



THIRIO
A Novel by
Steven Wade Fowler

Chapter 1

“I know I made the wrong decision,” moaned Grant as he lay on the ground against the fence.

“We couldn’t stay in the forest any longer after what happened to Jeremy,” replied Christine as she laced her fingers with Grant’s through the chain link, “At least we are still alive.”

“I know. I just thought God was trying to tell us to come here. Now, I think *I* was the one who wanted us to come here,” he explained.

“Don’t blame yourself. We are not the ones who brought this misery on the world. We are only pawns. Have you found Brett?”

“No. I search for him all day every day but I haven’t found him. It might not be so difficult if I had a photograph to show around. There are thousands of young men here who fit Brett’s description. It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack.”

“Do you think he has survived? The guards are so brutal.”

“I don’t want to think about it. If something has happened and he is gone, I can take some comfort in knowing he is in a better place. Are you ok?”

“I get a little stronger every day. I won’t let it destroy me,” she replied.

“I am so, so sorry. I love you with all my heart and I could do nothing but stand by and witness the assault,” Grant cried as she kissed his forehead through the fence wire.

“That’s absurd. If you hadn’t kicked him off, he would have finished. Have your legs gotten any better?” she asked.

“One of the guards that is still somewhat of a human being sneaked some ointment to me last night. I tore a sheet and made some bandages. I think the infection is healing. I can walk better now but I still have a little limp.”

Grant and Christine met at the fence in the dark every night after the internment camp fell quiet. They had discovered an area in the compound that could not be observed from the watchtowers that loomed above the camp.

It was the only interaction that they were allowed. The commandant of the camp had segregated the men from the women in an attempt to maintain discipline. This only created an opportunity for the male guards to prey on the defenseless women.

Christine had suffered a brutal attack on their first night. It was to serve as her initiation into the camp. One of the camp guards attempted to rape her while two others held Grant who was made to watch.

Breaking free from restraint, he managed to kick the guard off Christine before being restrained again. The two guards then held him while the third beat the back of his legs with a length of cane until they were reduced to bloody shredded flesh.

Life in the internment camp was harsh, but they had already become hardened by their prior existence in the forest. It had been a constant battle for survival foraging for food and shelter while attempting to remain undiscovered by muggers, highway men, or even worse- the law.

They had come to the camp with their son Brett, who was taken to another area. Grant searched in vain for him. Many of the youngest and strongest men were placed on work details and driven out to nearby farms that produced food for the detainees.

As with the other internment camps, the detainees were not criminals. They

had gone there of their own volition in search of food and safety. At the camps they found little of either.

The grounds were dark at night with the exception of the searchlights from the towers that swept the fences. These lights were not necessary for the most part because the detainees did not attempt escape. As bad as the camps were, they knew that there was no other place in the world for them more hospitable.

“How much longer do you think this will go on?” Christine asked.

“It’s hard to say. I’m not getting much information about what is happening in the outside world. If I knew all the current events, I might have some idea of where we are in the whole scheme of things.”

“What was the time table again?”

“The total length of the Tribulation is seven years- three and a half years of peace as the anti-Christ comes to power and three and a half years of suffering. It’s hard to say when it started, so it’s hard to deduce when it will end,” he explained.

“Tell me one more time how it will end. It helps me cope.”

“It will end with the war to end all wars. Millions will gather in the Megiddo Valley to make war with Israel. The fate of the Jews and the whole world will be bleak. Then *He* will appear suddenly and save us.”

Christine squeezed Grant’s fingers and closed her eyes, imagining their rescue. Grant kissed her hand and stared into the night sky. He wondered if there was any truth in what he had just told his wife. They had been holding on for so long to this belief. It was what had gotten them this far.

Now at the hour of their greatest trial, he wondered if they could remain steadfast to the end. In the back of his mind, there was always the nagging question, “Has God forsaken us?”

He closed his eyes and leaned his head against the fence as close to Christine’s as possible. He began to think back on happier times in their lives that were only a short time ago.

Chapter 2

Grant Stokes and his family entered the church from the main entrance and were greeted by several Welcome Committee members as they made their way into the sanctuary for the first time. Grant felt a little awkward and self-conscious in church, having not been raised in a particularly religious family. He felt that the eyes of everyone were examining him to find some flaw and he knew he had many. He and his wife Christine were new to the Christian faith and did not really know what to expect or how to act. Not wishing to call attention to themselves, they chose a seat far from the front in an attempt to remain inconspicuous. The sanctuary was loud with the voices of hundreds of people who were pouring into it. With the praise ensemble beginning to play upbeat music, he likened it to a carnival atmosphere. Some young people began to sing and the sound of the music quickly distracted them. Soon their unease gave way to comfort as they became more acclimated to their surroundings.

The music minister at last took the podium and called the congregation to order for the start of the service. Grant, Christine, and their two children, Brett and Maggie, stood with the others and listened intently as the singing began. They were unable to join in, not knowing any of the songs, but were content to look about at all the others smiling and singing at the top of their voices. After several songs, the music minister along with the congregation took a seat and the Reverend Kyle Winford took the podium.

“I want to welcome all of you to exciting Middleton Heights. It is such a joy to see all your shining faces on this beautiful Lord's Day. We want all of our members to offer a special greeting to those who are new and visiting from other churches. If you would, please stand so that our members might recognize you and give you a warm welcome.”

The minister was charismatic and reminded Grant somewhat of an entertainment show host. He was dressed in what appeared to be an expensive suit. His necktie was in keeping with the latest fashion and Grant was impressed with both his confidence and professionalism. As they stood to be greeted by the surrounding church members, Grant nervously shook hands with them as they exchanged names. When the greeting was over and they again sat down, Grant looked at Christine, who smiled and gave him a quick wink to encourage him. It seemed that she was far more comfortable with the situation. Knowing Grant's personality, she was sure he needed the reassurance.

“Let us pray,” began the pastor. “Dear Lord, we thank you for this day and all who are in attendance to worship you. Please bless this gathering and speak to our hearts and minds as we study your word. Please enlighten us with the Spirit that we may understand your will in our lives and learn to submit to it. Amen.”

After receiving a resounding “Amen” from the congregation, he opened his Bible on the podium and began his sermon.

“We are reading from First Thessalonians, chapter four, verses thirteen through eighteen.”

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning

those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who

have no hope.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

“Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

“Well, I don't know about you, but for me, these are some of the most exciting words in the Bible. I remember walking across campus at the seminary with some of my classmates. We would take a couple of steps and jump- practicing for the day of the Rapture. We called it doing the Rapture hop. This is surely what Paul is alluding to when he says that we will join Christ in the sky. Just before the tribulation begins, Jesus will appear in the sky and call home those of us who are worthy and faithful. The rest will be left behind. Some will convert during the tribulation and others will fall away into eternal damnation, but *we* will be spared the suffering that is about to take place.”

Grant was relieved to hear those words. A co-worker had told him all about God's plan for the salvation of the world. He had also been lectured at length about the fires of hell that awaited all those who refused to believe. He certainly wanted no part of that and was concerned especially for his wife and children. They would be among the fortunate few who had decided to believe before the tribulation and could now rest assured that they would not suffer all the evil that they had been told about. He took Christine's hand and gently squeezed it as he smiled at her. Looking over at his children, he was not pleased to see them scuffling quietly over a piece of paper. They immediately stopped and once again began to pay close attention to the sermon, after seeing the grimacing look on their father's face.

As the service continued through the sermon and collection of the offerings, Grant examined the church and how beautifully it was decorated. The pews were white with natural wood on the armrests. The carpet was a deep, rich shade of blue and had a plush feeling when stepped upon. The windows were indescribably ornate and depicted famous events in the Bible such as Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and the crucifixion of Jesus. There were six of them along each of the side walls. The balcony was wrapped across the rear of the sanctuary from halfway around each side. Corinthian columns with decorative capitals supported it. The light shining through the stained glass windows cast colors on the walls, pews, and columns, which gave the sanctuary a warm and inviting atmosphere.

“This place must have cost a fortune,” whispered Grant into Christine's ear.

“There are many wealthy people that attend here,” whispered Christine as she nodded in the direction of a couple sitting a few rows over.

Grant recognized the couple to be John and Nancy Powell of Powell International Avionics. John was founder and CEO of the large aircraft company that had recently won a lucrative military contract for fighter aircraft.

“I didn't know he was religious.”

Christine slightly shrugged her shoulders in reply.

“For our closing hymn we will sing “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,” said the music minister as everyone stood to sing.

“Where does everyone want to eat lunch?” asked Grant as the family walked across the parking lot to the car.

“I want to go to *Burger Giant*,” replied Brett quickly.

“No. I want a pizza,” said Maggie.

“I think we should go to a nice restaurant and get something other than fast food. Let's go to the *Garden Place*,” suggested Christine.

“I agree with your mother. The *Garden Place* it is.”

The family climbed into their S.U.V. and sped out of the parking lot onto the interstate. This would be the beginning of a Sunday family tradition- morning church service followed by lunch in a good restaurant.

Chapter 3

As the sleek black yacht eased into Sassnitz Harbor, the deck hands scurried at an exhaustive pace to drop anchor and secure the lines. The isle of Rugen in Germany could be seen from port side. Rugen is an ancient island that has been inhabited through the centuries by a myriad of nationalities and cultures. In the early eighteen hundreds, Rugen became a part of what was then Prussia and is today a part of Germany.

The two hundred forty-six foot private yacht *Perdicion*, was owned by one of the richest and most powerful men on earth. Erebus Nikomedes was born into poverty in Athens' sprawling slum district. His father had abandoned him along with his mother and three sisters in the early nineteen seventies. His mother spent the majority of her time earning a living for them, pursuing any avenue of employment possible. Erebus was raised primarily by his young sisters. He spent most of his childhood on the city's streets under the influence of older, rougher boys. It was this hard upbringing in poverty that drove his thirst for power and wealth. His great wealth was acquired initially through the traffic of heroin. Being willing to profit from the misery of others and even kill when necessary, it did not take a great deal of time for him to amass a fortune. As his wealth grew, he invested in legal, more respectable business concerns. It was the container shipping industry that provided the majority of his gains.

Six other men were expected to converge on the *Perdicion* before the week's end. This would be the meeting of a super secret organization comprised exclusively of the seven most wealthy and powerful men on earth. They met four times a year to plan the mechanisms of trade and monetary transactions throughout the world. The name of their group was derived from these four meetings. "Quadrivium" is a Latin term for the meeting of four roads.

Quadrivium was literally in absolute control of the world's finances from the largest super-power nation to the smallest village. These seven men had unlimited control of the ten largest banking systems in the world. Everything from monetary exchange rates to interest rates was micromanaged by them. They decided which nations prospered and which nations starved. Along with total control of the finances of the world came the ability to control world leaders and world events. It was a small thing for Quadrivium to replace a nation's leadership when they felt it necessary.

There was an understanding among the seven that knowledge of their existence must be limited. It was decided by the group that they would not associate personally with anyone on earth who possessed less than the equivalent of one hundred billion U.S. dollars. This would insulate them from the vast majority of common mankind. The members of Quadrivium were unknown even to people of the highest profile. Presidents and prime ministers, kings and princes, actors and actresses, sheiks and rock stars alike were equally unaware of their existence.

Each member had an envoy that actually interfaced with the outside world. Quadrivium was therefore able to move about the planet with anonymity to enjoy the fruits of their wealth. Servants under the direction of the personal envoys attended every aspect of their lives. The servants were unaware about who employed them and were sworn to secrecy under the threat of death. They were willing to take the employment under such strict terms due to the massive salary

they were paid. None of them was willing to risk the loss of such gainful employment.

None of the seven men was married. They took lovers at times but would never disclose to them the vastness of their wealth or the purpose of their lives. They would certainly not disclose to them the existence of Quadrivium or its mission. When the lovers would become too attached or demanding, they would be discarded. If the men felt threatened by the fact that the lover knew too much or was concerned that Quadrivium may be compromised, the lover would surely meet an untimely end. Many were the “accidents” that took the lives of their lovers.

Each of the men owned at least one ancient stone castle that was considered their home and base of business. Erebus Nikomedes purchased the Castle of Paralion Astros in his native Greece in the early 21st century. The castle had been a national historic location prior to the purchase and was in ruins. It was a small matter for Erebus to acquire the castle and have it restored to its original glory. The acquisition and rebuilding of the castle was just over two billion dollars. This would be considered nothing more than pocket change to these men of substance.

Sitting high on the summit of Nissi Hill, the castle had a commanding view of the white villas that cascaded down the hillside to the sea. Only the large brownish gray stonewalls could be seen from the surrounding countryside. On the corner of the south wall was located a large round tower. A heliport was constructed in the center of this parapet. Helicopter was the primary mode of transportation used by Erebus to gain access to his home.

No matter how much wealth and power these men possessed, it was never enough. Their drive for more possessions was as strong now as it was when they first began to acquire wealth. They would let no one or no thing stand in the way of their lusts. To cross Quadrivium was to invite quick and deadly retribution. Those who had dealings with the members, and they were few, had the same interests at heart. This helped to guarantee that no thoughts of betrayal would be entertained or tolerated. Those who were known to Quadrivium stood to profit alongside them. Wealth begets wealth.

Chapter 4

“Good Morning, dude,” said Grant as he popped his head into the cubicle of Jeremy Westbrook upon arriving at work.

“What’s up?” replied Jeremy as he spun around in his chair to face Grant.

“We had an interesting sermon at church. I’ll tell you about it at lunch.”

“Later.”

Aereodyne Thrust employed Grant and Jeremy. Their company designed and manufactured jet engine components for Powell International Avionics. Grant was a design engineer while Jeremy worked in the accounting department as a comptroller.

It was Jeremy who had first approached Grant with the Bible and news of faith in Jesus to go to heaven. They had been working together for two years and discussed the Bible and its prophecies on many occasions. Jeremy was a firm believer in the ideology that accepted the pre-tribulation Rapture teaching. Since Grant had only recently converted, he was still unsure what he believed. He did, on the other hand, study the Bible diligently to gain his own understanding of it. With so many varied teachings and denominations, Grant decided it would be best to keep an open mind with regard to what he was being told.

Arriving at his office, Grant started up his computer and prepared for another day at the grindstone. Placing his eye against the security aperture, his retina was scanned and he was immediately validated as an authorized system user.

Grant was highly respected by the management and employees at Aereodyne, having finished near the top of his class at M.I.T. He was also a personable young man with a good sense of humor. Many of his co-workers were surprised to hear that he believed what he read in the Bible- not to mention that he had experienced a religious conversion. For them the Bible was little more than a fictional storybook with interesting characters and plots that others used to promote their own moral positions. Because of this, Grant and Jeremy were avoided by most for fear that they may be put in the position of hearing what they jokingly referred to as “the word”.

Pushing and pulling his computer's mouse, Grant rotated on his screen a giant engine fan blade that he was designing. The blade was a new concept and he expected it to produce as much as eighteen percent more thrust than any previous turbines. As he inspected the blade, the dimensions and projected stress tolerance levels were flashing in the lower left corner of the display. He would have to know every iota of information about this turbine before it could be manufactured and at last tested in a prototype engine. Even the slightest flaw could cause the blade to disintegrate, costing time, money, and even perhaps lives. Time passed quickly during the workday for Grant. He loved his profession and would become quickly lost to his surroundings when sitting at his computer. Looking at his watch, he suddenly realized he was a few minutes past lunch.

In the company cafeteria, Grant and Jeremy carried their trays of food to a table against the wall away from the noise of the many employees’ conversations.

“The sermon yesterday was about the Rapture. I know that’s one of your favorite subjects. Tell me again what verses make you sure that all the believing Christians will be taken before the anti-Christ comes?”

“Well, I’ve heard many preachers and theologians debate this topic. One

compelling argument is that the church body is not mentioned in Revelation after the wrath of God begins to be poured out on humanity- hence pre-tribulation. Plus there is the scripture about us being caught up in the sky on the sound of the trumpet,” replied Jeremy.

“That's the sermon we had yesterday.”

“It also makes sense that those of us who have been faithfully waiting would be spared the persecution.”

“But does it literally say anywhere in the Bible that Christians will be taken before the tribulation?”

“No. That's why you have three different opinions on the subject. One group believes that the Rapture will occur in the middle of the tribulation period and another believes that the church will be taken just after.”

“How can anyone be sure?”

“Well, you can't and then you can. Keep yourself prepared for anything and you'll have all the bases covered regardless of what comes your way,” replied Jeremy with a smile.

“This meatloaf could be the first plague of the end times,” joked Grant as he shuffled the piece of meat around his plate.

“Yeah, when this stuff hits bottom, we'll definitely need saving!” replied Jeremy.

Finishing lunch, they deposited their trays on the conveyor and walked to the elevator. Piling in the elevator car with many other employees, Grant leaned against the back wall and began thinking about the conversation at lunch. He was trying to imagine the scene, as millions of people around the world would begin to float up into the air. What would Jesus look like in the sky? Would he be gigantic with outstretched hands dressed in first century clothing? Would he be terrifying with fiery eyes dressed for war? So many questions and so many answers, but what was the truth and what was speculation?

Chapter 5

The rear gallery was filled with anxious friends and families as the students paraded into the great hall. They began to take their seats in wooden chairs that had been carefully aligned in rows on the main floor. The room was lighted in the center by large chandeliers. Smaller lamps were mounted around the walls to light the gallery. Large portraits in heavy gold frames were hanging out from the walls close to the ceiling. The auditorium was concave in shape and the back wall was comprised of large windows that flooded the room with sunlight.

From the gallery, it was difficult to make out any conversations taking place on the floor. It was later determined, by some guests attending, that the students had been addressing each other in Latin. As the commotion began to settle, a distinguished looking group of three scholars took their seats before the students. They were dressed in black robes with colorful capes draped across their shoulders. The gentleman in the center wore a red cape and the other capes were yellow. As the room fell silent, the scholar in red arose to address the student body.

“We welcome you to Oxford University and thank you for attending this commencement ceremony. We know you are all proud family members and friends of these fine young people. The students have selected and invited a recent graduate to address this noble assembly. Without further adieu I will surrender the floor to our guest speaker, Amaro D. Homem.”

“Thank you, Dr. Hamilton. It seems that only yesterday I was myself sitting before this podium anxious to go forth into the world...”

Amaro D. Homem was a young man in his late twenties. He was notably handsome, tall, and well built. He had an olive complexion, being of pure Portuguese descent with dark hair and eyes. He had earned a degree in international law and finished at the top of his class. Rather than pursuing a career in the legal field, he had decided to accept the position of U.N. Ambassador representing his native Portugal.

At the U.N. he was well liked and highly respected. Speaking fluently in six languages gave him the ability to communicate directly with more than half of the other delegates. He felt right at home in the business world of politics and was quickly making a name for himself as a problem solver. Many times the older, more experienced delegates would have him speak on their behalf. Because of his handsome appearance and amiable nature, he could win over the hearts of even his most ardent adversaries.

“In closing, I would like to encourage you to view the world, not as a collective of individual nations and peoples, but rather as a community of neighbors. We must all join together in the monumental endeavor to bring a lasting peace to our planet.”

As he turned to leave the podium, the room erupted in a thunderous applause. He quickly found his chair and took a seat as Dr. Hamilton and his colleagues stood to begin the ceremony of presenting diplomas.

As the students left the hall, Amaro stood near the open doorway and spoke with students. The number of young ladies who had gathered around him evidenced his handsome appearance and boyish charms. As he spoke with them about their dreams of the future, he would smile invitingly and on occasion wink

as he caught the eye of a passing cute girl.

“Would you join us for dinner, my good man?” asked Dr. Hamilton as he approached Amaro from behind. “My wife and I are hosting a small party at Crosscove Manor and would be honored if you could attend.”

“I would consider it a pleasure and an honor to spend the evening with you. At what hour should I come around?”

“If you tell me where you are staying, I will send a car for you at seven.”

“I am at the Rothechilde.”

“Very good, then. I will send for you and we will have time to discuss your work, in which I am very interested,” replied Dr. Hamilton as he bid Amaro farewell.

Amaro again began conversing with the graduates for a while longer before setting off for his hotel. Riding in the taxi as he left the university, he was taken back in time as he viewed the familiar layout of the campus. It had truly not been that long since he had attended. He found himself proud of the great accomplishments he had made and would continue to make in the future. He had thought at length about the world and its current state. Although he was just one man, he was determined to make a difference. There must be something he could do to bring lasting peace to the world.

Arriving finally at his hotel, he paid the driver and stepped into the lounge for a quick sherry before preparing for dinner.

Chapter 6

In Israel, troops were amassing on the Lebanese border preparing for an invasion. The young soldiers, both men and women gathered beside the column of tanks and chatted nervously about the assault. The platoon leaders were busily walking from group to group, encouraging the fighters and making every effort to bolster their morale. This would be the first battle for most of these young recruits and the confidence that comes with experience was sorely lacking.

“Remember, soldiers, that's why we are here!” yelled Lieutenant Shalev Rabin as a Katyusha missile could be heard screeching across the sky above them. “We are all that stand between those murderers and the destruction of our land.”

Unlike most of the troops in his command, Shalev was a battle-hardened soldier who had been stationed in the Gaza Strip. He had experienced many skirmishes with Palestinian insurgents throughout his military service. As a former tank commander, he knew what it was like to be under siege. Constant bombardments of tank shells and mortar rounds numbed him to the fear that was felt by these young people.

“Get to your units and let's get these tanks rolling,” shouted the lieutenant motioning with his arm in the direction of Lebanon.

It was a long, hot march alongside the tanks to Tyre in the southern portion of the country. The troops had trained extensively for the job ahead. Anxiety was high as the first mortar rounds began to fall in front of the lead unit.

“Fan out along Ridge 21!” barked the commanding officer over the radio.

The tanks began to separate in all directions from the road at a high rate of speed. The infantry formed battle lines, as they lay flat on the ground behind a ridgeline of sand and small rock. Mortar rounds were raining down as they raised themselves slightly to crack off bursts of shells from their rifles. The explosions were deafening but that was the least of their concerns.

When the tanks finally reached the assigned positions, a massive barrage of metal and explosives was heaved onto the outskirts of the city. With every wave of shells fired by the tanks, there was a diminishing of the incoming fire on the Israeli infantry.

“Let's go!” shouted the lieutenant as he stood and once again motioned his troops forward toward Tyre.

The young soldiers leaped to their feet and with guns blazing, ran toward a wall on the south side of a neighborhood. It was horrifying for them to begin shooting into a residential complex, but they had no choice. It was a common practice for Hezbollah to hide among civilians and use them as human shields. It was a cowardly tactic, but the terrorists had no moral compass. To them, human life was cheap. How could they serve so ardently a god that would reward them with heaven for the slaughter of so many of their supposed enemies? Even reward them for the murder of fellow Muslims. This was contrary to almost every other religion on earth. Islam was a bloody, horrific faith that most followed out of fear. If given the chance, most practicing the religion would have happily renounced it.

“Take four men and let's try to secure that apartment complex,” said

Lieutenant Rabin to one of his sergeants.

The sergeant pointed at four soldiers and the five of them made their way to the apartment complex in a crouching run. As the sergeant peered around the corner of the complex, a shot rang out and the shell pierced his forehead. His skull exploded in the back blowing his helmet into the air. Two of the remaining men dragged his lifeless body away from view as the lieutenant looked on with disgust. Looking down at a soldier with a rocket propelled grenade launcher, he patted the top of his helmet. The RPG was aimed and fired in the direction of the sniper and tore a gaping hole in the lobby of the complex on impact. Following the explosion, the four soldiers rushed into the building with rifles blazing killing six Hezbollah fighters.

Once the lobby was taken, Lieutenant Shalev Rabin and the balance of the unit moved into the building and began a floor-by-floor sweep. Shalev knelt beside his sergeant and tears welled in his eyes. He could not cry. His anger was overshadowing that emotion. Walking over to one of the dead Hezbollah insurgents, he kicked his head in frustration.

“We didn't start this war, but we are surely going to finish it,” he said as he kicked the dead man again.

After securing the area, the troops were given a short time to smoke a cigarette and rest before the next engagement. The lieutenant was thankful that there was only one casualty so far. He was certainly not happy that it had been one of his closest friends and best officers.

Chapter 7

“Christine, turn on the television set in the kitchen,” said Grant as he arrived home from work. “I was listening to news talk on the radio and Hezbollah has started a war with Israel again.”

Christine grabbed the remote and switched on the set as Grant came into the kitchen and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Finding the Cox News Channel, they sat at the breakfast table as the announcer broke in with an update.

“Two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped by members of the militant Islamic group Hezbollah. Shortly thereafter the militant group began to launch Katyusha rockets at Israel's northern border cities. Israel is fighting back and an air strike has been called on the city of Tyre in southern Lebanon,” said the announcer with a most grave tone of voice.

“This might be the beginning of the end, Christine. This is the sort of thing that will probably spark World War III. I just can't understand why those people in the Middle East can't learn to live together. We have all kinds of people living side by side in this country and only rarely is there violence. Usually it is limited at that.”

“Now, Grant. You should know after reading the Bible as much as you have that those people have been fighting since the beginning of time. With the technological advances of the last century, it's just made it that much easier for them to start a conflict,” she replied as she poured a cup of coffee.

“I guess if you really believe what the Bible says about the Middle East, you will know there will never actually be peace until Armageddon. What a way to have to live until then. Innocent people are blown to bits and for what, a few thousand square miles of some of the most uninhabitable land on earth. It never ceases to amaze me.”

“It's pretty obvious that all the Muslim nations hate Israel with a passion. They don't like us that much either. Do you think their religion is really valid? Does it really call on them to kill anyone who refuses to worship the way they tell them to?” asked Christine.

“I'm really not sure. I guess it's just like any of the other religions that have zealots and fanatics. Don't forget that we have had people blowing up abortion clinics in this country in the name of Christianity. I don't think the radical Muslims are much different. It's just that a few maniacs are holding whole nations hostage. If they try to stand up for themselves, they run the risk of losing their lives and families. I think if it weren't for fear, they would have moved toward a kinder government years ago. The real shame is that they are indoctrinating the next generation of young people to follow in their footsteps. If the murderers get access to them when they are young enough, they can be molded into suicide killing machines with no value placed on human life.

“I hope nothing like that ever appears on our shores. Just the thought of my babies or grandbabies getting blown up at the supermarket makes me sick. I don't know how those mothers cope with so much loss. The grief must be numbing.”

“And the terrorists don't even care. They hide amongst the civilians and scream bloody murder when a few of the poor innocent people get killed by

mistake. The most amazing thing of all is that they really believe they are going to heaven. If Allah is really God, I'm not sure I want to go to heaven. I think he is just another face of the devil," said Grant with a look of disgust.

"Now calm down Honey, don't let your blood pressure go off the chart. Remember, we believe that God is in control and it will all work out," said Christine as she bent to give him a peck on the cheek.

"You're right, Sweetie. What's in the oven? It smells pretty terrific."

"I baked a chicken with some rice pilaf."

"Man! When do we eat?"

"It will be ready in about half an hour."

"Where are the kids?"

"Maggie is upstairs most probably on her cell phone and Brett had baseball practice this afternoon. He should be home any minute now."

"I'm going to run upstairs and talk to Maggie before I wash up for dinner."

Grant loosened his tie as he made his way up the staircase to Maggie's room. Entering the room he found her lying on her back listening to a conversation on the cell phone.

"Just as we had suspected. You are going to have to get that phone surgically removed from the side of your head if you don't give it a rest."

"Dad!" said Maggie as she cupped her hand over the phone.

"Tell whoever you are talking to that you will call them back."

"Let me go. My dad just came in. Bye." said Maggie as she dramatically rolled her eyes and put the phone on the nightstand.

Maggie was a typical sixteen year-old girl. Like most of her peers, she viewed her parents more as inconveniences than loving family members. She felt that it was incumbent upon them to provide not only her needs, but also her many wants. Unfortunately for Grant and Christine, this situation was further aggravated by the fact that she was cute and popular. This insured a steady stream of young men visiting the house and calling on the phone. It was also no benefit to her attitude. At times she could be the most loving daughter in the world. Most times though, she was as much a stranger to her parents as any girl they encountered on the street. Grant would remark that at the age of twelve, space aliens abducted Maggie and left behind this human-like being that was impossible to communicate with.

"Maggs, what have I told you about cleaning this room," he complained, stooping down to pull a dirty dinner plate out from under the bed. "This is just disgusting."

"Sorry, Dad."

"Did you get out and look for a summer job today like I asked you to?"

"I put my application in at several stores in the mall."

"Is that the only place you are going to try?"

"No, Dad."

"Straighten this room up tonight and I'm not going to tell you again. The board of health is going to condemn this place," he said as he stepped over a pile of clothes on the floor. "Dinner is almost ready so get cleaned up and come downstairs."

"Yes, Dad."

"Watch out for that green thing that I've seen moving under her bed," warned Brett as he passed the bedroom doorway.

“Shut up punk,” replied Maggie.

“Both of you get cleaned up for dinner. It's almost ready. How was practice, son?”

“Same as usual, hot and sweaty, just the way I like it. My hitting was off and the coach gave me some pointers to practice.”

“We'll have to go to the park this weekend and get in a little batting practice then. How does Saturday morning sound?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“See you downstairs,” said Grant as he headed down the staircase.

At the dinner table, Grant told the kids about the significance of the war in the Middle East. He explained the prophecies that he had been studying from the Bible and the relevance to their lives today. Brett was very interested, questioning his father about the future of the country and the world. Maggie showed only slight interest that centered mostly on money and shopping. Christine did her best to confirm what Grant was telling them and to convey the serious threat to world peace.

Chapter 8

The phone rang in Amaro's hotel room and he set aside the newspaper to answer it. On the line was his aide.

“Delegate Homem, it is imperative that you return to New York at once. Chief Secretary Mabuz Jaali is convening an emergency meeting of the Security Council to address the new unrest in the Middle East.”

“I was just reading the newspaper and there was no mention of an escalation of conflict in the Middle East,” replied Amaro.

“Turn on the television. The media is just beginning coverage. It seems that Hezbollah began firing missiles into northern Israel a short time ago. I will make the necessary travel arrangements for you immediately. I should be able to get you on a flight from Heathrow in the morning.”

“Very good, just email the arrangements to me when they are secured. I will expect to depart in the morning. Goodbye.”

Falling back into the recliner, Amaro took the remote control and turned on the television. Changing the channel to CNB News, he began to watch as the war was unfolding before his eyes. He began to reason within himself.

I must find some way to bring lasting stability to this region. As long as Israel is located there, the Muslim population is going to attempt to destroy them. Strapping bombs to cars and even themselves, those radical religious fanatics will never give up. With that religion spreading rapidly, soon the whole world will be engulfed in war. We will be reduced to a planet in anarchy. The U.N. is the only answer. Our august body could bring about this peace with the proper leadership.

If only there were some means available to track these zealots. We could then monitor their movements and preempt any aggressive action. Thus far we have been unsuccessful in thwarting all of their strikes. If a peace is to last, there can be absolutely no sneak attacks. Knowing the whereabouts of these people could help guarantee that success.

Amaro then reached for his notebook computer and logged onto the Internet. Using a search engine, he began to search for the websites of companies involved with personal identity devices. He found a company that had designed an implant that was as small as a grain of rice. The device was capable of holding ten terabytes of information about its host.

Biosilica Corporation had been testing the device for the past year. Amaro was sure that he had come upon a valuable tool that could be implemented to help curb the violence in the Middle East. As he continued to navigate the website, he

learned details of the device's specifications and capabilities.

“The Thirio is the quintessential identity device for the 21st century. With small scale integration and large scale data capacity, it is the perfect personal identity verification system.

“With a ten terabyte data storage capability, Thirio is able to store virtually every piece of information acquired by its host in a lifetime. From healthcare to finance, the Thirio can produce the information desired with a simple scan.

“Thirio can be implemented in a matter of minutes at any local clinic. The insertion device slides the tiny silica grain just beneath the skin. Biosilica has tested extensively with both animal and human subjects. It has been determined that the device works best in humans when inserted in the forehead or back of the hand. The unit then takes a DNA sample from its host which is programmed into its memory. This insures that the unit cannot be transferred to an alternative host.

“Another great feature of Thirio is its ability to be tracked or monitored. Biosilica has partnered with Heliarch Communications for use of their Global Positioning Satellites. The triangulation technique of G.P.S. allows pinpoint location of each Thirio worldwide...”

“Incredible! This is just what I have been looking for,” muttered Amaro as he fell back into his chair.

He quickly fired off an email to his aide to secure a meeting with the engineers and management of Biosilica. This would be the perfect solution to so many of the world's problems. If this device lived up to its potential, its application could be endless.

Closing his laptop, Amaro poured a glass of sherry from the mini-bar and again fell into his recliner. As he sipped the wine, a myriad of thoughts raced through his mind. All the various implications of what Thirio could bring about would become his passion.

Chapter 9

Aboard the *Perdicion* in the harbor of Sassnitz, Quadrivium convened to discuss the current state of world affairs. The seven men sat alone in a lavish conference room that was comprised of seven large leather chairs situated in an oval. The room contained no conference table but rather smaller tables at the right arm of each chair. Each table was equipped with a lamp, cell phone, laptop computer, leather bound notebook, and writing utensils.

The walls in the room were paneled in a light shade of the finest mahogany veneer taken from trees in the South American rain forests. Traditional round nautical windows were evenly spaced around the circumference of the room and a dimly lit lantern was mounted on the wall between each window.

The floor was made of the finest teak harvested in Indonesia and was covered with an ornate Oriental carpet. The carpet was made especially for Quadrivium and the pattern could be discerned- four roads converging. It was dense, almost one inch thick. The carpet was bordered completely in tassels that were interwoven with twenty-four carat gold fibers.

As the last of the attendants exited the room, Erebus Nikomedes addressed the other six men.

“Welcome. I hope that you are all prosperous and in good health. We have much to discuss and there is, as usual, not enough time to address every issue that is plaguing our sphere. However, we will make every effort to resolve the most pressing problems and bring what stability and profit we can to the world.

“You will find in your notebooks the topics of discussion. We must be diligent to avoid straying from these most important points. I believe we will begin with a briefing from Mr. Volker.”

Gunther Volker was at home in Rugen since Germany was his country of origin. His home was the Castle Muhlberg in the state of Thuringia. His family had ruled in that area for centuries and amassed an unimaginable fortune. Many of the machined parts and metal works that supplied the Nazi war machine were manufactured in the industrial complexes located in Thuringia.

Gunther was a gentleman in his early sixties but could be mistaken for a much younger man. He had cared for his health with diet and exercise and was strong, trim, and fit. He was thought by his colleagues to be a fashionable personality. He often dressed in exquisite fine Italian silk suits.

He was a stern man who had worked equally as hard at managing and enjoying his wealth as he had his health. He had savored the company of many women over the years but had been moderate even in his affections towards them. In truth, he cared little for anyone and cared even less for minorities- especially Jews.

“Gentlemen, once again I must sit here and discuss war in the Middle East. It wearies me that these people, and I use the term generously, should take up even a minute of my precious time.

“This current unrest threatens to spread outside that Godforsaken desert region and disrupt trade and commerce worldwide. Our predecessors wisely placed the

Jews on that piece of land to contain them and the conflicts that arise from the world's hatred for them. This Islam religion or culture is hardly better. They will stop at nothing until the destruction of the nation of Israel is realized. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep the aggression isolated to that region.

"I have arranged people in the United Nations to monitor the U.N. meetings and report back to me. I am hoping that those incompetents might stumble on a solution to the problem. So far, my best estimation is that they are fueling the fire rather than dowsing it.

"If we are ever going to attain a lasting peace in the world, we need new blood in the political arena. These tired democracies and parliaments are no longer working for us. There must be some new form of government that will be easier for us to control. We currently have an obstinate President in the United States who is not working with our people. He tends to side with Israel on whatever action they take- even when they are the aggressor. I have had my fill of him," declared Volker as he reached for a glass of cognac from his table.

Leaning back in his large leather chair, Gunther slowly crossed his legs, waiting for reaction to his words.

"The United Nations is good for our amusement. They are united only in the interest of taking advantage of each other. There will not be a recipe for peace that will come from that collection of talking heads," mused Vasco Ferruccio.

Ferruccio hailed from Italy and made his home in the Tuscany region of the country. His residence, Lamole Castle, had been restored from ruins after centuries of neglect rendered it uninhabitable. In ancient times, the castle stood as a fortress overlooking the Florentine borders.

His family had become wealthy initially by the exporting of wine, which was the prevalent product produced in that region for millennia. Once his family's wealth had been established, it produced its own growth through acquisitions and investments. With the other members of Quadrivium, he enjoyed the distinction of being one of the seven wealthiest men in the world.

"I think it would be wise to hear what the leaders of the world have to say regarding the Middle East. We can then use our influence to manipulate them. It is, after all, to our ends that they will ultimately bend," replied Erebus.

"I should be receiving information periodically from my attendant while we meet here. I will keep you apprised of the situation," said Gunther.

"I will not hold my breath waiting for some sense to come from the U.N.," retorted Vasco, "I would rather believe a donkey could fly."

With that statement, the men all laughed.

"For the moment, we have few choices," said Gunther.

"We have our other organizations that shape politics and what is reported in the news media. There is much we can accomplish with them. The Bilderbergers will conference soon and I believe we have much more direct control over them than the U.N. They are our puppets and dance at the movement of our hands," returned Vasco.

"Come, gentlemen. I have had my chef prepare for us his specialties. We shall enjoy dinner and re-convene later in the evening," said Erebus as he stood motioning toward the staircase to a lower deck. "We have much more ground to cover."

Chapter 10

“Dude, something big is on the horizon. Let’s talk at lunch,” said Jeremy, sticking his head into Grant’s office doorway.

“For sure,” Grant replied.

Later, in the cafeteria, the two found a table away from the noisy crowd and Jeremy began speaking to Grant in a low tone.

“My supervisor told me that there were some rumors about a huge order that had been placed with International Avionics. Apparently, they have won the bid on a multi-billion dollar contract to build fighter jets destined for Israel. It looks as if the Israeli military has had enough, and wants to ‘low level’ the entire Arab population,” he said taking a bite of his hamburger. “I have been instructed to look into our resources and inventory. I can’t tell you what kind of a figure he told me to expect to be working with, but it had a bunch of zeros following it. I have a lot of numbers to crunch in the next few weeks.”

“This will be great. I’ll bet they will expedite the completion of my fan prototype. I’ll finally get to test my design. They’ll surely want that puppy in the jets. That will definitely give Israel the edge in the air. Nothing will be able to touch them,” replied Grant with a satisfied look on his face.

“Don’t breathe a word of this to anyone. I am the only one in the accounting department that has been notified. The upper echelon is keeping a lid on it for now. When things get rolling, I’ll bet there’s going to be bonuses all around.”

“Cha-ching,” whispered Grant as the two brimmed over with smiles.

The extra money would surely be welcome to Grant but his interest in it was second to his desire to see his brainchild tested. Grant was a technical nerd in every sense of the word and while he enjoyed the lucrative position he held with Aereodyne Thrust, it was the ability to spend his day in front of a computer designing parts that really satisfied him.

“Hey, they’re having a seminar at my church tonight on end time prophecy. Dr. Thomas Cousins is the speaker. You know the guy who wrote that best seller about the anti-Christ. I think it’s going to be informative. Want to come?” asked Jeremy.

“That sounds great. I don’t think Christine and the kids would be interested. I’ll ask them anyway,” replied Grant. “Want me to pick you up and ride together?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“What time?”

“I think it starts at seven. We probably ought to leave about six because they will have some presentations, and I want to get a seat up close.”

“Sixish it is,” said Grant as the two of them rose and headed back to their offices.

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Arriving at home after work, Grant entered the kitchen looking for Christine.

Not finding her there, he made his way down the hall to the bedroom and found her folding laundry on the bed and watching the evening news on television.

“Hey, honey,” said Grant as he bent to kiss her. “How was your day?”

“About like usual. I took my car in and had the oil changed, stopped at the supermarket, and picked Maggie up at school, how about you?”

“Well, I’m not supposed to say anything, but Jeremy told me about a huge contract we are about to get. It will mean more money for sure.”

“Great. There can never be too much of that,” giggled Christine.

“Oh, I’m going to a seminar with Jeremy tonight at his church. Want to come?”

“What’s it going to be about?”

“End time prophecies from the Bible.”

“No, thanks. I just don’t get into that sort of stuff. I hope you enjoy it, though.”

“Jeremy and I will probably just grab something to eat on the way. I think I’ll change my clothes before I go.”

“We have some late breaking news coming out of Israel,” said the newscaster as Grant and Christine turned their attentions to the television set.

“We are trying to confirm a report just coming in from Jerusalem, that a missile fired from Lebanon has overshot its mark and totally destroyed the sacred Islamic Mosque known as the *Dome of the Rock*. I repeat, the report is, as of now, unconfirmed. We are trying to reach our correspondent in Jerusalem to give us a visual account of what is happening on the Temple Mount.”

“Yes, Ronald. I’m here. I am standing about five blocks from the Temple Mount and I can see a column of smoke rising from that direction. I am trying to make my way up the street, but as you can see, it is pandemonium here.”

