looked up slowly with a look in his eyes I had only seen a couple of times before, both of them in tense situations where lives were at stake.

“I walked into that hanger bay less than forty minutes ago from my office.” I sat down in one of the gray institutional chairs with the vinyl green armrest and cushions.

“And?” He waited.

“I just now walked out to be met by one frustrated guard pointing a gun in my face.” I put the watch back on after resetting it to the current time.

“He called out the guard at six this morning after checking up on you in the hanger and not finding you. They called me and since then for twenty-two hours we have looked in every nook and cranny of this place. Do you have any idea how many fucking nooks and crannies this goddamn place has? Seven hours ago I put the whole security force on this whole goddamn base, AND Nellis, AND the AEC facilities AND the guys at all gates on the highest level of alert. No one got on or off this base and I had them searching an area three times the size of Switzerland! They thought I was nuts, but I pulled rank and did it anyway. Now they are standing down and I am going to have to explain to them why I called up an alert and you were here the whole goddamn time!” Goddamn was the word for the day. He poured a glass of water and took a couple of aspirin from his desk drawer.

“Max. I did something. Something...amazing!” I didn’t know how to tell him without sounding crazy.

“Okay, you did something. Now how about telling me what you did?” He answered the ringing phone. “Yes, that is right! I found him and he is not dead...YET! Stand everyone down and put the regular schedule back into operation. That’s right. He’s alright as far as I can tell...so far. Thank you very much.” He slammed the phone down breaking the hand piece into two pieces. “Goddamn it.” He mumbled.

“You have twenty hours to spare, right now?” I asked him. He looked at me like I had just dropped off the cart loaded with pumpkins going to market.

“Now? I haven’t seen a bed in twenty hours thanks to your little stunt and you want me to stay up a little longer? What? We doing sleep deprivation experiments now or just shock therapy for everyone?” Max leaned his arms on his desk.

“I need you awake for half an hour. After that, you might never sleep again.” I sounded as mysterious as I could, hoping his curiosity would get him to bite.

“Sure! What the hell!” He got up and stretched his back.

“Call the control office and tell them you and I will not be back or on base for twenty hours and not to panic.” Listening to myself, I hoped I wasn’t having temporal lobe epileptic seizures and just losing track of time myself. But my watch had confirmed this wasn’t the case. Max called the control desk and told them. It was clear they started to argue about it, but Max was not a man to screw with when he was mad and right now he was still mad and nearly delirious from lack of sleep. He had to use the phone in the outer office and left a note to get his fixed first thing in the morning.

We walked back to the hanger bay. The sentry looked at both of us with an eye on Max’s groggy, rumpled appearance. Signing in, I asked Hutchinson if he was working tomorrow night. He confirmed that fact and I told him not to be surprised if the same event took place again. I knew he didn’t understand me, but he nodded in agreement.

Walking over to the Sport Model, I heard the door close and lock behind us. In less than an hour and half I realized a whole bunch more about why Einstein had shredded his notes on tensor equations. I opened the small craft’s hatch and took my shoes off again, dropping them and placing my lab coat on top of them. Max followed suit with his size thirteens and hefted himself up beside me.

“I can’t fit in here, this thing is too goddamn small.” He complained.

“Just sit back for a minute and watch what happens.” Max sat on the seat and looked like a gorilla riding a football. Then the seat started to conform and spread out. It slowly wrapped him into the cocoon of itself and he moved a little to fit a bit better.

“Man, that’s nice. I gotta get me one of these! Is this where you were?” Asking while I got myself in place.

“Yup.” I dropped the hatch and hit the control panel. It hummed again into life. As the canopy dropped the infrared viewing came up and Max whistled with excitement.

“They didn’t even get this far at Wright-Pat, you know that, don’t you?” His voice seemed somehow amplified in my ears.

“Watch, Max!” I hit the third button and Max yelled. I could see the whites of his eyes like pie plates as we floated up and he rubbernecked back and forth to take in the elevated view of the hanger. I grinned a huge smile at his reaction. “This thing has only about five controls and it is designed to fly at two speeds: fast and fucking faster!” I needed the expletive to make my point. I set the craft back down and sprung the hatch again. Sliding out he looked at me with amazement.

Putting our shoes back on and walking to the doorway Max finally said, “How in the hell did you figure that out so quickly?”

“Ready?” He looked at me questioningly. I knocked on the door and Hutchinson, the guard opened it up again, with his .45 Colt auto pointed in our faces.

“Easy man!” Max stepped back from the door.

“Oh! Sorry, sir! I still don’t know how the hell you guys got in. . .”

His words slowed as he looked at Max and realized that he was dressed and looked identical to the last time he saw him, which was now about eighteen hours ago. Max picked up the sign in sheet and then looked at his watch and grabbed Hutchinson's arm, who was none too pleased to be manhandled by Max even if he was the director.

"Let me see your watch, Ted." He looked at mine and compared it to his. They were identical. Hutchinson's was eighteen hours behind us. Max looked at the man with sheer child-like wonder then it all drained out of him and he sighed for a moment, then dropped into his official mode. "Listen to me very carefully, Hutchinson. You have seen nothing here and you will not tell anyone about us being in there, is that clear?" He looked really hard at the man who had no idea of what was going on.

"Of course sir, I understand." He nodded to Max

"No you don't but that's alright anyway, and why you are a good man." I said as I walked up the hallway toward the office area with Max in tow behind me asking a million questions as fast as his mind could formulate them.

"Tomorrow, Max. We will start to put it together tomorrow or maybe the day before, I am not sure yet." I waved as I walked toward the corridor leading to the dorms.

"What!" Max stood in the hall yelling after me. I just continued to walk. I needed to think about the last two hours or last two days.

I wasn't sure which.



CHAPTER 42

It was later the next day when I was finally able to get up and head back into my office. Twenty hours of sleep was required to re-energize my own biological batteries. Heading for Max's office was the most logical place to start, I thought. He was there looking better than the last time I had seen him.

"I want it back." He spoke without looking up.

"What do I have that you want back?" I thought for a moment that he was joking, but I soon learned he wasn't.

"I want the twenty hours that you stole from me, goddamn it!" He looked up as I sat down.

"What?" I bellowed.

"You can afford to throw away a day here and there. You're a young white man. But I am an old black guy that needs every one of those days. I could have used it playing golf in Georgia or something." He leaned back in his chair and looked at me and then started to laugh as well.

"Gotcha, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did." I conceded.

"Listen, I haven't called anyone about any of this yet. I wanted to talk to you first, put our heads together and figure out how we wanted to present this information. If, in fact, we want to say anything at all." He handed me a list of names he indicated should be informed, if we told anyone at all.

"I don't think we should say anything just yet. If we do, we're going to have a swarm of locusts down here from Wright-Pat to the Pentagon. And what do we really know? That I can make it float a few feet off the ground? Whoop-ee. We have no understanding of what is happening once we start it up with the exception that we are completely out of time phase inside that craft. I do know this: it is not intended to pass through space, but rather to move through time. Now the question is how do we control it, so we can move back and forth in a temporal sense." I looked at the list and winced at some of the names.

"Good point. Do you want to bring anyone else in on this to work with it, right now." He took the list back.

"Besides you, the only person I want in the hanger bay to do a couple of experiments is Irina and I don't know if she will be willing to be away from Pasha that long. I am going home this weekend and see what she says." I got up and started to leave. "I needed to know if the reaction starts when I get into the craft and when the cockpit drops or if nothing occurs until the third button is depressed. Too many questions on top of what I still need to get done in the chamber with our new machine." I left and walked down the hallway to my office. I have too many questions.

In my office I tried to keep some semblance of order, which was not always easy, considering the amount of information I was trying to deal with at any point in time. The design had not changed much over the past five years, but with the introduction of new components we found ourselves redesigning subsections and subsystems of the

device, to make them work more effectively and efficiently. This was a never-ending tale of the researcher, that needed to get the best results as possible with something no one had ever seen work right, yet or still. I had a note on my desk to call Irina. My secretary was not in her office so I didn't know when it had come in. I put everything else on hold to call her, since this was a rare occurrence for her to go through the process of getting through all the switchboards and checks to actually get to my phone. A process that even for her was not easy. I listened to the phone ringing at our home and then her voice was there.

"Hello?" As sweet as I had ever remembered it.

"Irina, is everything alright? Are you okay? Is Pasha alright?" My first concern was always for their safety and welfare.

"Yes. We are fine. I left Pasha at Mrs. Boying's for a while. I need to bring something to you right away." I listened to how she was saying her sentences. Her precise wording, explaining something to me she thought extremely important.

"When?" I asked.

"Now, Ted." I could see her standing in the kitchen looking out the back window at the pool in the back yard. She loved the idea of swimming and lying naked in the warm sun since we had come to Las Vegas. She found getting a tan on her body was something that had been a life long dream.

"I will meet you at that little diner at the junction, you know the one?" I asked.

"Yes. With the teepee?"

"That's the one. I'll leave now. By the time I'm off base you should almost be there." It took a good two hours by car to get off the base from the facility where I worked now, but Irina also drove like Ted Kennedy heading to the liquor store closing in five minutes.

"I'll just see you there!" She hung up abruptly. It was a strange call to say the least, but I knew something wrong.

I called Max and told him I had to leave for a while and where I'd be. He was curious, but he let it go. I mostly only left on long weekends just because of the hassle of getting through all the checkpoints and security stations out here. So I'm sure he knew it was important.

Halfway off the base, I wondered why I hadn't just decided to go home for a couple of days. It seemed odd that I was meeting my wife at a diner in the middle of nowhere in the late afternoon to "talk". But I continued to drive out the dusty road toward the next checkpoint.

* * * * *

Alamo is on the eastern side of the Nellis Practice Range and has some great family hot springs that branch off from the Paharanaghat River. The entire Paharanaghat Valley is beautifully lush and green, with cattle farms along the highway, all drinking from the Paharanaghat River. A lot of folks stop there for coffee and sandwiches and to fill up. Just north of Alamo and just south of Hiko, at the top of the Paharanaghat Valley there was a choke and puke truck stop diner/gas station at the junction where Highway 375 branched off to the east of Highway 93. Interstate Highway 375 snakes off up into the high mountains and comes out on the other side into the Tickaboo Valley. Take a hard left on an unmarked dirt road and it leads you to the foot of Bald Mountain and the only ground entrance to Area 51 on the east side.

Betty's Diner was the last stop before you continued up over the mountains on 375 to Rachel or Warm Springs or continued on 93 over into Hiko and past that to, literally, God knows where. It was also where most of the base personnel that lived in Alamo and Hiko parked and were then picked up by a blue bus with blacked out windows that took them all to work on the base in the early morning.

Irina was already there. I pulled into the diner's dirt parking lot and parked next to our station wagon parked near the huge tee-pee with a painting of "Betty" dressed as a sexy Indian squaw. There were a couple of pick-up trucks and one dark blue car from the base with yellow lettering on the door, indicating it was an Air Force vehicle. She must have been pushing her right foot awful hard to the floor mat to get up here that quick. I walked into the place and was immediately hit by the darkness and the coolness of the air. They had refrigeration for the place, so it made it a Mecca for travelers most of the time. Irina was sitting in a booth with a Coke in front of her. When I came in she got up and threw her arms around me, kissing me as if she hadn't seen me in a dozen years.

"I was so frightened I wouldn't be able to see you today." She held me tight and I felt a little uncomfortable since everyone in the place turned to watch the spectacle. I directed her back to the booth and sat down across from her holding her hands.

"What is going on?"

"A great deal has happened. But that will wait for a few minutes." She looked into my eyes and the waitress broke it up while we ordered.

"What was so important to come up here like this, honey?" I asked her.

"Something happened. No! Two things happened. But let me explain them to you while you eat your lunch." She smiled up as the waitress dropped the plate in front of me and spilled part of the soda as she set it down, dropping the check and wanting to get back to her conversation at the counter with the young airman who was clearly trying to talk her into or out of something.

"You remember last year when I took the class over at the junior college in the art department, charcoal rendering?" She asked while digging out her large sketchpad from under the table.

"Sure, I do. You got pretty good at making drawings of Pasha and photos that you had laying around." I was starting to get concerned that I wasn't spending enough time at home, if she thought it was important for her to come all the way up here and pull me out of the lab to see some drawings of a cat or of our child. I thought maybe she was feeling more isolated than I realized.

"Well, two days ago, I sat down and made a half a dozen drawings that I thought were important. And that you would want to see right away." She said.

I pushed the half eaten burger to one side. It was terrible and the fries were nothing but a greasy bomb. I drank the Coke and waited for her to continue. I was here, so I should try to make it all right for her, if she was feeling that lonely. That was my thought until she opened the first page of the drawings. I damn near dropped my Coke and had to fumble with it to make sure it didn't fall on the floor.

There, on her first page was a charcoal drawing of the hanger bay, with all seven craft sitting in the exact order we had them positioned. The next drawing was of the Sports Model, with the cockpit open. The third was the real head banger. It showed the instrument layout and a hand reaching for the third symbol to depress it. The only problem was, it wasn't my hand. It had only three fingers, all of which were long with an equally long thumb.

The fourth drawing, showed Max and I getting off the scout ship. She closed her book and set it down.

"What do you think of those? I don't remembering drawing them and they are very good. But they have a strange mixture to them I don't understand and it scared me."

"You said there were two things?" I held my breath. "What is the other thing?" She handed me a large envelope that contained something stiff, like plastic. "What is this?"

"Open it and then I will tell you the rest. First, I want to see if it means anything to you." She sat back and looked around. The young airman had left and the two

cowboys at the bar were drinking and trying to pick up where he had left off with the waitress. I opened the package she had clearly slit open earlier. I pulled out a panel made of plexi-glass that had all six symbols from the scout ship on it. Next to each symbol was a legend of what the symbol meant and what it did, precisely. At the bottom was the notation that by holding the button depressed the effect would increase or decrease due to the pressure sensitiveness of the button.

"Where did you get this?" I must have been turning red, purple and black from the way that she looked at me.

"I did something very bad and I am sorry, Ted." She spoke quickly and for the first time in a long time I could hear the accent in her voice that got worse when she was scared or nervous.

"What did you do, Irina?" I had no idea what was coming next, I just knew that my head was swimming again and I didn't understand anything.

"I went through your desk, looking for something. An old picture that you had. I wanted to make sure I was correct before I said anything." She bit her lip hard. Irina had small droplets of moisture at the corners of her eyes. She was watching everyone in the restaurant very carefully. I noticed she was keeping at least one hand in her lap all of the time. I noticed someone else had come into the place and I watched them until they sat down at the counter and greeted the other two men and ordered a beer.

"What do you have in your lap?" I asked her.

"My pistol." She looked back at me without hesitation or guilt.

"Why?" I was still confused about what was happening. She handed me a photograph face down. I turned it over and it was of Hans Kammler himself, my father and Simon Ratterman. Irina reached across the table and pointed down at the third smiling man.

"That man came to our door. He had a German accent, he knew my name and handed me that package. He said you would need it now." She turned back and looked at me carefully. "That photo was taken over twenty-five years ago, da?"

Very slowly a metamorphosis started to occur. Her face lost all its loving warmth. As she receded inward, all her girlish charm was now being replaced by the old Soviet Army officer and spy. I could tell she had mixed feelings about telling me and showing the template, knowing it would change her idyllic life somehow. That meeting with Simon Ratterman had been both a shock and an awakening. Her life of leisure in this brave sparkingly bright new world just had a new very long and extremely dark shadow cast across it.

I nodded in agreement, looking at the three faces on the old black and white photo grinning up at me like ghosts from out of the sands of time.

She leaned forward and stabbed her finger over Ratterman's face as she whispered: "He didn't look any different! That photo was taken twenty-five years ago. I am telling you he looked exactly the same! Not a wrinkle, not a gray hair, noth-ink! Neagh-a!" Her accent was getting the better of her as she grew more panicked and afraid. "He handed that to me, then left. I didn't follow him or look to see how he left. I was too terrified. All I know is that he was there and then, pift! He was gone." Her eyes never stopped moving around the room, watching every door and window for any sign of trouble. She was once an agent of the KGB and she knew how to handle situations that required covert or overt actions and right now, I was well aware all of that had come back to her. She wasn't my wife, my lover or a mother right now. Now, she was a highly trained killing machine, looking to protect all she loved with the berserker intensity of a mother bear and make sure nothing took her by surprise again.

"We need some help. I'm going to have someone pick up Pasha and get her to the base." I started to get up.

"Nyet! Mrs. Boying took her to California for a few days. I did not want to know where in case they torture us! I wanted her out of harm's way and there was no way I

wanted her near that place you work. I made that decision without you, I know, but it will be alright.” She held up her left hand, palm toward me in a gesture of recognition to stop my objections. “But if they want someone, it is going to be you or Max or at worse me.” She had reduced this to terms she could understand clearly; them versus us. I didn’t think that was the case, but I wasn’t about to take chances. I took the envelope and walked to the pay phone and called the direct number into the lab.

“Dr. Humphrey, he is with some people I don’t think I can interrupt at...”

“Margaret, I will tell you this only once: Get him on the line or there will be high holy hell to pay when I get back!” She heard the threat and tone behind it. A momentary pause then Max picked up the line.

“Ted! What the f....?”

“Shut up! I’m on an open line from outside. Alpha-Seven-Delta-Four.” I waited until it registered on him.

“Holy motherfucking shit! Where are you? What do you need?” The old soldier came out in him, like a boxer at the ringing of the bell he came out swinging.

“I’m at Betty’s at the 375/93 junction. I need a chopper with a DISCO team. I want someone from the detachment at the gate here in less than five minutes with enough men and guns to start a goddamn war if I need to. Then we, meaning only me, you and Irina, need to sit down and look at something very carefully. I also want the entire complex sealed. No one gets in or out but us!”

“We have visitors you might want gone before you get back here.” Max was obviously trying to talk in front of someone.

“Dammit! Committee?” I asked.

“Affirmative.”

I thought long and hard. “No! Keep them there. I want them to be part of this for all our sakes.” I hung up. I just put a flare up and this had better be good, ‘cause I just started something that wasn’t going to end real pretty, I was sure of that. I went back and sat down with Irina.

“We’re going in to see Max.” She winced.

“I don’t want to be in another hole in the ground like the cave on that *sic sukum sin* island.” She hissed out at me, slipping back into Russian as she did when she was mad or upset.

“We are not going down into it. We are staying up in the office complex, I promise you.” Her eyes flashed at me.

“I don’t want to be there again, Ted! Not ever!” I understood her feelings. It had taken a lot of time to get past everything we had gone through at Mount Grace and suddenly all the feelings were back.

Somehow, once again, we did not have control of our own destiny.



CHAPTER 43

When they came it was in force. The door of Betty's Diner burst open and three soldiers ran in, weapons ready. A young captain, his pistol drawn, strode quickly to the table and looked down at Irina and I. Once he made an ID on the badge around my neck he never looked at either of us again.

"Dr. Humphrey, ma'am. Please move out to your vehicle immediately." His gun and mind was trained on everyone else in the bar and diner. One of the cowboys got up in protest and one of the soldiers put a rifle right against his head. The man sat sheepishly back down and spread his hands on the counter. The locals knew the military was king around these parts and they were not to be trifled with.

I tossed the keys to both our cars to one of the men outside and asked him to bring them onto the base. He handed the sets to another two men and ran over to the cars. We bolted into the back of the car with the doors being held open by a soldier with his gun drawn.

We sped out of the lot with a five-car escort onto the winding highway 375 into the mountains. I felt the heat and the pressure wave before I heard it as if someone had boxed my ears. Irina's car in the parking lot exploded into a huge ball of fire that consumed the car, the two soldiers inside and took out the walls and glass of half the diner. The blast hurled us into a skid where we ended up across the road in the ditch. I was holding Irina tight and kept her from being jarred too much by the crash. The two cars behind us were hit by the blast and completely blown off the roadway, one of them flipped in the air rolling over till it came to a stop upside down. The officer in charge flung open our door in an instant from his lead car. Dragging us out, he tucked us both under each arm like frightened children and sprinted to the next vehicle with our feet barely touching the ground. He stuffed us both in, left the door open and screamed at the driver to floor it, pounding on the roof.

We were flying up the winding highway with the young officer, hanging out against the open door with his pistol trained behind us on the road. Irina grabbed his belt and was holding on so he didn't fall out. Shock set in, as I realized I'd broken my wrist. I looked behind us and saw the two smoking cars in the lot, one in the ditch and the other flipped in the middle of the road.

Someone did not want either of us to leave that parking lot alive and they didn't care who else was killed along with us.

That was all I knew right now and it did not make me happy.

* * * * *

The young captain did not leave Irina's side as we descended the helicopter at the complex. He radioed ahead and a medical team was waiting. They were all over me and I didn't have time to wait for them to treat me. I had them wrap the wrist temporarily and then went in, clearing a path ahead of us with two troopers and the captain. This was upsetting to everyone in the facility that much was clear. These

guys had never even been over to this side of the base and had no clearance to be here with the exception that I wanted these young, tough, heroic men around my wife and I. I don't think anyone except Max had ever heard me use profanity until this afternoon but it was coming fast and hard as I walked toward the director's complex. The door was open and Max stood there. It was the first time in years I had seen him with a shoulder holster on and his weapon in his hand. He looked at the young airmen surrounding us and noticed that they were wide-eyed in wonder, rubber necking to take in the establishment.

"These men are with me, Max, and they will be staying awhile." He nodded understanding without knowing everything.

"Conference room one." He motioned and we headed in. "You two stay in front of this door and Captain, you come with us."

"Sir?" The Captain looked at the older black man with the large frame automatic in his hand for my approval if he should stay or go.

"I'm the...well...A...boss here, too, Captain," he said then motioned to me. "Along with Dr. Humphrey." He handed him his ID card and the young man threw up a salute, seeing the rank on the card as well as his designated level of authority.

"Apologies, sir!" The Captain assumed parade rest in the doorway.

Inside the room one of the doctors kept fussing with my bandage. "I need to get an x-ray of this injury to set it correctly."

"Later! Now leave us please." I had gotten over the first rush of adrenal and was feeling suddenly exhausted. Irina sat in one of the large leather chairs and clutched her pistol with both hands in her lap, her knuckles turning white.

"Irina, honey, I think it's better if I take your gun right now." Max said quietly. Irina flinched away.

"Don't even try, Max." I said without looking up from the new bandaging going on, just before the doctor left the room.

"Captain...what is your name?" I asked the young officer.

"Hamilton, sir." He was in way over his head and we both knew it.

"All right Captain Hamilton, you just got enlisted into a new outfit. Everything you see and hear in this place is top secret over everything else. Now get on your radio and call down the thunder. Make it rain, Captain. I want an Omega Four, two minutes ago."

"Sir? Clarify please! I don't want to make a mistake. Omega Four?" Hamilton asked to make sure.

"I called it. Make it happen. I want at least twenty fighters in the air in thirty seconds with everything they carry. Every member of the military on this base armed and ready to use lethal force. Period." Max looked at him hard.

"Sir! Yes, Sir!" Hamilton picked up his radio, identified himself and gave the call sign. The dispatcher at the other end of the line didn't quite get it the first time and came back asking for authority. Max grabbed the radio.

"This is a full Omega Four alert. Now. This is Terra One countersign X-Ray, X-ray, Seven." Max waited for a moment.

"Countersign. Delta Eleven Alpha." The dispatcher was working the problem now.

"Repeat X-ray, X-ray, Seven." Max yelled into the box. There was a brief static pause.

"Omega Four now in action. Thirty seconds to seal." The voice was now as professional as it could be, someone had grabbed a headset off someone at dispatch. The red lights in the hallway started to flash and the sound of running feet and sealing thudding vault doors being sealed was all that was heard.

"Ted. This better be the right thing to do at this moment." Max was trying to maintain some degree of control and decorum.

"They just tried to FUCKING kill us, Max!" I screamed, finally losing it. "They blew up Irina's car! They expected to kill ME, my WIFE and my LITTLE GIRL! We left half a dozen good men out there in a ditch who I don't know are alive or dead." I looked really hard at him. "So, WHAT PART OF THIS LOOKS FUCKING UNREASONABLE TO YOU?" Members of my own security detail were showing up in bunches. Two of my personal security force came busting through the door and went to our side.

"El Paso gas line." Max holstered his weapon and looked at everyone in the room. "The El Paso gas line blew up and just happened to pick a spot where you were at to explode. It seems like something else happened, but it didn't. It was a freak accident, that is all, Ted. Nevada State police are on the scene and have already called base security." He turned and looked at a couple of the people that still had their weapons out and shook his head. "Besides, why the hell would anyone want to kill you two? Jesus Christ! Nobody even knows what you do, Ted. In your old age you're getting as goofy as Bates, Jacobs and everyone else that has worked on this project." He turned and exploded at a couple of the men. "Put those goddamn guns away, right now, do you hear me?" He was screaming.

"Then tell me this, Max!" I yelled back at him while sliding the big envelope down the table. "Why did the El Paso gas line 'just happen' to go off right then, right there, right when Irina gives me that little gift compliments of one Herr Doktor...Simon Ratterman!"

He opened the envelope and dropped into a chair looking at it. His eyes came up and met mine and he could see and feel the fire. He looked puzzled and then it hit him all at once.

"Hamilton!" He yelled at our new team member. "You call the main gate and stop anyone from leaving! That, mister, is an order." Hamilton went out in the hallway looking for a phone.

"Help him Ralph." I said to one of my security team. "He'll get lost out there." The man nodded and followed him.

"Who was here, Max?" I asked, while he stared at the template like it was a snake that had just bit him.

"Committee members. Two of them." He looked up again and then back at the plastic template.

"What did they want?" I asked quietly this time, calm reason returning.

"They were concerned Irina might still be leaking information back to her former employers." He didn't look up.

"Show him, Irina." She took the book and handed it to him with one hand while gripping her pistol in the other down at her side. He opened the book and noted the first four pictures, then stopped at the fifth; the one I hadn't seen until just moments before we entered the complex.

It was a drawing of Max meeting with two people.

Who were not human.

"Those your Committee members, Max?" I asked in a flat, deadly tone.

Max dropped the drawings, took a deep breath and expelled it in a loud whoosh. He rubbed his face with both hands and rocked back in his chair, looking at the ceiling, deflated and defeated.

"I think we have something to talk about Max."

I motioned for everyone but Irina to leave the room. When they were gone, I stood over Max and with my good hand I pulled his .45 Colt from its holster. Before he could react, I slid it down the table to Irina who snapped it up, cocked the slide and put a round in the chamber in one lightning fast motion. With a sneer she snatched up her pistol leaned forward on her elbows and pointed both barrels at Max, locked and loaded.

“Now,” I said with menacing calm, “I want some answers. We are not going to have another Kammler or Bates on our hands here. I have gone through that twice and don’t expect a third.”

“Ted...” he looked close to tears, “you don’t know what you are asking!” Max pleaded.

“Just the truth, Max. Is that so much after all this time?” I looked around for some coffee and poured myself a cup. The throbbing in my wrist was getting worse but I could live with it. Irina grimaced at him, growling. She clearly wanted to waste him right then.

“I get the truth,” I said sitting at the far end of the table next to Irina taking a sip of my coffee, “or one of us doesn’t leave this room alive.”



CHAPTER 44

Max looked at the space in between us. Some secret spot that held his attention, but it was clear he was surveying a different landscape in his mind than we were seeing. Through the last seven years we had worked together and become closer, and yet there were still deep secrets separating all of us from one another. The silence hung heavy in the room for several minutes and was finally broken by Max who took a deep breath. I motioned for Irina to lower the guns, which she did with a reluctant snarl.

Max started without preamble.

"I was a good naval officer. Dedicated and on my way to a major command. That is an accomplishment for any black man. Somewhere along that track, I came under Jacobs command and everything changed. I started to deal with secrets agendas and covert operations constructed not by policy makers or patriots, but by appeasers. After the first encounter in the fifties with the Visitors, we tried to make a working alliance with them, but that was short lived. Then, we started to follow their directions. Montauk was just one of four different methods we came up with to close the opening they were using to enter and leave our world. The other three were failures, as well as Montauk under Bates. Then you came along and things started to happen. Jacobs wanted you to work with Kammler for some reason he never told me. Jacobs was losing credibility and someone or something was looking to replace him as chief of the project. Then you came back and blew all of that up. A true feeling that the opening could be closed rippled through the secret government and funding was obtained. Somehow Jacobs knew those ships held part of the answer. The only way we could blend the technology and get the final answer was by bringing them here and letting you see them.

"That was the last thing I wanted, because somewhere along the line of all of this, they got to me. The Visitors made me an offer I couldn't refuse. I know it sounds crazy, but they offered me a White House Cabinet position if I would just make sure this project failed, as well as all the others I laid my hand to. You asked me once about MK Ultra, the mind control stuff that I just shined you on about? It was their tech. It was a way of altering what people thought and could be used to change the internal programming of an individual. But somehow, after repeated attempts, we found none of it worked on you or Irina. Some outside force was at work here that somehow, impossibly, had techniques and tech superior to a group of hyper-advanced aliens. That was my first true indication that there was some hope. Either there was a knowledgeable resistance group, or, another assemblage of aliens working for the good guys. The Visitors were not happy. They wanted to make sure you didn't make any more advances. When you got the scout craft to work, all hell broke loose in their ranks. That particular ship is not one of theirs, and none of them can make it work. It takes a special genetic coding process to kick it into gear. Somehow you have that. Irina has the ability to remotely view you from a distance and see what you are seeing when you are in 'phase' which is what they call it. That is when whatever has been implanted into you takes over. This concerned them greatly and they decided both of

you had to be...removed. Ergo, the 'pipeline explosion', caused by an extremely high powered frequency beam directed straight at it from a space platform." He paused.

"How did they know I got the Sport Model working?"

"I told them." He never looked up at me.

I rubbed my forehead in hopeless frustration, feeling like my skull was going to explode from the heat rushing to my face. I wanted to save this man who was my friend and with every word he dug his own grave.

"Why Max?" I pleaded. "Why? We could have worked out the bugs. You and me! We could have still beaten them!" I wanted to hear the logic behind any of this. "There's betraying your wife, or your country, but betraying your planet? And the entire human race? It's the same as Bates and others that believed we were already cooked and there was no hope of victory."

"I've always done what they wanted." He motioned to the room. "My rank, my home, my family, the respect of my community, all because of them! They gave it to me! Otherwise, I would still be just one more nigger slave trying to make it in a white man's world! I was promised a Cabinet post under the new administration! If I just finished my job here. Making sure this project failed, like projects do all the time. Making sure you...failed." He ended weakly.

There was a small knock on the door as Margaret stuck her head in.

"Washington is on the line, sir."

"Take a message." Max straightened himself.

"No, sir. It is Mr. Claver." She stood erect and waited for the name to sink in.

"Oh." Max got up and walked towards the door. "I need to take this. Please excuse me."

"Is this the part where you tell them they missed us, Judas?" I never looked up at him.

"Yeah...basically." He walked out and closed the door.

I looked at Irina, crying quietly. I started to get up and she motioned for me to sit down. "Is this what I left my family and my country for, Ted? This is the same thing I watched in Russia. They destroyed my father and brothers the same way. Here it was supposed to be different. Max was our friend I thought." She got up and walked to the door. "Will you have that young captain, what is his name? Hamilton? Take me home please."

"I don't know if that is such a good idea, Irina. I think you'd be safer here on the base right now." I got up, trying to comfort her, but she would have none of it.

"I want to be in my own home! Surrounded by my things!" She screamed with defiance in her eyes. "I won't stay here under any condition and you can't make me!"

"Of course I won't, but it's still safer." I hesitated and opened the door. My team member was standing with Hamilton. "Would you gentlemen take my wife home please?"

"Yes, sir." Came the response with a small note of surprise.

"Use the helicopter. Go straight into the municipal airport in Henderson." Irina touched my arm as she passed me, then turned and kissed me passionately for a long, loving moment. She pulled away and looked into my eyes.

"Get your hand fixed." She handed me the .45 and walked out still holding her gun in one hand and her purse in the other. I wondered if I could ever repair the damage that had been done today between the two of us.

Suddenly, Margaret screamed. I ran into Max's office. He was sitting up at his desk clutching the phone with blood gushing out of his nose and ears, his eyes rolled up in his head while his whole body jerked in a nightmarish spasm. I yelled for Margaret to get the med team but she just stood there screaming at the top of her lungs, until someone else came in and pulled her out of the room.

They put Max on a stretcher and rolled him down to the infirmary where it only took two or three minutes before the chief physician came out into the hallway pulling off his bloody latex gloves.

“I would say it was a massive cerebral stroke, Dr. Humphrey. He was pretty much dead when they rolled him in there. Was he under a lot of pressure lately?” The doctor started to fill in the required forms and I just walked away heading back to pick up some items in the conference room and go to my office. The man who I thought my best friend and ally turned out to be my greatest enemy all along. Now he was dead for not killing me. I was staring into a void that was now starting to stare back.

* * * * *

“Would you like us to stay here for awhile, Mrs. Humphrey?” Captain Hamilton asked Irina as she went into her house in Henderson.

“No, but thank you. I will be alright.” She walked in and closed the door. Walking to the living room she watched as the two men went back to the car they had picked up at the airport. They stood by for a few minutes and then got in and drove off.

Irina walked upstairs and looked at the two packed traveling bags that were sitting on the floor of the bedroom. Taking off her sundress, she folded it and placed it neatly in a drawer in the closet and pulled out a dark suit, high heels and a white blouse. She dressed quickly after making a single phone call.

Standing in the living room, she selected two photographs and placed them into one of her traveling bags. She put on her dark glasses and walked out when the cab pulled up in front of the house and got into it.

Colonel Mrs. Irina Tolsky-Humphrey had made a decision today.

Now she knew it was time to pay for it.



CHAPTER 45

The drugs the doctor had given me for my wrist made me very sleepy. I awoke feeling groggy and not sure of what had happened or where I was. I found I'd been out for several hours on the couch in my office. A distant drum was beating in my head, but I just couldn't remember the melody or the song. I got up and walked out to the reception area. There was no one there. The clock on the wall read 6:55pm, but the sweep second hand had stopped working, frozen in place. I shook my head trying to clear it. Realizing I must have been asleep for at least three hours, I couldn't believe all that had happened and that I had just fallen asleep. I looked at my wrist, noticing the ace bandage was gone. I flexed it back and forth and there was no pain whatsoever. My watch read 6:55pm. But the second hand, like the clock on the wall, had also frozen in place.

Something was wrong! I knew that now. My wrist was broken and had hurt like a bitch earlier. Now it was completely healed. I picked up my lab coat and walked back to Max's office. There was no one there. Going down to the main lab complex, I found it empty as well. This was unheard of. I walked back into the main part of the complex and headed down to the hanger bay. There was no sentry on duty at the security door. Pushing through it, I found myself in the hanger. No one there either, I thought, or, at least, I didn't see anyone right away.

Suddenly, someone walked out from behind the Sport Model. He was looking at the saucer very carefully, rubbing his hand along it. I couldn't see in the half-light of the bay who it was, but I knew if it was the guard I was going to have this man drawn and quartered for leaving his post. Walking towards him the man turned and smiled. I froze in my tracks, looking at the face I'd only seen in faded black and white pictures taken very long ago.

"Hello Ted." The man said in a hissing silky soft German accent with a smile. "I have been so wanting to meet you in person. I am Professor Simon Ratterman."

He extended his hand and I took it out of reflex, feeling the warmth and strength of the grip.

"This must be a drug induced dream. You can't be here. This place is off limits to everyone." I realized how foolish all of this was in saying it. If it was a dream what difference did it make and if it wasn't they were there in the hanger bay.

"It isn't a dream, Ted. Just think of all this as an alternate moment in between the seconds of reality. I am not a nightmare and where we are there is no one else here right now." He smiled again and motioned toward the doorway. "I would like to talk to you for a few minutes, but we could pick some place a little more comfortable."

Ratterman walked ahead of me and went into the employees lounge at the end of the corridor well past the security checkpoint that led into the hanger bay. There, he took down a couple of mugs and poured some coffee, handing one to me and added sugar to his own.

"I don't understand this. If I am not dreaming and I'm not in one of the ships in there, how can I be in a different moment of time?" I felt my pulse then pressed hard on skin and watched the coloration turn from pink, to white, then back to pink.

"Oh, you're alive and functioning quite well, I promise you. You haven't left your own time/space area if that is what you are thinking. You are between the ticks of the clock, sort of." Ratterman's German accent was a lot like Kammler's. But he seemed more real, more vibrant, than Kammler had ever been, and didn't seem to exude the haughty pretension Kammler was notorious for.

"You will understand it by the time I have to leave, which is very shortly. You got my front panel for the little saucer?" He sipped his coffee and looked around. Ratterman found what he was looking for, which was an ashtray, and he pulled out a cigarette and started to smoke.

"Irina gave it to me, yes." I said, still fuzzy, trying to piece the puzzle together. "Then someone tried to blow us up. Max told me a story about working for aliens and then...died. Irina went home. I passed out and then woke up to find you." I felt anger well up at all that had been done to me that was outside my control. "That has pretty much been my day."

"Calm yourself. I had nothing to do with the explosion or Max's death. I know about them, but they were not caused by my people or me. I swear." Ratterman held out his hand to me as if to shake on the deal, or as a way of sealing his word about his innocence. Again, I shook the man's hand more out of habit or instinct than actual belief. Ratterman clenched my hand in a vise-like grip and yanked me towards him. With his free hand he took his now red-hot glowing cigarette and ground the burning tip against my arm.

"OW!" I yelped and pulled back squirming but Ratterman held me firm until the cigarette had branded my flesh. With a cruel smile, Ratterman finally released me and I jumped away rubbing my arm.

"Now you know this is not a dream. I would have pinched you but I think that will prove far more effective. That," he pointed to my smoking flesh, "is for the sake of proof. Tomorrow when you think this is a dream again, look at your arm and you will see that burn." Ratterman squeezed out the cigarette between his own fingers, making a sizzling sound as he burnt his own flesh.

"Now, do you want to know the truth or are you happy living with all the lies that make up your current world view?" Ratterman sat back smugly and waited. I studied him, considering what was going on. I knew I was falling deeper into the madness that seemed to affect everyone that worked in this field. Were my delusions now talking to me and burning holes in my hide? Shaking my head to dismiss the conclusions of my own psychosis, I nodded in agreement and waited for the next phase of this insanity to continue. Ratterman leaned forward on his knees and, sounding like the Brother's Grimm, he spun his tale.

* * * * *

"There are two great houses in this universe. They are made up of ancient beings who have fought and struggled with each other for longer than there has been life on this planet. Each seeks dominion over the other and all the subjugated worlds that they possess. But there are rules that must be obeyed, even for these great houses. One of those rules is about the conquest of planets, which can only be done by compromise and acceptance. In this way, all out wars can be avoided, even though they have had their share of those in the past. Whole star systems have been incinerated in the wake of one of their little squabbles over rights to some insignificant little ball of dirt or star.

"Today, our world, yours and mine, has fallen under the desirous eye of one of the minions of the great houses. I would doubt anyone in the royal palaces even knows or cares who gets our world. But, on the other hand, I think we care a great deal about who serves and who rules."

He stopped and lit another cigarette taking a long, slow drag. Getting up he refilled our cups with fresh coffee.

"You're talking a bunch of crap about mythology and cosmic conspiracies, when I just want to know how you got here and where...here...is?" I snapped. "Hell, I don't even know if you are real...or if I'm losing my mind."

"Oh, you are quite sane, Ted, but unaware of realities. I had hoped by my coming here, I could help with some of the problems you have had and some that you are going to have." He sat there sizing me up through the drifting smoke. "But if you don't care, I can leave and you can drop back out of this alternate time-phase and we can all act like this never happened..."

"But? There is always a 'But' at the end of sentences like that." I watched his eyes narrow. He grinned like a wolf in grandma's bed.

"Of course there is. Truth is hard to hear. Honesty is almost impossible to obtain and loyalties change with the prevailing direction of the wind. Today, in your time continuum, I gave your wife a template to help you understand that craft in the hanger back there. The reason I did that is the fact that it will do things that this piece of junk in the basement you are working on will never be able to accomplish. I started with one of those, that thing you call 'The Device' if you remember, with Kammler in Germany. But it was not going to get us anywhere without killing us first from radiation or blasting us into some spirit filled dimension that was plugged up with ghouls, ghosts and floating vapors of suffocating ectoplasm.

"Then someone came to me and handed me a little secret that made it all work. The same type of thing that happened to your own father, if my memory serves correctly. Out there, in the desert in the night, the heat waves shimmering off the desert ground, him sitting there playing with his device and trying to get it just to hold a stable position in space/time for seconds. And then someone handed him a device that worked beyond anything he would ever hope to be able to build. But with a caution that goes with it: once he left, he couldn't go back without suffering certain consequences of paradox. He understood that and was willing to take that risk. That risk affected all of us in the local universe. His goings and comings caused a shift in the realities we work within and we had to make constant adjustments to the local universe so it would not phase in and out at the wrong time.

"We found he was given a disrupter from an agent of one of the groups trying so hard to control this planet. So then we had to send someone back to aid him in building something that wouldn't cause time shifts to the degree he was doing them. T. Townsend Brown had done the same thing years before, as well as Kammler. But Kammler was the worst. He ripped holes in the fabric of time to the point we couldn't repair them all. Others came as soon as they saw the opportunity to try their hand at subjugation as well. So, because of these far distant projects, each group did some degree of damage to the cloak surrounding this planet. Our little Earth, with our rich genetic resources of races and flora and fauna, became known to many orders and groups wanting to bring us under their control. Not for any other reason than just the acquisition of new wealth, new land and new peoples. The story is as old as the universe. Power, control and those that rule and those that serve." He crushed out his half smoked cigarette and got up.

"I must go. My time here is limited and I feel a strange vibration coming from the force field I left around this facility. I have probably been detected by your little gray friends, or the Visitors as you call them."

SANDS OF TIME

“Wait!” I said standing up. “Two questions. Is my father still alive? And will I see you again?”

“To your first interrogative the answer is yes, but I will not amplify on that. To your second; there is a possibility, but that depends a great deal on you.” He walked into the hallway without another word.

I followed and pushed the swinging door open to find an empty corridor and I was standing with a cup in my hand with no idea of what had just happened.

The hands on the clock began to sweep through time once more.



CHAPTER 46

Turning, I stepped back into the employees lounge with the sudden realization that my wrist hurt like a bastard again as it throbbed from the pressure of the wrapped bandage. A guy was standing at the refrigerator pulling out a brown bag. He looked up with a start, a shocked look on his face.

“Dr. Humphrey, I didn’t hear you come in.” He said.

“How long have you been in here?” I asked him which had to be the all time stupidest question I had ever asked anyone.

“About twenty minutes.”

“What time is it, right now?” I hesitated for a couple of seconds and then pointed at my watch, “It stopped again, must be something wrong.” He turned and looked at the clock on the wall. Every room had one and they were all synchronized to the same atomic master control unit up in administration.

“Eleven forty-two.” He looked at me carefully. “In the morning.” The man added in case I wasn’t sure of my AM or P M anymore as well as the time.

“Thanks.” I walked back up toward the front of the building. It was still seven PM last night for me, but every time I encountered something to do with movement in time, I lost time in my life, that much was clear.

I headed into my hallway and noticed the door to Max’s office was open. I looked into a clean office, where all the personal effects had already been taken out and boxed up. The file drawer was open and all of the papers apparently removed and placed in the security center. It was as if he had never existed. I stepped into my office to be greeted by the young man I had working for me as a yeoman. He was filing some papers as I stepped into the office and he looked up.

“I was hoping you would sleep in this morning. How are you feeling, sir?” He was always polite but distant, in his personal interactions.

“Where did they take Max?” I asked as I dropped my lab coat on the back of the chair.

“They took him to Bethesda yesterday to do the post mortem. They’re having a full military ceremony at Arlington.” The young man stood in the doorway looking at me. “Dr. Humphrey, would you like me to find a razor and a clean shirt for you?”

I looked down at myself. I still had blood on my shirt as well as some other anonymous stains. Rubbing my face, I realized I had two days growth of beard and the stubble was rough on my surprised probing fingers.

“No. I am going to drive home and I will be there for a day or so. I think this place can function without me for a little while, yes?”

I signed out on the prescribed form and headed for the motor pool to get a car. The day was clear and warm as I drove off the base, with the windows rolled down. I wanted to see Irina and just be home in my own world for a while. With my right hand on the steering wheel the cigarette burn on my forearm became a red circle and throbbed with each beat of my heart.

“Well, I don’t know. So far he has done well, but this business about the explosion and the information given to us from the Visitors may cause some problems.” The man’s full attention was not on just this one question. He had a hundred decisions to make this morning and this one seemed like it was a no brainer. Finally stopping, he looked at the file again and turned to the white haired man across from him.

“Listen, Ray. We got a lot invested in this project and what we need to know is if it can be made operational in the next two years. That is really the question, isn’t it?” The man sat in the large leather chair and turned to look out the French door windows next to his desk. The view was of a lovely rose garden next to the building.

“He can make it work if he wants to. He already demonstrated that to the director before he died. It is just how many of the true applications do we want to give Dr. Humphrey. If we put someone else in over him as an administrator, he may buck and run on us. If we give him the whole program, we will have to take him into our confidence and tell him the whole story. That will make him one of the most powerful non-elected men in this government.” The man looked down at his notes, then back at the man with the heavy jowls and the ski-jump nose across the large desk where so many other greater men than he had sat.

“That doesn’t really concern me. I just need to know the son of a bitch can get the thing to work and that we can deploy it and scare the crap out of those little gray bastards. You know, Ike told me this would happen and someday we would have to get them the hell off this planet.”

The President shook his head in an affirmative way for a long moment.

“I think we need to go with the first string. Give it to him. Let’s see if he can play hardball for us.”

He closed the file and pulled up the next. The other man made a note on the file. He needed to send someone out to Nevada and have them talk to Dr. Theodore Humphrey who was now officially the new head of Project: Black Light.

* * * * *

By the time I pulled into my driveway, there was a seasonal monsoon-like rain falling, filling up the gutters and running down the street at the pace of a good river. I got out and headed for the front door. Forgetting my keys was the norm for me, so I fiddled with the flowerpot and pulled the extra one out from underneath the desert rose bush and finally got it into the lock.

Stepping into the house, I stripped of my wet cloths and skirted the edge of the room so they wouldn’t drip and stain the expensive Persian carpets covering the hard wood floor. I bundled them up and carried the wet clump upstairs to the small laundry room off the bathroom next to our bedroom.

“Hey! I’m home! Anybody here to help me get warm? Cripes, it’s pouring out there!” I walked into the room and dropped them on top of the washer. Walking back into the bedroom I looked around at everything being so neat and orderly.

“Irina? Are you up here at all?” I strolled over to Pasha’s room and looked inside at the empty space. All the toys were picked up and placed neatly on shelves. Downstairs I walked through each room and finally into the backyard and looked around the pool. The rainstorm had passed, as they do in the desert, and there was no sight of her anywhere.

We had always left notes for each other next to the phone on a magnetic board glued to the refrigerator. I found the lavender colored envelope with my name on it.

Reading the letter Irina wrote me yesterday I could not believe the words. Her precise handwriting ran across each of the two sheets, the words ripping my heart right out of my chest.

I held the letter in my hand as I slumped to the floor and rolled up onto my side, racked by sobs. Beating the floor with my broken wrist, I screamed and cried at the same time. The next series of desert showers started to pour down on our little house in Henderson, Nevada. The cloudburst would not last long but it would be intense and the small animals living in their desert burrows would have to find high ground to make sure they didn't drown.

Part Seven

Harv



CHAPTER 47

General Clark Anderson was the errand boy sent out to see me in Nevada. His job was simple and straightforward. His briefcase held four large files and he was to provide me with an “Eyes Only” session of and then return them to the vault in the office complex in Washington, DC, where he worked.

He was one of the four senior military coordinators for what had become one of the darkest programs in their arsenal of defense systems, though totally untested and untried up to now. Anderson was spit and polish all the way. Dress uniform with ribbons that indicated all the campaigns he had served in, showing he was no marionette sitting behind a desk shuffling papers getting his strings pulled by his masters. He was a serving field grade officer that had been advanced into the trusted realms where politics, diplomacy and direct military action converged to form the elite of this country’s cadre. Individuals that would use any methods necessary to accomplish the tasks necessary to keep this country an open and free society.

Anderson had been at the complex for several hours when I arrived back from Las Vegas a shattered man. I had spent time at home not relaxing and making love to my wife, but trying to find out how Irina had gotten out of the country, from the most secure top-secret military installation on Earth, without anyone knowing about it. But then again, she was KGB and the best there was at what she did; a spy moving undetected. The path became clear when I tracked her to Southern California, then across the border into Mexico. From there, a flight from Tijuana to Mexico City, another to Havana and then a direct flight home to Moscow, courtesy of the Soviet Military. I knew the damage assessment team would have to be notified and a full inquiry would be launched. It had been high risk to have her with me to begin with, worse that we were married, and then even more so to allow her to see the functioning of the project up close.

But I had never questioned her loyalty to me. In reflecting back, I realized too much of what had happened recently made her frightened. That fear had spilled over onto Pasha and her concern for her well being and protection. Irina somehow felt, according to her letter, she would be safer back in her own country, where at least, as she put it, she knew who the bad guys were, a reference to Max’s double dealing, deceit and betrayal that had become evident at their last meeting. I didn’t like it and wanted to pursue a remedy to the situation at some future point, but right now I had a project needing my attention, so I sucked it up, rubbed dirt on it, wiped my eyes, blew my nose and got back in the game, like any good linebacker would. I had to play through the pain.

Walking into the facility I had on a freshly pressed dress suit and looked like the professional I was. Over the years I emphasized I expected the people working for me to leave their personal problems outside and come in with the intention of doing their jobs the very best they could. I was now using that same yardstick on myself for my work at Groom Lake.

If I were lucky enough to get through the assessment review and security hearings maybe I could finish up some of my tasks before I left this world and went back into the private realm of research and academia.

I walked in to find a new woman sitting at the desk in my reception area, a pleasantly attractive mid-thirties redhead with deep green eyes. She stood up and extended her hand.

"Good morning Dr. Humphrey, I am Ellen Hanson. I have been assigned to you as your new assistant and coordinator." She was in a blue business suit that was cut to her knees. Her grip was unusually strong and her eyes twinkled as she spoke.

"Where's my yeoman, Captain Marsh?" I looked into my office and saw the officer standing there looking at my degrees and pictures that graced the walls.

"He was reassigned two days ago, since his enlistment was coming to an end and it was thought that it would be a good idea if you had someone in the interim until you selected someone else to sit here. I am only on temporary assignment out of Washington." She straightened her skirt and sat back down, opening my ledger on her desk. "General Anderson is waiting to see you and then you have a staff meeting with the section heads at two o'clock this afternoon." She picked up her pen and waited for my instructions.

"That is fine. No! Cancel the meeting this afternoon. I need to do a couple of things and I don't know if I can make it. We will have to reschedule that one." I walked into my office as General Anderson turned. I closed the door and looked at the immaculate uniform and hard jaw on the man across from me.

"I presume you are here to relieve me of my position?" I sat at my desk.

"On the contrary, Doctor. I am here to provide you with certain information and this." He handed me the top envelope out of his open briefcase that sat in the extra chair across the desk. "That is your appointment as head of H. S. C. and comes directly from the President." The General sat down as well, using the front portion of the chair only and pulled out several file folders, setting them on my desk.

"This may be unwise considering the present situation." I closed it and put it down.

"If you are talking about your wife and her sudden trip back to Russia, we already know about it and it has been factored in. The evaluation is that she could not transfer enough information about the project to cause us much disruption. Her knowledge base is limited in certain critical areas, so the best she could do is advance their program by a few months, maybe weeks. That is not considered enough to replace you as head of this project, since, if we did, it would put us behind by a factor of years." He turned and looked directly at me with a hard set of eyes that never blinked.

"You sound like an accountant talking about doing my taxes, General, if you don't mind me saying so. We are talking about my wife leaving me, taking my daughter and fleeing the country to a place where I will probably never see them again and you are telling me about time schedules." I felt the anger welling up in me and this whole wretched system had now cost me my wife, my daughter and my happiness.

"Dr. Humphrey. I have spent my life commanding troops in the field. I have made decisions concerning people's lives, when I knew they would die. I cannot see how being emotional about someone leaving you and going back to where they came from is a matter of anything but accounting or damage control. I am sorry if I seem cold about it, but that is what they pay me to do." That was as much of an apology as I could expect from someone in this business.

"Alright, so you want me to go on. What are these?" I pointed to the files on my desk that had come out of Anderson's briefcase.

"Only twelve men know about these files. You are going to be the thirteenth. They detail the four other projects that are being brought together with yours. They form a security web we plan to deploy in hopefully less than fifteen years, which will

protect America from an invasion from space.” Anderson finally sat back in his chair and crossed his legs.

“That is about 1986 or 1987 isn’t it?” I wondered if everyone planned that far in advance.

“That is correct. When we get the High Altitude Atmospheric Resonance Program, or HAARP, online, we should be able to put an electronic screen over the North American continent, preventing any spacecraft from entering our air space through the opening in the Van Allen radiation belt.” When Anderson spoke, I could hear the sound of eagles screaming and flags flapping in a heroic wind. He reminded me a bit of my old uncle Bob.

“HAARP you say? When will that happen?” I pushed open the first file and looked at the cover sheet with all the disclaimers on what would happen to a person if they divulged any of the information contained in the file. I signed the form and flipped open the cover page.

“Around 1998. A long-term program to take our country back, but we must work slowly so none of them will know what we are doing. We are using a form of misdirection so we can get all the installations in place and working before they know what we have done. That, coupled with having to pander to a Congress that wants to know where each and every nickel and dime goes just makes it that much harder for all of us, but the end result will be well worth the effort, I am sure of that.” Anderson looked around and saw my ashtray. “May I smoke?”

“Of course. It’s the one vice I have not yet given up, but these days I’m leaning more towards a pipe.” I pushed the glass ashtray over to him and the man pulled a gold case out of his pocket that somehow seemed familiar to me.

“Do you know when they are planning to have Max’s funeral back in Arlington?” I thought it would be good to go back and at least see that chapter of my story to a conclusion.

“I am sorry. It was held yesterday. It was the President’s request for family only. Soviets are all over those things with cameras and microphones. He didn’t want to have anyone exposed by their presence at the graveside.” Anderson picked a piece of tobacco off the end of his tongue.

“Were you there?” I asked sadly.

“No. I had to be here, so I was making arrangements for transit to this location. Besides, I didn’t know him very well.” Anderson was just a cold fish that was all I could imagine.

“Did anyone tell Admiral Jacobs about his death?” I was hoping for a different answer.

“Again, I am sorry, sir. Admiral Jacobs died six months ago, in Florida. I am surprised that you didn’t know that, Dr. Humphrey. Didn’t Max ever say anything about it? He was at the funeral in Orlando.”

“No, he didn’t. Listen, did Max report to you directly?” I ventured a guess.

“To my office, yes. Not always to me, I have two assistants, two colonels that work directly with me. You will meet both of them in the next month or so. Why do you ask?” Anderson was starting to get the flavor of something rolling around inside of me that needed to come out.

“What part of the program do those things in my hanger bay have to do with?” I got up and took off my jacket. I was back in the now and wanted to question this man in detail since it seemed he had all the answers.

“Those are artifacts, nothing more. We had them at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, but no one could do anything with them. They are just curiosities mostly. Jacobs lobbied us to move them here and the guys at Wright-Pat wanted the space back inside their hanger. We couldn’t put them on display and we couldn’t junk them, so we sent them here. No one actually expected you to work with them.

They're just stored here until we can figure out what to do with them. I have no idea why Max went along with the request to move them here. Seems like a damn waste of expensive real estate to me." Anderson had completely discounted them in his ledger book that much was clear.

"So Max never told you anything at all about them?" I pushed a little closer to see if there was any response.

"He told us they were here, delivered to you guys, but what else is there to tell us, Dr. Humphrey?" The sarcasm was heavy with the man who thought I was just wasting his time out of spite.

"Okay. You might want to know that I got one of them to work about a week ago." I sat back and waited.

"I am not sure what you mean by that. You got, what? The hatch open and closed, what?" Anderson didn't seem like someone with much imagination, but I knew that he had to have some since he worked in the most novel area of science.

"No. I did a little more than that. It is surprising that Max didn't report that to your office. He told me the day he died that he'd met with two people off the Committee about what we had done the night before with the Sport Model." I was trolling now, casting out a wide net. I wanted to see the reaction of this comment inside the straight-line world of General Anderson.

"What did you just say? Max met with someone from the Committee? What Committee?" Anderson demanded.

"Why MJ-12; the guys that run this program. He was meeting with them when I came back from Indian Wells after the explosion that almost killed my wife and I." I waited, holding my breath hoping that the veneer would crack and some degree of truth would come out.

"There is no such Committee, Dr. Humphrey. It was disassembled years ago. All of its functions were taken over by the HSC steering committee, which includes the President, some trusted advisors, certain heads of the military and a half dozen top scientists in the country. I don't know why he would tell you he was meeting with someone that doesn't have any function. Besides, he should have called my office immediately if you got one of those things to work." Anderson took out another cigarette and seemed more agitated now, which pleased me to no end.

I pushed the button on the intercom and waited. Margaret, Max's former secretary answered. "Margaret? Could you come into my office please." The intercom went dead and twenty seconds later she walked in after a brief knock.

"General Anderson, this is Margaret, Max's assistant. I think you've met." I looked at him and he nodded curtly to her as though she was just a minion.

"Margy, who did Max meet with before all the excitement on the fourteenth?" She flipped her notepad she always carried with her.

"Doctors Urbarian and Klicton...from Washington." She spoke and looked up. She knew something was afoot since I had a new person at my outer door and that no one was gossiping around the facility. When secretaries and assistants don't know what's going on and can't prattle about it to one another, then everyone knows that changes are about to occur.

"Thank you, Margy. That will be all." She nodded and left. I looked at Anderson and watched his jaw getting tighter by degrees, like a screw was being turned at his temple. I imagined that this man would be a real jerk if you had to deal with him on a daily basis. "General?"

"That is outside your purview at this time, Dr. Humphrey." Anderson responded.

"That means," I pushed, like a large cat with a mouse, "that you know them but that you don't know why they were here or what Max was doing with them, if I remember my formal political lexicon correctly. Which is it?" I pushed up hard on him again, ratcheting at that screw.

“As I said, it is not in your purview.”

“It that your final answer?”

Anderson looked at me sideways, and nodded suspiciously.

“Good and fine!” I said merrily slapping my desk. “Then I will formally offer my resignation to you right now and be done with all this bullshit, General! I have had enough of it for a lifetime. And since I seem to be the only guy in this country, or even on this planet for that matter, that can get one of those flying saucers down in that hanger bay to work, and, as well, as I am not among the elite of your prized and famed ‘half dozen’ scientists’.” I spit the words back, drenched in sarcasm, as I was now having some real fun at his expense and I was really leaning into it now. “Then I don’t see any reason at all to be wasting my time, and yours, General, working for someone that thinks things of this magnitude are not in my ‘purview’. You will have my resignation on your desk as fast as I can get it to you. Until then, General, we have nothing else to talk about. Have a great fucking day!”

Without another word, I got up and walked out of the room leaving Anderson sitting there grinding his teeth and working his jaw in shock. I took the first left off the corridor and went out via the back door where I had parked the motor pool car and drove off the base via the Rachel road that no one, but security forces, used and tore out onto Interstate Highway 375.

I was actually humming when I picked up speed on the black top heading back to Vegas. I laughed in the car.

“We will see, won’t we?”



CHAPTER 48

A month went by without any word from the base. I had gone back, turned in my keys, ID cards and picked up my personnel effects, stripped all my degrees off the wall, packed them in an old file box and drove away, never looking back in the rear view mirror.

The house in Henderson was not only put on the market but sold in three days. I filed for an abandonment divorce with the courts and since Nevada was the most liberal of all states on its views on holy matrimony, it was granted immediately. I moved into a small rented house in Boulder City, the town wrapped around Boulder Dam, thirty miles outside of Las Vegas. It had no casinos, no houses of legal prostitution and no liquor stores. A quiet community of people that mowed their lawns, trimmed their hedges and kept pretty much to themselves. A refuge in the sea of sin was how some saw Boulder City. I wanted to move somewhere close and decided to work for awhile on my own on a couple of ideas I had for inventions that could be used in both the space program and during the current energy crisis sweeping the country. For the first time in years, I found I could work on things that were of interest to me and I was setting up a pretty nice shop in my little single car garage.

During the past month I thought of Irina and Pasha, but it didn't seem to matter. I couldn't change any of what had happened and I was just hoping she'd be doing all right for herself. Maybe she could trade her knowledge for a position that would afford her a place with a good heater. Their picture graced my small living room that I also used as an office.

During the evenings when it cooled down, I'd sit with the window open and type away about my newest invention: a nuclear battery. A small radioisotope thermal generator that would take the particle emissions from radioactive material and use it as a source of electrons to cause a current flow in a set of induction coils placed inside a container. The effectiveness was approaching forty percent, which is incredible for power generation and I was pretty sure someone would jump on the bandwagon with me and want to use these devices in the next generation of satellites. I'd spent months at the lab learning how to patent a system, which was a whole new experience for me and was part of the vast horizon before me in the wide, wonderful Private Sector. After selling the house and looking carefully at my bank account, I realized I didn't have to do much for a few years if I didn't want to. There were no wolves howling at my door and for the first time in a long time I was actually relaxing again.

At exactly eight o'clock in the evening, two months to the day after I'd resigned, a knock came on my door. I was typing away, trying to get the wording right on the third part of my patent and felt slightly annoyed that someone wanted my attention and was breaking my focus.

I pulled the sheet out of the typewriter and walked over to the front door opening it, still reading what I'd written on the sheet of paper.

"Yes?" I looked up to see a rumpled man in a tweed jacket, gray slacks and shoes that had not seen a shine since candy bars were a nickel. The face was round and

splattered with little red capillaries that formed a map against the landscape of wrinkles and a huge gray and bushy walrus-like mustache. Along with the equally bushy eyebrows that hung like planter boxes of protruding hedges over the windows of his twinkling, mischievous crystal blue bloodshot eyes, that belied the age of the face. The man was five eight at best and seemed as wide as he was tall.

“Well? Are you going to ask me in or are we going to stand here and look at each other longingly into the deep of the night?” The man’s voice was husky and brash as he looked up and down the block. The row of houses all pretty much looked alike and the street lamps gave it a nice blend of Middle America, even though it was in Nevada.

“Why would I invite you in? I don’t even know you.” I started to close the door, when a hand shot out with a card in between the sausage fingers.

“I forgot, we haven’t been formally introduced.” The card stated this man was “Dr. Harvey Gilpsen, PhD.” There was a telephone number but no address as well as no title under his name. The one thing I did notice is that it had the emblazoned seal of the President of the United States on it.

“Dr. Gilpsen.” I looked at the card and handed it back to him. “You got a driver’s license with the same name on it?” Gilpsen raised one of his bushy eyebrows and caught the meaning and made a grunting sound as he handed me a whole leather case from his inside pocket. Drivers license, passport, White House identification card, and a security pass with a clearance level I’d never seen. The whole shebang.

“Will that do as to the bona fide nature of who I am?” Gilpsen stood there looking gloomy by nature and just oozing sarcasm.

“Come in, please.” I motioned to the living room where the man walked in looking around and sat down in the large leather chair with the books stacked up next to it. It was my favorite chair and anyone could tell it was where I spent a lot of time, with my pipe and glasses sitting on the end table next to it.

“Listen, you got a beer? God, I hate the desert. I hate the heat worst of all. Fat guys sweat miserably in this kind of place.” I walked in and pulled out a beer, popped the lid off and came back and handed it to him.

“No glass?” He protested, irate. “You mean to tell me that you don’t have a chilled mug in the freezer for your beer? What kind of barbarian are you anyway?” The sweaty man slurped downed the contents in seconds, smacking his lips with satisfaction. “That is better! But Christ almighty! You’d think you’re living some kind of monk’s life in this place.” He sniffed. “And raising some kind of wild animal in here.”

“Who the hell are you and what the hell do you want?” I said smiling as I found myself actually entertained by the antics of this man who was a mixture of several characters on television including Jonathan Winters, one of my favorite comedians.

“Who the hell am I? You read who the hell I am. I laid bare my soul in front of you. My God, you have seen more of my documents than my mistress. However, I don’t know if she can read anything but price tags on clothes and shoes. But that’s beside the point. The real question is; what the hell are you doing here?” He waved at the room.

“I am working, Doctor Gilpsen, on a patent.” I sat down and picked up my half finished Pepsi from the coffee table.

“Cut the crap with doctor this and doctor that. We both got ‘em so make it Harv and I will call you Ted, if you don’t mind. God, I get so tired of all those assholes I’m around, calling each other the right honorable this or that while they sniff each other’s butts. Shit! None of them are worth the powder to blow them to hell and back.” He finished the beer and held out the bottle looking at it like a long lost dog from childhood. “I don’t suppose I could have one more, could I? And by the way, you can’t file a patent.” I got him another beer and sat down again.

"What do mean I can't file a patent? Any American citizen can file a patent if I understand the system correctly." I shot back at him.

"Nope! You, Sunny Jim, are the exception to the rule. Look at article nineteen of the National Security Code. Anything you invent belongs to the guys that used to give you a paycheck. God that is terrible beer, but it's cold." Harv sat back and belched.

"The hell you say! I'm done with all of that." I looked at the papers in my hands.

"Oh, not by a long shot you're not, junior." Harv put the beer down on the stack of books next to the chair leaving a dripping wet ring on the cover, then picked it back up. "You really pissed off old square jaw, you know that don't you?"

"Square jaw?" I shrugged my shoulders in incomprehension not really remembering much now that happened at the base way back there.

"Anderson! Jawbone you could split a diamond with? Anal retentive and insufferable asshole that thinks he is right up there with Grant and Lee in regards to defending this country. Do you know he never figured out that Lee was a traitor? You say something to him like that and he'd beat you into the ground for defaming one of the greatest generals in our history. What a prick! God, I finally got rid of him and had his ass shipped off to Southeast Asia so he can evaluate the conditions of the withdrawal of American forces in that part of the world, which is really just supervising the surrender which I knew would kill the sick bastard!" Harv sat back laughing and loosened his tie.

"Okay.... so, you planned that one and now you got my attention." I understood that this shabby character had set me up for that little diatribe to empathize who he was and what powers he wielded.

"Good. Ted, you walked out when my back was turned and that jerk of a President we got didn't want you to come back, if you can believe that. Anderson had something to do with that, they went to high school or some shit like that, that nobody or their brother cares about anymore. But they do, and this clown in the Oval Office is so paranoid he needs to be in a straightjacket. In the next six months all hell is going to break loose and everyone who presently works for him directly is going to be writing books, heading for Argentina or going to jail, lemme tell you!" Harv sat the can down again and just rambled on without interruption. "That cocksucker Anderson wanted to have Irina whacked, can you believe that? Heartless dick! I don't think his own mother even likes him!"

His words stabbed me like a knife and I recoiled. "You stopped him, right?"

"Oh, hell yeah! I stopped him and those assholes from Langley. Christ, the repercussions of that kind of stupidity would make the Korean War look like a well-planned event of choice. Jesus!" He rubbed his face with the huge puffy paw of his hand. "I could just see you finding out that someone had your wife and child killed for reasons of 'national security'. You would be on the first plane to China and be out at Loc Nor helping the Chinks build the biggest atomic bomb anybody could imagine and I wouldn't blame you! Hell yes I stopped them! Irina doesn't deserve that type of treatment and neither do you. But the truth is, I need you back and that is the flat ass truth of it. I can't go on trying to get people to understand things that are beyond them, so it is time that you pack up all this happy horse shit here and get back to work! The vacation is over!" Harv got up and got his own beer this time while I sat there transfixed thinking about everything that had just been said.



CHAPTER 49

"I ordered a pizza. Takes about twenty five minutes to get here." I sat back down in the living room after handing Harv another beer. This one the older man set to one side on the coaster on the end table.

"No anchovies, right?" Harv asked.

"None, and no green peppers. Hate green peppers." I sat there appraising the other man. In the ten years I'd worked in the field I had never met anyone like Dr. Harvey Gilpsen. Irreverent, vulgar, vocal and direct. He oozed a lack of charm out of every pour that was charming in and of itself. I could see him with his walrus mustache telling some off color story to a bunch of Congressmen or Senator's wives and having them laugh until they cried, where anyone else would have been drummed out and shot at sunrise for using the same kind of language in the presence of ladies. The old guy just had the gift to reduce everything down to a four-letter word and get away with it. I was finding I liked his style.

"Now listen to me. You got your invention, sure. Nobody but the government is going to buy it and they won't want it. They hate to pay anybody, when they got all those free loaders working for them at the labs. You file the patent and it is theirs. They will steal it, use it and later, when you find out, they will claim they developed it at the same time you did at Lawrence Livermore or Berkeley or Los Alamos. It happens all the time and no one in the private sector gets rich off this stuff." Harv got up and dropped his coat on the floor. It sounded like it weighed ten pounds.

"Let me hang that up for you." I started to reach down to get it.

"Nope, just leave it there. I got all kinds of stuff in there to show you as we work through the details tonight." Harv took a sip of beer and pulled out a small leather case from the outside pocket of the jacket and opened it. "Irina and Pasha." He handed me a photo. It was about four by six and in black and white, but it was a clear picture of both of them in a park, next to a carousel. "That was taken last week and I thought you might like it."

I held it in both hands and stared at it longingly, tears welling up in my eyes. I looked up to catch the other man's gaze. "Thank you." That was all I could think of to say.

"They're fine! Don't be such a girl! I'll keep track of them. She didn't have a hard time when she got back. Her debriefing was relatively short considering the actions against the state she was charged with originally. It took a couple of phone calls to get the dogs to stop chewing on her, but now she's working at Kursh in the south, on their time machine. After she told them what she knew and looked at the mess they'd made of their project, the senior director put her to work immediately to clean it all up and get it moving again in the right direction." Harv paused for a long, deep belch.

"I would have thought people like Anderson wouldn't have wanted her working on this project for our enemies." I responded.

"Ted, there are two groups in this country right now. Those that see Commies crawling out of the sewers in New York City and behind everything happening in the world not in the interests of the US. Then there is this other group that knows we got a

lot bigger enemy to deal with than a bunch of clods from the Urals that still don't know what an outhouse is for. Anderson and his type are all about power and their ideological hysteria that comes in and out of fashion, like high-top sneakers. There is nothing we can do about that, they will just keep causing us to move around things and get past them. But there is a solid core group in this country working diligently to correct the mistakes of others and prepare for the worst, while hoping for the best." Harv, reached down and pulled out another item. A small black notebook like the one I'd seen years ago in Montauk.

"Is there a committee handling all of this?" I asked.

"Oh shit! There are committees trying to climb over other committees to hump better-looking committees. My God, we got committees spying on one another. We got one, all they do is disinformation. They spin all the tall tales about flying saucers and anyone who starts to relate to them, they discredit and prove they're false. There are committees set up, just so somebody can find out about them and blow the whistle on them in books or tabloids and then everyone shakes their head and says 'See? We told you so'." Harv looked through his book for a moment. "Most of the time they are set up to keep things from happening. They spend their time delaying people from doing really good research. In that way we can keep the majority of the responsibility in a close group where we all know each other and what we are doing. That way it will work."

"Then what have I been doing for the past ten years?" I felt the old familiar flash of anger go through me.

"Getting your ass kicked on the JV squad. Now you're ready to join the Varsity and providing some really nice window dressing to keep prying eyes off the real projects." Harv smiled and I shook my head in exasperation as the doorbell rang. A man in a suit was standing there holding a pizza box.

"You ordered this?"

"Yes, we did." I looked at him as he handed me the box. "Oh, I thought that kid was trying to put a fast one over on me. Oh well. Such is life." He walked off the front porch and back into the darkness.

"One of yours?" I put the pizza down and Harv cracked a shy grin.

"Yeah, they are a little over protective. But I treat them well so they know a good thing when they find it." Harv opened the box and took out a piece of hot pizza.

"They didn't like...ah..." I looked for the right words.

"Kill the delivery kid? Oh, hell no! Turned him over to the aliens for anal probing and mutilation perhaps, but nothing serious." Harv slapped his leg and started to laugh to the point of almost choking. "Oh shit, you're fun, Ted! The look on your face! They paid the little brat and checked the pizza to make sure it didn't have a bug or that the box was wired. These guys are fanatics about what they do. Anal probing! HA-HA! I gotta remember that one."

"You're an asshole, Harv." I blurted out.

"Yes, well that is a functional part of the body that is highly needed as opposed to being a toe or wart on your rear. Now let's eat and get down to business. You got a pad and pencil to take some notes you're going to need?" Harv munched away on the pizza. The sauce colored his mustache as he licked his fingers.

"Yes, I do." I sat down on the floor with my back up against the desk and pulled a piece of pizza from the box and started to eat as well.

"We have been trying to clean up the mess that T. Townsend Brown and his friends made in the forties. That part of the cover story is true. You know that much. The rest of the stuff about alien invasion forces and raping the Earth is all speculation on the part of planners that have worked on this project for years. Somehow it got integrated into the story and it didn't seem like we needed to take it out since it served the purpose to motivate people. But the truth is, they are already here. We pretty

much try to keep them at Dulce in New Mexico at a base there that has been used for years to do hybrid experimentation seeing if human and alien genetics can be mixed and a species created that can survive on this planet. We got about three main groups that we deal with. The first one are those little gray sons of bitches everyone keeps seeing and writing about. The second are their bosses; these guys are the bright ones, Nordic in nature. Shit, they look like a damn Nazi poster boy, if I ever saw one. Big blonde bastards with blue eyes and light complexions. They run the little grays that are a biologically produced machine, basically. The grays are just throw aways to the Nordics. They make them in labs and then put them in the field. They can do all kinds of tricky stuff, but they are really vulnerable to lead poisoning. Shoot one in the head and you got yourself a dead alien that isn't much threat to anyone. Then we got these reptilian motherfuckers, the Alpha Draconians. Now these guys are the scum of the universe, let me tell you. They are plentiful and can live on anything that has flesh on its bones. They can eat any kind of red-blooded flesh and do. Seems like they and the Nordics have been fighting it out for a long time in space and that's why they came here, when they detected the hole in the space/time continuum. The problem is the Nordics are getting fewer and fewer and the reptiles are just growing and increasing in numbers all the damn time. So eventually, they are bound to win." Harv paused and looked at the two remaining pieces of pizza in the box. I pushed it toward him and he happily took the larger piece and started to merrily munch away.

"So, what I have read in some of the new books about flying saucers, aliens, cattle mutilations and abductions is correct?" Pondering the questions I began to consider the other man's sanity as well as my own for listening to him.

"Oh, hell yeah! What happens is one of these guys now and then springs to it and figures out we are working with the Nordics and they try to get that shit published. That is when Uncle Bob, that is what we call our heavy-handed friends outside, is called in. They show up in black suits and sunglasses, driving black cars with no plates on them and just scare the living be-Jesus right out some poor schmuck that thinks he is the first one with the truth. The truth is a lot of the time we tell him the absolute truth and that is enough to get guys to close down publishing companies, clipping services, newsletters and even magazines. They go off and start looking at growing hibiscuses in Hawaii or something equally appropriate." Harv took the last piece of the pizza with some comment about the fact that it was never good cold and finished it off.

"So are they successful? The people trying to genetically alter humans into aliens." I asked.

"Other way 'round, laddie buck! Aliens into humans, and, no, not completely. There is a lot about the genetics of our species they need to learn yet, so they work away down there in New Mexico, pushing and pulling on test tubes and making things that would scare the hell out of grown ass men much less the little girls down the street. Shit, they kill off about twenty failures a week. Man, would that set off the pro-life groups if they knew about that." Harv got up and washed his hands in the sink, drying them on a dishcloth and came back to sit down. "That was good. I haven't eaten so much since...well, lunch, I guess, and I was getting weak from the lack of carbohydrates. Anyway, let me tell you if the Reptilians can get inside Dulce there will be hell to pay. They will make that place look like a slaughterhouse. The hope is that the Nordics can break the code, find the way to hybridize their own kind and cause accelerated growth to occur here, thereby making this a place where new recruits come from for the cause. In return, they give us scarps of information and technology."

"They are the ones responsible for the saucers we have in the hanger and the device in the Pit?" I wondered.

“Oh hell no! Nobody knows where that thing in the Pit came from. They looked at it and flat out told us that they had no idea who came up with that thing. It’s from somewhere way...out there.” Harv motioned with his arm and hand to a space toward the ceiling that indicated great distant.

“Then why can I make one of them work.” I got up and stretched my legs before sitting down behind the desk.

“Isn’t that interesting, nephew? That is just what we want to know. You figured out how to make the machine in the Pit work, you figured out Kammler’s equation and you can get that little guy in the hanger to play Dixie and give you a hummer. So I ask myself, ‘Self? What is it about Dr. Theodore Humphrey that makes him so good at what he does?’ Then I came up with a little something that I thought was interesting.” Harv paused for dramatic effect until I shrugged and raised my hands for the ringmaster to continue his diatribe.

“I think you, nephew, are talking to someone who knows how all of this works. Now, wait! Don’t jump on me just yet. I realize old Max was running a scam on the side and when you showed him you could get that Cosmic Corvette to work he up and called his little gray buddies. The big bad lizard men equally want to know where that thing came from and how it got here, as well as how the device in the Pit works. So it’s clear to me these guys have tech to drop out and through space, but they haven’t mastered time. At least not yet. Now, I will shut up.” Harv sat back with that twinkle in his eyes again.

He fired for effect and scored a perfect hit. Right where I had gotten on my own over the last year. I chewed the end of my pencil and looked at the man carefully, considering again, for the first time in a long time, how good he’d be at poker.

“What are you offering me?”

Harv smiled. “The whole enchilada, nephew. All the parts of the game laid out, tied down, spread eagle, butt ass naked. You take over the operation at Five-One, figure out how to use the portal and mix it with the gizmos on the Corvette, bada-bing, bada-bang, bada-boom! Get results! Beg, borrow, steal, kill, I don’t care! Whatever you need, I will get it. Just make damn sure the thing works. Put it together with HAARP, Dulce and NASA stuff and anything else you want from the national labs, secret programs or even civilian stuff we have to steal. I. Don’t. Care. Make it real in less than ten years and I will hand you the keys to the kingdom.” Harv sat back and interlaced his fingers over his broad expanse of a belly.

“Who do I work for at that point?”

“Some USC Trojan asshole named...ah...Theodore Humphrey. You report to me and me alone. I report to the head guy and the President, although I don’t think Nixon will last out his term.” Harv never moved a muscle while he talked that time. He was a good poker player.

“The head guy? Who is it?” I pushed up the bet.

“No way. Worth more than your life or mine.” Harv sighed, looking off into space. “Put it to ya this way boyo: you get him when I retire to Miami to screw middle aged nineteen year old stewardesses until I’m dead.”

“That would make me your protégée then?” I waited to see if I’d gone too far.

“Oh, nephew! You always have been!” Harv didn’t elaborate on that one at all. But I had a funny feeling in my guts that he knew the answer only too well.

“It started with my dad’s work. It took me years to understand what he was doing then it hit me. The second factor was at Montauk. I figured out Bates had missed the whole principal behind the workings of the device in the Pit. The third event was Kammler, who showed me the American obsession with big is not beautiful, but small makes more sense. Then Ratterman gave me the latest. The template that makes the Sport Model work.” I waited. Gilpsen’s eyes narrowed at the mention of the last name.

"You talked to that Nazi Simon Ratterman? I mean 'talked', as in face to fascist face...with *him*?" Harv leaned forward and raised a cautionary hand. "This is truly important Ted: Talked...*to him*? Face to face?"

"In the cafeteria at Five-One, two months ago. We were in a zone where time stopped. We spent twenty minutes there and sixteen hours passed before I came back to our 'reality', if that is what we call this."

"The Germans didn't know if they should string him up or give him the Knights Cross. The Americans felt the same, especially your dad. Kammler absolutely feared him and admired him beyond even the Fuhrer. I hated the rat bastard son of a bitch, but that was because he was smarter than me. I was also young, dumb and fulla cum and cocky as hell at the time. But he's gotta be in his eighties if he is a day." Harv was counting on his fingers.

"Not a day over forty-five. Still smokes and loves coffee." I added to make sure we were talking about the same guy.

"He is the one who helped your dad out, you know?" Harv winced at his own statement.

"How did he do that?"

"He sent him a drawing via another person who could get in and out of the country like a ghost. Well, we thought she was coming in and out. Now that you tell me Ratterman was at the base, I believe they can go anywhere. Doesn't matter really. Anyway, he sent someone to show your dad how to modify the unit he was building in the lab out in back of the house. We figured as much later on from one of his journals." Harv looked up at the ceiling.

"I have all his journals." I said, basically accusing him of lying.

"There was one you didn't get." Harv reached into his coat and pulled out a black notebook and handed it to me. "That's a copy. Typed for easy reading. Look at page 152."

I flipped through it and read then looked up in shock. "I remember this name!"

"Ann Corbett. Yeah. Ratterman sent her to give your father a drawing he needed to refine his device. She either killed your dad or abducted him to wherever the Rat Man works out of now. We spent a long time trying to find her and never did." Harv got up and put on his coat. "So, yes or no, nephew? In or out? You a player or a spectator, Dr. Humphrey?"

"I am in, one hundred percent, with one proviso: if I find you have lied to me, and I mean about anything, I am gone. That day, that hour, that minute." I stood up.

"Everything I have told you tonight is true. When there is something I would normally lie about to you, I will avoid making any comment on the subject. That is the best I can do. It will take time, but before long Ted, you will know it all." Harv spit in his hand and extended it. I did the same and we shook on it.

"When do I go to work?" I asked.

"You are at work. Head back to Five-One in the next couple of days, everything will be ready for you to pick up the pieces and make sense out of it. Then we'll talk some more. I'll be back out here in...let's say, two weeks? Be on board by then and get me a report as to what we need to do to test the ships and the device."

Harv opened the door and two men emerged from the shadows with guns in their hands. He rumbled down the walkway toward the car, yelling.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph! This is Boulder fucking City, guys! The only people you have to worry about out here are the goddamn Baptists."



CHAPTER 50

Upon returning to Groom Lake, it seemed like everything had changed in just two months. A lot of personnel had been transferred to other labs and facilities. The core group of researchers working on the device were still there but the support staff had been eliminated. Someone had come in and run the place down to bare minimum operational standards.

Ellen was still sitting in the desk outside my office, but she didn't look as perky as the last time I had been in the facility. One could tell she had been working very hard for someone who did not let up in his or her demands and expectations.

"Good morning." I stood in her doorway looking at her as she raised her head and met my gaze with her sea foam green eyes.

"Well, it's about time you got back and went to work." She looked directly up at me then got up, walked around the desk, and embraced me tightly like we had known each other for years. I found the softness of her body against mine a sensation I wasn't used to anymore and it surprised me. I only managed to pat her on the back like an overly affectionate auntie.

"Well thank you, Ellen." I held her for a moment and tried to regain my composure as quickly as possible.

"It has been just hell around here." She burst out. "I show up on Harv's insistence to work for you and that day you decide to take a hike out of here and it takes two months to get you back? That is not the deal I signed up for, let me tell you, no sir-ee!" She walked me into my office holding my arm like we had worked together forever. I found it a contradiction of emotions, part of me thinking this was not a proper way to be handling this and the other part of me truly enjoying this degree of closeness. "I will get the coffee on and start piling things up a little at a time, so it doesn't overload you too quickly." She walked out and turned at the door, leaning on the frame in a very seductive way. "You should call Harv this morning. He is waiting and needs to talk to you."

She left and I sat there. The humor of this situation was getting better. If she could put up with Harvey Gilpsen and liked him, there was probably nothing I could ever possibly do to offend her. Somehow that was exactly what I needed in an assistant right now as my etiquette and social skills were...rusty...to say the least. I could use a woman like her to slowly coax me out of the cave I had been living in since Irina and Pasha left me. I could do without prudes and highly complex people that needed a lot of emotional support around me. There seemed to be a quick mixing of our personalities, like Tang, that orange drink developed for the space program where you just add water and you had orange juice. I liked that very much.

It was interminable sitting and waiting on hold on the telephone for Harv. Every minute an operator would come on, apologize, tell me everyone was very busy and ask me to hold and then silence again for fifty-one seconds. This went on for twenty minutes. Finally I just sat the phone down while I worked on some other papers and

listened to the voice that automatically told me to hold. Then a small, metallic gruffness bellowed out of the receiver.

"Pick that goddamn thing up will ya! I don't have all goddamn day."

"You wanted to talk me?" I asked.

"Well, hell yes, I want to talk to you, but not right now. I'd love to hear about your boyhood and your first love affair, if it was with your right or left hand. Hell, I would love to know if you ever went to Tijuana and saw the magic bottle act. But no, I didn't call you; you called me! So what the hell do you want right now?" Harv was obviously in a great mood.

"Ellen, asked me to call you when I got in. That is why I am putting up with your insufferable act right now. But you know I can go home and work on my loser of a patent if you are going to rip my head off every time I call you." I tossed that out to see if I could change his tune a little.

"Don't threaten me, you bastard!" He laughed, actually laughed. "No listen, when are you going to start work on the little saucer? I want to know so that I can be there and help you with some of the details. I need to know your schedule on that." Harv dropped back into being a professional very quickly changing context like most people change socks.

"Gimme a week to get the lay of the land again here. And then I will set up the testing schedule. So let us say, ah, two weeks, from today. I will mark it on my calendar and figure out who we need to monitor it." I listened to the response at the other end, which consisted of silence with the exception of Harv's labored breathing.

"Okay, got it. Everything else alright?" Harv asked.

"Yeah, with the exception that it looks like Typhoid Mary has been through this place. Probably sixty percent of the staff is gone. How are we supposed to get anything done?" I looked at my calendar to see if Ellen had added anything else to it.

"Well, that is the cost of democracy right now. Cut backs at all levels and even though our funding is off the record we lost a bunch with this energy crunch. Is there anyone that is vital that is gone? That's the biggest question." There was another phone ringing behind Harv on his end.

"I don't think so, but if there is, I will let you know." I answered.

"Don't tell me! You're the *boss* there! Get 'em back or fill the spot with someone you want and I'll find out how to cover it. You be Walt Disney and just create stuff and I'll be his brother Roy and just find you all the dough! Gotta go! Hey that rhymes!" Harv started to hang up, then added. "Oh, do me a favor will ya?"

"Sure, Harv. Anything."

"Slap Ellen on that million dollar ass of hers for me, please!" The line went dead. Laughing to myself, I started to work through the stack of new papers Ellen piled on my desk trying to see the pattern of why someone had gutted this place so badly while I was gone. I needed answers and it would take some time to see where we were project wise.

After three hours of straight ahead paperwork, my eyes were bloodshot and sore but I saw the pattern emerging. Everything I had been working on was being changed and sabotaged by Max. But once Max was dead and I had quit, someone had spent a lot of time shifting resources to other projects. That much was clear. But what sane person made a decision that Project: Tempus Fugit, the new name for the operation, was not worth the effort that had been put into it over the years and they were disassembling it to the point where it would fail completely in the next six to eight months. This showed up in the sheer number of scientists who had voluntarily handed in their resignations and left to go elsewhere. Nothing had been done on the spacecraft in the hanger with the exception of two or three Visitors looking at them for some reason or another.

I took a walk in the early afternoon over to the other building where the main time lab was and it looked like a research department at a university when the funds had dried up. Office after office of empty rooms, nothing on the bookshelves and security file cabinets standing open with no files or dividers in the drawers. All of it was very depressing, since I had spent my adult life working to make this project a viable competitor with the space program. I bumped into a couple of people I knew and they exchange pleasantries, but there was a clear distance in all of the conversations. It was as if I were back in Montauk dealing with the same paranoia that had gripped that facility. I didn't like any of it. The answers I wanted and needed weren't on paper that much was clear and I wasn't sure where to get them at this point. I felt like a caretaker for a graveyard that no one visited anymore.

Walking back into my office, I slumped into my chair, brooding over the feelings flowing through me.

"Pretty bad, isn't it?" Ellen walked in holding a cup of coffee. "May I join you in your morbid gloominess?"

"Sure, but you may not want to. It's contagious." I sat up and looked at her as she dropped into one of the chairs and kicked off her shoes.

"I have seen this before you know." She said, sipping her coffee slowly, getting ruby red lipstick around the rim. "I was at Dulce when this started to happen there. The funds got cut, people left and then everyone started back biting and scrapping for every dollar and dime to keep their own little fiefdoms going. It was ugly to say the least." She leaned back and looked across at me with her green eyes focused on me, and I could see on her face the questions she was asking in her mind.

"How did you get into this crazy world?" I asked.

"You mean this spook stuff? 'The Black World'?" She said with mock drama. "Oh that, my dear, was a life altering decision I have come to regret in the last ten years. I graduated from Harvard with plans for graduate school in the history of science. This charming little weasel picked me up and promised me the world and I ended up working in the foreign technology appraisal section of that large non-profit organization across the river from DC. I was stuck in an eight by eight cubicle reading Chinese technical manuals all damn day, to the point where I was dreaming about the latest high-speed steel lathing tools coming out of Beijing. Oooo, sexy! It was an absolutely dead-end job. The pay was enough to keep me there for three years, but the people were impossible to work with. My spirit is a little...freer... as you can tell, than what those uptight folks wanted. So I kept ending up in my boss's cubicle, being lectured on how I should act, and dress and relate to my co-workers. Well, that went over about once with me. Then I met Harv. He was wandering through looking for something and ended up in my area. We talked, he asked me to lunch, which I was stupid enough to say yes to, and I got introduced to high-level politicians that have no morals, ethics or scruples. Within weeks I was working for him. My boss at the agency said it was a career killer move and no one would ever hire me after being with Dr. Harvey Gilpsen." She finished her coffee and got up to get another cup and brought back the pot to fill mine up as well.

"He started me out working with him on low level project evaluations. Mostly trying to see if anybody else in the world were doing what we were. Half the time I was fending off his grubby little paws trying to get to places they didn't belong, but that stopped and then my workload increased. He asked me to take on more responsibility and in two years I was assigned as a senior admin assistant to the director at Dulce, much like my job here. Some folks think I'm a secretary, but truth be told, there is nothing at this place I don't know about, inside and out." She paused and looked directly at me.

"And report back to Harv, if there is a problem?"

“Exactly. What I was trained to do. I’m a spook of the first order. Maybe not a field agent going into East Berlin in the dead of night in a black leather jumpsuit and silenced automatic. But every bit as much a spy as anyone could ever want to be. That is why I’m here and that is why I am going to watch every move you make and review every decision out of this office. Sorry, sweetie, but that is the way the world works. Besides that, I will make you coffee, get you lunch, type your memos, schedule your haircuts and pick up your dry cleaning without complaint. But I want to be straight with you about what my role is here.” She waited for the eruption that was supposed to take place right now.

“Call personnel and get a secretary that can type, take dictation, file and has a clearance level high enough to work in this end of the building.”

“What?” She said with a shocked, hurt look. “You’re firing me?” Her face and her eyes changed color with anger.

“Yes. You are relieved of your position as Administrative Assistant to the Director as of now. I can think of a much better position for you.” I leered a bit and let the sexual innuendo hang in the air.

“You bastard!” She said indignantly. I got up, grabbed her hand and pulled her up and across the hallway.

“Let GO of me you big oaf!” She said struggling.

I threw open the door directly across from my mine.

“See this office? It’s yours!” I couldn’t keep a straight face anymore and busted out laughing. “You are the new Assistant Director of this facility and Project: Tempus Fugit. Have the new girl type up the letter and get it out this afternoon, Miss Hanson. Have maintenance move your stuff and gussy it up. Spare no expense!” I walked back into my office, grinning. “And keep your god damn shoes in your own god damn office!” I walked out in the hallway and tossed them to her. “Please.”

Ellen stood there with mouth wide open, shoes in hand, twelve shades of red looking at me in amazement.

I walked back into my office and sat down. I needed to get this whole program back on track and I wasn’t sure yet what needed to be done, but I was sure of one thing: I was going to need some help.

Lots of it.



CHAPTER 51

I decided we needed to head in two directions to do the project properly. This would include using most of the same people on both projects and, in fact, make it into one big project. I wanted to find out why, when I started the Sport Model, time passed on the outside and I didn't feel anything different. The second major addition to the program was reducing the size of 'The Device', dramatically. What everyone had thought would take a ten-ton box to do I was going to find out how to do in a ten pound box. Ultimately, something that could be put in a backpack, or even small enough to clip to your belt.

