

THE END

T H E B O O K

Part Three

Visions and Dreams

"...On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea."

Luke 21:25

J.L.ROBB

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Cover art and design by: Erica Robb, Yoni Art and Design, www.yoniartanddesign.com

Editing by Jacqueline Poulton and Lynn Thomay

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Energy Concepts Productions books may be ordered through booksellers or by contacting:

*Energy Concepts Productions
A Division of Energy Concepts
1502 Howell Walk
Duluth, Georgia 30096
1-770-476-0887*

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ISBN: 978-1-6284-7482-4 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-6284-7483-1 (hc)

ISBN: 978-1-6284-7481-7 (e)

Printed in the United States of America

Energy Concepts Productions rev. date: 10/01/2013

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

THE END The Book series is a fictional account of the predicted apocalypse as outlined in the Bible. Several readers have asked me, “Is this book true?”

It is true that the Biblical end will happen, but I have written this series as a counter-weight to the apocalyptic fiction coming out of Hollywood, like *Armageddon* and *2012*, that fail to mention God and His role. Any similarities between things that are occurring now and things written in this series are purely coincidental. It would be impossible to write a “true” account of the Biblically described End Times.

I hope all readers will find this series thought provoking, as well as thrilling, and might make us think about some of the things we believe and why we believe them.

In Part Three: *Visions and Dreams*, Jeffrey Ross continues his journey of unbelief in a Divinity from one tragedy to another, disaster lurking just moments away. The current world events certainly reminded him of some of the preaching his Mom used to do about the end of the world that was sure to come, soon. She thought that her whole life, but it never happened. But now, he found himself beginning to wonder, and he worried about his dreams. They seemed to often come true, at least the bad ones.

Wars, rumors of *nuclear* wars, disease and plague, famine and drought, crime and violence, the severe storms and earthquakes and a world economy in a tailspin. Not to mention the abundance of meteorites colliding with Earth, unprecedented

in human history. Could meteorites be the stars that fell from heaven to Earth that his Mom talked about from *Revelation*?

Glancing up in the night sky, looking at the Moon, now pink with rings, Jeff made a decision. He would dig out that mysterious Gideons Bible that kept appearing and would read *Revelation*. He started it once, but the story was just too unbelievable.

What would you do if you woke up one morning, turned on the news and found out the often-predicted end-of-the-world really *was* near? This time the story was true, and there was no escape. What would you do? Where would you hide? Could you somehow survive; and if so, what then?

I hope you enjoy reading *Visions and Dreams* as much as I enjoyed writing it for you, and for the glory of God, the father of Abraham.

J.L. Robb is an author and free-lance writer with a degree in Zoological Sciences from North Carolina State University. A U.S. Navy veteran and cancer survivor, he lives in the Bible-Belt with his two Great Danes and his kitty named “Glock.”

Robb is a member of Civitan International and The American Legion.

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR

PART ONE

Jeffrey Ross is Duluth, Georgia's most eligible bachelor, but not by choice. Retired Navy SEAL and successful entrepreneur, he had been married to Melissa almost 25 years; and he thought everything was hunky-dory. They had beautiful twin daughters and adopted daughter, Audry and a nice home in a country club community, nice cars and toys, what could be wrong.

Melissa asked for the divorce, begrudgingly. She loved Jeff, but he didn't believe in God, never had; but what was worse was his ridiculing of believers. Over the years, her faith grew stronger and she enjoyed her church community; but she and the daughters enjoyed it alone. No way was Jeff going to step foot in a church.

The divorce and Melissa's subsequent remarriage had taken its toll; and while Jeff wasn't a broken man, he remained in the dumps for the next four years. The most eligible bachelor wasn't available. He was hoping his wife would come back.

Jeff made new friends and maintained most of their old friendships too, as did Melissa, including The Admiral, Sheryl, Chadbo, Wild Willy and Abe the Bartender.

Nine-thousand miles away, along the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Korengal Valley of Death festered with various

jihadist groups, Muslims with a common cause: Kill the infidels. That would be everyone except them.

Jihad's Warriors, virtually unknown, unlike al Qaeda, had infiltrated the borders of Europe and the United States for years, decades. The U.S. border with Mexico was as porous as Swiss cheese; and jihadists had taken advantage with bribery and murder.

The Chechen jihadists from Eastern Europe looked, talked and acted as American as mom's apple pie. The Arab jihadists passed easily for Latino immigrant laborers, but these were not laborers.

The Divine Plan was to run America and Europe out of money. The warriors knew the West couldn't protect every single nursery school, church, synagogue, campground, shopping center, hospital and highway. It would be easy. Once economically destitute, the Islamic takeover of the world would finalize.

While Manhattan and Chicago remained the desired targets, security was tight. The Islamists would concentrate on the Bible Belt. More Christians that turn the other cheek rather than fight.

Jihad's Warriors were financed, not by Muslims so much as by a group of wealthy Japanese businessmen bent on revenge for the nuclear bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima during World War II. They were the grandsons and granddaughters of those burnt alive in December, 1945, the Baby Bombers. Money was no problem.

Jeffrey continues his pursuit of Melissa, now widowed, and can't help but notice all the people carrying *The End Is Near* signs. They seemed to be everywhere. Then there were the disappearing people, and Jeff remembered his mom's lectures.

“In the last days, sonny boy, people gonna be disappearin’, yes they is. You start seeing folks vanishin’ in thin air, you better find God. That’s all I can say.”

A creature of habit, Jeff had a routine that included the Dunwoody Starbucks every morning for coffee and the Atlanta newspaper. He was a news junkie. The Mayan Apocalypse was just around the corner, and people world-wide were preparing for *The End*. Ridiculous.

One warmer than usual Spring morning, record heat the words of the day, Jeff enjoys his latte and paper when suddenly his world changes... again.

The brown cargo van circling the small shopping center explodes with vigor as America’s first suicide bomber begins a wave of terror like the nation has never seen. Two minutes later another explosion several blocks away blows up the Dunwoody Day Care Center. Forty-seven dead in a split second.

Jeff’s Navy buddies, Chad Myers and The Admiral, work with the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. Astronomy buffs, their primary concern was space objects on a collision course with planet Earth. Near-Earth objects, mostly small asteroids, had become more commonplace.

Unfortunately, news of the object most recently discovered would now have to be shared with the world as it made its way past Jupiter on a course that would hit Earth in less than a year. The object, still invisible to most telescopes, was dark, massive and unavoidable.

Sixty-five million years earlier, the dinosaurs and most living creatures had been wiped out by an asteroid only six miles in diameter. The Dark Comet was more than a hundred

As the world reacts to the coming devastation, many begin to believe that the end really is near this time, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. There was little panic.

When Jeff's friend Samarra receives a strange call, she returns home as instructed. She would follow the instructions as directed, or she would receive her son's head in a box instead of the finger she stared at in desperation. And she did.

Samarra's access to Atlanta's CDC biological disease labs made her job simple and soon the Spanish Flu, one of the great killers of all time, is loosed into an unsuspecting world. It was inevitable, millions would die.

In the Indian Ocean, a hijacked nuclear attack sub vanishes. The only remnants were an oil slick, clothing and assorted debris but not enough to indicate the submarine was at the bottom of the Marianas Trench.

As New Year's Eve approaches, Jeff and Melissa visit Grand Cayman Island to celebrate memories and await the coming comet. To most it seemed the Earth would end months before the predicted Mayan prophecy.

A few hundred miles east of Grand Cayman, on the island of Montserrat, the Soufrière Hills volcano erupts and is blown into the Caribbean Sea. The massive tsunami that is generated speeds across the ocean toward Puerto Rico, Jamaica and... Grand Cayman.

PART TWO

Jeff returns from Grand Cayman Island alone. He and Melissa tried to escape the giant wave but were washed off the 4-story roof of their beachfront hotel. Melissa's body

was never found, and Jeff mourns his loss. He had prayed they would reconcile, his first prayer since a child; and it looked like it might happen.

The new year started off with a bang, literally, when the U.S. suffered its first nuclear strikes, one at the Diego Garcia island chain in the Indian Ocean that destroyed most of America's B-52 bomber force. The second destroyed the Buford Dam, Atlanta's fresh water supply.

The Dark Comet continued its journey toward Earth, two weeks until impact. Attempts to destroy the comet with the world's nuclear weapons supply failed to deter the coming tragedy.

The world became unified for the first time in history in their effort to stop the comet, and joyous applause erupted globally when the comet slammed into the Moon instead of Earth. Unfortunately, the resulting debris from the lunar collision meant waves of meteor showers for Earth, many of which made it through the atmosphere, destroying numerous communities, including the Three Gorges Dam in China.

Thankful that the world was still intact, Jeff flies to California to buy his million dollar dream car, a one of a kind 1954 Cadillac Pininfarina Cabriolet. Maybe that, he hoped, would occupy his mind a while. Shopping was great for depression.

Upon arrival at the La Jolla Jetport, Jeff's tragic misfortune continues as he is struck with the deadly and pervasive Spanish Flu. During his hospitalization, he begins to have a series of strange dreams, dreams of small white churches in fields of blooming daffodils. Dreams of a tiny Arizona town named Lukeville.

The European riots had become infectious, and America's cities did the same as gasoline reached \$ 8.00 a gallon. The police forces, hampered by budget cuts and not enough employees, became brutal; and rioters were killed mercilessly.

The jihadists coordinated closely with a well-organized Christian militia under the philosophy of, *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*. Their common enemy was the U.S. government.

The Admiral's romance with Sheryl blossoms cautiously, at least until the kidnapping. That's when he discovered his real feelings, the ones he had sheltered for sixty years.

Recalling their private conversation, he wasn't really surprised that the President had sold out Israel; only, it wasn't Israel's God that was trying to kill everyone in America, it was Islam's God.

