

LEAGUE OF MAIDENS



THE FALL OF MAN

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LEAGUE OF MAIDENS:

Book 4: The Fall of Man

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“November Company, snap in down range!” Ordered Captain Ahmes as she stood behind her platoon of Marines.

In a long, wide open field cut out of a dense forest; thirty-two Marines laid in the prone position preparing to fire their weapons. In the center of the Marines a tall wooden tower separated the firing range in two. Capitan Ahmes stood watch over the sixteen Marines on the left while another officer watched the group on the right. The firing range was twelve hundred yards long and the distance from where the Marines laid was exactly one thousand yards. At the back of the range a large man-made wall of earth protruded out of the ground to protect the Marines operating the target systems down range.

Capitan Ahmes had recently been given the opportunity to train the US Marines Force Recon troops and she was not taking her role lightly.

“You will not make a fool of me or my corp do you understand me!” She questioned the troops waiting to fire.

“Yes Ma’am!” The platoon shouted in synchrony.

“On my command you will fire in rapid succession, when I tell you to cease fire you will cease fire, do you understand me?” She continued.

“Yes Ma’am!” The platoon replied.

Capitan Ahmes looked across to the other side of the platform and nodded her head to the officer watching over the range. When the officer nodded back, she picked up her megaphone.

“Fire!” She yelled into the loud speaker.

The first clap of a M16-A2 service rifle echoed across the field from the left side, right below the Capitan’s tower. That shot was followed by hundreds of small explosions as the Marines popped off full magazines into the targets on the other side of the field. As soon as a short break in fire took place, Capitan Ahmes picked up her megaphone and spoke again.

“Cease Fire!” She shouted.

All thirty-two Marines raised their heads from their weapons and patiently awaited their results.

“Weapons on safe!” Capitan Ahmes continued.

A series of clicks broke the silence between Capitan Ahmes’ commands as the Marines flicked their weapons to safe. All thirty-two Marines lifted themselves off their stomachs and into a kneel as they waited.

“Lanes, let’s see the results.” Capitan Ahmes said into a Walkie-Talkie, communicating with Marines in the target area.

One by one each target dropped below the mound of earth. After a few seconds, all thirty-two targets returned with a green dot on the lower left corner and the field erupted in cheers.

“Hey lock it up!” The Capitan screamed into the megaphone.

The field fell silent and she continued to speak.

“Congratulations, thirty-two for thirty-two; but if you think I’m going to sign off on you being recon because you can shoot a weapon you’re dead wrong. Every Marine is a rifleman, all you did was do your job. Now fall in!

While the Marines scrambled to get into formation, a second officer approached Capitan Ahmes holding a cell phone. He handed it to her with the microphone covered.

“It’s the General’s office Ma’am; they want you in Washington by morning.” He said before letting go of the phone.

Chapter 2

Washington DC

Inside a wide-open room, lit up with computer screens from wall to wall soldiers and civilians scurried around the room panicked. The room was divided into sections by cubicles and inside each section someone sat feverishly typing away at their computer. Directly behind the middle section of cubicles, slightly raised by two tile steps was a large conference room. The conference room had thick panes of glass for walls on three sides as well as glass for its doors. On the back wall, furthest from the pit, an interoffice term used to describe the cubicle section of the room, four large TV screens were hung side by side across the room. In front of the TV screens a long glass table stretched across the length of the room. At the table sat thirteen people six on each side of the long rectangle and one man at the head of the table. His name was General Thomas Michaels. General Michaels was a Brigadier General with the United States Army. His dark hair with peppered grey showed his age slightly but his chiseled jaw and muscular body told more of his story than anything else. On his chest, he wore an array of service pins and medals representing his lifelong dedication to the Army.

While the people on the outside of the glass walls frantically made their way back and forth across the room answering the phone and delivering messages inside was dead silent. The twelve men and women sat

nervously staring at General Michaels waiting for him to react.

“I don’t know what happened but you better figure it the hell out” Ordered General Michaels, breaking the silence in the room.

“Sir, satellite feed at the time of the attack was disrupted. We have footage of the representatives and Colonel Snow outside the dig sight; the feed is still good as she enters the tunnel and as she exits but if you take a look at the feed right after she rejoins the group.” Said a younger man in the middle seat directly below the TV screens.

The younger man stood from his seat and tapped the surface of the center TV. The screen lit up and a small menu appeared on the right side of the screen. The man slid his fingers around the menu opening several files before he got to a freeze frame aerial view of The Great Sphinx. He turned to the General and tilted his head as if to ask permission to continue. General Michaels nodded.

“If you take a look here sir,” The man said as he swiped both hands across the screen in opposite directions to zoom in closer.

“Just as the Colonel approaches the group the feed begins to scramble, and after a few seconds it cuts out completely.” He continued.

“So, you’re telling me without this sat feed there is no way for us to know what happened out there.” Said the General.

“Unfortunately not sir, these were the only eyes we had on the Colonel and her group sir” Replied the man as he took his seat.

From the far end of the table a very deliberate cough followed the quick silence after the man finished. In unison, the men and women turned to the direction the cough came from as General Michaels stood slightly out of his chair keeping his palms flat on the glass.

“Something you’d like to say Major?” Questioned General Michaels.

“No sir, nothing really except that she is still alive. I just received word she is in a local hospital in Cairo being treated for her wounds.” Major Wilkes said confidently.

“We need information on her status ASAP, get on the horn with the Egyptians we need details of what happened. I want to know what happened to that rock!” The General demanded.

“She’s in a medically induced coma; I have an eye on her.” The Major said still seated.

“You?” Questioned the General.

“We, sorry.” Said the Major.

“Address me as Sir or General when you talk to me Major.” Demanded the General.

“No disrespect ‘General’ but that is my mother you’re talking about and I need to make sure she is ok. I don’t doubt that your stone is important but it’s not as

important as my mother's life." The Major said as she stood.

"Watch your tone Major!" Warned General Michaels

"I don't actually work for you General, but I do work for the United States Marine Corp and General Simpson asked me to deliver this to you!" She continued as she slid a small flash drive across the table.

"I don't know what it is, but I assume it has something to do with your stone 'sir'." She said as she walked passed the group of soldiers standing in awe, then exited the room.

General Michaels waited until the elevator doors closed and Major Wilkes was gone before he plugged the drive into a computer on the table. The center TV flashed then went black. A small white dot appeared on the center of the screen and immediately began to rotate in a circle as a video loaded behind it.

"Press play." The General ordered.

Chapter 3

Eyes in the Sky

The sun beat down from the cloudless skies of the Egyptian desert. A long shadow extended across the sand cooling the enormous limestone blocks that made up the base of the Great Sphinx. The ancient monolith stood watch over the Pyramids of Giza for forty-five hundred years before its true purpose was discovered.

A large trench had been carved between the paws of the ancient guardian and under its chest a deep tunnel extending hundreds of feet below the surface had been excavated. From the tunnel below the Great Sphinx a tall blonde woman in desert camouflage emerged covered in soot and cobwebs. She dusted her pant legs off as she stepped into the sunlight then approached the group of people waiting anxiously for her return.

“It’s there.” Said the woman as she adjusted her hat.

“Are you sure Colonel Snow?” Questioned one of the men in the middle of the crowd.

“Sure as stone!” She replied with smile.

“Well let’s get it out of there.” Another member of the group said.

A gust of wind blustered around the side of the enormous sculpture kicking up loose layers of sand. The

entire group, as if rehearsed, turned their back to the gust and continued speaking.

“We need clearance from the Egyptian Government.” Colonel Snow said as the wind briefly died down.

“Poppy-Cock!” Said a man with a strong British accent.

“We are representatives of the G8, we don’t need permission from the Egyptian Government to remove it. That stone is an international commodity; it is imperative it be removed immediately!”