The key to all of this was using the Sport Model as the prototype for the new device. It suddenly made sense to me why Admiral Jacobs wanted these things shipped here. It made absolute sense to me. Now I was going to have to re-educate my remaining staff and get them on board for the new project.

The other major event I wanted was meeting with someone from the Dulce Archeleta Mesa base. That was not going to be easy considering how spooky all those bastards were. The secrecy at Dulce made Groom Lake look like a Toastmaster's meeting. I had a couple of questions and I wanted to know if they would tell me if I was on the right track or not.

It took a week of concentrated effort on both Ellen and my part to get all the pieces put together to make the presentation sound and understandable. She was off the chart when it came to being bright. She had been wasted in doing the type of work she had done for Harv and others, but that is why they wanted to use her that way, because she was smart and could see how things related to other things quickly. She was the girl putting all the puzzle pieces together, which made me look like a real genius.

She was overjoyed about her new position, title, salary and advancement that were obscene in every way possible. I had the power of the pen and I was going to use it for the first time to truly reward people who deserved it. Ellen was one of those people.

When Harv finished his flexing and trying to impress her, Ellen just kept laughing at his antics and advances, he finally gave up and decided to sit down and hear what she had prepared for his review. A couple of other people were there, and Harv did not clarify or volunteer what their role was, just their names and something about working with him. In the Black World you didn't ask. They all sat around the conference table and we got started.

Ellen went first, following up and expanding on the concepts.

"What we've spent fifteen years trying to do has missed the point completely. Since 'The Device' was first built out at old Fort Hero with Project: Heron we have been trying to make the bigger and faster unit. What has been discovered is that the whole thing can be reduced and shown to work much more effectively in a smaller package using much less energy. But, it is this energy that has ripped the holes in the fabric of time and space. That's what we need to avoid in the future." I started out and

almost immediately after requesting we be allowed to finish our presentation and then take questions, Harv interrupted with a question.

"So," he blurted, "you are saying that the energy pulse ripped open the gap?" Harv looked hard at me, his hormones had calmed down from fussing with Ellen and now he was back in the skin of a hard-nosed scientist.

"Yes." I said definitively. "The pulse that was put out every time, continued to rip the gap open wider. Not only that, but in the last week we've made an estimate on data available. There may be as many as three major and seven minor rips or entrance and exit points in the fabric of the local space/time continuum, going out as far as the orbit of Mars."

Harv snorted and bristled.

"Every time a major pulse has hit the filament of the space/time fabric that filament has pulsed. Jumping back and forth between the generator and the point on the fabric where it is hitting. The standing wave sets up resonance and that naturally amplifies the waveform until it becomes too great to be contained and then blows right through the fabric, or, in some lesser cases, fries the device in the chamber. That is one of the reasons we have never been able to understand why some of the first devices tore themselves apart because the destruction could not be accounted for by the input of current going into the system. This has led us to believe that it is the standing wave form that will do the work for us, at a lot lower intensity, by creating the resonance between two points. Standard physics on that one." I paused again and scanned the room. They were on the edge of their seats.

"If this is correct, and we believe it is, that would explain why the small scout craft or Sport Model in the hanger bay has the ability to fold time while one is inside it, instead of pulsing so hard it breaks the connection to the fabric of space/time."

Ellen pressed a button and showed another slide on the white board, representing the equation explaining this process.

"That old crafty son of a bitch Nikola Tesla was talking about this stuff in the 1920s. Using sympathetic resonance, he claimed he could knock a building down with a device the size of my fist, and almost leveled most of Chicago by accident with a small prototype."

Harv intoned some humming sounds in the darkened room. Ellen went on without acknowledgment of Harv's input. "By working the device down in size and using the components we have been able to identify inside the scout craft, we should be able to construct a unit that is man portable, energy efficient and field ready within five years, if we start on the new project immediately and scrap everything else."

"Hold yer horses there, cowboy!" Harv blustered. "Are you telling me you want to stop work on the big bopper over yonder and change course on this project right now and by doing so within five years this thing will fly?" Harv waited for us to answer.

"We already have the device." I answered with calm confidence. "That's what no one has understood. It's sitting right out there in the hanger bay compliments of Admiral Jacobs. Something light years ahead of where we are. Why aren't we putting our man power and resources into understanding it and using the technology that has been handed to us instead of acting like a bunch of cavemen trying to reinvent the wheel?"

I flipped the lights on in the room to everyone's discomfort as they blinked and twitched.

"The reason is, with the exception of you, no one has been able to get that damn thing to work, Ted!" Harv glanced over at his two colleagues, then back at me.

"I got it to work as well." Ellen wiped her hands and sat down at the end of the table. "Ted gave me a template that, when placed over part of the control panels, allows you to touch certain parts of the unit and get it do all kinds of wonderful things. The one trick we found out is you have to sit in the unit first. Something no one else

wanted, or was just too scared, to do. The seat activates a switch to turn the craft on. Secondly, if you leave the hatch open, you don't shift in the time field. Here, look at these photos and drawings." She handed out packets. "The photos showed components inside the craft no one had seen because they were disguised by the blending of the plastic material covering them. Once the discovery was made on where the controls were, by just touching an area it revealed a function, a component or a panel that could be photograph and analyzed."

"Where in the hell did these come from?" Harv roared. "Nobody at Wright-Pat had anything like this!" Harv looked through them and the details of how all the parts fit together. "Some of this stuff could probably be reversed engineered at this point."

"And it would pay all the costs of the new project." I handed them a cost analysis sheet for review as well. "That radar suppression technology alone would put us way out ahead of anyone in the world right now. It is true stealth. Total invisibility."

"Radar suppression technology?" Harv looked at the cost sheet and ran his stubby fingers down the page like Ebenezer Scrooge and looked up with a fox like grin, like a Jewish accountant who found a bag of gold. "You want to sell this shit to the Air Force, don't you?"

"To quote the man: Yup!" I smiled back at him.

"We tell them we got this stuff and they are going to be beating a path to our door to get their mitts on it, are they not?" Harv was ecstatic about the idea of sticking it to other government agencies and having them pick up the cost of the operation here at Groom Lake. "God damn do I love free enterprise. Okay, but let's get to the other idea about the little critter you are talking about building instead of that thing we got over there in building B that cost this government nearly a billion dollars of taxpayers money."

"The whole idea," I continued, "is to move a device through space and time, have it do something and retrieve it. Right? We did that at Montauk years ago and no one seemed to care. The whole pile of crap they fed to us about plugging up the space/time hole was the first big lie as to the reason for building it. Then we got the scenario about the white hat and black hat aliens, playing cowboys and Indians. Now we're told the President wants a system to protect us from an invasion from space and be able to prevent support and re-enforcements for the forces already here. If we can do that, then someone is going to decide to clean out the hives of all the little gray alien boogies roaming around and this will be a nice place to live again." I took a breath and bit my lip, thinking. I looked over at Ellen. "Did I miss anything?"

"The only thing both Dr. Humphrey and I need at this point, Dr. Gilpsen, is a set of clear instructions as to what we are building and why. These are the same questions that plagued you at Dulce two years ago. What are our marching orders and what are we trying to build here?" She motioned back to me as I sat down chewing on the end of my marking pen. Ellen sat as well as the room went into a stunned silence. What we had presented was groundbreaking, historic, vertical science, all completely blue sky. History would be made here and everyone knew it. They also knew the rest of mankind would probably never know what had just been presented here today. Dr. Harvey Gilpsen broke the spell.

"Would you gentlemen excuse us for a while?" Harv leaned forward on the desk and waited until both the other men left. "Those men are aides to our current beloved President, who is dumber than a bag of ball-peen hammers, and the bag of hammers is probably better dressed. Those guys are trying to put things in perspective for him. Good luck! The guy can't even hit a golf ball straight, I will tell you that." Harv wiped his mouth with his hand. "It has been one up hill struggle to keep these four projects funded and not let the cats out of the sack in the process. There are rumors of crashed alien flying saucers and the hybrid genetics lab in New Mexico. People are pushing for something called F.O.I.A., the Freedom Of Information Act, which means we will

have to find new ways of hiding what we do in places like this. But to answer your questions as straight as I can, which is difficult at best, we are trying to hit a moving target with a fixed mounted cannon. Now hold on!" He raised his hand as both Ellen and I balked at his typical bureaucratic answer. "Give me a chance to lay all my cards on the table. Then you can cram them down my throat."

I motioned to Ellen to sit back and wait. Harv got up, picked up a red marker and walked over to the whiteboard.

"This is the way we are structured. Here is the whole shebang at Five-One. We got you guys here at Groom doing advanced research on crazy shit like saucers and time machines. Up the road over at S-4 we got some guys working on something we call Stealth technology at the moment along with some advanced engine designs for high altitude work. The folks at Dulce are doing their best to work with the Visitors to build a genetic hybrid that someone thinks is necessary as a middle point in both our evolutionary paths. It sounds good, but could get out of hand if somebody isn't really careful. Then over at Washburn..." Harv read our minds and looked over at both Ellen and I as we exchanged confused glances. "No, neither one of you knows about it, cause it was outside of your 'purview', as so many people like to use this term these days. Normally, that means it was none of your god damn business. But today is not a normal day, now is it? At Washburn, I got a group trying to work on something they call 'A.I.' Artificial Intelligence. They are putting together a huge computer system that's supposed to be able to think for it self some one of these days. The fall out from that project alone is going to be worth billions in the next few years, just for everyday simple business computers to do accounting and God knows what else. But these guys are pretty much out on the edge of reality, I must tell you. Then we got the gun nuts at Los Alamos building this thingamajig called a Thor's Hammer, or a Thor Four. It's an electromagnetic cannon that can produce a pulsed beam of electromagnetic energy in a straight line that'll knock the shit out of any saucer driven system so far analyzed or seen by anyone. Knock the shit out of just about anything really. They tested it in South Africa several months ago and knocked one of the Visitor's craft right out of the stratosphere and those boogies didn't have any idea what hit 'em. Killed everything on board to boot. So at the head of this hideous hydra of super secret black world projects is..." he paused for dramatic effect, "...well...me! Pretty scary, eh?" We laughed to break the tension. "I sit at the top trying to hold all the parts together and keep the dimwits from letting the monkeys out of the barrel and telling the whole fucking world what we are doing and you ask me...why?"

Harv passed like an absent-minded professor, looking at the ceiling thinking and counting on his fingers. "Oh yeah...forgot one...then we want to build HAARP in Alaska. It'll power all of this stuff at the edge of space about a hundred and fifty-miles up. So, as I was saying, why are we doing this?" He waited for someone to ask him, then shook his head in disappointment, but we were just too flabbergasted to play along. "Well...because you asked...it's all because a Nazi rat bastard son of a bitch named Simon Ratterman, escaped our custody in Germany in 1949."

My mouth dropped open. Ellen looked at me hard trying to see the connection.

"He didn't just leave," Harv continued, "but rather he fled...in a time machine of his own devising. He built something that moved him through space AND time. Now that part is bad enough, but here is the kicker: he has been back here over the last twenty years four times. Each time he has brought back part of a story, giving us proof and incontrovertible evidence of that story." Harv looked down at us and took a drink, waiting.

"Wh-what is the story?" I finally heard myself say, but was literally almost too shocked to speak.

"That at some point after certain celestial alignments occur in December, 2012, our planet will be invaded by extraterrestrials, hell bent to wipe every human being off

the face of the Earth, then use it for their own wants, needs and desires. Ratterman has convinced certain people in very high positions, including me, with proof he has brought us, that there are no ifs, ands, or buts, about it.” He flipped the marker in his hand in the air and caught it. “That is why we are doing all of this and why we have joined forces with both the Nordics and the Alpha Draconians without telling them about the deals we have cut with each of them. We would make a deal with the devil if we thought it would help us.”

He put the marker carefully back on the whiteboard tray and sat with a heavy sigh, now that he had gotten, oh, the destruction of all that ever was, off his chest.

“That, boys and girls is what this exercise is about.” He looked at us with more deadly seriousness on his face than I had ever seen. Shit! No wonder this man was half out of his mind most of the time. How do you *know* something like this and, well...live?

“Your part in all this is to build a unit, allowing us to move forward to 2012 and beyond and see for ourselves. We need to make sure what he is telling us is true.” Harv looked at me, and all I could do was stare down at the table.

“Now what’s wrong, Humphrey?” He threw up his hands. “You wanted the fat assed, big titted motherfucking truth and, what? Now you don’t like it?”

I steepled my fingers and leaned forward on the table, speaking with slow deliberation.

“You said Simon Ratterman had been back four times? Is that correct?”

“That is correct.” Harv got up and began erasing all trace of the various parts of his dark empire.

“Try six.” I looked up and fixed his gaze.

“What do you mean? How would you know that? He has told my boss four. Why would you think otherwise?” Harv seemed angry over the question.

“Because he met with Irina and gave her the template that she gave to me the day of the explosion. I think he also gave her other information she didn’t want to give to me and took with her back to Russia.” I couldn’t look Gilpsen in the face.

“And you never told anybody that?” He exploded.

“I told Max!” I said pounding my fist on the table.

“Oh...shit!” Harv was putting two and two together and getting forty-nine all of a sudden. “That is why he called them! And the other time?”

“Was when I saw him in the hanger bay, looking at the scout craft, the day Max...died.”

“You told me you met with him. But I hadn’t factored that in. Kee-rist, I’m getting old!” Harv sat down and put his hands to his face.

“Yes, I did. He told me a story I wanted to go to Dulce and confirm before I submitted it in writing to you and whoever you work for.” I noticed a quieting in Harv and Ellen, seeming distant at the mention of Dulce.

“What kind of story?” Harv asked.

“No. I can’t tell you. Not until I check it out.” I felt I was close to my personal goal and I didn’t want to lose it again. Not now. Not at this point.

“You know what is going to happen when I tell someone you have met with Simon Ratterman don’t you?” Harv waited for a long moment before continuing. “He will probably want to replace me with you.”

“There is time enough for that in the future. You are here to stay until we finish what we need to do here, Harv. That isn’t even an option in my playbook.” Harv sat back and smiled, his bushy eyebrows arched in a diabolical way.

“You think you can control this situation that much, huh? Hell, he would have me killed just to move you up the ladder in a heartbeat without missing his next martini. I appreciate your sentiment, Ted, but realize you just tossed in the big black

chip and that means you two are joined at the hip now.” Harv got up and moved around the table. “They take out one of you, they will get both of you, y’know that?”

“Why would they do that?” Ellen asked more out of curiosity than fear.

“ ‘Cause you two are now in possession of one of the biggest secrets in the world. Oh, not the part about the alien invasion coming. That is so far out there nobody would ever believe you. You can scream that from the rooftops if you want. The secret is you two actually know that a man can travel through time and has done it. That means there is a way to move from one place in time to another point in time and back again, which means you can control the whole game. The guy I work for wants that power. More than anything else in the universe, and he will do anything to get it, including wiping out whole nations if necessary. So welcome to the big poker game kids! It’s all going to get really interesting, really fast.” Harv shifted gears quickly, now finally understanding the stakes we all were playing for and what cards his team held. “Ellen, call Cal over at Dulce. Have him make arrangements for both of you to head down there and talk to whoever you need to.”

Harv jumped up abruptly and walked out without another word.

Ellen looked at me and chuckled a dark, humorless laugh.

“You want to go get drunk and screw...or just go screw?”

I got up and put my arm around her waist and we walked out of the conference room together.

“Let’s just go get drunk. ‘Cause I think we’re both already screwed.”



CHAPTER 52

The realignment of the facility started almost immediately. Dr. Harvey Gilpsen approved everything and told us to start the conversion as soon as we possibly could. He needed to head back East and sit down with whoever was head of this project and tell them the latest revelations to have occurred, especially the stuff about Ratterman, wandering like a ghost in and out of people's lives. He was none too pleased with the idea that someone else had made contact and was sure the man responsible for all of these endeavors in this black world of special intelligence operations, as they are called, was going to be even less thrilled.

Ellen made arrangements with her old boss at the Dulce Archeleta Mesa to get into the complex and see him first before we ventured into the labyrinth below the main floor where all the genetic engineering went on. The head of that facility was Dr. Calvin White. Ellen described him as the last Neanderthal to roam the Earth. 'Cal', as most people called him, was more concerned with how many paperclips someone was using than whether they were making timely advancements in their research. She had gone on and on about the guy who wanted the second file cabinet in his office for his overflowing papers. Forms in triplicate, reviewed by at least two committees and then consideration at Cal's level for a month, if it would cause even the slightest ripple in the budget. All the time top-secret papers were sitting on a chair in the researchers office, for anyone to read that might stroll in, day or night. It all sounded like it was going to be an enjoyable trip, to say the least.

There were also all kinds of regulations about which vehicles could be taken up to the mesa where the Dulce facility was located. It seemed like one could not just take any available car, but it had to be blue and with only Air Force markings on it. The cover story was that there was a top-secret radar facility on the top of the mesa and they were the only guys to go up there and do any work. Ellen almost busted a gut laughing about that one, since everyone for a hundred square miles knew there was some kind of secret laboratory in the mesa and no radar facility up there. But rules being rules, we decided to follow them, and were flown in a spanking new private Lear Jet to Los Alamos National Laboratory, the home of the atomic bomb. How Harv got that one through a budget committee was anybody's guess. We used its private airstrip since it was two hours closer for us than the general terminal at Albuquerque. A lot of people filed out onto the tarmac to see this small white jet airplane land and park among the rows of aluminum colored military planes. It was something fancy, shiny and new that no one at the laboratory had seen before, except perhaps in magazines.

Driving the dark blue sedan through the high mountains of northern New Mexico we saw some very beautiful countryside. Places where the creeks meandered down through groves and thickets of pine and spruce. The leaves of some of the smaller plants were just starting to turn color and once, Ellen asked me to stop by the roadside just so she could get out and look at a stream flowing down out of the mountains that ran all the way up into the high Rockies. She was wrapped up in a heavy sheepskin jacket looking down at the water as it moved ever southward carrying floating leaves of

red and gold along with it. I noticed the difference between the air here and back at Groom Lake. It felt cleaner and fresher, without being laced with sand and grit like everything else in the desert. Her blazing red hair was alive in the sunlight and her complexion was accentuated by the coolness of the breeze. She was an attractive woman and one of the smartest I had ever met. Her use of humor as both a defense and a way of deflecting away from the cleverness she possessed had been refined to protect herself in a world principally dominated by males with huge egos. She was available to everyone but obtainable by no one, which was really the trick to getting along with men. That skill served her well, but this morning, standing by the creek looking at her, it didn't seem like she was very full of humor or anything approaching it.

"You're having some problems with this, aren't you?" I asked.

"I didn't think I would, but coming back here...I have a lot of bad memories." She pulled the coat closer around her, the collar pushed in against her face and hair.

"Calvin bothers you that much?"

"Oh, hell no! He's just a really smart little weasel, but raised as a poor child and he will always be a poor child. No, it's what goes on inside that place that terrifies me. Experiment upon experiment they can take and flush down the toilet, living, human/hybrid tissue without once considering it is life. Just because it doesn't meet their 'Prime Directive' for what a hybrid should look like genetically. A lot of things have been killed in this place and it makes you wonder about the soul. If we have one and if you do, where does it come from and where does it go when biological life ends? Stuff like that, Ted." She moved a little closer and for no apparent reason I put my arm around her and pulled her close.

"I've been on a journey for a long time now." I said, nuzzling into her hair. "I haven't moved much off the mark I aimed at, so when you talk about things like life and the soul and birth and death, I remember it all from Philosophy 101 in college, but outside of that I haven't looked much at the meaning of life or the reasons why we're here. I've spent my time in a different quest than a humanitarian and I must admit that." I hugged her closer. "I can hide behind my science and act like a reductionist to the point of claiming there is no proof of a soul and the only meaning to life is the one we give to it. But that's not what I really feel deep down." I hesitated for a moment. "I was there when my daughter was born and I saw her come into this world. I watched her take her first breath and slowly open her eyes. That was a miracle to me. I was deeply in love with Irina when our daughter was conceived and I sat up many nights holding Pasha just looking down into her sleeping face. I can understand equations four white boards long, but why there is life and what we do with it is still a deep mystery to me."

"What are you after, Ted?" She looked up into my face. "What is it that drives you?" My hair was starting to gray at the temples and little wrinkles were developing at the corners of my eyes and mouth, which is, I'm sure, what she was looking at.

"An answer to a single question I have never asked out loud." I let go and headed back to the car.

"It's scary that you want to shut me out when I ask what it is?" Ellen responded to what seemed to her an abrupt end to a tender moment of real intimacy.

"If I say it, I can never take it back and if it's as stupid as I think it is sometimes, then I have wasted my life." I opened the door for her and she reluctantly got back into the car. Before I closed the door she looked up at me and we stared into each other's eyes for a moment.

"Will you ever tell me?" She asked.

"Probably. And then you will leave me too, I would imagine." I said sadly.

"Not me buster! I am in this for the long haul. And knock off that self-pity garbage, it's not becoming on a guy like you." She changed her tone from closeness to harsh

assertiveness again, mostly to keep from crying. I closed the door and walked around to get behind the wheel.

"Not self-pity as it's the reality about people." I said quietly to myself. I closed the door and started up the last hill leading to the base inside the Dulce Archeleta Mesa.

* * * * *

After being directed by a camouflaged soldier who appeared from out of the forest and directed us into a camouflaged cave, we went through all the security check-in procedures at the surface level. Passing muster, we were escorted down the elevator one level to a holding pen. The room was small, featureless and done in institutional green. The floors were white tile with green speckles. The room's only furniture was a gray metal table with four gray chairs arranged around it. We waited for ten minutes not even talking, since Ellen motioned to the walls and indicated they were bugged. Finally, a small ferret of a man strode in crisply, wearing a white smock pressed like a shirt. He moved his head in sharp quick motions between the two of us and spoke down his nose at us.

"I'm Doctor Calvin White." He said tersely. "I do not like these kinds of meetings and I want it known for the record that this visit is not with my approval." He immediately sat down and started to write on a chart, the date, time, where he was at and what he had just said.

"Hey, good to see you too, Cal." Ellen leaned casually on the wall holding her coat with a disarming smile.

Dr. White looked up at her and blinked his eyes twice then went back to writing. "You will have thirty minutes with the man. That is all I can assign for you to meet. Then you will need to leave here as soon as the interview is over." He noted something else on his clipboard.

"Can you show me to a phone, please." I asked, smiling at the man.

"Who are you going to call?" He said, like I had asked to borrow a hundred bucks. "If it is not a local call there will be charges that will have to be paid for out of someone's budget and it isn't going to be mine. I will need a recharge number for the billing." Dr. White got up and pushed the chair back under the table. "This is highly irregular and you know you are digging into your time with the gentlemen on the fourth floor." He opened the door while he was talking and the three of us walked across the hall to an identical room, with the exception that this one had a phone on the table. "I do need a recharge number, for this call if it is not a local call, you understand, don't you?"

"Yes. Thank you, I heard you the first two times. Now, if you would excuse us and wait outside, we will go with you to see your 'gentlemen.'" I emphasized the last word.

"I do not know about this. No one told me this kind of irregularity was going to happen. Just remember the clock is running. Tick-tock!" He stepped outside muttering while I told the operator the number and listened as the voice answered with a gruff hello. I spoke for two minutes straight, then listened for twenty seconds. Turning to the door, I indicated to Ellen that she open it. I pointed two fingers at "Cal" and wiggled them for him to come, which I knew would just irk him further.

"Dr. White? If you don't mind, there is someone who would like to speak with you." I handed him the phone with some glee and walked over looking at Ellen who was trying to keep from laughing out loud. She knew how much Harv detested Cal and took any opportunity to jam him into little, tight corners and then continue to stomp on him like a cockroach until there was nothing left.

"Yes sir, I do understand," Cool Cal sputtered, his face getting redder by the second. "But...no, that is so...yes sir...well you have...I didn't mean that you...no that isn't.....Yes....Yes sir, I understand completely...well Director, you don't need to take

that tone...Yes.Yes, sir...I understand. Thank you!" Dr. White hung up nearly apoplectic and turned to look at us as we hid smiles under our hands, fighting for our lives not to laugh.

"Now," I said clearing my throat, regaining my composure and putting on my work face, "you want to start all over, Dr. White, or should we set up a conference call so all of us can share our thoughts." I made a motion towards the phone and White stepped in front of me with his hand raised. I was so enjoying his pain, sure he had inflicted it on so many helpless others under him. Sweet revenge for how he'd treated Ellen.

"I understand I am to provide you with unlimited access and whatever else you may need to complete your task here." He walked out looking like a scalded dog in summer. "This elevator will take you to Green Level Four. We never go below that level and those working below that level don't come above level four. That is a hard and fast rule here, Dr. Humphrey. Lord Tugy will be waiting for you in conference room three. If you need anything, ask the military officer on the floor and he will make arrangements to get it. Now if you will excuse me, I have work to do." Without another word he turned and walked back down the hallway.

"His sexual habits, ancestry, mother's sexual inclinations and the visible results from cooking human flesh over an exposed fire would be just a few of the expletives I'm sure Harv used to explain to the good doctor, why you will get your way here and why he had better be a little more cooperative with those sent by the Director." Ellen laughed as we stepped into the elevator and hit the fourth level green button. As soon as the door closed we both burst out laughing.



CHAPTER 53

“I have heard that kind of conversation before. Did you know Admiral Jacobs?” I asked her.

“No, not personally but I knew of him and what he did for Harv.” She responded. Pushing her hair away from her face.

“I heard Jacobs, a four star Fleet Admiral, say ‘yes sir, no sir’ and ‘I understand, sir’ once as well. You would have thought God or the President was on the line with him.” I smiled at the memory.

“Harv has a winning way about him, when he wants to flex his muscles. Cal is a good man in a lot of ways, but in others he is a royal pain in the back side.” She turned to face me as the elevator slowed to a stop. “A couple of quick things about protocol. Don’t try to shake hands, he doesn’t like to be touched and don’t speak too loudly. They have incredible hearing so anything over a normal, soft level of speech will irritate him.”

“You know this guy?” I asked looking into her eyes.

“Yes. When I was stationed here I met him many times. Also, don’t be taken in by how timid he is. He is an alien with Einstein’s intellect times a 100, who will not be messed with. Take it easy and work slowly into whatever you’re after. Let it come naturally, otherwise he will shut down on you very quickly and then we are done and there will be nothing we can do about it. Remember we are inferior beings in his mind and not much more than basic genetic DNA material to be experimented on. His view is one of necessity, but we are like your favorite aunt’s Beagle who chews the furniture and pisses on everything; more uncontrolled pets than equals. The truce we have with them is fragile at best and if one of those little grey boogies shows up, clam up quick and start thinking about sex. That seems to confuse the hell out of them. They can read your immediate thoughts and they are nothing but dangerous.” The door opened as she finished talking. Ellen and I stepped into a long corridor with only a few doors on each side. A military security officer was there to check both sets of ID and then indicated the room for the meeting.

As we stepped into the room we saw what looked like a businessman standing there in a white shirt and tie, slacks and loafers and we turned to greet him. He was about six foot two inches tall and muscular in appearance. His hair was a sandy blond, combed straight back off his high forehead and had a slight wave in it. His eyes were light blue in color without being remarkable. The face was tanned and even in its coloration. He had a regal bearing about him, with a strong, quiet, nobility, like a rightful king of the blood in exile. He smiled at Ellen and spoke slowly and deliberately, as if he was unfamiliar with the language and had to purposefully slow down his thought processes just to speak to us.

“So good to see you again, we have missed you.” He spoke very softly and his greeting sounded honest in its tone and delivery. Somehow I had the feeling of a chime going off somewhere. The face had a familiarity to it, but I couldn’t put my finger on where I had seen him before.

“Lord Tugy. So good to see you again.” Ellen curtsied formally which surprised me. “I too have missed our conversations. This is my associate and friend Doctor Humphrey.” She gestured to me and bowed slightly.

“Ah yes. Doctor Theodore Humphrey, if I am not mistaken? I have heard many good things about you, sir.” He motioned to the chairs at the table.

“Please, just call me Ted, sir.” He pulled out a chair for Ellen and we sat down. Tugy stood for a moment and then slowly took the chair at the head of the table. Somehow it seemed like the place he would normally sit.

“Lord Tugy.” The being mused. “Miss Ellen still uses my official title but here things seem to be far less formal.” He sat straight and folded his hands on the table. It seemed like he was waiting for us to start the conversation. The silence lingered for an extra moment that normally makes people uncomfortable, but Tugy didn’t seem to mind. He just drank in our presence and the company.

“I requested this meeting for several reasons.” I started in slowly and quietly. “As you may know, we work at the Groom Lake facility and are involved in the evaluation of the craft that have come into our possession.” I waited for a response from the other ‘man’ but there was none coming so I continued. “We have been able to get one of the craft operational to a certain extent. I was wondering if you could help us understand a couple of the components on the craft that seem to be beyond our present level of engineering.” I paused and waited. My thoughts were of another poker game. Here I am, again, sitting with someone that was giving no indication of even hearing me.

“Ted.” He said suddenly, as if uncomfortable with the short version of my name and its familiarity, “You need to understand there is an infinite amount of technology in the universe that even we, ourselves, have never seen. Anything that I might try to add to your present knowledge might be pure speculation.” Tugy never blinked, that was the first thing that I noticed. Not the whole time we met with him and it made him seem more in control than a normal human.

“I am completely aware of that fact, sir. But I think certain items must have a universal counterpart for deep space movement to occur.” I picked up my briefcase and set it gently on the table and took out a set of photographs.

Tugy smiled gently, more to himself than anything else, but it didn’t go unnoticed by me. Maybe that was his poker ‘tell’. “There may be some correlations, but I am not sure I can explain the difference or similarity.” Cool customer this one, I thought. Not going to show any of his knowledge or understanding if he doesn’t have to or unless it aids his purpose and mission.

“I acknowledge that, sir, but do these photos show anything you might find...familiar?” I handed the photos to him without touching him. He took them from me with a distasteful glance, as it seemed clear he didn’t want to touch anything that a human had held, like he was some Maharaja in an Indian caste system.

“No. No, I don’t think I know what that is at all.” He pushed the photos away.

“Hmm. That is strange.” I took the photos, and neatly and carefully stacked each one upon the other, then neatly and carefully put them back in their file folder and then neatly and carefully put the folder back in my briefcase, and with a flourish I snapped the case shut. I purposefully made the entire process take as long as possible, like a dealer doing multiple trick shuffles before dealing the cards. I took one last look at the man who gazed back at me with no expression whatsoever, then suddenly got up, extended my hand to Ellen, who was completely confused as to what was happening, and she got up to leave as well.

Now the alien’s expression finally changed to one of slight concern. “Is that your only question for me? It seems as though you have come a very long way and gone to a great deal of trouble to see me and only have this one simple request?” Tugy showed

a little curiosity, now trying to understand what I was playing at. It was a look as if he was trying to understand why the monkey wasn't going to eat the banana.

"No!" I yelled as he flinched from the sound echoing off the walls. "That is not my only question, Lord Tugy," I spat sarcastically, "but since you are already planning to stonewall me, I can't see the point or purpose of wasting my time."

I turned toward the door and pressed the button to get the guard to let us out. Tugy rose haughtily to his full height and squared his shoulders. He was an amazing specimen.

"Normally," he said looking down his aquiline nose, "it is expected that I am the one who ends a session with a...human." There was a flare in his voice, not much of one, but it was clear he didn't like to being treated as something less than his exalted state required. Good. The monkey was rattling his cage now.

"Those photos, as you well know, are of a gravity amplifier attached to the bottom of one of your own ships. In fact, the very ship that brought you to this planet four years ago. It is a coupled device. A circulating plasma field generator that can isolate a target almost fifty million light years away and fold space into that point so it takes less than ten earth minutes to pass from your starting point to that destination, without violating the laws of relativity or losing time at all, because it works on a principal of exiting space/time and entering space/time at fold points. If you are not willing to identify that type of device for me, when you know perfectly fucking well what it is, I can't see any reason to continue. Can you?" I stood there a moment as Ellen's mouth hung open at my tirade. Tugy was visibly shaken by my tone, the volume, being caught in a lie and being beaten at his own game. And, for the first time, he blinked. Only once, but he blinked. Inside straight, you bastard! He turned toward the wall with his hands on his waist so I couldn't see his face.

"Where did you get this information?"

"Out of the back of a Fantastic Four comic book." I spat. "Why should I answer your questions any more directly than you answer mine?" I glared at the back of his head with defiance trying to burn a hole in it. "I also have the clearance to sit here all day with you if I want and get you to answer my questions, or the authority to leave here now and stuff you into the deepest, darkest hole I can think of. How would you like to spend a few months in a cage with a few of your failed genetic experiments? I'm sure the kids would love to spend some quality face time...with daddy!"

Ellen looked like she was going to lose her mind, but I was more aware of what was at stake here. In the pot of this cosmic poker game whole planets were at stake, and we both knew it. The alien's head rose and his back straightened at my threat as I saw an imperceptible shudder.

"Impasse." He turned back and faced us. Tugy sat back down and gestured again for me to take my seat. Ellen sat, but I turned and waved off the guard through the small observation window and stood by the door until I heard what his lordship had to say.

"Forgive me...Ted. I was not aware you were so versed in these things. All of the...people...I have met here have not been as, how shall I say it, well informed to the degree that you have been."

"A ploy to see if I obtained the information from someone else or if I learned it myself. Bravo. Well played, sir. So are we to play word games with one another? Is that course of action usual for a Lord of the House of Edactia." I again waited for a response and it came in the form of a slight satisfied smile on Tugy's face. He was obviously pleased that someone had at last recognized who and what he was and seemed pleased to finally have someone with whom he could converse with on a level higher than a chat with a chimp.

"Please." He made a genuine gesture for me to sit. "Please forgive me my error, Doctor. It was my responsibility to help you, and I ask your forgiveness for not being

more gracious. Will you have some tea with me? I have given them a peach blend from my home that is quite delicious." Tugy relaxed slightly around the shoulders.

"Will you be as open with me as your rules allow?" I fired back at him. The question stung him like a hot poker.

"As you say, as much as my...rules...will allow me to be." Tugy looked more closely at me trying to fathom a human weakness he knew was there.

"Then I would be honored to take tea with you, Milord." I sat back down and in my mind I raked in the first pot of chips, however small, up off the green felt and stacked them neatly as he spoke.

* * * * *

A young light blonde woman came into the room dressed in a one-piece jumpsuit of light blue made of a sheer material. She bowed as she stepped next to the table never making eye contact with Tugy. How she knew she was needed or wanted was outside of our understanding but so were a lot of things.

"Some tea and some of those little biscuits with the cream in them, please." I said and she turned and I looked directly into her face. By Earth standards she would have been considered attractive with the exception of the dull eyes. The rest of her features and figure were stunning, but the eyes had no light or spark, almost like someone on heavy psychiatric medication for a while, or some soulless biological construct.

She returned within moments and silence prevailed, until she came and went again leaving the tea and cookies for us to deal with. The aroma filled the room with the smell of freshly sliced peaches. It was amazing. There were only two cups on the tray and I looked up at Tugy as I poured a cup for Ellen.

"No, thank you. Though it is from my planet, it does not do well with my system, but I do enjoy the smell of it. It reminds me of the orchards back home. The biscuits are also for you two as well. I only eat rarely and it's mostly made up of vegetable matter with some amino acids involved." Tugy sat back and looked across at both of us waiting for our reactions. Ellen and I sipped at the tea and I couldn't help but make a face of wonder and amazement. It filled my entire body with a warm glow and I decided it was the single most delicious thing I had ever tasted.

"Oh my word!" Ellen exclaimed breathlessly. "This is...it's fantastic!"

Tugy smiled. "I am glad you enjoy it. There are so many more wonderful things from my home I wish I could share with all of you." His continence turned toward me with more seriousness and concern. "Where, if I may ask, did you learn about my affiliation with the Royal House of Edactia?"

"I believe the story goes, there were two great houses, both vying for the position of central principality of the known universe. Both houses colonized and conquered to acquire the role of supreme legate over the other and, in doing so, a thousands suns with all their worlds dissolved in vapor and fire."

"Are you a human being or a lizard changeling?" Tugy stiffened in his chair looking as though he was about to be attacked.

"Calm yourself, Lord Tugy. If I were a changeling I would have done my worst by now and impaled you on a rod of glass." I never looked up at him, but into the cup.

"Who has schooled you in our ways?" Tugy almost sounded like he was demanding an answer. He realized how direct his statement sounded and tried to refold it into a different shape by adding, "It is clear that you are far in advance of most of your contemporaries in your awareness of our situation."

"Lord Tugy, if I may be permitted to speak directly, I am not only aware of your situation, but believe with all my being that, unless we can cooperate with one another, your course has been run and yours is the losing side of this war." I finally looked up and met his pale blue eyes. They had narrowed into slits staring directly at me, not believing the impudence of my suggestion that they could ever lose.

"We have cooperated for over ten years here, since 1964 when we officially signed the agreement with your government." Tugy said with a little irony in his voice.

"No. That is not entirely true." I corrected him with a raised finger that set his jaw clenching. "Your 'people' signed an agreement with us and in exchange for some low level technological gizmos, the equivalent of a bag of glass beads you pawned off as advanced hardware, the United States government has allowed you to contact, take, harvest, abduct, kidnap, whatever you want to call it, somewhere in the range of twenty to thirty thousand American citizens every year off the streets of this country and try to play God by cross-breeding them to see if you can make up for the genetic deficiencies in your own bloodlines caused by thousands of years of in-breeding within the same family. What none of these guys upstairs understand is that you could have produced millions of soldiers with your cross breeding program, enough to fight all your wars, subjugate your territories and kill off as many reptoids as you wanted. But that is not what Dulce is all about. You are trying to make pure bloods here and so far you've failed miserably." I sat back and realized Ellen was burning a hole in the side of Tugy's face with her stare. Tugy got up again and paced rapidly around the room. His hands moved at his sides but he was saying nothing, well at least not in a voice that Ellen and I could hear. He finally stopped and took a deep breath.

"We must talk at greater length, but not right now. I need to take care of some other challenges inside the community. Your words have caused...problems...below on several levels and they need me to go down there and calm them." Tugy looked up and then added. "The whole community has been listening to this exchange if you did not know and now I must answer other questions." Without another word he walked to the door, pressed the button and the guard let him out leaving us alone.

As the elevator came to the surface level and they checked our passes, there was silence between Ellen and I. We walked across the parking lot and I opened the car door for Ellen, but she stood there looking at me. I waited, not sure how she was going to approach the subject.

"I don't know if I am supposed to get in the car right now and sit next to you or get down on my hands and knees and start worshipping you." Ellen looked at me, complete puzzlement on her face.

I laughed and went around the car to get in on the other side.

"Holy Christ, man! Jesus! You just knocked that poor bastard back on his heels about ten feet and all you can do is laugh about it? The next thing I expect is to see two or three flying saucers come out of the sky and blow our behinds right off of this planet, Ted!" She was still standing next to the car, really upset.

"You coming or waiting for the next bus?" I turned on the engine and rubbed my eyes.

"I don't know what to do." She got in suspiciously and closed the door. "I'm scared to be in the same car with you, because you may start growing antenna out of the back of your head or something." She pulled her coat close around her.

"You just never know about someone until you watch them in action with an alien prince, do you?" I gunned the car and headed back to Los Alamos.



CHAPTER 54

The trip back to Los Alamos was quiet to say the least. Ellen dozed as I twisted and turned through the mountains and then down into the area where the National Laboratory is. It started out as a collection of barracks-like wood framed, composite roof structures and turned into a place of cement buildings and enough power lines to run a major city. As I dropped the car at the airport facility, someone walked up and handed me a message. It was from Harv and told me to call before I went back to Groom Lake.

In the Admin building at the airfield I found a telephone and a quiet office, while Ellen got the pilots to ready the airplane for the flight back. I called the number and, surprisingly, Harv picked up.

"You want to tell me why you decided to pull the pin on a hand grenade and toss it into a room full of boogies?" Harv was speaking quietly at the other end, an unusual thing for him.

"I don't know what you mean? I just wanted some answers and that uppity prick tried to twist everything around in regards to the information I went there for." I waited for the diatribe to begin. It didn't.

"Cal called me about twenty minutes after you left and told me it sounded to him like somebody was getting chopped up downstairs. He says the whole Hive, that's what he calls everything below Green Level Four, is buzzing with some pretty mad little grey bastards who think our boy Tugy has sold them down the river. Now I've seen Tugy in meetings with presidents and the guy never even flinched when someone threatened him with a thermonuclear war. Yet, you go off on him, and somehow, now, he's trying to keep the peace among his own people as well as maintain some degree of authority. Boy, Ted, you just hit him where he lived apparently. What'd you do? Kick him in the nuts...wherever his...are!"

I paused for a long time, considering my options and the implications.

"It would seem to me," I said to match his calm tone, "that Lord Tugy was keeping some vital information from us lesser beings. They were all listening in to a conversation with some silly human and getting a big kick out of it and they were all yukking it up, until I decided to pull the rug out from under that smug dick." I waited and then added. "Those rooms are bugged, right?"

"Sure as shit! Cal has a whole team monitoring upstairs and what they heard scared the daylights out of them as well. Nobody knew we had someone on our team who knows so much about their history, society and intentions. Ted, this creates a whole other problem for me."

"Which is what?" I asked.

"Well, it seems to me you know something more about all of this than you have been telling us. The gravity amplifier for one, the folding process of space/time movement for a second and the fact that they are so genetically screwed up they need to build some heirs for their royal houses. I talked to the man I work for and shared with him the tape of the conversation that was just sent to me and he is very...curious...shall we say, as to how you know all this and why no one has exploited

it from you, since you have been working for us.” Harv breathed heavily into the phone. It was a habit he had from tucking it under his chin and still working with both hands on something else while he talked.

“You have been.” I said. “You have exploited me at every turn and we both know it, but you have compensated me extremely well in return. But I still don’t understand, why this is such a big deal?” I looked out the window at the plane on the ramp. Ellen stood next to it tapping her watch.

“Fair enough. You still in Los Alamos?” Harv asked.

“I am. We were just getting ready to leave and head back to Five-One.” I dropped the blind and turned to look at the clock.

“Don’t go there. Get on that bird and tell the pilot to change the flight plan and head for Atlanta. I’ll meet you in four hours.” Harv didn’t wait for all the reasons why that would be impossible to do right now and hung up.

I looked at the phone in my hand and finally put it gently back down in the cradle. I wondered what could possibly be of interest in Atlanta. Walking out to the aircraft the pilot saluted and asked if I was ready. I told him to change course and the pilot nodded, got his flight case and went back into the administration building to change his flight plan. I crawled into the cabin and sat in one of the four large leather seats opposite Ellen who thought we were leaving momentarily and was hooking up her seat belt. She turned and looked out the window to see the pilot enter the building.

“Is there a problem?” She asked. It was the first thing she had said to me in over an hour.

“We’re going to Atlanta. Harvey wants to see us.” Her face flushed and she turned and looked out the window again.

“Oh, to Jerusalem we go. That means you are about to be anointed the Messiah or crucified. Or both.” She looked back at me with a questioningly look on her face. “Any idea which?”

“Not a clue. Seems like our little visit caused some problems with the hired help downstairs at Dulce.” I loosened my tie and leaned back.

“Ted, we need to talk.” Ellen moved over to the seat directly across from me.

“I know that. But I also know you weren’t going to until you had a chance to speak with Harv and get his take on this situation. Isn’t that correct?” I rolled my head back down to a normal position and looked directly into her big green eyes.

“Not completely.” She looked out the window and saw the pilot coming back toward the airplane. “Yes, I am supposed to report to him what is happening all the time. We both know that and I haven’t tried to hide that fact from you. But there is something going on here that I don’t understand. Those pictures you pulled out and the description of the device on the bottom of the craft, your knowledge of his home world and the way you put him in his place. That is one scary bastard, Ted. He is from a royal family, the ruling elite, from another planet! Most people wouldn’t challenge him to save their own lives and you ripped into him like he was the mail boy late with your afternoon delivery.” She looked back at me with concern in her eyes. “And now you tell me we are going to Atlanta. That means we will refuel the airplane, Harv will get in here with us or we will join him if he has the big bird and we will spend the next two hours flying to the Grand Cayman Islands.” She put on her seatbelt deciding she was going to stay right where she was, across from me.

“And?” I asked.

“Sir Charles Henry Daniels Montgomery, Lord of the Bath, Knight of the Realm, Protector of the Scepter. His office and home are on the main island and he never leaves it. The house is guarded by a detachment of Royal Marines and supplemented by members of the SAS.” She looked...scared...there was no other word to describe it.

“SAS?” I asked. “I don’t know what that...?”

“Special Air Service! The closest the Brits got to our Special Forces or Navy Seals. Tough, hard men, trained to kill without thinking. His whole staff, inside his office and home are all SAS with distinguished service careers and a penchant for black ops and dirty deals. Oh, and murdering people.”

She shook her head again.

“You’ve been there before?” I saw something in her eyes I didn’t like.

“Yes.” She hesitated for a while and then looked at me carefully. “And I never want to go back! He is without question the coldest man I have ever known. It is as if he is already dead, but just has not allowed himself to know it.” She shuttered.

“Stay in Atlanta. Harv and I will go.”

“I CAN’T!” She said tossing up her hands. “I can’t.” She looked out of the window at the airstrip as it started to race past us faster and faster as the pilot pushed the throttles forward, finally lifting into the air.

“Why not?”

“I report to Harvey as a convenience. I work directly for,” she looked directly into my eyes, trying to tell me something, but I still wasn’t getting it, “Sir Charles!”

“Who is Sir Charles?” I approached this one as carefully as I could.

“Besides being the supreme coordinator of all activities concerning aliens on this planet by agreement with the heads of state of the six major nations. . .” She paused and turned to look at the mountains as the plane climbed higher.

“Sir Charles is...my father.”

I had felt something like this coming. I was concerned the words she would use would be lover, mistress, sex slave even, but daughter? Great! I thought, I was really getting to like her, but I wasn’t really ready to meet the folks. Besides, she didn’t seem too thrilled about introducing her new boss to daddy. I slumped in my seat and waited for her to decide to come back around and talk to me some more.

I was going to be waiting for a very long time.

PART EIGHT

***THE ISLAND AT THE
EDGE OF FOREVER***



CHAPTER 55

“Well, shit this is going to be old home week, ain’t it?” Harv buckled into the seat next to me and motioned to the co-pilot to get him a drink.

“I wouldn’t think you ever enjoyed going down to his place, Harvey?” Ellen looked over at her old friend and nodded a silent conversation to him.

“Well, Ellen, I look at it this way: if I am to have my head put on a pike at traitors gate and young Dr. Humphrey here takes over for me, I will still hold the world record as the longest serving director of any un-named agency in the world. Cheers!”

He completely finished the drink in one pull and handed it back to the young Air Force officer with an indication to fill it up again and keep ‘em coming.

“Come on Harvey, it won’t be that bad. Dismemberment and flailing is more his cup of tea.” Ellen said sarcastically.

“And you, sir! I am completely disappointed in you, I must tell you that. I thought you were a clean cut, upstanding, all American boy and I find out you are some kind of Machiavellian character who pits everyone against each other. Wonderful world, isn’t it? Cheers!” He finished another drink. It was clear that Harv was sublimating his anger in the form of booze. “One more of those, my good man.” He handed his glass back to the co-pilot who decided to stand there with the bottle in hand.

“You must have me confused with someone else, Harv.” I answered. “I’m just what I appear to be: a guy struggling to understand an enigma, wrapped in a conundrum, surrounded by a paradox.”

“And a damn fine job you are doing with it, too. Even though none of the rest of us knows about your results. Y’see, I was raised in far gentler, simpler times, where guys, that work for other guys, occasionally told those guys what they were doing so the guy in charge was never caught with his pants down. I know that’s a little old fashioned, but that’s one of my feelings about working relationships.” Harv motioned for the co-pilot to fill him up then shooed him away to head back up to the flight deck.

“Seems like I’ve done that.” I said defending myself. “And besides, Ellen made her regular reports to make sure you understood everything happening.” I looked out the window at the clouds drifting by as we headed south by east.

“Like hell you have!” Harvey flared up. “I’d like to know where you got pictures of the bottom of Lord Tugy’s space ship and how you know it runs on gravity waves? No one has been able to figure that out and we’ve got some of the best minds in the country, including yours, trying to hand us the answer.” He rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand and continued. “Suddenly, you get the Sport Model to work, you decide to change the configurations and make the device smaller, you meet with the most powerful alien on this planet, almost get him killed by his own people and suddenly know more about them than twenty anthropologists and sociologists that have spent ten years monitoring everything about them. All of which I cannot explain to my boss, who is fuming, wanting to know why you’re not in the inner circle meetings with him and his cohorts on a regular basis. So I’ve stalled and dodged and bobbed and weaved trying to protect you from the sharks. Then you pull a stunt like this that makes everyone sit up and take notice?” Harv finished his drink and pulled

out a cigar from his pocket lighting it up. The blue smoke quickly filled the compartment. "And furthermore, laddie-buck, you are one lying little rat weasel bastard, you know that? You told me you didn't know anything about the rest of our projects. Suddenly, Ka-blamo! You know all about them breeding new generations of hybrids for their royal family. Where the hell did you get all this information? *That* is what I demand to know!" Harv was raging even harder.

"Demand all you want." I said crossing my arms, closing myself off. "At this point, I don't think you have my best interests at heart here, Harv. I think you're trying to save your own ass. The problem with that is there has never been a threat to you. Goddamn it! I'm not trying to take your place! I just want the answers I need to do my job and I could care less about yours. In fact, if anyone tried to give me your job, I would turn it down flat!" I looked directly at the other man, biting the edge of his bushy mustache.

"You mean that?" There was a shocked sincerity in Harvey's voice, like no one had ever been nice to him before, or ever had his best interests in mind.

"Yes! I have no hidden agenda about you...or Ellen." I turned and looked at her. She was looking directly at me, trying to detect any indication of falsehood.

"All I want is the right information so I can do my job! Everyone is so worried about protecting their little secrets they're failing to see the threat this all leads to: the alien subjugation of the whole fucking world!" I pounded my fist on the armrest with each word to make my point. "Whether benevolent or not it's still conquest! And I for one am not going to be part of any program that makes deals with scum like Tugy. Screw him, screw 'his kind' and screw the UFO he rode in on! You're all just sniveling for mercy playing like we've already lost. I'm playing to win and beat these motherfuckers and get them the hell off MY planet! If I had my way, I'd send Delta Force into Dulce and clean the whole place out, top to bottom. Then have a Texas barbeque where we kill 'em, eat 'em and leave only one alive to tell the tale!"

"Hell's fire man! You're talking about declaring war on a group that could turn this planet into a smoking pile of ash!" Harv looked forlornly into his empty glass and started to get up. I stopped him and went to make him another drink. After handing him the glass I paused for a moment, reorganizing my own thoughts.

"No," I said at last, "they wouldn't and they couldn't. They'd be giving away their only chance to survive as a species. Once they started something on the surface the Alpha Draconians would be here in droves, hacking them up into little grey hunks of dog food. They're the ones we have to worry about. The reptilians have been here before and will be here again. When they come back, we'd better be ready, with all the firepower we can muster. Otherwise, it's going to look like Attila the Hun teamed up with Genghis Khan and blazed across this whole solar system."

"You believe that...or *know* that?" Harv asked emphatically.

"I *know* it, Harv! Absolutely! Guaranteed! Something is going to start happening after the December 21, 2012 galactic alignments, and we better be ready to hit 'em and hit 'em hard! If we don't, its curtains for the human race and everything we've accomplished as a species over billions of years is going to be tossed on the biggest funeral pyre this neck of the galaxy has ever seen."

I leaned back closing my eyes. I'd said enough. I knew the next few hours would be interesting, but I hoped I'd allayed Harv and Ellen's fears, even if it was just a placebo. I listened to them talking quietly about seeing Sir Charles and drifted off to sleep.

But I could still hear the aliens talking inside my head.



CHAPTER 56

The plane touched down to a soft landing in the early evening hours. Dusk had settled on the tropical island that was a haven for those wanting the security of the British Empire around them and the gentle warmth that prevails over most of the Caribbean. It was a private airstrip used only by those with permission to be there. It was at the far west end of the island beyond what is known as Nine Mile Beach. Set among the swaying palm trees and lush plants was the compound that had become the center of operations for what was loosely called “The Group”.

Descending the aircraft gangway, small electric golf carts rolled up with a driver and security officer hanging onto the back of each running board, armed with both a side arm and small shoulder automatic weapon. Black jump suits seemed to be the accepted attire of these men who never stopped moving their eyes, covering every direction of the compass. The golf carts whipped off the ramp and headed up a small lane with ground lighting and just wide enough for the carts, which curved up a half mile to the main house.

Sir Charles stood on the steps awaiting our arrival. Fists on his hips, chest out, chin up. He was a tall and extremely thin with a deep tan and a full head of silver gray hair fashionably styled. His loose fitting tropicals of khaki tan, made him look more like a big game hunter or tour guide than the single most important person in the world in regards to the alien “phenomena and visitation”. They needed to just start calling it what it was: Invasion.

Ellen was the first he embraced as she got off the cart. From where I sat in the third cart, it looked stiff and almost like cardboard characters touching each other. Harv was next with a handshake and gentle slap on the back by Sir Charles and then I stepped forward.

“Dr. Humphrey.” He sized me up like a lion he was hunting in the savannah. “I have heard a lot about you. Greetings and welcome to my humble piece of paradise.” Sir Charles appraised me with his eyes quickly and extended his hand. The grip was strong for a man his age and even though his face was wrinkled and burnt from years in the tropics, his eyes were vital and alive. I could tell that immediately they were the eyes of a hunter,

“The pleasure is all mine, Sir Charles.” I answered and saw the two Sepoys coming down the steps.

“We’ll see if that is the case or not.” Sir Charles turned at their approach. “If you and Dr. Gilpsen will go with my men they will arrange baths and changes of clothes for you before dinner which will be in an hour or so. My daughter and I have some things to talk about and I am sure you will both understand.”

He turned without another word and put an arm around Ellen who stiffened at his touch and they walked off the steps toward another house set back in the vegetation to the north of the main complex.

“Come sir.” One of the Hindu Sepoys took my arm gently and guided me up the stairs onto the large porch of the colonial style house, as I watched her walk away with Sir Charles.

“Welcome to Fantasy Island.” Harv said in a Spanish Ricardo Montalban voice. “The only thing we need now is Herve Valachez yelling, ‘da plane, da plane!’ for Christ sakes.”

I would have appreciated the humor almost any other time, but he had noted that as they got closer to this place Ellen had grown more edgy and now watching her walk with her father gave me cold chills down my spine.

* * * * *

The rooms were like something out of a fine travel magazine. They opened out onto their own verandas with views of the sea through the trees. The large glass doors provided fresh air to circulate through and the fans built into the ceiling provided the right ambiance for the setting. A mosquito net hung around the four-poster bed and the room was filled with tropical nostalgia including a glass-framed picture of Hemingway standing next to a swordfish. It looked like the real thing. The Sepoy had laid out all new clothes, including a soft tropical two-piece suit that was the most desirable considering the heat and humidity. Showering and shaving, I dressed and looked at myself in the long mirror in a heavy wooded frame. The fit of the suit was perfect and I saw Ellen’s reflection on the veranda. She wore a thin yellow flowing dress that accented her figure and made her hair stand out with a rare beauty.

“Are you alright?” I asked gently.

“I’m fine. I’ll be better as soon as we’re on that airplane and away from here.” She walked in and sat on the end of my bed, looking up at me while I took a cigarette from a case and lit it.

“You don’t like him much, do you?” I turned while blowing smoke toward the fan and watched it circulate into invisibility.

“My mother died when I was fourteen when we lived in London. My mother was American and met Sir Charles, who was just General Charles Montgomery at that time, when she was in England doing research at Oxford into the principals of nuclear reactions before the war. Anyway, after she died, it was expected that I take on the role of the lady of the house. A teenage girl that had to make sure dinner parties were arranged, seating charts done, guests occupied with the right wines and foods. So I didn’t have much of the formative period that most kids get to go through. I was a responsible adult by the time I was sixteen and then we moved here, where everything was done by someone else, and my time was spent in close proximity to my father who had acquired power and responsibility for The Group. He was always near me.” She paused and looked at me and I stared back at her with grave concern. Ellen read my mind.

“No, no! Don’t get the wrong idea. He never touched me in that way. He’s much too dignified for that sort of father/daughter relationship. Hell, I thought he was much too dignified to touch anyone, ever. But he watched me all the time. I met a boy from one of the small coastal towns when I was seventeen. His father ran a fishing boat out of one of the small villages down the coast. We would meet and walk on the beach, talk about the future and all the things young people do. One day he wasn’t there anymore. His father’s boat was gone, the family had moved and he hadn’t even left me a note or anything. I was crushed but when you’re young you get over things like that. But when it happens more than once, you start to wonder if no one is good enough for you in your father’s eyes.

“In college, he had one of his guys,” she motioned outside to a guard that was walking around the deck, “watching me all the time, so when I finished and went to work for the agency I had some degree of freedom. Then Harv hired me. I was sure it was at my father’s insistence, but Harv is like the bad uncle everyone doesn’t want in their family, but has. Harv would tell him only part of what I was doing and then

distort it in my favor. It became our inside joke. Then you came into my life and everything gets misconstrued again. I wanted to be close to you, but was fearful that if I did you would end up going away. Now here we are and I'm afraid for Harv, that something is going to happen to him." She looked out the window at the sea and I looked out, too, not sure what to say.

"Dinner, sir, is served." The Sepoy had gently knocked and then opened the door. Seeing Ellen he bowed deeply. "With all apology for interrupting, but Sir Charles is waiting for both of you downstairs."

I crushed out my cigarette and Ellen stood up looking at the beach in the distance. "I used to swim nude in the moonlight. It was as if I was getting away with something." She walked over to me not taking my offered arm as we descended the steps to the main floor.

"Do be careful. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you." She said.

"I always am."

But I wasn't very convinced.



CHAPTER 57

Dinner was a formal affair. Linen and silver services, local varieties of food including conch soup and blackened Gruber for the main course. The talk was small during dinner, mostly about the island and what was happening on it. Harv was working on a good buzz all during dinner to the disapproving glances of Sir Charles. The Sepoys would come and go with fresh drinks for him and with each one the amber color faded in the glass. He wasn't drunk, but just on the edge enough to let out his caustic side of him. Ellen was quiet and I listened, while Sir Charles regaled them with stories of local intrigues and banking discrepancies. There seemed to be a set pattern to this type of affair and Sir Charles had the choreography down pat. When he suggested moving his own little ballet out to the veranda for after dinner drinks I decided my dance card was full and I'd endured enough.

"I don't think so. This chair is just fine and we can talk right here, if we are going to talk at all." I motioned to the Sepoy to fill my wine glass. The man hesitated looking at Sir Charles who nodded.

"Alright, then. What's on your mind?" Sir Charles asked.

"It has nothing to do with what's on my mind, Chuck." I took the wine and drank a sip of it and then turned to the Hindu. "How about finding me a beer, in a bottle, please."

"Make that two." Harv joined in.

"I presume that little jab was intended to inform me you find me too stuffy?" Sir Charles smiled with his mouth, but his eyes were flaming.

"No. It has to do with all this Dr. No, Goldfinger, Ernst Stavro Blofeld bullshit we're playing out right now. The genial host who holds the pulse of the world in his hand, speaking about the happy natives and the tropical breezes with everyone at the table knowing that one phone call from you and any one of us will be on the menu tomorrow night in some Cuban Restaurant. I love the genre in the movies, but right now I 'm tired of waiting for someone to call, 'cut' and we all get to go out and have a pizza and beer with the crew. Why are we here? Or, specifically, why I am here?" I took a big slug of my beer, as did Harv, both of us thinking it just might be our last. The Sepoy hesitantly put down a glass next to both of us, but we ignored them.

"Dr. Gilpsen told me you were direct, confrontational and abrasive." Sir Charles sipped his wine and looked hard at me with some kind of intended intimidation.

"You tell him that about me, Harv?" I laughed and turned to the older man.

"Yes I did, but I don't think I used those...exact...words." Harv looked back at me.

"Thanks. 'Confrontational and abrasive...' " I repeated, chewing the words like a raw steak. "I like that description, it fits. What I didn't hear is 'effulgent, brilliant and observant' and that is why you picked me to do this little job and why you want to know what happened at Dulce this morning." I took out a cigarette and lit up even though the Sepoys had told me no one smoked at Sir Charles table. One more way to

get under Auric Goldfinger's skin. "I am totally impressed with what you got going here, Sir Chuck." I said blowing a cloud of smoke, which hung over the table like a wrath. "But the problem is, you are out of touch with reality, being out here and not in the trenches with us. You get everything second or third hand. Oh, I'd imagine you got a secret lab with all the fancy gadgets and gizmos anyone could want and hidden back in the palm trees is a communications center most nations would die for, but this isn't the frontline of this fight. This is still rear guard action for someone that doesn't want to get his hands dirty. It's cowardly."

Sir Charles jaw slid forward and I could literally hear his teeth grinding. I stopped and looked around for an ashtray, which no one was bringing, so I used my beer bottle. I was sure this was the first time anyone had pulled off this type of sophomoric stunt in front of Sir Charles. Out of the corner of my eye I watched Harv chuckle to himself.

"Let me take some pot shots and make some wild guesses and see how close I am, huh?"

"Go ahead, Dr. Humphrey," Sir Charles said with a sinister silkiness, "but you must realize that, in my humble opinion, your career with this enterprise is just about at an end." The threat hung heavy in the room. This was that defining moment when you cut bait or fish, or more like pull the pin, duck and cover or run and hide and pray someone forgives your incongruity and that you can survive your own mistakes.

"As far as I'm concerned," I looked at my watch, "as of right...now, I don't work for you people any more! So I am off the clock. You don't have to fire me because I quit, effective 10 seconds ago. I could care less about your 'enterprise' since you don't even have one." I looked back at Sir Charles with the same degree of hostility I was receiving. "Oh sure, you can have one of your buddies here shoot me in the head or down my ass. So what? That doesn't mean you're going to get this project any farther down the road. It will be just one more example of your incompetency to lead, Chuck, and that you are the one that needs replacing. You think you have all the answers?" I leaned into him getting in his face and didn't think anyone had ever been this close to him. "Bullshit, Sir Charles!" I spat into his face. I leaned back with a smirk and lit another cigarette. "You don't even know what's going on beyond the fourth floor at Dulce or in the back room at Washburn. And that's not Harv's problem. You have hamstrung him to where he can't even navigate through these shark-infested waters. I presume the other four guys working for you at Harv's level are equally tied up in their own form of your bureaucratic nonsense to protect your little empire." I leaned back and shook the beer bottle at the Sepoy, who left the room immediately without waiting for permission.

"Easy, Ted." Harv turned and spoke quietly, and now I could see the sweat beading on his upper lip.

"Oh, shut up, Harvey!" I barked.

"No, Dr. Gilpsen. Let him speak." There was a raging tornado in Sir Charles' eyes. I half expected him, at any moment, to pull out a gun and put a round in my forehead point blank.

"What? What do you want to know?" I said getting even more belligerent. "You are supposed to head up 'The Group'; well if they're as entrenched as you in self-interest and power then they're all about as worthless as you are!" I grabbed the beer from the Sepoy who came back in.

"You are in my home and at my table, sir." He said with a menace I had never experienced before. "Understand that I am unaccustomed to being spoken to in these terms and if we were anywhere else..."

"Yeah, but were not! So save your faggoty Queen Victoria English class crapola act for someone that gives a flying fuck at a rolling donut. What? You gonna slap me with a glove now? You calling me out? Wanna step outside? You want to meet mano a mano on the field of honor? It's like everything else about this set up. It's all cheap

theatrics to scare the rubes and marks. Maybe this stuff impresses the local savages, but not me. I'm ready to head back where I have real work to do. If I'm no longer employed at Groom Lake, then I will have someone pick up my personal effects and have them sent to me. But right now, I am either leaving on the plane I came on or finding an airplane that'll get me back to the good old U.S. of A." I got up, folded my napkin and bowed to everyone. "Good evening. Thanks for the grub."

I walked out. Sir Charles got up slowly watching me go. I was literally surprised I made it to my room without getting a bullet between my shoulder blades.

* * * * *

I walked upstairs and changed back into my suit. Picking up my briefcase off the floor I checked for the small hair I had placed on the catch to see if anyone had looked through it during my absence. The hair was gone and the locking dial had been moved from the original setting. I smiled and walked out on the deck. A whiff of pipe smoke drifted on the evening breeze.

"Did you find what you wanted?" I spoke into the darkness on the veranda.

"Very...interesting." A flat, deep, unaccented voice came from the darkness on my left side. "It looks to me as if you had photos taken of charcoal drawings, and then someone airbrushed them for you to make them look like the real thing."

"Irina did them for me almost a year ago. The descriptions were in her handwriting so I had them typed on the back of the photo and added the coding to make it look official." I pulled out a cigarette and lit up.

"You might want this back." A hand emerged from the darkness holding a small vial. I held it up to the light in the room and noticed a single human hair. "They show up in black light and look like a yellow streak against the leather."

I handed it back to him and laughed. "Alright, so you knew it was booby trapped and you still opened it. So that basically means you don't care if I know that you got into it?"

"Well, we would have put it back into place, if I hadn't heard your diatribe to Sir Charles. Very entertaining. But it let me know you had already figured out this was all a set up...and a test." I heard a pipe being snapped to clean the bowl. "Shall we take a walk?"

"Sure." I got up and followed the shadow as the man went down the steps to the pathway running through the dense undergrowth.

"I'm Bellamy. You probably haven't heard that name yet." The man walked just slightly in front of me with the bright walkway lights creating a halo around his head. I couldn't make out any facial features but his voice made him sound like he was in his late fifties. It was strong and deep and steady. His silhouette in the ambient light showed someone of medium build on the muscular side with short-cropped hair and the neck of a bull.

"No, I haven't. But I was expecting you." I offered while walking behind the man toward what looked like a darkened bungalow about two hundred meters away from the main house.

"That's interesting as well. Most people are caught by the circus act out front and I don't need to show myself, Dr. Humphrey." The voice was soft and gentle as well as educated.

"I'm sure Sir Charles does a wonderful job of fronting for the Group. But he took himself a little too seriously tonight, I think because Ellen's here." I offered for no particular reason.

"You are probably right." The silhouette agreed. "Most of the time, he let's his emotions get in his way and I am glad you left that table alive. He is not at all warm to

the idea of you as a son-in-law, you know that?" The figure opened the door into the darkened interior of the bungalow and stepped back into the shadows letting me walk in to find a chair using the path of light illuminating the room from the porch light and then he closed the door, which left us both in total darkness. I could hear the fan swirling overhead circulating the cooled conditioned air in the room.

"Strange, I don't remember asking her to marry me, yet." I sat feeling a little uncomfortable and then a light came on. It was small, more like a reading lamp next to him on a table and the man stood over it in the shadows again.

"You will. But that is business between her and you as far as I am concerned. Forgive my manners for not being in the light. I want to get to know you before I show you my face. I think it's better that way." The man sat down back in the darkness of the corner of the room.

"Okay. Here's the deal: We play a full hand of five-card stud. The stakes are; you out in the light or me being gone." I responded.

"Fair enough. I hold the advantage of seeing you, but you are not living in constant danger of being discovered. Yet. So forgive my melodramatics for a few more moments." I thought about the statement and wondered just how deep that concern went.

"Your Harv's boss, ultimately, aren't you?" I asked.

"I am the boss, as you say, of everyone involved in these projects, ultimately and completely. I keep people like Sir Charles and a few others to do the diplomatic stuff out in the open, where presidents and prime ministers have someone of their own ilk to deal with. Me? I am more of the back street brawler type that looks to get the job done any way I can, using any methods necessary. Ted, I don't play by the rules, let's get that out way up in front. What you told Lord Tugy is accurate and correct and there are not seven people in this world who know that. Two of them are in this room right now. Harv would be third sitting up there getting drunk figuring that someone is going to put a bullet in the back of his head tonight. Ellen learned about it just today, with you. This at one level makes it unfortunate, since I wasn't ready to pull her all the way into this mess just yet. But that is a consequence and circumstance of war as they say. The other three are my counterparts; one in Europe, one in Asia and one in South America. They do the same thing that I do. Coordination of defenses and preparation for the event horizon as we call it. Your dating and timeframe was the only thing that was a little off tonight, but that is understandable as well. The event horizon can only occur past and beyond the December 21, 2012 alignment date. It's a function of logistics, if you can believe that, on the part of the Reptoids. Moving an invasion fleet through space and time is not as easy as science fiction writers make it seem. The pathways are not always open and then you have to marshal them all somewhere before you start an assault.

"That having been said," Bellamy took a breath and leaned back deeper into the shadows, "I need to know how you know about it at all. I called my partners in this little deception we play and they didn't even know about you, with the exception of a vague reference to that stunt you pulled off at Montauk. So what I need to know is how did you get your information?" I saw the flame of a jet Zippo lighter illuminate just his lower jaw in an eerie blue glow and smoke puffed out of his pipe again.

"Herr Doktor Simon Ratterman." I said at last, slapping down my ace. "He told Irina most of it and she left a detailed report for me and the other drawings. He also told her he had prepared the way for her to get back into the time experiments in Russia and that she would be safer there. She left to protect both me and Pasha." I felt the pangs of loss again inside, but pushed them away from the center of my being.

"Simon Ratterman. Should have known. That old Nazi has an uncommon way of showing up every time we think we have made a successful move forward. Do you know where he is? I am dying to get my hands on him again and...talk...to him just

once more.” The voice had a touch of malice in it suddenly and his knuckles cracked as he clenched his fist. I heard the words and processed them carefully.

“Say again?” I said, incredulous. “You met him before?”

“Just after the war. He was working with Kammler and your dad. Yes, I knew him. But we never figured out how he escaped, who got him out or where they took him. There’s been speculation he’s in Loc Nor, China, working on a similar project. But he seems to move absolutely freely from place to place without being caught. That is the part that simply amazes me.” The voice had gone back to neutral again.

“The question isn’t *where* he is.” I hesitated again, considering if I should play my second ace, and then laid it down. “But *when* he is.”

“What do you mean?” The voice came quickly out of the corner and I could tell the man was leaning forward in his chair.

“You haven’t figured this one out yet?” I chewed that for a while. “Huh...that surprises me. Ratterman is somewhere down the timeline, jumping back and forth between his time, where he is now, and us. He does hit and runs on us, using a time delineation device that actually controls the flow of time around him while he is here. It’s as if he is dancing around and in between the seconds of the clock, in between our moments, so he is in a different dimension at the same time, standing right next to us, watching our every move.” I knew I was making some speculations, but was the only explanation fitting all the moving parts and the way things had happened.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” Bellamy exclaimed, quietly stunned. “No one has ever thought of that. We’ve sent people to their deaths trying just to get a glimpse of him. Now I understand why we’ve never found him.”

The shadow moved in the room toward the switch by the door and soft lighting came up. I was dazzled for a moment, adjusting my eyes. The man stood in front of me and I understood the need for Sir Charles being the front man for the operation. At some time in the past, Mr. Bellamy had been critically burned on the right side of his face and someone had done a really bad plastic surgery job trying to repair it. The one side was almost too hideous to look upon; red and puckered with folds of skin and deep grooves.

“Not much for the poster boy job, wouldn’t you say?” He sat back down in the corner chair facing me.

“Accident or chemical?” I asked.

“The device in the cave in Germany. I was the first to try it on for size after Kammler got it running again. Fried my face with hot plasma. I almost lost my eye, but they were able to save it. The rest is just the end product of three different attempts to normalize my features, but this is about the best it’s ever going to be.”

Sitting there I could understand the man’s reluctance to be looked at. He could not hide in plain sight, as he stood out too much.

“Did it work?” I asked.

“The surgery? Hell no, look at this.” The man pointed to his face.

“No. The device.” I shook my head already moving on past the point of shock when I first looked at Bellamy.

“Yes and no. We moved in time only minutes ahead but nothing in the spatial region, that’s why the blowback from the magnets in the gaussing coils got me so bad.” Bellamy stared off into space, remembering the pain from a different time and place.

“How about you? Any side effects from your ventures into time?” Bellamy looked closely at me, knowing things happened to people inside those fields.

“Voices in my head. Being able to read some peoples thoughts easier than others. Knowing things I shouldn’t know. Like the stuff at Dulce today.” I decided I could be frank and honest with this man and laid out all my cards.

SANDS OF TIME

“I know. It’s something you can’t explain to other people. But if you use them to your advantage they help.” He extended his hand. “Dr. George Bellamy. Graduated M.I.T. back before the war and have been in this stuff ever since. Want a beer?”

“Glad to meet you, finally.” I shook his hand with a good grip. “Love one, and do you have any potato chips around?”

“Yeah. I got just about everything around here or I can get something really quick, I bet.” Bellamy laughed.

“I bet you can.” I loosened my tie and sat back enjoying the coolness of the air in the room. I didn’t realize I was so tired or that I had drifted off to sleep in the chair. Not until morning.



CHAPTER 58

The room was filled with sunlight when I snorted awake. I sat there in the chair for a minute or two dazed and confused trying to get my bearings. The room was simple but neat. It had a desk on one wall with a bookcase over it. The books ran from hard science on one end to wild sensationalistic pulp editions on the other to subjects about UFOs and the paranormal. On the desk were a few files and two telephones. Three chairs and one couch filled the rest of the little apartment. Finding the bathroom I showered and found a new razor and towels laid out, clearly for my use. After making myself presentable to the world I strolled out to see what today had to offer. A young white man in a jump suit stood at a discreet distance from the front door. He nodded a salutation and motioned to a waiting golf cart.

“Dr. Bellamy asked me to wait for you so you could join him for breakfast, sir.”

I got in and we started up in the opposite direction of the main house. We broke out of the heavy foliage into an area where I could clearly see the azure blue water of the sea.

“Have you worked here long?” I asked the other man.

“ ‘Bout two years. I re-enlisted when my last tour was done, to come back here.”

His accent was pure Scottish.

“Like the place then?” I continued.

“Love the water. It’s warm and after I learned to scuba dive, I couldn’t see doing it in the Firth of Fourth I tell you that sir.” He handed me a pair of sunglasses to help with the glare.

“Thanks. I left mine in my coat pocket.” I put them on and took the opportunity to look back and up the hill at the villa. “How big is this place?”

“Just over a hundred acres. The main housing facility is back there where you were, but the lab and computer center is over around the headlands where there is also a power generating station.” The young man pulled up at the side of the narrow roadway and pointed. I could see a large building in the distance next to a small hill. They were just on the other side of a secondary fence line. “This road is the one of two ways down there. But I wouldn’t advise a gentle stroll across the grass area, even though it looks inviting.”

“Snakes?” My first instinct in tropical areas was always to worry about what you couldn’t see at feet level.

“Landmines, sir. Anti-personnel. The whole place is packed up with them. Set one off and three others right around them go off to make sure that the first one did the job right well.” The man started up the cart again.

“Must be hell on the native animals.” I looked out across the sea grass that was brown and swaying in the gentle wind.

“Was for the first year or so. Now the only thing you’ll find out there is birds. They aren’t heavy enough to set them off.” The path curved down and then back on the flat part of the upper beach toward another fence line.

“Great I would imagine that environmentalists love that?” I could hear the hue and cry if this was happening inside the US .

“Only great loss is now and again the green turtles decided to cross the pathway and try to lay their eggs up in the dunes.” He waved to the guard that had opened the gate into the laboratory compound.

“What happens then?” I wondered out loud.

“We normally have turtle soup on the menu that night.” He pulled the cart up to a stop and got out. “Dr. Bellamy will be upstairs in the cafeteria waiting for you, right up those outside steps.”

“I’m Ted Humphrey, by the way.” I turned back to the man.

“They call me Captain Jack ‘round these parts, sir. I’m head of the day shift of security. Pleasure is all mine, sir. You will never know how much.” He raised his hand in a mock salute and smiled.

“Same I’m sure.” I mounted the steps two at a time and walked into a room that was open on one side facing the ocean. The rest was pretty much a standard cafeteria, but it looked like the food was fresher and better. Two black cooks worked behind the counter and started talking to me the moment I came into the room.

“It’s the new Doc, Hami, look at him. Fresh up and ready. Say, Doc you want’a us ta make you some eggs and bacon, toast and hash browns?” The man smiled and he had a sea of white teeth on a field of chocolate brown.

The other man looked up. “Let me mak’a you some fresh squeezey fruit, boss. Good for young men to grow.” He was already pouring a large glass of mixed fruit juices into an iced glass.

“Take dis and we’ll bring you b’fest out to you, Doc, don’ you worry none, Hami and me take care of everything. GB is waiting for you on da deck, but don’t you be sharing your breakfast with him, he had a good one already. Right out there, there ya go.” Both men broke into pidgin English talking to one another as I strolled out on the deck and saw Doctor George Bellamy, drinking his coffee and looking out to sea.

“Sorry about that.” I sat down and looked up at the man. In the daylight his face looked worse but I had already got past his appearance last night.

“Never got your beer and chips. You must have been tired. I have a bed in there you could have used. It seemed simply inhuman to wake you. By the time I got back from the kitchen, you were snoring.” Bellamy smiled over at him.

“The day started at zero dark thirty yesterday and I didn’t take into effect the time difference of three hours, so I think it must have been about a twenty two hour day.” I tried the juice in the glass and it was great. Hami came up holding a large platter and set it down with eggs and the rest, all to the standards of any great five star restaurant any place in the world. I dug in and felt the sensation in my mouth first. Everything was done with spices, hot spices. “Wow!” I looked up at Hami who was still standing there. “That is wonderful.”

“Him like it, good one! Keep that one GB, he liken our dish.” The man went off singing a song.

“Those guys are great. Never down at all. They live in town about fifteen miles thata way.” Bellamy pointed toward the east. “They are here at three in the morning and leave after dinner at night. No one knows how they get here. Neither one of them drives or has a bicycle. They just sort of show up out of the bush and the guards drive them down here. At night they take them back to the gate and then wave and are gone again. They both live in shacks down on the coast, one of the guards has told me, they got a little fishing boat that leaks and when they are not here they look like every other native on this island, dressed in rags, but can those boys cook.” Bellamy smiled again and looked out at the ocean. “I would sure hate like hell to not have days like this on this planet, you know that?”

"I do. I prefer deserts myself, but only because I was raised in one and always found it interesting. Most of my time by the sea was in California when I was in college and in New York but those waters are not what one would call user friendly, unless you have a yacht, like Jacobs." I thought about the man for a moment in reflection.

"That man and I went back a long ways. I served under him a long time ago as did Max. We learned a great deal from him as well. I hated losing him. But life goes on." Bellamy shrugged to himself. Wolfing down the food, I was more than satisfied with half the breakfast but finished it all, just so I wouldn't have to hear from Hami that it was bad to waste food. Sitting back and enjoying my juice I studied the other man's profile and then asked: "What do you want me to do?"

"I need to know if we can defeat the Grays at Dulce first. Secondly, how much of their technology can we back engineer and when would be the right time to hammer them into oblivion. Third; can we close the torn rips in space/time Townsend Brown and company opened and the rest of the tears in the fabric of space/time in the local universe and can we formulate a plan to defend ourselves when the Reptilians decide to drop into our space and cleanse this world of us?" Bellamy put his cup down and turned to face me with a dark, humorless grin. "That's pretty much it...in a nut shell."

"Okay. Where do I fit in?" I leaned back and waited.

"Make it happen. All of it." Bellamy raised a finger. "And make the device work to boot. We still need to make one of those things work so we can do something constructive instead of just defending ourselves. We need some offense in this game. Those who attack must vanquish, those who defend must merely survive."

"All of it?" I was actually shocked. "You want me to head it up?"

"No. I still want Harv to play his role running interference for you with political and military types. He is a great left guard to protect your blind side. He is tough enough to handle them and they would just sap the life out of you. I need your mind and full attention to work on the problems and your special talents to be used to direct and manage the programs for us. Stay at Five-One working with Ellen on the device. The little one you proposed, but we will filter everything else that we know to you. You will sometimes need to work at Dulce and Washburn to get a better feeling for them. As time goes by, we will hook you up with the folks overseas as well, so you can see their operations. But I need a set of eyes looking at all this differently. That would be you. You've proven that since those days years ago when you worked with Bates. We need a new way of getting answers, 'cause the ones we've used sure the hell haven't been working, and we are running out of time."

Bellamy twisted his head to focus with his good eye and noticed someone walking in and I turned as well. It was Sir Charles.

"Don't get up and don't leave. Give the man a chance to make good on a promise." Bellamy's twisted face stared at me.

"Alright." I sat back as Sir Charles, in an immaculate white tropical suit, strolled out onto the deck and pulled up a chair.

"Gentlemen. Good morning. I missed both of you at breakfast in the villa, but I should have known you would be down here eating with the tribe." Sir Charles turned and waved to both men behind the counter and motioned for a cup of coffee.

"Good food with pleasant company." I said quietly, trying to hold my anger in check. Sir Charles held his hands together under his chin, as if in prayer and took a breath.

"We got off on a bad foot yesterday, Ted. I am sorry about that and I would like to make up for it in some way if I can." Sir Charles sounded sincere in his apology.

"My motto has always been let bygones be bygones. I do not hold a grudge against anyone." I felt the contents of my stomach turning over as he lied. "Let me just say that there is a role that I must play, just like the one you must play and it is not always

to each of our likings.” Sir Charles took some coffee offered from Hami, who didn’t have anything at all to say to this man.

“I understand that, Sir Charles.” I said, making him sweat, knowing I had all the power now, and someone had, no doubt, forced this upon him literally, on pain of death, to do what he was now doing. “But I think another issue is clouding our situation.” I finished my juice and walked in to get my own cup of coffee. Sir Charles looked over at Bellamy who was blank faced, impassive and unreadable, which was hard to do anyway under the most expressive circumstances as most of his face was paralyzed. I returned and sat down again.

“What would that be, Ted?” Sir Charles asked.

“The fact that I am going to marry your daughter is sticking in your craw.” I tasted the coffee and it didn’t have the institutional lab flavor I was so used too.

“Ellen discussed that with me this morning.” He said looking up and bouncing on his toes a few times, which was an odd quirk of the English. “She didn’t indicate that you had asked her yet. So, are you requesting my permission to ask my daughter to marry you?”

Sir Charles had to make his last stand here. It was clear he was trying to hold on to some edge of dignity and power in all of this, because he probably already had gotten the word from Bellamy I was the new guy who was going to take point. He had brought me here to, at best, send me into exile on some godforsaken St. Helena somewhere, or, at worst, have me killed in some unpleasant way. Now he wished he’d never seen my face, as his entire world had come crumbling down around his ears in the last 24 hours. His last and only play here to have any say in this game, was to pimp his daughter out to the hated man who had destroyed him. It would be throwing a drowning man a rope. I looked over at Bellamy, taking all this in, who imperceptibly nodded his head forward. I choked down my upset and did it.

“Yes...I am.”

“Then let me tell you as a father.” The haughty English bastard returned as he looked down his nose at me. “I want my daughter to be happy. If she thinks you can bring that into her life, then I will provide both of you with my blessing. But as a father I must tell you personally I don’t think you are the man for her. Your work will get in the way of a happy life, just as mine has. But that is for the two of you to sort out.” He bowed nobly with a gesture. “My blessings are with you both.” Sir Charles properly extended his hand. I got up and shook his as well.

With that Sir Charles nodded to Bellamy and turned on his heel and walked out of the room. I sat back down and looked over at the new boss.

“Well, that was the most emotionally filled barter session I have ever witnessed. You guys deserve to be related to each other, even if it is by marriage. Come on, let me show you downstairs where all of this stuff fits together.” Bellamy got up and waved at the boys behind the counter and I did as well. Hami worked on getting lunch ready for the next crew to come in, humming away to himself. He waved back and grinned his beautiful pearly white smile.



CHAPTER 59

The underground laboratory complex was like nothing I had ever seen or could imagine. When I watched the space shots on television I had seen the men at mission control sitting at various monitors displaying the multiple outputs from every conceivable part of the spacecraft and the personnel flying them. Bellamy's lab was much the same. There were at least twelve different monitoring stations broken up into four modules all facing a large screen display covering one whole wall. Everyone in the room could see the main projection, as well as each individual display in sub-displays on the edge of the larger one. Above this floor was a monitoring room, where Bellamy normally sat with two others and controlled the access points covering the globe and were electronically connected into a hundred different systems whereby he could pull all kinds of various information up within a second or two.

"It is from here we watch everything happening around the world. There are a lot of blind spots up there, but hopefully we will be able to plug them up one of these days with the next-gen of satellites launching this year. From space we should be able to detect any anomalies on the surface of the globe." Bellamy put on a headset and spoke quietly into it. "This should show you how far we have come at present."

The image on the main screen changed to an aerial view of our complex surrounded by foliage. The projection was slightly grainy and then Bellamy had them zoom in on it. As the resolution increased, the details faded but not enough to recognize certain aspects of the ground truth that was indicated on the projection.

I smiled, putting my hand over my mouth to keep from outright laughing. The rest of the crew stopped what they were all doing, and looked up at the main screen as if their favorite soap opera had just come on. We watched Sir Charles talking to Ellen in the open garden below the villa and she was yelling and waiving her arms at him. We all had an idea what they were talking about. There was a humorous mutter that went through the room. Bellamy smiled as best he could and spoke again into the intercom.

"Alright, alright. Show's over people." There was a group "Ahh!" of disappointment as the next projection was of the parking lot at Area 51. Two hits of a button put the view directly inside the aircraft bay they started to call Hanger 18, after the original at Wright-Patterson, watching the alien saucers. Bellamy spoke again and a darkened view of another set of structures came up, clearly from a satellite. He increased magnification and zoomed in to show the outline of a complex of buildings made of cement with guard towers clearly at the edge of the picture.

"What's this?" I asked.

"USSR Petrovisky Institute, in the Urals." Bellamy spoke again and the zoom increased. "That...is where Irina works now."

"Any pictures from inside?" I said hopefully, not believing they had anything on this place at all.

A picture flashed up of a slightly darkened hallway, with only minimal pixal resolution caused by the low light.

"The KGB monitors the facility from Moscow. We found a place where we tap in then re-transmit the images to an uplink in Turkey. This allows us some access without anyone knowing about it, so far. It helps depending on what they're watching at any point in time. We got a guy works the nightshift in Moscow we call Crazy Ivan who's so bored he switches to the kitchen at night and watches the girls working, hoping to see some cleavage I'd imagine. Entertainment for these guys when things get slow." Bellamy spoke again and the next projection was a composite overlay from NORAD, (The North American Air Defense Command), screen inside Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It showed all military aircraft up and on station, the readiness of all missile defense systems and on a small side projection were the deployment coordinates of all of our ballistic submarines as well as those of the Russians.

Bellamy motioned for me to sit and put on a headset. I noticed the red flashing dot on the console. He reached across and threw a switch giving me listening ability but he put a finger to his lips for me to keep quiet.

"Can you hear me in your headset?" He looked at me after he sat down and I raised my thumb.

"The reason I don't want you on line just yet is that the computer wouldn't recognize your voice and sense it as an intrusion. That would not be good, and part of our system would isolate itself. We don't need that right now." Bellamy handed me an ashtray and a pack of Camels.

"We're going to be here a while so get comfortable." He hit a button on the console but it didn't seem to do anything as I watched the monitor in front of me and the big board on the floor below. Bellamy pointed.

"Deep space monitors. Those are satellites turned away from Earth scanning the black background of space. They've detected something coming in that is presently being relayed to us through the Goldstone Facility in California." Bellamy lit his pipe again and changed the images on his secondary monitor to show a bar graph of some sort.

The door opened behind us and a uniformed young man walked in holding a thermal coffee pot and two cups. He placed one by Bellamy and poured him a cup and then did the same for me. He leaned in next to me and said quietly, so as to not disturb Bellamy, "The first button is for more coffee, two for sandwiches, three if you need someone to spell you. Four, the blue one there, is if you need a security team." The man left as if he had just told me my laundry was ready for pick-up. Something of significance was happening I didn't understand having nothing to do with my presence. Happenstance or providence had made it so I was there when a situation was occurring and now I got to see what this place really did.

Suddenly a shooting pain went through the base of my skull, as if someone had shoved a red-hot poker from the bottom of my neck up into the fissure in the middle of my brain. I grabbed my neck and doubled over in agony. Bellamy and a number of the other personnel took a step towards me but then turned to look through the main console window and went back to their places as I waved them off.

A man on the floor got up and turned to look up at what I later learned was called Studio Control, a little joke among the men and women who worked here for Bellamy. He looked up and touched his headset. His voice was quivering.

"Boss, we got a Z-level event on the outer marker." He watched Bellamy, who threw a switch that isolated his conversation to just my headset.

"Ted? Are you all right?" He spoke clearly and with genuine concern.

The flaming stabbing pain in my head subsided into a burning ache, but as it did it was being replaced by what sounded like the muffled white noise of a crowd of people gathered very far away, but getting closer with each pulse of my heart.

"Yeah, yeah! I'm okay. Just really...weird." I said.

Bellamy looked down at the floor, then at the door deciding if he was going to have me stay or go with whatever strange thing was happening with me. He took a resigned breath.

"I am truly sorry you are here right now. I wanted to wait awhile to show you how all of this works, but you are now doing on the job training. Hit your security team button and ask them to find Harv for me and get him here pronto." He switched back to common on the headset so everyone could hear him.

"Let's work the problem folks. Herb, you called a Z-level event, put it on the big board and notify NORAD." A red light on the top of each console began rotating and then lit up with a soft red flashing light.

I hit the red security team button and five seconds later two hard looking armed young men were standing next to me. "I need Dr. Gilpsen down here, right now. The last I saw him he was up at the villa." One of the men glanced over at me questioningly then back at Bellamy. Bellamy stood to face him and spoke sternly while covering his mouthpiece. "I am only going to say this once Mr. Packard, so listen and listen good. I am making you directly responsible for transmitting this to everyone: Dr. Humphrey speaks to me and I speak directly to God. Got it?"

"Affirmative, sir!" The young man spun and strode out the door. The impression was that I had just passed the initiation into the inner circle. Formally.

"Boss!" Came a nervous voice. "Situation Desk here. NORAD is winding up and sealing down tight. Are we on scramble yet?" I listened intently fighting off the noise in my head.

"Not calling the ball yet. I want Boss Two here first, or six minutes, whatever comes first. Mark it and make it so." Bellamy turned and pointed at the wall above my head. A digital readout showed T minus six minutes and was counting down. "Ted, in six minutes this facility is going to be sealed up like a sixteen year old Catholic girl's crotch. If you want Ellen in here have security find her, but she has to stay in the panic room. Clear?"

"Got it Boss!" I hit the security button and Packard was right there.

"Ellen. Get her to the panic room," I pointed at the clock. "But make sure you're inside before that thing hits zero." Packard looked over at Bellamy who turned and flashed a scowl to see if his first instruction had not registered on one of the heads of security. Packard pointed at me.

"Boss Three?"

"Boss Three. Make it so!" Bellamy hit a switch while Packard ran out of the room. "Be aware people we have a new member in Studio Control. His call sign is 'Boss Three', his voice is not entrained yet into Sophie so he won't be calling on the ICS but will be on phone one or two. Formal introductions later...if we are all still here! Clock it! Math One, Boss Three is live and working."

"Done and done, Boss." The voices were ringing in my headset. Twelve men working as fast as they could and Bellamy handling it as if in a zone above his head, working on a keyboard in front of him, typing so quickly his fingers became a blur.

The door opened behind me and Harv walked in, handing his sport coat to a guard, he filled his coffee cup. "This has been a fun filled couple of days hasn't it, kids? You know Ellen is going to string you up by the nuts when she sees you, Ted?" He stood for a moment reading the board in the distance and took a headset off the wall. "Move one space to the right if you please?" I moved and Harv sat down and plugged in. Harv slurped his coffee, spilling it down the front of his shirt and pulled out a keyboard from under the desk where I had been sitting and plugged it into the console.

"Math One. Boss Two on line and working." He immediately started typing. Harv reached over and toggled a switch on the console in front of me to show how you could go back and forth between the big board projection on the console and the

information that both he and Bellamy were typing. They were making a real time record of what was going on in the shorthand language they used. It took about a minute to recognize enough letter groups to see what they were saying on their communiqués. Packard stepped in and leaned down next to my ear.

"Miss Ellen is in the complex as well as every one else that needs to be here." I looked up at the digital clock on the wall: two minutes. I hit the private line function again which by-passed the computer and spoke into Bellamy's headset directly.

"All personnel inside, sir, according to Packard and we are still running on the mark. We are ready to bypass the mark and seal now." I had done this before at both New York and Nevada when we were running experiments, but I couldn't see how we could be any more secured here than we presently were.

"Roger-copy. Boss Three is calling the ball to go to instant seal. Make it so." Bellamy spoke and typed.