What was surprising, and shocking, was the rumor that there were thousands of infiltrators living and working in the nation's infrastructure: nuclear power plants, water treatment facilities, food distribution warehouses.

Vinny, aka Aboud, hasn't gotten any nicer as he continues to meet with his *deputies* at the concrete plant in Lukeville. The meetings, though brief, usually occurred on the Mexican side of the deep, underground tunnel connecting the concrete facility in Lukeville with the beer distributor on the other side of the border. Plans were made, plans of terror, death and destruction; and the stored weapons and nerve agents were the vehicles Allah would use.

Wild Willy continues his work with Mossad and Senator Jack Russell, Samarra's husband. The nanotech spybots were no longer experimental and looked like assorted bugs, but Will was

especially fond of the dragon fly style. Looked just like the real thing.

Samarra's case goes to the U.S. Federal Court in Atlanta. The charges are numerous, including international homicide charges for the tens of thousands killed because of the Spanish Flu. During the trial, Samarra's senator husband is arrested in a San Francisco shower house with a young boy and charged with possession of child porn and sex with a minor. Senator Russell stated that he thought the boy was 12, the new legal age of consent in the United States.

After Jeff's recovery from the Spanish Flu, he continues to have the strange dreams about a couple named Missy T and Kipper T, reggae music and disco lights; and the room, the one with the dark door. *You don't want to go through that door.* Missy T made the comment numerous times.

Jeff's life, a life that's never dull, continues to change suddenly and often. He finds himself having second thoughts about the whole religion thing, at least sometimes. He really couldn't explain how the Gideons Bible kept showing up.

One day Jeff gets a call from Samarra. Her trial was over quickly, temporary insanity; and her penalty was light. She asked if she could visit, they had been friends for many years.

During her visit to Jeff's Sugarloaf estate, yet another megacryometeorite storm hit North Atlanta. Jeff's home was spared, but a young girl in a Porsche was killed in his neighbor's driveway. The large ice bomb that hit the new Porsche Spyder was estimated to weigh 120 to 150 pounds, larger than a beach ball.

Samarra informs Jeff that she and Senator Russell are now divorced; and over the next few months, a new romance blossoms. There had always been *something* there.

The months passed swiftly, and soon Jeff plans a visit to his dive shop in Negril. Before going to Jamaica to check on the business, Jeff and Samarra become engaged, though a date is not set.

Jeff's journey to Jamaica is plagued with thoughts and confusion, not about his profound love for Samarra but about all the natural disasters going on. It was downright scary.

The Admiral told him about the large rock that appeared to be leaving the Moon's orbit, and he found himself hoping to God that it wouldn't. He fell asleep and dreamed, dreams of earthquakes and volcanos, roaring seas and asteroids, drought and poisoned waters... and *Melissa*. He prayed in his dream, a prayer that Melissa hadn't suffered in the tsunami, that she had been killed instantly in the fall.

“The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.”

Albert Einstein

LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS: ALPHABETICAL BY FIRST NAME

Abe the Bartender: Key character. General Manager and bartender at The Divide Disco & Café.

About Rehza: a.k.a Vinny, a.k.a. Ricky, a.k.a. Jean Philippe. In charge of U.S. Operations for Jihad's Warriors and various other Islamic Jihadist groups. Twin brother of Mohammed Rehza.

Aludra Khalid: Muhammed's sister. Lives with Muhammed, leader of terrorist Jihad's Warriors, in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Amber Michelle: Investigative reporter with al-Jazeera USA.

Betty Davis: Also known as Betty Davis Eyes. Bartender at American Legion Post 251 in Duluth, GA.

Bill "Wild Willy" Briggs: Master of Nanotechnology, Georgia Tech Nanotechnology Research Center, Atlanta. Ex-U.S. Navy, CIA and Homeland Security. Works closely with Israel's Mossad. His cover is high dollar repo man.

Chad "Chadbo" Myers: Assistant Director, Near Earth Object and Heliospheric Laboratory, Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, MD.

Chuck Hutz: a.k.a. Hutz the Putz. After accident, speaks fluent Hebrew and witnesses to others while in a trance.

CJ: Bartender at American Legion Post 251 in Duluth, GA. Helped capture terrorist wannabe that attacked the Post.

Condi Zimmerman: Independent news anchor/reporter and Atlanta contract correspondent with FOX News Network and OLNN.

Dan Brunson: Nuclear physicist and public speaker.

Dennis Duncan: Geophysics Professor and public speaker.

Dmitry Ustinov: Chechnyan-Russian arms dealer. Brokered the sale of 5 high-yield nuclear weapons and delivery systems from Pakistan to Iran. Arranged high jacking of Nerpa 155 nuclear submarine.

Dr. Joseph Rosenberg, PhD: Public Speaker and Professor of Apocalyptic Religions, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Edgar Allen Poe: Homeless veteran who discovers terrorist plot, and ends up working with Army Intelligence.

Erica P. Robbins: Freelance reporter and U.S. War Correspondent.

Farmer J. Kinsella: Owns large cotton farm in Clemson, S.C. He survived an assassination attempt, but terrorists stole his dust cropper plane for a planned chemical attack on Atlanta.

Gray and Andi Dorey: Close friends of Jeff and Melissa Ross, philanthropists and owners of Dine for Dollars, a restaurant for the homeless or just the hungry.

Jack Russell: United States Senator from Cumming, Georgia and ranking member on the Military Finance Committee. Married to Samarra Russell.

Jeffrey Ross: Main character. Ex-husband of Melissa Ross and father of three daughters; Jami and Jenni (twins) and Audry, his youngest. U.S. Navy SEAL until discharged with injury after the Vietnam conflict.

Jill Haskins: Wife of Leon “Bubba” Haskins and Melissa Russell’s closest friend.

Judi Ellis: Director of Paleobiology, Emory Primate Research Center, Atlanta.

Judy Blanton: Lives in Lukeville, Arizona. Previous owner of J. Blanton concrete Company.

Kara Mulherin: Missionary to Haiti and future girlfriend of Scott Johnson.

Kari K. Vermi: News anchor with OLNN, Omega Letter Network News. Columnist with www.omegaletter.com

Kipper T and Missy T: Angels who appear to Jeff in dreams.

Kyoto Kushito: Founder and Director of The Foundation, a shadowy terror think tank, based in the Hiroshima, Japan area. The Foundation consists of disgruntled grandchildren of Japanese kinsmen killed by the U.S. nuclear attacks of World War II and funded the hijacking of the Nerpa nuclear submarine.

Leon “Bubba” Haskins: Owns the largest minority contracting firm in Georgia and a tourist submarine facility at Lake Lanier Islands, Georgia. Married to Jill Haskins.

Mehdi: Chief of Security and Jihad Planner for Muhammed Khalid. Lives in Korengal Valley along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Melissa Ross: Also Melissa Ross-Jeremias. Divorced from Jeff Ross, mother of twins, Jami and Jenni, and adopted daughter, Audry. Recently married Robert Jeremias, later killed in a plane crash. Rumors are that he and the other missing were raptured.

Mohammed Rehza: Ruthless Islamist in charge of European operations for Jihad's Warriors. Twin brother of Aboud Rehza (a.k.a. Vinny and others)

Muhammed Khalid: Islamic Jihadist and founder of the extremely secretive Jihad's Warriors. Lives in Korengal Valley, Pakistan with his sister, Aludra.

Naomi: Old Jewish woman who carries a cross necklace. Helps Aludra escape Korengal Valley through Tajikistan.

Pam MacLott: Owner of *The Divide Disco & Café*, the South's only News Bar. The café becomes a meeting and planning place for those interested in combatting the Islamic takeover of America.

Richard "Rich" Badey: Investigative reporter.

Robert Jeremias: Missionary, philanthropist. Married Jeff's ex-wife, Melissa but was killed in a plane crash during a missionary trip.

Russ Ivies: Chief of Security, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta. Actor and producer. Suffered one of first Spanish Flu cases and later became Chief of Security for the Atlanta Veteran's Administration Hospital.

Samarra Russell: Director of Research of Communicable Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta. Married to Senator Jack Russell.

Scott Johnson: Assistant manager of *The Divide Disco & Café*.

Sheryl Lasseter: Director of the United States Public Relations Liaison. Works directly for the U.S. President.

Terry and Toni Fahey: Next door neighbors of Jeffrey Ross.

The Admiral: Justin P. McLemore. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and retired four-star Admiral. Director of Near-Earth Object and Heliospheric Laboratory, Goddard Space Flight Center, Maryland.

Three Wild Women: Wanda, BJ and Beverly manage the American Legion Post 25. The three very attractive women are seen together often. Skilled in self-defense and sharp-shooting, they seem to attract encounters with street thugs and drunks.

Vinny: A truly evil man, his real name is Aboud Rehza, a product of wealthy Saudi parents. He and his twin brother, Mohammed, had been child prodigies; and both spoke several languages fluently. A man of many aliases. Vinny resides in the United States after infiltrating across the Mexican border. Aliases include Vinny, Ricky, Jean Philippe, and others.

PREFACE

“The vine is dried up, and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.”

Joel 1:1 830 B.C.

Pomegranate’s Café
Jerusalem, 33 Anno Domini

“**Y**ou denied me.”
The statement wasn’t what you might call *loud*, it was more like a loud whisper. It had come out of nowhere and seemed to resonate off the dingy limestone walls of the gloomy tea house. The approaching afternoon was another hot one in Israel. The four men stared at one another but said nothing.

“You blew it...”

This time the voice was a faint whisper, no resonating off walls; and it had an air of sadness to it, maybe disappointment. James looked around the room. The man at the front, he looked like a sheep herder, didn’t seem to hear anything. The two Roman Guards, the ones who had just scared the pomegranate stew out of all of them, didn’t take note.

John, Judas and Andrew said nothing, except John kept glancing at the ceiling. The voice seemed to have come from the ceiling, or *up there* somewhere.

