

# 1

Consider time travel a risky venture. In July of 1986, Jim Cahill turned thirty-two and had twice traveled back in time. They first sent him to 1976. Retrograde's elastic effect of moving back in time returned him safely to Hastings Mountain in four hours and garnered him the distinction as the first man to successfully survive a trip through time. Eleven men were killed in the previous attempts, but he had triumphed. Cahill thought himself lucky and tried again, this time venturing back to 1979. As were his orders on the first trip, he did nothing, touched nothing, and merely let the video capture a midwestern cornfield.

As a boy in Kansas he dreamed about traveling back in time, but never knew how Einstein's theories could help him construct the slick time travel machines he saw in the movies. As a man he figured flying high-speed aircraft would be the closest experience to journeying back through time, but even his test pilot training could not prepare him for the perils of time travel.

Assignment to the Red Shift experiments demanded much toil and energy with neither reward nor free time. Cahill cornered Meinkewitz after the last time trip and secured a

week away with Kate. She would want to see more of him now that she had finished her doctorate work.

The cooler, fresh mountain air flared through the open window as Cahill maneuvered his five speed Explorer up a long asphalt stretch somewhere in the High Sierra. It was only two hundred miles to San Francisco and Golden Gate Park, where he would meet Kate in four hours. Over a month had passed since he had stared into her earthy green eyes and touched long her dark hair. He replayed their making love back in New York and could almost feel her tight body.

He smiled at the thought, turned on the radio and scanned the dial for the Kennedy program. He found it on a scratchy AM station out of Salt Lake City. Jack Kennedy, older since he left the presidency in 1969, sounded as clear as his first inauguration in 1961. "... of what the foreign policy of the United States should be. We need to make it clear that we are the force in world, ah, politics today and stand by that position. We are ready to listen as well as move toward peace. Neither position is to be taken lightly..."

The caller sought an argument. " Yeah, that's all well and good, but how much are we going to be spending until we break the U.S. Treasury? How much is all this defense spending worth? Do you have any idea?"

" I would like to point out that during the eight years of the Kennedy Administration, we... ah, yes, I do have some ideah of what this defense spending is worth..."

Cahill turned up the volume and the static. The former President maintained the most listened to radio program in the United States.

" It, ah, should be noted that because of the strong defense we were able to musta in the early nineteen sixties, we were able to stop communism just ninety miles from our shoahs. Now, conversely, I also have personal experience in not, ah, putting one hundred per- cent trust in all military advice."

The caller laughed. " Are you referring to Viet Nam?"

Kennedy kept a smooth and unruffled delivery. " Viet Nam was a mistake and I think that was the general feeling in late 1965 when we began bringing our forces back."

" But President Nixon said it was a mistake to bring the boys back."

" He said that at the time, yes. But I think it was the great initiatives of Mr. Nixon both to China and the former Soviet Union, combined with the Reagan build up of the 1970's and early eighties that led to the collapse of the Soviet Empire and-

" Led to terrorism!"

" Yes, there are ramifications to every move on the world stage and, ah, we have to adjust to those realities. We will have ample opportunity to discuss these ramifications with President Nixon, when he is my guest for all four hours on Thursday. We will pause now and be back next hour."

The announcer's voice faded-in. " You're listening to World Forum on World News Network."

Cahill hit the FM switch and sent the channel search to a classical station. He sat back and chugged higher through the Rockies. The last caller had correctly targeted terrorism. His own briefings showed groups and alliances forged in the post cold war era as the real enemies of the United States. Pr-odigious secrecy surrounded Red Shift's possible military applications and Meinkewitz's talks with the intelligence people concerning terrorists frightened everyone.

1986 had already brought several terrorist scares and one near disaster. A radical splinter group had almost succeeded in planting biological agents in the greater Pittsburgh water supply. The general public never knew elite forces had killed five terrorists at the city's filtration plant. Other incidents included dismantled pipe bombs under cars, plastic explosives on bridges, shootings, and airliners exploding. The nuclear threat, with spent plutonium readily available from the former Iron Curtain countries, and rogue scientists and military personnel ready to build bombs, reached a public frenzy.

Unless Meinkewitz called him again, Cahill could forget the terrorism and his Red Shift work for the next week. He gazed out the open window and across the parched plains to the hazy horizon. The brilliant spread of jagged peaks tapered downward into rock carved canyons and the spaciousness was

in stark contrast to the Hastings underground facility in Colorado.

Kate awaited him in Golden Gate Park. He planned it perfectly, flying her in from New York, setting up the catered table in the park with the three-piece string section. As they dined outside, he would present her with the sparkling diamond, secured by one of Meinkewitz's connections in South Africa. Then they would spend the night in a Yosemite lodge and hike tomorrow.

The cellular ring broke the mountain silence and Cahill stared at the phone. Meinkewitz had promised three hours ago not to call again. Cahill wanted to let it ring, but reluctantly grabbed the phone and pushed the green button. " Cahill."

He held the wheel with one hand, nearing the mountain crest and rolled his eyes as Meinkewitz's gravelly voice punctuated the transmission. " Jimmy, sorry to call you again."

" Ray, leave me alone. I think you have your damned watch set on a timer. It just beeped and now it's time to bother Cahill again."

The signal weakened. " Timer, that's not a bad idea... Jimmy, you need to get to a land phone."

" Ray, I don't even know where the hell I am. I must be fifty miles from a regular phone."

" You are past 120 degrees longitude, probably just passed Truckee. North of Tahoe."

" Unbelievable."

" And, Jimmy..."

Cahill looked across the rows of evergreens piercing the slopes below. " What?"

" Have a nice day."