"Boss Three: Hard seal instituted as of now." On the console in front of me a flash happened and changed the display to a television picture from outside and I watched the whole building start to move downwards into the ground. Packard leaned over me placing a laminated sheet in front of me showing every position on the floor, their function and their private direct intercom so I could talk to them without going through the computer. I nodded thanks and Packard patted me on the back and stepped back against the wall. I heard the definitive sound of an automatic pistol having its slide pulled back and a round placed in the chamber. On the screen as the building sunk into the ground the surface camera showed a huge cement plate moving over the opening and closing off the hole completely. There was a heavy echoing thud above us and I looked up.

"Boss Three. Math One. Facility seal complete." Packard stepped forward and pointed to the position so I could identify it on the floor below for the man standing and looking at me.

I hit the private ICS button and spoke: "Confirmed and thank you."

"Boss Three. Math One. On confirmation provide the time setting from the clock on your station so that I can check it with mine, please."

"Roger that. Eleven forty two Zulu." The man on the floor raised his thumb in the universal sign of approval and sat back down.

"Boss One. Situation Desk. Soviets just turned the light to red in Moscow. Stations down the line are coming up with a vengeance."

Bellamy turned to Harv. "Shit!"

"I hear ya, G.B.!" Harv pointed to my console and I saw the status reports running down the corner of the screen, changing every moment from red to green at places that I couldn't even pronounce.

"Boss One. Situation Desk. Domino. Domino. Domino."

"Got it and working." Bellamy was eating his pipe.

"Boss One. Situation Desk. Confirm from deep space: it is a craft, repeat: it is a craft, and it is heading in fast. Intentions at this time are unclear. ID not possible yet."

"Intentions or direction?"

"Boss One. Situations Desk. It's on a course putting it over the mid-Atlantic in forty two minutes."

"Roger that." Bellamy flipped his private line switch that only Harv and I could hear. "Harv, call Sir Charles, have everyone on list 'A' go to ground."

"You know if this is just another gambit those guys will be really pissed off...again!" Harv warned.

"I know, but we can't take the chance."

"On it. Working." Harv turned to me. "Touch seven on your console." I did and heard his lugubrious breathing. He raised his finger to his lips for silence.

“Sir Charles? We’re at Level Two. List A is now activated. Make it a rush, less than forty minutes.” Harv waited.

“I have been ready for some time”, came Sir Charles in his haughty British accent, “I have two of the principals on hold. Standard holes?”

Harv switched off the line, so Charles couldn’t hear him.

“Boss One? Standard or advance holes?” Harv looked at him and shrugged. Bellamy closed his eyes for a minute, took a deep breath and thought through the problem as quickly as he could.

“Standard.” He was back working something else.

“Standard holes,” Harv repeated, “but make it quick and button them down.”

“Is it real?” Sir Charles asked.

“It’s big and moving fast, but there’s only one...at present.”

The line went dead at Sir Charles end. Harv clicked back to just us talking.

“List A you’ll find on the screen to your right by typing in ‘List-A’. Look at the names.” Harv pointed back to Packard to get him a cigar. Packard was out of the room and back before I finished bringing up the screen. The President, Vice President, Secretaries of State, Defense and Treasury were on the list along with select members of the Senate and Congress, two justices of the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister of Great Britain plus four of his equals, the Premier of the Soviet Union and four of his colleagues out of the central community and finally, the head of China. I turned and looked at Harv.

“Yup. Got a light?” He had the cigar in his mouth when I put my Zippo under the end of it.

He could tell the level of my disbelief that the men in this room could actually get heads of state of other countries to respond this way. I suddenly realized this was the big poker game I had always dreamed of, the one for all the big black chips.

“A standard hole is a shelter in close proximity to their capitals and advanced holes are farther away. We try and determine the impact ratio from here and use our best judgment to determine how to best save what we can of the governmental structure without causing an all out panic. When one of these is bogus and we end up with egg on our face, these guys get really pissed off and scream and yell at each other. Ergo, shit rolls down the hill so you can imagine what Sir Charles has to put up with.” Harv actually chuckled to himself. “He doesn’t like that part of the job, but you know, what goes around, comes around. We have saved most of these guys asses at least a dozen times so they take it serious when we do this routine. Hold on!” Harv clicked back on the main ICS and listened.

“Dulce is on the router wanting you, Boss One.” A voice not connected to the room below me was in my ear. It was female and I didn’t see a woman on the floor below.

“CenCom.” Harv said to me while covering his mouthpiece. “Central Communications and Control at Washburn. It’s a back up for this place.”

“Are there any more of them?” I asked.

“That’s classified and I’d love to tell you but then I would have to shoot you!” Harv chuckled. “Four more: one at Sao Paolo, one in London and one in Joe’berg, South Africa and Madras, India. We’re always primary unless we’re out of position. Then secondary personnel are put into the control positions. Hopefully one of us will always be sitting in one of these chairs, ‘cause the others don’t know the whole story.”

“Who used to be Boss Three?” I asked.

“Jacobs, the old son of a bitch. He was good at it, too. Brinkmanship and big brass balls. Max never made it. He didn’t have the stuff to make these kinds of decisions. Kid, you just got elevated to the world of double blind secrets. There is no going back now. Keep quiet or that man will have a bullet in your head in a heart beat.” Harv turned and looked at me. “Tough luck when you don’t have a choice,

isn't it?" Then he laughed again. "Doesn't matter now. This one is no shot across the bow, this is a death nail heading right fucking at us. Apparently his Lordfulness Tugy didn't like what you had to say and now the Hive is responding. Flexing their muscles to prove to us they mean business." He switched lines. "Situation Desk, Boss Two. Tell me the trajectory right now."

"Situation Desk. It is moving into alignment with Washington DC and the Eastern Seaboard."

Harv hit the clock button on the console and looked up at the one on the wall. "T-minus thirty-one and counting."

"Orbit. Boss Two. How big and what is the composition?"

"Orbit here, Boss Two. 600 meters across, Mach twenty-four, iron and nickel. Playing asteroids with us, Boss Two."

"Confirmed." Harv turned and looked at me hard. His good nature had vanished. "It would seem the Hive have decided we needed a lesson in humility and this is supposed to do it. Take out Washington or New York with an asteroid and everything gets screwed up for a while. Fingers pointed in all kinds of directions. Also opens us up for the Soviets to preempt and hit us the minute communication links go down. That will be five seconds after impact. It's a cascade effect. One power grid goes off-line and draws the next and so on until everything east of the Mississippi is blacked out and we are running blind. They will launch sure as hell the minute it hits us. So somebody's got to make a Type One decision right now if we are going to tell the President to launch everything we have at them and then we pick up all the pieces when it is over."

"Boss One here. Go to red, I repeat, go to red!" I looked up and didn't see a change in the status board inside the room. Harv reached over and pointed at the console where NORAD's information was displayed and they were showing a full Red Alert. "That means all the missiles are coming on-line and aircraft are taking off. In about five minutes the Russians will follow suit as well as the Chinese and we got everyone ready to kill each other." Harv puffed nervously on his cigar filling the room with smoke.

"Looking Glass! Looking Glass! This is Boss One. Are you on the line?" Bellamy was using a different headset for the moment. He switched the audio input to the overhead speakers.

"Looking Glass, this is ALICE. Identify by Code Boss One." A voice boomed out of the speaker.

Harv looked up and then at me. "Looking Glass is an aircraft at forty thousand feet circling the US. ALICE is the general in charge. He takes over if the President and all other government officials are no longer able to communicate their wishes. He makes three attempts, two minutes apart and then assumes command. Not pretty, Theodore. Not pretty at all. Look at your Soviet monitor, they just lit up the boards, they are rolling the roofs off their missile silos as well." Harv pushed up a couple more screens and looked at China, it was buttoning up the hatches and launching aircraft from every field. "They will be heading for India right now. That is their prize if we get hit."

"Alpha-stroke-Gamma-one-seven-one-foxtrot." Bellamy pronounced every word as carefully as possible.

"Counter sign." The speaker boomed.

"Over-run break Visigoth." Bellamy waited watching the clock.

"Better listen to this on Com Two, GB." Harv spoke up to be heard above the static. Bellamy placed an earphone next to his head.

"Put it on the loudspeaker." He pulled the headset off, still waiting for ALICE.

"Confirmed by two. Sir, we are standing by. This is ALICE." The speaker boomed again.

“Hold and wait for one.” Bellamy switched headsets. “Go ahead Cal, what do you have for me?”

The shrill, clipped, nervous voice of Dr. Calvin White, Director of the Dulce Archeleta Mesa complex, filtered into the air of the room over the loudspeaker, sounding utterly terrorized. “Th-they’ve shut off the elevators and sealed all the tunnels into and out of the complex. There must have been a huge gunfight on level four. I have six, maybe eight, dead security officers here and as many wounded. I evacuated the next three levels and sealed the top entrance. I basically have a riot going on down there and I don’t know who is in control!”

“What started the gun battle?” Bellamy looked terrible with his scarred face grinding down the plastic tip of his pipe between his clenched teeth.

“Sounds like they tried to overpower the guards and get up to the second floor. The MPs wouldn’t let them and somebody shot someone and all hell broke loose. That isn’t much of a report, sir, but that’s the best I can give you.” Cal was breathless on the line.

“Stand by, Cal. I will get back to you.” Bellamy yelled into the mouthpiece. “They have closed all working circuits and indicated for us to do the same.” He fell silent for ten seconds then shook himself. “I need suggestions what situation to work first. Harv?”

“Getting drunk sounds really good to me about now.” Harv chomped down on his cigar harder.

“Doesn’t it? Teddy! You got anything to add?” No one had called me Teddy since I was a kid, and in this crisis it made me feel closer to him and truly part of the team, like old childhood pals. I wasn’t going to let him down.

“Give me a blueprint of Dulce on this screen.”

“Do it, Packard.” The young officer reached across and pounded in two of three lines and pulled up the blueprint.

“Boss One! ALICE here, holding my dick in my hand here! What the fuck is going on?” The speaker reverberated in the room.

“Hold ALICE. Working another problem.” Bellamy rubbed his eyes thinking.

“Another problem!” The speaker boomed, outraged. “You gotta be fucking kidding me!! I got a hundred and eighty B-five-twos heading for fail-safe and you got something more important to do?” ALICE wasn’t pleased.

“Yes, goddamn it! I do! SHUT UP AND I WILL COVER IT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE! UNDERSTOOD?” Bellamy exploded down the line at the five-star general in the aircraft, who was, technically, right now, the most powerful man on Earth.

“ALICE...standing by and holding.” The speaker went silent.

“Teddy! Buddy, talk to me!” Bellamy was watching his screens fluctuate.

I thought for a moment. I closed my eyes and relaxed, letting the cacophony in my brain into my conscious mind, surrendering to it and dropping all resistance. The buzzing voices flowed into me. As I breathed them in, they started to pound with a semblance of resonant sense. I soaked them in, then wound up and hucked the Hail Mary.

“Can you hook me into the com system at Dulce? So they can hear me on the lower levels?” I sat back and hoped I was right. The voices of the Hive were screaming into my head and I was trying to sort them out or shut them up. I turned to Packard who seemed to know a whole hell of a lot more about things than I did and called him over. “Are these accurate and up to date?”

“Yessir. Nothing moves on those charts or blueprints without us knowing about it first.” Packard stepped back to his place on the wall.

“Cal says yes, but he doesn’t know if the system down in the bottom is working. For all we know they ripped it out of the walls. You got something?” Bellamy held up

a hand to one of the men on the floor jumping up and down because he couldn't get through on Bellamy's headset.

"Yes. I have a...hunch. I started this mess and I should be the one to clean it up."

"You didn't start this. That happened a long time ago, but go ahead. Can't hurt." Bellamy looked at Harv who winced as if in pain at the last comment. Bellamy nodded and flipped a switch. "Roger that. Teddy you are live all over Dulce. Do that Voodoo."

I gathered my thoughts and took a deep breath, tuning into the sounds buzzing like a nest of hornets in my skull.

"This is Doctor Theodore Humphrey. I met with Lord Tugy yesterday and today you are causing a disruption on our world. You think you are going to demonstrate your superiority by harming us. I have given the Director of Dulce, Dr. Calvin White, an order to overload the nuclear generator and destroy the mountain. It will happen the moment the asteroid hits our planet. We will destroy all you have done there in the last ten years. Your race and your royal houses will die out. I will end you. Right now. You do not know about the special, ah...Corbomite unit...I had added to the nuclear reactor several months ago. But you are about to find out. Superiority is a two-way street. Doctor Humphrey out."

I sat back feeling the sweat pouring off my back. Harv and Bellamy stared slack jawed at the side of my head.

"What new device you had added?" Harv asked in disbelief.

"See this?" I pointed to the blue prints on the screen and enlarged a section with a date of installation on it. "It's called a thermal-coupled heat exchanger. The Corbomite thing was just something I saw on *Star Trek*."

"Yeah. We change those out once a year or so as standard operational procedure. What's new about...?" Harv was acting incredulous as Bellamy slapped his hands together and started to laugh.

"It's on the second floor!" He roared. "And they can't get to the second floor to check it! If this works...." He was stopped mid-sentence by another call on his headset.

"Ted, Cal is on Com One for you."

"Cal, this is Ted." I waited.

"Dr. Humphrey," Dr. Calvin White sounded like he was about to lose his mind. "I have an internal call from Lord Tugy and he wants to talk to you immediately! He says the fate of all of us is in your hands!" I motioned to Packard.

"Put this on the overhead." Packard hit a switch and everyone in Studio Control could hear Cal's terrified pleading for me to talk to Tugy.

"No." I said calmly.

Harv shot me a look while turning green around the gills looking like he would vomit. Bellamy just smiled and listened to all the other information pouring in.

"No?! What the hell do you mean NO?" He was staring hot melted nuclear death in the face now. "This is LORD Tugy...that wants to talk to you...now! I can't tell him no!" Calvin White had been at Dulce dealing with these Grey and Nordic prick bastards a little too long, and thought these guys were too powerful to resist. All that was going to change.

"Tell his lordship...I...am...busy!"

"I-I can't do that!" He sputtered. "They're tearing this place apart! It's only a matter of time until they reach us on the top floor! You people have to do something! You have no idea what these things are capable of!"

"Dr. White, listen to me very carefully." I said slowly. "You tell his royal ass-ness to divert that little Christmas present in the next fifty seconds or I am going to blow that mountain into a hot smoking nuclear hole in the ground no one will be able to get near for a thousand years! Boss One are you on the line?" I knew he was, but it was time to emphasize a point.

“Here, Boss Three, sir.” Bellamy used my new call sign, adding weight to my threats, waiting for the next card to flip.

“If the nuclear explosion does not completely devastate Dulce can you put a squadron of nuclear armed B-52s over it and finish the job within minutes?” I waited hoping he caught the inflection in my voice and that Tugy was listening as well.

“It is already done as we speak, Boss Three. They are approaching position now.” Bellamy never moved or said anything else to anyone, including ALICE in the Sky.

“Calvin, does he understand that I am *not* fucking around?” I wanted both White and Tugy to understand all the black chips were out on the green felt and this hand was one I could not afford to lose, because I was betting the ranch.

There was a delay as the message was communicated. “Lord Tugy says unless you talk to him right now, nothing can change.” White came back.

“Oh, I disagree. Everything will change. In exactly fifteen minutes. Mostly for him. There will not be anything left of that facility. That is my promise to him and God almighty. Plus I’ve scrambled fighters all over the New Mexico sky armed with Thor-Four pulsars that’ll kill anything that tries to get out. You tell him that.”

Harv had his face in his hands shaking his head. Bellamy just watched, waiting. He was, by and large, the coolest man under pressure I had ever seen. Maybe this was routine for him, but I was shaking in my boots and ready to mess my pants. But the drone of buzzing, hissing voices in my head had gone completely silent and the burning pain in my neck and skull had vanished.

“Boss One, Situation Desk. Object has diverted thirty seven degrees and now presents no present danger.” I held up a finger to indicate holding everything in place until I was through. Bellamy understood completely.

“Cal, you may tell Lord Tugy I am not shutting down the Corbomite device burn on the nuclear reactor until that object is completely past a point of any danger to this planet. I would suggest it goes away.” I waited and held my breath.

“Boss One. Situation Desk: Object has just imploded out beyond the orbit of the Moon. Debris field is going to be confined to lunar orbit and collision with the lunar surface only.”

“Check, got it.” Bellamy jumped in. “ALICE, stand down and call fail safe if Number One is not online.” There was a minor interruption and garbled speech then one voice I knew very well from the television came on the line.

“Thank you for holding the baby for me, Boss One. This is Number One with the thanks of a grateful nation and a grateful...world. ALICE confirm: standing down. I am calling fail safe. All agreed?”

A number of voices acknowledged the President’s words then started to show up on the screens. NORAD went back to Yellow Alert and the Soviets started to send flash traffic to all commands to reduce the alert level. The Chinese were the last to turn their bombers around and head back for their bases from the Indian and Tibetan border areas.

Cal was back on the line. “Boss Three?” It sounded like he was choking to say those words on the com line, but it seemed that protocol had to be observed. “Boss Three, this is Dr. White. Will you please speak with Lord Tugy now?” I knew that Calvin White had to live with this guy, and talking to Tugy would make his life much easier, but now it was time for some payback after the way he’d treated Ellen.

“No. I’ll start the deactivation process on the overload circuit on the reactor and recall the bombers and fighters over the Mesa. But I will only speak to him face to face when I return there in two days. This time, I would suggest we don’t play any games because I am not in the mood for a repeat of today. If there is one, I will not reset the timer the next time. Is that clear, Cal?” I waited and the voice came back on the line. I know Tugy could hear every word and I just wanted to see how he would

try and save some degree of face in all this. There was a pause from Cal as he listened to a message, repeating it back to me:

“Lord Tugy...sends his...regrets...for a poor judgment call on the part of some of the members of the royal house and that he, like you, only wants...peace between us and that the unfortunate accident today both here and in space will not be allowed to happen again. Ah, he is calling for the immediate...disciplining of the offending elements within his group.”

“I will see you in two days.” I clicked off and sat back looking at the ceiling, completely drained of all energy.

“Cigar...Boss Three?” Packard held a good Havana in his hand, which I took.

“Just like your old man, more balls than brains.” Harv was roaring with laughter as he slapped me on the back.

Bellamy got up and walked over extending his hand. He said quietly to me: “Welcome to the group, Dr. Humphrey.” He smiled as best he could and went back to reset all the systems. Turning, he looked back at me and the other men. “How did you know about the overload circuit I added to the nuclear reactor?”

Harv almost choked on his cigar, thinking I’d played a bluff and won. He looked back at Bellamy and back to me, waiting for an answer.

“I didn’t.”

Bellamy nodded and sat back down at his console.

“You may be a good poker player, but you’re a rotten liar, Ted. Let’s open this place up and get some fresh air in here. Secure the seal and get us back topside please.”

He sat back and twisted his chair around looking at me with a queer questioning gaze that said this conversation was going to be readdressed again at some point in the future. Before leaving Studio Control, he stopped on the way out and looked down at me. I still hadn’t gathered the strength to stand just yet.

“A voice in the back of your head?” He whispered.

“Yes, sir.” I finally pushed myself up and turned to face him.

“Someone I know?” He asked while Harv and Packard exited the room.

“You are right again, sir.”

I knew this was going to lead to some complications in the future.



CHAPTER 60

The building was topside again. I went to get a sandwich and hopefully stop shaking. The adrenaline had worn off and all that was left were raw nerves that needed some substance and a beer. Harv came up a few minutes after I sat down and got a beer from Hami who was talking a mile a minute about this building moving underground and all. Harv smirked at me from under his bushy eyebrows.

“What in the hell is so funny?” I finally asked.

“You are, kiddo. You jumped in with both feet and went to work. I was proud as hell of you down there. Quick, nimble, someone that’s a force to be reckoned with, no doubt about it. But GB is a horse of a different story. He’s impressed. But he’s like a pet cobra. You feed him and pet him and he wants more. But never forget he’s a snake and will bite you if the need arises. It’s his nature.” Harv chugged down the beer and looked out at the glistening, endless sea. “With the exception of most of the military in the civilized world and a few elected officials, you realize no one knows we just fought another engagement with ‘The Enemy’ and this time we won. This time.”

“I didn’t think about it that way.” Surprisingly, I hadn’t. I rolled his words around inside of head.

“If we got medals, they’d pin one on you today. But since we don’t you have to settle for the thanks of a grumpy old man,” he clinked his bottle against mine, “on behalf of a grateful and blissfully unaware planet.” He drank deep.

“Thanks. First time in all of this that I got to see what this is truly about up close.”

“Not very pretty. Mind you, this doesn’t happen often. Maybe every two or three years, but this one was started by you and finished by you. Not a bad beginning. Not bad at all.” Harv wiped his glasses clean on the shirttail sticking out of his pants.

“What do you mean, ‘what I started’? Bellamy said it all started a long time ago, and my actions were just the latest event.” Considering all the possible responses and the one they used, I think someone might tell Lord Tugy he slightly overreacted.

“I wasn’t talking about the whole thing, just today. You went toe to toe with Tugy and kicked his ass, and he won’t forget it. Just be on guard for his next attack; it won’t come directly next time. You can’t underestimate him either. He’s a tricky bastard, as you’ll undoubtedly find out in the none too distant future, like two days from now.” Harv started, looked around in a panic, and shot out of his chair like he’d been stung by a bee. “Sorry kid, but one battle a day is all I allow myself. This one’s yours and yours alone. Good luck, kiddo!” Harv patted my shoulder and shambled away in the opposite direction from the door in the closest thing to a run I had ever seen him attempt, covering the back of his head with his hands.

“What’s wrong?” Ellen was standing there, looking wild. “The mighty Doctor Harvey Gilpsen didn’t want his ass chewed off?” She yelled after him, her hair standing out from her head, her eyes glowing with feral, feminine rage.

“I’m not sure. How are you?” I said weakly, getting up, trying to hug her, but she shoved me away.

“Hami! Two beers and no lip!” She yelled across the room.

"Again, how are you?" I asked sitting back down, smiling in self-defense.

"Don't you 'how are you' me, mister! I am pissed off, tired of men and ready to beat something or someone to a pulp, if you want to know the truth of the matter. I hate coming here. I hate that somebody stuffed me in a hole they jokingly call the panic room, and the next time I see Mr. Wonderful Harvey I am going to kick him in the shins! He knows I don't want to be down there under any circumstances; never have and never will again!" She grabbed the beers from the normally jabbering native Hami with a glare that sent him running away covering the back of his head with the tray. She put one bottle in front of me and drank the other in long pulls.

"He didn't do it. I did. I told Packard to get you someplace safe." I looked out at the sea and put my sunglasses on.

"Great! Now not only are you interfering with my life you're locking me up in a dudgeon? Wonderful!" She walked to the railing and turned around, she was lovely angry even if she didn't feel she looked her best. "And what the hell is up with you telling my father we're getting married?" She was half yelling at me.

"You want to get married?" I asked her.

"Well...yes! Of course I do, but you don't go telling someone like Sir Charles that you want to wed and bed his daughter, over breakfast! It just isn't done." She turned and faced the ocean crossing her arms and leaning on one leg.

"You do want to marry me, don't you?" Back on thin ice and tap dancing again.

"Well...yes...but you should have asked me first and let me play with you a little. You know, act all coy and try to string out the answer for awhile to see if you put up with the crap women do to men to make sure they're truly in love with them." She had another drink from her bottle. I got down on one knee and looked up at her.

"Will you marry me?"

She slapped me as hard as she could across the face. It stung like crazy.

"Yes!" She said, still exasperated. "You already know that! But your style leaves something to be desired Dr. Humphrey. Asking a gal to marry you on a deck having a beer after being stuck in a pit like a holding cell at a county jail is not my idea of romance!" She turned, slammed the beer down on the table and walked away. "I want to be mad at you for a while. It won't change a thing between us. Of course I want to marry you, but right now I need to work off this anger and you are the best place to aim it." Her voice faded as she walked out of the cafeteria, no doubt hunting Harvey Gilpsen, and the door slammed as the final exclamation point.

"I love you, too." I said to the place where she had been a moment before and saluted with my beer. I really wanted to get out to New Mexico and kick ass on Calvin and Tugy, but I needed to make them wait for a couple of days to sort out the shootings and death in that place, and for Tugy to regain control of his people. I got up and walked over to Hami who had cautiously reappeared as the storm moved on.

"Yes sir, boss man, what you need?" Hami smiled at me with his warm and infectious grin.

"Another beer and a sandwich."

"Right away, boss man! Da' boys says ya done good today. Welcome to ya! Glad ya' here!" He hummed as he fixed the sandwich after he handing me another beer.

I sat and looked out at the vast, eternal ocean. I wondered if I did good or just acted out my part according to the script someone else was writing.

I saluted the sea and continued to consider my options.



CHAPTER 61

Dr. George Bellamy had asked to see me in the late afternoon. I had gone back to the villa and showered, changing back into the suit provided for the weather on the island and realized I had set things up so I would be here at least another day. I passed Sir Charles in the parlor, who asked me for a moment of my time, then walked into his library. It was a typical English study with a huge, heavy oaken desk, dark woods, books in leather, oriental rugs on the floor, oil paintings and all the features of a private setting where someone dealt with the world's problems. He had warmed somewhat since our first meeting and seemed resolved that I was going to be in his family in more ways than one.

"Dr. Humphrey. It is not my place to ask for a favor from you, but I do have a request that if you would honor it, I would be extremely grateful." He stood by the window looking out onto the scene that somehow seems strange to be viewing from a room that was meant to convey the strength and power of the British Empire.

"If I can, I shall be more than happy to." I sat on the buttoned red leather couch and felt the softness of the leather. This had to be the most expensive piece of furniture I had ever sat on in my life.

"We are an old English family, with a long and jaded history. I shall not bore you with the trails and tragedies of my forefathers. But know that you, by marrying my daughter, are entering into a group of people who are proud of where they come from and who they are." He paused and turned. Walking over he handed me a small case. "My grandfather was awarded the Victoria Cross in India for serving during the Afghan War. My own father was made a General before he was forty in the Great War. He fought in the Middle East with Ned Lawrence. Myself, I was knighted after the last war. I was with the Special Executive Operations, much like the OSS and the present day CIA. A lot of up country, behind the lines stuff no one ever gets to talk about. Anyway, those are just comments from an old man with a lot of memories. That is something that belonged to my grandmother. It was a gift from a prince in India, to my grandfather. My grandmother never took it off until the day she died and it has been in my desk ever since. I wanted to give it to Ellen when she finally decided to marry. But now, I would like to have you present it to her as an engagement and wedding ring, if you could do that with a clear conscience even though it is me giving it to you."

He stood there looking down at me. I opened the case. The rings were gold, one with a large, at least two carat, perfectly clear, blue white diamond and the other a large beautifully designed band to match it. Just looking at it and the setting, I had to believe that it was worth tens of thousands of dollars. I thought for a moment and then considered what I thought Ellen's reaction would be and without a word, I snapped the lid closed on the box and extended my hand to the older man. Shaking hands, our eyes met and no words were necessary.

He nodded and I left, putting the case in my pocket. Something I would present in a little different way than my request for her to marry me.

I walked down to Dr. Bellamy's bungalow and knocked on the door. Harv opened it and stood back to allow me in. "Survived the she-devil's wrath I see." Harv laughed.

"Barely. Thanks for the help. When she is angry she's worse than three Tugys." I stepped in and acknowledged Bellamy who was on the phone.

"Well, she doesn't like holes in the ground of any kind and she detested Dulce. Going down in there was her idea of pure living hell, Ted. So it amazed me when she went back there with you a few days ago." Harv motioned to a chair and sat down next to me, pointing his thumb at Bellamy. "He's been smoothing feathers with the other directors all day, the guys at Sir Charles' level. No one got to the other centers in time to take a hand off in case we got knocked out of the ball game. Sir Charles raked them over the coals this morning, being one of the senior guys, and now Bellamy is smoothing some feathers, finding out why the other four directors didn't come online. Seems like it happened so quick it caught them off guard, and they didn't light up their stations. They were too intent on listening to us."

"That, I would imagine, is not good." I added.

"Boy, howdy, you can say that again! So Sir Charles was handing out spankings right and left this morning in that wonderful British fashion and now Bellamy's finding out why no one thought it was important enough to bring their stations online. This won't happen again. It had something to do with the call on the ICS though. Yours." Harv chuckled and spoke quieter to me leaning over. "When folks heard Boss Three was back online, they all thought Jacobs had risen from the dead. The second coming and all that crap, shocked the shit out of them!" He slapped his leg and laughed out loud. Bellamy turned with a reproachful look and Harv quieted down.

"So what happens now, Harv? Is this the part where you shoot me?" I thought I was being funny with the question, but Harv narrowed his eyes and looked at me really hard for a few seconds.

"We should. We talked about it. But then decided to see if we could mold you into something akin to us." Harv continued to look hard and then broke out laughing again. "Gotcha." Harv was enjoying the hell out of himself.

"You clown, let up on him, will you?" Bellamy hung up and turned around in his chair. "Harvey, I should have put you out to pasture years ago."

"That is another way of saying he should have me killed, isn't it?" Harv was still laughing.

"Yes, it is." Bellamy deadpanned, then turned to me and looked carefully before speaking.

"I was impressed with your style, coolness and resolve under pressure today. You understand you are in so deep at this point there is no going back? This is a job you cannot quit and go work for General Electric or run for senate or even open up your own TV repair shop." Bellamy waited for a response.

"I kind of figured that out. Before today, actually, but it was the operation this morning that cemented my understanding of why Bates and Jacobs are no longer breathing air." A slight bit of sarcasm floated out of me that I didn't intend to expose, it just happened.

"Bates was a fool." Bellamy said flatly. "Jacobs was getting sick and started talking too much about the good old days. It's a terrible thing, responsibility. None of us wanted it and yet we got it. We hold the fate of this little blue green marble of a planet in our hands and we must be willing to do whatever is necessary to make sure we protect her. This is normally the place I ask someone if they want out, but Ted, frankly, you're too far in at this point. We're like the Mafia or the IRA, there is no getting out at this point. You are part of the inner circle and it has a lot of risks and responsibilities that go with it. Privilege and power. Don't misuse either of them and

you will be fine. But this is where we are right now and you have assumed, by default, the number three role in this group at the center. There will be other men, directors who've served in this organization for years that will feel you somehow circumvented their advancement, but that's just too bad. I've watched you for years and always planned for you to be one of us. This is just a little sooner than I'd expected. Here is the total of the deal though, in the most crystal clear and succinct words I can manage." Bellamy paused, picked up the phone, rang a number and hung up. "One: We are the ones here to make sure this place doesn't get destroyed by anyone not of this planet. Two: We are going to build a defensive system to stop anyone from trying. Three: We are going to use every bit of knowledge we have to make all of our systems, including the device you worked on for so long, work and we will use it. Four: We will suppress anyone who tries to expose us or our mission to whatever degree necessary using whatever means necessary." A knock came on the door interrupting him. He got up and opened it for a middle-aged man dressed in tropicals carrying a briefcase. Bellamy motioned for him to take a seat, but the man put his briefcase down and stood looking around the room "This is Major Thompson. Major Jack Thompson. United States Marine Corp. He has been with us for, what now, Jack? Five years?" Bellamy asked.

"Going on seven, GB." The man smiled a wiry grin at the other.

"Tempus Fugit. Time flies when you're having fun." Bellamy turned back to me and pointed. "Jack will be with you from here on out. He is our safety valve. He will supply you with every bit of information you could possibly want to know about every in and out of this organization. He has memorized every name, number, address, and birthmark of everyone at Sir Charles' level or above. He has all the codes to all the doors and can, without question, call down the thunder and rain from on high with one telephone call. He will serve you until he is replaced or dies." Bellamy turned to Jack. "Major?"

"Ho-rah, GB." The standard Marine Corp response that means "yes sir, affirmative".

"He is also our man as well as yours. If we decide you have gone rogue, or are playing some game that gets us all killed or exposed, no matter how much Jack likes you, he will shoot you in the head on either mine or Harv's orders." Bellamy waited for my reaction; there was none. "Do you understand what I just told you?" Bellamy was caught by the non-response.

"That should mean then I can have anyone from Sir Charles's level downward removed if I feel that's necessary?" I added waiting to see him field the question. This would determine what kind of leader Bellamy was in my opinion.

"More than that, but we do require at least one of us agrees with you before you kill a President or Premier of the Soviet Union." Bellamy never moved a muscle when he spoke.

"Kennedy?" I asked. Bellamy looked up at Jack.

"Which one?" Jack responded.

"JFK." I answered.

"He was going to bring unwarranted exposure of the Group because of his ongoing battle with Allen Dulles and the CIA over their errors in Cuba and the missile crisis the year before. It became apparent he was not going to hold to his oath of secrecy swearing not to compromise this operation." Jack spoke as if he was ordering a new tie.

"Seriously? Do not ask if you don't want to know." Bellamy turned back to me. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Does Jack live with me in the same house and is he going on our honeymoon with us?" I smiled at my questions. For the first time Bellamy turned a little in his chair and allowed himself a grin.

“Jack, can you act like a tourist when they are banging like minks in Hawaii?” Bellamy looked up at the man, waiting.

“I am going to have my eight millimeter going so I could ship the film back to Harv so he could see Ellen nude and fulfill his life-long dream of the last three years.” Jack said with his perfect deadpan.

“This is great. I get the girl. I get the job I always didn’t want. And I get Jack, the Peeping Tom Marine. What more could any woman want? Listen, GB, would you be so good as to come to dinner tonight at the villa? Bring Harv...if you have to.” I stood up. I needed some air and to clear my head before I heard anything else.

“No, I don’t go up there much.” Bellamy pointed to his face. “It disturbs the staff I think.”

“I could care less who is disturbed. I want you there for a little announcement I have to make.” I looked beseechingly at him and he nodded reluctantly in agreement.

“Harv?” I asked.

“Sure, but don’t ask me to be nice to your future wife. I tried to be nice to her once and she dumped me for you, the witch.” He laughed again.

“Jack?” I turned and looked into his eyes. They were a lot warmer than I would have expected considering what this man was by profession and desire.

“I will be with you when you leave this room and by your side for a long time, Ted, if I may call you that in private?” Jack extended his hand in friendship.

“In private, in the open. It doesn’t matter. You’re now my personal assistant if anyone asks.” I turned to leave and then back to the other two men. “Seven thirty in the villa, be there.”

I walked out into the air and wanted to stroll down the path toward the laboratory complex just to look at the sea grass again.



CHAPTER 62

Dinner was ready at seven thirty. I descended the staircase, with Jack beside me, both dressed in white dinner jackets he found for us, so that this would be a formal affair to the nines.

As I walked into the dining room, I was shocked to see Harv and Dr. Bellamy also sporting white dinner jacket. Harv raised his glass to me as I came in. He and GB stood in the corner having a quiet word with each other. All of us stepped to the table and stood behind our respective chairs. Sir Charles was the next to come in, wearing his white tropical suit and it was immediately clear he felt completely outclassed and underdressed in his own home. He looked at GB who infrequently came up to the villa and then to see him in a formal rig was overpowering to the gentlemen that had to be the one who stood on the side of formality by education, birth and character. He stood there for a moment and then called over one of the Sepoy servers and the man quickly went out.

“Well, I feel like I just walked into my club on Pall Mall in shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, gentlemen.” He stood behind his chair as well not sure what everyone was waiting for then he looked directly at me and nodded. “Excellent. Charming as hell, as well, thank you. All of you.” The Sepoy came back in holding a blue dinner jacket and helped Sir Charles put it on. “There, at least I don’t look like some bohemian from Soho.” Another man entered bringing two silver floor servers filled with ice and the man behind him brought in two large magnum bottles of vintage champagne. “I think this would be appropriate, if I am not mistaken.”

Harv laughed and finished his drink. “When you pull out the stuff that was bottled before Churchill was born, I love it.”

“I was keeping these bottles for your wake, actually, Dr. Gilpsen.” Sir Charles said dryly with GB, Jack and I all looking down and smiling at the bad joke between the two men.

“Good, I am glad that I am here to share them with you.” Harv nudged GB.

The door opened and Ellen came in, stopping just inside the doorway and looking at the scene she interrupted. She was in a light colored pants suit of a light yellow material.

“Did I miss the notice to the troops that this was a formal dinner?” She walked up past Sir Charles and kissed him on the cheek with little emotion and touched GB on the arm as she walked to her chair. Harv pulled it out before I could and helped her to her seat. Harv winked at me and stood back behind his chair. Sir Charles raised his eyebrow to me and I nodded. He sat followed by everyone else except me. Ellen looked up at me. She was radiant and beautiful tonight. Her hair was loose and full. Those green eyes were shining and she had recovered from the morning’s excitement. Sir Charles, in anticipation, motioned for one of the Sepoys to pour glasses of champagne into everyone’s glass. I waited until that was finished and then stepped around the table next to Ellen’s chair.

“Ellen, Sir Charles, gentlemen. I ask you to indulge me a small moment or two for my addition to everything that has happened today. Ellen, as you know I have asked your father for your hand and he has granted me the right to ask you for it.” Ellen started to blush in front of everyone in the room and then I went down on one knee and pulled the ring box from my pocket, popped open the lid and held it out to her. “Ellen, will you be so good as to accept my proposal to marry me and spend the rest of your life with me?” I held out the box and after looking at the other people in the room she turned and looked at it. She was totally unaware what I was holding it until she saw it.

“Oh my God, Ted!” She raised her hands to her face taking the box. “Oh no, this is . . .” She trailed off, starting to cry.

“Yes it is. And that should say a lot by itself.” No one else knew what was being said, but Sir Charles, Ellen and myself.

“My dear.” Sir Charles stood at his end of the table. “I believe it is time to tell this man if you are willing to be his wife and allow us old men to have this champagne before it goes flat.” He actually laughed.

“I will. Yes, I will. I would be honored to be your wife.” She got up and kissed me wrapping her arms around my neck. It was the first time I had ever kissed her and it was like the first one I had ever had, years ago.

“Here, here! A toast to the betrothed.” Dr. Bellamy stood up holding his glass. Everyone got up and held their glasses waiting for Ellen as I picked up ours. We did and everyone drank to our health. Under her breath she said to me so no one else could hear: “Okay. You’re off the hook and I can’t be mad anymore at you. But it is a cheap trick. I love it, but still, you are more clever than you should be.” She smiled and kissed me again.

“Come on, for Chrissakes, save it for later. I’m heartbroken anyway, ‘cause she picked him instead of me.” Harv acted hurt.

“You mean you didn’t tell him about that wild weekend in France we had Harvey, where you showed me all the possible ways a human could make love.” She smiled at him and Dr. Harvey Gilpsen actually blushed.

“Tell him it’s a joke, before your father has one of these Indians take me out on the lawn and use a knife on me. Holy Moses, I can’t believe you said such a thing girl. I am old enough to be your father or worse.” Harv drank deep into his glass as Sir Charles looked at him. Not wanting to be upstaged in his own home he looked at one of the Sepoy’s “Do you have your knife, Agah?”

“Yes sir, and it is sharp.” The Sepoy smiled a perfect set of teeth at Sir Charles.

“Enough. We all know that no one in this room is not tainted, especially Harv. Let’s have dinner as I am starved.” GB got everything back on track and ended the bad jokes.

“Good idea.” Harv seconded and Sir Charles motioned for the dinner to be served.

I sat down at the end of the table next to Ellen, with Jack sitting across from her.

“I am sorry, sir but I don’t believe we have been introduced. I’m Ellen.”

“Jack Thompson.” He nodded with a becoming smile.

“Jack is our new associate. He’s going to sleep on a mat outside our door.” I added.

“Not that bad, but close to both of you for a while, Ellen.” Jack added.

“Like Max and Jacobs?” She had been in the system long enough to know the realities of this little group.

“A liaison for Dr. Humphrey and the Group, Ellen, that is all.” He smiled again. She let it go, not asking any farther. Even though she looked at him and didn’t like the idea of having a permanent housemate with a gun under his coat.

“We’ll see.” She said without further comment. Nothing was going to ruin this evening for her.

“Now Harv, one final question tonight.” I asked while Harvey was having his glass filled for a third time.

“What’s that Ted? You need some ideas of where to go on the honeymoon, like the No Tell Motel in Bakersfield or Hemet?” Two of California’s less than ideal places to visit.

“No. I wanted to ask if you would be my best man?” Ellen looked over and winked at me.

Harv did a spit take on his champagne and wiped his mouth. “Are you kidding?”

“Nope.”

Harvey Gilpsen stood up next to his chair and set his glass down on the table. He laid his ham-sized hand on GB’s shoulder and looked down the table at me studying me carefully for a moment and then added in a completely serious tone. “Ted, I would be honored to be your best man, if you think that an old scoundrel like me would be suitable to stand up with you.” He bowed at the waist and then sat back down.

“Thank you, Harv. Now can I get someone to get me a spoon for my soup.” I had dropped my own spoon and didn’t bother to pick it up. Everyone laughed and one of the Sepoys came over and handed me a new one with a smile and nod.



CHAPTER 63

Considering the fact that a formal wedding would pull everyone off station for one to two days at least, Sir Charles recommended the idea of having the affair at the villa the following day. Ellen didn't stay in contact with many of her college friends because of the nature of her work and the people she worked with, so she decided an old friend from childhood who was still on the island could serve as her maid of honor. Sir Charles arranged for the local Anglican priest, that owed him a favor or two, could alter his schedule and make the arrangements, obtain the official documents and perform the ceremony on very short notice.

The whole event took less than three hours the following afternoon. With Sir Charles giving the bride away, Harv standing up for me, being more nervous than I was, and everyone not on duty in attendance in their best clothes. All in all it was a fun and jubilant occasion. Ellen looked wonderful in a formal dress she kept on the island and all of us men in our tropical white dinner jackets, looked as if we'd spent months arranging it all. One of the security team agreed to provide photographer services, being discreet to not photograph GB or many of the other men, except when their backs were turned.

The afternoon turned into a multifaceted celebration for both of us and for the staff in our latest victory over the Visitors. For myself, it was a whirlwind of activities and small discourses on a variety of issues, which seemed related as well as random. We finally got a chance to be alone at about 10:00 pm when most of the partygoers left the villa for their respective quarters on the compound. Exhaustion was more the order of business than exploration that found both Ellen and I awakening in the morning, clothed and in each other arms having slept through the night without the normal consummation of a relationship in accordance with all traditions.

* * * * *

After a hurried breakfast and final instructions, we found ourselves flying back to Nevada with our new permanent companion, Major Jack Thompson. It seemed downright polyandrous to say the least, and I am not so sure Ellen didn't mind the spare masculine company. I had planned to make a stop at Dulce so we needed to get an early start since it was going to be a full day to say the least. I watched the delighted rainbows of light dance across Ellen's face as she admired her rings as we flew through a cloud filled sky. She had a far off and dreamy countenance about her, which I found lovely and charming. I had to call up all my own discipline to prepare myself for the meeting with Lord Tugy that was the next item on my personal agenda and schedule of activities.

Landing at Los Alamos, I asked her if she would mind terribly getting a car and heading down into the village of Taos and looking around for a few hours until Jack and I got back in the late afternoon. Thinking about going back down into Dulce after the recent events and being given the opportunity to do so much needed shopping, she

decided Jack and I could handle the rough stuff, and she'd find something to entertain herself.

As we drove west from the private airport I landed at four days before a much different man, I thought about the speed at which things were changing again in my life. I wasn't sure if I had the impulse control necessary to wrap myself around the new job as well as finish the project on the device right now. It seemed like going from a researcher and scientist to a Group Director in just a few days time was pretty heady stuff right now, but Jack was the strong and sober type who could bring you back to reality fairly quickly when needed. I found I already was taking a liking to him and his style. It was straight forward and no nonsense without being boring. It was funny, but he reminded me of Matt Reilly, another Marine who worked for me for such a long time.

"What is your game plan for dealing with Tugy?" Jack asked as we wound our way up the mountains toward Dulce.

"Piss him off again, basically. I want to see how far I can push. I want to come away from this meeting with an agreement to get him and his whatever-ya-call-'ems to help us develop the device, as well as to start providing more information about what they're doing at Dulce." I navigated the twisting road, still insisting on driving. It kept me busy, otherwise, I'd get really fidgety about another face off with a thousand year old extraterrestrial to whom my intellect was only slightly more than that of an orangutan.

"Big order. From everything I've been told, he's not likely to be open to either of those ideas." Jack opened his briefcase and looked through a large binder he carried with him.

"I know that, but we played chicken the other day. He lost. So I want to see if I can use that as an advantage." I kept looking over to see what he was reading, but I couldn't make out what was on the sheet in the binder.

"Hit him in his vanity." Jack intoned. "He's big on the fact that he's in charge. Congratulate him on getting the situation under control and allowing cooler heads to prevail, especially his. Blow a blast of sunshine up his kilt."

"I hate like hell to play it that way, Jack." I didn't want to give that arrogant bastard Tugy one bit of acclaim, personally.

"I understand. But if you hardball him he's going to have to prove to those who serve him that he's still in control. That means things will escalate if you push too hard. He'll have to cause problems to keep us off balance. Think of what we are to them." Jack turned the page of the binder and ran his finger down it.

"What if we just took him out?" I asked.

"Overly?" Jack turned to look at me, considering the option on the table.

"Sure. Are we capable of killing him, like a human?" The question seemed strange to be asking, but I needed to know for myself.

"Yes. A single bullet would do it. But the ramifications of that would be hard to survive." Jack closed the binder and looked out at the trees in the distance.

"Would they attack us? Directly? You know, knocking out New York or London or something like that. Something like the stunt they pulled the other day?" I wonder how much Jack really knew and how much was speculation on his part.

"That 'stunt' as you call it, two days ago, was something they had been planning for awhile I believe. It came too quick on the heels of the upset inside the Hive at Dulce. They probably had that targeting system sitting there for months or a good year wanting for the right time to use it to make us understand they are in control. No," he shook his head, only just then dismissing the option, "if we kill him directly we have broken our treaty with them and then they would override one of our missile silos or a Soviet one and someone would end up launching a missile and then someone else would retaliate and then they would swoop in to pick up the pieces. They aren't strong

enough to conquer us without us killing off a good third of the population ourselves before they would even try. There just aren't enough of them here or in close enough proximity to do the job." Jack was deep in thought, thinking through all the possibilities.

"You want to share your thoughts?" I asked him.

"No Ted. I was just thinking what a better place this would be without them. I've worked at a different level than you have for a good period of time. I've seen what these ...creatures," he spat the word with sheer hate, "have done that would make most people faint or puke. If I thought we could get rid of all of them in one quick, decisive action, I'd lead the charge up the hill myself. But we aren't ready for that fight...just yet." He rubbed his eyes with his fingers and added. "But if we can get Washburn fully online and the device at Groom to work the right way, we may have a fighting chance to get rid of these guys, then pay attention to the real threat, which is that the Reptilians are planning to have all of us for lunch."

"How do you keep it all together? Inside your head I mean?" I wondered just what he did know.

"I don't think about 'what ifs', just on what we can do at the moment. It's the only way you can keep your sanity doing this job." Jack put his briefcase in the back seat and rolled down the window to get some air. "GB assigned me to three other men, doing things for us. They were not at your level and not one of the assignments lasted more than two years."

A cold feeling ran through me and my thoughts went to Ellen, hoping she wouldn't be a young widow. "Did you have to exercise your...prerogative?" The nicest way I knew of asking the question.

"Oh, hell no!" He laughed out loud. "They either cracked up or did themselves in. Two of them went totally bananas. I mean babbling idiots in an institution in straight jackets writing obscene poetry in crayon with their toes."

"The other one killed himself?" I still wanted more details.

"Yes. He was at Washburn trying to analyze the logic of the Visitor's speech patterns. You know we have Dulce bugged every which way. Well, he was supposed to be listening to the Visitor's communications with each other, but there was this constant background noise no one ever considered of any importance. He filtered the noise, refined it and when he finally got it cleaned up enough to hear what it was he realized it was the sound of human beings held captive and being experimented on. Things that make Stalin, Hitler and Mao look like Mother Teresa. He wrote a report and demanded action be taken. It was refused for the same reasons I just gave you and he was redirected to finish work on the logic patterns. So, he continues to listen to their voices on the tapes and one night, after hearing....something...he puts most of the tapes in a fifty-five gallon drum, dowses 'em with gas and burns them all. Then he sucked on a gun and painted the ceiling with his brains. I found him twenty seconds after he did it." Jack looked out the window for a long, forlorn moment. "I've never forgiven myself for not seeing him change before it was too late. He was a really nice man."

We pulled into the Best Western at the foot of the Mesa, which was also the tribal headquarters for the Jicarilla Apache Indians, preparing to take the trek up to the top. All the conversation between us was over.

At least for now.

PART NINE

DULCE



CHAPTER 64

Dr. Calvin White was waiting for us when Jack and I walked into reception adjacent to the huge bubble shaped underground hanger dome that made up most of Red Level One. His lab coat was not pressed or clean as it had been only a few days before and his general attitude had changed as well. Somewhere in the last 72 hours, the facts had hit him: he had lost control, what little control he had, of his facility. That now the number three man in the group funding this place was at his front door. He immediately launched into the diatribe I'd been expecting, singing a far different tune.

"Dr. Humphrey, I am certainly glad you are here. Hopefully, you will be able to smooth over some of the problems that have occurred in the last few days and if there is anything I can do to help you, please do not hesitate to ask." He blinked and looked at the man in the suit standing beside me as if he had appeared out of thin air.

"That is fine, Cal. Where's Tugy?" I headed for the elevator with Jack close behind me.

"Well, yes, he is downstairs on Green Level Four." He motioned to Jack. "But we don't have any clearance for this man to go down there with you." He pointed at Jack, who only smiled.

"Cal. This is Major Thompson. He works directly for me. He reports to my boss. Now don't you think it would be wise to get the Major whatever he needs to go down there with me?" I waited and stared at Cal, until the neurons all clicked into synchronization and suddenly he walked over and picked up another set of badges and a radiation dosimeter off the reception desk. He also scribbled in Jack's name on the register and initialed it himself.

"Lord Tugy won't like this in the slightest, no, not one little bit, you know that don't you?" Cal handed us the badges and meters.

"I really don't give a damn what he likes and doesn't like Dr. White! And you shouldn't either. He is an alien invader, not the goddamn Queen of England." I pushed the button on the elevator and waited impatiently for it to open. "Have we got our people out of there yet?"

"You mean the men killed and wounded?" White swallowed hard, looking nervously back and forth between us.

"Yes."

"Ah, well, um...no, we haven't. We sealed off Yellow Three and have a guard force on the floor since all this started. I only reached him this morning, when the Com lines were put back in working order and we, ah, didn't have the chance to, ah, talk about...our...people." Cal looked away. Jack Thompson took a hard step forward then officially, with both hands, dove down his throat.

"You mean to tell me we have wounded boys down there and nobody has gone to get them back?" Jack hissed through clenched teeth at the ferret like little man. "Do you have any idea what they could be going through right now? How about I throw you down there so you can find out personally?"

"We've had other things to worry about. It just wasn't something..." Cal cowered back and Jack stopped him by grabbing a handful of his lab coat and pulling him up on his tiptoes dragging him up to his face.

"Listen to me very carefully. I plan to bring those boys back and you had better have every member of your medical staff on alert and waiting with all pre-op and surgeries standing by, is that clear?" Jack let go of him and Cal dropped back to his feet with a thud.

"You just don't understand...what has been going on." White whined again.

"Cal." I said softly. "If Jack's order is not obeyed within the next thirty seconds, you will never see the outside of this building again, do you understand me?" I walked into the elevator with a fuming Marine Major in tow behind me. The door slid shut behind us. Jack straightened himself up and twisted his neck around, popping it a couple of times. His face was red granite.

"Did you mean that?" Jack said quietly.

"Those boys bought us the time we needed to keep those little gray bastards from getting up to the top of this place. They bought that time in blood for us on a paycheck that wouldn't cover the cost of the gasoline I use in a month."

The door slid open on Green Level Four. It was freezing cold and laying in the hallway were six human bodies wrapped liked baked potatoes in some kind of form fitting aluminum blankets. Jack reached down and pulled the covering back to expose a handsome young man in his mid twenties. He had lacerations and burns and looked as if someone had hit him with a flamethrower peeling back his face down to the bone on one side. Jack replaced the covering and patted the young man's chest, looking up at me with sheer rage.

"You don't believe I mean what I said? Just watch me!" I said as we walked toward the conference room.

"Understood Boss."

* * * * *

Ellen was just off the square in a small shop in Taos with a wonderful collection of Navajo silver jewelry and traditional dresses. She was holding it up to her body, looking in the mirror.

"That looks just divine on you! The color and the form is just right!" A blonde woman stood behind Ellen, smiling.

"I like it a lot. I think my husband will, too." Ellen turned around and looked closely at the smiling woman. "I've met you before, haven't I?"

"Oh, I think our paths have crossed. Do you have time for lunch over at the old hotel? I hear it serves wonderful food and I hate to eat alone. My name is Ann." The woman extended her hand to shake Ellen's. "Ann Corbett."

She motioned toward the door and Ellen put the dress back on the rack.

"I've heard that name. You work up at Los Alamos, don't you?" Ellen found the woman had a strong influence on her and she wanted to know more about her.

"Oh, something like that." She laughed and put her finger up to her lips in the international sign of keeping a secret.

"I would love to have lunch. I can come back and pick this up before I leave." Ellen found herself saying.

"That is wonderful!" Ann Corbett put her arm through Ellen's, like they were best and long lost friends. "We can have some good old fashion girl talk."

Ann led the way out and across the plaza.

* * * * *

"Lord Tugy. You will order your...subjects...to release any of our people who were wounded and have them brought here immediately to receive medical care."

Jack and I were standing at one end of the room, Tugy at the other, the tall, regal alien staring down at us. We didn't stand on ceremony, but because there was, literally, nowhere to sit. The place looked like a bombed out bunker. The walls were burned and charred and the furniture smashed to bits, as if the fighting had gone hand-to-hand in the conference room.

"My...people...believe if we surrender these few men to you, we will not have... how do you say it? A...bargaining chip...to make sure you do not do something rash." Lord Tugy was still arrogant, in speech, demeanor and body language.

"They are to be moved into the hallway immediately." I said, speaking quickly and ignoring him. "I will have the staff come down and get them and the men who are presently dead in the hallway transported topside for proper burial. This is not a 'bargaining chip' or even a point of negotiation. It is required by all of the treaties and accords between your race and ours. Failure to comply immediately will be considered a breach of all said treaties and will be considered an overt and aggressive act of war, and will be acted upon as such by all the militaries of this planet. We do not negotiate with terrorists or barbarians who take hostages." I turned to Jack and motioned toward the telephone on the wall that went directly to the duty officer's desk upstairs.

"You must...understand, we are not used to being dictated to by..." he looked for the right word in our language for "slave, monkey, pet," or whatever he thought of us as.

"Humans." I interrupted. "I believe that is the word you're looking for." I starred coldly at him. Every fiber of my being wanted to throw my left shoulder into him and slam his pansy ass to the ground, snapping him in two, just to show him just what we "humans" were made of.

"Yes. Well...I am not sure that this...what you ask...can be done right now. You see things have been a little...difficult...since the unfortunate incidents of the other day." Tugy raised his hand in a gesture that I took for his concession that things were out of his control.

"I suggest, in the strongest terms possible, that you make this happen right now." I leaned back non-chalantly against the wall, oozing disrespect from every pore, and crossed my arms, taking one more tack at this. "Seriously, Tugy? Hostages? Not letting us take care of wounded men? Seeing to brave fallen warriors? We have an Earth saying: *Nobless Oblige*. Nobility Obliges. Is this how royalty on your planet behaves? Is this how you prove you are...better than us? This is your vaunted...superiority?" I spit out the last word.

He watched me for a few moments then looked away and up slightly to his right. I'd seen him do this once before when we were served by a spacegirl with dead eyes and nice little cookies he'd passed out to his favorite subjugated hosts. He was sending out a telepathic message, I was sure of that. The sudden bustling noise from the corridor, proved it. "Major Thompson, if you would please be so kind as to check the hallway for me."

"Sir!" Jack opened the door and stepped out. A second later he popped back in and nodded. "Three. All here, sir."

"Get'em upstairs." He hesitated and looked at Tugy, not wanting to leave my side. "Major?"

"Sir!" He was out and moving. I could hear voices and the muffled movement of heavy items and after a couple of minutes of silence the hallway returned to its still, freezing cold emptiness. Tugy and I stared at each other the entire time, neither of us blinking. He broke first.

"As a gesture of our good will." Tugy bowed at the waist.

"I extend the thanks of all involved for your understanding of this situation." I could have puked all over my shoes having to vomit such crap.

Jack stepped back into the room, his face flushed with anger, his jaw set and the corner of one eye twitching slightly. I turned to him finally taking my gaze off Tugy. "All accounted for. The medics are working on the wounded, but they're a mess, sir."

"Thank you, Major." I turned my glare back on his Lordship. "I am sure Lord Tugy did all he could to assist them after the recent hostilities had ended." I played to the crowd listening to us below in the pits of hell.

"Yes sir, I am sure that he did." The words were right, but the delivery was filled with malice and hate, but Tugy either didn't understand the tone or chose to ignore it.

"Shall we discuss our problems now, or would you like some time to refurbish and make this area agreeable again for our conversations?"

Tugy wanted out of this room as badly as I did. He could tell Jack was one step away from repeating the events of the other day and this time, there was no place for Tugy to hide from a piece of hot lead with his name on it. I could feel Tugy had trouble reading through sheer hatred and rage. Maybe that's what made us humans stronger and so interesting to them.

"I believe we will all be better off if we adjourn today and meet again in a couple of weeks. If that is agreeable with you?" I found the words stuck in the back of my throat.

Harv had to be better at this than anyone. Double-dealing and lying came easy to him, but it was never one of my strong suits.

"Thank you. I agree. Until then." He started to leave.

"Plus, I think we could use some heat in here for our next meeting." I stepped ahead of him and out the door just for spite's sake and never looked back.

I could smell the noxious vapors the Visitors left wafting in the air behind them in the hallway and hated it down to the depths of my very soul.



CHAPTER 65

I stood in the Medical Suite of Red Level One in the cavernous hanger bay section of the secret Dulce Mesa base. Jack was on the phone to one of my two co-directors. He offered to make the call and it gave him a chance to report in and offer up his first field evaluation of my performance. I really didn't care and told him to go ahead. I couldn't be bothered with the cloak and dagger stuff about this operation and explained to him, that it was his job and just be open about it. He was a good man and doing his job well. I had no doubt about that, so I was not going to make this task any harder than it already was.

The chief physician came out of surgery, pulling his gloves off and dropping them in the sterile containers next to the door that led to where I was standing. He was an older man with silver gray hair and a propitious frown that looked set on his face.

"How are they, Doctor?" I waited for him to clear his thoughts. Picking up a chart he made a couple of notes and set it down. He sadly shook his head, looking on the verge of tears.

"Physically, Dr. Humphrey, they'll live. The wounds were treated by some technique I don't understand at all. Mostly, they are just dehydrated and need their bodily fluids brought up to acceptable levels. But they won't make it, what is left of them." He walked over and sat down on one of the chrome and plastic chairs in the waiting room. I joined him.

"What exactly do you mean, doctor?" I watched as the man struggled with some internal rage boiling inside of him.

"They've been exposed to high levels of radioactivity. Those lower levels must have enough isotopes in them to kill any human within days." He looked at me and realized the puzzlement on my face. "I know. We placed the reactor on the second floor and have enough shielding around it to keep any particle from getting out of it. But they have some source or something down there that is a lot stronger and more powerful. How they survived is my other question."

"Can anything be done?" I already knew the answer.

"I can figure out how to make them as comfortable as possible with drugs and then get the hazard material guys in to dispose of the bodies. The men who were killed also have to be incinerated in a captive unit. Their levels are not as high, but still every one of them has marked anomalies in their tissue samples, showing they were exposed as well." He thought for a long moment.

"Wait a minute, Doc. You're telling me these men who were killed on Green Level Four, had been exposed as well as those taken into the Hive?" I pondered the question.

"Yes, come to think about it, this doesn't make much sense, does it?" He got up and walked over to the counter and picked up our dosimeters. "Wait right here, Dr. Humphrey if you would please." He went back into the surgical area. I turned and looked around. Jack was still sitting at a desk on the far side of the reception area in an animated phone call with either Harv or GB. I looked at the clock above the door and realized it was after three in the afternoon and I hadn't heard anything from Ellen. I

hoped she was having an enjoyable day shopping down in Taos with the unlimited Treasury Black Card I had given her, but the ways things were going we weren't going to get back to Nevada until late tonight.

The doctor emerged from the surgery holding a print out and a clipboard.

"Well?" It was interesting, because in all the years I had worked around machines pumping out radiation, I had never considered any threat from exposure.

"This is interesting. You and Major Thompson were only down there for, what? Maybe an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes?" He looked at the chart again and then up at me.

"Yes." I waited. For the first time in many years fear had become my handmaiden. I heard reports years ago of the guys working on the Manhattan Project during the war and was especially taken by the way two of them died after being exposed to a lethal dose of enriched uranium.

"Trace amounts. Not enough to injury either of you, but you must remember this stuff is accumulative. We should do a blood sample and tissue culture. Probably a bone scan wouldn't hurt either." He shook his head.

"How about the areas around the actual wounds on the men, doc?" I wondered if they were using some kind of nuclear charged weapon.

"I hadn't thought about that. Give me a minute, please" He moved quickly back into the operating area. I watched as he pulled on gloves and another mask in the inter-lock space between the waiting area and surgery. Jack walked up.

"How are they?"

"Dead men walking." I waited for a moment to compose my thoughts. "They've been hit with high levels of isotopic energy, to the point of lethality." I turned and looked into his stone hard face.

"Those sons of bitches have a nuclear facility down there, without us knowing about it?" He twitched around the eyes.

"Looks like it." I thought for a moment. "Or they are using hand-held nuclear weapons?"

"That is another wrinkle isn't it?" Jack turned and walked back toward the phone. Over his shoulder he spoke. "Let me tell Harv about this as well."

"Good. Ask him to check with Wright Patterson and see if they detected any radiation off the devices in the hanger." The doctor was coming out again.

"No. It is uniform across the bodies. The dead men have lower amounts than the men held as prisoners. That means the lower levels are contaminated.

"How could anyone supposedly be doing delicate genetic research in an unstable radioactive environment?" I asked out loud, not expecting an answer.

"They couldn't be. It would effect the samples to the point of death within weeks." He pondered what he had just said. "Any human living tissue, with our genetic makeup that is exposed to these levels of radiation would be mutated within days and start to go carcinogenetic or die from exposure."

"Then they're not making hybrids, are they?" Another rhetorical question.

"Not inside the envelope of understanding of physiology currently we have, no." The doctor put down the clipboard and looked around. "This does not make any sense at all. I need to talk to Cal about all of this."

"No, you don't. You know he work's for me. I have a body I need for you to examine." I looked over to where Jack was on the phone. "Please wait here doctor...." I looked at his badge, "...Ridgeway. You are now under a higher clearance level and you are to speak to no one without my authority, is that understood?"

He nodded, but I could tell he wasn't sure how I had this type of authority. "Yes sir, but..."

"No buts doctor. Just stand by." I walked over to where Jack was speaking quietly on the phone and he looked up. I wiggled my fingers for him to hand it over.

“Harv, this is Ted. I want Dr. Ridgeway, who is a medical doctor, assigned to my department ASAP, I want his clearance level raised as well.” I waited for his response.

“Yeah, so what? You do it and don’t bother me with this kind of stuff, I got bigger fish to fry right now.” Harv was his normal gruff self.

“That’s not all. I want to send him back to Arlington and have him exhume Max’s body to do another post mortem.” I listened to the silence on the dedicated phone line.

“I know if I ask you why, you are going to say something that will scare the crap out of me, aren’t you?” Harv spoke slowly and quietly.

“Probably. But if I am right, we just got handed another wrinkle, as Jack says that won’t be interesting, but terrifying.” I wasn’t sure, but somehow it seemed to fit together.

“Let me speak to Jack and I will have him get Ridgeway back here and I will start to make the arrangements over at Bethesda.” Harv said.

“No. I don’t want this done in any of the existing facilities. Set up someplace private, covert and away from everything. Full spectrum facility, everything he needs and a hand picked crew, selected by you. I want the place to have a seal on it so tight that no one can get in or out of it...and also, Harv?” I waited for just a second and took a breath. “I want it all set up to perform full spread medicals on everyone at Jack’s level and above including all of us in the next two weeks.”

“Oh Christ! You Charlie fucking Chan now? Or have you gone down the hole chasing rabbits?” Harv sighed. “Ok, I’ll call the Boss, tell him and start making arrangements, but I got to tell you, Sunny Jim, this had better be good, cause I am going to be stepping on a lot of toes.”

“I understand that, but it may just give us the advantage we’ve been looking for. I’m heading back to Nevada for a couple of days and then we will be back there, say, in three days.”

Without waiting for the answer I walked away handing the phone back to Jack. I motioned for the doctor to come with me outside. I wanted to ask him some specific questions, not about the present situation.



CHAPTER 66

Dr. Ridgeway didn't now what else to say, but 'yes sir' by the time Jack had finished talking to him and making arrangements for his immediate departure back east. It would take a couple of days to fill in all the holes in the medical clinic and get a replacement set up for him, but Jack was going to leave that for others to do. By four o'clock the fun was over and he stood by me in the parking lot.

"We should head over to Taos find Ellen." He looked at his watch three times in as many minutes.

"You're right. She hasn't called or left a message either here or at the Los Alamos lab." I felt tightness in my chest. Things were happening a little too quickly right now and I needed more time to come down off the tension of the last few days.

"I'll drive boss and you can take a breather." Jack walked towards the car.

I nodded and appreciated his offer. Dealing with Tugy was exhausting to say the least. Right now a hot shower, a cold drink and a good woman was all I wanted. As we headed down the mesa, one of the normal late summer showers started to pour on us and with it the lightening was giving a display that one can only see in the four corners areas of the southwest. With pounding rain on the car, the twisting road and the lightening with its accompanying thunder, I was asleep within minutes of clearing the Air Force check station at the entrance to the facility.

I knew I had to still deal with Cal, but that could wait for a few days. He was a pain that needed correcting but I didn't have the energy to figure out how to reward the man for his years of service and equally move him to someplace his talents would be used more effectively. But mostly I needed to get him out of this facility and put in someone who could handle the situation with something more than abject accommodation and fear.

While I was asleep, I drifted into a state that some would call a hallucination. I walked into a sterile clean room. It was bright from the lighting fixtures and there were several people there. One of them was Irina. She was in a lab coat and explaining something to the group on a blackboard. The diagram on the board was one of the small devices I'd been working on. I looked carefully at it, when Irina turned and looked at me. In the dream she looked beseechingly at me as she spoke:

"Ted! They know you are working on the Device and they plan to stop you."

"Who knows, Irina?" I asked.

"They do. The ones you are supposed to use it on. They are going to try and stop you!" She started to fade from my vision.

"How could they know?" I asked.

"Simon Ratterman told them." She moved into the fog of my mind.

"Why did you leave?" I screamed.

"I had too. He told me they would kill you if I didn't leave and come here. I am working on a device that will stop yours from working. It's the only way I could protect you and Pasha." She moved farther into the fog.

"Wait, don't leave! Wait!" I was screaming.

“Boss....Boss!” Jack was shaking me awake. “What the hell is that? The granddaddy of all nightmares?” He was holding on to me, wiping my nose with his handkerchief. It was soaked in my blood.

“I don’t know...she was here and then left.” I mumbled.

“Who was here? What the hell are you talking about?” He let up on his grip and I looked around. We were in the parking lot at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

“A dream. It was just a dream.” I relaxed and took the cloth and held it against my nose. “That’s all.”

“One hell of a dream. You’ve been twitching and mumbling for the last hour.” Jack sat back and shook his head. “That just took a half dozen years off my life, I will tell you that. Look, buster, I don’t want a new assignment. I happen to like you and think we make a good team so don’t go and get weird on me or do something stupid...like dying. Okay?”

“I’m fine.” I got out and stood up feeling the world whirl around me. I breathed deep and all I remember is seeing the top of the buildings as I fell over backwards. From out of the deep black sky and the blanket of stars appeared a set of angry yellow eyes with small angular pupils looking down at me.

* * * * *

“What?” Harv yelled into the phone. “Say that to me again.” Jack Thompson repeated his comments on the phone. “I will get on the Big Bird and be there in hours.” Harv felt the frustration run through him.

“I wouldn’t do that just yet. He is out and the doctors say it could be a few days.” Jack answered back to Harv.

“Well, I have to call the other man in down on the island. Now what is the other problem?” Harv hit the record button on the dual deck tape recorder on his desk that was hooked to his telephone system.

“We have lost his...significant other...as well. She was in Taos shopping and had lunch with some woman and never came out of the La Posta Hotel. The following team went in and she was nowhere to be found. They started a street by street search but no results so far.” Jack intoned waiting for Harv’s response.

“Call out the cavalry, Jack. Get every one of our people in the area on it. I don’t care what has to happen, find her! Make it an area or statewide dragnet. Just locate her! I am not going to be the one to tell GB or Sir Charles that his little girl went missing and we don’t know why.” Harv felt the pain right in the middle of his forehead. He pulled a pair of codeine from his desk drawer and downed them with a shot of scotch. “Use the state police, military and feds if you need them. Just don’t come home empty handed or both of us will be looking at a bright light and saying hello to our dead relatives.” Harv hung up.

Harv sat there for a few minutes and brought out the red phone resting in his lower desk drawer. He picked up the handset and listened for an answer.

“Three is down. Ellen is nowhere to be found. Thompson is calling down the thunder on the area and I want to head out there.” He waited. “Got it. I will finish setting up Ridgeway’s new spot and take care of matters at Arlington and then join you. Who is going to hold the baby?” Harv waited. “Understood. Sao Paolo center is online. Checking...hold on.” Harv twisted his massive girth in his chair and punched some coding into the network terminal on his desk, which ran to the IBM computer in the basement that was used as a resource sharing system for the complex he was in and watched the display come up. “I got it. Confirmed it is on line.” He waited again while the voice talked to him from the other end. “Are you kidding me? You’re going yourself?” Harv waited again and listened. “Got it. I will have big bird there in...” he

looked at his watch and then thought for a moment, “let’s say six hours, ready to go with a splash team on board.” Harv hung up and sat back.

Staring at the wall he sat there in total amazement. He had just heard something he would never have believed in a million years.



CHAPTER 67

The man was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and light colored pants. He wore sunglasses and stood across the Plaza in Sante Fe from the old Governor's Palace. The Indians were hocking their silver jewelry to the tourists lining the streets. It was a warm day and most of the people were standing under the veranda to get out of the sun and really not very interested in the artwork lying in disarray on blankets Native artists had placed there for their inspection.

He watched one woman sitting on one of the benches under the porch looking up at a tree in the park. "I got her." He spoke quietly into the large Motorola walky-talky he pulled from under his shirt.

"I see her. Make this a quiet one, will you?" Another voice answered.

"Done." The man in the Hawaiian shirt glided across the grass in the plaza, while a car moved from the opposite end of the street. Two other men were converging on the same spot. They all reached it at the same time.

"Mrs. Humphrey?" The man asked looking down at her.

"Have you ever noticed the leaves in the trees are arranged in a geometrical pattern? It's caused by a natural phenomenon that follows a Fibonacci series, did you know that?" She looked up and smiled.

"Are you Mrs. Ellen Humphrey, ma'am?" The man asked again, gently.

"Yes. Have we met before?" She shadowed her eyes with her hand.

"We are going to see your husband. Would you please come with me, quietly?" The man reached down and took her arm.

"Is Ted here?" She got up and looked around.

"No ma'am, but we will take you to him." He moved toward the car holding her arm gently.

"Do you have a purse or handbag ma'am?"

"No. I don't know. I must have lost it, this morning when I was in Taos. I don't think I am there anymore. Is this Santa Fe?" She looked over at the palace and some of the Navajos were watching the men move the woman into the car.

"Yes it is Santa Fe, ma'am." The man slid in beside her in the back seat. Another took his position on the other side of her. The driver moved out slowly and turned on a side street that was less used by tourist.

"How did I get here and what day is it?" She looked at the man next to her.

"It's Thursday the fifteenth and we don't know how you got here. You left your car in Taos." He spoke gently to her.

"That can't be. I was shopping in Taos on Monday, wasn't I?" She looked confused at him.

"Yes ma'am, you were. But we'll sort that out later."

The man sat back as the vehicle accelerated down a two-lane black top heading north.

Major Jack Thompson walked into the hospital room and noticed Bellamy standing and looking out the window over the complex of Los Alamos.

"They found her in Santa Fe and an FBI team just picked her up and is bringing her up the hill." Bellamy turned and looked at the man for a moment.

"Anything else? Was she attacked or hurt?"

"No sir. She seems physically fine, but the reporting officer says she's pretty out of it." Thompson looked down at the floor and waited.

"Have a surgical team standing by to do full exam, but nothing that will scare her, is that clear?" Bellamy added.

"I've done that, sir. Got a female doctor and a couple of older nurses that the doctor says are really good. They are in Two down the hall." Thompson responded.

"Who are they examining?" I asked waking up with a hell of headache. The room was still foggy to me but I was coming back to the land of the living.

"Ted. How do you feel?" Bellamy leaned in, his scarred face looming over me.

"Like the Hulk took a shit in my head. What happened?" I found the adjustment control for the bed and moved it up until I was in a sitting position. There were two IVs plugged into my arms and a monitor working beside the bed showing my vital signs. Jack had stepped out of the room and then he returned with Harv walking in behind him.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph you had us petrified! What kind of a stunt was that?"

"Who is on station if the three of us are here?" My head was still not clear, but I knew something was really wrong with this picture.

"Sao Paolo, four, five and six are on full alert and Johannesburg is the back up, but don't worry about that, things are under control out there. It is right here that we need some answers." Bellamy stepped back as a doctor in a white coat walked in and started to thump my chest and listen with his stethoscope. He felt my pulse and then checked my eyes for reflex to his small bright light.

"He seems alright, but I think I need to give him a sedative and let him get some rest." The doctor added.

"I've been resting. Get these goddamn tubes out of me. I want to get up." He pushed me back on the bed.

"Not yet. Just lay there." He stepped back and looked at Bellamy.

"Give us twenty minutes, doc." With that the man walked out of the room with no other comments.

"How long have I been out, it looks like morning outside?" I asked.

"Three fricken' days, kiddo. It's Thursday." Harv handed me a glass of water and I drank it.

"What happened? Was it a heart attack or something?" I was really confused.

"Nothing. That is the conclusion of the medical team. They ran an ETKTM on you." Bellamy pulled up a chair and sat down next to the bed.

"A what?" I looked at him in disbelief.

"Every Test Known to Man. Full spectrum. Nothing. They say it was a combination of stress, altitude and barometric pressure, something like altitude sickness that climbers get, with a little extra." Bellamy actually smiled.

"What was the little extra?" I looked up at Harv's walrus like face.

"Caissons disease. What divers get if they come up in the water too quick. The Bends or Nitrogen Narcosis. You had nitrogen bubbling out between your joints. They put you in a hyperbaric chamber for a few hours and then it looked like the pain subsided." Harv wiped his mouth with the back of his fist.

"That must be why my head is slipping. Somebody gave me morphine didn't they?" I reached out and took another glass of water from Harv.

"No. Something a little stronger, but no one could explain why you were out like a light. Wasn't a coma, you had brain wave activity off the chart. It looked like you

were working on something.” Bellamy sat back and motioned for Jack to check the hallway.

“Where is Ellen?” I realized someone wasn’t in the room.

“Surg Two. Down the hall, Boss. The doctors are with her now, checking her out, but she seems fine.” Thompson answered looking down the hallway.

“What the hell is she doing in here, in surgery?” I yelled.

“She went missing, when you passed out. That is as close as we can figure it.” Bellamy looked over at Thompson who was talking to someone in the hallway.

“She is A-okay, boss. A little confused but physically sound. I think her mind is back as well, ‘cause she is screaming up a storm to be let out of there to come see you.”

Thompson was still talking to the other person in the hallway.

“I will go down and talk to her.” Harv started to turn away.

“Hold on, Harv. Jack, handle it and assure her that in a few minutes she can come in here.” Bellamy added

“Sir.” Jack was out the door and gone.

“What is the last thing you remember, Ted?” Bellamy actually pulled out his pipe and lit up in the room.

I rubbed the feeling back into my hands and face, trying to pull back my thoughts across the black oblivion where I had been.

“The Russians are working on a counter unit that will stop ours from functioning properly, when we activate it.” I heard the words come out of my mouth and didn’t believe what I had just said.

“Good drugs, kiddo.” Harv snorted. “I got to get me some of those.”

“How do you know that?” Bellamy spoke looking really hard at Harv. Who went back into silence.

“I saw Irina and she told me so.” I still didn’t believe what I was saying.

“You saw her or dreamt of her.” Bellamy asked slowly and guardedly.

“I saw her. In a room someplace near the Ural Mountains. She was lecturing to a group of researchers.” I waited a moment and added, “Must be the drugs.”

“Monday afternoon at seven o’clock my time on the island, I received a communication from an asset working at the facility in Russia that they had made a breakthrough on an Anti-Chronos device, something to thwart Project: Tempus Fugit. Irina is heading the project and no one else besides me in the Western world knows that.” Bellamy sat back and looked really hard at me.

“Why don’t I know that?” Harv asked.

“You’re a babblers mouth. You tell too many things to that slut of yours.” Bellamy answered with a sly smile.

“You shouldn’t speak of my wife that way.” Harv seemed incensed.

“Not her, that other slut you sleep with.” Bellamy added.

“Oh her. Yeah. Anyway I should have been told.” Harv laughed.

This was their way of relieving the pressure, I now knew that and expected nothing less from them. Their dry witted bad jokes was all that held these two together under unimaginable pressure. I didn’t think Harv even had a wife.

“Simon Ratterman gave her the plans.” I offered up as the coup de grace.

“FUCK!” Bellamy shot up, knocking his chair over backwards. Two men opened the door and looked in. He motioned for them to get out and they were gone.

“Boss, before Ellen leaves surgery have them check the back of her neck right here.” I pointed to a spot where the neck meets the shoulders. “Look for a scar or mark and then have an x-ray done to see if there is a piece of foreign matter in there.”

“Why would you ask that?” Harv looked down at me with a worried look on his face. He reached into his tweed jacket and pulled out a small vial with some kind of metal object in it about the size of a bird seed. “You mean like this one?”

I took it and looked carefully at it. Handing it back to him I looked over at Bellamy who was staring out the window again.

"It's some kind of microprocessor. I had it put under an electron microscope and it has advanced circuits like nothing we've ever seen. But nobody knows how the hell it works. Hell, nobody even knows what it does!" He turned and looked back at me questioningly.

"It controls us." I said blankly. "It was inserted in me in Scotland after the Mount Grace episode, when I was in the hospital. That's why Jacob's MK Ultra stuff didn't work on me." I felt the bandage on the back of my neck and realized Harv was holding onto the one that had been in me.

"Ridgeway found one in Max, just where you told him to look. It was what probably caused the overload in his brain that killed him." Bellamy turned and took three more vials out of his pocket and tossed them down on the table.

"Harv had one, too. So did Bosses Five and Seven."

"You?" I waited.

"No. That's what is so interesting. Jacob's had his pulled out before they buried him. We found someone had cut it out. Ridgeway is going through everyone and isolating them until they have been examined." Bellamy added.

"Where is he right now." I was just curious.

"There was a Department of Agriculture lab was closed down in Reston, Virginia. I took it over and brought in a surgery team to assist him from the Navy. Those navy guys are so paralyzed by the fact that they had to sign Presidential waivers for secrecy they're walking on egg shells." Harv laughed again at his little antics.

The door opened and Ellen came in, followed by Thompson who held his arms up in submission to Bellamy. The Boss just nodded and let her run up to me.

"Ted, darling! Are you alright, baby?" She grabbed me and kissed me hard.

"You bet! This just wasn't what I expected for a honeymoon. Harv's face and the smell of disinfectant somehow doesn't seem that romantic." I said between kisses.

"Let's leave these two love birds alone for a while, gentlemen." Bellamy started to walk out and Jack handed him something that Bellamy stared at then held up: another vial with another chip inside.

"You were right again, Teddy. We'll talk later." With that the three men exited and Ellen started to talk to me really fast and I wasn't sure I was getting it all. But something in her bemoaning and fright caught me.

"Who did you say you had lunch with?" I asked.

"She said her name was Ann. Ann Corbett. She said she knew your father. Why would she say that?" Ellen went back into the role of caring wife.

I let her.



CHAPTER 68

I just finished getting dressed when Jack walked in. He was carrying his ever-present briefcase and had a file under his arm. I'd spent three more days in the hospital, letting them prod and poke me, take blood samples and measure every part of my body. Ellen had finally agreed to head back to Nevada with Harv who had arranged a new house for us to move into in the small town of Pahrump about fifty miles on the west side of the secondary entrance to Area 51, or Five-One as those in the know referred to it.

He convinced Ellen that I'd be okay in the hands of the staff at Los Alamos and she would be better off getting the place ready for my return. Covertly, I think he wanted to get the doting wife away from me, so I could get the rest he thought I needed. G.B. had pulled up stakes and headed back to the Cayman Islands. Everyone had a lot of work to do and right now I needed to get back to my office and sort all of this out.

"How are you feeling today?" Jack asked dropping his case on the bed.

"I'm doing good. Surprisingly so. The biggest thing is that my head is clear." I turned to look at the man that was smiling at me. He opened his briefcase and pulled out a small frame automatic pistol in a leather holster. It was my old Walther PPK.

"Do both of us a favor for a little while, will you?" He handed it to me.

"Do you think I will need this?" I held it and felt its weight. I hadn't touched a gun since that day on the island in the North Atlantic.

"It's like a vaccination, you may never need it, but if you do, you got it." He closed his briefcase and opened the door to the hallway.

"Okay. But only for a while, remember I'm a scientist dammit, not a secret agent." I slipped it on my belt and checked the action and magazine.

"Right now Ted, I don't know what you are, but I wouldn't do this unless I thought it was important." Jack held the door.

"Thanks." I walked out and we started toward the elevator. "By the way anything else from Ridgeway?"

"Six more of our little chips have shown up. It looks like the whole program has been infiltrated, so the Boss is having everyone at all the facilities scanned, and it's going to become a regular procedure." He pushed the button on the chrome plate to call the car up to our floor.

"People are just going to love that one, aren't they?" I got in and waited for him to push the button for the first floor. He pulled a key from his pocket and inserted it into the locking device on the elevator and a door below the regular buttons sprung open. A keypad was visible and he punched in "666".

"It's a bad joke, the number series for these, but I think a twisted sense of humor goes with the territory." He closed the box and handed me the key. "Don't lose that. Harv hates like hell giving anybody access to what he considers his private domain." The elevator started down and I watched the numbers as they stopped at the first floor, but the car continued into some kind of sub-basement.

“Where the hell are we going?” I felt a degree of frustration. I just wanted to get going and didn’t need the guided tour of the fallout shelter.

“You’ll see. Don’t be upset, this is the fastest way out of here.” The door slid open and we stepped out into a small elegantly appointed subway station. The walls were tiled and the platform was done in reddish Italian marble.

“Don’t tell me?” I looked around realizing that the elevator was the only entrance point.

“Yup, uncle Harv’s creation. It’s taken twenty years of concentrated effort on the part of the Air Force and the Army Corp of Engineers, but it runs to every major installation and facility we control and a few that are attached to us as well.” He pushed a red button on the wall and walked to the edge of the platform.

“How far?” I stood next to him and looked up and down the line. The tracks ran into what looked like holes cut through living stone.

“Out to Edwards AFB in California, up the coast as far as the Bangor Sub Base, the new one in Washington State, also east to Texas, then on with several stops along the way, like Strategic Air Command in Omaha, then ending in DC. That’s called the Red Line. The Blue Line runs from a joint track, it runs up to Colorado and then on to Denver up at NORAD and Crystal Palace.” He looked at his watch.

“Why Denver? We don’t have anything there do we?” I tried to remember if Bellamy had mentioned anything there.

“Not yet, but they’re building a new airport. It’s going to be huge and we got twenty floors below it with all the items necessary for the C.O.G., Continuation Of Government, if the need arises. If something happens to DC, Denver is the secondary federal capital and we can transfer the entire government there in under 48 hours. Hell, they should do that anyway ‘cause the Feds own something like 80% of everything west of the Mississippi anyway. They’re building the airport way outside Denver on basically this tornado plain, so we could bivouac something like 200,000 troops there in a big hurry.” He looked up and smiled as a sleek looking two-car unit pulled in and stopped.

“I thought we had the Greenbrier in Virginia for all that?” We got in the car as the door slid open.

“G.B. feels it’s been compromised so he wanted a new hidey-hole for the Big Cheeses to go in case of emergency.” Jack walked up to a console and pushed several buttons and then indicated a set of seats with seat belts. “Buckle up.”

I followed his lead, sat down and put a seat belt around myself, laughing. “You don’t need one of these on a train.”

“This is no ordinary train.” He sat down and as we started out of the station, the lights in the car dimmed. There was a feeling of rapid acceleration.

“Wow!” I realized we were humming down the track.

“It’s called nuclear powered, high speed magnetic levitation. The train’s hull is a new ceramic porcelain compound to keep the heat and electro-static charge from building up around us in the tunnels. We’ll be hitting about three hundred miles an hour shortly. The cabin is pressurized and fully automated. There are sections of the long straight-aways that are huge vacuum tubes where this baby can get up to 700 miles an hour. The original tunnels were drilled under Eisenhower’s Route 66 American Auto-Bahn project. We have roads and a huge underground infrastructure if we ever fought a nuclear war with the Russians or Chinese.” Jack smiled a sardonic grin and patted me on the knee. “Ain’t science grand?”

“If you got the money, honey, we got the answers.” I jested back. “Maybe.”

“When the Pentagon budget is 60% of all government spending and more than the budgets of all 50 states combined, that, is a lot of cheddar.”

The ride was smooth and fast, plus I realized it was undetectable from the surface. We passed several platforms on our way, but there were no indicators of where or what

they were as they seemed to all be color-coded. After about a half hour I was lulled to sleep by the air-cushioned ride of the vehicle.

* * * * *

Bellamy sat in the conference room at the facility in the Caymans. A sterile white room where there were only two chairs and a small table. It appeared more like an interrogation room than anything else. The man sitting across from him was dressed in a single piece blue jumpsuit. The man was blonde, with pale blue eyes and a tanned face. His skin was flawless and his hand rested lightly on the table. Bellamy had a file folder in front of him. He placed one of the vials on the table and pushed it across. The blonde man picked it up and looked into the glass vial. He placed it back down on the table and sat back.

“Yours?” Bellamy asked quietly.

“No. It is an identification chip, similar to the one growers use to brand and identify their own livestock.” The man never moved.

“Marking their property?” Bellamy wondered to him.

“Not completely. It can be used to override normal brainwave activity. It monitors the actions and thoughts of the person and then somebody pushes a button somewhere and a new idea enters the person’s brain.” The man never blinked.

“Who uses them?” Bellamy asked pulling out his pipe and lighting it up.

“Several of my enemies.” The man pushed his chair back trying to avoid the blue smoke of the pipe.

“The enemies of my enemies are my friends.” Bellamy smiled. “An old Japanese proverb.”

“Not likely. We offer aid with little asked in return. They look at you like pond scum or probably more like a walking nutrient supply for them.” The man took a pill from his pocket and took one.

“What can we do, besides digging them out?” GB put his pipe down realizing it was bothering the other man’s breathing system. “Sorry.”

“It is alright. I just never get used to the smell and wonder what pleasure you get from the breathing of carbon dioxide.”

“It calms my nerves.” GB turned the page in the files.

“You are never calm. You may not show it on the surface, but you are always working inside that skull of yours and you don’t have enough time to accomplish everything you think is necessary to save this planet.” The man reached across and placed his hand on Bellamy’s arm.

“True, but what else can I do?” Bellamy looked at the man.

“Trust the young man you’ve been training. Someone is helping him, do you know that?” He pulled back his hand.

“Yes. But it bothers the hell out me. Who is it? It isn’t Ratterman, I know that, but he’s got some kind of game going. What is it, do you know?” Bellamy closed the file.

“No, I do not. But I must remind you, even if I did, I could not interfere. He is a human, no matter what he is doing.” The man stood. “I need to go George. My people will be worried.”

“When can I see you again?” Bellamy got up.

“I am not sure. I am needed in several places, but I shall try to return to you in let us say four months or so.” He took out a small item from his pocket.

“Sooner would be better than later.” Bellamy stood with his hands on his hips.

“I would like to meet with Dr. Humphrey at some point. I may be able to talk to him and provide some insight without violating the protocol.” The man offered.

“Not yet. I can’t drop this on him just yet.” Bellamy shook his head in disgust.

“Too much, too soon. I understand. But if he lives long enough, he will eventually have to know about all of us, not just the ones he is fighting.” The man nodded.

“I will approach him and see when he is ready. That is the best I can do right now.” Bellamy waited a moment. “Have a safe trip.”

“Take care of yourself. Our feelings are with you.”

The tall blonde being depressed a button on a small unit on his belt and was gone.

“Harv would love one of those.” George said grimly to himself. “Hell, so would I.” Bellamy turned out the lights and left the room.



CHAPTER 69

"I didn't think I would fall asleep. I've had plenty of rest in the last few days." I felt slightly embarrassed having done so in front of Jack.

"Not to worry. It's an effect of the air control unit inside the cabin of the train. It has something to do with negative ions or something like that. The designers at Rand made it so people using it, would not be overly bored while traveling. I would never admit it, but about five minutes after you dropped off, so did I." Jack laughed. "The designers call it 'Time-Compression'. Fancy way of saying it puts you to sleep."

"How long has this been here?" We got into the elevator and came out in a building on the main complex of Area 51.

"It's been online for maybe seven or eight years." He motioned toward a door that led out the side of the building where there were several waiting cars, with the keys in the ignitions. "We have whole cities down there very few people know about."

"It must be great during rush hour traffic. I would like to see them; the underground cities." I said as we got into the sedan.

"You can. Let me know when you want to go sightseeing, I will figure out some justification to tell Harv. It's pretty much his baby, 'The Underworld' as we like to call it." He drove off quickly heading for Groom Lake and my laboratory.

All the events of the last week had been compartmentalized on a need to know basis. When I walked into the complex, everything was moving along just like normal, (if one can ever call working on a black project, in a black facility with people that are sworn to a level of secrecy beyond anything ever conceived by the human mind, as normal.)

A stack of new files sat on my desk along with fifty some requests for new personnel, equipment and vouchers. I quickly looked through them, took about three quarters of them in hand and walked into Jack's office where he was reading the morning edition of the Washington Post.

"You work here, you share the load. You are now the second Assistant Director, working for Ellen and me. Shirley will get you any supplies you need and she will have someone paint your name on the door, this week." I didn't wait for an answer, but could tell by his face that he felt like he had just been Shanghaied off the docks of San Francisco and was now working for Captain Bly.

Walking back to my office I could hear the grumbling, which was all for stage effect. As I passed Shirley's desk, I winked. "Help the new A.D. with the problems will ya?"

"Sure, Boss. The new ball and chain called and left this for you." I looked at her questioning for a second. "Mrs. Humphrey? Your wife? That is the new number at the house? You guys ever talk to each other?" She went back to typing.

Ellen answered the phone. "You know Harv loves to spend taxpayers dollars. I have gotten lost in the place three times today. And, by the way, dinner is at seven. Maria is planning it so I have no idea what it is."

"How are you?" I asked.

“Besides being married to some Machiavellian character I found out is worse than my own father, I’m doing alright, considering my neck hurts, I feel like someone on the ten most wanted list and I have people in and around my new home that I have no idea who they are.” She paused. “Plus, my horniness scale is off the chart. So don’t tell me you are working late, something has come up or you are really starting to like your new secretary, ‘cause any of those will get you a treatment that will make the last week look mild.”

“Yes sir, I mean ma’am. Home by six, slippers and my pipe.” I laughed.

“I will be the one in the black baby doll outfit and high heels.” Her voice echoed down the line.

“By the way, who is Maria?” I waited for the response.

“Our new housekeeper and cook. Plus she is probably proficient in at least two martial arts and a crack shot.” Ellen was sounding better.

“Is she good looking?” I ventured out back on the thin ice.

“I have two words for you, buster: Dead. Meat!” She hung up still laughing. I yelled out so Jack could hear me in his office. “We are home by six, A.D. Thompson, with no ifs, ands, or buts.”

“Hopefully, but I am not sure.” His voice yelled back.