“Did you hear that?” James whispered, but the three others said nothing.

Outside, the two guards continued their daily routine, walking the dusty streets of Jerusalem trying to keep the peace among the Jews. They were a testy bunch, them and their invisible god. Riots could happen anytime, but they were always met with brutal Roman street-judgment.

“What were you talking to those Jews about?” Romulus asked his friend and fellow guard. They had been soldiers and friends for ten years.

“Wanted to see if they were followers of the prophet pushed a beggar back to the edge of the dusty street.

“The man in the desert?”

“Yes Romulus, the man in the desert.”

They walked in silence, and the men thought they were getting too old to be Roman Guards. The equipment was heavy and hot, especially today with the Sun beating down. Neither man could remember a time when it had been so hot. Naomi, a Jewish *prophetess* said the prophet in the desert was causing the heat.

“You think it’s hot now?” Naomi would scream as she walked Jerusalem’s dusty streets, “Just wait until the man in the desert arrives. The whole world will burn when you kill this man with your stones and crucifixions. It will be a sad day for Judah when that happens. She will be no more.”

The two soldiers laughed at the woman as they headed for Herod’s Temple.

“What did the Jews say?”

“The same thing they all say Romulus, they deny knowing him. Who would blame them? They’re scared of the crazy rabbis, especially the Sadducees.”

“The Sadducees are brutal in their judgments, I’ll give them that,” Romulus said and wiped more sweat from his face. The helmet was heavy and soggy. He needed a vacation, a respite away from this dusty, god-forsaken place. He hated his duty in Jerusalem.

“I saw him you know,” Romulus said.

“Really? No, I didn’t know; but I’ve seen him too.”

Antonius seemed despondent, and Romulus thought it was the heat. The two guards paused at the corner of Mount of Olives Way and Pomegranate Street to stop a fight. Three Judahites were beating another, yelling that he was a blasphemer for believing the man in the desert. One of the three attackers picked up a rock about the size of a grapefruit and slammed it into the follower-of-the-prophet’s head. Blood flowed heavily. The Roman soldiers separated the fighters.

“Clean up the street you fools! Stop killing each other. What’s wrong with you?”

They would leave the arrest and judgment to the Jews, and the Pharisees would decide. They knew the Pharisees would decide on the side of the three attackers. They hated the desert preacher, and the jealousy showed with their constant whining and griping. The guards continued toward the Temple.

“What did you see Romulus? Did you see any of his so-called miracles? All the Jews, especially the Jews who follow him, are talking about this man. I heard one say there were too many miracles to count.”

“I heard one say he was the *King of the Jews*. Just wait until Herod hears that,” Antonius answered. *And maybe he is*, he

thought silently. He had heard of the predictions among the Jews, that a savior with a great sword would come free them; but this desert dweller didn't even carry a sword or armor.

"I saw him feed ten thousand people with two fish and five loaves of bread," Romulus whispered in hidden amazement, "maybe more. There were four or five thousand men, and then there were their women and children. He has these special followers, disciples or something like that; they serve him. They brought the preacher the loaves and the fish, he held them up in the air and stared at the sky and then..."

Antonius didn't doubt Romulus; he had seen a grand miracle with his very eyes.

"And then?" Antonius asked.

"And then..." another pause, "and then they fed all the people, thousands of them. I've never seen anything like that in my life."

"That's amazing, Romulus. You actually saw it? With your own eyes?"

A fire brigade passed the two guards, and they stopped to watch. Smoke was rising from an industrial kiln.

"That's not the amazing part. Not only did the preacher feed thousands with a couple of fish and loaves of bread, when they all left for home, the preacher's disciples picked up the remaining scraps."

"There were scraps? How could that be possible?" Antonius asked, eyes wide. The Jewish fire brigade was passing buckets of water down the street to the fire, one bucket at a time. Fires were a problem.

"It's not possible my friend. That's why it's so amazing. Twelve baskets full. They collected twelve baskets of scraps

when the fish and loaves hadn't even filled one basket to begin with!"

They continued their watch, and the Sun scorched their bare arms. The brass handles of their close-combat swords were hot as fire.

"Yes, not possible," repeated Antonius. "What I saw wasn't possible either. I had duty in one of the small villages, trying to protect Matthew the tax collector from the Jews. A man came running up and told Matthew that 'Y'shua,' that's what the Jews call the preacher, had just brought a young girl back to life, some ruler's daughter.

"Well, I didn't believe that one for even a second. The preacher raised a dead person? I didn't buy it. But then I saw him walking down the trail just outside the village, and all these Jews were following him, listening to every word. Some threw flower petals on him as he walked by.

"This village I was working in had two blind men, blind since they were born. The men looked like they might be in their late thirties. The two heard the crowd and started yelling like crazy."

"What did they yell?" Romulus asked.

"Have mercy on us, son of David. They kept calling him son of David instead of Y'shua, not sure why. Anyway, he asked the blind men if they really believed he could heal them, and they said 'yes.' He touched their eyelids with his thumbs; and faster than a heavy Roman sword can sever a head, the men could see."

"Really?"

"Really, Romulus. The two men were jubilant and dancing around, the Jews were dancing around. It was wild."

“I can imagine. Never seeing anything for thirty years and in an instant, you are cured. That’s amazing too, Antonius. This preacher is not of this world.”

“The Jews were asking each other, ‘has anyone ever cured a blind man in our whole history?’ Apparently the coming savior, the messiah if you will, was supposed to heal the blind. All the Jews are talking about it.”

“I bet that makes Caiaphas happy, that snake. Those Sadducees are jealous of anyone who steals their attention, so they especially hate this preacher. I guess they must think the common man can’t recognize this savior, only the priesthood.”

“I will watch this man, Antonius. He has a power from his gods.”

“That’s the strange part,” Antonius replied. “He only speaks of a single, invisible god, his ‘father’ in heaven. I would like to know this father in heaven.”

The men continued their march around Jerusalem, and a storm was rising in the west. Rain began to pour outside the Pomegranate Café.

The four followers of Y’shua, still sitting at the table in Pomegranates Café were sullen and watched the rain fall outside the café, large drops dimpling the dirt. Soon the dusty streets would be muddy.

“I heard it James, a voice. Just as the two guards walked out the door. Who was it do you think?” John asked.

James and John were brothers, the sons of Zebedee. James was the level-headed son, and John was the mischievous one. They had followed Y’shua right from the start, the first time he called them. Now they had denied even knowing him. The day had been hot, but now the humidity rose. The four men were silent, contemplative.

“Do you think the guard really wanted to know more about the preacher? I think he did. We should have been a witness,” John pouted.

Zebedee had raised his children to be honest, direct and as helpful to others as possible. Sons James and John had followed Jesus when he first called them, right after he had chosen Peter to be his first disciple; but John seemed to have formed a special relationship. The preacher had told him *things*.

“Does it bother you that the rabbis hate you?” John had asked Y’shua. “I don’t know why they do, but they do? They’ve seen your works with their very own eyes.”

“They are blinded by Satan,” Y’shua had explained. “They believe the messiah is coming on a big white horse to rescue them, but the messiah doesn’t even know who they are. They will not inherit eternal life, I tell you now. That is the gift, to live forever without sickness and death. This is what I offer.

“The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.”

John had memorized those words that day and often thought about what the preacher had said. *Was Y’shua saying he would be the final judge?*

“I think the Roman soldiers will believe in Y’shua before the arrogant rabbis do. They are always worried about their ‘position’,” John said to the others.

The rain continued; and the four apostles finally left the café, their toes squishing in the mud with each step. A fire burned in the distance.

PROLOGUE

Jeff walked down the stairs toward the dark room, sweat beginning to bead on his covered arms. He enjoyed the beat of the Reggae. The air conditioning just couldn't keep up with the record temperatures, and he subconsciously slapped at another mosquito. By the time he was halfway down, he was perspiring profusely; and he subconsciously wiped his brow on the sleeve of his black, long-sleeved jersey.

Exiting the stairwell, he found himself in a vast room, dark but bathed in different colored lights and a mirror ball suspended over a mirrored dance floor. Ahhh, to be thirty again.

He spotted a familiar face but couldn't place the dark-skinned man. He started a conversation.

"The A/C must be broken." Jeff knew it wasn't broken, just inadequate for 106 degrees; or as his aunt might have said, "It's pretty daggone hot for a January mornin'," and it was.

"Pardon moi?" The familiar-looking man answered with a French accent. He was tall, maybe six-four with black hair and well-dressed in a dark suit, dark like his skin; and Jeff thought the man might be from the Caribbean. *Where have I seen this guy?*

"It's hot in here," Jeff said to the French-speaking man. "What's your name? You look familiar."

"It's always hot down here. You haven't been here before?"

The man ignored the question.

“No,” Jeff answered, scanning the vast room and was awed by the ancient artwork that graced the walls. “I don’t really even know where I am.”

Jeff felt light-headed, and his eyes fluttered. The man had the darkest eyes he had ever seen, and there seemed to be a tint of red in the center of each pupil. He blinked twice and rubbed his eyes, not believing what he saw. Looking back in the man’s eyes, there was no redness this time. He thought it must have been a reflection of one of the tiny red, rotating lights.

“Aren’t you hot in that suit?” Jeff asked as he again wiped his brow and then rolled up his sleeves.

He didn’t remember putting on the long-sleeved shirt and wondered why he had. The weather had been hot for months, maybe years; but this might be an oncoming fever. His head spun like a witch’s brew in a large stir-pot, and thoughts of Spanish Flu frolicked briefly in his mind. *Where am I?*

Glancing around the room, Jeff spotted the bar in the middle, circular like the one in Park Place Café had been... before the explosion, with one exception. The only patrons sitting on the barstools were women, women with short skirts and long legs highlighted by the soft neon lighting circling the underside edge of the bar. They were all young and beautiful.

“Would you like to play pool?” the Frenchman asked.