The reporter and his cameraman were struggling towards the Temple Mount. Pushing and shoving up the narrow street, they were only making limited progress. At last they reached a vantage point about a block from the site. Climbing onto a rooftop, they were able to get a clean camera shot for the news channel.

“Ronald, as you can see, the *Dome of the Rock* is gone- taken out completely by a missile fired out of southern Lebanon.”

“Was it a Katyusha missile, David?” asked the newscaster.

“I don’t think the Katyusha has enough range to reach Jerusalem from southern Lebanon. It must have been a longer range missile, probably supplied by Iran. I believe the Zelzal-2 can possibly reach Jerusalem from Lebanon.”

“David, can you tell whether there were any worshipers present at the time the mosque was destroyed?”

“I don’t believe there were but a few of the mosque’s administrative people there. At this time of day, there were certainly tourists and visitors from the neighboring Muslim nations there. With this type of destruction, I’m not sure we will be able to get an accurate death toll.”

“Thank you, David. We will be rejoining you in a few moments.”

“Wow! This is really important. I have read that in the end times, the Temple of Solomon would be rebuilt on the Temple Mount. I could never see how that would be possible considering the *Dome of the Rock* mosque was there,” said Grant as he stared intently at the television screen.

“It’s ironic. They have blown up their own holy place,” said Christine as she folded a towel and placed it on a stack of other towels. “Violence is never the answer. That’s what Jesus has tried to teach us.”

“I don’t think they got the message. I have got to get ready and go to the seminar. It will be that much more educational with this vital piece of the puzzle in place. I know Dr. Cousins will be able to elaborate more on what ramifications this will have on our world today.”

Just then the phone rang and was answered by Christine.

“He’s right here,” said Christine as she handed the phone to Grant.

It was Jeremy on the line wondering if Grant was watching the news.

“I know. Man, this is awesome. I’m about to leave now. I’ll see you in a few. Bye,” said Grant hanging up the phone.

“I’m gone, honey. See you later tonight.”

Grant was excited as he scooped his keys off the top of the dresser and headed for the door. What incredible timing that something like this would occur at a time when he could get some good information about it.

As he drove to Jeremy’s, he fiddled with the radio searching for stations carrying the story. Finding one, he listened intently as the broadcaster relayed the news. The entire Muslim world was enraged by the destruction of the mosque and immediately began blaming Israel. They were launching a conspiracy theory that the mosque was actually bombed from within by Jewish zealots even though eyewitness accounts and video clearly showed the missile strike.

Chapter 11

The stone and rock that jutted up from the ground in various places made it difficult for the jihadists to crawl through the mountainous terrain. Al Hakam Ramzi was no stranger to the demands of terrorist training. He had been in Afghanistan for some years and had studied under his mentor, Osama Bin Laden.

Ramzi had been intended to fly one of the hijacked commercial jets used in the 911 attacks. He was taken off the mission when he fell ill suddenly with pneumonia. His self-perceived failure made him train even harder and desire even more intensely the opportunity to strike at the infidels of the West.

The faces of the warriors were barely visible as they peered from the narrow opening in their traditional headscarves, known as shimaghs, that were wrapped around their heads. The men squinted to see their targets as the wind blew the sand and dust into their faces.

Shots rang out and echoed around the canyon walls as the men fired and struck their targets with deadly accuracy. The Russian army that had attempted to take control of the region in the 1980s had underestimated their training and skill. The United States learned a valuable lesson in the 9/11 attacks and would not take this army for granted.

It was ironic that the fighter's weapon of choice was an automatic rifle originally designed and built for the Russian Army. The *Type 56* was a Chinese copy of the famous *Kalishnikov AK-47* and was supplied to the Taliban exclusively by China.

"Yaaaaaah!" yelled the men as they jumped to their feet and charged toward the bombed out shell of a building.

With stealthy precision they crept through the doorways of the inner rooms half-expecting to be fired upon by enemy combatants. This was one of a hundred times they had practiced this exercise, dreaming of the day they could employ their skills against the infidel.

As the day of training neared an end, the evening call to prayer went out and the men unrolled their sajjad known in the West as prayer rugs. Dropping to their knees and bowing towards Mecca, the fighters assumed the familiar pose of humility in reverence to Allah.

When the final prayers had been offered, the men cleansed themselves before congregating in small tents for their final meal of the day. The cooks had prepared for them mihammer, a dish consisting of a small baked lamb stuffed with egg whites, raisins, and butter. The mihammer was accompanied by another traditional Arab staple made with lentils and cracked wheat or bulqur pilaf.

As the men lounged on blankets around the table of food that had been laid out before them, they spoke of the day's work and the anticipation of the mission that was being planned for them.

"I must be allowed to redeem myself," implored Al Hakam, "I must be chosen for the next jihad."

“I have it from good authority that we will not be long in avenging the destruction of our most holy mosque. Plans are already nearing completion for the next attack on our most hated enemy, the United States,” replied Yusri Zafar- one of the more influential leaders of Al Qaeda.

“I live to be the chosen one,” Ramzi replied.

“Yes, my brother,” said Zafar as he patted Ramzi on the knee, “You will have your chance. You will *all* have your chance.”

“Will the mission be large scale?” one of the other men asked.

“Let me say this. When the next mission is completed, we expect full scale war,” replied Zafar.

“Praise be Allah,” was chanted around the tent.

The shadows of the men’s silhouettes danced around the tent’s walls as the flames from the lanterns jumped about with the mild movement of the night air.

The flicker of the flames could be seen reflected in the coal dark eyes of the jihadists. The men stared into each other’s faces, happy with the prospects that they might get to die in battle for Allah.

As the evening meal came to a close, the men excused themselves one by one and adjourned to their respective sleeping quarters. Al Hakam Ramzi waited to be the last so that he could speak with Yusri Zafar alone.

“Sir, as you know I was to be an operative in the 911 attacks. I suddenly fell ill and was removed from duty. I believe Allah, by his grace, retained me for a more important role. I have prayed fervently for guidance and feel that Allah has chosen me from all Islam to carry out the next jihad,” explained Ramzi.

“I will tell you this in the strictest of confidence. I am the only one outside the inner circle that has been informed of this. Plans for the next attack are complete. It will be earth shattering. The world will no longer be the same.”

“Yes, you eluded to it before at dinner. But will I be a part of it?” Ramzi asked impatiently.

Yusri Zafar stared into the eyes of Al Hakam and paused for a moment. He then closed his eyes and lowered his head. Ramzi’s heart sunk in his chest taking this gesture to be a sign of denial.

After a few seconds, Zafar lifted his head and placed his hands on Ramzi’s shoulders.

“I am not supposed to tell you this, my child. It *will* be you who carries out the next great attack on the United States.”

“Praise be Allah for His infinite kindness!” replied Ramzi as he looked to the sky.

“You must tell no one. You must act as if you know nothing. If they find out I told you, you may be removed from the mission or even worse,” warned Zafar.

“You can rest assured that this secret will die with me,” replied Ramzi.

Al Hakam Ramzi then looked soulfully into the eyes of his leader and searched for the answer to a most profound question. Not being satisfied without discerning the answer, he decided to put it in words.

“Will I meet Allah?” he asked.

“Most assuredly,” replied Zafar as he squeezed Ramzi’s shoulders with his hands.

Chapter 12

“Let us come to order,” said Mabuz Jaali as he banged the gavel to open the U.N. Security Council meeting. “I have assembled this emergency meeting to discuss the current Middle East crisis. This is a matter of most pressing urgency. As you have all been informed, the sacred mosque *The Dome of the Rock* has been destroyed.

As the words fell from his lips, a delegate screaming at the top of his voice interrupted him.

“Our sacred and most holy place has been destroyed by those murderous Israelis,” screamed the delegate from Yemen as he pointed at the delegate from Israel. “We want justice. The United Nations should declare war against Israel and their American conspirators. The terrorists should pay for this crime against our faith and our god!”

“Your own terrorists have destroyed your sacred mosque,” fired back the Israeli delegate. “We have video footage tracking the missile incoming from Lebanon and launched by Hezbollah.”

“We will not accept any video from your underhanded leaders. We do not recognize your government and consider you a mere terrorist organization!” screamed the delegate from Syria.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, please, this bickering will not help solve the crisis we find our world in at this very moment. We must keep our heads as we explore our options for resolution of this matter,” said Mabuz Jaali as he attempted to regain control of the meeting.

The delegates from Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and Iran leaped suddenly from their seats and stormed out of the assembly. The room roared with the sounds of delegates discussing the events with their nearest counterparts. Mabuz Jaali continued to pound the podium in an attempt to regain control of the meeting. As the delegates once again came to order, Mabuz Jaali addressed them.

“Most of you know the delegate from Portugal, Amaro D. Homem. He has great wisdom for a young man and is well respected among most of this assembly. I have asked him to work on some possible solutions to the unrest we are experiencing in the world. He will speak to us now.”

Mabuz Jaali motioned toward the podium as Amaro stood from his chair. After a moment of silence standing stoic before the microphone, Amaro began to speak.

“World leaders, it is a great honor to stand before this venerable body. Like you, I have searched for answers to this growing problem of violence in our world. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the problems plaguing the Middle East. This violence is spilling over into every nation on earth. It is incumbent upon the United Nations to find a solution to the mindless killing of our populations. No person on this planet is safe to walk, sit, or ride without the fear of an explosion taking his or her life in an instant.

“I have studied the problem and believe I have arrived at a plausible solution. I am currently researching cutting-edge technology that will be the answer to many if not all of our problems with both terrorism and crime in general.

“If you have not already done so, please take a moment to look over the treatise that was distributed by our aides earlier. In general you will find that it outlines a plan of action for the implementation of a device capable of storing vast volumes of information as well as serving as a tracking device. You may be wondering how this could help our current world crisis. I will lay out my plan in this following brief explanation.

“We now enjoy all the benefits of globalization. Along with the benefits of globalization come the problems of global crime and terrorism as it has come to be known. What if it were possible to know where these troublemakers were at all times? How could this knowledge be put to use to preempt violence?

“I have discovered a technology that will not only answer these questions, but is available at this very moment in time. The device can and will be used to catalog every piece of information about its host. This will include but not be limited to financial, medical, educational, and social information. Along with that capability will come the ability to track its host on a global scale. There will be no place for criminals of any kind to hide.

“The implications for its use of managing finance are enormous. There will no longer be need for currency. All transactions can be managed by a simple scan of the implant. Since the implants will only operate in their original host, theft will be rendered impossible!

“In summation, I will encourage you to speak with your respective governments about a timely implementation of this plan. We have assembled a fully staffed department of scientists, engineers, and technicians to answer all your questions regarding the Thirio device. We are currently in the process of securing financing for its deployment worldwide. Its manufacturer assures us that there will be sufficient quantities available for each nation as implantation of the device begins. If implementation begins immediately, it has been estimated that all populations will be completed in approximately three and one half years. In a show of confidence, I have already received the implant myself and have made arrangements for my staff to do likewise.”

The room once again erupted in a cacophony of conversations as Amaro stepped away from the podium and the delegates left their seats to join in discussion groups around the room.

Chapter 13

Mael Tristan sat with his eyes closed as his male attendant styled his hair. The steady whine of the hair dryer was silenced when a knock was heard on the stateroom door.

“For the gentleman,” said the courier in a low voice as he handed an envelope to the attendant.

Closing the door, the attendant returned and handed the delivery to Mael. He placed the envelope on his lap as the attendant returned to the duty from which he was interrupted.

Mael Tristan had been a member of Quadrivium for six years. His fortune was second to none among the other members. He was born in Paris in 1968 to one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Europe. The Tristan family history was so long that it was almost untraceable. Historians had been commissioned to research the establishment of the family and had traced it as far back as 305 of the Common Era.

The Tristan family had been wealthy for so long that there was no idea of the origin of its wealth. Since wealth begets more wealth, their fortune had been self-sustaining and increasing century after century.

Mael Tristan had many residences around the world but his home base of operation was the Chateau de Villandry. Located in the Loire Valley of his home country France, its origin dated back to the 1500s. After having acquired the castle in the 20th century, the Tristan family renovated it, installing a maze of hedgerows and a vast patchwork of gardens. The grounds soon became one of the most awe-inspiring landscapes in the world.

“Leave the room,” said Mael as his attendant completed drying and styling his hair.

He then stood from his chair and crossed the stateroom. Reaching the bar, he poured a glass of champagne and took a seat by a window. Sipping the wine, he then set it down and opened the sealed envelope. Inside he found a copy of the treatise Amaro had presented at the United Nations meeting and a cover letter from his attaché to the U.N.

Sir:

Please find enclosed an interesting development at the United Nations. This proposal was issued by a young delegate with an unusual flair for diplomacy. He is well respected among the other delegates and I thought this worthy of your consideration.

In the event that further information about this plan is required, I would be happy to arrange meetings between the proper associates to ascertain its relevance and plausibility.

Your servant,
Geraud Naziare

Setting aside the cover letter, Mael began to read the proposal set forth by Amaro. The more he read, the more interested he became in the concept.

“I must present this to the others today,” he thought as he again sipped the champagne.

* * *

Quadrivium convened at 2 p.m. to once again discuss world matters. As was the custom, the host would open the meeting with points of discussion or a salutation.

“I trust you slept well,” stated Erebus as he stood beside his chair in the conference room.

The men nodded and motioned in affirmation as Erebus took his seat. Attendants quickly insured that all items were in their proper places and that each man had the beverage of his choice. Upon completion of his task, they left the room in a reposeful manner so that the meeting could get under way.

“I have come into the possession of some interesting information that could be of great use to us,” said Mael.

“Speak on, colleague,” replied Gunther.

“It seems that there is a young diplomat from Portugal with an intriguing proposition for the control of terrorism and monetary purloining. I have read the treatise at length and find little folly in his recommendations.”

“Who is this young man?” asked Gunther.

“He sounds like just another one of those prima-donna councilmen at that circus they call the United Nations,” quipped Vasco laughingly.

“Give him a chance to make his case,” returned Erebus.

“The young man’s name is Amaro D. Homem. He is the delegate representing the nation of Portugal. He has made the most amazing proposal and I believe it is worthy of our consideration.

“If you would open your notebooks, you will find enclosed a copy of the document I received earlier. It details step by step the implementation of a system worldwide that will assist in the curtailing of violence and monetary crimes.

“Do we need to read the entire document or can you give us a summary overview of the plan?” asked Aldous Sorrel.

“I can present a brief summary. It seems that Mr. Homem has uncovered a widely unadvertised yet well-developed and tested device. Basically it is a silicon integrated circuit about the size of a grain of rice. It is capable of storing all the information acquired by an individual in a lifetime- financial, medical, demographical- well, everything.”

“How does this bring peace and security to the world?” asked Vasco.

“He proposes that one of these devices be implanted in every man, woman, and child on the earth. The device is implanted in a matter of minutes. It is slipped just beneath the skin. Once in place, the device will give up its information when scanned by an authorized scanner.”

“But if the device is removed from the person, could it not be installed in someone else? This would in effect be just another variation of identity theft,” surmised Aldous.

“That is one of the device’s strongest attributes. Remember when our predecessors trusted that the credit card would be a solution to the theft of cash? Look how easily the cards are stolen and abused. This device takes a sample of its host’s DNA when first installed. Once programmed with that information, it will not operate in any other individual!” boasted Mael in an excited and confident tone of voice.

“That is all well and good for solving the problem of identity theft and robbery, but what of the control of crime and terrorism?” asked Gunther.

“The device, Thirio I believe it is pronounced, can be tracked by global positioning satellites. The ability to know where criminals and terrorists are located will allow authorities to thwart murderers, suicide bombers, and radical militias. Criminals will think twice if they can be placed at the scene of a crime at the exact instance it is committed. Criminal defense would be impossible.”

“This does indeed have promise. What do you think about it, Vasco?” asked Erebus.

“I like it.”

“Well, if Vasco thinks it is a good idea, then I think we should have a show of hands on the adopting of this young man’s plan. All in favor?”

Erebus looked around the circle of men as one by one they raised their hands in favor of Amaro Homem’s plan for the implementation of an integrated circuit being implanted in every person on earth.

“Unanimous. Mael, have your people make the necessary arrangements for the implementation and financing of this proposition. I see no need to delay. Should you need any further assistance from us, we will make ourselves available through the usual channels.”

“Let us retire for the day having solved the problems of the world in one afternoon. I think I need a massage,” joked Vasco as the others laughed with him.

Chapter 14

Two men could be seen standing just inside an obscure doorway to a building on Tiferet Israel Street in Jerusalem. As others approached, their identities were carefully checked before they would be allowed entry. This would be the site of a clandestine meeting not convened for centuries.

On the arrival of the seventy-first man, the guards closed the doors to the street and the group withdrew into a lower level room. The chairs were aligned in a semi-circle and elevated in stepped rows like stadium seating. Two large throne-like chairs were facing the seats and were occupied by elderly gentlemen wearing religious ceremonial attire. Oil lamps mounted around the wall provided light with shadows shifting as the flames danced in the movement of the air.

The gathering of these seventy-one men would be the first sanctioned assembly of the Sanhedrin since the year 358 of the Common Era. No other important religious event could overshadow this gathering of council members representing the various factions making up the Jewish religion.

Rabbi Baruch Shamira would be the Nasi or high priest presiding over this supreme court. He was a well known and respected elder from the orthodox community. Second in authority, sometimes referred to by the title Av Beit Din, would be Rabbi Shani Velvel. Rabbi Velvel was younger than Rabbi Shamira and had recently retired with a commission from the Israeli Army, where he had served as chief priest over the rabbis assigned to serve the troops.

As the last of the men took their seats, Rabbi Shamira stood with eyes closed and waited for the murmur of the assembly to quiet. Raising his hands with his palms facing the council, he began to sing in Hebrew an ancient prayer of worship asking for God's blessing on their meeting. At the end of each verse of the prayer, the assembly responded in unison, "How great is our Lord God who is our wisdom and strength." As the prayer concluded, Rabbi Shamira fell to his knees and bowed deeply in humility before God and the council. He then stood and motioned for guards to enter the room.

As the guards slowly walked into the room from a dark hallway, it became evident that they were carrying a chest supported by two rails that ran its length. The chest was two feet square and completely clad with gold sheathing. The sheathing had been hammered into ornate displays of pomegranates, figs, and date palms. The council members began to murmur as they attempted to guess what the contents of the chest might be.

"My brothers, this is a great day in the history of Israel. We have seen the Lord our God restore the Temple Mount to us in an instant and we should not delay what we know we must do. The Temple of Solomon must be rebuilt."

With these words, the assembly roared with cheers. The Sanhedrin members recognized this time to be a holy and unprecedented point in the history of the Jewish people. Nothing could rival the importance of the rebuilding of the temple and the re-establishment of the Jewish sacrifice.

“We have suffered in exile all these centuries, being children of foreign lands. God is gracious. He has given us back our homeland and delivered to us our precious holy place. We must make haste to show ourselves worthy of this gift and diligent in the eyes of God. See before you the evidence of this great ordination,” said Rabbi Shamira.

He then walked over to the chest and having bowed in reverence, lifted the lid and removed an ornate urn from it. Turning to the council holding the urn he said, “The discovery of this precious treasure has been hidden from the world until now. No more than three people in the world know of its existence. My brothers, I hold before you the sacred ashes of the red heifer!”

A protracted gasp was heard about the room and was then followed by an eerie silence. The atmosphere in the room seemed to change as a dead stillness overtook the council. The flames on the torches that had been dancing in the air were now straight, reaching toward the ceiling without movement. Suddenly, all of the council turned in a single motion and looked to their left, catching a glimpse of some movement from the corner of their eyes. There was nothing there.

“This most holy artifact was uncovered by a young boy while playing in the caves near Khirbet Qumran in the late 1940s. His mother recognized it to be of great religious significance and I was summoned by her immediately to recover it. We are now currently the only people on earth who know of its existence,” declared Rabbi Shamira.

“With this most holy sacrament in our possession, it becomes even more important that we rebuild our temple. An engineering team has already been assembled and has been working on the final detailed drawings before construction can begin. We have secured the stone and masons, metals and linens, woods and reeds. The temple will be rebuilt to the exact specifications outlined by God. No machinery or any modern piece of equipment will be used in its construction. We must observe every holy instruction from God,” said Rabbi Velvel as he paced back and forth before the gathering.

“How can we accomplish this task under such conditions as we have in Israel today? Our people are blown to pieces at every turn. Surely if we embark on this endeavor we will meet with swift and vicious retaliation from the Muslims,” said Yitzak Jacobson, a respected member of the court.

“We must have faith that God will allow us to persevere in this time of trouble. It will be with His strength that we will overcome and once again take our place in the eyes of the world as His chosen people,” replied Rabbi Velvel.

“Gentlemen, we must not underestimate the power of God as we have so often in our past. He is more powerful than any person, religion, or false god. He has given us a sign of confirmation in the destruction of the mosque. There is no place for the faint of heart in this commission. The temple must be rebuilt and rebuilt it shall be!” shouted Rabbi Shamira as the room erupted once again in cheers and adulations.

“Will our allies, the Americans, sanction such a direct slap in the face of Islam? Can we afford to alienate the only country on earth that has kept us from destruction these past years? Who will protect us while we undertake this great task?” asked another priest.

As Rabbi Velvel prepared to reply, a sudden rush of air moved through the room nearly extinguishing the torches on the wall. Cautiously he took a step backwards and paused.

“God is our strength and our protector! It is not by the hands of the Americans or any other nation that we will succeed. God alone will rebuild His temple and no nation can stand against Him,” replied Rabbi Velvel.

“Let us close this assembly in a mind of unity for the great commission that God has placed before us. I will ask that those of you who are against the rebuilding of the temple at this time stand and make your case before the council. You will not be shouted down nor will you be ridiculed. We must act in unison for God to grant us success,” said Rabbi Shamira.

As he scanned the room looking into the eyes of the members of the Sanhedrin, he was not surprised to find that no priest stood to make a case against the plan. He was certain that God had ordained this undertaking and would keep the council with one mindset until its completion. Standing before them, he once again closed his eyes and raised his hands.

“Oh most Holy God of Israel, we bow before you in humility. Your awesome greatness was known throughout the ages and we recognize it to this day. May your most humble servants always know and revere you. May your light shine upon us and make us strong. May we walk in the shadow of your greatness all the days of our lives and remember to observe your laws,” uttered Rabbi Shamira as he closed the assembly in prayer.

The seventy-one men quietly left the room in prayerful meditation as they felt the full weight of the great commission that God had placed upon them. It had been centuries since so powerful a group had so much to accomplish in Israel. It was certainly true that it would take the power of God to overcome the anger of the Muslim community. This action would most assuredly spark an Islamic Jihad and much blood would be spilled.

Chapter 15

“I heard they’re going to spin the monster pretty soon,” said Jeremy as he poked his head into Grant’s office doorway.

“Yeah, it won’t be long now. It’s already gone through research and development and the plans have been passed on to prototyping. They should have a rough model machined in a few weeks. Then comes balancing, more balancing, and then more balancing,” replied Grant.

“It seems like you’ve got a lot riding on this project. I’m not sure I could handle the pressure. It’s much easier to crunch numbers.”

“Well, if this thing flies to pieces, I might be crunching ice at the nearest convenience store,” Grant said laughingly.

“What do you think about the meeting? If we didn’t already know something was up, we would surely suspect it now. I can’t believe they rented the downtown convention center to hold a company-wide meeting,” said Grant.

“It’s still not common knowledge about the contract. Keep it kind of close to the vest until after the meeting. With the war in Israel and Lebanon escalating, I wouldn’t be surprised if the order for the fighters wasn’t increased.”

“Sounds like job security to me. Anyway, I’m about to go down to manufacturing and check on my baby. I want to make doubly sure that nothing is overlooked. If this fan works the way I think it will, we’re going to sell a lot of them,” said Grant as he passed Jeremy in the doorway and headed for the elevator.

Reaching the ground floor, Grant made his way to a shuttle cart and raced across the grounds, finally arriving at the prototype center. He inserted his identification card into the security panel and placed his right eye against the retina scanner. The door locks opened with a snap and he was allowed to enter. A security guard at the reception desk then greeted him.

“Good day Mr. Stokes.”

“Hi Michelle.”

“I saw you coming down the hallway and have already sent for an escort. Here’s your badge.”

“Thanks.”

When the escort arrived, he led Grant through a maze of hallways and doorways finally reaching the plant where the work was being done on his jet fan blade. Grant was always impressed when entering this area of the company. The giant room was filled with massive metalworking equipment. The noise level was so high that protective hearing gear had to be worn. Eyeglasses and hard hats were also mandatory in this area.

“It’s back here now,” said the escort as Grant followed him down a corridor between the giant lathes.

Grant then saw his brainchild mounted on a giant turning machine. He watched in amazement as the fan rotated slowly and tiny slivers of metal were shaved from

it. The light from the ceiling reflected off its shiny surface as the fan was bathed in cutting fluids.

“What do you think?” asked one of the chief metallurgists, Robert Foust, as he stepped up beside Grant.

“You guys are amazing. It’s one thing to draw something like this but to actually see it being created, well, that’s something else. How do you think it’s progressing?”

“I think we’re making pretty good time. I expect the testing to begin right on schedule. I’m really impressed with your design. The tapered edges on the blades with that subtle twist, well that’s just genius.”

“I don’t know about genius, just a lot of computer time and sleepless nights. I only hope it produces the thrust the modeling says it will.”

“I’m very optimistic. It looks like a winner to me and I’ve seen a lot of losers,” replied Robert.

“I’m going to leave it with you. I just wanted to look at it again.”

“Feel free to come by as often as you like. You will probably be spending a lot more time over here as this thing nears completion. I bet you’ll be plenty nervous about the time we mount this in an engine and spin it.”

Grant made a trembling motion as he reached out to shake Robert’s hand before leaving. Grant and his escort then began the trek back to the reception desk. Grant turned in his clearance badge and once again drove his cart back to the main complex where his office was located.

Chapter 16

“Good morning Mr. President,” said Secretary of State Clayton Jordan as President Donald Montgomery entered the conference room.

“Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be meeting with you today. We have many topics on the agenda and it seems there is never enough time to address them adequately. Do you all have your briefings?”

As the President’s cabinet members began to shuffle through the paperwork that lay before them, the president requested a cup of coffee and took his usual place at the oval table.

“Mr. President, I have a rather important topic to address. I feel that it should be moved to the top of our agenda,” said Clayton Jordan.

“Very well, let’s hear it.”

“I have received communiqués from our ambassador to the United Nations about a plan that has already been adopted and is being implemented in some nations at this very moment. The plan involves the implant of a device that will both store information about its host and provide tracking information.”

President Montgomery slammed his fist on the table when he heard this.

“You know how I feel about this. My religious convictions as well as my common sense tell me that this is a bad idea. I won’t have it during my administration!” declared the president angrily.

“Sir, I understand. But we will be one of the only nations on earth not to adopt the plan immediately.”

“Mr. President, if I may speak,” said Secretary of Treasury Elizabeth Hunt.

“You have the floor,” replied the President, rocking back in his armchair.

“I have been looking over the proposal since it was introduced. I can see many positive aspects to the implant. It would, if nothing else, end the illegal transfer of money- be it from petty theft or grand larceny. It would stabilize finances in the world and save billions if not trillions of dollars in loss from identity theft and unauthorized use of credit cards,” she continued.

“I also understand that through the tracking mechanism, crimes would be simple to solve since the device would put the criminal at the scene,” chimed in Clayton.

“No! I don’t care to hear about the benefits. We will neither at this time nor any other time during my presidency adopt this plan. Let us move on to the next point.”

“The Middle East violence is at an all time high, Mr. President. I have drawn up a proposal for sending more troops and supplies for the defense of the border between Israel and Lebanon. You’ll find on page seventeen a break down for the necessary troop deployments I am suggesting,” said Secretary of Defense Manuel Hernandez.

President Montgomery flipped through the pages and stopped to read certain sections of interest as they caught his eye.

“This all looks in order. I’m going to look it over more closely at a later time. I will trust your judgment for now and give you a tentative go-ahead. I might want to see a few more aircraft deployed. I think if we keep hitting them from the air it will take the wind out of them. What else do we have?”

“We’re catching a lot of heat from the Associated Constitutional Litigation Union about the detainees. Certain factions are pushing for the militants to be tried as U.S. citizens. Sooner or later we’re probably going to have a showdown with the Supreme Court over this issue,” said Attorney General Sebastian Turner.

“Tashika has my calendar. Schedule a meeting with me for next week so that we can discuss this further,” replied the president.

“Very good, sir.”

“We are showing strong numbers in the economic sector. Your tax cuts are generating the desired effects. Unemployment is down and the economy is growing at a slow but steady pace. As long as this slow growth keeps up, interest rates can be held down. I see a pretty good quarter ahead of us, sir,” said Secretary of Commerce Aaron Beckman.

“Finally some good news, how do the numbers look on our trade deficit with China?”

“Not good, Mr. President, they are still holding out on loosening their trade restrictions against some of our best selling products. I have sent a team of advisors over to work on the problem but the Chinese government is difficult to deal with. We’ve lost most of our heavy manufacturing to them. While we still have the edge in technology, most of what we develop is being manufactured for pennies over there.”

“Stay on them. We owe it to our people. We won’t have much of a nation if we lose all our jobs. What else do we have?” asked the President.

The President scanned the table and reached the conclusion that the meeting was just about finished. Closing his notebook he stood up, and the rest of the cabinet remained standing as the President walked from the room.

“I’m not sure the President’s on the right side of this one,” whispered Clayton Jordan into the ear of Elizabeth Hunt, referring to the Thirio implant.

She just shook her head and gave Clayton a discouraged look as they proceeded to leave the room. Both of them realized that the President and the people of the United States could not stop a worldwide effort that would control the world’s finances.

Chapter 17

Nights were cold in southern Lebanon as the soldiers huddled around fires in an attempt to fight off the chill. The firelight danced on the shadowy figures producing an eerie display. Conversation was rare as most of the soldiers were lost in the thoughts of their homes and families. Lieutenant Shalev Rabin sat in his tent with barely enough light to see the words that he was writing on his stationary.

“My love,

It seems as if a lifetime has passed since I held you. The scent of your hair still lingers in my senses and I ache to be with you again. I long to feel the brush of your soft cheek against mine. The thought of kissing your lips is too cruel a memory to conjure. I am consumed with desire for you in this God forsaken place.

We are making little progress in the defeat of this terrorist enemy. They gladly sacrifice themselves and their loved ones for the sake of their religion. How I wish God would deliver us from this evil. I still have faith that He will.”

A courier suddenly interrupted Lieutenant Rabin as he attempted to complete the correspondence to his fiancé.

“The Major wishes to see you, Lieutenant Rabin,” said the courier as he saluted.

“Tell the Major I will be there in a moment.”

Lieutenant Rabin carefully put away the letter he was writing and straightened his uniform. Grabbing his helmet, he headed out of the tent toward the Major’s temporary headquarters.

The command center had been set up in an old hotel that had been gutted earlier by insurgents. Few remnants remained of the hotel’s former glory. Only the ornate stone flooring gave evidence that the hotel had once been a beautiful lodging for tourists. Now there were only a few pieces of damaged furniture placed around ugly walls riddled with the pockmarks made from bullets. In the dim light of a lamp sitting on his desk, the Major could barely be seen flipping through documents. As Shalev approached, the Major placed the stack of papers aside and looked up at the Lieutenant.

“Major,” said the Lieutenant as he snapped to attention and saluted.

“At ease, Rabin,” said the Major. “I have received orders from Supreme Command for your reassignment of duty. You will report to Colonel Jacobson in Jerusalem the day after tomorrow. A troop transport has already been assigned to take you. All arrangements have been made.

“Yes sir. Begging the Major’s pardon but could I inquire why I am being removed from my platoon? Wouldn’t I be of more use leading the troops I have trained?” asked Shalev.

“I have only been told that it is a special assignment. No other explanation was offered.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the Lieutenant as he once again snapped to attention and saluted.

“You are dismissed,” said the Major as he returned the salute.

Shalev felt a sense of turmoil over the news of his redeployment. On the one hand he was happy that he was returning to his home in Jerusalem where he could be with his fiancée and family, but on the other hand he was distraught that he was abandoning his fellow soldiers. He could not help but wonder what this could be about. He was certain that he had made no egregious errors in the field. His platoon’s performance in the execution of their duties had been flawless.

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Arriving in Jerusalem, Lieutenant Rabin’s first goal was to see his fiancé, Adina Cohen. His return to Jerusalem would be a total surprise to his fiancé and family since he had not had an opportunity to contact them about his reassignment.

As he knocked on the door to Adina’s apartment, he nervously shuffled his feet not knowing whether she would be at home. His heart began to race when he heard the latches being drawn from within the apartment. When the door swung open his eyes fell upon the face of his love.

“Shalev!” she screamed as she jumped into his arms and kissed him.

“I would have called but I have not had the chance.”

“What are you doing here? How did you get leave?” she asked as she kissed all over his cheeks.

“Let’s go inside and I will tell you about it.”

Entering the parlor, they sat down on a small couch.

“I have been reassigned to an outfit here in Jerusalem,” stated Shalev as he took hold of Adina’s hands.

“So you will not be returning to Lebanon?”

“Not at this time, so far as I know.”

“I won’t even ask why! I am so overjoyed to have you safe at home that I don’t care. Do you know how long you will be here?”

“I have no idea. I report to a Colonel Jacobson tomorrow to receive my orders. I have a feeling that I will be staying here. I hope so, anyway,” he said as he leaned over and kissed her cheek.

“Have you seen your family yet?”

“No. You were my first stop. Will you come to my home with me? I know my mother and father will be glad to see you.”

“I wish I could but I was just about to return to work. What about this evening?”

“That would be great.”

“I will come to your house at about six o’clock.”

“I will be counting the seconds until I see you again,” said Shalev as he stood to leave.

Stopping in the doorway, he turned to Adina and they once again embraced in a passionate kiss before bidding each other farewell.

Chapter 18

The castle Berry Pomeroy in Devonshire stood looming above the wooded valley floor. Its gray stonewalls were as stark and cold as its wealthy inhabitant, Aldous Sorrel. Stepping from the limousine, he was greeted by his manservant as he mounted the stairs that led into the foyer. A maid took his overcoat and hat as he crossed the great hall.

“Is she here?”

“Yes sir. She refuses to leave her bedroom.”

Aldous stopped at the foot of a giant staircase and gazed up at the first landing. With a scowl he commanded the attendant to bring him a drink. As he entered the library, he slammed the door behind him.

The Sorrel family had controlled a large fleet of ships in England for centuries earning them the lion’s share of income from shipping cargo around the world. His predecessors had been ruthless in their pursuit of wealth. This family was the first to engage in slave trade, capturing African peoples and selling them in the New World. The blood of thousands if not millions of people was on the hands of the Sorrel family and Aldous by inheritance.

“Has she eaten since arriving?” asked Aldous as the servant placed a glass of wine on the table beside his chair.

“No, sir. We have made every effort to make her comfortable and see to her needs but she has been unresponsive.”

“Very well.”

Aldous just stared into the fire raging in the giant fireplace as the servant quietly vacated the room and closed the door.

Finishing the wine in one final gulp he smashed the glass against the back wall of the fireplace.

“How can she be so insolent? I have given her every amenity and still it is not enough!” he thought to himself with clenched fists.

The young lady ensconced in the upper room had been Aldous’ most recent companion for a couple of years. He had become quite attached to her and was as close to feeling love for someone as he ever dared.

“What am I to do with her?” he wondered.

She had recently become increasingly demanding both of Aldous’ time and attention. This current tantrum was brought on by Aldous’ refusal to divulge his whereabouts during his most recent meeting with Quadrivium. He felt backed into a corner, a place that he had been before and knew all too well how to escape.

Rising to his feet he made his way from the library up the giant staircase and down the dimly lit hallway. Pausing before a huge, ornately carved oak door, he sighed and raising his fist, rapped gently on the door.

“Giselle, I have returned.”

After a brief moment of silence Aldous heard the sound of the door lock being unfastened and looked down to see the gold plated knob rotate slowly. The door slowly swung open and there stood Giselle. She was the perfect picture of a twenty-nine year old woman. Her long dark hair framed her lovely face that was

accented with brooding coal-black eyes. Her tanned and slender physique left no doubt that she had been a much sought after international model. Dozens of men she had encountered over her short lifetime had desired her but she gave herself to Aldous Sorrel, surrendering to both his mature, stately demeanor and his incredible resources.

“I am sorry.”

“Now, now, my dear. I have returned to you as always. You know I must attend to my business.”

“Your business,” she said as she fell against his chest and placed her arms around his waist.

“Yes. My business,” replied Aldous as he lowered his head and kissed her passionately.

With his left hand still embracing Giselle, he closed the door with his right as the two began to inch their way toward the canopy bed while passionately kissing and tearing at each other’s clothing.

* * *

On the following morning, Giselle was greeted by Aldous as she joined him for breakfast on the second floor terrace. The birds in the nearby trees could be heard chirping happily and the scent of wildflowers was carried on the gentle breeze.

“Good morning, my dear. I trust you slept well,” said Aldous as he folded the newspaper he had been reading and set it aside.

“It is a good morning indeed,” replied Giselle as she rounded the table behind him to kiss his cheek.

“Please join me for breakfast,” he said as he motioned for his manservant to bring her coffee.

He stared intently into her eyes as she sipped the coffee. Setting the cup down on the saucer, Giselle smiled teasingly at Aldous and winked with a sparkle in her eye. She had enjoyed the prior evening with Aldous and felt that her world was once again back in its proper orbit.

The manservant placed a platter of fresh fruit on the table and a dish on the place setting before her. A look of concern suddenly replaced the pleasant face she had just displayed and with a cough, she began to drool slightly from the right side of her mouth. Aldous observed keenly as she began to shutter slightly. A small amount of a white, foamy substance could now be detected on her lower lip as she sat motionless, staring at him, unable to move.

With one heaving motion, she slammed her head down on the dish that was before her breaking it in half with her forehead. Aldous watched without making a sound or moving an inch. The manservant walked over to the table and stood beside Giselle.

“Let it be that she fell into the sea from a rented catamaran. Poor girl, she wasn’t much of a sailor, as it turns out,” said Aldous finally to his manservant as he once again took his paper and began to read.

Aldous finished breakfast and left Giselle to be disposed of by his people. Giselle’s choice of Aldous Sorrel as a lover had proved itself to be a fatal attraction.

Chapter 19

Amaro found himself sitting on a park bench in the middle of the night. He pondered as he sat there how this might have come to be. He did not recall taking a taxi from his townhouse nor did he remember walking the long distance to get to the park. How then did he get here?

Amaro was startled to see a shadowy figure sitting on the bench to his left. He was unable to discern whether the figure was a man or a woman. After a moment of curious silence, Amaro finally spoke to the person.

“What are you doing here in the middle of the night?” he asked.

“One might inquire the same of you,” replied the figure.

The voice of the stranger was not like that of a man or woman. It was as if Amaro heard the reply but not with his ears.

“Do you come here often?” asked Amaro.

“I travel about, going here and there. I am wherever I am,” replied the stranger.

Amaro considered the reply to be an enigma. He sat quietly and on occasion would glance over at the shadowy figure. Not sure what to do or think about this situation, he once again addressed the figure.

“Do I know you?”

“Yes. And what is more important, I know you.”

“Who are you then?”

“I am your father.”

“You are not my father. I am the son of Adriano Homem, born in the town of Lagos on the coast of Portugal.”

“No, my Son, you are *of* me and *are* me,” replied the figure.

Amaro felt for a moment fear and despair. Who was this person and why would he fabricate such an incredible story? The fear he had felt briefly finally gave way to cynicism as Amaro once again interrogated the being.

“What is this fantastic lie you are passing as the truth?”

“What I say is reality. You were indeed raised by a family in Portugal but that does not make you their son. You are of me and I have now come on your behalf.”

“To what ends have you come to me?”

“I know that you seek answers to deep questions. You wish for a world of peace but can find no means to bring it about. I have come that you may create peace in this world of conflict. It will be by your hand that the world will be regenerated and renewed.”

“I am but a single dignitary in a world of billions of peoples. How could I unite this vast sea of humanity and bring about a long awaited peace?”

“You are not a man. You are a god.”

With this statement, Amaro was tempted to jump from the bench and run as fast and as far away from this specter as possible, but he felt compelled to hear the figure out.

“I created you in my image. You shall go forth into the world and bring order.”

“You sound like the God that is preached about in so many of the world’s religions. Is that who you are?”

“Have you not noticed that the problems of the world revolve around religion? I am not the God responsible for all the bloodshed of humanity at His altar. His primary religions, Judaism and Christianity, are the root evils that bring about the chaos. If He were who He has been described to be, could he not with a thought solve all the problems of the world? I have come that people may have light to see the truth. You are that light.”

As Amaro listened intently to the words of the figure, he began to feel as if he belonged with this being. The feelings of fear and cynicism began to give way to acceptance and belief.

“Many times throughout the course of history I have raised leaders to do my bidding. They have all failed. Can you in your mind imagine the world had they been successful? My last disciple came very close to ridding the world of the scourge of the Hebrews. Had he not been stopped, the world and especially the Middle East would be at peace and in harmony at this moment. It is for this reason I have decided that you, my son, are the only hope to bring about this peace.”

