

**THE
JER1CHO
DECEPT1ON**

JEFFREY SMALL

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For Alison and Ella,
You Inspire Me.

PART I

“I am a Hindu, I am a Moslem, I am a Jew, I am a Christian, I am a Buddhist!”

Mahatma Gandhi

“I am a deeply religious non-believer.”

Albert Einstein

PROLOGUE

SYRIA
2000 YEARS AGO

The rider had no way of knowing that a simple fall from his horse would change the course of history.

For now, all he could focus on was the mission ahead. He adjusted the leather bag hanging from his shoulder. The mass of the parchment letters inside was insignificant, but the importance of the contents weighed heavily on him. The letters, signed by the High Priest himself, contained the names of those he would arrest and bring back in a fortnight. The rider knew the fate that awaited these unsuspecting men and women; he had made similar treks before. The lucky ones would die quickly, their flesh torn from their limbs by the ravenous animals kept for this purpose. The others would languish in a dark, dank cellar awaiting more gruesome tortures.

The rider shifted on the horse. He was sweating underneath his cloak, especially where the bag bumped against his body in time with the horse's stride. The sun had nearly reached its zenith, and the flat beige desert provided only an occasional thorny bush or limestone rock outcropping for shade. He squinted against the glare, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and massaged his temples.

At least summer is months away.

He kicked his horse with the heel of his sandal. The animal he had provided him ambled forward as if it knew of the terrible task ahead. Heat radiated from its damp brown coat, and the bony creature looked like it hadn't eaten well in months—in contrast to the powerful steeds of the three Roman

legionnaires in front of him. The legionnaires, two in their mid-twenties and the third barely a teen, joked with each other, passing a wine sack between them.

Pagans, he thought, but necessary to carry out his mission. He glanced at the long swords sheathed to their saddles. Men like these had to be watched carefully. For them, killing was a sport. At least he was a Roman citizen, and he had rights. *But out in the desert no one would know if I simply disappeared.* He shook his head to clear it. They would arrive in Damascus soon.

His first stop would be to eat. After two days of only bread and wine, his mouth watered in anticipation of the juicy leg of lamb he would buy. Then his mission would begin. The closer they got to their destination, the more jovial the legionnaires became. The rider, however, didn't relish the job he was sent to do. He was in the right, of course. The High Priest had made it very clear that this cult must be stamped out. *They don't have to die*, he thought. *It's their choice.* They were stubborn. Not one had renounced his or her ways.

A sudden glint of sunlight off the armor chest plate attached to the rear of the saddle in front of him flashed into his eyes. A shot of pain pierced through to the base of his skull. He snapped his eyes closed and massaged his neck.

Not again. Not now, please, he prayed.

The headaches had pestered him for the past year at the most inconvenient times. Usually he retired to his room, lying in the darkness for hours until they passed. For the past two months, this thorn in his flesh had occurred more frequently, especially since the council had charged him with ridding the land of the cult.

When he opened his eyes, he saw that the steeds ahead of him had distanced themselves. He kicked his horse, bringing him to a trot. When he caught up, the youngest of the three Romans turned and stared.

"You don't look well," Marcus said in an educated Greek. He held up the depleted wine sack. "A drink, maybe?"

The rider shook his head, which was a mistake because the pain spread from the base of his skull to his temples. He brought the sleeve of his tunic to his face and wiped his eyes. He sensed this one would be worse than the others. When he dropped his arm, he noticed that Marcus was still staring at him,

a curious expression on his stubble-covered face. That's when he noticed the taste. *Copper*—as if he'd placed a coin on his tongue to clean it, which was an unusual thought, he realized, because he'd never done such a thing. But he could think of no other description for the metallic flavor.

He almost said something to Marcus when he noticed the light again. As the legionnaire's horse walked along the compacted sand, the sun reflecting off the armor danced in his vision. But this time it didn't exacerbate his headache. To his surprise, the pain, which moments earlier had thundered through his skull, dissipated. He watched with interest as the light radiated outward from the armor, eclipsing the legionnaire and the desert around him. A moment later he could see nothing but the light.

He wasn't sure what caused him to fall from his horse. The light seemed to lift him from his saddle and deposit him on the coarse earth. He felt no pain.

"Paul!" Marcus called to him. The words came from a great distance. "Paul, are you hurt?"

The rider knew he should respond, but another voice eclipsed the legionnaire's. This voice, however, didn't come from the other Romans. It spoke to him from a different place. He had never heard this voice before, but at the same time it was familiar, as if it had been with him all along.

He listened. Then he understood.

His mission, his life, his very identity—none of it mattered anymore. The wonder of the revelation spread through his body like a drink of hot cider on a winter day. The answer had been within him from the beginning. He had just never listened. He had misunderstood the cult—they had been right all along.

CHAPTER 1

YALE-NEW HAVEN HOSPITAL PRESENT DAY

“Do you smell something, Doctor? Like honey?”

Dr. Ethan Lightman placed a hand on his patient’s shoulder. Bed-side manner wasn’t one of his strengths, but he made an effort. “Liz, just relax. You’re in the early phase of the seizure.”

He suspected that she was experiencing the first stages of an SPS, a simple partial seizure, which could affect a patient’s senses—smell, touch, sight, hearing, taste—but not their consciousness. *Good*, he thought. *It’s beginning.*

“I’m scared.” Her eyes were wide and her pupils dilated. “I haven’t been off my Phenytoin for over two years.” She tugged at the handmade quilt that covered her on the narrow hospital bed. The IV line attached to her arm swung above her body. “And I told you what happened then.”

He nodded. He knew his patient well: Elizabeth Clarkson, a thirty-six-year-old woman whose curly black hair and freckled face gave away her Irish descent. She looked like a younger version of Ethan’s mother, who had passed on her dark hair and fair complexion to him. During their initial interview, he’d learned that Liz had been on epileptic management drugs since she was seventeen. The unpredictability of her seizures made holding down a job difficult. She now worked at a flower shop part-time. But her misfortune, he hoped, might solve the mystery that had consumed the past five years of his life. Her seizures were special.

“That’s why we have you in the hospital.” He gestured to the nurse with the silver hair tied in a bun on top of her head who was arranging instruments on

the stainless steel table on the opposite side of the bed. “Judith has some nice drugs for you if the experience becomes too intense.”

“That’s right, Sweetie”—Judith touched her arm—“I’ll take good care of you.”