“What?”

“Would you like to play a game of pool?” The man repeated.

“I guess. I haven’t played for a while. I’ve never been to a bar where there were no men.”

“This is a different type of place, monsieur. You are fortunate to have found it, it’s like heaven mon ami.”

The Frenchman nodded toward the electronic dart board in the corner. "See there are a couple of other men, playing darts over there."

"What's your name?" Jeff asked the man for the second time.

"Jamal. My friends call me Jamal the Jamaican, but I was born in Montserrat."

Jeff thought that made no sense, but neither did this whole scenario. Jamaicans and Montserradians didn't usually speak French, especially flawless French. English or Patois, a Creole flare added to English were the common languages.

The hair on the back of his neck bristled as he walked to the pool table, the 9-ball rack in a perfect diamond at one end of the black, felt tabletop. He chose a cue and chalked the tip. He hadn't played pool in years.

"You break, monsieur," Jamal said as he grabbed a cue of his own.

With a crack, the cue ball slammed into the bright orange 1-ball in front, a perfect break; and the 9-ball plowed into the corner pocket, game over.

"Wow, monsieur, you won that one quickly. Your break again." Jamal racked the balls again into a perfect diamond. "Would you like to make it interesting?"

Jeff never forgot a face and knew he had seen the man before. He vaguely recognized the French dialect as memories stirred in the depths of his mind, like a computer searching for a file, only faster. *Where have I seen him?*

"How interesting?"

"Maybe one thousand dollars, monsieur?"

Jeff reached in his pocket without thinking and pulled out a roll of hundred-dollar bills. He had no idea where the money

came from, because he carried very little cash as a rule. The sweat continued to bead on his tanned forehead, and the hair on the back of his neck began to settle. He found the room warm, beautiful and quite comfortable. The reggae had morphed into soft mood music.

Jamal the Jamaican backed away from the table and waited for Jeff to break again. Jeff chalked the tip of his cue stick, leaned over the black felt tabletop and took aim. The cue ball again slammed into the 1-ball; and the yellow-striped nine made the journey to the right corner pocket, as before.

“Unbelievable, monsieur; two in a row. What can I say?”

Jamal handed Jeff ten crisp one hundred dollar bills and again racked for 9-ball.

Jeff’s smile wound around his face, and he couldn’t remember ever making the 9-ball on the break twice in a row. A crowd began to gather around the table, all beautiful women except one balding man with a pudgy red face and perspiring heavily.

Jeff aimed the cue ball once again, same result. After six breaks, six wins and six thousand dollars Jamal suggested they have a shot at darts and led Jeff over to the dart board in the corner. Jeff had never played darts and turned toward the bar for a drink when he nearly ran into the small brunette. She handed him a glass of Duckhorn, his favorite merlot. He felt *giddy*.

“You go first, my friend,” Jamal repeated and smiled broadly, his white teeth nearly glowing.

Jeff picked up the small dart with the sharp steel tip, took aim and *Bingo!* Bull’s eye. Three more throws resulted in three more bull’s eyes. The crowd applauded as Jeff’s head continued swimming, and the brunette rushed over and embraced him as her lips found his. Jeff felt faint and swayed to the music. *Did*

someone spike my drink? He looked in the beauty's eyes and said, "I must've died and gone to heaven."

"But you don't believe in heaven, Mr. Ross."

Jeff was sure he hadn't mentioned his last name, nor had he mentioned his religious views.

"Care to try bowling?" Jamal asked.

"Sure why not? Does this bar have a bowling alley too?"

The brunette led the way as memories of Samarra passed subliminally through his spinning head and then faded. Jeff wrapped his arm tightly around the young woman's small waist. She reciprocated, molding her body into his and lightly kissed the back of his neck.

"You go first this time."

Jamal balanced the fifteen-pound navy blue bowling ball, took three steps forward and the ball began its journey to the back of the ally, knocking all the balls down except the two in the back corners. His second ball missed both pins. Jeff gulped the glass of wine, and this time a tall blonde handed him another Duckhorn.

"How did I find this place?" he asked out loud. The crowd laughed and celebrated Jeff's good fortune.

"You're a lucky man, Mr. Ross," and Jeff didn't remember telling Jamal his last name either; but what the hell, he was having a blast.

"How do you know my last name?" Jeff slurred, slightly.

"We met in New York a couple of years ago, Mr. Ross. You chartered my medical helicopter for a tour of New York City."

It all came back to him. The medical helicopter was sitting idle at the airfield in New Jersey, and Jeff had asked the dark-

skinned man how he might charter the machine. Jamal turned out to be the owner. What a small world. *What a strange world?*

Jeff took the first ball, inserted his fingers and it was a perfect fit. The ball seemed to glow as it journeyed down the lane, edging closer and closer to the left gutter. Miraculously the spinning ball began a slow curve to the right and hit the lead pin just slightly left of center, a perfect strike.

The first strike was followed by more, and before he knew it he had bowled the first perfect game in his entire life. That perfect game was followed by another, and Jeff began to get bored. Winning every time was not fun.

“Let’s get out of this place,” the brunette cooed in Jeff’s ear as she stood on her tiptoes. Jeff was a head taller.

“Alrighty then. Where too?” he asked, and the girl again found his lips. Making out in public would have normally embarrassed him; but he found himself enjoying it like never before. He felt like a thirty-year-old man.

Walking out the back door and into the night, the royal blue 1954 Cadillac Pininfarina waited by the curb, motor running. Jeff opened the door for the young lady and couldn’t remember if he had asked for her name. He also couldn’t remember starting the car, but who cared? The night was young and the Moon, full; and he had no concerns about driving.

Jeff looked into the night sky; and the thought suddenly hit him; the Moon was no longer pink and had no rings. *And where were the meteorites lighting the night sky as had become the norm?*

Exiting the parking lot Jeff turned left onto Lukeville Highway, and the Cadillac purred. Jeff’s pride swelled at the magnificent one-of-a-kind machine.

“Where to?”

“My place, of course,” she cooed and began to massage the back of his neck as he headed down the highway bordered by large fields of yellow daffodils on each side. The bright yellow flowers seemed to glow.

Six hours later, Jeff’s eyes opened; and he tried to remember the night’s events, something about 9-ball, and darts and bowling and... the beautiful brunette. He hadn’t had this much fun in a long time, from what he could remember; but he suddenly felt guilt at the romantic encounter that just fell into his lap. Could he have died and gone to heaven? He had no idea where he was as he tried to recall the events.

He turned over and slid up against the woman’s back, her long hair flowing across the satin pillow. He snuggled up to her closely like two spoons in his Mom’s silverware drawer. Her scent was stimulating as he whispered in her ear, “This can’t really be heaven. I haven’t seen St. Peter.”

The woman slowly turned over and said in a gravelly voice, “What makes you think you’re not in hell?”

Jeff’s eyes opened wide, and his heart stopped beating as he looked into the woman’s face; but it wasn’t the face of the woman from the night before. Saliva drooled from both corners of her mouth; and her beautiful white teeth were now rotted, with several missing. Her face cracked with deep wrinkles, wrinkles like he had never seen, even in National Geographic. She growled like a rabid coyote, and her eyes burned red.

The growling woman who had been a beautiful brunette just a few hours earlier pounced in an instant and started gnawing Jeff’s face, biting hard and ripping off his right ear. He screamed in pain and rolled over, swinging his fists violently at the woman-monster and fell out of bed. As he hit hard on the

ceramic-tiled floor, he heard a chirp in the distance but couldn't figure out where the sound was coming from.

Coyote-woman pounced out of the bed, landing on all fours as Jeff scrambled out the bedroom door and down the hallway; but the hallway went on-and-on with no end in sight. She bit at his heels as his fist slammed into her... *its* face; and the hideous woman was stunned for a moment, a moment long enough for Jeff to find a door. He slammed the door after him and headed across the kitchen, out the back door and into the driveway. This time there was no Cadillac waiting with the motor running.

Blood flowed down his neck as he felt for his ear; but there was no ear. There was only a hole where his right ear had once adorned his handsome face.

The coyote-woman bounded out the back door in a gallop, chasing Jeff's bloody body down the driveway and into the street. He never saw the large garbage truck barreling down the road until it slammed into his body and threw him under the truck, dragging him underneath and down the road.

He somehow heard the chirp again and suddenly the pain was gone, the truck was gone and the gnarling coyote beast was silent after one last comment, "This is not heaven, Jeffrey Ross."

Lying on the hard pavement in a foggy mist, Jeff's heart continued to beat rapidly and sweat poured from his clammy skin. Another chirp and his body jerked in pain.

"Jeff!"

Someone, or some *thing*, was shaking his body; and he tried to scream. His vocal chords didn't cooperate, and the scream was nothing more than a whimper.

"JEFF! WAKE UP!"

This time it was a shout. He opened his eyes as the pavement became the soft confines of a king-sized bed; and he recognized Samarra's face, a concerned look in her almond-shaped eyes.

"You're having a bad dream, honey? What were you dreaming? I've never seen you so frightened."

Sweat rolled off of Jeff's body in small rivulets. Samarra's words were soothing, and his heart rate slowed again toward normalcy.

"What were you dreaming, honey?" and Samarra began to cry as she held him close in her arms. "It's only a dream."

The smoke alarm chirped again, asking mercifully for a new battery.

CHAPTER ONE

“Dmitry, are we set my friend?” The French air was stuffy and warm, too warm for early morning. A mist dripped from the gray clouds above, and Mohammed thought about brother *Vinny* and smiled at his American alias. He wondered if the weather was as strange in America as it was in Europe. The hailstorms had killed millions of animals and livestock in France and had wiped out several villages, pounding them into the ground.

The Russian arms purveyor had proven to be a friend indeed, at least for the enemies of the West. *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*. The café in Monaco was small and private, a single TV mounted to the cracked-plaster wall on the left.