The line went dead and Cahill grinned. Meinkewitz was a father figure over the last fourteen months at Red Shift, and was a time travel theorist since the 1950's. Brought through the ranks of the intelligence community, Meinkewitz's connections landed the top Red Shift job. He was not just an icy elite scientist, and while his decisions could be reasoned out with the precision of an advanced computer, he empathized with his people. That empathy allowed him to motivate and to steer subordinates on the proper course. Cahill trusted him without question.

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Half an hour later, Cahill rolled into a dusty lot housing a faded white gas station with dirty dark windows and a long porch. He slowed past a set of antiquated red and white pumps, and stopped at the corner phone booth. A heavy guy in denim farmer's overalls lounged next to a bulky, rusted red Coke machine. Cahill left the car door open, engine running, and entered the booth.

He quickly dialed Meinkewitz, but connecting took time. The porch guy's folded hands moved up slowly on his oversized stomach. Cahill had difficulty seeing beyond the porch's darkened screen door and reflective station windows.

" Meinkewitz."

" Okay, Ray. The view is splendid. You see, there's only this one thing: I can't enjoy it. Seems this guy keeps calling me."

" You're damned lucky I don't pull you out right now, Jimmy. There's a ton of stuff coming over the intelligence wires."

Cahill tilted his head back. " That's wonderful."

" Apparently they are searching New York City for a possible nuclear device." Meinkewitz's cigar was stuck in his mouth again.

" Come on..."

" There are reports that other cities might be searched. I was afraid with you going to meet your fiancé in San Francisco..."

" Did they mention San Francisco?"

" No, only New York."

" Kate lives in New York. Tell me you're making this up. Thank God she's on her way to San Francisco."

Meinkewitz talked to his people inside the mountain complex and strayed from the phone for nearly a minute. The

sun sizzled the nape of Cahill's neck as his heartbeat soared and he paced.

" Ray, I'm standing here waiting for you to tell me they're blowing up New York..."

Meinkewitz finished up with the group. " Jimmy, it's not an alert or anything. It's a precautionary measure."

" You and your precautionary measures. Sounds pretty serious to me. I'm glad I'm heading west. You should have told me this on the cellular."

" Cellular phones can be monitored, Jim. Look how I found your position."

" I don't see terrorist groups having the expertise to pull off something like this. Is that all? Can I go have fun now?"

Meinkewitz chuckled. " I thought you ought to know that there might be problems in other cities."

" Odds are with me... But if they go on alert or something... then call me."

" You'll be the first to know. "

Cahill looked at the phone, set it back on the hook, and checked the man sleeping on the porch. Then he stepped into the Explorer and shut the door once he spun around to the highway. As he placed the reflective sunglasses over his eyes, diminishing the glare, he visualized a brilliant orange explosion and a mushroom cloud rising over some American metropolis, sucking up the imploded buildings, streets and

people into a huge billowing fireball. Such far-fetched notions rattled his imagination as much as time travel.

## 2

Carlos watched his men drag O'Hanlon through the mist and around the brick building. When the highway traffic noise faded, he smashed his rifle butt into O'Hanlon's skull. Then he used his fists and knees. The Irishman could only blame himself for not giving the proper response to simple questions. This coward deserved death.

Carlos stood back and felt his neck veins bulge as he screamed. " Tell me what I want to know!"

In the street lamp shadows he pointed the AK-47's barrel at O'Hanlon's head. Only in his twenties, O'Hanlon possessed potential but had been talking to the wrong people. The crewcut young man sunk to his knees in the New Jersey Turnpike rest area as blood trailed down his unshaven cheeks.

" I want to know who you were talking to, man!"

O'Hanlon looked up slowly. More blood trickled from his mouth and his puffy eyes gave him the look of a beaten fighter. " I was forced..."

" Forced by who?" The kid shook his head. " Listen, you think I was born yesterday, man? I was with Castro when he fell before you were born! You tell me what I want to know and I will protect you."

" They'll kill me."

" No, I told you I will protect you. The devices are set to detonate. It will happen whether you tell me or not. You have a choice, my friend. You speak and I take you under my wing or you die."

O'Hanlon closed his swollen eyes, but said nothing for a few moments. " It was the local people in New York. Undercover guy... Inspector Merrill."

Carlos smiled and nodded to his men back at the van. " He says Merrill. That rotten..." Then he swung his handgun out of a side holster and fired once into the kid's head. " You were too trusting, my friend."

" Merrill, Carlos?" asked Ian.

O'Hanlon's body lay motionless on the cement as Carlos ran to the white van. The windshield wipers swabbed the accumulating mist. " We will call Eric and tell him it was Merrill. Let him make the arrangements before they head west."

He opened the side door and squeezed in with his men. The exhaust spewed out as the van backed up and sped out the rest area. Once on the highway he leaned forward. " Why am I worried? If Merrill is in New York, he is a dead man."

Santos turned from behind the wheel. " If he is in any American city, he is a dead man."

Carlos raised his knees upward and laughed. " Yes, yes. You are right. Higgens is a genius... Our genius. "



## 3

Like a fleeting dream, the park's late afternoon shadows swept the grass with an amber glow. Cahill walked upright in his white tuxedo as if he were in a marching drill. The three-piece string section tuned up behind a small table's white linen tablecloth, and waiters hovered over steamy metal covered food containers. Crystalline Champagne glasses glistened and the chilled green bottle, coated with water droplets, lay nestled in another white linen swatch.

Cahill smiled as the limo slowed at the curb. He thought for a moment about Meinkewitz's warning as the driver rounded the car, opened the rear door and helped Kate outside. Her pinned up hair, strands tapering down her bare neck toward her flowing yellow dress, intrigued him. He nodded to the violin maestro and a lively Brahms piece filtered through the pleasant late afternoon air.