“Don’t tell me?” I started to get up out of the chair.

“Joking, just joking, Boss.” I heard him laughing to himself.

The rest of the afternoon was consumed with paper work and requests to handle the change in directions I had planned for the device and the craft in the hanger bay. It felt good again to get back into the swing of things and once more work toward an achievable goal.

PART TEN

THE SPORT MODEL



CHAPTER 10

Things started moving again at the Groom Lake laboratory. Between Ellen's dedication and Jack's perceptive abilities and instincts, we started building the testing schedule on the Sport Model and were well into re-designing the device to meet the new demands and requirements. I was pleased to say the least. Several months had gone by and everything inside the facility was working quite well. That was about all I could claim as a success. There had been no further incidents with the aliens at Dulce and I had postponed my meeting with Tugy indefinitely until I felt more ready to approach him head on, one more time.

Ridgeway finished up screening over two hundred people and had come up with thirty-nine implanted devices. Just when he thought he was finished with the list I had drawn up for him, I told him I wanted to start all over again and screen everyone one more time. It might have been frustrating to him, but I wanted to make sure no one had been re-acquired by our little gray friends.

Harv had come up to Nevada to make sure everything was moving along and for once he was pleased with everything. Bellamy was silent on his island and I soon learned that unless there was something that needed his direct attention, he was not going to get involved. He'd bestowed his trust on me and allowed me to exercise my discretion to get the tasks done.

The bi-weekly meeting with the division heads had finished up and I asked Harv, Ellen, Dr. Ridgeway and Jack to stay behind for a few minutes. Shirley stepped into the conference room and gave me the thumbs up signal, which meant that everyone was out of the area and we had it to ourselves, then stepped out and closed the door.

"I thought you were going to re-assign her somewhere else, like Fargo or Bismarck, North Dakota?" Ellen asked with a smile.

"Why?" I looked at her questioningly. "She is like a right hand around here for all of us."

"Yeah, well she calls me 'the new ball and chain' when I'm not in earshot." Ellen laughed at her own joke.

"The girl sounds perspicacious to me! Hell, I ought to make her an assistant director somewhere." Harv croaked.

"Not on your life." Jack added with animation. "She can spell."

"What?" The three of us sitting across from him spoke at once.

"She can spell! Let me tell you, I am a professional solider, but my grammar is lousy. If it wasn't for her editing my writing, you would all be wondering what it was you were reading and if some of Tugy's people wrote it." The self-effacement was revealing and needed considering the amount of time we had spent lately getting everything back on track.

"Listen, jokes aside." Harv got down to brass tacks. "We got several problems I need to bring you folks up to speed on and the Boss is all over me, 'cause he thinks you need to factor them into what we're doing here." Harv pulled his battered black notebook out of his pocket. "The first thing is the new guy we got over in that rented

house on Pennsylvania Avenue. You know that big white monstrosity someone decided to build for John Addams? Well, anyway, this new guy is one of those bible thumper, goody two-shoes, who thinks everything in government should be open and above board and he is pushing this new Freedom of Information Act through both houses and he is probably going to get it. It will take a year or so but then some of these fantasy writers of pseudo-science fiction books about UFOs are going to be all over it to get everything out of us that they can to find out what we know. The other thing just sticking in my throat is the fact that he is demanding a financial review of the Group. Where we get our money, what we do with it and how many people work for us. Don't look at me like I am the stupid one here. I didn't vote for the guy and besides, you don't want to kill the messenger." Harv saw our faces and realized that each and every one of us couldn't believe what he was saying.

"Listen, this peanut farmer lives, breathes and eats purity and thinks we can 'all just get along.' After the first two briefing sessions over at the White House, he smiled and said thank you in that pleasing honeysuckle southern style and then sicced his dogs on us to find out exactly what is going on. He finds he needs to be fiscally responsible to the American people and thinks we may be featherbedding this issue to give ourselves jobs." Harv closed his book and looked up.

"Why don't we take him for a field trip down to level five at Dulce." Jack spoke before anyone else. Ellen winced with the thought of that excursion.

"Re-direct him." I spoke without thinking too much about it. "Get Bellamy to call in some favors and have someone place him on the top of their list for some kind of peace accord or have him as chief negotiator for some war someplace. If we don't have one, start one, Harv. Buy his aides out from under him. Bribe them, compromise them or kill them, I don't really care. But get the message across that any interference with this mission will get a one way ticket to nowhere." I rubbed my face and felt the stubble on my chin.

"You're a rather ruthless character, aren't you?" Ellen spoke to the side of my face.

"I have to be." I motioned to Harv to continue, his eyes lit up at the idea.

"I like that. Bellamy will, too. Good! Now the other thing bothering some of us, and it's not so much about the R and D stuff you guys are doing, but what our comrade counter-parts are doing in the Russian Motherland." Harv checked his notebook again.

"Dr. Ridgeway, I need for you to get someone inside the Soviet Union. I need to create a situation where they start to worry about implants. They need to know some of their best folks are tagged, infected and need to be treated." I waited while this man of impeccable personal morals thought about what I had just said.

"If I go to Switzerland and meet with two or three doctors I know there and show them what I have found, they may certainly use that information to enhance their standing with some folks who come to them for treatments. They are not the ones involved in the lab work, but they are the guys that run the show in Red Square. It might work." Ridgeway made some notes to himself.

"Jack, make it happen for the good doctor." I spoke without looking at the man I knew would already be making his own list.

"Consider it done. Military transport or public?" Jack waited.

"Big bird. Put a sweep team with him." Harv offered up something that he would normally never let anyone else use, his own private jet aircraft. Or rather a painted U.S. aircraft that he thought of as his own private business jet. "The guys in the Politburo will be putting everyone through a screening once they know about this. Hell, pig farms in the Urals will be screened." He laughed.

"And Irina." Ellen said quietly.

"Yup, I hope so. 'Cause if they are not, they'll get ahead of us on their little device, 'cause we all know someone has made one work already, don't we?" I got up from the table. "Anything else we should know about, uncle?" Harv laughed again and motioned for me to sit down.

"Yes, I kept this one to last. Doc?" He turned to Ridgeway and without saying anything he got up and smiled.

"May I use a phone to call my staff officer back at the clinic and tell them I'll be gone for several days?" He lightly touched Harv's shoulder.

"Shirley will find you one, Doctor, and thank you for coming out." I added.

"I am always glad to be of service." He left without another word.

"That is one fine man." Harv said with true honesty. "He's worked around the clock to find every one of those little freaky bugs in people, do you know that?"

Without preamble, I stood up. "I want a second facility set up and another set of screening protocols established. I want everyone that went through the first series to be tested again." I sat back down.

Harv looked at me in utter disbelief. "Do you trust anybody?"

"I would trust my life to two of the three other people in this room, Harv." I watched him flinch at the statement.

"You're a hard man." Harv rejoined his normal jovial self a moment later. "You're also better for it. You think Ridgeway's been compromised?"

"Isn't he the logical choice? Look at the list of those carrying the bug in their heads. All low level in our pecking order: scientists, technicians, security. Why not A.D.s or A.D.D.s?" I looked over at Jack and nodded for him to start talking.

"Dr. Gilspen," Jack went formal and Harv sat back looking at him with a fixed stare. "Harv, three weeks ago I went through screening at Ridgeway's facility. He cleared me. Two days later, Ted had me re-examined here by a new team I put together for an inside screening, without anyone knowing." Jack pulled a small clear plastic square box out of his pocket and pushed it across the table. Harv picked it up and studied it for several minutes. He placed it back down quietly on the table and opened his notebook again. Flipping through it, he finally stopped.

"Number Six, A.D. Rodriguez and Clements from London. All screened and certified by Ridgeway. All three still had a bug. Bellamy had each one re-screened after they saw him. The Boss was sure that all three of you had been re-infected and I was supposed to get you back east without you knowing why and have additional screening done." Harv closed his book.

"There are three people in this room, now, I would trust my life with." I answered.

"I understand, kiddo. This is a dangerous business and none of us can drop our guard." Harv looked over at Ellen, who'd been stoic through the whole process. "How's being married to this guy working out for you?"

"Ted's a slave driver here and collapses at home. Jack plays a mean hand of cribbage and I still get lost in that house of ours. Outside of that, what else could a girl ask for in life?" She smiled sadly.

"I will take the good doctor with me on the big bird and then arrange for a sweep team to go with him. Do you want me to bring him back or not?" Harv pulled on his old tweed jacket.

"Your call, Harv, not mine." I got up and walked out with him to the lobby area. "But after he is done in Europe, I would have him checked and then send him someplace where he can perform real medicine for us." I hoped Harv was in a benevolent mood when decision time rolled around.

"Sounds to me like there's trouble on the home front?" Harv took me by the arm.

"She's just tired and still trying to figure out what happened in Santa Fe. The shrink says she's suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, P.T.S.D. for short.

Says you see it in people injured in war, shot on the street by a mugger or raped. She's spending a lot of time crying to herself. She doesn't know I know, but we still sleep in the same bed. But that's about it; sleeping. She has a hard time being close right now. So, I come to work and try not to think about it too much."

Ridgeway was waiting in the front lobby area, joking with Shirley about something or other.

"Alright then," Harv said boisteriously. "I will call you when I have something else on that little matter. Thanks for the time, Ted." He left with Ridgeway.

I watched as they walked down the corridor together.



CHAPTER 11

I had most of the facility shut down for the weekend and gave everyone except the security staff, two research scientists, Jack and myself, a three-day weekend. Surprisingly, a lot of the folks grumbled about it, wanting to continue what they were doing on the “Device” side of the house.

On Friday night, I had the staff and Jack meet me in the hanger bay. The order of the day was for soft clothes and tennis shoes.

“Here is the deal. The last two times I crawled into this thing I have lost several hours. The first time I lost twenty some and the next time just about ten hours. So that’s what is happening. I have been working on the problem and may have some answers for us, but we need to try it under controlled conditions, with witnesses this time. Hal, you and Ed are going to stay in the hanger bay at all times. If one of us needs to take a leak or do something else the other one stays in and keeps notes on what is happening to the craft. Understood?” I waited for the two men to think through the process and nod.

“What are we looking for boss?” Hal, a young and very bright engineer had been with us for a couple of years right out of college and had been doing good work in the miniaturization of the device.

“Anything, everything, whatever. Any kind of movement, behavior or anomaly. I don’t know if this thing changes color or makes a sound or squeaks when you squeeze it. So you two okay with that?” I waited.

“Yes, sir.” Harris answered. He’d come over from the old Montauk project, and he had good standing as a physicist, but for the life of me I couldn’t remember him from my days with Bates.

“You two, I want outside the door. Same deal, one of you is always there. In the last set of experiments, I found that the guys sitting on the other side of the door weren’t affected. But if this thing puts out a gravity wave of some kind, and Harris and Hal here are caught in it, they won’t be able to leave. You guys are the secondary recorders. Keep your log on a basis of how many times they come out or if they do come out at all. But, and I repeat, but; don’t come in here unless you believe we are in danger. I can’t explain that any better. You are going to have to make a judgment call. I believe both of you are good enough to do that for me.” I nodded at the two hard looking men in uniforms and they responded with their normal impassive response of nodding once.

“What about me, Ted?” Jack stood with a clipboard in his hand.

“You my friend are taking a ride with me. You know a heck of a lot more than I do about flying and I want to see if we can find out how this thing operates.” I winked at him.

“I have no idea how to fly this bucket and you know it!” Jack looked stunned.

“Yup. But you know about ground reference and night flying. Right now that’s what we need on board.” I motioned to the two security officers. They went over to the main hanger doors and opened them up.

"If we get this thing up, are you really planning to take it outside?" Jack was stuttering.

"I have a cordon of other security personnel around the perimeter of the field in jeeps and vehicles to keep anyone away. We'll be all right out on the tarmac or just above it. But the first part is to see if we can get this to work in zero time." I walked over and popped the lid on the craft.

"Zero time? I haven't heard that before." Jack walked over and looked inside, like it was filled with lepers.

"That is because no one has figured out that this ship can move forward, backwards and sideways in time. Sideways makes it a zero time ship. You move through distances without moving through time." I crawled up into the back seat and waited for Jack to mount the flight control seat.

"You know, you aren't paying me to be a test pilot. Those guys are over at Edward's in California and they do this for a living." Jack climbed in, almost doubling over his six foot three frame, then he squatted in the chair looking ridiculous, like a circus clown riding a tricycle. He gave me a funny exasperated look and was just about to get up out of frustration when the seat morphed and adjusted perfectly around his body. "Oh, yeah!" He exclaimed with delighted surprise. "Can I get these in my Corvette?"

I gave the thumbs-up to the two men standing alertly in the hanger bay and they took their places at the table and chairs I had brought in from the cafeteria.

"Nice isn't it?" I said over to Jack. "Just like a recliner."

"Or a coffin." Jack mused darkly as he ran his hands all over the surfaces to feel the materials.

"The last guy in here with me died." With one more thumbs-up to the crew I hit the control to lower the hatch and watched as it lowered then went transparent.

"Thanks I needed that." Jack lifted his hands up and held them in clear view. "What do I do?"

"Place this over the middle console and wait." I handed him the plastic template I'd kept with me for almost two years. We could both watch the guys sitting at the main table. They had stopwatches running and were making notes. The largest hanger bay doors in the world rolled open and the two security officers took their places by each one. The night outside was high desert crystal clear and the sky was alive with a brilliant, pulsing blanket of stars.

"Console is up. Template engaged." Jack sounded like he was in a normal cockpit.

"Hit the middle button, top row. Depress it and hold it for three seconds." I hoped I was right.

"Middle button, top row. Engaged. Holding, 1, 2, 3 and released." Jack and I waited and visually we could see the craft lift off the ground and rise relative to the hanger surrounding us, but there was absolutely no sensation of lifting or movement.

"Check the desk. Are they still watching? Are they moving?" I asked Jack.

"Yes."

"Side of the console. Left side. Should be a protruding knob." I sat back and closed my eyes for a moment thinking it through.

"Got it. Left side." Jack took a deep breath and braced himself sinking deeper into the seat with a leathery crunch.

"Okay...slight pressure forward. Think about it like a joystick, but at a skewed angle. Forward, reverse, left and right. Left will be down and right..."

"Up!" Jack said, excited. I opened my eyes and watched as we jumped towards the ceiling, almost crashing into it, then leveled off into a hover.

"Whoa, Nelly! Easy, Hoss! This thing is designed for open spaces, so don't do anything too radical." I made a couple of notes on the clipboard in my lap.

“Velvet.” Jack said.

“What?”

“It’s smooth, like velvet, baby! If it works like this it would be really easy to fly, I think.” Jack held his hands up so I could see them from behind.

“If you feel comfortable, take it out Major Thompson!” I smiled to myself.

“You are kidding me, right?” Jack half turned in his seat to look back at me.

“I wouldn’t want to try it out in space just yet, but what the hell, take it around the block and see what it feels like.” I saw him reach down and lay his hands on the control like he was making love to a woman.

“What about base control over at 51? We’ll be on their radar as soon as we’re out of the hanger.”

“I told control we’d be working a project tonight without radio, so anything that comes up out of here tonight has priority airspace. They have cleared the skies for us.” I wanted to see the truth in action and here was my chance.

“Well, what the hell. I’m gonna fly me a goddamn UFO!” Jack pushed the knob slightly and headed out of the hanger. As we passed the men at the desk they were standing and watching. Hal had a camera recording the flight.

Once outside, Jack let it hover for a moment and then accelerated into a slight climb. In seconds we were looking down at the lights of the base and in the distance the lights of Las Vegas. He made a slow roll to the left over the mountains and then back around over the bombing range south of our facility. Then he gently brought it down to the deck and pushed up the speed. Moving in tight circles, he moved it right back to the front of the hanger bay, took it inside and sat it down in the same spot we started from.

He was like a student pilot who had just soloed for the first time. Jack was laughing his ass off and whooping like an Apache when we opened the hatch. I was a little more reserved and concerned since now there were three men standing in the hanger bay awaiting our return.

* * * * *

As the hatch locked into the open position, Jack slid out and I followed. I looked up into the face of George Bellamy standing next to the technicians. I didn’t have time for this right now, but my first concern was getting the marked time to know how we did. I walked to the table.

“Hal, how long have we been gone?”

“What?” Hal answered.

“What!” I exploded at him. “How much time’s elapsed while we were airborne? That’s what you were supposed to be doing here!”

“Boss?” He looked from me to Bellamy and back, utterly baffled. “You haven’t gone anywhere! You’ve been inside that thing, maybe, two minutes. You closed the hatch, this man walked in, then you opened it back up.”

I looked at Bellamy, wearing a very special visitors badge, indicating to the technicians that he was not to be asked any questions at all. He motioned for me to walk with him and Jack followed.

“What happened?”

I looked at my watch and held it up to his. He looked down and smiled.

“Twenty one minutes, difference. I am living that much ahead of the two of you in time.” Bellamy walked over to the desk and looked at the electronic timer on the table and compared it to his own watch. “On the money. Same thing.”

“Gentlemen, thank you. You may take off for the weekend.” I regained my composure as both men, who were now in a state of mystification, walk out of the hanger with their notepads under their arms, whispering to each other.

"I wanted to get here for the trial," Bellamy said softly, "but I got lost driving over here from Five-One. Had to have security escort me to the main building entrance and by then you guys were inside the craft."

"Jack," I said, having a thought, "check the security guards in the hallway." He trotting over to the door then came back.

"Same thing. It was not an isolated event within the radius of the craft." Jack was beaming.

"I ask again, what happened?" Bellamy pulled out his pipe and lit it.

"We took the craft outside, flew it over the base, down to Warm Springs and back up across the bombing range at what seemed like Mach 2." Jack told him.

"So...it flies?" Bellamy almost dropped his pipe. "You got it up?"

"Not only that, but we did it in a reversal of time." I was making notes on my clipboard. "What seems like twenty minutes to us was really running backwards here. The last two times I tried this thing out, I lost time. But this time we were able to take it out, make the test run and come back and only two minutes passed in this local area. The time wave was kept inside the ship and in that way we could move through time, without a distortion field happening in a forward motion. But we still didn't get to zero-time movement." I looked at Jack.

"That means there is one more setting in there we may have missed." Jack walked back toward the ship and pulled out the template.

"The clock was running for you inside the craft but was not running here, did I get that right?" Bellamy asked.

"Correct, but that was not the experiment I wanted to conduct. I needed to see if we could do it and not have any time movement at all." I wondered what I had missed.

"Maybe you did. Hold on." Bellamy walked over to the red wall telephone and called someone and spoke very animatedly for several minutes. He hung up and laughed as he came back over to us.

"What's going on, Boss?" Jack asked.

"Well, you were right and wrong about the experiment. Twenty-one minutes passed for you in the craft, two minutes passed here on the deck. But I just spoke to the main tower up on Bald Mountain and they have a recorded radar tape showing you were airborne for..." he paused for dramatic effect, "one hour and forty-two minutes." Jack and I both shared slack jawed glances. "They are screaming bloody murder, wanting to know what we're testing over here, because of the moves and 90 degree angles you were flying at." Bellamy thought for a minute. "We need to get someone over there and get that tape. The controller told me you hit a surface altitude of fifty-two thousand feet in less than two minutes and you almost went off the track twice, once south and the other time east. That is close to three hundred air miles."

"But Boss," Jack said, now pretty confused, "we turned around at about five thousand feet over Las Vegas." Jack looked hard at him, now thinking his leg was being pulled.

"Try Barstow on for size, at forty-one thousand feet, right through the transcontinental flight path. Two reports of a UFO were filed by two separate jetliners." Bellamy started to walk back into the complex.

"Get out the slide rules boys." He waited at the doorway for us to catch up. "You got some more work to do."



CHAPTER 12

Ellen was still up when Jack, Bellamy and I walked into the living room of our home. She looked up from where she was sitting on the couch, reading a magazine.

"GB, what are you doing here?" She neither looked surprised, happy or shocked. She was running most of the time in neutral these days and it was no different tonight.

"I decided I'd avail myself of your husband's offer of dinner and a bed for the night. I hope that's alright?" Bellamy walked over and took her hand in his and stared deeply into her eyes for what seemed like an extended, uncomfortable moment.

"Of course it is." She said, her voice still dead even. "Glad you came. I told Maria to hold off until Ted got home for dinner, so I will get her working on it." Ellen got up and walked to the kitchen. "Why don't you make our friends a drink, Ted." She left the room. Jack and GB exchanged knowing and worried glances. They had been at this stuff much longer than I.

"The words are right. But the body language is out of context." GB said off handedly. Jack nodded, looking worried.

"She's been a little distant of late." I said, not wanting to make too much of it. Both men looked at me. "Probably just stress. She's been through a lot recently. Drinks, gentlemen?" I went over to the bar trying to change the subject and poured everyone a stiff one. By the time Ellen came back everyone had taken a chair and was holding their glasses.

"Would you like one, Ellen?" I asked her.

"No." She sat back down on the couch and picked up her magazine. "How did the test go tonight?" She said to Jack.

"We flew it. It does some incredible stuff. But the time factor has all of us confused." Jack sipped his drink.

"We?" She asked looking at me.

"Jack and I." I answered her scrutinizing look.

"That is just plain stupid!" She spit out at me, like venom from a cobra. "You have no idea what you are dealing with! You both could have ended up on the other side of the galaxy, or lost, not knowing what to do! Jesus Christ, George! How could you allow them to do that?" She turned on Bellamy with the same rage she exhibited towards me.

"It is what we do." I countered, trying to get her attention back on me.

"No, it isn't!" She stood up, screaming at us. "You manipulate people's lives! You twist the truth and call it protection! You're more than willing to kill anyone who would come between you and the power you so desperately crave!" She flew completely off the handle. "I was THERE when you told Harvey he could kill Dr. Ridgeway! KILL Doctor Ridgeway, if he thought it was necessary! And you did it like you were ordering a goddamn pizza to go! Not like you were ordering the MURDER of a PERSON! My God, Ridgeway was one of the most harmless men I've ever met!! And you... THUGS... just had him, what they say in the mafia... RUBBED OUT!"

"That's not a totally accurate statement, Ellen, but don't let me interfere in a family fight." Bellamy drank his drink and got up. "I think I'll pass on dinner and get a room in Vegas. Thanks anyway." He started for the door.

"What exactly is THAT supposed to mean, Boss One?" She screamed at his back. He slowly, ominously, turned to face her.

"In your present state of mind, I do not know that I want to answer that question, because you probably wouldn't listen to reason." He thought for a moment. "But since you asked, and you are obviously concerned, and out of respect for you, Ellen, I will tell you. Dr. Ridgeway has disappeared. He has not gone missing. He has simply vanished, literally into thin air, and not I, nor anyone else, have the slightest idea of where he is or what's happened to him. Harvey relocated him to Atlanta. We bought him a mansion, gave him an unlimited Treasury Direct Black debit card, put a few million in his bank account and even set up college funds for all his grandchildren. He gave us a list of everything he wanted and we set up a state of the art laboratory according to his exact specifications. He was overjoyed on his first day at work, was happily working in his new lab for a grand total of six minutes. He was there and then he was gone. That was four days ago. That is why I am here now, to find out if anyone else is experiencing any major changes."

"They took him!" Ellen brought her hand up to her mouth in horror.

"Who took him, Ellen?" I asked and she looked at me with terror in her eyes.

"They did! The ones that..." She stopped talking.

"How do you know?" Bellamy spoke very quietly to her.

"I know. He'll be going through...the same thing...that I..." Suddenly, she collapsed in the middle of the room, like a puppet with the strings cut. I was beside her as quickly as Jack was, checking her pulse as he looked in her eyes. She began to convulse with her eyes wide open. Bellamy whipped off his leather belt and jammed it in her mouth to keep her from biting off her tongue.

"Call the base hospital!" Bellamy barked at Jack as he helped me pick her up and put her on the couch. "I want a smash team on a chopper and her in it in less than fifteen on my authority, is that understood?"

"Sir!" Jack grabbed the phone and dialed.

"Have an isolation ward established and call Harv. Have him get his fat ass out here now. Tell him to forget Big Bird. Use one of the Interceptors. I want him here at Mach 5!" Bellamy looked up at me. "I need your permission to use one of the compounds that will open up her mind and allow us to find out what happened to her in Santa Fe."

"Tell me it won't hurt her." I pleaded. Bellamy just shook his head.

"I can't do that. I can tell you if we don't go in and pull that shit out of her head and replace it with something different, she'll self-destruct in a matter of weeks, maybe days. They did something to her and she needs help, right now." Bellamy stood up and looked at Jack.

"They're airborne, en route." Jack went into the kitchen to speak to Maria.

"You've seen this before?" I asked Bellamy.

He nodded his head and rubbed his jaw. "Yeah. Unfortunately. If what happened to her is what I think occurred she's carrying enough trauma in there to kill a dozen people." Bellamy waited for a few moments until Jack came back. "Have the flight crew on the chopper isolated for at least seventy-two hours and seal the base once we have her inside."

"Got it, boss." Jack left for a moment, then came back dressed in his uniform, including his sidearm.

"Harvey is the best there is at doing a mind probe using the bug juice. I'll have two shrinks standing by. She'll have the very best on this planet. But Ted," Bellamy took me by the shoulders and looked me in the face, pulling me close, looking ugly

and monstrous now. “I don’t want you in the room. You can’t hear this until we’re through.”

“I can’t do that, George!” I protested, feeling a tide of anger rising from a well of helplessness. “She’s my wife!”

“She’s an integral part of our team.” Bellamy said. “I could order it, but I won’t. I am asking you...as a friend. Don’t put yourself through this. Hearing what she’s been through will...change you. It’s like rape, times a hundred. You’ll never be able to look at her the same way again. It could destroy whatever you have together and I don’t want to see that happen.” He thought for a long moment. “If you really want, I’ll let you listen to the tape when we’re done.” Bellamy pulled a small vial from his pocket and took two pills, swallowing them with his glass of booze.

“Alright,” I conceded, “but don’t edit them.”

“I wouldn’t think of it. It’s just when she’s going through the release, it won’t be pretty and you’d want us to stop and we can’t. I don’t want her to associate you with anything we have to do.” Bellamy turned his head at the sound of running feet.

“Crash team, Boss.” Jack opened the door and pointed to Ellen who was now unconscious on the couch, still foaming at the mouth.

“Treat her easy boys, that’s an order.” Bellamy looked at the lead paramedic who turned and looked at Thompson in uniform and sidearm and realized this civilian was in charge.

“Yes, sir.” He pulled the gurney up next to her and three of them lifted her gently, as if they were picking up a dozen eggs.

“Ted,” Bellamy said, barking orders again, “come with me. Jack, seal this place; post guards. Follow us to the base then have it sealed from the entrance inwards.”

Bellamy put his hand on the stretcher next to Ellen as we walked out to the waiting chopper parked in the middle street in the quiet neighborhood. The night then filled with the whirling sounds of accelerating rotors lifting off.



CHAPTER 13

Sitting in my office, I tried to make like I was working. It was 0300, the soul's midnight. My ashtray overflowed and I couldn't drink another cup of coffee. I felt like that guy on the coffee and cigarette fourteen-day weight loss program. Being wired was not my favorite feeling, and tonight was no exception. I looked around the room at the pictures I'd hung years before, mostly of experimental aircraft. It was designed to camouflage the real intent of the work I did here and make it look like a normal office in some section of the R & D part of government. But there was nothing normal about my world. For years I'd abjured normal research wandering far outside the classic cathedral walls of establishment science for this iconoclastic, God forsaken rabbit hole I'd tumbled down. I realized in so many ways, in this dark night of the soul, that Bates had been right on that night he tried to warn me all those years ago: this work ruins lives.

I thought about my father, Bates' ultimate doom, Sally Jennings, Matt Reilly, Max, Admiral Jacobs, Sir Charles, Irina, my beloved little Pasha and now my darling Ellen, and so many more that I couldn't even remember. All of them victims. All of them offered up as sacrifices on the same altar to some angry god that commanded we were the one and only true church, that only we were righteous and that we had the right to destroy any life to gain our ends. But this night, the faces returned with a haunting vengeance, wrapped in a shroud of betrayal of all that I believed and once held sacred.

I tried to push the thoughts away, but they stormed in like a great horde having their way with me. I was one of the architects of this madness and I didn't know how to turn the machine off that I started so many years ago. I wondered where would it all end?

"Where it should." A voice came from the hallway. I jerked open my desk drawer and pulled out the small automatic, pointing it towards the sound.

"Who's there?" I yelled, jumping up and pushing my chair back hard against the bookshelf behind me.

"Just some old harmless friend, thas' all." The black janitor I'd seen all those years before at Cal Tech, walked into my office. The one who'd given me the equation that set me on the path I was on. In so many ways, he was the real architect of either my destiny or my destruction. He was still dressed exactly the same, in his dark uniform and red rag sticking out of his back pocket. "May I sit down, Dr. Humphrey?" I lowered my arms and the gun clattered to the floor as I, literally, no longer had the strength to hold it. I could only gape at him like a trout gasping for air.

"I-I- know...you." I burbled out at last. "That night...in my office when you added the equations....to my calculations..."

"Thas right, boss. Been awhile now hasn't it. Sit down, son. Please sit down and pick up that cap gun and put it away. Won do you no good no how anyways. If I was here ta hurtcha, you'd be dead and gone by now." He smiled with a full set of white

teeth against his beaming dark chocolate brown face. “Go ahead. Pull the trigger. See if I’m lying.”

I was regaining my strength and courage now. I picked up the gun, pointed it directly at his head, point blank, and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.

“Now that was mighty unfriendly.” Still smiling, he reached across the desk and took the gun from my hand, popped out the clip, and expertly ejected the round, plucking it out of the air. He placed all the items in the OUT basket on my desk.

“See? Wasn’t lying to you. Never have, never will.” He smiled again and laughed.

“Who are you?” I sat down slowly still not sure I wasn’t dreaming all this.

“Me? Names don’t mean much. Call me Charlie. Yeah, Charlie’s as good a name as any. Got a nice ring to it.” He offered me a stick of gum. “Better for you than those coffin nails.”

I just continued to stare.

“Suit yourself.” He put the package back in his pocket and smiled.

“So, what do you want?” My curiosity began to overcome my shock.

“Don’t want nothin’. Just stopped by ta tell ya a couple a things. First, Miss Ellen’s gonna be fine. Those two old boys over yonder, in the base hospital, they know their stuff, yes sir-ee. Oh the tape? It’s gonna be pretty bad. But when she come ‘round, she won’ ‘member none of it. It’ll all be gone and then you gots your little darlin’ back, safe and sound. But if I was you, and I ain’t, but if I was, I’d keep Miss Ellen out of dis place for sure and for good.” Charlie smiled and looked around. “Well I gotta be going. Got rounds to make.”

“What are you?” I had to ask.

“Me?” Charlie smiled and looked up. “I’m a thought that’s been amplified and moves through atoms with the ease and lightness of air. I am only a mere reflection of someone else’s thoughts.” He smiled again. “It’s a poem I read once. Oh, mercy! I almost forgot. I was asked to give you somethin’.” He pulled a folded piece of paper from his pocket and laid it down on the desk in front of me. “You have three choices in all of life. You can accept, you can reject or you can abstain from making any decision. But the game is about choices, not about the results those choices lead to.” Charlie got up and wiped his hands on the red rag and smiled at me again.

“Who sent you?” I stood up.

“Listen to you! All fulla questions that don’t make no nevermind. There are folks that care about you, sunny boy, and they ain’t gonna let you get hurt in all of this.” He stopped and twisted his head. “Now I’ve gone and said enough for one day. Gots to be about my business.” He walked out of the office humming, closing the door behind him.

I dove for the door, flinging it open then darted into the hallway. It was dark and empty. I ran up to the lobby and there was no one there. I considered calling security at the main entrance, but knew better. Charlie didn’t work in this facility and probably wasn’t here at all.

I sat down at my desk again. I reloaded my gun and tossed it in the drawer. Then very carefully I unfolded the paper. The work was all carefully done by hand. It was a fine engineering drawing of the fully completed small device we had been working so hard to build. It had all the components labeled and shown in scale. It made perfect sense, once I had looked at it three different times. Everything I had missed had been placed on the drawing and it showed the interrelationship to each item. Someone wanted me to have the device and knew the way I was going about it was all trial, error and plain dumb luck. Obviously someone, or some thing, couldn’t wait that long. This single drawing took five years off our program in one night. I refolded it and put it in my pocket. I slipped into my jacket and headed out for the lobby. I was going to drive

over and see what Bellamy and Dr. Harvey Gilpsen had done to the inside of my wife's head. I realized this was the first time Jack hadn't been with me in a long time.

I'd been all alone in a deserted building, just like the night at Cal Tech, all those grains of sand ago.

* * * * *

Harv looked like he'd been dragged through a keyhole backwards or teleported somewhere inside out. His shirt was rumpled and his eyes were bloodshot, behind his glasses. Bellamy had gotten someone to get him a surgical top and had changed into it, leaving his jacket and dress shirt somewhere in the building. His arms, now exposed, showed scars all up and down. I realized he'd been through some tough times as well.

"This isn't pretty laddie buck," Harv sat back drinking what had to be his sixtieth cup of coffee for the day and lit a cigarette taking a drag like someone that had been underwater for 3 minutes gulping air. "You sure you want to hear it?"

I turned to Bellamy. "Before you start I want a couple of questions answered."

"Shoot." He said flatly.

I tossed out my question to see what would happen and gage their reactions. "Do we have a dead alien body anyplace?"

"That's a damn strange question, considering what we're here for." Harv planted his hands on his knees and twisted his head, like I was an insect ready for dissection.

Bellamy turned, looking at me questioningly. "We do. Why?"

"Can I have it? To take apart?"

"If you feel it will aide your mission here, of course, but that still doesn't answer my question: why?" Bellamy never changed his tone.

"Take a look at this." I handed him the folded paper. He looked at it and then refolded it and handed it back to me.

"Let's cut around the corners shall we, Ted. What do you want to know?" Bellamy sat back.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" Harv got up and slammed his fist into the table. "You two want to just go outside and duke it out or something? What in the hell is going on here? We just took Ellen's brains apart in there. Isn't anyone going to even ask how she fucking IS?"

"Calm down, Harv." Bellamy looked up at him and pointed to the chair. "You are witnessing a rare moment in history. A quantum leap in the evolution of Mankind, right before your very eyes. Ted already knows what's on that tape, don't you?"

"Not word for word, but she was abducted, taken aboard a spaceship of some kind and they performed a medical or neurological exam that was none too pleasant, I would imagine." I sat back, waiting. "Then you guys have gone in pulled it all out of her and then scrambled the memory in such a way she won't remember any of it, even in her dreams. That is what's been going on, I believe. Flashbacks to the episode in her dream state as nightmares and she's been repressing them in her waking state. In fact, she spent so much time repressing them, she's lost contact with the day-to-day world. She has been working in overdrive just to maintain."

"I could give you all the medical terms for it, but you're right." Bellamy said. "It's no different than someone who's been raped. Forced to submit out of fear and probed, little gray bastards pushing silver instruments into every cavity and recess in her body. She's been defiled, degraded and humiliated beyond most people's endurance and then drugged up with something that will keep it out of her thoughts in the daytime. But the human mind works to recall these things out of survival, and that happens when our defenses are down, at night, when we sleep." Bellamy walked over and poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Where did that come from?" Bellemy pointed at the folded diagram on the table.

"Two hours ago, I was alone in my office. A black janitor walked in and offered me a piece of gum. Then he handed me this and told me someone was looking out for me. Oh, did I mention I tried to shoot him in the head and the gun wouldn't fire?" Bellamy looked at Harv, who raised his hand in a gesture of resignation.

"I'll have a security team sweep the place from top to bottom and personally shoot anyone that let someone in there." Jack reached for the phone on the wall. He was reacting as my safety was his concern and he would ultimately be held responsible for anyone getting that close to me when I had been left alone for only a few hours.

"Don't bother, Jack. He was never there." I turned to where Bellamy was standing. "Was he George?"

"They come and go, without leaving a trace." He sat down at the end of the table. Rubbing his hands through his hair. "I've been meeting with one for the last three years. They have a rule of non-interference for the most part. But your guy is breaking the rules."

"Exactly what are we talking about?" Harv was turning redder by the moment. "He says some phantom was in his office and you start talking like he is the normal one in the room. Listen you two, I haven't slept in thirty hours. I just finished working over a wonderful gal in there that I happen to love as much as my own daughter. I had to listen to her say things that make me want to rip the guts out of the first alien son of a bitch I can lay my hands on and you two are talking like you would like to take them to a Yankee's game for hot dogs and beer. What the fuck?"

"Why? Do you want one?" Bellamy ignored the man, who threw up his hands and sat back folding his arms across his chest.

"Are they living beings?"

Bellamy smiled sardonically at the question. "They are...alive. By definition."

"Are they biological machines or computers?" I asked.

"As close as we can figure, yes. They are programmed for certain functions. They operate on a group hive mentality with a shared consciousness and are simple constructs in their views." Bellamy pulled his pipe out and started to play with it.

"Do they reason?" I asked, probing deeper.

"No. They do not have that capacity. They have no concept of individuality or self. They have no moral structure or ethical principals to drive them. They are the closest thing we have ever seen to a living automated system. They have a life span of several years and they are created fully-grown. They have no genitals and are neither male or female. They have no drive whatsoever except for the program that is running. Does that answer your questions without you having to tear one apart with your bare hands?" Bellamy looked up at me.

"Then who, exactly, went nuts at the Dulce Mesa? Down in the Hive?" My question hung in the air for a moment and then Harv reacted.

"Say that again...very slowly." Harv looked at me.

"You heard him." Bellamy interrupted Harv sternly. "That is the question I've been laboring over for two years now. It doesn't make sense to me, either."

"They have no will, no volition of their own. So someone, or some thing, told them to take Ellen. They also figured by taking Ridgeway they'd throw us off track for a while longer. Then Charlie, the magical time travelling janitor shows up, with this." I pointed at the paper on the table. "And everything becomes crystal fucking clear. Reversal! It's been staring me in the face for years! Reversal! My dad did it when he changed the size of his device, making it smaller. Kammmler did the same and figured it out without ever telling his bosses. Simon Ratterman used it and disappeared into the timestream of our future or past. Our friends did the same thing. We were going in one direction, the right direction and Tugy wanted to push us in another. That's why he ordered Ellen taken and why they took Ridgeway. He hoped we'd all start going

down the wrong track, hunting down abductees and everybody taken aboard their ships. The exams mean nothing! They're all a misdirection, trying to keep us from asking the right questions."

"Have you ever felt like you walked into a movie half way through and missed the opening, so you don't know what the hell is going on?" Harv looked up at Jack.

"Often and tonight is one of those."

"I'll fill in the blanks for both of you later." Bellamy turned back to me. "What's our next move?"

"Make it work, and find out who *they* are." I offered up quietly.

Bellamy raised an eyebrow. "Go inside the Hive?"

"All the way in." I got up and started to leave. "By the way, thank you. Both of you, for taking care of Ellen." I walked over to the room she was resting in. I sat down next to her bed and held her hand. The nurse came in.

"She'll be out for hours. You look like you could use some sleep, too." She told me.

"I am fine right here, thank you." She walked back out of the room. "Right where I belong."

I kissed her hand and started to cry.



CHAPTER 14

Ellen was recovering from the whole ordeal at home. I had spent a few days with her until she pushed me out of the house and back to work. She seemed to be recovering remarkably well. She told me she needed a few weeks to get the gumption up to come back on board at the laboratory and take back over her responsibilities. I patronized her about that issue, but it was pretty clear to me I didn't want her working on this right now. Somebody had taken the gloves off and this was going to be a bare knuckles fight if there ever was one, and I wanted her clear of it. The only chips on the table now were all black and I thought, right or wrong, this game was too rich for her blood.

Harv agreed to stay on and work the small device project for a week or so, until I was better able to concentrate on it and get it going forward in a fashion that would be acceptable to Bellamy. The lingering question for me right now, the mystery that consumed me, was what was in the pit at the Dulce Archeleta Mesa? What was down on Levels Green-4, Blue-5, Indigo-6 and Violet-7? Who was hitting our people so hard? And who were they and where were our "Visitors" really coming from?

The last two might be the hardest to answer. The first I resolved to find out even if I had to rip and tear that facility asunder with my bare hands and a team of crack Marine Raiders and Army Rangers. This was what I was thinking about when I pulled into the parking lot and saw the main hanger bay doors open. I parked and cleared security for the fourth time and walked over toward the hanger. Inside was a small group of men in business suits walking around the sleek silver Sport Model. The other craft were covered with silver tarpaulins and lashed down. Bellamy was walking the men around the craft.

Each had a pad and took notes. Bellamy turned and greeted me at my approach. "Good morning." He smiled in his twisted sort of way. "How is Ellen?"

"Much better. We need to talk later, when we're alone." I walked up to the group. Two of them turned and nodded without speaking, checking various surfaces and touching different parts of the craft.

"These gentlemen are with the Ravenswood group at Wright-Patterson. He thinks now that you've shown it can fly, they might be able to figure out some of the flight dynamics of the systems." He spoke without confidence.

"Great. I would love someone to tell me how it works in flight or on the ground." I excused myself and walked into the main building, after checking in with security. Harv was in the hallway, his hand wrapped around a coffee mug, speaking to Jack, who was already in his office.

"Bout time you showed up, you goldbricker." Harv finished his last couple of sentences with Jack and followed me into my office.

"What is that all about?" I jerked my thumb toward the hanger bay.

"That, m'boy, is called politics. GB is making sure everyone is on the same page, so all of us can work off it. Those guys up at Wright-Pat are screaming bloody Jesus about funding going our way and the guy over in that house in DC is leaning heavy on the financial guys to account for every dime. We're playing along right now, but I

promise you that peanut farming clown is not going to get re-elected. Seems like a lot of news coverage came out after your little joyride the other night and some folks in high places are being asked questions they don't want to answer. So, GB has turned it around; told them about the breakthrough we made and is trying to pour as much oil on the water as he can. That's why he's here, doing the dog and pony show." Harv splashed part of his coffee on the floor and never noticed.

"I really thought we were immune from any oversight." I sat down behind my desk after wiping up the coffee.

"Well, yes and no. Since we serve directly at the pleasure of the President, we have to make certain concessions now and then. This is one of those times." Harv laughed.

"He doesn't know anything about the rest of this does he?" I looked up at him.

"Oh, hell no!" Harv coughed while laughing and almost choked. "You think anybody is going to tell that Bible thumper we're dealing with your little gray pal or that we're working night and day to keep this planet in one piece? Shit, he'd be on his knees looking for divine guidance, wanting to meet with Lord Tugy to convert his ass to Jesus. Could you imagine that? No, we're handing them something everyone in the inner circle already knows about, so it's really no big deal. Your flight proved we're doing something with the craft nobody else has. That'll keep 'em off our backs long enough to get some kind of Right Wing Reactionary in that big White House who wants to bomb, pillage and plunder half the galaxy and look to us for the insight on how to do it."

"Since you mention bombing and pillaging, I have a serious question for you." I watched as Jack stepped in and leaned on the doorframe. He nodded to me and I waved at him.

"Dulce?" Harv asked after sitting in one of the two chairs across from me.

"How did you guess?" I smiled sardonically at him.

"A little birdie told me. Scarface himself out there has been waiting for you to ask. You probably want to take the Marine Corps third division down that hell hole with you and forcibly get some real answers." Harv put his coffee cup down and pulled his notebook out of his shirt pocket.

"Can we do it and get away with it?" I asked.

"I'll take point and lead the charge, boss." Jack smiled at me.

"You would? Shit," Harv snorted, "you would do about anything right now to get out of flying that desk across the hall. Probably get yourself shot up and expect someone to get you the Congressional Medal of Honor in the process." Harv looked up at the man. "I thought you worked for me and were supposed to do what I told you to do, no matter what." Harv was alluding to the task assigned to him to watch me and do whatever was necessary if I step over that invisible and non-defined line.

"Things change. So do people." Jack looked down hard at the man in the chair.

"Now you would probably kill my ass, if he told you too." Harv pointed at me.

"I would think really hard on it, let's just leave it at that." Jack actually laughed out loud.

"This is a fine kettle of fish. Junior here wants to whack Tugy and company. You're supposed to make sure this young'en stays in line, now you're ready to help him and I'm the bad guy. What happened? Did everyone get the memo and I was excluded this time?" Harv picked up his coffee cup and acted hurt.

"Can we do it is the question, not may we. Should we do it just to get some answers?" I wanted to see Jack leading the raiding party with me right behind him. I found I was starting to hate certain things in the universe and wanted to strike out at them. I wanted them to feel the same fear at their front door that they had brought to ours. I wanted a few of them waking up nights, shaking in fear. I smelled pipe smoke coming down the hallway and Bellamy walked up and touched Jack to stand easy.

“Yes. But we need to plan it very carefully.” Bellamy looked down at Harv and then back to me. “I am working out the details and we will all sit down and shred the plan until we have it airtight. Then we will execute it.”

“I wanted you to tell him.” Harv smiled to himself.

“I know. We all walked away the other night from your insightful questions and had to do some soul searching as to why we had not tumbled to this before. If Tugy’s their leader, there should never be a protest of any kind from them. If he is their front man, then who, indeed, is in the pit? You said something else that got me thinking. ‘Reversal’. That was the term you used. What if someone decided to do to all of us what we have done here? Ratterman, and that bitch, Ann Corbett; they could be working for someone who has given them protection, assistance and aid in the process. So what we have been told is not the case at all, but some other group is working down in the hole at Dulce, and doing something far different than their stated, or agreed to, purpose.” Bellamy looked out and down the hallway to make sure no one was there. “If that is the case then who is ‘Charlie the Magic Janitor’ working for? And why is someone so interested in making sure you are alive and well, as well as working on a small version of the device.” He pointed at me. “It doesn’t serve certain people’s interest, that much is clear; so we have to assume there are two or three groups playing us against the middle.” He paused and collected his thoughts.

“Two or three?” I asked.

“Yes. Do you ever listen to the radio and hear Paul Harvey. He always finishes his program with the phrase, ‘And that is the rest of the story’.” Bellamy smiled to himself. “So this is the rest of the story for me. I’ve been meeting with a representative from another group of ‘Travelers’, as they call themselves, interested in the welfare of the local universe around these parts. They cannot get involved, but they can warn and assist us up to the point of violating a protocol established by some other, more powerful, group. That much I know. He comes and goes occasionally, offering me tidbits of information. Much like your visitor, Charlie, he’s benign and only wants to help us. I saw him recently and asked some pointed questions about our neighbors in New Mexico at Dulce. He was reluctant to align himself with our effort, but then conceded that if we did have a battle engagement, it was his position there would be no retaliation, since that would upset the delicate balance of power.” Bellamy waited for reactions. “He assured me the evidence would be...revealing.”

“What in the hell is that suppose to mean?” Harv looked up dumbfounded.

“That the Colony or Hive at Dulce is not made up of grays, doing genetic research.” I offered up, a point I’d already gotten to.

“Then what the hell are they doing?” Jack interjected.

I looked at Bellamy long and hard, considering my next sentence very carefully.

“They are processing and storing.” I said without hearing how hard the words came out.

“I think so.” Bellamy answered with anger in his eyes.

“Is this going to be another one of those conversations where you two talk in Aramaic and Jack and I sit here looking ignorant?” Harv added.

“They are the front team. They’re setting up supply depots for a landing they are planning in a few years and they’re preparing for their people.” I didn’t acknowledge Harv’s comments at all.

“They’ve been at it for almost twenty years and they’ve got another thirty-two or so to go. Fifty years of supplies. Enough to keep a lot of beings going for years of deep space travel.” Bellamy actually winced.

“Raiders. Boat people, like the ones living in Hong Kong harbor. Always on the move, stripping one place and heading out towards another. They send in a team that sets up the center and then stores materials all over the planet in expectation of the

arrival. It's not energy or water or power they need." I stopped, stuttering at the ominous nature of the logic trail, and where it was heading.

"Raiders? Boat People? What are you guys talking about?" Harv looked bewildered. Jack wasn't doing much better and then I saw the spark hit him like a bullet between the eyes.

"To Serve Man!" The Twilight Zone episode, we all knew the reference; a story about aliens coming to this world and taking us to their home to serve us up as dinner.

"You're telling me they're taking people off the streets and not returning them? The treaty was about taking some here and there, removing genetic material, then putting them back, wasn't it?" Harv's eyes were tightening.

"It was, and we've been living under the belief this is what they've been doing. But I am with Ted at this point. I think they're canning us down there for a future group to use, as food stuffs for their next journey." Bellamy stood up straight and put his pipe away.

"We have got to know the truth." I looked at GB.

"We will. But none of you are going in there, is that clear? Not until we have complete and total control of that place." Bellamy turned and walked away down the hall.

"Jesus H. Kee-Rist in a fuzzy sweater! The man drops a bombshell like that and walks away." Harv got up and headed out into the hallway after him.

"That doesn't help us here, does it, Ted?" Jack sat down in the chair Harv had vacated.

"No. We still need to close the holes in space/time, and make sure we can defend ourselves against whatever is coming our way." I rubbed my eyes. "There's just one little problem we need to address. The big ones are how do we patch up the holes and get a system airborne that will protect us. Then we need to find out who is going around sticking these little gadgets in the back of our necks."

"Which one do we do first?" Jack took a cigarette out of his pack and then dropped it back in.

He pulled out a piece of gum from his pocket and unwrapped it.

"The Device. It has been and should be our first priority." I nodded to him and started going through the stack of papers on my desk.



CHAPTER 15

Someone once said; "Time flies when you're having fun". My own take on that old axiom is: "Time flies when you're up to your ass in alligators and trying to tread water at the same time." Dr. Harvey Gilpsen had been gone for six months with just the random phone call to ask how we were progressing on the device. I had not even been in the hanger bay to look at the ships. Bellamy had been silent as a tomb out on his island paradise in the Caymans and somehow during this period I started to feel I was no longer in the Third Boss position. Jack was pulling double duty, flying his desk and covering all of the material usually handled by Ellen. She was home doing whatever it was she occupied her time with during the long hot days of summer. I was sure the magazine bill she ran up would pay for half the national debt. No one could read that many fashion, women's and general interest articles. But she was making a herculean attempt to prove me wrong. Sitting by the pool, she had deepened her tan by a major percentage and each night I went home, she was doing the best Donna Reed impersonation I'd ever seen.

What had been most surprising was the fact that she never asked about what we were doing at the lab, with the exception of random and relatively unimportant personal questions about this person or that. She was sweet, kind, considerate and...vacant. I had what most men would consider the perfect wife. Never demanding, always understanding, accommodating to a fault and always there waiting at the door with a kiss and a drink in her hand. Jack was still with me most of the time. But when we got to the house, he would head over to his section in the separate wing and joined us very seldom for dinners or drinks or much of anything. I should have been happy. But I wasn't.

The device was progressing, but like all major scientific projects that require huge inputs of money, time and resources in regards to personnel, this one was moving along on schedule and in the dull tedium of making sure every resistor, capacitor and gauge of wire was correct, it was taking its toll on me. Our first scheduled run up of the device was well over a year away and yet there was a ton of paperwork that had to be done everyday to insure all the tees were crossed and the eyes dotted.

I found the cocktail at night before dinner was turning into two or three and the after dinner drink was becoming four or five. I was falling into bed by ten without caring if Ellen was next to me or not. She would stay up at night and watch Johnny Carson in the living room and then sometimes, actually most of the time, watch a late movie afterwards. Each morning I was up and gone before she was out of bed. A gentle kiss on her shoulder and I was out the door.

I had become a normal every day working stiff who just so happened to be working on one of the most important and interesting projects in the country, the world or for that matter in the history of the Human Race, and I really didn't care.

Now and then the discussion would come up about having a child. She thought it be would nice to have one. I never said anything, but I thought she and I would probably be better off getting a dog. I had two children; one I had never seen and the other I would probably never see again. That pain was enough to keep me from ever

wanting another. Besides, I had gone to the base physician and had a series of test for a recurring pain in my groin. The results were something that I didn't want to tell anyone, but someplace along the path I had been on, I had been exposed to enough radiation to impair my reproductive ability. I thought of the day at Dulce when Jack and I had met with Tugy after the firefight and realized that knowingly or unwittingly they'd exposed us to a large enough dosage of radiation to make sure that neither of us would ever have children again. Jack told me he had the same results on his tests, after I'd asked him to go in for a routine exam. The motility factor was almost nonexistent in both of us. Jack never spoke about it, being the good soldier he was, it was just another injury in a campaign, in a war no one else would ever be aware of.

I spent the afternoons in my office with the door closed, reading and re-reading my father's journals. All of them. I was trying to find what was not written on the pages. Things that were spoken of between the lines. I was searching for his frustration and how he coped with being out of the circle of power, when he was conducting research out in the desert by himself. Things were still not adding up for me. His knowledge of the project was so deep and extensive he had to know others would be working on the same thing, yet he never talked to anyone about it.

I had a staff of over a hundred scientists and related staff working away on something that was about the size of a shoe box and they were talking about five year programs to me.

With each reading of his journals, I became more certain that dad was working with someone else. His insights would make quantum jumps and then a whole new part of the device would be added. The notes never reflected the actual building of anything, but rather were filled with notes on theory, that could be translated into a working device, but something was missing; there had to be another journal, somewhere. The one that was the lab manual on how he was constructing the device itself. I wondered if someone had taken it and was why he went missing or, even a more wild thought, that he had taken it with him.

That was the day everything stopped for me. I was still under the belief that he had left, physically or through some time manipulation he had engineered. Never once, in all these years, did I think he was just lying out in the desert decomposing in a shallow grave where someone had tossed his lifeless corpse. My hypothesis had not been built on facts at all. I'd always presumed he was still alive somewhere. But on that summer day in 1980, I realized for the first time that he might, actually, be...dead.

I felt as though a ton of hard material had just been dropped on me. Everything I'd done, all my life, was secretly about finding him. I didn't realize it, for the most part, until that afternoon, but then slowly the thought took form and I realized in so many ways that I had sidetracked my own career and life, to follow a dream, or worse, an illusion, that might not be real.

Leaving the building without checking out with security, I walked in the hundred plus heat over towards the old test airstrip that sat a quarter of a mile from our laboratory. I put one foot in front of the other and walked the length of the seven-mile runway. I was only partially aware of the heat, the sun and the immense desert that surrounded this place.

I was sure where I was going, but now I had a new destination.



CHAPTER 16

Harv sat in the corner of the room reading a chart, when I opened my eyes. The room was shaded by the white Venetian blinds over the windows. The place had a decided smell of antiseptics. I laid in bed, my eyes barely open. “Hi, Harv.” I mumbled through the haze of drugs coursing through my system.

“Hi, my ass!” He looked up and closed the metal lid on the chart clipboard in his chubby hands. “What exactly was this stunt about anyway?”

“What stunt?” My mouth was really dry and I could feel my lips were cracked and hurt.

“What stunt’, he asks?” Harv got up and walked over to the sidetable and helped me get a drink of water out of the glass with the funny little white straw that had a bend in it. The water felt cold going down my throat. Lying back on the bed I realized I was in a hospital room, again. Harv pushed the button on the control to raise the bed slightly, then pulled his chair over next to the bed.

“I got better things to do with my time, than be here in the middle of the damn desert, playing nursemaid to you. I could be laying on some beach in Puerto Rico with a middle aged woman about nineteen, soaking up the sun and sucking down cute little drinks with umbrellas.”

“Harv, you’ve never sat on a beach...in your life! You and I both know that. Besides,” I moved a little to re-adjust myself to look around, “you don’t like foo-foo drinks.”

“Okay, but I still could be with some woman that likes me.” Harv twisted up his face.

“That’d be a first.” I joked.

“Hey!” Harv stuck out his lower lip in a pout.

“Why am I here?” I started to move my arms and realized I had two feeder tubes stuck into me, coming out of the two plastic bags hanging from a stand next to the bed.

“ ‘Cause you’re a dumb bastard who decided to take a walk out in the middle of the most inhospitable desert in North America in a 110 degree heat, without a hat, water or telling anyone where you went. What were you thinking about, son? Were you trying to escape the misery of being a married man, ‘cause you’ve no other reason to off yourself.” Harv actually looked concerned as he patted my arm.

“No. I just went for a walk to clear my head.” I didn’t know what time it was or even what day at this point.

“Hell of a walk. You might want to consider running in the Boston Marathon next year.” Harv chuckled then quashed his humor.

“Why do you say that?” I took the glass and lost the straw, just drinking it straight out of the glass.

“It took the team out here a good seven hours to find you and when they did you were over on the Nellis bombing range, sprawled out on the ground, cooking like a frankfurter. It had to be sixteen or seventeen miles from the lab.” Harv sat back and blew out breath between his lips that made a flapping sound. “The saw bones in this

place thought you had fried your brain completely. Your core temperature was up to one hundred and four and they had to pack you in ice for two days just to get you back down to normal. Everyone was sure as hell that if you did live, you would be one of those guys like Howard Hughes pissing in milk bottles, watching old black and white movies in a locked room, wearing an aluminum foil hat to keep the cosmic rays from getting into your mind.” Harv rubbed his face.

“How long have you been here?” I looked at him. He was looking older and more haggard than I had seen him in the past.

“Seven days. From the time they found you. A couple of days ago the doctors shot you up with morphine just to get you to shut up. You started talking and yelling. Mostly in Russian. After a few hours of that, they figured your brain was still functioning. Impaired but functioning so they hit you with that stuff and you have slept until now.” Harv hit the nurse’s call button. A male nurse in whites stepped in and looked first at me then Harv. “I need a cup of coffee, black and bring my nephew here some more water.” Harv barked.

“I will also call the doctor.” The nurse added.

“Don’t bother him. I need to spend some time talking with Dr. Humphrey without anyone bothering us, understood?” Harv looked really hard at the younger man in the doorway.

“Yes, sir.” Knowing this was not the time to challenge anyone of Harv’s status the door closed and the nurse was gone.

“I was speaking in Russian?” I looked in disbelief at Harv.

“Yeap. I had it taped and got the transcript right here.” He tapped the clipboard on his lap.

“Pretty interesting stuff as well. Sounds to me like you were having a conversation with a certain someone.” Harv went silent as the nurse came back into the room with the coffee and the thermal jug filled with water.

“Irina?” I drank some water. It tasted of antiseptic.

“Seems to me that’s the case. But unlike most hallucinations, it’s not a one-way dialog. You were answering and asking questions.” Harv sipped his coffee and put it down with a sour face. “These guys don’t know coffee from horse piss.”

“What was I talking to her about?” I held my breath.

“Besides all the mushy stuff, which needs to be deleted from these transcripts or sold to Grove Press for their next porno novel, it’s mostly about your father and his work on the device.” Harv sat there looking perplexed.

“Where is Ellen?” I asked.

“She had to head to the Caymans to make arrangements and then onto London. Sir Charles died and she had to go. A formal state funeral is being planned in London and she needed to be there. Seems like the old boy just toppled over dead. PLAM! Some big long name for it, but it was sudden and nobody had any idea that he was about ready to check out. They held it yesterday and she’s planning to stay on there for a while until matters are sorted out.” Harv picked his coffee cup back up and tried it again, with the same disappointment as before.

“You don’t seem overly disconcerted about it, Harv.” I questioned him.

“Didn’t really care for the old buzzard. He was needed and I tolerated him more for Ellen’s sake than anything else, but just didn’t really warm to the man very much. Don’t think anyone ever did, fucking British bastard! He was good as a front guy for the operation, but we need to figure out who’s going to replace him on the island without a bunch of questions being asked.” Harv got up and patted my arm again like a good Cocker Spaniel.

“Get some rest and we’ll talk in a day or so.” He shambled towards the door.

“What else did I say while I was out?” I knew something else had transpired, which Harv was reluctant to speak of.

SANDS OF TIME

“We will talk about it later. Right now, enjoy your vacation in here. If you can stand the food.” Harv, slipped his old tweed jacket on, picked up his clipboard and walked out the door. I knew I should feel something. But I just closed my eyes and drifted off into sleep again.



CHAPTER 11

The phone rang and rang when finally a nasally male voice answered asking me my business. "I am calling to speak with Ellen. Ellen Humphrey." I was a little miffed, to say the least.

"Her ladyship is not taking calls today." The voice was used to speaking down to people.

"She will take this one; this is her husband." I found not hearing anything from her with the exception of receiving an arrangement of flowers with a simple note of getting well, in the hospital room, had got my back up a little.

"Oh. Dr. Humphrey. Excuse me but not having spoken to you before, I was not aware from your voice that you were he." The voice used a proper form of English that I was completely unused to.

"Great, now you have heard me, so put her on the line, please." I didn't like this guy whoever he was and didn't care if he knew it or not.

"Just a moment please." Silence and the occasional cracking sound came down the phone line from England.

I sat in my office and waited. I had been out of the base hospital for a day. Going through the backlog on my desk and having to sort out my own thoughts had been a pain, in and of itself. That was the lie I had told myself, but I knew already something major had happened, and I just wanted to find out if my instincts were justified.

"Dr. Humphrey, this is Oliver Heath-Smyth, esquire. I am your wife's attorney here in London, sir." The voice was mellow and flowing on the phone.

"Okay, Mr. Smith." I wondered if she had a live in lawyer with her. I looked at my watch and realized it was nine at night in London.

"Heath-Smyth, sir. It is Heath-Smyth. Anyway, her Ladyship asked me to represent her in this matter." He went on. "It seems as though Ellen, if I may be informal with you, has decided it would be better if she stayed in England for a while."

"So that means that she doesn't want to speak with me?" I almost laughed.

"Well, that is correct. I shall be drawing up papers shortly and filing them with the high court here as well as handling the estate matters." The man rambled on.

"Alright, you are handling Sir Charles's estate, so what the hell does that have to do with me talking to my wife?" I started to get really angry.

"Well it is not just the estate, Dr. Humphrey. It is also a divorce that her ladyship desires." He paused for a moment waiting for a response. I sat there neither shocked nor dismayed. Something way back in my head had told me this was a possibility and that Ellen and I had been living a lie during our short tenure together. "I was under the understanding that you knew about it?"

"Just send me the papers, Mr. Smith, and give my best to Ellen." I hung up the telephone and looked up to see Jack standing in the doorway.

"Did you know about any of this?" I asked him without anger or dismay.

"About what boss? I was just going to ask you if you wanted to have some lunch together." Jack backed out into the hallway.

"I just talked to my wife's lawyer and it seems like she wants to call the marriage over and done." I sat there looking back at the black phone on my desk.

"I didn't, Ted." Jack pulled out a cigarette and lit up. "Did she say why?"

"She won't even talk to me, Jack." I turned and looked back at him. I could tell the wheels were rolling around inside his skull. "Where?"

"Where what?" He rubbed his thumb across his lips while thinking.

"Where do you want to have lunch?" I got up and picked up my jacket.

"Over at Dreamland. But I can understand if...." he trailed off.

"What the heck is Dreamland?" I walked out into the hallway, shutting and locking the door behind me.

"It's over at Five-One. That's what the boys call it over there now. Stands for: Defense Research and Experimental Advanced Mechanics, land. Catchy, eh? Like a section at Disneyworld. It's where they're working on some high-tech aircraft that has something they call 'stealth technology', makes the birds invisible to radar." Jack walked into his office and picked up his jacket and pulled his automatic out of the drawer in his desk.

"Think you will be needing that?" I laughed at my own words.

"You just never know, boss. You just never know." We walked out to reception and grabbed a car. The drive over the ten miles of private road was a quiet one.

PART ELEVEN

***OPERATION:
DOUBLE AGENT***



CHAPTER 18

Hiding away off the edge of a runway was a very nice cafeteria. It was on the second floor of a hanger building and had a long five-star buffet lined with all kinds of interesting and wonderful foods that would have been the envy of every hotel in Las Vegas. I went down the line and picked up a couple of items and sat down at a corner table overlooking the seven miles of black runway.

A few groups of men in white shirts with ID badges sat at various tables chatting and eating. Jack joined me and set his tray down on the table.

"They have it pretty nice here. I get tired of the mom and pop operation we have over at our place." Jack motioned to the runway. "They're doing a ramp run up today. One of the guys here I've known since my college days at USC, and he called me. They really don't like outsiders here, but since we have clearance levels well above these guys." He motioned to the groups sitting around behind us. "Nobody is going to even ask where we are from. The pleasures of power."

He smiled to himself.

A black, rubbery looking aircraft with a completely different design than anything I'd ever seen before, came out of a darkened hanger and rolled up the ramp.

"Is that it?" I pointed to the aircraft, which looked more like a flying wedge.

"That's her. They call it the Night Hawk. F-117. Completely built out of composite material and light alloys. All weather fighter and bomber." Jack had stopped eating and was watching the craft taxi up the ramp.

"Where did they build that? I haven't see anything in the trade journals." I was really interested in the design.

"Up at the Skunk Works in the desert north of here. Private contract, but the stuff is pure science fiction on the inside. Uses two different computers just to fly." Jack was clearly impressed.

"Why do you think she bailed?" I asked watching the airplane move out onto the main runway, finally making a comment about Ellen.

"Scared I would imagine. Didn't want to go through another episode like the one in New Mexico. I listened to those tapes after everyone was through analyzing them. I don't blame her for that. If she has any memory, or worse a lack of memory, about it, I think that would traumatize just about anyone." Jack turned back to me and pushed his plate away. "You want to hit something or yell at me or should we just punch the shit out of a couple of these eggheads over at one of the tables?"

"That's the problem, Jack. I don't feel...anything. It's not like I'm numb, it's that...I just don't care. When I wandered off two weeks ago, I don't know if I was trying to kill myself in the desert or just run away from everything, like, mostly, my empty life I was going home to every night. Or the realization finally hitting me that my dad is dead, and if he is, then what is the point of all this? I think I snapped because I felt like it was all the end of hope for me. Ellen was just at effect of all that, on top of what happened to her."

"Ellen said to me once she thought you married her on the rebound from Irina. She believed that you still loved her. Complex. Women are very complex. Far more

so than anything we have to deal with here.” Jack turned and looked at the aircraft again.

“What is the report going to look like when you write it up, Jack? Dr. Humphrey is becoming unstable and should be replaced?” I laughed to myself about the irony of all of it.

“There isn’t going to be any report. If you’re up to it I got something I have orders to show you, if you want some answers. I just don’t know if now is the right time.” Jack pulled out another cigarette and then slowly pushed it back into the package.

“What do you want me look at?” I found my basic curiosity was catching back a hold of me.

“Listen, Ted.” Jack said, squaring his shoulders and leaning in close to me. “I have something I need to say to you. I don’t want to have this conversation again. Ever. But right now I’m not speaking as a member of the group but as your friend. Every one of us has our nightmares. We all go through questioning ourselves as to the rights and wrongs of this business, trying to maintain an even keel. You took a walk the other day. Every one of us has done something dumb while we’ve been with this operation. I’ve sat up nights looking at my automatic thinking about putting it in my mouth and painting the ceiling with my brains. Harv went on a mad drunken binge once that lasted weeks in Rio. Jesus, we pulled him out of some god-awful bordello in the worst part of town. Bellamy’s been on prescribed anti-depressants on and off for ten years. So don’t think you’re some kind of isolated case. We just all know it comes with the territory. Ellen, well, that is a horse of a different color. I have my opinion, but that doesn’t matter. I will sit up late with you and listen to you rant and rave if that’s what you need or I will never mention her again. But mostly I’m your goddamn friend and I will support whatever you need to do to get through this.” Jack sat back.

“Thanks Jack. But I am okay now. Two weeks ago I came to an understanding of something that hounded me for years. It was one of those things that comes along in life where you really don’t know which cabinet to put it in.”

“Good enough for me. Let’s go! I think you’ll be interested in what I have to show you.”

Jack slapped the table, got up and, for no reason at all, extended his hand. I took it and we shook hands. It affected me in a way I didn’t understand. I don’t know why but it all suddenly seemed all right to me again. Ellen would have to do what she needed to do for herself. I couldn’t blame her. But now I needed to do what was right for me. I followed Jack out and down a long corridor.

In building D-12 of the facility, now known as D.R.E.A.M.-land, we took two different elevators down to a fourth level sub-basement. The hallway exited straight out toward a door flanked by two very solid looking air security officers. They were standing behind a bullet and explosion proof glass partition. As we approached red lights built into the ceiling started to revolve and blink.

“Don’t make any sudden moves, Ted.” Jack said under his breath. “These guys will fill this hallway with enough gas to kill a herd of rhino.”

“That’s comforting.” One of the men slid out a tray and spoke through an amplified speaker, demonstrating they were not in direct air contact with the hallway.

“Please set your passes down and step back.” The other man had his hand on a red button on a console in front of him.

I took my ID badge and set it down on the tray. Jack slowly reached inside his coat pocket and pulled out two other cards besides his own badge. I noticed as he laid them on the tray that one had my picture on it.

“What’s up with that?” I asked as we stepped back.

"It's your White House identification card. From now on, you also carry that with you at all times. You, my friend, now have access to everything in this country, no questions asked. Use it wisely."

"Sir." The airman placed the cards back on the tray and slid them back out. "Please look into the retinal scanner on your right."

Jack looked into a device with a soft shining light then motioned for me to do the same. I complied and noticed a slight irritation in my eye as the light quickly passed from left to right and then up to down.

"When did somebody get my scan?"

"I took it while you were out in the hospital." Jack stepped back and waited as the security officer examined the results.

"Great. I was hoping you had some Polaroids of me in bed with a bunch of nurses dancing around me."

"We did. Just wait till the Christmas party." Jack deadpanned.

I looked at my new ID card, noticing part of it was in a symbolic language. I had no idea what it was or what it meant.

"Elevator locked and secured." The guard with his hand on the button moved to another console.

"Secured." The first man responded. An alarm sounded.

"Pressurizing chamber." The man spoke out to the other.

"Depressurize your ears." Jack said to me.

"What do mean?" Then I felt it as the air pressure increased.

"Yawn." Jack was opening and closing his mouth to relieve the pressure increasing on his eardrums. I followed suit.

"Sixteen point five PSI. The room is positively pressured so nothing can be sucked into it by accident." A whole section of wall moved sideways. Jack stepped through the opening and I followed. He placed a hand on my chest just inside the opening and the door slid closed. We stood inside the room in the dark. After the door was completely closed, bank upon bank of recessed tube lighting came on, running the length of the room. It was huge and absolutely silent. I could hear my heart beating in my ear. In front of me were several cubicles and then a doorway leading into another room. The room was all glass, floor to ceiling. The walls were lined with blast proof file cabinets reenforced with lead and cement between the outside and inside metal. I had tried to move one of these years before into my office in New York and realized, very quickly, it took a crane to lift one of them. They were designed to withstand a direct hit from any kind of explosive up to a nuke.

"You are now in the belly of the beast, Ted. Less than twenty men in the world can come in here. I've only been here, in this part, once before, with Bellamy." Jack stood as if waiting for something else electronic to happen.

"Are we just here looking or are we doing something here?" I was amazed because this did not look much different than most of the area of my complex.

"Just a minute, please." Jack waited and sighed.

"Gentlemen?" An old man came out of one of the side rooms. He was dressed in a blue sport coat and polo shirt.

"This is Dr. Humphrey. I believe you have him on your list." There were no introductions.

"Yes, I do." He turned and walked toward the distant room with the glass walls.

I gestured to Jack, asking who this was.

"This is Mr. Rafferty. He is the custodian of records here. He will get you anything you want." I followed him and Jack stopped.

"Is there something wrong?" I turned to Jack and looked at him.

"I am not cleared to go in there. Only this far." Jack leaned up against the wall.

"Then let's get out of here." I walked back to him and Mr. Rafferty turned around.

"Excuse me, gentlemen. But there is an understanding that only you, Dr. Humphrey, were to be given access." The man seemed annoyed.

"Bullshit. Take a look at my ID and call whoever it is you call and get it cleared. Jack goes in with me or I don't go. I need his help." I was truly pissed off at all the cloak and dagger stuff these guys lived for.

"This is most irregular, gentlemen. I have my instructions. Now either you want in or you don't, sir." Rafferty finally hit the tilt button in my brain and my last nerve snapped.

"Listen up, BUDDY, do you know who I am? I am one of the guys with my finger on the button! So you go find a secure phone and call Bellamy or Harvey Gilpsen or the President, I really don't give a good goddamn who you call! But Jack Thompson is in this as deep as I am, so get him cleared and stop jacking me around. How much clearer do I have to be?" I considered what it would be like to go back to academia and teach. I was seeing clearer all the time why my old man decided to go it alone in Barstow. A door behind us opened and another security officer stepped in with his weapon drawn.

"Whoa! What?" I yelled at him. "Don't you have something better to do or are you bucking for a position on an Arctic re-fueling team?"

"Ease up, Ted. These guys are a little different down here." Jack was showing his nervousness and I understood it. I was running a bluff myself but I wanted to see if someone was going to call my bet or not.

Behind the air security officer a one-star general walked in and straight up to Rafferty. "There's a call on the blue line." He turned to us as Rafferty walked into the office he had come from.

"Jack, good to see you." The general extended his hand and they shook.

"General Clarke, I would like to introduce you to Dr. Humphrey." The man turned to me and nodded.

"Doctor Humphrey. A pleasure. I am sorry as hell for this mix up. Some of my folks are a little tricky to deal with here. They have orders and we enforce them fairly rigidly." He motioned to the air security man to return to his post.

"Normally, staff line officers, even though they're assigned to one of the Group members aren't allowed in the vault for security reasons. It's protocol. Someone thought it was the best way to keep a tight handle on the information in there." He was a cordial man who could probably be one very nasty character if it was needed.

"My problem with all of that General is I am one of the people that makes the rules, in case anybody hadn't noticed lately." I was still wound up and not giving in to any pressure whether it was overt or sugar coated.

"Well, yes, I understand that, but there's a standing order we must comply with under all circumstances." The General had less of a smile.

"Let's go, Jack." I turned and started for the door. "Somebody get this piece of shit open for me right now!" I yelled and hit the door with my hand.

"Ted." Jack pleaded, looking a little green around the gills at the moment.

"No Major Thompson. I am not playing this stupid little game. I am making one phone call and this place is going to be a bad memory! And everyone working here is going to be in an unemployment line. How clear do I have to make it? Now get this goddamn door open! That, sir, is a direct order!" I yelled again.

"Sir." Jack jumped and hit the intercom on the wall.

"I don't think this kind of behavior can be tolerated..." The General started and I whirled, stepped in, raped his personal space, and lost my mind.

"Shut your goddamn mouth! Right FUCKING NOW! Do NOT dig your grave any deeper! It has been a lousy day and I promise you it is going to be worse than you

can even imagine before it is over!" I glared at the man. The rage of Ellen, the desert episode and the whole nightmare I was embroiled in reached its breaking point and right about now I was planning how I was going to exercise all the executive power I controlled.

A loud speaker crackled to life in the ceiling.

"Dr. Humphrey. This is Boss One in the Hole."

I'd been correct in my present hypothesis that the man had insomnia and lived in Studio Control on the island and had been watching.

"Sir?" I responded.

"I can see you on the closed circuit camera to your right on the ceiling. Unfortunately, this is a one-way system so you cannot see me..." there was a pause, "laughing my ass off at this melodrama being played out before my eyes. Very entertaining!"

"Gee, GB, I'm delighted you find my problems so AMUSING!"

"No problems at all, Ted." Bellamy chuckled. "Jack, have the orders cut or everyone working there is on the first plane for Diego Garcia. Clarke!" The voice boomed out of the loudspeaker like an angry native god.

"Sir!" He faced the camera and snapped to attention.

"You know that second star you're hoping for? Well, it hangs in the balance of the next fifteen seconds of your life. You hold your future, my man, in the palm of your hand. It is either that or demotion and forced retirement as a colonel after three years of detached service on some atoll no one can find on a map. I don't need to be bothered with this kind of crap and every one of you there knows this. I don't care if Dr. Humphrey wants to take your maiden aunt, two Vegas hookers, a midget, a sheep and a birthday clown into that room. If he wants it, he better get it and no one, and I mean NO ONE better call me again! Can I make that any clearer for you?" I smiled, looking down at the floor. Funny how you can sometimes run a bluff and win.

"Sir, I-I just thought..." Both Jack and I winced that his response was anything other than 'Sir! Yes Sir!' It was coming out badly and no amount of back peddling was going to save the day for the General. He was done for, and, now that Bellamy was involved, I actually started to feel sorry for him.

"Ted? Call the spot. You want a sweep team in there now? I got Delta on hold, topside." Bellamy was using his best 'everyone's angry dad' voice. Rafferty ran out of the office, waving a paper at the General.

"It's alright, General Clarke! Dr. Humphrey can..." He noticed the General looking up at the red light on the camera. Rafferty went pale. "Oh, my!"

"That's alright, Boss One. Call off the shooters. I think Mr. Rafferty has found the information we need." I looked at the older man.

"I am sorry, gentlemen. I didn't realize the situation had changed. General Clarke, thank you for being here, but I can handle this now." Rafferty looked like a man beside himself.

The General turned and looked at me hard. Everything inside him wanted to knock out my teeth, but prudence, and the thought of losing the next star on his shoulder, prevailed.

"I am certain this is just a misunderstanding, as you can well understand. But we must be so careful..." I cut him off. A man this dumb deserved to go down.

"Is that supposed to be an apology?" The statement dripped with sarcasm. It took three deep breaths for the man to regain some degree of control and he glanced up at the red light on the camera glaring down at him, like the baleful eye of God.

"I am sorry for the actions of my staff and myself, Dr. Humphrey. I am sure it will not happen again." He got it right this time.

"Oh, I can completely guarantee that, General Clarke." I was not letting him off my hook that easily. Let him spend a couple of days waiting for the guys to show up

with his new orders or, worse, the one-way ride out to the old small arms range, where he would be the 'target of opportunity', which is how they did things out here.

"Now is someone going to open that room for Major Thompson and I?" I turned to Rafferty who was hurrying towards it.

"Yes sir. I am. Yes, I am." Rafferty hit buttons and the glass door slid to one side and we walked into a pleasant, comfortable climate controlled air conditioned room with leather chairs and a walnut table. Rafferty unlocked certain file cabinets, passing two of them, leaving them locked.

"All of them please." I added, for no other reason than to see if he would do it. Rafferty turned and looked at me as if to say something, then nodded in fear and removed all the locks. Jack sat down, pulled out a cigarette, tossed me the pack and I helped myself.

"Ah, this facility has a strict no smo..." Rafferty froze as Jack and I looked over at him. "I mean...I will get you gentlemen some ashtrays."

"And a pot of coffee, too, while you are at it, Raffy, old buddy." I smiled.

Jack mumbled, "Maybe you can see if he can bring you a birthday clown."



CHAPTER 19

The coffee and ashtrays were there when the telephone in the center of the desk rang. Jack pushed the speakerphone.

“What exactly are you two Bozos doing out there?” Harv’s voice boomed in the room. “I just got one of those wonderful calls from Scarface who was just delighted to take the leading role in this little party of yours.”

“Did you know Ellen’s divorcing me, Harv?” Silence permeated the room. “Ahhh, c’mon! Seriously? You bastard! You knew and didn’t tell me?”

“She told me a week ago, when she left. She just didn’t like the idea of being married.” Harv sounded heavier than normal as he wheezed through the phone.

“Could have given me a head’s up on that one old pal, don’t ya think?” I was still miffed to say the least.

“Not my place, nephew. Anyway, you weren’t having a whole hell of a lot of fun being married to her now, were you?” He chuckled, actually chuckled, at my misfortune.

“Now that is what I like; compassion and caring.” I steamed.

“No time for it, Sunny Jim. The clock is running and we’re losing the race. Women come and go, the future is set in stone.” Harv was no longer laughing.

“I want Jack completely in on this. He isn’t a fixture on the outside of our glee club. So what do I have to do to make that so?” Jack looked at me with frightened shock and disbelief, which I didn’t understand.

“Jack?” Harv yelled down the phone at us.

“Boss?” Jack cleared his throat nervously.

“This what you want?” Harv was his hard professional self right now. “This is the whole enchilada, red sauce, sour cream and the little green stuff on the side.”

“I am placed in a compromised situation here, Harv. If I take it, I can’t serve as escort for Ted anymore.” Jack was buying himself time to think, the wheels spinning in his head.

“Tell me something I don’t know?” Harv barked.

Jack closed his eyes, took a deep breath and for the first time I had known him, he actually looked afraid, and I didn’t know why. “Yes.” He said at last. “If I am good enough for it.”

“Boss Three, are you sure?” Harv already knew the answer, but I was certain someone else was listening.

“I wouldn’t ask if I wasn’t sure.” I said. There was a long pause while Harv hit the mute button and conferred with another member of the team that I was sure was listening to every word.

“Call sign: Boss Nine. Confirm!” Harv yelled again.

“Confirmed.” Jack’s voice cracked with emotion.

“The papers will be sitting on your desk when you two renegade Injuns get back to your own reservation. Now, just read what you need to and get the hell out of there, before Bellamy gets really pissed and has Delta Team start zipping people into body bags for Christsakes.” We could hear Harv slurping his coffee.

“Approved.” Bellamy’s voice chimed in on the open circuit. “Your retirement papers are being processed as we speak, Jack. A new level seven pay grade is in place and we will exchange ID cards as soon as it is convenient.” A momentary pause in the transmission. “Start in cabinet three, top draw and work backwards. Then if you want, go through the other ones. Mostly black budget stuff and fund diverging plans that have to be kept someplace where the GAO can’t find them.”

“Boss?” I spoke very quietly.

“Not now, Ted.” Bellamy answered.

“I was just going to tell you thank...”

“Ted, get to work. I’ll see you in two weeks.” The line went dead.

“Okay, you two goons. I’m not here for the Sunday afternoon social with the women’s auxiliary of the benevolent society for the protection of unwed mothers. Call me if you need anything. And what is this shit about you fucking a birthday clown? You have any idea what the paperwork is like on that?” Harv guffawed and hung up.

Jack sat back and looked at me for a long minute. “You sure you wanted to do that?”

“What’s that?” I asked as I pulled the first file out of cabinet three, not making much of it all.

“What’s that... the man...asked me? Jesus Ted! You have no idea what you just did, do you? You forced those guys into a life and death decision. If there was any possibility that I was unfit, we would both be dead men.” Jack rubbed his hand through his hair.

“If you hadn’t noticed, we are anyway.” I laughed out loud. “Besides, you have what it takes to be part of this. You’ve been an errand boy long enough. What?” He was looking at me again, beseechingly, for an answer.

“I hold a Master’s degree in aeronautical engineering from USC. I am a career soldier. You guys all hold one or two doctorates in hard science. I don’t know this stuff about phase shifts and feedback circuits. Hell, I can do calculus but you guys are writing things on white boards that nobody understands.” He seemed overwhelmed.

“It not about the science, Jack. I can hire scientists by the truck-load. It’s about this stuff.” I pointed at the cabinets. “This isn’t physics, it’s war. Overt and covert war. So don’t kid yourself! You’re trained to handle this part of it, probably better than anybody. The device, hell, we got folks that can build it, but this game is about brinkmanship of the first order and how to stand toe to toe with the neighborhood bully from someplace beyond the stars. You don’t need to be a scientist to do that, but you got to have the toughness and the guts to stand your ground no matter how bad it gets. And right now, I promise you, it is going to get bad!”

Jack just shook his head, looking worried.

“And, we both went to USC, so us Trojans have to stick together. What’s our school motto?”

“Fight on!” He said proudly.

“And that, my friend, is exactly what we are going to do!”

He nodded and smiled, then opened a file and started to read.



CHAPTER 80

I read file after file until my eyes burned and my head ached. I had stopped taking notes and even the ones I had taken were pointless since there was no way in God's black universe I was going to be able to synthesize all of this information into any useable format that I could think of. The stuff just went on and on.

I turned to Jack pulling off my glasses. "Do you know about some project called GRUDGE?"

"No. Project Blue Book had something, but I read about it, like..." he looked at his watch, "four hours ago."

"A sixteen volume set documenting all the information, collected from the beginning of contact with the Visitors. All of our understanding about their science, technology, medical and intelligence information." I paused for a moment. "Who the hell collected this stuff?"

"CIA, NSA, or someone else, I would presume." Jack looked at his pad where he'd been jotting down notes as well, flipped some pages and found his reference. "Turned them all over to the, ah, Jason Scholars for review and evaluation and then put everything under Project: Grudge, I would imagine."

"I thought the Jason Scholars were futurists trying to road map what we should do as a nation to get there. Hm..." I looked at another file. "Here: 'The Majority Agency for Joint Intelligence'?"

"MAJI." Jack nodded. "Yeah, they work for us. I know that one." Jack rubbed his face and got up to walk around the room. "We are never going to get through this stuff tonight."

"I know that, but hold on, I just found...." I trailed off and read down a report. "Read this Jack."

I handed it to him and without complaint he read the document, then closed it and read the file cover. Opening it back up, he sat and continued to read. I walked over to the intercom.

"Yes sir, what do you need?" The voice was not Rafferty's.

"How about some sandwiches and a six pack of beer." I waited for the normal gripe about security, blah, blah, blah.

"Anything else Dr. Humphrey?" The voice sounded very young, eager to please and I couldn't tell if it was male or female. I looked over at Jack and we made surprised faces at one another.

"That will do for now. Oh yeah, where is the head around here?" I realized it had been a long time since I'd seen the inside of a men's room.

"Out the glass door, turn right, then right again. Heavy wooden door, sir." The intercom went dead.

"Back in a flash." I walked out and found the restroom around the corner. As I washed my hands I splashed water on my tired unshaven face running my hands down the stubble on my chin. I looked up into the mirror to check my bloodshot eyes.

A woman was standing behind me.

I whirled around and she was gone! I turned back to the mirror...nothing...then, panicking, I kicked open all the stall doors, as if she could hide by moving that fast, and the absurd thought actually rushed across my fevered brain for a second that she had somehow jumped into a stall and made her escape by flusing herself down the toilet.

All Empty. I was alone in here...but I hadn't been seconds before. She had dirty blonde hair and I'd seen her face somewhere before! I shook it off as a hallucination induced by stress, coffee, cigarettes, and having the little spiders of this much top-secret information crawling around in my head all at once. I soaked my entire head in cold water, dried off and headed back to the file room.

"You okay?" Jack noticed my worried face was ashen white.

"I just saw a reflection in the mirror behind me." Jack tensed and reached for his pistol, long ago learning to take anything I had said or had seen as gospel truth.

"Don't bother. There was no one there when I turned around. But I've seen her face before, I'm sure of it. I just can't place it." I sat back down.

"You need to take a break and get out of here?" Jack still held onto his pistol.

"No. And I don't think I am cracking up, but one never knows." I sat down, closed my eyes and rubbed my face.

"How is it we know so much about them but don't seem to know anything at all? It just doesn't add up. These files represent tens of thousands of man hours but no one seems to know anything for certain." I noticed sandwiches and beer had arrived and I immediately popped one open and started to drink.

"This is a complete alien autopsy report. Everything right down to the composition of the stuff they use for blood. But...this can't be right..." he looked puzzled, "their brain vault capacity is less than a great ape." Jack closed the file and reached over taking a sandwich.

"Collective intellect. Hive mentality. That's what Boss One told me, once."

I swigged at my beer still mulling over what I had seen. I was really tired of ghosts and magic janitors and mystery women appearing out of toilets in ultra-high security facilities. I swished the beer back and forth around in my mouth and an idea sprang into my head. "Does this place have any way of monitoring floor pressure?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Ask if there was a fluctuation in the floor density in the last ten minutes." I wondered if beings that were traveling through space/time, or ghosts, left evidence behind.

"The lady in the mirror?" Jack was up and on the intercom. Two minutes passed and someone called back on the private line. Jack picked it up.

"Yes, I understand. Thank you. No. That won't be necessary." Jack hung up and sat back down grinning.

"Well?" I waited, hoping I was right.

"Six minutes ago there was a temporary fluctuation of six ounces in the approximate location of the stalls in the men's room." Jack screwed his eyes up into a squint. "Six ounces of what?"

"Sonofabitch, Jack! They leave a footprint! They have to assume a physical form and they leave a footprint." I got up and pulled on my jacket.

"What's going on now, Ted?" Jack followed me.

"They put this crap back, right?" He nodded in the affirmative. "Good. I need to get back to the lab for a while. We might just know something that everyone else doesn't." I dashed to the door and Jack grabbed another sandwich and hurried up to follow me.

"Are you going to tell me?" He asked as we were checking out of the security facility.

"Sure I am." I walked ahead in silence toward the elevator. "But not here."

SANDS OF TIME

Once we're on the surface level I turned back to Jack. "I want the records of everyone that has gone in there." I pointed down toward the room we had just come from. "Also, I want all the pressure readings from the same period of time." Jack thought for a moment and then nodded. He was processing the statement carefully and then the lights went on.

"Got it!" We walked back to the entrance heading for our parked car.



CHAPTER 81

When we returned to our offices, a man was standing at reception, holding a briefcase. He was in uniform and just seemed to be waiting. He acknowledged us upon entering and waited to be ushered into Jack's office. Harv hadn't lied; the new personnel documents were here for the new Boss in the system.

I went back to my office, followed by Shirley who had her note pad with her. She closed the door behind her, so we had privacy. I looked up and waited for her to tell me the endless list of people that wanted to talk to me.

"The man in the Cayman's called." She hesitated for a moment. "He says if you want, he'll have someone inside the beltway take care of the paperwork for England, whatever that means." She waited again for my response.

Ever the controlling figure, Bellamy didn't want to have me interrupted by such trivial matters as a messy divorce. I flushed and felt the blood rush to my face. The man was cold, but effective. That probably just comes with the turf.

"Good, call him back and tell him that would be helpful." I acted like I was in a hurry to start reading a file.

"I never talk to him. Just some guy that works for him, but I will make the call, Boss." Shirley walked out without another word.

I sat thinking that even our private lives weren't private at all. Every call, and probably every heartbeat, was monitored by someone.

* * * * *

It had taken about four hours of hounding the folks over at Five-One to get the records I needed, but Jack was like a rabid bulldog, when you gave him an assignment. At eight in the evening, he walked in and dropped them on my desk.

"Why don't you head out and get some rest." I asked him.

"No. Now that we're yoked like oxen to the slaughter, I need to take care of more stuff before this night is over." He laughed and went back to his office.

I started to work my way through the list, comparing occurrences of additional pressure to times when someone was in the vault. No names were used, only numbers that didn't seem to correspond to anything logical. A pattern appeared in the randomness of the numbers. Then, very carefully, I noted the pressure changes lasting longer, when one number was in the vault. Graphing it on paper I noticed another pattern. It represented the same day and time sequences over and over again. Someone was going into the vault on the same day of the week, at the same time, and spending between two and three hours.

"Jack." I whispered into the intercom.

"Yeah."

"Do we keep our records over there as well?" I wasn't sure of what I was asking, but had a feeling I was dangerously close to something. Jack paused for a long second or two then I heard him walking up the hall and he came in and closed the door.

"That's where we keep everything that involves us." Jack had a disturbed look. I motioned for him to sit as I looked at my watch, then made up my mind.

I hit the blue button on my phone console and waited for the satellite connection to be made. The phone rang at the other end. It was late, but I was sure that the man I was calling would be there.

"Go ahead." The voice answered with the sound of someone puffing a pipe.

"67-09-66." I waited. The phone went from speaker to handset.

"Yes."

"If I were to tell you we were not alone in the vault, what would be your response?" Again the seconds passed, like grains of sand through an hourglass.

"My logical response would be that it was impossible. My gut tells me you know something I don't." I listened to the Zippo lighter being thumbled again and the sucking sound of him lighting his pipe.

"Every time. A pressure sensor indicates there was a fluctuation of six ounces corresponding to an event that seemed temporal to me, today, but in all actuality was more likely a mistake. Someone thought '67' was in there and they tried to make contact." I felt like I was writing something for Night Gallery.

"How deep is the involvement, or can you not speculate on that?" He said flatly.

"If they accessed our files? I would say total knowledge is possible." If I was right this would probably mean a death sentence for someone.

"Is Jack in the room?"

"I'm here." Jack leaned into the speaker.

"Comments?"

"Ted's done the numbers. I'm looking at his graph and it shows other fluctuations other than the ones he's reporting." Jack replaced the documents back in front of me.

"Seal the base. I need to see this for myself. Sao Paolo will hold the baby right now." A momentary pause while the phone went back on speaker at his end.

"Jack." I looked up at my partner and he was out of the room heading for a phone to seal the whole base down, from the front gate to our area. The folks that were still on base would just love this. Nobody gets on or off, so folks would have to use the dormitories and eat in the cafeterias until someone called off the alert.

"Harv, you there?" At the other end of the line, Bellamy became animated.

"Do you know what time it is here?" Harv was waking up.

"Get your fat sorry ass out of bed and head for Five-One. Ted found our ghost and the medium."