“I hope so Mohammed. I have worked hard for you. It will be New Year’s Eve tomorrow, and I hope your plan works out for you.”

Dmitry referred to *The Preacher* by his Muslim name, which annoyed Mohammed greatly; but he made no comment.

“I hope in the coming year you will become a Muslim, Dmitry. You need Allah in your life.” Mohammed laughed.

“I doubt it Mohammed. I don’t believe in religion. You know that. I believe in money.”

The Russian smiled and sipped his mocha-vodka. Mohammed remained silent, as another CNN newsbreak flashed

across the television screen. The two men read the scrolling message along the bottom of the screen.

“The Mississippi River remains closed for shipping due to the continuing drought, the worst since records have been kept in the United States. The National Weather Service said there was an unusual shift in the jet stream and has issued a severe storm warning for numerous tornados and downdraft winds from the Midwest to the Northeast, and large hailstorms are again forecast along the Canadian-Minnesota border where several thousand cattle were killed yesterday from the large hailstones.

“The largest naval buildup since World War II continues in the South China Sea and the Pacific as world powers try to prevent war between China and Japan over disputed islands and the surrounding fishing rights as food is becoming more and more scarce, largely because of unprecedented red tides. Red tide algal blooms are highly toxic and often make the water look like blood.

“Yesterday a Russian destroyer fired four rounds over the bow of a Japanese ship as a warning, and the United States responded by sinking the Russian ship. Tensions are high, and World War III is the fear throughout the world as sabers continue to rattle to the north of Israel. Israel’s military remains on high-alert.

“Meteor showers have been forecast for eastern areas of Europe...”

It was early in the day, and the café was nearly empty as the two men sat in the window booth, watching the few tourists go by, most wearing surgical facemasks. Dmitry pondered the coming events but with no guilt in his soul. Smuggling the fifteen thermonuclear weapons into Europe and Russia from Iran and Pakistan had proven easier than he thought, but

Pakistan's Taliban militants had made it simple. All it took was dinar, and Dmitry had lots of dinars.

"So what's the plan?" the Russian asked.

The Preacher knew the arms dealer well, had become good friends over the past few years; but he had learned to never trust anyone with details, especially an infidel. *The enemy of my enemy is my friend.*

"We have plans, my friend. That's all I can say."

"They're big ones," Dmitry commented concerning the nuclear weapons, "much larger than the ones used on the Japs. Be sure and show them respect. One of these bad boys, from the right altitude, can flatten a city. Every man, woman and child within 5 miles will be vapor.

"You know, if you be patient the Russians and the Chicoms will take care of the United States and Europe for you."

The Preacher wasn't worried. He would surely sacrifice his life for Allah and Paradise, and the seventy-two virgins. Mohammed wished Vinny had been able to obtain one of the large-yield weapons, but his dear brother would have to make do with the numerous briefcase nukes. The Islamic Chechen Brotherhood had three of the large nukes, and St. Petersburg and Moscow would soon be no more. The new year would bring the beginning of a new world, Insha'Allah.

"What do you mean, Dmitry?"

"The Chinese and Russians are talking about taking the U.S. out, a joint venture if you will. They believe that the U.S. sent most, if not all their nuclear weapons to destroy the Dark Comet. They also know that half the U.S. submarine fleet is grounded because of the flu."

"And this from Chili: The ALMA observatory has reported two asteroids that appear on a close-encounter with Earth. It is

believed these asteroids are relatively small, less than a half-mile wide and came from the Kuiper Belt, well beyond our solar system.

“Dr. Chad Myers at Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland said in an interview yesterday with Kari Vermi of OLNN that activity departing the Kuiper Belt was ‘disturbing’ and probably caused by gravitational tugs from planetary alignments. Stay tuned for updates and have a nice day. I’m Condi Zimmerman.”



“These are big-ass balloons, Vinny.”

Vinny laughed because they were. Nearly three feet in diameter, the flat-black balloons seemed huge when compared to the normal balloons one sees in parades, except Macy’s.

Vinny thought about Allah and the gifts of knowledge that Allah had bestowed upon him. It was Macy’s after all that gave him this idea. He reminisced and entered the world of his childhood when, as a young boy his parents took him to the Macy’s Christmas Parade.

He had fallen in love with the parade and dug into its history and how so many balloons became a part. He had been at the previous year’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and he wondered why the stupid Americans changed the name from Christmas Parade to Thanksgiving Parade? *Why would they shun Jesus?* But once an infidel, always an infidel.

Vinny looked out the floor-to-ceiling glass windows of the luxurious penthouse suite and could see the new building in the distance.

The Grand Opening of New York City’s “newest office tower” would be tonight, New Year’s Eve; and the planned

celebration would be “one of a kind” according to Condi Zimmerman the news-babe. She would certainly be right about that, Vinny thought out loud.

“What did you say, Vinny?”

“Nothing. Just talking to yourself.”

“Myself.”

“What?”

“Never mind, Vinny. You just messed up the saying,” and the three men in the suite laughed loudly; because Vinny always messed up the sayings. This would be a day to rejoice, praise Allah. Several of the Great Satan’s major cities would not likely forget this New Year’s Eve fireworks show.

As the Sun crawled westward toward the horizon, New York City became the city of lights; and the festivities could be heard on the streets below. New York City continued to “move on” after the tragedy of the *9/11 Event* as it was now known. Just six more hours, Vinny thought, until the midnight hour.

This would be the night that the world’s Christians would know the feared Tribulation had begun, at least as far as he was concerned.

Vinny scanned the large living room, dimly lit with window coverings closed, annoyed by the loud hiss of the helium tanks as the balloons filled to maximum capacity. Only a few of the large balloons would be needed. He had researched the helium lift effect and discovered it would take hundreds of regular-sized helium balloons to lift a sixty-pound bomb, the weight of the two briefcase nukes. It would only take sixteen of the large black, Mylar balloons. He smiled and was proud that he had researched thoroughly, had “done his schoolwork.”

Vinny turned on the Weather Channel to check wind speed and direction; but he had planned well and had all bases covered, no matter what the wind direction.

What was happening in the penthouse suite of the new eighty-story *5th Avenue Tower One* was happening in three more penthouse suites surrounding Manhattan. No matter what direction the wind blew, one nuclear weapons package would surely explode in the night sky, possibly all eight, a quarter-mile above the New Year's Eve celebrations.

With the sixteenth balloon finally inflated, the room was filled with large round, black objects, enough to carry the two briefcase nukes to the appropriate height, based on the current barometric pressure and wind speeds.

The packages were secured, the bombs wired to explode simultaneously at midnight unless the balloons reached an altitude in excess of 1,800 feet. The detonators would activate based on altitude. If the balloons gained too much altitude, the eight bombs would explode as programmed, regardless of the time. With an explosive force of sixteen thousand tons of dynamite raining down terror, debris and despair on the infidels below, there would be no Times Square or New York Stock Exchange opening tomorrow.

Vinny knew there was no assurance that all eight nukes would explode properly. Some of the trigger mechanisms may have reached the end of their shelf life, but only one would need to work. A single 2K nuke over Times Square and Wall Street would damage or destroy the bridges, and Manhattan would be a ghost town. Thousands would be dead. Vinny loved explosions and smiled, but he would not be around to see this one. Allah had other plans for him.

“Are we set?” Vinny asked.

“We’re set, Vinny. All we have to do is get the packages to the balcony.”

“The balloons will be no trouble. The French doors are two meters wide. Keep all the lights off. You know what to do. May Allah bless you Jamal, and your brothers.”

Vinny finished the final instructions to his fellow warriors, left the room and took the elevator to Parking Level Three. Exiting the elevator, he glanced around the parking garage. No one in sight. He remotely unlocked the rental car’s doors; but before he could reach the car, he heard the sound.



Mohammed sent the email from Viva Café, a favorite coffee shop just outside Naples. The brown vans, all painted to look like delivery trucks, were parked and ready.

“You need to get those things in the air,” the Russian had instructed Mohammed; but that had been impossible with the large thermonuclear weapons, now armed.

The multi-megaton bombs weighed far too much to lift by balloons or small aircraft, and they had no missile delivery systems. If the nukes could be a couple of thousand feet high when they exploded, the effect would be more devastating; but it wouldn’t matter. A 5-megaton bomb exploding on the top deck of a large parking garage in downtown St. Petersburg would still blow the Russian city to China. Like brother Vinny, Mohammed loved explosions. He continued to type.

Is the chicken prepared? Mohammed waited.

It’s finger lickin’ good, came the response.

Mohammed repeated the procedure until confirmations came in from all outposts. *This has been too easy*, Mohammed thought and smiled. Allah was willing.

Leaving the late-night coffee shop, the only other customer recognized him.

“Preacher!” the lady shouted in French.

Mohammed stopped and turned to face the lady. He liked being called *The Preacher*.

“Buon giorno, signora!” The Preacher answered in near-perfect Italian and gave the lady a warm smile, but he had little time to spare and explained that he was on his way for a children’s New Year’s benefit. It was already January 1 in Italy.

Mohammed apologized and hurried out the door of the dank coffee shop, the TV still spewing news about meteor showers in Indonesia. Approaching his bicycle, the ground suddenly but gently shook beneath his feet. In the distance a plume of smoke rose from the top of Mt. Vesuvius.

Mohammed wasn’t worried, because the volcano had been dormant since 1944; but still... he recalled what Vesuvius had done to the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 A.D. Sixteen thousand dead in a flash. The city was buried under thick ash until 1748 when explorers rediscovered the ancient metropolis. The ash flow had happened so quickly, buildings and skeletons remained intact underneath, some in the fetal position.

Just three hours until midnight in New York and the beginning of one of Paris’ biggest shopping days.



Vinny knew the sound all too well as a shell slammed into the chamber of the shotgun.

“Gimme the keys, a-hole.”