The sunlight only enhanced her beauty. The driver escorted her to the table and Cahill gently kissed her forehead. She smiled slowly, her teeth in perfect alignment between her smooth lips, and her green eyes twinkled. He felt her touch as he slipped his fingers around her smaller hand. "You're perfect."

This time she smiled without exposing her teeth and her eyes moistened. " You've outdone yourself, Mr. Cahill."

Cahill motioned for Angelo, a man with the thin mustache and maroon vest, who pulled back Kate's chair. Once seated, Angelo popped the Champagne and poured a cascade of pink bubbles into the glasses. Cahill lifted his glass upward.

" To the lady of the doctorate, a woman who possesses both beauty and intelligence."

They clinked glasses and the twenty-five year old Champagne tickled his lips. Cahill lowered the glass and removed a green velvet box from his tuxedo pocket. He clicked it open and a clear-cut diamond reflected the sunlight into crisp linear colors. They had talked about marriage many times and she beamed as he gradually placed the ring onto her finger.

" Will you marry me?"

" Yeah." She now smiled broadly and nodded her head.

" I'll marry you, Jim."

" Next month... I'll make the arrangements, Kate. There is a garden chapel at Chatre."

" You have a penchant for planning." She sipped the Champagne again.

" Complaints?"

" None."

The music played softly in the warm air. He held her hand, gazing into her eyes and Meinkewitz's bizarre reports of nuclear devices finally evaporated into the evening skies. As Angelo and his people served dinner, Cahill talked about the wedding and how a few close friends would fly to France. He assured her their busy lives would merge into a gentler pace. She spoke about having children and living in Connecticut. The future beckoned, and Cahill, looking over the bay waters past Alcatraz to the bridge, savored the thought.

" Should I address you as Dr. Landers?"

" You may."

She held up her hand and he kissed it.

" Doctor." The cellular sounded in his pocket, he closed his eyes and ripped out the phone. " Oh, no."

" Oh, yes."

" Cahill."

Meinkewitz sounded agitated. " Jim, get to a pay phone now."

" Ray... Ray..."

" Jim, this is the real thing. Get to a phone."

" What the hell are you talking about?"

He glanced at a perplexed Kate. But the transmission was over.

" I love you." Her wide smile fell. " What's the matter?"

" I love you, too... I have to get to a phone."

He extended his elbow and she raised her brow. "Strings, Champagne, and AT and T."

Cahill prayed this nuclear thing had not gotten out of hand. He left the musicians and Angelo's caterers back at the table, took Kate's hand and hurried to the limo. He asked the driver to find the nearest phone booth and stared aimlessly out the window as Kate talked about his last trip to New York. She spoke more about furnishing a house in Connecticut, but Cahill was silent, visualizing New York going up in a nuclear fireball. At a curbside phone he rushed from the car and called Meinkewitz directly.

" Meinkewitz."

Cahill stared past the limo at Coit Tower. " What happened?"

" Get out of there, Jimmy. Get in your car and get the hell out of there! Try and get back to Hastings!"

" What are you saying?"

" San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. All possible sights for bombs to go off. We are very worried about information we have about New York. "

" This sounds too bizarre."

He looked at Kate inside the limo doorway, the sun dancing on her long brown hair. She had no idea they were sitting in the middle of a possible death trap.

" Jim..."

" All right... I'm coming back. I'll be there in six hours."

He hung up the phone, hesitated for the longest time, and was unaware Kate had climbed from the limo.

" Looking for stray phone numbers, Cahill?" She grabbed his arm and her smile dropped again. " What's the matter, Jim?"

" Ah... You'd better come with me, Kate. We have to leave."

" Leave? We haven't even had desert yet."

She started to laugh but must have sensed the tension embedded in his face. He brought her back to the limo and ordered the driver to hurry to the hotel. Kate said nothing as they raced over the hills. When they reached the hotel, she closed the front privacy panel, and leaned toward him.

" Where are we going? Jim, what happened?" Cahill shook his head. The driver stopped under the long red canopy and then opened Cahill's door. Cahill in his white tux and Kate in her yellow evening dress, walked directly to the adjacent parking garage and to his Explorer. " Jim, *what...is...going on here?* Is it that project you're working on?"

" Meinkewitz just told me they think New York might be blown up by a planted nuclear device. And there is a possibility that this city and L.A. could be targeted."

Her mouth opened wide. " Is this for real?"

He started the Explorer and he backed out quickly. " Yeah."

" Where are we going?"

" Out of here, that's for damned sure... To a safe place...  
At least for now."

## 4

Hastings upper rock peaks were silhouetted against the starry sky when they arrived in the early morning hours, Kate's eyes were still closed and her arms crossed as Cahill slowed at the lighted main gate deep within trees. Although the guards recognized him, he produced his identification card, but they called Meinkewitz about Kate. The bright, carved out of dense rock down the slope ahead originated as a defense facility.

On the monitor the animated Meinkewitz waved them through, and Cahill brought the Explorer along the high, barbed wire fence into the block lighted tunnel under the mountain. Kate's astonishment was evident when they zipped by the halogen tunnel lights into an extensive parking area constructed within rough edged rock layers.

An armed contingent handed them green military fatigues near the garage elevator. Cahill whisked Kate inside and as the elevator car shot through the mountain, they changed from their formal clothes. " The odds are that these people will be caught and you and I will be in Yosemite tomorrow night."

" I can't believe this is happening."

" Come on, Katie. You know I like to go with the odds."

Cahill kissed her briefly and buttoned her fatigues.

" You're an optimist, Cahill. What kind of research is going on here?"

" I can't tell you unless Meinkewitz okays it. If it wasn't for the crisis, they'd never let you within fifty miles of this place."