“How can I know that what you tell me is true? Can you demonstrate your power?” asked Amaro.

“I will *not* perform a miracle before you to prove what I say. However, if you desire a sign, I will impart my power to you so that you can prove yourself to be the leader you are destined to become. If you wish to become the world’s salvation, if you wish to be the supreme ruler of this world, and if you will believe in me and accept my spirit, I will show you your greatness.”

With some strange sense of desire more powerful than he had ever previously possessed, Amaro closed his eyes and meditated on this stranger’s discourse. He had never been a particularly religious person, although he had been raised in the Catholic faith. This seemed to run against the grain of every teaching he had encountered in his many studies of world history and theology. But still, he was compelled by an unquenchable desire to control the world and bring about peace regardless of the method.

“In a moment, a worthless animal will wander from beneath those shrubs. Simply consider that this animal is responsible for the deaths of innocents in a far away land and will what you would have done to it in retribution,” said the figure.

With his eyes still closed, Amaro could here the rustling of the bushes. In his mind and in his heart of hearts, he made the conscious decision to accept the power that was offered to him and took the being into him. He thought of the poor children in Africa, starving and homeless from civil war driven by religious differences. He thought about political aggression and the taking of other’s lands for the riches of oil. He saw in his mind the bodies of children strewn about the streets of the Middle East, missing arms and legs from mines and explosives. He saw the withered bodies of AIDS victims wasting away because of a lack of funding for research and treatment. As he thought more and more his anger grew and he felt a genuine hatred for the God of the Bible coursing through his veins.

At that moment he heard a faint moan and opened his eyes. The figure that he had been speaking with had disappeared. Amaro arose from the bench and walked slowly towards the bushes where the animal had made the sounds. Lying there

with his face to the ground was a shabbily clad homeless man. Blood was oozing from every opening on his body and his skin was covered with boils.

Amaro was amazed, not that he had brought about the demise of this man, but that he was pleased with it, reasoning within that he had rid the world of one more useless human being who was counter productive to society.

As he turned to walk away, the man suddenly grasped his ankle and looking down at him, Amaro recognized the man to be Adriano Homem, the man who had raised him. The man's eyes then rolled back in their sockets as he fell dead.

Amaro sat up in his bed abruptly.

"What had just transpired?" he wondered. "Was this just a dream?"

Placing his hand on his forehead, he realized that he was soaking wet and had drenched the bed linens as well. He contemplated the vision as he held his face in his hands sitting slumped over on his bed.

After a moment of trying to gain full consciousness, he made his way to the bathroom and splashed cold water in his face. Gazing into the mirror he saw himself in a different light. There staring back in the mirror was the shadowy figure from his dream.

Chapter 20

“Mom, you’ll never guess who just asked me out.”

“Toby Phillips?”

“Mom, Toby is a total geek. It was Brandon Powell,” exclaimed Maggie at the top of her voice.

“Mom, I wouldn’t let Maggs go out with him. He’s got a D rep,” said Brett as he took a swallow of milk from the carton.

“Brett, get a glass! We don’t like having to drink after you,” scolded Christine as Brett closed the milk carton and placed it back in the refrigerator.

“Mind your own business, butt head,” whined Maggie.

“What has gotten into you kids? Maggie, you know I don’t like you using such common language. Clean up your mouth. And what is a D rep anyway?”

“It’s a guy that is only interested in getting one thing.”

“Brett! Mom, I’m going to kill him,” cried Maggie as she ran over to Brett and began to wrestle with him.

“Stop it. Stop it this instance. Where have you kids been picking up all this trash?” asked Christine.

“School, television, friends, you know, all the usual places,” chuckled Brett.

“Well, just because you’re exposed to it does not mean you have to indulge in it. You wait until your father comes home. I’ll bet he’ll have something to say about it.

“Come on, Mom. Don’t sic dad on us. We were just kidding around,” pleaded Brett as he put his arm around Maggie and kissed her forehead.

“Leave me alone,” Maggie retorted as she broke free from his grip and stormed out of the kitchen.

“Brett, I want to talk seriously to you about what you said about Brandon Powell.”

“It’s true, Mom. Everybody knows he’s just a player. I don’t want him to get his hands on Maggs, that’s all.”

“Well, I’ll have a talk with her. You know the Powells are one of the most powerful and influential families in the state. Your father indirectly works for them and I do not want anything to happen that could hurt Maggie or jeopardize your father’s position at Aerodyne Thrust.”

“That’s what I’m talking about. Don’t let her go out with him.”

Brett rolled his eyes, kissed his mom on the cheek, and headed out the door to baseball practice.

Arriving at the field he saw Brandon Powell warming up with a couple of other guys. Brett tossed his glove on the bench in the dugout and headed over to the group of boys throwing the baseball to one another.

“Brandon, you got a minute?” asked Brett as he motioned for Brandon to join him against the fence.

“What’s up?”

“My little sister said you asked her out.”

“Yeah, so what?”

“Well, I just don’t think it’s a good idea,” said Brett staring intently into Brandon’s eyes.

“I don’t see where it’s any of your business,” replied Brandon pounding his glove with his fist. “Besides, I’m just going to take her to see a movie. I don’t have anything big planned so don’t worry about it.”

Brett stood toe to toe with Brandon without breaking eye contact. Brandon at last looked down as he shuffled some dirt with his cleats.

“If it’s just a movie, I don’t have any problem with it.”

“I swear. It’s just a movie and some talking, you know. I just think she’s cute and want to get to know her. I’ll keep it on the ups, I promise.”

“Cool. Later,” said Brett as he tugged at his baseball cap and walked back to the dugout to get his glove.

Later in the evening when the family joined at the dinner table, Maggie was noticeably irritated at Brett.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“You know!”

“What’s this all about?” asked Grant sternly.

“Brandon Powell asked me to see a movie with him and Brett bullied him at the ball field about it.”

“Is that true, Brett?”

“I didn’t bully him. I just let him know I was concerned about him going out with Maggs. I didn’t punch him or anything like that.”

“Still, he had no business talking to Brandon about it at all.”

“Calm down, Maggie,” consoled Christine. “How did you know Brett did it?”

“Brandon called and told me about it.”

“Is he still interested in taking you out?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then no harm done. Brett, I want you to stay out of Maggie’s affairs. Your mother and I will handle it from now on.”

“But Dad, you don’t know about the guys at school.”

Grant looked up at Christine and smiled. Christine returned the smile and winked at him across the table.

“I was young once, believe it or not. It really hasn’t been that long ago. I’m pretty sure I know what the guys at school are up to.

“OK,” replied Brett as he shuffled some peas around on his plate.

“As for you, young lady, I’m not so sure I’m ready for you to start going out and hanging with the boys,” teased Grant as Maggie looked up at him and dropped her mouth open.

“We’ll talk some more about it later. I want to make sure you know the do’s and don’ts. We’re going to have a very serious discussion and it’s not optional if you intend to go out with Brandon,” Grant said with authority in his voice.

“Yes, sir,” replied Maggie meekly, relieved that she would be allowed to go out.

Chapter 21

“Honey, I hear Jeremy’s horn,” yelled Christine up the staircase.

“Please tell him I’ll be just a minute,” replied Grant.

Sticking her head out the front door, Christine shouted to Jeremy that Grant would be out soon.

“If he doesn’t hurry, he’ll make us late for the meeting,” yelled back Jeremy.

Finally Grant came bounding down the stairs with his briefcase in hand. Rushing by Christine standing in the doorway, he pecked her on the cheek and ran toward Jeremy’s pickup.

“Man, I’m sorry. I overslept.”

“No problem. I just don’t want to be late and find all the breakfast food at the buffet cold,” joked Jeremy as he punched the accelerator.

Arriving at the convention center the two men hurried from the pickup truck across the parking garage to the elevators. Once they reached the first floor, the doors opened to reveal a huge lobby filled with professionals and their business associates. Making their way through the crowd, they stopped briefly at one group and then another to make small talk and get acquainted with new people.

“I smell bacon,” whispered Jeremy as he attempted to draw Grant away from a group of fellow engineers.

Motioning with his head in the direction of the banquet room, Jeremy finally coaxed Grant to go with him. Arriving at the buffet tables, the two began to load their plates from the bounty of breakfast foods that were available for their consumption.

“Man, what a feast,” declared Grant as he piled bacon and sausage next to the scrambled eggs on his plate.

“Yeah, I can feel my arteries hardening even as we speak,” chuckled Jeremy.

They made their way between long rows of linen draped dinner tables and finally took a seat beside some fellow Aereodyne co-workers.

“Have you guys heard the scoop on what this is all about?” asked Grant trying to find out if the contract had become common knowledge.

“Well, rumor has it that we will be awarded a huge contract on engines for a new fighter being built over at Avionics,” replied one of the co-workers.

“Wow,” said Jeremy. “They didn’t keep that secret very well.”

The two finished their breakfast and along with their associates made their way into the huge auditorium. Finding a couple of seats together about 20 rows from the front, Grant and Jeremy sat down and anxiously waited for the meeting to begin.

After some moments of men and women mounting and dismounting the platform at the front of the auditorium, the lights began to dim and a well-known figure walked across the platform and took his place behind the podium.

“I would like to introduce myself for the benefit of visitors we may have in our midst. I am Walter Anderson, president of Aereodyne Thrust and I will be presiding over our meeting today. We welcome our associates from affiliated companies who are here with us today and extend our hand in friendship.

“I know you must all be curious about the nature of such a gathering, which I will shortly make known to you. Before I do, I would like to introduce a special guest who is in our midst and ask you to give him a warm round of applause. I would like to acknowledge Mr. John Powell of International Avionics.”

As John Powell stood on the platform the room erupted in thunderous applause that lasted for minutes. As it diminished, Walter Anderson again addressed the crowd.

“It is my profound pleasure to introduce you to the aircraft of the future.”

With these words, the lights in the auditorium were extinguished and the wall behind Walter Anderson was bathed in spotlights as it began to open. As the opening grew, gasps could be heard around the auditorium. There on the platform before them stood a jet fighter previously unseen by anyone other than the engineers and craftsmen who had been directly involved in its creation.

“Please let me introduce to you the IA-101 Peregrinee.”

The auditorium erupted in cheers as the employees and associates rose to their feet in admiration of the spectacular machine. The fighter was truly unique, not resembling any prior attack aircraft. From the thin stingray like front, the wings swept back in a wave configuration. Its single giant Aereodyne Thrust engine was housed in the center of its fuselage and could only be detected by its intake openings just under the wings and its relatively small exhaust port from which the craft would be propelled at speeds exceeding all other fighters.

“Awesome,” gasped Jeremy as he and Grant stood to gain a better look.

“That’s definitely cutting edge,” replied Grant.

“I guess your fan is destined to be pushing the envelope in that baby.”

“I never dreamed it would be a part of anything like that.”

“This aircraft has the latest stealth technology and can not only be hidden from detection equipment, but also has the ability to project a false footprint up to 10 miles away from its fuselage,” continued Walter Anderson. “I don’t wish to take the credit away from the man and the company that whose insight, management, and sheer will brought life to this technological milestone. I will now yield the floor to Mr. John Powell.”

After another protracted round of accolades, John Powell began to address the assembly from the main podium.

“I’m sure that the rumor mill has been grinding at a steady pace and your curiosity must be piqued now concerning this meeting and the unveiling of this piece of mechanical artwork. Before I go any further, I would like to offer a special thanks to the hard working men and women in our company and community that helped bring this project to fruition. Many long hours have gone into this marvel and International Avionics owes a debt of gratitude to all its employees, their families, and associates.

“Now, without further delay, I would like to get to the crux of this meeting. International Avionics along with our friends over at Aereodyne Thrust are proud to be able to announce that we have secured a contract through our government to provide the nation of Israel with 70 of these advanced fighters.”

Once again the room erupted with clapping, shouts, and an occasional high-pitched whistle as everyone sprang to their feet. Hand shakes and high fives could be seen all about the auditorium as John Powell waved his arms in an attempt to regain control of the assembly. Finally, after minutes of revelry, the room returned to some semblance of sanity and John Powell again began to speak.

“This contract will be very lucrative for International Avionics and Aereodyne Thrust as well as our subcontractors and this community itself. We plan for our employees to share in the windfall and will we expect 110 percent effort from them.”

Once again the noise of hand-clapping overpowered the sound of his voice and he was forced to pause until the room quieted.

“I will ask Walter Anderson to join me here at the podium as we close this meeting. Walter, do you have anything further to add before we adjourn to our respective department conferences?”

“I would just like to say thanks to our many employees who *are* International Avionics and Aereodyne Thrust. You are our greatest asset!”

As the meeting came to a close, the assembly began to move slowly from the auditorium. Jeremy and Grant were engrossed in conversation about the new fighter until they were forced to separate to attend their department briefings.

Chapter 22

In a small fishing community on the coast of Finland, a team of United Nations doctors had opened a temporary clinic. Members of the town from its civic leaders to its most humble elderly citizens were lining up for a simple procedure having been notified and encouraged by the media.

Parliament has recently passed legislation to comply with UN resolution 616 that sets forth the specifications for future business transactions. A summary of the resolution basically states ...that no commerce will be transacted with any individual, either a member of financial institution, merchant of goods or services, or person of limited monetary means unless that person has received in his hand or forehead the security device heretofore referred to as Thirio...

In layman terms this calls for a simple and painless visit to your private physician, public physician, social worker, or a healthcare provider furnished by the United Nations. The Thirio security implant can be inserted just below the skin in less than one minute. The procedure is painless and the device cannot be detected once in place. This device will be necessary to transact business in any form or fashion including but not limited to payment of bills, purchase of goods and services, payment of taxes, receipt of wages, and any other means by which assets change from one person or institution to another.

Teija Kanerva
The Turku Sanomat

“Miko, the doctor will see you now.”

“Come in, young man. Is your mother or father with you?”

“No sir. My father died at sea and my mother is working.”

“How old are you?”

“I just turned eleven in May,” replied the boy.

“Are you here for the Thirio?” asked the doctor.

“Yes sir.”

“I’m not sure why they did not make this more clear, but the age limit for receiving the device is twelve. You will have to come back to see me after your next birthday. OK?” explained the doctor.

“Yes sir.”

“Heli, please inquire the age of the younger looking patients before sending them back. This will eliminate delays caused by underage patients.”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“Mrs. Vertanen, the doctor will see you now.”

“Come in, Mrs. Vertanen. How are you today?”

“I am fine. Will this hurt?” she asked.

“It won’t hurt at all. If you will close your eyes, you will not even know when the procedure takes place. Would you like to wear it in your hand or forehead?”

“What do you recommend?”

“It really makes no difference. Most people have chosen to place it in their hand for the sake of convenience.”

“That will be fine,” she replied closing her eyes and stretching forth her right hand.

“OK. That’s it,” said the doctor.

“You were right; I did not even feel a thing.”

“Now if you would step over to this computer, Heli will scan your hand to program the Thirio with your profile and you can be on your way.”

The nurse took a scanning device from its cradle on the counter, and aimed it at the back of the woman’s hand. When she pulled the trigger a series of beeps sounded from the computer system and several pages of information scrolled by on the display.

With a final long beep, the programming was completed and the Thirio device was loaded fully with every piece of information concerning Mrs. Vertanen’s life. Thirio now held all her financial information as well as health, demographics, education, political affiliation, religious preference, and the entirety of her history, which had been compiled by the United Nations Information Technology Department- UNIT D.

This encounter was being played out across the whole of humanity. In every city, hamlet, and rural region, people were lining up to receive the Thirio and get the benefits it offered. Those who were apathetic or opposed to receipt of the device were finding themselves cut off from goods and services at an alarming rate. The implementation was progressing quickly in some parts of the world but the United States was still a major obstruction. The President refused to allow Thirio to be used within his borders. The U.N. was bearing down hard on the ambassador to the U.S. in an attempt to strong-arm the government into acceptance of the plan.

Chapter 23

“Lieutenant Shalev Rabin reporting.”

“I’ll see if the Colonel is ready to see you now,” said the young private as she disappeared through a doorway behind her desk.

She returned in a few moments and asked Lieutenant Shalev to follow her. Walking down a short corridor, she stopped to open a door and motioned for Shalev to enter alone. In the room was a middle-aged man sitting behind a large desk with his hands folded. Behind the desk and around the walls were bookcases that were filled to capacity.

“Come in,” said Colonel Jacobson as he stood and stretched out his hand to Shalev.

Shalev was uncertain whether he should take his hand, salute, or both. Finally he reached out and shook the hand of this commanding officer.

“Take a seat, my young friend,” said the Colonel.

Shalev was puzzled. This seemed more like meeting a friend for lunch than having an official meeting with a commander. This man’s demeanor was casual and he had a very pleasant appearance and countenance.

“I bet you’re wondering about now just what brings you to my office. Well, let me ease your mind. You are not in any trouble. The fact is we want, or rather need your assistance on a special project,” said the Colonel as he walked from behind his desk and stared at the books on his bookcase. “We have been contacted by certain rabbis and they have asked that you be brought here to Jerusalem for a clandestine operation. It’s no secret that you finished at the top of your class at Tel Aviv University and that your specialty was archeology as it pertains to the ancient Hebrew texts and religion. It seems that you have one other little known accreditation that uniquely qualifies you for the task. I have it on good authority that you discovered a treasure as a boy.”

Shalev sat forward in his chair and squirmed as if he were uncomfortable. He sat staring at Colonel Jacobson back but did not respond. When Colonel Jacobson turned around to face him, he was relieved to see a broad smile across his face.

“My boy, I know all about the discovery in the cave at Khirbet Qumran. I am also an archeologist and student of the ancient. God revealed a great treasure to you in your youth and we are hoping that He will once again lead you to a great artifact.”

“But Sir, I was just a boy who stumbled upon the jars. It was only by chance that I found the ashes.”

“Well, chance or not, you will be assigned to a special outfit that will excavate the Temple Mount,” ordered Colonel Jacobson in a more stern voice.

Shalev jumped to his feet.

“Dig on the mount? I can’t believe it! This is the opportunity of a lifetime, but how?”

“With the destruction of the Dome of the Rock, the government has decided to take control of the Temple Mount and hold it by military force. A team of highly trained scientists along with rabbinic authorities will be allowed to excavate without interruption. As you know, it has long been suspected that our ancestors

hid the Ark of the Covenant deep within the mount. It will be your job to oversee this dig and hopefully locate the most valuable piece of antiquity in existence.”

Shalev fell back into his chair and rubbed his face with his hands as if to wake from a dream.

“I am dumbfounded. What can I say? This is the opportunity of ten lifetimes. Literally thousands of people throughout the last hundreds of years have desired to dig on the mount and have been denied the chance for one reason or another. I am humbled to have this task awarded to me. I can think of no greater adventure, no more profound and holy endeavor than to search for the Ark,” said Shalev with a serious and sincere tone of voice.

“Very well, then. I will make the necessary arrangements for your redeployment. You will be working directly with Rabbi Shani Velvel. Do you know him?”

“I have not met him but I have heard of him. Was he not head of the ministry for our military?” asked Shalev.

“That is correct. He retired some time back and has taken his place as Av Beit Din with the newly reorganized Sanhedrin. He along with Chief Rabbi Baruch Shamira will be the spiritual leaders on the quest and have complete control of the dig- under your authority that is.”

“Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin has organized, the Temple Mount will be ours, and we shall even perhaps rebuild our temple. God be praised,” said Shalev.

“God be praised,” repeated Colonel Jacobson as he placed his hand on Shalev’s shoulder.

Shalev stood and saluted Colonel Jacobson, who promptly returned the salute and reached once again to shake the hand of this young lieutenant.

“May God grant you success, my friend. If you need anything, I am at your disposal at all times. Please feel free to count on me as both your commander and your friend. I envy the opportunity you have been given but I know now that God has selected the right man for the job. Bless you, my son.”

Shalev nodded respectfully as the words fell on his ears. Turning to leave the room, Shalev took one last look back to find that a broad smile once again graced the face of Colonel Jacobson.

Chapter 24

“Cardinal Bertoni has something important he wishes to discuss with you, Holiness. He is waiting in the foyer. Should I send him away?” asked the attendant.

“No. No. Send him in,” replied Pope Paul Aloisius.

Before leaving the room, the attendant helped the elderly Pontiff from a large chair and escorted him into the parlor of his upstairs apartment where he was accustomed to meeting with his staff and clergy.

Pope Paul Aloisius had overcome many hardships to become the head of the largest Christian denomination on earth. He had felt a calling from his youth with his service beginning as an altar boy at his local parish church. The small town of Monteriggioni was just down the road from Siena and was home to a small but enthusiast congregation of Catholics. The Tuscany region of Italy was well known by the Vatican and it was no surprise that the College of Cardinals would choose a leader from among its descendants.

He had served the church well, having been assigned to various parishes around the world. In his earliest assignment, he was priest to a small congregation in Poland. He was later reassigned to other churches in Europe, including parishes in Ireland, Germany, and France.

His promotion to Bishop brought him to the United States. There he was assigned to preside over some parishes in Massachusetts. He was often entreated to say Mass in Boston at the Holy Cross Cathedral. His sermons were welcomed by the congregation and admired by his fellow priests. He became known as a ‘man of the people’. He was a champion for the poor and downtrodden.

It was during World War II that he was called back to Rome. These were dark days for the church. Benito Mussolini was a callous dictator who gave false reverence to the clergy. He would have preferred them dead than in the pulpit as he and his cohort Adolf Hitler built their murderous war machine. But even Mussolini knew he could not rule the masses if he dared attack the church.

It was during this time that the Pope’s leadership and devotion was recognized by the College of Cardinals and he was elevated to Arch Bishop. He held his ground against the intimidation of the military leaders even in the face of death. This dogged determination to keep the church from falling into the influence of a dictatorship was indicative of his personality and became his hallmark.

For years following the war, he remained in Italy at the Vatican serving in many capacities. It was Pope Paul VI who finally rewarded his years of service and devotion by appointing him to the College of Cardinals. Subsequently he was elevated within its ranks until being elected Pope by the vast majority.

“Your Holiness,” said Cardinal Bertoni as he knelt before the Pope and kissed his ring.

“What can I do for you, my son?”

“May we speak in private?” asked the Cardinal.

Pope Paul motioned for the attendants in the room to leave. As the door closed behind them, Cardinal Bertoni paced before the seated Pope with his hands clasped behind his back. His face reflected the vexation in his heart.

“We have a matter of the most severe gravity facing our organization, Holiness. I have been meeting with fellow administrators for the last week and we must solicit your prayers and help.”

“What is this matter that has you so concerned, my son?”

“The United Nations, or rather the world, has adopted a plan for future control of the world’s resources. It is quickly becoming impossible for our poor congregations to contribute to the church. More and more countries are adopting this U.N. resolution that requires receipt of an electronic device in order to control one’s finances,” bemoaned the Cardinal.

“I see. Have the Cardinals researched the religious significance of this endeavor?”

“We have, your Worship. There are theologians in our ranks that believe this could be linked to passages from the Apocalypse that reference the ‘mark of the beast’. These verses lead many to believe that the implanted device could indeed be the mark foretold and as many as receive it should not enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” cried the Cardinal as slapped his hands behind him.

“I see the dilemma. If we encourage our parishioners not to receive the device, they cannot contribute to our religious organization. If we tell them that it is acceptable, we may be leading them into perdition,” said the Pope as he fell back into his chair placing his hand under his chin.

“What shall we do? This will be the end of the Catholic religion and perhaps Christianity as a whole if we do nothing. What would God have us do?” asked the Cardinal in frustration.

“Let us pray over the matter and wait for God to lead us. Keep me informed on the progress of this movement and its financial ramifications on the church. Surely God would not have our organization destroyed and end our mission to bring the message of Our Lord to the people. It was, after all, his great commission to his followers,” extolled the Pontiff as he rubbed his temples with his fingers.

Chapter 25

Amaro took a seat on the left side of the podium and appeared almost statuesque as the delegates made their way to their designated positions in the gallery. There was a dull roar in the U.N. conference hall as the delegates prepared for the assembly.

Amaro felt no emotion as he scanned the room in what appeared to be an almost hypnotic state. His demeanor did not alter even as the chief of the U.N. Security Council, Mabuz Jaali, banged the gavel on the podium in an attempt to bring order to the meeting.

“Would the delegates would please come to order. Please, ladies and gentlemen, we must begin soon if we are to cover the day’s topics,” he barked as the assembly finally began to settle down.

“Today we will hear a report from our most distinguished delegate, Amaro D. Homem, on the progress worldwide of the implementation of U.N. Resolution 616. As you will remember and your documents outline, this resolution calls for the implant of the device known as Thirio in all persons for the purpose of the transaction of finance and the deterrence of identity theft. If you would be so kind as to give him your undivided attention on this matter, we may be able to conclude our day’s work in a reasonably short time. Thank you.”

As Councilman Jaali stepped down from the podium, Amaro stood and walked calmly toward the center of the platform. As he turned to face the assembly, his demeanor changed suddenly and a smile graced his face. Looking first to the left and then to the right, he began to address the crowd.

“Delegates from every country around the world, I greet you with a salutation of peace and the hope that you and your constituents are happy and well. It is this hope on which I will focus my address to you this day. For I fear that we cannot have happiness, health, prosperity, or peace in this world unless we unite ourselves against the very enemies of such. It is the Thirio device that is our chief weapon against these enemies and so it is with great desire that I seek the nations of the world to arm themselves.

“I am happy to announce that great strides have been made in this arena. Thirio is installed in 90% of the populations of 65% of the nations of the world. It is reported that the device’s usefulness is exceeding even the most conservative of estimates. The successful prosecution of crimes in those countries that have implanted the device is up an astounding 80%. With these successful prosecutions there has been a 70% decrease in crime.”

With this statement the room exploded in applause and cheers from the delegates in attendance. Amaro stood confidently with his hands clasped before him- brandishing a broad smile as he nodded to the members across the gallery.

“These results are conclusive that we have taken the proper course and must continue to encourage the remaining countries that the directive is imperative. As you know, one of Thirio’s greatest detractors has been the last ‘Super Power’, the United States of America. We must bring the full weight of this assembly’s

influences down on this member to join with our ranks and bring peace and safety to the world.”

Again the room burst into applause as the delegates leaped to their feet and began to converse with one another. It seemed that Amaro had struck a chord with the assembly. Most countries agreed that the United States should not be allowed to be a holdout. The delegate to the U.S. sat quietly with her hand covering her mouth as she wagged her head back and forth with a disgusted expression on her face.

When the delegates had risen from their chairs, it had been necessary for them to remove the headphones that connected them to their respective interpreters. The interpreters were necessary since the vast majority of the delegates understood only their native language. While they were still standing, Amaro again began to address the crowd.

“My fellow associates, let us continue.”

A sudden hush fell over the auditorium as the delegates began to look at one another in astonishment. U.N. Chief Jaali ran across the platform to Amaro’s side and began to stare into his face. Other U.N. delegates also made their way to the front in an attempt to get closer to Amaro.

“How did you do that?” asked Mabuz.

“How did I do what?” replied Amaro.

“How is it that you are speaking and all the delegates are hearing you in their respective tongues?”

Amaro’s eyes were transfixed on Mabuz Jaali. As Jaali stared back, he began to feel power emanating from Amaro.

“If you will bring accord to this assembly, I will attempt to help them understand,” he told Mabuz.

U.N. Chief Jaali once again brought order to the room. He turned and looked intently into Amaro’s eyes before turning to leave the platform. Amaro stepped to the podium to once again address the assembly.

“It is no longer necessary for you to have my words interpreted by a translator. The ability to speak with a universal tongue has been given to me as a special gift from a superior power. This power is the one we think of as God.”

The room began to hum with the sound of murmurings among the assembly. They were not sure what to think about this new revelation. How was it possible? It had only been reported once in recorded history when the disciples of Jesus Christ performed the same miracle. This would place Amaro in the same company as the apostles or Jesus himself. What did it mean?

“Please do not be alarmed. I am not against the world but on its side. You are my fellow workers and together we have a monumental task before us. It has been revealed to me that I should help bring peace and order to this world. It is a divine commission from God Himself. I must have your help and cooperation if I am to have any success in this venture. I ask you now, as you hear me in your own tongue, can I count on you to help me bring peace and safety to this violent world?”

Amaro stood confidently before them awaiting their decisions. The delegates turned to their closest neighbors and began to discuss this proposition. Amaro could see more and more positive nods as he scanned the room looking for some acknowledgement by them.

“Delegates, I would ask that you return to your seats. I would like to propose that we create a new leadership position here at the U.N. The position would be one of absolute leadership and authority over this august body. If we can have a vote on this, we can then adjourn to our respective committees to draft the resolution and have the final vote,” entreated Mabuz Jaali as the crowd began to quiet and resume order.

The vote was unanimous with the exception of the United States delegate who left the assembly in protest. The body agreed to create the new position of Supreme Chancellor to the United Nations and it was determined that the first person to be nominated to hold such office would be Amaro D. Homem.

Chapter 26

The drone from the engine of the hydrofoil could be heard approaching for some distance. The entourage on the landing prepared Serkan Savas and his personal effects to be taken to his luxury yacht that waited just offshore. Every caution was exercised that this powerful member of Quadrivium not be inconvenienced in the least.

Kyrenia Castle on the northern shore of Cyprus had been home to Savas since its purchase in the early nineteen sixties. Kyrenia's restoration cost had exceeded the entire budgets of most small nations but was a mere pittance to one of the seven wealthiest men in the world. Like the other members of Quadrivium, Savas enjoyed all the privileges that accompany wealth and power.

The initial source of Serkan Savas' fortune could be traced as far back as 700 B.C.E. and was founded on profits earned from the silk trade. Turkey had been a main trade route between China and the West, and the Savas family had been ruthless in the control of this commerce. Around the year 555 of the common-era, cocoons were brought from China to Byzantium by monks and it became necessary for his ancestors to broaden the scope of their trade to other products. Soon the trade of china, paper, precious stones, and spices were also controlled by agents of the Savas family ancestors, amassing a fortune of unimaginable proportion.

As the entourage, along with Serkan Savas, finished boarding the hydrofoil, the captain ordered the lines loosed and slowly brought the boat about. With increasing speed, the massive nautical wonder slowly began to rise from the water until only the foil and engine's propulsion system were in contact with the Mediterranean Sea. Because so little of the shuttle's hull touched the water, the ride was almost perfectly smooth across the choppy water.

Arriving at his yacht, Savas and a personal attendant made their way to the dining hall to discuss affairs over breakfast. The dining room was lavishly decorated in authentic Chinese motif, including many rare porcelain pieces from the Han, Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties. One of his most treasured possessions handed down through his family's generations was a complete set of dinnerware dating from the Ming Dynasty which had been a gift to his ancestors from the Chinese emperor.

The cabin walls were ribbed with rosewood beams spaced at four foot intervals from floor to ceiling. The expanse of the wall between the ribs was covered with a fine off-white linen cloth that was embossed with dragons in various poses. The embossing was twenty-four karat gold encrusted with precious stones. Soft lighting had been installed around the floor and ceiling and was hidden behind the cloth so that only a faint glow of light could be seen through the material. The effect of the wall treatments gave dinner guests the sensation of sitting inside a Chinese lantern.

"Have all the arrangements been made for our hunting excursion?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Ferruccio's envoy notified me of his tentative arrival schedule."

"What will the weather be like in Tanzania?"

“At last check the temperature will be in the thirties Celsius with little precipitation. By all accounts it should make perfect weather for the hunt, Sir,” replied the attendant.

“Very good,” remarked Savas as he sipped coffee.

Once a year a hunting expedition was organized by Savas and he would invite at least one member of Quadrivium to attend. Arrangements were made with the government of Tanzania that the game be supplied by one of the tribal chieftains. This would be no ordinary big game hunt. The game supplied by the chieftain would be human.

The selection would be made by the elders and would include men, women, and children. The elders would decide based on who they considered least worthy to live. If a man was a man of substance, owning livestock or property and owning workers, he would not be considered. The same would be true of a woman if she belonged to such a man or was a productive member of the community.

Those poor souls who were selected would be the outcasts of the society. This did not mean that they were weak and helpless but that they had fallen short either by birthright or circumstance and were people of no substance.

If a young man had been caught stealing or was slothful, if he possessed no special skill or talent, he would be at the top of the list. A woman who was an adulteress or who abandoned her children would also be a prime candidate.

Most of the children selected had been orphaned by the loss of their parents with no family guardian to take them in. They were unimportant, inconsequential, and generally unwanted. They were considered a burden on the society.

The prey would be held in a compound on the edge of a dense jungle area until the day of the hunt. They would not be released into the jungle all at once. Their release was timed precisely to keep an active flow of game for the hunters.

The predator’s weapon of choice was the large caliber rifle most often used to hunt elephants. They would include models such as the .585 Nyati, the .577 Tyrannosaur, and the .585 Gehringer.

One direct hit from this type rifle could destroy up to one third of the body mass of an average sized adult. There was usually very little left of the prey when the photographer was called to document the kill. Most times when the prey was a child, there would only be a blood stain to account for the kill.

As each victim was released into the jungle, a bugle was sounded to signal the hunters that the hunt was on. The unfortunate quarry would attempt to move as quickly and as quietly as possible on the hopes of making it to the opposite side of the jungle without dying. If they succeeded, they would win their freedom and not be considered for selection in the future.

Unfortunately, there were few instances of freedom. The offer was more of an incentive to keep the hunt lively. The predators were skilled in their stealthy ability to stalk the game and sure in their aim to bring them down. It was a horrifying game of cat and mouse, and the mouse had little chance of finding sanctuary or freedom. The only freedom would be death and the restful sleep it would bring.

“This year’s hunt should be memorable, sir. I understand that the selections have been made and are comprised primarily of young girls and children. It seems

that the civil war that has been raging has killed off many of the men both young and old,” declared the aide as Savas patted his lips dry with a napkin.

“I do so like to hunt the children,” he replied with a wicked smile. “They are a challenge to hit as they duck and run behind the foliage. All the more satisfying when I hit the mark.”

“You are quite the sportsman, sir. I know you will have a satisfying hunt and Mr. Ferruccio will be thoroughly pleased as well. You know how he likes the young girls.”

Chapter 27

“Hi Mrs. Stokes.”

“Well, hello, Brandon. Won’t you come in. Maggie should be down in just a minute. I’ll tell her that you’re here,” said Christine as she showed Brandon Powell to the den.

“You have a very nice home, Mrs. Stokes.”

“Thank you, Brandon. I have been to your home on several occasions and it is absolutely breathtaking,” responded Christine.

“My mom has put a lot of effort into the design and decoration. She always has some fussy guy or another wandering around the house making suggestions about color or texture. Those guys give me the creeps.”

Christine smiled as she left the den to inform Maggie that her date had arrived. Topping the staircase, she poked her head into Maggie’s room and whispered, “Mr. Wonderful is here.”

“Mom!” whined Maggie as she rolled her eyes and brushed by her mother standing in the doorway.

As she entered the den, Brandon jumped to his feet.

“Wow, you look great,” he exclaimed.

“Thank you very much,” replied Maggie curtly.

Maggie was a very cute girl who had begun to blossom into womanhood at the age of thirteen. She was 5’ 8” with a slender frame that was well proportioned. Her dark, shiny hair was cut at shoulder length and turned under in a soft curl. Her hair would bounce as she walked and was easily blown in a gentle breeze. Her eyes were dark green. The color combination of her hair and eyes was uncommon among the young ladies at her high school. Her eyes were further accentuated by her long eye lashes, which curved upward perfectly. Most of Maggie’s peers were envious of her outward attractiveness.

“What are you two planning to do this evening?” asked Grant as he entered the den from his study.

“Hello, Mr. Stokes,” replied Brandon as he reached to shake Grant’s hand.

“We plan to grab a bite to eat and then catch a movie.”

“Sounds like fun to me. Don’t keep her out too late, though.”

“No, sir. I’ll have Maggie home right after the movie,” replied Brandon nervously.

“Dad, I’ll be OK,” said Maggie as she gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“I guess we’d better get going if we’re going to have time to eat before the feature,” said Brandon as he took Maggie’s hand and they headed out the door.

“Your folks are real nice,” said Brandon as he opened the car door for Maggie.

“Yeah, I guess. They can be a real pain sometimes, though.”

“I guess it just goes with the whole parenting thing. My parents pretty much let me go my own way. It’s not always a bad thing for your parents to be interested in what’s going on.”

“My parents don’t miss a trick,” chuckled Maggie as they sped away from the house.

Maggie felt very comfortable with Brandon. Perhaps it was his nonchalant demeanor or his security in the knowledge that he was one of the wealthiest and most popular boys in town, but he had a confidence about him that set Maggie at ease. This most impressive boy had asked her out on a date and she knew that, because of it, her peers would hold her in high esteem.

Brandon's face was illuminated by the soft blue glow of the dashboard's indicator lamps. Maggie could not help but stare at his handsome face as he drove to the restaurant. Once or twice he glanced over and smiled at her as their conversation hit a lull.

"Here we are," said Brandon as they pulled into the parking lot of Cedar Hill country club.

"This seems kind of formal for a first date," said Maggie.

"We're not going to the dining room. I thought we'd go to the grill and get a burger if that's OK with you."

"That sounds much better," replied Maggie, relieved that she did not have to struggle through a large meal.

After dinner, the two got back to the car and started for the theatre. The meal had been just perfect. The light conversation helped the couple better get acquainted and the more they learned of each other, the closer they became.

When they arrived at the theatre, it became apparent that Brandon had not yet selected a movie. Both of them made suggestions as to what would be good while they stood before the ticket counter staring at the board. Each of them had seen at least two of the features which narrowed the field somewhat.

"I've seen previews of *Jungle Heat* on the internet and it looks pretty good," Brandon suggested.

"Isn't that a little risqué?" inquired Maggie, knowing that it was rated R for nudity and explicit scenes.

"I thought you would be cool with it," responded Brandon in an attempt to imply that Maggie was being naïve or immature.

"I'm not intimidated by it. I just don't think it's appropriate for a first date," fired back Maggie with a scowl on her face.

Brandon got the message quickly and decided to defer to her choice whatever it may be. He only hoped it would not be some chick flick that he would have to attempt to stay awake through.

"How about *The Scorpion Files*," suggested Maggie.

"That sounds like a plan," replied Brandon, relieved that she had chosen a who-done-it over a sappy love story.

Brandon and Maggie sat in the dimly lit theatre with the other viewers enjoying the plot and while sharing a bucket of popcorn. Each of them would whisper to the other as they tried to decide who committed the murder. Their choices would change with every twist of the plot and they would giggle as they discovered how wrong they were.

Finally the end revealed that the perpetrator had been the one they thought was the most innocent and least likely and they jeered at each other about how stupid they had been.

The drive home did not seem to last long enough and they both regretted that the date was ending so soon. The time seemed to have passed at an unrealistic pace and they felt that the date was over nearly as soon as it started.

Brandon walked Maggie to the front door and gave her a quick peck on the cheek.

“I really had a great time. I hope you’d consider doing it again soon,” queried Brandon.

“Call me,” replied Maggie as she disappeared behind the front door.

Chapter 28

“Ms. Vice President, Secretary Hunt is here to see you. May I show her in?” asked the clerk.

“Yes, by all means,” replied Vice President Mallory Henson as she stood from behind her desk and straightened her jacket and skirt.

Secretary of Treasury Elizabeth Hunt entered the office and walked over to the Vice President with an extended hand. The Vice President shook her hand and motioned with the other an offer for her to take a seat before her desk.

Vice President Mallory Henson was an intelligent woman in her early sixties who had worked hard to become the first woman elected to the Executive Branch of government in the United States of America. She was the daughter of the founder and CEO of Golden Brewery and had grown up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Golden was the second largest brewery in the country. Because of the wealth the brewery had generated through the decades, she had enjoyed a childhood of privilege. Graduating magna cum laude from a local private school for girls, she went on to Brown University where she finished at the top of her class in political science.

Her parents had always been involved in politics, usually supporting candidates that were moderate to liberal. Having been born in Germany and emigrating to the United States just before World War II, her father had seen the disastrous effects of an ultra right-wing government and wanted Mallory to understand government and the world as he saw it. Perhaps it was her parent’s influences or a misplaced guilt for having been raised in luxury that made her have liberal leanings as well. She most often championed the less fortunate and downtrodden.

It was a strange set of circumstances that led to her being added to the Republican ticket with one of the most conservative presidents in recent history.

She had recently switched party affiliation due to a conflict over party platform. She was adamantly opposed to socialized medical care being implemented in the United States. She had studied its affect on other governments and knew that it would not work- especially in a capitalist society.

Many of her closest friends were in the medical profession and had a great deal of influence over her on this subject. They warned that if medical care became the business of the government, only the wealthiest Americans would be able to afford competent doctors. Only those doctors who finished at the bottom of their class would have incentive to work for the government, getting paid pennies on the dollar.

The Republican Party jumped at the chance to add her to the ticket for the then up-coming presidential election. They correctly surmised that she could draw voters from the moderates of the Democratic Party- not to mention be attractive to women voters. In a very close election, she became the first woman Vice President.