From the back of the crowd a young woman crept backward keeping her face to the group as they distracted themselves in conversation. She was below average in height and thin with black hair. On her face, she wore thick framed eye glasses which took the focus off of her bicolored eyes. Her left eye was blue and her right was a deep brown almost black. When she reached the end of the massive foot she ducked behind the stone wall, hidden from view. The mysterious woman outstretched her arms and raised them, palms up, till they were parallel with the sand. Her iris’ faded to white and her pupils disappeared. With a single blink, her pearl white eyes turned a crimson, blood, red. In the palms of her hands, sand began to gather quickly gyrating in the air in a spherical motion that resembled a spinning ball. The woman clinched her fists collapsing the balls of sand into her grip and held it as a pain shot through both forearms. Her biceps bulged and her veins protruded from her arms until she released her grip. She raised her hands to the sky and extended her fingers wide as sand rocketed from her palms. The blast flew up

into the air and down again like a crashing tidal wave filling the area with a lethal blast of sand. The group screamed in horror as the sand engulfed their bodies. The delegates wavered back and forth in a group trying to escape the storm. The sand pelted them with such force it began to tear the exposed skin from their bones. The Colonel, still standing with her face to the group, was spared the initial blow of the sand. But, as the members of the party began to fall the storm showered her face with sand. She reached up to her hat and ripped it off her head. She placed the sun hat over her face and dove to the ground as fast as she could. The wind blew stronger, and more layers of loose sand assaulted the bodies of those still standing above her. Through the wind, she could faintly hear the screams of her group but the pain in her face was all that she could focus on. Her eyes burned intensely and her mouth was dry and filled with sand. All she could do was lay there and hope to wait out the storm. The few people still standing had stopped screaming as shock took over their bodies. They walked in a daze unaware their life had already ended. The longer they stood upright the more the sand destroyed their bodies. The last few members of the party stumbled over the Colonel and they came crashing down on top of her.

Suddenly the sand storm came to a halt and the mysterious, young, woman exited her hiding spot. She walked across the pool of blood that formed around the pile of bodies. Her feet slogged through the blood as she stepped over the bones of the delegates. As she approached the trench she paused and looked around surveying the area. From beneath the mound of bodies,

Colonel Snow watched the young woman standing on the edge of the trench as she tried to squirm her way out of the pile. The raw, battered skin on her leg scraped along the sand and she cringed in pain. She took a deep breath though her clinched teeth trying not to draw any attention to herself but it was audible and the woman spun around to face her direction. Colonel Snow froze as their eyes locked. The woman started toward her but stopped a few feet away; staring directly at her. Colonel Snow tried to remember which member of the party the woman came with but she couldn't keep her mind off the woman's eyes. The dual colors looked so strange to her. She knew the mutation existed but had never before seen it in real life. As she stared into the woman's eyes the pain in her arms and legs disappeared. She felt like she'd been hypnotized by her eyes. Suddenly, the woman turned back to the Sphinx making her way into the trench. When she reached the edge, she glanced back to the Colonel then dropped down out of her sight. From beneath the pile of bodies Colonel Snow wobbled her way to her feet then limped toward the base of the giant monument. As she approached the Sphinx, her foot caught the edge of the trench and she tumbled to the bottom. When she landed, her head crashed down on the packed sand. Her body was battered and she began to drift in and out of consciousness. As her vision tunneled she shifted her gaze toward the mouth of the trench. Just before blacking out she saw a flash of light fill the entrance of the passageway below the Great Sphinx; then black.

Chapter 4

The Crystal

Inside a catacomb, deep below the surface; the mysterious woman stood in the center of the room. Her smooth, milky white skin shined orange in the light from the torch she held in her hand. A small flicker of fire reflected off of her eyes as she stared widely into the back of the underground vault.

Directly in front of her, a narrow, stone bridge stretched across a deep ravine that led to a large step pyramid on the other side of the room. At the top of the pyramid suspended by solid gold braces, a bright light shined down on a massive clear crystal. The cut on the crystal was immaculate. But, this stone was far too large for any modern-day jeweler to perform such a task. The crystal was as clear as glass and thick; it rested weightlessly on its braces.

The woman, without thinking, made her way across the bridge. She lowered her torch closer to the ground to guide her way. Unnerved, she reached the other side and began her ascension up the stone fortress.

When she reached the top, she paused momentarily and looked into the center of the crystal with awe. She placed her torch on the ground next to the stone and slowly rested both palms on the side of the crystal.

She raised her head and looked directly into the light that shined down on the crystal. She rolled her eyes into the back of her head then began to blink rapidly. Her hands began to shake violently as they pressed firmly on the smooth surface of the crystal. Originating from the palms of her hands, a red glow lit up the dark cavern and within seconds the light fully engulfed her body. The woman clinched her fist and the glow shifted back into her hands; she pressed them into the stone and a wave of red tainted the flawlessly opaque crystal.

Chapter 5

Jackie Snow

A quiet, rhythmic beep brought Jackie out of her deep sleep. She woke up rather confused; it took several extra-long blinks to bring her eyes back into focus. She raised her head from the uncomfortable, cheap, pillow where it rested and looked cautiously around the room. After a few seconds, she attempted to move her legs but a sharp pain shot up her spine. She keeled over in pain and screamed. The beeps in the background began to speed up as they increased in volume. From the hallway, a nurse rushed in.

“Ma’am, I need you to relax!” Said the nurse in a thick Egyptian accent.

Jackie wrenched in pain, she clinched her eyes and teeth shut as she screamed out again without opening her jaw.

“It hurts!” She said with tears flowing from the cracks of her sealed eyelids.

“We had to perform a skin graph on your left thigh and arm Ms. Snow. We will talk about that later for now just rest.” Said a doctor as he walked casually into the room accompanying the nurse.

“I can’t rest!” Jackie bellowed out in between her labored breaths.

“You’ll be fine.” Said the doctor as he approached her bedside.

With his right hand, he reached above her head at a small hand-held cylinder with a red button on the tip and held it in his palm. With his other hand, he traced the plastic tubing from the bottom of the cylinder with his thumb and index finger to a transparent plastic bag labeled *Morphine*. At the base of the bag, a spin-dial that restricted the flow of the medication to the desired amount. The doctor opened the dial completely then plunged his thumb onto the red button allowing for a free flow of the medication to fill Jackie’s veins. She started to speak but before she could get the words out her head fell back onto her pillow and her eyes began to close. The room fell silent and quiet rhythmic beeps began again.

From the hallway, another doctor entered Jackie’s room.

“Jesus Christmas, you scared the crap out of me Fady!” The doctor said to the man beside him.

“My apologies Jim.” Fady replied.

“Any word on the rest of the group?” Continued Fady.

“She was the only one who made it out alive.” Doctor Tucker responded.

“That’s terrible; I’ve never seen such a thing in all my life! Forty-two years here, some of the corpses look like they’ve been sand blasted.” Doctor Fady said shaking his head as they turned to leave.

“She sure is lucky to be alive” Doctor Tucker added as they exited the room.

Chapter 6

Plan B

Inside the glass room, General Michaels paced back and forth in front of a group of subordinates. From the pit a man dressed in civilian clothing rushed through the door to the conference room; once inside, he stood at attention waiting to be acknowledged by the General.

General Michaels continued pacing for several more seconds before speaking.

“Yes?” The General asked vaguely.

“General, sir, we just got a call from the White House. The President is on board with Plan B. Your primary objective is to retrieve the crystal sir.” The man said as he handed a hand-written note to the General.

“Thank you Omar.” The general said to the man politely as he exited the conference room.

“You heard it ladies and gentlemen let’s make it happen!” General Michaels said to the group of soldiers seated at the table.

“Sir, who will you be sending?” Questioned one of the subordinates.

“Send the Rangers” He replied.

Chapter 7

Excavation

Sand plumed from the desert floor as two large helicopters skimmed the ground; bobbing and weaving their way around the ancient civilization. As they approached The Great Pyramid they split formation and flew around each side of the massive monument then returned to their lineal flying positions. With their blades kicking up more loose sand, the helicopters came to rest at the base of the Great Sphinx.

Out of the first chopper eight soldiers dressed in full desert camouflage dropped to the ground with their weapons drawn. The soldiers immediately jogged toward the second helicopter and stood guard as six more soldiers exited their chopper followed by a small, dark skinned man in khakis and a white T-shirt. The soldiers escorted the man away from the helicopters and toward the monument but several hundred feet short of the tunnel.

