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HOMELAND SECURITY



BY

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PROLOGUE

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The story of America is one of ordinary men and women refusing to bow down to the yoke of tyrants. Dennis Walls didn't choose to be a hero. The professor of political science surely didn't think of himself as one. First his parents' lives were claimed, although inadvertently, by the actions of would-be-tyrants. Now he looks and sees his beloved America under siege.

These events happened because no one wanted to believe that the message of security that we were receiving was from villains. After all, these men that we heeded have influence in high places. They stand in the corridors of our lawmakers. They sit upon the seats of our justice system. They control our businesses and our media. Worst of all, they control our protectors; security agencies, military and police. We are told that the world is filled with enemies who envy us our prosperity, hate us for our religious beliefs and are hell bent on bringing us low. At first we choose not to believe, but with all of the power that we have given to them they are able to create the illusion of an enemy where there is none and inflame the passions of the enemies that once had not existed. All of this they do to manipulate "The People" into believing that security sometimes requires the surrendering of liberty.

Too often we take our liberties for granted or place too low a value upon them. We believe that we can

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surrender some liberty in exchange for the phantom of security. Too seldom or too late do we realize that to surrender a single liberty is to relinquish all security for it is upon our liberties that our security truly rest. To our shame we are seduced by the other prospect.

Outside Dennis Wall's window is the proof of our folly. A behemoth in the form of America's most powerful armored tank sits as a sentinel for the illegal regime which has taken control of our government.

CHAPTER 1
BROKENHEARTED DOVE

Is it the sum total of our lives that mold us or are we fated from birth to be hero or villain? At eight years of age Dennis Walls is attending his first protest with his parents, Robert and Lucy Walls. It's a presidential election year. An important part of that run is The Republican Convention. Seemingly unrelated events will reveal villains and begin molding a hero.

America didn't know it at the time, but there were forces at work even then that would change this boy's life forever and mar the beauty of the American ideal. Across the street from Canton Park and many stories above it is a luxurious penthouse suite. There a tall, heavy, menacing man with slit like eyes stands staring out the glass windows that enclose his suite. The power that he wields in the U.S. senate dwarfs even the huge specter he presents. The man is Senator Daryl Morgan II.

The door to the penthouse opens and he turns quickly in the direction of the door. It's no surprise to him that it is the Mayor of Canton, Ohio - Charles Shutz. Wanting to place his own touch upon the occurrences surrounding the convention the senator had sent for the mayor earlier. The mayor is here now because when Senator Morgan requests your presence it is taint amount to a presidential or royal command. "What shall you do my knight?" a ritualistic chant is spoken. "Protect the Castle Keep, my lord. Protect the Castle Keep," he pledges.

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One can clearly read the scowl of displeasure etched into Daryl's face as Charles approaches him. Anticipating being scolded like a child Charles timidly makes his way across the room. The mayor resents being made to feel this way, but knows better than to voice that resentment. "God, I can't believe what you allow to go on in your city. ... it is still your city?" Daryl adds facetiously. In an attempt to make light of the situation and to excuse his inability to control the demonstrators Charles laughs then points out to Daryl, "This is still America. There is only so much even a mayor can do to keep peaceful protesters in line." Knowing the mayor to be a political coward, who tries to ride the fence, Daryl shakes his head in resignation.

"Care for a drink", Daryl asks as he has already started across the room toward the suite's bar. As Daryl pours himself a drink he emotes with an air of nostalgia and melancholy, "I long for the days when the peasants blindly followed wherever we might lead them." The inept mayor has followed the senator over to the bar. Now standing and waiting for his host to pour him the drink that he is sorely in need of he answers with trepidation. "It would make my life a lot easier if that was still the case, but at last education has lift their blindfolds. The media fools fewer and fewer people with each passing day." Charles reminds Daryl.

After pouring a second healthy glassful of his favorite brandy and handing it to his guest Daryl

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takes his glass and crosses the suite once more. The large man has some difficulty seating himself on the plush couch in the center of the suite. The chair is too soft or he has allowed himself to put on too much girth. Unsure of what is expected of him Charles simply stands at the bar sipping on his drink awaiting his menacing ally's whims. Finally Daryl places his drink on the table in front of him then speaks, "There will be trouble ... that is unless you take steps to head it off." The mayor knows that Daryl has something unsavory in mind, something he is sure that he is not going to like. He also knows that this man is not anyone he wants to make into an enemy so he asks, "What do you have in mind?" Quick to take control of the situation, the senator offers his solution - at least as much as he feels the mayor needs to know, "... just as a precaution, mind you ... have your police ready in riot gear. This should dissuade the protesters from any violence, but even if it doesn't at least you will be prepared to act swiftly and efficiently." The meek mayor knows that there is a hidden agenda in the solution the senator offers, but he nods in agreement. The coward rationalizes that whatever devilment this man intends will not be of his making.

Meanwhile in the Canton City Park the protesters (who have been labeled "Flower Children" by their adversaries in an attempt to trivialize them and their cause) don't truly have a leader. There is one man that most of them respectfully heed. That man is

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Dennis Wall's father, Robert Walls - a professor of political science at Columbia University. At his side is his beautiful wife Lucy and his very young and naive son, Dennis. The wife and son smile up at him, beaming with pride.

The reluctant orator, Robert Walls, stands across the street from the menacing meeting between the mayor and the senator. Out in front of the teacher a throng of protesters are gathered. Anxiously the group awaits his message. "Beware the tools that are used by these villains. The media is a surgeon in the employ of scoundrels. Language is the scalpel that it uses. When they call our involvement a Conflict ... the idea is repugnant - young people die, but it's not a war. It's merely a conflict. The surgeon doesn't stop there - their policy of separate but equal has no resemblance to segregation ... or at least that's what the power brokers would have you believe. The way they use language is as a refined instrument. It slices away at common sense and reason leaving only what the surgeon chooses not to slice away." Robert's message is clear, don't trust the media. The crowd yelps, claps and cheers in support of that message.

After his speech Robert and his family walk among the admiring crowd.

Mostly he is greeted with open fingered peace signs. There is someone who doesn't belong here. Unnoticed by most an agent of the FBI, Harold Smith, adorns

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the costume of a Dashiki shirt, bell bottom pants, sandals and wears his hair in a long scruffy ponytail. All too easily he mingles among this group. Hating how low he must sink to pass as one of them, Harold sits in the mud his legs crossed, Indian - style. The infiltrator takes a toke on a joint then as he would put it- he regurgitates their fascist rhetoric. The agent's lips curl into a devious smile when he spots the speaker from earlier, Robert Walls. The corrupt man has been instructed to bribe, threaten or otherwise compromise the leadership of this protest.

Getting up Harold begs off from the group he has been sitting with for the past hour. Target in sight Harold approaches the orator throwing up the peace sign. "Peace my man." There is something off putting about this stranger. Even Dennis Walls at his tender age could see that his father believes that the man is ingenuous. Despite his suspicions Robert greets Harold warmly. "How are you doing ... my brother?" The smile on Harold's face becomes even bigger. "I really dug your message man. You are one groovy dude", the agent furthers his facade in an attempt to lull the father in. "Just sharing some truth," he assures the stranger. "I got some truth I would like to lay on you," is Harold's cryptic reply. "I'm listening ..." cautiously Robert waits not sure what he expects of this stranger, but sure that it won't be good. "Maybe I'm being paranoid, but I prefer to talk where we can't be overheard by the man. At

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these things you never know who is listening."

Harold continues to play his role. The husband and wife stare at one another, both now wary of the stranger. Despite his distrust of the man Robert decides to give him the benefit of the doubt. Gently he squeezes his wife's hand hoping to reassure her. "I'll be right back," he promises her then turns and follows the stranger into a stand of nearby trees. As Harold and Robert stand behind a group of tall pine trees people pass by just out of sight of them. The agent looks around as if he is expecting someone to interrupt them at any moment. The fidgety stranger is starting to make Robert nervous. The same stupid smile which had made the teacher distrustful of the agent in the first place appears on Harold's face as he reaches under his Dashiki and into a money belt, which he wears beneath his costume. The agent takes out a fat envelope. Grinning, Harold hands the envelope to Robert. The man of principle stares down at the envelope that he now holds. "What is this ...?" he asks, sure that he knows what the answer will be. "Open it." Harold instructs Robert. Hesitantly and watching the evil expression the stranger wears Robert lifts the flap of the envelope. Now he finds himself staring down at a thick stack of hundred dollar bills. While Robert stares at the money the villain offers his spiel, "Do you think anyone would notice if you and your family headed back to Columbia University a day or so early? I promise you that there you will find

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that you are now a tenured professor with a substantial pay raise." If not for the dark hue of Robert's skin Harold would have seen the flushed anger of his face and may not have grinned his stupid grin of success.

"Whoosh ..." from behind the trees Harold is thrown. Being only eight at the time Dennis doesn't realize the significance of the stranger being tossed by his father or what the thick wad of money which spills out upon the ground at the man's feet could mean. The commotion draws many of the other protesters. The others gather around the altercation wondering what could have provoked the man of peace. Bouncing to his feet Harold brushes off the dirt then leans over and begins to gather the cash from the ground. Many are beginning to glean what has transpired. Dennis had never heard the ugly word that Harold then spoke before that day, but it wouldn't be the last time that he heard it. "I wouldn't have offered you a damn thing. I don't know why they thought that a nigger would be smart enough to look out for his own first." Angry the father jumps toward Harold. Lucy grabs her husband's arm. The crowd mumbles angrily over the use of the offensive word. Choosing to forget the remaining money on the ground Harold turns and runs away. Meanwhile the wife jokingly reminds her husband of who they are, "Remember ... we are pro love and peace." The two of them laugh. "That's true, but they sure know how to test a man's convictions," the husband half-kids in reply.

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It doesn't take long before the protesters forget the snake in the grass and are back to waving their signs of protest and/or sharing war stories about other demonstrations.

This was Dennis' first protest. So far it has been more confusing than fun. A gust of wind blows by them. The wind seems as if it is gnawing at the very marrow of the boy's bones. It is a cold Winter's evening in Canton, Ohio. The family is huddled together with the other protesters as much for warmth as it is for camaraderie. Although in his heart of hearts he wants to make his parents proud Dennis has to admit that at this particular moment he would have preferred to be back in his warm home watching TV.

The first plan has failed. The Senator's lackeys were not able to buy off the leaders of the protest, so it is now time to move ahead with plan B. The police in the park are donned in riot gear. Most have been instructed to act only in the case of the demonstrators becoming unruly. Others have been bribed and/or brainwashed into believing that the protesters are commie liberals bent upon threatening their American way of life. Between the money and a sense of patriotism the police are primed for the more than combustible situation which those in power hope to ignite.

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The daylight hours, when the public and the media can easily distinguish what is happening, pass without incident. As is often the case with villains they embrace the darkness as they would a pass lover returned. A tall, husky, red headed policeman named Bart Townes whispers a venomous lie into his partner's ear, "I heard that a couple of those flower children are planning to barrage us with balloons filled with piss as soon as it is dark enough for them to go undiscovered." His partner, Randall Sawyer, is incensed by the lie. "What should we do?" Randall wonders aloud. Bart smiles - knowing that his partner will do the rest of his dirty work - and he can just sit back and wait for his big payday.

The pawn, Randall, circulates among his colleagues spreading the lie like some cancer, which will surely eat away at reason. By 9 P.M. most of the policemen have bought into the untruth and are ready to take some preemptive action. Which of the policemen throws the first punch is unknown, but the identity is inconsequential. The mayhem that follows is unforgivable. These are men who have accepted the role of protectors of our laws. Like dominoes falling one policeman after another strike out with their nightsticks, striking innocent protesters. Quickly voices of the wronged rise in response, "This is a peaceful demonstration ... that's right Gestapo troopers ... beat women and children like your Nazi brothers before you." In answer to the heckling

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the policemen escalate their attack. The paid policemen begin tossing canisters of tear gas among the protesters. Chaos reigns. People begin to run in different directions. Water hoses are turned on the demonstrators. Some fall. Others, blinded by the tear gas, trample some of their fallen brethren. Reporters begin recording the police brutality. These reporters find that they are quickly set upon by the police. They are beaten and their cameras and other equipment is destroyed.

Among the chaos Dennis trips and is about to fall when he feels a firm hand tugging on his shirt tail. It is his father dragging him and his mother toward safety. "Come on Dennis!" Robert exclaims loudly. The family weaves their way through the maze of madness. A policeman's nightstick barely misses the father's head. The three of them finally reach the edge of the park. Clear of most of the havoc they have reached the site where Robert had parked their car earlier. The Walls sigh, relieved.

Once inside the car the parents laugh with relief. Confused Dennis stares at them in disbelief. "Have they gone crazy?" he wonders. Thump ... thump ... thump ... Dennis' heart is pounding inside his chest, announcing the fear which has consumed him. "What's so funny?!" Dennis finally screams at his parents. The two adults stop laughing and stare back at him with concern. The parents had gotten so caught up in

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the excitement of the day that they had forgotten to consider how this all might affect their son. "We're sorry baby ..." his mother begins her explanation by apologizing. "... it's just that we want you to feel as strongly about making the world a better place to live as we do." With relief Dennis can feel his heart slowing down, the fear subsiding and a burst of pride replacing all of his bad feelings. "We forgot to ask you if you wanted to be a part of this and that was wrong," his mother admits their oversight. Smiling, Dennis lets her know that he is beginning to understand. Their laughter is from a sense of accomplishment.

That wasn't the last time Dennis was ever afraid, but it was the last time he let fear get the best of him. "No. I'm the one who is sorry." Dennis begins. "It was so scary - with the police hitting people, people falling and screaming. I do want to help. I just never expected it to be like that." Now it is the father's turn to explain, "Son, if you are going to stand up for what you believe in there will be times when you will find yourself in harm's way. There is nothing wrong with being afraid. You just can't let that fear rule your life or stop you from acting."