“I wanted to speak with you about a matter of great importance. I was wondering if you have been informed about a device known as Thirio and its

implementation around the world,” said Secretary Hunt with a most grave tone in her voice.

“Yes something. I am not an expert but I have read some briefings on the device.”

“I believe that President Montgomery is on the wrong side of this issue. He will not even discuss it with us in the cabinet meetings. He seems to be sticking his head in the sand on this one. Politically it will eventually be a millstone around his neck,” continued the Secretary.

“How so?” asked Vice President Henson.

“The U.N. has mandated that all countries implement Resolution 616 calling for the implant of the Thirio device for the purpose of monetary transaction and population control. Most of the major economies in the world are already complying. If we do not, in a short period of time it will be impossible for us to do business with our trading partners around the world. We will be cut off in total financial isolation,” she said with a sense of urgency in her voice.

“I see. What can I do to help the situation?”

“Ms. Vice President, if you have any influence with President Montgomery, would you please use it to convince him to change his position on this most important matter. The position of the United States in the global economy rests in your hands.”

“That is a heavy weight to place on one person. As you know, the President and I do not always share the same positions or ideals. While I assisted in his getting elected, I don’t know that I am the person to take on what sounds like the most important task that has come before me. Is there anyone else that I might employ to help me persuade the President?”

“There is a new leader at the U.N. who has accepted a recently created post. Amaro D. Homem has just been named Supreme Chancellor to the United Nations and has been the driving force behind the resolution. If you would like, I could make arrangements to have this young man come and speak with you.”

“It might be better if President Montgomery not get the impression that I or rather we are using clandestine tactics to influence him. I have some influence with the first lady. In private, we are really close friends. I could speak with her about inviting this man to the next White House dinner party. There the two men could speak directly about the matter. I feel that this would be the most effective course of action. If this young man is capable of swaying the rest of the world, he would be the best man to have a go at the President,” explained the Vice President.

“That is why I came to you. I knew that you would have a brilliant solution to the problem. I have always been impressed by your intelligence and your character,” complimented Secretary Hunt.

“Thank you for those kind words. I am a little embarrassed,” replied the Vice President.

“Don’t be. I hope or rather expect that one day you will hold the office of President of the United States. You will be the President who returns our country to its place of greatness in the world.”

“Now I am starting to think you are campaigning for a place on my cabinet should I ever make such an achievement,” Vice President Henson said with a smile.

“I had not thought of that but now that you mention it,” Hunt replied with a chuckle.

The two ladies stood and shook hands. As Secretary of Treasury Elizabeth Hunt walked toward the door to the office she turned and said with a wink, “Here’s to a successful conspiracy.”

Chapter 29

Grant could hardly contain his excitement and anxiety as he made his way down the passageway that led to the control room. The tunnel was lined with spinning red and blue safety lights and he could hear the blaring of alarm buzzers through his soundproof headphones.

Today was the day he had long awaited. The turbine fan he had designed and was his brainchild, was mounted in an Aereodyne Thrust engine and would be tested for the first time.

As he placed his eye on the retina scanner and slid his I.D. card through the reader, the door lock snapped and the door opened to reveal a room full of electronic consoles. The meters, gauges, switches, and dials looked like something out of a science fiction movie. Men in white lab coats scurried about the room with clipboards and electronic recording devices logging the varied information being presented to them on the displays. The test had not begun but he was told by one of the engineers that benchmarks must first be taken for later comparison.

Looking around the room, he finally saw the familiar face of his good friend Jeremy, whom he had invited as his guest at the first testing. It was mostly for moral support that he had invited Jeremy but he also wanted him to be a part of the exciting moment. He had also invited Christine but she declined- concerned about his pride should the engine fail.

“Scared?” asked Jeremy.

“Terrified!” Grant replied.

“Grant, you are a fanatic perfectionist. There’s no way that thing won’t work,” encouraged Jeremy.

“Let’s just hope you’re right. My future and quite possibly the future of the company might depend on this test. That’s a lot of pressure.”

“How much longer until they start?” Jeremy asked.

“I don’t know. Hold on and I’ll ask someone.”

Grant walked over to what he deduced was the senior scientist in the room to ask about the test. He was told that the engine mounts were being secured and checked and as soon as the tunnel was cleared, the test would begin.

“It’s just a matter of minutes now. As soon as the guys down there are gone, they are going to fire up the engine. I’m so nervous I think I’m going to toss my cookies,” Grant moaned.

“Let’s just try to keep breakfast down. In a few minutes, it will all be over and win or lose, you can go back to your office and relax.”

Grant felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to be face to face with Walter Anderson.

“Good morning Mr. Anderson.”

“Good morning, son. This is exciting stuff. The test is about to begin so why don’t you and Jeremy join us over by the viewing gallery?” he said as he pointed to the glass wall.

The gallery was a section of the control room that extended into the tunnel. It was built out of four-inch tempered glass and reinforced with Lexan polycarbonate. This made the area resilient to flying debris in the event the engine suffered a massive failure.

Grant felt his stomach in knots as he watched the last of the millwrights exit from the tunnel and heard the warning sirens scream. The lights in the tunnel were dimmed as the engineers started the engine spinning slowly.

“Why did they turn down the lights?” asked Jeremy.

“The engineers want to see any sparks, flames, or indications of fuel leaks as they start the engine. As soon as they feel it’s safe, they’ll raise the lights and boost the thrust,” replied one of the scientists standing next to him.

The swirl painted on the nose cone of the engine had an almost hypnotic effect as the viewers watched with anticipation. Suddenly, the lights became extremely bright and Grant took a deep breath in an attempt to calm down.

“Take it easy, son. I have every confidence in you,” said Walter Anderson as he once again placed his hand on Grant’s shoulder.

The engine roared as the scientists and engineers began to increase the fuel to the engine to increase its thrust. Slowly but surely the thrust of the engine increased as the men and women darted around the consoles reading gauges and turning dials.

Finally an announcement went out across the intercom in the room that standard maximum thrust had been achieved and the engine was performing at the industry’s current maximum standard. They were told it would be held at that thrust for 10 minutes before attempting to move past the benchmarks of prior engine design.

The ten minutes seemed like an eternity to Grant. He began to roll over in his mind every minute calculation and detail that had brought him to this moment in his life. Jeremy stared at Grant’s face and instinctively knew the angst that his friend must be experiencing. He patted his friend on the back in an attempt to wake him from this trance.

Finally, a horn sounded and an announcement was made informing the gallery that the speed would be increased. Once again Grant drew a long breath and held it for a few seconds.

The roar of the engine became noticeably louder as the fuel was increased and the thrust elevated. Faster and faster the turbine spun as the spectators stared at the massive engine.

“Thirteen percent, fourteen percent, fifteen percent,” the engineer announced the increase in thrust as Grant worried that his fan would disintegrate.

“Sixteen percent, seventeen percent, eighteen percent,” he announced as Grant suddenly realized that his fan had succeeded his predictions had been correct.

Looking over at Walter Anderson for approval, Grant was surprised to see Mr. Anderson staring at the Chief Engineer. As he watched, Walter Anderson gave the engineer a nod of approval.

“Nineteen percent, twenty percent, Twenty-one percent,” the announcer continued as Grant’s anxiety quickly melted into solid confidence.

Suddenly, one of the engineers ran over to the engine’s control panel and punched the emergency kill button. The engine immediately began to spin down as the engineers all gathered in a huddle for an explanation.

After a short discussion, the engineer in charge of the testing approached Walter Anderson to brief him on the reason for the shutdown.

“Mr. Anderson, there was no compromise in the engine or the turbine fan. The reason for the termination was the lack of anticipation of the level of force that the engine’s mounts would experience. It’s quite possible that we could have pushed the engine as far as a twenty-five percent increase in thrust had we felt the mounts would hold. All of the engine’s tolerances were held to perfection. Levels of vibration, overheating, and turbulence were actually below our existing engine the AT-17F,” the engineer boasted.

High fives were flying all over the room as engineers, scientists, and especially the spectators were elated at the success of the engine. Jeremy held Grant in a bear hug as everyone gathered around to shake his hand or pat his shoulder.

The crowd parted as the most distinguished member of the gallery made his way over to Grant.

“Well, son, looks like we have a winner,” said Walter Anderson with a handshake.

“Thank you, sir,” replied Grant followed by a broad smile.

“I think you’ll be receiving a more practical expression of my appreciation for your hard work and accomplishment,” continued Walter Anderson with a wink.

As Mr. Anderson walked away, Jeremy leaned over to Grants ear to whisper their familiar phrase, “Cha-ching.”

Both of the men laughed heartily as they made their way from the control building back to their offices. The employees of Aereodye Thrust were given the balance of the day off in celebration of the success of Grant’s turbine fan.

Chapter 30

The implementation of U.N. Resolution 616 was progressing at great strides with seventy-five percent of the most populated countries on earth implanted.

Biosilica Corporation, designer and sole manufacturer of Thirio, was making profits for its shareholders unlike any other industry since the early days of computer software. The stock split and split again many times multiplying its value exponentially.

John Powell had been an insightful investor and had purchased large quantities of the stock before Thirio had even been conceived. He was now becoming one of the richest men in America, if not the world. He no longer needed financially to head International Avionics but decided to stay on for the everyday satisfaction he received from the power he yielded there.

Even though law in the United States had not mandated the implant of Thirio, people of great wealth who knew of the U.N. resolution and its coming financial ramifications were lining up at their physician's offices to get the implant. It seemed that the only way President Montgomery could stop the implementation would be by executive order or marshal law. The balance of power in the government would surely not allow those actions and would most certainly reverse any such dictate.

All those who practiced the Christian faith were feeling acutely the moral dilemma Thirio caused. Anyone who had studied the Judeo Christian Bible had most assuredly come across scriptures that warned against receiving a mark for the purpose of buying and selling. It clearly stated that anyone who received such a mark was forbidden to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Most true Christian believers would be forced to reject such a mark. Many of the Orthodox Jewish religion rejected the device because scripture forbid them to defile their bodies in such a way.

Without the Thirio device it would become impossible to possess any asset in the world. This would mean one could own no home since payments could not be transacted and taxes could not be paid. With no home, it would be nearly impossible to own any belongings other than the clothes on one's back. No food could be purchased. People would be forced to eat from the land or from the garbage discarded by those who received the device. Those who did not receive the Thirio device would be forced to wander the land scavenging for sustenance. Other wanderers could easily take what little they might have away from them.

Many people who had held out and not received the device began to seek answers from the clergy. The clergy was many times, as confused and without answers as their congregations. The implications were explored with every passing sermon. There was conflict within the churches as well. How could the churches continue to minister and exist if they could receive no tithes and offerings?

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“Mr. John Powell is here to see you,” said the secretary on the office intercom.

“Give me a couple of minutes and show him in,” replied Chris.

Chris Douglas was a clever financial advisor that had managed the Powell’s wealth for many years. It was Chris who first put Biosilica into John Powell’s portfolio. Both he and John Powell had now accumulated millions of dollars from the Thirio device.

Although John Powell respected and did business with Chris, it did not mean he was particularly fond of him. Chris had always been somewhat of a playboy and news of his escapades would sometimes become known to Mr. Powell. John had always been a church going believer and could not easily accept Chris’ lifestyle. Many times through the years, Chris would attend church and be seen by John and Nancy but this only made matters worse. The only thing John Powell liked less than a heathen was a hypocrite.

“Good morning Mr. Powell,” said Chris, as John Powell entered his plush office suite.

“Have a seat here on the couch. Cindy, could you bring us some coffee,” said Chris as he closed the office door.

“What can I do for you today?”

“Chris, I’ve been studying this issue with the Thirio device and quite frankly I’m worried. I want to know if you’ve developed a plan of action to insure I retain possession of my holdings. It can’t be true that without this device I will lose all I’ve worked for and accumulated through the years,” declared John.

“I have been looking into the problem as well. Like you, I also do not wish to lose my assets. I just purchased a new sports car. You would not believe how long I had to wait for the Lamborghini to be imported.”

“Enough about your car, this is serious,” snorted John Powell.

“Mr. Powell, you and I have been business associates for many years. I take your concerns *very* seriously. With all kidding aside, we are all in the same boat as far as I can tell. We can convert our assets into any form we wish be it gold, petroleum, or wheat. The problem is that shortly it will be impossible to convert it back into tangible resources without that device,” explained Chris.

“So what you are telling me is that we either have to set our beliefs aside and receive the Thirio, or we have to walk away from everything,” said John Powell in an angry tone.

“I guess that is the short of it, sir. I have not found a loophole yet- although I have not stopped looking. Since you are a man of faith and it is this faith that is causing the conflict, perhaps prayer will bring you to the proper resolution,” replied Chris.

“I hope you are not being disrespectful,” snapped John.

“Not at all, Sir, I meant that sincerely. I am not a particularly religious person and I certainly don’t pray. Maybe, if you are given the answer, I might benefit as well.”

“Very good, then,” replied John Powell as he rose from the couch to leave.

Chris shook John Powell’s hand and closed the office door behind him. Taking a seat behind his massive mahogany desk, he leaned back in his black leather chair placing his hand on his chin.

“What would I do about my own wealth?” he pondered as he rocked steadily back and forth.

Yes, it was true. He faced the same dilemma that John Powell and every other person of wealth faced in the world. Receive the Thirio and take a chance that there was no God- or walk away from everything he owned.

Chapter 31

The jet's tires screeched loudly, belching a plume of smoke as the United Nations jet touched down on the tarmac at Fiumicino Rome International Airport. Attendants scurried about the plane as the U.N. entourage prepared to collect their belongings and disembark the aircraft.

Amaro D. Homem sat stoically staring in an almost trance like state at the terminal building through the window by his seat. He was playing and replaying thoughts of how he would accomplish his upcoming mission. He wondered how Pope Paul Aloisius would receive him and his message about the Thirio.

"Sir, it is time to depart," said the airline steward standing beside Amaro.

Amaro awoke from his trance. Unfastening his seatbelt, he stood and straightened his suit. The attendant removed Amaro's garment bag from the storage locker and followed him down the jet way into the terminal.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Homem," said the envoy that had been assigned as his liaison from the Vatican.

"I hope you had a pleasant trip," he continued as they made their way to the waiting limousine.

"It was pleasant. Is my meeting with the Pope still on schedule?" asked Amaro.

"As of my last briefing, I am to pick you up from the Westin Excelsior at 10:00am and your meeting with the Pontiff will be at 11:15am sharp," responded the envoy.

"Excellent. There is nothing I am looking forward to more than speaking with His Holiness."

Amaro slipped into the limousine and they sped out of the dark parking garage and into the bright Italian sunshine. He marveled at Rome's historic scenery as they raced down congested streets making their way to the hotel.

"I have taken the liberty of making dinner arrangements for you, Mr. Homem. You will be dining at an exclusive restaurant near the Piazza Campo de Fiore called *Crudo*. It has a reputation for fine dining as well as having an exciting nightlife. You will also find that they have a very well stocked wine cellar."

"That sounds delightful. Thank you," replied Amaro.

Amaro enjoyed his evening in Rome. Dinner was excellent and he met several young executives in the restaurant's bar. They spoke of world affairs and their place in the global economy. Amaro was happy to listen to their viewpoints and to offer his own. The night passed quickly and he returned to his room somewhat earlier than he usually would have. His anticipation was mounting for the important meeting in the morning and he wanted to get a good night's rest before his liaison returned for him.

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Amaro, his Vatican liaison, and two secretaries walked briskly down the sidewalk that led through The Courtyard of St. Damaso at the Vatican. Amaro could not help but stare at the Swiss Guards that stood on either side of the passageway. Their colorful uniforms were exactly as he had seen in photographs. The men stood tall and without emotion, brandishing their traditional weapon- the spear. He had been told that the Swiss Guard had first come to the aid of the Pope about five hundred years ago and had served there at the Vatican ever since. They were comprised exclusively of taller Swiss Catholic men.

“Right this way, sir,” said the liaison opening a door that led into a lavish sitting room.

“The Pope will be just a moment. Will you please have a seat there until his entrance?”

Amaro took a seat on a small couch that faced a throne-like chair where he deduced the Pope would be seated. The couch was covered in the softest fine Italian leather he had ever encountered. After seven minutes that seem like an eternity, the Pope was helped into the room by his attendants and took a seat on the chair.

Instinctively, Amaro rose to his feet and approached the elderly Pontiff. He then genuflected on his right knee and kissed the ring on the Pope’s finger as he had done an Arch-Bishop when he was a young Catholic altar boy. After he stood and reverently bowed, Pope Paul Aloisius motioned for him to return to his seat. He then asked that all the attendants in the room exit so that they could speak in private.

“Thank you, Holiness, for giving me this special audience. The matter which I am here to discuss is of the most important nature,” Amaro began.

“Go on, my son.”

“I know that your advisors have informed you of the U.N. resolution calling for the implementation of a device that has the potential of bringing peace finally to our ailing planet. The device is called Thirio and has the ability to put an end to financial crime as well as other benefits. This is the reason that I seek your help in convincing the rest of the world that are hesitant to receive it,” explained Amaro.

“Tell me about some of the other benefits,” ordered the Pope.

“Well, your Holiness, an individual’s entire medical history can be stored, including allergies to medicines. It allows for the tracking of criminals using global positioning satellites. It can also be valuable in search and rescue operations,” boasted Amaro.

“What are the reasons that people will not receive the device?” asked the Pontiff.

“We are finding that the principal reason for not receiving the implant is found in the Bible. Fundamentalist Christians believe this to be the mark spoken of in the Apocalypse.”

“I see why you have come to me. What if they are correct? Is this device evil by nature?”

“I assure you Father that this is simply an electronic device that has no religious implications what so ever. I am Catholic and I have received it. It is here in my hand,” said Amaro as he held his left hand before the Pope for inspection.

“I see nothing.”

“Yes, Holiness, it is just beneath the skin and is impossible to detect.”

“Would it not be possible for someone to remove the device- or the hand for that matter and continue to use it for other purposes?” asked the Pope.

“No, Holiness, the device is biometrically designed to malfunction if the life is removed from the body or if the device encounters a different DNA sequence in its host,” explained Amaro.

“Fascinating, it seems that every contingency has been foreseen except for the religious implications,” returned the Pope.

“I am certain that if Our Lord were here with us today, in this very room, he would agree to have this device implanted in order to bring peace and prosperity to this lost world. Also, Holiness, you must consider the health of the church. The masses are already receiving the Thirio device. How will Christianity continue to live and grow if its financial income is terminated? Even the very nation known as the Vatican will be financially cut off from the rest of the world.” declared Amaro applying more pressure to persuade the most powerful religious figure on earth.

“I understand. What would you have me do?” asked the Pontiff.

“More or less form a partnership with me. Appear on the world stage and endorse the Thirio device. Your influence will help calm the fear of the masses. You will certainly spare them from starvation and want.”

The Pope sat quietly mulling over his options. He understood Amaro’s arguments. If he did not agree with his position, the whole of Christendom would be decimated. Also, there had not until then been any concrete link between the Thirio device and the mark referenced in the Bible. After careful consideration, the Pope folded his hands in his lap and bowed his head in prayer.

“Heavenly Father, I seek Your guidance. I have been given the great commission to bring Your word to the people of this world. Is it Your will that I endorse this undertaking,” prayed the elderly clergyman.

After a brief silence, the Pope lifted his head and stared into the face of Amaro.

“It is the only way,” said Amaro in a voice so low it was almost a whisper.

The Pope nodded in approval and accepted Amaro’s argument. He would now join Amaro and the U.N. in promoting the Thirio device to the citizens of the world who had been hesitant due to the religious ramifications of receiving Thirio.

Chapter 32

The wind from the rotors beat down the wild grass and palms as the helicopter slowly descended and set down gently on the concrete pad. A black Hum-V wheeled to within a few feet of the pad as the rotors slowed, coming finally to a stop. The white sand that had been swirling around the helipad eventually settled down and the door to the helicopter was opened.

Rudolf Lothar stepped onto the stairs that descended from the hatch and looked out across the pristine white sand beach that disappeared into a clear blue ocean. As he turned and looked behind the chopper, he gazed up the sides of the mountains that were a backdrop for this secluded rendezvous.

The other members of Quadrivium had already arrived and were settled into their villas. The island of Fiji would be host to the quarterly meeting of the seven men. It afforded them the seclusion they sought. This particular hideaway, tucked into the hills far from any prying eyes, was unknown even to the local inhabitants of the island. It was built and maintained exclusively for this elite group.

Rudolf Lothar was born in Switzerland and was the descendant of a powerful family in the banking and finance industry. He made his permanent residence in Castle Steinsberg, near the village of Ardez, which had been purchased from the Swiss government. The castle had been in great disrepair and had taken over four years to return to its former glory on its mountain perch.

The initial source of the Lothar family fortune was clouded in mystery. The Lothar family name appeared with some notoriety in the early 14th century after the crusades. The name had been associated with the wealthy group of crusaders known as the Knights Templar.

The Knights Templar were an association of wealthy warriors who had banded together to rescue the Holy Land from the hands of the Muslims. They also protected the route used by Western Europeans on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Because there were so many instances of robbery at the hands of highwaymen, the Knights Templar set in place what could be thought of as the first banking system. They would receive gold or silver from the pilgrims and issue them certificates that could later be redeemed at the end of their journey. This allowed the pilgrims to travel without gold and silver but still be able to pay for goods and services along the travel route.

At the end of the 13th century, King Philip IV of France became jealous of the wealth and power the Knights Templar had accrued. He had Pope Clement V issue an edict calling for the arrest of the knights. They were accused of such things as defacing the cross, sexual perversion, and idol worship.

Many of the Knights Templar leaders were put to death including Jacques de Molay, the last grand master of the group. On March 19th, 1314, he was burned at the stake. While he burned it was said that he cursed King Philip IV and Pope Clement V. The curse declared that both men would join him in death within one year. Whether it was by chance or by curse, Pope Clement V died within one month and King Philip IV seven months later.

Even though the leaders of the Knights Templar were put to death, the

majority of the group escaped. It is not known for certain where they went, but tradition has it that about that same time, a group of white clad warriors appeared in Switzerland. The area was sparsely populated and always under seige by neighboring peoples.

Legend has it that the white clad warriors taught the Swiss how to protect themselves and secure their lands. In keeping with the Knights Templar's veil of secrecy, the record of Swiss history is also hushed and relegated to hearsay and rumor.

Whether it is true that the Knights Templar escaped to Switzerland or not, the country has always been famous for its wealth and banking system, two things for which the Knights Templar were also famous.

* * *

“Willkommen,” said Gunther Volker, welcoming Rudolf Lothar in his native tongue.

“Guten tag,” replied Rudolf as he entered the conference room.

Rudolf was likewise greeted by the other five members of Quadrivium as he glanced around the room nodding with respect.

The conference room was oval in shape. It was unique in that from about four feet from the ground to the ceiling it was one continuous ring of glass. The glass had been formed from a single pouring of the hot molten substance and was three inches thick. It had been made in a German glass works and airlifted to the site by large commercial helicopters. The glass window was supported by a four foot wall, also formed by a single pouring of the finest brass. The brass had been produced in a foundry in India and transported by ship. Reliefs in the brass depicted many of the great battles in history, along with images of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Since the walls were a solid oval, entrance into the building was made via an escalator to an opening on the roof. The men would then take an elevator to the ground floor. Attendants and servants to the men entered through a subterranean passage that accessed the kitchen, servant's quarters, and storage rooms below. The building was impervious to the tropical storms that frequented the South Pacific.

As Rudolf took his seat at the large Italian marble conference table, the attendants scurried around the table serving cocktails. Mael Tristen stood and began to tap gently on his glass with a large diamond ring on his right index finger.

“Gentlemen, welcome. It is truly my distinct pleasure to be in your company once again. I hope that I find you healthy and in good cheer since last we met,” stated Mael.

“Are there any comments or disclosures you would like to make before we get to the business at hand?”

“I would like to thank my esteemed colleague, Serkan for a delightful outing. I must say, I don't know when I have been more entertained,” said Vasco Ferruccio.

“You are very welcome, my friend,” replied Savas.

“Yes, we heard of your recent safari. Were you successful in your pursuit of game?” asked Aldous Sorrell.

“Oh, yes. You could say we bagged the limit,” laughed Vasco as he winked at

Serkan Savas.

All the men at the table laughed, knowing what sort of safari Serkan hosted and that the game was human. At one time or another, they had all been on the hunt and had downed men, women, and children. Some had even kept their hides as trophies to display on the walls of their castles.

“Does anyone else have news that they would like to disclose to the group?” asked Mael, “No? Then, we shall continue.”

“As you all know, I have been closely following the progress of the implementation of U.N. Resolution 616. You will find a copy of it in your briefings.

“I have heard miraculous things about the young leader, Amaro Homem. The United Nations has elected him to a new post as Supreme Chancellor. I believe we should allow a variance to our bylaws and engage in dialog with this man directly,” continued Mael.

“Outrageous!” barked Gunther Volker, “I would not consider such an absurd suggestion.”

“Do not shout him down,” replied Erebos Nikomedes, “Let us give him the courtesy of an explanation.”

“Very well, continue,” returned Gunther with a motion of his hand.

“I do not believe this man is someone that we will be able to ignore. It is rumored that those around him speak of his use of power over people- some sort of supernatural power he possesses that influences decisions. It has come to me from my people that he has now employed the Pope to do his bidding,” explained Mael.

“Poppycock!” said Aldous Sorrel, “Probably some cheap magician's trick. You know I don't believe in that religious, supernatural mumbo-jumbo.”

“I, like you, am also skeptical. However, I believe we should not take it for granted. We should see for ourselves whether the reports are true,” argued Mael.

“I agree,” said Vasco, “Let us have him appear before us at our next gathering. We can discern for ourselves whether there is anything to this young man.”

“Let us put it to a vote then,” said Erebos.

The men scribbled on small sheets of white paper, folded them, and deposited them in a crystal bowl that was in the center of the table. Mael Tristen took the bowl and stirred the paper with his finger. Finally, he took out the sheets, unfolded them, and put them side-by-side on the table before him.

“Gentlemen, it is unanimous. I will have the young man contacted and make the arrangements,” said Mael.

The men each took the snifter of brandy that was before them and raised it in a toast. They then returned to the other orders of business that they routinely covered during their meetings. This business included the movement of money, assets, wealth, and power. They shifted the positions of entire economies with the stroke of their pens.

Chapter 33

The muffled drone from the heavy equipment being used to clean the Temple Mount could be heard constantly in the dimly lit tunnels below the surface.

Shalev Rabin and a group of archeologists and excavators were carefully digging at the end of a tunnel that was rumored first to have been created by the Knights Templar when they occupied Jerusalem during the crusades.

The work was very tedious and progress was slow. Every precaution had to be observed not to damage a priceless artifact while chipping away at the cavern walls. The men and women were also reminded of the dangers of tunneling by every downpour of dirt from the ceiling.

The sound of water could be heard dripping, as trickles would sometimes flow from cracks in the stone. The water would form mud that created a messy working environment. The working conditions were difficult but the crew did not even consider them, knowing the importance of the task that they had been given. It was a privilege to be allowed to dig on the Temple Mount under any circumstances.

Each day before entering the tunnels, Rabbi Shani Velvel would offer prayers for a successful dig and bless the workers at the Western Wall. Many others of the faithful from around the world would be praying there as well, placing prayer notes in the cracks or reading from their scriptures.

In the tunnel another day of exploring was nearing an end as the exhausted workers put forth their last efforts. A shower and a good meal would be a great reward for a hard day's work and was much anticipated.

"Could you hand me that small pick?" asked Shalev wiping the sweat from his forehead with a rolled shirtsleeve, "Not that one, the small red one."

"Yes, sir," replied one of the young undergraduate students who had volunteered to assist.

Twenty archeology undergraduates had been hand picked by Shalev's former professor to assist on the dig. Some were assigned the task of gently excavating the walls while others had the task of sifting through the rubble for artifacts. All of the young students rotated on a bucket brigade that formed from the recesses of the tunnel out to its opening. This was difficult manual labor but was necessary for removing the dirt and stone.

The students did the work without complaint being aware of the privilege they had been given. To be allowed to dig on a site like the Temple Mount was historical even of itself.

Shalev gently tapped out a fragment of stone and began to scrape the cavity with a trowel.

"Just more stone," he moaned as he dropped the pick and fell back against the stone wall.

This scene had been played out day after day in the dark dank tunnels. Inch by inch the tunnels were extended only to reveal more stone. No hidden passages or vaults had been uncovered since they had begun digging. The illusive treasure

that they sought remained just that. Where was the Ark of the Covenant or the Holy Ark that housed the ancient Torah? So many missing pieces that had been supposed to be buried below the Temple Mount and not one yet found.

“Let’s call it a day. I think we have made about as much progress as we can,” said Shalev as he tossed the trowel into a wooden crate along with the other tools.

The workers wandered off in different directions as they exited the tunnel. Shalev walked to his Jeep and pulled a white towel from the back. He wiped his face and forearms and then wrapped it around his neck.

Arriving at his home, he was pleased to see the car of his fiancée Adina in the driveway.

“I wouldn’t get too close if I were you,” he said jokingly as she met him at the door, “I reek of sweat and dirt.”

“I love you in spite of your filth,” she said as she leaned over and gave him a peck on the lips, “Dinner is almost ready. Take your shower and I will pour you a drink.”

Even though Shalev and Adina had been engaged for a couple of years, they did not live or sleep together. They had made a decision to remain chaste until the day of their marriage. This was an unusual lifestyle choice but they wished to honor the sacrament of marriage as God had intended.

“Did you find anything today?” asked Adina as she passed a bowl of lentils over to Shalev.

“Just another crack in the wall.”

“You sound discouraged,” she pouted.

“I’m just exhausted. I guess I had gone into this assignment with a thought that we would immediately make some earth-shattering discovery. It was an unrealistic expectation. Many people have excavated the Mount over the centuries. It’s possible that anything worth finding has already been carried off to some other location. The Ark of the Covenant could well be in some billionaire’s private museum or a part of the treasures of another nation,” he explained.

“How long will they allow you to continue without any success?”

“I do not think there is a time table. I get the distinct impression that we can take all the time we need to thoroughly search the Mount. The Muslim community is raging but it was their own fault that they lost control of the Temple Mount. It was a judgment by God against their murderous ways.”

“Now, Shalev, you know they are not all like that,” she said in protest.

“I know, my love. I just cannot forget the loss of so many of my brothers on the battlefield. It makes me prejudiced against all Muslims, especially the Palestinians. I have to remind myself of how many I know that are good, decent people.”

“Or *I* have to remind you,” she said with a smile as she pointed her fork at him.

After dinner, Shalev and Adina curled up on the sofa in front of the television and spent the balance of the evening watching an old black and white movie that had been made in Italy. Both enjoyed tender kisses as they snuggled. The evening would be over all too soon and Adina would return to her home before midnight.

Chapter 34

Christine ran from the garage into the house to answer the telephone that had rung four times. Cans rolled out of the grocery bags as she hastily placed them on the kitchen counter.

“Hello,” she managed to say while trying to catch her breath.

“Hi, Christine, is Grant around?” asked Jeremy.

“He’s back in his computer room. I don’t know why he can’t answer the phone. He gets so wrapped up in that stuff that he’s in another world,” complained Christine, “Hold on and I’ll go get him.”

“Grant, Jeremy is on the phone. Why didn’t you answer the phone? I almost missed it. It would have served you right.”

“I’m sorry, Hon. I was at a crucial place in the program that needed my undivided attention,” he explained.

Grant was an accomplished Delphi programmer and had minored in computer science at university. Delphi was a visual *object oriented* language based on the earlier Pascal programming language.

He found computer programming to be a very rewarding pastime. Grant felt a real sense of accomplishment with each completed program. Sometimes his programming was more rewarding than the engineering successes on his job.

Picking up the phone, he was glad to hear his friend on the other end of the line.

“Are you on the computer on a Saturday? Don’t you get enough of that stuff at work? I try not to turn on my home computer on the weekends unless I need to check the movie schedule or the weather,” Jeremy scolded.

“You’re starting to nag me like Christine. What’s up?”

“I was just calling to see if you wanted to go fishing this afternoon. I hear they are tearing up the bass out on the reservoir.”

“I’m gonna pass. I’m at a crucial point in a program I am writing and don’t want to lose my train of thought,” replied Grant.

“What kind of program are you writing?”

“Well, you know how we have been talking about the end time prophecies.”

“Yeah.”

“I thought I would write a program that will attempt to decipher the name of the anti-Christ,” explained Grant, “You know the 666 number.”

“How does it work?” asked Jeremy.

“Well, there are about six thousand languages that have been used in the world. Only a fraction of them are still in use today. I have taken about one hundred of the most commonly used, plus some of the ancient languages such as Egyptian, Samaritan, and Latin, and loaded them into a database. I also included the corresponding alphabet and symbol weight into the database.

“When the program is finished, I will enter the names of the best known figures in politics and have the program attempt to calculate a number from each name. The algorithm is pretty complex,” explained Grant proudly.

“Sweet! What’s a symbol weight?” asked Jeremy.

“It’s just a term I’m using to represent the position of the character in a character set. You know, like the letter A is 1, the letter B is two, and so on.”

“Oh, I get it. When do you think you’ll have it finished?”

“It’s progressing pretty good. I might have it done this weekend or next. Then I’ll have to debug it which will take a little while,” replied Grant.

“Keep me posted on it. I’m curious to find out if you get any results,” said Jeremy.

“Don’t worry,” laughed Grant, “you were going to be the first person I told anyway. I don’t think anyone else would be interested.”

“Speaking of end times, have you been following the news about the Thirio device?” asked Jeremy.

“Yeah, it’s pretty scary. Do you think it could be the mark of the beast that’s in Revelation?”

“It sure sounds like it. You can’t buy or sell in some parts of the world without having it now. People here in the States are starting to get it. I wonder how long it will be before they try to force it on us?” asked Jeremy.

“I don’t know. Are you going to get one?”

“Are you crazy? I’m not gonna take the chance. That thing is too close to what is described in the Bible. If you get it, you absolutely can’t get into heaven- no way.”

“I don’t know what we will do but I’m not getting it either. We will really be at God’s mercy if they force implementation of it here in the U.S.,” complained Grant, “It’s things like this that make me hope the Rapture theology is correct.”

“Yeah, anyway, you sure you can’t tear yourself away for some fishing?”

“No, but if you go, I hope you don’t come back with that tired old story about the one that broke your line. You know I never buy that,” Grant chuckled as he said it.

“See you at work, later man,” said Jeremy.

Grant returned to his computer and sat staring at the computer screen. He kept thinking about his conversation with Jeremy and about the Thirio device. He wondered if he had enough faith and courage to be able to walk away from all he owned. More troubling was the question of how he would care for his family.

It was one thing to take risks with one’s own life, but to involve his wife and children was very unnerving. Still, if any of them received the mark, they would forfeit the kingdom of heaven and that was truly not acceptable. It was a real quandary.

He once again placed his hands over the keyboard and with blistering speed his fingers hammered the keys. Lines and lines of programming code scrolled down the computer monitor as he came closer to completing the program.

Chapter 35

“What time is Brandon picking you up?” Christine yelled up the staircase.

“He said around 7:00pm,” replied Maggie.

“Well, it’s 7:05pm now. I’d say he stood you up,” yelled Brett from his room.

“Mind your own business, mutant,” returned Maggie.

“Would you two grow up *please*,” complained Christine as she walked back into the kitchen, shaking her head.

Maggie could hear the sound of Brandon’s car horn through her upstairs window. The two had been dating regularly and Brandon had dropped the formality of calling on Maggie at the front door.

“I’ll be right down,” she yelled through the window as Brandon waited in his convertible.

Maggie ran down the staircase and flew out the front door, running to the car. Brandon looked over the top of his sunglasses at her as she opened the car door and plopped down on the front seat. He leaned over and gave her a quick peck on the lips and threw the gearshift into reverse.

Brett watched from his bedroom window as the two sped off down the street. He was still not comfortable with his little sister’s choice in men. He feared the worst but was happy that ignorance was bliss. What he didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

“Where are we going tonight?” asked Maggie.

“Well, I thought we would start with a pizza at Fatini’s and then just drive around a little,” he said with a smile.

Walking through the doorway, Brandon and Maggie recognized some of their friends from school as they passed a booth in the pizzeria. Maggie waved and said hi as they passed and Brandon just looked at one of the guys and winked.

The two split a pizza and then played some video games before leaving. It had become dark outside and Brandon decided to drive up to lookout point to view the city’s lights below and the sky above.

“It’s beautiful up here at night, don’t you think,” said Maggie.

“The scenery is not the only thing beautiful up here,” replied Brandon as he leaned over and kissed Maggie.

As they began to kiss more passionately, Brandon drew Maggie close so that their bodies pressed against each other. Brandon was gently rubbing Maggie’s back with his hand as they were locked intensely.

As he ran his hand down her back, his upward motion brought his hand under Maggie’s top. He could feel the strap from her bra with each pass of his hand up and down her back. After what seemed to him like a life time, he began to fidget with the clasp.

Maggie could feel what he was up to but was not sure how to react. She wasn’t sure he would succeed and if he did, she was not sure whether she would stop him.

Brandon was experienced in this sort of thing as his reputation had touted. With a fluid motion, the last clasp was loosed and Maggie’s bra was opened.

"I'm not sure I'm ok with this," declared Maggie as she pushed back from Brandon.

"It's not like we're going to have sex or something. I thought you were cool. I'm just taking our relationship to the next level," he replied.

This was a standard statement that Brandon had used on many other girls before Maggie. He found it to be successful for two main reasons- the girls didn't want to be thought childish or un-cool and they wanted to be in a relationship with him.

Brandon leaned over and kissed Maggie passionately. Once again Brandon pulled Maggie to him and put his hand under the back of her top. Seconds turned into minutes as they continued to kiss.

As the minutes turned into an hour, Brandon had fully explored Maggie's body above the waist while keeping her dizzied with very heavy kissing. Finally, as Maggie began to come back to her senses, she realized that she had allowed Brandon to go too far.

"It's almost time for me to be home," she whispered as she backed away from Brandon to button her top.

"Where did the time go?" asked Brandon with a sigh.

Maggie sat back in the seat and stared out the window in a daze. Brandon noticed that she seemed far away.

"Are you ok?" he asked.

"Yeah," replied Maggie.

Brandon took Maggie's hand and kissed it. She turned and looked him in the eyes not breaking contact.

"I know I have somewhat of a reputation. It's not like that with you. I can't think of anyone else but you. I've never really felt it before, but I believe it's love," declared Brandon seriously.

Maggie sat motionless not sure how to respond. She had been thinking about Brandon in the same way but was not sure whether he was being sincere or just trying to comfort her.

Brandon became nervous after revealing his feelings and opening himself to the chance of rejection. He was still holding Maggie's hand and fidgeting with a ring on her finger.

"Please say something. I'm dying here," he finally whispered.

Maggie realized from his nervous demeanor, sweaty palms, and fidgeting fingers that he was telling the truth. She closed her eyes and leaned in to kiss him. This kiss and the ones that followed were tender and not the impassioned kisses enjoyed earlier in the evening.

They sat quietly on the drive home still holding hands. When they arrived at the Stokes home, instead of just letting Maggie out, Brandon walked her to the door. The two stood face to face for a moment before Brandon leaned over and gently kissed her cheek.

"Love you," he whispered nervously.

"You too," she replied, followed by a quick kiss on the lips.

Maggie disappeared behind the front door as Brandon confidently walked back to his convertible. Turning his back and leaning against the driver's door, he spun his legs over it and slid into the front seat.

What he feared had been destroyed with his promiscuity earlier in the evening had weathered the storm. Maggie loved him and to his own amazement, he felt

the same about her. He made a vow to himself that from that day forward, he would respect Maggie and not make further attempts to despoil her.

Chapter 36

President Donald Montgomery and First Lady Jennifer Dale Montgomery stood at the head of the receiving line, welcoming guests and making small talk. The White House was brightly lit with chandeliers and candles as the honored guests and dignitaries arrived for dinner.

“Mr. President, I would like to introduce a distinguished representative from the United Nations- Supreme Chancellor Amaro D. Homem,” said Secretary of State Clayton Jordan.

The President heartily shook Amaro’s hand and bid him a sincere welcome. Amaro then took the hand of the First Lady and raised it as if to kiss the back of it. He stopped short of it actually touching his lips.

“Good evening, Madam. Amaro D. Homem,” he said as he looked deep into her eyes.

“We are very pleased to meet you. I am First Lady Jennifer Dale Montgomery,” she replied.

Amaro nodded respectfully and followed the other guests into dining room.

The dining room table was adorned with one of the finest and most formal White House China sets. Each place setting was the picture of perfection and contained a card with a name for prearranged seating. The President would be seated at the head of the table with the First Lady sitting at the opposite end. Couples were seated side-by-side and the unescorted guests were mixed randomly around the table.

Large floral displays were placed in one third increments down the center of the table with the remaining center space adorned with ice sculptures of swans. The serving staff was lined against the wall waiting for the guests to begin taking their places. The room was buzzing with the sounds of many conversations.

When the President and First Lady took their places behind their chairs, the guests began to be seated. When the last guest took his seat, the President walked to the other end of the table to pull the chair out for his wife. He then marched back to his place and stood behind his chair.