The fifteen-by-twenty-foot space was larger than the standard private hospital room because it was set up for longitudinal studies. Liz had lived there for two weeks, undergoing LTVM—long-term video monitoring, a protocol used on patients with difficult cases of epilepsy. She was continuously monitored by video and by EEG, electroencephalography. Although the room had the sterile smell of antiseptic, and the clean but scuffed white linoleum tiles left no doubt as to the hospital setting, they’d let her hang a swath of multi-colored silk in an Indian design over one wall, which, along with the pictures of her three cats on the bedside table, helped to soften the room.

She smiled at him. “Are you sure you’re old enough to be a doctor?” Her blue eyes dropped down the length of his body. He felt his face and neck flush.

Ethan knew he looked younger than his thirty-two years. Although he was nearly six-four, he was lanky. At times, usually inopportune ones, he tripped over his own size thirteen shoes. He had a runner’s build—though he didn’t run. His high school track coach had begged him to try out for the team, but after a few practices, both knew he wasn’t meant to be an athlete.

“Old enough,” he said, returning her smile. He suspected it looked awkward. He pulled his penlight from the breast pocket of his lab coat to keep himself focused.

“At least you don’t think I’m crazy. I mean, the things I used to see during my spells.”

He didn’t think she was crazy. On the contrary, he was determined to understand the etiology, the causation, of her visions. During her early twenties, Liz had been active in her church. In addition to working as the minister’s administrative assistant, she’d led an adult Sunday school class, a Tuesday morning Bible study, and a prayer group. However, after she’d revealed the details about her special experiences to the minister, he had asked her to leave. The things she saw were not natural, he’d explained, and he feared that the devil might be at work in her mind.

Ethan checked the connections of the nineteen wires attached to her scalp; they joined in a single bundle below the bed and then ran along the floor until they terminated at a computer monitoring station. The computer recorded the electrical signals originating from Liz's brain—her EEG—and had sent a text message to his cell phone fifteen minutes earlier, as soon as it detected unusual sharp-slow waves.

He hoped this time he would get the data he needed. He felt the tension in his shoulders as he bent to examine the dilation of her pupils with his penlight. He and his mentor, Professor Elijah Schiff, needed a breakthrough. They weren't there to cure Liz of her epilepsy. Her condition was under control with the medication that he'd stopped when she entered the study.

If I could just capture an EEG of one of her episodes, then maybe . . . He let the thought trail off.

Ethan and Elijah had hit a dead end, and they were running out of time. They had exhausted their grant several months earlier. While Elijah was out canvassing the nonprofit community for more money, Ethan was working harder than he had in his life, trying to demonstrate progress—trying to prove that their idea wasn't just a pipe dream. In his gut, he felt they were close to making one of the greatest breakthroughs in modern psychology. But not everyone believed that their theory was plausible. In fact, most of their colleagues ridiculed the idea.

"Dr. Lightman!" an urgent voice from the back of the room interrupted his thoughts.

He'd almost forgotten about Christian Sligh, the second-year grad student sitting at the small wooden desk overflowing with computer equipment. The bundle of electrodes attached to Liz's scalp terminated into ten differential amplifiers, which boosted the slight electrical signal coming from her brain activity. These signals were picked up and analyzed by the computer workstation, which filtered out extraneous signals, such as any electrodermal response—spontaneous electrical impulses across the skin caused by a fluctuation in emotion—or the EMG signals produced when muscles contract. Ethan only cared about capturing the electrical signals produced by her brain.

Chris stared at three twenty-inch LCD monitors. With his shaggy blond hair, he appeared more like a surfer from Malibu than a psych graduate from Notre Dame. The flip-flops and shorts enhanced the surfer image, but his wool sweater was a concession to the cold New Haven rain they'd experienced that fall. Ethan didn't know what he would do without his grad student. Chris had a knack for wading through the bureaucracy of the various university approvals their study required. Ethan didn't have the patience for paperwork; he was too busy spending late nights working on the project itself.

The faint beeping of equipment echoed in the background. "I'm getting some interictal activity in the temporal lobes," Chris said.

Ethan turned to Liz. She stared at the ceiling without blinking. Judith reached for her arm to place a blood pressure cuff on it. He touched the nurse's shoulder, shaking his head. He didn't want any external stimuli to influence the patient's experience or disrupt the EEG. Judith withdrew the BP cuff with an annoyed look.

Liz gazed at the ceiling with an expression that exuded relaxed concentration. He guessed that the seizure was spreading: *probably evolving from an SPS to a CPS, a complex partial seizure*. He wondered if it was still primarily located in the left temporal lobe. He was torn between observing at her side and joining Chris at the computer screens. But the EEG was being recorded, and he would spend the night studying it.

"Doctor," Judith said in a voice just above a whisper, "hasn't it been long enough?" She held a syringe in her hand. Her brow was furrowed.

He shook his head. He'd explained the protocol to her several times before, but she'd grown close to the patient over the past weeks. Next time, he would rotate the caregivers.

Liz's voice caused both of them to break their stare-off and look down at her. "It's beautiful."

He was uncertain what to do. Did he engage her in conversation or let the experience play itself out? Sensing Judith's restlessness, he asked, "What do you see?"

"Beautiful." Her voice had a distance to it.

"Uh, Doctor," Chris called from behind him, "the seizures are originating in the left temporal lobe."

I was right, Ethan thought.

“But they’re spreading quickly!”

At that moment, Liz’s body went rigid. Her legs and arms stiffened as if she was being hit by a sudden jolt of electricity. Her hands arched upward on the quilt, each of her finger joints locked out.

“It’s time, Doctor,” Judith said. She moved the syringe toward the IV.

“A minute more.” The most important data would be from the early stage of the seizure, when it was isolated to the temporal lobe, but he needed a complete picture. Too much was at stake.

Then Liz’s eyes rolled back in her head, and her body began to convulse. Her chest heaved while her arms and legs shook as if being shocked by a rhythmic electrical pulse.

“She’s going myoclonic!” He lunged for her shoulders.

“Doctor!” Judith screamed.

Ethan knew he was losing control of the situation. Judith jammed a roll of gauze into her mouth—*quick thinking*, he realized, but he should have asked for it earlier.

“Now!” he instructed the nurse while he struggled to control Liz’s shaking arms. “One gram of Phenytoin, two of Ativan.” Normally he would have doubled the Ativan dose on a seizure this strong, but he wanted to control it without sending her into unconsciousness. He needed her clear memory of the experience.

Within ninety seconds of Judith administering the antiepileptic and anti-convulsant meds, the myoclonic jerking ceased. Ethan released the patient’s arms. Judith wiped Liz’s forehead with a cloth while gently removing the gauze from her mouth. The nurse didn’t look at him.

