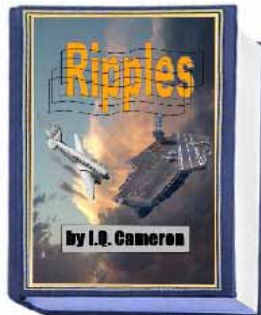


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Ripples

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(Version: V8.0C)

(A novel by)

I Q Cameron

Introduction

Thank you for choosing to read this free novel portion from www.killernovels.com

As stated on my website, this novel portion is offered free of charge for your consideration.

As a writer, I make every effort to make available novels of the highest quality, and I sincerely hope that you will enjoy this free portion so much that you will purchase the remaining portion of the novel from www.killernovels.com for a small fee. Please remember that by doing so you will receive a fantastic novel conclusion, while also helping me to be able to continue this writing venture.

Ripples is the sequel to my first ever novel, *Quicksand*, so if you enjoyed that novel, I think you'll enjoy this. It is a science fiction novel (time travel) that allows you, the reader to view the mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle and time travel through the eyes of people who must do battle with both. If you're a history buff, you may even recognize a few of the events I've indirectly referred to.

Hmm... Could any of this be real???

It has a fun, exotic plot, and again has a small measure of political intrigue to provoke some extra thought. If you enjoy action and suspense, as well as the obvious questions and paradoxes that time travel presents, all with a tactful Christian message, you'll definitely enjoy this. It's tricky and offers you the thrill of trying to work out what will happen in the end.

Great fun!

Now, please enjoy!

Foreword

Having been a Christian for some decades, I always found it difficult to find novels that properly captured lifelike action, terror or even romance, while still maintaining Christian values or the deep truth and freedom that having a *real* relationship with the living God brings. Often (I found) writers sacrificed the reality or impact of life's sometimes horrible events, watering things down too far in an effort to make their story appear more 'Christian' or inoffensive.

The Bible, on the other hand, does not hide from the awful things men (and women) are capable of. Nor does it play down horrible events such as war, murder, sexual misconduct and assault, treachery, etc. Indeed, life itself can be unrelentingly offensive. With all that in mind, I have tried to keep my novels as realistic as possible without glorifying such things as violence, murder, sex, terror and every other horrifying human advent.

Jesus Christ died for us so that we could live forever (Heaven), as well as live fulfilling and meaningful lives right here and now – *true healing and true freedom!* And only He can do

this, because He has the power and authority to firstly forgive us for all our wrongdoings (sins), and then to begin working inside us to change us into what He has always wanted us to be (and wanted for us).

So often Christians (in novels and in life) are portrayed as weak and ‘just too good’ to be real, in a world that we all know is *very real!* I would like to break that mold, since I believe a Christian hero or heroine should probably be one of the best examples of Godliness-meets-humanness we could ever find in this life.

Just like my books, such heroes are not perfect! (Smile...☺) Those who trust in Jesus for forgiveness and everlasting life (in this life) are not perfect. God is changing and working on us and in us every single day, no matter how our story looks. Like a story God is telling, we are a work in progress...

Jesus Christ has a life-changing impact on the genuine believer, because the two enter into a *real and loving relationship*. This, however, does not mean that our Christian heroes will ever be perfect, nor should they be portrayed that way. Indeed, the whole reason for Jesus Christ’s intervention in history and in our individual lives is that we will always remain in need of His divine help and salvation, whether it be with external forces, internal ones, temptation, sin or any other factor.

Needing His help and forgiveness will never change. And God will never tire of giving it.

Many of my earliest writings lacked Christian input. Hence, I have done my best to withdraw most of those versions of my novels from circulation, and have replaced them with something I think that both Christian and non-adherent will find challenging to say the least. I am attempting to fill what I believe is a Christian literature void, and while some may find my stories too violent or suggestive in some areas, I have tried to write about *real* issues without shying away from reality, and yet without glorifying sexual issues, crudity or coarse language.

These things exist. I don’t ignore them, but neither do I exalt them.

I have no interest in terms such as ‘have faith’ or ‘simply believe’, which are meaningless to the one who doesn’t understand them. Sometimes I may give an example, or even brutally demonstrate them. I would rather ire some readers, who judge my work as ‘going too far’, than to indulge in the usual ‘*too valiant and too true*’ hero figures. Life is real, and when there is action, it is very often brutal.

With all that in mind, I have decided not to pull punches, so to speak. My ‘baddies’ are bad, and my ‘heroes and heroines’ are human, and as real as I can make them. I avoid excess coarse language and sexual scenes, but make no apologies for realistic violence and faulty characters. These things are very much a real part of life, and since we are all living in the age of

terror, perhaps there is a time and need for recognizing ‘real’ characters and events, even – and especially – in Christian writing.

Hence, perhaps you, the reader, will be kind enough to show me a measure of grace (should you deem that I go too far in some of the things I write, etc.), as I endeavor to explain in my own very fault-riddled way, what salvation in Christ, God’s love, forgiveness and some other key Christian values and teachings really mean to us all.

And I sincerely hope I don’t fail you too greatly... ☺

Disclaimer

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PREFACE

FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 1969. NEAR GRAND TURK ISLAND, BAHAMAS.

Alone in the evening sky the tiny single-engine Cessna seemed an insignificant speck, magically suspended in a sea of enveloping blackness. If not for the low even drone of its engine and the small, colored wing lights, there would have been nothing at all to indicate the presence of life.

Summer's evening was as peaceful as the day it had lavished upon the picturesque island of Grand Turk. The warm June day was over, with the last stubborn traces of a blazing orange sunset beginning to fade. Winds were slight and cool. It was a perfect end to another day in paradise.

All was not at peace in Debra De Braun's mind however. As she piloted the small aircraft in silence, she searched the instruments for signs of trouble, but there were none. This did little to calm the growing disquiet in her belly though, her senses having been inexplicably on alert for several minutes.

It had begun suddenly and without warning. In the space of a single breath Debra had felt a strange and heavy sense of danger wash over her. It was irrational and without substance, with all instruments insisting that she deny the tingling in her body and the churning of her stomach. But she could not.

With her fiancé sleeping peacefully in the seat beside her, Debra tried to make as small a disturbance as possible. It had been a busy day, and she knew that Mike needed the sleep. Inevitably though, even in the continual, gentle rocking of the droning cabin, her fidgeting with cabin lights and tapping of gauges brought him around.

"What's up?" His question triggered a rush of spontaneous and icy fear within Debra, which rushed through her veins and caused her to involuntarily shiver.

"Nothing. Nothing's wrong. Just checking the instruments. That's all." She lied. With her broad smile, Mike did not detect the small indiscretion at first, but was gradually able to discern her nervousness a minute. Debra's restless inspections gave her away.

"What's wrong, Deb?" The demanding tone in his voice gave her no option but to answer truthfully this time.

"It's really silly," she confessed. "All the instruments read okay, but it just doesn't feel right. Don't you laugh at me!"

He didn't.

~~~~~

Partying at the Ambassador Hotel was the ideal way to close a perfect day on Grand Turk Island for Antone Grier. There was no better way to get to know his new tourist friends, and besides, Antone was not one who required an excuse to do anything, least of all to stage a party.

Slowly his regular friends wandered in, perpetually late as only seemed fitting in the casual and relaxed tropical lifestyle they were accustomed to. The evening breeze had picked up a little, and after the heat of the day it was almost as much of a relaxant as the drinks being served. So pleasant was the cool that most of the party had spilled outside, with guests laughing and drinking beneath the bright lights of the Ambassador.

Downing the remains of yet another glass of wine, Antone could not help but remark to himself that he was a truly blessed man. He had good food and great wine and plenty of friends to share them with. Having poured himself another glass, he ventured outside into the cool and refreshing evening air to join some of his guests as they watched the last remaining traces of a spectacular sunset blend into the calm ocean. He also noticed that they were occasionally casting their gazes upward, just as they had been doing for almost twenty minutes.

Yes, Antone had to concede that this beautiful and balmy evening in the Bahamas had to be as near to paradise as there could possibly be on Earth. All except, that was, for the annoying and incessant droning of the light plane which was continually circling just a hundred meters above.

~~~~~

Debra felt the chill of fear rush through her body again, but this time it was worse than before. With fuel now becoming a vital factor, she was finally forced to admit that they were in serious trouble.

“Tower! Tower, this is Light Flight N 705. We are in trouble here. I am circling two islands and there is nothing down there. No lights. No buildings. Nothing! All there is – *is trees!* We should be over Grand Turk Island, but we are not. Can you help me? Please help me!”

Debra was unable to disguise the fear in her voice now, and it triggered a silent, nervous response in her fiancé, who leaned forward to aid in the search for lights below. The reply Debra sought came almost immediately, but was no more helpful than she had expected it to be.

“LF 705. LF 705. How is your visibility?”

“Visibility is good, but fading. It’s getting dark out here. I can see two islands clearly, Tower. But all there is, is just land and trees. No lights. No buildings. There’s nothing down there! My instruments all seem to be working normally. That’s supposed to be Grand Turk

down there! We're low on fuel, Tower. Please help us!"

Proper radio procedures were eroding quickly as Debra De Braun thought frantically about what to do. In sheer desperation she allowed the Cessna to circle another fifty meters lower, knowing that this was in violation of the law. But she needed answers, and procedures and regulations were quickly becoming the first casualties.