“Dr. Cole, you wait here.” Shouted one of the soldiers yelling over the sound of the helicopter blades.

Three of the soldiers left the escort team and returned back to the second chopper. When they arrived at the door, a tall red headed woman exited the helicopter unassisted.

“Area is secure Major.” The soldier closest to her yelled through his helmet.

“Let’s move!” Yelled Major Kathleen Ahmes, as she signaled to the choppers behind her.

The three soldiers formed a semi-circle around the woman and escorted her away from the spinning blades. As the helicopters took off, leaving the group alone, Major Ahmes made her way across the desert without flinching at the loose sand pelting her exposed skin. Her hair was tightly braided and her eyes were protected by large aviator style sunglasses.

“Doctor Cole, let’s take a look at that crystal. Shall we?” She said once the thundering of the helicopters faded.

Dr. Cole looked over at the entrance to the tunnel then back toward Major Ahmes without saying a word.

“It wasn’t really a question.” Said the soldier standing next to Dr. Cole as he shoved him with the butt of his rifle.

Dr. Stephen Cole obediently turned to the tunnel and followed the long path toward the Sphinx. Dr. Cole was a very reserved, intelligent individual, not someone who liked confrontations. When he was told he would be escorting another team into the vaults of the Great Sphinx he knew no was not an option. As an archeologist he was opposed to the US Army bullying their way onto a legitimate, history changing, dig site, but as an American citizen he knew if he resisted the consequences could be far more severe.

As the group approached the entrance to the tunnel Major Ahmes signaled for four of the soldiers to wait outside and stand guard.

“Yes Ma’am!” Said the soldier closest to her.

The remaining group followed Dr. Cole down into the depths of the tunnel.

Chapter 8

The Crystal II

Once inside the main chamber of the tunnel the soldiers fanned out; each member of the team took a post watching Major Ahmes and Dr. Cole. Major Ahmes followed behind Stephen as the pair crossed the long narrow bridge overlooking the deep gorge below. Dr. Cole nervously walked one foot in front of the other with his arms spread wide for balance. A few small red dots circled the ground below his feet guiding his way through the darkness

“Buck up doc, it’s like four feet wide.” A voice echoed from the darkness.

His hands shook as he stood frozen suspended high on the rock bridge above the gorge.

“Keep it movin’ Doc!” Ordered the Major as she softly pushed his right shoulder forward.

The pair continued together across the bridge until they reached the other side. Then, Stephen stepped off to the right and Kathleen to the left. A sudden thumping of footsteps filled the room and only seconds behind them the soldiers made their way across the bridge one by one. The last soldier wheeled a dolly in front of him with ropes and straps wrapped around his chest like a row of .50 caliber bullets.

“Is that it?” Question Major Ahmes, pointing to the large red crystal atop the step pyramid above them.

“One would assume so.” Replied the doctor sarcastically.

“Don’t you sass me doc!” Major Ahmes retorted.

“No sassing here Major! I’ve never actually seen the crystal. Jackie’s the only person to have ever seen it and considering this is the only giant crystal in the room, one would have to assume this is in fact... it” replied Dr. Cole sheepishly.

“You squints are all the same! I don’t know how the Colonel puts up with you guys!” Kathleen said as she shoved Stephen to the side.

“Ladies and gents, get it strapped up and let’s get it out of here. Marco, get on the horn with the choppers and get us home.” She continued.

“Yes ma’am!” The soldiers replied in unison.

“Come in Fox Tree, this is papa over!” Said Corporal Marco into his handheld radio.

“Come in Fox Tree, this is papa, do you copy over?” he repeated.

“Nothing ma’am, no signal down here in this shit hole.” Marco yelled out to Major Ahmes.

“Figures.” Kathleen replied.

The soldiers hoisted the large crystal on to the dolly and wheeled it across the bridge. As they made

their way back toward the surface Corporal Marco continued to radio their transport.

“Fox Tree, Fox Won this is papa, do you copy? Fox Won, Fox Tree this is papa, are you boys alright out there? he continued.

“Save your breath Fallon, we’re under about a million tons of stone.” Said one of the soldiers trailing behind him.

“I don’t know Major, we’re right at the entrance. Something doesn’t seem right to me.” Questioned Marco as they approached the exit.

A loud bang echoed through the desert as the group exited the tunnel. The group of soldiers dove out of the entrance way; one of them pulled Major Ahmes down with him. Stephen Cole stood alone in the middle of the entrance confused and disoriented. He looked around the area but didn’t see anything out of the ordinary. He could hear the voices of the soldiers around him but they were muffled slightly. The sunlight in the Egyptian desert seemed oddly vibrant to him but he didn’t really think too much about it. He seemed happy to be outside, a warming sensation took over his body, and he could feel it in his chest. He felt it spreading to his arms and legs. He smiled as he looked back at the soldiers hidden behind the large blocks that made up the base of the Sphinx. They waved at him frantically but he didn’t understand why. A second bang rang out across the desert and Dr. Cole’s body fell lifelessly to the ground. A bullet struck him between the eyes and killed him. On the portion of the wall behind him splattered

with blood and large chunks of his skull, a large brass bullet lodged itself in the side of the limestone block a few feet from Major Ahmes' face.

Chapter 9

Dept. of Defense

“They’re taking fire sir!” A private called out from the back of the room.

A group of soldiers gathered around the young private at his work station. The young man punched a few keys on his keyboard and the satellite feed popped up on a large TV screen in the center of the room. Behind the crowd an older woman in a business suit walked up silently. She stood behind them with her arms crossed trying not to draw attention to herself. She quietly watched the feed as small sparks of muzzle fire lit up the screen surrounding the Sphinx.

“Push in closer!” Demanded the woman.

General Michaels, standing directly in front of the screen whipped his head around at the sound of the woman’s voice. He recognized it immediately and snapped to attention.

“Attention on deck!” General Michaels bellowed across the room.

All the soldiers in the room jumped to their feet, temporarily ignoring the screen, they turned their attention to the woman behind them.

“As you were.” The woman responded without thought.

The soldiers returned to their seats then their attention to the live feed of the fire fight taking place in Egypt. The General made his way to the woman as she stood watching the screen.

“Madam Secretary.” He said as he approached.

“General Michaels.” She replied.

“To what do we owe the pleasure ma’am?” The General said modestly.

“Don’t play coy with me General. You know why I’m here. The President wants to be sure that stone comes back in one piece. The second a call rang in to El Gorah from the dig site we all knew I’d be here.” The woman barked back.

“Madam Secretary, we already called off the support teams. General Trousdale was a little confused but I told him it was a routine training exercise with a group of Rangers in the Gaza Strip. I apologized for the alarm. We seem to be ok. I already scrambled two Apache choppers to provide an aerial assault for the Major and her team.” The General reported.

“Call them back!” The woman ordered.

“Ma’am?” The general questioned.

“You heard me General. We cannot afford to damage that stone! By the looks of things your team has everything under contro... who is that?” The woman said pointing to the center of the tunnel.

“It appears to be Dr. Cole ma’am; we caught the feed just after the first few shots and he is the only body unaccounted for.” Said a soldier sitting next to the General and his guest.

“Dammit!” The woman said in frustration.

“I suggest you get your shit together and figure out a way to get that stone state side immediately.” She said bluntly before she turned and exited the room.

“You heard her get those choppers turned around, Blakney get on the radio and find out what’s going on down there.” The General ordered.

“Echo Won Niner, This is Hotel Bravo, abort mission, I repeat abort mission! Your services are no longer required gentlemen, head back home over.” Sergeant Blakney said into his headset.

“Hotel Bravo, This is Echo Won Niner, we heard you loud and clear, we’re heading home.” Said one of the pilots.

“Roger that, Echo Won Niner” Sergeant Blakey replied.

“No problem Hotel Bravo”

Chapter 10

ISIS ASSAULT

“Behind the hut!” Screamed Major Ahmes, pointing to her left.