The two olive-skinned men approached Vinny, their pants nearly dragging the ground; and they reminded him of Atlanta’s infamous Pants-on-the-Ground Gang. He didn’t try to stifle his laugh.

“Perdóneme?” Vinny answered in Spanish. “Hey man, what’s with your pants. They look so stupid dragging the ground.”

Vinny laughed out loud.

“Pardon *this* kemosabe. Gimme the keys.” The assailant’s partner stayed in the shadows as kemosabe-man raised the shotgun. In a flash, Vinny disarmed the young man and slammed the gun into his skull three times, hard. The kid hit with a sickening thud and blood poured from his ear. Vinny took the stiletto out of his holster, slammed it through the man’s neck and repeated, “Kemosabe this.”

The assailant’s friend disappeared into the darkness of the garage, and Vinny decided not to pursue. He entered the non-descript automobile and drove the white Hyundai out of the garage, turned left and headed for the southbound freeway. He would be well on his way to Atlanta before the nukes exploded in New York City, Charleston, Miami and San Diego.

Six hours until midnight.

Vinny began to sing out loud the Wilson Picket tune... *I’m gonna wait ‘til the midnight hour*. He merged onto the freeway, aimed the small car south and sang like a rock star.



The young mother, tall and thin in stature and dressed in a blue running suit was anxious with anticipation and held her

daughter's hand tightly. Like mother-like daughter, they were blessed with the same hair, brown with golden highlights and lots of curls and ringlets. She wished so much her husband could be with them for the night's celebration; but he was one of New York's finest, and the Port Authority would be busy tonight. In less than a minute the large crystal ball would begin its descent in Times Square and the din of the New Year's Eve crowd nearly drowned out the approaching sirens.

"Look at all the balloons, Momma?"

The small girl, maybe eight, tugged on her mother's sweatshirt adorned with Notre Dame across the front. The weather was almost muggy for New Year's Eve in the Big Apple.

"They're everywhere, honey!"

"No, Momma, I mean *those* balloons. Way up there!"

The small girl pointed skyward toward the new office tower. The mother looked up but saw nothing, when suddenly one of the streaming search lights briefly lit several large, dark balloons floating high above the vibrant crowd. She was amused at the large size but thought nothing of it.

"There're more over there, Momma," shouted the small girl, again pointing skyward but in the opposite direction. Momma looked up and counted two more, at least it looked like two; and then the balloons disappeared as they ascended into the night sky. The sirens grew louder, approaching from every direction.

"Three...Two... One..." The noisy crowd was the largest in history, and they jubilantly shouted the countdown. At the strike of twelve, the crystal ball began to move.



Goddard Space Flight Center
Greenbelt, Maryland

The gray walled laboratory wasn't stifling but close as the Maryland temperature had hit yet another record high, eighty-seven degrees on a windy New Year's Eve. The winds were blowing at a constant forty to forty-five miles per hour because of the unusual dip in the jet stream.

The two large windows in the laboratory let the darkness stream in, fought off by the numerous LED lighting fixtures recessed in the white-tiled ceiling. To Chad Myers, the night's darkness wasn't so dark, highlighted by the dark blue but transparent colors of the jet stream high above. Sometimes his ability to see the wind was more burden than gift from God.

Wall-mounted monitors surrounded the space, tracking several newly-discovered near-Earth objects approaching from the Kuiper Belt beyond the solar system. Chad and The Admiral stared at the NEO data, mesmerized by the dismal analysis; but both knew the immediate problem was the large rock heading their way from the Moon.

When and if the large, lunar space rock hit the Ross Ice Shelf as predicted, the Antarctic would never be the same; and all indications were it would be a direct hit in less than five days.

"I'm glad it's a small one," The Admiral whispered, mostly to himself. He was surprised this asteroid hadn't generated all the hype that the Dark Comet had; but then, they just discovered this space rock two days earlier. Not much warning. "At least we have all the base personnel evacuated, thanks to calmer-than-usual weather in the southern hemisphere."

“It ain’t that small, Boss,” Chadbo said matter-of-factly. “Nearly a hundred meters. That’s a football field, a lot of mass.”

“Well,” The Admiral continued and glanced at the large flatscreen on the wall that monitored the Moon and her evolving set of rings. “I’m just glad Antarctica is uninhabited.”

“How many ships are in the Pacific?” Chad asked. “The news says it’s the largest naval buildup since World War II. Looks like China’s gonna get even with the Japs.”

The animosity between Japan and China wasn’t new news. It had been going on since the end of the Second World War.

“A bunch, why? Four aircraft carrier groups in the Pacific and South China Sea.”

Chadbo Myers had always been a little on the wild side, especially for his age and was known to occasionally imbibe in illegal smokable substances and vodka tonics; but he was a brilliant scientist and specialist in the world of near-Earth objects, those large and larger rocks floating through space, potential disasters for Earth and her moon. Most of the NEOs came from the asteroid belt, a cloud of various-sized orbiting rocks between Mars and Jupiter, but nearly all of the newly-discovered objects were coming from well beyond Jupiter, a long way from Earth.

The Admiral and Chad had been friends for many years and were both old enough to get senior discounts at the grocery store on Wednesdays. Everyone who knew Chadbo knew he was about as laid back as laid back could be. Today however, he looked worried, his ever balding head amiss with a few gray hair sprigs aiming for the facility’s tiled ceiling. He was restudying the data when the power went off again. The UPS backups kept the electronics going until the generators cranked up.

“That’s becoming an everyday event, Justin.”

Chad never called The Admiral by his first name unless he was distressed, and Justin made note.

“And we’re gonna have a hell of a disaster when and if.”

“At least no casualties, Chadbo. McMurdo Station is empty, so there’s no one left. What are you getting at?”

“The wave. If this asteroid hits the Ross Ice Shelf, it could possibly collapse. That would mean almost four hundred miles of solid ice falling into the sea, ker-plunk. The tsunami will be enormous, you can bet on that. It will not be a good day for the beach.”

The lights flickered, and the winds tried to find an opening into the lab.

“I hadn’t even thought about that,” The Admiral said, rubbing his chin; and lightning flashed outside the window, in the distance. “You don’t think it will just penetrate the ice shelf, like a straw can go through a potato if it hits fast enough?”

“Oh, it will definitely penetrate the ice; but remember, ninety percent of the ice is under water. The part we see is the ten percent above water. It’s the largest ice mass in the world. If it collapses, there could be a tsunami of...”

Chad’s voice faded in thought.

“How big?” The Admiral asked.

“Oh, I don’t know, Justin; maybe a mile?”

“What? You’re kidding.”

“Afraid not. The massive displacement of water would send a gigantic wave from Antarctica through the Pacific, South China Sea and Indian Ocean. Hell, it could theoretically cause tsunamis all over the world. Hawaii will be completely swamped except for the mountains, as well as Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, any island community. You wouldn’t want to be vacationing in Bora Bora.”

“Should we be evacuating the islands? Has Hawaii been warned?”

“Are you kidding? How would we evacuate the Hawaiian island chain in time; and what if it goes straight through the ice and there is no tsunami. This is one of those ‘damned if you do; damned if you don’t’ kinda things I guess, know what I mean?”

“But if the Ross Ice Shelf does collapse, a lot of people will die.”

“Yeah Admiral, you’re right. And every ship in those oceans will sink, even the aircraft carriers. They will sink or wash inland, possibly for miles.”

CHAPTER TWO

One Year Earlier

“This message is not for the United States but for the world. Your waters will be poisoned, your streams defiled. A big war is looming just over the horizon; and when the Day of God’s Wrath comes, there will be no unbelievers.”

Chuck Hutz

Jeffrey Ross drove the new, blue Cadillac south on Peachtree Industrial Boulevard toward Atlanta, dodging one of several potholes and admiring the Caddy’s throaty exhaust sound. It wasn’t quite as throaty as the Nissan GT-R he once owned; but then, the Cadillac wasn’t really new. She was a beauty though.

The 1954 Cadillac Cabriolet Pininfarina was royal blue, a real head-turner; and he liked that, always had. He reminisced about the Caddy, the only one of its kind ever produced, well worth the million he paid for it. He knew he had to have it when he learned about it on a *History Channel* special two years earlier.

As Peachtree Industrial became Peachtree Street, the traffic was noticeably light, the streets almost desolate. The top was down, and the air was pungent. Homeless people lined the sidewalks outside the boarded up stores in what once was some of Atlanta’s finest shopping districts along Peachtree Street.

It wasn't a perfect morning. Mornings were never perfect anymore, with record heat in most parts of the world, and the other parts suffering through record cold and blizzards; and then there were the plague and the meteors. *I believe I have a plague in my mind* he would often think.

At 9:00 A.M. on a perfect February morning it wouldn't have been eighty-seven degrees. With the convertible top down, the attention-seeking Cadillac's air conditioning was working full-force. Jeff's smile grew in spite of the stench. On the right, in a small parking lot behind Dunkin Donuts, a gang of kids dressed in black were kicking something... or someone.

Looking to the left after hearing a ruckus, he was startled at what he saw, a man's body lying in the gutter with three men and a woman going through his pockets. The dead man's swollen, dark face was covered with boils; and blood spilled from his gaping mouth. This must be from the mutated virus Samarra told him about, some kind of strange derivative of the Spanish Flu, as though the non-mutated version hadn't been sufficient. That version had only killed an estimated one million U.S. citizens, and now a more virulent form had apparently paid a visit. The four thugs would soon have dark boils on their faces, and the beat goes on.

"The mutated version seems to have characteristics of the 1918 Spanish Flu and black pox," and Jeff recalled Samarra's warning... and her guilt.

Seeing two UPS trucks and a couple of cars, Jeff was relieved to finally see other traffic once he entered Buckhead. He turned right onto Peachtree Battle and into the neighborhood where the "Old Money" lived, as well as Samarra. He couldn't wait to see her and felt his heart skip a beat. He tried to convince himself it was possible that she was just as beautiful on the inside as the outside. He wasn't sure of that possibility, because

she was *BF*; and he laughed at the memory from his Navy days, *Blemish Free*.