Her closer search revealed nothing new. Though visibility was fading with the onset of night, she could see that the islands were dark with greenery, but totally void of any signs of human habitation. In desperation Debra turned the plane out to open sea, maintaining the same course she had originally held, and hoped feverishly that she had simply erred. She prayed silently that Grand Turk Island would be just beyond the horizon and within the range of her meager fuel supply.

As she gently encouraged the small plane to gain height again, Debra thought she could feel the engine give the first tiny trace of a splutter. The end could not be far away. She radioed a final frantic plea for help, knowing that once the plane went down it would be too late to call for help.

"Tower! Tower! I am out of fuel and we're going down. Help us! Please help us! We're going down!"

~~~~~

Antone and his guests cheered noisily as the small plane finally headed out to sea. The last circle the plane had made seemed only just above the hotel. All eyes were on the tiny wing-lights as they disappeared into the darkening horizon.

The plight of the tiny Cessna would have proven infinitely more interesting had any of the guests thought to watch its departure through binoculars. Just as the plane passed from the ability of the naked eye to see it clearly, it seemed to pass through a wave of distorted air. The wave had little aerodynamic effect on the plane, its two passengers barely noticing the small sway it caused. They placed the blame for the shudder on the already faltering engine.

But to an observer, had there been one, it was as though the atmosphere was curved at that point, and one's vision along with it. For a brief moment it was as though the plane was being viewed through a curved lens.

The plane did not dive. Nor did the engine die. But in the twinkling of an eye, the small Cessna simply vanished.

# CHAPTER 1

## WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON D.C. OCTOBER 21, 2040.

Paul Emerson's face was as bleak as the tone of the meeting he was to address. His face was marked heavily with lines and his lips were firmly pursed as he drew his chair under him at a table surrounded seemingly by hostile faces. Although this fiasco could not be directly pinned to him in any way, Emerson could not help but wonder whether or not the familiar chair of the director of the CIA would be his for much longer.

At the head of the long, dark antique timber table the president took his seat just a few seconds later. His face too was heavy with the strain of worry. Those present all rose in a gesture of respect, then took their seats again as the president sat down. A hush fell over the murmuring group of over a dozen individuals, and for a short while it seemed that no one was willing to break the silence without his express invitation. President Will Forrest remained silent for a time, rubbing his tired eyes with the pads of his large black fingers. He leaned forward, rested his elbows on the table and sighed long and hard. It was the invitation Paul Emerson was waiting for.

"Mister President, I regret to inform you that our sources in Beijing have confirmed what we had already suspected, Sir. It is now definite that the Chinese have stolen most, if not all of our own research into time travel." Emerson cleared his throat nervously as those present shuffled again and broke into an automatic, albeit hushed murmur. "The Time Energy Gap Astronomy Net process is no longer *just* ours, Mister President. It would seem that there remains little the Chinese don't know about the TEGAN process."

Emerson's summation triggered an open slather of opinions and the room erupted into an unintelligible conglomeration of murmurs and accusations, and continued until Forrest raised his large black hands.

"Okay, okay," he called. As the volume of the anxious crowd began to metamorphose into a more intelligible mix of just a few voices, he repeated the call to cement his order.

"Enough! One at a time, people. Go on, Paul."

"It gets worse, Mister President. Our sources also tell us that they have constructed most, if not all of what would be required to put the technology to use. Intelligence has confirmed it, Sir. They are up and running – or at least close enough to pose a very real threat. The only fact we can't confirm is just when they might be planning to put the technology to use. But I believe we would have to assume that they will use Tegan at any time."

"How could it have gotten this far without *your* organization noticing it, Paul?" General



Brandon Clyde's accusation was lost on no one. Emerson did not react to what was a clear attempt to place blame in his direction. He answered without emotion.

"Because, General," he said calmly, "the Chinese were not exactly advertising what they were doing. And rather than making accusations here, we should all be thankful that we know as much as we do. My people in China have risked their lives getting us what we have."

"Point taken, Paul." Forrest interjected, ignoring the tensions and keeping the focus on himself. "Let's leave the recriminations out of this, people. We haven't got time for them. Let's stay with the problem."

Emerson ventured on. "Intel tells us that they have set the entire project up in an area roughly five hundred kilometers south-southwest of Beijing, in the Shanxi Province, and you are not going to believe where it is. Computer, show us a satellite scan of that area."

Instantly a live color image of China appeared at one end of the room, taking up most of the wall in that place. With each command Emerson gave to zoom in, the image changed, with identifiable landmarks soon beginning to appear. The most striking of these first appeared as a long, snaking line that meandered across the rugged Chinese landscape. Only as the image became enlarged at Emerson's bidding did the strange serpent become identifiable. It was the Great Wall.

"The area we are looking at is south of the Inner Mongolian border, and you may recognize it as the scene of that nightmare radiation spill of a few years back. We always wondered why they went so public with that accident. Now we know. In light of what we know now, it's not such a surprise."

"You think it was a ruse to ensure that the area remained deserted, Paul?"

"Absolutely, Mister President. Of course the radiation part wasn't staged. That was real enough. Satellite imaging still shows that the whole area practically glows in the dark. But if they had planned to set up a secret base somewhere, that would certainly have been a sure way of keeping unwanted guests away, especially in a country as populated as China. In any case, the area is almost void of human life. Yes Sir, I'd say they planned and built the base some time back with the express intention of housing *our* technology in it - when they stole it, that is."

Brandon Clyde's eyes narrowed at the comments. He allowed a quiet but audible comment to pass his lips. His displeasure toward his own countrymen who had allowed the time travel technology to be stolen was surpassed many fold by his distaste for the tyrannical regime which had become his nation's most fierce and threatening enemy.

Will Forrest pursed his lips. "A lot of peasants died and a whole lot of land was lost in that fiasco. Was that part of the ruse too?" His sarcasm and distaste were obvious.

Emerson tilted his head and shrugged. "I guess people is the one thing they've got plenty of. Anyway, Mister President, Intel tells us that the complex is directly beneath the Great Wall where we are now looking. Of course you'd never know it. They've gone to a lot of trouble to hide this thing, Sir."

"What about our satellites, Paul? What do they tell us?"

"Satellite imaging has revealed very little, Mister President. Obviously the Chinese have shielded the base against it. No heat signals, no noticeable EMR. And of course the human element gives no sign, Sir. The place is almost deserted, naturally enough. No unusual troop or civilian movements. Nothing. So Sir, anything we do know comes direct from Intel sources." Emerson turned his gaze from his commander in chief and spoke clearly into mid air. "Computer, enlarge the image one level."

Again the image dissolved and was replaced by another clear picture. This time the detail was so accurate that a small flock of sheep could be seen grazing at the lower left side of the aerial view. The flock then slowly disintegrated into several smaller groups as the animals played out their natural game of follow-the-leader in the quest for food on the barren landscape.

"Sheep," Brandon Clyde snorted as he made the observation.

"Sheep, the odd peasant who is too ignorant or too poor to stay away, and the Chinese Wall, General. But if you could get in close enough to take a proper look you'd also find a very comprehensive hidden surveillance system. There are hidden cameras and sensors everywhere. The base is there all right, just beneath the wall. The only small piece of evidence which our satellites *have* been able to tell us is that there's been several occasions in the past few weeks when there has been what we consider an excessive use of electricity for the area."

"Meaning, Paul?" Forrest was afraid he knew the answer before he asked.

"Could mean a whole lot of things, Sir. Could be purely coincidental. It could just be pure chance that everything in the area got switched on at the same time, but that's highly unlikely." His tone had already given his true feelings away.

"Well what *do* you think it is?" Brandon Clyde made no effort to hide his impatience. "We give you the best, Paul. *Surely* you can come up with more than guesses!"

Emerson bit his lip. "No, General, at this time I cannot. However, with the help of Doctor Fredericks, here, who is head of the TEGAN program at US-TECH, I *think* we can tell you what has happened."

All eyes turned their gaze upon the scientist seated almost at the opposite end of the table from the president. Fredericks was used to working under pressure and to making decisions, but for the first time in years Will Forrest could see the unmistakable signs of stress and fatigue

etched deep into the face of his old friend.

“What have you got for us, Lou?” asked Forrest.

Fredericks cleared his throat, appearing almost nervous. It was greatly out of character, as though stress had disheartened the once dashing and bright man. His hair was almost untidy and his eyes had sunken somewhat into their darkened sockets. The familiar smile was lacking and the usual confidence was gone.

“Mister President, I’m sorry to report that I fear I fall short of the CIA director’s hopes.” Lou Fredericks spoke slowly and with hesitation, measuring each word so as to guard against overstating himself. “However, I can tell you from our own use of the TEGAN process that it is possible that the extra use of power might be as a result of some kind of testing.”

The scientist hesitated. “It’s possible that it was the result of some sort of testing of the TEGAN technology, Sir.” As the room began to lapse into opinionated mumbles, Fredericks was quick to raise his voice above them.

“But at this time, Mister President, I would like to emphasize that this is only *one* possible explanation. There could be any number of reasons for the extra power usage.” Suddenly Fredericks appeared to be far more certain of his opinions. His voice rose aggressively above the murmurs.