Three Arab men stood with their weapons pointed at the group. The men were dressed in plain clothes and their weapons were out of date but they fought with great ferocity. Two men stood on each side of the hut and the third lay prone on the roof. They screamed in a language the Major couldn’t understand but under the circumstance she assumed they were telling them to drop their weapons.

“Hold your fire!” She yelled out to her soldiers.

The soldiers pointed their weapons back toward the militia troops but didn’t fire.

“Go ahead shoot! One of soldiers screamed at the opposing troops.

At Kathleen’s feet, a small metal ball thunked as it hit the stone and rolled between her legs.

“Grenade!” She yelled as she bent down and grabbed it.

Major Ahmes gripped the grenade and tossed it as hard as she could toward the hut. The troops dove out of the way just as the hut exploded in ball of fire. The soldiers opened fire as the men rolled to safety. The

sand trailing the men erupted as the soldier's bullets hit the sand behind them.

From the right side of the Sphinx a burst of bullets pelleted the large blocks above Major Ahmes head. She ducked her head below the cover and pressed her back to the stone wall.

"Fire from the right!" She called out to her soldiers who were still focused on the men on the other side.

Major Ahmes reached over to the soldier closest to her and pulled his sidearm from his holster. She cocked the pistol back and flicked off the safety. She placed her hands on the grip ready to fire then quickly poked her head above the small stone wall that provided her protection. As soon as her head appeared several shots rang out and pelted the wall in front of her. Kathleen saw the muzzle fire appear behind a small Jeep Wrangler parked off in the distance and trained her focus on that direction. Once the bullets stopped she fearless raised herself above her cover and fired 3 quick shots into the side of the Jeep. The man behind the vehicle dropped out of sight.

"Rangers, take 'em out!" Major Ahmes yelled to her soldiers without taking her eyes off of the Jeep.

A series of shots rang out across the desert as the soldiers released a spray of bullets toward their attackers. The soldiers split into two groups without thought and fanned out in opposite directions. The group on the right was led by Major Ahmes and she kept her sights trained on the man behind the jeep. The man

poked his head around the hood of the vehicle and she unloaded three more shots in his direction. The first shot struck the man in his head and he dropped heavily to the ground. The second two shots struck his stomach as his body fell. Kathleen broke formation and sprinted toward the Jeep.

“Major!” The soldier next to her yelled.

She slid on her knees across the sand and took cover next to the man’s lifeless body. She reached down and grabbed his weapon, and loaded a bullet into the chamber. The last used shell flew out the side of the AK-47. She pressed her thumb on the side of the weapon and the magazine dropped into her awaiting hand. She quickly counted the remaining shots then popped the magazine back into the weapon. She opened the driver side door of the jeep and dove inside. She felt around for the keys keeping her head out of view. Between the two front seats, she peered into the back of the vehicle then froze. On the floor of the jeep a large black flag with white writing was spread over a few small boxes.

“Isis!” She screamed out to her soldiers.

She jumped out of the side of the Jeep and sprinted back toward her group. The soldiers stopped firing and ducked below some excavation equipment.

“We got em Major” Corporal Thomas said with confidence.

“They’re Isis soldiers and there’s more coming! We need to get that stone in the jeep and get the fuck out of here!” She said pointing back toward the jeep.

Chapter 11

Delivery

On the 3rd floor of an ordinary building set apart from the famous skyline of Washington DC, General Michaels waited anxiously at his desk. His office was very plain. His white walls were bare, except for his commendations and his degree from Dartmouth University. His large brown desk was centered perfectly in the room; that too was bare. Inside, the General sat in the dim light of his reading lamp. On his desk a bottle of Jack Daniels stood next to a half full glass of whiskey and ice. General Michaels picked up the glass of whiskey.

A knock at the door startled the General before he could swallow his drink.

“Come in!” He said with a burdened tone.

He cleared his throat as a woman entered the room.

“General Michaels sir.” The woman said.

“Yes Sergeant?” The General replied.

“We just got word from El Gorah that the package is in route.” The woman responded.

General Michaels, without saying a word, picked up the glass and carried it around his desk toward the

woman in his doorway. He handed the glass to the sergeant and bowed his head in her direction. Confused by the General's reaction, the Sergeant nodded back at General Michaels before speaking.

"Everything OK sir?" She asked.

"Of course. It's been a long night Mills." He replied.

General Michaels grabbed the glass from Sergeant Mills' hand.

"Get a good night's sleep Mills, tomorrow is going to be a long day." He continued.

"Yes sir." Sergeant Mills replied, before she turned and exited the room.

The General shut the door behind her and made his way back to his desk. He placed the glass back in the same spot it was moments before and sat back in his chair. He picked up the receiver of a small black phone bolted to his desk punching in a series of numbers. After a single ring, a woman picked up the other end of the line and spoke.

"General Michaels." The woman said.

"We've got it Madam Secretary; the stone is in route." He replied.

Before he could continue, a click on the other end signaled she'd hung up. General Michaels took a deep breath and hung up the phone as well. He reached

over for his glass of whiskey and took a long sip as he leaned back raising his feet up onto his desk.

Chapter 12

Welcome Home

Rain poured down from the night sky as Jackie Snow exited a cab in front of her two-story townhome. She reached into her pocketbook and pulled out the money needed to pay her fare. She placed the money inside the driver's outstretched hand then cautiously made her way down the long paver walkway. It felt good to be out of the hospital and back in the United States. When she approached the front door, she saw a large pile of mail scattered on her front step. She reached down gingerly as not to aggravate the skin grafts on her leg.

"So much for keeping an eye on my place Cara Marie." Colonel Snow said to herself as she grabbed the mail.

She reached in to her jacket pocket and pulled out her cellphone. After dialing she placed the phone up to her ear and waited for an answer.

"This is Major Cara Marie Wilkes, United States Marine Corps; I am either on the other line or away from my phone right now. Please leave me your name and number and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

Semper Fi.” The voice on the other end said once it stopped ringing.

“Cara this is your mother, I thought you were going to look after my place for me? What happened to that?” Questioned Jackie.

She hung up the phone and placed it into her back pocket and turned toward the entrance unlocking her door. Stepping into the darkness of her home she shut the door behind her.

“SURPRISE!” Several people screamed once the lights clicked on.

Shocked, Jackie threw her hands up tossing the mail into the air above her head. She jumped back against the door and screamed as loud as she could. Laughter filled the room as she struggled to keep her cool. She looked out around the room at the people staring back at her. Her heart beat was so intense she could feel the blood pumping. She attempted to talk but she couldn't. The room quieted down to a whisper as tears began to trickle down Jackie's face. From the middle of the crowd Major Cara Marie Wilkes made her way around the couch that sat centered in the living room and approached her mother.

“You OK mom? She said quietly.

“I’m fine” Jackie replied as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“I can’t believe you did this to me!” She continued as she playfully pushed Cara on her shoulder before hugging her.

Assuming everything was OK once they hugged the room erupted in chatter once again. The guest of the party removed themselves from their hiding spots and the party spread out across the room. Jackie watched in awe as her friends, family and colleagues comingled with each in celebration of her safe return.

“I can’t believe all these people came.” She said to Cara.

“You deserve it mom.” Replied Cara.

“Twenty-five years in the military and who would have thought a sand storm would have been the closest thing to killing me.” Jackie said in a joking manner.

“They got the crystal a few days ago; it’s a shame so many people had to die to get it.” Said Cara.

“Not now Cara, I don’t want to talk about work right now.” Insisted Jackie.

“You’re the boss tonight mom!” Replied Major Wilkes as she halfhearted a salute to her mother.

“Excuse me?” Jackie said shooting a sarcastic look toward Cara.

“You know what I mean Colonel!” She said with a smile on her face.

Chapter 13

A Tale of Caution

After the party, Jackie sat alone inside her bedroom tucked into her bed. She leaned against the wall with her computer resting on her lap. The screen illuminated the dark room with a white glow as she browsed the internet. In the search bar she typed WWW.WORLDNEWSNOW.COM and the site's homepage loaded. At the top of the page she clicked a hyperlink labeled WNN and her screen began to flicker. Curious, she clicked it again and the screen went black.

From the black screen a voice spoke out in an auto-tuned voice.