The doors opened twenty floors up and they rushed into an expansive monitoring area, originally used to detect incoming missiles, but now transformed into a data station for the Red Shift time displacement experiments. More consoles and the power-up containment canisters, located deeper in the mountain, actually controlled the embarking chamber. A massive, plastic United States wall map cast a blue glow over the complex and a complex array of monitors, remaining from the old days, allowed video conferencing from around the world during an attack.

Across the room Meinkewitz held a clipboard and talked with the lanky Dan Harrington from Army Intelligence. When he caught sight of Cahill, he grabbed his cigar and marched forward. He had lost most of his graying hair and had flipped the rest over the bald spot. His red, paisley polyester tie hung loosely at the collar as he walked. As he approached, he exposed a thin line of stained teeth and his crisp blue eyes disappeared in the cigar smoke.

" Jim, I'm glad you got out of there. We just heard a report confirming there is a device in San Francisco." He looked at Kate. " You must be Kate."

" You must be Meinkewitz."

" I'm sorry we couldn't have met under better circumstances. Jimmy has told me a lot about you, but this is a serious situation. Thank your lucky stars you not in New York. There may not be a New York by tomorrow morning."

" Who would..."

" Yeah, who would do this?" asked Cahill.

Meinkewitz removed the cigar from his mouth, holding it in his hand as he exhaled. " Dan Harrington can elaborate on that. Kate, could you excuse us?" Kate nodded, Cahill squeezed her wrist, and then followed Meinkewitz along the monitors. Meinkewitz spoke in a lower voice. " From what I've been able to gather a consortium of international terrorists are involved here. The core of this group is an organization called, The Funeral House Gang. These people are completely amoral... ruthless and have long standing hatred of the United States."

" But do they have the means to do this?"

Meinkewitz dragged Cahill back further, as if it made any difference what Kate now knew. At that moment Dan Harrington, in full brown uniform, strutted toward them.

Cahill mouthed words to Kate. " I'm sorry."

She held up her thumbs and nodded, but she looked scared. Thank God she was not in New York.

" Dan, you know Jim Cahill."

He shook Cahill's hand. " Yes, we met briefly in Washington a few years back."

" He is here with his wife." Meinkewitz closed his eyes at the mistake. " I'm sorry.. fiancé, Kate."

Cahill smiled as Meinkewitz led him and Harrington back to the rear monitors. An array of video pictures from around the country were lined on the monitors like a displays in a department store electronics department. " You're in Army Intelligence, Dan. Did they send you out here?"

" Well, not because of this. It was a routine visit."

Meinkewitz bit on his cigar as he panned toward Kate. " You know, I introduced my wife once, when she was my fiancé, as my wife. Her mother sent me a scathing letter. I burned it. Never even told my wife."

Cahill smiled.

" The country's going up in smoke and Meinkewitz is worried about burning his mother-in-law's letter." Cahill saw a military unit on the New York monitor. They were standing on a rooftop, the city in the background.

" New York, New York," said Meinkewitz.

" Are they close to finding the device?" asked Cahill.

Harrington's face tightened. " No, that's why they're all screaming at each other. I think... in my opinion, according to a reliable informant, time is running out."

Cahill looked at Kate and thought of their friends in New York. He disliked leaving her alone as this evolved. Across the New York monitor, marines scrambled around the roof while the Long Island soldiers remained calm away from ground zero.

" Did this Funeral House Gang demand anything?" asked Cahill.

" Let me give you some background," said Harrington.

Harrington said that a group of individuals, shed by the old Soviet Union and their former allies, once bred as international terrorists, trained to carry out the most vile and heinous deeds, now sought new targets. Many old power groups humiliated by the United States demanded retribution.

" Then you know who is behind this?" asked Cahill.

Harrington nodded. " Two individuals. A Carlos Sanchez and Eric Bonheim. Carlos has been around a long time. He is very clever and has eluded our people even after his benefactors fell by the wayside. Bonheim, originally from the old East Germany, is as ruthless and as illusive as Carlos. Now, the major factor here is a former United States citizen, Dr. Stephen Higgens."

" Ah, the bomb maker," said Cahill.

" Yes, your assumption is correct. Higgens disappeared off Miami in early 1961. It was later learned that he was brought to Cuba and then, on Khrushchev's orders, to Russia."

" He sold out."

" Yes, he did sell out."

Meinkewitz nodded. " I knew him. Worked with him in the fifties. A fair competency in physics. He could be brilliant at times... But he ended up enmeshed in the international terrorist game. Well paid, also. Until everything collapsed. And I would estimate he'll be pretty well set after this."

" Unless you guys know something I don't." Cahill stepped back from the screen. " Do we know the materials... plutonium, etcetera, are in this country?"

" We have two guys who were paid four hundred thousand a piece to bring plutonium in on a Norwegian freighter. Now we have to find it in the city," said Meinkewitz. " Be glad you're not in the middle of that mess."

Harrington crossed his arms. " The crewmen didn't know what they were bringing ashore. But the guy who paid them the money is a Palestinian named Acud Shalon. Shalon has long standing ties to Eric Bonheim."

" Now it's getting complicated." Cahill looked back toward Kate. She was slowly pacing over the glossy black tiles.

" Just the beginning. The money came out of a fund in New York called the Assistance Relief Fund. It's been funneled

up through Mexico from Switzerland. We're working on accounts, but a man named Felix Levine is listed on the books. Levine is an alias for André Mouseau."

" Mouseau supplied arms through agents to the F.H.G. for years," said Meinkewitz.

" Are you sure Levine is Mouseau, Ray?"

" This came in on the fax."

Meinkewitz showed Cahill a document from Hong Kong, detailing the alias on a failed drug deal. Mouseau had eluded authorities, but had lost three hundred thousand on the captured drugs. The name was clear: Felix Levine. The signature confirmed to match the New York bank signature and the drug shipment orders. And five far eastern witnesses substantiated that Levine was Mouseau.