He realized that his own hairline was also damp with perspiration. Taking a step back from the bed, he wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his white lab coat. His heart was pounding, and he was breathing deeply. He recognized the signs: his own sympathetic nervous system was engaged in a fight-or-flight response.

Liz’s eyes opened as if she was awakening from a nap. “Try not to move,” Ethan said. “The seizure is over now. We’ve given you some medication that might make you feel a little groggy.”

He stepped to the bed, bent over her, and placed two fingers on her neck. Her pulse was coming down. He wished his would do the same. He focused on her expression, curious as to what she'd remember in the post-ictal state. Many patients had complete amnesia, but the rare ones with her condition recalled every detail. Those details often changed their lives forever.

While he waited for Judith to give her a few ice chips, he grabbed his black notebook from the leather satchel he'd left near the room's entrance, pulled a chair over to the bed, and opened the notebook.

"Liz, if you're feeling up it," he asked, "can you describe what happened?"

She turned to him, locking her eyes onto his.

"Infinity."

She smiled a dreamlike smile, as if to say anything else would be inexact.

CHAPTER 2

MALL OF EMIRATES DUBAI

Mousa bin Ibrahim Al-Mohammad shifted the backpack from his left shoulder to his right. He was sweating underneath his heavy coat. At least the air conditioning in the mall provided some relief from the October heat wave Dubai was experiencing. He walked across the polished marble floor, passed the gleaming brass columns of the Middle East’s second largest mall, and paused at the window of the Harvey Nichols store. Amira, his eight-year-old daughter, pressed her nose against the glass. The mannequins were dressed in crisp linen pants and bright polo shirts, as if they were enjoying at day at the yacht club. He wished he was dressed similarly, rather than in the jeans, pullover, and heavy coat he was wearing. He shifted the backpack again.

Turning back in the direction he was heading, Mousa almost ran into another man hurrying by who was dressed as inappropriately as he was, and similarly sweating. “Pardon me,” he said to the man.

Without breaking his stride, the man turned his head and nodded. “As-salaam alaykum.”

The man was about Mousa’s height, just under two meters, and had a similar olive complexion and short dark hair. He was younger than Mousa by a few years—late twenties or early thirties—but unlike Mousa, who was clean-shaven, this man had a week’s growth of beard. *Jordanian like me*, Mousa thought.

“Wa alaykum as-salaam,” Mousa replied.

A grin crept across the other man's face as he continued his journey in the direction of the food court. Mousa noticed that they carried the same backpack in a different color. The man's was blue and his was red.

"Baba, may I have a cocoa, please?"

Mousa smiled at his daughter. "Don't you want to get on the slopes before they get too crowded?"

He pointed to the giant glass windows to their right. Beyond the windows lay a sight that still astounded him, even though this was the third time he had seen it. In the middle of this shopping mecca in the center of a desert country on the edge of the Persian Gulf was an indoor ski slope over eighty meters high. The chairlift wound up to the left past where he could see. A wooden play structure with several tubing runs, one of his daughter's favorite activities, occupied the lower section of the slope closest to the windows. The main ski slope lay just beyond, complete with real snow and fake evergreen trees. Nothing like this existed in Amman, their home. He made it a point to stop here whenever he had a conference in Dubai. He looked forward to the cold air inside; then he would appreciate his extra layers of clothes.

Traveling to Dubai was like exploring another world. Whereas Amman blended aspects of a modern city with its ancient heritage, Dubai looked as if it had sprung out of the desert overnight. Even New York, where he had been two years earlier, paled in comparison to the hundreds of skyscrapers rising from the red sand and piercing the cloudless blue sky. While he was proud to see a fellow Arab country achieve this level of success, something about the conspicuous display of wealth disturbed him. He thought of the Egyptian laborers, also fellow Arabs, who were bused into the city's construction sites each day from communal living quarters he didn't even want to imagine.

He also thought of his own country and the burden of the thousands of Palestinian refugees his government struggled to accommodate. At King Hussein Hospital, where he was an orthopedic surgeon, he often saw Palestinian patients whose limbs had been blown off by land mines. These people had been displaced from their rightful land by the Israelis, certainly, but what had his Arab brothers done to help besides complain about Israel in the media?

Taking in the opulence of the mall—Dolce & Gabbana, Escada, Tiffany, Versace, not to mention the ski resort he was going to—he knew that much more could be done among his own people.

Amira, his princess, tugged on his sleeve. “Baba!”

He gazed down at her. With her sharp nose, angular jaw and cheekbones, and wide eyes, she looked noble. *Like the queen*, he thought, and like his wife, Bashirah, who had stayed behind in Amman with their newborn son.

“What if we ski first, and then I’ll get you an extra large cocoa?”

She put a little finger to her lips, thought for a minute, and then asked, “With cream?”

“Extra cream.” He grinned.

“Good. We ski first then.” She took his hand and skipped beside him as they headed toward the entrance.

Fifteen minutes later, they sat together on the chairlift as it approached the top of the slope. He placed a hand on his daughter’s head. She was bouncing in the seat. “Do you remember from last year?”

“I liked France,” she nodded. “But indoors, Baba! This is really neat.”

Mousa clicked his skis together, shaking off the bit of snow that had stuck when he boarded the lift. He wished he had more opportunities to ski. He tried to schedule at least one medical conference a year somewhere cold. Last year, he’d taken his wife and daughter to the Alps.

As they began to descend the slope, he stayed a couple of meters behind Amira. He cut slow arcs in the grainy snow as his daughter headed straight down, her ski tips pointed toward each other in a snowplow position.

The explosion hit without warning.

Just below and to the right, the glass windows separating the ski slope from the interior of the mall, the same windows where he and his daughter had been standing minutes earlier, imploded in an orange ball of fire. He watched the shards of glass shred the clothes and skin of a Saudi family of four skiing just fifteen meters below them. Before his brain had a chance to register the horror of the sight, the pressure of the blast’s concussion hit him like a solid wall of heat. He felt his right eardrum rupture. He rocked backward but somehow managed to stay on his skis.

Amira's hands flew to her head. His daughter's ski tips crossed, and she tumbled forward. Her body appeared to fall in slow motion toward the fire and glass raining on the snow before them. Fear cinched Mousa's heart.

He shifted his weight to the outside of his right ski, cut across the snow, and focused on pointing his body straight downhill. Bending at the waist, he picked up speed. He was almost parallel to his daughter, whose descent on her stomach was slowing. He thought he could hear her scream, but it was hard to discern anything with his ruptured eardrum and the explosions booming from the mall.