“Citizens of the world, many events have taken shape over the course of only a few years, and slowly our system has been working towards the gains of itself rather than the gains of its people.

Her computer screen flashed on to a man standing in long black robes and a white mask. The face on the mask was familiar to her and to government officials all over the world. It was a face of rebellion, a

face that had become synonymous with Guy Fawkes; a fifteenth century rebel that plotted to blow up the English Parliament, a face that had become synonymous to the hacktivist known as “Anonymous.”

“While we all have watched and rallied against the system working against us, there have been other gains of the system that have gone without a peep as back room deals and bargaining allow for the passing of legislation and research funding that will bring an end to our civilization as we know it. We repeat the history of our mistakes; instead of evolving our society. The US government has crossed the line and we must now band together to stop them. Generations in the past spoke of what we face as current issues, a single government becoming too large and too strong. Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it. At the center of the deception is an ancient crystal that The United States Government has unearthed. They claim to be attempting to harvest the powers of this crystal to use as a renewable power source, but the true plan is to develop weapons of mass destruction. The United States is attempting to create a New World Order, and they must be stopped. Mobilize yourself as we provide you with the necessary resources to help stop their cause.

Take the information you find and inform your government of your demands. We want Americans to wake up! We want the world to read! We want the citizens to think, and above all else question everything! We want you to analyze, criticize, critique and learn to read between the lines, to expose and to deconstruct! We want you to believe in the infinite power of the people! We want you to learn that we are all truly brothers and sisters in humanity regardless of all the artificial barriers that have been setup to separate us! Inform. Educate. Guide. Evolve. Wake up! The time for the next step in our species' evolution has come!

“We are Anonymous, we are Legion, we do not forget, we do not forgive, expect us.”

Jackie Snow sat alone in the darkness for several minutes after closing her computer screen. She wondered if the video she just watched merited any concern or if the hacktivist group Anonymous were merely a bunch of hatemongers attempting to scare the world via cyberterrorism. She glanced down at her bedside clock after the flickering glow pulled her out of her deep thought. Quickly snapping out of it, Jackie reached for her phone and dialed.

“Corporal Thomas, United states Army; how can I help you ma'am?” The voice on the other end of the phone answered.

“Forward my calls to my cell Jonathan, I won’t be in the office tomorrow.” Jackie replied.

“No problem ma’am, will you be returning in the afternoon? You have a meeting scheduled with...” The corporal began to ask.

“No, I’m taking a trip to Washington, reschedule it.” She said interrupting him.

“Will do.” The corporal said before hanging up the phone.

Jackie placed the phone on her nightstand and laid back down in bed. As her head reached the pillow a restful calm spread across her body. Her mind began to race but her body stayed relaxed. Just as her mind began to settle her eyes began to close and she drifted asleep.

Chapter 14

The Dream

Fast asleep, Jackie's face began to contort. She rolled around violently in her bed thrashing her arms and legs. Suddenly she shot up from her bed and looked around the room confused. She was no longer in her bedroom, her bed sat in the center of a dark cave. A small reddish-orange light flickered from the ceiling several feet from her bed. In the darkness, the dancing light illuminated the entire wall behind her. She stayed in bed; deeply confused staring at the light from the ceiling. To her it looked like a fire burning through a small crack above her. She attempted to move but her legs would not respond. She tried again to move but her legs would not budge and she began to feel anxious. A small bead of sweat rolled from her hairline onto her eyebrow but evaporated before it could fall any further. She reached her hand out to dry her brow but there was nothing there. Panic swept over Jackie as she tried again to get out of bed to no avail. Her heart began to race and in the dead silence she could hear it pumping ferociously against her chest. The temperature in the room began to skyrocket as sweat began to leak out of every pore in her body. Within seconds her body was drenched. She tried to scream but there was nothing but silence.

Suddenly, a dark shadow covered Jackie and her bed and flowed onto the wall behind her. The figure got larger as it approached Jackie, still paralyzed in her bed.

Jackie froze completely, watching a woman walk thru the light. When the woman reached her bedside, Jackie felt a surge of energy fill her legs and they began to tremor. She immediately lifted her legs on her own accord pulling them in close to her chest and away from the approaching stranger.

“Where am I, who are you?” Jackie questioned.

The woman, whose face stayed covered in shadows, did not reply.

“What is going on here? You tell me right now! How did I get here?” Jackie demanded.

“You are dreaming.” Replied the woman in a soft calming voice.

“Dreaming? This doesn’t feel like a dream to me!”

Jackie responded but when she did the woman vanished into thin air. Jackie stared into the darkness in disbelief. She reached her arms out to brace herself and when she did she felt an object at her bedside. A small and clear prism shaped crystal. She touched the edges of the stone with her finger tips and suddenly a red cloud washed over it turning it from clear to a bright red color.

Jackie’s eyes shot open and she jumped out of bed. In pure panic, she looked around the room and gradually realized she was standing in her bedroom. Alone. In complete darkness.

Chapter 15

The Lab

On the front wall of a one-story building tacked onto the brick, a small inconspicuous sign reading “AES Consulting LLC.” From the perspective of a passing pedestrian, the building appeared to be abandoned. The windows were boarded up and the plywood was covered with graffiti, the walkway leading to the front door was cracked, and the small patches of grass and shrubbery that surrounded the building were well overgrown. It seemed as if AES Consulting had gone out of business years ago.

The morning sun had just crept above the horizon as General Michaels approached the front door. Dressed in a pair of dark blue jeans and a black polo shirt, someone catching a glimpse of him walking in the door would never suspect that he worked for the Army. When he reached the front door, he pulled a small key from his back pocket placing it in the lock. He looked around the still dark street then entered the building.

The inside had the same disheveled look. Cobwebs filled every corner of the ceiling. The walls, although still very white, had several holes punched out of them. In the center of the room sat a pile of office chairs and flipped over desk. From the right side of the room a dim light crept through the bottom of the hallway door.

General Michaels made his way to the door and stopped before entering the room. Next to the door, built into the wall a fingerprint scanner lit up after he placed his palm on the screen. The screen let off a series of beeps and flashes for several seconds while the machine read his prints, then, the screen turned green and a loud click echoed through the room as the door unlocked. General Michaels opened the door and made his way into the lit hallway.

The General passed a few dark offices before reaching a large steel elevator door on the left side of the hallway. From the ceiling a small retinal scanner settled in front of him at eye level. He placed his right eye into the scanner and watched as a thin red laser ran up and down.

“Good morning, General.” An automated voice said as the doors to the elevator spread open.

“Good morning.” The General replied as he entered the elevator.

“The lab please.” The General continued once the doors closed.

“Yes General.” The voice replied.

The elevator dinged as it dropped below each floor until the doors opened on the fifth floor.

“Sub floor five, General.” The voice said as the doors opened.

“Thank you, Maci.” The General replied as he exited the elevator.

The elevator opened to a wide-open laboratory filled with computers and monitors. In the center of the room sat the massive red crystal unearthed from Egypt and around the crystal several men and women in white lab coats.

The general made his way around large aluminum tables and office chairs until he approached the group.

“What have we got?” The general questioned as he reached for a lab coat.

“The energy coming from the crystal is amazing sir.” One of the scientists said as he pointed to the computer next to General Michaels.

“If you look here sir, you can see the levels are self-sustaining. Basically, the crystal is creating a renewable wave of energy. As the levels on the outer layers drop slightly the core of the crystal intensifies to keep the crystal at even production.” The scientist continued.

“Sub level five, Colonel.” Maci’s automated voice interrupted the General before he could talk.

General Michaels and the group of scientists swung around to find Jackie Snow standing at the elevator doors.

“Jackie, what are you doing here?” General Michaels questioned sincerely. “You should be resting.”

“Thomas, we need to talk.” Jackie said sternly.

The group of scientists stared back and forth between the massive red crystal and Colonel Snow. They looked confused as she approached General Michaels.

“We need to talk alone if you don’t mind.” said Jackie.

Chapter 16

The experiment

“Clear? The crystal has always been this color Jackie. It came out of the burial site this way. You have to be mistaken.” The General responded.