“Mister President, I would go so far as to say that we don’t have enough evidence to indicate that a test *has* taken place.”

Paul Emerson was visibly stunned and angered. Clearly his star witness had reneged on their understanding, and the entire group knew it. Fredericks resumed a fixed stare at the table and Emerson’s eyes were wide open and staring in disbelief. He was not long reacting. “Oh *come on*, Lou! Just an hour ago you told me that it was the most likely explanation! Just what are you trying to do to me?”

“I’m not trying to do anything, Paul,” Fredericks blurted. He looked even more disheveled as he tried to defend his position. He broke eye contact with the CIA director, his nerves clearly on edge.

Emerson’s voice was raised and angry at the betrayal, and his eyes bored into the older man. Betrayed before his colleagues, he had no choice but to pursue the head of US-TECH. “You told me it was the only explanation that made sense, Lou. You said...”

Fredericks shook his head, refusing to return the younger man’s gaze. He appeared lost, unable to answer the accusation. Will Forrest came to his old friend’s aid.

“That’ll do,” he said calmly, his deep voice rattling in his chest. The chief’s face stiffened and he took a deep breath as the eyes returned to him. “Okay, I can see that you have some

apprehension about this matter, Lou. However, I rely on having the best information that I can. There's no room for anyone to be playing politics in this room – not when it's me your advising."

Emerson remained defiant, staring from his boss to the scientist and back again.

"I can't have this, people," continued the president. "I *will not* have it. Not all those present here were with us during the last TEGAN fiasco. However, I trust that you have all made yourselves familiar with the "eyes only" details of what happened and not just with the public record. In any case, even the official records don't do it justice." Forrest's voice deepened with resolve.

"I consider meddling with time to be more dangerous than the nuclear and satellite threats combined. If *anyone*, let alone the Chinese, plays with this thing then you need to know that a lot of people are going to die. If they develop the technology to the level that we have, then you should be aware that they could wipe out *this* government in a moment. *And without notice!* They could overthrow the United States in an instant – just by getting rid of us or our ancestors at some point in the past. *That's the situation!*" Forrest's voice lowered in volume and the room became completely still and quiet. His face had a steely hardness about it.

"So let's cut out any thoughts of political point-scoring here. There's just no time for it. I consider you all expert in your various fields. That's why you are here. I also consider you to be my friends, but understand this; I have no interest in listening to petty arguments here. What's done is done. I will not entertain laying blame within this room. While we waste time trying to score personal political points, we are all in peril. Our nation is in peril!" He turned his gaze to Lou Fredericks.

"Neither will I allow anyone's personal ambitions to get in the way here. There is too much at stake. I know that keeping the project alive is everything to you, Lou, but if the Chinese use this thing against us, you won't have a country – let alone your precious Tegan. So, let's have the truth, Lou. This is no time to be trying to ensure the survival of your own program!"

Fredericks was clearly shaken by the tone in his old friend's voice. Just for a moment he had the shocked look of a disciplined schoolboy. Rarely had Forrest seen Fredericks appear so lacking in confidence. Then, in just seconds, the composure returned to the scientist's face and he was able to answer his president without another moment's hesitation.

"Deceit is not my motive, Mister President, I assure you. I just like to deal in facts and not in guesses. Certainly I *did* tell Paul that it is *possible* that the large use of electrical power could indicate that a test had taken place, but it is *only* a guess. Pure speculation. We have *no* proof at all that such a thing has occurred. My motive for reticence is that I do not want you mounting some sort of action based on *my* speculations."

“None of us knows the answers here, Lou. We’re all guessing. And more importantly, any action taken would fall directly on to *my* shoulders. You need only concern yourself with giving the best advice you can.” It was a further chastisement, with the president making quite sure that Lou Fredericks understood the limits of his realm. The scientist resumed his stare at the table and Forrest turned his attention to Paul Emerson. “You need to find the leak, Paul.”

The CIA chief nodded. It went without saying. “It was a very professional job, Sir. Somehow they got the data out past both computer security systems at US-TECH. We don’t know how they did it, but we’ve got our best people on it.”

“The Chinese would have to be crazy to use Tegan – especially after we went public with all the problems we had.” Chief of Staff Morgan Tyler raised his eyebrows in a forlorn gesture to indicate that his statement was rhetorical, but it served to help ease the pressure on Paul Emerson.

“Why do the Chinese do anything?” Brandon Clyde smirked as he answered, further diluting the tension. “The same reason as for everything else they do. World domination! That’s why. If they can’t get us one way, they’ll get us another.”

Secretary of State, Robert Maynard rubbed his eyes as if to wipe away tiredness. “I’m wondering how they could afford a program like this, Mister President. It’s common knowledge that the Chinese are broke. Ever since they ran Hong Kong into the ground and turned it into a prison island, they have been on the downhill slide. You know my views on this, Mister President. It’s a lot worse than even the media portray it. This thing has got to have broken the bank.”

“Not really, Mister Secretary.” Lou Fredericks’ voluntary comment seemed out of place considering his mood, but the underlying point scoring soon became evident as he went on. “You see, while we have spent billions developing time travel, now that it is up and running it is actually very inexpensive to develop and maintain. The Chinese have evaded the initial costs by taking our work in the manner in which they have. So, while their plant might still cost a great deal, they’ve actually acquired it at a bargain price. And, Mister Secretary, once it’s built, it will cost almost nothing to run.”

Fredericks turned to face the president as he completed his discourse, and Forrest knew full well that it was the scientist’s defiant way of protesting the presidential order which had not allowed the team at US-TECH to develop Tegan to her full potential. Forrest would have reacted had it not been for General Clyde’s intervention.

“They’re broke and the whole world knows it, Mister President. If they’ve spent that much of their remaining credit on this thing then you can bet it’s their one last effort at world domination before their own people throw them out.”

Forrest's stare was still fixed firmly on Lou Fredericks as the General aired his view. Most of those seated at the table felt sure that the scientist was about to receive another reprimand from the Commander in Chief, but it did not eventuate.

Only when the general had finished speaking did Forrest move his gaze from his old friend. When he did, his face took on a deep and worried demeanor and he sighed lightly before acknowledging his general's views. For the first time Forrest realized that the obligations he had as leader might cost him his friendship with Lou Fredericks.

"The problem is, General," he answered, "that on this occasion they have a very good chance of achieving it."

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **US-TECH BUILDING. WASHINGTON D.C. OCTOBER 28, 2040.**

It struck Security Chief Alan Lewis at times that if there had been a detectable hum being emitted on floor 102 of the US-TECH building, the true source would more likely have been the various scientists and technicians who worked on the TEGAN project, rather than the state-of-the-art equipment itself. He watched with interest as technicians worked with enthusiasm and excitement, trapped in their own world of calculations and technological possibilities, urged on by past successes.

The entire building stood as a benchmark of computer controlled security and technology, housing not only the cutting edge of Time Travel Trials research, but also the people involved in the project, their families and all that was required to maintain their virtual isolation from the world. US-TECH stood as an attractive monument to computer design, capable of self-protection and analysis. To the uninvited, it was an impenetrable fortress.

For its part, floor 102 was a single sprawling room, almost totally devoid of columns or supports, and was filled with the people and equipment which had already proven capable of sending a person almost one hundred years into the past. To the outsider, this room and its potential would have surely inspired awe, though sadly to the staff it had come at times to represent a lesson in futile waste. Ever since the president had made public what he saw as the enormous dangers of 'dabbling in the past', the outcry had rendered the most powerful discovery on the face of the earth unusable. Tegan, the computer which made time travel possible, lay idle. For many long months Floor 102 had been no more than a quiet, almost mundane workplace. But not today.

Alan Lewis had watched over past years as his boss, Lou Fredericks had ridden a wave of unprecedented success. Fredericks soared as his life-long project, Tegan, had successfully allowed the U.S. to send men into the past. Lewis had then watched the scientist fall into what bordered on despair as the project was forced to lie idle due to the problems caused by those who were sent back in time. It had been a roller coaster of monumental proportions, and one that had aged his boss. It struck Lewis as very pleasing to see the aging scientist somewhat happier and more positive once more, though Fredericks' keenness was still a long way from the former days of the project's glory.

Lou Fredericks was somewhere close to appearing his usual confident self, though perhaps not quite – at least not in the eyes of Alan Lewis, who still eyed the scientist with concern. Never had Lewis seen Fredericks affected by worry as he had been in the past weeks, and to a lesser extent, months. The recent breach of security had taken a visible toll.

"Tegan, are you ready to proceed with the test?" Fredericks asked.

"I am ready, Lou," came a feminine voice from somewhere above him. "All systems are functioning normally. You may initiate the energy beam when ready."

Tegan's voice was, as always, calm and polite. She showed no trace of the nervousness and doubt that had shaken her creator. Although able to successfully create even a small degree of humor in the computer, Fredericks had not attempted to move into the more complex realms of giving artificial intelligence the ability to act upon fears and emotions. That was an area he gladly left to technicians of the Defense Department, who had reportedly given computers the powers of reason and discretion. Lou Fredericks had no time for such things. Thus Tegan always seemed calm and even cold.