"Oh great! Middle of the damn night, lover boy is up working," Harv grumbled.

"As well as being on the line. Say hello Ted." Bellamy laughed.

"Hello, Ted." I said smiling.

"Great! Now I got the kid listening in on my bedroom conversations? Does anybody know how to transfer out of this chicken shit outfit?" Harv was trying to smooth the wrinkles out from engaging his mouth before his brain was in gear.

"I'll be there in less than five hours. You two grab some shut-eye. It will be a long damn day. Hold on." Bellamy was talking to someone else on another line. "Sao Paolo has taken over primary operations. I am moving right now." The line went dead, just as Jack stepped back into the room.

"A man that doesn't believe in formality at all." I clicked the unit off on my desk. "It's Wednesday night. They got a test flight going on over at Five-One. They want to know if they should abort." Jack was reading his notes.

"Let them finish. Just quarantine the place until Boss One lifts it." I sat back and wondered why he wasn't surprised. "Jack, did you know we had a leak?"

"I didn't know, but there've been comments in the past. It seems like certain folks knew a little more than they should." He walked back to his office and his phone.

I spoke to the empty room: "Very interesting. That is all I can say about that."



CHAPTER 82

I was in the middle of a wonderful dream, lying on a beach in Jamaica, doing nothing. Seemed like that'd be a criminal offense to the people I worked with here. The dream was really starting to get good, when a hand shoved me awake.

"Ted! We got visitors." Jack was standing looking totally professional as usual in a clean dress shirt, tie and polished shoes.

"What the hell time is it?" I swung up into a sitting position on the couch in my office and tried to stifle a yawn.

"0900. Clean stuff for you."

Folded neatly at the end of my desk was a clean shirt, tie and shave kit, which I truly appreciated. Getting up I looked at my watch.

"How much time?" I picked up the things and headed for the men's locker room.

"Thirty minutes. They just touched down at Five-One." Jack hesitated and then added. "I hope you are wrong, but I don't think so." He walked back to his office.

I got ready and was just walking back when I heard Harv's voice booming down the hallway. "So we got this new flight attendant on Big Bird. A cute little Air Force corporal, who hasn't been farther east than Kansas and she sees me and what's-his-name get on and strap down. Well, she thinks that they are going to go pick up fifty nabobs in DC and can't quite wrap her mind around a 747, being used for only two guys. I mean she is just cute as a button. She's mumbling about taxpayer's dollars and what a waste, yada, yada, when Bellamy finally has enough and tells the pilot to dump her ass at the first available strip on the way out here. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! The skipper is planning to get into it with Bellamy when I have to intervene and tell this guy which way the cow ate the cabbage. This was the back up flight crew, seems like the first string were all laid up with the flu or something. Well, this full bird colonel is not exactly liking the treatment he and his crew are getting from the two civvies and starts to cite section and verse. Boom! Bellamy goes off and calls the goon squad in the back of the airplane up and suddenly this guy's eyes are rolling in up his head when he sees these four SAS boys come walking up, reaching inside their coats. HA-HA! Poor dumb bastard! Probably dropped a load right in his pants when he realized that he was transporting somebody's important cousin from Cleveland. Then Horton, that big limey dick that is like glue with Bellamy, pokes a huge .44 Mag in the pilot's face and tells him, what and why for....! Kee-RIST! You shoulda been there Thompson! You'd still be laughing your ass off. This guy hurries the flight attendant up to the flight deck and locks the door. I had to get my own damn drinks for the rest of the flight." Harv was crying he had been laughing so hard.

"Where's Bellamy?" I asked, not as amused, as I walked in.

"In your office with the door closed. Said he had to talk to someone." Harv looked at me for a minute and for some unknown reason, except to himself he gave me a bear hug. "Sorry as hell about Ellen, kiddo. It's just the way the world works some times."

"Thanks, Harv." I felt embarrassed and wanted to move on to another subject.

"Conference Room Two is set up for us and I found someone to run over and get us some pastries for breakfast. Plus a gallon of hot coffee." Jack intervened with his usual quickness and class. We walked down and made ourselves comfortable. I realized I hadn't eaten anything since lunch the day before, while watching the test plane go through its warm ups.

Bellamy walked in holding my graph and printouts from the vault. He poured a cup of coffee and sat down, tossing the papers in front of him.

"Six ounces isn't much to hang someone on, is it Ted?" Bellamy looked like he had just walked out of a normal business meeting. As usual there was no preamble to this session or his comments. It was straight for the jugular.

"It is, if it represents a signature." I didn't want to show my hole card just yet. I still wasn't sure which side of the table Bellamy was playing for right now. But I wanted him on the house's side for sure.

"Talk to me about signatures." He picked up the printout and scanned it.

"I was in the men's room at the vault. In the mirror I saw a face, a blonde woman looking at me." I waited for just a second and then went on. "She looked like she had made a mistake. I asked Jack to check the pressure sensors at that location and there it is." I pointed to the first printout.

"Are we talking visions now? We've somehow moved over to psychic spying like those weirdoes at the Pentagon are using to do..." Harv had to think. "Remote Viewing! That is what they call it. Mumbo Jumbo, swinging a pendulum over a map and finding some lost school girl from Montana?"

"Close Harv, but no cigar." I looked back to Bellamy.

"Then what?" Bellamy was still playing hard to read. His actions spoke of someone who could be judge, jury and executioner, if I was wrong.

"Bi-location." I dropped the ace to see if anyone wanted to play out the hand.

"Go on." Bellamy held a hand up stopping Harv from his inevitable diatribe.

"They move through or around time and space, I'm still not sure. But they show up and have a physical form, or at least it looks that way. But in reality, they are nothing more than a loose collection of atoms, held together close enough with surface tension, to give form and characteristics of being really there. But there is no substance, only a simple interference pattern, making them look real." I knew how crazy it sounded, but it didn't matter. I didn't see a ghost! It was a real, or a facsimile of, a real person.

"Where did this collection of atoms come from?" Bellamy was asking the questions like a Joe Friday investigating a homicide; just the facts, ma'am.

"Around us. In this room, there must be enough spare atoms to make up a good twenty interference patterns that would look like real people." I had read something in my dad's notebook that made me believe what I was saying was correct.

"Dr. Boris Tarusov of Moscow University was working a few years ago on a similar assumption." Bellamy said, finally sharing. "He called it 'living luminescence', showing how faint rays of light coming off a leaf could be photographed to show the original whole plant. We stole some of his research and then he fell out of favor with the guys running the show and disappeared. He found that a small amount of photons could construct a complete image. What you're telling me is that when adding atoms to photons, you get what seems real and that the construct can actually interact with the environment. Is that right?" Bellamy pulled out his pipe and lit it up. "And show a weight displacement of six ounces." He already had at least a guess of what I had told him. "I've been struggling for a few years with a similar problem. I have been meeting with a Visitor that is like no one any of you know about." Bellamy waited for the effect of his statement to hit its mark.

"You didn't think I should know about this?" Harv looked down over his glasses at the man he had spent years with.

"It was need to know. The place I meet him doesn't have floor sensors. So I always assumed that his comings and goings were some kind of physical manipulation of space, but now I am not so sure." Bellamy got up began writing several equations on the whiteboard. "If I understand what you've said, and what the Russians were doing, it should look something like this." He finished and looked at it on the board. Every one of us worked through the equation to see if we could catch up with him.

"Then the vector function is a form of strange entanglement." Harv was first to see the relevance.

"In quantum physics, yes. But in relativity it still violates the function rule." Bellamy chewed on the end of the marker and sat back down.

"Nothing can travel faster than the speed of light. But then what is the time frame the Visitor is working in?" Jack looked up from his notes.

"Tachyons. Superluminal loophole in the whole theory." I offered up, believing, but not being sure.

"Hypotheticals." Harv grumbled.

"How do they sense, then?" Bellamy ignored the comment.

"They use our field of vision, hearing, sight and touch." Again I was on thin ice for a scientist, all of us were.

"Oh great! And now boys and girls, let me bring in Mister Rodgers to explain the simple stuff. You're talking about ESP and telepathy with shit like that. Where is the hard science?" Harv was getting madder by the moment.

"Not necessarily. All sensory inputs are nerve impulses. If they can do a step-down transformer of some kind, they can monitor us, just like we tune a radio." Bellamy was already there, but the rest of us were still working on learning how to sharpen obsidian tools.

"That would require selective monitoring of at least five separate inputs on a nervous system that contains millions of inputs a second. Our best computers couldn't do that right now. Plus the voltage potential is so low, it would take an immense amount of energy to do it! Where do they get that from?" There was no question Harv was a top-flight scientist, one of the best in the world, and when he wasn't cracking jokes he could think through a problem extremely quickly and find the faults.

"Us." Bellamy looked back up at the equation. "They are using us as the storage battery for their actions. Fifty-thousand volts of skin potential when we are aroused. Twenty-five to thirty when we're excited. Every time we meet one of the Visitors, I would imagine we're discharging vast amounts of energy, discharging it into the air around us."

"Static electricity?" Harv tossed his pencil down. "You're sitting there telling me they're using static electricity to re-refresh the interference pattern every second and then monitor our brain wave functions?"

"That's exactly what they're doing." Bellamy said calmly. "They are sitting somewhere in a darkened room, meditating, moving outside the normal flow of space and time. They show up, feed off of us and monitor our cortex. They see what we see and by doing that they can be watching and learning from us all the time." Bellamy was there. Surprisingly, so was I.

"Then why have they only showed up when one person was in the vault?" I asked out loud. "Why not monitor it when just anyone pulls out a file and reads it?"

"They would have to stand very close to someone and be inside their bio-plasmic field. An area that surrounds the body and pulsates with the energy we give off. When you turned around in the men's rooms it was so quick that the image moved outside your field and therefore disappeared. They need to be close to someone who won't

notice them standing next to them at all.” Bellamy seemed to know far more about this phenomenon than I was comfortable with.

“Your Visitor, does he or she, whatever it is, stand close to you?” I asked Bellamy.

“He and no.” Bellamy tapped the inkless marker on the table. “But we built a special room for him to come to.”

“What kind of room?” I remembered helping my dad build the laboratory behind the house in Barstow and something I thought was unusual at the time.

“A Faraday cage surrounds the room. We were told it was to keep interfering electromagnetic waves out.” Bellamy actually smiled at his own naivety, admiring the cunning and artifice with which the wool had been pulled over his eyes.

“Instead, it keeps your energy pattern and discharge in the room, building it up as you get excited.” I offered up, realizing why we had covered the building with fine copper mesh wire in the desert, so many years ago.

“Stupid!” Bellamy hit himself in the head. “Just plain stupid to miss that one!” Bellamy threw the marker across the room losing his normal cool, which took us all aback. This was a man that could start a war, or have us all killed. He was not someone you wanted to see angry. But he was angry at himself now.

“What else aren’t you telling us, Boss?” Harv said very quietly looking at his notes.

“A lot.” Bellamy sighed and got up. “Goddamn it! How could I be so fucking dumb!! We’ve been waltzed right into this corner and we did it with our eyes wide open!! Goddamn it to fucking HELL!”

“Rafferty?” I said, looked up at the ceiling.

“We pulled him out of a research team when he started complaining about seeing things. Everyone thought he was just getting old and needed to be put out to pasture. I worked under him years ago and wanted to give him something to do to keep him from curling up and dying in some old folks home. I made him the custodian over at the vault. He was always backed up by the security people, but I never thought he’d spend his nights reading what we were working on. He couldn’t let it go. So, he’s been systematically reading everything we send there to be filed.” Bellamy sat back down and for no apparent reason but his own internal dialog, smashed the coffee cup into a hundred pieces on the conference table with his hand.

“Damage assessment?” Jack asked in his normal voice, acting very professional.

“Oh, fuck, Jack! I don’t know. Total, most likely! They’re probably aware of everything we know and everything we’re doing.” Bellamy fumed like a man that had just lost his girl, his horse and the ranch on the flip of the last card.

“Well, we know one thing. We can stop the leak pretty damn quick, can’t we?” Harv’s face had grown dark with blood.

“No! Don’t do anything like that.” I heard the words come out of me, before I could even know what I was saying.

“What?” Jack looked at me incredulously. “The man has compromised us! God knows how long it will take to start in another direction and time is moving in on us very quickly.”

“I know that. But this might be more of an advantage than you think.” I got up and started to pace the floor, lost in my own internal dialog.

“Listen...” Harv stopped with a sharp wave of Bellamy’s hand.

“Ted. Think out loud.” He pointed at my head. “We need to hear what’s going on in there. Pull us out of this somehow! Two-minute drill. Down by five. Go!”

“Okay...listen! We have two problems: first, find out who is penetrating the vault. The woman I saw was not an alien. She was one of us. But more than that, she could be working for them. That is the first issue. I don’t think we can find that out without using Rafferty. The second issue is telling them about the new project.” I waited for a moment.

“What new project?” Harv looked more confused.

“Excalibur. The deep penetrating nuclear tipped drilling missiles we’ve developed to blow the holy hell out of the base at Dulce.” I looked down the table at Bellamy.

“Reversal, isn’t that what you told me once, Ted?” Bellamy nodded at the idea.

“You’re going to feed them false information out of our own files?” Jack caught the drift immediately.

“Not feed. Choke them with it. A weapon so strong that nothing can stand up to it.” Bellamy understood and rounding the last outside turn was Harv, but he was catching up.

“Is that room monitored?” I asked Bellamy rhetorically. “No, of course not. You would want someone who broke into the system, to catch a glimpse of a file cover or contents.”

“That’s right.” Bellamy added.

“Pull Rafferty out and place a whole new set of cameras in there, have them record everything, plus audio. Twenty-four/seven.” I looked at Bellamy who was regaining his composure.

“Both issues. If it has substance we can record it.” Bellamy looked over at Harv.

“Okay. I will rotate him so he can learn about the new auditing system or some such crap as that. How long you need?” Harv asked.

“A week. Then get him back in there. I believe this is our top priority right now.” I said to the group.

“Make it so, gentlemen!” Bellamy slapped the table. “I need to get back to work.” He got up, nodded to us and walked out of the room without another word.

“Moody. Has something to do with living in a hole in the ground, I am sure of that.” Harv got up and started to follow. He turned and looked back at me. “It’s still better than being in Boulder City, playing with batteries, eh?”

“Good-Bye, Harv!” Jack and I said in harmony with each other.



CHAPTER 83

Two weeks passed as preparations were made for setting a trap for our unwanted guest. Operation: Double Agent. Harv called every other day to make sure we had covered all possible avenues for monitoring the vault. I had added a little more to design specifications than anyone knew except for Jack, who was quite clear about his desire to remain mum about what I had done. I had soothed his concerns by telling him that if I was wrong about my little surprise, I didn't want him painted with the same brush as me. He reluctantly agreed, even though I knew if push came to shove he would admit foreknowledge of the trap. Jack was just that type of man, admirable beyond compare.

He walked into my office and sat down on a Thursday afternoon, before the day Rafferty was supposed to be back. I could already tell he was being pulled in many directions at once and wanted to air something out with me. I closed the folder I was working on and sat back in my chair. He had been an excellent choice to work with and over the period of time had become a friend in many ways. I believed he had a right to blow up, get mad or just pour his guts out about the whole enterprise without reprisal or sanction.

He sat there and lit up a cigarette. Blowing smoke toward the ceiling in my office he looked off unto some distant landscape.

"Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer by this son of York." He said while staring off into space.

"Richard the Third. Planning to start a new career? 'Cause I'm seriously thinking about checking out the long haul truck driving school in Vegas."

"I sat up last night and read it again. I didn't get to bed until two and then I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and turning, wondering who was playing Richard in our little drama." Jack crushed out his smoke in my ashtray.

"Good question. Any suggestions?" I had been pondering the same question but in a far less elegant fashion using a mathematical spread sheet.

"I have several. None of them I like very much." He started to get up to leave.

"Sit down, Jack." I motioned to the chair and he complied. "Let it out. I need to bounce it off you as well. I don't like what I'm seeing anymore than you do."

He sat and flicked an invisible piece of lint off his trousers in an effort to buy himself a little more time. "If someone is monitoring us this closely, then wouldn't it seem logical that Tugy would have information that would put him in more control at Dulce? If Tugy doesn't know anything that we are doing, then who is getting the information? And if someone else has it, could it be the very group we are spending so much time and money on to prevent from wiping us all out?" Jack had been counting on his fingers.

I asked my burning question: "What if it's none of them?"

"Exactly. Then who is it and why do they want to know what we're doing? If they are coming from the future, they should already have all of that information; it would be their history." Jack had taken the same quantum leap I had two days before.

“Do you read much about quantum physics?” I wanted to know at what level I needed to start to hear myself talk and explain what I believed to be the truth.

“I’m acquainted with it, but I don’t claim to know a great deal about it. Remember I am only an engineer, by education and a soldier by profession.” Jack smiled to himself.

“Simply put, time travel has all kinds of booby traps. Some are the kind that won’t allow certain actions to take place. You’ve heard of the ‘Grandfather Paradox’?”

“Sure. I can’t go back and kill my own grandfather, because then I wouldn’t exist. The time frame won’t allow it. If I am not born then I couldn’t travel back in time.” Jack might not have expressed it like a scientist, but hit it right on the mark.

“Exactly. But there is no paradox if someone jumps into the future and then brings back information into the past. It only accelerates the process. Since they are using something we invented here and now and then take it back with them into their present timeframe, they can use it, make it or create it. All that means is that on their timeline, the events happen differently. We are not affected because we are actually on a separate and distinct time line.” I heard myself and started to realize that I was probably correct about one thing.

“Okay, so how does that affect our Visitor in the vault?” Jack was not there yet, but getting really close.

“They aren’t monitoring us for someone else. They are using what we are doing to help them build their devices. In that way, they are making huge leaps ahead of everyone else.” I couldn’t believe what I was saying, but it fit the problem very well.

“So the guy that visited you, was from our past?” Jack asked.

“From one of our possible pasts. He had to have gone ahead on the timeline and found the information in the work we are doing here, then took it back with him. When he shows up back in my office, he is jumping forward again and giving me what we would have already designed in our own future at some point. But then he looks like Mr. Wizard and we start thinking he is the mastermind of all masterminds. I know how crazy this all sounds, but it still fits onto the board as a good playable game piece.”

“Then they are somewhere behind us on the timeline?” Jack rubbed his face and looked at the ceiling again.

“Or between intervals on the timeline. Choosing to stay in a sort of limbo. In that way they don’t have to worry about being found, then or now.” This was the worst part of the theory that I could not hope to defend to Bellamy or Harv if I had written an equation to prove the point. We had broken out the masks, rattles and grass skirts, because this wasn’t science anymore; it was Voodoo.

The intercom buzzed and Shirley’s voice came over it. “Harv’s on two for you Dr. Humphrey.”

“Thanks Shirley.” I sat there for a moment, laughing to myself again.

“You know I think sometimes he has this room bugged as well.” Jack said off handedly.

“Yes Harv.” I answered the call and put it on speaker.

“Of course I do!” His gruff voice came down.

“Oh shit!” Jack said under his breath.

“Yes, of course I do, whaddaya think? Okay, get back to me!” Harv was yelling at someone else. “Sorry Ted, someone is having a cow about something they think is important over at the White House. Listen, tomorrow is going to be a strange day. Boss One and I will be at our respective spots monitoring from long distance, but are you guys ready at that end for this little fiasco?” Harv was slurping coffee.

“Yes. Jack and I were just going over the final plans.”

“Final plans?” Harv huffed. “A camera and a set of high gain mics in a room doesn’t sound like any major strategic formulation to me.” Harv heard every word I said and wanted to know what they meant.

“Right. We are just very interested to see the results.” I tried to cover my tracks on this one the best I could.

“Kiddo, I hope you don’t have any surprises for me and old what’s-his-name.” Harv sounded deadly cold on the other end of the phone.

“I just hope we get results.” I looked at Jack who had his head buried in his hands.

“Good. I’ve sent the Excalibur Program file folder out by special courier. It’s huge, about four hundred pages and twenty-five diagrams. Now here’s the killer. We had the boys over at Brookhaven National Labs put it together on the fly. Bellamy told them it was a theoretical exercise needed post-haste. Gave them the parameters and they whipped out something that looks like the next gen of devices coming out of Loch Nor in China. Well, the funniest damn thing happened! Some dumb bastard over at the White House got wind of it and that fucking cowboy actor that thinks he’s President hears about it and wants to start building a whole program around it! So while we speak they’re starting something called the Strategic Space Weapons Program that he nick-named ‘Star Wars’, for Chrissakes! He somehow found out about it and now wants the damn thing built in less than a year. Can you believe that?” Harv didn’t wait for an answer. “So if someone calls and asks if we are working on it, the answer is ‘yes’ and ‘Hell, YES!’ HA-HA!”

“Harv!” I yelled at the phone.

“Boss’s orders. They want to weaponize space and we are here to help. That is the long and short of it. So all our money problems are over at least!” Harv laughed again.

“How did they find out about it?” Jack asked, without raising his head.

“What did he say?” Harv didn’t hear the question.

“Who told them over at the White House about it?” I refined the question for Harv.

“Oh, hell, nobody knows. Somebody told their wife, who told the butcher at the market who told the news guy for WXXX TV in Chicago who called the White House to confirm the story and they said sure. That’s the way things go in this town. Okay, I’ll be on station tomorrow and we will see what our new friend looks like.” Harv clicked off.

“How far does the paranoia go?” Jack sat back and looked at me. “Did someone just happen to tell someone or did someone show up in the Situation Room in the Basement of the White House and tell someone we had a new invention. That someone being the person who is going to be in the vault tomorrow and just happens to come back the day before to talk to someone else. This stuff could make you start drinking heavily, do you know that?”

“That train left the station for most of us awhile ago. And yes I do. So something that is invented by us and we know is not real, just used as bait for a trap, becomes a real live weapons system, because now we have to build it to please our masters.” I could feel the control of the situation slipping from my grasp.

“Did I do something to you that you are holding a grudge about? Is that why you Shanghaied me into this glee club of yours? As payback? I don’t want your job, Ted. I was happy being a solider in the service of my country. Now I’m dealing with you guys at a level I never wanted at all. What’s worse, I think you’re enjoying my pain.” Jack got up to leave.

“You don’t really want to know that do you?” I wasn’t sure.

“No.” He hesitated for a moment and then turned back to me. “Except the part about not wanting your job.” He laughed and walked down the hallway.



CHAPTER 84

Jack and I had been sitting in the new monitoring facility we had built for about an hour, watching the four different camera angles of the vault. Not much had happened. We'd seen Rafferty twice, walk out of his office and head to the men's room and then back, wiping his hands and mumbling to himself.

The new hallway camera showed the elevator opening and a bright young officer in his blues walking out holding a file folder in his hand. The security guys went through their formal meeting and then one of them took the folder. He logged it in and stood behind their glass protection, until the officer left. At that point they opened the vault and one of them took the file into the room. Rafferty came out, took the clipboard, signed for it and then waited until the security officer went back to his post. He then entered the vault, setting the file down and making the proper entries in his log and placing a self-adhesive label on the new file. It was jet black with a red line running diagonally across the cover. The highest level of security clearance was attached to it. This type of file was so far above Top Secret we doubted the President even knew this level of classification existed.

Rafferty sat down at the conference table and pulled a small black box from his coat pocket.

"Zoom in on that for Christ sakes." Harv's voice was in the room with us.

"It takes a moment, Harv." Jack said with a little more sarcasm than normal.

"What is it?" Harv was blubbing.

"It's a communicator." Bellamy's voice sounded hollow and distant.

"A what?" Harv spoke again. We were in close up mode on one camera and looking at a unit that had one button and a small red lamp on it. Rafferty pushed it twice and then put it away.

"A communicator. I've seen one before." Bellamy answered.

"Who is he communicating with?" Harv couldn't just sit and wait.

"That is what we're going to find out. Pan that camera back out will ya, Jack." Bellamy answered again.

"Yes, sir." Jack was still military, whether he wore civilian clothes or not.

I sat there listening to the sound of the air conditioning duct above my head in the small room off the hallway. The mics were so good in the vault, we could hear Rafferty turning the pages of the report, one by one and looking at each one of them very carefully. I held my breath.

It started very slowly. A shimmering in one corner of the room, then it became more like a glint of something that moved in and out of the light.

"It's starting!" Harv ejaculated.

Then slowly a form began to appear, more like an after image, like looking at the sun then looking away and closing your eyes, the after image still burned onto your retina. Then, as more sparkling atoms came together, the form coalesced.

It was a young woman, with short, dirty blonde hair, dressed in dark slacks and a white blouse. The same woman I had seen in the men's room.

"That's her, Boss!" I spoke to both Harv and Bellamy.

"I hope you have a tape running." Bellamy said dryly.

"Two, one backing up the other." Jack added.

"She is a looker, ain't she?" Harv had to add his lecherous comment, just to annoy us.

"If you like fake boobs." Bellamy retorted with an underlying hostility.

"Oh, those fun bags are the real McCoy!" Harv snorted. "You just don't..."

"Hello, there. How are you, my dear?" Rafferty turned and watched where the phantom was forming.

"Good. And yourself. You haven't been here in a while." The form moved closer to the table and sat down next to him.

"Oh, I have been in training on our new system." He turned and smiled beguiling at her. "I wish you had been with me, we could have had some fun in Houston. It is a lovely city." His voice was pure honey.

"I can't do that, you know that only too well. It is all right for me to come to your place now and then, but we couldn't be seen in public. What would your superiors say?" She spoke with a slight tinny metallic sound to her voice.

"Oh, them. All of their antics! My goodness they don't know the first thing about what they are doing. All this bother, you and I already know how to do it, you are the proof of that, both here and when you come to me at home." Rafferty made a gesture.

"She comes to him in full physical form?" Harv coughed into his hand. "That old bastard has been boning this broad! That's why he's giving her access to our files! He should be fucking hung." Harv was never lacking opinions.

"By his nuts! But try to convince a jury he's having an affair with someone that doesn't live here any more." Bellamy added.

"Listen, I have this new file I think Simon would like to know about." Rafferty added nicely and then turned it to face her.

"Simon? Oh my fucking GOD! Simon Ratterman!" I actually yelled.

"Easy Ted." Bellamy's voice was right in my ear.

I slammed my hand down on the table. "ARRGH! I KNEW she looked familiar! That's Ann Corbett!! But, shit, that was over twenty-five years ago! I saw her in Barstow! She was posing as a waitress! She was the last person to talk to my dad." I was raging at this point.

"Ted...?" Jack turned to me, looking concerned.

"I know, I know....!" I tried to calm myself down and get back on track.

"What is it about, Raffy?" She spoke in a low voice that still sounded mechanical somehow.

"A new defense system designed to blow up the little guys at Dulce, I would imagine. It has some flaws in it, but in principal it could be made to work, but not in it's present configuration." Rafferty added.

"He could figure it out that quickly? By page four? Shit! I thought you put him out to pasture 'cause he wasn't the brightest bulb on the string?" Harv's voice echoed in the small room.

"We all make mistakes, don't we?" Bellamy wasn't amused at all.

"Boss, can you get him out of there for one minute?" I asked the ceiling.

"Why Ted?" Bellamy answered.

"Trust me!" I wondered if this was the game blower or not.

"Calling. Have Rafferty take this right now." We could hear him making the call and the security man answering at the vault. Rafferty answered the phone looking annoyed.

"Yes sir? Well right now is not a good time....is it in my office? Well. I understand. Well of course... Just a moment then, please. Let me put you on hold. Thank you." Rafferty pushed the hold button on the phone and then turned to his guest again. "I need to take this out there. It is trivial, so I shall only be a moment. Please wait." Rafferty got up and started to leave the room then came back to the table and the phantom of Ann Corbett. "Please wait."

The woman nodded her consent and Rafferty walked out closing the door behind him.

"Te-e-d," Bellamy said, suspiciously, "what is the plan you two clowns have worked out?" Bellamy wasn't surprised at all, but then why should he be. He would have done the same if he had thought of it.

"A reversal." I said. "We set up a Faraday cage that's being pulsed with static electricity."

"DO IT!" Bellamy yelled into the phone. "DO IT NOW!"

I hit the switch. The room glowed for a moment and there was a flare in the camera lens. We changed cameras and used the long distance ones across the room. These would be out of range of the static electricity and we could see the form in the room, swing around wildly, gyrating like a wound up top that had just been released. Jack had to turn down the volume control on the monitoring, since the screams were unearthly and nerve racking.

"Will it kill her?" Harv asked.

"No, but she's not going anywhere as long I have my finger on the button." I was actually enjoying the show. This bitch had taken away my father, wrecked my wife and destroyed most of my life. It was time for some payback.

"Pressure sensor shows twenty eight, forty one, fifty two..." Jack was counting off the gain of structure and weight going on in the chamber.

"Stop it!" Rafferty was standing in the doorway yelling at the cameras. "Stop it!! You will kill her! God Damn it! Stop it! You can't....you can't...!" He grabbed his chest over his heart.

"Let up Ted." Bellamy spoke above the noise.

"Why? Let's see if we can fry the bitch!" I growled, still holding the button.

"Doctor Humphrey. Release that button...now!" Bellamy went formal.

Jack lifted my hand and the screaming stopped. I jerked my hand away and walked out of the room. I was royally pissed off. I wanted to kill that little whore. If it overloaded her circuits where ever she was, that was alright by me. She deserved to die. She had probably killed my father and for that I would have fried her into the next galaxy over, if I had my way. I walked into my office and sat down in the chair. Jack walked in and pointed at the phone. The hold light was flashing. He turned and walked away closing my door behind him. I picked it up.

"Don't start!"

"I would not think of it." Bellamy said, knowing better than anyone on Earth what Ann Corbett had put me through. "It is just that you made it personal in there and I needed for her to be in one piece when she gets back to where ever it is she is going."

"I know that. You are absolutely correct. I was wrong, but somehow that just didn't matter right then...."

"Rafferty is dead. Massive heart attack. We overloaded his pacemaker."

"Pacemaker?" I choked out the words.

"Yeap. The static electricity in that room was enough to fry the circuits in it. His heart probably exploded in his chest." Bellamy waited for the effects of his word to hit me.

"Oh shit! I'm sorry..." I truly was. I knew Rafferty represented a threat to all of us, but I didn't want to be the one to throw the switch on him. But that is exactly what I had done.

“We both are. Now you have got to get past that and we need to find out what affect we had on her, where ever she is.” Bellamy spoke very quietly into the phone.

“How do you propose we do that?” I asked, not really caring right now.

“I will make contact with someone who can find out.” Bellamy was still quiet for a moment. “Have Jack secure the area and have forensics work it over.” The line went dead. I walked out into the hallway and Jack stood looking at the floor.

“I’m sorry, Jack” I looked at him.

“So am I, Ted. So am I.” He lifted his head and his face showed a solemn sadness.

“Secure the vault and have the team process it for any evidence, please.” I turned to walk away.

“Ted.” Jack stepped closer to me.

“Yes.”

“It wasn’t your fault. I don’t know why it happened that way, but sometimes things just happen and we can’t understand them.”

I knew he was trying to make it all right for me and heal the wound that now existed between us. But I didn’t care. I’d let my own desire for revenge cloud my judgment and it took him to stop me. I felt truly ashamed of myself. I walked away toward the lounge at the end of the hall.

I didn’t want to talk to anyone anymore.

PART TWELVE

MISTER ATKINS



CHAPTER 85

I told Shirley I'd be gone for a while and probably wouldn't come in the next day either, and drifted out of the building like a ghost with no religion. She looked at me with worry in her eyes, but I didn't wait around for her to call Jack or anyone else. I got in my car and drove. I cleared the main gate at Groom Lake, or Five-One or Dreamland, or whatever the hell they were calling it now, and tore down the 17 mile dirt Groom Lake Road, raising a huge sandstorm of gravel and dust in the air. A black helicopter swooped over me low, heading into the base. I ran the stop sign and squealed onto the pavement of Interstate Highway 375 in a careening controlled skid. I down shifted as the engine whined in protest, and tore up 375 headed north, with absolutely no plan to go home at all.

I needed solitude, and central Nevada was the place to find that. I moved up the Tickaboo Valley, out beyond the trailer park shanty-town of Rachel, Pop. 18, and took 375 till it ended at a gas station in Warm Springs. I headed west, skirted around the Nellis Test Range, which is three times the size of Switzerland and takes up most of the middle of the state, and headed back down south on Highway 95, which bordered the west side of the range.

I crossed over the mountains on a two-lane blacktop that led down into Death Valley. On the edge of the desert, just along the foothills, is an old desert resort that was a high spot for movie stars back in the day. The Desert Inn was a well-designed desert building set amongst the gigantic boulders and desert plants. It had Arctic air conditioning, huge guest room suites, and a great restaurant and bar. I'd taken both Ellen and Irina there....back...when I was happy...and not a murderer.

I checked in with Tessa, a cute, young, perky local blonde, whose shirt was much too tight, and pulled my emergency travel bag out of the trunk I always had packed just for emergencies like base lock downs or complete and utter psychotic freakout breaks with reality. It was the height of their season, so Tessa did some finagling to get me the best room in the place for a government employee rate.

The room was ridiculously spacious, with two huge thick plate picture windows providing a panoramic view of the magnificent desert landscape. The heat was shimmering on the rolling white sand dunes in the distance. I cranked the air conditioner to maximum and lay down on the bed, just to enjoy the peace and quiet.

I wasn't aware of what happened, but between all the events of the last few days, I drifted into a dreamless sleep, where black nothingness surrounded my mind and I was embraced in the sweet arms of Morpheus.

I heard a ringing in the distance that grew closer, until finally I shook myself awake. I looked around, not remembering where I was, feeling startled. I couldn't imagine who was calling. No one knew I was here, that was the whole point of running away. So in a less than friendly voice I answered.

"Yes!" I growled.

"Dr. Humphrey, is that you?" A polite, timid young woman's voice said. "This is Tessa, at the front desk."

I immediately felt bad. Clearly she was just doing her job and I was ready to chew her head off. "Sorry, sorry...just woke up. Yes, Tessa, this is Dr. Humphrey, what can I do for you?"

"There's a message for you, sir, ah, doctor...sorry." Her friendliness returned as she read the message back to me. "A Mr. Atkins was wondering if you would be so good as to have dinner with him in the dining room in about an hour?"

"Is he a guest?" I didn't recognize the name at all.

"No. He is apparently driving here to meet you." She sounded unsure of the whole idea, but was probably used to strange meetings at this place, far from the prying eyes of others.

"Is there any information about who he represents or a call back number?" I was curious as to how someone could find me here so quickly.

"No, nothing at all. Would you like me to arrange a table by the window for six thirty?" She was being very nice.

"Sure, why not. Is the food good?" I joked with her.

"Best for a hundred miles in any direction." She tossed back. I liked that one.

"That's not hard to say, now is it?"

"I'll have your table waiting. Gotta go." She hung up. Clearly someone had walked up to the front desk that she didn't want to ignore.

I got up and decided to clean up. One never knows what a meeting like this is going to turn out to be like, so one should always put their best foot forward. I laughed and unpacked my case. My Walther PPK was snug in its holster. I pulled it out and checked the action. It might just be the other item I would never leave home without, beside my American Express card.

* * * * *

"Tell me again! The part where no one knows where he is right now?" Bellamy and Harv were on the speaker with Jack who was sitting in the conference room. Bellamy sounded very cold on the phone.

"He checked out while I was over at Five-One having the place sealed and getting the forensic team doing collections. I got back and Shirley told me he'd gone home." Jack replied. "I know I should have been watching more closely, but I didn't think he would just leave."

"Did he take an escort?"

"No one." Jack could hear the wheels grinding away at the other end.

"Do we have a marker on his car?" Bellamy hissed.

"We do, but all scans come up empty." Jack told them.

"How can that be? Those things can be picked out by any of the orbiting Keyhole Satellites." Harv interjected.

"Unless he's in some area of high metal concentration, iron ore or tungsten." Bellamy offered up. "Put a team on it, now. Don't spook him or approach if they find him, just monitor until I can get out there."

"You're going?" Harv asked.

"Yeah. He's going to need some answers and I am the one who needs to give them to him. He fried a guy this morning and I don't care what he might have thought about Rafferty, he was still a human being and Ted is going to feel responsible for it." Bellamy hesitated for a moment. "Jack, will you come with me when I get there?"

"Sure Boss, I'll be standing by to pick you up. I called out a search team to work in all directions." Jack looked at the map and wondered where Ted would be headed.

"If we are getting no signal he is hunkered down somewhere. Have Metrics pull all the places within two hundred miles that have heavy metal concentration and see if anything shows up. Just don't send those guys roving through the desert without a

direction, or we'll have to put search teams out to find the search teams." Bellamy ordered.

"Besides frightening all the locals!" Harv laughed.

"So true. Find and watch is the order, Jack. Make it so."

Bellamy clicked off.

* * * * *

The dining room was as nice as the rest of this palace in the desert. A large open room that was cool to the point of being almost cold. Several couples were sitting in the room and waiters in black slacks and white shirts with ties, were hovering around to make sure all their desires were met. It seemed strange to be here and not really have any reason to be, as well as meeting a perfect stranger who knew more about me than I did about him.

The natural rock had been used for the outside walls and thermal glass panels provided the view of the desert in the distance without allowing the ultraviolet rays to get through and heat up the air. I took the chair by the window and ordered a cup of coffee and looked lazily at the menu. When I lived in Barstow I always wondered how they could sell fresh seafood in a town three hundred miles from the ocean. The same went for this establishment. But they had some exotic dishes I would have never expected to find in Death Valley.

"Dr. Humphrey? May I join you?"

I turned to see a tall thin man in a well-pressed expensive navy blue suit, thin blue tie and dark brown Fedora standing next to me. He could have stepped out of an MGM movie in the 1930s. His eyes were a deep, piercing, crystal blue and his skin a pale white and almost tissue thin.

"Mr. Atkins?" I stood up to greet him. He nodded silently and sat down crossing his legs and placing his hat on the empty chair revealing a thick shock of metallic silver hair. He meticulously unfolded his napkin, laid it gently on his lap and clasped his hands on the table.

"I hope you have not been waiting long?" Atkins spoke as the waiter moved over to loiter around us, taking drink orders and main selections, telling us how good the items we picked were. When my fresh coffee came, I added some milk and waited for him to start the conversation.

He looked very calm and then nodded towards the sand dunes.

"Did you know every year the desert encroaches on more and more land around the earth?" He sipped his tea and put the cup down quietly.

"I didn't know that. But then again it's not my area of expertise. Is this your field?" I thought about getting the game under way and this looked like the best opening gambit.

"No, but I am interested in the field of ecology on...planetary levels. As with many species that have periods of existence within certain environmental niches, planets go through changing processes that can be charted and graphed. This world is no exception. During the last glaciation period, this entire area was one large inland sea. But now it is an inhospitable terrain fit only for small, well-adapted creatures and, of course, man. Humans have a strange way of surviving in very harsh areas, have you ever noticed that?" Atkins was stone faced. He had to be a good poker player, which was all I could determine so far.

Our main courses came and we ate in relative silence. The entree' was excellent and I truly enjoyed it with the view in the background. After the meal I found I was starting to relax and I was not sure why.

"I grew up out there, in a small town, on the other side of that." I motioned toward the desert.

"Yes. Barstow, if my memory serves correctly." Atkins barely moved a muscle as he said it, all the time he just watched my eyes.

"That's right. You have me at a disadvantage, sir. You know something about me, and I know nothing about you. That hardly seems...well mannered." I found a slight flare of anger rising in me.

"I know your father. That is all." He smiled briefly.

"My father's been dead for almost thirty years. I think the phrase you are looking for is, that you 'knew' my father." I felt the flush hit my face as the blood rushed up to it.

"The report stated that he was...missing...yes? Was he ever confirmed dead?" Atkins folded his napkin and laid it on the side of the table.

"When someone isn't around for thirty years, you can normally figure they're dead, whether you have an official report or not." I was finding this a little hard to take right now. "Look, do you mind if we give up the waltzing around and get down to the reason you wanted to see me. It surely wasn't because you knew my dad, once."

"That is precisely why I wanted to see you. Because of your father. You see our relationship, his and mine, goes back a very long time. Here, this might help." He pulled a faded photograph out of his wallet and laid it down next to my hand. The picture was almost identical to the one I always carried in my wallet, the one Kammler had given me.

"I've seen one like this before." I picked it up and looked very carefully at it. Atkins didn't look much different in the photo than he did sitting across from me.

"That is because they were taken within minutes of each other. I took one with the three of them in it, Kammler, your father and Simon Ratterman. Then Ratterman took one, with me in it." Atkins looked out into the desert watching the sun descend over the Paramint Range in the distance.

"You were working with them in Germany? After the war?" I laid the picture down and slid it across the table. He picked it up and replaced it in his wallet.

"No, I wasn't working there. I was just...visiting...them." Atkins motioned to the waiter to bring over more coffee and hot water.

"Then exactly what part of the secret government do you work for, anyway?" The waiter refilled my cup and his teapot with hot water and moved away trying to be nonintrusive.

Atkins laughed slightly, "I am not one of those types. I am an historian of sorts. I conduct research on technology."

"That facility was closed up tighter than a bull's butt in fly season. If you don't work for the government, you would have never gained entry. So let's give up the charades and just tell me what you want. That picture will buy you about two more minutes of my time and, that's it! Don't waste it!"

"I would imagine that you would be the one wanting my time actually, Dr. Humphrey. I am the only one in the flesh who can tell you how to make the small orbiter craft in your hanger at Groom Lake work, without losing time." He dabbed his mouth after he had taken a drink of tea.

I couldn't believe what I had just heard. I cocked my head and leaned forward.

"Okay. You just bought yourself five more minutes."

"That gives me seven." He flashed a bizarre crooked smile. "All right, here it is: You are working on two items of vital interest to certain parties. The first is a device that will allow you to move through time, back and forth, and by doing so you believe you can mend and modify a rend in the local space/time matrix.

"Secondly: you are trying to find out how the craft works so you can reverse engineer one very much like it and use it for defense in a few years against a marauding band of planet killers that are supposed to descend upon your world when

certain galactic alignments occur after Decmeber of 2012. Am I correct, so far?" He paused and looked back out at the sunset.

"You just got an extension on that clock." I sat back and wondered where this guy came from.

"Thank you. Who likes to rush? There is never enough...time...yes?" Atkins pulled a long white piece of paper out of his pocket and laid it on the table pushing it towards me. "These are the formulas you will need to work out the faults in the device. With those equations you can have it up and operating in less than a month. Please make an extremely careful note of the handwriting."

I opened up the folded sheet and saw seven equations running down the center. Every one of them fit perfectly into the problems we were having. The designs left for me before by my other friend, Charlie the Magic Janitor, was the mechanical aspect. This was the program that would make it work like a Swiss watch. I had only completed the top one. Back at the lab it would require a whole series of trail and error experiments, thousands of man-hours and take years to get to the second one, if we ever stumbled on it at all. I folded the paper back up only to reopen it and look at the handwriting, as realization dawned.

"That's right, Ted. It was done by your father. He wanted you to have it after you got to a point where you could use it on the small device." Atkins smiled at me.

"When did he give this to you?" My head was whirling again and I had a thousand questions.

"Let me simply say that it was after his disappearance." Atkins was being cagey and I didn't like this part of his game.

I sat back and waited while some folks walked past the table and were speaking about the vista outside. The dinning room by now was fairly empty and the wait staff were cleaning up and clearing off tables to prepare for the breakfast rush the next day.

"And the little craft? What about it?" I waited while he finished his tea.

"Ratterman gave your wife Irina a template to operate it. The only problem with it was that he gave her only a third of it. He was hoping you would be eager and reckless enough to try it and be scattered across the universe, hopelessly marooned in the infinity of space and forever lost in time. You, wisely, resisted that impulse. So Dr. Ratterman underestimated you. I assure you he will not do so again. If you knew exactly how the scout craft worked, you could use the ship for many things that would directly affect his plans and those of the people he works with. So he tried to get you out of the picture. Piff!" He gestured with his hands like an explosion. "Ted Humphrey is gone and nobody is going to be able to fix the problem. In effect, by default, he wins the game."

"What game?" I was trying to follow him.

"Dear boy, the race that all of you are in to save this little world of yours. Simon Ratterman sold you all out years ago and went to the other side. He has been coming and going trying to muck about and cause problems. But there are many of us who love this world and would like to help more, but the rules of engagement and involvement are very strict and only certain things can be done." He looked across at me and then closed his eyes. "You are still dealing with this exclusively as a scientist and you haven't figured out that you need to move into a different realm of thinking. You need to start managing this problem as though the future depended on it, because, I assure you, it does. Your father was willing to make many sacrifices in this matter and he believed you would be of the same mettle as he was in this regard."

"Then by giving me this," I held up the paper, "you're not violating the rules?"

"No. We did not produce it, your father did. Ratterman gave you the template. If you can find the other part of it, then we have not violated the rules." Atkins gave a slight, but knowing smile.

“And, of course, it also benefits you and yours if we get it right?” I added, playing a hunch.

“Of course. But be that as it may, the task at hand is going to take your undivided focus and concentration. You must not waiver. Today, you left the base with the idea of never going back. If you do that the projects there will be thrown into disarray and the time line for completion will be set back years, at the very least, which is time you do not have. By that action alone, you guarantee your world will never be ready for the time horizon or event, and hence, you doom this entire evolving sector of the galaxy.” Atkins was actually animated and intense for a moment.

“Ann Corbett?” I had to ask. “I tried to destroy her double today inside a static chamber.”

“I know.” He didn’t act surprised at all. “You damaged her. It will take months of rehabilitation before she can make another time jump. Crude as your trap was, it caught her and Ratterman off guard. He is now angrier than I could ever have believed. He took her with him when he left years ago and has used her in many ways, so if the man is capable of loving anyone, which I doubt, he is probably smarting badly from having you beat him at his own game and bring her harm. But be warned, he is not a man to be trifled with and he does have means at his disposal. Just a word to the wise.” Atkins raised his finger to the side of his nose in an all-knowing gesture. He then turned his head as if hearing some silent bell. “I must be on my way. Good luck to you, Dr. Humphrey.” Atkins got up and buttoned his jacket.

“One more question before you leave, please?” I hoped he would linger just a moment longer. I felt the Walther PPK in the small of my back and considered using it to hold him here until I could get a team down from the base.

“I will answer it, but first.” He laid the clip to my automatic on the table. Smiling he looked down at me. “I haven’t lived this long among humans without understanding how their minds work.”

“Sorry, old habits die hard.” I apologized.

“Your question.” He waited.

“Is my dad still out there somewhere? Alive?” I held my breath.

“Your father is not far away right now. Yes he is alive. But I cannot say more as it would deflect your progress. He wanted me to give you that. It should indicate something of his concern for this project.” He paused and closed his eyes, listening to some inner guidance. “Your father, in his way, loves you very much and is proud of the man you have become. He promises he will make all this right someday and that your difficult path was necessary, in order to save us all.”

Tears welled up in my eyes. “Thank you.” I said to the strange visitor.

“I cannot linger. In one minute and twenty-seven seconds you are going to have some company. Good-bye Dr. Humphrey. Until we meet again.” He touched my shoulder and I felt a shock go through my body. I wanted to get up, but couldn’t move. All I could do was watch in the mirrors at the distant end of the room his retreating form as he walked through the lobby and waved at the receptionist. As he opened the right door to exit the lobby, the left door opened and Bellamy came bursting through with his security team in tow. When the paralysis finally wore off I staggered to my feet and toddled towards Bellamy like a two-year old, waving my arms in desperation, but I couldn’t get my speech centers working. Bellamy saw me and ran up to me and I fell into him hugging him around the neck to break my fall.

“S-s-s-stop the man... passed...you!” I stuttered in a cracking voice.

He sat me back down in a chair, concerned.

“Do you need a doctor?”

“N-n-no! Stop... silver...man just passed in... lobby.” I felt a sharp pain in my arm.

“I didn’t pass anyone. I have two guys out there who told me nobody had been through there in twenty minutes. That you were sitting here alone.” Bellamy sat down in the chair just occupied by Atkins. He picked up the clip for the Walther and looked at it. “We got a problem here or what?”

“No, thas mmmmine.” I said slowly getting my tongue to work again. “But to tell you how it got there, you just won’t believe me.” I took it and dropped it into my coat pocket.

“Try me.” Bellamy barked and he called a waiter over and, reluctantly, the man went to brew a fresh pot of coffee, then Bellamy steepled his fingers and sat back.

“I am all kinds of interested to hear anything you got to say.”



CHAPTER 86

It was midnight by the time we had finished discussing my meeting with Atkins. Bellamy listened while I related every detail in depth and my assumptions about what it all meant. The waiter had left, telling one of Bellamy's aides where to find the fresh coffee and where to put the dirty dishes when we were done. He had to be back for breakfast and didn't want to spend all night sitting there. The \$100 bill Bellamy handed him recovered his normal helpful attitude and probably a word or two from one of the Boss's men, encouraged him to forget ever seeing any of us.

After Bellamy finished reading the paper I handed him, he slid it back to me and lit his pipe. "I've torn apart four states looking for you, do you know that?"

"Oh, come on! Seriously? I've been gone, what? Ten hours? What is the big deal, Boss? Can you climb out of my ass just long enough for me to clear my head? Christ! I just murdered an old man!"

"Say that to me again, very slowly." Bellamy looked at his watch.

"I left the base at exactly 1100 and it is now midnight. 13 hours. What is the big deal? I would have been back by tomorrow about noon." I sat there waiting for an answer that didn't seem like it was coming.

"Ted. You have been missing and completely off our radar for three days." Bellamy blew smoke toward the ceiling. Thinking about what I had just said and pondering the consequences of it. "It took us two and half days just to find your car. The registry at the front desk says that you checked in Monday at about four. Today is Wednesday night, Thursday morning." Bellamy was talking very slowly.

I was flabbergasted. "That...that can't be! Call the front desk girl, ah, Tessa! She'll tell you I checked in today. She had to juggle rooms to get me one." I was pushed back a step or two by his reaction.

"I did. She told me that you have been in your room and calling down for room service. Tonight is the first time you came out and you had dinner alone." He raised his hands in a gesture of not understanding.

"I don't get it. I just don't understand." I was confused again but now starting to panic. Time movement inside a time movement, I needed some answers that no one here was going to be able to explain to me.

"Let's head back to your place and spend the night there and then tomorrow we will all sit down and try to make sense out of it." Bellamy got up and motioned for his men to head out and get the cars ready.

"Am I under house arrest or something like that?" I was suddenly frightened of Bellamy and now terrified that they would order Jack Thompson to shoot me in the back of the head. I stood up and stumbled backwards. "Are you gonna have me killed now?"

"TED!" Bellamy said. "No. I just don't want to stay out here, so far from back up. It is more my own paranoia than anything about you. Come on, my friend, let's you and I sit in the back seat and talk while one of these over paid thugs drives us back over the mountains." He nodded to the large blonde man in front of us, who opened the

front door. "I need to hear what your new friend told you before you sleep on it and forget all about it again." He laughed. "We have a strange way of doing that don't we?"

I was not quite sure of what he meant, but it was clear to me that he had some experiences similar to mine and had lost the main thrust of his meetings after sleep. But I still wasn't sure if he just wanted to know everything I knew before he made me dead.

* * * * *

We had spent the morning going over the incident in the conference room. Harv was on the speakerphone and Jack was sitting with us taking notes. By noon I was trashed and needed some shut-eye. My whole circadian rhythm was off and I was running behind the curve a little too far to be of help to anyone right now. Over the past few months I had the fabrication guys build me a half dozen plastic templates like the one Irina had given me on that fateful day at Betty's Diner, which seemed like a hundred years ago.

I picked up one of the green replicas off my desk as I laid down on the couch, held it up to the ceiling lights and examined it carefully. I thought about how it worked in the craft and then smiled to myself. Of course, I knew something right then that made total sense that I should have seen before. Hitting the couch in my office I dropped off into a deep sleep, and let my body relax for the first time in a long while.

I awoke at five am. Someone had thrown a blanket over me and taken off my shoes. The couch in my office was being used more often than the king-sized bed at my house across the valley Ellen and I once shared. This wing of the building was silent with the exception of the air conditioner sounds coming from the vents. I watched a dust strip on the blower oscillate as the flow of air moved past it. That was part of one of the answers I needed. The second one I would test later in the day.

Walking in my stocking feet I padded down to the reception area. A security officer was always on duty there when Shirley was gone. The young man was sitting reading a sports magazine.

"Good morning." I spoke to him as I silently walked up to him and the young guy nearly jumped out of his shoes getting up and dropping the magazine on the desk.

"Sir, good morning. I was..." He started and I waved for him to relax.

"Is Dr. Bellamy still here or has he left?" I asked him.

"Let's see." He looked at the check in sheet on the desk. "No sir, he is still on site at the transit dorms. Do you want me to call him?"

"No, just leave a message that I'd like to see him after breakfast." I started to walk away and then turned back to him. "How are the Chicago Bears doing?"

"They will never make the playoffs." He relaxed a little more.

"Too bad." I went back to my office to clean up and get ready for what was going to be another interesting day.

By 0900 I had finished my work in the fabrication lab. Technicians were strolling in and upon seeing me working on the plastic cutter, started to act like they had a lot of important business to do. An older man, who was bald, with a reddish face, walked up next to me and watched as I attempted to use the cutter.

"Can I help you with that, Doc?" He looked over at me. He seemed like one of those good natured sort of fellows that could do what I was trying to accomplish in a quarter of the time, but didn't want to show up the amateur if I was bound and determined to display my ignorance of his system.

"Sure can. Not as easy as I thought." I handed him the template and my crude drawing. He looked at the unit I was cutting and pulled out another blank of green plastic.

"It's all in the set up of the cutter. You're running it a little too close to the line you want, it can fillet the holes if you add a little more cutting speed. Here, let me

show you.” He replaced me at the machine and in less than ten minutes had produced the exact image on the plastic that I wanted. I laughed to myself. It had taken me an hour and half to roughly cut my form and, again, I realized I should stick to my whiteboard and let the real experts do their jobs. Thinking about this, I realized my father had to be a man of many skills to have accomplished all he did working alone.

Thanking him, I took the new template and went back to my office. The complex was coming alive with folks in white smocks carrying clipboards moving around the various lab areas I was responsible for. One of these days I think I need to find out what all of them really do here. As I walked past, Shirley was already at her desk. I said good morning, and she got up and stopped me. She folded her arms and the scolding began.

“Boss, it may not be my place to say anything, but this stunt of yours just scared the Be-Jesus out of both me and Jack!” It was the way she said his name that gave me the first indication that theirs had turned into something more than a working relationship. “Well, anyway, listen, you need anything these guys here aren’t supplying, you let me know. I just don’t want you taking off and leaving us all trying to figure out if you’re pulling a Jimmy Hoffa on us, okay?” She smiled at me.

“Anything?” I teased.

“You got it. Hey! You need a hooker, I will go over to the Cotton Tail Bunny Ranch in Pahrump, get the best one I can find, and smuggle her onto the base in the trunk of my car. You want the band from the Sands Hotel lounge, I will steal a truck and get them here. I really don’t care! Just let us know if there is anything we can do.” She blushed slightly, realizing she might have said more than she should have, and showed she might care a bit too much.

“Thank you, Shirley. I don’t think we will have any more problems.” I walked past Jack’s doors. He was acting like he was engrossed in some paper work on his desk. I was well aware that, at this moment, he didn’t want to look up after hearing what had just transpired in the hallway. It was strange how people would react during periods of complex excitement. I thought about it and considered the strangeness of that relationship. I hoped Jack had a better track record with woman than I did.

I walked into my office and the blanket had been put away, everything tidied up and someone had used an air fresher to remove the smell of sleeping man left behind this morning. Bellamy was sitting in my high-backed leather chair and turned around like a James Bond villain.

“Good morning.”

“Is it?” Bellamy looked up and closed his file.

“I don’t know. You tell me, Boss.” I waited.

“I just got the latest report from Dulce. In the last forty-eight hours activities have increased. They’ve sealed off level four again from the inside, and the Hive won’t talk to anyone. I think it’s related to your visit with your new friend.” Bellamy handed me the chart and I looked quickly through it.

“Let’s deal with this one in a little while, I think I have the answer to that problem as well.” I handed back the clipboard and file and clapped my hands. “You got a little time for an experiment that involves real science?”

“Sure, I will make time, if you think it’s important.” Bellamy got up and left the file on my desk as we walked out into the hallway.

“A.D. Thompson! Front and center.” I yelled down the hall.

“Sir, yes sir!” I heard Jack pushing the chair back and jumping up.

“I love that!” I said smiling. “He still thinks when someone calls him by his last name he’s going to get an ass chewing.” I headed down the hall toward the double doors that led to the hanger bay when Jack joined us.

“What’s up?” He asked. Bellamy shrugged his shoulders and pointed at me.

“When I was a kid, I used to watch Mr. Wizard on Sunday morning TV. He was always doing something that was hard science but reducing it to a simple trick to show the kids with him how it applied to everyday life. After he showed them how a newspaper could hold enough pressure, when spread over a yardstick, he could break them in half with just a hit of his hand. I broke a half a dozen rulers learning how to do that one.” We cleared security and then walked into the sterile bay and stood in front of the scout craft.

“So we are going to break yardsticks all morning?” Bellamy added with sarcasm.

“Not exactly, George. Where has your sense of wonder gone? This will cheer you up, I guarantee. Open her up will you Jack.” I watched as the hatch lifted into full open position.

“Inside my man. I thought we would have Jack lose a couple of days and have Shirley pull her hair out for another reason besides me, Boss.” I winked at Bellamy who didn’t seem to be in all that good a mood, if he ever really was.

“Oh great. Payback time.” Jack crawled into the pilot’s seat and waited until it conformed to his body.

“I know how this parts works.” Bellamy added in his cool, dry way.

“Sure you do, but you don’t know this one. Now boys and girls watch Mr. Wizard very carefully as he tests his latest amazing theory.” I turned to Bellamy. “You know when Howard Hughes told the world that if the Spruce Goose didn’t fly he would leave the country. Same bet is on the table right now. I will become a carrot farmer in Idaho if this doesn’t work.”

“It’s potatoes in Idaho, so no chance of that happening. If this doesn’t work I will have two of my guys beat the arrogance out of you for good measure.” Bellamy finally laughed a little.

“Good.” I used my Walter Cronkite announcer voice. “More exciting when life and limb are on the line here folks in greater downtown Groom Lake. It is like working for the Russians at this point with their two-button system. One to launch the missile and if it does not launch, you hit the second button that blows the designer apart. True incentive for the poor schmuck working for you, Boss.” I pulled the new template out of the white envelope I had it hidden in. I handed it up to Jack in the craft who looked at it and placed it on the console.

“Better than Harv’s one button system.” Bellamy added with a sense of irony. “It just off the designer before he can finish the project.”

“Am I supposed to hit any of these unmarked squares?” His fingers were poised over the new configuration as the machine conformed to the new panel. I jumped up and pulled it off the console.

“Oh, hell no!” I handed the template to Bellamy. “Conforms to any shape you place on it. Multiple roles for the same craft. Ingenious as hell isn’t it?” Bellamy handed it back to me and Jack crawled back out of the craft.

“That son of a bitch Ratterman only gave us the parts that would cause time dilation to occur. He wanted us to make a mistake and splatter our atoms all across the space/time continuum. Figured if that happened, we’d give up on trying to find out how these little beauties work. So, we need to start by having an analysis team tell us the finger length spread of the alien hand that flies this thing and how many buttons they could use at one time. We need to work out the configuration of the exact hole placement and then, and only then, can we start pushing buttons and take some easy steps in learning how to fly this thing properly.” I turned and started to walk away.

“You just thought of this all on your lonesome...or did someone tell you these little facts?” Bellamy asked my retreating form heading toward the door.

“It came to me in a dream. Now let’s look at our other problem, I think I may have the answer to that one as well.” Bellamy started to follow me and turned to Jack as he was closing up the lid on the spacecraft.

“Get all of Mr. Wizard on VHS so the rest of us can catch up with our Brainiac here.” Bellamy jogged up to get next to me.

“I love surprises. But Ted, this one is just too good.”



CHAPTER 87

Jack had just walked into conference room two with Dr. Steven Loppin, MD, where Bellamy and I were on the phone with Harv. Loppin looked like a deer caught in the headlights of a fast moving car on a deserted stretch of road in Maine. He didn't even know Groom Lake existed with its black buildings and tons of security all in jump suits, armed to the teeth. He'd been part of PROJECT: HAYWIRE, working exclusively on alien anatomy. He was classified as the best expert we had on their physiology, at least the ones that we knew about, as we had been able to get a body or two courtesy of the Thor's Hammer and PROJECT: POUNCE.

Jack had been running around all morning trying to cover all the requests that I was throwing at him and looked it. I had never seen him in anything but a pressed and ironed shirt and slacks that always looked military perfect. But today he was sporting a pair of Levis and a polo shirt. The only unusual things about him was that he also wore his large .45 Colt automatic on his hip and had a metal security enforcement badge on his belt, making him look like an off duty police officer. Dr. Loppin on the other hand was the perfect M.D. Wearing khaki slacks and button down shirt with pens, lights and a pocket protector. Uncomfortable was all I could add to the description that would make sense of what he looked like.

"You do understand everything said or heard in this room is classified Above Top Secret, don't you, doctor?" Bellamy had put on his 'Voice of God' to make the right impression from the start of the meeting.

"I am cleared by the military to handle security matters. Yes, my work requires it." Loppin was trying to find parity quickly with the scarred faced man across from him.

"Listen to me very carefully. You have not seen any of us here today. You have never been to this facility. You will not remember anything we talk about here today. Is there any part of this you do not understand?" Bellamy wasn't allowing anything near parity to occur.

"Now look here, I am...." Loppin started.

"Dr. Loppin, this is Dr. Harvey Glipsen in DC on the speakerphone." Harv was right on top of it and worked the good cop, bad cop really well with Bellamy.

"Dr. Glipsen." Loppin answered.

"Steve, these men represent the highest level of our government. Don't ask any questions you might regret. Answer them fully and completely and there will be nothing else said about this." Harv was using the oldest trick in the book. He wanted Loppin on the defensive.

"About what? Oh no, never mind. I'm sorry. Yes, I understand that this is a private consultation where no records are to be kept. Fine. What can I do for you gentlemen?" Loppin regained his composure. Everyone in this business lived with paranoia in their back pocket. The stories ran rampant in these places about people disappearing and never being heard from again. Some of them talked about murders in the middle of the night and people being sent off to China for experiments. It made for a great working environment if you were anyplace down on the pecking order or food chain, whichever analogy worked best.

"Is it true that you preformed an autopsy on a type two alien body one year ago in your facility at Five-One?" Bellamy looked at his notebook that consisted of a blank sheet of paper.

"A type two?" Lippon hesitated.

"A reptilian type of alien." Bellamy pushed harder with his voice.

"Yes. That is correct. It had been dead for probably seventy-two hours and had several lacerations and deep cuts on its body, which corresponded to a forcible landing in a hard craft." Loppin was precise, that was good.

"During that investigation did you determine the respiratory system of the alien?" Bellamy was now making notes.

"I did." Loppin however wasn't giving up anything that he wasn't asked. Probably out of sheer terror of saying the wrong thing.

"Describe the respiration method and chemical complex for its survival." Bellamy looked at the man making sure that his scar was pointed right at him.

"It is a gas breather. Mixed levels most likely. It can maintain itself in our environment for one or two days, without marked reduction of ability, but they must have an input of methane at that time or they start to exhibit signs indicating respiratory suffocation. Fluids would start building up in their lungs and they would die in a matter of hours." Loppin waited and fidgeted while Bellamy looked straight at him.

"What kind of gas and air mixture would cause their system to collapse almost immediately?" I asked him in a matter of fact voice.

"Freon, high amounts of hydrogen, any of the noble gases and most likely a compound like Carbide mixed with water. It would fry their lung systems in seconds." Loppin offered up.

"Most likely or it would?" Bellamy fired back.

"It would. Their tissue could not handle it. They would go into arrest from the lack of gas flow because the lung could not function properly and they have no way of throwing it off. With each breath they would be struggling more and more to breathe and gulping in more of a mixture that would cause their alveoli to rupture more and more rapidly. But it would have to be in a confined area and in a highly concentrated dosage." Loppin twisted in his chair in discomfort.

"And hydrogen?" Bellamy looked up from his notes.

"Slower, but the same effect. Suffocation, it would just take longer." Loppin tapped his finger on the table for a moment.

"What is it doctor?" I asked in a gentler voice.

"Florin. It is toxic as hell in a confined area and they could stand it for..." he paused to make a mental calculation, "maybe twenty-five to thirty seconds. Also, it would blind them completely. Their eyes have a strange membrane over them that would erupt when exposed to Florin and expose the inner eye to all ambient light. It would appear that light is one of their greatest dangers. If the membrane is lost or damaged and light gets in, it overloads the brain. They have two of them by the way. Both would be hit with such intense neuro-activity the brain would be mush in ten or fifteen seconds." Loppin looked at us with a knowing glance.

"Dr. Loppin." Bellamy started again. "Thank you for your time, I know it is precious. Jack would you see to it that Dr. Loppin is escorted back to Five-One please. Again doctor, thank you and as I said this will remain among us. Is that correct?"

"Yes it is, er, it will." Loppin got up and stopped at the door. "I would recommend using Florin in liquid form, so the spill keeps generating gas molecules in a confined area and then turn on the highest intensity lighting system you can obtain. Personnel involved should be equipped with rubber boots, haz-mat suits, latex gloves and scrubbers for breathing." He stood there while Bellamy looked at him, giving up

nothing by his facial expressions. "It will be quick and deadly, they won't have time to don any kind of protective gear."

"Thank you, doctor." Bellamy stood up and motioned to Jack who ushered him out. I got up and closed the door, so as not to hear Jack's diatribe about not talking or thinking about what was said as he escorted him back up to reception and the waiting security team.

"Smart man. Knows we're hunting wabbits!" Harv laughed at the other end of the phone.

"You got something really juicy on him, Harv?" Bellamy sat back in his chair, lit his pipe up and relaxed for a change.

"Yeah, well, he had a minor indiscretion with a nurse over at Five-One. Cute little thing, too." Harv chuckled.

"And?" Bellamy was unimpressed but was a demon for the details.

"He's married. Fourteen years, to a cold hearted devil woman, who would not like to lose her status as a research scientist's wife." Harv laughed again.

"So he knows that as long as he plays ball you won't tell his dear, sweet, darling one?" Bellamy looked up at the ceiling.

"Pretty much the size of it. Nice to know the weak spot, isn't it?" Harv laughed out loud in his office. "He called in to some late night radio show guy one night when he thought no one was listening, and, wouldn't you know, he got caught. Talked about wanting to go public and write a tell-all best seller. We had a chat a few days after that. Since then, he's sat in that lab of his and worked like a beaver for us."

"Can't blame a guy for trying. Would have been a best seller too, I imagine." Bellamy nodded to himself.

"Like the one you could write?" I looked at him.

"Oh yeah. 'Memoir of A Man In Black.' Book of the month club selection for fiction and horror." Bellamy sat back and waited until Jack came back and sat down.

"I presume, which is always dangerous around here, that someone came up with a better idea about Dulce than storming the front door with the Marines and having to send out a lot of letters to grieving mothers and wives." Jack said while trying to find which cup on the table was his.

"That's what I like, someone that can follow a disjointed conversation without the aid of the cue cards." Harv roared down the line.

"Hey! Where is my raise?" Jack yelled back. "You piker. You told me it would be on the last check and it wasn't."

"Minor oversight. Have to check with the accounting office. Blah-de-blah-blah! What's wrong? Not making enough for your new lifestyle?" Harv was still laughing. It somehow relieved the tension all of us felt.

I couldn't resist the temptation to join in. "His girlfriend is more demanding and he needs to prove he's the top dog in our little pack."

"Ted!" Jack looked at me as though I had just told the story I had always promised to keep hidden from childhood.

"Sorry." I wasn't and that was ok, too.

Bellamy brought all of us back to earth. "Gentlemen, we have a mission to plan and I need all of your input. I need a good solid plan, and it must be reviewed by everyone involved before we launch. Jack, take care of the manpower side. Pick one of the crack groups from Delta and bring their commander in when you think it's right for a briefing. I will be there and so will Ted. Harv, I need you to handle logistics. We will need to move a shitload of Freon without anyone knowing. We'll need FEMA involved and all the back up Haz-Mat folks you consider necessary. We will have to evacuate the Apaches in the town around the Mesa and use some cover story. I always like the one about the nuke lost in the mountains and have them clear the area for

fifteen or twenty miles. Very dramatic, but some viral outbreak is the old stand-by. Less trouble for everyone.”

“Got it. I will put all of that together as fast as possible.” Harv was back to being a professional again.

“And me, Boss?” I asked.

“You are coming in with me for a few days. We got some folks to talk to.” Bellamy got up and closed his folder.

There were no questions.



CHAPTER 88

We gently touched down. The airstrip was just another one in a desert somewhere north of Groom. I noticed a little green town nearby in the dimming light of sunset. We were in a small white Lear Jet just noisy enough to make talking difficult. So Bellamy and I sat back and watched the empty space of Nevada go by under our wing from thirty thousand feet. As we rolled toward a large hanger, Bellamy put together his papers and closed his briefcase.

"We can sure pick the worst spots to work in, can't we?" He moved forward and released the door, even before we were completely stopped.

"Where exactly are we?" I followed him down the ramp and off onto the tarmac next to the hanger. A car waited and his two bodyguards were ahead of us, checking out the car very quickly, issuing orders for the man standing beside it. He turned and walked back toward the hanger.

"Fallon Naval Air Station, Fallon, Nevada." He pointed. "The main area where the navy guys train is over there. This part of the field is off limits to them. This area was a joint use training center until we finished construction. Now it's in our inventory."

We got into the backseat of the car and the two men in front of us drove off toward a more remote part of the airfield. A low flat building came into view as we rounded one of the small desert hills. We slowed and drove into a completely enclosed parking garage. Bellamy got out and I followed him. As we went through the glass doors connected to the garage, it looked like we were entering a hospital or clinic of some kind. I felt my stomach tighten.

"Welcome, gentlemen." An older woman in a black business suit and white blouse came over and extended her hand. "Welcome to the 'Admiral Jacobs Facility.' We are honored to have you as some of our first guests." After shaking our hands, she walked ahead of us and told us about the various areas set aside for medical research.

"Our principal work is in aviation medicine and space biology. We have been working on a series of new sensors for monitoring vital signs during high altitude flights and the effects of upper atmospheric ionization of the human physiology and ways of preventing the injurious effects of space borne gamma rays from causing bone cancer and bone density loss." It seemed to me like we were getting the \$2.00 tour that she did for tourists fourteen times a day, but I knew better.

"Here you go." She motioned to a set of double doors, with a sign that simply stated: "Rad Lab". Bellamy thanked her and we walked into a glass and metal room. The windows were opaque and frosted. The metal was shining aluminum. Bellamy stepped forward onto a circle indicated on the floor and placed his briefcase next to him and raised his arms.

"Bellamy, George M." A high pitched sound filled the room and one of the panels ahead of him opened and he walked through it. He turned and pointed to me.

"Humphrey, Theodore J., Jr." The room filled again with the sound and the panel opened and I walked into another world.

“This entire thing is called Project: TEMPUS FUGIT. It’s the most advanced experimental time research center in the world. Sixteen floors of concrete and steel, riding on a set of springs at the bottom that can take a direct hit from a nuclear bomb and just bounce up and down for a few minutes. It has four nuclear power plants. Seven of the floors are living areas, set aside for members of the team. There’s a shopping mall, a food court, and even a theater showing the latest Hollywood hits. The next seven floors are set aside for research projects. On fifteen, we have offices and meeting rooms. Sixteen, or as they call it here, One-Six, is dedicated to the Pit. That section is devoted exclusively to Project: Time Runner.” Bellamy pushed a button on the wall and a silent elevator opened. The walls were glass and as we went down I could get glimpses of the other floors. The place was enormous.

The elevator glided to a stop and the doors effortlessly opened. Another corridor and two security men stood by the entrance. I started to reach for my wallet and ID.

“You don’t need that here. Once you have cleared the top security screen, you can go anywhere in here. You are monitored completely. Every person can be located immediately on screen maps you will see on the walls in various locations. You can watch them move around their labs or in the living area. Every person has an RFID, radio frequency identification tag, imbedded under their skin. Vital signs can be called up on certain consoles and physical conditions can be pulled up as well. The floors have weight sensors, so we can tell if someone is carrying something in their hands and how heavy it is. Air pressure is adjusted every four seconds and extra oxygen is pumped into all areas, to facilitate alertness.”

Bellamy gestured and one of the guards opened the doors for us with a smile and a nod. Bellamy returned the nod and we walked into a conference area with one glass wall. I looked through it at a room right out of Star Trek. Seven devices sat on the floor in various configurations. My devices! The ones I had been trying to build for sixteen years!

I turned to Bellamy clenching my jaw. He looked at me and then out at the lab floor slightly below us.

“Oh,” he said, marking my building rage, “those.”

He sat his briefcase down on the conference table and looked over at the knot of men standing on the far side of the room. He acknowledged them, then turned back to me.

I felt bile come up in my throat as my stomach churned. My fists were clinched at my sides and I was overcome with rage at the realization that everything I had been through my entire life was a rouse.

“Do you mind telling me, why I have spent so long, playing at a game you had already won?” I could hardly get the words out.

“Simply put: time. We needed time and a decoy. You were it.” Bellamy pulled out his pipe and turned back to the men on the far side of the room. “Gentlemen, would you excuse us?”

They all left quietly and without a word. Bellamy pulled one of the chrome and leather chairs out from the table and pushed it over to me, then he sat down.

“I first heard about this place when I was in New York, then I was told it was shut down and we were moving to Nevada. Now, here I am inside what we were supposed to be building at Area 51!” I couldn’t believe what I was looking at. This place had to be online for at least seven or eight years to be this far along. I didn’t know what to believe any more.

“We are at war Ted. We have been for sometime. You have been one of the front line troops busting your ass everyday, getting the shit kicked out of you for good measure, but that is the cost of fighting a war.” Bellamy wasn’t apologizing. He was just making a statement that to him was clear as day.

“So what have I been doing?” I still felt anger welling up inside.

"You are responsible for all of this being here, Ted. Your work, every breakthrough you have made is reflected in that room. The final piece, the confirmation of all this, came the other night when you got those formulas. They were compared to what we had and everybody down here, relaxed. We were right. More importantly; you were right. You were right years ago at Montauk when you laid out the information for the first jump series. We knew then you were responsible for it. We just built it, that's all. But what is really important is that the other side believes we're still struggling with the math and the formulas and dicking around with that little device at Groom. They think we're still seven to ten years behind schedule and that, my friend, is what is going to keep them off balance, because they do not know we are almost ready." Bellamy got up, opened his briefcase and pulled out a Com unit. He hit a button and spoke. His back was turned to me and I didn't hear him or just didn't care. Everyone came back in and stood at attention in their white lab smocks with folded hands. Something was going on.

"Will someone pull up the screens please?" Bellamy asked and a man near the wall hit a set of buttons. Three screens came up out of a piece of furniture. On the right was Jack Thompson in full uniform, sitting at a desk with an American Flag behind him. On the left was Harv, in a suit with the same patriotic background. The middle screen showed just an empty desk flanked by flags and curtains.

A voice came from all around us.

"Gentlemen, the President of the United States."

President Ronald Reagan sat down at the desk.

"Dr. Bellamy, Dr. Glipsen, Dr. Humphrey, Colonel Thompson and members of the staff of the Jacobs Research Facility. Thank you for allowing me to have a few moments of your time. It is an honor and privilege to be able to address you today. Now, I understand this is an unusual situation, but we live in difficult times. The work you have done in the past, and will continue to do, for this great land of ours and for the rest of this little blue green planet, cannot be measured in words. I understand the great sacrifices many of you have made for all of us and if it were up to me, well, I would have the biggest ticker tape parade down Broadway since the astronauts came home from the moon, for you folks. But the reality is we must keep all of this very quiet. I have had to resort to this kind of ceremony which, to me, is demeaning to the man we are here to recognize today. That being said, let me now extend the thanks of a grateful nation and a thankful world, as well as my own humble gratitude to you, Dr. Theodore Humphrey, Jr., for services above and beyond anything that any man can imagine. For what you have done and accomplished is, by and large, the greatest single service that any hero could have ever provided for his nation. In that vein, I would ask Dr. Bellamy to hand you that blue box, please." The President paused.

Bellamy pulled opened the lid on the blue velvet box and held it up so I could see it. "This," Reagan went on, "is The Congressional Medal of Freedom. It is the highest honor this nation can award to any civilian."

A tear formed in the corner of my eye.

"This country owes a great debt of gratitude to you Dr. Humphrey. I have read the reports submitted by Dr. Bellamy, Dr. Glipsen, and Colonel Thompson. All of them are glowing and filled with praise for your valor, courage and dedication to this great cause of ours. It is a small token of appreciation from a grateful nation to one of our heroes, regrettably unsung, though you may be."

The President paused again. Bellamy laid a citation out on the table in a leather portfolio that stated the date and time of the award. He then took it out of the box and hung the ribbon around my neck.

"We can not give up our vigilance, nor can we forget that we fight a dreadful and terrible enemy. But as long as we have people like you, Dr. Humphrey, we have a chance of not just winning but prevailing. Your work has been the guiding light for

several new research projects that will enable us to meet and defend against any enemy from any place in our universe without fear of defeat. We are small by comparison with many worlds but our resolve is great and someday, in the not too distant future, when we have proven that we are not slaves on our knees to masters who would use us wrongly, but men equal to any beings in this universe, we shall be admitted to the Great Council that governs space with a gentle and caring universal understanding that all beings deserve respect and the ability to chart their path to the stars."

The President tilted his head as though he was actually in the room looking at me, and grinned that famous crooked half smile.

"I have been lucky enough to have been taken into the inner circle of the Group and have been told, not all, but a great deal of what you men do each and every day and I must tell you that I am glad that we have such men as you. Men that are willing to place everything on the line to protect the rest of us, without ever asking, what is in it for me. With people like this, how can anyone possibly believe they can defeat us. Dr. Humphrey, we will probably never meet in person, for that I am truly saddened, but when this is all done and over, if you're ever in California, you come by the ranch and we will ride a horse, drink an iced tea and watch the sunset together. You, sir, are always welcome in my world.

"With that being said, I must again, extended the thanks of this nation and this world to all of you that work so hard for all of us. Thank you again. May God bless you, may God bless America, and may God bless this good, good Earth.

"Thank you and good day."

The screen went blank and I heard the thunderous applause of twenty-five or so other people standing in the room behind me I hadn't even heard come in. Men and women all in white lab coats clapping and cheering for me. Bellamy shook my hand then slapped me on the back. "That is from the Gipper!" he said. Harv was saying something, but the clapping drowned him out. I didn't know what to do.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jacobs Research Facility." Bellamy motioned for silence and everyone calmed down. "Ladies and Gentlemen I would like to introduce you to the new director of the Jacobs Research Facility, Dr. Theodore Humphrey. The President's and my best friend." Bellamy played to the crowd and they started to clap again. I felt myself blush and didn't still know what to say. I turned back to the screen and saw Harv pointing to something in the back of the room. He was mouthing a word to me. I turned and looked around the white lab coats and saw black hair, with a streak of white in it and a woman with glasses clapping for me. I strained and pulled out my glasses to get a better look at who was standing among the others, when the lab coats all parted like a foam white sea.

Irina.

I bolted across the room as people were saying different words of congratulations to me and touching me. I moved through the throng, fearful that she would disappear and that it was just another hallucination, but she was there and real. I grabbed her and pulled her to me, embracing her with tears streaming down my face.

"Irina! Where? How?" I held her at arms length. Bellamy was motioning the others away and herding them out of the room. The two screens went blank and we were left alone in the conference room.

"It was Harvey. He pulled me out just before it got bad at the lab in the Urals. The whole place was destroyed within weeks. They said it was on overload in the circuitry, but I know it was an attack by one of them. The ones that tried to kill us both years ago." She smiled and had tears in her eyes as well.

"Pasha?" I asked.

"She is nine now. She is upstairs in school. We live here in the facility. I have been here for two years now." She laughed at me as my faced turned beet red.

"I will personally thank Harv, then kill him." I said through my teeth.

SANDS OF TIME

“It doesn’t matter, we are here together now. Let’s give it some time and see if we still even like each other.” She laughed again.

“Irina?” I looked at her.

“You got married again I hear. That certainly shows depth of commitment.” She acted hurt and then laughed once again. “Later! We will talk later. We have plenty of time now, to catch up on things.”

I hesitated then asked. “Are you married or involved?” I felt my heart skip a beat.

“Involved, yes. Married, no.” She waited to see my expression. “You have that one coming. I am involved in my work here and with our daughter. That is the extent of my involvement as compared to you Americans that trade woman in like cars.” She laughed again and took me by the arm and led me to an adjoining area where a party was in full swing. Bellamy held out two glasses of champagne as we walked into the room.



CHAPTER 89

Bellamy handed both of us a glass of champagne, and he took my hand and started shaking it. "Someday you will have the gratitude of a grateful country, and a grateful world. But that is only going to be when people start to wake up. And when they Wake Up, they will only then realize that we can only defend our world when everyone WAKES UP! SO WAKE UP! WAKE UP, TED! TED! WAKE UP!"

Two shudders went through the entire building. I looked up at the ceiling and the room went black.

"Ted!" I heard Bellamy's voice and his hand was shaking me. "Ted wake up, will you please! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!"

I slowly opened my eyes and Bellamy was looking down at me. The background behind him formed a semi-circular space that looked like the leather upholstery in a car or something.

"Did they hit us?" I came awake with a start. "Where's Irina? Where's Pasha?" I swung my hand to the side and hit it on the armrest in the Lear Jet. I tried to get up, only to find I was still buckled in the seat on the aircraft.

"You were pretty deep asleep, my friend." Bellamy leaned back in the other chair.

"No, I wasn't!" I slumped in the seat and looked out the window at the desert airstrip we had just landed on and then back at Bellamy.

"What is it, Ted?" Bellamy sat down in the chair across from me and released the lock on it so he could swivel it around and face me. The pilot came out of the cockpit and opened the door and the cabin was flooded with the hot dry air of the desert.

"Leave the ground power unit on and keep the air conditioner going for a few, Captain."

The pilot acknowledged the statement with a nod and went back into the flight deck cabin.

"What just happened, Ted? Tell me slowly, take your time." Bellamy pulled out his pipe.

"We were at Fallon Naval Air Station. You are going to take me over to the Jacobs Research Center and introduce me to the staff. Irina works there now, since her facility in Russia was hit by the aliens and almost everyone was killed." I held my breath and closed my eyes for a moment. Without answering what I had just told him, Bellamy asked me a different question. "How big is the facility?"

"Sixteen floors underground, an air and space medical research facility on the surface as a cover for our activities. There are seven devices in the pit on the floor they called 'One-Six'." I paused and opened my eyes again. The man across from me was leaning in, staring at me intently.

"Tell me the whole story, Ted. Leave nothing out." Bellamy opened his brief case flicked on a built-in recorder and started to make notes as we talked for the next two hours, still sitting on the airplane.

When I finished relating the story right down to the most finite detail, I felt exhausted. Bellamy closed his notebook and got up.

"Let's go see what you're talking about." He descended the aircraft and I followed, putting on my dark glasses. An open white Navy Jeep sat near us on an empty runway. Bellamy got in and we drove across the base. We pulled up in front of a low unfinished cement structure and walked in through an open space where the door should have been. A man in a white construction hat came over and greeted Bellamy.

"Is the lift working?" Bellamy asked.

"It is, but the air driver still makes it a rough ride down. It's fine coming up, but we don't have it adjusted all the way just yet." The man hit the call button and I looked at the hole in the ceiling where the security screener should have been. Bellamy watched me as I moved into the elevator. "This all look familiar?" He asked.

"It was complete, with glass and chrome, polished aluminum and textured floors." The elevator went down, stopped and went down again, the ride was jumpy and hesitant. The doors opened onto a large empty bay with construction lights strung across the ceiling and I walked to the place where the windows should have been and looked down into an empty chamber below.

"This is where you planned to move the second set of devices you're having built somewhere else." I pointed into the pit. Bellamy sat down on a stack of boxes and rubbed his hand through his thick hair.

"Are the reactors in place, yet?" I turned back to face him full on.

"No, Ted. They are not. This is a shell. Funding for it was cut and we don't know if the Group can get the funds to finish it. There is a lot of opposition from Congress and the White House." Bellamy continued to look at the floor.

"That means you haven't told the President about The Group or the projects yet. Isn't that correct?" I added turning back to the view of the empty pit.

"Only minor explanations. Introductions to what we do about monitoring saucer activity. The Directors thought this man would be reactionary to the point of wanting to try to take over the operation completely and insert his own cronies. Our foreign programs have been hamstrung as well. More and more 'black' funds are being diverted to special programs in Europe and South America. It all takes money and the way things are right now, we are in a funding crisis." Bellamy looked at the floor and rubbed his hands together. "With the recent amount of publicity all of this has been generating, with books about government cover ups and writers using the Freedom of Information Act to access CIA and DOD files, everyone is running scared. All the crap about Roswell coming out has made those who normally don't care about such things, rethink their positions. There are those in Congress that want to force a GAO audit of the operation and hold public hearings to determine if we have exceeded our mandate. It is just crazy, right now." The man never looked up. "Lobbyists are trying to get funds diverted to aerospace companies and universities to conduct the research and they claim it would be better for fiscal responsibility and openness. The old ploy of using the Soviets as the threat, is losing ground since everyone believes that within a year, two at the most the whole system over there will collapse."

I looked into the pit and wondered if the dream, or whatever it was, had a hidden meaning.

"Get Harvey a new suit." I said succinctly. "You will go to President Reagan and you will show him the program. Top to bottom. Take the pictures of the aliens and all the stuff about Dulce. Pull no punches. Bring him in and then you and Harv scare the living shit out of him! Threaten him with assassination or worse if he openly talks about it." I said hearing the ruthlessness in my own voice.

"He won't take the bait, Ted. I know him." Bellamy added.

"Oh my God! It isn't fucking bait, George!" I turned and looked directly at the man yelling in his face. "There might, just *might*, be people that want to save this planet, too, George! People that will help us if you just let them! People who are as terrified of these lizard motherfuckers as I am! But they can't help us if they don't

KNOW what we are doing! And if they don't know, how they can help? For once in your fucked up, dastardly, double dealing, double crossing life, tell the goddamn truth! Tell him everything!"

He got up and looked in my eyes.

"What haven't you told me?"

I took a folded piece of paper out of the breast pocket of my jacket. I found it after we left the Desert Inn in Death Valley. Atkins had put it there.

I hesitated for a long while, thinking about the future this would bring, then handed it to Bellamy. He unfolded it and read the carefully written note. Not until Bellamy had explained why the project had slowed down did comprehension begin to dawn on me, and I had not understood the message in that note until this very moment.

"Give that to the President." I said staring at the rough-hewn unfinished floor and then up on the bare grey cave walls where all our futures would be, literally, written in stone. "Tell him everything. When you've finished he'll still be slightly reluctant until he reads that. He will then call his wife into the room. Don't be surprised and don't ask any questions, George. Not now and not then."

I walked back over to the elevator and hit the call button. Bellamy followed me in without a word.

The ride going up was much smoother than the long trip down.

PART THIRTEEN

THE DULCE WAR



CHAPTER 90

The plane ride back to Groom Lake was quiet. Bellamy had been on the phone for almost the full hour talking to Harv in DC. When we landed, I saw the re-fueling truck coming out towards the airplane. I already knew the Boss was headed back east to meet with Harv. We were in another game where the pot was huge and everything, all the black chips, were on the green felt table. I started to walk off the plane and then turned after our good-byes.

“Boss, I need you to do one other thing for me.” He looked up from his notes.

“What is that, Ted?”

“Get Irina out.” I said in a flat tone. “And my daughter. I want them here with me. Please.”

Bellamy took his glasses off and looked at me for a long moment, then sighed. “If it can be done, I’m sure Harv will make it so.” Not the answer I wanted but good enough.

I watched the aircraft move onto the main strip. I was in the shadow of the building, really not sure of what I should do next. It was a waiting game now, hoping Harv and Bellamy could pull off the best acting job of their careers. It’d be harder than most since they were performing for another actor who knew all the cues really well. The sleek jet lifted into the airspace above Five-One and a white glint was all I could see as it turned east climbing out to altitude.

“Want a Coke?” My old friend the black janitor walked out of the hanger in his coveralls, holding two cans of soda. He wiped off the moisture with his handy red rag and handed me one looking up at the empty space where the airplane had been moments before.

“How is Dad?” I asked him without looking into his old wrinkled charcoal face. He opened his soda and took a long pull.

“Oh, he’s fine. Sends his regards. He’s more concerned ‘bout how you holdin’ up.” The old man didn’t look at me at all.

“Fair to midland, I guess.” I opened my can and enjoyed the cold liquid running down the back of my throat.

“Figured that. All this stuff about jumping between dimensions and timelines can cause a body to not know what is real and what is in their head, I think.” He looked at the can in his hand. “When I started in this business, these things came in beautiful glass bottles. I think I like the bottles better. It felt good to hold an icy cold bottle in yer hand.” He shrugged. It looked like just two guys standing on the ramp talking about airplanes.

“Since we keep meeting, how about giving me your name. Your real name.” I still didn’t look at him.

“Don’t you laugh now, y’hear?” I nodded in agreement. “Rufus. Rufus T. Henry.” The man laughed to himself. “My folks were poor dirt farmers in Oklahoma and that sounded like a good strong farmer’s name to them when I came along. Daddy thought I’d take over the farm, but I won me a college scholarship. Went on to

the University of Oklahoma, played varsity ball for the Sooners. Majored in physics and after that I went on to the University of Chicago.”

“Worked with Fermi?” I asked already knowing the answer.

“Did. Nice man! Too careful. Didn’t want to push beyond power production with atoms. Everyone else in the field wanted to build the bomb. I wanted to work in a different area. Quantum Mechanics. Enrico told me it would be the end of my career. A dead end field he told me.” Rufus crushed the can in his hand. “Enough energy in the atoms of that can to run this base for a year.”

“If you know how to get it out.” I finally turned and looked at his face. He smiled.

“You aren’t scared of seeing any more of me, are you?” The older man laughed to himself.

“Oh, hell no! In fact, I look forward to seeing you, Dr. Rufus T. Henry. Somehow you make my work easier, knowing that somehow you guys are behind me, helping.” I still wasn’t sure if I had completely fallen into a deep psychosis or not. But if anyone saw me talking to myself, I was sure I would be humping a couch for the base shrink again, very soon.

“Just Rufus. I don’t use that other stuff much anymore. Don’t need to.” He turned and looked down the ramp. “They’ll be coming for you pretty soon.” I turned to look at what he was seeing.

“Who?”

“Your friend Jack, and his driver. They’ll want to get you out of the heat. Delayed them just a little bit with a piece of fuzz under the distributor cap so we could have a quick chat.” He laughed. “Time is limited, so here is my best advice: take out those scabs at Dulce as quick as possible. It’ll cause all kinda holy hell and disruption with their bosses...out there.” He pointed to the sky. “That’ll buy you, and this planet, a couple of extra years, at least. Then push it to floor. Drive those fobs that work for you, night and day, night and day! You got all the details now. Build’em! Build all seven of them devices and get those holes closed first. Then we got us a fightin’ chance. But it all depends on you, and that school motto of yours.” He held up two fingers in a victory sign. “Fight On!” He shuffled away back into the hanger.

“Dr. Henry?” I asked the retreating shadow. “When will I see you again?”

“When you need me, you will see me, Ted.” He moved into the darkness of the interior of the hanger.

“Say hello to my dad for me.” I called after him.

“I’ll let him know you sent your best, Teddy.” I heard the voice fading.

A young airman came out of the hanger door and looked around.

“Is everything alright sir?” He asked looking me up and down.

“It’s all fine.” I turned and watched the approaching car.

“I heard voices and wondered if there were folks out here that needed some assistance.” He was still trying to figure out why a man in a business suit was standing in front of his hanger.

“I talk to myself. That’s what all of us egghead geek types do.” The military vehicle pulled up. Jack got out and opened the back door for me.

“Oh, okay.” The airman looked at the car and Jack and decided it was better to head back to his own area and leave me well enough alone.

“Was he bothering you, Ted?” Jack looked sternly at the young man.

“No, no! Calm down. Don’t kill anybody today! We were just talking about whether Coke should come in bottles or cans.” I got in the back seat and shut my eyes.

Right now it was time for some forward thinking,



CHAPTER 91

Several weeks went by and I hadn't heard from Bellamy at all. When Harv called it was all about the present project at Groom and there was little to no comment about anything else.