Ptt ... ptt ... ptt ... outside the family car the rain begins to fall again. The noise made by the confrontation between police, protesters and media

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has tempered down to a quiet roar. The family looks out the car window and sigh a collective sigh of relief. Grateful for the lessons of success and failure that the day has brought Robert has decided that they have done enough ... for today. Placing the key into the ignition he turns on the car and its lights then drives his family away from the scene of the continued mayhem.

Three more days pass with different levels of confrontations between the police and the demonstrators. Each day Robert continues to speak out against the "Powers That Be." And although there are few who know it at the time Daryl has continued to scheme behind the scenes to undermine the protester's efforts. Despite Daryl's stature he is simply a figure head for a serpent.

Finally the convention, the protests and the drive home are all over. The Wall family is home in the small house just off of the Columbia University campus. Happily, Dennis is back in school, Grey Point elementary. Finally the parents feel like they can relax. Lovingly, Lucy brings her husband a cup of coffee. She is about to sit down and enjoy a cup herself when the phone rings. Already standing, she reaches out and takes the phone from its wall bracket. "Yes, Walls' residence", she answers. Quickly her demeanor changes from one of friendly to one of concern.

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"We'll be there within the hour," she informs the party on the other end then she hangs up the phone. Staring across the room at his wife Robert knows that something is amiss. "What was that about?" he asks. "I'm not really sure. Marsha, Dean Langford's assistant, said that there is a problem and that you and I should get over to Dean Langford's office as soon as possible." she gave her husband as much information as she herself had.

"Should we have breakfast first?" Lucy wonders aloud. Deciding to make light of whatever problem lies ahead of them Robert gets up from his seat and crosses the room wearing a mischievous grin. This lascivious expression his wife has seen many times before. Laughing she then playfully starts to back away from her husband. "Robbie ... we don't have time for that." The husband laughs. "Time for what ...?" he pretends to be unaware of what she means. The amorous husband grabs her into his arms and carries her upstairs to their bedroom. If they are concerned they choose to forget those concerns for the time being and simply relish the love that they share.

Two hours later Robert jumps up from his seat in the dean's office screaming at Dean Langford, "What are you talking about Dean Langford? Both Lucy and I put in for our leaves of absence two months ago and those leaves were approved. Not only that, I talked

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to you before we left." He reminds his boss. "I don't recall ... it's too late anyway. HR checked for a copy of your request before they began your dismissal proceedings and they said no such request is in their records." The couple watches as beads of perspiration accumulate on Langford's forehead. It is so obvious that the man is lying. It is now clear to them what is happening. It is Robert who finally points out the truth of their situation to all, "I hope that you can live with being a puppet for the political machine because now that you've cow towed to them once they will be back for another piece of your soul." At her patience's end Lucy exits the Dean's office first. As Robert exits Langford's office his one time friend grabs him by the arm. "I am truly sorry Robert. I wish that this could have ended another way," he says with pleading for forgiveness in his eyes. Looking at the Dean with disdain the ex-friend yanks his arm from the man's grasp then reprimands him for the last time, "It could have ended differently if you had a set of balls, but courage never was one of your strong suits, Langy." This is Robert's attempt to further belittle the man of cowardice.

In an attempt to make up for his cowardly ways Langford has given the family three months instead of the usual one month to move out of the home which the school provides for its faculty members. "That bastard ...!" Robert refers to Langford. The wife is a

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little more understanding. "Think of it this way ... if he had refused to set us up and fire us he would have probably been fired along with us." Shaking his head Robert answers, "At least then he could have held his head up high." Laughing, Lucy jokingly points out, "I'm sure Emily (*Langford's wife*) would have loved to know that he could hold his head up high when she stood in a soup line." The husband and wife laugh, knowing that Lucy is exaggerating, but getting her point.

The phone rings. This time it is the husband who is closest to the phone and answers it. His face lights up as he listens to the caller. "I'm afraid that's true," he pauses. Curious, Lucy is signaling him to let her know to whom he is speaking. Instead of answering her Robert continues to talk then listens. Finally the husband speaks the caller's name and Lucy's face lights up, "Bruce, you and I both know that courage is not one of the attributes one would expect of Langy." Rushing across the room Lucy tugs on her husband's arm, trying to get him to surrender the phone. "I had better give my wife this phone or I may get beat up," he teases then hands the phone to Lucy. "Hi Bruce ... how is my girl, Denise?" she waits for Bruce's answer. Unexpectedly the friend has done more than just answer her question.

Reticent the wife and mother responds to his suggestion. "We can't put you out like that. There

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is a pause while Bruce answers her. She laughs then replies, "In that case we would love to ..." Now it is Robert who has become impatient. "We would love to what ... ?" he questions his wife. Shaking her head Lucy mouths the words, *in a minute*. "Talk to you soon," she says to Bruce then hangs up the phone. "Okay ... now ... what would we love to do ... ?" Robert asks.

It is two days before Christmas. The Wall family has decided to take Bruce up on his generous offer of putting them up while they decide what it is they want to do next. The father has also decided that it would be nice to get settled in before Christmas. What no one anticipated was the treacherous conditions on the roads this December. The roads are icy and there is a fog across the roads making visibility limited. To add to these hazards there is a heavy snow falling and the snow is getting worst. They haven't seen another car on the road that they travel for over ninety minutes. The ever cautious Lucy pleads with Robert, "Let's wait out the weather." To Dennis' lingering heartache his father decides to try to outrun the snow. "It's probably only going to get worst. I'd rather try to get ahead of it," he answers his wife's pleas. The family rides on.

The family car finally passes a sign which reads, Okai - 10 miles. The husband and wife look at the

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sign then at one another and smile, believing they have made it. In the back seat stretched out Dennis is fast asleep. Without thinking the father takes his eyes off of the road and looks back to check on his son. Robert smiles when he sees that Dennis is asleep. In that fleeting moment the mother spots a young deer darting across the highway and she screams, "Aaeiii ...!" Jerking around Robert spots the deer. Without thinking he slams his foot down upon the brakes. The deer vanishes safely into the nearby woods. The family car spins across the frozen highway. In terror Lucy covers her face as the car slams into a tree. The inertia of the car slams the father's head into the side of the interior of the car while tightly jerking the seat belt against Lucy's body. The car is stopped. With her last vestige of strength the wife unbuckles her seat belt. Lucy then reaches out and gently touches her husband's cheek. "I love you," she whispers before she collapses into a huddled mass in the front passenger seat. There is a soft whimpering and panting coming from Lucy then all sound stops. The night is an eerie silent once more.

The ugly scene sits undisturbed for the next few hours of the night. Finally a patrol car happens upon the horrific scene. Spotting the family car wrapped around a tree sheriff Tim Washington of Okai leaps from his car with a prayer upon his lips, "Oh God, please let everyone be alright." With a great

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deal of difficulty Tim trudges through the embankment of snow until he reaches the car. Through the frosted window he can see the bloodied forehead of Robert. Although Lucy's body is huddled down upon the passenger seat Tim can make out that the other passenger is a woman. Still unseen to the lawman is Dennis who is unconscious in the back seat of the car. With his finger Tim taps on the window of the car and calls to the occupants, "Hey lady ... mister ... are you alright?" When neither answers he begins to struggle with the jammed door. It won't budge. "Uhhh ... uhhh ...!" The Good Samaritan strains upon the door then he digs down deep inside of himself and with an almost superhuman effort he snatches the door open. Leaning into the car he checks the vital signs of first Lucy then Robert. His heart aches when he discovers that they are already dead. Sitting down in the snow he places his hands over his face and begins to weep. At that moment he is startled by an unexpected sound, "Ohhh ..." the boy moans as he comes to in the back seat of the car. Without a single thought the sheriff climbs over the seat of the car, opens the back door of the car then lifts Dennis from the wreckage. As he runs carrying the boy toward his patrol car he sends up a second prayer, "Dear God, there has to be some reason for me finding this family. Please let this boy live."

Despite the cold weather perspiration runs down the

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sheriff's face as he makes his way through the snow to his patrol car. As soon as he reaches the car he opens the car's back door while still holding the boy then places Dennis gently upon the back seat of the car. The sheriff runs around to the driver's side of the patrol car, climbs in then starts the car. The patrol car speeds away.

In the small town hospital of Okai the nurse and staff take Dennis from Tim's arms. "We have him now." The nurse assures the concerned man. The care that the boy receives is surprisingly good for a small town. A short time later The sheriff paces the hallway of the small hospital. Tim waits for some news of Dennis' condition. Exiting from his newest patient's private room the local physician- Dr. Branch then walks over to the sheriff and places a comforting hand upon his shoulder. "He's going to be alright, thanks to you. I don't know what his prognosis would have been if you had gotten him here even a few minutes later." The physician speculates. "I'm glad. Poor fella ..." Tim replies. "What about his parents?" the doctor wonders aloud. "They were already dead when I found them. I sent my deputies out to the site to retrieve the bodies, the car and whatever identification that they may have had on them," was his official reply.

Having done all that he can do at the hospital the sheriff drags himself home. Elated over the boy, but devastated over the parents, he surrenders to the reality of the moment. "Death is a part of the job and there is no doubt that tomorrow will bring its

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own set of unexpected challenges, so I had better be rested and prepared to face them," Tim tells himself.

The next day finds Tim sitting at his desk in the Okai sheriff's office. He is content that so far the day has been uneventful. Opening the drawer to his desk he removes the two I.D.'s that his deputies had retrieved from the wreckage of the Wall's vehicle. Though he tries to take his eyes off of the beautiful black woman pictured on the photo I.D. he can't. A sullen mood washes over him. "So much like my wife," He speaks to the photo, almost expecting it to answer. The door to his office opens. Startled by the intrusion he jumps. Professor Bruce Winters enters his office. Laughing a nervous laugh Tim remarks, "You startled me a bit." As if trying to hide the I.D.'s Tim quickly pulls open his desk drawer and starts to drop them inside. "Mind if I see those ...?" Bruce asks. Looking up at his friend Sheriff Washington asks, "Do you think that you may know them?" Nodding his head Bruce answers, "I hope not, but I think that I do. Two of my friends were supposed to be on that road last night. They never arrived." Hesitantly Tim hands Bruce the I.D.'s. After looking down at them the friend begins to weep sorrowfully. "I heard that both of them died," Bruce states almost questioningly. "There should have been a boy with them. What happened to him?" the concerned friend asks hopefully. "... he'll be fine in

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a few days ... at least as fine as a boy who has just lost both parents can be, anyway." The sheriff answers.

A couple of hours later a disoriented Dennis awakens, aching from the bruises he has received. Sitting up in his hospital bed he calls out for his parents, "Maaa ... Daddd ...! A nurse runs into the room. The compassionate woman rushes over to his bed and takes the boy's head against her breasts, trying to comfort him. "Shh ... Shhh ..." Not knowing the nurse the boy pulls away from the stranger. Vague images from the previous night run through his mind; a deer, the car crashing, his mother screaming and a strange man carrying him through the snow- these disjointed pictures flood his mind. "Where are my parents ...?" he asks, although he is sure that he already knows the answer. The nurse stares at him. Instead of answering his question the beleaguered woman informs him that his doctor will be in to see him in an a few moments and that he will answer all of his questions. Brokenhearted, he leans his head into the pillow then begins to cry. As the nurse exits the room she looks back one last time. She tries hard to hold back her own tears, but fails.

A few minutes later the door to the hospital room opens again. Dr. Branch enters. A glassy eyed Dennis stares toward him. "So, you're back with us ... I'm Dr. Branch," he informs the boy. "Where are my

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parents?!" Dennis screams at the doctor. The man is a young doctor and hasn't had to give this kind of bad news to any patient yet, never the less to a young boy. Branch sits on the edge of the hospital bed, next to the boy. "Let me examine you first then I will answer all of your questions. Deal?" he bargains. What choice did Dennis truly have. He leans back and waits.

After the examination is completed one can easily see that Dr. Branch is uncomfortable with the role of being the bearer of bad tidings. Not knowing what else to do the doctor bluntly spews out the news then makes a hasty retreat rather than be forced to deal with a crying boy.

There is a sad symmetry to Dennis' loss. Both of his parents had lost their parents at a young age also, although they had been old enough to be on their own at the time of their losses. Not only did Dennis have to deal with this unbearable tragedy he is left to wonder, "What is to become of me." As far as he knows at the time he has no living relatives except a great uncle whom he has never met. For all intents and purposes he is all alone in the world. Just when Dennis is beginning to lose all hope Bruce Winters enters his hospital room. Again the boy finds himself staring across the room at yet one more stranger. The family friend hesitates for a moment. Crossing the room then sitting on the edge of the

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bed he introduces himself, "I'm Professor Bruce Winters, your parents' friend." The boy is silent. Showing very little emotion Dennis continues to stare at the puzzled man. Scanning the room in search of a doctor or nurse, but not finding one Bruce turns once more toward Dennis. "Are you alright? Do you understand me?" he asks. "There's nothing wrong with me ... not really," is Dennis' sullen reply. "I know what you mean. I'm sorry," Bruce replies. "Are you an orphan?" the boy demands of his parent's friend. The man hesitates for a moment then responds, "No. I'm not." Shaking his head Dennis assures him, "Then you can't possibly know what I mean." Feeling lost the boy turns his back to the well meaning friend. "Of course you're right, but they were my dear friends and I loved them too, so I do know a part of your loss also," the teacher reminds him.

A few days later Dennis is strong enough to leave the hospital. Over the last few days he and Bruce have talked and grown closer. At least for now he is going home to stay with Bruce and his wife, Denise.

On the ride from the hospital Dennis notices the differences between this small town and the big cities he has always lived in. The houses are further apart, making them appear larger even though most are merely comparable in size. The lawns are all green and more like small football fields rather

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than the tiny green patches found in the city. The population of the small town is of course sparse in comparison to the smallest city he has lived in. He can't imagine that he will be seeing any Broadway plays coming to Okai. In fact the boy doubts if they even get movies the same year that they come out. The thought causes him to snicker. "What's so funny?" Bruce asks. Believing that his father's friend might be offended by his opinion of Okai he lies, "Nothing." Bruce is afraid to push. Besides, he is simply glad that Dennis still has a sense of humor about anything after all that he has been through.