The moment he passed her, he carved his skis to the left. His plan was to arrest her fall by stopping in front of her. Then the ground underneath him buckled upward, as if an earthquake had struck the ski slope. He toppled over.

The manmade snow wasn't as soft as the powder he'd skied on in the Alps. He hit hard on his side, his left leg twisting underneath him. He felt something pop in his knee and knew instantly it was his ACL—he'd performed many reconstructions of this ligament on Jordan's top football players. He ignored the searing pain that shot through his leg and forced his body to roll over as his momentum carried him down the slope. He had to reach his daughter.

There!

Amira was beside him, a wide-eyed expression of terror on her face. He shot out a hand, grabbed her fluffy pink jacket, and dug the heel of his ski boot on his good leg into the snow. They stopped about midway down the slope. He pulled his daughter to him. Her head fell into his chest. He felt her press against the small travel version of the Qur'an he kept in his pocket.

Allah, please let my daughter be okay, he pleaded.

He shouted over the screams of the wounded skiers around them, "Amira, where are you hurt?"

Her lips quivered. "Baba, what happened?"

"Are you injured?" He tried to push himself upright, but his left leg collapsed underneath him. He shifted his weight and rose to his right knee instead. He ran his hands along her body, carefully palpating her limbs, feeling for any sign of injury.

"I'm okay, I think," she whimpered.

For the first time since the explosion occurred, Mousa allowed himself to take a breath. *What happened?* Surveying the destruction around them, the horror of the tragedy came to him. The mall had been bombed.

As soon as the realization struck him that the explosion was most likely deliberate, another more disturbing thought occurred. *The smell.* Not just fire and smoke, but the sickly sweet aroma of burning plastic. All that remained of the plate glass windows between the slope and the shops of the mall were a few jagged shards thrusting out of the twisted metal frame. He could see none of the shops, nor the food court where they might have been enjoying their cocoa. Gray smoke billowed from the mall into the ski area. The smoke glowed orange where a fire raged somewhere behind it. If they didn't leave quickly, they would die. As if to accentuate the point, the eerie sound of protesting metal came from above his head.

He knew that an emergency exit to the outside must be located somewhere at the bottom of the slope. He scanned the area around him. The formerly pristine snow was littered with bodies and debris. Some of the skiers, faces contorted in agony, held onto limbs leaking bright red blood onto the white snow. Others lay quiet, dead. A moment of indecision struck him. He was doctor, and these people needed help.

“Baba?”

He gazed into the dark eyes of his daughter, who clung to his side. Then a loud groaning noise pulled his attention upwards. The ski lift was swaying back and forth. The metal poles holding the cables aloft slowly bent over toward them.

He made his decision. He sat back onto the snow and pulled his daughter onto his lap. With the screeching of the metal becoming louder and the stench of the smoke bringing tears to his eyes, he pushed off, watching below to make sure they avoided the glass that had peppered the slope.

As they picked up speed on their controlled slide, a loud pop echoed through the resort. The lights went out, and they were plunged into darkness.

CHAPTER 3

SHEFFIELD-STERLING-STRATHCONA HALL,
YALE UNIVERSITY

***F**ive years' work. The breakthrough no one thinks is possible.*

Dr. Ethan Lightman gazed at the machine in the center of the room: *the Logos*. It offered so many possibilities, and yet he was balancing on a narrow ledge. He had to produce results—and fast. He swiveled his chair around to his desk, the wheels creaking against the well-worn strips of maple flooring. He'd worked for the past ten hours in the expansive room that doubled as his lab and office in Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall, known by everyone at Yale as SSS. The gothic cathedral at the intersection of Grove and Prospect Streets housed Yale's Psychology Department. All of the lights in the lab were off except for his Tiffany desk lamp and the blue glow from his laptop. The hallways were silent.

Ethan ran his fingers through his hair. *I should leave and come back in the morning.* The last thing he'd eaten was a Snickers bar, and that was five hours ago. But he sensed that he was close. He focused on the lines of code displayed on his monitor.

The data he'd collected from Liz's EEG during her seizure was rich with potential, particularly when combined with the results from a study he'd worked on as a young medical doctor writing his PhD dissertation in the field of neuropsychiatry. He clicked a window that brought up a color image of the two hemispheres of the brain of one of the subjects from the earlier study. He thought back to the small group of Buddhist monks and Catholic nuns who had been quite willing, even curious, to be injected with radioactive dye so

that he could scan their brains using SPECT and fMRI analysis. Since Liz's seizure the previous day, he'd studied the spikes and troughs of her EEG until he was dizzy. His dilemma now: how to combine Liz's data with the earlier brain scans so he could program the machine in the center of the room? He knew he could make it work; he just wasn't sure yet how he would do it. His colleagues in the psych department delighted in predicting that the Logos would do nothing. He would prove them wrong. He had to: his shot at tenure depended on it.

Massaging his temples, he reclined in the chair whose frayed fabric seat cushion had seen several generations of Yale professors come and go. An untenured assistant professor, Ethan needed to produce results or he'd find himself teaching at some small college in a town he'd never heard of before. But it wasn't only his career that drove his search for answers; he longed to understand what had happened to him *that day*. He pushed the memory away. *Ancient history*, he thought. He was a research scientist, and right now he needed to focus on the task before him.

He massaged his temples again. *Not now*, he thought. He took a moment to inventory himself. *No tunnel vision, no nausea*. Those were the usual symptoms that indicated a migraine was beginning. If one developed, he wouldn't be able to work for the next twenty-four hours. He opened the top drawer of his desk and removed a yellow prescription bottle. He popped the Topiramate into his mouth and washed it down with a swig of water from a half-full bottle. He was first prescribed the drug when he was thirteen. He needed it most frequently when he was under stress.

He glanced at the desk to his right. While his workspace was always immaculately organized, Professor Elijah Schiff's had stacks of psychology journals and notebooks filled with his illegible scrawl strewn about. Five years earlier, when Ethan became his research assistant, he'd tried to organize the senior professor, but the attempts hadn't lasted long. Elijah had his own system. He also possessed the most brilliant mind Ethan had ever encountered. After his father's sudden death from pancreatic cancer when he was a junior in high school, Ethan had been without a male mentor until Elijah took him under his wing. The senior professor had also been his main source of comfort

after the horrible accident that had taken Natalie, his fiancée, three years earlier. He shook his head to clear the memory.