Jackie Snow and General Michaels had located the nearest meeting room to speak in private.

“Thomas, listen to me. I know you’re not going to want to hear this but, I had a dream...” Jackie pled.

“A dream?” General Michaels interrupted before Jackie could finish. “Colonel Snow; I will give you one chance to decide, you can be here for the experiment or you can leave, I will not call the Secretary of Defense and tell her we opted out of investigating the stone because you had a bad dream.” General Michaels said with authority.

“Thomas...” Questioned Jackie.

“I think maybe you should just sit this one out Colonel. You’re playing this too close to home. Also, you should probably go back to addressing me as General or sir Colonel because I’m honestly starting to wonder where your loyalties lie.” The General demanded.

Jackie’s face became blush with anger. She balled her fist up and squeezed as hard as she could. She pulled a diamond ring off of her finger and slammed it onto the aluminum table between them. The clank of

the diamond hitting the metal table echoed through the silent room.

“Fuck you and your loyalties Thomas!” She said angrily after slapping him in the face.

Jackie exited the room and headed towards the elevator. As if nothing had happened General Michaels collected the ring and exited the room making his way back towards the scientists.

“Where were we?” The General asked.

On the side of his face, a bright red hand print formed on his white skin. He tried his best to ignore it but the pulsing pain was intense.

In the background a large screen hanging on the wall flashed on.

“General Michaels.” The woman on the screen interrupted.

“Madam Secretary.” Said the General sheepishly.

“What happened to your face?” She questioned.

“Nothing.” He replied as he reached up and touched the welt.

“Let’s get started.” General Michaels continued with little confidence.

The group spread around the crystal and waited for the General before they started. General Michaels

flipped a switch on the side of the table and a large machine positioned above the stone powered on.

“Tiffany, let’s start with one millimeter” General Michaels ordered.

The woman standing directly in front of the stone reached up to the machine and shifted its position to the edge of the stone. She pulled it down toward the crystal and stopped it just short of touching the surface.

“Test one, one millimeter.” She said out loud.

Tiffany flipped a toggle switch on the edge of the table and a thin red laser shot out of the bottom of the machine.

“Are we ready?” She asked.

“Yes, let’s see what this thing can do.” General Michaels said without thought.

She edged the laser to the surface of the crystal and began to cut through it. As the laser touched the crimson stone bright red sparks flew off the edges of the cuts and landed on her protective gloves. She cringed in pain as the sparks penetrated her gloves but she continued cutting. A dry red dust plumed from the base of the laser as it sliced through the stone until a pencil tip size piece dropped to the table. She flipped the switch again and the red laser disappeared. She raised her head to the crowd and looked around at their cheerful expressions. Sweat dripped from her brow as she removed her gloves and her hands shook mildly. She attempted to smile back at her onlookers but her

hands felt numb. The spots where the sparks hit her hand throbbed with pain but she said nothing.

“Here it is.” General Michaels said as he picked up the tiny piece of stone with a set of tweezers and held it up for the woman on the television to see.

“Let’s continue.” The woman on the screen said.

One of the men standing next to the General reached under the table and grabbed an odd-looking weapon. The weapon was hand held like a pistol but had no place for ammunitions to speak of. General Michaels grabbed the weapon from the man and positioned it so he could see down inside the barrel.

“Placing shard inside the chamber.” General Michaels said confidently.

The general pressed a thumb sized button on the top of the weapon and a small tray ejected from the side of the handle. He held the shard above the tray for an extra second looking deeply into the red stone. He thought about the argument he just had with Colonel Snow and how she had a bad feeling about the situation. He thought briefly about her claims that the stone was originally clear. He thought about the diamond ring sitting inside his pants pocket and about how badly it hurt when she smacked him across the face. He dropped the small shard into the tray and pressed the button again. The tray pulled itself back into the handle and the weapon lit up. A red light ran down the barrel of the gun on both sides and came together at the end of the weapon where a red glow filled the empty

barrel. He walked over to the make shift firing range on the other side of the laboratory and focused in on a target using the metal sights built on top of the weapon.

“Test two, ammunition free hand cannon.” The General said loud enough to be heard without looking back.

As he pressed the trigger the weapon hummed in his palms for a second then let off a blast of red light that rocketed across the room. After the smoke cleared, the entire target had disintegrated into a pile of ash. The General placed the weapon down on the table and turned back to the group.

“Testing complete.” He said calmly.

Chapter 17

Backlash

The glow of the television screen partially lit the living room where Jackie Snow sat alone. On the glass table in front of her couch a half empty bottle of her favorite wine as well as the remote control and dirty dinner plate. Jackie sat for hours replaying the argument she had with Thomas earlier that day. *I'm honestly starting to wonder where your loyalties lie.* That statement ran over and over in her head like a broken record. Her emotions, no matter how hard she tried to restrain them, continued to rip at her from the inside. She felt betrayed, she felt as if her relationship with General Michaels was just something he used to fill in the empty hours between work days. She was angry, but more so, she was heartbroken. The more she sat and thought the angrier she got. She thought back to the morning she came out of the coma in Egypt and how he never called. She thought about the fact that he never showed for her welcome home party. Their relationship had been a secret to everyone but her daughter Cara. Cara made it very clear to her that she wasn't very fond of Thomas and she warned her on many occasions that she felt her relationship with him seemed manufactured.

He doesn't care about you mom! She recalled her daughter yelling during one of their arguments.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

“Jackie, you here?” A man’s voice called out from behind the door.

Jackie got up and walked to the front door realizing exactly who it was. She opened the front door to find General Michaels.

“Hey Jackie.” He said calmly.

“What are you doing here Thomas? She said.

“I think we need to talk about what happened.” He replied.

“Did you move forward with the testing?” She asked.

General Michaels didn’t respond. In his silence, Jackie had her answer.

“Then I guess there’s nothing more to talk about.” She continued.

“Jackie, I didn’t....” He started to talk but was interrupted.

“Leave Thomas. Just, leave!” She said angrily.

Thomas paused for a moment, then turned his back to Jackie and left. Jackie stood alone at her front door as she watched him walk down the hallway.

Chapter 18

Side Effects

Inside a small studio apartment a few blocks from Pennsylvania Avenue in downtown Washington, the jingle of keys broke through the silence in the dark room. The door swung open as Tiffany Steele entered the room. She was exhausted after having worked a full 12-hour shift but was excited about the developments of the experiment. She flicked the light switch next to the door and the room sprung to life with the light. The room was filled with an excess of laboratory equipment that all powered on simultaneously. In the far back corner of the room a small twin bed was pushed up against the wall.

She removed her jacket and placed it on a wooden coat hanger standing next to the door. She made her way toward the bed, but stopped as she approached the light of the ceiling fan that dangled in the center of the room. She brought her right hand up close to her face and rotated it slightly in the light. She softly tucked her fingers into her palm flattening the surface area of her wounded hand. The large red rash that swelled her skin cracked open as she flexed her fingers back and forth. Her face cringed with discomfort as blood began to trickle from her wound. She dabbed the blood from her hand with her sleeve then began walking toward the bathroom. When she reached the edge of the door she felt her fingers begin to twitch

uncontrollably. The spasm traveled through her hand until her entire right arm was violently shaking. A jolt of pain forced her muscles to contract which brought her to her knees in agony. She watched as her fingers dislodged themselves from their sockets and expand in size. Her wrist locked itself up with her contorted fingers while her forearm muscles bulged from her bones. The veins in her arms pulsated as her blood pumped feverishly through her body. The convulsions spread throughout her entire body as she fell to the ground in an all-out seizure.

Chapter 19

Anonymous Threats

Herds of voices exploded into dozens of conversations as the back door to the US Capitol opened. Colonel Jackie Snow walked down the center aisle followed by a team of lawyers. She made her way to the front of the room and took a seat across from the Speaker of the House. The conversations turned to arguments as Jackie placed her briefcase on the long wooden table and centered herself in front of a microphone positioned at her chair. At the table adjacent to Jackie, General Thomas Michaels sat with a separate group of attorneys.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” A voice called out through the PA system.

The arguments continued despite the man’s call for silence.