" Okay, then where the hell is the plutonium?" asked Cahill.

" It's chaos back in New York. They're combing the city. The cargo left the dock in an unmarked white cube truck. No plate or... The bottom line is that the bomb may already be set."

" Why do they think San Francisco or L.A.?"

Meinkewitz threw the cigar in a metal barrel. " A passing comment by the guys in the cube truck. They mentioned the other stuff arriving at those two cities. I honestly think our people are virtually helpless to stop any of this."

" You're telling me he's going to vaporize New York City, is that what your telling me?" asked Cahill.

" I pray to God that he's wrong," said Harrington.

" I don't get it. We have the apparatus to intercept anything coming in. This shouldn't have happened."

Meinkewitz spoke first. " Carlos Sanchez's hatred of the United States goes back to the fifties when he was fighting alongside Castro in the Cuban mountains against Batista. When the Kennedy Administration launched the invasion, knocking out Castro and placing Juarez as Premier, Carlos was imprisoned because he was found to be loyal to Castro."

" For eleven years he was imprisoned," said Harrington.

Cahill squinted. " They should have got him while they had the chance."

Harrington nodded. " Kennedy called off an April, 1961 invasion force of exiles that was supposed to take the island with air cover from the U.S. I guess he thought they weren't ready. But when the pressures built and the hint of a Soviet presence on the island began, they moved in September with full force."

" In '61, old brave Carlos tried to cut a deal with us... until they found out just what he had done to the exiles." Meinkewitz looked back to the monitors.

" So just what the hell do we do about all this?" asked Cahill.

" We can't do anything but wait... and pray."

# 5

One of the soldiers awakened a groggy Cahill around three a.m. and informed him a nuclear bomb had just detonated in New York City. A cold chill covered his skin as his heart thumped. Kate hugged him and they silently headed for the stairs. The adrenaline pushed him as he accelerated up the stairwell. Millions of people, alive when he went to sleep, had just perished in a cataclysmic fireball.

The technicians striking computer keyboards provided the only sound upstairs. Meinkewitz and Harrington, surrounded by everyone in the complex, stood near the monitors. Cahill quietly edged his way closer and peered over someone's shoulder at the news channel. A shaken young reporter stood in a West Coast location. His teary red eyes wandered and he forced words into the camera. " ... at two forty-nine, eastern daylight time... Again, this... will be recorded as one of the... worst..."

He turned away and the screen switched to a different fresher reporter, three hundred miles away in San Diego.

" Ladies and Gentlemen. World News reported some twenty-two minutes ago, the city of New York was decimated by a nuclear explosion at two forty-nine this morning. There is

no viable way at this time to access the damage and the destruction from this cataclysmic event. World News has obtained this tape which we will play for you at this time."

Meinkewitz spoke in a low voice. " They somehow got this from intelligence."

Cahill held Kate tightly as a taped shot from a Long Island rooftop appeared on the screen. In the darkness of night, the half lit buildings of midtown Manhattan flashed out of existence as a brilliant, convoluted, orange fire mass expanded into the night. He could only imagine the humanity swept up in the thermal nuclear reaction.

" This is not a fabrication. Again, World News is reporting that the city of New York tonight, July 18, 1986, was destroyed in a nuclear explosion... I have with me, Professor Henry Yunes from the University of California at Berkeley. Joining Doctor Yunes is a retired General in the United States Army... General-"

" That's Chet McBee," said Harrington.

" General McBee, is there any way of telling who could have survived this nuclear blast?"

" It is much too early to begin to access this damage, Bill. My concern is for the living on the outskirts of the city and down range."

" Which leads to my next question, Doctor Yunes. Is the death count going to be in the millions?"

Yunes' baldhead shined in the camera light and his analytical voice sounded like an over-dub on a documentary. " Bill, it would have been far greater if this had occurred during the work day. The work force in the greater New York area-

" Excuse me." The reporter listened in his earpiece and appeared shaken. " My God... We... we have learned that a second..."

Meinkewitz stared at Cahill and turned back to the screen.

" The nation's capital..."

" Jesus Christ!" Meinkewitz, his eyes fixed on the screen, walked away and spoke loudly.

'The destroyer comes upon every city,  
Not a city escapes;  
Ruined is the valley  
wasted is the plain, as the Lord has  
said.  
Set up a memorial to Moab  
for it is an utter wasteland  
Its cities are turned into ruins  
where no one dwells.'

" A poet?" asked Cahill.

Meinkewitz turned and wiped a tear from his cheek.

" Jeremiah, Chapter Forty-Eight, verses eight and nine."

The room was silent until another technician called out.

" Our channels are blank."

Kate moved over and cried softly into Cahill's shoulder as he wrapped his arm around her. His queasy stomach correctly gauged the depth of this surrealistic nightmare. The news channel could only broadcast a still video shot of the moon over silver rippled ocean as all other news from the public and the military sectors vanished.

Meinkewitz stepped in front of everyone. " I don't think they're going to say anything more. They've probably been ordered off the air... And it's not the end of it, either."

Cahill leaned toward him. " What are you saying?"

Harrington also stepped forward. " He's saying that more cities will fall."

Meinkewitz cleared his throat. " All right, listen up! What has happened is real. It did happen. We have to do what we can here."

One of the men at the communications desk rushed across the room and handed a piece of paper to him. Meinkewitz visibly winced. Then he nodded and ordered the man back to monitor to listen for more information.

" You're going to try to commence Red Shift operations, aren't you?" asked Cahill.

" That is exactly what I'm going to do."

He motioned for Harrington to follow him. The two men quickly disappeared into the elevators. Kate looked up at Cahill, dabbed her eyes with a Kleenex, and then held him again.