“The First Lady and I would like to welcome you to our home,” he said and then promptly took his seat.

The dinner lasted over two hours, with many courses being delivered by the serving staff. So many simultaneous conversations made it difficult for anyone at one end of the table to know what was being said at the other. Distance kept the number of participants down to around four per conversation.

When the dinner was completed, the guests retired to the East Room where they sipped cocktails and continued to mingle. As the evening came to an end, the First Lady singled out Amaro and escorted him to speak with the President.

“Mr. President I have been speaking with this young man and find him absolutely charming,” declared the First Lady.

“I have heard marvelous things about you, Chancellor.”

“Thank you, Mr. President.”

“Mr. President, why don’t we have an aide collect Mr. Homem’s personal items from his hotel and have him stay with us?” asked the First Lady, “He confided that he would, some time soon, like to speak with you in private.”

“That would be fine. I have an hour free in the morning before I depart for a Camp David summit. We could speak over breakfast.”

“That would be greatly appreciated, Sir,” replied Amaro.

“I will have the staff prepare the Lincoln Bedroom. I believe you will find it quite accommodating,” said the First Lady as she walked away on the arm of Amaro.

* * *

The next morning, Amaro was escorted to breakfast by one of the staff. He found the President already sitting at a small glass table in the sun room sipping coffee. The President stood to shake his hand as he welcomed him to breakfast.

“I trust you slept well?”

“Yes, Mr. President. The bed was quite comfortable.”

“Good, good. Bring Mr. Homem a platter and then have the staff give us some privacy,” the President told the server.

Once the men had been served and were enjoying their meal, Amaro disclosed the reason for his meeting.

“Mr. President, I have come to encourage you to rethink your position on U.N. Resolution 616. I feel that perhaps you have not been given the proper information or you would embrace the idea as the rest of us do,” said Amaro.

The President set down his coffee cup and folded his hands on the table before him. He paused for a moment before his reply.

“I had already been informed as to the nature of your visit. Nothing happens in a vacuum in Washington. My staff has briefed me extensively on the Thirio implant device and the decision I made is one based on my convictions,” replied the President in a quiet yet stern tone of voice.

“But, sir, the rest of the world is already in the process of receiving the implant. The economic and financial apparatus depending on the device will soon be instituted. The United States of America will be cut off from the rest of the world,” warned Amaro.

The President’s countenance changed noticeably as he was angered by what Amaro said. He leaned forward slightly and looked Amaro intently in the eyes.

“Let me remind you, sir that you are speaking with the leader of the most powerful nation on earth. That would mean that you are speaking with the most powerful man on earth. I have made my decision and it is final. I will veto any legislation that supports the resolution if it crosses my desk,” fired back the President in a stern voice.

Amaro lifted the linen napkin from his lap and patted his lips dry. He then nodded respectfully at the President.

“I will speak no more about this matter. I thank you Mr. President for allowing me to speak with you privately,” said Amaro in an effort to reconcile with the President.

The two men continued in small talk as they finished their breakfast. Amaro went back to his bedroom while the President prepared to leave for his summit.

Amaro stood at the bedroom window and pulled back the sheer drape. He could see the President walking across the lawn towards the helipad. As the President climbed the steps to enter Marine One, he turned back and waved at the First Lady Jennifer Dale and a handful of staff members.

Amaro watched as the helicopter slowly ascended into the air and drifted away. He had successfully contained his anger at breakfast but he felt it building acutely as he stared at the helicopter and thought how the President had spoken down to him. His eyes were transfixed on the black dot in the sky. His anger quickly exploded into rage and his heart beat wildly. The hatred he felt for the President caused him to clench his teeth and beads of perspiration formed on his forehead.

Suddenly a puff of smoke could be seen behind the helicopter followed by a belch of flame from the engine. The First Lady and staff rushed onto the grounds in an attempt to get a better view. The chopper was spinning erratically as it warbled in the air. In a second, the helicopter disappeared from the sky and a tremendous explosion followed.

The First Lady began screaming as a black plume of smoke replaced the helicopter in the sky. Her knees began to buckle and she was quickly supported by two aides as they walked her limp body back into the White House.

Amaro felt a calm overtake him as he watched the pillar of smoke grow in the sky. He lowered the drape he had been holding and turned to the bed. He began folding his clothes and placing them neatly in his suitcase.

When he had completed packing his bag, he took a seat beside the window and stared into the sky. He could here the scuffle of footsteps outside his door as the White House staff scurried down the hallway.

He propped his head with his hand under his chin and smiled. He was satisfied with the outcome of his meeting with the President. There would be no more opposition to U.N. Resolution 616 from the United States of America.

Chapter 37

At an abandoned air force base in eastern France, weary travelers disembarked from crowded military cargo planes. They staggered across the tarmac and into the compound that had been prepared for them.

Chambley Air Force base had been retro fitted to become an internment camp for the European and African populations that refused to receive the Thirio device. Most had come by choice, having no means of feeding and clothing themselves.

Three major internment camps had been set up and funded by the United Nations to house the indigent population that would not comply with the resolution. The Chambley Air Force Base was a central location in Europe situated just outside the city of Metz, France.

Nearby farm land and prairie had been purchased to expand the facility to hold up to one million people with minimal accommodations. This would allow for approximately six square feet of living space for each person. It would be a miserable existence even under the best conditions.

It did not take long for the quality of life in the camp to begin to take a downward turn. Within months the camp had exceeded the one million mark with more people arriving each day. The U.N. workers labored tirelessly every day in an attempt to accommodate and feed the masses.

As people's nerves began to frazzle, fights erupted resulting in many deaths. The U.N. officials were almost happy when this occurred. It would free more space and resources for those still arriving.

The strongest and fittest men were pressed into service as construction workers. They dug a huge trench that would be used as a mass burial site. As people died, they would be laid in the trench. Their naked bodies would then be covered with lime and a thin layer of earth. There was a fairly steady stream of bodies deposited in the trench daily.

The construction hands were also busy each day building more and more housing with materials that were supplied by the United Nations. The living quarters consisted of long rows of barracks. The length of the barracks was lined with bunk beds that were stacked four high. Each bed had a storage locker beside it that the inhabitants of the bunk unit shared.

The indigents were allowed to possess only a few personal items. These possessions were limited to two changes of clothing, a hair brush and toothbrush, and a razor. All soaps and toiletry items were supplied by the U.N. staff.

The youngest and strongest women were employed in the fields tending crops that were harvested to feed the masses. Children were educated by the elderly. Everyone had a task or duty to perform that was beneficial to the commune.

The sick were cared for by medical staff and nurses that had come there because they too had refused the Thirio device. Medicine was dispensed by the U.N. staff.

Although the United Nations as a whole cared little for these rebels, many of the people who worked in the field for the United Nations had compassion and did not intentionally abuse their power. There was the occasional crime against a detainee such as assault, rape, or murder. The penalty for the offense was merely reassignment by the United Nations to an alternative location.

The same scenario was also being played out in the Syrian dessert near the city of Palmyra. This internment campsite was set up to accommodate the Near East and Middle East populations that had refused the implant. The Syrian camp was not nearly as overpopulated as the French camp. There were fewer numbers of objectors in this part of the world. The United Nations had considered the redistribution of detainees but found it more difficult logistically to keep open the lines of supplies.

This camp had a more volatile population. The mixes of different cultures, especially those that had been at odds for centuries, made for much unrest. Like the French camp, tasks were assigned to the general population but still there was time found for fighting and riots. Unlike the French camp, U. N. soldiers had to police the compound to keep order.

The best of the three camps was located just outside Urumqi in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. Urumqi was the most inland city in the world, surrounded by miles of farm land.

The Chinese camp was by far the most peaceful and operated like a well oiled machine. These people were accustomed to oppression and therefore they were very meek and cooperative.

Most of the Far East populations who refused to receive the Thirio device did so out of fear or ignorance. They were a poor people who had no reason to take it. They had lived by the barter system for centuries and had little use for monetary finances.

Peoples of the East who had been proselytized by the Judeo-Christian religions of the West also refused to accept the implant. This side of the world had been host to thousands of missionaries since World War II. There were hundreds of churches constructed during this time period and the congregations were growing steadily.

The future for all these detainees was bleak. It was difficult to see a future beyond the day to day toil and labor of this drab existence. Many felt that God had abandoned them. It certainly seemed to be true.

In contrast, the peoples of the former Soviet block and Japan received the mark without hesitation. It had been promised in the former Soviet countries that a redistribution of wealth from those who had refused the mark would benefit them directly. They had lived a hard life since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the desire for a better lifestyle was intense.

The Japanese population put a high value on their quality of life and position in the world community. Since the rebuilding of their nation after the Second World War, they had worked painstakingly to achieve a quality of life equal to the United States. They would not consider losing their possessions or their ability to transact business.

Chapter 38

“I just can’t believe it,” moaned Grant with a depressed look on his face as the crash of the President’s helicopter was announced over the company intercom.

“I know. Cut down in the prime of life,” lamented Jeremy.

“Turn on the TV and let’s see what’s being reported.”

Grant, Jeremy, and a handful of Areodyne Thrust employees stood silent watching the events unfold. Video of the crash site revealed that little of *Marine One* was left intact. The crash had ignited the highly explosive aircraft fuel tanks and exploded the helicopter like a bomb.

“I wonder what we are in for now?” asked Grant as he took a sip from the coffee cup on the break room counter.

“I’m afraid to imagine. You know, Montgomery was a fairly conservative President but the Lady Vice President, I don’t know,” replied Jeremy.

“I think Mallory Henson will usher in the beginning of the end for this country. I read that she favors the U.N. plan to implant everyone with the identity device. She will also attempt to ram that socialized healthcare legislation down our throats again. Neither our nation nor any other nation on earth can afford to pay unlimited taxes to provide free healthcare. It just doesn’t work,” said Grant in a frustrated tone of voice.

“We will end up with a two tiered healthcare system. The very wealthy will be able to pay for good healthcare while the middle-class and poor will be stuck with medical professionals who are willing to work for a minimal amount of income. Do you think that will attract the best in their fields?” asked Jeremy sarcastically.

Grant looked over at him and made a twisted face.

“Yeah, that’s what I think too,” said Jeremy.

“Well, one thing is for sure, I’m not getting that Thirio implant,” declared Grant.

“I’m afraid that means hard times for us, my friend,” replied Jeremy, “If we don’t get it, we can’t work, pay taxes, own possessions, nothing.”

Grant once again looked at Jeremy but this time with a serious look on his face.

“This really is the beginning of the end. There is nothing to stop the anti-Christ from taking global control of the world’s finances. It is just as John prophesied in Revelation,” said Grant.

He then began to quote the scripture to Jeremy.

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

“You know some manuscripts state that the number of his name is six hundred and sixteen.”

“I know,” replied Grant. “That really makes U.N. Resolution 616 even more terrifying.”

“Speaking of the number of the beast’s name, have you finished your deciphering program?” asked Jeremy.

“Yeah, I bought an inexpensive desktop computer system from one of the big box stores and loaded the program on it. That way, I can let it run uninterrupted 24/7.”

“Has it turned up anything yet?”

“I looked at it last night before going to bed and it had listed two coincidental matches. I don’t think either of them is the anti-Christ.”

“How come?” asked Jeremy.

“They’re both dead.”

“I’d say that was pretty definitive,” said Jeremy with a chuckle.

“It may take a while for any serious results. There are a lot of name combinations and language alphabets to crunch. The truth is it might not come up with anything tangible.”

“Well, I’ll keep my fingers crossed just the same. It would be awesome if it comes up with the name of a real credible individual.”

“Yeah, more like a miracle,” laughed Grant.

A low murmur was building in the room as conversations turned to Vice President Mallory Henson who was about to speak before the cameras on television.

“I have assumed the full duties of the office of the Presidency. I will continue to conduct the daily business of running this great country until officially sworn into office as the President of the United States.

“Our hearts go out to the First Lady and the family of President Donald Montgomery. His leadership and ability to work together with the other branches of government are a testament to him and will be a lasting legacy.

“This is a somber time in our nation’s history. There has never been a celebrated moment at the loss of a leader even by their opponents. We all mourn the loss of this great President.”

A barrage of photographers began snapping pictures as the Vice President stepped away from the podium. She was replaced by the White House press secretary who began to take questions from the reporters.

The Areodyne Thrust employees hushed as another announcement came over the public address system. They were informed that the company would close for the balance of the week as a memorial to the loss of the President.

The workers slowly began to make their way from the break room, their offices, and the workstations. An eerie quiet fell over the facility as the employees reflected on the tragedy.

Grant stopped for a moment on the front grounds of the office complex to watch a custodian lower the giant American flag to half-staff. He considered as it

whipped and popped in the gentle breeze that it was a reminder of how strong and resilient the United States had always been even in the face of the loss of its leader.

Chapter 39

On the last sustained word of the hymn, the music minister turned and took a seat on the platform opposite the pastor. The Reverend Kyle Winford arose and walked over to the podium. Placing his Bible on the podium, he prepared to give the sermon with an opening prayer.

“Oh Lord, it is in the precious name of Jesus that we gather before you here today. Please bless this service and this congregation of your most faithful servants,” he prayed.

The prayer was followed by a chorus of “Amen!” and a loud shuffling sound filled the sanctuary as the congregation took their seats. Grant put his arm around Christine, resting it on the back of the pew. He tapped Brett on the shoulder and gave him a quick smile as the preacher began to speak.

“I would like to continue with our series on the end of days and the prophetic writings found in the book of Revelation. If you would, turn in your Bible to the book of Revelation chapter two.

“This is an important message to the seven primary churches spread out across Asia Minor at the time this book was written by John, while he was exiled on the isle of Patmos.

“God is assessing these churches, finding both fault and favor with them. I believe that parallels can be drawn between the seven churches of John’s time and the many various Christian denominations that exist today.

“The warnings that are presented to us from God in these chapters are intended to keep us true to the course and be ready for the *Second Coming* of Our Lord. If we let the world creep into our daily lives, we will not be prepared and could be left behind when Jesus appears in the sky, where we are to be caught up with him,” he preached as he paced back and forth across the platform.

The congregation was deadly silent as the words poured from the preacher’s mouth. All of them were captivated by the thought of escaping the punishment that was to be exacted on a corrupt world society.

Each of them secretly or unconsciously felt righteous in their own minds for being religious and in church on the Lord’s Day. They would be favored by God far more than the average inhabitant of the earth who was oblivious to these teachings.

“I would like to draw your attention to...”

The pastor stopped in mid sentence when he looked up and saw John Powell standing before him in the front pew. Everyone’s eyes were transfixed on either Reverend Winford or John Powell. The pastor had a look of shock on his face.

“John, is there something the matter?”

“I realize that this is highly irregular. I don’t know exactly what has possessed me to do this but I was moved to stand and ask you an important question here before the congregation.”

“John, would it not be more appropriate to meet with me after the service and speak in my office?” asked the Reverend.

“As I stated before, I was moved by The Spirit or some power to stand immediately and make inquiries about the Rapture teachings and how we will stand with God as the rest of the world is punished,” he replied.

Reverend Kyle Winford was dazed and confused by what was happening in the service. In all his years as a pastor he had never had a service interrupted in this way. What made this interruption even more perplexing was that it was one of the most prominent and influential members of the community that was standing before him. He could not just have him escorted from the sanctuary to end the disruption.

“Very well, John. Please make your inquiry.”

“We are living in remarkable times. So many of the prophecies and signs that we have been taught to look for are being fulfilled before our very eyes. It is about these prophecies that I am troubled.

“You are our pastor. We are your flock and dependant upon you,” he said as he waved his arms pointing out into the congregation.

“You have been teaching us that we will escape the tribulation that will be brought on the world by being taken before it happens. There is the question of this mark that one must receive to be able to buy or sell.

“My question to you before this assembly is whether receiving the Thirio implant mandated by the United Nations constitutes receiving the mark of the beast?” he asked.

The Reverend Kyle Winford was noticeably unnerved by this direct question. He had given it some consideration but his firm belief that born again Christians would be taken from the earth before the conflict did not allow for them to be put in a position to have to make such a decision.

He took a handkerchief from his suit pocket and blotted his forehead dry. He then placed it on the podium and began turning pages in his Bible. After a brief moment of thought, he began to answer the question.

“John, if you will take your seat, I will address your question.

“It is not possible for me expound on all the many volumes that I have read on the subject. What I will attempt to do is condense the explanation into short but pointed arguments that helped me decide that the Rapture concept is indeed well founded in the scriptures.

“I will start with my first argument that is taken from the passages we were looking at today. It has been noted by many renowned biblical scholars that there is no mention of the Christian church beyond the warnings to the seven churches at the beginning of the book. They contend that because the church is not mentioned thereafter it is an indication that the church is no longer on the earth. This includes the time period spoken of during the reign of the anti-Christ when the mark is given.

“The second convincing argument that the church will be removed was studied by us a few weeks ago. The apostle Paul tells us that we are to be caught up in the sky with Jesus on the sound of his shout and the trumpet blast. We will then reside with Christ forever. Revelation mentions that Jesus will appear with his legions of angels and crush the armies of the world at the battle of Armageddon. This return does not resemble the return spoken of by Paul.

“Lastly, there is the great commission. We are told to spread the Gospel to the whole world. How can this be done if we have to close our church doors and walk

away from all our assets? Spreading the Gospel is an expensive undertaking. This is not consistent with either reason or the nature of God.

“In closing, I don’t believe that we as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ will be subjects of the anti-Christ and abandoned by God to suffer the tribulation.

Once again John Powell rose to his feet and addressed Reverend Winford.

“Then by your council we may feel secure that in receiving the Thirio device we will not be deciding to follow the anti-Christ and suffer eternal damnation because of the mark,” he stated.

“I will ask you this one question. Who is the anti-Christ?” asked the pastor.

Reverend Kyle Winford scanned the room waiting for an answer from any member of the congregation. After a brief pause, he continued.

“There you have it. How can you pledge allegiance to someone who you don’t even know. To answer your question, John, yes I believe it is safe to receive the Thirio device,” he concluded.

“Thank you, pastor. You have set my mind at great ease. I have been tortured by this quandary since I first heard of the device. According to my sources in Washington, D.C., President Mallory Henson will sign into law new legislation mandating that U.N. Resolution 616 be implemented in the United States immediately.”

“I think you can rest easy knowing that God is in control and will never forsake you. We have his written guaranty right here,” said the pastor as he held up his Bible.

Grant was silent for most of the drive to the restaurant after the church service. Both Brett and Maggie were listening to their MP3 players with headphones on. Christine stared out the passenger window at the neatly manicured lawns as they passed by.

“No.” muttered Grant shaking his head.

“No what?” asked Christine.

“No, I don’t believe what the pastor said today was correct.”

“How so?”

“I don’t believe any of his arguments were compelling enough to place one’s soul on the line, especially the last one. If you think back to the beginning of Christianity and the onset of the Great Commission, giving your life for spreading the Gospel was common and the word went out across the globe in spite of the fact that there was not an organized religious infrastructure. I feel sure he is wrong and we should not receive that implant,” he replied.

Christine put her hand on her husband’s shoulder and patted him gently.

“I’m sure you are right. I have always looked to you for direction and would not take the opinion of another man- even if he has the title reverend before his name,” she concurred.

Grant looked into her eyes as sense of trepidation washed over him.

“We are in for some pretty scary times,” he warned.

“Don’t forget what we believe. He will never leave us or forsake us,” she consoled with a confident smile.

Chapter 40

“The *Holy of Holies* will be located about here,” shouted Rabbi Baruch Shamira to the Sanhedrin members over the noise of the heavy equipment as they inspected the construction progress on the Temple Mount.

“What is the projected date of completion? Are we on schedule?” asked a priest who had come from an area near the Gaza Strip.

“By the grace of God we are actually ahead of schedule,” replied Rabbi Shani Velvel, who had been overseeing the construction personally.

“With the blessing of God, we should be worshipping Him in His house by early next year. The stones are being transported from the quarries already and should begin arriving next month. The foundation and dirt work you see going on today should be completed just in time for the first stone settings. The gold and silver for the vessels and fixtures are already being forged. Everything is as it should be in accordance with the Torah and the ancient traditions,” added Rabbi Shamira.

The Chief Priest led the members of the Sanhedrin around the Temple Mount on a tour pointing out the placement of the various rooms and courtyards that made up the original temple better known as King Solomon’s Temple.

King Solomon’s Temple had been first constructed in the 10th century BC and was the focal point of the Jewish faith until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The reconstructed temple in Jerusalem stood from 516 BC until 70 AD and was destroyed by the Romans. It was referred to as the Second Temple.

Exiting from an entrance to the excavation under the Temple Mount, Shalev Rabin was seen by Rabbi Velvel, who motioned for him to join them.

Shalev was sweaty and covered with the fine dust that comes from chipping stones. It filled the air in the caverns below. He wiped it away from his face and brushed it from his hair as he approached the group.

“Hello, Shalev.”

“Hello, Rabbi Shamira, Rabbi Velvel,” he replied reaching out and shaking their hands.

“You will have to excuse me. My work is dirty and not conducive to a proper appearance.”

“You look like a man on a mission. We applaud your tireless effort and dedication to our people,” said Rabbi Shamira.

“I only wish I had something to show you for all the effort. I am afraid we have turned up nothing as of yet.”

“We have faith that God will bless you and lead you to His treasures in time for us to begin worship. He will not fail us,” said one of the priests as the rest of the Sanhedrin nodded in approval.

“Thank you for your confidence. I would like for you to remember me and my team in your prayers that we should not lose the enthusiasm that we began with,” entreated Shalev.

“I have always believed from the time of my first studies of our people’s history that the treasures of the temple, the Sefer Torah, the many vessels and

artifacts, and even the most precious of all- the Ark of the Covenant, could be found here in Jerusalem below this very spot,” declared Rabbi Velvel.

“I believe that you are correct. The center of our faith, the rock on which our religion was founded, is here beneath our feet. I don’t believe God has ever allowed it to be removed. This is where we will find it,” Rabbi Shamira concurred.

Suddenly gunfire began to ring out above the noise of the heavy equipment. The members of the Sanhedrin along with others on the Temple Mount hit the ground covering their heads with their arms. The men operating the machinery leaped to the ground as well.

Muslim insurgents were firing at the Mount from the east side as Israeli commandos began to deploy along the Western Wall to start a sweep to the south.

The attackers were armed with Bekaa assault rifles but lacked any heavy rounds of munitions like rocket or grenade launchers. They were small in numbers but had sought protection by attacking from the midst of civilians. This was a tactic that they had used all too often. It would be difficult for the Israelis to fire on them head-on while avoiding the killing of innocent people.

To the insurgents’ dismay, the Israeli Defense Force had formulated a new tactic for stopping the attacks on the Temple Mount which had been increasing in frequency since the destruction of the Dome of the Rock. The Israelis had trained a special force of sharp shooters that could be deployed at a moments notice. Along with the sharp shooters, armed assault soldiers disguised as Bedouins intermingled with the population around the Temple Mount in anticipation of such attacks.

As the Muslims continued to fire at the Mount, the sharp shooters and the soldiers began to kill them one by one. With every minute that passed, the gunfire became sparser until there was no insurgent left alive.

As the Israeli commandos cleared and secured the area, it became apparent that not one Israeli had been injured in the exchange. Twelve insurgents, however, lost their lives in the attack. It became increasingly apparent to the insurgent Muslim population that they would either have to attack with larger forces and heavier munitions or give up the fight all together.

“Are you all right?” asked Shalev as he helped the rabbis to their feet.

“How long, oh Lord, must we suffer with these murderers?” prayed Rabbi Shamira holding his hands above him as he stood before the assembly of the priests.

A murmur could be heard from the group as they brushed the dirt from their robes and discussed the attack.

Shalev wondered if the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstatement of the sacrifice would ever actually come to pass. He tried hard not to lose hope but with every passing day of not making any discovery and after every assault on the Temple Mount by the Muslims, the certainty of success with which he had begun this mission dimmed ever so slightly.

Chapter 41

The sleek black limousine wheeled around the front drive of the Hotel De Bilderberg and eased to a stop. The driver stepped quickly from behind the steering wheel and slammed the door shut.

In the back seat, Amaro was gazing up at the white façade of the building as he waited for the driver to open his door. He had been expecting a more impressive building, having been invited to a meeting with the seven wealthiest and most powerful men in the world.

The Hotel De Bilderberg had been reserved for the week exclusively for the meeting between Amaro and Quadrivium. No one else would be at the site other than the members and their attendants. The regular hotel management and staff had been given leave to afford Quadrivium the anonymity they desired.

The driver at last opened the door and Amaro stepped from the limousine and made his way into the main foyer of the hotel. He was greeted by a staff member employed by Mael Tristan who directed him to his room.

The suite was tastefully decorated in a style that had been in fashion during the early 1960s. The drapes and bed linens sported a complimentary combination of bright green and rust colors. The furniture was adequate and tasteful. The wall treatments and carpet were an avocado color with everything giving the room an inviting atmosphere.

“Would you like for me to have your things unpacked and put away, Sir?” asked the attendant as he brought Amaro’s bags into the room.

“No, that will be all,” he replied offering a gratuity to the attendant.

“No, thank you, sir. We are not allowed,” the attendant said.

Amaro nodded and the attendant turned and left the room. Pulling back the sheer curtain, Amaro looked out across the lush grounds that lay behind the hotel. He could see quaint wooden tables that lined the terrace located just outside the windows of the main dining room. Inside, the staff was busily preparing for dinner.

Amaro contemplated the meeting that was scheduled for the following day. He realized that he was not the least bit nervous and marveled at the fact that he had a feeling of strength and superiority over these men.

This was contradictory to his nature of even a year prior. He felt that he was becoming the powerful spiritual being that he had been told of in his dream. That dream, that strange dream when he met that person in the park. It was all happening just as the stranger had predicted. Amaro was beginning to believe that he was a god if not *the* God.

Amaro prepared for dinner after resting in his room until evening. The trip to Oosterbeek in the Netherlands had been a long one and he had scarcely eaten. A good meal would be a welcome treat and he looked forward to it as he smelled the food from the hallway just outside his room.

Arriving at the main dining room, he was seated by the Maitre d’ at a table in the center of the room. He had expected to be joined by at least one of the members of Quadrivium but saw no one other than the staff.

“Will I be joined by other parties this evening?” he asked a server who was pouring wine into his glass.

“We were given instructions to see to your every need. The gentlemen are dining together in a private room and will not be joining you this evening,” replied the attendant.

Amaro was disappointed and a little aggravated at the arrogance and inhospitality of his hosts. He finished his dinner and took a walk around the grounds before retiring to his room. He drifted to sleep while watching the evening news reports on the television.

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The following morning Amaro was served breakfast in his suite. He sipped coffee and contemplated the day ahead. The meeting would be in a couple of hours and he wondered what he would find there.

He supposed that these seven mysterious men could not be more impressive or intimidating than the Pope or the President of the United States. He would assess them and deal with them in accordance with his observances. It would be they who learned the meaning of *true* power.

Finally a knock was heard on his door and an attendant led him down the hallway to a large conference room. Entering the room he found the seven men sitting around a large conference table. The seat at the end of the table closest to the doorway and some distance from the others had been reserved for Amaro.

Each man had the same materials and equipment at their place setting. An open leather-bound notebook with a gold pen for hand written notes and a tablet pc were set on the table before each of them. A goblet and crystal pitcher of water was set off to the side of each place setting and the attendants were busy filling the goblets. As the last of the preparations were completed, the attendants left the room and Mael Tristen stood from his seat.

“Please come in and be welcome,” he said to Amaro as he motioned for him to have a seat at the end of the table.

Amaro glanced around the table into the eyes of each of the men. He held the stare until they felt uncomfortable and would break eye contact. He did this as a means of establishing dominance over them. With each of them he would then nod as a gesture of respect.

“We have heard many wonderful things about you, young man,” said Vasco Ferruccio, to break the ice and get the meeting under way.

“Thank you.”

“Let me introduce my esteemed colleagues. This is Vasco Ferruccio of Italy, Erebus Nikomedes of Greece, Gunther Volker of Germany, Aldous Sorrel of England, Serkan Servas of Turkey, Rudolf Lothar of Switzerland, and I am Mael Tristen of France. We are all extremely pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“The pleasure is mine, I assure you,” replied Amaro.

“Now that the amenities have been observed, let us continue to the matter at hand. We have heard much about you and your work and wish to become better informed about your plans for the future,” said Gunther.

“I have heard that you have some mystical power. Would you be willing to show us a feat of your magic?” asked Aldous Sorrel, in a joking manner.

“His seat has barely had time to acclimate itself to his chair. Please forgive the impatience of my esteemed colleagues,” Mael said.

“I see no reason to beat around the bush. Let us get right to the point,” added Serkan.

“Very well, you must be curious about us and why we have invited you here,” said Mael.

“The question had crossed my mind but I did not come here to perform cheap parlor tricks,” Amaro replied looking at Aldous.

Aldous then cleared his throat and took a drink of water.

“What you see before you sitting at this table is the apex of the world’s power. We are in total control of the world’s financial markets and with that control we wield power over all nations and peoples. It may come as a surprise but we even control your United Nations,” Mael continued.

Amaro sat with his hands folded on the table before him. He remained very still and did not take his eyes off of Mael.

“We have asked you here because we have received information about the plan you have initiated. This implant is going out into all the citizens of the world and we are curious as to how we fit into your scheme.”

“Would you even suggest we receive one of these things?” asked Vasco in a sarcastic tone of voice.

“Gentlemen, times are changing and you must acquiesce and welcome in the new world order,” Amaro replied with a stern tone of voice.

“Who do you suppose yourself to be to sit there and tell us how our world will be run?” barked Rudolf Lothar in an angry tone.

Amaro stared at Rudolf Lothar but did not respond. His demeanor did not change and he continued to sit stoically at the end of the table. A moment of silence was then interrupted by Mael.

“Gentlemen, we are all here at this table, intelligent and resourceful men. There is no need that we should be at cross purposes. Perhaps if we heard Mr. Homem’s plan in its entirety, we could better decide what alterations may be necessary to insure continued success for our future.”

“I agree,” added Erebus.

The meeting continued well into the afternoon as Amaro unveiled his plans for the new world order, including its power and financial structure. The members of Quadrivium listened intently as he laid before them the details of Resolution 616 and the effect it would have on crime and social order.

With every word the group became more accepting and it was as if they were falling into a hypnotic web spun by Amaro’s spiritual power. By the end of the meeting the group, with some reluctance and reservations, agreed to work with Amaro and not impede the implementation of U.N. Resolution 616.

Chapter 42

In the city of Turin in northern Italy, a family talked casually as they enjoyed a dinner meal at their favorite café. Father, mother, and daughter lived in a nearby village and did not come to town except for special occasions or to purchase supplies that were not available locally.

That evening, they are celebrating their daughter's eleventh birthday. As the meal was nearing the end, the waiter arrived with a small cake topped by a red and white swirled candle. Other waiters gathered to sing a birthday song to the girl. Everyone in the restaurant applauded loudly as the song wound to an end.

"Will there be anything else?" asked the waiter as he placed a device on the table and handed the check to the father.

The device looked similar to a portable credit card processing machine but the father could see no slot in which to swipe his card. Opening the folder with the check, he set it down and pulled his wallet from his coat pocket.

"Where do I put this?" he asked the waiter as he held a credit card in his outstretched hand.

"I'm sorry, sir. You will have to place your Thirio near this device.

"I have no Thirio device. My family has decided to refrain from accepting it."

"Once again, I am sorry sir, but we now only accept Thirio. The entire area is now exclusively under the Thirio banking system," the waiter explained.

The waiter left the table and returned after a short time followed by the manager.

"The doorway is clearly marked. We accept Thirio for payment only. You should not have come in and dined if you knew you could not pay," the manager complained.

The patrons in the restaurant were now watching intently as the confrontation escalated. What had just moments ago been a happy family celebrating was now a nervous family concerned with their precarious situation.

"Can I give you cash? I have the money right here," entreated the father.

"And what do you expect us to do with this. We can not deposit this in a bank. The banks here no longer honor paper money or coin. They will take electronic transfers only."

"But sir, we do not have the Thirio. What do you want us to do?"

"Call the police," the manager ordered the waiter.

"No, please," begged the mother.

The manager remained at the table to insure that the patrons did not leave before payment was made for their dinner. The whole affair had become like a dinner theatre to the other patrons who looked on with anticipation as the confrontation continued.

The police finally arrived and began to interrogate the father in an attempt to determine whether this was a premeditated crime or an innocent oversight. Neither the policeman nor the restaurant employees seemed to have much sympathy for the predicament the family found themselves in. They like most

people who had received the Thirio implant, thought that anyone who was unwilling to receive it must be a little strange or cult like, certainly not normal.

"I do not think this family came into your establishment with the intent to defraud you out of a meal. I think they were negligent in not reading the sign posted so prominently on your doorway. I am afraid I will *have* to take them to the precinct and process them none the less," the policeman explained.

"Please sir, we are not common criminals. Have mercy on us, I beg of you," pleaded the mother.

The young girl was shocked by these events. Tears streamed down her face that had been all smiles just minutes ago. She was being watched closely by a couple at the next table who listened intently to the saga that was playing out beside them.

"Let's go," said the policeman as he grabbed the father by the arm to lead him away.

"Wait," said the woman at the next table that had been watching, "Let me speak with this family for a moment please. There will be plenty of time to take them."

The policeman released the father's arm and stood beside the manager a few steps from the table. The two discussed the matter while they waited for the woman to speak to the family.

"My husband and I have been observing your family the entire evening. We lost our only daughter last year in an automobile accident. Lucinda was riding with her friend in a car driven by her mother when she lost control of the vehicle. They were all killed," the woman explained as a tear streamed from her eye.

"I am so sorry," said the mother taking hold of the stranger's hand.

"Thank you. You must wonder why we wanted to speak with you. We have received the Thirio device and can pay for your meal. We have one condition to our offer- that you allow your daughter to come and spend time with us in the city. I can assure you that our motives are pure. We miss our daughter so much and your little girl is the picture image of her."

She then opened her handbag and withdrew a photograph of her late daughter. The family could not believe the resemblance. She was in fact a near twin to the stranger's late daughter.

"My name is Cecilia Mazziati and this is my husband Anthony," the woman said.

"I am Marie Serio and this is my husband Carlo and daughter Teresa," the mother replied.

The men shook hands and the ladies kissed each other on the cheek. Cecilia asked permission to kiss Teresa on the cheek, which was gladly granted.

"Capocameriere, we will pay for this meal," said Anthony to the head waiter.

The scanning device was returned to the table and Anthony passed his hand over it. The funds were immediately transferred from the Mazziati account into the restaurant's account.

"We can not thank you enough, Anthony, Cecelia," said Marie.

"Remember our condition. We must be allowed to spend time with Teresa."

The families then exchanged addresses and telephone numbers.

Without the Thirio device, the Serio family would soon find themselves in this predicament on a regular basis. They would not be able to pay their phone bill, taxes, utilities, or general cost of living.

It could well be that they would have to rely on the Mazziatis for their very lives. Carlo wondered without ever mentioning it to anyone whether God may have taken the Mazziati's daughter as a means of providing for his family during this time of tribulation.

Chapter 43

“Hey girl.”

“Hi,” replied Maggie as she slipped into the front seat of Brandon’s sports car.

“Where ya wanna go tonight?” he asked.

“One of my friends is in the *Backstage* theatre group and they are doing a rendition of *To Kill A Mockingbird* tonight. I kinda promised her I’d be there,” Maggie replied with her bottom lip sticking out in a pout.

“Oh man, are you going to make me sit through that?”

“Have you read the book or seen the movie?”

“No, but just the name sounds like a sleeper to me,” he complained.

“Brandon, you asked what I wanted to do and this is it.”

“Ok, but you’re gonna owe me big time,” he said with a mischievous expression.

Maggie rolled her eyes and then planted a kiss on his cheek. The couple backed down the driveway and drove to the playhouse. Brandon had the top down and Maggie’s hair was sailing behind her in the wind. The music was blasting and Brandon was bobbing his head to the beat.

They arrived at the playhouse and purchased tickets at the door. They found good seats close to the front so that Maggie’s friend would surely see that she had come to support her.

After the play, Brandon and Maggie went to their favorite burger joint to get something to eat. They sat at a booth near the front window where they could see a steady stream of cars passing on the highway in front of them.

“What did you think of the play?”

“It was all right I guess. Those were really bad times when blacks were treated that way. I really did get the meaning of it.”

“The sad thing is that in some ways things haven’t changed that much. There is still prejudice and hatred on both sides,” Maggie said sadly.

“Let’s talk about something upbeat. I’m tired of this conversation. Hey, guess what I got today.”

“What?”

“I received my Thirio implant. Now I’m equipped and ready to spend some bling,” he said confidently.

“My dad said we are not going to get it. He thinks it’s against the Bible or something.”

“No way, my dad confronted the preacher about it and he said it was ok.”

“I was there, remember?” she shot back sarcastically, “It doesn’t matter what he said, my dad says no.”

“Well, he’s going to be in a shock pretty soon.”

“Why do you say that?” she asked.

“My dad told me that they are bringing in a medical staff to begin implanting the employees at Aereodyne Thrust. It will be mandatory if you intend to continue working there,” Brandon explained.

Maggie shook her head in disbelief. She quickly thought of her father out of work with no income. How would she be able to afford new clothes, jewelry, and shoes? This was a catastrophe.

“You better go home and convince your dad to rethink his position on the whole Thirio thing. I mean, think of it, how would you guys be able to live?”

Maggie quickly began to realize that this problem had far greater implications than just the inability to purchase personal items. For the first time in her life she began to think less like a self-absorbed teenager and more like a young adult.

“So we won’t be able to buy or pay for anything?” she asked.

“Don’t you ever watch the news or read the newspaper. The whole world is moving to this new technology and what they are saying is that without this device, you can not conduct business in any way,” he said while holding out his hand and pointing to what appeared to be a pin prick on the back of it.

Maggie stared at the back of his hand and wondered how something that small and invisible could wreck her life. There must be some way around it, she reasoned within herself.

“Did it hurt when they put it in?” she asked while touching Brandon’s hand in the vicinity of the mark.

“Nope. It took like one second. They pushed a needle in and then scanned my hand with a computer thing. That was it.”

“It doesn’t seem to be that evil to me. I don’t know what all the fuss is about. My dad sometimes has the craziest ideas about stuff. I bet I can convince him that it’s ok.”

“Well, even if you can’t, you can still get it,” Brandon said matter of fact.

“Do you have to have your parent’s permission?”

“Nope. All you have to be is twelve or older. There are no strings attached. You don’t even have to fill out a lot of paperwork. I read that the government has been gathering every piece of information about everybody for the last few years and storing it in a super computer somewhere- I think in Germany.”

“So I could get the Thirio device and my parents wouldn’t even know about it.”

“Yep, you can’t see it, feel it, or sense it in any way. They would never be the wiser.”

From that moment on, Maggie began to seriously consider receiving the device against her parent’s wishes. After all, it was her life. She had every right to make a decision like this on her own. Her parents couldn’t tell her what to do. Soon she would be eighteen years old and on her own. She would need things- food, clothing, an automobile. The more she reasoned within herself the more convinced she became that she should get the implant.

Chapter 44

“Good morning, Ms. President,” said each cabinet member as they filed into the conference room and took a seat at their assigned places around the large oval table.

President Mallory Henson nodded in acknowledgement of each greeting. She sat stoically in her seat with her hands folded on the table. Her head was held erect and her shoulders were pinned back assuming a posture that communicated her position of authority.

“I trust you all had an enjoyable weekend,” she said.

With this comment, the room erupted in conversation as the cabinet members discussed amongst themselves their activities of the last couple of days. After a few minutes, the President opened the portfolio that lay before her on the table, which signaled to the others that she was ready to get down to business.

“I see our first topic of discussion is the implementation of U.N. Resolution 616. Can you brief us on its progress, Secretary Beckman?” asked the President.

“We have come a long way in the last couple of weeks. We have expedited its implementation among all our government contractors. They will have their employees and subcontractors implanted by the end of the month. With the trickle down effect, this will account for about thirty percent of the total U.S. population.

“As far as the general population, it is going out over P.S.A.’s that it is both mandatory and imperative that they contact their private physicians or county medical clinics to make an appointment to receive the Thirio device. At the present it is estimated that a further twenty-five percent has already received the implant.

“We are attempting to convey to the remaining population the gravity of the situation with the utmost urgency. They are being informed that they will soon lose their holdings and not be able to conduct business without the Thirio,” replied Secretary of Commerce Aaron Beckman.

“Very good. We do not wish to fall too far behind our European trading partners,” said the President.

“Ms. President, there is a matter of the utmost importance that we must consider. The United Nations has proposed that we place our military under their authority until such time as the Thirio implementation is complete and war, crime, and poverty throughout the world is brought under control,” declared Secretary of State Clayton Jordan.

“Begging your pardon, Ms. President, but I believe this would be an action that would be very unpopular among the American people. Besides that, I’m not sure we can defend it constitutionally,” argued Secretary of Defense Manuel Hernandez.

“Still, I believe it would be in our best interest to work with the U.N. and be as cooperative as possible. We are now in a global community and with our status as the last remaining superpower, we should show our willingness to be a partner and not project the impression that we are an autonomous bully,” fired back Secretary Jordan.