Alan Lewis could not help but notice the hint of a lack of confidence in Fredericks' actions, and since Tegan had complete control of the test, he knew he could interrupt without causing harm.

"You seem a little nervous, Lou. You okay?"

At first Fredericks' face began to harden, then slowly the scientist shook his head and flashed his security chief a half smile. Fredericks thought for a moment and then appeared to drop any pretence of normality.

"I've been on edge ever since someone pirated my life's work, Alan. It tends to have that effect, you know." The comment held no suggestion of sarcasm, but rather a hint of a deeper despair or anger. Fredericks raised his voice and spoke into empty air.

"You may initiate the test when you have the president's and my own approval, Tegan." Fredericks lowered his voice again so that only Lewis could hear. "The truth is, Alan, that I'm

not sleeping at night and I'm worried sick. All of a sudden it seems as though I could lose my whole life's work. And frankly, the president hasn't been exactly sympathetic." There was a short pause while Fredericks tried to gauge his security chief's true feelings. Alan Lewis gave no sign.

"Actually, I could use a little break, Alan." The comment bordered on emotional blackmail, but Lewis could not be conned. Security and safety were his primary concerns.

"Are you up to this test, then Lou?"

Fredericks stiffened, but again only momentarily. Lewis' concern, while easily taken as an insult, was genuine and considered the good of all rather than any one individual. Fredericks seemed to realize it and again his face softened and he answered, not in the retaliatory fashion Lewis expected, but in quiet, low tones.

"Yes, Alan. Quite up to it."

Fredericks then turned his attention to Will Forrest, who, shadowed by other visiting chiefs, stood just a little way off, gazing intently at the scurrying scientists beyond the safety of the StrikeGlass.

"Mister President. It's time, sir." The sound of Fredericks' voice seemed to jar the large black man from some kind of dream. Forrest remained silent, waiting for the question that he both feared and knew was necessary.

"We are just waiting on your say so, Mister President. All the other chiefs have consented."

The president's reticence was clear as he remained still and silent. Several seconds elapsed before he spoke the command. "Tegan, you may proceed with the moon base test at Doctor Fredericks' command." Fredericks' sigh of relief was both audible and visible.

"Yes, Mister President," Tegan replied in a soft voice. The words were without emotion as always, and yet they had a visible effect on the scientific staff, who suddenly began leaving the open area of Floor 102. Just two technicians remained outside the blast-proof office that stretched most of the full length of one side of the enormous room, the others having rapidly filed inside to join Fredericks and the dignitaries.

The man and woman outside continued making last minute checks and adjustments to what appeared to be a round, elevated landing pad, around five meters in diameter and raised a similar distance above the floor. Even at that distance President Forrest could recognize the familiar faces of two of US-TECH's chief scientific personnel. When the president's relationship with Lou Fredericks had become strained over past years, his friendship with these two had grown stronger and more genuine. As the two walked briskly toward the control room Forrest could see and hear the smooth mechanism within the ceiling opening just above the landing pad, laying it



open to the outside world. Simultaneously a hydraulic ram raised the pad several meters upward, bringing it ever closer to the ceiling and the path of the beam it would intercept.

With their work done, one of the two stragglers joined the group within the safety of the control room, the other just a few seconds behind. Forrest watched the two, a middle-aged man with a thick, dark beard, and a woman in her thirties with her hair coiled up in a net.

“Mister President. Good to see you again, Sir.” Warren Kriesler’s welcome was warm and genuine as he joined the waiting group. “I haven’t seen you here for some time.”

The bearded face of Fredericks’ second in command of Time Trials was pleasant as always, his broad smile impossible to disguise beneath his thick facial hair. Warren Kriesler stood eye to eye with his nation’s leader, undaunted by his presence. On the contrary, he clearly considered Forrest’s to be just another friendly face, albeit a powerful one.

“Warren. Good to see you too,” responded Forrest. “I’d visit you more, Sir, but Lou won’t let me come along to your meetings.” Kriesler flashed a smile at Fredericks, who remained straight-faced. Underlying stresses had robbed him of the ability to share almost any joy of late. His disposition was not improved seconds later when the other latecomer also entered the room and joined the president in a few lighthearted comments.

Forrest greeted Pamela Carter with equal and genuine friendship as she welcomed her president. She nodded and removed her synthetic hairnet as they spoke, allowing her long dark hair to fall down her back. Innocent as the move was, it added to Fredericks’ frustration. His mouth tensed and in his mind he was mumbling something about ‘fashion parade’ and a ‘married president’. At the first available opportunity he interrupted the trivialities of the three.

“Then we will begin, Mister President?” It was obvious that Fredericks didn’t want to waste any more time. “What we propose to do today, Sir, is to simply send a small organic object from Moon Base Alpha to the landing platform you can see on the lab floor.”

Forrest nodded without expression, still harboring the fears of many memories as Fredericks went on. “As we’ve already discussed, Mister President, there is absolutely *no* foreseeable risk.”

The president wondered whether Fredericks could read his mind, or if perhaps his fears were so great that they were visibly obvious.

“As you already know,” Fredericks continued, “Tegan sends an object through time and space by dematerializing it, then projecting it inside a very special light beam, if you like. That beam of course, travels at a speed greater than the speed of light, and when it strikes solid matter at its destination, the object is... reconstituted, shall we say. Now, Sir, we would normally point the beam into space and the object would travel backwards in time to a place where the Earth *used to be*. Hence, it would arrive in the past.”

“To date, all of our experiments have been to test the effect of the TEGAN process on the organic subjects we have sent. But in today’s experiment, we will be examining what effects, if any, the process has on the landing site – that is, the place to where the object is sent.”

Forrest nodded. He had studied the brief thoroughly. If he had not, this test would not be proceeding as it was. But while he was apprehensive because of problems in the past, Forrest knew that he had no choice but to allow the scientists to learn as much about the TEGAN process as possible. With the Chinese on the verge of using the pirated technology, his people *had* to stay ahead.

“To do this, we intend to send a small organic recording device developed specially for Tegan, since only organic matter may be transported,” Fredericks explained. “We have called this device a *casket*, because that’s what it looks like. It’s about the size of a regular building block, but weighs about a fifth as much.

“But since the beam will travel at a speed greater than that of light, and will only be traveling the three hundred and eighty thousand kilometers to our landing platform, it will arrive less than half a second after it was sent. Therefore, there should be no noticeable time travel factor involved, and so too, no risk.” Fredericks read the continuing apprehension on the president’s face, and then added, “No risk at all, Mister President.”

“You’ll guarantee me that, Lou?” Forrest asked blandly.

“Absolutely,” Fredericks shot back.

With a word and the nod of his head Forrest gave Fredericks his permission to have Tegan send the beam. Then both men gave their verbal commands to Tegan and seconds later she had the StrikeGlass of the control room windows become quite dark. She initiated all digital and graphic recording equipment. Then she sent the beam.

In an instant there came a single flash of light from the landing platform. Although filtered so as not to be of any danger to the eager group of onlookers, the beam did still appear as a small flash, causing the naked eye to have to readjust slightly.

The result was not at all what the scientific team had predicted.

By the time the StrikeGlass was clear again just seconds later, Tegan was already announcing an urgent call to the president, direct from the nation’s computer defense alert systems. All western United States nuclear weapons and attack satellites had reached a Def-con 4 status.

Tegan’s calm, feminine voice betrayed the horror of her announcement, which caused an unguarded collective cry of panic to rise from most of those present. According to initial reports, a nuclear strike had occurred above the city of Washington.

## CHAPTER 3

### FRIDAY, JULY 2, 1971. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

When Andrew Cruise returned from his customary afternoon break, coffee in hand, there was a trace of dampness on his forehead. It was an indication of the unusual sweltering heat being endured by those away from the confines of the tower.

At just over one hundred and eight degrees Fahrenheit, it was the hottest day he could remember, and for a brief moment it struck him that if not for the comforts of the air-conditioning, to want the steaming coffee he carried would border on insane. Outside he could see the shimmering of the heat waves on the tarmac, and he paused momentarily, captivated by their magic.

Suddenly Cruise realized just how tired he was. The beginning of his precious two-day break was less than two hours away now, and he dreamed of the time he would spend with his new bride, Maryanne, and of the delights of sharing Independence Day celebrations with her. Even within the protective glass barrier of the tower windows, the effects of the heat had seemed to slow his mind to a crawl. The coffee would help to revive him.

A minute later he resumed his seat alongside the other controllers. Though still feeling the effects of tiredness, he was strengthened slightly by the walk and the caffeine, and was appreciative of both. With almost fifteen year's experience, Andrew Cruise knew that the control tower was no place to be anything less than totally vigilant and alert.

As he began to give speed and direction instructions to Heavy Flight 972 on its westbound course for Miami, Cruise gave silent thanks that air traffic was light and there were no emergencies.

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"Roger that, Miami tower. Heading 270. Maintaining air speed. Estimated time of arrival at Miami is twenty-five minutes. 972 Heavy, out."

The businesslike voice of Captain Sam Evans did not reflect the true spirit of the man. With the duty of formal radio contact over for the moment, he turned a large broad smile to his co-pilot and navigator in turn.