" This place, Jim. What is it? Some kind of missile defense system? What is Red Shift?"

" It used to be a missile defense system."

" But, what is it now?"

" Kate, the code name of the activity in this place is called Red Shift. Since the late 1960's, not always at this location, we've been involved in time displacement experiments."

" Why? She tilted her head in disbelief.

" Military applications. Kate, I've been back in time, for short periods, twice."

Kate squinted. " Come on..."

Cahill debated whether to take her below, but the need for security clearances had ended with the New York City flames. He pictured her apartment and walking through the park in the fall. Only the memories remained. " Come on, I'll show you."

Kate nodded and took his hand. She entered the elevator pensively, probably needing time to digest what he said. Cahill pushed the worn black button marked, **Red Shift**, and the plastic walled car dropped through the mountain. She suddenly turned to him about halfway down. " How is this possible, Jim? This is 1986 not 5186!"

Cahill raised his left brow with a mindful arrogance. " We have been able to produce fields that bring us *between* the realm of our own time and space. Like the elevator we're in now, moving through the carved space in mountain rock, a similar effect occurs, the Red Shift."

" Red Shift?"

" The first people working on this compared the change in the displacement fields to the stars accelerating away from Earth at great speeds, the light shifts, giving a distorted reading down the spectrum. The name stuck."

She shook her head, half closed her eyes, and did not seem to understand. They were soon deep below the garage and moving deeper. When the doors opened a five story multi-layered, green pyramid, constructed over a circular metal power grid and field generating complex hundreds of feet in diameter came into view. A long sloping tunnel connected the chamber pyramid to what looked like a ballpark press box. They walked inside, dwarfed by the immensity of the sculptured out rock. Cahill brought her up an open concrete stairway. It was at that time he seriously thought about traveling back to warn someone of the looming disaster.

Meinkewitz worked with the people in the control booth, trying to get the chamber powered-up. Cahill brought Kate along the rows of monitoring stations. " Ray, we have to keep sending our people going back... Until we've changed the future."

Meinkewitz firmly put his hand on Cahill's shoulder. " If the future can be changed. We may never know. It will just change. We have to assume that we're doing the right thing, Jimmy."

" What was on that piece of paper upstairs?"

" Another city." Meinkewitz studied the computer readings.

" You two would now be dead."

Kate closed her eyes. " San Francisco..."

" There are more reports coming in." Meinkewitz leaned over the technician's shoulder. " I frankly don't want to hear them. There's not a God damned thing we can do about any of this except go back and try to change it." He turned to Kate.

" I need to talk to Jim for a second."

Kate nodded and locked her arms briefly around Cahill. Then Meinkewitz pulled Cahill into a side control room and shut the glass door.

" I don't like leaving Kate out there. Who is the hell is she going to tell now?"

" I know... I know." Meinkewitz clenched his fist as he thought.

Cahill took a long breath but his own emotions surged. " These attacks have to be more than just Carlos and the other people."

" I don't know that. But I do know that Higgs, Bonheim, and Carlos are at the center of it. Every major

American city has been hit. Our country, our way of life, is over."

Through the glass Kate's eyes remained closed. Cahill knew how she must have felt. Emotions raised to this incomprehensible level, with millions dead, squashed all other thoughts. He faced Meinkewitz. " So, what do we do about it? What *can* we do?"

Meinkewitz regained his calm demeanor. " Powering-up this system will take six hours. *If we still have electricity!* Denver hasn't been hit...Yet."

" I'm bringing Kate inside while we power-up. As a matter of fact, she's coming back with me."

" Jim, you have to establish your priorities!"

" I thought I just did that."

He thrust open the door and marched over to Kate. He held her shoulders. " I'm going back in time to warn everyone. You're coming with me."

She had a blank look. " Back in time?"

" Do you want to hang around here? Everything that we knew... gone. The country is one big waste pit."

" No... I do want to go with you but will it work? Is it safe?"

" I've done it twice. It works. Come on."

He led her to the long concrete ramp to the chamber. " I suppose if it's really possible... at least we'll be together."

" I think that's possible to get stuck, but that's not how it works. You don't get stuck. It's called retrograde." He stopped for a moment and put his hands on her shoulders. " When you're sent back, it's like everything gaining momentum, tightening and then snapping back. Just as well. I went back to the seventies and I'd still be there if the retrograde was not in effect."

They continued to the chamber door. Cahill pushed the button and stepped onto an orange grid mezzanine surrounding the upper levels. A bright transparent rod cluster covered a luminescent green floor far below. He explained how the fields, requiring tremendous power, surged from these rods around the chamber structure. A wide and long, protruding pathway, extended from the chamber opening and ended abruptly at the embarkation point in mid-chamber.

" Looks like a diving board."

" Good analogy. Once this thing is in full operation, you don't dive, but you do walk into the fields and you are suspended above the chamber. It's an odd feeling, I suppose it's like you're weightless. Then everything becomes weird. You can feel yourself being accelerated. When you are actually back in time, you see the area where you're emerging. It's like being placed in a picture. Everything develops. Then it just starts up. You're back in time. Same thing happens in reverse back to the chamber."

" I keep telling myself, you guys are somehow going to be able to pull this off..."

" I'm sure we can do it."

Meinkewitz's voice echoed around the chamber. " Jimmy, up here right now."

" He sounds serious," said Kate.

" He is."

They ran up the ramp this time and quickly moved through the adjacent room, now packed with personnel. Meinkewitz bounced between monitors, barking out orders.

" Ray, what's the matter?"

Meinkewitz talked as he moved. " We have problems outside. There are people shooting at the guard gate. Somebody knows about what we're doing here!"