The car pulls into the driveway of the Winters' home. As Dennis exits the car the door to the house opens. Excitedly Denise runs toward the car with open arms. The well meaning woman wraps her arms around Dennis. Seeing that this is making Dennis a little uncomfortable Bruce eases his wife's arms from around the boy's neck. Denise wears an expression of hurt and embarrassment. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to let you know that you are welcomed." Feeling guilty about not accepting this show of affection Dennis smiles then wraps his arms around Denise's neck. "Thank you. You are the dearest lady I have ever known, other than my mother." Tears of joy fill Denise's eyes. "First thing we have to do is take you shopping for some clothes and boy stuff for your room." The woman makes plans. The three of them

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interlock their arms and walk into the house side by side.

A couple of weeks later Dennis is all settled in and has been transferred from his old school to Okai Elementary. Realizing the possible problems that could evolve Denise decides that she had better find out exactly what her husband's long term plans are for the boy. "What is going to become of him?" she asks her husband. "I don't know. It seems that he doesn't have any relatives, at least none that he knows of their whereabouts. I figured that he could stay with us until we figure out what to do next." Bruce lays out his vague plan. "I see a light in your eyes every time that you look at him. The same light you had in your eyes when his father was one of your students. Don't get too close. We may find a relative who wants him to stay with them. I don't want you to get hurt" she warns. "His mother use to write to me about the boy. Lucy said that he was her dove - that he will fly above the crowd and teach us all love and sacrifice. I see those traits in him already. It's too late to warn me not to get too close," he assures her.

School has been over for some time this day. Dinner is over and Dennis is asleep in his new room. The door is closed. Denise stands outside his room. Only moments ago she had peek in on her new charge. Speaking quietly to herself she says, "The dove is brokenhearted. We will have to help you mend and fly

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again."

It all seems an unavoidable accident, but if the tyrants hadn't abused their powers the Walls family would not have been on that road on that terrible night. Was it all fated? Did the villains have to help mold the instrument of their own downfall?

CHAPTER 2 MY FATHER'S SHADOW

When Dennis looks back on his youth in Okai he thinks, "How funny ... odd ... not ha ha ... the things that make one man a hero and another man a willing pawn of tyranny." With regret for a life gone wrong he remembers his friend Gary Washington.

The school bell rings. Moments later the hallways of Okai Elementary School is filled with the hustle and bustle of prepubescent youths. The mindless chatter of 5-12 year old kids has turned from the usual subject of who likes who to one of adoration for the feats of a hometown hero. Tim Washington' son-Gary weaves his way through the maze of his father's admirers. A kid that Gary doesn't know gleefully yells at him, "Hey man ... your dad is the best. He waded through six feet of snow to save that kid." Although it could be said that the boy's retelling was more than a slight exaggeration of the hero's actions that alone couldn't explain Gary's reaction. "It wasn't any six feet of snow and worst of all everyone seems to have forgotten that he didn't save the parents," an embittered Gary answers. The other young boy gives the son a curious stare before hurriedly putting distance between them. Everyone who encounters the sheriff' son is surprised at his negative response to the hero worshiping of his father. What few know or some have chosen to forget is that there is a deeper reason for this animosity, however undeserved.

Years before this the Washington's were a loving and

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happy family. Their leisure time was spent together. On the day that changed their lives they had gone boating on the Okai River. As usual they found excuses to chide one another. "I bet that four inch trout will be two feet long by next week," Berta teases her husband. "It's two feet now. You just aren't wearing your good glasses," Tim kids her in return. With all of the friendly banter and the father engaging in horseplay with his son it is no wonder they never see the protruding sand dune. The boat slams into the sand dune then tilts over. More often than not the river's waters are calm, but not that day. The river's rushing waters washed the boat and the family away from the dune. Unexpectedly Tim finds himself caught up in a powerful riptide. There is only time enough for Tim to spot Gary struggling to keep his head above the water's surface. Frantically the father swims over to his son then assists him over to the top of the overturned boat. Once his son is safe a now panicking husband realizes he hasn't seen his wife since the boat capsized. His heart is filled with dread as he dog paddles to stay afloat. The river's splashing waters cloud his vision as he looks around for his wife. "Berta...! Berta...!" he screams before he dives beneath the water's surface.

Hearing the panic filled screams of their sheriff many of the locals gather on the shore line. Two friends, Mark and Nathan, dive into the water then

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swim out to the boat. For the first time since submerging Tim breaks the surface, but only long enough to take in a breath of air then he quickly dives back under again. Nathan and Mark take turns diving under the water, aiding Tim in his search for Berta.

A half an hour has passed. The swimmers are all tiring and there has been no sighting of the lost woman. The husband can barely move his arms, but he starts to dive once more. The two friends, Nathan and Mark, grab the distraught man then pull him over to the boat. "No ... no ... I have to go back down! I have to go back down!" crying he pleads with his friends. Many of the townsfolk have joined in on the search. Pointing to the deputies who are now in the water in scuba gear Mark tells his friend, "They will keep on searching, but you need to take your son to the hospital and have him checked out." A second boat has made its way to the swimmers. Tim and Gary are helped into the boat. As the boat heads for shore the sheriff looks back at the rescue workers and cries. His experience tells him that this is no longer a rescue mission, but a pursuit to recover his wife's body. A scared young Gary looks up at his father and asks, "Where's mommy?" The father sits silently.

It is now years later, but Gary still resents the fact that his father had failed to save his mother. Foolishly he tells himself that if he had been older that he would have saved her. In an attempt to prove

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his folly he competes with his father's legacy in all things. For him one defeat would mean that his mother didn't have to die. Somehow in his grief stricken heart this would be some sort of consolation.

On the pee wee league football team that Gary plays on he plays the same position his father once did, halfback. Even now, people still talk about the time that Tim Washington almost single handedly won the state title by running for three touchdowns against their daunted rival town of Method, Oklahoma. The best Gary's team had done so far is first place in the town league. The father still holds the national record for the hundred yard dash for pee wee track and field. There seems to be nothing the young boy can do to better this man.

Unable to match his father's successes in his athletic pursuits Gary decides to abandon them for more malicious endeavors. Rebelling against the figure he finds that he can't live up to the young Gary Washington stands outside of Bruce Winter's home tossing rocks.

The door opens and Dennis exits the house. "Hey, you! Jerk ...! Stop throwing those rocks before you break something," he screams at Gary. "Make me!" Gary responds. Being ever so grateful of the new life he has been given Dennis hopes to show his appreciation by protecting his new home. Enraged he

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runs across the yard and dives onto Gary. The two boys roll around on the ground. From inside the home Bruce and Denise hear the commotion. The husband and wife come outside to investigate. To their surprise they find their always passive charge is pounding the juvenile delinquent, Gary Washington. An annoyed Denise turns to the snickering Bruce, who has made no attempt to stop the altercation, and yells, "Break them up!" All too leisurely Bruce makes his way toward the boys. Shoving Bruce aside Denise rushes over to the two boys then pulls Dennis from on top of Gary. As she holds the two of them apart she turns to her husband and comments, "Yeah ... he's a peace loving dove alright."

As Dennis and Gary stand glaring at one another Bruce has finally made his way over to the two boys. "Tell me what happened here!" Bruce demands. Pointing at Gary, Dennis begins to explain. "He was throwing rocks at the house. I asked him to stop, but instead of stopping he told me to make him, so I did." The usually peace loving Bruce tries to keep a straight face while reprimanding both boys, but in truth he relishes the fact that Gary has received his "comeuppance." Scolding the two Bruce begins with the instigator of the fight, "I don't know what's gotten into you Gary, but I do know that when I tell your father a belt is going to get onto you." Bruce then turns to Dennis. "... and you. I'm disappointed in you. Violence is never the answer."

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How do you think your folks would feel about you fighting?" Bruce reminds Dennis. "There has to be a time when you don't turn the other cheek," Dennis confidently answers. "There is, but it's not over something as petty as tossing rocks," the surrogate father explains. "Now you boys shake hands." Bruce orders the two scamps.

Still glaring at one another they grab each other's hands, squeezing as they shake. Bruce watches them and shakes his head knowingly.

The neighbor makes the same mistake as many of the Okai residents before him, he doesn't tell Tim about his son's bad behavior. Many similar incidents follow for Gary, but the townsfolk respect and care for Tim, so they let it go as mere youthful rebellion.

The scuttlebutt around town is that the boy, Gary, will end up in jail before he finishes high school. Their predictions may have come true too if he hadn't become friends with Dennis and another boy in town, Calvin Watts. A few years later, in Junior High, Gary approaches Dennis and Calvin at school. Remembering their first encounter Dennis assures Gary, "I don't want any trouble." Gary laughs. "Naw man ... we're cool. In fact I came over here to tell you that unlike many of the perpetrators around here you're a kinda bad ass, like me." The other two boys laugh. "Yeah ... that's what I was going for ...,"

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Dennis snidely remarks. "Look we don't mind you hanging with us, but we aren't trying to be bad asses. We're just trying to have some fun," Dennis is interrupted by Calvin, "... the kind that won't get us locked up." Gary glares at Calvin. "Oh you got jokes." Shaking their heads the other two boys assure Gary that Calvin isn't joking. And that is how their friendship began.

After a time the friends become known as the three W's; Walls, Watts and Washington.

There are plenty of times when Gary tries to lead his friends astray. One Halloween Eve the imp suggests, "Hey, why don't we egg Principal Carter's house?" With the exasperation of a disapproving parent Calvin shakes his head in resignation and wonders aloud, "What is your problem?" A puzzled Gary questions Calvin, "What are you talking about? It's Halloween, he's a cheapskate with the candy, isn't it only right that we should make an example of him." Laughing Dennis answers, "You make it sound so reasonable, but think about this ... if we get caught he gets to make an example of us then our parents get to make an example of us and just maybe this is on our permanent school record when we try to go to college ..." Although he doesn't agree Gary surrenders to his friends' good intentions. "Okay, okay, okay ...! Tell me, how did I end up being friends with two goody two shoes like you?" Laughing

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Calvin playfully pushes Gary pass their principal's house. "Just lucky, I guess," he answers.

It isn't long after becoming friends with Calvin and Dennis that the spirited Gary redirects his attentions back to out-doing his father athletically. His friends support him in this pursuit.

The latest season of football is nearing an end. Neither Dennis or Calvin play, but they have been at every game and are in attendance today. The winner of today's game goes to the state finals.

With hands waving Calvin and Dennis sit in the stands watching their friend. Out of the corner of his eye Calvin spots the very lovely Kathy Harris. There is no mistaking the fact that it is at least puppy love at first sight for both of them. Always observant, Dennis laughs when he sees the huge smiles on each of their faces. "Go talk to her," he eggs Calvin on. The shy young man pretends that he doesn't know what his friend is talking about. "What?" Calvin questions. Again Dennis laughs and mocks his friend, "What? You know what I mean. I think she likes you too," Dennis continues to urge his friend. The two friends are so busy with their distraction that they almost miss Gary running down the field toward the goal line. This would be his third touchdown of the day. It would also give his

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team the lead for the first time today with only seconds left in the game. It should almost definitely clinch them a regional title and make them eligible for the state finals.

The two friends look back toward the field just in time to see big Tommy Hamm heading straight for Gary. The two yell out a warning, "Gary ... Gary ... Big Tommmmyy!!!" A focused Gary doesn't hear them. The world for Gary consists of nothing save the goal line which lies a mere few feet of grass ahead of him. The two forces meet just short of that goal line. The collision causes a thundering thump that resounds throughout the stadium. That sound is followed by a heart-wrenching cracking sound. In agony Gary falls to the ground, but only after pulling himself and Tommy Hamm across the goal line. At first glance everyone can tell that Gary is wracked with pain. The coach, Dr. Branch and Tim all rush out onto the field.

A little while later the mood is dark at the Okai Hospital. The friends and family of Gary Washington all stand in the hallway wearing expressions of apprehension as they await the doctor's return and prognosis.

An embittered and concerned Tim stands beside Calvin and Dennis watching for Dr. Branch to return with news concerning his son. "That damned Tommy. I could

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break his neck," the anguished father threatens. "You don't truly mean that Mr. Washington. Besides, Tommy didn't do anything dirty. It's football. People get hurt," Dennis plays peacekeeper. Tim turns and smiles at Dennis. "You're a good kid. I'm glad that Gary has a friend like you." Remembering the other friend Tim turns to Calvin then adds, "... you too."

A hush falls over the waiting room when Dr. Branch appears. The expression on his face speaks volumes. They know that they're about to get bad news. The doctor walks over to the friends and the father. "We've taken x-rays. The good news is that he will mend and be able to get around pretty good. The bad news is that he won't be able to put a lot of stress on that leg after this," the doctor explains. "What does that mean, doc?" Tim insists that Branch clarify. "No more sports. He will be able to walk just fine, maybe a little jogging, at the very most a little running, but no more competing." And so that is how it ends, one chapter of competition between son and father is closed.

A brokenhearted father wonders, "How does one tell your son something like this?" Tim decides he has to go in alone to explain things to Gary. The friends wait for a time in the hallway, not even knowing what to say to each other, so they wonder, when the time comes what will they say to their friend. After

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a time Dennis and Calvin join Tim in Gary's hospital room. As they enter Gary wipes tears from his eyes. The friends pretend that they haven't seen this. "How did you like that touchdown?" Gary laughingly asks them. They feign laughter too. "Man it was the most awesome run I've ever seen," Calvin answers honestly. "Looks like they're going to have to win the state championship without me," Gary points out. His two friends give one another a queer look. The "look" did not escape Gary. "Spill it!" Gary excitedly demands. "My mother told me that after they took you away Willie Garner from Brownsville ran the kickoff back for a touchdown as time ran out. Method is going to the state finals." Calvin informs his friend. "Damn it! Nooo! It's not fair! It's not fair!" Gary screeches pitifully. If his team had won the state championship his three touchdowns today would have to have gotten credit for them getting the opportunity. At last he would have at last matched a success of his father.