The staff had been working hard on making the equations of my mysterious Visitor, Mr. Atkins, function with the new designs and everyone was busy. I watched from a distance as Jack and Shirley became close. As this happened, it just made my world feel more empty than ever before. To keep from sinking into self-pity, I drove myself to work on all aspects of the Dulce Archeleta Mesa battle plan, the new name for it was "Project: Dzit Dit Gaii", the Jicarilla Apache word for "White Mesa". At first there was resistance to it, but it caught on when someone joked DDG stood for "Destroy Dem Grays", which I liked even better.

I first had to determine where each airshaft and entrance to the place was. The original Dulce cavern was known to the Native Americans, and was first explored by the Murdock Expedition. They found the bodies of Apache warriors and desiccated grey aliens side by side, along with piles of technology they didn't understand at the time. So it looked as though this war had been going on longer than anyone knew, with the Apaches as the first humans to fight the Visitor menace. And who knows how long the Visitors had used the place before that.

Next an Army Corp of engineers had gone in using explosives to widen the place out, drilling access tunnels to connect it to the greater underground grid. The base was built as a nuclear waste dump, but that plan was scrapped. The place was abandoned, until someone came up with the bright idea of a genetic research facility and the fun began. But all this made it a mysterious rabbit warren of tunnels and caves and pockets and nooks and crannies, so no one really knew what the actual layout of the place was or what to expect. On top of all this, the Mesa itself was loaded with lead, nickel, tungsten and zinc which made it virtually impossible to scan with GPR; Ground Penetrating Radar.

I pulled up all the blue prints in our special control room we used in case of emergencies, much like the one at the Cayman Island facility. We had ours buried in a sub-basement under the old flight service center, next to the main laboratory building. It had direct connects to the Caymans, Sao Paulo, Jo'berg in South Africa and the fourth control center near Alice Springs in Australia. Mine was small and consisted of one large room, but I had all the displays and communications consoles that Jack or I would need if he were working a problem, as it had instant communications to the others by wire, satellite and fiber optic cable, all taking different routes.

While I was down in the "Hole" I had to monitor the traffic from the other centers. There was always something happening. They would be monitoring deep space satellites that would pick up meteorites moving in our direction, or experimental space launches around the world, atmospheric conditions and solar activities. So the air was always filled with routine traffic as well as the overlay of Air Force Command Communications, logging and monitoring everything moving in high altitude air

space. I was aware that when I was in the hole and online, that my computer console would show up in Bellamy's control center as a green light, showing the status as being up and working. But there were no exchanges between us.

I worked slowly through each level of the Dulce complex. Noting every detail of the facility. I wanted to know every twist and turn of the place. The light was the problem. I couldn't figure out how to get high intensity lighting into the place, without giving up our hole card to the visitors. So, I put that issue aside and went on to survey the adjoining areas.

That's when I realized Harv's super-secret high-speed underground railroad, had a platform station right at the bottom of the Hive complex. Caves are famous for having methane pockets. This had always been a danger to miners and spelunkers. If you walked into one, you were as good as dead on your first breath. But it would be like Heaven for the Visitors, taking in a breath of home in the same environment. When the original planners set out the route for the high-speed rail system several hundred feet below ground, they used existing cave complexes as much as possible. Dulce had smaller tributary cave systems most of which had never been mapped.

Harv made the arrangements for a small, armed squad to escort me to the Dulce Station Platform. He told someone, probably Tugy, there'd be a survey team in the area to check on track conditions and make some repairs. Harv didn't want me going, but finally relented when I told him it would do no good if I didn't see everything down there to make sure they didn't have any escape routes.

Jack wanted to go along, and Harv insisted on it for my protection. So I had to give a little to get what I wanted. I was certain if Shirley found out she'd be mad as hell at me for taking him into harm's way.

* * * * *

After a week of planning we arrived at our destination. The small single subway car pulled up to the station and ten members of the team, besides Jack and I, emerged looking like the stars of that Michael Creighton movie *The Andromeda Strain*. Yellow rubber jump suits, re-breathers at the ready, attached lights to our helmets and geared up with sidearms and a spray canisters of Florin, which could be fired out ten or twelve feet. We had a grid map developed and each two man team had a specific area to check and video. Jack and I were to freelance the area and see if we could find any openings within a quarter mile of the station that hadn't been mapped. We all had communication sets built into the suits, but were on strict orders for radio silence unless something came up, where one member of the team needed assistance quickly. If we got jumped down here by the Visitors there would be no help or hope of rescue. We were on our own, and everyone knew what that meant.

Jack pulled up his visor to speak to me directly not using the com-link.

"The last time I felt like this I was shot down over North Viet Nam. Took me three days to walk out to a spot where Evac could pick me up." Jack looked around at the darkness in the cave and shuddered.

"Big difference here, old buddy." I said to him.

"What's that?"

"No Evac Team."

"That's what I like about you, Ted. Comforting words from our fearless leader!"

He slid his faceplate back down and we moved off in a southwest direction. A quarter of a mile of searching showed nothing in the form of a hole or path off the main artery of the tracks. We turned and headed northeast passing the crews working the platform area and filming everything.

Our lights were covering every crack and rock break as we slowly walked abreast up the line. I was aware that we had covered the quarter mile and Jack was slowing

down, getting ready to head back, but in my light I saw a faint fissure ahead of us. I wanted to go a little farther even though he was motioning to head back and pointing at his watch on the outside of his sleeve.

I shook my head and continued up the tracks toward the outcropping. On the other side was a small opening, heading due north. I pulled up the camera and filmed it. We stood there for a few moments looking at it and then I hit my com switch.

“Alice is going down the rabbit hole.” The prearranged code to tell the team that we had found something that needed our attention.

“Roger that. I will send B and C your way.” The captain in charge of the rest of them had his instructions and was following communications protocol and orders to the letter. We stood waiting until the four men showed up holding their weapons at the ready and positioning themselves in a semi-circle to protect our backs.

Jack started in but I pushed past him and dove through the hole. This was my idea and I was going to be the guy on point if there was a problem. I listened to my own breathing in my headset as I moved through the tight spot, which was only four or five feet. Then the fissure opened up to a larger cavern. I was concentrating my light on the walls and the ceiling to make sure I didn't hit my head, when I felt Jack's hand on my sleeve, pulling me back.

I turned and looked at his illuminated face inside his helmet. His face was twisted in a contortion of pure horror. He motioned toward the floor of the cavern and then hit his own light and illuminated the scene.

The floor was littered with bones. Human bones. All sizes and shapes. Bleached white and lacking flesh of any kind. A mound ahead of us of human remains was like a small mountain. Tens of thousands, if not more, of bones heaped in stacks reaching ten feet above the floor of the chamber in every direction. I gagged and doubled over, retching up into my throat as if I had been hit with a physical blow to the stomach. Jack grabbed me and we scrambled back through the abattoir over the skeletons snapping and cracking under our feet, back through the opening.

Jack slid my faceplate up as well as his, and propped me up against the wall near the tracks. The soldiers turned to look at me but then went back to their original positions.

“Hold on, Ted!” He was speaking to me. “Breathe, buddy! Breathe deep! Just hold on!”

I felt as though someone had just kicked my guts out. We'd made speculations about what was happening here, but this was the real thing. Proof positive we were being...harvested...by these...creatures! Nothing more than livestock being boiled down to a base genetic material soup! This was Eisenhower's "Sigma Treaty"?

"FUUUUUUCCCCCCCCCKKKK!" I screamed, the single word bouncing and echoing down the walls of the cave, now closing menacingly in on all of us. I slumped against the wall as tears filled my eyes, just trying to hang on. "What took us so long?" I screamed. "Why didn't we deal with this sooner? Our government, our WORLD, has a GODDAMN DEAL with these FUCKING MONSTERS!" I was beyond hysterical now.

“Ted!” Jack grabbed my face and forced me to look into his clear crystal blue eyes. “TED!” He shook me.

I felt myself coming back down, realizing I wasn't as tough as I thought. I took a breath. "Okay...I'm...okay..."

Jack turned to the team with sharp, decisive hand motions. Two members came to my side helping me stand. The others got closer to Jack and stood at the ready.

"I'm going in," Jack said. "I'll film this, then we are beating feet out of here." It wasn't a request.

Jack reached for my camera and I grabbed a handful of his suit.

“Jack! We didn’t start this war, but I swear to you, with God as my witness, we will end it! I will do everything in my power to wipe these motherfuckers off the face of this Earth! You understand me? I will destroy them!”

Jack nodded, took my camera and moved into the fissure, telling the other men to stay out in the main cave and cover his back. The two assigned to me helped me walk back to the platform and the waiting train car.

It seemed like an eternity, but when he finally jumped aboard followed by the rest of the team, his face was red with rage and his eyes were burning holes through everything.

“Get us the hell out of here, Johnson. Now!” He yelled at the man, from pure anger and frustration.

I leaned against the side of the car and sat transfixed by the image of the room under our lights still in front of my eyes. I was afraid it would be burned there forever. I never thought I could see something that would horrify me so much. I desperately tore off my helmet, slid the faceplate down, held it between my knees and puked in it.

No one said a word.

Jack put his arm around my shoulders. I was shaking uncontrollably, felt awful and didn’t care if I’d embarrassed myself or not. It just didn’t matter.

Nothing else would matter ever again until they were dead!

All...fucking...DEAD!



CHAPTER 92

We were sitting in the Hole at central command watching the films from Dulce. There was seven minutes of the darkened areas with nothing of note.

“Wow, interesting shit, Ted. Guided tour through a New York subway? So what? What’s your point here?” Harv said gruffly on the com-link, as though we were wasting his precious time. Bellamy said nothing from the island.

“Stand-by, Boss Two.” Jack said as I sat chewing at my lower lip.

“You see the doorway. We can block it so nothing can get out after we use it to enter from below, while the top team works down from Level Yellow Three.” Jack added.

“Hmff. Illuminating!” Harv, being a sarcastic bastard, as always.

The frame flickered and the scene opened to the cavern filled with bleached human remains. Jack had walked deeper into the chamber than I expected, filming at least twenty-five piles of bones, each a good twelve feet high. He panned in on a set of children’s bones, small and fractured, like they had been gnawed on, the size of a five or six year old child. Next to it was a curly haired blonde baby doll in a tattered pink dress, its blue plastic eyes wide open, staring directly into the lens, accusing all of us for letting this happen for so long.

Jack lifted the camera and panned around the cavern, littered with bones and rotting flesh and parts of bodies for as far as the light would penetrate.

There was silence from the com-link speakers.

“I-i-is this something you two found in a George Romero film...or...this can’t be real. Is this...real?” Harv’s voice wasn’t gruff anymore, but of someone trying to come to terms.

I still wasn’t ready to say anything. Jack looked at me and demonstrated his normal professionalism that secreted from every pore of his being.

“This is the real deal, Boss Two. Estimates are over two hundred thousand sets are contained in that chamber.” Jack made it sound like a typical description of a normal event, somehow.

“No skulls.” Bellamy finally acknowledged his presence.

“Exactly correct.” Jack added back.

“Why...why are there no skulls?” Harv asked, puzzled.

“Trophies.” I said. The video stopped. Harv and Bellamy came back up on the screens.

“Trophies? What the hell do you mean trophies?” Harv was trying to deal with the images just like we had tried to deal with the reality of the scene in the chamber.

“Ancient Aztecs keep the heads of their victims and built walls with them in their temples. It was a sign of how victorious they were.” Bellamy’s voice sounded flat in its tone with a death like sound to it.

“Wonder where they got that idea?” Harv asked quietly.

“Exactly.” Bellamy responded.

“Want to show THIS to the President?” I added with contempt.

"I will show him, just not yet. It should be presented after we've closed that place with DDG." Bellamy answered back.

"Are we going to be able to?" I brightened at the prospect of providing a little payback to some unwanted Visitors.

"I have waited to tell you two the results of our meeting." Bellamy paused to make both Jack and I hang on the edge of our seats.

"And?" I finally asked.

"He was non-committal for the better part of two hours explaining to us, in depth, his new Star Wars Program he was ordering and how things had to change to keep up with the times around the world, blah-ditty-blah, blah, and a few etceteras." Harv started and then paused.

"Then I handed him the letter you gave me." Bellamy added.

"That came as a big surprise to some of us outside the loop, I must tell you." Harv added, looking glum into the camera in front of him. That was more for Bellamy than for us.

"He called Nancy into the Oval Office and had her read it. She sat on the couch and read it three or four times, left without saying a word, then came back in a couple minutes later with another letter on the same letterhead and handed both of them to the President. He looked at them and asked if he could keep the one I handed to him." Bellamy paused for dramatic effect. "Then he opened up our file and crossed out the bottom line cost projections." Bellamy added in his flat tone.

"What does that mean?" Jack was going crazy at all the foreplay going on between us.

"What that means is he just handed us the biggest blank check in the history of the world. He told us there is no limit to what we need to do and however much it cost we will make sure our government, and twenty-five other governments around the world, will pick up the tab. We got a green light on the Jacobs Center, expansion of Groom Lake, the new HAARP facility in Alaska and the two new massive underground complexes that are on the drawing board for the new US Space Command Headquarters under King's Peak in Utah and the Bangor Submarine Base in Washington State." Harv was laughing out loud.

"And Dulce?" I added with venom in my voice.

"He wants it gone. He was ready to nuke it by the time we were through. We need to hold onto this film, until afterwards, otherwise he'd lose his mind and nuke it right now, along with half of New Mexico." Bellamy added and followed up with; "I don't know who or what dealt you that hand Teddy, but it was a Royal Flush, Ace high. Well done!"

I sat back and studied his face

"And my other request?" I wondered if it had fallen on deaf ears or not.

"Project: Greenhouse?" Bellamy added.

"Okay?" I said, waiting for the answer.

Harv smiled his mischievous smile. "It wasn't easy. You probably know that, but both of them are safe in London at a quarantine center under our control. They're both fine and after talking to her and explaining everything I know, she's ready to come back here, with only one stipulation."

I already knew she probably hated me and would not want to be near me. Irina had been too frightened to want to be around me again, I was sure of that. It didn't matter; I just wanted her and my daughter to be safe.

"And that is, Harv?" I waited expecting the worst.

"She wants to continue her work, and that includes being where ever you are." Harv chuckled. I felt myself slump in my chair. "Christmas in July, Sunny Jim!" Harv added.

Jack looked at him unaware of what the current conversation was about, but didn't bother to ask.

"Boss One, what was in the letter Mrs. Reagan had?" I still wanted some additional information.

"I don't know, Ted. But it had the impact of a sledgehammer. I think the one you had was...expected...by her, and when it showed up in our hands, we suddenly became the angelic Messengers from the Great Beyond." Bellamy added and continued. "I flew to London earlier this week to make sure no one bothers Irina with any type of debriefing and made sure those jerks at CIA wouldn't think she was some kind of asset for them to play with."

"Thank you for that. How is she?" I asked, hoping I could get a better feel of the lay of the land.

"Confused, scared, upset. All of which is to be expected after the job Ratterman did on her, to get her to defect back to the Commies. I took enough paperwork and proof that she understands now she was a victim of a major double cross and is smarting from having left the way she did. I told her that you would understand." Bellamy was showing concern at a level that was hard for me to believe.

"And Ellen? You tell Irina about her?" I wondered just how far the membership in the Group went and if one person's problems became everyone's problems.

"Just enough to allow you to fill in the blanks that only you and her need to talk about. Okay?" Bellamy wanted to move on and leave family relationships to us.

"Pasha?" I had one more question. I thought of the sight I had seen in the cave and knew I never wanted to see anyone's child's bones on that pile.

"Beautiful. Really. And I hate kids. She's bright and charming as an angel. You are a lucky man." Bellamy reluctantly added.

"Now if we can travel down some other street than Memory Lane, gentlemen." Harv barked.

"Shut up Harv." I yelled back, covering a tear in my eye, then I laughed. "And thank you! You old bastards!"

"I think that's a compliment, but a little twisted around for old Harvey." Jack said. Harv looked hurt on the screen. "Anyway, when are we moving on Dulce, Boss?"

"Two weeks from today, at zero dark thirty. Jack and Ted, you will be with me in the second wave into the hole. Harv will hold the baby at Groom, with two sets of back up teams, at both ends of the section of track, east and west of the Dulce Platform, besides the main assault group that is going in hot." Bellamy held a piece of paper and read it as he spoke.

"I want to go with the first wave." I said flatly to him.

"Me, too. I'm a combat veteran and I want to go with the first bunch of boys going in that hellhole." Jack said with a fixed glare. He hadn't shown it back when we were in the cavern, but his voice told me volumes about the effect it had on him.

"Negative, both of you. We're going in the second group as support and back up. We need to see if we can get in and clean out the Hive of all the information we can, before I reduce that mesa into a quarry." Bellamy looked directly at the camera. "There will be no discussion on this matter, is that understood?"

Both of us nodded reluctantly. "You both are old enough to be retired from active duty in any military in the world, so don't even think about it. Clear?" Bellamy knew if there were any way both of us would probably try, so he was making doubly sure there were no misunderstandings or loopholes for us to get our way.

"Yes, sir." Jack answered. "But we still don't have a method of using lighting in there. We've reviewed every way we know how to use searchlights, but we can't do it. Plus the ones we have are huge."

"Not a problem." Bellamy held up a small black device, no bigger than a shoebox, with a lens on the front. "A one million candle power, handheld searchlight,

developed by Peripheral Systems in Oregon. The Navy just signed a contract for two hundred. The first batch came in for testing. They all work and they have a lifespan of four hours on constant.” He held up a piece of paper about two feet from the lens, turned his head and hit the button. The camera flared from the light blast and when it re-focused Bellamy was dropping a piece of smoking ash.

“You could tell a fellow to put on his dark glasses before you did that little trick, for Christ sakes.” Harv growled.

“Sorry.” Bellamy rubbed his eyes.

“What kind of lens is in that thing?” Jack asked.

“Not the lens, it’s the bulb: halogen quartz. New stuff. Brighter than sunlight in a darkened area.” Bellamy smiled his most evil grin.

“Where do we go in, top or bottom?” I wondered what horrors we were going to find walking into this cesspool.

“Topside. Full rad suits. We follow the sweepers and strikers after the mop up guys certify a floor is clean. Dr. Loppin told me that we make sure we don’t touch any of the blood from these boogies, because it will eat through your skin like acid. We’ll have a complete decontamination setup on Level Yellow Three. Nobody comes out until they’re certified clean from him and his staff.” Bellamy went down the page and looked up at the camera. “Harv, the base Evac and adjoining areas, is that under control?”

“Hanta virus outbreak, all over the area, twenty-four hours before. All of the staff and the folks in the reservation town below the Mesa will be moved out, really quick. We’ll have the top and bottom sealed, so even if they know something is up, they won’t have the time to respond. I hope.” Harv added with a grimace.

“It has to do. We can’t afford to give them too much warning. It will take them a few hours to figure out what we are doing.” Bellamy added.

“Unless they already know our plans.” I said glumly.

“I’ve had the same thought. But I have it on good authority, that they won’t know.” Bellamy didn’t expand on his comment and didn’t have to. We were all aware of his meetings with “someone” from “someplace else”.

“I can live with that.” Jack nodded.

“Anything else?” Bellamy asked closing his file.

“Yeah. Can we have a beer bust and pizza party when this little stunt is over?” Harv tried to lighten up the conversation in his usual way.

“I will personally buy the beer.” Bellamy said. “Boss One, offline.”

The screen went dead.

“Harv?” I said.

“Three weeks, kiddo. I don’t want her in country until we’re done with this scalping raid. Boys, if you get a chance, when the Boss ain’t watching, kill one of those stinking sons of bitches for me, will ya?” Harv clicked off.

“I will personally bring you the ears, Harv.” Jack said to the blank screen.

“Amen and ditto for me.” I got up and headed back up topside. “Want a beer?”

“Two or twelve would be in order, ‘cause I am done for today.” Jack closed his file and turned the system off.

“You going to be okay going back down there?” Jack asked as we walked outside and put on dark glasses heading for the car.

“Hell no. But I am going to be there. I have intrusive images of what we are going to find down there and I keep waking up nights thinking about what people are going through in that place.” I got in and slammed the door. Jack slid behind the wheel and pointed over to Five-One, to go have a drink. I nodded approvingly.

“I don’t have that same problem.” He added.

“What have you done to get rid of the nightmares?” I looked at the side of his face and realized that his hair had been turning gray at the temples in the last two years. The job was taking its toll on him, as well.

“I just gave up sleeping. I don’t like waking up in the middle of the night screaming.” He smiled, never paying attention to his driving. “It wakes up Shirley.”

“Yeah, I know. Nobody wants the dorm rooms on either side of mine in the bachelors quarters.” I laughed a sad guffaw.

The day was clear and they would probably be testing the new bird tonight, but maybe they would have it on the ramp, so we could watch it run up and down the tarmac without thinking about our future engagement with the ‘things’ at Dulce.



CHAPTER 93

It was about three in the morning when we assembled outside the Dulce Archeleta Mesa facility. All of the security cameras had been shut down on the surface, so no one could plug into them.

There were 100 crack Delta Team members, all in full radiation gear waiting for the word that everything in the subterranean tunnels was ready to go. The warriors from Delta were all silent young men with grim faces and hard countenances. These were not your average soldiers. These were hand picked, highly trained professionals that were ready to execute whatever orders given without question. They had been briefed at White Sands, New Mexico, the military rocket base then held there incommunicado for the past two days. They were tense and ready to do the job at hand and that job was to kill every alien in this facility, bar one: Lord Tugy. He was to be taken alive, if at all possible, but not at the cost of losing one of these fine young men. I preferred dead, but I was not in charge.

The joke going around was this was truly the first episode of Star Wars and they were the real Jedi Knights, first on the frontline in defense of the Earth. For that they were excited. I knew, as they did, this feeling would evaporate in the first few seconds of the upcoming firefight.

Bellamy had us glued to him by two of his personal bodyguards. Their job was to make sure that neither Jack nor I tried to infiltrate the striker unit. They were successful in their task. Bellamy was talking on the satellite uplink that'd been set up in the courtyard as the tanker trucks started to pull in. Huge units that looked like they normally handled five thousand gallons of high-test aviation fuel. Three of them were positioned above three newly added fixtures that connected directly into the ventilator system. We had re-worked this system over and over until we were sure that "they" couldn't stop the Florin from filling every spot in the levels from three down. It was going to be like an acid bath. Bellamy had brought an older Navy chaplain with him, who was walking among the troops offering up support and help for those needing it. Most of his time was spent joking and laughing with the men. These fellows had made their own kind of peace with the work they had ahead of them.

"Got it Harv." Bellamy put down the phone. He turned to me. "Any last thoughts or suggestions before this starts. Have we missed anything?"

"I can't think of anything else. We have run this through the computer so many times that I feel like we have four levels of overkill. I just wonder if there is going to be anyone left down their for us to save." For some reason my thoughts were always going back to the hostages, or victims, caged down there.

"It may sound cold on my part, but that has to be a secondary issue, Ted." Bellamy looked at me and I understood what he meant. He didn't like it any more than I did, but that was the cost of war, and we both knew that anyone we managed to save after spending this long at the none too tender mercies of these creatures was better off dead anyway.

Dr. Loppin walked up to us and nodded. "Good to see you, Dr. Humphrey."

It took a minute for me to realize who he was. "Yes sir. Glad to have you along." He returned to the medical team formed up to follow in the striker unit.

"Harv says we got everyone out of the area. Air space is closed. We're on Green. Secondary strikers are in the tube, waiting. Any comments?" Bellamy spoke into the com-link system attached to his helmet. No one had anything to say. It was Go Time.

"If there is nothing else, everyone take their places." His words shot through the groups and everyone moved very quickly. Jack checked his sidearm, took two deep breaths of fresh air and then lowered his glass facemask. I did the same and headed over to the staging area behind the Moppers. These guys were assigned to "mop up", or kill off, any stragglers found on the level as the strike team worked its way down toward the platform.

"Gentlemen." Bellamy paused for a moment. I was sure he was praying to whatever god he worshiped personally. "We are go! Hit it, Cliveson!" He actually yelled into the headset. The adrenalin was rushing through everyone's system by this time. The doors on the main level opened and the gas tankers started up the pumps as thousands of gallons of Florin gas poured into the prepared connectors. The officer in charge watched his gauges and then after two minutes of hard pumping, held up a thumb to Bellamy.

"You got saturation in the hole." Cliveson spoke on the ICU, the com-link all of us could hear. "We are completely dry topside."

"Mole One." The call sign of the guys in the tube, well below the surface. "Do you have signs of leakage?" Our biggest concern was that the stuff would flood through and out into the subway below the complex.

"Negative. All dry here. Monitors are still in the Green. Mole One out." Bellamy turned and made a slicing sign with his hand toward the front of the complex to the officer leading the striker unit.

"You are go!" Bellamy spoke a little quieter into his headset. "I repeat you are in go mode. Give'em hell!"

A mass of men in radiation suits, high intensity lamps and firearms rushed into the Dulce Mesa. It took three minutes before we heard the first concussions of grenades blowing open sealed doors on emergency staircases and the sound of small arms fire reverberating up the corridors.

Our headsets were filled with the sound of men fighting for their lives down there in the Hive.

"Yellow Level Three, clear!"

"Take out that one! Shit! Over there!"

"Door won't open."

"Blow it."

"Man down! Man down!"

"Fuck! What is that stuff they're firing at us?"

"Keep it under control people. Work the problem."

"Door Open."

"Green Level Four, is a mess. Got bodies all over hell and gone, skipper."

"Alvarez just took a hit! He's hiding behind that wall and flash firing."

The sounds of explosives and gunfire were thunderous and all of us were moving closer to the entrance.

"Stay where you are, Ted." Bellamy came across on the separate channel right in my ear.

I raised my hand and bent down on one knee, waiting.

"Boss One, level is secure, but it's a mud bath in here. I am ankle deep in gore."

"Affirm, Striker Leader, secure and move." Bellamy picked up the handset yelling into it, but I couldn't tell what he was saying from where I was.

"Green Level Four secure! Blowing doors on Blue Five."

"It's booby trapped! Johnson get ba..." A louder detonation went off and smoke actually billowed out of the doorway.

"Talk to me people! Do I still have a Striker Team?" Bellamy was back on com.

"We're here, but we got two of ours KIA. I'm losing people fast, Boss, I need the moppers as back up, now."

"Mopper Leader, you heard the man, provide fire support and suppression down there."

Twenty more men poured into the entrance at a run. I watched as rounds were being jacked into rifles.

"Boss One. Mole One!"

"Go Mole One."

"Lower Doors are blown. Not encountering resistance."

"Mole Two, hold that door at all costs. Repeat: ALL COSTS!"

"Got it Boss. They are in and moving fast."

"Mole One, straight up, no prisoners, I repeat no prisoners!"

"Boss! Call Black Flag, Striker. We are coming up the bottom. So don't kill us!"

"Got it. Striker is on your six. Less enemy here. Most of them are dying or dead. We're cleaning up the hallway."

"O.D.M. to Boss One."

"Go!"

"Yellow Three is clear. I need the Med Team down here now if I am to save any of these guys. We don't have enough hands to stop the bleeding."

"Hold one, ODM. Striker, call a clear on three or four for triage."

"Make it three, I need to have Moppers on four to make sure nothing got through us."

"Lippon. On the triple! Make it happen on three, right now!"

"Boss One, we are moving, taking secondary fire squad for protection."

"Go Lippon, go!"

The medical team started to run, carrying heavy cases and battlefield surgical kits. Another groups of Delta troops, about ten in all, ran ahead of them for protection.

"Holy Mother of God!"

"Keep it to yourself, Sanchez! Boss, we got vats with...humans in them!"

"Condition."

"They got tubes in their noses and mouths and they are looking at us. HOLY SHIT! I think they're still alive."

"Affirm, message noted. Maintain!"

"Boss, what are we supposed to do with them?"

"Leave'em! Ferret out the bad guys. I will get some folks down there when the place is clean."

"Affirmative. Striker is heading to seven."

My worst nightmares hadn't prepared me for this. The clean laboratory where we worked wasn't like this. This was also not the battlefield I'd imagined. I turned and watched Bellamy and he was on the handset again. That meant he was talking to Harv and they were trying to pull another rabbit out of a hat.

"Mole One to Boss."

"Go."

"We are all bundled up here. We got fire coming from every side and I don't think it's the suckers that you told us about."

"Repeat and clarify."

"We got maybe twenty shooters, above us! And they aren't Reptoids."

"Call the target."

“Gray, small, leather skin, big heads, using a green plasma weapon. I got three men KIA and two damn near. I need some support or I will have to pull and head back down.”

“Where are you Mole One?”

“Eight, bottom of the staircase. But this place is like a rabbit warren in here. We can’t even try to clear this floor without additional people.”

“Can you hold for two?”

“I will hold, Boss, to the last man if that is what you want, but I need some horse power! Our pop guns aren’t even phasing ‘em and the Florin doesn’t affect them at all!”

“Ditto on seven. We have back up in the hallway. The door is being held by maybe sixteen of those same things. Lights and .223 aren’t making it.”

“Hold striker.”

“Mole two, get your ass up there and lay down some suppressing fire to keep their heads down.”

“Mole Two is moving.”

“Ted!” The private com-link crackled on in my helmet.

“Boss?”

“I need some help here. We don’t come up with a Hail Mary pass and we’re going to have to nuke this place. And probably us included.”

I heard the words but didn’t believe it. I knew Bellamy would call down the thunder if he needed to, and for that I was glad. I just didn’t want all of us to go out this way. Think, Ted... THINK, GODDAMN IT!

“Have we got a flamethrower?” I yelled.

“You can’t use one of those in there. There’s enough chemicals in that hole to light us up like the fourth of July.”

“You got a better idea?”

Bellamy growled. “Cliveson! Get Dr. Humphrey’s team four flame throwers.”

“We got ‘em, Boss!”

“Ted, Jack...” He was on the private com-link again. “I don’t want to ask you to do this, but we are all getting nuked and heading straight to hell otherwise, and I will NOT let this happen! Not here, and not now! Jo’bergs got the baby until further notice. I can’t move fast enough to help you, so what do you need?”

“Our guys here and one squad for fire suppression.” I took the flamethrower and strapped it on and Jack took another one. We sprinted towards the doorway.

“Jamison, you keep those two alive or I will have your guts for garters.” Bellamy called out to one of his men was running with us.

“Boss, they got to go through me first.” Jamison said with a Scottish accent.

We were moving down the hallway and hit the stairs on the fly. The emergency stairwells were the bottlenecks in the facility. Two men abreast running down the stairs was the best we could do, and that took time. When we got to Yellow Level Three it was a mess. Seven or eight men were lying dead, torn to ribbons. Another ten were being treated by the med team under Lippon. I stopped for a moment and took in the scene.

“Lippon! Get ‘em out now!”

“Some of them we don’t dare move.”

“Take the ones you can and get your people out of here. I need your fire squad, now.” We butted helmet faceplates and he looked into my eyes.

“I understand, sir.”

“We are pulling out the walking wounded. I will stay with the others.”

Someone started to complain to him on the com-link.

“That is a direct order from Boss Two! Now move your ass! Leave the packs and equipment and get the men out of here!”

I motioned for the fire squad and we hit Green Level Four with fury. The place was a mess. The floor was like a lake of blood and viscera. There were thirty or thirty-five dead Visitors lying sprawled in convulsive positions over rails and surgical tables.

When we hit Blue Level Five we could hear the firefight going on below us. It sounded like angry bees, swarming.

"Those must be the weapons they're using." Jack yelled above the noise. I didn't bother to answer.

"Striker, where are you?"

"Halfway toward the stairs on Violet Seven, holding. They ain't coming at us, yet. But we are all running down on rounds."

"Shit. Boss One?"

"Go Ted!"

"If you need time to initiate the final phase, start it now."

"Understood."

Jack hit the private com-link on his sleeve. "Does that mean what I think?"

"It does, buddy."

"Shirley will be really pissed about this, Ted."

"I know." I clicked back to normal comm.

"Ted..." A man's voice came crackling through my headset.

"Repeat! Repeat! Repeat unreadable!" I yelled, moving my head to clear the signal.

"I didn't hear anything..." Jack yelled as we were running.

"Ted", the voice repeated, coming through the static, "stop where you are." I held up my arm and everyone bumped and bounced into each other.

"Ted...what's going on?"

"Boss Three, is there a problem?"

"Boss One." I yelled. "Call radio silence for ten seconds!"

"You heard the man! Take a breath. Hold it for ten."

"Ted..." the ghostly voice said, "the door to the right of you. Use it now, quickly! Tell the teams to duck and cover." I froze for a good count of three.

"Everyone! This is Boss Three. Duck and cover, I repeat duck and cover." I hit the door with my foot and led the team in finding a wall to get up against. "Everyone hide your faces!"

"Three, this is One..."

An explosion of white light filled the hallway and a rushing sound of air being ripped out of the building. No one moved.

"One to any unit....One to Three....One to Mole One?"

"What the hell is happening?"

"They are dead!"

"All of them? Look at that! Shit! What did he hit them with?"

"Can it, Sanchez."

"This is Boss One! I need a report now!"

"Boss One this is Three. Shut down final phase sequencing."

"Confirm that."

"Repeat: shut down final phase sequencing now. I'm investigating."

I dropped the flamethrower and jogged down the hall to the staircase and went straight down to Violet Level Seven. At the blast door on Seven there were sixteen dead aliens, ripped in half. We worked the doors open and went down the stairs to eight. Mole One and Two were still hiding in the small rooms that formed that floor. It was like a rabbit warren. All the alien defenders on the other side of the door were in the same condition as the ones I'd found on the floor above.

"Boss One, this is Boss Three."

"Go."

"The facility is sterile. I repeat the facility is sterile."

Bellamy's voice came across on the private com-link.

"You want to tell me exactly what you just did?"

"No, not right now. We got wounded and I need a survey team in here PDQ, 'cause I think we got a number running down here on us." I wasn't sure, but it felt that way.

"Confirmed!" Bellemy's displeasure was crystal clear.

"I need transport on the bottom, now!" I called out on the open com-line.

"Two cars running hot, fast and true. Two minutes."

"Boss, clear out everyone up there now! Everyone!"

"Survey was just getting ready to go in."

"Cancel that. Bug out! Everyone needs to move, now!"

"Ted, what the hell is going on?" Bellamy spoke into my headset.

"Trust me, George. This is my gut telling me something."

"Clear the area, rapidly. Move everyone out here now!" Bellamy barked an order.

"Mole One, Two, Striker and the rest of you," I said, "head down and get on that rail car and get the hell down the track two or three miles likes your asses were on fire, then close the blast doors and hold."

"Striker, do it." Bellamy followed up.

The men were moving quickly down the stairs and out the bottom.

"Where are you going?" Jack looked at me.

"Lippon is still on two and he won't leave with those guys. I am going up to get him out."

"Not without me you ain't!" Jack was at my heels and as I turned I realized Jamison and his four men were right behind us as we took the stairs two at a time heading for three.

We ran past the vats with humans in them, being boiled down and processed in some terrible and awful way.

"Come on! If we live we'll come back for them." I knew better.

"The top is clear!" Boss One called down.

"We are coming. Send a vehicle for transport."

"I'll be here Ted, waiting for you, you dumb bastard." Bellamy was in my ear again.

We got to three and Lippon was still working. One other doctor was right beside him. "How many can be carried out of here that will make it?" I looked hard at Lippon.

"These four and him." Lippon motioned to Lord Tugy who was lying there, covered in his own blood.

"I got Tugy." Jack hoisted him into a fireman's carry and jogged toward the stairs.

"Jamison, make yourself useful and grab one of those guys. The rest of you do the same." A moment of reluctance, not wanting to drop their weapons. "Move, goddamn it!" They all grabbed a man and carried them out.

I looked at Lippon and the other four mortally wounded men, just holding on. "Morphine, Doctor." I held out my hand to him.

"I can't do that, Dr. Humphrey. I live by a code."

"Nobody is asking you to violate that code. Give me the morphine and you two beat feet out of here." Lippon hesitated and handed me a plastic case filled with pre-loaded syringes. He looked at me for a moment with something between disbelief and respect in his eyes. "I am ordering you out of here, Doctor, now." Both men jogged up the hallway toward the steps.

I knelt down next to the first man, looking at his face. They had taken his helmet off and he looked so young. He was unconscious, his breathing shallow. The lower half of his body was torn and hanging by a thread. They'd tied off all of the bleeding,

but there was no way he would make it another fifteen minutes. As I knelt there beside him, I felt a soft, gentle hand on my shoulder. I looked up.

There stood Dr. Rufus T. Henry. I slid my visor up and turned off my com-link.

"Rufus! Thank God! Thank you! Thank you!" I looked up into his sad eyes.

"Couldn't let you get killed down here, now could I? That's not how the story ends, son. Someone had to show up with the cavalry in the nick of time. These pups will be alright with me. I'll take care of them." He took the plastic case from my hand.

"I need to..." Rufus raised his hand.

"You need to pick up that case, right there," he pointed down the hallway at a silver aluminum Haliburton case sitting on top of a medical crate, "and scoot your butt out of here. You heard me right down there. This place gonna blow, sky high, in about two minutes. So you get to going. I will look after these fine brave young fellows."

I got to my feet and looked at him. He seemed older to me right now than he ever had before. I jogged over to the case and picked it up by the handles on both sides. It must have weighed over a hundred pounds, but the adrenaline pumping through my system must have made it seem lighter. Still I wondered how I was going to get out of here carrying this and running for my life.

Turning, I saw Rufus kneel down and give the first soldier an injection. He was praying and singing an old Negro spiritual gospel song and patted each of the boys tenderly, then took the boy's faces in his hand and then kissed each one on the forehead, and they smiled and cried as they embraced the long sleep of death.

"It will be alright, child. You'll see." He was speaking in a kind, soft voice to each of them. Seeing me standing there he said, "Ted! Get outta here! Do NOT let Tugy live! Somabitch will try ta kill ya first chance he gets! Now getcher ass going!" He waved at me to move and I did, never looking back. I hit the front entrance on a flat run, desperately clutching the heavy box, trying to hold it high by the handles as I ran, gasping for air and feeling like my heart was going to explode.

Bellamy was waiting behind the wheel of a Jeep. I heaved the crate into the back jamming it between the front and rear passenger seats.

"Go! Get out of here now! Run like hell!" He ground it into gear and the Jeep leaped up on its hind wheels like a spooked horse as he gunned it. We went flying down the road, full of hairpin turns and switchbacks, which Bellamy handled with an almost occult skill, and headed down to the little Apache town below us, where he'd set up a make shift camp around the Best Western Motel.

"Why are we running like the devil is after us?" Bellamy yelled over the sounds of the racing engine.

"Because he is!"

The pressure wave knocked us sideways off the road and into a ditch. Both of us were thrown out and landed in the soft soil under some trees. It had come out of a cave that may have been an old abandoned mineshaft, or blocked up volcanic flume. Something huge had happened down in the bowels of the Mesa. I hid my face as the explosion rolled over us. I couldn't hear a thing for several minutes. When I finally sat up I looked over at Bellamy, holding his limp, twisted arm at a bad akimbo angle. It was badly broken.

"That wasn't a whole bunch of fun." He moaned and I could barely hear him through the high-pitched whine in my ears.

"Would have been worse up on top!" I yelled, still nearly deaf, pointing to the rising cloud drifting east with the wind.

"Was that a nuclear blast?" Bellamy tried to get to his feet as I helped him. I felt a stabbing pain in my back. Something was wrong.

"You okay?" He asked.

"No. But at least I'm alive. Let me see if I can get this thing running." I crawled into the Jeep and it started right up, but it took me ten minutes to roll it back and forth

SANDS OF TIME

and get it out of the ditch. I finally pulled it up over the shoulder and onto the road. Bellamy got in. I patted the box in the back for luck, and drove down the hill at a reasonable speed, the death knell of the Visitors still ringing happily in my ears.



CHAPTER 94

Jamison had stripped out of his rad suit and was already in fatigues organizing the camp. Everything that could be saved was already being set up and he was on the satellite radio talking to Harv when I pulled into the Best Western parking lot in the town of Dulce.

Lippon was out of his suit and right on us, helping Bellamy out of the jeep.

"I need a sling right now, doc." Bellamy told him.

"I need x-rays of this arm and I need to set it and put on a cast." Lippon pulled out a sling and draped it over Bellamy's head.

"In a while doc. Not just yet." He let Lippon help him over to the satellite phone. He flipped a switch and threw it up on speaker so everyone could hear.

"Harv, are the boys in the tunnel alright?"

"Yes, sir. They're sitting down there eating Meals Ready for Ethiopia and playing dice." Harv chuckled.

"You got landsats on this yet?" Bellamy was in no mood for jokes about MRE Army food.

"Got a spy in the sky looking at it as we speak. First estimate is total involvement." Harv got back to reality.

"Nuclear?"

"Negative. Repeat: Negatory. Recon says it was an implosion followed by an explosion of a conventional type. Totally gone! Just a big hole in the ground inside that cave is all the GPR flyboys can tell us right now. When it cools a bit we can send a ground team in."

What we could make out on the GPR was that inside the Mesa, the entire base was gone. I was just surprised the whole mountain hadn't collapsed in on itself, but it was all reinforced inside the main hanger dome to withstand a direct nuclear hit.

"Cover story: El Paso gas line just blew. That's the call then."

"Roger-copy. Affirmative." Harv answered back. "Already got a call into CNN."

"Clear." Bellamy started to hang up.

"Did the kid make it out okay?" Harv asked with genuine concern.

"The kid saved all of our butts. Again." Bellamy said, looking over at me proudly.

"Good! 'Cuz that bastard still owes me fifty bucks!" Everyone laughed and it released the pressure of the nightmare. Good Old Harvey. Bellamy hung up and sat down on a crate.

Jack helped me out of my Rad suit, which was good, because now I could hardly move. He was watching something else over by the hospital area, where people were working frantically on some soldiers.

"Tugy is alive, barely." Jack said quietly. "He wants to see the Boss."

"Help me up, Jack. I got a busted back." I told him.

"I'll get the physicians over here." Jack looked up and around.

"No. Not yet." I slung my arm around Jack's neck to walk and we headed over to Bellamy walking toward the medical tent.

“Jamison! I yelled and pointed to the blue plastic box in the back of the Jeep. “Guard that box with your life, man!”

“Sir. I need to...” He started to head toward Bellamy.

“You need to follow a direct order, mister.” I yelled again, glaring at him.

“Sir. Yes, sir!” Reluctantly he pulled his weapon and stood next to the Jeep.

“What is going on, Ted.” Jack asked me.

I set my jaw, broke away from Jack and limped behind Bellamy as he walked into the Med tent.

Tugy laid there sucking really hard on air to breath and the doctor in attendance turned when we came in and shook his head to us. Bellamy walked over to the table and looked down at him.

“You have killed my world and all of its people, do you know that?” Tugy gasped.

“No, I am just protecting mine.” Bellamy looked tired.

“It was a fragile alliance,” Tugy gasped, “but in return for my help with your kind they let us live in peace. Now, they will rape my planet completely. Why did you have to do it? We did nothing to you to deserve this.” He sucked on air again.

“You trusted them and didn’t trust us. You picked the wrong side to back Lord Tugy.” Bellamy showed no remorse or care.

“They will come here,” he wheezed, “and you won’t be ready. We know all your plans and we have told them about all of it. They will come, but you won’t be here to see it.” Tugy struggled to raise a silver pen-like device, aiming it at Bellamy.

“Gun!” Jack yelled, and in one fluid move he pulled his Colt .45 auto and crashed into Bellamy, knocking him to one side. A green beam fired out of the device and hit Jack’s right arm, ripping open the flesh. The gun flew up into the air as he spun and hit the floor in agony.

Jack’s weapon, literally, dropped right into my hands as I plucked it out of mid-air, as if someone had placed it there, with all the bounces going the way of the home team today. Like the walking dead I lurched forward, and stood over Tugy, glaring down at him through the sights of the Colt. Panting, he pointed the device at my face.

“Too bad it only has one shot...isn’t it?”

Tugy’s eyes darted around like a trapped wild animal, knowing his bluff had been called. He futilely dropped the device and weakly raised his shaking blood soaked hands. It looked like this was the first time in his miserable thousand-year life he had ever known real fear. With sheer strength of will, he raised himself into a sitting position, and stood up. His muscular frame swaying and shuddering like a shipwrecked galleon pounded by a storm.

“I am unarmed and defenseless. Under our treaty and accords, I am your...prisoner.”

“When you see Simon Ratterman, tell him Ted Humphrey says hello!”

I pulled the trigger and kept pulling it until the clip was empty and still I kept pulling it, until the hammer clacked against the plate. Tugy’s head was a Jackson Pollack smear of red and yellow ooze with no features left on his handsome face. I convulsively kept squeezing until the pain in my back shot up into my skull with a brilliant flash.

Then the lights went out in a universe filled with stars.



CHAPTER 95

I had been lying there for a good hour, not moving, looking up at the ceiling. My counting obsession had me counting the holes in the ceiling tiles again, then multiplying that by the complete number of tiles in the entire ceiling. I had done this before in my life and I was getting a little tired of being in hospitals. I felt the needle in my arm, but I didn't even want to try to use my legs. I was terrified they wouldn't work. Finally I decided to twitch a toe. It worked. Then I moved one foot and then the other. Raising my legs up into an arch was a little more difficult because of the pain in my lower back, so I didn't push it.

"When your estimate is over, you can raise your bed into a sitting position." Bellamy's voice was right in the room with me and didn't have any of the harsh mechanical sounds associated with a speaker.

"I didn't know if I had a broken back or not." I found the controls and pushed the button, until I was in a comfortable sitting position.

"Nothing so dramatic, Dame Judy. You pinched a nerve in the crash. Nothing even exciting, but I bet it hurt like a bitch. The saw bones here worked on you and they already gave you a clean bill of health. Why you were out so long is anyone's guess. I would chalk it up to stress myself." Bellamy was sitting in a chair next to the bed with a cast on his lower arm. "You want to sign my cast and put your year of graduation?" He laughed.

"You're in one piece, besides the plaster appendage, I see." I looked at him sitting there, this battered hulk of a man. Between the facial scar, the stitched up cuts, the black and blue bruises and the cast, it looked like he had done 12 rounds with Muhammad Ali, then lost a fight with a Mix-Master blender.

"If it wasn't for Jack, we would all be singing in the Choir Celestial." He smiled painfully. "How are you feeling?"

"Beat up. Tired inside and out. Outside of that, not really sure of anything." I was being frank and honest.

"Understandable. That was a picture perfect exercise of a military operation." He added.

"What were the casualties?" I asked, concerned.

"We lost sixty-six men." He said, shaking his head. "But we achieved all our objectives, vanquished an implacable enemy and pulled out an unbelievable victory from the desperate jaws of defeat against impossible odds with a deck stacked against us. Like I said, picture perfect."

We sat in silence for a moment in honor of our 66 fallen comrades.

"What is today and how long have I been out?" I looked for my watch in the nightstand next to the bed.

"Four days. Total." He got up and helped me find it and slipped it on my wrist.

"There are bunches of unanswered questions, Ted. Mostly about how you know things and exactly how you turned a cluster fucked fecal blizzard of a defeat into a win. Then in a complex of that size, you just so happened to pull out a single box that

contains everything we needed. And no one understands what happened to take out the Grays at the Violet Level Seven blast door.” Bellamy sat back down.

A nurse came in and checked my pulse and blood pressure without saying a word. She tucked the pillow under my head a little more snugly to make me more comfortable and exited.

“It seems to me like we had lost the battle and you, single handedly, pulled all our asses out of the ashes of defeat, and I can’t explain to anyone what happened, so I have resorted to lying...again. It was all part of our perfect plan. We had certain knowledge about certain things that we cannot disclose, sir. You know the standard BS we shovel up when we are totally in the dark.” Bellamy got up and opened the curtains so I could look out at the lights of the buildings around us.

“Los Alamos?” I asked realizing it wasn’t Groom Lake.

“Yeah, it was the closest triage center for everyone.” He stood looking out the window. “Who was in there with you?” He still didn’t turn back to face me.

“Why would you think there was someone in there?” I dodged it as best I could.

“Because, you might have turned off your Com unit, but your biometric sensors were still on and there was no way you could have made it from level three to where I was waiting in thirty seconds carrying a hundred pound box.” Bellamy turned and looked again at me questioningly. “Which means you were wrapped in some kind of time dilation field.”

“Rufus Henry.” I had no other option at this point than the truth.

“Doctor Rufus T. Henry?” Bellamy said with surprise, recognizing the name. “The black nuclear scientist from the University of Chicago?” Bellamy threw up his good arm in disgust. “He’d have to be a hundred years old if he’s a day! My God! The man disappeared in the 1940s when he was well into his fifties.”

I felt challenged by Bellamy’s disbelief. “I didn’t have to tell you the truth, you know. Get a set of photos of older black men, make it ten or twelve, hell, fifty, and put one of Dr. Henry in there, and see if I can pick him out.”

“I already know you could.” Bellamy shook his head, seemingly even more frustrated. “How long have you been seeing him?”

“Since Cal Tech. Only occasionally, but he always shows up at just the right time.”

“The small design, for the small time device? That was from him then, I presume, at Groom?” Bellamy sat back down and waited.

“Yup.” I wasn’t in much of a mood to continue this right now. I needed some time to clear my own head and figure out what was continuing to happen to me in this whole process.

“Jack? How is Jack?” I remember the final full moments before I passed out at Dulce.

“He saved my life. I would have been cut in two by Tugy if he hadn’t jumped in front of me, but he paid a hell of a price for saving me.” Bellamy looked at the floor for moment then looked up.

“Dead?”

“His left arm. The nerves were completely cut. The doc’s stopped the bleeding, but there is no repairing the nerve damage. He is going to have a hanging arm for the rest of his life. He is contemplating having a prosthetic to replace the dead one. At least with a hook he could do a lot of things that there is no way he could now.” Bellamy cursed under his breath.

“Better that, than you being lost.” I made the obvious statement.

“That doesn’t make me sleep any better at night. I was unprepared and it’s my job to expect the unexpected. I was responsible for deaths of sixty-six of the finest men this country has to offer, and for my friend Jack being crippled for life because...because I

wanted to gloat over that smug alien bastard. I was stupid! That doesn't go down easy." Bellamy stared out the window into the stormy black vista of his own guilt.

I had finally enough!

"Listen to me, George. What happened was the result of some spineless politicians years ago entering into an illegal and ill-advised treaty with the scum of the universe. That cavern is filled with the bones of hundreds of thousands of innocent people that don't know any of this! People WE are sworn to PROTECT! All betrayed by a government that we are supposed to be working for! They all went through a hell of lot worse than any of us! If it had taken every single one of us dying, and ten thousand more, to do what we did, it would be well worth it in the long run! So, stop it with the self-pity sob sister bullshit and look around you! You just took on three different types of aliens and demonstrated you could kick their ass! That will send a message through the halls of power on dozens of worlds and send shockwaves through this galaxy that we are not to be *fucked with*! *That* is nothing to be taken lightly!"

"But I didn't do it. WE didn't do it!" Bellamy yelled. "You did it! You! You saved our butts in there. And I don't know how you did it! Or with what! That frightens me as much as Tugy and the Grays and his entire bunch. I don't know who you're working for anymore, Ted. Me? Us? Or them...whoever *they* may be!"

I was stunned that this is what it had all come down to.

"So this is the thanks I get? Because it's not all about YOU?" I shouted back. "Then relieve me of my duties and put me out to pasture! I just don't fucking care anymore! If you are that concerned who I'm working for, why not just have me killed? Like you do to anyone else who stands in the way of you being the one and the only lord god fucking king of the universe of all of this crap!"

The yelling brought on the stabbing pain in my back.

Bellamy didn't say another word. He just turned and walked out. I laid back feeling the dull pounding in my lumbar region radiating through to my kidneys. Whatever the doctors had done to my back, they had screwed it up. I knew that now. I took the morphine injector on my IV drip and rolled the plastic wheel with my thumb and felt the warmth of the drug surge through my system.

I drifted into a dark place, filled with visions of Grays swimming in tubs of blood and vats of boiling screaming humans, looking at me with baleful pleading in their eyes.

There was nothing I could have done to help them.

All I could offer them was vengeance.

PART FOURTEEN

***THE
LONE RANGER***



CHAPTER 96

The days turned into weeks. One surgical procedure followed another and finally they were satisfied they had found the small piece of metal that had somehow been overlooked in the two other surgeries. It had been lying on my spine and flexing it caused muscle spasms in my lower back and legs. The recovery time was filled with reading popular magazines and books the nurses were kind enough to pick up for me at one of the local bookstores.

I had given up trying to reach anyone by the second week, when, out of curiosity, I finally tried to call myself. I discovered all my calls were re-directed to some offensive little clerk who said he would take a message for me and direct it to the “Recipient”.

It was after a month that I had come to the conclusion I was no longer the fair-haired boy of The Group and was now in a state of limbo. When I asked the nurses about Jack, she told me Major Thompson had been transferred to Bethesda Military Hospital where they were going to work on his new metal arm. That was the final indicator I was out of all of it. They had clearly indicated that even Jack, my closet friend, could not see me to say good-bye. Well, at least he didn’t come over and shoot me.

I should have been angry, but in reality I was totally relieved. I had spent the better part of nineteen years since getting my doctorate with these men and I had half a hunch I was now free to explore my own future. I wondered every day about Irina and Pasha, but realized very quickly if I were outside the Group, she would be forbidden to see me as well. That hurt, but I could understand it. At least she was out of Russia and would be able to take better care of my daughter and raise her in a country where she would have heat in their home and plenty of food to eat. That would have to do as far as I was concerned.

* * * * *

Twelve weeks after I had been brought into the hospital and after I had been going through physical rehabilitation and getting my sea legs back under me, I was allowed to walk the hallways on my floor. With the exception of three nurses who worked different shifts and a security guard at the elevator, the floor was empty. So, I took up the habit of walking the two hallways and tried to complete what I calculated was two miles a day. I knew I was ready to check out and the attending physician told me it would only be a couple more days and he would release me. I didn’t quite understand the delay, until, on a Thursday, as I was finishing my last circuit around the floor and I found a small man sitting in my room with an open briefcase.

I walked in and sat down in the other chair and looked at the side of his face as he finished making some notes on a file.

“Dr. Theodore Humphrey?” He asked when he looked up.

“In the flesh.” I smiled to no response.

“My name is Jenkins. I have some forms for you to sign.” He handed me six NSA forms that were non-disclosures and a Protection of Secrets Act. He then handed me a pen. “You understand that you may never talk about anything you have been involved

with over your past period of government employment. You are restricted from writing any material that directly or indirectly provides any information as to what you have been working on while in the government's employ. You are further advised that any disclosures will result in immediate arrest and trial by military tribunal, followed by incarceration for the rest of your life in a maximum security facility."

"Do you know what I have been working on?" I held the papers and pen in my hand looking at him.

"I have no idea nor do I wish to discuss anything with you." He paused. "Dr. Humphrey, I am just a man who takes care of details for others. I can't tell you anything about any of this. I just know I need those papers signed and then I can explain the rest of what is in here." He held up a package in his hand.

I signed the forms and returned them to him. He counter-signed them and put them into another file and sealed them.

"I have here a new bank account for you I opened with Wells Fargo Bank. It contains the proceeds of your salary for the period of time you worked for the government. Apparently, you were using expense account funds only during your tenure with whom ever you worked for." He held up a hand to keep me from speaking. "Here is a new driver's license for you out of the state of Nevada. Two credit cards that will have the bills sent to this address, which is a post office box in Las Vegas. You are responsible for all charges on them after I give them to you. A new Social Security card and three hundred dollars in petty cash. Your personal belongings from whatever facility you were working on have been placed in storage in Las Vegas. Here is the address and key to the locker. The bill on the storage unit has been paid for one year in advance. After that time you are responsible for all charges if you wish to keep it. All identification cards, badges and keys have been collected out of your personal effects. I have brought with me one suitcase, that contains three changes of clothing for you and two suits with ties." He looked down his list and then added. "A new Ford sedan is parked in the visitors lot with Nevada plates. It is paid for in full. The registration is made out to your new mailing address. A simple insurance policy was arranged for one year and you may change that anytime you wish. You also now have a private medical insurance package that is paid for one year and after that time you are responsible for the maintenance of payments on it." He stopped. "Just like a new person, wouldn't you say?"

I glared at him as he handed me the package.

"You may stay in this facility for two additional days at government expense, but then you are required to leave these premises. You will need to be escorted off the facility by a member of the security staff, since all your governmental clearances have been canceled."

"Do you do this often?" I got up and looked down to see the suitcase sitting in the corner of the room.

"I have found it is best to keep these meetings to a minimum of outside conversation which is best for all involved. If you don't have any technical questions about the paperwork I will be leaving." He closed his briefcase and stood holding the handle with both hands.

"What would you suggest a forty-something physicist, who has just been dumped from secret government service, do with his life, Mr. Jenkins?" I felt a vile taste in my mouth.

"Forget." He said pushing his glasses up his officious little nose. "Go find a beach to lay on. Maybe in Mexico. Figure out that you are luckier than most. At least you've got a life of some kind. Good day, Dr. Humphrey. And good luck." He walked out and I could hear the short staccato clip-clop of his shoes as he walked down the hall.

I opened the suitcase and pulled out some slacks and a shirt. I loaded up the things I'd accumulated in the weeks I had been here and walked out in the hallway. The nurse looked up at me.

"Where do you think you are going?" She smiled at me, but had concern in her eyes.

"Home, Janet. I am no longer part of any of this. So, I can't see why I should stick around." I looked at the guard who had gotten up out of his chair. "If you call me an escort, I will be going now thank you."

She looked at the chart in front of her and noted what the doctor had written.

"Phil, will you escort Dr. Humphrey to his car, please?" She came around the nurse's station and took me by the arm walking with me toward the elevator. "Jack told me to tell you when you got settled, he would get in touch...if he could." She winked.

"Thanks. You are a doll for that." I hugged her and kissed her on the cheek.

"Good luck, Ted. I hope it all works out well for you." She let go and stood back as I walked into the elevator and the guard pushed the down button.

"Thanks for giving me back my life, in more ways than one, Janet."

She blew me a kiss as the door closed and we started down.

The guard had put my suitcase in the trunk of the Ford and stood there for a moment. "Keep to the road with the yellow stripe on it and it will take you to the main gate. I will call them and let them know you are exiting. Have a nice day, sir."

I drove off and out of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Not really sure where I was heading, but I knew that it would be west. I finally got on the interstate and listened to the radio. It was already November of 1988 and the Vice President had just been elected President of the United States.

I laughed at the fact that I hadn't voted in, or even been aware of, a national election in years.



CHAPTER 97

After six months of visiting old sites and getting the rest of my ‘paper’ life put together, I found myself back in Barstow. I had driven up the canyon where I had grown up and nothing much had changed. There wasn’t new construction going on here, like in most areas of the Southwest. Barstow was still a small desert crossroads where the center of town had grown, but the outlying areas were still just the same. I found the house we had built when I was kid and it was all boarded up. After walking around it for a quarter of an hour, a car pulled up in front and a young man got out and walked up to where I was standing, looking at the old lab building.

“Hi. I am Jim Evers. I live up the road about a mile or so.” He was half my age and had the sun tanned looked of a desert dweller.

“I hope I’m not trespassing passing on your property, Mr. Evers.” I walked over to meet him.

“No, not at all. I’m a local real estate broker in town. Thought you might be interested in seeing this piece of property. It’s got its own well, such as it is and ten acres running back up that canyon there...don’t I know you?” He took off his sunglasses.

“I don’t think we have ever met. I’ve been out of the country for the last few years.” This was my new story to explain why I didn’t have much of a history behind me.

“I do know you!” He snapped his fingers. “You’re Ted Humphrey. I thought I recognized you.” He extended his hand.

“Well you got the name right, it’s just that I don’t think we have met, Mr. Evers.” I was caught completely off guard.

“No, we haven’t but I walked past your picture ever day I went to high school here. You were with the State Champions in ‘57. Crashing full back.” He laughed and it was genuine.

“Got me. Yes, I played right here in Barstow and that seems like ancient history.” I turned and looked at the place again. “My dad and I built this place. It could use a little fixing up now.”

“Well are you thinking about doing that?” Jim asked while looking around the grounds. He found the fallen down real estate sign and pushed it back into the ground.

“Is it for sale?” I asked not believing in the circumstances.

“Sure is. I’m the listing agent on it. The folks who own it finally had enough of fighting the desert and moved to Arizona to some retirement community. It is still too far out of town for most folks but I love it up here in the canyon, it is quiet and nobody bothers us. Oh now and then we get some dirt bikers coming over the back hills, but that is only on the occasional weekend.” He went back and pulled a binder out of his car. “Let’s see...it is on the market for one-fifty, but I’m sure you can offer about one-

thirty and they will take it. It has been on the market for about two years now with no nibbles.”

“I will give them \$150,000. Right now.” I had over two million dollars in Wells Fargo Bank in Las Vegas. It represented my thirty pieces of silver for betraying the pure faith of physics.

“Appliances and furniture all go with it. I have a couple of local gals who work for me. I’ll have it cleaned up and the one broken window replaced. I put the boards over the windows to keep them from being broken out by local kids.” He closed his book.

“Write up the paperwork and I will come by your office and find out where to have the money wired to. How soon can I have it?” I was really happy and I didn’t know why.

“As soon as escrow closes and the money is in the account, it’s yours. Maybe a week.” He extended his hand again. “When you are moved in and comfortable, my wife and I will have you up to our place for dinner and some getting acquainted.”

“Sounds good to me.” I shook his hand and went back around the main building to look at the old lab as the man drove off to another appointment.

After stopping by his office and signing all the necessary papers, I told Jim I would be back in a week and finish the closing documents. I needed the time to get all of my stuff boxed up in Las Vegas and have it moved out of my apartment.

I knew more about my father right now than I had ever imagined possible.



CHAPTER 98

It took three coats of heavy latex paint from Sears to cover the outside of the old house and lab, but when I was finished it actually looked new. I replaced the old warped wooded frames with new vinyl ones and new carpeting. A new high performance air-conditioner for both the house and the lab, made them wonderful year-round. I'd took over payments on a truck one of the Marines over at Twenty-Nine Palms couldn't make and used it for hauling and landscaping.

Within a couple months, I had the old homestead looking like what most Southern California homes in the desert should look like. White rock instead of a lawn, desert plants in pots all around the edge of the house. The driveway was now black topped and a new carport to keep the Ford and the truck out of the noonday sun that could pull the paint off of anything in weeks.

I had only encountered two rattlers while I was doing all of my work around the place and both of them were in the crawl space under the lab. I gently relocated them up the canyon. I went under there to make sure the hundred pounds of dynamite my dad had placed there was gone and not just boiling the nitroglycerin out of the clay and pooling in the bottom of the pit we had built. Someone had taken care of that little task for me, which made me very grateful, to say the least. Not getting 'blowed up' is good.

The lab had been used for storage for all these years, and I actually came upon some old stuff left behind when my Uncle Bob had the place cleaned out. There wasn't anything of value, just a couple of old Allied Electronic catalogs and some vintage Life Magazines. I had set them aside to look through at some point in the future.

I got every last speck of dust out of that lab, then painted it with high gloss enamel. Two new whiteboards, a set of cabinets, with a complete bench on the top, made a great place to work on electronics. I'd gone into L.A. a couple of times for special items and, during one of those trips, stopped by a large electronic supply house and picked up all the test equipment I thought I might need. I threw in a used Hallicrafters Short Wave receiver to listen to news from all over the world and Coast to Coast with Art Bell. A small fireproof safe finished it off, bolted to the floor and walls, containing my father's notebooks, as well as my own. I'd spent a good six months putting my world back in order and I was just about ready to start on my new adventure.

During the fall, I had started going down to the high school and got back into jogging on the track. There were several middle aged guys doing the same, all fighting the battle of the bulge and a few of us would get together on Friday nights to watch the football team play when they were at home and then go to the local sports bar to have a beer or two as well as trading lies about how good we were when we played ball.

My new cover story for myself was that I was a private research consultant working for an un-named company, working in the area of micro-circuitry for new personal computers.

No one asked much further than that. I was respected as a professional and a man, what more could anyone ask out of life?

Jim Evers and his wife Alice became friends and she was always trying to fix me up with some charming local gal that was divorced with two kids or someone from their church that had a “really good personality”. But I had become an expert at bobbing and weaving out of any of those challenges in life. After a few months, I think Alice decided I was a closet case gay and she stopped trying to find me a mate.

In December, after the last game of the high-school football season at the coolest part of the year, I started work on my project in earnest. If twenty-five years ago my dad could build a device that worked with what he had available and not all of the information that I had at hand, and actually accomplished his task, then I could not believe I couldn't replicate it. I wasn't sure what I planned to do with it. Maybe get future lottery numbers, find the right stock picks, or, pull a Marty McFly and buy a Sports Almanac. But the challenge was there, and I was up to it.

The one thing giving me pause was when Bellamy booted me out he'd let me keep all of my, and my father's, notebooks. I had no recourse to get them back if he hadn't, so it struck me as strange as to why he'd done it. I traded it off as an oversight on someone else's part that had bagged up my place for me. Not knowing what they were or what they contained, they'd been tossed into a box and put in storage along with so many other things I probably shouldn't have.

I reduced the size of the device down to less than a shoebox. It was all solid state but it was a bitch to wind the main and secondary coils, which had somewhere between thirty five to forty thousands winds of micro-thin magnetic wire. I bought a small lathe and a mill, the type folks used to build model steam engines. It took up only a small corner of the lab but I could fabricate items I couldn't possibly buy on the open market.

I'd found a portable military surplus generator in Tucson that I drove out and picked up, that put out ten kilowatts of power using diesel. It was housed in a converted shipping container I'd bought and painted to match the lab exterior and was equipped with its own air-conditioner and exhaust silencer. So, when I needed extra power in the lab I had it available without burning out the local electrical grid from the drain in cranking up the “Gadget”, my nickname for the Time-Runner device I was building.

In February, eighteen months after I had walked out of that Los Alamos hospital, I was ready for the first test of my Time Runner. It sat atop a chamber made of stainless steel, surrounded by a Faraday cage. I'd bought a large lead panel and attached it to rollers on the ceiling. After checking out everything around the device to make sure nothing would blow up, I prepared for the first trial run. I didn't know what to send into the future. So I picked up an old, faded Life Magazine, the July 17th, 1957 edition, still sitting in a stack on my desk, and put it in the chamber.

I'd brought the device up to working speed twice before. That was the reason I bought the lead shield. The first two times, my Geiger counter pegged and I knew I was producing enough gamma rays to fry my behind, or turn me into the Hulk, if I wasn't careful. This time it came up to a working level and the meter stayed silent, except for common background radiation, behind the screen. I pushed the control all the way to the top of the range and saw the signature bright bluish-white flash I expected. The air was alive with ozone and I felt my hair stand straight up from the static electricity.

I waited five minutes after I shut down the device, waiting for it to cool before I even thought about opening the blast door on the chamber. I rolled the shield away and checked the unit for fried wires, burnt out circuits or anything else that would make me crazy. Everything looked fine. I put a thermograph on the chamber door and it was cool enough to open, so I unstrung the latch.

The Life magazine was gone. In its place was a buff colored envelope. I took it out and walked over to my desk and opened it. The handwriting was small, tight and masculine:

Nice Job, Ted!

Thought this might help you to align the unit better.

Also a little gift I got from an old friend.

You are ready now, and I think he would want you to have it.

Rufus.

I sat back and looked at the sheets of paper. It was a scaled diagram and a schematic of a time unit, probably some kind of directional locator. It would allow a smaller Time Runner device to be tuned to a specific place in space as well as time, one of the things we had never been able to figure out, when we worked on reducing the size of the great beast at Montauk, all those years ago. No one at Groom Lake had been able to get the “Coordinator”, as it was called, down to any kind of portable size. It still took up fifteen square feet of floor space, was seven feet high and weighed several tons. I marveled at the simplicity of Rufus’s design and laughed out loud. He had by-passed so much of the trivial and hit the heart of the matter, dead on. It made the Time Runner to where it could be portable. The Gadget could be thrown in the trunk of a car and carried anyplace, possibly reduced to fit in a backpack, or maybe, someday in the future, the size of a telephone pager you could just clip on your belt. Wow! Wouldn’t that be something? The massive power input needed was the only problem I needed to work out now, and I didn’t see that getting fixed anytime soon. But it had all worked, just like I said! And here I was, stripped, branded, blackballed and kicked out of the government, but still dealing with Dr. Rufus T. Henry, somewhere up or down the timeline.

I finally shuffled to the last page, which was a different size and much older than all the other leaves in the disheveled stack. It was a very old, yellowed, 5x8 sheet of personal stationary that had been torn off a notepad, the kind you keep on your desk for messages, doodles and various scribblings.

The bottom had a block printed line that read: “Princeton University.” The header had a more elegant, cursive typeface in gold leaf that said: “From the desk of A.E.”

Hmm...didn’t know anyone with those initials connected to Rufus. “A little gift I got from an old friend.” Okay.

In the center of the note page was an equation:

$$S = -Mg C \int_a^b ds$$

I rubbed my jaw, trying to make heads or tails out of it. It obviously had to be important, or Rufus wouldn’t have bothered to send it back through time. I went over to my desk, cleared it off, and rooted around through the piles and crates till I found a yellow legal pad and flipped over the used scribbled on pages to find some still blank. Using the language of mathematics and physics, I needed to break this down into its elements and integers if I was ever going to make heads or tails out of it.

With the common and standardized notation used: There is a negative reference in the formula in the Lagrangian function, because ψ , becomes the action integral instead of S . In Lagrangian format, which he would be seen as:

$$L = - \frac{|\psi|^2}{2m} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d^2 \psi}{dx^2} = - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d^2 \psi}{dx^2} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d^2 \psi}{dx^2}$$

Therefore it can be assumed that the Mg particle, or mass/gravity can be seen more generally as Mi . Therefore I could assume that:

$$\psi = -Mg C$$

All the hair on my body prickled as an electric shock went through me. Stunned, the blood drained out of my face and a space opened at the back of my head. My mouth dropped open and I put my hands over it out of what I could not decipher was either sheer terror or unabashed wonder and amazement.

OH...MY...GOD!

How could I have been so dense?

How could I have not seen this for what it was right away?

An old friend...of Rufus?

The yellowed note pad stationary:

"Princeton University".

The inscription, *"From the desk of A.E."*

A.E.

Albert Einstein.

This was the actual, original sheet of paper, taken from his desk, probably from right under his head, only moments after he had died.

Complete, elegant, simple, magnificent, and a work of sheer, shining, unadulterated, genius.

It made the whole universe make sense and come into clear view.

It was the Unified Field Theory!

The full and complete formula! What $E=MC^2$ had done to unlock the secrets and power of the atom this equation would allow us to unlock the infinite power and mystery of the universe. We could fold space for superluminal faster than light speed travel or instantaneously communicate with anything or anyone anywhere in the universe. It made distance no factor at all, as it explained the underlying inter-dimensional interconnections of everything, everywhere. It was the mathematical expression of the face of the Creator!

Oh, and, of course, unlimited travel backwards and forwards in time.

I wanted to send Rufus back a thank you note, but thought better of it. I didn't know where to begin. I needed to calm down and master the Coordinator problem first. With the Unified Field Theory in hand, it should now be child's play, which meant I could also locate where, and when, he, and my father, were in the time field. That, in and of its self, would be interesting.

History had been made here today. Future generations would look back on this moment as the day everything changed, if they were ever actually told about it. But I'd find a way for the world to know, somehow, someday. When I died, or just moved ahead in the time stream, I would get this story to one of those crazy researchers the government spent so much time smearing, then they could write a book to tell the

whole story. There was this psychic remote viewer who was also a TV and movie writer/director. He was always my favorite guest on Coast to Coast AM with Art Bell. Say what you want, Sean David Morton had some serious balls, and I couldn't believe no one had put a bullet in this guy, the way he messed around with Dulce and Area 51. They had to move the whole Groom operation to Utah because of him. But because he claimed to be "psychic", with some fantastically accurate predictions, he was easy to discredit by the "mainstream/government stooge media", so he didn't wind up dead. Smart! Yeah, he was crazy...like a fox! He had nerves of steel and ice water in his veins, but could tell a great joke and had a grounded sense of humor about himself and the world. I have never heard him lie or back down from anyone. At Five-One he'd been chased, shot at, threatened, harassed and he still kept coming back for more. They'd killed several of his friends who had gotten in too deep like Jim Keith, John Hadley and Danny Cassalero and he still kept at it. I even heard one General say once that they knew his dad and that he was "Too funny to kill", which was the only thing keeping him alive.

Yeah. He would be the one.

All Sean would have to do was show this equation to a couple of top physicists and they would know right then and there this wasn't some bullshit made up story. That is only after they fainted...or went nuts. The applications for instantaneous superluminal communications and the transmission of unlimited packets of data, sound and video anywhere in the universe with no infrastructure would be limitless. It would shape the 21st century. To say nothing of travel through space and time. Maybe I could help him from the future like my friends were helping me. Hmmm...

Of course, my story and this equation would probably get this poor kid dead, but that was a long time off. He'd just have to stay alive long enough to see that a book about all this made it to print, or better yet maybe a movie or TV series. And even if they didn't knock him off, I know the rotten bastards in the government would probably smear him like no one had ever seen!! They just would make something up or set him up. It's what I would do...if I still worked in the guts of the machine. But I was no longer beholden to "The Man."

I was The Lone Ranger out in my desert shack hideout that had just cracked open all of time and space!

I pulled a celebratory beer from the small fridge in the lab I kept there for just such occasions, and popped the top.

"Cheers to you, Uncle Albert! You finally figured out who God was...right before you met Him!"

I took a long swig.

I felt like a million bucks!

PART FIFTEEN

RETURN FROM EXILE



CHAPTER 99

I was out front watering my plants on Saturday morning, when the black sedan pulled into my driveway. The windows were tinted to protect the interior from the desert heat and make it impossible to see who was sitting in the car. I continued to water, not really caring if somebody was lost up here in the canyon or not, when the back door opened and a heavy man struggled to get out of the back seat.

Dr. Harvey Glipsen had found me again.

I stood there non-plussed holding the hose and watching him huff and puff as he waddled his way up my driveway, working around the chain I had erected between two steel posts cemented into the ground.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph Ted!” He sweated out. “You might as well be on the back side of the goddamn moon. How in the hell did you find this place?” Harvey was almost out of breath, wheezing like he was going to have a heart attack walking up a 10° incline. He was still sporting the same tweed jacket with leather patches and dark slacks. His hair was thinner than I remembered and almost completely white.

“Yeah. Just grand to see you, too. Dad and I built this place when I was a kid.” I continued to water as he sidled up beside me doubling over with his hands on his knees. I stepped to one side so he wouldn’t drip sweat on me.

“Oh cut all the polite crap! Of course it’s good to see you, you dumb bastard!” He looked around and continued to shake his head out of pity or disgust, I wasn’t sure which. “Do you have, like, a cold drink of water in this place or...please Jesus...a beer...maybe?”

I turned the hose on him. The water hit him square in the face. I left it there for a nice long while until he was good and soaked, as he flailed his arms and sputtered in shock. I moved it up and down, not wanting to miss a spot, and finally nonchalantly turned it back on my plants.

“Okay! Okay! I guess I deserved that!” He thought for a moment. “That did feel pretty good though. Ted! Please!”

“Are you asking to come into my home? The one that I pay for?” I couldn’t help myself, the resentment that still stung deep and I was ready to let the world know it.

“Look, if you want me to grovel and embarrass myself, I will! But can I at least debase, degrade and humiliate myself inside like a human being, where I can get out of the sun? You think you owe me that much in your life? Do I need to die of heat stroke and burst into flames to make you feel better?”

He stood there still spitting out water dripping down into his mouth from his wet hair and moustache. Harv was still Harv. He would never change. He was going to his grave being a big fat jerk, but I found myself still liking him even after everything.

“Come on. But make sure whoever’s in that car gets out of the sun. I don’t want dead bodies on my hands by the time you finish a beer...except yours maybe!” I walked around to the front door and Harvey spoke into a small handheld unit and the black car headed down the canyon.

He walked in and looked around at my well ordered home. "And I thought Groom Lake was a pit. This is worse! How do you stand it?" He picked out my favorite leather chair and plopped himself down with a wet squish, after dropping his dripping wet coat on my red leather couch. "Cool in here, though. Nice if you like living in French Guiana. Got a whole Devil's Island kinda feel to it all. Dustin Hoffman your butler here Mr. McQueen?"

I let the *Pappion* movie reference slide and got a beer and a glass of iced tea for myself and came back in and sat down. I wondered what had brought him off the reservation to see the branded traitor to his cause. He downed the beer in two pulls and sat back. I tossed him the second one without comment and he plucked it out of the air with a cat-like speed and had it open in one graceful motion.

"Nurse that one, 'cuz that is all you get. There's no credit for servicemen or their bosses. Strictly cash and carry. That one's on the house." I motioned at the can. "Anything else you pay...cash."

"Grumpy fart in your old age, aren't cha?" Harv laughed and drank.

"Not really big on social customs these days." I knew he had something on his mind but I wasn't ready to here his pitch just yet. "Last time you and I had a beer it cost me ten years of my life and my career, with not even a kiss good-bye."

"Ah, bitter too. After all the things I did for you? That's what I call ingratitude." I worked my jaw, thinking of something to say. He put the beer on my oak coffee table, leaving a wet ring, and put his reading glasses on. He pulled out his notebook and looked through it. He picked out a picture and handed it to me. It was Irina and Pasha, dressed, posed, smiling, leaning toward each other and both beautiful beyond compare. It was a studio portrait shot.

"That's a really cheap shot, Harvey! Even for you!" I tossed it back at him and it fluttered in the air, landing face up on the table like a line drawn in the sand between us.

"Taken two weeks ago, in New York. She's growing up." He took off his glasses and sat back chewing on the tip of one of the arms, surveying me like a lion taking in a fat, slow zebra.

I put my iced tea down on a coaster then grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and the seat of his pants and threw him head first through the front window...in my head...for about the fourth time.

"What exactly do you want from me?"

"I can only imagine how you must feel about all of us, Ted." Harv started with his best voice reserved for Senators and the POTUS, the President of the United States.

"NO YOU FUCKING CAN'T! NOT EVER!!" I exploded jumping to my feet, dying to fulfill the fantasy roiling in my brain. "You will never know what I feel! Don't you DARE insult me by even thinking that!" I flared up with all the suppressed rage built up like a gallows inside me over the last eighteen months. "I did what was necessary! I accomplished every task asked of me and what did I get in return? WHAT? A boot...up...my...ASS! Without as much as a 'thank you, man!' No! You do NOT know how I FUCKING FEEL!"

"Calm down, Teddy! Let's approach this like two old friends instead of you going off like some raving lunatic." Harv was clearly shaken by my outburst.

"You walk in here and expect me to be civil?" I said pulling it back to a low boil. "You wouldn't even return my calls! I had some sawbones cutting on my spine, wondering if I was ever going to walk again or come out some drooling paraplegic. Bellamy brands me a traitor to my country, my species and my world! Then you hold my wife and daughter hostage and then I get some..." I couldn't remember the guy's name that came to Los Alamos, "... pinhead bag boy who knows nothing about me or what I've done and hands me my walking papers. Don't think for one goddamn minute I plan to be civil, cordial or anything resembling it! You and Bellamy and the

rest of you goddamn monkeys can roast on a slowly turning spit in the fires of hell being fucked up the ass all day and night with the pointy barbed dick of Satan himself, as far as I'm concerned!"

Harv just took it. He winced at some of the words, but just stared, slack jawed and expressionless. "Feel better now? Can we talk like reasonable people?"

Looking at him I wanted to laugh. Instead, I walked to the kitchen to buy myself some time and got him another beer. He had his back on the ropes that much was clear, otherwise he'd never be here. If I wanted to go on in exile, alone, by myself, in my government sanctioned St. Helena, I could. But it would be just that. The end of the road. The isle from which I would never return. But if I ever considered going back and making this my Elba instead of St. Helena, this would be the time. The man was scared to death of something. And if this bear of a man with nerves of steel and liquid nitrogen in his veins was frightened he was only the iceberg's tip, the point man for thousands of other people. Hell, governments, nations, the whole world was scared shitless as well, otherwise Dr. Harvey Gilpsen (possibly the second most powerful human being on Earth) would never be submitting to my humiliations. My curiosity was eating me alive.

I walked back in and held out the beer. He grabbed at it like a drowning man, but I snatched it away. "Twenty-bucks!" I said as he sputtered. "My house, my rules, bubba!" He reached in his pocket and he put a hundred on the table.

"Keep the change, you bastard." Harv scowled.

I put Benjamin safely in my pocket then handed him the beer, which he grabbed and held to his chest with both hands, narrowing his eyes suspiciously like I was going to fight him for it. He put it down without opening it, glaring at me.

"Would it do any good to tell you I fought Bellamy tooth and nail about this? You were absolutely right about everything. His plan, that he double-money-back-guaranteed people would work, blew up in his ugly face and he almost had a tragedy of epic proportions on his hands. You jump in, save the day, kill the bad guys and pull out the goose that laid the golden egg to boot! Then, you go and save the dumb bastard's life, twice, and blow away that galactic prick Lord Tugy for good measure, in front of twenty witnesses!" Harv finally opened his beer, drained it, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and belched.

"To top it off, nobody knows what went through that Mesa like crap through a goose. It killed all those little gray sons of bitches and the evidence is blown sky high to boot. To this day, we don't know what happened, other than you seemed to know all about it and saved everyone's ass. So, Bellamy doesn't know who you are, what you're doing, who you're getting your information from or who you're really working for. He errs on the side of caution. Not the right decision. I knew it. Jack knew it. But Bellamy got to where he couldn't trust you. You've seen all this before. Paranoid people work in this business, and they're paranoid for very good reasons. He wasn't about to give you the keys to the kingdom and hand you the Jacobs Center at Fallon after all of this happened. In his twisty little mind it would be like putting the coyote in charge of the sheep farm."

"Okay! So what?" I still wasn't convinced.

"Boy, you are working on being a hard case, aren't you?" Harv reached into his jacket and pulled out a buff colored envelope, still wet around the edges, and held it in his hands.

"Why should I?" I sat back crossing my arms in my own brand of defiance.

"Because we need you. Hell, Teddy...I need you! Here's what happened while you've been out here in the dirt playing *Rat Patrol*. First," he counted on his sausage fingers, "the Visitors have been raising holy hell with us; using small raiding parties to come and go. There aren't enough of them to do a lot of damage but they're keeping the guys in Information Suppression so busy they can't think straight. Sightings,

encounters, abductions, you name it. Just for the hell of it. They took a secretary to a prime minister two months ago and did an Ellen on her.”

I winced at the thought of that happening to anyone.

“They did it, just to let us know they are pissed as hell and playing hardball.

“Second: they wiped out Tugy’s homeworld. Pfft! Gone! Blammo! Just like he told us they would. Made an example out of it for anyone else thinking of fucking with them. Complete and utter destruction. Total genocide. The whole planet burnt to a cinder, and they’re running their fleet at full tilt to get to us next. The timetable has been moved up by three to five years. Something about alignments with galactic center on December 21, 2012 that will help them get here quicker. So we might be looking at going toe-toe with them by the end of that decade,

Dulce made them all re-think their entire game plan. Bought us several more years.

“Third: we can’t get the device to work at all. Some little something in it we can’t find. Irina is the only one with any idea, and she won’t go any further without you being brought back from exile. Period. That is her condition.

“Fourth, and finally, this...” he fluttered the envelope at me. “This, my friend, is the shot to the head, for all of us. Five people have seen this. All of them know you are the only guy that can make that piece of shit at Fallon dance a jig, and they are raising high holy hell to know why the ‘Hero of the Dulce Mesa’, who we should have pinned a medal on, has been stripped of his stripes, branded a traitor and sent to fend for himself like Chuck Conners amongst the savages.”

He flicked the envelope with his finger.

I could remain in my St. Helena to die, or take that envelope from him, get Irina and Pasha, and my whole life, all back, and escape from exile in Elba, returning triumphant. I had lived to fight another day.

I grabbed the envelope and tore it open as Harv smiled and sat back. I stared at it for a long hard minute as my jaw went slack. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

I held in my hands the July 17th 1957 edition of Life Magazine. But it was just the cover, as the innards had been torn out. The date was circled in red ink and someone had written across the cover:

Thought you might like to see this.

Ted sent it to me.

Really good photos of Marilyn Monroe in it. I am keeping them.

Yours truly,

Dr. Rufus T. Henry.

I held it out in front of me and thought about the experiment two nights ago.

“When did you get this?” I asked quietly.

“Three months ago. Why? Don’t tell me you just got this in the mail? The US post office is bad, but it’s not that bad.”

“Two nights ago. I dug it out of an old box. Come on, let me show you my workshop.” I got up and headed for the back door.

As Harv bent to pick up his jacket a gun fell out of the side pocket. He quickly picked it up and stuffed it back into his coat.

“Is that in case I didn’t want to play ball?”

“It’s for snakes.” Harv said indignantly. “I hate snakes...and the goddamn desert!” He walked out, puffing and shambling along.

Inside the lab, he looked around and futzed with this and spun that, then sat on the metal lab stool. “Nice set up you got here. It must work, too. From the looks of that cover of Life.” He fiddled with a knob on the oscilloscope.

“Bellamy must have loved that. He never believed me when I told him I’d talked to Dr. Henry.” I added.

"Yeah, he told me...just before he tried to blow his brains out on a live transmission from the Caymans. Told me he'd been so wrong about you and that we should try to get you back." Harv never blinked when he said the words.

"Did he kill himself?" I asked.

"No. Jamison, that Scottish son of a bitch, stopped him. Wrestled the gun out of his hand then whacked him with it a couple of times for good measure. They tossed his ass in the hospital and found he'd been living on Benzedrine to keep him awake for months. Made him goofy as hell. He's back on the job and doing pretty good now. But now we have to babysit him 24/7. No one trusts him not to try it again. I don't think he will, but we need to make sure he doesn't up and decide to join the 'Choir Celestial,' as he is so often fond of saying." Harv walked over to the device and looked in the chamber.

"How do you direct it to where you want it to go?"

"That's what my old friend Dr. Henry just gave me the other night. Now all I'm working on is a power unit to make it man portable." I took some pride in showing off my brainchild.

"You want a big one to play with?" Harv sat back down on the stool.

"At Fallon?" I asked.

"Yup. That, and all the help you want. Whattaya say, nephew?" Harv thought he had a done deal and put out his sweaty hamhock of a hand. I looked down at it, swaying in space.

"No." I said. His mouth came full open.

"No! Whaddaya mean NO? You can't say 'no' to this! This is your life we are talking about, here! You've spent years trying to make this work and I want to hand you the most well funded, best staffed facility in the world, and you say 'No?'" Harv was beside himself.

"Why didn't Bellamy come and ask me himself? He's the one that caused all this trouble. And you're all just letting him get away with it!" I was still smarting and I was not ready to go back in the game just yet.

"Bellamy wasn't going to come out here and face you eye to eye after what he'd done. He watched you blow a man to pieces without a fucking twitch! He could see himself lying dead among the cactus in your front yard and you pissing on his corpse to boot. He may be crazy but he's not stupid. So he sends out old Harv. Hell, if you killed me, you'd just be putting me out of his misery. I've been jacking my jaw at that prick for eighteen months about how stupid he was that we lost you. Do you know how much fun it has been for me to stick that up his ass every day? Hell, I'd rather see you rot out here just for the entertainment value it provides me!"

Harv licked his lips and wiped his mouth again with the back of his hand. He opened my refrigerator and pulled out a beer.

"Hey!" I said with palm out.

"Screw you! A hundred bucks buys me five beers, ya cheap Jewey bastard!" He took a long swig. "Ah! Twenty-dollar beer!" He rubbed the cold can on his sweaty forehead and turned back to face me.

"Tell you what, Sunny Jim. Let me bring in the second string, see if they can make a difference, is that all right? As long as you promise me not to kill anybody else."

"I haven't hurt anyone in a long time, Harv and I don't plan to again."

"Just hold on." He pulled the little radio unit out of his pocket. "Morty? Ask them to come up to the... 'lab'." He said the word with disdain. "It's behind the main house...yeah, where the shitter should be."

There was a click on the radio as Harv put it away. He finished the beer, crushed the can and dropped it on the floor. There was a soft knock on the door and I opened it expecting some science geeks that were going to paw through all my stuff. Jack

Thompson was standing there, dressed in a suit. His left hand was a mechanical hook. He reached out and grabbed me in an embrace.

“Hello, Ted! So good to see you.” I held him at arms distance and looked into his eyes.

“You don’t know how good it is to see you.” I held the hook for a minute and looked at it.

“It’s a little tough to type, so Harv got me a new secretary.” He smiled and stepped in.

“What happened to Shirley?” I was closing the door.

“Married her. Now she’s home getting ready to have little Jack.” He laughed and I beamed at his good fortune, as I shut the door. “I wouldn’t close that just yet, Ted.”

I opened the door back up and standing like a vision in a business suit, looking absolutely beautiful was Irina.

“Permission to come into your laboratory, Dr. Humphrey?” She said coyly and tilted her head.

“It’s our laboratory! And you never have to ask permission, you know that!” I grabbed her and hugged her so hard it squeezed all the air out of her.

I never wanted to let her go again.



CHAPTER 100

The afternoon had been filled with old friends and lovers sharing everything that had gone on for years between us and around us. Irina sat next to me, holding my hand on occasion and regaling me with stories of Pasha and their lives in Russia. The ups and downs of it all. The way they were treated when in favor and the hardships of being held accountable for those things she had no way of controlling.

Harv sent Morty to get some Chinese take out, since he didn't think it was a good idea for all of us to be seen together in Barstow at The Bun Boy. He had Morty pick up two cold twelve packs to make sure he restored to my world that which was mine. But there was no way he was getting his hundred bucks back.

Irina would get up and wander around the house looking at everything. She opened medicine cabinets and looked in closets. She sat and cried looking at her own picture on my desk and that of our daughter, when she was really young.

During a lull in the conversation when everyone was just about talked out, she leaned over to me. "I have grown older. I don't look like that picture any more."

"I can't tell the difference myself." I hugged her.

"You are such a liar, but don't stop! It does my vanity good to hear that someone thinks I am still pretty." She blushed and swept her long hair back from her face.

"I won't ever lose you again. I will bring down the thunder from heaven before that happens." I said with conviction and absolute belief.

"You have never lost me. You know that. We all make mistakes in life. Let us see if we can correct some of them. I tell Pasha every night about her father. The man that stood beside me fighting for our lives under fire and in the Atlantic Ocean and never flinched. She thinks that you are ten feet tall and kill dragons." Her accent would still come out when she talked fast. "She is going to be an artist when she is grown. She does beautiful watercolors and pastels. She did a charcoal for you. She told me you would want it." Irina took a folded piece of paper from her purse and handed it to me.

I gently unfolded it and looked at the drawing of a man's face on the paper. I sat transfixed like I had been pole axed. I looked up first at Irina and then Harv.

"We didn't do it!" Harv was off the mark quicker than I thought he could be. "We never gave her anything like that."

"She tells me this is her grandfather. I don't remember the photo Kammler gave you at Mount Grace, but it has some of the same features." She tilted her head looking at it. I dug into my wallet and pulled out the old faded photograph and handed it to her. She sat looking at it and then looked up at me.

"She tells me he comes and talks to her at night sometimes in her dreams and tells her that her father is a great and wonderful man that she will be very proud of." She looked a little frightened.

It was a perfect likeness of my dad. I went over and took a frame out of the drawer of my desk I had been saving, placed the drawing in it and put it beside the picture of Irina and Pasha. I couldn't speak, I was so choked up with emotion.

"Can I talk all of you into an experiment in my, tiny lab?" I was sure, but I needed to know something to help me make a decision in my life.

"Of course." Irina answered and looked at Harv who shrugged and Jack who stood up.

"Do you have another picture of Pasha with you?" I asked. She pulled out her wallet and handed me one that had been recently made in the photo studio in New York. We walked out to the lab and got everything set up. I gently placed the photo inside the chamber and slid the lead into place.

"This is going to hurt, isn't it?" Harv asked from the stool behind the lead shield.

"Not a bit, but keep your eyes closed, it gets bright in here." I started the generator and hit the relays. The flash was instantaneous and the room smelled of ozone. I shut everything down and waited five minutes before I popped the chamber open. In place of the studio photo, was now one of Irina and I with graying hair at the temples beaming proudly, posing in front of the circular 15th Century building called the Camera at the heart of Oxford University. Between us was Pasha in her Oxford college graduation gown. I flipped the picture over.

Teddy,

Your future is still my past!

Love,

DAD!