" Great." Cahill checked the power-up monitor. " Three hours to power-up... We have minimal weapons here."

" If we can just hold them back for a few hours."

Harrington ran back into the control area and scampered around the consoles to Meinkewitz. " Ray, I have posted people in the tunnel and the doors are secured. Someone in intelligence has tipped these people off. They understand the importance of this place."

" Just hold them off, Bill. Hold them off."

## 6

A constant barrage pummeled the tunnel doors for two hours, but the sheer bulk of the old military fortress repulsed the attack. Meinkewitz remained below and worked frantically, trying to devise a plan for Cahill once he was back in 1984. The computers had increased retrograde time past two weeks, maybe a month. On the forward monitor the technicians had prepared a video, detailing the events of the past twelve hours. It was suggested that Cahill, no matter where he landed in the world, head direct to Hastings Mountain and contact Meinkewitz. The tape and his own corroborating verbal account would alert Meinkewitz to the disaster awaiting two years in the future.

Cahill leaned over the outside monitor. Just as any other day the sun had broken over the forest ridges. Men in army uniforms milled around several military trucks, and another group worked on the now dented and charred tunnel doors.

Kate looked at the scene, then gazed up at Cahill, and held his wrist. "Who are these people?"

"I don't know." Cahill pressed his lips and turned, when he saw Meinkewitz walk past the monitors with a food tray in his hand. "I always tip a good waiter."

"Here. We all need some sustenance."

" Thanks." Cahill grabbed a sandwich and bit into the ham and cheese. " Have we identified those guys out there?"

Meinkewitz, looked at the monitor. " They have to be fringe units. I just hope we can get you two out of here before-"

" It's going to take awhile before they get through those doors," said Cahill.

Meinkewitz set the tray on the counter. He crossed the room again, returning with a maroon briefcase, lifted it onto the table and popped the locks. Inside was a cellular phone, a small video machine and a laptop computer. Cahill looked at Kate and then removed the computer.

" I haven't seen this model. They're getting smaller and smaller."

" Faster and smaller chip. An entire intelligence schematic is inside." Meinkewitz picked up a tiny black book. " Just in case... Numbers, people to contact. The New York and San Francisco explosions are on the video. There should be no doubt you've come from 1986."

Kate sat on the counter. " What can you guys do in 1984 that you didn't do in 1986?"

Meinkewitz drank some soda, burped and smiled. " That's one hell of a question. I can only say we'll have two years instead of a few hours. With the situation laid out, the names of The Funeral House Gang, I think we will take whatever steps we have to prevent Armageddon."

" It's still a big chance," said Cahill.

" It is, not doubt about it. When you retrograde, I will try to align the return close to New York. I can't guarantee it, but if you see the city standing... you know you were successful."

" Wonderful."

As Cahill finished the sandwich, a plethora of red warning lights flashed. Everyone turned toward the monitor but nothing had changed at the tunnel doors. The soldiers still tried to get inside. Meinkewitz started back along the other consoles. He studied a few readings and then raised his hands into the air. " Why are the warning lights on?"

" I think they're coming in through the ducts!" shouted Harrington.

Cahill left his half bitten sandwich on the counter, took Kate's hand and jaunted over to Meinkewitz and Harrington. On the larger screen, the soldiers scrambled away from the tunnel doors and up the forested slope.

" This is going to get ugly." Meinkewitz looked at a pink and green air duct schematic on the computer screen. He shook his head several times and mumbled something to Harrington. Harrington seemed to concur. Then he rushed back to Cahill and held his shoulder. " Jimmy, I want you in the chamber now."

" There's nothing left here. Kate's going with me."

" I don't give a damn what you do. Just get your ass down there!"

Cahill first went over to the main system and checked the power levels. He shook his head as Meinkewitz appeared behind him. " Wait a minute. You sure as hell know that you can't send us out without full power-up."

" Jim, they're inside the mountain!"

" But, Ray-"

" Go!"

Meinkewitz closed the briefcase and locked the brass latches. He put his hand behind Cahill's back and pushed him forward. Cahill held Kate's hand down the ramp. Bright red warning lights flashed at the bottom level as they rushed across the concrete. He kept telling Meinkewitz an early departure might mess up everything and send them to places unknown.

There were already five or six Red Shift people inside the booth above the pyramid's green glow and Cahill specifically heard them override all previous instructions. Operations would commence prior to power-up. Meinkewitz ignored Cahill's protests and went to work at one of the consoles.

A flushed Harrington, minus his coat and tie, ran up the ramp. The few armed personnel left within the complex momentarily held the back the intruders near the upper air vents, but the terrorists had gunned down four of Meinkewitz's technicians. Harrington believed they might have fifteen minutes before the entire outside force stormed the lower area.

Meinkewitz spoke in a booming clear voice. " I want you and Kate inside the chamber."

" Ray, listen. Let's push the system. Get as close to power-up as we can."

Harrington yelled from one of the monitors. " They're through! And coming down the elevators!"

Meinkewitz stormed from the console and moved his hand like a plane propeller. " Get in the damn chamber or I'll get in there myself!"

Cahill stared at his raging eyes, grasped the briefcase handle and motioned Kate forward. They abandoned the control room and sprinted down the ramp to the chamber. The rounded chrome hatch sounded like a refrigerator door opening in higher air pressure and the ubiquitous green glow across the inner walls signaled Meinkewitz had started the process.

" Will we make it, Jim?"

" We'll make it, Katie." The displacement had never been started without full power-up.

From the booth Meinkewitz came on the tiny monitor.

" We're going to activate the lower area now, Jimmy."

" Okay." Cahill turned from the monitor and put his arm around Kate. Her green eyes were lost in the chamber glow.

" Isn't exactly what I had planned when I flew you in from New York."