The hospital stay seems agonizingly long, but in truth it's only a month after surgery that Gary completes his rehabilitation and is released. To his friend's surprise they find themselves sitting silently in the stands of the stadium where Gary's injury had occurred. Breaking the silence Calvin declares, "This is too morbid." A solemn Gary reflects, "Naww ... I'm not thinking about the injury. All I can see when I look out over that

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field is me running across that goal line for the go ahead touchdown with less than 20 seconds left in the game." Then with a bitter undertone he repeats, "... less than 20 seconds." The friends stare at one another.

"Some things just aren't meant to be," Dennis tries making some sense of it all. "I guess not," a somber Gary surrenders to his fate. With one last scream of outrage Gary vents his anger, "Agghhh! I will beat him. I will be so great a cop that this whole town will forget that he was ever the sheriff. That's a lot better than any sports glory anyway. It means more to him." Disappointed in his friend Dennis shakes his head. "Instead of trying to be better than your dad why don't you just try being half the man he is? If you do that you'll be miles ahead of most men," is Dennis' mature observation. "You live in someone's shadow then tell me how you like it," Gary challenges, not wanting to admit the truth of his feelings origin. Both friends wish there was some way to heal the father-son rift, but they realize that this is something Gary and Tim will have to work out between themselves.

CHAPTER 3

A LIFE OF PRIVILEGE

The cocky young boy who strides across the grounds of High Crest Academy is a senator's son, Daryl Morgan III. As he looks around the grounds of his elite boarding school he sees the scenic setting of the Maryland suburbs is like something from a landscape portrait - beautiful rolling hills and a private lake to swim in, fish or boat upon. Yet the majesty of this site isn't what this spoiled aristocrat likes most about High Crest. His most favorite thing is that they need not mingle with those his family views as the peasants, the common folk. Even though the boy is not yet old enough to drive, he has a fleet of luxury cars at his disposal, a wardrobe that cost more than the salary most instructors at High Crest make in a year and almost every amenity wealth can buy. Yes, he wears all of the trappings of the privileged class. Foolishly though, he takes it all for granted. Everything is the way it should be. It is an entitlement, a birthright. That is what he's been taught, so it is what he believes. "Too bad some of the peasants have accumulated enough to mingle among their superiors. It won't always be this way. Some day we will be able to keep them in their place." These are the ugly thoughts of the arrogant youth.

As the young master Daryl Morgan III walks the grounds of this exclusive private school he wears

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arrogance like an immovable crown. The boy brushes by his fellow students as if they were pond scum to be scraped from his shoe. There are a few schoolmates he treats better. These schoolmates are the ones his father has pointed out to him as members of the upper crust, older students like Toby Smith and William Franklin.

There is another boy, Dillon Mathews, your typical bully. This one likes taking advantage of the weak. Without provocation he pushes one of his classmates to the ground as he passes by the other boy. This ruffian is from one of the families which Daryl Morgan III would consider one of the common folk made good and not truly worthy of being here. "Ha ha ha ...your feet must be too big. You're tripping over yourself," The bully taunts a much smaller boy.

An uppity aloof aristocrat and a spiteful insecure bully attend the same school. It is inevitable that one of them will have to try to topple the other from their self assigned perches of superiority.

These two, Daryl and Dillon, are the same age and have attended High Crest Academy for the same two year period. Even so, they have never shared a single class before this year. Now the two share a PT (physical training) class.

On the athletic field this morning the teacher, Mr. Dodger, points to Daryl. "You captain the blue team,

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Mr. Morgan." Then Dodger points to Dillon. "... and you captain the green team, Mr. Mathews." An evil grin spreads across Dillon's face. No one knows why Dodger placed the two in opposition to one another. Maybe he hoped for a confrontation. If that is so, he got more than he bargained for this day.

The two teams march toward the center of the field for the face off. Dillon takes a flanker position on one side of the field while Daryl takes a flanker position on the opposite side of the field. One might have thought this meant there wouldn't be a confrontation today, but the opposite is intended by the bully, Dillon.

As if by premonition Dodger stares straight at Dillon, "I want a clean game ...". Then turning his attention to Daryl he adds "... and I expect you all to play as a team." The ball is placed down for the face off. The instructor signals the beginning of the game with his whistle. Hoping to gain favor with the aristocrat Daryl's team mate kicks the ball to him. The athletic Daryl shows off his prowess by making his way down the field with the ball. Darting by one defender after another the flamboyant young boy puts on quite a display of athleticism. Ignoring the earlier words of his instructor he shows no willingness to surrender the ball to his teammates. "Over here!" one of Daryl's team mates yells for the ball. At first the blue team captain ignores all

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of his team mates' pleas for the ball. The observant young man takes note of the frown of displeasure that his instructor wears. Knowing that his grade is dependent upon the favor of the man Daryl finally gives the ball up to another boy.

The plotting Dillon watches as Daryl relaxes after surrendering the ball. His wicked intent is etched into Dillon's face as he runs storming toward his classmate. It doesn't matter to him that his foe no longer has the ball. This is his opportunity to deal some punishment to one of the most arrogant A-holes at High Crest and he surely isn't going to let it pass. Like a freight train Dillon slams into Daryl, knocking them both to the ground. The two boys quickly jump to their feet after the collision. To the bully's surprise the aristocrat quickly retaliates. "Sucker ..." Daryl yells as he jumps onto Dillon, knocking them both to the ground again. Once on top of the bully Daryl begins jack hammering one blow after another into his rival's body and aside his head. Cowering, Dillon tries to cover up, but to no avail. "You picked the wrong somebody this time!" the arrogant elitist assures his adversary.

For a second Mr. Dodger hesitates because there is nothing more that he would like than to see both of these rascals beat the other senseless, but his responsibility as a teacher wins out. The instructor separates the two. "Have the two of you lost your

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damn minds!" he scolds the two boys. "He knew I didn't have the ball!" Daryl exclaims. Mr. Dodger turns toward Dillon. "You take yourself back to the dorms. You, the principal and I will have words about this later," he informs the instigator of the event.

"Man that was foul ..." one of Daryl's classmates places his arm over Daryl's shoulder, trying to console him. Daryl shoves the boy's arm from his shoulder. "I don't need you to tell me that!" he assures the other boy then walks away fuming mad, more so over the other boys familiarity than Dillon's assault.

With all of the turmoil still going on out on the field no one notices the two older High Crest students, Toby Smith and William Franklin, as they take note of the incident. "That peasant can't think that he can get away with that," William wonders aloud. "If he thinks that he can he is sadly mistaken," Toby assures his friend. The two older boys follow Dillon inside the dormitory.

The soccer game continues without Dillon. Distracted, Daryl no longer has any interest in the game. Instead of playing he stands alone watching the others play. Suddenly everyone is frozen on the field after they hear the shattering of glass. To a person they all look up to see Dillon as he comes crashing through one of the dormitory windows then

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lands on the ground beneath. It is like the sound of dry branches cracking in half. Dillon's neck snaps. "Oh god ..." some cry out in horror. Other young men throw up, while still others run around in a panic. The instructor makes his way to Dillon's side, but it's to no avail. "Get back! All of you get back!" A flustered Mr. Dodger yells at those boys who have gathered too close, out of a morbid sense of curiosity.

Everyone is so preoccupied with the horror of the moment that no one notices Toby and William as they exit the dormitory then continue on their way.

To no one's surprise who had heard the sound of the cracking of Dillon's neck he dies. The boy is a second generation blue blood, so his death doesn't warrant a school scandal. After a superficial investigation by the local police the boy's death is ruled an accident.

Rumors follow Daryl the remainder of his time at High Crest. Because of these rumors no one dares challenge him again.

Needless to say, possessions aren't the only badges of the elite. Opportunities abound for those born to the American aristocracy. At twelve the boy, Daryl Morgan III accompanies his father, Senator Daryl Morgan II, to the Oval Office. Instead of being in awe of the office or the man seated in the office

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the young boy feels at ease in the seat of power and contemptuous of the commoner who wields control of it.

With his usual air of confidence the young master Morgan addresses the leader of the free world, "Good morning Mr. President." Amused by the formality of the boy President Daniel Hilton smiles and greets him almost jokingly with the same formal protocol, "Good morning young Mr. Daryl Morgan III." The boy respects the office, but not the man and wants to make sure the "MAN" knows it. "Your parents were immigrants to this country, weren't they?" the impertinent young boy dares question the President of the United States. Believing the boy's intentions are good Daniel Hilton smiles at the boy then answers him, "That's right. It proves that if you work hard enough you can achieve anything in America." The boy is displeased. "Is that necessarily a good thing?" the annoying young aristocrat asks. The boy's attitude offends the world leader. "I have a meeting, so if the two of you will excuse me," the President curtly dismisses the ill-mannered boy and his father. "Yes sir," the senior Morgan answers then leads his son from the Oval Office.

Once in the great hallways of the White House the father grabs his son by the ear and drags him away from the door of the Oval Office. As they move along

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the corridor he lectures him, "You prove nothing when you expose your innermost thoughts to your enemy except your own stupidity." The younger Morgan asks, "Why should we care what they think? They aren't our equal." The father shakes his head in disappointment. "Arrogance has been many a man's downfall. Without someone to follow you one cannot lead. Learn to charm your inferiors and defeat your equals and you will always end up the victor," he instructs his son.

From the opposite end of the White House hallway comes a member of the secret service. As the father completes his lesson the man walks by the two. The young master Morgan smiles and feigns politeness, "Good morning sir." The agent smiles and returns the greeting "Good morning to you too young man." As soon as the agent is out of sight of the boy and his father they laugh. "You're a quick study. You'll go further than I will because of that," he compliments his son.

It should be no surprise that even celebrations are different for the elite. It's New Year's Eve 1970. The throng of the masses is assembled outside in the cold at Times Square in New York. They laugh, meet new people, share drinks and try to forget the cold weather that wraps around them like an unwelcome suitor. Meanwhile, in the Penthouse of the Times Square Luxury Hotel Carlyle the elite from around

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the world gather. The whole city can be seen through the massive penthouse windows. Champagne flows from a 24 carat golden fountain. There is caviar and every other type of expensive or exotic dish one can imagine available to the guests. As they look down on the shivering masses the warmth of the room is only chilled by the coldness of their empty emotionless hearts.

A now fourteen year old Daryl Morgan III barely notices the skinny young girl, Elaine Sparrow, as she and her mother pass through the main room of the hotel penthouse on their way out. "I don't want to leave yet mommy," Elaine pleads with her mother. "Where we are going will be a lot more fun," Greta promises the girl.

Some twenty minutes or so later Daryl is looking down on Times Square. He strains trying to get a better look because he is almost positive that he sees the mother and daughter from earlier. "Impossible," Daryl tells himself. "Why would anyone leave the warmth, comfort and luxury of these surroundings to go down and be among the peasants?" he questions. The woman and the girl he sees are blowing noisemakers, shaking hands and hugging people who a few minutes earlier they hadn't even known.

A young Daryl walks through the penthouse. Like a starving man at a buffet he devours the beauty of

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the genuine classic artwork, he quenches his thirst with the people of note and dismisses the presence of the others as a necessary nuisance. "I love the life and the things I have ..." he thinks "... but there is so much more that I can possess." Greed consumes him.

At that moment the senior Morgan interrupts his son's avarice thoughts. "How do you like New Years Eve atop Times Square?" the father asks. Wearing a smirk and pointing down to the crowd, the son answers, "It's better than being swarmed by the huddled masses." This brings a smile. "Did you meet Greta or Elaine Sparrow?" the senior Morgan asks. "No. Are they people I should know?" a curious younger Morgan wonders. His son's curiosity causes the father to smile once more. "Maybe it's too soon." The insolent boy demands answers of his father. "Tell me about them!" Now impatient the father frowns at his son's disrespectful tone. "Remember, I'm the father. You will respect me and my position in this family. If I say it's too soon then it's too soon. Nothing more need to be said," the father issues his ultimatum. The young master Morgan realizes then that there are limits and obligations that accompany his privileges. What he doesn't know is that there is much... much ... more to learn.

CHAPTER 4 THE CROWN'S PEDESTAL

Time is much like a river current, at times it flows by leisurely, as if it has nowhere to go and nothing to do - while at other times it rushes by like the winds of a hurricane, as though it can't get where it's going soon enough. It has been more than a decade since Greta Hancock and Mitchell Sparrow were the Crown's Pedestal of their generation, the royal heirs of Castle Keep.

Mitchell's parents and others in the leadership of Castle Keep tried to persuade the headstrong young man to join the National Guard to avoid a tour in the Korean Conflict, but he wouldn't hear of it. It wasn't any sense of patriotism that motivated the young man. The plans Mitchell Sparrow had for his future included running for President of the United States someday. No one was going to be able to accuse him of avoiding his duty to his country.

All the influence of the Castle Keep was brought to bear to assure that Mitchell's wartime post was as safe as being at home, but in war there is no such thing as a safe place. While driving a jeep along one of the back roads, where Mitchell had been told he could find the best weed in Korea, he drove over a land mine. The Crown's Pedestal didn't suffer. He was killed instantly. There were many in Castle Keep who wanted his commanding officer's scalp on a stick, but calmer heads prevailed, but only because the officer's family was Castle Keep as well.

Being Castle Keep Greta didn't have to endure some

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protracted period of not knowing. The day the incident occurred she received a personal long distance phone call from Mitchell's commander. Although she already knew by the time she received the official letter informing her of his death she was nagged by self recrimination. Instead of grief all she recalls was a sense of relief. It was true ... the male Crown's Pedestal was dead. She would not be the Matron of Castle Keep after all. No ... their marriage had never been about love. It was a union of two powerful families. Greta and Mitchell had been their generation's Crown's Pedestal of the secret organization known as Castle Keep. The woman had never wanted any parts of the elitist group, but her father had warned her that being a part of this group isn't an option for people of their backgrounds.

Despite Mitchell's death it was not over. Before Mitchell had left Greta had become pregnant with their daughter, Elaine. Being the daughter of Mitchell and Greta Sparrow it is Elaine who will inherit the role of the female half of the Crown's Pedestal for the next generation. The male will come from the Morgan family, Daryl Morgan III.