Just then his eye caught a Post-it note stuck to the cover of one of the journals. Elijah was fond of leaving bits of wisdom for his students on these notes, and he still considered Ethan one of his students. Ethan peeled the yellow note off of the magazine and stared at the mixture of cursive and print: “Truth cannot be known, only approximated.”

He slapped the note back on the magazine. *If truth can't be known, then what are we doing here?* He and Elijah shared the same professional interests and goals, but they approached their project from two different perspectives. Maybe that was why they worked well together.

Suddenly, he had a flash of inspiration that caused him to start, as if a glass of cold water had been poured over his head. *The wavelength, not the amplitude, of the EEG is the key, he realized, and it has to be applied asynchronously to the left and right temporal lobes.*

The idea was like a spark that had smoldered within him and suddenly ignited with a breath of air. As he returned to his computer, he was grateful the headache was keeping itself at bay. His fingers flew across the keys as he rewrote a portion of the code. Then he reran the simulation analysis. He wiped his palms on his khakis while he stared at the three open windows on his laptop. One contained the script of the code he'd been writing, the second a graph showing the electrical impulses the Logos would create in a subject's brain, and the third a series of ones and zeroes—binary code—that was the computer's translation of his programming.

When the analysis was complete, he studied the results. Was the answer to the past five years of research really that simple? He swiveled his chair and stared at the machine. Now all they had to do was to test it.

He thought back to Liz's vision. “What do you mean by infinity?” he'd asked her.

“Words are inadequate, trivial,” she'd said. “It's something that must be experienced.”

“Can you try?”

She'd put a finger to her lips for a moment, shrugged, and said, “God.”

CHAPTER 4

DUBAI

As his daughter played in the white sand on the edge of the blue-green Persian Gulf, Mousa sat on a beach lounge chair by the Royal Mirage Hotel. He rewrapped the Ace bandage around his knee, pulling it tighter and crisscrossing the joint to add stability. He didn't need an MRI to know that the ligament that normally did that job was ruptured. He tugged his linen pants leg down over the wrap. It fit, barely. He'd picked up an elaborately carved cane in the hotel's gift shop, much fancier than he needed, but it would allow him to walk well enough until he returned to Amman. He thought about which one of his colleagues would do the surgery to repair his ACL. *Too bad I can't operate on myself*, he thought.

Their flight left in four hours, and it was time to head back inside the hotel to clean up, but he decided to give Amira a few more minutes to play. She was chatting to herself as she built a sand castle, miraculously uninjured from the bombing that had killed countless others the previous day.

Alhamdulillah, Mousa mouthed for the hundredth time that day. *Praise Allah*. The emergency lights above the ski slope had kicked on a few seconds after the main power went out. Mousa had somehow navigated down the slope on his back, maneuvering past the dead and dying in the bloody and blackened snow, frantic to get Amira out before the entire building ignited in flames. When they reached the metal fire door at the bottom of the slope, he put a hand on his daughter's bony shoulder to steady his balance as he stood. He hopped on his good leg to the door as Amira clung to his waist. The cries

of his fellow skiers called to him to do his duty: to help. He was a doctor, after all. But the groaning sound of metal twisting against its will overpowered the voices. And what use would he be if he couldn't even steady himself?

He and Amira had managed to wobble out onto a side street and into the harsh sunlight. He led her away from the exterior of the mall in case the walls failed. In the time it took to reach the intersection with the main street, police and fire trucks screamed up to the building. He'd paused, breathing deeply and resting his leg. People and smoke poured out the main doors to the mall.

How could this happen? he'd wondered, paralyzed by the shock of the past few minutes. Then an image popped into his head, one that was almost as disturbing as the injured people he'd passed on the ski slope: the other Jordanian he'd seen in the mall, the one with the backpack.

Mousa surveyed the police cars screeching to a halt in the street around them. He had to get Amira far away. The ambulances were arriving, and he rationalized that they wouldn't need one more doctor, especially one who was lame and accompanied by a child. If he stayed, the police would ask him questions. A quiet voice in his head told him that he had a duty to tell them about the Jordanian, but he also knew how things worked. A louder voice said that it was better not to get involved. He had a greater duty to the little girl beside him.

Now that he sat on the peaceful beach out of danger, his daughter safe and himself with only a burst right eardrum and a bum knee, he felt guilty. Maybe he should have remained and helped. But he'd been afraid. Terrified, if he was honest with himself. More for Amira's safety than his own, of course, but he'd also heard rumors of where men were taken after a terrorist attack. He shook off a chill even though the sun warmed his skin. Within a few hours they would be back in Amman with his wife and new son.

As he looked up across the flat waters of the Persian Gulf, he noticed how the city looked manufactured, the same thought he'd had the previous day in the mall. The beach was groomed by a crew with rakes every morning and was off limits to the local population. He and Amira were the only Arab-looking people on the beach; only guests at one of the expensive hotels bordering the Gulf were allowed access. Three German tourists strolled ankle-deep in the water. Bellies, pink from overexposure to the sun, extended over their too-

small bikinis. Just offshore he saw more high-rise buildings than he could count, thousands of condos recently constructed on a manmade island in the shape of a palm tree.

The display of wealth around him reminded him of the news reports that morning. The story about the bombing played worldwide. The UAE was supposed to be an example of a peaceful, safe Muslim state that had put aside politics and religious fanaticism in the name of capitalism. But that was exactly why terrorists had targeted the city.

An Internet press release from an unknown terrorist group had declared a jihad against any Muslim state or organization that had turned its back on the teachings of the Prophet and had embraced Western capitalism and the lust for material items. The actions of fanatical Muslim terrorists over the past two decades pained him. Their exploitation of his religion—a faith centered on prayer, charity, and justice—in the name of terrorism was a dismaying phenomenon he'd seen develop since his childhood. In the seventies and eighties, when terrorism in the Middle East began to rise, its proponents had been motivated by politics. He recalled hearing Yasser Arafat, founder of the PLO, quip that “fighting wars over religion is like arguing about who has the best imaginary friend.” But the previous day's bombing was even more troubling: now they were pitting Arab against Arab.

The irony was that Mohammad had been known during his day not just as a Prophet of Allah, but as a great statesman—a ruler who had united the Arab world and brought an economic prosperity that had not been seen before and would last for centuries. Mousa shook his head. The problem in his fellow Arab countries was not rampant religious fanaticism itself; it was poverty, a lack of opportunity for young men, and illiteracy. Discontentment bred anger, and those who couldn't read and think for themselves were easily led astray. The billions invested in the construction on the fake island before him was one example of the wasted resources of countries that concentrated their vast oil wealth to benefit the few. *Simple economics*, he thought.