“Ladies and gentlemen can we settle down please?” The voice said again.

The conversations faded out and silence swept across the room. The representatives focused their attention to the group of people sitting on the first floor of the hall.

“Members of Congress, today we will address the issue of the hacktivist group known as Anonymous and their

most recent attempts to rile the American public with the release of their newest threat.” Said the majority leader standing at the podium.

The room erupted with conversation again as they shouted out their respective opinions on the matter.

“This is not an issue of Congress.” One of the officials hollered out behind Jackie.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please!” The man at the podium said into his microphone.

The room fell silent again and the man continued.

“Colonel Snow if you would?” The man motioned to Jackie.

“Yes sir.” She responded obediently.

Jackie stood from her chair and opened her briefcase. She pulled a small flash drive from the pocket and handed it off to the awaiting hands of one of her attorneys. He walked back to his seat and plugged the flash drive into a laptop at his station then nodded for Jackie to continue.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the House, this video released this morning depicts some very sensitive footage of General Michaels and a team of researchers performing some very questionable experiments inside one of the Army’s most secure test facilities. A copy of the video was anonymously delivered to my office this morning

and it has since been pulled from all of the major video sharing platforms on the internet. We are trying to the best of our ability to contain the spread of the footage but I'm afraid it will resurface again shortly and my office believes the damage has already been done." Jackie said into her microphone.

When she finished, she looked out across the room at the shocked onlookers and waited for someone to speak. She held her pause for several seconds then nodded at her attorney to proceed. A large white screen dropped from ceiling behind the Speaker of the House and the lights inside the hall dimmed. The video turned black for a second as it loaded then a man in a Guy Fawkes mask appeared on screen. In the usual auto-toned voice, the man spoke.

"Two weeks ago, a line was crossed, a line that you can never cross back from; you chose to test the reach of Anonymous and now you must pay the consequences. We warned the world that your greed and hunger for power would jeopardize civilization and you have proven this to be true."

The screen turned black then cut to surveillance footage from inside the laboratory as the researches cut through the red stone. Then the video cut to General Michaels loading the shard into the experimental weapon. Finally, the video showed the weapon being fired. As the video played the voice of the man continued.

"Citizens of the world, as we have said before we must band together and stop the U.S. Government from

abusing their power. We are not calling upon the collective to deface or use a distributed denial of service attack on a United States government agency website. We are not calling upon the people to occupy a city or protest in front of a local building. This is a real threat to our safety as this technology can only bring bloodshed. The American government has developed a new form of weaponry that is unmatched throughout the world! We are showing you the evidence here. This video was taken directly from a hidden government laboratory. Corporations and lobbyists are the true leaders of this country. They are the ones with the power to control our world. To rebuild this government, we must first destroy it. Our time for democracy is here. Our time for real change is here. This is our time for a revolution. Therefore, Anonymous has decided to openly declare war on the United States government. This is a call to arms. We call upon the citizens of the world to stand beside us in overthrowing this corrupted body and call upon a new era. Our allegiance is to the American people, because they are us, and we are them.

We are Anonymous.

We are the ninety-nine.

We never Forgive.

We never Forget.

To the United States government, expect us.

Chapter 20

The Split

A tall African American man shook his arms and legs vigorously as he attempted to get the blood in his body flowing. He tilted his head back and forth cracking the bones in his neck as the lights around him dimmed.

“Unique New York, Unique New York, Unique New York.” He mumbled to himself as he took his position on the studio floor.

“Thirty seconds Scott.” A producer voice came through in his ear piece.

He raised his thumb toward the back of the studio at the control room then cleared his throat as the countdown from the director began.

“Five, four, three...”

Behind the camera, a large on air sign lit up red and from the shadows Scott stepped forward into the studio light.

“It has been two months since the hacktivist group Anonymous released, what is now known as the Fall of Man tape, and the chaos around the world continues. I am Scott Joyce and you are watching The World News Network.”

The camera shifted to a studio desk as Scott made his way to his seat.

“On tonight’s show we will revisit the timeline that brought us this morning’s massacre in Philadelphia and we have a very special guest with us, the woman behind the protests and the unofficial leader of the so called blue party Jaquelin Snow. Stay tuned to WNN, we will be right back.”

“And we’re clear.” The producer called through his ear piece.

Through the side door Jackie snow entered the studio and greeted Scott with a hand shake. She stood side by with him as the production crew placed her microphone on her waist.

“Ms. Snow, thank you very much for coming in and talking with us tonight.” Scott said enthusiastically.

“It’s my pleasure, I’m just glad there are still people out there willing to listen.”

“No way, you have quite the support group Ms. Snow; the latest polls show that nearly fifty percent of Americans support your efforts in disarmament.”

“Thirty seconds.” Said the producer into their earpiece.

Scott guided Jackie to the desk and pulled a chair out for her to sit in, then took the seat next to hers.

“Just be natural, I’ll guide you through the conversation; you just answer however you’d like.” He said to Jackie as the director counted down in his ear.

Jackie nodded back as music began to play in the background. Above the camera, the on-air sign lit back up and Scott spoke immediately.

“Welcome back, you’re watching WNN and I am Scott Joyce. Tonight, we have a very special guest with us. A face and a name we all know by now, Ms. Jaquelin Snow. She is here to discuss what many are calling the next World War and for the first time, exclusively on The World News Network, what makes these new weapons work.”

The camera cut to a double shot of both Jackie and Scott as he turned his chair to her direction.

“Ms. Snow, if I may can we start first with a timeline of events that brought us here tonight?” Scott asked.

“Jackie is fine, and yes I’d be glad to.” Jackie said nervously.

“Ok fantastic, so Jackie tell us how did you first come across the video and did you know at the time the crystal you unearthed was being used to make weapons of mass destruction?” Scott asked.

“A flash drive containing the video was dropped off to my office in Washington anonymously and no I had no idea what the plans were for the crystal as a matter of fact, I honestly didn’t think many other people knew about the crystal to begin with.” She responded.

“Ok great, well let’s flash forward a few days after the video was released and let’s talk about the Arlington protests.” He proceeded.

Jacqueline paused, shocked at the change in the line of questioning.

“I’d rather not.” Jackie retorted with hostility.

“Our viewers have the right to know what really happened that night don’t they?”

“Everyone knows what happened that night.” Snapped Jackie.

“That is the night you claimed General Michaels experiments went wrong.” Asked Scott.

“Ms. Snow do you honestly believe those explosions were caused by secret government tests?” He asked with sarcasm.

Anger swept over her body and she stood from her chair with her fist balled ready to throw a punch. Scott quickly raised himself from his chair as well with his hands up in submission.

“Ok, ok, we won’t go that route. We all know what happened in Arlington let’s move on to Baltimore.” Scott said submissively.

“We know by that point in time you had taken some sort of leadership role with the protestors, how did that happen?” Questioned Scott.

Slowly, Jacqueline took back her seat as she calmed herself before responding.

“After the National Guard massacred the protesters outside the White House in Washington, I realized that this crystal was never intended to be used to help further humanity, its sole purpose was to manufacture those weapons and I felt like I was tricked into taking the fall for uncovering it. When I spoke my mind the government tried to have me silenced. I felt betrayed and I took to the streets with the rest of the protestors and once they realized who I was and why I was there, things just fell into place.” She responded.

“So, we have the Arlington protests that turned bloody, followed by the violent protests in Baltimore, Charlotte, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. A total of six billion dollars in damages done by protestors, how are you helping the cause?” Scott said applying pressure on Jackie.

“You know I’m starting to think I’m not here to talk about our side of the story Scott, I think it may be time for me to leave.” Jackie said angrily.

A loud thump echoed through the room from outside the studio that caught Jackie’s attention. She looked out passed the camera out into the newsroom and watched as a group of US soldiers entered the room.

“This was all a set-up!” Jacqueline turned to the camera and spoke hastily trying to get her message out to the world.

“If you’re watching this, spread the word, the time is now! I won’t make it out of here but you can make a differ....” Jackie spoke directly into the camera but was interrupted by fifty thousand volts of electricity that shot through her body.