“I am inclined to agree with you, Secretary Jordan. As the Commander in Chief, I have complete control over the military and its deployment. There is constitutionally no specific prohibition to our military being subjugated to foreign leadership. Why in the two world wars, our troops were many times under the command of European officers,” reasoned the President.

“But, Ms. President, giving up command of our military and placing our nation under the authority of the United Nations is tantamount to giving up our national sovereignty. Are you sure that this is a position that the other branches of government will support. Forgive me, but this is not a dictatorship. The Congress will surely weigh in on this matter,” argued the Secretary of Defense.

“May I remind you that you serve at my discretion? What I expect from you is your total cooperation and commitment.

“Secretary Jordan, I want you to communicate to the United Nations that we will cooperate in any way possible. Our military will be at their disposal to deploy when and where they deem necessary.

“As for you Mr. Turner, I would like for your office to verify the legality of this action and prepare a defense for the opponents that will surely line up against us. If congress does not honor an executive order, then I may be forced to go so far as to entertain the thought of marshal law,” dictated the President.

The conference room went deadly quiet as those words fell from the President’s lips. No one who lived in a democratic society wanted to live under the oppression of marshal law. This was a lifestyle for third world countries or even worse, but not the United States of America. The cabinet members sat staring down at the paperwork in front of them.

Finally after some brief moments, the President scanned the table looking for some support of her position. Her only supporter was Secretary Jordan.

“Please, ladies and gentlemen, this will not be the end of the nation or the break up of our United States. We will simply work with other nations of the world to bring order and prosperity to our planet,” explained the President.

The President began to see the demeanor of the cabinet members slowly return to normal. She knew that the Executive branch of government could not be run successfully unless the cabinet members worked with the President. She could not afford to make this many enemies among her own subordinates.

“I give you my word, at the first sign of a problem arising from U.N. control of our troops, I will pull the plug on it,” said the President.

She then smiled when she caught the eye of the Secretary of Defense. He nodded and returned the smile, acknowledging he understood that the President was not angry with him.

“What else do we have on the agenda?” asked the President.

“Well, there is the matter of the legality of the detainment camp at Guantanamo Bay. The Supreme Court has set the date to hear the case. I feel that we are on fairly solid ground with this case,” explained the Attorney General.

“Well, I have come to a decision about this matter. I am going to order the release of the detainees to their countries of origin and let their governments deal with their internment,” replied President Henson.

“Don’t you think that will put our nation at risk of another major terrorist attack?” asked Secretary Hernandez.

“I believe we have demonstrated our ability to thwart all the recent attempts against us. These few prisoners are not going to pose any greater threat than we

are already facing. I believe releasing them will improve our relationship with the other democratic nations who have frowned on our internment camp,” she explained.

“I will notify the Justice Department and let them know of our change in plans,” said Attorney General Sebastian Turner.

“I believe that pretty well addresses our major concerns. Let me know if you have any questions regarding my decisions of today. You can make an appointment with my staff and I would be happy to meet with you,” said the President as she closed the portfolio before her.

Chapter 45

“I’ve got something really hot to show you,” said Grant as he and Jeremy pushed their lunch trays down the cafeteria line.

“What’s it about?”

“Wait until we sit down,” replied Grant.

“I’ll have the pork chops,” said Jeremy to the server, “and maybe some of those peas.”

After the two found a secluded table and sat down, Grant opened the manila folder he had been carrying under his arm and laid it on the table. Jeremy spun it around and began to scan the document on top.

“Wow, this is incredible!”

“I know. Doesn’t it give you chill bumps?” asked Grant.

Jeremy just shook his head and kept reading.

“So your computer program selected that U.N. guy out of all the possible candidates from recent history,” marveled Jeremy.

“Yeah, it’s pretty impressive, huh.”

“What is all this calculation information?”

“Well, remember I told you that the program would take names and alphabets from the various known languages and attempt to calculate the number of the anti-Christ that is given in Revelation?”

“Yeah,” replied Jeremy as he shoveled a fork full of peas into his mouth.

“The program calculates that out of all the possible scenarios, this is the most plausible.”

“Awesome,” declared Jeremy, “Can you explain it to me?”

“I’ll tell you what, if you will come by the house tonight, we can go over it in detail. It’s a little too complicated for the short time we have on our lunch break.”

“It’s a deal,” replied Jeremy.

They then finished their lunches and returned to their own offices to complete the day’s work.

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“Grant, someone is at the door,” yelled Christine.

“I’ll get it,” Grant yelled back as he darted to the front door from his office.

“Well, let’s get to it,” demanded Jeremy as he entered the den, “My curiosity has been piqued ever since that teaser you gave me at lunch.”

“Hi, Jeremy.”

“Hey Christine, you are looking as beautiful as ever.”

“Whatever,” replied Christine blowing a wisp of hair from her cheek as she crossed the den with a basket of laundry.

The two men made their way down the hallway that led to Grant’s office. Grant pulled up a chair beside his desk so that Jeremy could see the computer monitor.

“Ok, here we go,” began Grant, “Remember what I told you about the weight of the characters in an alphabet? Well, the alphabet that the program settled on is the ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics used during the reign of the Great Pharaohs. But there is another twist. The program did not use his name directly but it first translated it into Ancient Greek.

“Here is the chart that shows the characters and their position in the alphabet. I have numbered them assigning their character weight. The U.N Ambassador’s full name is Amaro Diabo Homem. Add up the numbers of his name using the chart,” instructed Grant.

“Let’s see, that is 15, 46 plus 31 and 15 uh 36- all I get is a total of 128,” concluded Jeremy.

“That’s right. That is why I wanted to use a computer to calculate the number of the name. Until this generation, it would have been impossible to take into consideration all the factors that could be involved in identifying this mystery man.”

“Let me show you how the computer arrived at its conclusion. First, let’s take a look at the characters and weights of the Egyptian hieroglyphics and Greek alphabet on the computer.

<u>Egyptian</u>	<u>Greek</u>
A=Eagle symbol=1	A=Alpha=1
A=Arm symbol=2	B=Beta=2
B=Foot symbol=3	G=Gamma=3
C/K=Basket symbol=4	D=Delta=4
D=Hand symbol=5	E=Epsilon=5
E/I/Y=Two Strokes symbol=6	Z=Zeta=6
F/V=Viper symbol=7	H=Eta=7
G=Jar symbol=8	Th=Theta=8
H=House symbol=9	I=Iota=9
H=Flax symbol=10	K=Kappa=10
I/Y/E=Reed symbol=11	L=Lambda=11
J=Cobra symbol=12	M=Mu=12
L=Lion symbol=13	N=Nu=13
M=Owl symbol==14	X=Xi=14
M=Bar symbol=15	O=Omicron=15
N=Water symbol=16	P=Pi=16
N=Crown symbol=17	R=Rho=17
O/U/W=Lasso symbol=18	S=Sigma=18
P=Door symbol=19	T=Tau=19
Q=Slope symbol=20	U=Upsilon=20
R=Mouth symbol=21	Ph=Phi=21
S/Z=Cloth symbol=22	X=Chi=22
SH/CH=Pool symbol=23	Ps=Psi=23
T=Loaf symbol=24	O=Omega=24
TH=Rope symbol=25	
U/W/O=Chick symbol=26	
X=Basket Cloth symbol=27	

Y/E/I=Double Reed symbol=28

Z/S=Bolt symbol=29

“Amaro Diabo Homem is from Portugal and the meaning of his name loosely translated into English is *Dark Devil Man*. In Ancient Greek the name translates to *Daimonion to Anir o*.

“Now we will take a look at our character weight tables and assign values to the Greek words.

Devil: d-5-hand symbol
 a-2-arm symbol
 i-6-two strokes symbol
 m-14-owl symbol
 o-26-chick symbol
 n-16-water symbol
 i-6-two strokes symbol
 o-26-chick symbol
 n-16-water symbol

t-24-loaf symbol
 o-18-lasso symbol

Man: a-2-arm symbol
 n-16-water symbol
 i-6-two strokes symbol
 r-21-mouth symbol

o-18-lasso

“The total of these characters is 222. Keeping in mind that throughout the Bible there are many instances where the devil falsely imitates God or takes on some of His divine attributes, the computer has deduced that the total has been multiplied by three in mockery of the Trinity. This brings the total number of his name to the notorious 666,” Grant concluded.

“Incredible! I just can’t believe it. Are you sure that the program is right? I mean there must be some margin for error.”

“Here is what I did. I wrote an efficient *bot* program or *web-crawler*, and set it to work searching through all the cataloged web pages on the Internet concerning world politics and religion. As far as the names of people it found, I coded it to take into consideration education, nationality, background, accreditations, accomplishments, and position of authority. It also had to determine whether the people were dead or alive. Of course, a dead person would be immediately eliminated.

“After weeks of filtering and calculating, this man Amaro Diabo Homem, was the program’s sole selection,” Grant replied confidently.

“Awesome. Are you going to show this to anyone else?” asked Jeremy.

“Are you kidding? They would lock me up in a padded cell.”

“You’re right. This seems a little fantastic but I believe you have hit on something. I guess this gives us a little insight into the future knowing that we must keep a close eye on this guy’s agenda.”

“We already know what this guy’s agenda entails. He is the single biggest proponent of the Thirio device that will eventually cause us not to be able to buy or sell without having one. To put the icing on the cake, I did a little research on the name of the device and it turns out that thirio is an ancient Greek word for- are you ready- beast!”

“Unreal. It’s just like it is written in *Revelation*.”

“Yep. It’s going to come down just like the Bible says. We can’t alter the future or do anything to stop it. We are truly about to be in the hands of God,” Grant said with a sober tone in his voice.

With that the two just sat silently staring at the computer monitor, envisioning in their minds the horror that was about to be unleashed on humanity.

Chapter 46

In St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, thousands of people gathered in anticipation of Pope Paul Aloisius address to the faithful congregations around the world who looked to him as their spiritual leader.

In the center of the vast courtyard, a large contingency of news organizations had set up their equipment to broadcast the address throughout the world. The members of his church had been alerted for weeks as to the importance of the information that he would deliver to them.

The sound bouncing around the Basilica could only be described as a roar with all of the onlookers speaking with one another. The crowd was packed shoulder to shoulder and the children struggled to keep from being pressed in the crowd.

Finally, Cardinal Bertoni stepped out onto the balcony and raised his hands into the air to request silence from the crowd. The courtyard was immediately hushed except for a random baby's cry.

All eyes were on the balcony as the crowd awaited the appearance of the Pope. After a few moments of anticipation, His Holiness appeared from the open doorway.

The crowd immediately broke into cheers while the Pontiff made the *Sign of the Cross* in the air before them. They likewise made the gesture and quieted as the Pope motioned for them to be silent. They then lowered their heads as he began to pray.

Our Most Heavenly Father, forgive us for our debts as we forgive our debtors. Please make us truly worthy of your redemption by the blood of your most Precious Son- Our Lord, Jesus.

Blessed Mother of God, please intercede on our behalf that God might hear our pleas and rescue us from our iniquities. Instruct us as you did your own Son and teach us the ways of God.

Holy Spirit, fill us with wisdom that we may make the proper choices in our lives. May we listen to you and submit to your guiding hand, Amen.

“Amen,” replied the congregation.

A Cardinal then walked around the length of the balcony with a smoking urn of incense that swung from a chain. He swung the urn out over the edge of the balcony in all directions blessing the crowd.

A second Cardinal then walked the length of the balcony blessing the crowd by sprinkling them with holy water dipped from a vessel with a metal staff forged in the image of a hyssop branch.

When the Cardinal had finished his blessing, the remaining clergymen on the balcony returned inside, leaving the Pope to address the crowd.

My children, I offer my most humble welcome to you. I am happy that so many of you could be here with me on this most important day.

It is my great privilege to bring you comforting words as imparted to me by our Heavenly Father. It is a responsibility that I do not take half heartedly. For if God has through His divination appointed me His representative on earth, it is with great humility that I disclose to you His will.

Many of the faithful among our congregations have prayed to God for direction so that they may follow His plan in their lives.

With so many changes in the world being accomplished so rapidly, we often find ourselves feeling confused or abandoned-wandering without purpose or meaning.

God has not abandoned us. He is our light in times of darkness. He is a city set on a hill for all to see.

Many of you have inquired about your security for the future. How will you feed your children and pay your way in the world? You have been finding it increasingly difficult with the changes in the world's monetary system.

My children, God does not wish for you to starve your children or lose all your possessions. God is not a vindictive God who would punish those who have so faithfully followed Him.

I have asked God for the answer to the question so many of you have been asking- if I receive the Thirio device, will I be cursed?

Certainly, some have mistakenly interpreted scriptures in *Apocalypse* to fit this scenario but God has assured me that this is not the *Mark of the Beast* as it is referenced.

As assurance, he has sent me a heavenly messenger who has explained the benefits of this plan. He has given me peace about the device and its spiritual irrelevance.

My flock, I can tell you with certainty that the receipt of the Thirio device has no adverse religious implications.

The crowd erupted into a thunderous applause with cheers as these words fell on their ears. Weeks of built up anxiety were relieved in the few moments it took for the Pope to address the world about the position of the church concerning the Thirio device.

As the roar of the crowd subsided, Pope Paul continued his address.

In order to offer further encouragement for you to feel at ease in receiving the Thirio, I have invited the messenger from God I spoke of to be here with me today.

Amaro stepped through the open doorway behind the Pope and made his way to the edge of the balcony. The crowd applauded and cheered as he took his place beside the Pope.

He did not kiss the Pontiff's ring or make any gestures of reverence to the Pope as was traditional and would be expected. He instead assumed a position of equality with the highest dignitary in Christendom.

The two stood side-by-side on the balcony as much of the Christian world watched with amazement. Here stood before them what could be the *beast and his unwitting prophet* as described in the book of *Revelation*.

Chapter 47

“The Chinese ambassador’s flight has just touched down at King Abdul Aziz International Airport, my prince. A limousine has been sent to Jeddah to take him to Riyadh.”

“Very good, make preparations for our meeting tomorrow in the afternoon,” commanded King Abdul Malik Qutaybah.

“Yes, my grace,” replied the secretary as he bowed before the king.

“Before you go, make arrangements for the comfort of the ambassador. Select 7 concubines from the palace harem and have them sent to his quarters. Choose only those with fair skin and hair- those with eyes of blue or green. I have had my fill and have become disinterested in them.”

The servant bowed once again and disappeared through a doorway that led down a hallway decorated with ornate mosaic work.

The fair skinned women that populated the king’s harem had not done so by choice. Many had been lured to the desert country with the hopes of working as models or performers. They were easily enticed by the chance that they may partake of the great wealth that the Saudi Royal Family was known to possess.

Others had been taken against their will from countries where they worked or vacationed. Most of these countries were third world nations on continents such as South America or Africa. The island of Aruba and the vacation resort islands in the Caribbean were also good sources for the fair-haired beauties. They would bring a good price from the wealthy Middle-Eastern patrons.

As the limousine pulled into the circular drive that lay before the hotel, Ambassador Shoutan Fang from Beijing stepped from the rear door and entered the lobby. He marveled at the Moorish craftsmanship and mosaic work that adorned the walls and floor.

An attendant who had been assigned to see after his personal needs directed him to the elevator. Opening the door to his suite, he was both surprised and delighted to find the beautiful women reclining on large round cushions that were scattered about the room.

He turned and smiled at the attendant who closed the door as he left.

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King Abdul Malik Qutaybah sat on a throne-like chair and did not stand as the Chinese ambassador entered the meeting hall at the Riyadh Conference Palace the next afternoon. An attendant led Ambassador Fang to a chair that had been strategically placed close to the throne so that the two men could be easily heard by one another. No interpreters were needed since both men were fluent in the common language of English.

Photographers snapped photos before the meeting that would soon be distributed by the international press corps. Foreign correspondents asked questions and received quotes from the two men about the nature and significance of their meeting. They received short vague answers.

Once the room was cleared of everyone but the pair of men and a few security guards, the meeting began.

“I have looked forward to this meeting for some time now,” opened King Qutaybah.

“My government has as well,” replied the Ambassador.

“I am a man who does not mince words. I would like to speak directly about the nature of my request to meet with you and how our nations might mutually benefit from an alliance.”

“Very well, I will listen with the utmost attention,” replied Shoutan.

“As you know, we have long been at odds with the Israelis over lands taken from our Islamic brothers in Palestine. It is no secret that we have financially backed the jihad against the western influences in our region. The truth is that we hate the Americans as much as we hate the Jews.

“Of late, the Israeli Air Force has been making bombing runs over our brother nations and we have been defenseless against them. We have learned that the Americans are supplying them with jets equipped with a new engine design that is at a minimum 25% faster than anything to which we have access.

“We know that you have great energy needs to fuel your growing manufacturing base. It will be impossible for you to continue the exponential growth of your massive economy without vast quantities of oil.

“What I am proposing is an arrangement that will mutually benefit us both. Can your government help us with the needed armaments for our continued jihad if we supply you with crude oil?”

“We are aware of the new jet engine. What I am about to tell you is highly confidential and must not leave this room.

“For some time now, we have been selling computer components to the United States. We have for all practical purposes put all other suppliers out of business. What the government and industries in the United States do not know is that the computer components we sold them have been reporting back to us- in other words spying for us.

“As a matter of fact, the design for the turbine that powers the new engine has already been given to our military engineers. We expect to have a working model of the engine in four to six weeks.”

“Just as I would have thought, your people are superior in every way to the Americans,” said the King confidently.

“We have already defeated the Americans without even firing a missile. We now own and control America by possession of its currency. The American people have no idea what their own government has done to them,” said Ambassador Fang with a laugh.

“Will you help us then by supplying the aircraft we need?”

“I am authorized to make the agreement with you. Have the documents drawn and I will sign on behalf of Beijing. We will supply jets in proportion to the crude you deliver.”

Chapter 48

“Hand me that impact hammer,” shouted Shalev to one of his assistants.

Placing the pointed bit against the stone wall he began chiseling away at the rock. Dust filled the narrow hallway that had been excavated weeks earlier. Lights had been strung along the ceiling but only dimly lit the new tunnel. They were now digging in uncharted areas beneath the temple mount.

He could see by the faint outline of joints that these were man made blocks that had been in place for hundreds if not thousands of years. The stone was similar in nature to other stones that had been recently found in a nearby quarry.

After some hours of chiseling the stone, the bit finally broke through making a rather small hole.

“Let me see that flashlight. I still cannot see what is behind here. Did we receive the camera scope that was ordered last month,” asked Shalev.

“I will go back to the office and find out,” replied the assistant.

While he waited, Shalev began a second hole so that he would be able to shine a flashlight in one hole while peering into the other. This would work if the camera scope had not been received but would not be as revealing.

For months, while the archeology team diligently dug beneath the Temple Mount, construction crews were busy building the new temple above. With its completion nearing 75%, it was becoming increasingly important that Shalev make some kind of progress in finding the temple artifacts that the Jewish people so desperately coveted.

It had been almost 2000 years since they had practiced their faith in their native land and in their most sacred temple. Shalev felt the pressure more acutely with every passing day.

“We got it, we got it,” shouted the assistant excitedly as he shuffled down the tunnel towards Shalev.

“Here, set the laptop up right here,” ordered Shalev.

Shalev plugged the scope into the USB port on the laptop computer and extended the cord over to the hole in the wall. After pushing the flexible neck of the camera scope through the hole, he launched the computer program that displayed the camera’s image.

Turning and twisting the flexible device, Shalev was in awe of what suddenly became visible on the display. What appeared before him on the laptop screen was the faint image of two riders on a single horse. This was a known emblem used by the Knights Templar during the Crusades.

“Get the big jackhammer down here,” shouted Shalev nervously, “Quick man.”

The assistant finally shuffled back down the small corridor dragging a large pneumatic hammer-drill. It took both men to hold it in place against the wall as it bounced against the stone.

Chunks of rock and clouds of dust filled the confined space.

“We have to stop. Get the breathing masks out of that crate over there. We are going to suffocate if we breathe in all this dust,” said Shalev.

Once the masks were on and the air cleared enough for the men to see clearly,

they once again began blasting away at the wall. An opening large enough to put a hand through was finally created and they put aside the tools.

“It appears to be a wall behind this main wall. Apparently the wall with the Knights Templar emblem was constructed first and then this main outer wall was constructed to hide it. This is very promising. Whatever is behind the inner wall must be of great significance for them to have gone through so much to conceal it this far beneath the mount,” Shalev said with excitement.

“I think we will need better equipment down here before we proceed,” said his assistant.

“I think you are right. Let us get an air vacuum duct down here for the dust and a couple of other diggers to help clear the rock.”

“Do you want to start fresh in the morning, sir?”

“What? I’m not coming out of this tunnel until I have seen what is behind that wall!”

Shalev poked and prodded at the inner wall while he waited for the new equipment and workers to be brought down the tunnel. He was covered with sweat and dust and would have been miserable but for the nervous impatience that he felt as he wondered what was behind the inner wall. He was giving no thought to his surroundings other than that small opening where they might possibly find the world’s greatest treasures.

Finally, after nearly an hour had passed, the fresh workers crawled down the tunnel dragging an 8” flexible air vacuum duct and 2 medium sized pneumatic air hammers that were more manageable in the confined space.

The workers alternated operating the hammer drills and carrying buckets of the stone chips out of the tunnel. The air vacuum system was doing a good job of keeping the air clean, making it easier to see and breathe.

After four hours and well into the night, the first stone was loosened enough to be pushed out of the way, making an opening big enough for Shalev and the workers to begin on the inner wall.

“We must preserve this portion of the stone that bears the mark of the two riders. It is, in and of itself, a historical treasure that has great value. Let us start here at the top of this adjacent stone,” instructed Shalev.

The workers diligently began the routine of alternating on the hammer drills and the bucket brigade. With the passing of another three hours, the first stone on the inner wall was loose enough to be moved.

“We must pull the stone out. We cannot take the chance of pushing the stone into the opening and having it fall on a priceless treasure,” said Shalev.

“If we drill some small holds and install anchors in them, we can attach cables and use a wench to pull the stone free,” suggested one of the diggers.

“That is an excellent idea.”

Once the anchors were in place, Shalev began to crank the wench with its lever and the stone slowly began to be extracted from its placement. When the stone was half way out, Shalev was relieved from cranking the wench by one of the others.

When the stone was just about to fall from its perch, a supporting ramp was installed and the stone was slid down to the floor of the corridor. No one made an attempt to look inside the cavity. They all waited for Shalev to be the first to peer inside the inner wall.

He nervously took the flashlight in his hand and gave a quick look at the

smiling faces around him. He felt like a little child waiting to be given a gift as he approached the black opening in the wall.

“Jehovah Jireh,” was the only phrase he could muster as he shone his light into the hole in the wall.

“The Lord provides,” was the translated response from his helpers.

“It is here. It is *all* here. The Ark of the Covenant, the Torah, the Menorah, and the Incense Altar are all here,” he declared in a quiet reverent tone of voice.

The workers dropped their tools and fell to their knees. They were struck with awe, knowing in what close proximity they were to the most important artifacts on earth.

Shalev did not touch anything or even extend his arm into the opening. Once he surveyed the walled cavity, he likewise fell to his knees on the floor as the corridor went eerily silent.

It would now become incumbent that the High Priest Baruch Shamira and Shani Velvel arrange for the removal of the sacred temple items. Everything would have to be done in accordance with the ancient laws set down in the Torah.

Chapter 49

The implementation of U.N. Resolution 616 was nearing completion as billions of people around the world had already received the device. The transaction of business without the device was becoming increasingly difficult and was rapidly approaching impossible.

“Would all employees please proceed to the main auditorium for assembly?” was announced over the company intercom.

The hallways and elevators of Aereodyne Thrust filled with people making their way to the meeting. Grant and Jeremy met in the foyer and found seats 4 rows from the front.

“I hope this is not what I think it is,” whispered Jeremy.

“You know full well that it is,” replied Grant.

Walter Anderson, president of the company, took his seat on the platform as the Director of Human Resources stepped up to the podium.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my pleasure to address you today. Mr. Anderson has asked that I speak with you about the world’s new finance system and how it will affect our company.

“As you know, we are now in a global economy and as such can no longer act autonomously in regards to finance and business.

“Many of you have already taken the steps necessary to migrate to this new financial system and we applaud you. There are still employees within the company who have reservations about receiving the Thirio device and I would encourage them to reconsider immediately.

“We have brought in a team of nurse practitioners that are certified to install the device and they will be here all week. Those of you who have not yet installed the Thirio can make an appointment with them at any time regardless of your schedule.

“We are making this as easy as possible to comply with the government’s mandate that all of our employees be implanted by the end of this work week.

“Are there any questions?”

“If we choose not to receive the device, will we be terminated? And if so, can you tell us when?” asked one of the employees.

“I regret to tell you that the deadline for receiving the device is midnight on this coming Saturday. That will be the termination date as well,” he replied.

Jeremy clasped Grant’s hand, which was tightly clutching the arm of his seat. The two stared into the other’s eyes. They both knew the gravity of what was being announced on the platform before them.

“Does anyone else have a question? No, then Mr. Anderson would like to speak with you.”

“I want to encourage all of you to comply with the resolution and receive the device. There is not one of you that I wish to lose. You are all appreciated for the hard work and devotion you have given to build Aereodyne Thrust into the Fortune 500 Company that it is today.

“In closing, I have to say something that I do not wish to say. If you decide not to receive the device, there will be no need to report for work on Monday. Your

security passes will be revoked and you will not be able to gain access to the facility. I'm sorry."

"Well, I guess that's it. We are officially at the mercy and in the hands of God," said Grant as he and Jeremy left the auditorium.

"I won't be able to stay in my apartment after Monday. There will be no direct deposit into my account. I can't pay the rent which is due on Monday," lamented Jeremy.

"I will have the same problem with my house payment. We knew this was coming. Is there really any reason to continue here knowing that we will be out of work on Monday?" asked Grant.

"It seems to me that our time would be better spent preparing for what we will do next," Jeremy replied.

"Let's go to my house and do some planning. Christine should be in on it as well. We must form some course of action."

Grant and Jeremy left Aereodyne Thrust for what they knew would be the last time. There was no need to go back to their offices for their personal belongings because they knew that they would no longer have a place to put them.

Finally the day had arrived that they had anticipated with both excitement and trepidation. On the one hand it was exciting that the end of days was approaching and Christ soon would return. On the other hand was the possible horror that they might have to experience until the end.

"What are you two doing home so early?" asked Christine as she met them at the front door.

"We finally got the bad news we have been waiting on," replied Jeremy.

"Fired if you don't get the Thirio?" she asked.

"Yep," replied Grant, "Let's go into my office and see if we can come up with some sort of plan for our immediate future."

The three of them soberly walked down the hallway that led to the office. Once inside, they closed the door so that the children could not hear their discussion.

"Let's ask God for guidance," Christine suggested.

They agreed and the three bowed their heads and joined hands for a moment of silent prayer.

"The way I see it, we would be better off in numbers. We should stick together," said Jeremy.

"I agree. If you will stay with us, we have a better chance of surviving," replied Grant.

"I have seen websites that quoted airline pilots who reported seeing large compounds being constructed around the country. Some have supposed them to be internment camps for those of us who refuse the implant. I don't know about you, but I would rather take my chances in the wild," said Jeremy.

"What do you mean?" asked Christine.

"Do you have an atlas?"

Grant pulled an atlas from the bottom drawer of his desk and handed it to Jeremy.

"Ok, we are here and less than two miles from Waterbury National Forest, which is here. I am excellent in the woods. I have spent half of my life camping and living off of the land. We could fish, hunt, and live off of the bounty that God would provide. We already have His blessing in that we live in an area with a temperate climate. It doesn't freeze or get too hot."

“I don’t know,” replied Grant, “I’m a city dweller and aside from a little fishing, I don’t know that much about the wild.”

“It will be easy and certainly better than being imprisoned in an interment camp where God only knows what will happen to us- not to mention the females,” warned Jeremy.

Grant looked into Christine’s eyes.

“What do you think, Hon?” he asked.

“I think Jeremy has a point. If we can avoid capture and protect ourselves from predators, both animal and human, we may stand a chance at survival until Jesus comes back. How long does the Bible say it will take?”

“It’s hard to say where we are in the whole scheme of things. Most scholars agree that the tribulation period is about seven years. Do you think we could stay alive in the forest for seven years?” asked Grant.

“I don’t know. With God’s help I believe we can. The point is that we should try it anyway. If it doesn’t work out, there is always the internment camp.”

“I’m inclined to agree with Jeremy. We should make a go of it in the forest and if we have to, we can then make other arrangements later,” Christine decided.

“Ok, we have a plan. Now, we should acquire provisions while we can still spend money. We will need tents, rifles, ammunition, knives, and any other type tools that would be useful,” said Grant.

“I already have most everything on your list. We should buy staples that would last a long time and not spoil. Canned goods and dried fruits are a good example. We should also get as many over the counter medicines and vitamins as we can carry. We can drive to the national forest and park our vehicles on one of the access roads. We will take only what we can carry. Then, we will just step out on faith,” Jeremy declared.

“When should we tell the children?” asked Christine.

“I think it would be best to wait until the last minute. There is no need to alarm them and have them suffer all that anxiety while we prepare,” replied Grant.

Chapter 50

The sleek black yacht *Perdicion* slipped silently into Grand Harbor near the city of Valleta on the isle of Malta. Nightfall provided the perfect concealment for its entry. The seven men known as Quadrivium were already aboard the yacht as they prepared for an emergency meeting.

The meeting would be held on the smaller island of Comino- part of the archipelago that included the larger island of Malta as well as Gozo. Comino was thought to be uninhabited. Quadrivium had kept it that way for its own purposes.

An underground complex had been constructed in the cliff sides that rose on the southwestern rim of the island. It was fully staffed year round and supplied by boats that embarked from Sicily. The merchants that supplied the island complex were solely owned and controlled by Vasco Ferruccio.

Employees that operated the complex were rotated on a regular schedule of six weeks on and six weeks off. This insured that the compound would always be staffed and ready for just such an occasion as this meeting.

On the following morning, the seven men gathered around a large dining table that had been fully prepared for brunch. Servants busily served the men as they partook of the feast that was laid before them.

The finest caviar from Russia, smoked salmon from Alaska, and truffles from France were among the delicacies enjoyed by them. They sipped champagne made exclusively for them from their vineyards in the Champaign region of France.

As the meal came to a close, Gunther Volker tapped the side of his goblet with a spoon to gain the attention of the others.

“Gentlemen, I have called this emergency meeting to discuss an alarming shift in our control of the world’s finances. It seems that our friend, Amaro Homem, has betrayed our trust. It has been reported to me that he attempted to move 10.3 billion Swiss marks from the World Bank into a United Nations account of which he has sole access.

“If it were not for the attentiveness of my people, it might have happened right under our very noses.”

“I saw the pompous young upstart on a balcony with the Pope on television,” added Aldous Sorrel.

“Gentlemen, we must not underestimate this man. He has acquired an enormous following in the world. We can not just take his notoriety for granted,” warned Erebos Nikomedes.

“I agree. We should meet with him once again and let him know of our concerns,” said Serkan Servas.

“I have already made arrangements for him to be here today. He should be arriving at any moment. We will tell him how world politics and finances will be handled through us and make him understand that he will make no further efforts to rearrange finances without our knowledge and express consent,” replied Gunther.

“Let us move to the conference room until he arrives,” suggested Mael Tristen.

The men retired to the conference room as the attendants cleared the dining

room and began preparation for dinner that evening. Others darted around the conference room preparing cocktails and water for the meeting.

The men were sitting around the conference table discussing other world affairs when a secretary entered the room and whispered into Gunther's ear.

"Gentlemen, Amaro Homem has arrived and will be with us shortly."

The men continued in their discussions until the door opened and Amaro stepped into the room.

"Have a seat here, my friend," said Rudolf Lothar pulling a chair out for Amaro.

"Thank you, sir. You are most gracious."

Amaro set his brief case on the table but did not open it. He looked around the table at the other gentlemen and nodded respectfully. Gunther Volker had an unmistakable scowl on his face, as did Aldous Sorrel.

"We have asked you here today after a report that you have attempted to reallocate funds from the World Bank," opened Gunther.

"Please explain your thoughts and intentions for this action," Erebos asked.

"I am the Supreme Chancellor of the United Nations. As such I must have funds to bring about the changes necessary to institute world peace. I was merely exercising my authority as a world leader," explained Amaro.

"Sir, I do not believe you understand the nature of wealth and who controls it. Those who you see before you control the world- both the politics and the wealth. We have no interest in world peace or the United Nations. You will do as we say," barked Rudolf Lothar.

"Mr. Lothar, please. Let us discuss this calmly and with restraint," said Erebos.

"I agree with Rudolf. Let us make this young man understand the nature of power and from where it emanates," added Vasco.

At this point Amaro opened his briefcase and removed a stack of papers from a folder. He stood and walked around the table handing each man a contract. As the members of Quadrivium read the documents their countenance changed noticeably.

"What is this? Have you lost your mind?" yelled Gunther.

Amaro stood at the head of the conference table and scanned the faces of the men.

"Gentlemen, it is time that I now reveal to you the nature of power and from where it emanates. I have placed before you an agreement- a contract if you will. I would strongly advise that you place your signatures on the proper line at the bottom," said Amaro in calm monotone voice.

"How dare you. We have invited you into our sphere of influence and this is how you repay us. You ask us to sign over our wealth and power to you- to subjugate ourselves to you. What nerve," Mael fired back.

"Once again, gentlemen, I would strongly advise that you capitulate and sign the document. This is your one and only opportunity," warned Amaro.

"We will not!" shouted Serkan as he and the others threw their pens to the center of the table.

"Very well, you leave me no choice."

Amaro closed his eyes and stood very erect for several seconds. As he opened his eyes, the members of Quadrivium could see an eerie red glow that seemed to originate from around the outline of Amaro's eyes.

Suddenly, the pens that had been thrown to the center of the table, moved back

across the table and into the hands of the men. They were powerless as they struggled to release the pens.

Amaro then stared into the eyes of each man one at a time and as he did, they were compelled to sign the document against their will. Each man signed and then dropped the pen. Their hands were restrained to the table and they were unable to move them. Their ability to speak was taken away. They sat motionless.

After all the men had signed, Amaro walked around the table gathering the documents. When he had them all, he placed them in his briefcase and closed the lid. He then returned to his position at the head of the table and lowered his head.

“This could have been much easier. Now you have forced me to display true power. It is a pity that we could not work together,” Amaro said with his eyes closed.

The men were looking around at each other but were unable to move or speak. Vasco began to notice a change in the color of Rudolf Lothar as he stared into his face. Lothar’s skin assumed a pale green color and began to move as if bugs were crawling beneath it.

Suddenly, one of Lothar’s eyeballs was pushed from its socket and fell onto his cheek still attached by the optic nerves. The others watched in horror as a large beetle crawled from the empty eye socket and began biting Lothar on the nose.

Erebos, having seen the disgusting sight, vomited what he had eaten earlier. In the vomit were thousands of maggots. The maggots began to crawl on Erebos’ face and consume his flesh.

The skin on Lothar’s face then began to peel open revealing an army of small insects devouring his flesh. He finally slumped over onto the table, dead.

Mael Tristen’s face began to swell. It grew larger and larger as the skin was stretched beyond its ability to remain intact. When the skin had reached its maximum capacity to stretch, his head exploded scattering flesh and brain matter about the room.

The maggots had eaten the majority of flesh on Erebos’ face. The appearance of his eyeballs moving in their sockets with only bone showing on his face looked horrific. When the maggots had consumed enough of his brain, Erebos also slumped to the table dead.

Vasco Ferruccio’s hair began to fall out. Strand by strand it began to pile on his sports coat, lap, and the table. When his hair had fallen out completely, a wound was revealed that began at the center of his forehead and continued to the base of his head. The wound began to ooze puss and grow wider and wider.

Serkan Savas’ eyes began to bleed. As the blood flowed down his face, it became evident that his eyeballs were swelling. Bigger and bigger they grew until they were bulging oblong out of his skull. When they could swell no more, they exploded tearing his eyelids out with them. The large beetle that had come out of Rudolf Lothar, crossed the table and began to bite his tongue as it hung from his mouth onto the table.

Vasco’s wound was now opening rapidly and his skull took on the appearance of an orange being peeled. At last the flesh from both sides of his head fell open and only the bare bone of his skull remained. He fell dead on the table.

Aldous Sorrel was terrified at the macabre scene that was playing out before him. He looked at Amaro at the end of the table. Amaro was still standing with his head lowered and his eyes closed. He glanced over at Gunther Volker who

seemed to still be intact.

He then looked down at his lap and noticed a small wisp of smoke. The wisp became more and more pronounced until it manifested itself into a flame. Aldous wanted to scream but could still make no sound. The flame grew until it began to cook him. After several minutes, Aldous Sorrel had been broiled alive in his seat.

Gunther Volker had been chief in speaking out against Amaro and now was the last to pay the price. He had watched as his other companions suffered horrific deaths at the hands of Homem. The anticipation for what was about to happen to him was torture in and of itself.

Amaro finally unleashed his anger on the last member of Quadrivium. Gunther began to shake uncontrollably in his chair. He looked down at his hands and saw that his skin was beginning to melt in much the way butter melts in a pan. He could feel the flesh on his face begin to run and drip onto his clothing.

Amaro at last opened his eyes and watched the culmination of his anger. Gunther Volker continued to melt until nothing remained but a skeleton in a man's business suit.

Amaro's countenance then returned to normal. The glow in his eyes was gone. He looked down into his reflection on the glass tabletop, straightened his tie, then picked up his briefcase and left the room.

Chapter 51

“All of the arrangements are in place. You will cross the border outside of Palomas, Mexico. A vehicle will be waiting in the desert just to the west of Columbus, New Mexico.”

“What about the package?” asked Al Hakam Ramzi.

“It is being moved through a tunnel. I am not allowed to reveal its location—even to you, my friend.”

“You will meet up with your counterpart Fatih Najid in Philadelphia. From there, you will travel together to New York. The package will arrive by truck in the next few weeks. It must be assembled and ready for the 12th.”

“I understand,” replied Al Hakam.

Fatih Najid was a Saudi national that had been a member of a terrorist sleeper cell in Frankfurt, Germany. He had gone there posing as an immigrant laborer in a restaurant until he could acquire a work visa in the United States.

Once he arrived in New York, he traveled to Philadelphia and moved into a neighborhood with a large Muslim population. It was easy for him to become lost in the midst of the other Middle Eastern populace.

At nightfall, the man dropped Al Hakam 500 yards from the border. He was not alone in the desert. Mexican nationals were also poised to cross the border that night to seek jobs in the United States.

Illegal aliens from South America crossing the border in search of jobs had become a hot button issue with the American people. The vast majority favored a structured work program but the politicians would rather use the issue to their advantage rather than fix the problem.

It seemed that the companies who benefited from the source of cheap labor, contributed large sums of money into the politician’s coffers. As long as the politicians did nothing, they could be assured of reelection.

Al Hakam joined in a group of men who darted across the border under the cloak of darkness. When they reached the American side, he broke away from the rest of the pack and headed northwest toward his rendezvous point.

After running for the better part of two hours, he finally located the truck parked off of a deserted road. The keys had been left in the ignition and he found papers on the seat.

Thumbing through the paperwork, he found a driver’s license, work visa, map, and an envelope containing \$5,000 dollars in \$100 and \$20 dollar bills. He opened the map to select a route that would lead to the nearest major highway. He then cranked the truck and sped away.

A secret tunnel had been dug beneath the border east of Aqua Prieta, Mexico. It surfaced across the border just outside of Douglas, Arizona. A crate was carefully wheeled through the tunnel. A truck painted to look like a United States Postal Service vehicle was waiting on the Arizona side for the package.

Inside the crate were the components to assemble a thermo-nuclear device that had been purchased on the black market in Russia. It was just larger than a briefcase but contained an explosive power 100 times that of the bomb dropped on Nagasaki Japan during World War II. This bomb was to be used to level the

entire New York City metropolitan area.

The crate finally reached the truck. It was carefully loaded in a cushioned container, and the truck departed for New York.

Hours into his trip, Al Hakam was pulled over in Ohio for speeding.

"May I see your driver's license please?" asked the officer.

"Si," replied Al Hakam.

The officer radioed back to headquarters and was told that the truck license was valid and that there were no prior arrests or warrants for Juan Pedro Gonzales.

"You have no priors. I'm going to let you go with a warning," said the officer.

"Gracias, Senor. You are a very kind man."

Al Hakam returned to his journey, paying much closer attention to his speed. He could not afford to be arrested for some petty infraction with such an important mission depending on him.

He at last arrived in Philadelphia and drove to the motel that had been a prearranged meeting place. He pulled up close to the room and parked. He knocked on the door to room 146 and saw a face peering at him from behind the curtain. His friend hurriedly opened the door.

"Hello, my brother," said Fatih Najid as he hugged him.

"I would like to clean up and rest before we leave for New York."

"Of course, you will find everything you need in the dresser."