"And in one half of an hour I'll be out of here and off for the big weekend, leaving you two to work and keep the passengers happy." As he spoke, Evans glanced at his wristwatch. It read

2:30. He continued to smile, searching his friends' faces for the reaction he knew he would receive. He was delighted both at his prospects, and their reactions.

Just like controller Andrew Cruise, Captain Sam Evans was due for the weekend off.

With the flight crew's minds on the humor of the moment, they did not see the strange twisting of the daylight ahead of them. Neither did they notice anything out of the ordinary about the slight shudder, which passed through the aircraft as it entered the wave.

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Flight controller Andrew Cruise noticed it.

Having an aircraft disappear from the radar screen for even several minutes was not unusual to a man of his experience, but never had Cruise seen it happen in this particular area. He felt adrenalin begin to pump through his veins, and suddenly tiredness was no longer an issue to him. His supervisor moved from one screen to another, the first pangs of fear beginning to show.

"Any sign of 972?" he asked.

Cruise could sense the tension in his supervisor's voice. "Not yet." He answered without taking his eyes from the screen. "I just love it when the big ones do this to us," he added, bolstering his supervisor's silent fear. "I can't get them on radar or radio, and they're only fifteen minutes away from heavy air traffic."

His boss cursed and rubbed his thinning hairline. "What was their last radio message?"

"All normal. The captain acknowledged my call. Said that they were maintaining their current heading and speed and that all systems were normal."

"How far out were they?"

"Two hundred miles due east. At least, they were when I last spoke to them..."

"Well they can't have just fallen from the sky! Try them again!" he snapped.

Cruise maintained his study of the radar screen as he pressed the button on the radio microphone and repeated his earlier message. It had now been over nine minutes since Flight 972 had shown as a small, bright, but comforting blip before him.

"Heavy flight 972. HF 972. This is Miami tower. Are you there? *Come in, flight 972!*" Except for an undulating hiss there was total silence.

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Again there came a slight shudder through the hulking airframe of the Boeing, but again it did not register as unusual to the crew. Such a small movement didn't rate a mention as turbulence went.

Sam Evans and his crew were still smiling at his humorous barbs when the radio beckoned for the captain's attention. To their amazement, the controller's voice had suddenly become quite agitated. It was tense and demanding, and very fearful.

"Heavy Flight 972! H.F. 972! Can you read me? Are you there? *Come in flight 972!*"

Evans instinctively turned to face forward as he answered. The sudden change in the tone and volume of the controller's voice could only indicate one thing – imminent danger. Evan's eyes flicked from radar to the world beyond, over and over as his fingers found the switch that would allow him to reply. If there was another aircraft traveling too close, then seconds could be priceless.

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Andrew Cruise felt a physical shudder of hope pass through him as the tiny bright spec suddenly appeared on the luminous screen before him. In the time it took for the radar to cycle, the missing dot was no longer missing. Neither was it where it had been ten minutes before.

"Heavy Flight 972! H.F. 972! Can you read me? Are you there? *Come in flight 972!*"

Hope turned to relief as the answer came briskly back to him through the receiver.

"Miami Tower, this is Heavy Flight 972. What is the problem, Tower? Over."

"972, where the hell have you been?"

"Say again, Tower," Evan's voice replied. "Is there a problem?"

Hearing the calmness of the captain's voice, Cruise lowered his tone and spoke more slowly. "Is everything okay there? Is everything normal?" Try as he did, Cruise could not disguise the excitement in his voice.

"Affirmative, Tower. Everything is normal. All except for the sound of your voice. Is there a problem?"

Andrew Cruise sighed into the microphone. "Not now, 972. We just lost you on radar for a while there. We've got you now though. Must have just been some sort of anomaly." There came a short pause as the controller flashed a quick look of relief to his superior, and then returned his gaze to the comforting spec on the screen.

"Flight 972, we now have you on approach for Miami. ETA is fifteen minutes. Please wait for further instructions. Over."

Sam Evans glanced at his wristwatch again and was quick to correct the mistake. "Negative, Miami. We have ETA as twenty-five minutes. You may need to check the time. Over." The smile on the captain's face slowly dimmed at the sound of the somewhat agitated voice that replied.

“Negative, Captain. Miami Tower has your ETA at fifteen minutes, Sir. Please confirm with your onboard radar, Flight 972. Over.”

Evans was quick to retaliate. “Miami Tower, you confirmed an ETA of twenty-five minutes yourself just ten seconds ago...” The captain’s voice trailed off as his navigator tapped urgently on his shoulder.

“*Captain! Captain!* You need to look at this!”

Evans’ attention turned to his own onboard radar, which now clearly showed the coastline as being much closer than any of the crew had anticipated. An expression of bewilderment passed over each of the crew as they studied the screen. Each knew that what he was seeing was not physically possible. Only seconds had passed since they were almost twice that distance away.

The captain turned and stared blankly through the windshield for several seconds. His eyes widened and he seemed mesmerized as he allowed a call from the tower to go unanswered while he thought. Stretched out before him in the distance was the unmistakable snaking, sandy Miami coastline. He turned quickly to his crew, gesturing at his watch.

“The time! What time do you have?”

Each answered in turn, and a general consensus was reached. Allowing for small differences, all of the timepieces were in agreement. Evans spoke into the microphone with a purpose.

“Miami Tower, this is H.F. 972. This may seem unusual, Tower, but could you advise us of the time please? Over.”

Unusual as it may have been, the request was dutifully answered. Andrew Cruise’s answer sounded in Sam Evans’ ears with an eerie reverberation.

“972. The time here is 14:40, Captain. That’s twenty minutes to three, Sir. And please be advised that we still have your ETA as being fifteen minutes, Captain. Over.”

The captain looked from one baffled crewmember to another and then back to his own watch for certainty. Less than one minute before, the tower had agreed with him that their ETA had been twenty-five minutes. In seconds they had seemingly revised the figure to just fifteen minutes. Without taking his eyes off his bewildered crew, Evans spoke into the microphone again.

“Miami Tower, this is 972. How long were we off your radar screens? Over.”

There was a small delay, and then the answer.

“You were gone for a good ten minutes, Captain.”

Evans lowered his gaze to his watch again. It read just seconds after 2:30.

# CHAPTER 4

## US-TECH BUILDING.

“Tegan! *Tell me what is happening!*” Forrest’s voice boomed over the tumult of gasps and frightened expressions that filled the control room.

Information was already being relayed from the Pentagon and was appearing on the many screens at Tegan’s disposal, automatically taking precedence over the display of Fredericks’ experimental results. Forrest looked at the complicated lists of written data, and instantly issued another command.

“Summarize this for me, Tegan.”

“Certainly, Mister President. In summary form, the CIA mainframe and Security Net Systems computers have reacted to a possible atmospheric nuclear strike. This strike has measured as having an equivalent electromagnetic pulse magnitude of approximately eleven kilotons, with similar resultant force to a blast detonated at an altitude of two kilometers above sea level. Initial unconfirmed analysis indicates that this electromagnetic pulse wave has affected approximately two-thirds of the District of Columbia.”

Tegan’s calm voice gave no comfort to the tense listeners whom she was informing of what could only be the announcement of Armageddon. Forrest pushed away two of his Secret Service detail, who were intent on escorting him immediately from the building, as he struggled to remain focused and calm. Even his black face seemed flushed red with tension.

“Has the United States retaliated in any way?”

“No, Mister President. Security Net Systems has been unable to establish the source of the pulse. It has only the target coordinates.”

“Heaven help us!” Warren Kriesler’s voice was slow and heavy with shock. “They’ve bombed the Pentagon!” The sound of the scientist airing his silent terrors was enough to trigger another immediate outpouring of emotional and fearful murmurings across the room.

“*Be quiet!*” Forrest’s harsh command quieted the hubbub to a whisper, but did not silence it.

“I said *quiet!*” The small crowd of frightened staff fell silent and Forrest made his point. “*Just listen!*”

With that the president turned his attention to several StrikeGlass windows and stared out between the surrounding skyscrapers and across the sprawling city beyond. It quickly became

obvious what he was doing.

“This wall would face roughly east,” he said quietly. “The Pentagon should be only about nine or ten kilometers in that direction.” He pointed with a finger for clarity. “So, where’s the blast?” He turned as if to face the invisible Tegan. “Where is the blast, Tegan?”

“Initial reports suggest that there was no resultant explosive force, Mister President. The only detectable force has been electromagnetic pulse. Some of my own external electronics have been damaged, but as yet I am unaware of any change to Washington weather patterns or of mass destruction fall-out. My internal pulse-protected software and hardware is intact and functioning normally. Normal city communications have ceased, but I am detecting multiple distress signals from airborne traffic and security systems in the immediate area.”

“Of course. Every unprotected computer system in the city will have been knocked out. Aircraft... may well be falling from the sky!” Pamela Carter’s comment slowly impacted her listeners, as many began to stare out into the blue sky, searching for planes. Her grandfather had been killed in the World Tower terrorist attack of 2001, and the memory of the aircraft smashing into those tall buildings was never very far away. She held her hands to her mouth as she searched the sky.

Moans of distress, and some of relief were audible and repeated across the control room as the news that no actual explosion had occurred sunk in. For the moment, they knew, they would survive. Chatter began to rise again as distraught faces uttered expressions of fear and hope.

“What was the cause of the EMP, Tegan? Was it nuclear?”

“No, Mister President. I can confirm that the cause was not nuclear. The cause and place of origin are so far undetermined.”