Listening to Bob Marley on the radio, Jeff was in a good mood today for some reason, maybe the new ride or maybe the new fiancée; maybe all of the above. Life suddenly seemed to be “good” for a change, but he did remember what Abe had told him.

“Things are changing, Jeff. The *Bible* talked about a lot of this stuff, these plagues and hailstorms and droughts; the wars in the Middle East. For the unbeliever, things are going to get really bad. They don’t believe a final war was foretold to happen in Israel. They haven’t read the Book.”

Jeff had a lot of respect for his good friend Abe the Bartender but still found it odd that Abe was both a Jew and a Christian. Abe certainly seemed like a pretty smart guy, but who could possibly believe all those biblical stories? Jeff had taken note of some of Abe’s comments but still found the “one God” teachings of the Jews, Christians and Muslims to be mostly mythology. Any belief in gods was mythology he reassured himself, but he was perplexed that his feelings seemed to be changing a little. *What if the stories are true?* He erased the thought.

The previous two years since Melissa’s death had been difficult, but now... He still missed his ex-wife, and her death would always haunt him as he remembered watching Melissa wash over the side of the hotel roof on Grand Cayman Island the day of the Great Wave.

He slowed the Caddy to take the turn onto Tuxedo Drive, and the hair on the back of Jeff’s stiffened as he saw the white car pull out of Samarra’s driveway. He had seen the car before, or one awfully similar. Only briefly did he think of following

the car as he rushed down the quarter-mile driveway and screeched to a halt in front of the main entrance.

Starting up the stairs of the palatial Southern home, listed in “Atlanta’s Most Historical Homes” magazine, Jeff first noticed that the double-front doors were both open. *Is that blood on the wall?* He knew it was though, and his bright mood suddenly dimmed.

Where is Harley he asked himself, realizing that his Great Dane would most likely be outside if the doors were open. Samarra usually kept the dog with her, ever since the hate mail started coming in. The adrenaline pumped through his body, and the retired Navy SEAL removed the Glock from his back holster.

Three steps from the top, Jeff’s heart stopped. Harley the Great Dane was now Harley the deceased Great Dane as he lay in a gray heap at the base of the doorway, a fresh pool of blood still flowing heavily from his bullet-riddled body.

CHAPTER THREE

Goddard Space Flight Center
Greenbelt, Maryland

“**W**hat the hell is that?”
The Admiral spoke quietly, but few were around. Most of the staff were either quarantined at home with the flu or were already dead. He turned away from the image on the screen and rubbed his unshaved chin, a habit. This was the second time in less than a year that he had seen the strange phenomenon.

Could stars really just disappear? In a few short months? Were they burning out? He perspired more than normal, the air conditioning barely keeping up with yet another record heat wave. The early January temperature was a muggy 88 degrees, and it was still morning.

“What’s *what*?” Chad asked, walking into the small gray cubicle in the near-Earth object lab with an image of his own. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead on the flowered sleeve of his loud, Hawaiian shirt.

“Look at this, Chad; and tell me what you think.”

Chad Myers was an NEO expert, one of his many areas of expertise. Ex-Navy himself, Chad, The Admiral and a select group of other senior citizens in their clique watched the world situation closely. The world had suddenly gone from the wrath of terrorists on Earth to the wrath of Mother Nature in outer

space. Chad scratched his balding head, sipped his lemonade and spoke.

“Stars have disappeared before Admiral. Maybe due to the age of the universe, maybe they’re going supernova on us. Many astronomers believe the Star of Bethlehem in the Jesus story was a supernova, at least the ones that still believe in God. That number seems to be dwindling, wouldn’t you say?”

Chadbo knew that most scientists didn’t believe the Star of Bethlehem existed at all, even though there was evidence.

“The most pressing agenda I see at the moment is the solar activity. We’ve passed the eleven-year solar max, yet the Sun’s acting like an alien in an outhouse. There are twenty-seven viewable sunspots, highly unusual.”

“What is that?”

“What?” Chad asked.

“What the heck is an ‘alien in an outhouse’ Chad? Where do you come up with these things?”

“Never mind. Just pass the vodka.”

The Admiral thought an alien probably would be confused in an outhouse; but he was more perplexed about, and continued to question, the disappearing stars. He had never seen stars disappear.

“These aren’t stars disappearing as supernovae, Chadbo. A supernova is one of the most energetic explosive events known to mankind. You can often see them during the day. These are just disappearing. They grow fainter and then they’re gone.”

“You’re correct,” Chad responded. “When a star’s nuclear fuel is consumed and the core collapses, the light intensity is enormous. And we haven’t detected any extreme light sources, not even Jeff’s ‘blip’.”

“Don’t think it’s a supernova, Chadbo. The last one observed happened in 1604, Kepler’s star. This seems entirely

different. Wasn't there a reference in the *Bible* about stars disappearing?"

"I don't have a clue," Chad answered.

"I thought you believed the *Bible*."

"I do believe the *Bible*, but I don't have it memorized. Geez, give me a break. Do you?" The Admiral thought Chadbo seemed a little testy this morning but said nothing.

"You must be out of pot," The Admiral said with a laugh, but Chad let the insinuation pass without comment.

"Maybe they're getting farther away, Mr. Admiral, Sir."

"Maybe so, but they would have to be moving awfully fast to be going from faint to gone in such a short period."

"So maybe they are going awfully fast, away from us. They would eventually disappear. If it weren't for the Hubble and other space telescopes, these stars would have never been seen in the first place.

"The Sun is our most immediate concern, other than all the meteorites falling on us," Chad continued. "Even though Solar Maximum has passed, the Sun's surface temperature is increasing at a rate previously unseen, except in other star systems. That's not good."

Chad had become almost obsessed with solar activity over the last couple of years, at least The Admiral seemed to think so.

"Global warming is not being caused by man," Chad continued. "Now, I'm not sayin' that man doesn't contribute, only that man's contribution is negligible. It's being caused by something natural or something supernatural. Volcanos are erupting all over the world, unprecedented eruption activity I might add. Then there are the deep sea hydrothermal vents spewing out seven-hundred degree water."

"And the Sun is getting hotter!" The Admiral interjected.

“Yep,” Chad said, “but based on the Sun’s age, it should not be warming up this dramatically this quickly. Used to be that the hottest place on earth would be 120 degrees or so. Iran just recorded the hottest midday temperature, ever; at least in the time we have been keeping records.”

“Really? Hadn’t heard. How hot?” The Admiral asked.

“One hundred forty-six degrees.”

The interior office lights flickered as yet another brownout occurred, and the backup generators sounded in the distance. The air conditioning did not restart. Chad wiped his head with a wet hand towel, walked over to the tinted window and looked up at the Moon.

“And then there’re those large rocks orbiting the Moon.”

“The ones you said may be coming out of lunar orbit?”

“That’s right, Admiral. If that happens, and it looks like it will, these monsters could wreak great havoc, depending on where they might crash. These rocks won’t be world-ending; because they won’t be traveling at the same rates of speed as an asteroid from Kuiper or the asteroid belt, but you don’t want to be near when and if one hits.”

“I need a Bloody Mary,” The Admiral said and ran his hand through his thick, gray hair. “Think I’ll call Sheryl and see if she wants to meet.”

“Is she back in Washington?”

“Yep. We’re keeping the Warner Robins Air Force Base as a temporary White House Ops Center, but for the most part the flu problem in D.C. is over. The new vaccine seems to be working.”

“You mean the vaccine that Jeff’s new honey developed?”

“That’s right, Chad. Samarra has been a great help.”

“Yeah, right. If it hadn’t been for her, we wouldn’t need a vaccine!”

“Chad, don’t be so judgmental. You have no children, so objectivity isn’t in your corner. Samarra went home to find her son’s finger cut off and stuffed in a box of what looked like Valentine’s candy with a note saying the kid’s head would be in the next box. You don’t know what you would do in that situation. It’s easy to Monday morning quarterback, but I know that a mother will do anything to protect her kids. Lionesses, hyenas and baboons do the same thing.”

“Yeah, maybe; and I’m not being judgmental. Would you have done it?” Chad asked.

The Admiral didn’t answer and picked up the laboratory phone to call Sheryl. The dial tone suddenly went dead as light flashed outside, and a small meteor slammed into the roof of an adjacent office building. The explosion was deafening, and the suspended ceiling in the laboratory collapsed.



Mohammed Rheza enjoyed the freedoms of Europe in a way but found himself envious of brother Vinny. He had wanted to go back to the United States since his last visit years earlier. He hated cold weather, and Europe was having unprecedented cold spells all of a sudden.

Europe’s record heat had been replaced with the coldest weather in decades, and Paris was blanketed with twelve inches of snow. Mohammed knew for a fact that Allah didn’t approve of the near-naked women and porno shop districts; but he could feel the allure in his body, especially his loins. It almost made the cold worth it. Still, the United States was warmer; and there were even more porno shops there.

He smiled and felt guilty about the previous night. He had been a bad boy he knew, but he smiled again at the memories of the Ritz Carlton luxury suite and the two women. He couldn't do *that* in Saudi. Maybe the record cold was Allah's punishment for his recent decadence. He would have to pray for forgiveness; and Allah was very forgiving to the followers of Muhammad, may peace be upon him.

Mohammed operated out of an Islamic safe-house in Paris, once a small, non-denominational church with a white cross on the small steeple and stone walls. The computer setup in the hidden basement of the church was elaborate, and French security was scant in the Christian neighborhood. Muslim neighborhoods kept the police plenty busy.

Mohammed, like brother Vinny, had several aliases and was known in the area as Pierre LaFonte, though most referred to him as *The Preacher*. What Vinny was to the United States, Mohammed was the same for Europe.