Al Hakam and Fatih had a quick breakfast the next morning and departed for New York. As they drove down the turnpike, Fatih remarked at the beauty of the countryside. They had only lived in nations that were predominately mountainous and desert. The greenery of the fields and forests were foreign to them.

It would only take a few hours to reach New York. When they entered the city, they drove to a safe house in the borough of Queens.

"Has the package arrived?" asked Al Hakam to the Muslim woman who owned the house.

"No, I have been told to expect delivery at any time. Until then, you will live here in the upstairs rooms. Arrangements have been made for you to report to work at my husband's convenience store in the morning. Let me show you to your rooms."

Al Hakam and Fatih followed the woman up the stairs and to their rooms. Al Hakam placed the bag of clothing he had received at the motel in Philadelphia on the bed and pulled out a dresser drawer.

Inside the drawer was a comprehensive set of tools that he would be expected to use in the assembly of the bomb. He picked up a case, opened it, and took out a small jeweler's screwdriver. He then replaced it and began to arrange his clothing in the dresser drawers.

The crate containing the bomb components was being moved very slowly and stealthily across the country. There could be no slip-ups. The handlers knew that if they were discovered it would not only end the mission, but would cause a crackdown at the border that would make any future attempts impossible.

Fatih walked over to the window in his room and pulled back the curtain. Outside in the street below, he could see children playing stickball. He knew that in a short period of time, the entire area would be a wasteland. Nothing could survive the nuclear blast.

He thought for a moment about his own children that he had left behind in

Saudi Arabia some years back. His heart had become cold and callous from the indoctrination he had received in Afghanistan. He would have felt no more regard for his own children than he did for these strangers playing outside. Death was his religion's way of life.

With a smirk he turned away and let the curtain fall in place. He closed his eyes and pondered on the rewards he would receive in heaven for the carnage that he would bring on these strangers.

Chapter 52

The sleek red BMW convertible wheeled into the parking space beside the medical plaza. Brandon and Maggie got out of the car and walked hand in hand across the parking lot and into the main entrance.

“On what floor is Dr. Chastain’s office?” asked Brandon.

“Three,” replied Maggie.

The elevator door closed behind them and Brandon pressed the number three.

“Are you scared?” he asked.

“No not really. It doesn’t hurt does it?”

“I told you, it is just like getting a shot. It might not even hurt that much.”

“Boy, my dad’s going to be hot if I tell him.”

“So, just don’t tell him. He won’t know.”

“Let me see your hand again.”

Maggie examined Brandon’s hand for the tenth time. She rubbed her finger over the spot where the implant was located but could not feel it. She was sure her father would never have to know.

The doors to the elevator opened and they walked into the plush office. The reception desk was staffed with nurses and Maggie went over to sign in while Brandon grabbed a magazine and found a couple of seats.

“Maggie Stokes to see Dr. Chastain at 4pm.”

“Hi, Maggie, I’ve got you right here. It won’t take but a minute. Have a seat, and I will call you,” replied the receptionist.

Maggie took a seat beside Brandon and scanned the room for anyone that might recognize her. Brandon’s face was buried inside a sports magazine.

“I feel like a criminal,” whispered Maggie.

“Actually, it’s the law. Your parents are the ones that are wrong,” explained Brandon without even looking up from his magazine.

“With all this sneaking around, I still feel funny.”

After what seemed like a lifetime, a nurse appeared through a side door with a clipboard and called out, “Maggie Stokes.”

Maggie almost leaped to her feet with anxiety as the rush of adrenalin coursed through her veins. She disappeared behind the door as Brandon continued flipping through the magazine still not looking up.

“Hi, Maggie,” said Dr. Chastain as he entered the room and patted Maggie’s shoulder, “How have you been these last few months?”

“I’ve been feeling great except, you know, a few bouts with P.M.S.”

“I see you’re in for the Thirio implant.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I haven’t seen your parents. Did they have the procedure done somewhere else?”

“No, sir, they are not receiving the implant.”

“Oh, I see,” replied the doctor with a confused look on his face.

“Well, lets get you fixed up and out of here. Would you like it in your hand or in your forehead?”

Maggie held out her right hand. The attending nurse handed the doctor a small

syringe that had a tiny needle on the end. Dr. Chastain lifted a fold of skin with a pinch of his fingers and with a quick motion had the needle in and out of Maggie's hand before she knew it.

"That's it."

"Wow, I didn't feel a thing," exclaimed Maggie.

The attending nurse then walked over to the counter and picked up a device that looked like a hand held barcode scanner. She then took Maggie's hand in hers and held the device over the implant until a beep the device started to beep.

"Ok, you are all programmed," declared the nurse.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Maggie?" asked Dr. Chastain.

"No, sir, I think everything else is fine."

"Well, I will see you on your next routine exam then," he said as he placed his clipboard in the holder on the door and disappeared into another exam room down the hallway.

"How much do I owe?" Maggie asked as she handed her paperwork to the receptionist.

"Not a thing. The government is paying for this procedure," the receptionist explained.

Brandon joined Maggie at the reception counter and they left together. When they got into the elevator, Brandon began to inquire about the procedure.

"Well, did it hurt?"

"No."

"I told you it wouldn't. Don't you feel better knowing that you are legal and can go on with your life in a normal way?"

"I guess. I still feel a little guilty, as if I've done something wrong."

"You'll get over it. You haven't done anything wrong. That's just your parents' guilt trip they have thrown on you."

Maggie stared into Brandon's eyes and said, "I love my parents. Don't talk bad about them."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to come down on them. I just want you to be happy," he explained with remorse.

The elevator doors opened and the couple made their way back to the sports car. The two were silent as he drove her home. Maggie was not completely certain that she had made the right decision in receiving the Thirio.

Chapter 53

The priests of the Sanhedrin filed into the hall on Tiferet Israel Street for the last time. At this meeting they would make final plans for the completion and dedication of the New Temple, as it would come to be titled. Future meetings of the court would be held in the chambers of the New Temple.

Baruch Shamira and Shani Velvel took their places before the august body of men. The meeting would once again be held under the cloak of darkness- a practice that in the future would no longer be necessary.

The eerie light from the torches that lined the walls made the atmosphere for the meetings seem even more clandestine. The men were nervous with the anticipation of the reinstatement of their religious ceremonies. They had not been allowed to sacrifice in the way God had prescribed for over 2,000 years.

The room fell quiet as the high priest stood and raised his hands.

“Blessings and honor and praise be to our God and His holiness,” he sang.

“Blessings and honor and praise be to our God who has delivered us,” the entire body sung in refrain.

Baruch Shamira sat down and yielded the floor to Shani Velvel. The two priests were adorned in the traditional robes of high priests whose description had been handed down through the ages.

“My brothers, I am happy to stand here before you and announce a wonder so fantastic that even I can not believe it. We have not disclosed to anyone until now the significant discovery.

“As you know, our team of archeologists have been diligently excavating below the Temple Mount at the same time our construction crews have been building above.

“It is with timing that could only be imparted by our Lord, that we have made a divine discovery coinciding with the completion of the New Temple. We have located the *Ark of the Covenant* and the balance of our Temple treasures.”

The room echoed with the sounds of the priests praising God and offering prayers of thanks for the return of their most prized possessions. Velvel raised his hands and motioned for a return to decorum.

“We will observe the dedication of the New Temple in the month of Ethanim as did our forefather Solomon- in the 7th month. We cannot chance the public ceremony of delivering the Ark into the *Holy of Holies*, as did our predecessors. The climate in Jerusalem is too volatile among the Muslim community.

“We will move the Ark this very evening.”

Again the room erupted in praise and worship. Baruch Shamira and Shani Velvel stood before the men and called for silence. Shani motioned to a temple guard that stood beside the doorway in the back of the chamber.

The priests in the room folded their hands before them and lowered their heads in reverence. Velvel selected four strong young priests from the tribe of Leviticus to follow him into the now open doorway.

Within a few moments, the four priests, led by Shani Velvel, appeared from the darkened doorway carrying the Ark. Each man was holding a pole that extended from the four corners of the Ark that was covered with an ornate

tapestry.

Baruch Shamira was swinging a golden incense burner that had been discovered along with the Ark. The smell of frankincense filled the air along with the song being sung by the high priest.

The Lord has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud.
I have surely built Thee a lofty house, a place for thy
dwelling forever.

The Israeli Armed Forces lined the streets outside that led from the doorway of the meeting chamber to the Temple Mount. There was not a space in their ranks on either side of the streets. The arrangements for maximum security had been made in advance. The high priests could take no chances with an artifact of this importance.

The men stood holding the Ark in the chamber as the members of the Sanhedrin left the room and lined the street on either side. They would be a holy shield between the Ark and the soldiers. The soldiers would not be allowed to gaze upon the Ark.

The procession to the Temple Mount began in the darkness. As the Ark passed, the priests would move from the back to the head of the line. This insured that there was always a priest between the Ark and the soldiers.

Baruch Shamira led the procession with the incense burner and was closely followed by Shani Velvel, who was reciting scripture from the Torah. The streets of Jerusalem had not witnessed a procession of this significance since the day that Jesus was marched through its streets to Golgotha.

Finally, the long trek ended as the men stopped in the courtyard just outside the inner temple. The area was lit only by torchlight, as all the electrical lighting in the area had been extinguished by order of the military for security.

Baruch Shamira turned to face the Ark with the priests of the Sanhedrin forming an arc behind it. He then began to sing as he passed the incense burner around the Ark.

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, who spoke with
His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled it with His
hand saying,

“Since the day that I brought My people Israel from
Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of
Israel in which to build a house that My name might
be there, but I chose David to be over My people
Israel.”

But the Lord said to my father David,

‘Because it was in your heart to build a house for
My name, you did well that it was in your heart.
Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but
your son who shall be born to you, he shall build
the house for My name.’

“Now the Lord has fulfilled His word which He spoke; for I have risen in place of my father David and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel.”

At the end of his song, the high priest turned and faced the temple entrance. The priests carrying the Ark followed him up the staircase and into the temple. The priests of the Sanhedrin remained in the courtyard offering prayers of worship before God.

Baruch Shamira stopped in front of the massive curtains that hung in the entrance to the *Holy of Holies* and instructed the four priests on how they should conduct themselves.

He then drew back the curtains and the priests carried the Ark into the sanctuary and placed it on a raised section of floor beneath the golden wings of the cherubim.

With the Ark securely in place, the high priest turned and exited the holy sanctuary followed by the other priests. As the last priest walked past the corner of the Ark, his curiosity was aroused and he lifted a corner of the covering to get a glimpse of the treasure.

When his finger brushed the gold that sheathed the Ark, he was instantly dissolved and reduced to a pile of ash on the floor. Seeing this, the other three priests ran from the temple and out into the courtyard.

Baruch Shamira bowed low before the Ark. He approached it in a crawl and collected the ashes of the dead priest. When he returned to the courtyard, the Sanhedrin surrounded him.

“The power of the Lord is still in the Ark. We must never take this for granted again. We must be careful to observe all propriety in the exercise of rituals. God can not be mocked as is evidenced by the remains of our brother,” he declared as he opened the front of his robe that had been folded as a pouch to hold the ashes of the priest.

Chapter 54

“Brett, Maggie, come down to the den. We want to speak with you,” yelled Christine up the staircase.

She could hear the pounding of their feet down the second floor hallway as they approached the stairs. The two teenagers walked into the den and found their father, mother, and friend Jeremy waiting for them.

“Dad, what are you doing home?” asked Brett.

“Come in and sit down. We have something very important to tell you,” Grant said.

“What did we do now?” asked Maggie as she plopped down on the couch.

“It’s not about you. It’s about our family,” replied Christine.

Grant stood from his recliner and walked across the den to the fireplace. Putting his hand on the mantle, he turned to face the others in the room. The children instinctively knew from his demeanor that something grave was about to be said.

“As you kids know, your mother and I have been practicing Christianity for the last few years. We take our faith very seriously. Jeremy is also a devout Christian.

“We feel as though the world as we know it is approaching its end. We also think that there is too close of a coincidence between what the scriptures say about the ‘mark of the beast’ and the implant called Thirio.

“Jeremy and your mother and I have decided not to receive the implant. This is no small decision. It has cost us our jobs and income. It will subsequently cost us all that we own.”

“But dad...”

“No, wait. Let me finish. We have decided to take what I guess you could call an extended camping trip. For the last few days, Jeremy and I have been acquiring all the necessary provisions for us to go into the mountains in the national forest and live in seclusion.”

“That’s crazy. I can’t leave my friends. What about food, clothing, and well everything,” cried Maggie.

“We will have everything we need. People have lived off of the land for centuries. Many are still living that way today. God will provide for us,” explained Jeremy.

“How long will we be up there?” asked Brett.

“I don’t know. The Bible gives a time table for the end times but it’s hard to know for certain if it is literal. Basically it is three and a half years until the anti-Christ is in full power and three and a half years until Jesus returns,” explained Grant.

“Seven years, no way,” yelled Maggie.

“I’m afraid you have little or no choice in the matter. We will certainly lose this house because we can’t make the payments to the bank or pay the taxes.”

Maggie crossed her arms stared at the floor. Her parents could see her anger building in the expression on her face. She was not willing to accept this decision. She quickly rolled other options over in her mind.

"I'm game," said Brett, "Come on, Maggs, it's not the end of the world."

"Maggie will understand after she has had time to adjust. We will all be ok," consoled Christine.

"When are we leaving? What do we need to do to get ready?" Brett asked.

"We can stay here and continue to make preparations until the house is repossessed by the bank. They will then send a marshal to serve us with eviction papers."

"How embarrassing!" mumbled Maggie.

"I'm sorry you feel that way. We hoped for your cooperation," said Christine.

"I don't think what you are doing is right. I have talked about this with my friends and they said their parents got the implant. They go to the same church we do. I don't understand why you have to be so closed minded and fanatical about this. Doesn't the Bible tell you to work hard and pay your bills?"

"Maggie, there are also plenty of instances in the Bible where good people had to stand against bad leaders, defying their rules. Take Moses for instance. He did not obey the Pharaoh at God's command. We believe God has commanded us to give up everything and place our lives in his hands," her father explained.

"It's wrong. No matter what you say, it's wrong!"

"There's no reasoning with her. She is a teenager and you will never get through to her," said Jeremy.

Maggie gave Jeremy an angry glance and stormed out of the room.

"Are we going to force her to go with us?" asked Christine.

"We have no other choice. She is our daughter and we have got to protect her from herself. We can't just leave her here all alone. We must try to keep her from getting the implant," replied Grant.

"If she wants to get it, there is no way to stop her. The doctors are bound by law to do the procedure upon request and are also bound not to disclose who receives it."

"I know, Jeremy. It's just so painful to think she might..."

"Let's don't borrow trouble," said Christine as she sat on the arm of Grant's chair and put her arm around his shoulder.

"I won't get that thing. I promise," consoled Brett.

The room fell silent as the four of them began to consider the new life that was unfolding before them. Feelings of anxiety and fear overcame them.

Chapter 55

“Tashika, would you contact Secretary of State Clayton Jordan and Secretary of Treasury Elizabeth Hunt to meet with me in an hour. If they have any reservations, tell them it is an emergency.”

“Yes, Madam President.”

The receptionist promptly contacted the two officials and set up the meeting. They were rushed into the Oval Office upon their arrival and seated before the President’s desk.

President Henson did not respond as the two offered her a greeting. She thumbed through a stack of papers that were on her desk. After a moment, she removed her reading glasses and looked up at them with a grave expression on her face.

“Secretary Hunt, these are the worst numbers this economy has seen since the Great Depression. Why was I not informed about the rapidly growing unemployment figures and the slow down in the private sector? If this trend continues, we are going to slip off into a recession that will take years to overcome.”

“Madam President, our projected figures on the growth of the economy was grossly over-exaggerated. When you called for this meeting, I was pouring over the reports to see what went wrong.”

“I’ll tell you what went wrong. Corporate America has flat out lied to us!” shouted President Henson as she slammed her fist on the desk.

“How, why?” asked the Secretary of State.

“They hoodwinked us into believing that cheap immigrant labor and the outsourcing of manufacturing and service jobs would insure the continued expansion of our economy. It has done just the opposite,” complained the President.

“I’m sorry. I should have anticipated the results and advised you better.”

“Me, I’m not the only one responsible for this mess. The whole government is to blame including the late President. We have no jobs because we have sent them overseas to create cheap products. The cheap products do us no good because our people have no money with which to make the purchases. The only winners are the greedy corporations and their stock holders,” stated the President in an angry tone.

“What can we do to reverse this cycle?” asked Jordan.

“The reason I asked *you* here is to inform you that I have made a major decision concerning our foreign policy. We are cutting aid to every foreign partner with a trade deficit. If they are not willing to open their markets to us fairly, then we will give them nothing- not even protection from the Eastern block of nations.

“Also, we will not be able to continue the massive spending we do in the Middle East. Israel is on its own. All things considered, we may have to end foreign aid to everyone. If we are to survive as a nation, we must make some tough decisions.

“I want you to get the message out to all our ambassadors that I am taking

these trade deficits personally and it will stop *now*,” she commanded again pounding her fist on the desk.

“As for you Elizabeth, we are going to Congress to lay out a case to end this influx of cheap labor across our borders and the hemorrhaging of American jobs overseas.”

“Yes, Madam President. I will put together a team of the brightest economists in the nation and have them assemble a presentation to explain the gravity of the situation before the Congressional committees. The chairman of the Fed should also testify. You realize of course that there will be stiff opposition from the corporate lobbying groups.”

“Hang the lobbyists! I want some tough laws drawn up and acted on quickly to stop the bloodletting brought on by those scum. From this moment on, I want stiff penalties for any corporation moving its base of operation out of the country. If they do, hit them with high tariffs for their imports and heavily tax any holdings they have here.

“As for the illegal immigration problem, let’s push for large penalties on anyone who hires them or gives them shelter.” President Henson shouted.

“I think it would be a good idea to hold an emergency press conference and take the information before the American people. If they get blindsided by a sudden recession, mayhem or even violence could erupt,” suggested Jordan.

“Yes. Yes, you could be right. At least you might be partially right. Instead of a press conference, I think it would be more effective if you have a television special directly from the Oval Office. It would be taken as much more serious and sincere,” added Hunt.

“Ok. Now we are getting somewhere. I don’t want what we are discussing to go public just yet. We need to keep it under wraps and do some damage control. Just how bad is it, Elizabeth?”

“It’s as bad as you think. With all the financial controls we have in place with the FED and the SEC, I didn’t think a major depression could be possible in this country again. With the reports that I have received as recently as yesterday, we are on a slippery slope that could bottom out in a *real* depression.”

“You mean a real breadline situation?” asked Jordan.

Secretary Hunt nodded her head slowly in affirmation.

“With all respect, Madam President, I reluctantly have to remind you that because of your prior positions on immigration, commerce, and your policies on globalization, the American people will hold you solely responsible for this mess. It will be difficult if not impossible to get a second chance.

“You also sold this platform to the congress and judiciary. I can assure you that they will want your head on a platter,” Jordan said quietly.

President Henson lowered her head and propped it with her hand across her forehead. Secretary Hunt looked over to Jordan and shook her head from side to side. All three of them knew that the future of the United States was bleak.

“It *is* my fault and the fault of the political system we have built in the last few decades. We have prostituted ourselves for the sake of reelection telling ourselves that we could not help the country if we were not in office,” said the President.

“The truth is that we should have allowed the American people to put the best person for the job in office instead of selling our convictions to the highest corporate bidder.

“If things get bad enough, I can declare marshal law and suspend the

Constitution. It may become necessary to use force to control our own military to keep order. They will be reluctant to turn their weapons on our citizens if there is an insurrection. I can use the U.N. troops to keep our military leaders in check.

“Well, we know the tasks that now lay before us. It won’t do any good to continue to hash this out among ourselves. Let’s hit the ground running,” said the President as she stood from behind her desk.

As the cabinet members shook the President’s hand and left the Oval Office silently, the President picked up the telephone handset and began to place an international call to Belgium. She listened intently for the salutation from the party on the other end of the line.

“This is the President of the United States of America,” she returned as her salutation.

“What can I do for you Madam President?” asked the mysterious party.

“I was guaranteed at the last meeting that my country would be spared economic collapse in exchange for my cooperation!” she stated angrily.

“I am sorry, Madam President. I regret to inform you that we are under new management. The council has been dissolved.”

The President slammed the phone down and lowered her head to the desk.

“There will be no stopping it now...” she mumbled under her breath.

Chapter 56

The spirit of anti-Christ grew stronger in Amaro with each passing day. He found it nothing to take the life of an opponent and sometimes relished the adrenalin rush he felt as he watched his victims expire.

He assumed his position as the Supreme Chancellor to the United Nations and began the delicate commission of reordering the socioeconomic status of the world.

He drew direction from his spiritual father who advised him on what courses he should embark. It was determined that the world would function better and be more easily controllable if the playing field was leveled economically.

A redistribution of wealth would help end world poverty and wrestle power from the rich. Countries that had enjoyed first world status would be brought down to second world. Likewise, third world nations would be brought up to second world status.

Now there would be no need for countries to pursue aggression against their neighbors since they all enjoyed equal rank. The world began to enjoy a peace it had not seen since the dawn of man.

As his plans progressed, the nations of the world began to praise and, to a certain degree, worship him for his wisdom. No world leader would oppose him or his minions nor did they desire to do so. The news went out of his ability to supernaturally take the life of anyone who stood in his way and no one would have risked suffering his retaliation.

As Amaro stood alone in his office before the large plate-glass window that looked out over New York City, he was startled by a soft voice that seemed to come from nowhere.

He turned to see the shadowy figure that had first appeared to him in the park. He could just make out the figure of a man standing in the corner of the room. The figure appeared as a shadow even though the room was well lighted.

“Sit down, my son.”

“Yes, Father.”

“The time has come for us to leave this city. It has been reckoned that all who live here should die.”

“Where shall we go?”

“We shall go into the world wandering here and there until the appointed time when we shall take our place on the throne.”

“What throne?”

“It is not for you to know just yet. At the appointed time, I will reveal the mystery of mysteries to you.”

“As you wish, Father.”

“For now, I have set aside a villa outside Rome in which you shall dwell. It will serve as your home when you return from all your travels. You shall go out into the world and claim it for yourself.”

Amaro picked up the phone and had his secretary make arrangements for his jet to be prepared for the flight to Rome, Italy. He felt secure in the knowledge that this father figure was watching over him and giving him guidance.

“I will depart at once.”

“You will be greeted at the airport by one of our devout followers. She will take you to your new home. She has an itinerary for your travels and meetings for the coming year. You will meet with kings, dignitaries, and holy men. You will win over the hearts and minds of all.”

“What about those who will not submit to our will? The Jews and the Christians refuse to accept the Thirio and subjugate themselves to our authority.”

“Do not trouble yourself with this. I have made arrangements to seal their fate. They are inconsequential to us. We have a great ally in the Vatican. Pope Paul Aloisius will partner with you to bring a great number of the faithful into our flock.”

“Yes, he is our friend. I believe he craves power even greater than I. He will serve me well.”

“You must not allow him to be greater than yourself. You will keep him in his place just below you as your prophet. He must not outshine you.”

“Yes Father, I will rule over him.”

“When the appointed time comes, you will have no further need of him. For now, he is indispensable. Many will be won over by him and will follow us on his account. He will change the hearts and minds of many who have been deceived by belief in the one God.

“At last the truth will be known and the veil will be lifted from the eyes of the followers of this God and his Christ. His Holy Spirit will be driven from the earth and will be replaced by our spirit.

“From ages of old we have been ignored and shunned. It is now our time to shine as a glimmering city on a hill. Prayers and offerings will be made to us and we shall rule the earth with a rod of iron.

“The masses will congregate before our throne and worship day and night. The regular sacrifice will go up before our nostrils as a fragrant aroma. The very sun and moon will sing their praises to us.”

“We will go into eternity in glory. You are my father and the father of us all. I love you and am honored to follow you and do your bidding.”

“You are my beloved son and you are one with me.”

The shadowy figure dissolved into a mist before Amaro’s eyes. He once again stood and peered from the window of his office onto the great city that lay before him. He knew from the warning he had received from his father that soon not one stone would be left on top of the other in this city.

The day of reckoning had come for the great city that had made the world rich through its commerce.

Chapter 57

“Mr. Stokes, John Powell here. How are you today? I am calling on behalf of my son Brandon and your daughter Maggie. I realize that the request I am about to make is unusual, but these are unusual times.

“You know my family and our position in the community. I understand your desire to follow your convictions and I do not judge you. We all have a right to our beliefs. Your decision to leave Aereodyne Thrust saddens all of us. Walter Anderson tells me you and your talents have been sorely missed.

“Getting back to the kids, Maggie has requested that she live here with us as our ward until she finishes high school. She is deeply upset with your plans to go into the wilderness and I fear what she might do if we do not help her.”

“Well, Mr. Powell, I appreciate your concern but Maggie is our daughter and I feel that we know best how to care for her.”

“I understand your position and admire you. However, I do not believe she will return to you whether you order her to or not. The reason I am calling is to attempt to reach an understanding that would avoid any confrontation.

“With the loss of your job and finances, it would be impossible for you to provide for her needs. She and Brandon are in love and it would be cruel to separate them as well.”

“Am I to assume that you would be willing to take civil action in order to keep Maggie?” Grant asked.

“I was hoping to avoid any such action. As rational men I would rather we reached an agreement outside the justice system.”

“I might consider allowing her to stay with you *but* only under the condition that she not receive the implant device. I must insist on it.”

“I am sorry to be the one to have to inform you of this but Maggie has already gotten the implant.”

John Powell could here the noise of the telephone handset hitting the floor after it fell from Grant’s hand. Grant lowered his head to the table and rested it on his arm as he began to weep uncontrollably.

He fully believed in his heart that he would never see his daughter again either in this world or the next. After he regained control of his emotions, he bent and picked up the telephone.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Powell. I suppose there is no use in opposing Maggie’s wishes. Tell her that we love her and will never forget her.”

“You have made a wise decision, Mr. Stokes. I will see to it that she wants for nothing. I will also make sure she knows how much you love her. She will always know what a fine father and mother she has. Goodbye.”

Grant placed the phone on the table and slowly made his way up the stairs to Maggie’s bedroom. He stood in the doorway and looked around at all her pictures on the wall. Her possessions were messily thrown around the room.

He would have given anything to see her lying across the bed in the middle of the mess chatting on the telephone. Since she received the implant, he knew he would never see his baby again. He again started to sob.

“What’s wrong?” asked Christine as she appeared from Brandon’s room.

“We better go sit down. I have something horrible to tell you.”

Christine took Grant’s arm and they went downstairs into the den. Sitting down on the couch, Grant turned to her.

“We have lost Maggie forever.”

“What?” Christine screamed.

“Yes, I’m afraid so. I just got a call from John Powell and he told me that Maggie wants to live with them as their ward until she finishes high school. That’s not the worst of it. Maggie went and got the implant without our knowledge.”

Christine cupped her face in her hands and began to cry hysterically. Grant put his arms around her and rubbed her back in an attempt to console her. After a good cry, she regained her composure.

“What did you say to Mr. Powell?”

“What could I say? She had already gotten the implant and she doesn’t want to be with us. There would be no use in taking on a man of his stature and besides that, we have no resources.

“I did the only thing I could, I told him to tell Maggie we love her and would not stand in the way of her wishes.”

“But she’s my baby. I can’t go on without her!” Christine declared with a whimpering voice.

“We must be strong for Brett’s sake. We knew this time in the world was going to be difficult. It would not have been called the *Tribulation* if there was not going to be big trouble.”

“I know. I just never thought our family would be broken. I thought we could go through it together.”

“Remember what the Bible says about family members betraying each other in the end. Maggie has done us no harm but she has done to herself a terrible thing. If we are right and the Thirio device is the *mark of the beast*, she will not be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven. The Bible is clear on that point.

Christine began to weep again. The two remained in their embrace well into the evening consoling one another. The room slowly dimmed as the light from the window faded with the setting of the sun. They prayed earnestly that God would have mercy on their daughter.

Chapter 58

“You wished to see me Rabbi?”

“Yes, Shalev, please have a seat.”

Shalev Rabin took a seat before the desk of the High Priest Baruch Shamira in his office in the new temple. He had not until now been nervous to speak with this man who had become the most powerful figure in Israel.

The people of Israel were extremely grateful to Rabbi Shamira and the Sanhedrin for the reconstruction of the temple and the reinstatement of Judaism. The regular sacrifice had been resumed and people from all over the world were flocking to Jerusalem to make offerings of atonement in the temple.

All of Israel was profiting greatly from the influx of visitors spending money and from the sale of sacrificial lambs and religious artifacts. The massive convergence of the faithful to the Temple Mount was creating unique security problems for the temple and the scribes and priests that served there.

“I will get right to the point. I have asked you here today to press you into God’s service. You are a highly regarded military leader and a well respected member of our faith.

“Rabbi Shani Velvel along with the members of the Sanhedrin has unanimously agreed that you should be selected as the leader of the new Temple Guard.”

“I am a military man, this is true, and a scientist, but I have not been ordained into any level of our religion. I do not feel as though I am worthy of such an honor,” replied Shalev humbly.

Rabbi Shamir arose from his seat and walked behind Shalev’s chair. He placed his hand on Shalev’s shoulder.

“My son, we have all recognized the signs that God is with you and moves through you. From the time you were a small boy you have been special. We will make all of the arrangements according to the law to see that you are properly ordained to serve in the temple.”

“I am honored to be considered worthy of this service. I will execute my duties with the utmost of diligence and conscientiousness. Are there any texts that I might reference that would instruct me on how I am to conduct myself as the chief of the guards?”

“The Sanhedrin has assembled a library that has been kept secret from the public. It contains writings from the great Rabbis of old and ancient texts describing life and conduct in the first two temples. I will see to it that you have unlimited access to this library and these texts.”

“Thank you. I have one important question regarding my personal life.”

“Yes, go on.”

“I am engaged to be married to a wonderful woman of our race, heritage, and faith. Will my position in the Temple present any impediment to our plans?”

“I foresee no problem whatsoever unless you allow someone other than myself to perform the marriage ritual,” the Rabbi said with a smile.

Shalev stood to face Rabbi Shamira with a broad smile on his face.

“That would be such an honor, sir. I can think of nothing greater that would

make Adina and me happier- of course along with the wonderful position you have honored me with today.”

“It is to the Lord and your credit that you owe the position. You will make a wonderful leader in the Temple. You and your wife will dwell happily here in Jerusalem. You will raise your children in the shadow of the house of the Lord observing our traditions.

“Just let me know when the wedding plans are finalized and I will set aside the dates for the ceremony.”

“Thank you, sir. Thank you again.”

Shalev left the office and ran to his truck. He couldn't wait to share the good news with Adina. This meant that he had a secure job for the future and would insure a stable home life for the couple and their family.

He was so excited that he could hardly dial the number on his cell phone. At last he heard a familiar voice on the other end.

“Hello, this is Adina and how may I help you?”

“Adina my love, it is Shalev. I have the most wonderful exciting news. Are you sitting down? I have just met with the Chief Priest Rabbi Baruch Shamira and he has offered me the position of Chief of Temple Security!”

“That is wonderful. I am so excited for you.”

“I am excited for us. We can now prepare more earnestly for our future life together. And there is something else incredible; the Rabbi has offered to perform our marriage rites personally.”

“That is incredible! To be married by the High Priest himself is an unspeakable honor. I am so proud of you, Shalev. You are the most wonderful man in the world.”

“Thank you, my love, but I must give all the glory to God. Without his blessings, I would be nothing.”

“Nor would any of us,” she added.

“Well, I will let you get back to work. I just couldn't wait to share our good news with you. Will I see you tonight?”

“I have been invited by your mother to dine with your family. I will see you later, love.”

“Until then, goodbye.”

Chapter 59

The rain beat down in torrents on the streets of New York as people scurried for shelter under awnings, doorways, and umbrellas. The night was dark except for the light provided by street lights and signs. The large drops of rain formed a translucent curtain that drew its color from the lights.

What appeared to be a United States Postal truck came to a stop in a narrow alley behind a block of old commercial buildings. The buildings had been abandoned for some time and were mostly inhabited by rats and vermin.

A light appeared in the window of a door as the driver stepped from the cab of the truck. The door screeched as it was slowly opened and the driver walked over to speak with the men who stood in the doorway.

“Allah has his vengeance.”

This was the phrase that Fatih Najid and Al Hakam Ramzi had been told to expect. This was the rendezvous for which they had waited patiently working hard and keeping a low profile.

“Can we unload?”

The three men walked to the back of the truck. The rain had subsided somewhat and they did not need umbrellas. Each of them grabbed a container which had separate components and carried them into a room that had been prepared as a workshop.

“Sit them here,” ordered Ramzi.

When the containers had been safely delivered into the workshop, Fatih and Al Hakam hugged and kissed the driver before sending him on his way.

“We have much work to do. We must be very careful. If we make any mistakes, we will have nothing to show for our efforts,” said Fatih quietly.

The two men worked into the night. They had only hours before the scheduled detonation. The mission had been planned in such a way that the bomb would be in New York for only a short time. This would help insure that the secret was not discovered and the attack not be thwarted.

It was now 11pm on the night of December 11, 2012. The detonation was planned for noon on the day of December 12, 2012 or 12/12/12. If nothing went wrong, the mission would be on time.

“Hand me that screwdriver, Fatih.”

“Be careful not to nick the red wire. If it rubs the case, it could short the microprocessor.”

Fatih took a handkerchief from his pocket and dried the sweat from Al Hakam’s forehead. An electric heater warmed the room but it was not heat from it that was making him sweat. It was the anxiety brought on by the importance of his task that made him perspire.

“It’s time to insert the timing device. Where is the adapter?”

The two men panicked as they rummaged through the containers looking for an adapter that would tie the timer to the detonator. Most of the containers were now empty and Al Hakam was kicking them out of the room in anger.

The room was somewhat dim except for the light on the workbench. Fatih retrieved a flashlight from the tool kit and began searching the floor under the

bench.

“Here it is,” he exclaimed.

“Praise Allah,” prayed Al Hakam under his breath.

Al Hakam placed the adapter on the timer and inserted it into the detonation unit. The deadly device was nearing completion.

“It is now time to install the power unit. This is the final piece before we activate the nuclear module and set the timer.”

With the skill of a surgeon, Al Hakam connected the wires throughout the unit that would provide power to the modules that collectively composed the nuclear bomb.

After the last wire was connected, the two men sat down on the shipping containers and wiped the perspiration from their faces.

“It is done, my brother.”

“When will we set the timer?” asked Fatih.

“Let us end our toils for tonight and get some sleep. In the morning, after our prayers, there will be time enough to finish.”

The men had brought sleeping bags to the abandoned building. They had no intention of leaving the bomb unguarded. Each of the men was equipped with an automatic hand gun.

In the morning they spread out their sajjad on the floor and knelt to pray. They prayed longer and more intensely than at any other time in their lives. They both knew that this would be their last day on earth. They wanted to be prepared to meet Allah.

When the prayer was concluded, they went back into the small workshop and sat before the workbench. There before them lay the destruction of New York and a vast area around it.

It was now 10:30am and the timer was set. It would only be one and a half hours until doomsday. The two men returned to their prayer rugs and stayed in a bowed position awaiting the explosion.

At the appointed time, Fatih Najid and Al Hakam Ramzi heard a loud click and fizzling sound from the workshop. The two men glanced at each other and in an instant, saw only white.

The mushroom cloud generated by the nuclear blast grew thousands of feet into the air in a second. A tremendous rush of wind began to suck out air and life for a circumference of miles from the epicenter. Ships that were just off the coast outside of New York Harbor were capsized immediately as the water was first blown out and then instantly drawn back.

Crew members from ships further out to sea rushed to the deck to witness the catastrophe. They began wailing and screaming at the horror that was unfolding before their eyes. They watched intently as the smoke and fire engulfed the eastern seaboard.

The shock wave from the blast could be felt as far away as the Mississippi River basin. Nuclear fallout from the atomic energy released would be carried on the wind and in the clouds across the Atlantic Ocean.

In Washington D.C. government officials and staff members scurried about in an effort to determine what was going on. It was not until fighter jets from nearby air bases were scrambled that the Pentagon officials got their first accounting of the incident.

Within minutes, the fighters were reporting the sighting of the massive

mushroom cloud looming over what was once the most powerful city on earth. As they approached the area they were ordered to return to base. Nothing could be done by them to assist in the cataclysm.

With the exception of the military's proprietary radio communication system, the nation suffered a total blackout of communications. Both the telephone system and the internet were dead. Satellites that carried television programming for North America were rendered inoperable due to the loss of key facilities in the New York area. Local radio and television stations were able to broadcast however they did not know what to report.

The financial institutions that relied on information from Wall Street were without the resources to function. The entire means of trade came skidding to a halt as the Thirio device processors could not access their databanks.

The whole country was in pandemonium, with most people not being able to discover what had happened. It would be days before control of the communication hubs could be switched over from what had been New York to backups in Kansas City, Missouri.

The Houses of Congress, Supreme Court, and the Executive branch of government were immediately relocated to the secret underground facility known as Mount Weather.

Chapter 60

Only hours before the attack on New York, Grant, Christine, Jeremy, and Brett drove into the national forest leaving behind all that they had known to embark on a new life.

They would rely entirely on God's favor and the skills Jeremy had learned on his many excursions into the wild. Several times he had stayed in the wilderness for over a month surviving on game that he had trapped and nuts and berries that he had foraged.

The Tadona National Forest was comprised of a small mountain chain that stretched across three states. The highest peak in the chain was 5166ft. above sea level.

The mountainside and floor of the park was covered in a dense forest consisting primarily of evergreen trees such as pine and fir. The trees created an almost impenetrable canopy over the landscape.

The park was also a game reserve and was heavily populated with bear, deer, and squirrel. There were also dangerous predators dwelling in the caves on the mountainside such as mountain lions and panthers.

"I think this looks like a good place to pull over and get started. This old logging road hasn't been used for years. It will make it a little easier for the first leg of our hike," said Jeremy.

Jeremy pulled his truck to the side of the road and the four stepped out onto the soft ground. Grant, Jeremy, and Brett began loosening the straps that held the tarp over their gear while Christine sought privacy in the woods for a restroom break.

They had brought a lightweight four-wheeled wagon that could be easily pulled by two people after being loaded with as many supplies as was practical. The three of them quickly loaded the wagon with food, medicine, clothing, tools, and camping gear. They had everything they needed to set up a base camp on the side of one of the peaks.

After debating on whether to bring a four wheeled off-road vehicle, it was decided that it would not be very useful in the dense forest. It would also be impossible to replenish the fuel once it was depleted.

When all the supplies were loaded onto the wagon, the four started down the overgrown logging road. Jeremy and Brett took the first duty of pulling the wagon. After a few hundred yards, they would then rotate with Grant and Christine.

All four of them were equipped with a backpack, rifle, and hand gun. The men carried large hunting knives and machetes on their belts but Christine elected not to carry the additional weight. They would pile the gear on the wagon when it was their time to pull.

The hike would take the better part of a day if they only stopped briefly for rest and to eat. Jeremy had planned to make it to the mountain by late afternoon, giving them just enough time to find a cave for shelter and set up a camp.

"Are we there yet?" asked Brett in a teasing way, just as he had done from the back seat of the car when he was a boy.

"Now don't start that," replied Grant.

The going got much tougher when the logging road came to an end. Pulling the wagon across the brush, tree roots, and broken limbs was very difficult. For the last leg of the journey, it became necessary for Christine to be removed from the pulling rotation. It was just too difficult.

Jeremy pulled a compass from his coat pocket and held it out in front of him. He turned slightly to the right and then back to the left.

“I think we need to go a little more to the East. It would be a good idea if we could get a glimpse above the canopy and make sure we are heading in the right direction.”

“There is an oak tree over there that has limbs low enough for me to get started climbing,” suggested Brett.

“Ok, Brett you go up and look for the highest summit. We can get our bearings from it,” Jeremy said.

Brett got a leg up from his dad and began climbing the giant oak tree.

“You be careful up there,” cautioned Christine.

“I’ll be ok, Mom.”

After ascending about sixty feet, Brett was able to get a good view of the mountains. He quickly climbed back down to the forest floor and pointed in the direction of the peak.

“We’re right on track. I’d say we have about five more miles. We are making great time. We’ll have time to spare after setting up the base camp. Let’s get going,” Jeremy commanded.

Once again the party struck out across the forest floor pulling the wagon and all of their supplies. At last they reached the foot of the mountain that Jeremy had selected to be their new home.

“We won’t be able to pull the wagon anymore. The terrain is just too steep. Let’s secure it to a tree and make sure we have the tarp tied down tight. I don’t think we have anything in there that would pique the interest of the bears. I don’t think they can smell through tin cans,” Jeremy said with a chuckle.

“How are we going to get the stuff up to the camp?” asked Brett.

“There will be plenty of time for that. Remember, we are not running on time tables anymore. We have all the time in the world. I can already feel the stress of living in the modern world evaporating from me,” replied Grant.

“We need to take some of our camping equipment up with us tonight. Just the bare minimum should do the trick. Starting in the morning, we can come back down and begin carrying the rest of the supplies up a little at a time,” added Jeremy.