“Mister President, if I may?” Alan Lewis’ voice called loudly over the rising chatter, catching the president off guard.

“Make it quick,” Forrest said.

“Mister President, we are presuming that the target was the Pentagon, or you, Sir. What if the real target was us – US-TECH? This attack could be aimed at Tegan, especially after the recent breach of security. After all, Sir, if there’s been a strike, surely we would have to be a likely target.”

Forrest thought about what Lewis was offering. “Pulse weapons were commonplace, but I’ve never heard of them being used on this scale,” he replied. “And Tegan’s already told us it’s not a nuclear strike. I think EMP on a scale large enough to bring the nation’s security systems close to nuclear retaliation is a bit much – I don’t even think *US-TECH* could do that.” He was thinking on the run, trying to make sense of the event.



“The implications are horrendous,” he went on. “It’s fearful. Just how far *have* the Chinese progressed?” He thought about the rationality of that statement, and then realized how little evidence he had upon which to base it. “I need more information,” he said. “Tegan, I want you to tell me the exact target of the pulse, if you can.”

“Assuming that the target area is central to the electromagnetic pulse ripple, the pulse target is the US-TECH building, Washington, District of Columbia,” came the calm response.

The revelation sent yet another shiver of fear through the small crowd of US-TECH staff, but surprisingly without an accompanying flurry of comments. There followed a stunned silence. It did, however, bring an instant response from a square jawed Secret Service agent.

“Mister President! Sir, we need to get you underground now!” Again Forrest silenced the well-meaning interruptions of others with the raising of his hand.

“No. I am as safe here as I am anywhere for the moment. Besides, here I have access to Intel – and Tegan is protected from EMP. They tell me that this place will withstand a small nuclear strike. No, I’ll stay here for the moment.” Forrest returned his attention to Tegan.

“Status report, Tegan. What is the Security Net System computer doing at this time? Is it formulating a retaliatory action?”

“Security Net is monitoring and searching for possible sources of the pulse, Mister President. No retaliatory action has been taken at this time, nor has one been formulated. Initial evaluation of the cause of the pulse was a nuclear strike, but this has been struck. Cause remains unknown. Defense condition has been downgraded to three. Monitoring suggests no exterior threat to continental United States at this time.”

Warren Kriesler sighed aloud. “Thank God their computers are programmed for fear. Otherwise I think we would just have seen the start of the final war.”

Fredericks, who was showing clear signs of terror, was quick to retaliate. “They are programmed to reason! Not fear! Computers can’t do that!”

“Fear, reason.... whatever. It just prevented a holocaust, Lou.” The response of Fredericks’ second in charge was measured and calm and was enough to defuse Fredericks’ aggression. The tension was further broken by Tegan’s voice.

“You have a message from the Pentagon, Mister President. Landline communications are temporarily inactive. Would you like me to communicate for you?”

“Yes. Quickly, Tegan! What is the message?” Forrest’s voice was as steady as could be expected, though noticeably nervous.

“They wish to know your present status.”

“Tell them I’m alright.” Forrest drew a long breath before going on. “Also tell them that I

want to address a meeting of the Joint Chiefs and security personnel, ASAP. Tell them to put together a team of their top technical experts and to have them standing by. I want answers, so tell them to do it yesterday!”

“I’m sorry, Mister President, but that final command does not...”

“Just send the message, Tegan! Just as it stands!”

“Very well, Mister President. The message is sent.”

Forrest turned to Lou Fredericks. Both men were shaking, and just for a few moments, they stood eye to eye, two old friends, neither speaking. But the silence could not last.

“Lou, I want you to be at that meeting. This will have to wait. We may have just been attacked.” Fredericks did not respond verbally, but nodded his head dutifully in compliance. Inside he was torn between the fear that some world power may just have executed a strike against his precious Tegan, and the frustration of not being able to complete the only real experiment he had been able to conduct for many long months.

“Mister President, if I may?” Pamela Carter’s question bought a look of surprise to Fredericks’ face and a quick response.

“Miss Carter, we’ve just been fired upon by something we don’t even understand! It may well be an act of war! *Do you mind?*”

“I’m sorry, Lou. I think it might be important...” She began to protest, defying his glaring eyes. Forrest interrupted them, putting an end to their debate.

“I don’t have the time, Pamela. If you have any information, spit it out now.”

“Yes Mister President. It’s just that it seems more than a little strange that this military strike we are supposed to have just experienced happened at the time of our Moon Base Alpha test. Am I the only one here who thinks so?”

“Oh, come on, Pamela...!” Fredericks’ anger came quickly to the boil.

Again the president cut off any argument from him. “Make your point, Miss Carter. I am leaving.”

“Mister President, it seems to me that it’s possible that we just experienced something that we caused ourselves. We’ve always fired the accelerated light beam away from us – never toward us. That is, until today. Tegan said herself that she didn’t know the source of the EMR. After all, we had the equivalent of Tegan on the moon being fired right at us.”

Forrest shot a questioning gaze at Lou Fredericks and then at Warren Kriesler. It was Kriesler who weakened first.

“It is possible, Mister President,” he offered hesitantly. “I don’t understand it, but it is possible. If Lou is to accompany you to your meeting, I could have Tegan go through the

recordings of the test to see what I can find. If you desire, I could have Tegan pass on whatever that may be.”

“Do it.” Forrest’s answer was short and forceful. “I want answers and I want them *now*.”

Only as the president was leaving the control room did he think to look again toward the landing pad, which remained undisturbed some distance away. Resting apparently unharmed at the center of it was a small casket. It seemed that the test had been a success. In his mind though, Forrest was sure that an old ghost had returned to haunt him.

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Will Forrest’s stomach churned relentlessly during the short trip to the White House. From the relative safety of his shuttle, he could see that the city was in turmoil. People hurried about on foot, dazed and frightened, their transports having been rendered unserviceable by the electromagnetic pulse. Fire fighters fought to control a large fire several stories from the base of a tall building, while one fire-truck remained stuck in traffic. Forrest wondered if the fire might have been the result of one of the stricken aircraft Pamela Carter had been so concerned about.

He prayed silently for God’s help for his nation, and gave thanks for his ever vigilant security personnel and the fact that all emergency vehicles, which included his own, had been allowed to retain their fossil fuel engines as a backup to their computer controlled electric turbines.

The electromagnetic pulse had also knocked out radio communications, and with them, immediate contact with much of his government. He could feel old demons returning to taunt him. He felt powerless. Alone.

It was a good time to pray.

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Radio silence spared Will Forrest unnecessary heartache. By the time he learned of a second possible missile strike on the city of Washington, it had already been responded to and neutralized.

Standing thirty-five kilometers east off the coast, a guided laser and missile destroyer with its EMP-protected radar and missile guidance systems was still functional and on high alert. Even with some systems temporarily impaired she made a formidable foe and a worthy defender of the nation.

Incoming and without its mandatory recognition transmission beacon, the fast moving westbound UFO was quickly deemed to pose a serious enough threat to warrant a forceful

response. The object appeared without warning, materializing in an instant on radar screens. Traveling at over half the speed of sound, there was no time for debate. Besides, the response in such a case was standard.

With many nearby military aircraft suffering computer avionics difficulties due to the pulse, and therefore preventing the verification of the size and type of the missile, the captain was left without option. With laser cannon rendered inoperable, he resorted to a conventional heat-seeking missile.

Just seconds after the order was issued, the unidentified object which had seemingly materialized from nowhere, dropped harmlessly into the sea, thanks to the quick actions of the captain and crew of the president's own namesake, the USS Forrest.

## CHAPTER 5

### SITUATION ROOM, WHITE HOUSE.

For the bearer of good tidings, Lou Fredericks' face was unusually bleak. Clearing his throat a little before he spoke, he seemed particularly preoccupied with the small personal computer on the table before him, and continually diverted his eyes from the computer screen to the president and back again.

"Mister President, Warren Kriesler reports that Tegan will be on line any moment. She'll be able to expand on her findings herself, better than I. However, Sir, she confirms what your own people have already established. Doctor Kriesler makes a special mention here that Tegan has been able to confirm beyond doubt that the electromagnetic pulse we have experienced was definitely *not* the result of a military strike on the United States."

The room erupted into a chorus of sighs and verbal expressions. Forrest joined the noisy moment of relief with his own few audible words of thanks, raising his eyes upward as he did. Then he resumed his stare toward Fredericks, surprised at the sullen face of the scientist.

As the din of relieved voices died down, Fredericks looked again at the screen of his portable computer and announced that an audible link between Tegan and the White House had been restored.

"Tegan, are you with us?" Forrest asked.

"Yes, Mister President. Data and communications systems are now fully restored."

"What happened, Tegan? What was the cause of the EMP?"

Fredericks had little choice but to remain silent, annoyed that Warren Kriesler had been left

with Tegan to discover what had happened in the midst of her first test in many months. And now the president himself was addressing questions to her, denying him the privilege. He lowered his face and stared into his reflection in the table as Tegan answered.

“Actual practical applications or cause for the pulse ripple are not yet fully understood, but we have been able to compose limited theories based upon incoming data, Mister President. I have been able to verify the trigger for the pulse, and several symptoms of the anomaly.

“Alright, what triggered it then, Tegan?” In his own heart, Forrest feared that he already knew the answer, and that he had personally sanctioned it.