A naive Greta had hoped that if she failed to keep in touch with the Castle Keep and stayed as far away from them as possible the obligation would somehow magically disappear.

On April 1, 1973, Daryl Morgan III turns seventeen.

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The estate is filled with the aristocracy of America - movie moguls, Wall Street barons, congressmen and people of influence from almost every field of endeavor are here.

While the guests mingle and get reacquainted with old Castle Keep associates or work business deals, the father and son walk together across the estate grounds. "You know a lot of our family history, but there is one thing you aren't aware of yet." The son waits for the revelation. "Our family and many other influential families started a secret society when they first came to America, before it was America. They decided that we should not leave our families' fates to the peasants of the new world or the aristocracy of the old. With this in mind they created their own aristocracy and called it Castle Keep. Our family is one of the elite of the elite. When you attend college you will pledge yourself to the organization and learn more of the benefits and obligations of belonging to Castle Keep. Know this son, nothing is beyond your reach with these people supporting you," the father begins the young master's introduction to Castle Keep.

The same day young Daryl is being introduced to Castle Keep Greta and Elaine are taking in an exhibit at the New York Metropolitan Museum. Suddenly Greta's expression changes to one of disappointment. She sees her father, Byron Hancock,

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walking toward them. Seeing the change in her mother's disposition Elaine turns to find out whom or what has caused the change. A surprised Elaine lights up upon seeing her grandfather. The girl runs and jumps into his arms. The doting grandfather kisses his grandchild and swings her around in his arms. A security guard spots them and comes up behind Byron and taps him on the shoulder. The guard is shocked to find out who it is. "I'm sorry Mr. Hancock. I didn't realize it was you," the guard apologizes. Byron feigns politeness. "No. It is my fault. I shouldn't have been swinging my granddaughter around in the museum. What's your name?" he asks the guard. "My name is Taylor, Mr. Hancock." The evil man smiles at Taylor. "Good work Taylor."

The guard turns and walks away. The grandfather kneels down next to Elaine. "I guess Mr. Taylor will be looking for another job tomorrow," he laughs. Upset over Byron's proclamation Elaine and Greta frown. "No granddad. We were wrong, not Mr. Taylor," the young girl pleads Taylor's case. "We're Hancock's. We can't be wrong," the obtuse man insists. Again mother and daughter frown at him. Noting their displeasure he concedes. "Okay. If it will make you happy he can keep his job." Knowing the type of man her father is Greta knows her father is lying, so inwardly she makes her own plans.

Minutes later the three generations sit in Central

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Park having hot dogs and sodas while watching the passers-by. A young boy goes by pulling a kite behind him. Spotting Elaine he asks, "Would you like to try it?" The flirtatious young girl smiles at the boy. Turning to her mother she asks, "Do you mind?" Greta shakes her head, no. The two teenagers run off with the kite trailing behind them.

Shaking his head in disappointment her elitist father comments, "You don't know that young man. Like you your daughter is a little too friendly with the wrong kind of people." Not being one to bite her tongue Greta answers her father, "Like you said, she's my daughter and I won't have her growing up with the pervasive attitude that she's somehow better than someone else." The foolhardy man declares, "We are better."

A wall of silence stands between them. The father knows that he can't let their little spat prevent him from his all important task. It is time for Byron to do what he has come to do, reason with his daughter. "You had better understand that Elaine can't escape her responsibilities to Castle Keep. If she tries there will be consequences," he warns. "Are you threatening me and my child?" an irate Greta questions. "Never ...! You are my life. But others will see her rejection of the old ways as a threat. Just pretend to go along," he asks, begging of his daughter. The woman has never seen her father

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grovel before anyone or for any reason. She now knows that the danger is all too real. With a frown Greta concedes compliance with her father's compromise.

The next day Greta knocks on the door of Melvin Taylor, the security guard.

Considering the fact that Byron had followed through with his plan to get the man fired it is no surprise that Melvin is annoyed to find her here. "What do you want? I lost my job. Isn't that enough for you people?" he asks of her. "I'm sorry Mr. Taylor. My father and I don't share the same philosophy of life." His cynical smile relays the disdain with which Melvin Taylor has began to hold this family. "I'm glad to hear that. I'll tell my children that when they ask where is their dinner," he replies sarcastically. "I would like to offer you a job as personal security to me and my daughter. Of course there will be a raise in salary," Greta offers. This time Melvin's smile is one of a mischievous child who knows he is about to do something that will piss Mr. Hancock off to no end. "What will your father think?" the man asks. "In this as in many things I couldn't care less," she answers. "In that case I would love to work for you Ms. Hancock," he mistakenly addresses her. "That's Sparrow, but you can call me Greta," the two shake each other's hands then laugh in victory over the devious Byron Hancock.

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Reflecting the true nature of the organization the locations at which Castle Keep meetings are held are always in some dark hidden place. Today they meet below Morgan Manor in a secret room that was built just before the Revolutionary War. The manor above has been renovated many times since. The present patriarch of Castle Keep, Byron Hancock, stands at the head of the room. "The peasants are at the castle gate. What shall you do my knights?" he chants. "Protect the Castle Keep my lord, protect the Castle Keep," all answer in unison. Byron continues the ritual chant, "... with what shall you protect the Castle Keep my knights? With what shall you protect the Castle Keep?" Again in unison they cry out, "With mind, body and soul my lord we shall protect the Castle Keep!"

Later on that same day others mill around. An anxious Daryl Morgan II stands face to face with Byron Hancock. "We don't see much of Greta or the Crown's Pedestal heir my lord. Is there a problem?" Daryl asks. "When the time comes the Crown's Pedestals shall be joined. That is all you need to know," Byron puts his subordinate in his place. "Yes my lord," a respectful but` resentful Daryl Morgan II answers.

The day that Greta has hoped would never come is here. She must tell her daughter about Castle Keep and her father's perverse views of life.

The mother and daughter sit together. Pensively

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Elaine sits. Her posture reveals her apprehension. Uncharacteristically, Greta is not her usual happy go lucky self. The girl fears that this isn't a normal happy mother -and-daughter talk that they are about to share. After her mother reveals all of their family secrets the girl sits stunned.

"How could they believe in such an antiquated creed? The world is open to them. They can see the promise and the virtue in all men that their forefathers may not have seen," words of reason trip from her tongue. "What do you want me to do mother?" the girl asks. "I want you to hold tightly to all the things that I've taught you, but pretend to be one of them," Greta advises. "I'll do my best, but I don't know how I will be able to fool anyone," Elaine admits. "You don't have to do much. The arrogant fools want to believe in you and what you stand for to them - the Matron of Castle Keep. You are the future they've invested their faith in. They won't give up on that ideal easily," Greta assures her daughter.

A world away Daryl Morgan III sits in a gazebo on the family estate. Looking out over the grand property. He reflects on his short privileged life. "Nothing is by chance," he tells himself. "If I wasn't deserving of all that I have someone else would have been born to this. The world shall know my name. After I'm gone the mark I shall leave will

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live on. I am the Crown's Pedestal of Castle Keep," he announces, as if the world is listening and he is making a coronation address.

In Grand Central Park in New York City Elaine now sits alone. Although many people walk by her, she doesn't take note of anyone. The young girl wonders why she has been chosen to bear this burden. Her heart is heavy with the weight of it. "Can I change their hearts? Do I try? Do I simply give what I can of myself to the world while I pretend to be this uncaring princess for these villains?" Elaine asks herself. "What egotistical bull crap ... Castle Keep ... Crown's Pedestal. Envious of those born to royal lines they've created their own. Man was not meant to be ruled by man, but by the love of God." So clearly the young girl sees the world and it is a better place for her being in it.

CHAPTER 5 A CALL TO DUTY

The loss of a parent's love can haunt a young man, but it's what comes of that emptiness that reflects the parents' influence. Most teens that Dennis, Calvin and Gary know are more interested in fashion, parties and first boyfriends or girlfriends than the affairs of the world. If the truth be told Calvin and Gary lean toward the same interests as their peers, but Dennis hears a different calling and he carries his friends along for the ride.

It is a few weeks after Dennis' seventeenth birthday. Although the weather is quite warm for December a frost nips at this young man's soul. This mournful youth stands in between the graves of his mother and father. It is the ninth anniversary of their deaths. Tears of grief well up in his eyes.

"I miss you. Not a day goes by that I don't think of you. When I look at the shape that the world is in I can't help but wonder what God was thinking when he took the two of you away." He laughs a hurtful laugh of irony. "We could use all the help we can get," Dennis talks to his deceased parents.

The young man turns, startled by the crackling of leaves. The warming smiles of his two friends greet him. "We went by your house. Your parents ... I mean Mr. and Mrs. Winters said that we would probably find you out here," Calvin explains how they have found him. Another, more joyful laughter escapes Dennis' lips over his friend's perceived faux pas.

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"You can call them my parents. I'm lucky. I've had two sets of parents whom I love and who love me," Dennis corrects his friend. "What were they like?" a naive and curious Gary asks. Unsure if this is a subject they should broach Calvin shakes his head. As Dennis remembers he can't help, but smile. "He never talks about them," Gary adds. "They were the two most generous and caring people you could ever meet." There seemed an almost visible glow of light around Dennis' face as he describes his parents to his friends. "You know how people are always complaining about the way things are, but never get off of their butts and do anything? Not them. Any time they thought something wasn't right with the world they went out and tried to change it."

The two friends can almost envision the two crusading parents - dressed in super hero garbs - and they smile. "That's what I should do. No. It's what we should do," Dennis makes an open declaration. A puzzled Gary asks, "Do what?" Jubilantly Dennis grabs a hold of his two friends' hands and exclaims, "Change the wrongs of the world!" His two friends laugh. "That covers an awful lot of territory," Calvin answers cynically. "Then we had better get started," Dennis answers his friend's cynicism with optimism.

In the small town of Okai everyone knows one another. Despite the racial divide that still exists

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there is a sense of community and camaraderie. This exists even between the races. The only place in town where there is a line of demarcation is the establishment - Martin's Pub.

Clint Martin is a good ole boy who migrated north in search of greener pastures. It is an unfortunate thing that he brought with him the racism and bigotry he had grown up with in the south. On the front door of his pub there is a sign that represents all of the smallness that lives within the man. The sign reads, "No Coloreds Allowed."

The small community of blacks who reside in Okai generally live on one side of the tracks while the whites choose to live on the other side. This is more by tradition than discrimination these days. Few venture on the other's side of town and there isn't a single black in town who wants to drink with Clint Martin, but to Dennis this is a wrong that needs to be addressed.

It is bitter cold in Okai, December 24, 1973. It's the day before Christmas. It became cold overnight and the cold weather has everyone in a foul mood. The crowd inside of Martin's Pub becomes more irritated when loud banging and clanging sounds coming from outside grow ever nearer to the pub. Finally Clint and some of his patrons stick their heads out the door of the pub. They find Dennis, Gary, Calvin and several other students - black and

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white - standing outside the pub carrying protest signs. The messages vary. One reads, "End bigotry, segregation and hate!" A second reads, "Beer with a hate chaser?" Still another sign reads, "We are all Americans."

Glaring out over the crowd, Clint is most disturbed by the white students' presence. "Damn nigga lovers," he accuses the white students. Although his patrons like the idea of having a place where they can hang out with friends of similar backgrounds it had been easy to convince themselves that there isn't really anything menacing about this. The ugly words Clint had chose to use opened many of their eyes. Most of the patrons walk out and join the young men and young women. The others walk back inside, followed by Clint.

Two hours go by and the chanting protesters along with the banging and clanging noises grow louder. Ironically, as a business owner Clint feels his rights are being violated, so he calls the Okai sheriff's office and complains.

Usually white officers are sent to handle complaints on the white side of the tracks, but having heard about the protest today Tim decides to visit the one sore spot in his town himself. You could have knocked Clint over with a feather when the black sheriff, Tim Washington, shows up instead of one of his white deputies. Still the man will not back down

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from his stupidity. The crowd jeers louder as Clint walks over to Tim. "These people are disturbing the peace and trespassing. I want you to arrest them," he insists. To the crowd's surprise Tim takes Clint's side. "I'm sorry people, but you don't have a permit to demonstrate. This is Mr. Martin's property. All of you are disturbing the peace, so I am going to have to ask you to please disperse." The crowd begins to boo Tim. He laughs. "I know. I'm the bad guy because you didn't think this thru and get a permit to gather lawfully to protest," he points out to his detractors. Every one of the protesters begins to move away except Gary. "No! No! This ain't right. A black man shouldn't be protecting any bigot," the boy insists. "A lawman can't pick and choose which laws he will uphold and which he won't. It's dangerous for everyone if he does," the father explains. The small minded man, Clint, wears a smirk of victory. Tim turns to Clint. "These people and I will be back tomorrow ... after I get a permit from Judge Parker for them to gather legally," he warns Clint. The smirk turns to a frown. The crowd cheers the sheriff.

It seems that Calvin and his friends aren't the only ones who have heard a call to duty. Looking around at the crowd Calvin notices that among the other late comers to the protest is the lovely young lady he had seen on the day of Gary's football injury, Kathy. This time he can't deny that she has a smile

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as bright as the sun after a total eclipse or that her mere presence has his spirit soaring toward the heavens. Finding his courage the young man finally walks over to Kathy and extends his hand. "I'm Calvin ... Calvin Watts," he introduces himself. Not willing to make it that easy after waiting so long she teases him, "I wondered if you would ever get up enough nerve to talk to me." Noting her mischievous smile Calvin returns her kidding, "This is the age of women's lib. You could have talked to me." The two laugh.

Shoving one another playfully back and forth Dennis and Gary jokingly protest, "I should have talked to her," Gary says. "No. I should have," Dennis chimes in. Their horseplay continues while Calvin and Kathy walk away together.