After scouting around on the mountainside for an hour, Jeremy found the perfect shallow cave to be their new home. He carefully entered it with his pistol and flashlight in hand to be sure there were no predators hiding there.

“Hey, up here,” he yelled to the others.

Grant, Christine, and Brett carried the supplies they needed for the night up to the cave and joined Jeremy. Christine began sweeping the cave’s floor while Brett picked up stones and debris from the floor and cleared a living area.

Grant and Jeremy gathered enough firewood to get them through the first night and built a makeshift barricade for the entrance to the cave. They did not relish the thought of being awakened by a hungry mountain lion.

All had gone according to plan and the four of them sat around the campfire after enjoying their first meal, singing praise and worship songs they had learned

at church. They soon retired to their sleeping bags after a long and tiresome day.

Chapter 61

“Come on, Brandon, or we’ll be late for church,” Nancy Powell yelled up the staircase to her son on the second floor.

Maggie was dressed and sitting in the den waiting for the family to go to church. She had been given a bedroom on the ground floor on the opposite side of the house from the Powells’ master bedroom. The Powells’ did not want to tempt the teenagers by letting them stay together on the second floor. It would be too easy to sleep together.

“Finally, I do declare, you are the slowest dresser in town.”

“*Mom!* Don’t pay any attention to her, Maggie.”

The family got into their BMW and departed from the circular drive in front of the Powell mansion. John Powell loved driving and gave the family chauffeur the weekends off. Weekends were the only times John got to enjoy the feel of his automobiles on the road and it was one of the few pastimes he had left to enjoy.

Arriving at the church, the Powell family made their way to their regular seats. The other church members always respected the Powell’s status in the church and community. They would be careful to reserve their places.

The service started in the usual way with the minister of music leading the congregation in a few standard hymns before surrendering the podium to the pastor.

“I want to welcome all of you to exciting Montgomery Heights on this beautiful day of the Lord. It is a pleasure to be your pastor. I would like for our new members and visitors to stand so that our members can give you a warm welcome,” said Reverend Kyle Winford.

The sanctuary erupted in conversations as the members shook one another’s hand and greeted the visitors. When the congregation sat down and became quiet, the pastor began his sermon.

“I guess I don’t have to tell you how blessed we are to have been spared the suffering, death, and destruction of our fellow countrymen in the New York area. Later we will be taking up a special collection for the relief effort there. Our denomination has set up rescue centers in the area and is in need of common supplies. I know monetary credits are tight right now but consider it prayerfully.

“We also need to be in prayer and have a spirit of thankfulness that God has restored order to the rest of our country after a period of such chaos. I believe that if He had not intervened on behalf of His saints, our nation would no longer exist. There is still much to be done to restore our financial condition but I’m certain that in time, God will provide.”

The pastor had been generous in his assessment of the state of the nation. The destruction of New York had made life in the United States harder than anywhere else on earth. The suffering was felt acutely even by those that had received the Thirio. The problem was that the government had taken a path towards socialism and there was a distinct decline in productivity. With the exception of a few products from industries such as Aereodyne Thrust and International Avionics, the overseas markets for Western goods were closed.

Life had become unbearable to many in what had once been America.

Countless lived a day-to-day existence that they wished would soon end.

“I would like to draw your attention to the current events that are unfolding before us. It seems that I can’t turn on the television that I don’t see another prophecy fulfilled.

“The first fulfillment of end time prophecy was the establishment of Israel as a nation. Isaiah wrote about it in the sixty-sixth chapter of his book. The more recent destruction of the Dome of the Rock Mosque and the subsequent rebuilding of the Third Temple is another fulfilled prophecy. Daniel wrote about it as well as Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians.

“Jesus spoke of the end as a time of turmoil with many wars and rumors of wars. He said it would be a time of great tribulation unlike any time before.

“I believe it would be safe for us to assume that the end is very near based on the predictors God gave us in his word. Personally, I expect to be Raptured from this earth any time now. All the prophecies have been fulfilled that are necessary for the return of Jesus in the sky to gather his church. After that, Christ will return with the angels to wage war with the anti-Christ.

“Until that time arrives, we must be faithful stewards with the mammon God has given us. We must give sacrificially *especially* in times like these. It will be a testament to your faith to give when you do not have.

“In a moment the ushers will pass the processors and I want you to consider the fact that we will not be here much longer. There is no need to store up a great deal of wealth because soon we will be taken.

“Store up the wealth in heaven where we are told moths can not eat nor thieves break in and steal. That’s where our true wealth will be- in heaven with God.”

The church organ began to play as the ushers arose in concert and began to pass the Thirio processors down the pews. John Powell entered a large sum of monetary credits on the keypad and passed his hand over it. Likewise most of the congregation did the same. Because of the decline in the value of the Amero currency points, even a large amount could buy very little.

After the service concluded, the Powell family enjoyed lunch at their favorite restaurant. They were contented, having been to church and assured of their salvation and the nearing return of their Savior.

It was very satisfying for Mr. Powell to give monetary credits to those whose lives were turned upside down after the attack on New York. They laughed and conversed about their future.

“I am looking forward to the Rapture so, John,” stated Nancy joyfully.

“So am I,” Maggie chimed in.

“I really would have thought the tribulation would be worse than this. I don’t think it has started yet,” replied John.

As they continued with their lunch and conversation, they gave no thought to the millions of people around the world who had elected not to receive the Thirio device and as a result were living in concentration camps or abject poverty.

Chapter 62

The world was beginning to reap the benefits from the effects of the Thirio device. Serious crime was on the decline while peace, safety, and prosperity became the order of the day.

The penalties for crime became much more harsh and death penalty use much more common. As a result, the over-burgeoned prison systems began to experience fewer inmates.

Those who entertained the thought of theft, murder, or violence began to learn instinctively that they would be quickly apprehended. The Thirio could place an individual at the scene of a crime with the pressing of a few keys on a computer.

These were not the only benefits of the implementation of the device. The device also automatically notified the authorities when a person was involved in an accident or suffered from a serious health problem such as a heart attack or stroke. Paramedics would be quickly dispatched when alerted by the Thirio system.

The inhabitants of the world that had received the device prospered to a degree unrealized since the foundation of civilization. Commerce thrived and the rivalry of the nations was erased.

Trade flourished among all the nations of the earth. Tariffs and duties were removed and replaced by a universal value-added tax system.

The United Nations became the preeminent authority on earth and all governments were subjugated to their control. With the exception of the nation of Israel, all the armies of the earth fell under the leadership of the U.N. No war could be waged or battles fought without their consent.

The nation of Israel became the last bastion of defiance against Amaro D. Homem and the United Nations. They refused to serve him and surrender control of their tiny country. The nations of the earth knew that Israel would not hesitate to launch their nuclear missiles if necessary.

Amaro and Pope Paul Aloisius went on a worldwide tour promoting themselves as the saviors of the earth. They were well received in every nation and with all peoples.

Everywhere they appeared together and addressed the crowds, they were cheered and worshipped. The people would chant and sing praises to them.

Who is like the Supreme Chancellor and his grace
the Pope? Who can stand against them or make
war with them?

We will follow them and serve them. They are our
strength and our protectors- our wealth and our
providers.

We are honored to be in their presence and under
their wings. May we worship and honor them all
the days of our lives.

Amaro and the Pope would take refuge in their respective dwellings with brief respites from their touring. The Pope would catch up on the duties of leading the largest religion on earth while Amaro would retire to his villa and dwell on the future.

Upon the return from his most recent tour, Amaro spent several days in his home resting from his many travels. He carefully studied world conditions and economics and what adjustments may be needed to keep balance.

One night while sitting before a cozy fire sipping a glass of wine from a nearby vineyard, he considered the fruits of his labor and the great success his policies had brought on the world.

Out of nowhere the voice of the mysterious man spoke to him once again. He could see a shadow moving along the wall. The shadow was the shape of a man but there was no substance.

“You have done well, my son. I am very proud of you,” the voice said.

“Thank you, Father.”

“We have brought peace and safety to the world. This is something that no one else has done since the dawn of time. There is but one thing in want.”

“What would that be, Father?”

“The nation of Israel must bow before us. It is imperative.”

“Could we not just destroy the nation and kill the people?”

“No, my son. It is far preferable that we receive due honor and worship from this people. It will not do for them to be killed before they are *my* people.”

“What would you have me do? I am your servant.”

“You will go to Jerusalem. You will speak to the people and win their hearts and souls. They will follow you as all the nations have followed you. You will then take your place in the Temple and be elevated to godhood. It is your birthright.”

“Tell me of this birthright, Father.”

“I am a god. The world knows my name and the world knows me. I was in the beginning and was the precious one. He stood against me and caused my rejection.”

“Who is he?”

“He is the one that the world knows as Jesus. Now I will reveal a secret to you—a mystery. In the ancient writings there are many stories and accounts of the inheritance being given to the younger rather than the older.

“Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, are prime examples. Such is the case with us.”

“How so?”

“I am the older and the rightful heir to the inheritance. The world has known me by many names but my given name is Lucifer— the fair one.”

“Yes, I know you and I know of the stories about your fall from grace.”

“I fell because of the stumbling block. The one named Jesus. He is my younger brother.”

Amaro said nothing but contemplated intently this most amazing revelation.

“The nation of Israel belongs to us. We shall be their gods and they shall be our people. They will worship before us in the temple day and night— offering sacrifice and praise.

“Then, when the fullness of the times has been completed, we will make war

with the enemy and lay waist to them and their offspring. I have prepared the assembly of the nations that will make up our army. The kings of the East have begun to flood the valley outside of Jerusalem. They will rain down terror on the nation of Israel. We will at last be rid of that scourge.”

“It shall be as you say.”

Chapter 63

Life in the Tadona National Forest had now become routine and the foursome began to prefer this slow-paced life above their former lives in the city. The location that Jeremy had selected as their home was strategically located to give them easy access to fresh water, game, and berries. God was providing for all their needs.

The cave that they had originally found dirty and barren had been transformed into a cozy and inviting hunting lodge. Grant and Brett had taken up wood carving as a hobby.

They had carved ornate furniture and cabinets for the cave and built beds that provided much more comfort than the sleeping bags. On days when they could not hunt or fish because of weather, carving was the perfect way to pass the time.

Grant and Brett had become proficient woodsmen under the instruction of Jeremy. He taught them the art of trapping, snaring, and fly-fishing in the nearby stream.

Christine elected to do more domestic duties but it was by her own choosing. The men encouraged her to join them in every activity but she was happy to mend clothing and take care of the camp. Christine had been an excellent cook and she easily adapted her skills to prepare the fresh game that was brought to her.

She had used up all the makeup she had brought from the city but found ways to create natural products that worked equally as well. She really did not need makeup having a natural beauty. Grant would tease her about putting on her 'war paint' though he really thought she looked better without it. He knew that the vanity of a woman was a sacred thing and not to be taken lightly.

Brett continued to grow into a strong young man that any young lady would have been taken with. He dreamed about the girls he had dated in high school and wondered if he would ever have the chance to date again.

Jeremy had long since abandoned the idea of having a meaningful relationship with the opposite sex. He knew himself too well. He was selfish in the best sense of the word. He liked his time alone. When he wanted to go fishing, he wanted to go fishing. He did not relish the idea of someone else having an opinion that he had to consider.

This was ok, though. He recognized these traits in his personality and did not hurt another by attempting to have his cake and eat it too. He decided he would be a bachelor and that's what he became. He did not regret it or have second thoughts.

The stream that ran through the forest was fed from a natural spring that originated at the base of a nearby mountain. The water was always crisp and clear and did not need filtering.

The group would alternate bathing in the river while having a watch out. Grant would guard as his wife bathed and the men would watch out for each other. Many times bear and other game would come to investigate the interlopers in their stream. Usually a well-thrown stone would satisfy their curiosity and they would quickly run away.

Nights were an especially good time for the group. They would sit around the

stone fireplace that Grant had designed and talk about life. They repeated stories that they had been told and read aloud from a few books that they had brought along.

Their main reading and reciting resource was the Bible. They studied it in depth in an attempt to gain an understanding of God and his plans for them. They also wanted to get some idea of where they were in the end time scheme.

There was no information on what was happening in the world. Their only contact with the outside world was the sighting of an occasional aircraft that would fly over. It was a reminder of the life they had left behind.

They supposed that the shock from the nuclear holocaust that had consumed the New York area was just a distant earthquake. They speculated on where it was and if anyone was hurt. They had no way of knowing how many millions of people were killed and how much of their nation was destroyed.

They wondered who was running the country and even if the country had remained sovereign. All these things were fodder for the evening discussions and helped the time pass.

Christine called to their attention the fact that though they had been exposed to the elements for some number of months, there had not been a sickness among them. They attributed it to God's care. It could well have been that by following the guidance that God had given for the preparation of food and eating all natural food products, that God indeed was keeping illness from them.

Whatever the truth was, Grant, Christine, Brett, and Jeremy were living a good life in the wilderness and were as happy as they had ever been.

Chapter 64

All over the world, millions of people had been displaced from their homes for refusing to accept the Thirio implant. Families and individuals were living under highway overpasses or in wooded areas seeking shelter from the elements and those who would prey on them.

Only a few had foreseen the future and made plans as conscientiously as Grant and the others. The masses were forced to wander about scavenging for sustenance. Most lacked access to even the most basic necessities such as clean drinking water and sufficient clothing.

Children suffered most from the lack of food and water. Their parents knew that if they did not survive themselves that there would be no one to care for their offspring. It was imperative that the parents eat to stay alive.

As if there was not enough suffering on the part of the indigents, those that received the implant and had more than they had ever possessed would still take advantage of them. Rapes and beatings were commonplace and there was no redress of grievance for the homeless. To the authorities they were *persona non gratis*.

Many children that had been lost or abandoned by their parents were taken as slaves. They were kept in squalid conditions and fed only as much as would keep them strong enough to work. Many died from overwork or disease. Their broken bodies would be taken to U.N. workers who would bury them in mass graves. It would be as if they had never existed.

The back alleyways of the cities and towns would fill with scavengers during the night. They would rummage through the garbage cans and dumpsters as quietly as possible to avoid detection.

Restaurant and fast food dumpsters were picked clean in the darkness. Supermarkets were also prime sources of food that had been discarded for having gone bad- souring or molding.

Hunger and despair removed any reservations about eating even the rotting flesh of an animal killed on a highway. Grubs, worms, and insects of every kind were eaten regularly and the diners were happy to have them.

Those that were found wandering openly would be approached by police from the United Nations Emergency Management Agency. They would be interrogated and then offered relocation to one of the nearby internment camps.

People were only taken to the camps with their consent. It was no longer mandatory and no one was forced. The UNEMA had learned that the population of the camps was more manageable and less violent if the people wanted to be there.

Many millions more chose to go to the camps rather than wander the countryside in an attempt to survive. Life in the camps was hard but not as hard as the life these fiercely independent citizens of mankind experienced.

The UNEMA had become the universal world police force. Members of law enforcement agencies from all the jurisdictions on earth were rolled into this force managed and funded solely by the United Nations.

Most of the officers were decent and honest men and women that had formerly

served their city, state, or country as uniformed police of one kind or another. Their uniform and chain of command changed along with the nature of their duties.

Due to the decrease in serious crime after the implementation of the Thirio system, the police took on a role that more closely resembled social worker. Their time had been freed to an extent that they were able to make routine checks on the elderly and disabled, assist in the transport of citizens in emergencies, and join in community services such as the construction and repair of homes for the financially challenged.

There would be the occasional violent crime of passion- a shooting over a dispute or the fight between jealous lovers. There were still those foolish enough to break and enter or attempt to steal property. They would be quickly apprehended and sentenced. There was no escaping Thirio.

For the recipients of the Thirio device the world had become a much safer place to live. It was just as it had been written in the Bible about the end times.

1 Thessalonians 5:3

“While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly...”

Chapter 65

Arriving at the Tel Aviv Yafo Ben Gurion Airport, Amaro was met in the terminal by the U.N. Ambassador to Israel and a delegation of aides from the consulate in Jerusalem.

Arrangements had been made for Amaro to take residency in a walled estate located just outside Jerusalem. A wealthy Palestinian named Yousif Rawhi Harbeed owned the estate.

Amaro met in a closed-door meeting with the U.N. Ambassador upon arrival at the estate. The aides carefully put his belongings away. This would be his home for the immediate future.

Harbeed had made a fortune in the weapons trade by supplying Hamas with guns and ammunition to fight the Israelis. His great disdain for the Jews was only exceeded by his great greed. Amaro found these negative personality traits attractive making this man useful.

“First I would like to offer you the most sincere welcome, Mr. Chancellor,” opened Ambassador Abrams.

“It is good to be here. I have long looked forward to visiting this city. I have studied much about its religious and cultural background. Tell me, do you think we could begin our tour of the city tomorrow morning? I am anxious.”

“Yes, Mr. Chancellor. I began making preparations for security from the moment I received news of your visit. We will have the protection of the U.N. Military Force that is stationed in our quadrant of the city. We have notified the Israeli Military Forces to give us their full cooperation. They will not interfere with us.”

“Very good, will I be allowed to visit the New Temple that has been constructed?”

“Arrangements have been made for you to visit the Temple and to meet with the High Priest.”

“What is his name?”

“He is known by Rabbi Baruch Shamira.”

“Very good then, have one of your aides that is skilled in the old Jewish religious practices stay here with me. I want to become an expert on the method by which they worship their God.”

On the next morning a limousine carried Amaro and the Ambassador to Jerusalem. This was Amaro’s first glimpse of the ancient walled city. Prior to this he had only seen it in photographs.

He remembered all he had been taught about Jerusalem as a boy in Catholic school. The nuns that had instructed him brought the city to life. He now found it just as they had described it all those years ago.

Amaro marveled at the people scurrying through the narrow streets to the markets that lined them. It was as if he had stepped back in time. This scene had been played out for literally thousands of years. He smiled as he watched a small boy offer a melon to a tourist.

“Yes, these will be my people,” he thought to himself as they drove around the city.

The Ambassador described the history of each significant location in great detail. He knew the city as well as anyone- having lived there his whole life. He had been schooled at Tel Aviv University and received a doctorate in ancient history.

Amaro let down the window of his car door as they approached the Temple Mount. As the limousine rolled to a stop, he stared up at the massive structure looming above them.

A giant staircase zigzagged up the Mount and led up to the courtyard that lay before the Temple. The stairs were full of devoted worshippers bringing their sacrifices to the altar.

Tourists were only permitted at limited times of the day. They could enter the courtyard only. They would not be allowed into the Temple, for it was considered holy and exclusively for the Israelites.

There would be an exception made for Amaro Diabo Homem. God had placed a deluding influence on Rabbi Baruch Shamira. He was compelled to issue an invitation to Amaro even though it violated their law. Rabbi Shani VeIVel would have certainly protested had he not died recently from a heart attack.

Amaro and the Ambassador slowly ascended the massive staircase leading up to the Temple. He could hear the Hebrew prayers that were being offered by the worshippers on each step that they took. His father placed in his heart the realization that these same people soon would be worshipping him.

As they stepped into the courtyard they looked up at the stone columns that supported the entrance to the Temple. They could just see the altar through the entranceway. Smoke filled the area with the scent of the burning sacrifices.

Lambs and turtledoves were among the traditional sacrificial offerings prescribed in the law. They were purchased from markets that had been built at the east end of the courtyard. These would have been the very markets that Jesus disrupted 2,000 years earlier.

The Ambassador led Amaro to a small doorway on the side of the Temple. Two men in traditional Temple Guard uniforms guarded it. The uniforms were comprised of an ankle length white linen robe with a gold waistband. A large round gold buckle was in the center of the waistband. On their feet were leather sandals and each man had a long brass spear held out before him.

“We are expected,” said Ambassador Abrams.

One of the guards disappeared into the doorway and returned a moment later. He escorted Amaro and the Ambassador down a columned hallway and into a sanctuary where they found Rabbi Shamira reading from the Torah. He lowered the scrolls to the table when they entered the room.

Amaro stared into the eyes of the High Priest and the Rabbi fell into what was almost a hypnotic trance. Not a word was spoken for five minutes as the two men just held eye contact. Ambassador Abrams was dumbfounded as he looked back and forth at the two men.

Finally Amaro spoke.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Your Highness.”

“I have heard great things about you,” replied the High Priest.

Once the two of them began to speak, Abrams was asked to excuse himself from the room. The two men sat down and began to speak candidly.

“I have longed to be here in the Temple. This is the most holy place on earth. It is fitting that I should be here.”

Still under the deluding influence from God, the High Priest agreed with Amaro's statement.

"You are welcome here, anytime. You may worship here as an Israelite making sacrifices for atonement."

Amaro grunted. He had no intentions of sacrificing to any god. He knew that the Rabbi had not yet come to the understanding that *he* would be the worshipped one.

"Yes, I will come here often. We will speak and become quite well acquainted," Amaro said with a devilish grin on his face.

Amaro stood and bid the High Priest farewell. He rejoined the Ambassador and was driven back to his estate outside Jerusalem.

Over the course of the next few months, Amaro went about the task of winning the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. He frequented the assemblies and parties given by the wealthy and used his natural charm to sway them.

He was known for having brought peace and order to most of the world outside the Middle East and he convinced them that he could do the same there. With every passing day, he was more highly regarded amongst the well-educated and people that controlled the news media in Israel.

The people were bombarded with glowing reports about Amaro's accomplishments and his plans for the future of their nation. He soon became more popular and better known than the High Priest or Prime Minister. He often addressed their Parliament and was well received.

He spent more and more of his time on the Temple Mount speaking with the High Priests and the Sanhedrin about the law. His spiritual ability to delude them increased with every confrontation. Before long, he began to instruct them on the ways of worship.

However, there was one person on whom his influence was of no effect. Shalev Rabin, who was now the Chief of the Temple Guard, was suspicious of Amaro from their first encounter.

He sensed insincerity in the demeanor of Amaro. As a faithful Israelite he could not help but wonder why the most holy men on earth would allow the most holy ground on earth to be trampled by a gentile.

Many nights after returning home from the Temple, he would complain to Adina about having seen Amaro in the Temple and even being allowed in close proximity to the Holy of Holies.

This never sat well with him. He could not understand why the High Priest and Sanhedrin allowed this sacrilege. His mistrust of Amaro grew greater as time went on.

Chapter 66

“What’s your problem?” asked Brandon in a sarcastic tone.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Maggie replied.

“Oh, I get it. It’s that time of the month.”

Maggie broke into tears and ran into her bedroom. She slammed the door behind her and flopped down on her bed sobbing.

“I’m sorry. Can’t we talk?” Brandon said as he gently tapped on the door.

“Just go away.”

“Please?”

After a moment of silence, the doorknob slowly turned and the door opened slightly. Maggie had returned to the bed and Brandon slowly stepped into the room.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have been so insensitive. Can I help? Is there anything I can do to help?”

Maggie raised her head and with tears streaming down her face she said, “That’s the problem, you’ve already done too much.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Maggie got up from the bed and walked into her bathroom. She came back holding a thin white plastic device. Brandon immediately recognized it as an early pregnancy test. His heart sunk in his chest and he felt nauseated.

“It’s positive,” she said as she handed it to him.

“Are you sure? These things have been known to give false results.”

“That is the third one. I have missed my period for two months and I am not feeling good in the morning.”

Brandon fell back on the bed and placed his arm across his eyes. Maggie just stood there staring at him. She was terrified of what he might do and say. The suspense was torture.

“Well, can you say something?” she finally asked in desperation.

“Oh, my God, what will we do? What will my parents do?”

Maggie once again burst into tears. This was her worst nightmare. It was not at all what she hoped he would say. She had hoped he would be strong and take control of the situation. Instead, he was more confused than she.

“Are you going to keep it?”

“It! It! It is our child that is growing inside me. Keep it?”

Once again she stormed out of the room stomping her feet on the floor in anger. Brandon jumped up and ran to her. He caught up with her and spun her around. He lifted her chin with his hand and began wiping the tears from her cheeks. He then kissed her gently on the lips.

“I apologize for that back there. It was shock speaking. Everything will be ok. I’ll take care of everything.”

Maggie fell into his arms and rested her head on his broad shoulders. This was the strength that she needed. Finally he was acting in the way she expected. They stood quietly in their embrace. Maggie felt the assurance she so desired.

“I will talk to my parents in the morning. There is no need for them to lose sleep tonight.”

“Shouldn’t we both speak with them?”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right. It would be better to have you standing beside me for moral support.”

Brandon walked her back to her bedroom and kissed her goodnight. Neither of them would get much sleep.

The next morning came too early. John and Nancy Powell were having their breakfast in the sunroom. John was enjoying his morning paper as Nancy flipped through an old edition of her favorite home and garden design magazine. It was no longer in print after its headquarters was blown up in New York.

“Would you pass me the coffee, dear?”

“Thank you, John.”

“Oh, there you sleepy heads are. Brandon, you need to do something with that hair,” complained Nancy.

The young couple took a seat side-by-side and was holding hands underneath the table. They were conspicuously quiet and at last it was noticed.

“What’s up with you two?” asked Brandon’s dad putting the paper on the chair beside him.

“We have something to talk with you about,” replied Brandon.

Nancy closed her magazine as her attention was piqued.

“Mom, Dad, we have something important to tell you and would like for you not to get angry. Will you promise to remain calm?”

Both parents knew instinctively what was coming but did not say it.

“We agree,” replied Nancy looking over at John.

Brandon looked into Maggie’s eyes for a moment and he could feel her squeezing his hand to the point of pain. After screwing up enough courage, Brandon continued.

“Maggie is pregnant.”

Total silence fell across the table. John watched his wife’s face, as all the blood seemed to drain from it. The Powells just sat there in silence while Brandon and Maggie were practically holding their breath. John finally broke the silence.

“Well, I guess the apple really doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

The young couple was puzzled by this comment. They looked into the face of John Powell, who did not seem angry in the least bit. They quickly glanced at Nancy Powell who then seemed to blush.

“What do you mean by that? I thought you would be lecturing us by now.”

Mrs. Powell stood, took Maggie by the hand, and led her into the living room. They sat together on a small couch holding hands. John then began to lecture Brandon in the sunroom on the responsibility of fatherhood.

“There is something that we have never told anyone. I will share it with you but you must keep it in your heart and not tell anyone.”

“Not even Brandon?”

“Especially not Brandon, you see, we told him that he was a premature birth.”

It didn’t take Maggie but a second to understand what she was being told. Tears flooded from her eyes as she reached out and hugged Mrs. Powell.

“Do you mean it will be ok?”

“Do you think everything is ok between Mr. Powell and myself?”

Maggie once again hugged her and they returned to the sunroom.

“What was that all about?” Brandon inquired.

“I simply told her that everything was going to be all right.”

“You will be married and there will be no debate on that fact,” insisted John Powell.

“Yes, sir,” replied Brandon as he leaned over and kissed Maggie’s cheek.

“Now, what I want you to do, is take that young lady into the parlor and properly propose marriage to her,” suggested Nancy Powell as she winked at Maggie.

Chapter 67

The water in the stream was clear and cold as Christine stepped into it. She had become accustomed to the initial shock of the cold water on her warm skin when she bathed.

Grant sat on a boulder just ten yards up stream on lookout. It was usually an uneventful task. He had promised Christine that he would not watch her daily beauty regimen but throwing rocks in the stream was boring and he cherished the site of his beautiful wife.

Brett and Jeremy were in the woods not far away hunting. Jeremy had spied some turkey earlier in the week and thought it would make a good change of pace from the deer and mountain goat.

Turkey hunting required a good bit of stealth and it was necessary to be extremely quiet. It consisted for the most part of sitting at the base of a tree hidden by bushes and trying not to swat at the insects buzzing around your head.

Jeremy had been sitting patiently for hours not making a sound as he had done many times since they had moved into the forest. This day was different. As he sat there he began to hear what he thought was the sound of someone walking.

At first he thought it was an animal but the sound was very intermittent and there were long lapses between the apparent sounds of a limb snapping under a footstep.

He knew it could not be Brett because he had left him sitting under a tree in the opposite direction. It could have been Grant and Christine because it was coming from the direction of the stream, but he knew it was not time for her to be finished.

He suddenly had a very bad feeling about this. He took off his boots and carefully rose to his feet. He had become very good at sliding his bare feet under the foliage and limbs on the forest floor to walk with no sound.

He stealthily walked in the direction of the sound stopping from time to time to get his bearing on the next sound. As he walked, the noise became louder with each snap. He knew he was heading in the right direction.

Slowly but surely he was creeping closer and closer to the stream. If Grant or Christine saw him, he was afraid they would think he was peeping so he stayed behind trees as much as possible.

Finally, he heard a crack that sounded like it was right next to him. He carefully peeked around the corner of a large pine tree and saw a man with binoculars watching Christine bath.

Jeremy stepped from behind the tree with his rifle at his hip pointed at the man. The stranger heard him and wheeled around with a pistol in his hand. Both men fire at the same time and both men's bullets found their mark. They crumpled to the ground.

Hearing the two shots so close together, Brett and Grant knew something was wrong. Grant threw Christine her robe and he grabbed his rifle and headed in the direction of the gunfire.

Brett came running from the opposite direction and they arrived at the scene together. Christine checked the pulse on the stranger while Grant lifted Jeremy's

head into his lap.

“It’s going to be all right. We’ll get you back to the camp and get the bullet out,” Grant told Jeremy.

“No. This is it for me, old friend,” said Jeremy with a narrow stream of blood flowing from the corner of his mouth.

“No, no, hold on,” cried Grant with tears streaming down his face.

“Do you know where I am going?” asked Jeremy with his last breath.

Grant wailed with the death of his best friend. Christine and Brett were also crying and trying to console Grant. He couldn’t control his sorrow.

Grant sat holding Jeremy and rocking back and forth. Brett stood with his arm around his mom as they watched silently until Grant had cried his last tear. He closed the eyes of his friend with his fingers and gently laid him on the forest floor.

Evening would come all too soon and they knew that they needed to bury Jeremy securely before the predators came out for the night. They drug the stranger deep into the woods and left him.

Grant and Brett took turns digging as deep as the forest floor would allow. Christine carefully and tearfully placed Jeremy in a sleeping bag and zipped it. Grant and Brett made trips to the stream and gathered large rocks to line the grave so that the animals could not reach Jeremy’s body.

Jeremy was lowered gently into the grave and covered with rocks. A makeshift cross was made from fallen limbs and placed at the headstone. This would do until Brett and Grant could carve a proper one.

As evening was falling, the three of them stood at the graveside with tears in their eyes. Their lives would never be the same. Grant read from the Bible Jeremy’s favorite Psalm.

The Lord is my Shepard I shall not want,
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For his namesake.

Even though I walk through the valley of
The shadow of death, I fear no evil; for
Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff,
They comfort me.

Thou dost prepare a table before me in
The presence of my enemies; Thou hast
Anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth
Over

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me
All the days of my life, and I will dwell in the
House of the Lord forever.

The happy life that they had lived for the last few years was suddenly

interrupted by this tragedy. The Stokes family sat around the fire meditating on the life of their good friend and what an impact he had had on them

With each passing day Grant seemed to become more withdrawn and unhappy. At times he would look to the sky and scream, "Why, God?"

He knew why but it didn't help the sadness that he felt over the loss of the man that had ultimately saved his and his family's life.

"Perhaps God is telling us that we should no longer stay here," said Grant as he sat and tossed stones into the stream.

Christine and Brett were sitting across from him. They were unsure what he was talking about.

"If God wanted us to be here, he would have protected us. I don't feel safe here anymore. This could happen to any of us. We've lost Maggie and now Jeremy, I just don't think I can take anymore."

"What are you suggesting? You're not saying we should go down to the camps are you?" asked Brett.

"Well, I'm trying to figure out what God wants. I'm not getting any clear answers. We have remained faithful and followed His word and look what happened," bemoaned Grant.

"Honey, you know we will follow you and adhere to whatever decision you make. We will pray with you about it until you feel as if you have received the right answer from God."

Grant went over to them and gave them a group hug. He kissed them on the cheek and walked up to the cave. Christine and Brett held hands and began to pray fervently to God for his help. They did not want Grant to slip further into this depression that was gripping him.

Chapter 68

Amaro had become very powerful in Israel. The people held him in the highest esteem. He had practically made the Temple his home, being there from sun up until sundown.

It was finally time for him to assume full control of the Temple. Rabbi Shamira would have to be removed. He devised a scheme for his elimination. He would call upon his friend Yousif Harbeed to make the necessary arrangements.

“I have a little job for you. I need a couple of things done discretely for me.”

“Will there be anything in it for me?”

Amaro smiled. He knew that Harbeed’s greed would come shining through.

“Yes, my friend. You will be well compensated.”

“Then your wish is my command.”

“I want you to tactfully remove Rabbi Shamira.”

“You mean kill him.”

“Exactly. Then I would like for you to begin to recruit some of my most ardent supporters to become Temple Police.”

“I know just the Jew for that job. He may be even more greedy than myself,” laughed Harbeed.

“I knew I could count on you.”

The next day it was arranged that the Rabbi would dine with a prominent member of the Temple. After enjoying a delicious lamb dinner, the Rabbi returned home to his wife.

Waking in the night, his wife rolled over in bed to find the Rabbi had suffered what appeared to be a heart attack. She quickly called for an ambulance but it was too late. He had passed away in his sleep.

Harbeed then set about the task of eliminating Temple Guards. They met with an assortment of tragedies including automobile crashes and house fires. Some were even found victims of apparent suicide.

As the guards were removed, they would then be replaced with men loyal to Amaro. The plan was working perfectly. There was one that was not replaced. Amaro decided that he would especially enjoy forcing Shalev Rabin into his service. He would break him and force him to declare his allegiance.

Upon the news of the death and subsequent funeral of the High Priest, Baruch Shamira, it was up to the Sanhedrin to select the next High Priest from among its ranks.

Once again, God placed a deluding influence over them and it was suggested that Amaro Diabo Homem be elevated to the position as High Priest. With a vote, it was done.

Amaro had finally realized the success for which he had labored so hard. He was now set up in the Temple. He could enter the Holy of Holies and assume the position of God.

From that point on sacrifices and offerings were brought before the altar and Amaro would watch the flames leap to the sky from his throne that he had installed in the Holy of Holies. The entire regular sacrifice had become perverted as he corrupted the people in every way.

As time passed he decided that anyone who would not worship in his name or sacrifice in his name would be put to death. He never left the Temple or the Holy of Holies. He was served there perpetually. The city and the nation fell into turmoil and confusion as the giant armies in the Megiddo Valley had begun firing on the city. The Israeli Army was completely under siege.

The Temple Guard became secret police that went out into the city rounding up dissenters and killing them.

Shalev Rabin hated Amaro and let him know it every encounter. He would call to Amaro's attention the state of the nation. Amaro cared nothing. Shalev feared reprisal against his family and Adina so he was forced to comply as much as possible with the demands of this mad man.

Amaro enjoyed greatly inflicting pain on Shalev. He knew that with every report of the killings, Shalev's hatred grew. He thrived on that hatred.

Month after month passed and Amaro became more of a monster with every breath. He decided that it was no longer pleasing to have animals alone for sacrifice. Perhaps it was a waste for the police to kill the people in their homes or in the streets.

Amaro issued the edict that he would now accept human sacrifice on the altar and that those who brought them would be greatly in his favor. Those that remained alive in Israel were either as evil as Amaro, or so terrified of him that they dare not defy him.

At any rate, his will was being done throughout Israel and especially in Jerusalem. He dressed himself in the royal robes of the High Priest and sat on his throne in the Holy of Holies ruling with a rod of iron.

He finally had had his fill of toying with Shalev. Calling on his accomplice Harbeed, he had the police bring Shalev's mother and father to the Temple during the regular sacrifice.

"Bring Shalev Rabin before me in shackles."

Shalev was brought before Amaro's throne in chains. Amaro laughed a most wicked laugh and pointed to the altar. Standing there before the altar was his parents in white robes. His mother was sobbing but his father held his head high in defiance.

"You are the very personification of evil. I will never bow to you!" declared Shalev as he spit in Amaro's face.

Amaro motioned for a priest to wipe the spit from his face. He then nodded in the direction of Yousif Harbeed. Harbeed walked over to Shalev's parents with two of the Temple Guards. They forced his parents to bend over and the sacrificial priests lopped their heads off with axes.

"Shalev screamed loudly and turned his face away."

"What, don't you want to see them burned as a sacrifice to me? It is a sweet aroma going up before my nostrils."

The bodies of his parents were heaped on the altar and burned quickly. Their pain and suffering in this world were over. That could not be said for the remaining inhabitants of the earth. Everywhere the spirit of evil went out and consumed the nations.

The entire planet erupted into anarchy as God turned his back on the world and its vile corruption. He had unleashed the four horsemen that had been bound up and removed what had held his wrath in place down through the centuries.

The earth shook and the chains fell from Shalev's hands and feet. The anti-

Christ became enraged and ordered that he be killed immediately. Those that were armed became powerless. Their swords could not be raised neither could their guns be fired.

Amaro could hear a low rumbling sound behind his throne. He turned to look at the Ark of the Covenant that was directly behind him. Between the wings of the Cherubim that adorned the top of the Ark was a tongue of fire that glowed but mysteriously did not burn.

Amaro turned back to see Shalev Rabin walk slowly from the Temple under the direct protection of God. This infuriated the anti-Christ further and he ordered that twice the regular sacrifice be offered in human blood.

Chapter 69

Shalev found Adina in the hiding place where they had planned to rendezvous. It was no longer safe for her to be seen. The anti-Christ would have surely put a price on both their heads.

“Let’s go this way,” shouted Shalev as he took Adina’s hand and began to pull her down a back alleyway that was filled with the rubble of crumbling buildings.

Jerusalem had been under siege for weeks and the sound of the constant bombardment from the giant Chinese and Arab armies that had amassed in the Valley of Megiddo could be heard throughout the nation.

The jets that had been purchased from Powell Avionics and were equipped with the engines designed by Grant, had outperformed the Chinese made copies that had been sold to the Iranians. The superiority of the Israeli pilots trained by the U.S. military had also helped sustain the nation.

If not for the few remaining sorties flown from aircraft carriers by the last remnants of the Israeli Air Force, the nation would have already been overrun by the horde. The losses of aircraft and men were increasing with every mission as the invaders fired on them with surface-to-air defense missiles. Only ten percent of the former population of the nation of Israel remained.

Amaro Diabo Homem and his murderous Temple police vacated the Temple and joined the troops in preparation for the last big onslaught to annihilate the nation of Israel for all time. His satanic power had now reached its full potential and he was invincible in the face of mortal battle.

Still clothed in the robes of a high priest, he had added the adornment of a battle crown and sheathed sword that hung from his waist. He at last informed the leaders of his army and the world that he would now and in the future only be referred to as the *King of the Earth*. His transformation into a god was complete.

Shalev and Adina crouched in a darkened doorway as people ran screaming past them in the streets. The city had become a horrific nightmare with the lack of food and clean water. The infrastructure for electricity and gas had long been destroyed and nights were particularly miserable with the cold and hunger.

Their plight was such that they had little emotion left to grieve for their lost loved ones that had been killed by the Temple police. Even the hatred that they had felt for the anti-Christ and his minions took second place to their desperate need to just survive.

Shalev had caught and killed a rat two days earlier. He gave all but one hindquarter to Adina. That had been their last meal. Even rats were scarce in the city now. Some had turned to cannibalism of the many corpses that littered the streets.

“Aaaahhhhh!” screamed Adina as the dirty and bloody face of a small girl appeared directly in her face through the smoke from the many fires.

Adina buried her face in Shalev’s shoulder as a shot rang out in the darkness. The girl fell face down before them. Shalev could barely see through the smoke by the light of the moon, a shadowy figure drag the little girl away by her foot. Shalev was in no doubt of her fate.

“We have to try to find a safer place to hide. The city has fallen into anarchy

and the people have digressed into animals,” cried Adina.

“We will die here or somewhere else, my love. Let us hold each other and ask *El Elyon* for His mercy and forgiveness.”

Adina lowered her head and the two began to pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob just as they had as children. Shalev looked into the sky as the flashes of light from the bomb explosions lit up the night against a backdrop of blackness.

Suddenly, he jumped to his feet and pulled Adina up as well. Directly above them, a light began to burn through the blackness with intensity so strong that they had to shield their eyes.

As their sight became more acclimated, they began to make out what looked like a rip in the night sky. It was as if a black cloth was being torn in front of a strong search beam.

The rip grew longer and longer as they watched with amazement and near disbelief.

“Could this be the result of a lack of nourishment?” Shalev wondered, “Perhaps this was a delusion brought on from weeks of hunger and stress.”

“Do you see what I see?” Shalev asked in an almost panicked voice.

“Yes, yes. I see,” replied Adina excitedly.

In a flash, the rip exploded open as if large theatre curtains had been drawn. The night was gone and a day brighter than any they had ever seen replaced it. The sound of thundering trumpets, battle cries, and choruses could be heard everywhere. Right before their eyes appeared an amazing and most unbelievable sight.

“It cannot be! It just cannot be! All our lives we were told the wrong thing! We believed the wrong thing!” cried Adina.

“It was He. All along, it was He!” shouted Shalev as he and Adina fell to their knees and stared into the sky with wonder.