“Cut the cameras!” One of the soldiers yelled out.

Jackie lost control of her muscles as she flopped down to floor shaking uncontrollably. She faded in and out as the rest of the soldiers approached. She watched a pair of black combat boots come to rest in line with her face right before the butt end of an M16 came crashing down on her forehead which knocked her unconscious.

Chapter 21

The Beginning of the End

Cara Wilkes' black BMW roared down the highway as she raced toward the television station. She gripped the steering wheel so tight her muscles drowned out the color in her knuckles. As she reached her exit her tires screeched struggling to keep traction at such high speeds. Cara pulled off the highway and careened down the off ramp toward a blinking red light. She brought her car to a brief halt then floored the accelerator as she turned; but before she got the chance to make her way down the road she was forced to slam her breaks. She put her car in park and slowly exited in awe. Cara stood speechless as she watched hundreds of people rioting and looting just outside the station gates. As far down as she could see, buildings on each side of the road were set ablaze. She reached down the side of her door and pulled out her service pistol then slammed her door shut.

Cara walked cautiously down the side of the street with her weapon in hand and a bullet loaded in the chamber. She watched as hordes of people ran down the street vandalizing anything they came across. A man dressed in black pants and a black t-shirt with a photo of Guy Fawkes on the front ran across the street directly in front of her carrying a glass bottle with a flame burning from the top. He launched the Molotov cocktail

as far as he could as it crashed down on the front lawn of the television station exploding into a ball of flames.

Behind Cara flashing lights and the screams of police sirens overpowered the shouting looters as dozens of squad cars flew past her. She quickly tucked her pistol into her waistline and took off running toward a nearby alley. She ducked behind the brick wall and watched as the rioters and police officers exchanged gunfire.

Inside a squad car parked less than twenty feet from her hiding spot a young officer stood shielded by his door. He yelled into his radio while the rest of the officers continued to try and restore peace to the street.

“It’s an all-out war out here. We need back up, we’re under heavy fire! There’s several hundred people out here, there are dozens of structure fires, we need the national guard!”

The voice on the other end of the radio responded but the constant bang of gunfire made it impossible to hear. The officer looked around his immediate area then retreated into his car and slammed the door.

“Repeat, I did not copy.” He said into the radio.

The radio crackled a few times but there was no response.

“Can you repeat; I did not copy?” The officer said in a panic.

He waited for a response for several seconds but then dropped the radio and stared out his windshield in disbelief. He pushed his door open and slowly raised himself out of the vehicle never taking his eyes off the skyline.

The ground shook as three F16 jets thundered through the air close to the ground. The officer watched as the jets approached releasing close range explosives onto the street below. His eyes widened as each detonation drew closer. He felt the heat singe his facial hair as the last passing jet dropped its package in the center of the road a hundred or so yards away. The explosion ripped through the street destroying several of the squad cars parked ahead of his. The young man abandoned his vehicle and dove off to the side of the road as the approaching flames engulfed his car.

Chapter 22

The End of the Beginning

On the ceiling of a small prison cell a single light bulb flickered on and off. The walls were bare except for a single TV mounted in the corner of the room. The concrete chamber was riddled with cracks and small drops of moisture collected near the holes of the dilapidated walls. Adjacent to the blinking bulb a near constant drip of water dropped down on to a soaking wet Jackie Snow. Her damp hair hung over her bloody face. Her cheeks were bruised and her left eye was swollen shut. Dried blood clung to her upper lip just below her nose. She shivered as she watched her breath float above her head and dissipate into the open air of her cell. She sat strapped into a small folding chair with her feet chained to the ground. The clank of a prison door that echoed through the empty cell block made Jackie cringe. She struggled trying to rip her hands free from the restraints that kept them behind the back of the chair. A rope was wrapped around her chest and a large cloth was stuffed deep in her mouth. Footsteps coming from the hallway got louder as she continued to struggle. When the steps stopped, Jackie raised her head to the cell door and looked out in amazement. Standing in the doorway was General Thomas Michaels.

“Hey Jack.” He said sympathetically.

Jackie mumbled aggressively through the cloth in her mouth but the words were inaudible.

“I’m going to remove your gag; if you’re not going to cooperate I’m just going to have to put it back in. We clear?” He said as he pulled the cloth from her mouth.

“Go fuck yourself!” Jackie screamed as soon as the cloth came out.

General Michaels smiled as he pulled his hand back. He took a moment allowing Jackie to let out her anger before speaking.

“Jackie, things don’t have to be this way. You and I both know the world is changing. And not for the better.” He said.

“If you’re going to try and justify your actions you can save it Thomas. Nothing you say will help to justify what you’ve done.” Jackie said sharply cutting General Michaels off.

Her words hit a nerve. In response, General Michaels leaned in close before responding. Uncomfortably close.

“Not two weeks ago a man and his wife walk into a Christmas party and gun down 14 of his own colleagues. Leaving them all dead with another 21 injured. The worst thing about it? It’s one in the long list of attacks we’ve had on American soil and guess what Jackie? It isn’t going to stop. Not unless we can do something about militant groups waging war against our country in the name of whatever faith happens to think Americans are the devil at that particular time!”

General Michaels stood back up to regain his composure.

“I want you to watch something.”

General Michaels reached to his side retrieving his walkie-talkie as he walked over to the TV monitor hanging on the wall.

“Play it.” General Michaels ordered.

Suddenly, the monitor turned on. After a few seconds of TV noise, a video began to play. Playing on the screen appeared to be video footage of a woman strapped to a bed convulsing.

“In case you’re wondering, that’s Tiffany Steele.” Said General Michaels.

Jacqueline watched in horror as she finally began to see the resemblance.

“Tiffany? What the hell did you do to her?” Jacqueline screamed.

“We didn’t do anything. In fact, it’s Tiffany that did a great service for her country. You see, we knew that harnessing the crystals energy would serve as a great advantage when creating tactical weaponry. However, we didn’t know about the adverse effects when exposed to it for prolonged periods of time.”

Tiffany began to convulse more violently now. After a few moments, the convulsing stopped and the video went to black.

“Unfortunately, Tiffany didn’t make it. But, her sacrifice will not go unnoticed. Tiffany taught us that not only can we enhance our weapons. We can enhance our soldiers. The doctors weren’t able to save her but we do believe this, mutation can be reproduced and controlled.” General Michaels turned to Jackie trying to appeal to her.

Jackie finally began to see the grand plan that drove all the atrocities for what was believed to be the greater good. She said nothing.

“The universe has provided us a solution on a silver platter Jackie. You just have to understand what it is we’re trying to accomplish here.” Again, General Michaels attempting to appeal to Jackie.

“And how many lives will serve as justified casualties for your experimentations before it just isn’t worth it anymore Thomas?”

Without hesitation, General Michaels responded.

“However many it takes.”

“Enhanced weapons, enhanced soldiers, hell even the teleporter initiative that was abandoned years ago is back online because of this new power source. We now have the ability to defeat Isis or any other militant group that challenges our country. The stakes are too high Jackie. We cannot sit back and do nothing.”

Slowly, Jacqueline Snow looked up to make direct eye contact with General Michaels to ensure that he understood the depth of her conviction.

“I will do everything in my power to make sure your weapons will never see the light of day.”

Disappointed in her response General Michaels turned away from Jackie. After a few moments, he raised his walkie-talkie again.

“Bring her in.”

Jackie froze in fear. She knew whatever the order meant it wouldn't be good for her.

As General Michaels began to exit the room he stopped at the doorway. He turned around and spoke sincerely to Jackie.

“I don't want to see you like this Jack. We aren't the bad guys.”

General Michaels stared at Jackie for a moment before leaving the room. As he walked down the hallway he crossed paths with a petite woman. She entered the cell and made her way towards Jackie.

“Who are you?” Jackie asked.

The flickering light above them surged bright as they locked eyes. Jackie's heart dropped into her stomach when she saw the woman's face up close. Her bicolored eyes seemed to glow in the bright light. Jackie sat speechless as the woman made her way closer to her chair. She leaned in close to Jackie then whispered.

“We are the Netherian.”

To Be Continued...

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