At that time a slightly built woman entered the room and hurried to General Brandon Clyde’s side. As she whispered into his ear, she handed him a paper, then as quickly as she had come, she scurried away.

Tegan, meanwhile, was giving her reply. “Trigger of the electromagnetic pulse ripple was the Time Travel Trials testing of an accelerated light-particle beam from Moon Base Alpha. Study of the test recordings reveals that a concentrated yield of particles or waves was emitted as the beam encountered solid matter within the US-TECH building. I am as yet unable to fully comprehend this phenomena, but can report with some accuracy on the symptoms experienced as a result of it.”

“Go on then.” Forrest’s voice was heavy. He could feel a deep, familiar wrenching beginning all over again in his stomach. He had been spared a nuclear strike, but now it appeared he would have to face the frightening prospect of paying the price for attempting to meddle with time. It was happening again. “Give us a summary of what happened, Tegan, and of any further dangers you are aware of.”

“EMP was a spherical shaped emission centered at the point of contact of the accelerated light beam with solid matter; that is, the landing pad within US-TECH. The EMP ripple traveled at five hundred and fifty kilometers per hour, diminishing in magnitude and becoming negligible at a radius of approximately forty kilometers. All unprotected, prone software within that area has been destroyed or damaged, effects varying with distance from epicenter.”

Several voices of disquiet arose within the room of advisers as Tegan went on without pausing.

“Also recorded was a second wave emission of unknown character. This wave was emitted simultaneously to the EMP wave, but traveled at one half the speed and was not able to be fully recorded by any available equipment. This second emission has repeated twice more since the initial wave. Duration between repeat ripples is growing, and the energy level of each wave is geometrically diminishing. Suggest more testing is necessary for proper analysis. However, I

suggest that this phenomena is beyond the ability of current technology to record.”

Eyebrows began to rise around the room as Tegan went on to other matters. “I also have information on civilian casualties and installation damage at this time, Mister President, though due to poor communications...”

“Enough, Tegan.” Forrest cut her off. “Let me deal with one issue at a time.”

Lou Fredericks’ eyes rose from the table with the comment, and he was quiet for several seconds. When he looked up at last, he found himself staring into the gaze of the president.

“Lou? Any comments?”

“Not at this time, Sir. I need time to study what Tegan is saying. This....” He hesitated nervously, then went on. “This is as new to me as anyone.” Fredericks looked down at the table and then back again, as though strengthening his resolve. “I mean to say - a wave that Tegan was unable to measure? That’s... ridiculous! It’s just never happened.”

Forrest did not bother to point out that it obviously *had* happened. Tensions had been noticeable between the two of them for some time, and to point out the obvious could only drive the wedge deeper. But there was a need for honesty.

“According to Tegan, we caused the EMP ourselves with the Moon Base Alpha test,” Forrest noted. “We can’t dodge that issue. But, for what it’s worth, Lou, I hold myself responsible for what has happened. I sanctioned the test. It’s my fault. But what we have to do now is to find answers, and not let this happen again.”

Fredericks came alive as though electrically touched. His eyes widened and he became defensive, like an accused man.

“So you’re going to stop any further testing to Tegan? Is that it?”

“If that’s what it takes, yes. I’ll do whatever I have to do to protect this nation.” Forrest felt the barbs of having his authority tested, but resisted the urge to crush his old friend. “But actually no, Lou. That was *not* what I was thinking at all. Whatever has happened today has not made me forget that the Chinese may be just a day away from unleashing our own time travel discoveries against us. If that happens, then what has happened here today will pale into insignificance. I’m still committed to preparing any action against them that we have to, should they use this thing. If they *do* use it, they could cut this country’s throat over night.”

Forrest paused, keen to remain calm and focused. When he did continue, he spoke much more quietly. “What I’m saying, Lou, is that nobody blames you for what happened. We have to work together on this. The city is in turmoil out there, and we don’t even know the half of it because so many communications are still out. No one knew that it was going to happen, Lou, so stop being defensive and help us find answers.”

Fredericks was taken back by the curt and public rebuke. He swallowed, clearly hurt, and yet relieved that Forrest did not hold him responsible for what had happened. Best of all, something in the president's tone told him that Tegan might yet be spared. He cleared his throat to speak, but the words would not come. In the end he spluttered a meager, "Yes, Sir."

The president turned his attention to the military.

"General Clyde, what is our military position in this?"

"We appear to be quite safe at this time, Mister President. MHQ tells me that the situation has now been downgraded to Defense Condition 2. Everyone seems happy that it was an isolated incident and at this time no further action is anticipated. And apart from Washington, Mister President, all other defense installations and capabilities are normal. We're quite safe, Sir."

Forrest nodded and sighed out loud. His musings were interrupted as the general continued.

"Mister President, there is one other small matter," the general rasped.

"Go on." Forrest met Clyde's gaze.

"I have just received another somewhat disturbing message, Sir, and in light of the current circumstances, it may be important. When the EMP knocked out so many of our systems, I thought it was a military strike, and so I told my staff to keep me informed of any new developments of that nature. This is a message just in, Sir." He passed the papers across to Forrest.

"I'm not exactly sure, Sir, but it would seem that the USS Forrest has just engaged an incoming UFO. The object had no identification beacon and was headed straight for Washington City. It happened within one minute of the EMP wave. Apparently just appeared from nowhere, and the captain obviously felt it was a threat and had the thing shot down. What you have is just a preliminary report, Sir. We'll have to wait to know more."

"So what was it, General?" Forrest was in no mood to read the documents before him. Clyde pursed his lips, then answered.

"It would seem that our navy has just shot down what appears to be a small jet plane or something similar, complete with passengers. We don't know how many, if any, have survived. Our people are pulling bodies from the water as we speak. Those on the scene have ventured the unconfirmed opinion that it was a small, private jet. The strange part is that it appears to be almost... antique."

Forrest's eyes widened just a little. "You're telling me that we just shot down a civilian passenger plane?"

"The craft showed no recognition signals of any kind, Sir. It did not respond to radio contact... Well of course, it couldn't, could it? The captain of the Forrest was likely under the

misconception that the U.S. may just have been attacked. And besides, any unidentified object would be automatically targeted... All that would have been required was the order..." Clyde broke off his defense of his own accord, then nodded regretfully. "It would appear that we did, Mister President."

"What was it doing out there without a recognition beacon? The pilot would have to be drunk. Or crazy!" Paul Emerson was angry at the apparent stupidity.

"Why wasn't a visual confirmation made, Brandon? Any ideas?" Forrest asked his general.

"Yes, Mister President. The EMP had temporarily even knocked out communications with our downward looking identification satellites and the Air Force didn't have a bird close enough that wasn't already in serious trouble. There was no way of doing a visual, and no time, Sir. Without a recognition beacon or radio contact, the captain of the Forrest had no choice. *That's* the regulation, Sir." Clyde made a gesture with his eyebrows as if to purge himself and his underlings of any responsibility in the matter.

"But what makes it even more strange is that the object, or should I say, the fuselage is in shallow water," General Clyde continued. "And the Forrest reports that there is not a modern piece of gear on board. Divers have so far been unable to locate anything even resembling modern recognition hardware. The whole thing appears to be original. They're estimating that the plane is approximately fifty to seventy years old.

"That doesn't sound right," noted Paul Emerson. "Just can't be. You couldn't get a bird to within a hundred kilometers of the coast without being shot down if it can't be recognized. Even civilians know that! If there was no recognition beacon, the Forrest should have engaged it a lot earlier than it did. Tell them to keep looking, General. They'll find a beacon. If they don't, you can stop worrying so much about how a civilian aircraft was shot down by the U.S. Navy."

"How is that, Paul?" the General asked.

"Because the greater question will be – how did an *unidentified* plane *without* an identification beacon fly to within visual distance of the capital of the United States without being challenged?"

Fredericks, who had fallen quiet and sullen under a dark cloud of fear and resentment, seemed to come alive at the news, his eyes widening and his brow becoming lined with new wonder.

## CHAPTER 6



Pamela Carter smiled and made a small joke as she brushed her hand under Warren Kriesler's beard. He responded with a smile of his own, and the mutual feelings that they felt were very obvious to the observer.

It struck Pamela that it might seem out of place for her to be attracted to a widower who was almost as old as her father. At thirty-five years of age, she was still youthful and attractive, and she knew it. It was commonly accepted that she could have taken her pick from many of the younger single men on staff, many having made romantic advances in the past. But Pamela Carter was intelligent as well as attractive. She knew exactly what she was after.

Warren Kriesler was in his early fifties, and Pamela viewed the fact as an asset rather than a liability. He was quiet and mature. After the passing of his wife some years before, Kriesler had suffered greatly and as a result had grown more quiet and considerate than ever. Never had he made a sexual advance toward her, unlike the younger men, who seemed to display an excess of hormones and a lack of feelings. It became easy for her to forget Warren Kriesler's age when she considered how kind and mature he was.

What had begun as true mutual respect and friendship was quickly blossoming into something far more and they both knew it. At first he had withdrawn, afraid of the difference in their ages, and of causing any hurt. But these fears were dissipating and he no longer sought to suppress her demonstrations of affection, but rather actively returned them.