I had tears in my eyes as I handed it to Irina and Harv got himself and Jack another beer. "We are not just talking about science here folks. We are talking about a whole different level of understanding of things." Harv: master of the understatement. Irina held the photo to her chest.

"Are you coming home to us, soon." She asked softly.

"Am I wanted there?" I had to make sure this wasn't just one of those funny dreams that plagued me for the course of my life where she would start kissing me and I would wake up with a dog licking my face.

"You have always been wanted there. I have been waiting for two years to be reunited with you, Doktor Ted Humphrey, meester beeg shot! I will show the world I am smarting than all of you." She was actually mad, I could tell, and we all smiled at her bad English. "We broke our backs in Russia and couldn't get our device to work at all. When I come here, they are no better. They tell me to fix, but PIFFT! Is disaster! Bellamy gives me documents you gave him after Dulce. But I can't even understand them, they are so complex. He blow up what, five machines, Meester Harvey?" Her accent was getting worse the more beers she had.

"Six...but who's counting the millions of dollars for each one of them." Harv added with sarcasm.

"And you!" Irina slurred. "Out here in Bar-Stool. Playing at being scientist. You hand me this as proof of your genius. I know you are the smartest man alive. It just them, Harv and what's-his-name." She was picking up Harvey's lines as well. I was sure that went over really well with Bellamy. One Humphrey would be enough for anyone, but two was unthinkable. "And you here? Twenty rubles of wire and solder and you make impossible thing work? What a waste! Come work with me, dah-link! Be da Boss of me day and night! I don't care! Show us how to do it, so this picture become reality and our child live," here eyes began to water as the Russian poet in her came to the surface, "in a free world...where no one fears the stars or the night sky and what comes in it!"

Bam! The fish hit the bait and it was all over. Hook, line and sinker. I looked at Harv and he nodded. "I need a week to finish up some things here and then I will be wherever it is that you want me to be." I thought about the Coordinator and wanted to still work on it.

"You got it. But since you are back on my payroll, you get a new set of shadows. I ain't losing you again, kiddo." Harv got up. "Well, it is time we three head back for that joke of a base called Twenty Nine Palms, outside Bar Stool, and get our backsides in da ocean and head back to Ja-kobs." Harv pulled on his coat and pulled out his radio. "Morty send the terrible twins in here."

Two tall blonde men in black suits and black sunglasses showed up at the door within seconds. "These here are the Bobsie Twins, Lincoln and Jefferson. They work directly for me and they are going to be smelling your arm pits until you are safe and secure at Jacob's Center. No arguments now." Harv held up his hand. "They can sleep on the couch, such as it is."

I objected to the intrusion. "Harv, I have been out here for a year and half alone. I don't think anyone is going to come in and drag me out in the middle of the night."

"Don't tell me, tell him." He pointed at Jack.

"Ted. It has to be this way. I am responsible for all the security of the Group now and there is no way around it. What you showed me tonight here, is the proof I needed to see that we cannot let you fall into the wrong hands no matter how uncomfortable it may be." Jack said and then smiled at me.

"He always was better at being diplomatic." I acquiesced to the demand.

"Give him the stuff Lincoln." Harv barked at the first young man who pulled a portfolio from his pocket and handed it to me. A complete set of new identification cards and security passes. "Full run. Nothing off limits to you now. Boss Three is your call again."

"What happened to the last Boss Three that replaced me while I was gone?" I asked.

"I shot him, for asking too many questions. BWAA-HA-HA!" Harv broke out laughing, then regained control after seeing my face. "Oh, okay, I didn't shoot him, he just went nuts, like everyone does in this outfit. Didn't have the where-with-all for the long haul. He's sitting on a beach in Mexico counting sand dollars or something like that."

I turned to Irina and held her hands against my chest. "Will you be at Jacob's?"

"I will be at home there, waiting for you to come home to us." She reached up and kissed the side of my face.

"Oh fer Christ's sake cut the mushy stuff for right now. It is only going to be a week and then you two can play house for a couple of days and then get to work. Let's get out of here." Harv started to leave and then stopped and looked at me.

"Thank you, Dr. Humphrey. Thank you very much."

I nodded and escorted them down the driveway where Morty was waiting in the car for them. Lincoln and Jefferson were standing around looking at the ground for snakes, I was sure of that.

"Oh, by the way, rattlers are attracted to shiny patent leather, and they'll strike at anything the color black."

I grinned evilly and headed back inside.



CHAPTER 101

I had gone up during the following week to see Jim Evers to ask him to look after my place and I was willing to pay him for his time. He told me it wasn't necessary and he would be glad to do it, but wanted to know if everything was alright.

"Why, Jim? Like I said, I took a position where I need to be gone for several months at a time." I was curious why he would think something was wrong.

"Does it have to do with the visitors you had the other night?" He asked me in an off-handed way.

"What would make you think that? It's true, but I didn't think you watched my place that closely." I laughed, but the old paranoia was right there again, itching at my brain.

"It wasn't your place. It was the fact that the whole road was closed off, with Marine security guys who weren't letting anyone up the canyon, unless they lived here and then it was only with a military escort." He scratched his head under his often worn cowboy hat. "Alice just knew they were going to take you out in chains for being like a Ruskie spy or something. She reads too many spy novels. I figured you had, like, the President or Secretary of Defense up there."

"No such luck. Just some folks who like to protect their identities and work for the government." I thought that the rumor mill had to be grinding this one through Barstow right about now.

"You going to work for them, Ted?" He asked then raised his hand to stop me from answering. "Never mind, none of my business. I will be glad to take care of the place. Anything special you need done?"

"Just don't let it run down. I will send you a check every month to have the garden kept up and the inside cleaned by one of your folks." I didn't need to go into any more details. I liked Jim and Alice and would have liked to stay in contact with them. I also wanted to keep the old place I had grown attached to again. I remembered how much I hated it when I was a kid and now it was the only place that felt like home.

I gave him a check that he reluctantly took and we said our farewells.

At my place I had packed up the device, all the journals, my dad's and mine. I had some of the stuff I thought I would need immediately. Lincoln and I had the debate about moving it myself and I won. He wanted a security detail to take it to Jacobs but I refused. I put it all in the back of the pick-up and had Jefferson follow in the Ford that had my clothes and personal effects loaded in it. We looked like a gypsy caravan. Both men were less than happy about the ten-hour drive up to Fallon, Nevada, but I was looking forward to it. Lincoln had lost the toss of the coin and had to ride with me. I would have preferred to drive alone, but that wasn't happening.

By the time we were on Nevada Highway 95 between Goldfield and Hawthorn I realized we had been traveling with company all the way. There were two chase and pace cars behind us that never varied in speed from what we were doing and one other up ahead of us that always kept just out of passing distance. As I went through

Hawthorn, I got my first real impression of the seriousness of these men's intent to get me to Jacobs safely. The lead car put out a red light on the top of his car and slowed down to make sure I was on his bumper and the two following cars sped up with red lights flashing. Lincoln pulled down his sunglasses and looked over at me.

"Don't stop at the lights, just keep going right through them." He motioned.

"Little obvious aren't we?" I flicked back at him.

"Doesn't matter. We don't want to give anyone a standing target do we?" He emphasized his words well. They must have been privy to something that I wasn't told.

"You want to tell me about this?" I asked the first time and he was mute. "Let me put it differently: since I think I am one of your bosses now, tell me why so much firepower?" I drove right through town without letting up on the gas, following the lead car and noting the expression of folks' faces to see a military convoy racing through their berg, with two civilian cars in the middle.

"Oh." He sighed and pulled his glasses off and cleaned them.

"Out with it." I demanded.

"Two directors have been assassinated in recent weeks while off station. It wasn't random but meticulously planned professional hits. Somebody is trying to take out section chiefs all over the place. Another two just barely got away with their lives. Sao Paolo got hit the worst, and one in Johannesburg."

"That's why all the military around my place the other night?"

"That is it. Having Dr. Glipsen and Dr. Humphrey there was simply an unacceptable risk and the icing on the cake was the presence of Colonel Thompson." He looked in the rear view mirror to make sure everything was in place as we moved back out into the open dun colored silver of the desert.

"Um, remember, I'm Dr. Humphrey. I don't like being referred to in my presence in the third person." I said back to him, a bit offended he had already forgotten my name.

"Oh not you, sir. The other Dr. Humphrey. The woman that is the Assistant Director at Jacobs." He said off handedly.

"Irina?" I asked while watching the road carefully.

"Yes sir. Why? Is she related to you somehow?" He asked puzzled. I thought that someone was so paranoid they were hiding all the facts about everybody from everyone now.

"Yes. She's my wife. Or, ah, was my wife....well, is...but..." I tried to sort that one out for myself.

"That is strange. I thought she was a Russian defector that had just come over to us in the last couple of years." I was constantly moving and looking around.

"She is. But I knew her years ago and...well...married her." I followed his eyes as an Air Force plane swept through the valley and circled above us. I saw two black helicopters in the distance coming straight at us. Somebody had the big black knob pushed to the firewall on those birds.

"Are these here because of us?" I asked craning my neck to watch the low flying choppers pass us and make wide turns in opposite directions to move along side us. A loud panicked beeping blared from the device on Lincoln's waist. He picked it up and pushed a button.

"Cover One?" He called into it.

"Halo One here! FIND A HOLE! NOW!" The voices were yelling over the rotor blades in the background.

"Roger-Copy!" Lincoln hit another button and yelled into his set. "Scramble!" He pointed to a dirt road ahead on the right.

"Turn in there and head up that hill."

I didn't ask why. I already knew and the sweat was pouring down my back. Being stubborn this time might mean I wouldn't be there for Pasha's graduation. I conceded in my mind that me driving might have been a bad choice on my part. I turned onto the road and started to feel the bouncing on my lower back. I looked down and saw I was hitting sixty on the dirt road heading out into the desert.

"Left! Turn left." Lincoln pulled his weapon and was yelling into his radio to the chase cars. They were following my dust cloud. The lead car had turned around on the highway and was now shoring up our rear.

"Head for those small hills over there! That old mine!" Lincoln was yelling at me over the thunderous sound the truck was making, hitting every pothole in the dirt and the washouts.

Suddenly, in the rear view mirror a brilliant light appeared from out of nowhere, heading right for us, getting larger and brighter. Then the light around the object faded. Sweet holy mother of CHRIST! I would know that dull burnished silver disk anywhere! It was the Sport Model, or something very much like it, screaming out of the sky chasing us down. I spun my head around, almost crashing the truck, to catch a glimpse to make sure I was actually seeing what I thought I was seeing, and there it was, looking like it had us in its sights. I was about to be killed by a goddamn UFO!

"This is SLASHER, I got a bogie at ten o'clock coming in hot, fast and straight. Can NOT, I repeat: can NOT fire THOR FOUR at it! Too low! Too low! NO JOY, NO JOY! Bogie is on the hard deck." That had to be the jet fighter above us. I learned years before that a Thor Four was a high altitude electromagnetic pulse weapon the Air Force developed to take out alien spacecraft once they were inside our atmosphere. Only problem was when fired below thirty thousand feet it fried every piece of electronic equipment on the ground in a directional beam for seventy miles.

I madly juked the truck from side to side, mostly out of sheer terror but also with the hope we would make a harder target and raise a bigger cloud cover of dust. Lincoln yelled, being smashed against the interior every which way. I floored it as I slid into the turn on two wheels and skidded sideways almost rolling the truck toward the old rusty tin processing building in front of the mine. It covered the shaft someone built years ago looking for gold or silver, then going somewhere else to try their hand at striking it rich.

Leaping out, I grabbed the box with the journals and pointed to Lincoln to grab the one with the device. He reluctantly complied and we ran into the shaft entrance. Normally a really dumb thing to do, since most of them had a drop shaft just a few feet inside the entrance that could extend two or three hundred feet with a hard stop at the bottom. Like they say, it's not the fall that kills you.

Dropping the boxes next to the wall of the shaft, I moved back toward the entrance to see out. Lincoln pulled a spare small revolver from an ankle holster and tossed it to me.

"I think you know how to use one of those." He said, scanning the sky.

"Once or twice." I gripped it tight. I had never wanted to use one again, but right now was not the time to split hairs about my preference and morals about killing people, or things, that wanted to kill me.

The other cars careened to a halt forming a semi-circle as the agents jumped out into defensive positions pointing their weapons over the vehicles. I watched as the helicopters came to hover some distance away. In a dazzling burst of light the evil Sport Model materialized and hovered between them, the dull silver disk bouncing gently up and down on the earth's magnetic field like a balloon on a string. Ropes came out of the sides of the choppers and small black figures, that I realized were our armed and battle ready Delta Force troops, poured down the lines, hitting the ground running, fanning out in all directions.

The choppers turned and opened fire on the saucer with everything they had, but the bullets and missiles just bounced off an ovoid shaped transparent force shield about twenty-feet out with sparks of pink and violet light. A green beam flicked out like a tongue of emerald fire and one of the choppers was sliced in two, exploding as it fell. The other chopper turned to run, but the implacable green beam slashed out slicing the chopper in a diagonal line from the rear wheels to the cockpit and it exploded in a white yellow ball of flame.

"Understand one thing, Doc!" Lincoln said as we watched in horror. "They cannot be allowed to get their hands on you. It's nothing personal."

"Whoa! How can you *killing me* not be personal?" I yelled.

I saw Jefferson running to get into the shaft with us. He was clearly under the same orders. I heard panic and yelling from outside, echoing down the shaft.

The UFO was slowly, ominously, coming toward us.

The green ray ripped two of the vehicles wide open and the gas tanks exploded, scattering fuel all over the building and the other cars. One explosion was followed by another. Then it cut my truck in half in a vertical line from the trailer hitch to the cab and the two pieces fell away from each other for a moment as if taking one last breath and then exploded as well. Those bastards!

The Interceptor fighter jet came in for a run. SLASHER opened up with rockets and conventional cannon fire that just exploded harmlessly with no better luck than the doomed helicopters. The beam lashed out at the jet, but missed as he pulled up and started to make another turn. The air was crackling alive with the cutting sound of the green ray getting closer to our position and everything around us was blowing up.

We were outmanned and certainly outgunned even though there were probably only three Grays in the craft. But something was wrong. The dull burnished silver skin of the disk began to glow a soft pulsing red. It was faint at first but the reddish color deepened and the pulsing became more rapid, like an overworked heart, with each use of the green death ray. I racked my brain to remember the construction and schematics of the Sport Model scout ship we had back in the hanger at Five-One. They ran on a single small cone like engine that used a triangularly cut copper colored exotic material called Element 115. The element 115 was bombarded with an extra proton that produced Element 116, which, for all intents and purposes, was anti-matter. The anti-matter was contained by a magnetic field and shot at a target gas at the base of the cone creating a 96% annihilation ratio. A cobalt-hydrogen bomb was only something like 6%. A bomb made out of Element 115 would take out all of Western and Eastern Europe and most of the top of Africa. That energy went into the three gravity wave amplifiers at the base of the ship. In Omicron mode, with only one pulsing amplifier, it floated on the Earth's magnetic field. Kick in all three and you could warp space to jump to where you wanted to go. But scout ships like this one certainly were not meant for combat. The power it used to get here from wherever it came from, and now the energy to the defensive force shield and then into this force beam was overloading and overheating the core engine, which was now showing as the reddish pulse in the gravity field around the ship.

Once I did the math and figured all the variables, it suddenly hit me: this was a suicide mission. They had no intention of ever returning home. Their only job was to make sure that I didn't make it to Jacobs. But they certainly wouldn't be landing and having a firefight with the Delta Force team on open ground when they could cut this mountain to pieces and bring it down around our heads. But it gave me an idea.

"Lincoln!" I yelled. "Give me your radio!" He hesitated and then handed it to me.

"SLASHER? This is Boss Three on the ground and in the hole, copy?" I yelled above the noise of the explosions outside.

“Got ya, Boss Three.” The radio answered. “Those things have a force field I can’t punch a hole through.”

“SLASHER. Climb to forty-zero thousand feet using afterburners! Do a one-eighty and head straight down at them. At twenty-zero thousand, pulse the THOR and then pull out. ROGER THAT?” I waited.

“Roger-copy, sir, but that is a contravention of all P and P...sir!” God damned Policy and Procedures, the whole concept of the operations manual. It was the water I had just thrown out the window along with the proverbial baby. “Also, sir, it won’t work at that range! I’d be too far away for it to have...”

“Look, this boogie is The Lone Ranger! It’s out here all on its own with no backup or support! That thing is about to overload! It’s a kamikaze on a suicide mission! We just need to give him a nudge. One more time, SLASHER! That is a direct order from Boss Three, on my personal responsibility and authority, roger?” Lincoln looked at me as if I was crazy, and he had every right to do so.

“Roger-Copy. On your order, sir.” His voice filled with belief and conviction. “SLASHER on the rise, twenty seconds. Boys, hold the fort and throw away your Walkmans.”

The green ray sliced into the rocks above us and tore tons of granite off the cliff and dropped it near the entrance to the shaft.

I roared into the radio: “Close your eyes, soldiers! Cover your ears and open your mouths. Lay flat, face down, AND DON’T FUCKING MOVE!” I turned to the two men next to me. “Get back into this shaft and against a wall.” I was already running and avoiding obstacles. The radio burst alive with the sound of the screaming jet behind the pilot’s voice.

“SLASHER is on the down leg run. PLOWING THE FIELD!”

The pulse hit the ground, literally, like Mjoliner, the hammer of the Norse god of thunder, The Mighty Thor. It felt like a force six earthquake inside the mine. All of us were knocked off our feet and loose rock and shale fell all around us. Lincoln and Jefferson threw themselves over me, pinning me to the ground.

Seconds later we heard a ripping crash outside followed by a muffled explosion. I laid there waiting to see the white light and the visions of dead relatives waiting to greet me in the after world. The angels never sang but the radio did come alive in my hand. We had been protected from the EM pulse by the granite of the mineshaft.

“SLASHER here! That is a confirmed kill, I repeat: a confirmed kill. Sayonara suckers!” I got up and headed toward the entrance. Lincoln worked up ahead of me with his weapon pointed outward, looking for survivors. The combat team was already surrounding the downed Sport Model now sitting in two pieces on the ground, with a debris field as big as a football pitch. There were three small big-headed smoking bodies strewn into the wreckage like dolls torn apart by an angry child.

“Damage estimate, SLASHER from your vantage point.” I asked.

“A bunch of dead alien sons of bitches if you ask me, Boss.” I laughed at his response.

“In the area? In the valley? Damage report?” I called back to him

“Well the slot machines from Beatty to Carson City aren’t going to be paying off since the main high tension electrical line going through the valley is vaporized along with the phone lines, so no one is going to be gossiping right now about this. The choppers are toast with what looks like no survivors.” He clicked off.

“Call out a recovery team and cordon off the area. If you can find anyone’s radio that still works. Then get more choppers with full fighter escorts to pick us up and get us to Fallon.” I handed back the unit to Lincoln.

“You okay, Doc?” He looked at me, while he popped a piece of gum into his mouth to help clear the throbbing in his ears, then offered me some, which I took gratefully.

SANDS OF TIME

“I’m just tired of killing those little gray wads of scum.” I walked out into the sunlight to survey the damage. The place looked like a battlefield. But we had won another one for the goods guys.

At least that’s what I thought.



CHAPTER 102

The helicopter landed at Fallon Air Force Base about two hours later after the battle. Lincoln, Jefferson and I got out covered with dirt and grime. They pulled my boxes out of the luggage bin and followed behind me. Harv was standing there with his sunglasses on in his tweed jacket, sweating profusely.

“Can’t just show up like normal people can we Dr. Humphrey? Have to make the grand dramatic entrance to the sound of a twenty-one gun salute? I thought we might sneak you onto the base and have you here for a day or two, before we made you a public figure to your co-workers, but noooo! You have to black out half of Nevada just to let everyone know you’re coming.” Harv started to laugh. “Can’t say I’ve ever heard of that stunt being pulled before, or at least by nobody who lived to tell about it. All in all, I would say it was a nice piece of handiwork, Ted.”

“The aliens killed my truck!”

“I’ll buy you a new one Ted.” Harv chuckled. “Are you okay, after all of this?”

“My back hurts like hell, I have a murderous headache and I don’t want somebody around me to blow my brains out, just in case.” I hooked a thumb at Lincoln standing right there.

“Oh. That. Well...” Harv grimaced.

“Don’t ‘Well’ me! That little item on the second page of today’s agenda caught me just a bit off guard. I don’t need this shit anymore, Harv! And as soon as I can get a new truck, I am out of here and back home and doing my own thing!” I wanted to see the re-action to this twist that I planned to put in the big cat’s tail.

“I don’t think that is called for. You just made page one of the Daily Bulletin and now you want to go back to Bar-Stool?” Harv looked questioningly at me while using Irina’s new pronunciation of my hometown.

“Yup. I want to see Irina, make some plans of my own and I am gone. I don’t really need this kind of aggravation, from the folks that are supposed to be with me in all of this.” I felt the anger working up in me again. I had almost been fried once more and having someone more concerned with offing me than protecting me, was not my flavor of the month at all.

“How about coming inside, getting cleaned up and then we can talk about it. Holy heck, laddie buck, no one expected this to happen! Lincoln was just following orders. He doesn’t have a lot of latitude when it comes to making decisions about the Group leaders, you of all people should understand that.” Harv motioned to the facility. “Come on. At least get a shower and then we’ll see Irina.” I followed him reluctantly with my two new friends following us, lugging my boxes.

I still had Lincoln’s spare gun in my belt and I took it out and handed it back to him. I made sure he heard the whole conversation and wasn’t at all pleased with any of it. I think he thought if I walked he was going to be blamed for it. I didn’t really care.

* * * * *

The shower felt good and the clean clothes were just a little too big for me because of the weight I had lost in the hospital. But after the medic checked me out and gave me a clean bill of health, I walked out into the corridor to find Jefferson standing there.

"I was asked to show you to conference room C. If that is alright." He was even more quiet than he had been all week, which had been like a Sphinx.

"Lead on MacDuff. Lead on." I waved to him like an actor and followed behind him. The facility was completed and looked great. I noted the maps on the hallway walls that showed the movement of people around the facility, exactly as it had been in my "dream" two years before.

"It's shorter if we go this way." I stopped at a cross corridor. "Isn't it?"

"That is a non-public area." Jefferson caught himself and then turned down the corridor. When we got to the glass entrance he stopped and turned to me.

"There is a procedure..."

I stepped around him and onto the spot on the floor raising my arms and spoke my name. The light came on and the doors slid open. I walked into conference room C. He followed me a minute later.

"How did you know that?" He asked in bewilderment.

"I designed the systems for this place." I knew that wasn't exactly true, but Bellamy had taken my notes and it looked like he had incorporated every one of them into the final construction. All a self-fulfilling prophecy in stone.

Harv was sitting in one of the chairs and Bellamy was on the big screen on the wall. I walked in and looked around. No Irina. I hesitated for a moment, clenched my jaw and shot Bellamy and Harv angry looks and turned to leave.

"Teddy. Hold on just a minute. Please." Bellamy said from out of the TV. "I know there is a lot of ass kissing I should be doing right now. I hope it will suffice to say I was totally wrong and you were absolutely right. I am sorry for my actions and everything that happened and I deeply and humbly apologize and ask for your forgiveness. Jesus, Teddy! You don't know how sorry I am!"

I turned and faced the screen ready to launch into this mangled scar-faced bastard. Just who did he think...?

"Ted!" Harv pleaded. "Sit down, kiddo! It won't hurt you to give us a few minutes. After that, if you want to go I'll have you flown back home to think things over. Nothing is going to change. Nobody is going to fire you or pull your clearances or..."

"Or kill me?" I barked.

"Or...kill you. We just need some time to sort all of this out." Harv was actually being nice for a change. I had a hard time with the sudden twist in demeanor.

I sat down and folded my hands on the table. Waiting.

"You have got to be a lot closer to the truth than we are, if they would attempt a daylight run at you like today." Bellamy said grimly. "That was a suicide mission. That craft was never getting back out of the atmosphere. It was using all of its energy in one desperate act, like a kamikaze." Bellamy waited a moment for the affect of his words to sink in. "If they are that desperate to get to you, that means someone told them you hold the key to all of this that we've spent so long working on. I say this to you, with no hidden agenda and no deceit, as the God's honest truth: your life would not be worth a plug nickel if you went home now. Harv told me about Lincoln and his comment. I think he took his instructions a little...too literally. But that's not the point. We both know that. I think you are just pissed to be back on the job and on day one they have you in their crosshairs. But I also think it just proves how dangerous you are, what a major threat you are to them and..." he paused with a long breath, "just how badly we...need...you."

Bellamy rubbed his hand through his hair and looked back into the camera.

"What do you need me to do? To get you to stay?"

Bingo! I had just drawn the card I was looking for and it was an ace high.

"Full disclosure. Everything. Not the stuff in the vault or some dripping here and dapple there. Everything. The whole game with all the players. The ones you are talking to privately, the ones Harv works with and whoever's been talking to Irina. All the cards on the table and I will offer up mine as well. Then we can see who's been playing us all for fools against each other. Then maybe, just maybe, I will stick around and finish the gadget for you. No ifs, ands, or buts." I wanted it all. It would give me parity with anyone in the Black Ops community. I would have the files that made them powerful and where all the bodies were buried.

Bellamy looked at me. He knew exactly what I had said and what the implications were. There would be no one over me, no controls. No one could pull the pin unless they were ready to kill me, outright. Knowing that everyone builds a safe structure with enough valuable information hidden away in case of their untimely demise, that would all be leaked to the public, and having that kind of information, being the kind that can bring down governments, would make me untouchable, by any of them, including Bellamy, and he knew it.

"I won't play if there is the slightest chance of a repeat of that little number you did on me eighteen months ago." I emphasized my point by hitting the table with my index finger.

"And in return? Besides making the gadget in the basement work?" Bellamy wanted something and I think I knew what it was.

"Oh, how about something simple, like, say, a man portable Time Runner system with a space/time locator and distance calculator." I said off hand.

"You got it already?" Bellamy couldn't believe it.

"All but the power supply." I sat back and waited.

"Harv? Did you know this?" He looked angrily over at Harvey who was drawing something on the palm of his hand with an ink pen.

"Yes I did." He never looked up, but extended his arm, admiring his artwork.

Bellamy sat back and sighed. "Done deal in my book then. Harvey, give Dr. Humphrey the keys to the kingdom."

Harv pulled up a briefcase from the floor and unlocked it. He took out a thin white card and slid it across the table. I picked it up. It didn't have any writing on it, only a key code strip on the back.

"Don't lose that." Harv said. "Third floor, off limits to everyone. The key will get through the special elevator and into the room. It also opens all of the file cabinets. It's all there."

"Here is the deal. I want a week to use this." I held up the key and looked at Bellamy. "Then we will talk again. I want unlimited access to Irina and my daughter without any bugs or intercoms in their living area. I want two guys of my choosing to be with me. I tell you who they are after I have reviewed personnel files. I won't leave the base, but I don't want to be bothered either, until I am ready."

I waited and Bellamy threw up his hands in capitulation. "We will live with it." He leaned forward and the screen went blank. He was angry, I knew that, but he needed me and I wanted to know a lot more right now than ever before.

"You know, kiddo, you have turned into a good poker player and a royal pain in the ass." Harv got up and walked out, waving at me. "Good boy!"

I sat there for a few moments and took in two or three deep breaths. It was good to be home. I desperately wanted to see Irina, but that, for the moment, needed to wait. Right now I had an appointment on the third floor of the Jacob's Research Center.



CHAPTER 103

I accomplished two major things over the next week, besides seeing Irina. We discussed our future plans and decided to take it easy and start seeing each other for dinner, and I would spend time with Pasha. She wasn't ready just to have me interjected into their well ordered, and now stable, life. I couldn't blame her for that. I was well aware that we would get back together, but I, too, had several things that needed completing before I wanted to jump into being a full time husband and father again. There was just the fact that even though we loved each other, time had passed and patterns had been established and those would require some work to integrate between the two of us.

I had gone through the base's personnel files and selected several candidates for the position of escort, bodyguard and assistant. The final two were both bright young officers with advanced degrees and a willingness to work and learn from me, as well as handle all of those little nagging things that needed to be handled on a daily basis.

Lance Harden was from Montana and had grown up on a ranch, before entering the Academy at Colorado Springs. He was tall, handsome and bright. He knew physics and was a perfect fit for the job.

Ralph Daniels was a Navy squid that had been a carrier based pilot and had advanced degrees in engineering. He came from Monterey, California where he still had family and was devoted to the work at The Jacobs Center.

After spending some time with them and finally deciding they would be perfect as my assistants, Jack Thompson sent them back to DC for a month of specialized training and indoctrination into their new roles. Knowing Jack, I figured he would scare the holy hell out of them to make sure nothing happened to me, and have them operating at a level of fear that only someone like Jack could instill in people. Now a full bird Colonel and the only man in the service with a hook instead of a prosthetic arm, he was often referred to behind his back as 'Lefty'. It wasn't going to be long after Harden and Daniels returned that I was sure I would be called "Robin" to complete the dynamic duo, at least when I wasn't within earshot. They already knew Jack and I were old friends and had been in the trenches together, so it only made sense that Poncho and Lefty would ride again.

I had the research staff set up a small lab on floor three for my own equipment and had the shielding put in place. I was the only one with the combination to the security lock and everyone knew very well that "The Doc's" lab was off limits unless expressly invited.

After making my personnel selections, I began work in the new vault. It had only taken me a couple of hours to realize how much information I'd not been privy to. It was overwhelming. The vault at Five-One had been the tip of a huge black iceberg. I now knew it was all a decoy and Rafferty had been the bait in one of Bellamy's own schemes that had not come to fruition, since my minor addition spoiled his well-oiled plan. After reading most of the files on what he was trying to do, I still felt horrible. Rafferty had been zapped in the crossfire. But without knowledge, we all make

mistakes. It became obvious we were all stepping on each other's toes, wasting money and dearly precious time, because no one knew what waltz we were dancing.

After three days and nights of digging, I had copied about two hundred critical political documents that if released would blow the roof off the whole business we were involved in. I carefully put these documents into a folder and hand wrote a small note that I attached to the cover with glue. It simply stated that if anything should happen to me these papers were to be leaked and used in any way the receiving party wanted to use them, but were only to be used in the case of my untimely death. I placed them into the chamber of my device and powered it up in my lab. I got the flash and when the unit cooled I opened it to find a note:

Got the papers, Ted.

Will hold them until you instruct me differently.

Rufus

I looked at the paper, from the future or the past, or just from a different world completely. I didn't really know if it would save my life or not. But I was feeling a little better in this game, hiding an ace up my sleeve.

The next few days were occupied with me reading everything that had gone on while I had been on sabbatical from Project: Tempus Fugit. I noted several modifications had been made on the design I'd been given by Dr. Henry. All of them were reflected in the Russian's work on what they called the Chrono-Generator System. They were still trying to pound a square peg into a round hole. They couldn't see the mistake. So I was going to have to change the directions of the entire staff, including Irina. That would mean I had to talk to Bellamy and Harv. This time, I decided I wanted to try to get this relationship back on an even keel.

It would be hard, but maybe we could get past it.



CHAPTER 104

It had taken a day to set up the video-conference between all of us. I wanted for it to be in a friendlier mood than the last time this happened, so I included Jack and asked Irina to come with me to the conference center. But she declined. She felt I needed to work through the political problems without her present. I agreed, reluctantly, and told her I needed to take over the operation if it was going to operate properly. She hadn't even flinched when I said it to her. Her only response was that this idea seemed to her to be the only logical one. I had already proven I could make a jump in time and that made me the ideal candidate for the position. She just wanted to be part of the team. I admired her love and loyalty even more than ever before.

The screens came up out of the cabinets and the monitors came online, with all three men looking into their respective cameras watching me.

"Ted." Bellamy acknowledged me first.

"How are you, George?" I asked with true concern.

"Doing pretty good for an old guy." He answered and gave me a half smile.

"Well, kiddo. Did you find a good place to hide the key?" Harv was smirking.

"I did Harv." I wasn't going to take the bait on this argument. I had more important things to do right now.

"Can you trust Dr. Henry?" Bellamy asked catching me completely off-guard.

"I believe I can. But I added a small caveat to my request with him." I figured they already knew I sent the file. Since I had designed the floor pressure monitor, they would know the one-pound package was gone from the facility.

"What would that be?" Bellamy raised an eyebrow.

"I included that the information was to be used if anything happened to any of us, you three as well as Irina and Pasha. That he should take whatever action he deemed appropriate." I waited, watching the reaction.

"You think someone might want to take all of us out, because you're back?" Harv had caught it the first time through.

"Makes sense, if we are all being played off of each other. If I was trying to divide our forces, I would make sure none of us could trust each other. That would make it easy to divert our attention to more mundane things, like professional survival. It's already cost us almost 2 years!" I had been thinking about this for a long time, coming to the conclusion that this is what had happened once before.

"You just paid the premiums on all of our life insurance policies, didn't you?" Bellamy grinned a genuine smile, for a change.

"Hell, I thought you were trying a palace revolt to topple old Bellamy and me." Harv laughed and relaxed.

"I don't need nor do I want your jobs. In fact, mine is a lot easier if you guys handle what you two do so well, and let me do the science." I sat back and looked at Jack, watching his monitors very carefully, but looked incredulous at my grand conspiracy theory.

"Who, Ted?" Jack finally put his frustration into words. "Who is this mythological, diabolical mastermind, playing us all against each other?"

"The same bastard that's been setting all of us up for years, leading us down dead ends to waste what precious little time we have. The real villain of this entire story: Dr. Simon Ratterman."

"Ratterman?" Harv yelled. "Why do you think he's responsible?"

"'Cause he sold us all out a long time ago. He's been giving us false leads and partial information since I started with this program. Max was taken in by him, and I think Jacobs was tainted as well. Admiral Lawrence Jacobs was giving him everything we did. I think Dr. Bellamy can confirm this. Am I right, Boss?" I waited.

"Yes." It was a flat intonation without amplification.

"So it only makes sense. He was the one that wanted to waste our time, playing with the scout craft at Groom Lake. He wanted us to build the big time device that he knew would rip the place apart. Acting on information from Jacobs, Ratterman was the one that called in the additional help at Dulce. Remember our seemingly indestructible little gray reptilian friends our bullets bounced off of? Ratterman was trying to protect the food storage and genetic material, while having us rid him of the Reptoids. It was only after someone came to our rescue and wiped out the base, that Bellamy had a visit from his 'friend' who told him I was working for the other side. That's why he wanted me out of the program. Bellamy thought I'd sold you all out and was working for Ratterman. Am I right or am I right, George?" I sat back and looked at everyone. The man never moved a muscle. He stared directly at me, unblinking, like some wax work horror, and I could feel the heat through the screen.

"How long have you known all of this?" He asked.

"That you were being played? Since a couple of months after you booted me out." I didn't have any feelings or emotion about it now. It was war. All just part of the game. Bellamy did what anyone in his position would have done given the same circumstances.

"They wanted the box. The big blue plastic one. The one you gave to Jamison." Bellamy said sternly. "They said it would help them to...help us." He said, now seeing the irony. "They said it would be beneficial to us for them to 'review it.'"

I leaned forward and looked intently at him raising an eyebrow.

"I didn't do it. It's under lock and key, right where you are and no one has opened it. I wasn't going to let anyone near it until I could talk to you. Things got out of hand. I believed you would...eventually...come back to us and we could let you find out what was so important." Bellamy added.

"You told me it was nothing of importance." Harv was mad again.

"I lied. Then I lied to everyone. Including myself. I won't try to justify my actions, but I knew it was another link in the chain and I wasn't ready to look in the box either." Bellamy rubbed his face. "You find you can't trust anyone in this business," he snarled a sad bitter grin, "even yourself."

"We need to trust each other!" I said throwing up my hands in exasperation. "We have been through too much together not to. That is the reason I wanted full disclosure. It wasn't to get back at you, it was to protect all of us! We got very lucky at Dulce. Someone thinks I'm important enough to keep alive and I feel the same way about the three of you. So let's stop standing behind doors, and looking through keyholes and hiding and watching each other for some tell-tale sign of a conspiracy. We do not have the goddamn time for it!" I said pounding my fist on the table and then I sat back again and realized this was the way of all power in the higher realms of government. Everyone trying to protect their own little fiefdoms.

"I agree, Ted" Jack added, as I knew he would.

"Of course, but shouldn't we find out what's in Pandora's plastic blue box?" Harv was clearly upset by the latest information coming out of Bellamy.

"I will take care of that, Harv. And provide all of you with an inventory and assessment as soon as I can." I offered up to smooth some wrinkles in Harv's ego.

"I agree." Bellamy sat there, then leaned closer to the camera. "Ted, I don't know what to say. With the fate of this planet hanging in the balance, I have been an insufferable, drooling idiot about all this. I take full responsibility for wasting our valuable time and for that fiasco on the way here that almost got you killed."

"A simple conversation with someone, I would presume? Something to the effect that I would be coming here and taking over the project, again?" I asked very carefully.

"Yes. Then I was told again you were a traitor and this was not a good idea, since you were already compromised." Bellamy understood now how wrongly he had been used, and it was still tormenting him inside.

"We made it through, that is all that matters." I felt differently, but this was not the time to approach that subject either. "But I think it would be best if you considered taping or monitoring your meetings with whoever you are getting together with, because, personally, I don't think he wants us to succeed."

"I agree. I'll make arrangements, but somehow I don't feel he'll be coming back anytime in the near future." Bellamy sounded convinced, so I let it slide.

"What are we supposed to be doing now, Herr Director?" Harv asked me and sat back waiting.

"What?" I was puzzled.

"Well, since you are the head of Jacobs, I hope you've got a plan. Because I can't speak for anyone else, but I am fresh out of new ideas." Harv looked old and tired, hunched over in his rumpled tweed jacket.

"We build the same device and add the tuning module to it. That way we can test it without smoking off several million dollars worth of electronics that we already know won't work." I laughed to myself. Reversal upon reversal. The answer to the universe.

"Okay," Harv continued, "when are you starting?"

"Already have. I gave the new plans to Irina last night and she is having a proper set of drawings put together so the guys in fabrication can start, very soon." I had done it without anyone's approval just to test the water and found that my new little boat floated very well.

"What do you need from us, Teddy?" Bellamy had returned to his former, closer self. The hair on the back of my neck stood up, but I let it pass.

"Minimize the Groom Lake program at Area 51 while letting the public go crazy with it. Give some low level scientist some unimportant information and then let him leak it to the press. Then have someone fly the Sport Model and some of the other craft every Wednesday night or Thursday morning, which is when they test experimental aircraft anyway. Let those test pilots out there have some fun. Make sure people see it. Fly it low in the Tickaboo Valley down from Rachel so we don't have any trouble with the radar boys at Nellis. Then put it away and let it rust in the corner of the hanger, I really don't care. That program is a money pit and we need to focus our resources on the construction of the two other new sites. The new US Space Command Center under Kings Peak, in Utah, and the new facility in the Pacific Northwest. I thought an adjunct to the Bangor Submarine Base near Port Orchard, Washington would be the best. That way we can create a triangular grid for all three of the small devices to work from. It will create an interferometer with three long legs. When we combine all this with the HAARP system in Alaska, we should be able to pull enough direct power out of the Earth and the air to begin sealing the rips in the fabric of space/time they tore open with the Eldridge in '43."

Bellamy shook his head, still remembering what a gigantic simian orgy Project: Rainbow, or the so-called Philadelphia Experiment, had become. It was clear the aliens had tricked us into performing the experiment on August 12, 1943, which was a 60 year bio-rhythmic low point in the cycle of the Earth, that ripped open a hole in the dimensional barrier. It was the first major move in their invasion plans.

“By using three of them,” I continued, knowing what George was thinking, “we can mitigate the need for using only one big unit. Much more effective and far less hazardous.” I paused while each man made his own calculations.

“Might just work, sonny boy.” Harv chuckled looking up from his notes.

“That will take care of the problems we have created in the past, but what about a defense system? Don’t we need the ships at Groom Lake for that aspect?” Bellamy looked up into the camera.

“No.” I didn’t offer up anything else. I already had the answer I needed, but this was not the time to share it. Besides, they would never have believed me anyway. No one said anything else about it. I had done a fancy shuffle of the deck and it was my deal. They were all just waiting to see the next cards come off the top.



CHAPTER 105

The whole time I'd lived in Barstow I'd read all the popular UFO material I could lay my hands on. I subscribed to every magazine. I'd spent many an evening devouring every paperback, some that were reasonable and, most, that were so far out I had to just laugh. But through all of this I noticed a new trend of more sophisticated investigators showing up and writing about actual events we had logged within the Group. These were serious, sober men, not like the crackpots writing about long haired women from Venus or the Pleiades giving them the elixir of life in some desert rendezvous, where they told them about the meaning of life and what it meant to be a member of the galactic community. The material was coming off the presses hard and fast and people increasingly believed the government was hiding things from them. I knew we had to redirect our efforts in this area to keep the general public off guard, all the while working desperately, in a race against time, to protect them. A couple of researchers really stood out in my mind and I wondered what was the best way of stopping them from getting too deep into our labyrinth of control.

I called Jack on the secure line and wanted to run a couple things past him. When he answered he seemed a little preoccupied.

"Are you free to talk?" I asked.

"Yeah, Ted, gimme a minute to finish up one item. I like those men you picked for your assistants. Level headed and hard workers. I think they'll do you right." He switched to speakerphone, since he was working with a minor problem, trying to hold a phone and write at the same time.

"Okay, I am all yours." He sounded chipper after he was done.

"I hope so. I like them and since I'm going to be spending a lot of time with them around I needed someone I could trust, since you decided to move up and make yourself a big shot." We laughed at that one.

"Listen, seriously now. Didn't we have some guys working for us a few years back that were going around frightening folks that were talking too much?" I couldn't remember the exact name of the sub-section they worked within.

"The Registry." He offered.

"That's it! I couldn't pull that one back. Do you still have them?" I hadn't heard about them in years now. "What do you call them now?"

"Oh, buddy, I could tell you, but then I would have to kill you." He laughed on the phone. "No, that is a joke. Yeah, we still got the department, but we haven't been using it much lately. We call it MIB now, after the stuff in Gary Baker's book a few years back. Men In Black."

"I like that." I was playing with my ballpoint pen and it broke spreading ink all over my hands. I tried to wipe it off, but now I had the mark of beast on me.

"What do you want with them?" Jack got serious.

"I want to increase their usage, but in a different direction. I want to use them to compromise some folks. Give them the power to provide some heavy disinformation to a couple of these researchers. I'm sending you a list right now over the fax. Tell me when you have it."

I waited while I sent him the page I had worked up.

"Got it. Wow! That is a list. Two professors, one independent film maker, a couple of scientists doing research into the subject, five writers and a psychic in Hermosa Beach. Nice place. Good surf. Okay, what do you want done, exactly?" Jack was onboard as always.

"Leak them some high level stuff. Make it come from high-ranking military types involved in special ops in advanced R and D areas. Rock solid backgrounds, provable if anyone looks really hard. Make it plausible that we've reverse engineered alien spacecraft and are testing them. Include the cattle mutational stuff as well. Blame it on a secret project at White Sands or Nellis. Have them start some crazy rumors about HAARP as well. Make them believe we're going to use it to heat up the atmosphere to alter weather patterns over China or something to cause floods, storms, anything like that." I waited for his response. There was a pause as, I knew, he was taking notes.

"Got it. When do we start on this?" He asked without questioning me.

"Yesterday would be fine." I laughed, still wiping ink off my hands.

"Disinformation, then what? Discredit their disclosures?"

"Exactly. Anybody on that list you think we could buy off to get to work for us inside their community?" I had a couple of hunches but I wanted to hear his comments.

"Two of them. Number 3 and 7." I looked down my list as well.

"I would agree. They've got arguments going with others in the field, so they would be prime to be given inside information and have the last laugh on those they want to show don't know what they are talking about. Get ahold of someone over in Intel at Langley. It's always better coming from those guys. God knows those bastards can screw up a wet dream." I'd had dealings with them in the past and knew they'd jump at the chance to work closer to the Group, thinking they might be able to infiltrate and use us for their own ways and means. But there was no chance of that ever happening.

"Sure, that's not a problem. I got a couple of favors owed to me over there and I will call in the markers right now." Jack acted like I was ordering a pizza, when I knew I was actually ruining people's careers and lives. But it was necessary.

"Also, you remember MK Ultra? The mind control stuff?"

"Sure. About ten years ago we gave up on a lot of that when funding dried up." Jack was amazing to pull these facts off the top of his head.

"Have a collection of bright guys get together and re-write the manuals. Bring it up to date with the latest university research, then leak it, as though it's really going on right now. Make people believe their encounters with the 'Visitors' are really nothing more than the government screwing with their heads, with some kind of new ray gun or something." I wasn't sure of the right words but I had always liked the idea of "ray guns", and it always made me laugh we actually had a US President named RayGun who had financed so much of our program.

"I think we can do a little better than that, Ted. But let me put some stuff on paper for your review. Anything else?"

"Nope. Hit that one hard. Get someone in the Air Force to write up some bogus report that explains away that Roswell crap, will you? The dumber the better." I had been seeing more and more books come out about the crash at Roswell and some writers were getting really close to the truth.

"So the MIBs are back in business. Good! This should be fun." Jack was always trying to find the bright spots in the gloom.

"How is Harv doing?" I asked quietly.

"Not good." Jack wasn't filling in many blanks for me.

"Health?" I knew something was wrong, but not sure what.

“No, I don’t think so. I think he may be concerned you’ve been given too much power and that his days are numbered. He’s spending a lot of time trying to make more contacts than he should, all of them powerful and very misdirected in their views of what is important.” Jack never said it any way but straight which was one of the things I always like about him.

“What can I do to help him?” I closed my eyes listening very carefully. I owed a lot to Harv, and now would be the right time to start paying him back for all of his support over the years we had worked together.

“Let him in.” Jack said quietly. “Tell him what you’re thinking. Make him feel like he’s still part of your world. If I’m way out of line here Ted, tell me to shut up and I will.”

“Don’t pull any punches, Jack. You never do, so don’t start now.” I could see him in my mind, stewing over this. He was never one to interfere in people’s lives if he could help it, but he knew something that I needed to know about Harv. I had to find a way to make the horses all go in the same direction.

“He went crazy over what Bellamy did. None of us liked it, but Harv almost got himself killed over it. Bellamy is a ruthless bastard, who’d just as soon kill you as spit on you, and Harv was crossing the line everyday, shoving George’s nose in the shit. So, when you came back and forced their hand, Harv felt like you just pushed past him and shoved him down in the mud. You came across like you didn’t need him anymore.”

Jack stopped, thinking he had said too much.

“Jack, I have to make this work between all of us. I need your opinion and your advice. That’s an order soldier.” I said quietly.

“Ted, without *this*, what he does, his job...he’s got nothing. And it’s a thankless job he can’t ever tell anyone about...ever. We have wives and kids and families and things that give what we do some purpose and meaning. He has nobody but us. We’re the only family he has. There’s no one home at night waiting for Harv. He lives in a small, cold flat, where he just drinks himself to sleep when he does go home, which is hardly ever. He is a stupendously brilliant man, and we sometimes forget how incredible he is under the jokes and bravado and bluster. He doesn’t want much, Teddy, just to be part of the team and to feel like he’s contributing. Like he has a purpose again, which is all anyone ever really wants out of life, isn’t it?”

“Jack.”

“Yes sir?”

“Thank you. Let me know when you start the new disinformation program.”

I hung up and headed down the hallway for the men’s room, as because of the spilled ink I looked like I’d been in a knife fight with some cobalt-based alien life form.

And now I needed to wash the blood off my hands.



CHAPTER 106

I had planned to have dinner with Irina and Pasha but canceled at the last minute. She understood and let me off the hook, gently, after a minor rebuke. I needed some alone time and I had to get out of the facility for a while. I needed to see the night sky. I checked in with security and told them I needed a car, a driver and one security officer. They were waiting for me at the entrance to the medical part of the building. I got in the back seat and told them to drive me out to Dixie Valley, approximately thirty miles east of the base on Highway Fifty, ‘The loneliest stretch of road in the state’, as it is known in Nevada.

Dixie Valley is the top end of the Naval practice bombing range. Each night one could see jets screaming out of the sky and blow up a whole black city at the bottom of the valley. I hadn’t been through this country in years, but I had remembered this part from one of my trips years before.

When we got there I had them stop the car and I got out to look up at the night sky and the millions of billions of stars above me. The air was crisp and clear and I could have spent the rest of my life standing there. After about ten minutes the security man walked up to me and asked if everything was all right. I smiled and nodded, asked him to go back to the car, and went back to watching the blinking of the stars out there in space, where someone had told someone else there was a war going on. It was hard to imagine, from this small patch of desert ground, that there was anything else out there but us.

That was the lie I wanted us to start telling people and try to make them believe it. I had convinced myself it was for the right reason, but I still wasn’t sure, that I had the right to ruin people’s lives. I had the power, but the reason came from a different part of me. I had started out to learn about physics. Now, I was masterminding a defense system that would meet an enemy that was like nothing the human race had ever faced before. I had seen it up close and personal at Dulce, but it didn’t lessen the feelings within me that I was manipulating people to do my bidding and I wasn’t sure I was the right man for the job.

“Awful pretty, ain’t it?” I heard the voice behind me.

“Sure is. But won’t those guys in the car be concerned that you’re here?” I never turned around to see the man. I knew it only too well. Dr. Rufus T. Henry had become a close part of my world, even though, at times, I thought I had become schizophrenic and that he was nothing more than a voice in my own head I had created for myself to justify my own actions.

“Nah, they’re taking a little nap, right now.” He walked up next to me and pointed to the starry sky. “I’ve been up there on a small planet circling that yellow sun. It’s a binary star, with two of them. The planet is a nice place with lots of green foliage and crystal clear water. There’s a small group of human-like people living there. They use their minds to do all kinds of wonderful things. They have advanced far beyond us, but they haven’t depended on technology. They think it and it is there.” He

chuckled. "I really, really like 'em. They're like the pixies my mama used to tell me stories about when I was a kid."

"I..." Starting a sentence that way seemed inappropriate when dealing with this particular friend. "We...me...and you...guys, have made it possible to defend this world of ours. But defenders must only survive. I need something offensive. I need to be able to neutralize their ships coming into our atmosphere or a little farther out would be better."

"Yeap." He didn't say anything else. He just stood there looking at the sky with me.

"Do you grow older, or do you stay the same age?" I turned and looked at him in the darkness.

"I am that I am. Time doesn't have much hold on me much anymore. I move around and learn things. I've had some help from some kindly folks who have done physical things for me. I have some new organs and my sight is better than I had as a kid. I'll die one of these days when this business is over and done, but that's no big deal. The part of me that is non-physical will just keep going on. You know what I mean?" He laughed.

"No, I don't. I haven't spent much time thinking about the life after this one. This one has been hard enough to deal with for me." I felt older. Infinitely older.

"Not to worry. It's all the way it should be." He moved a little toward me. "I got something for you. But you might be wanting to show it to Mr. Harvey first before anyone else sees it."

I took the file from him and tucked it under my arm.

"You been listening to my conversations again, Rufus?" I smiled to myself.

"I been doin' that, now and again. But it's just to make the road a little smoother for you, Ted. I'm just here as an errand boy for somebody else. I think you know." He laughed again.

"Why doesn't he just come see me?" I asked feeling the pangs of loneliness and abandonment inside.

"He's got him a powerful lot of work to do. He is 24/7 at it. 'Cause he knows you need him to be about what he does. I do what I do, and you need to do what you do. That way, all of us are working just like a close-knit family on the farm. Don't worry, son. He's there, and you'll see him when it's time. He promised you that." I felt, more than saw, him move back into the shadows behind me. "Now you be getting back home, Dr. Ted. These boys will be waking up soon now."

I turned and he was gone. I held the file and looked back into the night sky, wondering if I would ever be able to stand on that distant planet where people use their minds to make what they need. It was a nice thought and I made a wish on the star I thought it was.

"Dr. Humphrey! Are you alright!" The security man ran up next to me, probably feeling pretty guilty and stupid for having fallen asleep in the car. "We've been out here a couple of hours, even though it doesn't feel like it, but I think we should be heading back, don't you?"

"You bet. I'm ready. It is a beautiful night though."

I looked up once more and then got back into the car. I turned on the light in the backseat and started to read the file.

I was clearly no longer directing the movie that had become my life.

But if I wasn't, who was?



CHAPTER 107

It had been several years since I had used the supersonic mag-levitation train of the Underground Railroad in the “Basement” as those who knew about it, referred to it. A new line had been dug into the subterranean earth linking up Jacobs and Fallon with the facility at Five-One. The “Mole-Men,” the guys that drove the huge boron nosed nuclear powered boring device developed by Rockwell and Rand in the sixties, which had now given way to ultra modern sonic drillers, were still churning away, making holes to connect all of the important stages along the route, where secret government programs were being worked on.

The power stations, mag-rails and other features were placed into the holes as soon as they completed each section and moved onto the next. The Mole-Men were now heading northwest towards Puget Sound, getting ready to put the Bangor Washington Sub Base on their map which would complete the railroad from “Sea to Shining Sea”. Someone suggested a ceremony where they would drive home a golden spike once they made the connection.

The railroad was still the fastest land based transport system and only a handful of people used it, but it allowed them to move about without the knowledge of certain people...or beings. I had settled into the executive transport car, the one supposedly only used by the President and his immediate associates, and, in a very short period, lulled into a comfortable and deep sleep as I whizzed along at four hundred miles an hour, seven hundred feet below the surface of our great nation, in a pure oxygen haze.

I sat in the incredibly comfortable large leather chair that was a form-contoured model, no doubt adapted from the little seats in the Sport Model at Groom Lake. Finally, a little practical reverse engineering, I thought. A small nonintrusive sound came out of the overhead speaker and I found myself waking up, as the map display ahead of me on the wall indicated we were slowing down as we entered the Washington DC Metroplex area. The pressure and air changed inside the car and I felt wide-awake and very comfortable. The mag-train glided into the station, called Executive One, right under the old Executive Office Building across the street from the White House. Harden, dressed in a suit and thin tie, was standing on the platform to greet me.

“Nice trip?” He motioned at the train car.

“I could use one of those at home. I had a really good sleep.” I shook his hand and continued.

“Are you now on-line and with me fulltime?”

“I am yours to command, Dr. Humphrey.” The young man beamed at me.

“Let’s get past the formality. Call me Ted.” I wanted this man to be content with this assignment and didn’t want to start out with all the normal junk associated with superior to inferior relationships.

“Thank you. I prefer just Harden.” I nodded and we walked over to the escalator that ran up to the sub-basement of the OEB, (Old Executive Building.)

"Everything ready upstairs?" I checked for the third time to make sure I had all my documents and IDs with me.

"Dr. Glipsen is awaiting you, in his office. Everything else seems to be in normal condition." Harden looked around the empty station and appraised the set up.

"You haven't seen this place before." I pointed back at the train.

"No, sir. Heard about it, but really didn't believe it existed. One hears a lot of scuttlebutt that isn't true out at Jacobs. I traded it off as just one more unfounded rumor." It took a good three minutes to get up to the sub-basement, changing escalators at least four times.

"When we go back out West, I will try and get the use of that car again. It's the President's and it is very comfortable. A lot more so than the general transports. Since he is out of the country for a week or so, it shouldn't be too hard, but Harv is the man who controls all of that." I laughed knowing about Harv's feeling that the mag-lift was his exclusive domain.

In the sub-basement the Marine sentries were waiting. They inspected all of my papers and asked me to sign-in on their electronic roster.

"Over there through that hallway, is the White House. The door leads directly into the Situation Room in the basement." I pointed to the nondescript cement hallway that had no sign on it.

"Really, I didn't know that." Harden said, looking around.

"I've only been in there once and that was a long time ago." We moved up to the elevator landing. It was a quick trip up to the third floor and the doors opened unto Harv's waiting room, with his secretary sitting there looking up.

"Go right in, Dr. Humphrey, Harvey is waiting for you." I thanked her and told Harden to grab some coffee as I'd be at least an hour or so.

"Well, well, well. If it isn't Teflon man!" Harv got up and shook hands with me gesturing towards the couch and chair at one side of the room.

"Teflon man?" I asked, noting Harv's continuing sarcasm.

"Nothing sticks to you Sunny Jim. Not like the rest of us who get covered with crap and have to live with it." I saw by his eyes the envy of what I had accomplished.

"Wonderful." I sat, waiting for him to have his fun at my expense. I owed him that much.

"Okay. So...I am still pissed off at you. I pick you up out of the dregs of Bar Stool and you come out as the hottest commodity since Lincoln ran for President. I'm an old guy, Ted, that just wants his declining years to be filled with young girls, accolades and glory, which I totally, utterly and completely deserve for putting up with the likes of old Scarface and young punks like you."

"Harv, if you'll remember correctly, I didn't want the job. You came to me remember? I think you need to think through that series of events as well. Besides, I'm not here to listen to you bellyache about what you got going. I live in a hole in the ground in the middle of the desert, remember?" I threw it right back at him.

"So do snakes." Harv hissed, lobbing out one last grenade. "Now what is so goddamn important you used my train to get back here and talk to me about." He paused and leaned forward. "You know you got Bellamy chewing his nails off right now? He was so concerned about you coming here that he was ready to come off the island to be here." Harv laughed at that, starting to lighten up.

"Listen Harv, let me get to the matter at hand. I am working at putting the triangulation format in place right now. We should have everything ready for the first set of trials in less than a year. But, I need you to handle something really important for me." I waited to see if the old spark was there. I saw a faint glowing ember and waited for the idea to sink into his mind.

“And what would that be, Ted?” Harv leaned back in his chair and waited, wanting to hear if I had another errand boy task for him or if it was something really special.

“A few years ago you were the right hand man of President Reagan with his Star Wars program if I remember correctly.” I needed for him to juggle all his thoughts into the proper order.

“Yeah, I was. But since the Ruskies have gone belly up everyone has put that stuff on hold, ‘cause they think it’s a big money pit boondoggle.” Harv was getting himself a candy out of the dish on the table in front of us.

“Here, look at this.” I handed him a folder with the design of a hydrogen and fluorine chemical pump laser that fired an extremely fine and concentrated beam path. Harv took the drawings and flipped through the pages, then went back to the first page and started all over again, reviewing each page very carefully. It took a good ten minutes for him to finish his first analysis of the system. He got up, went to his desk to get a calculator and then started plugging in some numbers. Scratching his thick gray hair, he looked at the drawings and then at the notepad on his knee.

“You’ve jumped maybe two or three levels in this design. The guys at Lawrence Livermore worked on this, but they only had it at a prototype level when funding was cut. You added at least ten different sub-systems to it that’ll make this thing hum when it’s fired. You work on this while you were goofing off out in Barstow?” He looked perplexed for a few minutes while he chewed his lip. “Y’know, you could take this thing and....” The light went on and he brightened up, when he saw the whole system and what it was intended for. “You got to be kidding me, kiddo!” The ember had become a flame and it was glowing white-hot.

“Not a bit.” I said. “How long for you to gear someone up and stand on their tails to get ten of those babies built?”

“Fourteen, eighteen months tops. Most of this is off the shelf so it’s available now. Man, this is a zapper that could punch holes in just about anything on this planet.” Harv was thinking of ground actions inside the atmosphere.

“Now, place that here.” I pulled out a star chart and handed it to him. “It just sits and waits for our ‘friends’ to show up and then fires up. A back up zone here and then another set to be deployed as needed and where needed. They come out of hyper-dimensional space and those babies go to work right in the middle of any kind of fleet they have.” I had seen it all in my head over the past few days. Hit and run surprises, knocking out five to ten motherships per unit.

“Would make someone stop and pondered if they had the right plan or not, wouldn’t it?” Harv chuckled to himself. “But listen, if we build this system, how are we going to get it out far enough to deploy it in deep space?”

I sat and looked at him for a long minute letting my body language speak for me.

Harv gasped. “You don’t mean to tell me that you can use the Time Runner to deploy this?” Harv shook his head in disbelief. The Time Runner had been planned to heal up the holes in space, but no one had thought about using it to launch anything into deep space.

I handed him the second set of documents showing the modifications to the King’s Peak, Utah unit that was a tuning module. It caused a resonant standing wave to occur in the field after it was tuned properly and it would bi-locate the devices to any spot in the local galaxy we wanted within a fraction of a second.

“If NASA knew we had this, they would join up with the CIA to try to take over this whole operation! All of us would be on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean for ‘interviews’ until we squealed for mercy.” Harv laughed again and rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand. “The big black chip in the game, that is what this is, Teddy-boy.” He got up and went over and pulled two beers out of his icebox in the office.

“Twenty bucks!” He joked as he handed me one. “Ah, your credit is good here. I’ll just dock your pay.” He would, too.

Sitting there he looked at the drawings again and studied the fine details.

“This must have taken months for you to work on and resolve. This is so far out of your expertise area I can’t believe you did this on your own. Shit, the chemistry is enough to make my poor old brain swim, just trying to remember what I learned in college years ago. This way of amplifying the beam is truly amazing. We need to try it in small form on some really hard piece of metal, like titanium or something harder.” Harv didn’t follow up on the timeline and I wasn’t about to tell him about Dr. Henry’s visit, not now at least.

“Try it out on one of the saucers sitting at Groom. That would be comparable to the metal foil anyone would use for deep space. Build a small one and zap it with this and see what happens.” I had already been down this road and knew now why someone had wanted us to have those craft.

“You’re getting into this business of killing aliens aren’t you?” Harv looked deeply into my eyes.

“You bet your sweet ass! Did you see the film from Dulce?” I asked clenching my jaw.

“Yes, I did.”

“Well, I saw the real thing. Vats with people half alive being reduced to their constituent genetic material. The nightmares have never gone away and probably never will. That,” I pointed to the file, “well help me sleep a lot better at night.”

On reflection Harv dropped the topic, realizing I was more a man possessed by his own demons than he really wanted to know about. He rose and picked up the phone, then stopped.

“Can I tell Bellamy?” He held the phone without pushing the button.

“Your call Harv. You are still my boss the last time I checked the organizational chart.” I said with lightness in my voice.

“Son, you don’t work for anyone but yourself, you and I both know that, but thanks for that bone. It makes my old bones feel good to at least think you still believe in lineage and chain of command, even though we both know you could care less.” Harv punched the button and then threw the switch for the speakerphone.

The next forty-five minutes was a planning conference on who should do the work and how we should divide up responsibilities.

Just before I left, I took a ruler from the side of Harv’s desk and took a Sharpie marker out of my shirt breast pocket and drew a straight line across the top of the plans for our weapon. In my best block lettering I wrote: “THE BUG ZAPPER.”

Harv turned the plans around to see the name and smiled and gave me a thumbs up as I left, leaving him to wheel and deal and work the phones. Dr. Harvey Glipsen was back on track and running hot, fast and straight. I also got to use the President’s mag-lift car for the trip back to Fallon and Jacobs Center.

Ah, it’s good to be the king!

PART SIXTEEN

***END GAME AT
THE EDGE OF
TIME***



CHAPTER 108

Two years came and went without problem or incident. Irina and I moved into a new apartment in the complex with our daughter, who would wear me out with questions at night about everything concerning my life. Pasha wanted to know every detail of it, from the time I was small to now. Not an easy task, to tell someone about all your mistakes, and still have them love you; but she did.

Irina and I had gotten closer and closer. Our nights lying in the cool bedroom of the complex were spent discussing all kinds of plans for when this never-ending nightmare would be done.

Her idea for retirement was a chicken and rabbit ranch somewhere where she could wear coveralls and let her hair grow long and not be concerned with it turning slowly gray, as we both grew old. Mine was a beach, someplace with a cold bottle of beer and a good book. We had to find the middle ground, but it was the common joke, about the difference between the souls of Russians and Americans.

I had not seen Dr. Henry or anyone else for that period. The plan was coming together like we actually knew what we were doing. There had been several incidents concerning 'Visitors' but the other Group leaders had taken care of them without much of my involvement. The device was moving along very well. The one under King's Peak, Utah, was already installed after we had tested it and certified it as workable. The other series, all seven of them, were in the pit and all of them were working as well. The only thing missing at present was the installation at the Bangor Sub Base in Washington State. The facility was not yet ready and there were endless problems again with DC.

A new administration had come into office and the whole process of re-education had been started by Harv's new under secretary, a young scientist by the name of James Nakamura. An MIT grad in quantum physics and electrodynamics, he was bright and quick and was looking for the fast track up the organization, so he never missed a chance to point out any and all of Harv's flaws to anyone over at the White House that would listen. He was trying to make his star rise a little faster than some of us thought he should and he wanted to climb up Harv's back to reach for the top of the shelf. This left Bellamy with the problem of pouring oil on the water constantly and having to make a lot of excuses for Harv. My heart went out to him, but there was little I could do. I had never been in the Washington Merry-Go-Round and didn't want to start handling the problems of politics this late in my career.

Jack Thompson had made one star general and, after talking to each of us separately, had decided to retire. He and Shirley wanted to spend the rest of their lives in the sun of Florida's west coast around Bradenton and raise their son. He deserved it in my opinion for his long and trusted service. At his going away party, he asked both Irina and I to come down and spend some time with them and maybe consider moving down there. Jack had some ideas for a technical business that would make them a considerable living and he had asked me to be a partner. It sounded great but I needed to see this project through to the end and he understood, letting me know that

there was always a desk for me at the office right next door to his. I had recommended Harden for the vacant post and, with Harv's support; he got it with a three jump rank increase. I knew that he would do a good job of filling Jack's boots and I had little need for him, since almost all of my time was spent inside the complex now.

One afternoon Bellamy called me out of the blue

"Teddy, can you get down to Groom and meet with Harv, Nakamura and me, this afternoon?"

I looked at my calendar and realized that it was clear with the exception of administration functions, which I hated anyway. I agreed and took the sub-way in the early afternoon. It was a little over an hour trip.

I was met at Five-One by Nakamura. He started in at me almost immediately with no preamble or introductions like some small yippy Japanese dog. "Good to see you Dr. Humphrey. I am concerned that this project Dr. Gilpsen has been stewarding through isn't going to be all he cracked it up to be. If that is the case, the folks over at the White House want to know if you think it is time to replace him."

We got in the car and sped away toward the Groom Lake facility, while he continued his name dropping and listing all the reasons why we needed a new person, sitting in Harv's chair. I was about ready to blow up, when we finally walked into the hanger next to the old facilities building.

"Ted, good to see you!" Harv took my hand and shook it really hard. Bellamy smiled and slapped me on the back.

"Everything running smoothly up at Jacobs?" He asked.

"Couldn't be better. Irina sends her greetings to both of you." I walked to one side of the hanger and looked at the scout ship. Nakamura continued to yap away.

"I believe we should be working on this and trying to get it to fly again, Dr. Humphrey. It is a waste just sitting here. The small things we have found warrant us trying to take this apart and see what makes it work and then building our model." Nakamura had been told I held some kind of power in the Group and I was probably the conduit to getting things done. He looked with disdain on Harv who had plucked him out of obscurity, trained him, and now had the long suffering task of watching this man gnaw at the hand of the man who fed him. This was not the payback I would have expected from someone elevated so quickly within our ranks. It showed disrespect, dishonor, disloyalty and just plain bad manners.

I walked over to the covered unit sitting there all alone in the bay. I pulled the cover back and saw Dr. Rufus T. Henry's little present to me, two years ago. It was a chemical laser that was so compact it was less than ten feet long and no more than two feet across. I rubbed my hand down the framework and looked at the various controls. It was aimed at the hull of one of the older ships that had sat in the far side of the bay for years.

"This toy work?" I looked at Bellamy then Harv.

"That is what we're here to see. In the lab it does fine, but you were the one who wanted to see if we could use it." Harv looked at me and then over at Nakamura.

"I don't think this is a proper use of resources and neither does the President. I was talking to his assistant the other day and they think we should use this device on the 'expendable' craft, as you call it in your memo Dr. Humphrey, for something better than this 'hocus pocus' stuff about aliens." Nakamura was bucking for another stripe on his sleeve, but he was not correct in his assessment of my view of the political realities understood by the President or his staff.

"A moment, gentlemen, if I may." I held up a hand to Nakamura and good old reliable Jamison stepped in front of him, to keep him from following Harv and Bellamy over to the corner of the hanger.

"Okay, so...why are you keeping him?" I asked Harv in a low voice.

"It has made some powerful friends over at that rented white house and I think I am on the slippery slope heading down and out to the trash heap if I fire him." Harv had a note of fear in his eyes. I looked at Bellamy, who smiled and nodded to me.

"It's your call, Ted. If you want us to take on this battle, I am game for it. But there is no guarantee of the outcome. We have a standing executive order giving us a license and we are granted funds until 2012, but there may be a shit storm if you do it." Bellamy rubbed his face and his scar puckered up and down. "Then again, we could be in the process of being sold out as well."

"How much about the Group does he know?" I asked Harv.

"The edge only. After the first six months I slowed down his access to files and that put a real twist in his tail." Harv looked old.

"Are you still up to handling this whole project Dr. Glipsen without the use of your assistant here?" I asked formally, already knowing the answer.

"I will give up one of my mistresses if it means me continuing to work with you two bandits." Harv laughed.

"Good enough." I walked back to where Nakamura was standing.

"Jim..." I started.

"I prefer to be addressed by my proper title as Doctor Nakamura, sir." He said, feeling rebuked from our conclave.

"Jim," I let my uncaring sink in, "let me explain the ins and outs of power to you. Right now, you look to me like a bright young man who wants very badly to go places. I need to know what you have told those folks in the administration about our program here." I smiled at him.

"I understand that my security clearance doesn't...allow me...to talk to outsiders about the program, but in only the most general terms." He dodged the question.

"Good answer. Now what have you told them specifically about our program?" I raised my voice slightly as Bellamy and Harv walked back up to where I was standing.

"I don't think my private conversations have anything to do with you." He flared.

"Didn't you tell me," I said to Jamison, only slightly raising the timber of my voice, but never looking away from Nakamura, "that the phone intercept on Dr. Nakamura's phone had indicated he was actually going outside the boundaries, Mr. Jamison?" Jamison looked at me and picked up quickly on the move I was making.

"I did, sir, as I was instructed to do. He sounded to the technicians as though he was telling them what we were planning to do." Jamison never missed a beat. Even though we had not talked to each other in a couple of years.

"You couldn't have heard anything!" He said, a little too quickly. "That is a secure line and they have it back traced."

"You don't think we can monitor your line without the White House knowing about it?" I feigned a hurt look.

"They told me all of the lines were checked and I was on a clear line." Panic is always good to watch when you are not holding the losing hand.

"They didn't know we had a back trace of our own?" I said waiting for the full effect of my statement to hit him. "Now, why don't you tell me what they promised you for the information that you gave them?"

"I-I can't do that." He stumbled again and hoped no one would notice. Harv was turning purple with rage.

"You had better." I said menacingly as I stepped in close to him. "Because here are your choices at present: One: I leave you to the none too tender mercies of Mr. Jamison, who will escort you to Diego Garcia for interrogation and detainment, until I feel anything you might know is worthless. That could be ten years in a cell on an island that makes Devil's Island look like Club Med. Two:" I flicked two fingers at the guards who marched over and stood over him, "I have you taken outside to become a 'target of opportunity'. In non-military terms that means, I have you shot. I'm sure Mr.

Jamison would follow my direct orders without question. Three: I have you tried for treason. I don't know if you read the small print on your employment contract, but it is there. Oh, and don't worry, no one will know about it because it will be before a military tribunal, right here, not in a federal court, and, again...I have you shot. So think about your next answer, very carefully. What, and who, have you told about us?" I stood there and suddenly Jamison pulled out his large framed automatic and jacked a round into the chamber, then held it by his side. The other two guards followed suit.

"Y-you c-c-can't! You don't have the right! I need to c-c-all general counsel at the White House and speak with them and have them talk to you!" Nakamura was in hysterics.

"Oh, you are very mistaken, doctor. I do have the right and I will use my power, and, no, you are never talking to anyone at the White House ever again. That is the least of my promises to you." I reached up and snapped my fingers and one of Bellamy's other assistants handed me a cellular phone and I dialed.

"Give me LaCross. LaCross? This is Humphrey." I waited for a moment. "I have just ordered Dr. Nakamura executed as an enemy of the state. Tell the President that if he tries to infiltrate my organization again, I will pull a Kennedy on his ass! Am I clear, Mr. LaCross?" I hung up and handed the phone back to the man.

"T minus one minute...Jim." Jamison cocked his weapon and slightly lifted it, followed by the guards. Everyone was absolutely still. Nakamura's mouth moved, unable to make a word, as he looked pleadingly back and forth between us all.

"Mr. Jamison, take this son of a bitch out and..."

"WAIT! Just wait!! I'll tell you! I've been meeting with the President's private assistant for internal security matters. We never meet at the White House but at various places around McLean. She didn't want to meet me where anyone would see us talking. I told her everything I knew or that I could find out, by going through Harvey's desk at night. I told her about the triple jump and the laser. I added some stuff to make me look better. I wanted to make a good impression with her, since she told me there might be a senior staff level job that she could get me into with this Administration." He was crying out of fear.

All three of us shared a look of concern. "What was her name?"

"C-corbett!" He bumbled out through his sobs.

"Ann Corbett?"

"Yes!" He looked up, surprised that we knew the name. "Dr. Ann Corbett! The President's assistant." Nakamura could hardly speak.

"Son of a bitch!!" Harv exploded at me. "I thought you killed that bitch years ago, Ted!"

"So did I, Harv." I turned to Bellamy. "Call whoever you call at the White House. See if she is really there. I doubt it, but make the effort to find out." I walked a few feet away.

"Boss Three?" Jamison was ready to do the guy right there.

"Morgan isn't it?" I turned to one of the security men who stepped forward.

"Yes, sir. Corporal Stan Morgan, sir!" He was like a rail in front of me.

"Get a stenographer, a clean room in the facility, a team of security guys to surround it and have Jamison take Nakamura into it. He is going to tell you the where, when and how of everything he's reported. Use the bug juice if you need to. High intensity. Is that clear?" I looked over my glasses at the man and then to Jamison who knew exactly what I meant. If Nakamura was going to have any recall lapses, Jamison would quickly revivify his memory, with the back of his hand.

"Sir!" Morgan spun and dashed away at a sprint.

"Jami, don't let him out of your sight, do you understand me?" Jamison looked hard at me and then back at Nakamura.

"Intrusions?" The best word he could come up with, but I got the drift.

“Exactly. I want him in one piece, but he doesn’t have to be...whole... when we go to the President.” Jamison nodded and grabbed the man by belt and the scruff of his suit and pushed him toward the facility door like a Scottish bouncer about to toss a drunk into the muck of the gutter., which is exactly what his life would now be...if he lived that long.

“The President?” Bellamy said softly to me.

“Absolutely. This guy doesn’t want any bad press. We show him the transcript of a traitor as well as someone using official documents from his Administration, which he won’t be able to justify, he’s going to play ball with us all the way.” I said with anger in my voice.

“Who the hell did you call?” Harv asked me.

“Shit, I don’t know. I think it was Ramona at The Cotton Tail Bunny Ranch in Pahrump.” I didn’t even smile at my statement.

I had become the master of the bluff and I was good at it.



CHAPTER 109

As the three of us stood there looking at one another, no one wanted to start with the obvious questions: How had they done it? Who was controlling the operation? Why did they want to know so much if their guys were beyond defeat? It was all very clear to me. I had been working on this problem long enough to know that there were certain bits and pieces of it no one else really understood but me, and it was going to stay that way for right now.

“Well. What should we do, Ted?” Bellamy asked. While Harv was looking at the ground feeling like he had let us all down by hiring someone who got caught up and used in just one more lousy little plan someone else had created.

“I came here to watch a weapons demonstration. Kicking junior’s ass was just for shits and giggles. Harv would’ve taken care of it in time. I know that.” I lied. But it didn’t matter. No one was going to keep me from making sure that no fleet of invaders would ever land on my planet as long as I had anything to say about it.

“You can be a kind man as well as a tyrant, Theodore.” Harv looked up at me. “You just flushed that kid down the toilet and didn’t give him a chicken’s chance in a wolf pack”

“What!? You feel bad for him?” I wondered what was up with Harv.

“No, I don’t. It’s just I never thought when you came aboard t you would end up being like Bellamy here, a black hearted cold-blooded bastard, only slightly better looking.” Harv shook his head. “I never did. But you are twice the fiend he is. I think you enjoyed that little demonstration of power back there. And it was not just for young Nakamura.” Harv walked over toward the ‘Bug Zapper’ the coined phrase we used for the new laser system.

“Being compared to me in the same sentence must hurt?” Bellamy noted.

“Not at all, George.” I followed them behind the shield that been erected on the edge of the hanger. “Not at all.”

“We’ve got the power setting on the highest function possible. It should engage and probably blast a hole right through that craft. It is our belief that when this device is in space, deployed, and at full power, it will knock out the complete drive system of any ship it is pointed at. Ted explained to us how this is supposed to work and the small test bench model has performed admirably, but this is the first run of the bug zapper at a composite material that our best instruments cannot even scratch.” Harv had finished the adjustment with the test team he had called into the hanger. “There should be a sixty nano-second burst and then a small flash. Then we will see if theory works in the real world.”

Harv moved back behind the shield and picked up the phone. He told security to put out the alarm throughout the building, that we were doing a test shot, and nobody should be surprised. No one would probably even hear it, but those of us on the hanger deck floor.

“On my mark, five, four, three, two and one. Engage!” Harv did the countdown and pressed the sequencer to operate the Zapper. The Zapper warmed up for a

moment, humming solidly. There was a small blue flash and a steady stream of blue plasmic energy shot out of the gun's muzzle with an electric buzzing sound. For the next sixty seconds we watched it harmlessly twinkle on the hull of the craft. It shut down timidly on its own, smoking gently.

We walked over to the craft and there was not a scratch on it. Harv reached out his hand and touched the skin of the ship where the beam had struck, and it was dead cool to the touch.

"So," Harv said, beyond miffed, "Waddaya going to invent next? The sparkler? You can use this piece of shit to gay up Fourth of July all over the country! Maybe we can stick a Piccolo Pete up the exhaust pipe and light it to juice up the power! Or maybe stick a playing card in the spokes to give that Big Wheel Sound of Power! You goddamn id-jits!"

I opened my briefcase and handed Harv a small electronic box with one single connector on it.

He looked at it for a moment and then up at me, turning red again.

"What the hell is this?" Harv held it gingerly in his hand.

"A cascading multiplier." I pointed at the connector. "Pin ten, please. The slot you wanted removed from the original designs. That is what it's for."

"This wasn't on the original drawings, was it?" Harv looked at the unit.

"No." I said flatly.

"Oh great!" Harv was annoyed again and tossed his hands in the air when he talked. "So, does this whatchamafuckit make the device go, like, invisible or something?"

"Something." I wasn't going to say anything else. I had made my point. They had doubted me and this was the least I could do to not make that happen again. Harv handed the box to a technician that plugged it into the Bug Zapper and walked back to the control housing.

"Put it on the lowest setting, please." I asked lab tech politely.

"All systems checked and ready. Commence countdown on my mark..." Harv started up again. I yelled over at the technician.

"Oh, just pull the trigger!" I said.

An electric blue flash filled the hanger, followed by a thunderous explosion, followed by another explosion that caused the floor to tremble and shake like an earthquake. The rolling sensation almost knocked all of us off our feet. Security men were running in with guns drawn and looking for the mad bomber that just hit the building.

"It's alright, it's just a test!" Harv was coughing and trying to clean the smoke away from in front of his face.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Look at that." Harv was the first out from behind the shield.

A hole had been ripped a good ten feet wide in the length of the craft, splintering the metal and a new circulation hole had been blown through the outside cement wall of the building about four feet in diameter and continued through a number of other buildings used, thankfully, just for storage, and then there was a whole in a mountain some distance away.

Bellamy walked over to the craft and was going to touch it until he felt the heat coming off the destroyed hull and then knelt down and looked inside. It was the first time anyone had seen inside it since we had it.

"What is the range on full power, Ted, if you have an idea?" Bellamy asked.

"Lethal at two thousand kilometers in space on the medium setting. That was low. On high? I have no idea." I was still shaking from the blast.

"Nice gadget you got there, nephew. How in the hell does it work?" Harv went over and pulled the multiplier out of the socket and held it.

“Folds the waves back on themselves and then sets up a resonating circuit inside the tube. It will work much better in a vacuum.” I pulled out the plans for it and handed them to Harv.

“Make it small enough we could sell it to wrecking yards to cut cars in half, or quarters, or down to their original molecular structure.” He looked at the drawing and showed it to the technician next to him. I picked up my briefcase and started to leave without a word. I now had the means I needed to complete the program. A way of getting a platform into deep space at an exact location and time and a weapon that would pulse enough energy to destroy a whole enemy fleet without hesitation. Bellamy jogged across the hanger to catch up with me.

“What would you like me to do with Nakamura?” He asked as we were walking.

“What is your plan, Boss?” I deferred to him.

“Hide him away for a few years and then let him go.” I stopped and listened to him carefully.

I remembered Ann Corbett, disguised as a waitress in that restaurant, standing near my father that night, so many years ago and what had happened to him, and what she had done to Ellen, someone we all loved. I looked at Bellamy for a long moment and then just turned and walked away.

“I understand, Ted.” Bellamy walked back toward Harv. Nakamura wouldn’t be talking to anyone else when Bellamy was through with him. It might not have been the way my father or Dr. Henry would have done it, but I didn’t have the luxury of traveling to the stars and learning kindness from gentle pixie people who just used their minds to create reality. I was still in the middle of a poker game with all the black chips on the table and...ah, hell! Who was I kidding?

This was a goddamn war!

But I sure as hell wasn’t going to lose because somebody else had an ace up their sleeve.



CHAPTER 110

Time was passing quickly now. Seven months had gone by since the Bug -Zapper test at Groom Lake. I was spending more time working on the Bangor, Washington submarine base problems, getting the facility finished. It seemed like one thing after another delayed bringing this damn station online. Irina had finished up her part of the project and needed a break. We agreed, because of my schedule, she and Pasha would take a vacation. They wanted to spend the summer touring America looking for a nice place for a chicken and rabbit farm. They had been cooped up long enough under this sterile cement and steel hive. I didn't blame them for wanting to have some adventures in the outside world.

We said our good byes and that we'd join back up in October. I thought I'd have everything done by then and we'd get a place in the country around Fallon, Nevada where Pasha could have a horse and Irina could raise rabbits.

Dreams fulfilled: check!

I'd been fighting with some techies about the placement of the new device at the Bangor submarine station. I couldn't make them understand it had to be exactly aligned to the north/south magnetic poles, and the platform had to rotate and adjust ever so slightly if the mag poles moved or shifted, and if they had to re-pour the whole damn building then that was what had to be done.

The next phone call was not one I expected.

"Ted? Your got a clean black suit and tie?" George Bellamy said.

"Why?" I joked. "We going to a funeral?"

Bellamy and I had grown closer again over the past few months. He kept me informed on the progress Harv was making in DC. It seemed like the President had seen things our way and had committed fully to our project without hesitation after reading the transcript of the Nakamura confession. One of his own advisors meeting with Ann Corbett had forced the President to deal with it. It apparently wasn't pretty and became much like Dr. Bates' "departure".

"Yes." Bellamy said flatly. There was a long, emotional pause. "Harvey died."

"Oh my God!" I felt a stabbing pain that went through to my soul. Harv had always been there for me and I didn't want to think about finishing this project without him.

"When? What happened?"

"Yesterday. Heart attack. Too much pressure. Old age. Diabetes, drinking too much, not exercising, this crappy life we live." Bellamy was clearly upset as well.

"Where's the funeral?" It was the only thing I could think of asking, under the circumstances.

"Arlington. Just a graveside service. The President, First Lady, a couple of close friends of his out of the Senate and Congress. And us. You and me." Bellamy was making an exception to his own rule.

"I understand, Boss. He didn't have any family did he?" I closed my eyes and felt the emotions well up inside.

“We’re his family, Ted. We were all he had. Us, and this piece of shit job!” I already knew the answer and, like most families under pressure, we were all dysfunctional as hell.

“I will be there, Boss.” I hung up and sat for a few minutes thinking about what I could do. Then I remembered a lot of bad jokes over the years that made me smile.

I called Harden in DC, who was now head of the security section, and asked him to make certain arrangements for me for tomorrow. He was a little shocked but complied with my request when I explained why I needed the special attention.

I called Jack Thompson but only got the message machine telling me he and his family were in Europe for the summer. I didn’t leave a message.

* * * * *

It was a humid morning in Arlington, Virginia, as I walked up the grassy knoll in the garden of stones, which holds the mortal remains of our best and most dedicated. The path had been cordoned off and Secret Service was everywhere. I strolled among the rows of fallen heroes. As I passed some of the stones I stopped and read the inscriptions. First World War, Second World War, Korea, Viet Nam, Iraq; they were all here and in good company. At the top of the rise a small group of mourners were standing. Within the knot was the President and First Lady and several men I didn’t know with their wives. An honor guard was positioned slightly off in the distance and a bugler stood at attention.

I saw Bellamy and walked up next to him. He was standing with a group of six young beautiful crying women, all stylishly dressed in black with black lace veils over their faces. Bellamy motioned for me to come by his side. One of the women came close and took my arm. I held her hand. The flag draped coffin stood above a hole in the most holy ground this country has. The President stepped forward and nodded to me.

“Now that we are here, I would like to take this time to express a few words for my fallen friend. Doctor Harvey Wilcox Glipsen was a true American hero. From the beaches of Normandy as a young Captain to the hand-to-hand trench warfare of Capital Hill, Harvey has been on the front lines for over five decades of government service. Never asking anything for himself, but always giving the full measure of dedication and service to this nation. I personally knew Harvey and liked him very much for his wit, charm and intelligence. He never failed to bring a smile to my face.”

The President went on. I almost puked. If Harv heard all this happy horseshit he’d be laughing his ass off. He’d twisted this turkey’s tail feathers almost out of their sockets and laughed like a hyenea about it. This guy had been pushed into a corner with no place to go by Harv and was probably overjoyed he was dead. But the news crews being held at a distance were eating up the clandestine, shadow world, private ceremony with the President speaking for an old time friend that no one knew anything about or who he was or what he did. The cover story the White House released was that Harv was a super secret spook of some kind. They would try to get all the mileage they could out of this, with all the brouhaha going on about the President’s land deal down in his home State of Arkansas. The woman next to me almost bent over crying her eyes out and held on to me tighter. Bellamy looked out the corner of his eye and nodded his approval.

“Harvey Gilpsen was one of the last great heroes of this century and he will be truly missed. I would like to ask his closest friends if there is anything they would like to say.” Bellamy declined as did I. At some prearranged signal three rounds of rifle fire from seven guns filled the air. The wailing of the women next built to a fever pitch. The bugler played taps and the uniformed men came forward and took the flag, folding it, then presented the triangled banner to Bellamy. He held it to his heart for a

moment then gave it to me and I kissed it. I handed it to the woman next to me holding my arm. She clutched it to her chest and dried her tears on it. One of the other women stepped forward and knelt down in her tight black dress and four inch black high heels. She laid her hand on the casket and leaned forward to kiss the top of the box. A set of four jets screamed over and one pilot pulled out, in the famous "Missing Man Formation". The President stepped forward and helped the beautiful young woman to her feet. She leaned her head against his shoulder and touched his hand. He patted her hand and helped her back into the group with a few kind words.

Just as they started to lower the coffin, I stepped forward and motioned for them to stop. Everyone watched carefully as I pulled a bottle of beer out of my pocket and laid it on top of coffin.

"One for the road, old friend."

I stepped back and Bellamy pulled out a small box that contained a medal, which no one in the crowd could recognize. It looked like something I had never seen and put it on the coffin as well. Then they lowered the most miserable, hard drinking, womanizing, funniest, most charming, most irritating, hard to get along with, lovable bastard I had ever known, into the hallowed sacred ground of the Arlington national cemetery. The Earth that I, too, would die to defend.

Bellamy and I escorted the women down to the three waiting limos and helped them into the cars in their grief. I knew I would get the flag back, but that was between me and Harden.

As we walked up the lane, one of the President's aides joined us for a short walk.

"The President wanted to know if those ladies were relatives of Harvey's." He asked Bellamy. "The President wondered if he should have their addresses to send bereavement letters."

"They were his mistresses, son. All six of them. The best women any man could ever know. And that is not for publication, is that understood?" Bellamy turned and glared at the man, who got the message loud and clear. He moved back up the hill toward his own group.

"Ted, of all the low down dirty tricks that anyone could have played! My God, man! That was the President of the United States!" He laughed out loud. "I wish I'd thought of it!"

"I'll give you the flag for our collection on the island when Harden retrieves it for me." I said quietly while taking his arm and walking among the stones.

"Were they actresses?" Bellamy leaned toward me.

"No, they really are Harvey's mistresses. Call girls." I smiled. "The highest priced ones in New York. Harvey had expensive taste in women. Harden called them up on short notice and they all showed up this early in the morning, which is a small miracle in and of itself. They all wanted to be here to send Harv off. Of course they cost the American taxpayers about \$15,000 apiece, plus expenses, to be here. But I wasn't going to let that old son-of-a-bitch get out of this world without being represented by those he knew and loved so hard and so well." I chuckled.

"Harv would have died to see this!" He patted me on the back and actually gripped me around the neck. "Best money we've ever spent!"

Bellamy was still laughing when another figure dressed in a black suit, tie, top-coat and hat, walked up next to us.

"May I join you boys in grieving for our old friend?"

The old black man looked like he fit in very well with us misfits in his dapper tux from the 1950s.

"Dr. Rufus T. Henry!" Bellamy yelled in delighted surprise. "You are always welcome in our company. How are you, sir?"

Bellamy took his arm and the three of us walked down through the garden of the rows of sacred stones, talking about life, the universe and everything in it.



CHAPTER III

October came and went. I was Perseus battling the monstrous Kraken that had become getting the Bangor, Washington sub base online. It seemed like every two steps forward I was pushed one back, because of just stupid crap. Contractor disputes, labor issues and working on a secret naval base didn't help. The Navy was less than cooperative since they felt left out of our loop and activities, so they didn't make it easy to work around them. But I had just waited to hand them a peace offering that would change this rapidly by the first of the year.

Irina had found a place just outside of Fallon and we bought it. Pasha was enrolled in the local school and was doing fine. I found that I made it home maybe two out of five days and sometimes weekends. Irina knew the difficulties I faced, since she had been through much of the same when she had worked on building the devices. There were weeks that she had spent seven days a week in her lab pounding out the details and following up with the technicians. So I was given the latitude I needed, as we both knew this would be finished soon and I would be able to return to a normal life, whatever that was.

For months after Harvey's funeral, I had collected tabloid articles about the secret ceremony at Arlington where the Nation's leaders had gathered to plant one of the top spooks in the world. The long distance photos showed the tight knot of women that had been listed as "sexual assets" used by this spymaster to infiltrate the highest realms of foreign governments. Harden, in his usual perfection, had required every one of the women to sign a National Security Form. This meant they could never disclose why they were there, and this just heightened the media frenzy to find them and question them about their work, since after the funeral they had disappeared into the background of everyday life. A photo on the cover of one of the magazines that I especially liked was the long shot photograph of three smiling men in dark topcoats, walking through the gardens of stones at Arlington. The caption was, "New spy masters divide up the kingdom!" It was great. Irina, Pasha and the new media blitz on Harv's funeral, were the only pleasures in life I had right now.

Rufus told us what was in the silver titanium Haliburton case and why it was so important. It was a detailed analysis of all the Visitor's battleplans for the invasion of Earth. It marked out landing sites, points of infiltration and neutralization for the enemy fleet to concentrate on and, most importantly, the route they would take and the timetables for their scheduled arrival. It had been moved up, quite a bit, from our first estimates, which had no doubt been pushed back due to their defeat at Dulce, but we had absolutely no idea how far or how much time we had bought ourselves. This drove me even harder to complete the grid design I needed to test the Bug Zapper within.

Bellamy had been working with his part of the Group to set up various points where they thought our tests should be conducted first and then the ambush points along the route. He had decided to divide up our operations into two units: a defensive unit that he managed along with the MIB group and I was named head of

the offensive operations group. This made me virtually the Boss over all ground and spaced based systems used to prevent a mass landing. George was my back up and I was his. So we ended up as equals in a world where that seldom works out well. But we made it work exactly the way it was supposed to, and we were true friends united now against a common enemy.

By December, I had seven operational Zappers sitting in the basement waiting for testing and deployment. HAARP in Alaska was online and worked well to create a disruptive field of energy over half the globe. Nothing could get through it that used any kind of electromagnetic drive system. As soon as it entered the envelope, their main drive would cough and sputter off and they would free fall thousands of feet and splatter on the ground like a bug on a windshield. It did play havoc with the weather, as the conspiracy theorists conjectured, but, *cie' la vie', cie' la guerre.* Such is life, such is war.