The protest is over for today so Calvin and Kathy have gone off to be alone. Her lovely auburn hair frames her beautiful face as Kathy stares up at the boy she has hoped for so long would ask her out. After all of this time the two finally huddle together in the park's enclosed gazebo staring out at the world. Beside the two is a glass pipe, the bottom of which is filled with Boone's Farm Strawberry Hill wine. The bowl of the pipe is filled with Jamaican reefer. The two young people take turns inhaling the potent drug. The two are transported to a state of lower inhibitions and

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higher libidos. Leaning toward Kathy, Calvin blows reefer smoke into her mouth through a kiss. Their tongues entwine. The two lean back upon their blanket. Kathy's arms are wrapped around Calvin. In between them Calvin's hands explore her body. The two youths lose control. They make love.

The next day the crowd is abuzz with anticipation. Anxiously Dennis and Gary wait with the other protesters outside of Martin's Pub. Just as Tim had promised he drives up to the protesters then exits his car. In his hand is the permit to assemble. Late to the protest Kathy and Calvin are embarrassed as they approach the gathering. The two are sure that everyone knows what has transpired between them the night before. The others barely notice that the two have arrived together. Everyone else has only one concern, the protest.

A grimacing Clint storms out of his pub the same as the day before. "I told you yesterday sheriff that I don't want these people nowhere near my property!" Clint screams. Now within the law Tim smiles and holds up the piece of paper. "If you don't lower your voice Mr. Martin it's you who I will gladly arrest for disturbing the peace. Unlike yesterday this is a lawful assembly of protesters. They have every legal right to be here."

The pub owner looks over the permit. Frowning, the small minded man turns then marches back inside of his pub.

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A neighboring store owner, Mr. Blackman--a white man--has witnessed the scene. The store owner comes over to the protesters. Trying to play the devil's advocate, he takes up for Martin. "He's not a bad man, none of us are. We grew up in different times and change is a meal we're slow to digest, but we will. Things will change. We just need time to get these old teeth into it," the man says as he shows his teeth. Everyone laughs then Dennis steps toward Mr. Blackman. "We know that people don't easily accept change Mr. Blackman. That's why in almost every generation it's the young people who have had to push their elders to do what the old folk already know is right." Blackman and other white store owners join the protest. The protest turns into a Christmas celebration with food, laughter, conversation and more.

Near the end of the night the four friends; Gary, Calvin, Kathy and Dennis sit together, apart from the others. A big grin is on each of their faces. "My mom and dad would be proud of all of us," Dennis assures his friends. "Does that mean we can go back to partying and goofing off like regular teenagers?" Gary asks. Half jokingly Calvin slaps Gary aside the back of his head. "My friend, we have only just begun," Dennis informs his friends.

CHAPTER 6 SOMEBODY'S WATCHING YOU

There is a beautiful woman walking by what seems to be a vacant construction site. An impish child runs away from a broken window. You are at a typewriter in a seemingly empty office. For some it is like two ghostly fingers tugging at your jacket. For others it's like a gentle tap on the shoulder when no one else is around. Maybe for you it's like a cool slight breeze on the nape of your neck when the air is perfectly still. You don't know where they are or even who they are, but you do know that somebody's watching you.

It is May 1974. Now eighteen, Calvin Watts sits in his History class at Okai Senior High. The scholarly student is taking the last final exam of his high school life. Suddenly he feels someone's presence behind him, so he looks up. Ms. Sherwood, his attractive thirty-something history teacher, is standing there looking down at what he has written. They smile at one another. As she walks away he returns his attention to his work. The teacher smiles once more. Students like Calvin fill a teacher with a sense of accomplishment. It's why they teach.

Ms. Sherwood moves further down the aisle. Occasionally she looks down at the works of her other students, but not with the same sense of success. The bell rings. The students put down their pencils and pass their papers to the front of the room. They gather up their belongings then pass out

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of the classroom.

Class is over and Calvin alongside his friends, Gary and Dennis, stand in the hallway just outside of the history classroom. "That test was a killer," Gary admits to his friends. "Not if you studied," Calvin teases him. "Some of us have a life outside of school," Gary retorts. "What life? You don't have an after school job anymore, no girlfriend and Dennis and I are your only friends, so what life are you talking about?" Calvin continues taunting Gary.

"It's only been a month since Sheila and I broke up ... and only two weeks since Harry fired me from the Penny Mart," Gary offers his excuses.

Suddenly Gary turns away from his friends. A lovely junior, Clarice, is staring at him as she walks by. The young man smiles at the lovely junior then walks away from his friends. "I'll see the two of you later at Mickey D's," he adds. Amazed at their friend's lack of focus Dennis and Calvin laugh as they watch him walk down the hallway side by side with Clarice.

After the Christmas incident Clint Martin sold his pub and returned home to Alabama. The McDonald's chain bought the pub, tore it down and built one of their company's restaurants in its place. The new owner is a Philippine gentleman named Arnold.

As the two seniors, Dennis and Calvin, exit the

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school the mild Spring weather belies the frost of conspiracies still hidden. It is coming up on prom season. Along with Gary and Kathy the four friends are all seniors at Okai Senior High. The guys' biggest worry for now is that the girl that they may ask to the prom might say no. At least that seems to be their greatest concern.

They, like most high school students, have a favorite hangout spot. Their favorite spot is the only Mickey D's in Okai. Gary joins his friends there. Now the three friends sit around shooting the bull. "Have you asked Kathy yet?" a curious Gary asks Calvin. "Asked her what?" Calvin is caught off guard by Gary's question. "The prom ... dummy," the friend replies, as if there couldn't have been any other possible answer. "No, but we've been going together for the last two years. It ain't likely that she's going without me." Dennis smiles mischievously. "I heard that Todd Hanson is going to ask her," he jokes. Calvin is angered by the ribbing so glares at his friend. "It doesn't matter if he is the quarterback of our team, Kathy will never go out with him even if I don't ask her," the boyfriend assures his friends. "I wouldn't be too sure if I were you," Dennis continues the ribbing. A confident Calvin answers, "Kathy would never go out with a white guy." Shaking his head, Dennis won't let go of this joke. "That's what Gary thought until Sheila dumped him for Aaron." Icy daggers shoot from Gary's

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eyes. "That was cold. You didn't have to go there," the jilted young man reprimands his friend. "I was just letting our boy know that he had better not take his girl for granted. In fact you should ask her right now," Dennis advises. As Dennis had looked toward the door he had observed Kathy as she had entered.

The alert Kathy spies Calvin sitting with his friends. The smitten girl smiles at him then throws him a kiss. Always the clown, Gary reaches out pretending to intercept the kiss. Playfully Calvin slaps Gary aside the back of his head. The young woman laughs as she walks toward the three friends. The horseplay continues as Kathy sits down next to her boyfriend. Wrapping his left arm around Gary's head Dennis gives him a nuggy. It is then that Kathy plants a big kiss squarely on Calvin's lips. The other two stop their horseplay in order to taunt the couple. "Ohh ...! Kisseey kisseey." Shaking her head, the young woman chastises them. "Why don't the two of you grow up? You are about to finish high school yet you still act like you're twelve." Proving Kathy's point Gary climbs out of the booth and starts walking on his hands. "No. *This* is acting like I'm twelve." The crowd in the restaurant stares then laughs at the silly acting young man.

Amid all of this frivolity they barely notice as Arnold comes out from the back accompanied by a

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stranger. The stranger carries a small ladder in one hand and a box in the other hand and a bag of tools over one shoulder. The ever curious Calvin turns his attention to the man. The stranger puts the box down and sets up the ladder. The others notice that Calvin is no longer participating in their games, so they turn to see what has him so intrigued. He is a workman who tears open the mysterious box which he holds then removes a camera. The security man makes his way up the ladder then begins installing it.

As usual Gary is the first to speak. "What the devil is that?" It is Dennis who playfully smacks Gary aside the head this time. "It's a security camera, knucklehead." Frowning Calvin glares at the mechanical spy. "It seems like everywhere you look there's a camera spying on you nowadays," Calvin notes. Laughing at his friend Dennis accuses, "You are paranoid. The next thing you'll be saying is that it's some kinda government conspiracy." Leaning in toward his friends Gary whispers, "I read this book that says just that thing." Laughing even louder Dennis mocks his friends. "I can't believe the two of you. I could believe this from that hippy guy, Marty Crenshaw, but I thought you guys lived on planet Earth." Shaking his head Calvin offers a warning, "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean that there isn't someone who's out to get you."

Wanting to change the subject, Gary jabs his elbow

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into Calvin's ribs, egging him on: "Ask her. Ask her." Being the only female at the table, a suspicious Kathy wonders aloud, "Ask me what?" Quick to jump in Dennis answers for Calvin, "Calvin wants to ask you to the prom." A smile creases Kathy's lips. Cruelly she decides to be devilish and tease the enamored young man. "Didn't you hear ... Todd has already asked me ..." Kathy, Gary and Dennis all laugh. There is no humor in the expression that Calvin wears. Sticking her fingers under his arms Kathy attempts to tickle him. "Don't be such a grump ... laugh for me. Give me a smile at least," she cajoles him. Though he tries not to Calvin breaks down and smiles. "You didn't have to ask. Of course we're going to the prom together," Mercifully, Kathy ends her teasing.

The four friends all smile. Kathy looks at Gary and Dennis. "... but if they can't find dates they won't be tagging along with us," she warns all three young men. No longer smiling Dennis lies, "I have a date." Not wanting to appear lame Gary lies also, "Me too." Then Gary turns to Dennis. "Who's your date?" he asks. Gruffly, Dennis answers him, "Don't worry about it!" Dennis then jumps up and heads toward the restroom.

"Look at what you did. You could have told me that when we were alone." Calvin scolds Kathy. "What are they going to do after we go away to college?" Kathy

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questions. "Dennis is going away to college too," Gary jumps in. The couple directs their anger at him, "Shut up Gary!" They both vent in frustration. "I wish we had kept talking about the security camera," wearing a puppy dog expression Gary answers. Regretting having been short tempered with their friend Kathy and Calvin laugh at his charming innocence.

The restroom door is locked so Dennis returns to the others just in time to hear the laughter. "What's so funny?" Shaking his head Calvin replies. "I think we're going to visit Marty and find out more about the security camera conspiracy." The four friends laugh.

As they exit the restaurant Gary turns to Dennis and whispers, "You don't have a date." Dennis whispers back, "Not yet, but neither do you." The couple smile knowingly at their two friends.

While Gary and Dennis run ahead of the two lovebirds, the couple talks. "Why are we going over to Marty's?" Kathy asks. "As you pointed out, soon we will be going away, so this is probably going to be one of the last buddy adventures the four of us may ever share," Calvin answers. Resigning herself to being a part of the silliness she is sure will follow Kathy takes her sweetheart's hand as they walk along the streets of Okai with their friends.

A short time later the four friends find themselves

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standing in front of the totally outrageous home of Marty Crenshaw. On the door the twelve signs of the zodiac are painted. Rainbows are used to decorate the remaining exterior of the house. All types of magical ceramic creatures line the walkway and the garden - everything from angels to leprechauns to unicorns. An uncomfortable Gary and Dennis have allowed themselves to fall behind Kathy and Calvin intentionally.

The two young men push Calvin toward the door. Turning toward his two annoying friends he questions them, "What's your problem?" The two friends look back and forth at one another. "He's kind of queer," Dennis finally answers. "He's a hippy," Calvin reminds them. "No. I mean ..." then Dennis bends his wrist downward. "... he's gay," Dennis whispers. "I think he knows that he's gay," Kathy states sarcastically. "What do you think is going to happen?" she questions. In answer to Kathy, Gary and Dennis stick out their chests and talk in their deepest bass voices, "Nothing." Calvin shakes his head, laughs then walks up to the door and knocks.

A man with long blond hair and a beard, who is approximately 26 years old and dressed in a toga and sandals, answers the door. "Hi, Calvin ..." Marty greets his friend, wrapping his arms around Calvin and giving him a big hug. Marty looks at the others and asks, "Who are your gorgeous friends ... and the girl?" Kathy finds Marty's dismissive attitude toward

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her patronizing. "Don't be bad Marty. The girl is my lovely lady, Kathy, and you've met Dennis and Gary before," Calvin answers. Standing with his arms open Marty playfully greets the other two boys, "Come give Marty a hug." Cautiously Dennis grabs one of Marty's hands while Gary grabs the other. The two friends shake hands with Marty then push pass him and into the house. To get back at Marty, Kathy wraps her arms around the gay man's neck and kisses him full on the lips. Pulling away from Kathy the gay man wipes his mouth, facetiously. Laughing Calvin heads inside.

The year is 1974 and the inside of Marty's home reflects the psychedelic trip motif of the times. The group wades through a sea of lava lamps and glass pipes then sit down on bean bag chairs. Bending down Marty takes a cigar box out from under his couch. When he opens it they can all see that it is filled to the rim with marijuana.

"Joint or pipe ...?" Marty asks each their preference. "Joint," Gary quickly answers. Everyone else favors smoking from one of the menagerie of glass pipes Marty owns. The host hands the cigar box and rolling papers to Gary. Getting up he then leaves the room. Marty calls back, "Sangria or Boone's Farm in the pipe?" Looking at one another Kathy and Calvin laugh. The first time the two had gotten high with one another it was Boone's Farm in the pipe's bowl. They had made love the same night and started going

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steady the next day. "Boone's Farm!" they answer, remembering. "Sounds like there's a story there," the perceptive Marty replies as he pours the wine into the bottom of a glass pipe.

After filling the top of the pipe with weed he reenters the living room to a chorus of cheers, "Yayyy ...!" Kathy answers Marty's inquiry, "Not one we're gonna tell." Surprisingly the two of them are becoming unlikely friends in the briefest of time spans.

With a fat jay rolled Gary tokes away at the joint. Anxiously Dennis waits for Marty to fill the glass pipe that is in front of him. Patiently waiting for the others to start Kathy and Calvin are cuddled together. Crossing his legs Marty sits down in the center of the gathering.

"So ... What brings all of you by my humble abode today?" Leaning toward Marty as if he believes someone is eaves dropping the paranoid Gary whispers, "Government conspiracy." Still skeptical, Dennis laughs. Frowning at Dennis the hippy warns, "Don't take conspiracies lightly. From the aliens at Los Alamos, New Mexico to drug and mind expanding experiments in the military there is much for us to fear." Not yet convinced Dennis accuses the others, "All of you have read too many of those supermarket tabloids. That or you've smoked too much weed."