“Baba, come play with me.”

He pushed himself out of his chair and hobbled to her side. “Just for a minute, dear, and then it is time to go home.”

“I miss ummi.”

He thought of Bashirah’s silky curls, her warm embrace, and the mischievous twinkle in her eye. “I miss your mum too, Princess.”

While he searched the signs for directions to the departure gates, Mousa kept an eye on Amira, who pulled her small pink suitcase behind her. He wished he could take her hand, but he pulled his own suitcase in one and used the other to bear down on his cane.

Dubai International Airport was like the rest of the country: new, shiny, and large. The main terminal was a giant stainless steel and glass tube designed with a nod to an aircraft fuselage. Palm trees grew down two rows the entire length of the tube. Mousa noted that many of the same posh clothing and jewelry stores that were in the Mall of the Emirates had outlets here too. He shuddered at the memory.

When they reached customs, the muscles in his chest tensed. Military men dressed in black and carrying machine guns paced around the passengers who waited in front of a line of desks at passport control. Mousa had never seen so much security at the airport before. Their taxi had been stopped three hundred meters before the building while a bomb-sniffing German Shepherd circled the car. He looked down at his daughter in order to tear his gaze from the eyes of a security guard who was staring at him.

“Let’s wait in this line, sweetheart.” He stopped behind two American businessmen. While Amira chattered to a stuffed puppy she had pulled from her backpack, he glanced at the backlit advertisements on the wall to the left of the customs agents. He had no reason to feel guilty, but the way the military men studied each passenger was unnerving. The bright ads drew his attention: each was for a different high-end condominium in the city. One declared that anyone who bought a property would be given a free Bentley; another promised that buyers would be entered into a lottery whose grand prizes included a year’s use of a private jet and an island off the coast of Africa.

“Next!”

The customs agent in front of them waved impatiently. Mousa approached the desk, pulled his and Amira's passports from the inside pocket of his tan blazer, and handed them over. The man was dressed like all the other customs agents, wearing a white robe that reached to his ankles, sandals, and a red-and-white-checked headdress. The agent was well fed, but not obese, and had a darker complexion than Mousa. He took the passports without smiling. With the practiced movement of countless repetitions, he opened each to the first page and studied the pictures. First, he scrutinized Amira and then swiped the bar code on her passport through the scanner on the computer. Next, the agent opened his and held it up so that he could compare the photograph with Mousa's face. He never knew what he was supposed to do in that moment: did he smile, look bored, make a small joke?

He stayed quiet and looked passively ahead. The agent studied him for a few seconds longer than he was used to, and the tension began to creep back into his chest again, restricting his breathing. After the trauma of the previous day, he assured himself that his anxiety was natural. He pushed back the twinges of guilt he still felt for leaving the mall without speaking to the police or helping with the injured. His first duty was to his daughter. Allah understood that.

Finally, the man seemed to be satisfied. He swiped the passport through the computer, but he didn't hand it back to Mousa. Instead, he stared at the monitor, his bushy brow furrowed. Then he keyed in a command and looked up.

"Network slow today. It will just take a moment." He smiled. Mousa thought the smile seemed forced.

An unmarked white door behind the customs desks opened, and three military officers hurried out. They were dressed similarly to the others patrolling the terminal: black cargo pants, thick-soled black boots, black turtlenecks, and black bulletproof vests. The lead officer had a pistol on his belt; the two behind him carried submachine guns. Following the three men was a woman dressed in a traditional black burqa with a scarf over her hair, but her face was uncovered and she wore a subtle shade of lipstick.

The men split up and strode around the desks. Then they converged on Mousa and Amira. The other travelers waiting in line stepped back. The

tightness he'd felt in his chest cinched in like a python trying to squeeze the air from his lungs.

"May I help you?" He tried to keep his voice relaxed.

The lead officer rested a hand on the butt of his pistol and asked, "You are Mousa bin Ibrahim Al-Mohammad?"

"I am *Doctor* Al-Mohammad." His voice came out weaker than he wanted, even with the emphasis on *Doctor*. He had done nothing wrong, but the determined look in the officer's eyes concerned him. Before Mousa could process what happened next, the officer standing to his left grabbed his arms, jerked them behind his back, and tightened a plastic handcuff tie around his wrists until it dug into his skin. His cane rattled to the ground.

"What are you doing?"

"Come with us, please," the lead officer said.

"Baba! Don't leave!"

His heart lurched. He turned his head to see Amira staring at him with terror on her face for the second day in a row.

"My daughter—" He struggled against the men who pushed him forward. "Please, let her come with me."

"She will be taken care of." The officer nodded to the woman in the burqa who bent to Amira's level and put a hand on her shoulder.

"It's okay, Princess," Mousa tried to sound comforting in spite of the surging fear in his gut. "Just a misunderstanding. This will only take a minute, I'm sure."

"No!" she pleaded. "Let my Baba go!" The tears streaming down her face tore at him.

He hesitated again but was shoved from behind. His weight fell on his injured knee and he stumbled, but the men on either side of him grabbed his arms and dragged him toward the white door. The first officer opened the door, which led into a narrow hallway. The last sounds he heard before the metal door slammed behind him were his daughter's screams.

CHAPTER 5

SSS, YALE UNIVERSITY

As the memory of Liz’s mystical vision echoed through his mind, Ethan packed his laptop into his satchel. He was tired, and the dark silence of the building reminded him that once again he’d worked too late.

“Dr. Lightman, explain yourself.”

Ethan jumped in his chair. He swiveled to see Samuel Houston, Chair of Yale’s Human Research Protection Program—the HRPP—standing in the doorway. Houston was in his late fifties, a few years younger than Elijah, wiry thin, and mostly bald with a ring of salt and pepper hair around the crown of his head.

“Explain what?” He tried to keep the tension out of his voice. He didn’t have much contact with Houston, and that was by design. He let Elijah handle the temperamental chair. A former researcher and psych professor himself, Houston was now a full-time administrator whose job was to oversee human experimentation at Yale. When he took his position four years earlier, he had moved from being a peer to being a thorn in the side of his former colleagues.

Houston removed the wire glasses that teetered on the tip of his nose and stabbed them in Ethan’s direction. “I should have terminated your research when your funding dried up a few months ago, but Elijah persuaded me to give you two more time. After what happened yesterday, I’m making an executive decision: your time is up.”

“But the data we collected . . . I just—”

“Your treatment of your patient, *Doctor*, was out of line.”