The Preacher had been hard at work for the last couple of years and had single-handedly engineered the bombings of the Eiffel Tower, as well as the bombings of the London Bridge and Big Ben. The London Bridge was a special gift for Mohammed because it had been built by the pagan Romans just thirteen years after Jesus was hung on and nailed to the cross.

Sliding the leather-swivel office chair to his computer desk, *The Preacher* studied the graphics display on the twenty-seven inch monitor. A computer whiz and cyber-attack expert, he was in the system and had been for a week. His associate pastor, a Chechnyan Muslim, was hard at work in Germany; and the Brokdorf nuclear plant, Germany's largest, would soon have an "accident."

France's Civaux reactors were located in the small French community of Civaux, population less than a thousand. The

reactors, some of the largest nuclear power plants in the entire world, provided electricity for a large swath of France. The two reactors would soon cease to produce a large part of the 76% of France's nuclear-created electricity; but the meltdown and subsequent radiation, depending on the winds, would cripple Paris even worse than the snowstorm had.

Mohammed pondered the movie he had so often enjoyed, *The China Syndrome* and like the movie, he thought it might be possible for a nuclear core to get so hot it melted through the Earth. He hoped Tel Aviv was on the other side. The winds were perfect, praise Allah.

When the clock strikes 2:00 P.M., Greenwich Mean Time, the coordinated attacks on some of the world's largest nuclear reactors would begin. The intrusion would be so subtle, the damage would be complete before even the slightest warning signs.

"Fantastic," *The Preacher* said to himself. There was no one else around to hear.

The cooling tower temperatures slowly began to rise, unbeknownst to technicians and engineers at the facilities. The cyber-hackers had dismantled the cooling tower alarm systems and placed the water temperature indicators in safe-mode. The Emergency Cooling Bypass Valves were frozen in place with a little help from Allah and *Liquid Nail*. The shutdown power switches were disabled, and everything appeared stable to the reactor staff.



Vinny was busy; and the early morning Arizona air was stifling, as was now the norm. Today was a big day; because

today would start a new reign of terror, not just in America but Europe and Russia too. Brother Mohammed was hard at work in Paris. Vinny pulled the white Impala into the Lukeville *Stop Shop* to buy a soda and pick up a girlie magazine.

“Jean Philippe!” Vinny heard his alias and glanced across the newly-striped parking lot.

Oh great, he thought. He liked the previous owner of his concrete company and found Judy Blanton to be disarmingly attractive. Blonde, petite and shaped like a goddess, Vinny had thought about her a lot, though his preference was younger women, under fifteen. However, he remained focused on the mission. What he didn't realize was how attracted Judy found him to be.

“Mademoiselle Judith.” He smiled as she approached. The timing could've been better. “Good morning to a very lovely lady.”

Judy loved the French accent and planned to ask Jean to dinner. A gourmet cook, Judy was known around the small town of Lukeville, Arizona as the *Martha Stewart of Lukeville*. She had been attracted to Jean Philippe since she first met him a couple of years before during negotiations for her family's concrete business, but he traveled a lot.

The new managers at J. Blanton Concrete were nice enough but aloof; and they appeared to all be Mexican. They would never tell her Jean's whereabouts, and the secrecy worried her. She would've been worried more had she known that *none* of the men were Mexican but were of Middle Eastern descent.

Vinny had often considered the similarities between the olive-skinned Mexicans and the Semitic Arabs, like himself; and he considered it Allah's blessing. The Mexican border had been a piece of cookie, he knew *that* and laughed at the stupid

American sayings. Most of the so-called homegrown terrorists looked just like Mexican laborers. The disguise was perfect.

Vinny was proud of his Semite ancestry. The Semites were descendants of the prophet Abraham's sexual union with his servant girl, Hagar; and then with his wife, Sarah. He revulsed at the thought of the Hebrews being a part of his family tree, but that's the way it was. After Ismael was born to the slave girl, Abraham's wife finally got pregnant... and that was the trouble with the world today. Sarah's son, Isaac.

Isaac became the father of Judaism, and Ismael became the father of Islam. Even though they were half-brothers, Vinny and most Arabs refused to acknowledge their genetic relationship with present-day Jews. The Israelites had stolen their birthright, just like Jacob stole Esau's. That was the way the Hebrew scum operated; theft and manipulation. Ismael was the first-born son, and Abraham's inheritance should have been passed to *his* descendants.

"Jean Philippe," Judy loved to say his name, "where have you been? I've been meaning to ask you to dinner, but you've been traveling. Did you go to France without taking me?"

She tilted her head and smiled, her blond hair blown by the warm breeze.

"No, my dear, I have not been to France. I have been in Sacramento negotiating contracts," he lied.

Vinny couldn't help but notice Judy's short dress and knew her attire would never be allowed in his own country. The modesty police would have stoned her. She had nice legs he thought but controlled his desires. He wished she was thirteen instead of thirty-something. He had always been attracted to young girls; but he was in good company since Muhammad the Prophet had a six-year-old wife, his favorite of all.

Vinny dared not tell Judy he had been in Charleston, Savannah and other key cities of the Bible-Belt. He also wouldn't mention the scouting trips through the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, nor his tour of the Vogtle Nuclear Plant in gnatty Waynesboro, Georgia. Waynesboro would soon be without power, as well as much of Georgia; and Vinny wished death to all the obnoxious gnats and other pests that vacationed in the South. He also declined to mention his stakeout of Samarra Russell's Buckhead estate in Atlanta. Samarra seemed to be spending more time at the Sugarloaf home of Mr. Dine-for-Dollars than at her own. Vinny would not venture back to Jeffrey Ross' home though, the Great Dane no longer a puppy. His first encounter with the dog had been fearsome.

"And I would love to come to dinner, any place, anywhere, any hour." He loved that line and had picked it up in a John Wayne western. Vinny was a fan of American movies, at least the old westerns.

"Great! Saturday night, six-thirtyish?"

Judy felt like a school girl, though high school graduation had been almost twenty years earlier. She hoped she wasn't coming on too strong.

"I will bring a bottle of fine wine for you, pretty lady," and he bent forward to kiss the back of her hand.

A few minutes later, Vinny was back in Mexico just a mile away, crossing under the border through the deep tunnel from the J. Blanton Concrete plant to the beer distributorship in Mexico at the other end, nearly a half mile away. The workers at the beer distributor looked Hispanic too, but none were. They were all Middle Eastern, proficient in English and Spanish and excellent shooters. Most had AK-47s in their possession.

Vinny's computer setup was more elaborate than his brother's was in France, because Vinny wasn't confined to the

small space of a country church. The Plant Vogtle cooling and containment systems were laid out in hi-def graphics on the thirty-two inch plasma display; and temperatures flashed in a neon-blue light, indicating everything was within limits. The blue neon indicators would soon change to red, though the displays at the plants would not.

“Are we in?” Vinny asked.

“We’re in, Vinny. Alarms are deactivated, temperature displays are constant on the plant computers, and...”

“Wait, did you say ‘constant’? Does that mean the temperature display will remain at one setting? Won’t that look suspicious?” Vinny asked Ahmed but knew that he was the premier hacker for *Jihad’s Warriors*, probably as talented as the Christian hackers that froze all the stoplights on green a couple of years earlier.

Ahmed lived up to his name and was always smiling. Vinny grinned as he thought of the death and destruction of *that* day and how simple it had been to hack into the Department of Transportation computers. He also thought about Hutz the Putz, the man who survived the severe crash caused by the stoplight malfunction, only to die and then come back to life. Vinny doubted that story, though some of the aspects were puzzling, like how did Chuck Hutz learn to speak Hebrew so fluently after his near death experience? He had to be a Jew, even though he denied such a connection, Vinny knew that for sure.

“The temperature indicators at the plants are programmed to vary slightly. They won’t notice, Vinny; and if they do, it will already be too late. The emergency cooling valves are locked in place. Ten minutes ‘til GO.”

Vinny was pleased with the progress, and the warriors had been unleashed. Soon, this very year, the Great Satan would be

brought down, a victim of the wrath of Allah, with a little help from the failing economy and Spanish Flu. He was *not* pleased with the results of the Spanish Flu, a virus he personally installed in the HVAC systems of Atlanta's International airport terminal. There were plenty of deaths, but the virus didn't seem to be as contagious as the original Spanish Flu of 1918. And now that woman, Samarra, had developed a vaccine.

I should have killed the woman and the kid. He would have a chance soon; and Samarra Russell would be no more, nor would her young son Thomas. Then again, he would have his way with her before killing her. He had never raped a Jewish woman and knew this was not allowed by the Quran; but he remembered her olive skin and dark hair, and her body. Satan had made her beautiful.

Vinny thought about the night at CDC in Atlanta, it seemed so long ago now and smiled as he remembered the gasoline transport truck explosion, the "diversion." He loved explosions.

The Russell woman had done just as instructed, perfectly. A mother will do anything to protect her child, especially when she finds her young son's finger in a candy box; but she fooled him.

The vials she stole from her laboratory and left in the rooftop mechanical room for him to pick up, turned out to be a *less potent* version of the virus. Now Samarra had developed a vaccine with KKD Labs, and the plague was less than he had hoped. She had fooled him twice, but his greatest pleasure of the year so far was bombing the KKD Labs facility. He thought Samarra would be at the lab, but this had not been the case. Later he would take care of her.

"Ten... nine... eight..." Ahmed began the countdown.



Outside Paris in a small, country church, Vinny's twin began his own countdown. Three... Two... One...

Mohammed and brother Vinny hit *send* at precisely the same time, and the signals weaved their way through the myriad of shadow links and ghost sites that *Jihad's Warriors* had built to maintain secrecy. By the time the coded messages reached their destinations, the encryptions would evolve into nonsensical gibberish about *Kentucky Fried Chicken and finger lickin' good*.