Ignoring Dennis' skepticism Marty asks, "What

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mischievous are the bourgeoisie up to this week?" Calvin answers with a question, "Have you noticed all of the cameras that are going up all around us?" Calvin looks serious as he points out their observation then draws on the pipe in front of him. He blows a puff of smoke toward Marty's face as the hippie underground newsman answers his query, "That's one conspiracy that you don't want to delve into unless you're truly serious about changing the world." The other friends take a more serious posture and wait patiently for Marty to further enlighten them. The underground newsman sits silently. "Is that all you're gonna say?" Dennis asks, agitated by the vague reply.

Then the disclosure begins; "Cameras, computers, computer technology, man-made space satellites - all of these make it easier to keep track of the activities of every human on this planet." A cynical Dennis interrupts Marty, "Why in the world would anyone want to keep track of everyone?" The guarded hippy answers, "Those you monitor can't surprise you and it gives you the opportunity to direct their actions and that puts you in control. There are nations, secret societies, even families whose goal it is to control everything."

The others first wear an expression of fear. The fear turns to disbelief then disbelief turns to amusement. Then the friends all laugh, except Calvin.

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"As messed up as the world is why would anyone want to control it?" Gary makes fun of Marty's theories. "It's a sickness ... like racism, bigotry and many other maladies of the soul. Man's ego demands that he be more than his fellow man and to that end all of the diseases of man's nature feeds that beast." A now sullen Gary stops Marty. "Man you're bringing me down. This was all supposed to be us making fun of the powers that be, not some pity party for the masses." Marty takes a toke on the pipe in front of him then feigns a laugh. "You'll didn't take all of that seriously did you?" Marty feigns laughter again.

All of the others, save Calvin, laugh also. Knowing Marty all too well Calvin knows that Marty meant every word he spoke. Problematic for Calvin because not only does he believe ... now he wonders what he can do to change things.

Under a beautiful golden full moon and a seeming cascade of glimmering stars Calvin walks Kathy home. Their friends, Gary and Dennis, have gone on ahead. The two sweethearts walk along in silence. Kathy is silent because she wants to enjoy being alone with Calvin. On the other hand he is silent because he can feel the eyes of conspirators upon him. Now he knows that somebody's always watching him ... and you.

CHAPTER 7 THE CASTLE KEEP

Evil men have planned and kept to the shadows. A new generation stands at the ready to act. It is October 1, 1975, more than a month into the Fall semester at Princeton. The leaves are just beginning to change color and cover the campus grounds. There is more than a bit of a nip in the air. With a heavy wool coat wrapped around her Kathy walks beside Calvin. He is equally prepared for the cold weather with coat, scarf and a peculiar looking cotton cap upon his head. As they walk together three white students, Daryl Morgan III, a freshman, and two upperclassmen, William Franklin and Toby Smith come rushing by the couple. The upperclassmen pass first. As he rushes by them Daryl slightly bumps Kathy, knocking her books from her hands. Not realizing what he has done he continues running. An angry Calvin yells after him, "Hey asshole ...!" Not to be intimidated by anyone Daryl stops and turns toward the young black man. "You talking to me?" he asks. "You're damned right I'm talking to you," Calvin answers. "What's your problem?" the white youth wonders. "You knocked my lady's books from her hands!" Calvin points to Kathy's books. Her books still lay on the ground beside her feet. Looking down at the books the freshman realizes that he is in the wrong. "I'm sorry," he offers, but makes no effort to retrieve the fallen books. Instead he turns and continues running after his friends. Calvin starts after Daryl, but stops when Kathy grabs his arm. "Don't! He isn't worth it. You and I know that he will get a slap on the wrist while you

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will get kicked out of school.", she summarizes the reality of what would unfold if there were an altercation between him and some spoiled rich white kid.

Gone unnoticed by the couple before is a senior, Mark Wallman, who sits observing the turn of events then he laughs. Thinking the upper class man is mocking him Calvin turns toward Mark with a scowl. "I'm sorry," Mark apologizes. "I wasn't laughing at you. I was laughing because he's so foolish that he doesn't even understand that he did anything wrong. America's aristocracy is who you just met. To him we are common folk. An apology is more than he owes us for any wrong he may do." Mark tries to explain to the novices the ways of the real world.

"I thought this was a democracy. I didn't realize that we had an aristocracy," Calvin rebuts Mark's claim. Kathy and Calvin walk over to the upperclassman and sit down beside him. "You must be from the west coast, mid west or the northwest. Easterners and Southerners aren't quite that naive. Yes, in theory we are a democracy. The reality is that we are heirs to the European feudal system. Yes. There is an aristocracy and if you have to ask, you aren't a member," Mark points out to the two newcomers.

The first attempt at truly connecting to Mark is made by Kathy. The freshman reaches her hand out to

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the Jewish student. "My name is Kathy Harris ..."
she then turns to Calvin. "... and this is my
boyfriend, Calvin Watts." The older student takes
Kathy's hand and introduces himself, "I'm Mark
Wallman, but you will soon learn that people are
defined at Princeton more by their majors than their
names. I'm a journalism major." Turning to Calvin
the senior extends his hand. The two young men
shake. "I'm a law major or computer technology ... I
haven't truly decided yet," Calvin points out. "I'm
simply undecided," Kathy admits. "I will bet that
you're both freshman. Don't worry. You have plenty
of time to define yourself," Mark assures them.
Kathy smiles at the older experienced student.

"About this aristocracy you were talking about?" an
inquisitive Calvin questions. "The guy who knocked
the books from Kathy's hands, he's Daryl Morgan III.
A member of his family has served in every Congress
of the United States since the Continental Congress.
He will be President someday," the senior predicts.
"Don't the American people have anything to say
about that?" Calvin counters. The upperclassman
laughs. "You have a lot to learn about the real
world. The good news is that you're in the right
place to learn. Keep your mouth shut and your ears
open," Mark advises. "I'll see the two of you
around." Wallman gets up, turns then leaves.

"Do you know who he reminds me of ...?" without

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waiting Kathy answers, "Marty." Smiling Calvin nods his head in agreement. "I have a Law Ethics class," Calvin reminds Kathy. "I have English Essay 101," she adds. The two kiss then head for their classes.

The Princeton quad is a gathering place for the students in between classes. Later that same day Daryl, William and Toby stand looking out across the quad. The older boy, Toby, is the first to spot the very beautiful freshman, Elaine Sparrow. "There she is ... the future Mrs. Daryl Morgan III," Toby half kids. "And why are you being so generous to me?" Daryl asks his new "brothers."

William and Toby laugh. "The two of you have been preordained. Both families go back to the founders of this nation, both heirs to Castle Keep, both at the Crown's Pedestal," William lays out the parallels. The two freshman's eyes meet. They smile at one another. "I guess I had better go meet my future wife," Daryl half kids. The three young men all laugh. The bold Daryl walks over and sits down beside Elaine.

There is an ominous dungeon-like room not often spoken of when one speaks of the Princeton campus. Eight older students dressed in crimson robes and carrying medieval fashioned torches, march single file into the unspoken-of room. Behind them follow six freshmen, among them the future Crown's Pedestal - Daryl Morgan III. The freshmen are all dressed in

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black tee shirts, black sweat pants and white tennis shoes. William Franklin marches to the front of the room and bellows out, "Off with the tees!" The tee shirts quickly are snatched over the heads of the freshmen. They stand there bare from the waist up. Toby Smith steps in front of William. "The peasants are at the castle gate. What shall you do my knights?" Toby begins the ritual chanting of the creed. "Protect the Castle Keep my lord, protect the Castle Keep," the freshmen answer. "And with what shall you protect the Castle Keep my knights, with what shall you protect the Castle Keep?" Toby continues. "With mind, body and soul my lord we shall protect the Castle Keep," the freshman all pledge.

Ketaaw ... ketaaw ... ketaaw ... the repeated sound of wooden paddles tearing away at naked flesh fills the night. Not a single pledge cries out.

Lying across his bed in his dorm room later that night the young pledge, Daryl, grimaces. Gingerly Elaine applies a salve to his back. The young woman is close to tears. "I don't understand why this cruelty is necessary to join a club," she questions. Turning over and glaring at Elaine the young man answers her charges, "First of all it's not a club. This is an age old aristocratic order. Being a member means that the world is open to me ... to us. Still, one has to prove that you are willing to

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stand up for the things that we hold dear. It's a small price to pay for the privileges afforded us." Leaning down Elaine kisses him. She then sits up and stares into his eyes. "I just want to be with you," she assures him.

The next day, and miles away from Princeton, the sound of high heels clicking across marble floors hints at the majesty of the grand halls of the U.S. Congress. Here Senator Daryl Morgan II hands a folder to his female aid, Carol. "See that this gets to the President's desk by the end of the day," he directs her. "Yes sir," she answers then turns and walks away. As Carol leaves her boss she and Senator Thomas Franklin pass by one another.

"Hi Carol," Thomas greets her. Flirtatiously she smiles then answers, "Good morning Senator." She continues on. Thomas stops next to the senior Senator. The two cautiously look around. The halls are empty. "... with what ... my knight?" Daryl asks. "... with mind, body and soul my lord." Thomas answers. The two men clasp each other by the elbows. "Castle Keep!" they say as one.

The two men walk the halls of Congress side by side. "I just heard from my son William. He tells me that your son's induction ceremony will be held at the end of the Fall Semester without a hitch." The pride filled father smiles and answers knowingly. "I never had any doubts that it would be ..."

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As the two men walk together their attention turns to a more complicated matter. "A reporter by the name of Marty Crenshaw is investigating the ownership of Deplaw Security," Thomas warns. "Who the hell does he work for ...?" the senior Senator asks. "He's an independent government conspiracy rag reporter," Thomas explains. "Is anyone going to pay him any heed?" the older man wonders. "Why take that chance?" is Senator Franklin's cautionary response. "Protect the Castle Keep!" Daryl orders. The two men head their separate ways.

CHAPTER 8 ONE FRIEND DOWN

There is a reason the First Amendment is FIRST. For liberty to survive there must always be voices crying out against injustice. It is 3:00 a.m. in the morning in the sleepy town of Okai, Oklahoma. There isn't a single soul in the streets. An old wife's expression goes, "The town is so sleepy they roll up the streets at nine o'clock." That pretty much describes Okai. Only this night an outside influence disrupts the tranquil little town. Garuunnkk ... Garrruunnk ... is the sound of the mechanical beasts that prowl the Okai streets this night. The sheriff and his whole department has been contacted by the Justice Department and told to stand down as federal agents make a bust in their town. When asked who the subject might be they were instructed that the person's identity is on a need to know basis and they didn't need to know. Some Okai residents are awoken from their sleep by the lumbering monsters. Tim Washington receives more calls that night than ever before. He assures his town there is nothing to worry about. He couldn't have been more wrong.

As the convoy of six government vehicles roll through the streets an unsuspecting Marty Crenshaw sleeps as content as a baby in its crib.

The sound of wood cracking and splintering apart as the Justice Department agents use a battering ram devise to smash down his front door is what finally awakens Marty. A frightened Marty catapults up to a

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sitting position in his bed. The agents make their way inside. It sounds like a herd of buffalo is trampling through his home--through the down stairs then up the stairs toward Marty's bedroom. Intentionally they smash and break things as they go in hopes of putting terror in the heart of the man whom they pursue. As the frightened man listens to the threatening noises that echo through his home he almost wishes that he wasn't a pacifist then may be he might have a gun with which he could protect himself.

The door to Marty's bedroom is kicked open. Men brandishing guns burst into the room pointing their weapons at him. "On the floor!" an agent demands. Two other agents rush to the side of the bed. They drag Marty from the bed then throw him face down onto the floor. "He told you ... on the floor asshole," the second agent berates Marty. "What's going on?" Marty pleads, on the verge of tears. One of the agents who helped to throw him to the floor kneels then pats the suspect down. The first agent turns to the agent in charge and says, "He has no weapons."

The agent in charge, Agent Cross, faces Marty and asks, "Where did you hide the drugs Marty?" A skeptical Marty laughs. "This ain't about drugs. This is about Deplaw Security," the astute man has finally figured it out. Cross rushes over to Marty

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and kicks him in the stomach. The injured man groans in pain. "Don't play me for a fool Marty. DEA told us that you're the biggest mover of heroin in the mid-west," Cross argues. "Then why is the Justice Department here and not the DEA?" Marty counters. Again Cross kicks Marty. This time he kicks him aside the head, knocking him unconscious.

Twenty minutes later the cobwebs slowly clear from Marty's mind. His vision begins to focus in on his surroundings once more. The angry puppet stands over the radical newsman ready to render him unable to speak again if the man should point his finger at the puppeteers once more. Cross holds a large plastic bag filled with a white powder. All Marty can do is to shake his head in resignation. "Are you going to deny that this belongs to you Marty?" The defeated man struggles to sit up straight. One agent grabs for his gun. A second agent grabs the first agent's hand. "It wouldn't do me much good to say that you brought those drugs with you, now would it?" Marty accuses. "Who do you think a jury is going to believe ... four government agents or some crazy hippy that runs a radical underground newspaper?" Cross offers in reply to the newsman's accusation. "Do I at least get my phone call?" Marty wonders aloud. "Oh yeah ... You'll get your phone call Marty. Hell, I'm curious as heck who you will call," the agent almost threatens.

On the Princeton campus Kathy and Calvin are in

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Calvin's dorm room. The two are making love when the phone rings. The boyfriend stops moving. He reaches for the phone. Kathy grabs his arm. "What are you doing?" she demands. "It might be important," Calvin answers. Moving beneath him Kathy questions, "... and this isn't?" she moans. The two lovers laugh. Despite the temptation Calvin rolls away from Kathy and answers the phone. "Yes ...? Marty! How you doing, dog ...?" A mask of concern replaces the jovial mood." Calvin listens intently. "Tell me it isn't so and I'll believe you," he promises Marty. Kathy tugs at Calvin's arm. "What's wrong?" she asks. Holding the phone away from his mouth and turning toward Kathy he tells her "Marty is being framed by the Justice Department."