My treatment of Liz?

“You’ve let your ambitions for this project cloud your professional judgment.” His voice was larger than his slight frame seemed capable of.

“How dare you question—” Ethan took a breath and fought the urge to lash out at the administrator. In his role as Chair of the HRPP, Houston had the power to close down a lab, to prevent a researcher from receiving funding, and to keep a professor from achieving tenure.

He tried again in a calmer tone. “All of the protocols were followed to the letter. My patient gave the necessary consents to stop her medication. She volunteered to have a seizure so we could conduct the EEG testing.”

He glanced toward the far corner of the room to Chris Sligh’s desk, bare but for a thick file folder. The grad student conducted preliminary patient interviews and obtained the necessary consents before they began any experiments. Ethan knew how paranoid the university was about liability. Since the cutting-edge but controversial experiments conducted there in the 1960s by Stanley Milgram, the administration was especially sensitive to human psychological testing.

In a now infamous study, Milgram had devised an experiment to see how far people would go in deference to authority. His subjects were falsely told that the experiment they volunteered for was about the effects of punishment on recall and learning, through the administration of electrical shocks that the subjects would give when a confederate answered a question incorrectly. Although the experiment showed how powerful authority could be in determining behavior, it also created a firestorm of controversy over the intense stress and anxiety the subjects suffered as they went ahead shocking people against their better judgment.

But that was fifty years ago, Ethan thought. Houston was overly cautious, worried about a past that was no longer relevant.

“My information is that you withheld medication when the seizure spread, putting the patient in danger of injuring herself.”

Judith. He’d worried the nurse might be a problem. Neither she nor Houston understood the true nature of his work.

“If you review the patient’s chart, and you are welcome to watch the video as well, you’ll see the protocols were followed exactly as approved by the insti-

tutional review board.” Ethan’s colleagues who had reviewed his proposed experiment and then reported to Houston’s committee had been skeptical that the Logos would ever work, but they had approved the research. “We had to allow the seizure to proceed along its natural course to capture all of the relevant EEG data. Liz agreed to this protocol precisely.”

“I will review *everything*,” Houston enunciated each syllable. “We aren’t the Yale of Stanley Milgram anymore. My responsibility”—he stretched his body to its most erect posture—“is to shut down any project that doesn’t smell right. It’s not just the university’s reputation that’s on the line; half-a-billion dollars in federal grants is contingent on us upholding the highest ethical standards.” He leaned in close to Ethan. “From the beginning, this nonsense you and Elijah have concocted hasn’t smelled right to me.”

Ethan forced a smile. “My grad assistant, Chris, will email you the files in the morning.”

Houston surveyed the lab, his eyes lingering on the two-foot-square metal box in the center before returning to Ethan. “So, does this machine”—he gestured to the Logos with a dismissive wave of his spectacles—“do anything yet?”

“Just before you walked in, I may have figured out what was wrong with our programming. You see, I combined the data from Liz’s EEG with—”

“Doctor,” Houston sighed, “every time I come here to question you or Elijah about this failing project, you’re on the verge of some major new progress, and yet the only thing you seem to do well”—he made a show of looking around the room again—“is take up valuable real estate in one of our larger labs.”

Ethan felt his face flush as he tried to formulate a response that wouldn’t aggravate his superior, but he wasn’t as smooth as he wished. The perfect comeback always seemed to form in his brain a minute too late to be effective. He had the same problem speaking with women. Feeling his heart rate and breathing increase, he reminded himself that he was experiencing a typical sympathetic nervous system response to stress. He’d discovered during medical school that naming the biological basis for his response to anxiety helped to calm the nervousness he often felt under pressure.

“We got it!” boomed a Brooklyn accent from the lab’s open doorway.

Startled for the second time that night, Ethan turned to see his mentor, Elijah Schiff, bound into the room. His eyes sparkled with excitement below his thick, white, unkempt hair. His khaki pants sported a coffee stain on one knee, while a striped tie whose advanced age was betrayed by the frayed strings of silk around its edges hung around the open collar of his blue oxford shirt. He held up several sheets of paper crumpled in his hands.

Ethan wondered what had brought Elijah back to the office at this hour, and he figured he’d be none too pleased to see Houston here. But when Elijah met Houston’s glare, he seemed unfazed, as if he’d expected him to be there.

“What is it you *got*?” Houston asked.

“Funding.” The elder professor’s smile revealed crooked teeth that his working-class family had never had the money to fix.

“You’re serious?” Ethan asked.

When their first grant started to run low, Elijah had tried to get re-funded by the original foundation but had been told that the foundation’s priorities had changed toward projects “with more concrete medical benefits.” Elijah had suspected that the continued failure of the Logos to produce any results in their test subjects had more to do with the rejection than did any changing priorities. The other foundations the senior professor approached had dismissed them out of hand, questioning whether the topic of their study was an appropriate one for psychiatry or, as one foundation director put it, “better off left to the Theology Department.”

“And where did this last-minute funding come from?” Houston stuffed his hands in his pockets.

Although Elijah was close to retirement age, Ethan had noticed how his mentor made Houston uncomfortable. Maybe it was because Elijah refused to participate in the game that was university politics, or maybe it was just because the professor was so much smarter.

Elijah waved a hand. “A new foundation based in Dallas—last-ditch try, really. I met today with an old classmate of mine from Harvard who’s the Executive Director.”

Ethan didn’t remember Elijah mentioning a classmate.

“Which foundation?” Houston asked.

“The NAF: Neurological Advancement Foundation.”

“Never heard of it.”

Elijah shrugged. “Until recently, me neither.”

“How much are we talking about?”

Elijah’s smile widened. “Two hundred fifty thousand for the next eighteen months.”

Houston’s eyebrows shot upward, while Ethan’s jaw dropped. Such an amount was huge for a psychology study. *How does he do it?* Ethan wondered.

“The foundation was set up by a Texas software tycoon whose teenage son committed suicide.” He paced over to his desk and dropped the papers in the midst of his journals. “Schizophrenia. He claimed he heard the voices of saints—they were a strong Catholic family, you see.”

The perfect funding source, Ethan thought. “So this tycoon is interested in the psychological basis of religious experiences?”

“How convenient,” Houston said.

“Imagine for a moment”—Elijah pulled out his desk chair and sat, reclining so far back that Ethan worried he might tip over—“that certain individuals have the ability to sense that which most of us cannot see.” He picked up a ballpoint pen from his desk and began to twirl it between his fingers. “Life is something more than mere matter made of molecules. What is it that animates life itself? I’m not talking about a God who molds us like a sculptor making figurines from clay or a God who acts on the world like a puppeteer manipulating the strings of a marionette. What if God is more intimate to life itself? If physicists can study the Big Bang by examining the background microwave radiation left in the universe from that event, maybe we can hear the echo of God that is inside of us.”