Above all, Kriesler was a Christian, and as a Christian herself, Pamela knew that before God, she could not settle for anyone who was not. She smiled broadly at him, knowing that in time she would marry him if she were patient. Just for a moment she thought about how some might not understand her feelings or attraction toward an older man. The thought no sooner came than she dismissed it, and walked away to continue her work.

Unknown to Pamela, her negative thoughts seemed to materialize as though on cue. Even as Warren Kriesler watched her walk away, Lou Fredericks arrived at his side with a smile of his own.

"Warren, Warren. I'm surprised at you. Pam Carter could pass as your daughter. You old dog." Fredericks' tone disguised his comments with the veneer of a friendly jibe, but there was no mistaking the deeper accusation. Kriesler wondered whether he could let their reputations go undefended.

"We're good friends, Lou, but..."

"Of course you are." Fredericks did not let him finish, but rather continued with his accusation. "That's very obvious."

Kriesler would not be bullied. His reply was calm, but direct. "You're right Lou. Pamela

and I are very good friends, but I can assure you that whatever it is that you think is going on, is not. Not that it would be anyone's business but our own."

Both men desisted, knowing that a friendly jibe could easily escalate into something more ugly and destructive to their own, already stressed friendship. Knowing that he had touched a nerve by questioning either Kriesler's or Carter's behavior, Lou Fredericks sought to make amends.

"You're absolutely right, Warren." He looked from Kriesler to Pam Carter and back again as he spoke. "I was just thinking that whoever catches our Pamela will be a very fortunate man indeed. That is all."

Kriesler glanced at her and silently agreed.

Any remaining tension caused by Fredericks' remarks seemed to disappear as he patted his colleague on the back and turned to face the arrival of Alan Lewis. In his usual style, the security chief hurried in, his face appearing lined and intense. As quickly as he could, Lewis gestured his boss away so as to speak alone with him.

Lewis paused briefly, glancing around to check that no one else was in earshot. Fredericks allowed Lewis to play out his game as he waited to hear the report he had dreaded. When he finally did speak, Lewis antagonized his boss even further by dragging the waiting out a little more.

"Do you want the good news or the bad news first, Lou?"

"I don't care much either way, Alan. I just want to know everything you have found out. I want to know who has sold out my project."

"Good news first then. Tegan was not compromised. The technology wasn't smuggled out electronically. It seems that your system is as hacker-proof as you hoped it was – at least from the outside world anyway." Fredericks showed no surprise. He smirked as if to say 'I told you so'. Lewis quickly burst his bubble.

"The bad news is that the technology was smuggled out in hard form. That means 'from the inside', Lou. We have a Gaseous Endless Memory chip missing from stores. Neither of the building's computer systems have any record of where it is. And now for the really bad news." Lewis paused for effect. It seemed to work, as Fredericks leaned just a little closer as if to concentrate.

"There would seem no doubt that a GEM chip would be the only possible way to smuggle out that many years of research without being detected. It could be done in one movement. It's the obvious way. The problem is that whoever stole the chip was somehow able to erase the event. We've been over the motion chips several times. Whoever it was, was somehow able to

erase Cassie's surveillance recordings without her even knowing they had done it."

His words drew an immediate and vitriolic response from the scientist. "*That's not possible, Lewis!* Cassie is an advanced security system running on a GEM chip herself. Even if someone *could* erase part of her memory, which they could not, that event too would be recorded on GEM. Gaseous *Endless* Memory, Lewis! It can't be done!"

"Hey, doc, don't shoot the messenger!" Lewis defended himself. "I'm only trying to tell you what we've found." He changed the tone of his voice so as to question his boss. "Besides, Lou, I always thought that you were one of those visionary types who thought that *anything* was possible if you tried hard enough. You know – technology and perseverance, and all that stuff. I would have thought that you of all people would consider it possible."

Lewis screwed up his face and raised his hands as a gesture of peace, not wanting to rile his boss any more than necessary. Fredericks was under pressure, and it was beginning to show. Still, Lewis knew he had a job to do, and could only proceed on what he knew to be the facts. He couldn't be deterred.

"Peace, Lou. Okay? I know who you are and I respect your position. I don't know how it was done, but all I can tell you is that Cassie has no recordings of the chip being taken from the store. Nor does she have any record of the chip being taken from the building, and she *should* have. I'm sorry, Lou. I know that you know your stuff, but that doesn't mean that I can close my eyes to what I know to be the facts."

Rather than being placated, Fredericks seemed to become more agitated. The reason was not long in surfacing.

"For anyone to smuggle out *my* research on a GEM chip, they would have to break into *Tegan's* memory too, Lewis. Cassie is the building's security system – and it's bad enough that you think someone got past her. But Tegan is... a computer so advanced... she... You're saying they got past Tegan, Alan. Had you thought of that? *Tegan! No one* could do that!"

Lewis maintained eye contact with his boss, squinting a little to question Fredericks' anger on the subject more than the logic involved. For a moment he wondered if the scientist was not suffering from burnout, or bordering on some kind of breakdown. As quickly as he had flared though, Fredericks seemed to realize the severity of his tone and disposition. He came visibly off the boil, and then sighed aloud. He shuffled and resumed eye contact with Lewis.

"I'm sorry, Alan. I apologize. You are my chief of security. If you say there is no record, then I believe you." He paused to gather his composure before going on. "It should be no secret to you that I am coming under a lot of pressure direct from the president. He's after answers and I don't have them. This whole fiasco is undoubtedly going to cost me my life's work when he

shuts Tegan down for good, Alan.”

Again Fredericks paused, and Lewis was surprised, this time by the frankness of a man who was normally very much in control and perhaps a little lacking in emotion. It was a rare display of humanity and vulnerability.

“The president and I go back a long way, and this is also costing us our friendship,” he admitted. There came an awkward silence, then the final gesture for a truce. “I’m sorry I’m so testy, Alan. This is very hard for me.”

Lewis was somewhat surprised. Never could he remember such a display of openness from his boss. He nodded sympathetically. Sadly, deep down he believed Fredericks was right. Forrest would more than likely close the TEGAN program down forever when this crisis was over.

“Don’t worry, Lou. We’ll find out who stole the chip. And I’ll make a bet with you. When we find out who stole the GEM chip, we also find who smuggled out your technology to the Chinese.”

Fredericks simply nodded. While he knew that Lewis was trying to console him, he also knew without a doubt that Lewis was the kind of man who would dig until he found the answers he was after. He would never give up.

“And just how do you intend to catch this person without video chip evidence? Tegan shows no record of anyone having copied her data either, you know?”

“I know. We’ll just have to dig a little, Lou. Anyway, we have CIA searching too, so whoever it is, they can’t hide forever. We’ll use the satellite tracking system to track everyone’s movements. GPS should narrow the field if we can tell where everyone was at the approximate time the chip was stolen. We are also doing a check of external personal communications and banking records. It’s only a matter of time until we find something, Lou.”

Fredericks looked across the sea of technology and personnel, his face looking forlorn and tense.

“I’d like to tell my people what’s going on, Alan.”

“No-can-do, Lou. You know you can’t do that. As much as we hate to admit it, we have to accept that the traitor is someone on your own scientific staff. Besides, it’s President Forrest’s orders.”

“I know. I know. I just don’t like keeping my team in the dark like this, that’s all. I can’t believe that any of them would sell me out... sell *us* out, I mean.”

“I know,” said Lewis. “I know exactly what you mean.”

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Inside the Oval Office, Will Forrest sat quietly. For as long as his heavily burdened schedule would allow him, he remained with his elbows resting on his desk, his face engulfed within his huge black hands. Had there been one, an observer might have thought at first that he was silent, but this was not the case. In a voice just above the quietest whisper, the president was praying.

Slowly he opened his eyes and turned his face upwards. Beads of sweat gathered upon his furrowed brow as he pleaded with God for wisdom and for answers. “It’s happening again, Lord,” he prayed. “I’m begging you for answers. Please help us...”

In the midst of his troubles, Will Forrest suddenly realized that it was as though he was speaking with an old friend. The thought struck him as strange; God – a friend. At first the very idea seemed irreverent to him, but then he reconsidered. God had visited the earth and died for His children so as to save them. He was far more than a friend. God loved him, despite his faults and weaknesses. And despite his lack of faith.

Somewhere deep inside him a voice whispered. “I will not leave you to do this alone, Will Forrest.” Forrest’s eyes filled with tears at the thought. He was not sure whether it was his imagination or not, but a strong feeling began to arise within him, telling him that the safety of the nation had been placed in his hands – that was his job as president. To that end, he should act with confidence, and to the best of his ability. God would honor his decisions and would help him.

“Thank You,” he answered. “Thank You. I’ll look for Your answers.”

The president’s close communing with God was abruptly cut off by the call of his “urgent communications” alarm. He rubbed his eyes, wishing that the deep moment he had just experienced could have been prolonged. It had revived him though, and he felt stronger, knowing that God was on his side and trusting that answers would soon be revealed.

Paul Emerson’s holographic image appeared, his face heavy with the seriousness of his tidings, and it would soon become evident that Will Forrest would need all the strength that God would give him. American satellites had detected a single, powerful accelerated light beam heading into space. The origin of the beam had been detected clearly and accurately.

It had come from the pirate base within the Great Wall of China...

Continued...

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