" Could be worse. I could be *in* New York."

" This is true."

Meinkewitz punched the proper sequence. An emerging green energy push would slowly move like mercury up a thermometer to the clear rods and then fill the chamber itself. Each laser-like beam connected to coordinates within the chamber and would form an intricate crisscross pattern. The beam would then swell, becoming one moving mass.

" At least we're together, Jim."

" This will be easy. We'll head right back here and warn Meinkewitz." The energy flow waned and the process ended abruptly as the beams retracted into the cluster transparencies. Inside the booth Meinkewitz pounded his fist.

He held her shoulders. " Stay right here, Katie." He popped the hatchway. Holding the briefcase, he ran up the ramp to booth stairs.

" Jimmy, what the hell are you doing out here? Get back inside!"

Cahill pushed buttons and got readings as he studied the monitors. " I told you, Ray. We're not powered-up! The overload was triggered."

He stood motionless and then crossed the room, dodged the consoles and slid under an array of colored lights behind the orange main power box. He clawed at the bottom panel clips, finally forcing them open, and the box fell to the floor.

Meinkewitz yelled as Cahill crawled deeper in the dim light, illuminated only by the magenta circuit route tubes. He

was now at least fifteen feet below the upper controls and soon found a jammed inner panel. He ripped it open and tossed it across the tiles. The red digits revealed odd power-up readings.

He called back through the muffled passageway. " Ray, get me some monitoring equipment so I can change these levels!" There was no response. " Ray, come on!"

Cahill decided to flip the switches manually. It worked and the readings did stabilize. He slid along the floor back to the control booth opening. Before he stuck his head into the room, he faced two automatic rifles pointed in his face. He sat up in the brighter light. At least a dozen soldiers now controlled the booth and had shot all personnel.

Meinkewitz, sprawled across the chair, blood oozing through his white shirt, showed no movement. Cahill wondered if they knew Kate was inside the chamber. An older sandy haired soldier, with either a German or Russian accent and deep smile lines etched over his face, walked across the booth and waved the pistols in his large hands. " You will be debriefed."

Cahill stared at the dead and could not understand why he survived. He briefly glanced to his right. Pushing the advance button on Meinkewitz's panel would begin the power-up process again. At least Kate could get back. Even without the briefcase her resourcefulness would guide her to the Meinkewitz of the past. But he worried about the power-up.

Any premature departure into time might kill her before she reached the past.

" I have to shut this down!"

The man's unshaven face and piercing blue eyes were inches away from Cahill. " Why?"

" Because if I don't push that button, this place is going to blow sky high, Mister!"

The officer looked at him and then toward the chamber. He quickly nodded his head and motioned with one of his guns.

" We want to use this place. You do what you have to do."

Cahill scrambled to the panel and disconnected the chamber monitor. Then he locked the hatch and pounded the advance button. The power-up systems quickly cranked, shaking the booth. In two minutes and twenty seconds, Kate, without system overload, would be catapulted back to 1984.

The officer pulled at Cahill's sleeve and pointed the gun at his face. " Who are you?"

Cahill squinted at Meinkewitz's lifeless form in the chair. He pushed his lips together and looked at his captor. " James Cahill. I... work here.

" You are engaged in scientific research."

" I think that's evident."

The chamber glowed green. " What is happening in there? It sounds louder now. I don't want any tricks!"

" It's winding down. It will glow for a few minutes and then shut off."

Another soldier appeared in the door. " The other area is secure, Vladimir."

" Good. Radio Carlos." He turned to Cahill. " We have heard you are doing something with... time experiments..."

Cahill looked at the clock. One minute and eleven seconds. The chamber hummed. Any overload would disrupt and destroy Kate's body cells and sending her back might kill her. The Russian seemed confused as Cahill screamed. " We have a problem!"

" What is it?"

" It's not working. You made me wait too long. The chamber is going to blow! This whole place will be destroyed unless I deactivate it from inside!"

Vladimir pursued the chamber and then gazed at Cahill. " Deactivate. Deactivate."

Cahill hit the manual button for the hatch. He ran from the booth and the soldiers followed him down the ramp. Maybe it was still be possible to enter the chamber before Kate was brought back. When he reached the chamber, he pushed the security numbers for manual hatch activation. A massive rush of steam and wind pushed him back. But he fought the onslaught, advanced ahead of the soldiers and struggled to close the hatch. Then he called into the swirling mass. "

Kate! Kate!" Maybe she had leaped into the displacement. " Kate!"

Vladmir called his name from the booth. Cahill was secure inside the chamber, but blinded by the displacement as he shuffled along the board. There was no waiting. Meinkewitz would have told him to jump. With fifteen seconds to optimum level, he took a running leap into the shifting gaseous mass.

He called out for Kate within the weightless green fog and no longer heard the taunting Russian, He sensed movement back in time, but the briefcase lay under the control room panel. Explaining everything to the past Meinkewitz, with no proof, presented a major problem.

Hovering in the timeless mass he worried about Kate's displacement route. Hours could pass before he emerged and he planned his strategy. Two years ago Meinkewitz was still at Hastings Mountain, but Cahill was stationed overseas in Germany. Dual identities in this time period could compound his problems. He would overcome this dilemma by admitting up front he had come back in time and another Jim Cahill existed in their time at the air base in Stuttgart.

Cahill panicked as the time dragged on. What if they did not believe him? History would then play out, annihilating United States cities again. Crackpots told intelligence agencies wild stories all the time. He could find himself dead if they questioned his story. The briefcase would have at least provided the proof.

And what if he and Kate had traveled an alternate route back through time? It might be impossible to find her unless she went to Meinkewitz. He worried about the prudence of her getting involved in this at all and prayed the lack of power-up would not affect the time travel.