“Unanswerable questions,” the dean huffed. “We are concerned with scientific inquiry here that can be demonstrated empirically.”

Ethan hated to admit it, but Houston had a point. His own interest in the Logos Project had always been from a different angle than Elijah’s. He cleared his throat. “Religion is one of the most powerful motivators of humankind. Over ninety percent of the world’s population believes in God. If we can

unlock the biological basis—the neurological and biochemical processes—that leads to these beliefs, we will have accomplished a feat no scientist has ever accomplished.”

Houston sighed. “That’s a very big *if*. After five years of university resources, all you have to show for this”—he pointed to the machine in the center of the room—“is, well, nothing.”

Elijah said, “Samuel, I’m not sure it’s productive for us to revisit this discussion. We just need more time to figure out the right programming. Now that we have our funding, you shouldn’t be concerned. Ethan’s work with temporal lobe epileptics who experience hyperreligiosity holds great promise. The Logos will work, and the results will be spectacular.”

The professor’s words reminded Ethan of his earlier breakthrough, but he bit his tongue while Houston turned to leave.

“Don’t screw this up,” Houston said, casting a final wary glance at the machine. “New funding or not, I will shut this program down if I hear so much as a hiccup.”

Once he was out the door and out of earshot, Ethan turned to his mentor. For the first time, he noticed the strain behind the excitement in Elijah’s eyes. “We’re going to need to show results now more than ever, aren’t we?” he asked.

“How did your programming go?”

Now it was Ethan’s turn to smile. “I think I did it.”

CHAPTER 6

CIA HEADQUARTERS LANGLEY, VIRGINIA

“**W**hen do I see something for my \$20 million?” demanded Casey Richards, Deputy Director of SAD, the Special Activities Division of the CIA’s National Clandestine Services. He spoke into the phone on his desk on the sixth floor of the New Headquarters Building at the CIA’s 258-acre campus in Langley, Virginia. While he waited for the delay as his words bounced off the satellite and then rerouted through the scrambler, he massaged the top of his scalp with his free hand. He’d started to lose his hair in his early thirties when he was still a field spook. When he became a desk jockey ten years ago at the age of forty-five, he’d finally shaved it.

He eyed the bulge created by the pack of Marlboros in the pocket of his suit jacket, which hung on the back of his door. He longed for the old days when he could smoke in the office. Since joining the Company in the eighties after serving a stint in Army intelligence, technological advances had fundamentally changed the business. *Not all changes were good*, he thought.

“I’m just as anxious as you, but Project Jericho has only been online for eight months,” the refined baritone voice replied. “PSYOPS aren’t an exact science.”

Richards propped his feet on the unopened packing box next to his large oak desk. He’d moved into the office four months ago from the OHB, the Original Headquarters Building. He preferred the larger windows and contemporary steel and glass structure of the NHB, but he found it ironic that they referred to a twenty-year-old building as “new.”

He'd been promoted from being the head of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center to the position that oversaw all of the Agency's clandestine activities when his predecessor left for a quadruple bypass. He'd only had time to unpack the essentials—his files. The walls and his desk were still bare of any personal mementos. He was always struck by how modest in size and plain in design most government offices were compared to the Hollywood portrayal. But that was fine by Richards. He didn't care about the perks that the political appointees he reported to valued so much. His job was to ensure his country's security, not his own.

“Right now”—he raised his voice—“I've got the White House, the DNI, and that bozo in Homeland Security riding my ass.”

“Dubai?”

“That bombing could change the dynamics of the region.”

“How were we to know about a target that doesn't even pertain to us?”

“The NSA claims they've been warning the Intelligence Directorate for months about increased chatter. But there's always chatter. Damn it, I need to show that we're doing something now.”

Over the previous few years, the various Islamic terrorist groups had been relatively quiet as they nursed their wounds from a decade of pressure from the US military. That had changed two days ago with the bombing in Dubai. Now that the UAE, one of the most stable, and certainly most capitalistic, of the Arab countries had been hit, the Agency was picking up rumblings in Turkey. None of the secular Muslim states were considered safe from attack anymore.

Since the end of the Cold War, the CIA had struggled with its mission and its methods. He knew firsthand that combating Islamic extremism was not as easy as the talking heads on TV thought it was. Failures had occurred on many levels prior to 9/11: lack of focus, too high a reliance on technology rather than HUMINT, marginalizing the few analysts who warned of the dangers. The US had become complacent with being the sole surviving superpower for having won the Cold War. Human intelligence was more difficult when one's adversary was driven not by politics but by religion. As a motivating force, religion was more powerful than lust, greed, or ego. Men were not just willing to die for their religion, they were enthusiastic about becoming martyrs.

“I told you in the beginning I needed more leeway with Jericho,” the man on the phone said.

Richards usually wouldn’t have tolerated such insubordination, but the man was an off-the-books subcontractor, not an official employee. He had also devised the most creative plan to combat the difficulties they faced that Richards had ever heard.

“This isn’t the 1960s anymore.”

“Unfortunate indeed.”

“Look, I spoke with the director this morning. You have the go-ahead to ramp up Jericho. Just bring me some results.”

Richards’s oversight of Project Jericho, one of the boldest and potentially most explosive—if, God forbid, it was ever made public—covert operations undertaken in the post-Cold War era, was the key reason he’d been tapped for the role of Deputy Director. His career, not to mention the potential for peace in the Middle East, hinged on the success of the project this man had first pitched to him several years ago. Prior to 9/11, the man never would have gotten a meeting with Richards. The sort of operation he was proposing hadn’t been attempted in almost four decades, which was exactly why Richards thought it just might work.

“I may have a surprise for you too.”

Richards cringed. Surprises were rarely a good thing in intelligence.

“We may have a new technique that will revolutionize our work.”

“Tell me.”

“It’s better if you don’t know all of the details now.”

Knowing the man’s checkered reputation and questionable ethics, he could only imagine what he had planned. Richards had reviewed the file of the experiments the man had overseen early in his career. Even as a CIA covert-ops veteran, he’d been shocked by some of what he’d seen. But if anything, the man was a patriot.

Anyways, all aspects of Jericho took place far away from American soil, with no discoverable links to the American government or the CIA.

Richards didn’t ask for elaboration.