Over the past two years I had Jack Thompson's new aerospace company hired on a huge government contract to work on designing the new ETS (Earth To Space) fighter aircraft designed to carry to new advanced THOR'S HAMMER-4-A, or just the THOR 4A. He had performed a herculean job and melded all of my desired systems into the craft we now had Lockheed Martin building, in mass, for us at the Skunk Works near Tonopah, Nevada. The folks who built the U-2, the SR-71 Black Bird and the new F-117, F-117-A and Y-A fighters that had their debut during Desert Storm. These guys were experts at building modern composite aircraft in short order and for high dollars from the taxpayers. But that hadn't mattered. I wanted fourteen of them and the first four I gave to the Navy as a bargaining chip for assistance with finally getting Bangor finished.

By February, I had a dozen admirals kicking ass and taking names around Bangor, getting my job done for me. The new aircraft used tech that no one in the Pentagon even knew we had until they saw it fly at Groom Lake and then all hell broke loose.

The Air Force Space Command Group, that was supposed to be the first line of defense in space, were breathing fire over the fact that the Navy had been given first choice of the new bird. The grumbling from DC was that we had done a dirty deal to create two organizations to provide the same service. A couple of Air Force four-star generals wanted my head on a platter and were being very vocal about it.

Bellamy had done his best to pour oil on the troubled waters, but it wasn't selling among the brass. They wanted in and there was not going to be any way they would give up their grasp for power without Presidential intervention. That was probably the last thing we could count on, I thought. I had my intelligence unit pulling everything they could to find a handhold on that slippery bastard in the White House. I had to assume that role since Harv's departure for the Great Beyond and I hadn't found anyone I could trust to do it for me. But then a little bit of information showed up that I thought might help.

I called the President and got straight through to him without the normal run around with aides.

"Yes Dr. Humphrey." He answered the phone with his normal abrasive and less than tactful business voice.

"I understand there are some problems with the Air Force over one of my new projects." I asked trying to bear in mind that this was the leader of the free world and one of the most powerful men in the world. It still didn't mean much to me.

"Well you might say that." He said in that soft whispery Southern drawl of his. "It seems like they feel that you have gone outside your purview and stuck your nose into their business." He had emphasized the 'you' in that sentence.

"I understand that. But there are certain circumstances that warrant my decision." I could play at this level of gamesmanship as well.

“Look!” The niceness wore off very quickly. “That prick Glipsen tried to blackmail me and I played along. But right now, I don’t think any of what you guys are doing is warranted. So, I am not going to even try to pull your chestnuts out of the fire. I am going to sit back and watch those self-inflated brass hats tear you a new asshole! Now what part of that don’t you understand, Humphrey? I am very well aware that you had Jim Nakamura killed and I had to live with that, but don’t think I don’t know that you guys think you can take over anytime you want! That is not going to happen!”

“You through?” I slammed the ball right back across the court at him to see how he could play his back-hand.

“What the hell does that mean?” He almost yelled into the phone.

“I would highly suggest that you pick a side and hold to it. Waffle on this one and I can promise you your days of luxury and happiness are at an end.” I read the file in front of me.

“Are threatening me, Humphrey?” He was livid.

“No. I am telling you I expect you to calm down those idiots who think they know something and I am willing to help you with a little problem of your own.” I waited, still holding my temper.

“What problem?” He was angry, but curious now.

“Angel Fire.” I spoke very softly into the phone.

“What do you know about that?” I heard the rage in his voice he was fighting mightily to contain.

“That all of the files are located in one spot, so none of your people can get to them or see them. It looks to me like you got a little problem that will blow up in your face and this administration isn’t going to survive it.” I took one sheet of paper and placed it in the fax machine on the table behind my desk and hit the special number that placed it right on his desk.

“Take a look at that document and then I would shred it if I were you.” I waited and could hear the fax working behind him. There was a two-minute pause in conversation.

“Where did you get this?” The President exploded. “I could have you disappeared, do you know that?”

“You really want to play this game? The ‘who’s got the most power’ game? I wouldn’t if I were you. You have no idea what I can do.” I was very relaxed and, in fact, I was enjoying playing Harv’s favorite game. Pin, then twist, the tail on the President.

“What does that mean?” He tried to compose himself.

“What would happen if just twenty papers like that ended up, somehow, on the desk of the editor of the New York Times. It would make Nixon look like a hero.” I laughed to myself.

“You wouldn’t dare!” He hissed into the phone.

“How far are you willing to go to prove that point, Mr. President?” I waited. Silence on the end of the phone. I waited.

“Alright! You have my attention. What do you want? If, this problem can just go away.” He was now probing to see what he could get out of it. Good. We had gotten past the obligatory penis waving and straight to “Let’s Make A Deal.”

“A confidential Executive Order establishing a multi-task force of military under our direct control with full power to make or break anyone who doesn’t toe the line. A joint space defense command, that Bellamy and I will head up.” I answered.

“And this stuff.” I heard the shredder working in his office.

“It will all just disappear.” I figured I could drop a crew into the federal building, pull all of the files out, using the one of the small devices and they would be gone, out of sight, out of mind.

“I will comply after you have proven to me they are permanently removed from view.” Trying to bluff me with a ten, a three and seven in his hand? I laughed so he could hear.

“Forget it then. Sorry I wasted your time.” I got ready to hang up.

“Wait! Hold it just a minute! If I do this, I want oversight.” He tried after looking at his hole card.

“Good luck.” I paused. “I want the order with a non-expiration clause in it and no over-ride from any future President, so I don’t have to go through this again.” I waited, gloating over my four aces.

“Alright. I will have it drafted and I will sign it before the end of the week. You will get a copy of it and so will the Joint Chiefs. But, God, they will just explode.” He was folding his hand. This was good.

“You smooth their feathers or fire them, I really don’t care.” I thought for a minute and then added. “By the end of April the problem will be handled.” I hung up and sat back. If that man could get to me he would surely have me killed like everyone else he had problems with. The press even coined the term “Arkansas Suicide” for all his associates that had woken up dead.

I got back to work. Putting the file aside, I needed to get a team together and prepare them for the time jump and retrieval.



CHAPTER 112

The firestorm in Washington was still raging. I got the jump retrieval team assembled and we were getting ready to make the jump, but we had put it off to the end of April because of some logistics we needed to iron out. That's when Bill Stewart, who had been with me for a year, stepped into my office.

Saying nothing, he opened up the cabinet where I kept the TV. He switched it on and we watched a reporter standing in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

"What we know right now is that a lone bomber has destroyed the Murray Building killing scores of people. A truck bomb exploded this morning and authorities are searching to locate the person or persons responsible for this cruel and hideous action."

I turned it off and sat down at my desk.

"I guess this kinda ends our little raiding party doesn't it?" He had been aiding me in the planning of our snatch and grab as we like to call it.

"Looks like someone saved us the effort. From that picture, he hit the spot we were planning to be in." I thought about synchronicity of events on the timeline and wondered if someone else had decided to aid or help. It was too close for comfort for me.

I already had the Executive Order in hand and the first meeting was planned for next month with the command staff from the military. So no one was going to try and back pedal, especial in light of the bomb blast that ripped a building apart. I think the man in that rented house in DC would be quaking in his boots right about now. He would never believe we'd be that open and brazen to do the job. But if we did do this, he would know that I wouldn't hesitate to commit to the same kind of action if he didn't play ball with me. I was convinced he would not want another phone call like the last one.

I went back to work and set the working file on Angel Fire to one side of my desk. I wouldn't be need that one any more.

Bellamy called in the afternoon, late. "A little messy, don't you think?" His opening lines.

"It did the job for us, didn't it?" I gave up nothing.

"Yeah. Well, I have had one call after another from insiders wanting to make sure we know they are with us, totally, 100%. I have talked to six Senators, fifteen Congressmen and a half of a dozen heads of states. For some reason they all think that one of us is crazy, so they called me." Bellamy was being his direct self as always.

"You want me to tell you it wasn't me?" I asked feeling annoyed and trying to get rid of a headache.

"Hell no!" He paused. "I don't care if you did it or didn't do it. It got us some in roads right now to folks that don't want to be on our bad side, I will tell you that much."

“Is there any chance of pulling Jack Thompson back in with us?” I had been working through the joint operations list and needed someone I could trust to head it up.

“Funny you should ask. I had a similar feeling. What do you think about giving him a three star rank and making it public.” Bellamy was right there. “The new Hemispherical Space Command, representing all branches of the services?”

“Make it happen, George. He knows the game and won’t get lost in all the bullshit. Hell, give him four stars if he needs them. I want that group operational in less than a year.” I hung up without another word. I wanted to head home and see Irina and Pasha. I felt very tired.



CHAPTER 113

When I pulled into the driveway, Pasha was riding her horse and Irina was watching her. She ran over and wrapped herself around me.

"I am so glad to see you." She looked up and kissed me.

As I stood there, realizing how much I loved her and our daughter, I pushed my world away from me and wanted to just get lost in her eyes.

"I wanted to see you two in the daylight for a change. Crawling in bed at ten at night and leaving at five in the morning doesn't seem like a life to me right now." I waved at our daughter riding around the paddock.

"She understands and so do I. But it is good to have you here. Oh! Let me show you the bunnies." We strolled over to the hutches she had bought and pulled out one of the little rabbits and held it to her chest. I rubbed its fur and the little critter snapped at me.

"He's a biter. That will make him a good breeder when he is older. The dominant male." She laughed as I pulled my hand back quickly.

We had a split level, modern ranch-type home, that had all the luxuries Irina had never expected to have in her lifetime. Ten acres of fenced grounds and a barn, two dogs and a couple of indoor cats that were very aware this was their home and that I was the interloper they had to barely tolerate.

Irina brought over a letter from the table and handed it to me as I fell into the large leather recliner in the living room. It was from Oxford University.

"Our daughter graduates high school this year and we need to think about her future as well. She's been accepted into the arts program." Irina was beaming and I just felt old. I read the letter and saw she'd been given a complete scholarship for the five-year program. "They looked at her works and immediately granted entrance. Isn't that wonderful?"

I didn't know what to say. It had just seemed like yesterday I started at USC and now my own daughter was getting ready to go to college. I found myself feeling sorry for the years I missed out on her life.

"Oxford is a long way from us. Don't you think we could find a school a littler closer?" It sounded so feeble and selfish I couldn't believe I was saying it, but Irina's eyes never missed a thing when she looked into me.

"Let's see, Clark County Community College or Oxford University?" She acted like she was balancing something in her two hands. "Besides, when we visit her there, we can just head on to Russia and see my mother."

"They won't let you in will they?" I was puzzled by her joke, not realizing it was just that.

"It isn't the getting in that's hard, Ted." She laughed. She took the letter and headed off for the kitchen to do something.

"Never is. Is it?" I said to myself. "It's always the getting out that's the problem." I leaned back and drifted into sleep before I knew it.

I was home and felt safe around my family.

I awoke about three in the morning. Irina had placed a light blanket over me and she was sleeping on the couch next to me. My pager was vibrating on my belt as I sat up. She stirred then went back to sleep as I padded softly across the living room in my stocking feet to my small home office.

I called the "Panic" number at Jacobs and they patched me through to the monitoring station in the Caymans. Jamison answered the scrambler.

"Boss, we got a situation." I heard his clipped and perfect words on the line, tinged with his Scottish brogue.

"Go." I responded according to my own established protocol.

"Bellamy is out for the count. The heads of each section have been notified. Sao Paolo has the baby. The senior members of the Group just got off the video-conference. You were the subject of it and no one wanted to call you until Boss One's last request was fulfilled." I could hear the pain in his voice. "Confirmed and approved as of this date, 0931 universal time, Dr. Theodore Humphrey, Jr., you are now the head of the Group, and your new call sign is Boss One." Jamison stopped talking, choked with emotion.

"Jami, I am truly sorry." He had been with Bellamy as long as I could remember, his absolute right hand.

"It was quick. He knew something. He had left detailed orders, which I was required to follow. There was no slight intended, sir." Still the ever dutiful soldier.

"None taken. What arrangements?" I didn't want to go to another funeral, but I knew I had too.

"Already done. Cremated today. No services. His wishes. What are my orders, Boss?"

I was stunned. I had expected to see this whole thing through with him to the bitter end. I had never expected him to cash out his chips and leave me in this game alone. I felt suddenly lost, but knew only too well that I had to push that emotion way down deep inside of me.

"Hold the fort. I will be there as soon as I can. Do you know if George talked to Jack?"

"General Thompson is en route as we speak to assume temporary handling of the station until you designate a successor and approve the recommendations that..." he paused trying make sure he said it correctly, "Dr. Bellamy left behind."

"Thank you, Jami. I shall be in route very soon. I want a full video conference set up when I get there with the Group members." I waited for acknowledgment.

"Sir." The phone went dead. I hung up and walked back into the living room. Irina was awake and a light turned on next to the couch illuminated her sleepy face.

"Is everything alright, Ted." She asked, knowing it wasn't.

"No. George just died. I need to head to the Cayman's." I sat back down and pulled on my shoes.

"Does that mean you are now the..." She worked through her words. "The head of the agency?"

"That looks like the size of it. They met and confirmed it a couple of hours ago. New call sign Boss One." I grimaced.

"What can I do to help?" She wrapped the blanket around her.

"You may have to take over Jacobs for me. I know that is a lot to ask right now, but it may be required. I need someone I can trust with my life." I reached over and held her hand and squeezed it.

"If you need me, you know I am there. Does this effect the time table?" She started to think like a scientist again and not a rabbit farmer.

"Not much, it just means I have to cover a couple of desks until I can find people I can trust and work with while we finish up the project." I got up and looked for my keys.

“Let me call security at the base. You can’t be alone now.” She walked into the kitchen and made a call. I heard a drawer open and close as well. She came back holding the two guns we had with us some many years ago on Mount Grace. She handed me one. My old trusty Walther PPK.

“It’s still clean and works well. Put it on and don’t take it off, for Pasha and my sake.” I nodded agreement and pushed it in my belt. I hadn’t worn one in a few years and felt somehow uncomfortable carrying one again. I didn’t like the idea of using it, but at this point, I would be the one in the crosshairs of every one’s scope. I waited for the security escort to arrive and then kissed her good-bye after looking in to see Pasha sleeping in her bed.

I hoped she was going to like Art School in England and I was determined to make sure that school was there when she was ready to go to it.



CHAPTER 114

It took me almost twenty hours to arrange for my departure from Jacobs and get The Big Bird to come to pick me up, then the whole thing about passing through time zones heading east. I landed in the evening at the private strip on the Caymans with my three plane military escort that Jack had arranged to fly chase and pace over me. As we rolled to a halt Jamison was standing next to the ramp beside an open Jeep dressed in his jumpsuit, with a sidearm at the ready.

“Boss.” He walked up and I greeted him. I held his hand for a little longer than normal and then threw an arm around him, patting him on the back. We got into the Jeep and started to slowly drive up to the mountain to the monitoring station.

“How long were you with Bellamy?” I asked looking at all the new lights twinkling on the island in the distance.

“Twenty-seven years, since I graduated from Sandhurst in England and finished SAS training.” He moved through the gates and just nodded at the sentries, it didn’t seem like anyone was willing to check my papers anymore.

“Any family back home? Wife, lover, anything like that?” I knew I was prying, but I had my reasons.

“Nah, me mum she died a few years back and I got an older sister, but she and I never talk. She is only a half sister by some bloke my mum had an affair with before she married me dad.” He worked up toward the top of the island and the view, even at night was spectacular.

“Any plans? Retirement? You going to open that dirt bike shop in Dorset you always talked about?” I had heard that story more than once.

“A good plan, but I would be dealing with civilians and that isn’t my cup of tea really. Don’t know right now. Kinda at loose ends, if you know what I mean.” He pulled into the complex parking area. “I’ll get your bags.” He jumped out and grabbed them for me.

“Put those down.” He did and stood looking at me. “Could you serve me, the way you did George?”

“Oh Boss, that is a tall order. Don’t know if I’m the man you need. I am older and not the soldier I once was.” He was being modest to say the least. He still didn’t have a pound of fat on him and I wouldn’t have wanted to try to race him in a hundred yard dash, because I would have lost hands down.

“I need someone I can trust without question standing behind me. If you want it the job is yours.” I waited, letting him think about it.

“You sure, Boss?” He looked really hard at me.

“If you are half as loyal to me as you were to George Bellamy, I will be a happy man, knowing I got you and your boys at my back.” I told him.

“Boss I don’t do nothing in half measures. If I work for you, you got me one hundred and ten percent. The boys as well. We all thought we would be disbanded and end up as doormen for belching civilians at the Savoy.” Jamison actually tried to smile. It didn’t work well on him.

“New call sign, Black Guard One. Note it in the log and descend the numbers to cover the lads. You lads are now with me, full time. Anybody wants out, now is the time, otherwise this one is for the duration.” I told him and picked up my briefcase. “And get some shave tail kid to carry my bags. It is not fitting for a full bird colonel to be a bell hop for Christ sakes.”

“Sir.” He yelled at one the men next to the doorway that was on the run toward us. “Get the Boss’s stuff into his room in the Station and post a guard by his room, 24/7.” The man was flying carrying my two bags.

“With me, Colonel” I walked into the station and started yet another page in my life.

* * * * *

Jamison put on a headset and flipped a switch in Studio Control.

“Gentlemen, Boss One is now on station.” The men on the floor turned and looked at me. Before long, there was slow applause coming in over the speakers, which built into a standing ovation. I recognized a couple of them from being here before. I held up my hands and motioned for silence. I picked up my headset and sat down slowly in Bellamy’s spot. Jamison stood behind me.

“Thank you, gentlemen. Please! Note the duty log. There is a controller in the room.”

I was interrupted by a voice on the ICU. “Log noted. Boss One is online and functioning.”

“Sao Paolo here. Noted and welcome. Jo’Berg ditto. London Center confirms and logged. Madras logged and welcome.” The speakers went silent.

“I won’t say anything about our loss. We all have feelings best kept to ourselves. Note for log,” I paused and turned to Jamison, holding my hand over the mouthpiece on the head set. “What the hell is your first name?”

He blushed and squirmed for a second or two. “Percy.”

“Your mom hate you or something?” He laughed.

“It was her dad’s name, sir.” He was still blushing.

“Colonel Percy Jamison is now assistant director of security and goes by the call sign Black Guard One. Note it and log it.” I flipped the transmit switch.

“Noted Boss One.” The recorder called out.

“Ops, tell me the present situation, near space and deep space.” I hit the button again and motioned for Jamison to take a set next to me. He reluctantly complied working the screens that I was unfamiliar with.

“Ops, Boss. Near space is zero, I repeat, zero unknown activity. Deep space monitors have one ripple. Something out there is moving around the outside edge of a rip. Nothing coming through, only gravity waves showing at this time on satellite relays.”

“Control, read me the board.” I called out. Control was the center position on the floor below me. The man in charge was Red Carlton. He had been here for years and was the general unity player who could pick up any slack on the floor.

“The board is green Boss. No actions.”

“Got it. Sao Paolo you still online and holding the baby?” I waited for the satellite relay to make connections.

“We are here and holding. Boss Four here, Ted. It’s Sanchez.”

“Good to hear your voice Don Padre. I need to confirm: are you ready?” I hit the switch and watched everyone on the floor hustling like they hadn’t expected this activity in the first few minutes of my arrival.

“Holding for confirms.”

"I need two confirms, one from Sao Paolo and One from another station in the link."

"Jo'berg is online and awaiting confirm. Ted, this is Angus." The voice was heavy with an Afrikaaner accent.

"Is Devilles with you?" I hit the transmit button again.

"Right here, Ted."

"Make it three confirms, log." I switched to the internal communications in the facility for a minute.

"Got it Boss One." The logger noted.

"Carlton, Boss Two this station. Wilkinson, Boss Three this station." I flipped and sat back.

Jamison whistled through his teeth.

"Bad move, Jami?" I asked.

"Not at all, but they may all die of heart attacks on the floor. None of them were prepared for this today." He covered his mouthpiece.

"Sao Paolo confirms and consents."

"Jo'berg confirms and consents, good choice Boss One." Angus added.

"On the ICU internal. Boss Two and Boss Three get your replacement at your desk and get your butts up here, now." I flipped it off, just as Jack walked into the room in full uniform.

"Hi, pard." I never turned to look at him for more than a brief second.

"That is what I call administration on the fly. Welcome aboard and all that kind of stuff, Ted."

Jack was standing against the back wall when the other two men walked in and sat down at their respective positions. Jamison had moved back behind me, still on the auxiliary headset.

"How does it feel to have all those pretty stars back on? And so many of them!" I laughed at his new cluster of four stars on his shoulder.

"Heavy. And from what I see here, maybe premature on my part to think that you had changed." He was watching the two men adjust their headsets.

"Log, note it. It is now officially Old Home Week. Boss Two and Boss Three are on station." I turned to look at my aide now. "Jami make it clear to everyone these men are now running this show. Let the word out, and get moved down the line as fast as possible. I want bodies on them full time, bad ass gun fighters, is that clear?"

"Got it Boss. The word will be out in a minute and I will have their assistants ready for them by the time they clear the building." Jamison was already on the phone telling someone to start the process. I hit the all station alert tone and then followed up.

"All stations on the line, understand this as of right now: Our 'friends' will believe that with Boss One, Bellamy, gone we will be in disarray and vulnerable. Nothing could be further from the truth. I want Sao Paolo to hold the baby for another six, I repeat six, days. By then Two and Three should be up to speed. I want three drills a day, with all back up players on consoles, going through the motions and leads watching for screw-ups. What part of this is not understood?" I waited for answers; there were none.

"Two, lock down the facilities for the next six days, everyone there, stays. If they are not in the hole, they don't get in. Confirm and log, on my orders." I clicked off.

"You are expecting a hit?" Jack asked me.

"Wouldn't you?" I turned and pushed the red alert red button behind me on the wall.

"Thirty minutes we are going to phase one, if you need it get it and then be ready, because I am sealing this place up in twenty nine and counting." I pulled my headset off and walked outside followed by Jack and Jamison.

“What gives?” Jack asked me while pulling out a cigarette and lighting it.

“I thought you gave those things up?” I looked questioningly at him.

“I did until a week ago. When Bellamy hinted he wanted me back and then three days ago when I got the call to get a uniform out of moth balls and put these four stars on it.” He walked toward the surface exit.

“I need for you to head out to Groom Lake, collect everything you need there and see Riley, he has all the papers for you on the new Squadron. I got it based out of King’s Peak. A good facility with underground bunkers for the birds, and the best pilots I could steal from the joint command structure. But get them up to speed. Settle in and I will be there in about seven to eight days, if I don’t have to go to DC. We got a hole in us right now and somebody has to sit at Harv’s desk. The guy we have there right now is okay, but he doesn’t get the big picture. So I may be delayed. I got Irina back in harness and she is finishing up at Jacobs and whipping Bangor into shape, or at least she will be in the next couple of weeks. I want a test run ready for your guys and the Bug Zapper in less than two months.” I paused and took his cigarette and pulled a puff off it. “We need to make sure we don’t have any loose lips that are telling our buddies out there we have our pants down and doing the paperwork right now. This alert will scare the hell out of those guys in DC and they will want to run for cover for the moment. So let’s use the time to our advantage. Questions?”

“Can I use Big Bird?” He smiled at me.

“I won’t be using it for the next six days. Have it back by ten and make sure the date is home by then and still a virgin.” I slapped him on the back and let him out the side door off the hallway.

“Jamison.” I yelled, he was on the run up the hall to be at my side. “We got a couple of beers in this joint, before I snap the lid?”

“We will in about three minutes, Boss. Can I call my boys in and use the time for briefing them?” I turned and started to walk away.

“Don’t waste my time with questions like that Colonel, I got work to do.” I turned and winked at him. He was out the door, yelling into his radio as he ran.

The best way I know to get past a morbid state of bereavement is getting people busy, but this was not an act of kindness on my part.

There was a problem and I wanted to be on top of it.



CHAPTER 115

Twelve days had gone by and I'd spent hours on brutal training and scenarios in the monitoring station. Leads stood behind back ups and walked them through every conceivable scenario. Their tails and mine were dragging in the dirt. But I couldn't let up. I spent off hours on the phone with Irina having her work on my secondary problem and she had it in good order by the time I needed it.

All of this had started months before at Harv's funeral at Arlington, when Bellamy and I had spent an hour with Dr. Rufus T. Henry. He'd provided us with timetables and possible future actions. Somewhere in the flow of time, he'd been able to list the actions of those who were unfriendly towards us, and gave me an extremely detailed list. It seemed like someone was directing the 'Visitors' actions from partial information and didn't have the same source Rufus did. That much was crystal clear to me.

Bellamy was the key. When he died the Visitors were going to try to re-establish their preeminence among earthly leaders, believing we could not fill the vacuum left behind by one single man's death. It spoke to their view of collective mentality and hive operation. The few Nordic-types that ruled the small Grays used them as pawns in their expansion based plans for our world. The Grays, in their opinion, were throwaways, biologic computers that didn't function like other members of the space community. Worker bees, supporting a few drones and a queen in the hive. It made perfect sense considering what I had seen of them in action. They were totally mindless in their understanding of us as a race. Their view was simply A to B and they didn't ask why.

Rogue elements within the space community were trying to use the Earth as a bargaining chip in their bid for power and they needed us to be submissive to do that. In the forties and fifties they had found that we had no way to defend ourselves, but all of that had changed because of giants like George Bellamy and Harvey Glipsen. They had, with an unbelievable bravery and courage, set a course for returning our planet to our own control. We may burn it out or blow it up, but at least it would be by our own actions and not from some outside intruder.

I had spent the first week reading all of Bellamy's private journals. I was aware of his meetings with an alien visitor named "Zinc-Bar" and what they had discussed. ZB, as Bellamy referred to him, was a "Monitor", like Klaatu with Gort from *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, sort of a cosmic policeman, sent to this sector of the galaxy. His job was to make sure all the protocols were observed, that the playing field was kept even and that no one did anything to cause another space war out there somewhere.

It was clear from Bellamy's comments that he had been only slightly helpful and did more listening than talking. It also appeared he was someone that needed to be watched very carefully if he decided to show up again, since, towards the end of his life, Bellamy admitted that everything ZB had told was not exactly accurate. It had been flavored to suit his personal needs for the information flow to continue on all of our projects. Bellamy had, unknowingly, been one of the leaks, or at least he was at the

time I returned to The Group, and assumed leadership at The Jacobs Center. Then it dawned on Bellamy that he was being used and he shut down the communications link totally. We all have faults, and Bellamy had his, but his heart was in the right place, just some of his judgments weren't.

"Boss." Jamison was slowly raising the light level in the room with the dimmer. I had been sacked out in a chair with a blanket over me in my room, a Bellamy journal still on my lap. I looked at my watch and it was 2:21 AM in the morning, East Coast time.

"What is it?" I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes.

"Glimmer Man has shown himself." Glimmer Man was the nickname the main floor techs had given the object flitting around one of the rips in the space/time fabric. A perfect place to enter our dimension, and close enough to the outer orbit of Pluto to spit on.

"Deep Space Probe Achilles just picked up the signature of a type two craft, then it blinked offline." He said, handing me my black jump suit.

"Hubble got it yet?" I asked crawling into it and zipping it up.

"They are re-tasking the number two scope right now and will have visual by the time we hit Studio Control." Jamison held the door for me as I moved very quickly out and up the stairs for Studio Control.

I pulled on my headset and pointed to the chairs next to mine.

"They are being pulled out of bed as we speak." Jamison was on his handheld speaking quietly.

"Wilkinson is coming, but Carlson is in the infirmary under sedation for a migraine." Jamison said quietly behind me as I ran the board and checked everything.

"Call Jacobs, get Irina on the line and keep her there." I turned and spoke to him.

"Working it now, Boss" He was using the side phone.

"On the board, Jami. Next to me. I won't have time to turn." I was watching the numbers run down the screen and looking at the visual imaging coming up on the big screen on the floor.

"Look alive people, this is not a drill, I repeat, the is no drill!" The movement was incredible below me. Folks were sitting at consoles and back-ups standing two deep. It looked like the whole staff had turned out.

"Sao Paolo, are you online?" I called into the air around me.

"Were here, Control, watching the screen." It was Sanchez. The old man never slept.

"I want a confirmation from one other station, do we have a live one, inbound?" I hit the switch again.

"Confirmed and registered Control. Type two signature, full bore. This is Jo'berg"

I went to internal first as Wilkinson hit his seat and pulled himself alive, still in pajamas.

"Boss Three is on line. People turn and note. Jamison is holding Boss Two's seat until further notice."

"Logged and registered." The voice came back at me by the time I released the push to talk button.

"Boss?" Jamison covered his mouthpiece and spoke to me, with disbelief in his voice.

"Work the problems Colonel. We got a job to do here. You got Jacobs on line for me, yet?" I hit the com-link to all the other stations.

"Colonel Jamison is sitting in Boss Two's position until further notice. Confirm."

"Sao Paolo, Jo'Berg, London Center, Madras." Everyone hit their confirm switches and flooded the board with responses. My own hands were flying over the keyboard.

"I need a probable point of contact or entry?" I hit the keys on my computer that repeated the request in binary on the screens for everyone down the line to read.

"Working." I heard Ops call in and watched as three men huddled around a screen and one of them pulled out a handheld calculator.

"Jo'berg here. I make it Paris or London." I hit an automatic response key that flashed on his screen I had heard him and acknowledged his transmission.

"Same entry point. Madras to Control." I hit it again.

"Madras to Control." I hadn't recognized his call the first time so he repeated it.

"Madras, go." I listened in my earphone and hit the switch that put it on the overhead. Wilkinson almost went through the floor not expecting the sound level I had it set at.

"This signature can't be true! If it is, he needs to slow down outside the LaGrange point of Jupiter and I don't see that happening. Madras clear." I punched the button and called to the floor.

"Is he right? Is this guy a straight line shooter?" I called to no one in particular. I saw heads turn and look up at the booth.

"Boss, Ops." I listened and looked at Jamison. He shook his head that we didn't have a confirm yet.

"Go Ops."

"Madras got it before us. Angle and trajectory is saying in two minutes if he doesn't put on some brakes. He is a suicide waiting to happen."

"Registered. Sao Paolo, your assessment?" I waited knowing Sanchez would be dead on, as he always had been in the past.

"Sao Paolo Control, One Seven One." I listened and tried to remember the code. Jamison leaned over to me and spoke while holding his hand over the mouthpiece of the phone.

"Private line, circuit three, the blue one."

"Humphrey here"

"Ted, it's Sanchez."

"Don Padre, you wouldn't be calling if it wasn't a problem." My heart was dropping.

"The President is in London at a conference. No one is supposed to know. It's about the Middle East problems and they are hiding away just outside of town at a country house."

"Do you have any other good news for me?" I hit the respond key on my keyboard.

"The Vice President is somewhere in Kansas tonight. He is supposed to be at a town hall meeting and at an opening for a library tomorrow." Don Padre was speaking very fast and his words slurred, but were still clear.

"Is there anybody left in DC?" I knew the answer before I asked.

"No one in control." Don Padre's voice was now cracking.

"Boss Three, get NORAD on the hotline for me, now." I switched back to Don Padre.

"Would you be offended if I took complete control on this one?"

"Please, my friend! Let me act as your back up tonight, as always." I hung up and switched to regular COM lines.

"Studio Control to all Stations, Boss One is assuming the Conn, I repeat, Boss One has the baby. Confirm by key stroke." I watched all stations light up.

"On the floor, we got it and it is ours. Now let's work it people! Ops? Has he passed the go/no-go line?"

"Ops. La Grange passed. Speed is increasing."

"Systems! Is he on target, London?"

"Confirmed and logged, London is mark. If he changes course at this speed he will be in fly-by mode."

"Ops, give me an ETA to insertion and impact?" I held my breath.

"Insertion in thirty one minutes, impact in thirty eight minutes. Weight and type, estimate a two-hundred kiloton blast."

"Ops, start sending us data on the trajectory...NOW!" I yelled into the headset. Jamison touched my arm.

"Irina is in route to Jacobs. Taylor is her back up."

"Great. Let's see if he can do the math like she can. Send him the trajectory. I want it on line in fifteen minutes and jumping in two after that. If he doesn't, I am personally sending you out there to shoot that simple son of a bitch!" I hit the button marked in red after Wilkinson pointed to me.

"This is General Adams, NORAD control."

"Countersign. Alpha Two Four Bravo."

"Again for voice verification."

"Countersign Alpha Two Four Bravo"

"Approved. Go."

"Scramble and go to DEFCON One, now. Repeat: Def-Con One." I said as calmly as I could.

"Sir! That is a call only the President can make." He was following his orders.

"I am calling a Whiskey Overlord." Silence on the phone.

"Sir. I am not allowed to take that sign. I can't do that."

"In thirty minutes General I got two tons of non-melting metal traveling at a speed that is going to make England a big hole in the ocean. It will look like a twenty-ton nuke leveled the island. Now, are you going to call it or not?" I hated this part! Dealing with some jag-off more worried about his next star than all life on Earth as we knew it.

"I am online. This is ALICE in Looking Glass." The airborne command and control aircraft was monitoring the alert message and tones.

"Who am I talking to?" I spoke quickly while pounding on the keyboard to get the information to Jacobs.

"General Howard."

"That would be Philip Howard if I am not mistaken?" I wanted this one to work for all of us.

"You know damn good and well it is, Doc! What's happening?" I met him many times during my stay at Groom and he had been Jack's boss before he came over to us.

"I need a Whiskey Overlord, about two minutes ago." I spoke clearly and distinctly, so that the scrambler wouldn't mess up the words going on a free air uplink.

"Sequencing now." The board on the right of the console lit up like a Christmas tree. NORAD was online and running everything up the flagpole.

"Get underground, General. It won't do any good if I can't stop this guy. But they need a chance."

"Are you talking about London, that is what I am reading on my screen right now."

"You got it." I watched the message start to rapidly burst across the screens in the center downstairs. He was getting everyone in the air.

"I got full scramble from England and Germany, now what?"

"Get them the hell out of there! They won't be any good if they are caught in the EMF wave that's going to follow this hit."

"I am looking right now at the screen and deep space satellites have picked it up. Jesus, Ted! We got nothing up there to stop that thing with!" Howard's voice was crackling with static.

"Ops here, we got twenty-one and counting."

"Logged" I was offline for a minute. "God damn it." My heart was racing in my chest and I had to stop and take a breath.

"Irina!" Jamison hit my console button for me.

"Sweetie! Honey, sorry to wake you up." I waited while she screamed at someone in Russian.

"Yea ne nid em scores! Da se net is sloor!" She yelled.

"In English, baby!" I yelled back over the noise at her end.

"I've got it on track! Give me the number! Where do you want me to hit it?" Irina was sucking air at her end; she must have run from the car to the pit.

"Sending." I hit my keyboard again.

"Ops. Boss. Thompson on red line." We were jammed with calls.

"Control. This is Alice. We are starting the count down on space borne platform to intercept." I listened to him and knew as well as he did it was a wasted effort.

"Rocks off a tank Alice, but try. We are working the numbers on something else." I didn't have time to tell him.

"Ops Boss, I got the President on Blue for you, what do you want me to do?" He was on the floor jumping up and down waving a handset.

"Talk to him! Ask him how London is this time of year. I got work to do!" I hit another button.

"You ready, sweetheart?" I listened very carefully.

"Counting, seven, six, faver, farve, treba, amare! Engaged." Irina yelled, mixing Russian and English.

"Scram the screens! I repeat all: stations scram your screens." I hit the override in Studio Control and everything went offline that was looking at space.

"Holy mother of God, what is that?" I heard the open line from Alice in my ear. I waited in silence for ten seconds then lit my monitors back up.

"Give me input people." I spoke more slowly feeling the pain run down my left arm.

"Palomar in California just reported a massive explosion on the other side of Mars. So did Kitt Peak in Arizona." I heard a voice in my ear.

"Identify for logging, god damn it." I yelled again. I knew that Jamison was watching me closely. I had to keep going right now even though the pain was incredible.

"Logged."

"Sao Paolo, we are showing clear sky. I repeat" clear sky!"

"Jo'Berg, ditto."

"London center ditto."

"This is Alice, Control. May I shut down and reduce from DEFCON One?"

"Affirmative Alice and...thank you!"

"No, thank you Dr. Humphrey! I don't know what you just did, but it fried every one of my onboard sky cameras. Alice is clear and back on NORAD control channel."

"Situation to Boss One." I hit the key with my right hand.

"Go."

"We are calling the situation, I repeat; we are calling the situation. Awaiting your confirmation."

"Confirmed. Situation is clear. Sao Paolo," I took a deep breath, "please take the baby from us."

"Sao Paolo, we got it, Boss One. Good job, Ted!"

"Boss let me get a medical team in here now." I nodded and he hit his panic button on the console.

"Irina? Is the baby home safely?" I asked trying to hold it together.

"Singed but whole. Number was two of ten. I repeat: number was two of ten. Twenty percent power did the trick on the laser." Irina waited.

"I will call you back when this is over." I said trying to sound okay.

"Ted, is it over?" She sounded worried.

"Not just yet, baby. I love you. Control out."

I didn't wait. I disconnected the line and sat back as Wilkinson jumped out of his seat and looked at me.

"Earn your keep for Christ sakes and talk to the President." I pointed to the still flashing blue line.

I motioned for Jamison to help me up and get me out into the hallway. He did, reluctantly, and suddenly the hallway elongated and tilted like a circus funhouse in a bad horror movie and I heard my head crack against the wall as I hit it with my forehead as my face slid down the smooth metal ending with a dull thud on the thin carpet.

Later I learned Jamison snatched me up off the floor and carried me at a full tilt run to the infirmary.

He wasn't waiting for anyone to come to us.



CHAPTER 116

“Hold on there, Dr. Humphrey.” The young Navy doctor was pushing me back down in bed.

“I have work...to do.” I weakly glanced over at the IV tubes in my arm.

“Not just yet, not until we have a talk.” He pulled a chair next to the bed.

“Okay give it to me quick. First, how long have I been out?” I worried about Irina and the others.

“Not long. About six hours.” He took my pulse.

“Heart attack?” I asked not wanting to hear the truth.

“Not lucky enough. But it resembles a heart attack. Acute Hyper Stress. AHS. Caused by too much work, pressure and not breathing enough during periods of high anxiety. Which, I understand from Colonel Jamison, you just went through tonight.” He got up and looked into my eyes with his small flashlight. “Blood pressure came down alright, blood test shows you are in pretty good health for a man of your age. No clots, occlusions or tumors in the brain. Just pure and simple you drove yourself past the breaking point and your system decided to shut down. I have seen this before in this place.” He got up, walked over and turned the lights up a little higher. “But you need to slow up on yourself and others. I have treated a half dozen people this week for similar complains. This place is a killer if you don’t manage it right.”

“Doctor, don’t lecture me. I have a job to do.” I started to move into a sitting position.

“I understand that very well. But I just lost the last Boss around here and I don’t plan to lose another one in the near future. I was told you pulled off a near miracle tonight, but that won’t count for much if you are not here to do it again when we need you.”

He handed me a small vial of pills. “Use these when it gets really bad. They are not sedatives but an anxiety controller, that will help to regulate your system when you are running at warp ten.”

I took the pills and looked at the little orange tablets in the bottle.

“Can I get up and get going now, please.” I added for his sake.

“Sleep for about five more hours and then you are good to go. You need some rest and I am going make sure you get it.” He injected something into my arm and patted it.

“That will knock you out for a few hours and when you wake up you will feel fine.” He started to walk out and stopped. “Boss Two told me to tell you he ordered everyone to stand down and is using minimum staff at present. Said you needed to know that.” He smiled and left. I felt the drug surging through my system. I wanted to fight it but couldn’t. I drifted into a deep sleep.

* * * * *

I was walking in a garden, filled with flowers. I rubbed my hands over them and felt the pollen come off in sparkling vibrant little clouds. The fragrance was almost overpowering. I saw a stream ahead of me running down a waterfall of stones and it

bubbled as the water played frothily with the rocks to make a gentle melody. I sat down on the grass and looked into the water. I knew I had never been here before.

"Hello, Ted." I turned and saw a vibrant young black man walk up and sit down next to me in the grass.

"Rufus?" I couldn't believe my eyes.

"It's me. I like this body better when I'm here. Makes me feel younger, somehow." He laughed that big, open laugh. It was Rufus all right.

"Where are we?" I looked around and noticed the yellowish tint of the sun filtered through a haze.

"Oh this is just a place I spend some of my time. I thought you might like to join me here for a little while." He picked a flower and held it to his nose and smiled.

"This must be a dream." A thought floated up in my mind that just wouldn't come to the surface.

"No not really. It's just a state between time and worlds. This is a place that exists a long ways from your body lying in that hospital room back on Earth. But there is another part of you that is here with me." He handed me the flower.

"I don't understand." I was trying to find the reference plane in which I was working and couldn't.

"Oh, it isn't anything to concern yourself with. Mystics all over the galaxy know about it. They talk in funny terms making them sound like they are smarter or weirder than other people, but this is a transcendental state, that can be explained using quantum physics. One of these days folks will realize that and make some great leaps forward in using it. But for right now, this here place just belongs to me." He laughed and got up. "Come on along, I want to show you something."

We walked through the flowers to a small cottage and went inside. It was comfortable and modern. He motioned to a chair and then he took up a book in his hand.

"I was reading about what you did today. Very good, Ted! You showed them you got the guts and the knowledge to beat them. They won't try that again for a long time." He read down the page.

"Is that a...history book of some kind?" I was confused.

"It is, but like nothing you've ever seen. I just wanted to tell you that all of this is just about over with. All you gotta do is get through one more problem and you have done your bit for Mankind." He smiled and closed the book. "Ted, you learned something a long time ago. Now you need to remember it again. You learned that your father believed in reversals. Just remember that, reversals, and you will be alright."

"Reversals. Yes! Reversals. He did use them." I was speaking and being shaken at the same time.

"Boss! Wake up, you're dreaming." Jamison stood over me looking down. "You okay? The doctor said I could wake you up and get you going again." He looked worried.

"I just met a middle aged woman, about twenty-one, and she had just said yes, damn it all!" I awakened fully and looked around. It was the same sterile hospital room I had been in a few hours ago.

"I will remember to tell the other Dr. Humphrey about that." He helped me to my feet and I started to come back to this world and this way of life.



CHAPTER 117

I spent the next few days working out the last few problems with the personnel and then decided they could handle the day-by-day operations. I re-established the one-day-on and three-days-off sequence so everyone on every station could have some kind of normal lives again.

Jamison, two of his boys and I, all headed back to DC. I knew I had to clean up the desk that Harv used to sit at and find someone that could truly handle it. I wasn't ready yet to give Carlson and Wilkinson full admittance into the Group, but left them as temporary acting Bosses. I figured that after several months we, as a group, would re-evaluate their performance and see if they had the right stuff to make full-fledged members. They didn't know about all the other stuff we did, technically or politically, and I wanted to leave it that way. Don Padre Sanchez in Sao Paulo had agreed with me, as did the guys at the other stations, but still it gave us operational capacity at the Cayman Station in case of another incident.

I had half a dozen conference calls with Irina and her group at Jacobs and we went through all of the procedures and made some improvements if we needed a rapid launch of the Bug Zapper again.

It had worked perfectly, delivering a deathblow to the incoming ship and had only suffered minor burns in the process. Next time, I knew we'd crank the power setting up higher and stand off at more of a distance to do the job.

The device at Jacobs had performed its function perfectly, teleporting the unit in real time from one spot to another. We still hadn't tried it yet for a time jump and that was sitting on my list of things that needed doing and testing. But I wanted to be there when we pulsed that one.

To my amazement Jamison was like a walking computer, along with all of his other skills sets. He could call up a phone number, a record from the file and names at random without ever referring to any notes. It was total re-call by some near-photographic memory. If he had read it or seen it, he had it in his head somewhere. This became indispensable to me in the next few weeks in Washington. Having him with me was like still possessing a large piece of Bellamy. I had talked to Don Padre on the side and confirmed that Jamison should be included on the active list of the Group and received full conferment to do that action. Jamison was now totally one of us and he rose to the occasion. He was not only an excellent soldier, but unequaled at administration and had a very strong grasp on all of the technical details surrounding the Group's activities.

Within a very short period of time, he was becoming my right hand. For that I was truly grateful, as it didn't seem so lonely where I was now. We had sent the current occupant of Harv's desk on a road trip to conduct evaluations of needed equipment. General Thompson got him out of the picture with a wink and a nod between Jamison and myself that he would get a posting someplace far from the center and be used at a level more fitting to his personality.

Jamison had arranged for a floor of apartments for all of us on 30th Street, about a half mile from the Old Executive Office Building, which had its own internal security

and because several Senators lived in the building they had Secret Service checking it every half hour or so.

It was modern, nice and had a great view of the city.

My days were spent in the conference center on the video units, talking to Irina or Jack or a half dozen other people who were all trying really hard to finish up the major programs and minor projects that needed to be in place before the first series of test runs commenced next year.

The details mounted up to a mountain of paperwork, tens of millions of bytes on the computer screens and a phone permanently hooked to my head. From six in the morning to nine at night, I sat in Harv's old chair and played at being an administrator and head of the most powerful group of men in the world. Just to protect our investments and personnel in various locations and to keep our profile below the surface, I had to deal with toppling governments in South America, buying off news organizations, covering up for stupid mistakes and all the time trying to manage the world's most secret projects. The leaves on my desk calendar keep being torn off and I had little time for my family or myself for that matter.

I had expanded our office space to eight instead of three rooms to make room for Jamison and his boys. The guys at GAO started to raise hell but were soon quieted down by the man across the street in the White House.

It had been three months since the night of the "incident" when Jamison stuck his head into my office and waited for me to look up from my mountain of files.

"Boss, you got a visitor." He said very quietly.

I looked at him after looking at my appointment book and shrugged not understanding who would be here.

"The President wants to see you." He said, still in a hushed tone.

"Christ, Jami! What? I don't have time go all the way over there! Tell that..."

Jamison stopped me just in time. "No! He's here." He opened the door and stepped back to let the tall man walk into the room.

"Ted, thank you for seeing me." He came in and sat down after shaking my hand.

"Mr. President. To what do I own this honor?" I couldn't imagine what he wanted.

I noticed the milling men standing outside the office and knew his Secret Service detachment was out there. Jamison had his boys guarding the door to protect their investment and meal ticket, namely, me.

"Well, I think we got off on the wrong feet originally and I hadn't seen you at any of our briefings in the Situation Room." He said in that charming, whispery Arkansas drawl. "Harv used to show up now and then to just check in and I was hoping you would pick up that habit as well. I would like to know what my people are doing." I let it pass. He was trying to make an implication that we somehow worked for him, but we both knew differently and there was no reason to antagonize him by stating the obvious.

"I get the reports every morning and I haven't really seen anything you need our expertise with right now." I played along, but still found I didn't like being in the same room with him.

"Well, Clifford, my aide, told me, that the Senator from the State of Washington is raising all kinds of hell in committee meetings that the work being done at Bangor is being contracted outside Washington State, and she wants to know why. It's causing us some problems with one of our bills that we really need to get through. She's telling some folks she is going to hold up the bill, if we don't start handing out some contracts to her folks up there." He pulled out a cigar, lit up and sat back, blowing smoke up towards the ceiling. I raised my hands as though I didn't understand what he wanted from us. I did, but he needed to spell it out.

"Come on, Ted! Help us out on this one. You saved our ass in England otherwise that school boy would be running the country. I can't say I approved of your handling of those other files, but it got it off the screen as sure as hell. I need another favor. Besides, that operation up there is yours and you guys can afford to be a little helpful. I got a re-election campaign in full swing and I need all of the support I can get right now." He puffed away.

I hit the button on my console. Jami walked in and stood at attention, his normal form when anyone was present in my office.

"Sit down, Colonel." I motioned to the couch.

"I don't think I know you." The President stood and extended his hand. Jami shook it and sat down without saying anything. He looked hard and professional.

"Colonel P.W. Jamison. SAS commander and a senior member of the Group." I waited for the full effect of the statement to sink in.

"Were using British officers?" The President was actually thrown by this one.

"Scottish, sir. But, yes, I served in the British military." Jamison corrected.

It was the comment about "Senior Member of the Group" that made the politician's cunning eyes narrow. It was one thing to have American scientists and Generals calling the shots, but to have a British, or Scottish, Senior Member was something he was not prepared for.

"Which bill?" I picked up my pen.

"What?" The President looked back at me, not sure of what I meant.

"The bill you are having problems with and want to get through the Senate?"

"The United Nations Supported Bio-sphere bill. It will set aside areas of biodiversity for future generations." He was concentrating again on the subject, but had noted that he needed to find out something about Jami. I thought, good luck. The man didn't exist on paper anywhere, except inside files I controlled, and that was the way it was going to stay.

"Harold..." I couldn't remember the Senator's name on the committee and I snapped my fingers.

"I know the one, Boss." Jami answered.

"Call him and have him push the bill through today. Get it to the floor and have Lacture push it through without delay by tonight. Have them re-arrange their schedules. Then ask Poppy to leak the information to the Washington Post that the President was instrumental in getting the compromised and expanded version approved, over conservative's desire to use something as good as this bill as a political tool to further their cause of obstructionism." I rattled off.

"I think I can tone it down a little, but yes. I will have it done within the hour." Jamison got up and nodded curtly to the President and left.

The President looked dumbfounded and put his cigar into my glass ashtray. He sat for a minute and looked at me.

"That's it? You tell your aide to do that, and it get's done?"

"He is not my aide." I said bristling. "He is my equal. And yes; that is the way I do things." I was really getting bored with this guy's over inflated delusions of self-importance.

"Who exactly in the government do you guys work for? I know I have a pretty thick file on your little 'Group'." He said with his slight southern drawl, implying he didn't care for us, fully. "But all it tells me, is that I can't touch you guys. What exactly is your purview in all of this?"

"Need to know basis, sir. And you are not on that list." I had to throw that punch. I just couldn't help myself. I knew he had asked to know two things when he became President: what really happened at Roswell in 1947, and who shot his boyhood hero John F. Kennedy. He was told the same thing I was telling him now. That he was just a temporary public servant; he did not need to know, and that his clearance and

classification levels were not high enough. I know it pissed him off then and I knew it would piss him off now.

"You listen to me you cocksucking son of a bitch!" He leaned forward ominously, squinting his eyes and pointing his thumb over his clenched fist at me. "I am the President of the United fucking States, and I am not used to being spoken to like this by some science geek that holds a degree and builds toys at the taxpayer's expense." He was getting into his famous state of rage, trying to prove who the better man in the room was.

I tossed a file in front of him with the photographs in it of him and a certain Presidential aide. All in glorious *film noir* black and white pulled off his own security cameras inside the White House. It showed the entire deed, stained blue dress and all. And, my God, I smiled to myself; he had rotten taste in women. I gave him a moment to peruse the file, watched his face go purple as he turned apoplectic with sheer unadulterated rage, then I let him have it.

"I have worked with nine Presidents, three Prime Ministers, seven dictators of the Soviet Union, twenty despots in third world countries and one ex-wife. I don't plan to explain to you now or ever what it is that I do or what the Group does. You are over there," I pointed toward the White House, "for a very short period of time. But like every other man that has sat in this office, I will be here and doing what I must do, and you will live with it and not interfere. That is the short version. Most people who assume power understand we are here, to make sure the power structure that is in place, and which you are temporarily part of, survives." I waited for his reaction. He was still holding the file and looking at the pictures that no one would want to have their voters see.

"And I guess you are threatening to give these to the press?" He smirked, thinking that was no threat at all.

"No." I said, and paused for effect. "To your wife."

The smirk melted away, and a brief look of sheer terror crossed his face. It took awhile for him to finally regain his composure, but I had driven in the dagger far enough and twisted it on a bone. He got the point. "You are a lot worse than I was made to believe by Harvey, aren't you?" He looked up at me and closed the file, laying it back on my desk.

"I run this organization. I report to no one but me. If anything were to happen to me, or that man out there, two thousand like him will paint a mural on the walls of the White House in blood, and no one could stop them. I have five-star generals that just say 'yes sir' to me. I have foreign leaders who will kill their own populations if I tell them to. I control the most awesome weapons arsenal this world has ever seen. You saw an example of that when you were in England. That wasn't the Air Force that saved your ass, or the Navy, the Army, the Marines or the Girl Scouts. That was me. Me and the men that stand with me. If you think I am worse than you believed, you have no idea of the reality.

"I don't like you as a person, and I think you are an awful human being. But right now I have no beef with you," I leaned into him for menace and effect, "and believe you me, you do not want to have a beef with me. It is my job to protect you and the rest of this planet. So you should work on your re-election campaign and go about your business in a quiet and dignified manner. You are, after all, the *fucking* President...and I mean that in the most literal sense, although by your antics and behavior, you have no respect whatsoever for your office, the people around you, our country or this world for that matter. But that is not my business. So, you bang as many interns on your desk as you like. That is your business. I won't interfere with you. But I am warning you, *sir*... you make one more trip over here like this and try to play some kind of brinkmanship game with me and you will be on the lecture circuit hocking

your book, explaining what it's like to be a one term President so fast it'll make your dick twist to the right."

I sat back and looked at him across the table, then added. "You want to call my bluff, go ahead. I will show you what power really is."

He leaned back, put his tongue in his cheek and that evil Cheshire cat grin came over his face again. "You are just a little man, in a little office who does not have any idea what I am capable of, you..."

I hit the button on the intercom. A mechanical sounding voice came online.

"Awaiting your orders, Mr. Director."

"Take down the main NORAD communications system grid for one minute. On my mark." The shit-eating grin slid from the President's face. "Mark." I released the button.

Buzzing phones and a panicked bustle began in my outer office. Ten seconds later a knock came on the door and one of the Secret Service men rushed in.

"Ah, Mr. President? I just received a call that all of our strategic defense systems just went off-line."

The President didn't blink, and continued to stare right at me, his eyes narrowing. "Where?"

"World-wide, sir. I think you need to get back to the White House stat, Mr. President!" The man had his hand on his gun in the holster attached to his belt.

The President waved like Caligula dismissing a slave. "Wait outside." The Secret Service man looked confused, but did as he was told. "Point made. Well played. I don't think I like you much either, Dr. Humphrey. I don't think you are good for this country." He was still trying to get some parity, even though we both knew he'd lost all the chips in front of him, and the ranch to boot, on that last hand. Jamison walked in and stood, waiting.

"Yes, Colonel?" I asked him.

"The bill is out of committee and heading to the floor of the Senate. It should take about an hour, with some posturing, but it will pass by three and the Senate Majority Leader would like a photo opportunity over at the White House with the President as he signs the bill into law." Jamison looked at his watch.

"If there is nothing else then, Mr. President, have a nice day. Colonel, if you would be so kind as to show the President out." I never got up, or looked up, as I started working through the papers on my desk again. The tall, bulky man walked outside and smiled for everyone and went down the hallway toward the elevator. Jamison came back in and sat down.

"Did you listen in?" I smiled at him.

"Jerk. The guys needs to be whacked just on principle, you know that don't you?" Jamison almost spit his words out.

"Oh, we won't need to do a thing. In time he will hang himself. The next three or four years he will be ass deep in problems."

I pointed at the file and Jamison looked at it for the first time with a big grin.

"Cute little gal, ain't she?" Jamison snorted, taking far too long reviewing the documents and I laughed out loud at the Scottish taste in women.



CHAPTER 118

It had taken another three and half months to get the DC office running again smoothly. I hadn't realized what an effect Harv had on the operations. The man must have been working twenty hours a day. There was no wonder why, when he went on trips, he drank like a fish and ate like a horse. I had actually lost weight while in DC. I couldn't stand that much take-out and not one of us that lived in the apartments could cook worth a damn.

I had started to search for a new director for the Washington office as soon as I had arrived and found that one of Jamison's boys was a good candidate. Robert Mitchell-Hedges, a distant cousin of the great adventurer of the twenties and thirties in Central America who had discovered the famed Crystal Skull. He had graduated with honors and a double major from Oxford, then went on to Sandhurst and received his commission. He was a Major who served a stint in Northern Ireland and then been picked up by Bellamy. We called them "The Lads", but Bob, as everyone called him to his own disapproval, was almost forty, well educated, charming and tough. After a long and formal review, Jamison and I decided he would serve as the director for the Group in DC without being made part of the inner circle, at least not just yet.

I spent a lot of time on conference calls between Jacobs and the new base at King's Peak under Jack's management. It was time for a full-blown conference and we needed all the players in place. I decided we should meet at the new facility at Bangor to get the guided tour and use the new conference room. It was a logistical nightmare so I reluctantly moved it back to Jacobs and decided I would head up to Bangor and witness the first jump from there, when we were ready and let that suffice. I didn't have any desire to be buried alive again under the desert at Fallon, Nevada. But some things we just can't control in our lives.

* * * * *

The conference room was set up for about twenty-five people. Other members of the Group would be on closed circuit video links and have the ability to ask questions and receive answers.

I had taken the Silver Case File, as it was now known among some of us, and compiled it into a detailed report that was given to everyone before the conference with all the calculations that Metrics Division had done on it. Everything seemed ready and so was I.

Irina and I drove in together with Jamison and one of his lads in a car behind us. They had used the spare bedroom in our house the night before and actually had a good home cooked meal Irina had made. I believed that, if I would have let them, they would have moved in permanently just for the food.

"We need to get to the photographers by five. He is working late for us and Pasha wants you and I in one of her pictures in her graduation gown." Irina said and I

stopped in the hallway. “I know, I know! Your future is my past. I have never shown her that picture. It is safely locked up.” We continued on and I was silent.

The room was filled with white-coated men and women, all with clipboards and files under their arms. Jack Thompson was there in a summer uniform with two aides. Jamison and I looked so out of place in our three-piece suits. I felt like a geek among real scientists.

I was actually embarrassed at the applause as I walked into the conference room and motioned for them to stop, which they didn’t. “Alright, enough already. No one is getting a raise, except my wife.” Good-natured boos filled the room.

“As most of you know, this has been a long uphill road and we are only here today because of a lot of hard work on your part and those that have come before us. This project doesn’t belong to any one single person. It would have never happened if a lot of folks hadn’t given their all and some of us here today, have given much more than duty calls for.” I motioned to Jack who nodded to me, as did Irina. “I never liked those long winded guys that give political speeches, but I have become one of them and that is just too bad, because I have spent thirty years getting ready to make this speech and all of you are going to listen to it and you are going to enjoy it. That is an order.” They laughed and clapped.

I let the room settle down and then motioned to all of them with a gesture of my hand. “Good work, folks. The future will probably never know what you have done here. But those of us that do, will never forget.” I paused and everyone was silent. “I would like to ask Dr. Irina Humphrey to conduct the briefing.” I gestured for her to get up and she had to deal with the applause now.

“I will try to do this without reverting to my native tongue.” She blushed.

“No way, you can’t do it.” One of the scientists said out loud to the hoots and howls of the rest of them. “Especially the part about my ancestry and my mothers sexual preferences.” Again hoots. I had known that when Irina was mad, the language she used would have frightened a sailor in her native Russian.

She waved them into silence. “All right! Let’s get down to business.” She pulled out her black frame horn rimmed glasses and stepped to the podium and started the display on the screen that dropped down from the ceiling as the lights dimmed. “We have all the components of the Project: Tempus Fugit jump system, and the Time Runner, in place. We have not yet tried it, but we plan to this month. We have worked out all of the bugs for a standard jump that we can accomplish anywhere within local space, without a time drag at all. But deep space is still a new adventure for all of us. The Bug Zapper is working perfectly and we have made three test jumps with it and one operational one.” She paused reading her notes. Everyone was aware we had taken out a planet killer with the ease of swatting a fly and they all thought that had proven the system beyond anyone’s expectations.

“We’re well aware that we now can make a jump without creating another rip in the time and space continuum of local space. If the calculations are correct, we should be able to start shutting up what we have been calling ‘holes’, for all these years.” She paused and took a drink of water.

“We have been able to detect six of them. Only three are currently usable for the ‘Visitors’ to drop through. Otherwise, they have a long trip and no one thinks that they are going to make it, without the holes. We plan to close the three major rips first and then the minor ones after that. That is step one. Step two is the deployment of the first monitor on this course line.” She used her laser marker to point to the chart projection and showed it in relationship to the Earth, which seemed like a long way out there. “The monitor will only deploy for a few seconds and its function is to see how much of a trail is left behind by the supposed fleet of invaders. From that Metrics can determine approximately how many craft are heading in our direction, without them picking up the unit on their sensory arrays.” She paused. “We hope.

“After we have laid in the plots to their exact course we can start sending intercept units to destroy as many of their ships as possible and hopefully dissuaded them from continuing on their course with designs on us. If all of this goes off without a hitch, we should be done with the offensive portion of our mission, in two years.” She looked up over her glasses for questions. One of the scientists raised his hand.

“And if the Bug Zapper doesn’t do the trick?”

Jack stood up. “Dr. Humphrey, if I may?”

“Go ahead, General Thompson.” Irina sat down for a moment.

“The Xerxes ETS Unit is fully operational and by the time their fleet could be nearing our solar system I will have fifty-one ships that will be able to discourage them in force. We aren’t the frontline. You good people are, but the other Dr. Humphrey up on stage has made sure we have a backup and a fail-safe.” Jack sat back down.

Everyone had read the briefing paper and knew that the Xerxes was able to handle anything that came into the atmosphere for the last year and had proven it a few times. We had other plans to build bigger ships with greater weapons capacity, but I didn’t even want to think about that just yet.

“Anything else? No?” She stepped away and motioned for me to come back to the rostrum.

“Alright. I would like to see the first test in sealing the space/time rift on Friday. I will be in Bangor, Washington to make sure those folks are back up to speed. Good work people! Now let’s go have a drink! They’re all on me tonight!”

I’d arranged a reception in one of the other conference rooms and Jamison had made the arrangements with the base kitchen to do up something special for all of them. It was an awesome five star spread. They needed a party.

So did I, but not yet.

I had one more problem to deal with.



CHAPTER 119

After having my photograph taken with my daughter and Irina for Pasha's high school graduation, Jamison and I were on the Big Bird heading for the bucolic landscape of the Bremerton National Airport, the closest long strip that could handle our aircraft. It was a thirty-minute drive from there up to the Bangor Sub Base and the new facility, hiding back in the woods.

The facility was finished well and everything was working in good order. It had a small team of technicians and scientists that had been there since the start. They had a laid back attitude that pretty much fit the land around them, filled with evergreens and water. Tennis shoes and open collars were the dress code of the place, so they would blend into the surroundings on the naval base.

Bill Lancaster headed up the team, who was an old timer that had worked for me at Groom years before. It was good to see him as he took Jamison and I on the \$2.00 tour. I might have paid for this place, but it was his baby and he was proud of it.

After meeting the people and seeing all the controls and overrides in the system and actually looking at the pit and the gadget in it, I was convinced we were ready. I asked Bill to use an office to make sure everything else was up and working at the other stations and make the final adjustments for tomorrow's first "seal job" of the rip in the space/time continuum. It would finally be the beginning of the end for those using it to travel and terrorize us from out of the time stream.

I had just gotten off the phone with Irina and Jack when the phone rang again. I picked it up without thinking. "Dr. Lancaster's office. May I take a message?"

I waited, listening to dead air. I was going to hang up, when I heard crackling static and a feminine voice wafting up from it. Soft and faint, sounding hesitant, like a timid ghost from far away.

"We have met...a couple of times and both of them were...unfortunate, Dr. Humphrey...but I think we should see each other before you...throw that switch...tomorrow." The voice was of a woman and I motioned to Jamison to pick up the other line and listen.

"Who is this?" I waited, but I knew, as the hair prickled on the back of my neck.

"You won't be able to trace this call...if that is what you are stalling...for, I have made sure of that. This is...Ann Corbett...and I would like to speak with you...alone." My blood ran cold in my veins. Somehow they knew what we were doing, and it was, for them, something unthinkable: closing up the time/space hole they had used with impunity for so long to come and go.

"Where and when, Dr. Corbett?" I masked my own fear.

"There is a little place in...Silverdale, called...Stewart's in Old Town...a diner...I will be there in an...hour. I suggest you do...the same...and come...ALONE...if you...really know what's...good for you and those...*IDIOTS* ...that work for you."

The line went dead. I placed the receiver back on the cradle. I looked up at Jamison knowing he was ready to call out the Marines and have Silverdale reduced to ash.

"What are you planning, Boss?"

"I am going to meet her, what else? This has gone on for too long. It's time it all comes to a finish, one way or another!" I got up and slammed the file in front of me shut. Jamison just shook his head.

"Boss, this is a really bad idea."

I set my jaw, pulled out my cell phone and punched in a couple of numbers. "I want a car in front right now, and two back up teams ready to move in five minutes. All in civilian clothing and armed to the teeth." I didn't wait for an answer.

"I don't like it, Boss!" He was livid. "These people have been able to study you your entire life! If they really are from the future, don't they already know what is going to happen? Isn't it all a foregone conclusion? They know you will react this way! Not rationally, but emotionally!"

"I know, but this is something I have to do. I think you know why." He saw the crazy, obsessed look in my eyes, and Jamison knew this was a fight he wasn't going to win. I reached out and asked him for his sidearm. He hesitated, and then handed it to me.

"Spread the team out around the place. I want you inside, but don't shoot anybody that just happens to move." I tucked the gun into my waistband and remembered Death Valley. I hoped I was meeting a human and not someone who could pull the clip out of this gun without me knowing it.

* * * * *

We drove down towards town and I found the spot, driving by it twice, while our people moved into various locations. There was a huge plate glass window in front emblazoned with "STEWART'S. GOOD FOOD. GOOD PRICES. GOOD PEOPLE." It was in a gold, shadowed 1890s script, and the window let me see almost everything going on in the restaurant, which was moderately busy, with customers waiting by the door to be seated. Satisfied that I'd given everyone enough time to move into position, I finally parked the car and walked in alone.

A nice young man was behind the counter, obviously Stewart, a big man in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts, joking with one of the customers at the bar. They were cracking stories about some gal that worked for Stewart and she was blushing. He looked up when I came in, just as a table opened up and a busboy cleaned it up.

"Have a seat." Stewart hollered over at me, gesturing to the now clean, empty table. He waved at the waitress and she scurried over and handed me a menu. "We got a special on the Deli Delight today, ham and cheese grilled with cabbage." He pointed again to an open chair. The table was near the corner of the plate glass window. I saw Jamison sitting at the other end of the window facing the door, pretending to eat some kind of sandwich.

"Coffee, black." I said to the waitress with a smile. I sat at the table with my back to the door right at the edge of the window where it joined back into the wall with a supporting beam. It let Jamison and I cover the place looking both directions.

Stewart came over with steaming coffee in a generously sized heavy bottomed ceramic black mug with the Stewart's logo in gold letters on the front.

"How are you, partner?" Stewart said, setting the coffee down. "Sure you don't want something else?"

I shook my head and put some Sweet & Low into my cup and stirred it.

Another group of boisterous people came in and waited in a clump in the foyer at the door for a vacant table. A man in a heavy plaid coat and jeans, a woman in a red dress, another brunette with a red and gold scarf with a blue knit hat, and a stout man with reddish hair and beard in a Seattle Seahawks sweatshirt. They must have been regulars, as they waved at Stewart and the waitress.

I went back to my coffee and saw Jamison focus and stiffen. I spun back towards the door, and, standing just behind the group in the shadows, I could make out the burning, baleful eyes of Simon Ratterman. He pushed his way through the group, bumping into the woman in the red dress, the girl with the scarf and hat, and the men in the plaid jacket and Seahawks sweatshirt. His eyes darted around the room as he moved to the table in short, sharp motions. The rat-faced man with the hotly gleaming beady eyes silently slid into the chair across from me. I had seen him before, a couple of times in photos and, of course, our meeting at Groom Lake a long time ago. I still had the scar from the cigarette burn.

Simon Ratterman! In the flesh! But not in some time phased alternate universe reality. He hunched forward, glaring at me with a hatred and malice I had never experienced before in my life. I tried to retain my composure, knowing this all had to be some kind of trap.

"No Ann Corbett, Simon?" I said looking around. "Sweet young thing that she is! Thought she went everywhere with you? Losing your touch with the ladies?" I spoke just loud enough for Jamison to hear.

"Shut up!" He said quietly. "She is across the street with her finger on the trigger of a high powered rifle with that ape of yours behind me in the cross-hairs. If he so much as breathes hard she is going to put a .50 caliber slug through his head."

Ratterman pulled a .38 Colt Cobra revolver from his jacket, devastating at close range, and flashed it at me before pointing it at me under the table. I saw Jamison make a slight movement that would have been imperceptible to anyone who didn't know him. I raised my palms up just above the table to show Ratterman I was unarmed, and to stop Jamison.

"It's okay." I said. "You're the boss. Jami! Just sit still there, laddie." I called out calmly. Jamison froze like a cat watching a mouse hole, with every muscle ready to pounce.

"I have been told you are finishing up the project." Ratterman growled. "You have been busy little bees and are about a year away from using your device, but you still don't have an offensive system yet. You have been working, but it is not fast enough." Ratterman grinned evilly. "You may be able to plug the space/time holes, but they are still coming, and they will be here in six years and there is not a thing that you, or your government, or this world, with all its imaginary power, will be able to do about it." He smirked at me, his eyes flashing like a cobra ready to strike.

I leaned back, pushing my chair out just far enough to be out of the line of fire of the window with the upper half of my body obscured behind the supporting wall that had sheet rock and some kind of wood siding on the outer façade. Nothing that would stop a super sonic high-powered bullet from outside. A fact I was painfully aware of. But right now, Simon Ratterman was the direct threat.

"Nothing to say, bright boy!" Simon spat, leering at me.

"What does it feel like to be a traitor to your people, your race and your whole planet? A scumbag like you makes Judas Iscariot look like a grade school snitch." I said, glaring at him.

"Call it what you want. I cut a good deal. I live like a king where no one can get to me. I've put up with your meddling long enough. I finally decided to end this and it was nothing for me to lure you out and finish the job. It may not stop that useless, idiotic little program of yours, but so what? I will be beyond the rift and when someone after you finally does figure out how to seal it up, if they can, it won't matter. I will be coming at the head of their fleet that will 'eat' this nasty little planet." He expelled a dry, horrid laugh. "I am a prince in their world, with power, authority and glory, beyond your simple understanding. I can come and go as I please, using my device. A device I stole from that stupid father of yours, giving me access to all of time itself. They want the technology, but until I control this planet I have refused to give it to

them. They can't use the holes and rips in time/space like the Grays or Nordics. They don't understand it, but the Alpha Draconians are savage warriors and they are mine to control." He was clearly dangerously insane, around the bend and on some kind of power trip I could not even imagine.

"That was why Ann Corbett came to see my dad. You killed my father, didn't you? Just to get your hands on the device?"

"No. I never had the pleasure! He was already gone. I would love to have killed him, but he ran away after Ann talked to him. He was always running away. He left the project just as we almost finished the first phase. He ran away from your mother and then he ran away and left you. Like the sniveling coward he always was. He was very good at running away." Simon's eyes darted quickly around the room and then he focused all his hatred back on me, like a coiled desert rattler, ready to strike from out of the dirt and dust and sands of time.

"So, you think by killing me you can slow the project down?" I asked, taking a cautious sip of my coffee, trying to steady my nerves and give some outward appearance of calm.

"Cut the head off the snake and it dies! With you gone, I can get into some other places before that asinine system of yours comes online and change some opinions. We almost did it before, but then you went and killed Nakamura." He hissed.

"Let me tell you a little secret." I leaned in close to him. "It's complete. And fully operational. So is the offensive system. All nicely rolled up and ready to blast your scaly pals back into whatever cosmic sewer they crawled out of." I laughed.

"Boss, I wouldn't be telling him that." Jamison was right on the mark again, being my straight man. What would re-enforce the fact more than him telling me not to speak?

"You lie! You both lie!" Simon screamed, his eyes darting back and forth between us like a trapped rat. The people in the diner looked over at us, all going quiet. "You couldn't! You didn't know how! I gave you all the wrong information!" Simon's eyes were rolling in his head with anger and his face reddened with rage, but then he collected himself and found his resolve. Here we go, I thought.

"It's over, Simon. This whole place is surrounded." I said. "There's nowhere left to run. You are out of time."

Ratterman grinned. "What do you know of time, boy?" He screamed, foam coming out of the side of his mouth. "I come from the future where your death is already history!"

In one fluid movement, he stood up, kicking the chair back behind him, and brought the gun to bear, level with my chest at point blank range, less than six feet away.

Jamison pounced, springing at Ratterman with a feral, guttural roar. The plate glass window shattered, and the force of the sniper bullet literally plucked him out of the air, altering his trajectory like a child punching at a balloon. A spray of bullets filled his body, exploding like blossoming roses of flesh and visera, as Jamison twitched in death on the floor.

"Good-Bye, Doctor Humphrey!"

I dove towards him. Ratterman pulled the trigger, again and again and again, putting five bullets in my chest, in a tight grouping right through my heart. The force of the blast knocked me up and off my feet, throwing me against the wall with the shuddering force of getting hit by a bus, breaking most of my ribs.

I hung in space against the wall, somehow keeping my feet under me, motionless for a moment, clutching at my heart in shock, my life spurting through my fingers. I looked up through a red hazy mist, and saw Ratterman smiling with savage victory. He turned towards the shattered window laughing maniacally. He lit up like a Christmas tree with red laser sights all finding targets on his body. From a muffled, far away

SANDS OF TIME

distance, I heard men yelling commands at him, interrupted by their screams as Ann Corbett opened fire, picking them off one by one, in a rapid fire succession.

Ratterman let the gun fall carelessly from his hand and reached for a device on his belt. I began to slide slowly down the wall as my shattered heart finally gave up the fight.

Stewart's Diner exploded in a rain of bullets and blood as Simon Ratterman, still gloating and laughing triumphantly, just shimmered out of existence, like a grain flowing down the waist of an hourglass, caught up in the sands of time.

I saw all this as my own life slipped away with a brilliant flash and the sound of a choir of celestial angelic voices as I traveled down a tube of warm, loving light.



EPILOUGE

A nice young man was behind the counter, obviously Stewart, a big man in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts, joking with one of the customers at the bar.

"Have a seat." Stewart hollered over at me, gesturing to the now clean, empty table. He waved at the waitress and she scurried over and handed me a menu.

"We got a special on the Deli Delight today, ham and cheese grilled with cabbage."

"Coffee, black." I said to her as I sat at the table with a weird ringing in my ears. Stewart came over with steaming coffee in a generously sized heavy bottomed black ceramic mug with the Stewart's logo in gold letters emblazoned on both sides.

"How are you, partner?" Stewart said, setting the coffee down. "Sure you don't want something else?"

I shook my head and put some Sweet & Low into my cup and stirred it.

I shook my head and put some Sweet & Low...into my cup...and stirred...

Wait! What? A feeling of *déjà vu* hit me like a hammer. There was a twisting in the pit of my stomach and my vision tunneled as I felt a spasm of vertigo spinning my head as the diner tilted under me.

I went back to my coffee and saw Jamison focus and stiffen. Still dizzy and desperately trying to focus I spun around. Standing in the shadows, just behind the boisterous group at the door, I made out the burning, baleful eyes of Simon Ratterman. Just as before he pushed his way through the group; the woman in the red dress, the girl with the red and gold scarf and hat, bumping into a man in a hound's tooth hat and checkered coat and shoving past the man in the plaid jacket and the red haired bearded man in the Seattle Seahawks sweatshirt. The rat faced Nazi with the hotly gleaming beady eyes, silently slid into the chair across from me.

"No Ann Corbett, Simon? Sweet young thing that she is! Thought she went everywhere with you? Losing your touch with the ladies?"

“Shut up!” Ratterman hissed. “She’s across the street, her finger on the trigger of a high-powered sniper rifle with that ape of yours behind me in the cross-hairs. If he so much as breathes hard she’s going to put a .50 caliber slug through his head.”

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“It’s okay. You’re the boss. Jami! Just sit still there, laddie.”

“I’ve been told you’re finishing up the project. You’ve been busy little bees and are about a year away from using your device, but you still don’t have an offensive system yet. You’ve been working, but it is not fast enough. You may be able to plug the space/time holes, but they’re still coming, and they will be here in six years and there is not a thing that you, or your government, or this world, with all its imaginary power, will be able to do about it. Nothing to say, bright boy!” Simon spat, leering at me.

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“So, you think by killing me you can stop the project?” I asked, but now I was seriously freaking out. My vision was blurring, and I saw a sparkling refraction around all the lights in the diner, I felt like I was going to vomit, and that I was trapped in the re-run of a TV show I had seen before, but reality went on as it had before. Something important had changed. But...*what?*

“Cut the off the serpent’s head and it dies! With you gone, I can get into some other places before that asinine system of yours comes online and change some opinions. We almost did it before, but then you went and killed Nakamura.” He hissed.

“Let me tell you a little secret, Simon.” I leaned forward. “It’s complete, and fully operational. So is the offensive system. All nicely rolled up and ready to blast your scaly pals back into the cosmic sewer they crawled out of.”

“Boss, don’t tell him that!” Jamison said.

“You lie! You both lie!” Simon screamed, his eyes darting back and forth between us like a trapped rat. The people in the diner looked over at us, all going quiet. “You couldn’t! You didn’t know how! I gave you all the wrong information!”

“It’s over, Simon. This whole place is surrounded. There’s nowhere left to run. You are out of time.”

"I come from the future where your death is already history!" He screamed, foam coming out the side of his mouth. "What do you know of time, boy?"

Suddenly, I felt a jolting shock run through my body like a bolt of electricity. It was like I was riding a train that had just, miraculously, jumped the tracks, and landed on another line and course altogether.

"I know a great deal about time."

The deep, resonant voice came from a man in a hound's tooth hat and checkered coat, sitting by the window with his back to us.

"YOU!"

Ratterman's eyes went wide with stunned shock and terror. He pulled his gun up from under the table in panic. As he got up, I threw my mug of boiling hot coffee in his face. He screeched in blistering pain. His left hand went up to his face as his gun hand came down on the table to brace himself from falling backwards.

With all my might, fueled by a rage seething for years finally being released, I slammed the heavy coffee mug down on his hand and he screamed, jumping up clutching his bloody, broken, twisted fingers, the gun and his chair clattering to the tiled floor behind him.

In one fluid graceful motion, the man in the hound's tooth hat whirled around into the center of the room, a silver .45 Colt automatic in his outstretched fist. He stopped his arc of motion and took aim.

Ratterman clutched his broken hand, growling in pain.

"This world is still doomed! Nothing can stop me! I have all of time and space to deal with you!" Ratterman laughed manically, and reached for a space on his belt under his coat. But then his hands moved faster, in panic, as he looked down, clearly checking for something he had lost.

"Looking for this, Simon?" The man held up a blinking black box with a red dial.

The Nazi let out a guttural scream and lunged at him. The tall, thin man fired point blank, right into Simon Ratterman's chest. He was hurled backwards and lifted off his feet by the force of the shots, crashing through the plate glass diner window in a blizzard of glistening rainbow shards, coming to rest with a sickening thud on the sidewalk as the tinkling glass rained down like colored hail, the breath leaving his body in a muffled howl.

"GET DOWN!" Jamison yelled as he pounced like a panther, leaping across the room, tackling the man in the hat, slamming him to the floor and landing atop him with a dull thump. I flipped the table towards the window and crouched behind it, waiting for the hail of bullets from Ann Corbett's sniper rifle. All the patrons dove under the tables. Jamison had his weapon pushed into the thin man's temple, waiting.

The silence was deafening. Through the ringing in my ears, I heard men in the distance giving orders, moving into position around our location, closing in.

Seeing there was no further fire, with his gun glued to the side of his head, Jamison yanked the lanky man to his feet by the scruff of his neck and slammed him face first against the far wall, out of the line of fire of the window. His hound's tooth hat fluttered to the ground as he raised his hands in surrender.

"Who the hell are you?" Jamison yelled, adrenaline racing through his system. He gave the man a rattling shake. "I said, who the fuck are you?" He screamed at the back of his head. I got up and picked up the old, well-worn hound's tooth hat I knew so well, as realization dawned.

"Jamison! Jami!" I said putting my hand on his gun, pulling it away from the man's head, and pointing it down at the floor.

"He's my dad."

With a stunned look, Jamison relaxed his grip and Dr. Theodore Humphrey, Senior, slowly turned around.

Jamison's eyes bulged. His jaw went slack as he chewed the air in shock trying to form a word. He looked incredulously from my older face, into the younger handsome face of my father, recognizing the family resemblance but just not believing it.

My father had not aged a day since the last time I saw him when I was 17 years old, when he put on that oversized checkered coat and his favorite old hat and walked off into that long, dark night.

"He can't be!" Jamison sputtered, his accent heavier than I had ever heard it. "He's got to be fifteen years younger than you!"

"Hi Teddy." My dad looked at me and smiled. Jamison relaxed his grip and my father gave me a hug that I had literally been waiting for all my life. Neither of us wanted to let go. But our reunion was broken up when seven or eight men hit the front door and crashed into the room. Jamison barked some orders and they cleared the scared but unharmed patrons out of the diner and into the street. They dealt with the scene outside and surrounded the building, leaving us alone.

"What happened to Ann Corbett?" I said, still half expecting to get sniped through the window.

"I took care of her over on the roof across the street, but she escaped. I'm sorry. I managed to get the gun away from her before she 'jumped' away. They should be able to at least lift her fingerprints off it, if that matters."

"But how did you get Ratterman's time device?"

"I got a good look at it on Corbett's belt before she vanished. Then I bumped into Simon at the door and picked his pocket." He held up the blinking box. He saw my stunned look and smiled. "I wasn't always a scientist, son."

He held up a finger, then walked over to the table where he had been sitting, and pulled an old style canvas and leather backpack up off the floor. The buckles strained to contain its contents. He took it over and put it on the counter with a loud thump. He undid the buckles and pulled out a heavy black object, with lights and dials, about the size of a hatbox. He took out the hand-held device and compared them. I could see right away it was the first model prototype of the man portable Time Runner he had built in his lab, next to an ancestor of his device, several generations down the lineage.

"Fascinating how they've managed to miniaturize the components." He mused, still the eternal scientist. "The power supply must still be a real challenge, though. They obviously have multiple jump capabilities..." He rubbed his chin, and I could tell he wanted to take everything apart right then and there. That was my dad. Off in a world all his own, even after all this time.

I walked back behind the counter, pulled out three ice-cold bottles of beer, and handed one to each man. Jamison grabbed his like a drowning man, still in shock.

"To my dad!" I toasted. "Who has always been my hero!"

"Bloody hell!" Jamison exclaimed as he polished the beer in one long gulp.

I took two long pulls, my throat so dry from fear I couldn't believe it.

"This was the only place where you could drag that rat out of his hole in the rift he's been hiding in all these years." I had worked the numbers in my head. "You needed to get him out in the open, is that it?"

"Had a little help." He smiled at me.

"You're not bloody kidding me, are you?" Jamison was still trying to catch up, jerking his head back and forth between the two of us so hard I thought he would sprain his neck.

"Nope." I said. "Grandfather's paradox in action. Couldn't go back in time and kill him, otherwise everything would be messed up in the future. All of this..." I pointed to Ratterman's body on the street as I heard sirens wailing in the distance, "would not have happened. So you had to go forward to nail him here, when he came back. The only time he was actually in phase and in the flesh, as he would have to be to actually kill me. You cut it pretty close there, dad."

He shook his head. "I jumped ahead realizing he had killed you and I couldn't let that happen. So I had to jump back to the exact moment it happened. The power supply on my device is only good for two jumps, out and back. So I had to decide where to jump back to. Since you were at the eye of the timeline shift you may experience some pretty disorienting déjà vu. Sorry about that."

I looked over at the wall where I had just died, felt a pain in my chest, and remembered beautiful voices and a brilliant flash and the loving tunnel of light.

"Did-did...was I just shot...dead?" I said, feeling flashes of what, I thought, had just happened, but then...didn't....

My father looked pained. "Yes. But you'll find the memory fades as the timeline resets and readjusts itself. Fluid quantum time in the right-brain eventually reconciles with left-brain linear time. We are remarkable that way."

Dr. Ted Humphrey, Sr., took a long breath and then shifted gears to lighten the mood. "You know you're an old man?" He looked at me and reached up to pull a piece of glass out of my hair.

"It happens when you just have a normal life, living in only one direction." I laughed and turned to Jamison, who seemed to have some glimmer of understanding of the situation now.

"You too, Jami. You have a lot to be grateful for. Just enjoy life from now on and be glad you're alive!" I thumped him on the back.

"Wait!" Jamison said with utter bafflement, having a nightmare déjà vu as well. "Was I...?"

"Yes," my dad said. "You were killed as well. Shot dead by Ann Corbett. But history, as the great inventor Henry Ford once said," he raised his bottle, "is bunk!"

"To history not being all it's cracked up to be!" I toasted, and we finished our beers.

Jamison just worked his jaw, still confused. I hooked my thumb toward the door to snap him out of it. "Jami, go make yourself useful. Go talk to the fuzz. Call a clean up team out from Bangor and have them get rid of the body. Tell the cops it's a matter of National Security, but don't scare them too badly. No need to make a huge fuss."

"Right you are, boss. No fuss. Roger that." His mind snapped back to a set of tasks he could understand. He looked at my dad and gave him an old school British open palm salute. "An honor to meet you, sir. I am very proud to be of service to your son. He is a great man."

"You do not know the half of it." He smiled proudly. "And, thank you. I know that." He sat down and I joined him as Jamison went out to deal with the local constabulary and give orders that we were to be left alone.

"What now?" I said thinking about my past and his future and what he could do from this point in the timeline both forward and backward.

"My device is kaput. I had enough power for the two jumps. The jump back here turned the innards to slag." My dad said, looking lost and confused.

"You can't go back." I said at long last, trying to gauge all the possibilities. "I sure as hell don't want to wake up tomorrow and be seventeen again living in Barstow. So," I tried to work it through again and it was literally making my skull ache. Exasperated, I just threw up my hands in frustration. "You can't go back," I said with finality. "You know that?" I looked at him.

"Yes, Teddy. I know." He looked in my eyes for a long time, taking in my graying hair and the age lines on my haggard face. "I knew that when I left...last night."

It just then hit me. Oh my God! This was literally only tomorrow for him since I'd seen him last. He'd met Ann Corbett, discovered what they had planned, and gave up all his work and hopes and dreams and aspirations, he unselfishly gave up everything in his life...to save mine. Tears welled up in my eyes. All those years of hate and anger

and resentment at him for abandoning me, for him not loving me, all washed away by revelations of him being here with me now.

My father smiled sadly and shook his head. "No. I'm hoping to find an old friend that left a few years before me. You wouldn't know him, but he was a great man that taught me a lot."

"Will this slow them down? I mean from coming to Earth?" I asked him and he just shook his head, confused. He obviously didn't know what I was talking about. He threw up his hands.

"Ted, I am truly sorry that I don't have any answers to your questions. You've lived forty years of life, filling in all the blanks. Like I said, I left last night. To me you should still be in high school playing football and, instead, I find you an old...well, older, man. But at least now you're alive. It's as confusing as anything to me, but if I can find my old friend, I think he can explain a lot of it to me." He got up and looked around the ruins of the restaurant.

"You mean Dr. Rufus T. Henry?" I asked.

He turned in amazement. "You know Rufus?"

"I certainly do. I owe everything in my life to him, and to...you. But you'll know more about all of that when you get to where I think you're going. Let me give you some prophecy dad: you find Rufus, you go much further ahead in time, and things work out pretty well for the two of you. And for all of us, back here in the past."

He went to the counter and stuffed the Time Runner back in his pack and slung it over his shoulder. I got up and took him by the arm. We walked out the back door, getting out of the area before the local cops showed up. Two men from my security team fell in discreetly behind us, machine guns at the ready, watching every angle.

I looked off at the pier in the distance, and the gouts of fog magically parted and I saw a man standing there with a fishing pole in his hand and a white bucket set down at his side. He looked over smiling and waved. I waved back.

"In fact, I think you will find the good Doctor Rufus T. Henry right over there, fishing." I took my father by the shoulders and held him, gazing into his eyes.

"I hated you when I was young. And now... I love you with all my heart. You may never understand, but that doesn't matter. I know we meet again. One day soon... dad." The words caught in my throat.

"I am so sorry I wasn't there for you, Ted. I wanted to be so badly, but I provided for you as best I could and I knew how important your life was going to be, and I would have done anything to save my...son." My dad had tears in his eyes, and I lost it and started to cry, too.

"You have always been there for me dad! We have never been apart." I held him and then let go. "You will learn that. Very soon."

We hugged. He put his hound's tooth hat on my head, then walked towards the pier. He stopped and turned, holding up the small black box Time Runner. "Oh! And I am sorry I can't leave these with you, but you will get there eventually." He put it back in his pocket, and walked away as the fog swirled around him, caressing him like an angel's wing.

He saw Rufus and threw his arms out wide in surprise and started to jog toward him, like a kid seeing a long lost best friend. The two men shook hands and patted each other on the back. They began a happy, animated conversation, between two men from a different, nobler age and from the same time and place.

A police officer came running down the street and pointed his finger at the figures walking down the pier into the fog. "Hey! I need to speak with that man."

"Not unless you got an order from the President of the United States or from me." I held up my ID, as my security men flanked him, and the officer quickly backed off, with my lads herding him back in the direction from whence he came.

I watched the two men, still talking happily, get into a boat and motor off south into the bay. I stood looking after them until they were well out of sight disappearing like wraiths into the fog.

I walked back up to where Jamison was finishing up as they were carting off the body of Simon Ratterman for immediate disposal. I went to the gurney and flipped back the sheet to see the dead, glassy eyed face, twisted and frozen in the shock and pain of a violent death, a huge bloody hole over his heart. I stood there, not wanting to forget that moment. My own personal demon who had tortured and terrorized me, and everyone I loved, my entire life, now just a lifeless lump of meat. But Anne Corbett, Lilith to his Lucifer, was still out there, loose in time and space, and she was going to want her revenge. I would worry about that...tomorrow.

"Seems too easy, considerin' what he's done." Jamison said.

"Feed him to a pack of dogs. Then maybe then this traitor will amount to a pile of shit." I said darkly as I flicked the sheet back over his face and motioned to the men to take him away. We watched as he was loaded into the back of the van.

"Ann Corbett is still out there." Jamison looked at me. "She could be in the future or the past. So does this mean any of this is over?"

"For right now it is. But no one ever knows what the future has in store. Okay, I guess some people do. Guess we have to remember that our today is always someone else's yesterday." I laughed and headed for the car. "Or our present is their past, or our tomorrow is their yesterday...Ah, hell!" I said grabbing my head. "No matter where you go, there you are!"

We laughed as we both climbed in the car.

"Nice hat." Jami said. "Where to Boss? Back to Bangor?"

"No, my friend. How about we go get into that giant airplane the taxpayers have so generously given us, pop a 20 year old bottle of Scotch and head to my bunny ranch. Would you like to have dinner with the two most beautiful women on Earth? My wife and daughter? Could you use a good home cooked meal, Mr. Jamison?"

"That I could, sir!" He grimaced. "My sandwich was terrible! How does that whanker stay in business with pastrami that bad?"

"Good! Because after tomorrow's experiment, I plan to have a lot of dinners at home and it is okay with me if you are at the table with us every night."

"It seems you and your dad had a lot to talk about, and didn't." Jami said starting the car.

"Too much to talk about in too little time, Jami. He and I both knew that. We couldn't fill in all those blanks. I knew he was moving ahead, so anything I told him now would alter any actions he took in the future, which might change how things turned out tonight. So, I will just remember him the way he was the night he left and he will remember me as the young man I was then. Rufus will explain it all. He already has, I'm sure. For my dad, all of this was just a day and a night. Only hours passed since I saw him last, but years have passed for me and during that period I'm sure he is well aware of everything. Time moves differently than anyone can even imagine." I sat back and pushed the hat down over my eyes. "Every now and then I keep thinking I'm going to wake up in a classroom in Barstow and that this has all been just a bad dream."

"It's no dream, Ted." Jamison said stoutly. "It's the business we do, and, as of today, I would say that all three Dr. Humphrey's are the best at it there has ever been, or will be." He put the red light on the roof and drove up the street.

We headed south for the airport. The test would go on just fine tomorrow. I knew that now. I also knew the Bug Zapper would work perfectly as well.

Right now I wanted to see how all my furry little rabbits were doing and if I could learn to sleep in my own bed again next to the woman I truly loved, down the hall from the daughter I adored.

Man plans. God laughs.

Tempus Fugit. Time flies.

But tomorrow would be another day.