The young woman gets up from the bed and begins to dress. "We'll be there Marty," Calvin assures him. Holding the phone to his ear with his shoulder Calvin gets up from the bed then begins to pull on his pants. The dorm room is enshrouded by silence as Calvin listens to Marty. "We trust you Marty. If you were guilty you wouldn't have involved us," the confident friend declares before he hangs up the phone.

"We're going back to Okai?" Kathy asks. "Nope ... He's being held just outside of D.C.," Calvin corrects her. "They had to arrest him in Okai, so how in the hell did D.C. end up with jurisdiction?" the astute

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journalism student questions. "Stinks to high hell ... doesn't it?" The two are in agreement. "This is way over our heads. We're going to need some help if we're going to pull Marty's butt out of this fire," Kathy points out to Calvin. The only person they trust at Princeton is Mark Wallman.

Near noon the same day Kathy and Calvin enter the quad. They've been looking all over campus for Mark. Instead they spot the annoying Daryl Morgan with Elaine. The couple is cuddled together under the legendary Mating Oak. Legend has it that if a couple kisses under the tree at least once every year for the four years that they are undergraduates at Princeton the two will be married and stay happily married for life. Kathy and Calvin have already shared their first kiss.

A tap on the shoulder startles Calvin. Turning around he finds Mark standing behind him. "Mighty jumpy this afternoon, aren't we?" Mark notes. Relieved at finally finding their friend Kathy smiles. "You would be too if you had gotten a phone call like the one we got earlier," Calvin assures their new friend. After listening to their story Mark questions if it is possible that their friend is into more than they know. The two are resolute in their defense of Marty. The upperclassman decides that they should all visit their friend in jail and find out exactly what is going on.

The next day an elated Marty screams Calvin's name

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across the prison visitor's section, "Calvin! I knew you wouldn't let me down." A guard sits Marty down across from Calvin, Kathy and Mark. The endearing man smiles at Kathy. "I hate you for having such a good man, but I love you for being my friend." Struggling with her concern for Marty she manages a half smile. "To know you is to love you Marty," Kathy replies with a hint of humor. Again Marty smiles then answers, "Ain't that the truth."

The three old friends and a new friend all laugh. It is then that Marty looks at Mark suspiciously. "... and who is this?" he asks in an icy tone. "A friend ... Who is here to try to help you," Kathy answers. "Are you a genius law student?" the cautious man asks sarcastically. "No. I'm a genius journalism student." Mark is flippant. "I'm allowed to take this lightly. It's my ass on the line." Marty reprimands the other man. "I'm here to help, if I can," Mark assures him.

As the time ticks slowly away Marty tells his friends what he has discovered about Castle Keep and Deplaw Security, which is nothing concrete. The journalism student tells his new friend of the Princeton connection to Castle Keep and the families who he believes make up Castle Keep. It's a story Mark has been working on as his final paper for a journalism class. This new information only serves to put terror in Marty's heart.

"If I had known what I was getting involved in I

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would have left it alone. I want the three of you to go back to school and pretend that you were never here," Marty instructs them. "We have to help you," Kathy pleads. A smile creases Marty's lips. "You are just one wonderful person." He then looks at Mark and Calvin. "You all are. That is why I have to say this to you ... the world is a shit hole. You can't change it. You can only steal a few moments of joy from it or let it destroy you. I want you to steal some moments of joy." Marty abruptly jumps up and walks away.

The three friends sit there staring after him, but he never looks back. A guard walks over to Kathy, Calvin and Mark. The three friends stand up and follow the guard out of the visitor's area.

A few hours later the friends are on the road headed back to Princeton as Marty walks alone across the cool ceramic tiles of the prison shower stall. Surprisingly he has the shower all to himself ... or so he believes. An ominous shadow falls across the shower room floor.

It is hard for Mark, Kathy and Calvin to keep their minds on their studies over the next week when they know that their innocent friend is in jail. They get together each night and make plans on how to prove his innocence and expose Castle Keep for what it is. By the end of the week their spirits are beginning to soar again. They have a new vision of why this

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has all happened. It is to move them to action once more.

It's an Indian Summer like day as Mark, Kathy and Calvin drive down to the suburbs of D.C. where Marty is being incarcerated. A Three Dog Night song is blasting on the car radio. "... Momma told me not to come ...". Suddenly Kathy's mood changes. Looking over at the woman he loves Calvin can see that something has her upset. "What's wrong?" he wonders. "I don't know, but I feel that something terrible has happened," ... an ominous prediction. "They probably stopped making your favorite shoes," Calvin tries to lighten the mood. "Never make fun of a woman's intuition," Mark cautions. The music is now forgotten. The remainder of the ride is under a cloud of concern.

As the guards lead the three friends deeper into the prison Kathy wonders if it is her premonition or pure paranoia that has her believing that the guards are acting very guilty. The three friends are led to the Warden's office. The door to the Warden's office swings open. At the grand mahogany desk sits a distinguished looking gentleman. He is approximately 50 years of age, salt and pepper colored hair and well built. "Come in," Warden Shifffield beckons them in. Apprehensive, they enter. "I would ask you to have a seat but our business won't take that long and there aren't enough chairs." He delays getting

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to the matter at hand. "We don't understand why we were brought here at all. All we want is to visit our friend." Mark points out. "I'm afraid that won't be possible," the Warden begins. "There was an incident last week." Not exactly sure how she knows, but Kathy does know what his next words will be before he speaks them and she begins to cry. "Prisoner Marty Crenshaw was found dead in the prison shower," Shiffield informs them.

A banshee-like scream pierces the veil of suspicion. "Noooo ...!" Calvin tries to take Kathy in his arms but she resists. "You bastards killed him!" she accuses. Almost too calm is the Warden's response to her accusation. "I can understand your pain, but if a charge like that is made outside of this room I will sue whomever is responsible. Your friend was raped and murdered. It happens all the time in the prison system. We'll investigate, but it isn't likely we'll find the culprit." There is no limit to Kathy's anger. "Fuck you!" she screams at Shiffield.

He is taken aback by the verbal attack. Warden Shiffield is unaccustomed to having his authority challenged within these walls. The flustered man makes his way to the door, Shiffield opens it and signals for his guards. Two guards enter the warden's office. "These people have worn out their welcome. See them out," the Warden orders. One guard grabs Kathy by her arm. The distraught woman, angry

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she snatches her arm from his grasp. "Don't you touch me!" she commands. Now apprehensive the warden nods his head then instructs the guards, "As peaceably as is possible escort them out." The three friends walk ahead of the guards.

As the prison gate closes behind Kathy, Mark and Calvin, the young woman glares back at the guards. "You won't get away with killing my friend!" Tears flow then she continues her tirade. "You bastards killed him and someone is going to pay! I swear someone is going to pay!" Seeing that she is simply upsetting herself Calvin takes Kathy by the arm and leads her to Mark's car. Mark follows them. "He was such a gentle soul. How could God allow his life to end like this?" she ponders this big question. "... some would say free will. Me, I say God is a fairy tale meant to make the masses more pliant for the powers that be," Mark answers with skepticism.

CHAPTER 9 THE WARDEN'S RECKONING

Some men spend their whole lives searching yet never finding that place where they belong. Behind the concrete fortress known as Millen Penal Institute Mark Shiffield feels invulnerable. This is his kingdom. There isn't anything that he can do that is not without impunity. At least that is what he truly believes. That is why the man sits behind his grand desk grinning over the threats of retribution that the young woman has made. One of the guards, Kilpatrick, enters his office. "They're gone, but the girl is threatening to make us all pay," the guard warns.

"If I thought they were a threat they would have disappeared behind these walls the same as their friend." The warden assures his flunky. "I don't know. Young people today have a tendency to hold tight to things. If they yell loud and long enough someone just may listen," Kilpatrick insists. Shrugging off the warning Shiffield promises, "Tomorrow they will be back at school drinking beer, smoking pot and worrying about their grade point averages."

The warden then takes out a celebratory bottle of aged bourbon. "This is a present from our friends who asked for that favor." He holds out the bottle offering Kilpatrick a drink. "I would prefer that we never refer to that favor again. In a prison one never knows who is listening," the cautious villain

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advises his superior. "Don't be paranoid Kilpatrick. Besides, this is my kingdom - in here I can't be touched," an overly confident Shifffield assures him.

While the fool revels in his arrogance three friends drive home. "That bastard truly believes that he's going to get away with this," Kathy vents her anger. Looking into his rear view mirror Mark tries to console his friend, "Don't worry. We are going to shake the trees so hard every leaf on the tree is going to fall. The Warden is going to be left naked to the world. And if we're lucky some of the Castle Keep will fall with him." It is then that an angrier Calvin shouts, "Castle Keep must fall!" The remainder of the trip is spent in silent reflection.

The very next day Mark is on the phone with the editor, Bradley Avril. He had done his internship at the Miami Herald, so he is using one of his contacts there. The young man lays out all the events as they have transpired. The usually difficult Avril is impressed and intrigued. "You know that if you get close to exposing Shifffield the Castle Keep won't let him implicate them. Their strength is in their anonymity," the editor adds as a footnote to Mark's discoveries. There's a silent pause as the journalism student thinks about his mentor's warning. "As much as I want Shifffield I think it's more important that we tie Castle Keep to Marty's

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Crenshaw's death," Mark makes plain his agenda. "We'll do what we can," Bradley promises.

The fact that Marty Crenshaw is dead means nothing to Senator Daryl Morgan II. The despot has already forgotten the little known conspiracy tabloid reporter. The man was a minor annoyance which had been dealt with before he became a big problem.

As Senator Morgan makes his way down the hallways of the capitol building he is approached by a reporter from the Miami Herald, Sue Nichols. "Senator Morgan ... Senator Morgan ... may I have a few minutes of your time?" she asks. Pausing he tries to recall her name. "It's Samantha ... nooo ... Sue ... Sue Nichols, Miami Herald." She smiles. "That's right. Good memory. It's been almost two years since we've spoken to one another," she reminds him. "If I recall correctly you didn't think much of me. Least ways not as a presidential candidate," he reminds her. "I still don't, but that's not what I want to talk to you about today," she is short with the Senator. Pretending that he is amused over her assessment of him Daryl assures her, "I'm a public servant, so I'm always available to the press, even those who don't hold me in high regard." An insincere smile hides his true feelings. "Marty Crenshaw ...," Sue says the name and waits for a reaction from the man. The cool villain is well tutored in deceit. He hides behind a stoned face

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exterior his reaction. "Never heard of the man," he answers. "Now that's funny that you said man. I know a few women with the name Marty." Sue tries to push some buttons. Smiling a half smile he replies, "Not me. All the Marty's I know are men, so that's why I assumed it was a man. What about "your" Marty? Is it a man or woman? Tell me what has happened and what makes you think I might have some information?" he quizzes Sue. The reporter watches him even more closely as she speaks again, "He was investigating Deplaw Security and Castle Keep. Your family name was prominent in his notes, along with some other notable families." Now the icy villain flinches. How could this reporter have become privileged to so much dangerous information? Now Sue smiles because she knows that she has touched a nerve. Lies spew from the Senator's lips, "I have never heard of any Deplaw Security or Castle Keep and if this man was investigating me and my family it was probably a smear campaign. As you know a public figure like myself is accustomed to unwarranted attacks." The reporter knows she won't get anything more from Daryl, but his reaction has told her that she is on the right track.

A day later in the New York Hall of Records Sue sits at a computer. The woman is searching the records for ownership of Deplaw Security, a lead Marty had given them. To her disappointment no Morgan family member name appears there. To her delight though

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there is one name that is closely tied to the family, Harold Smith - Toby Smith's father. He was the former director of the FBI.

In the seclusion of retirement, Harold Smith relaxes on the porch of his Oregon home. Circles of smoke drift upward from his pipe as he looks out over his farm. To his surprise an unfamiliar car is heading up his driveway. He assumes that someone must have gotten lost to end up this far from the main highway. As the car comes closer Harold smiles to see a lovely young woman is driving the car. The car stops in front of his porch and the young woman gets out of her car. "Mr. Smith ... Mr. Harold Smith," Sue Nichols inquires. Wary, he gets up from his seat and walks to the edge of his porch. "Do I know you?" Harold asks. "No sir. I'm Sue Nichols. I'm a reporter with the Miami Herald," she answers. The man frowns. "I'm in private life now. I don't talk to reporters, Miss," he tries to dismiss her. "Not even about your interest in Deplaw Security?" she tries to rattle the man. Unmoved by her revelation Harold answers, "If I do have any interest in this Deplaw Security it's just one of my many holdings. I don't get involved directly in any of my business investments. I have people for that sort of thing. That's all I have to say about that or anything else, so if you don't mind and even if you do, goodbye and get off of my property!" Harold demands of the reporter. Turning his back to her he enters

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the house. The door closes in the reporter's face.

Days later Senator Morgan is still disturbed by the fact that the reporter, Sue Nichols, seems to have a lot of information about Castle Keep. His only consolation is that if she could substantiate any of her suspicions she would have already exposed them. As he sits at his D.C. office desk his thoughts are interrupted by his assistant buzzing his phone. "This is Senator Morgan. Yes," he answers. It is Harold Smith on the other end. An irate Harold tells him of his visit from Sue Nichols. After the two men have finished talking Daryl decides that he needs to tie up any and all loose ends. His first call is to Toby Smith, who he instructs to contact agent Cross of the Justice Department. The second call that Senator Morgan makes offers a more permanent solution to their present problem.

Scrambling to cover their butts agent Cross of the Justice Department has been ordered to issue a news release admitting that he had made an error in the arrest of Marty Crenshaw. It had been a case of mistaken identity. There had been another man operating in the same general area that fit Marty's description, so he claims. No more information will be made available because it is an ongoing investigation, is the Justice Department's official position.

Veteran news-people, Bradley Avril and Sue Nichols

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understand that Castle Keep is scrambling to cover its tracks. They also understand that they had better start wrapping things up before all trails leading to Castle Keep vanish.

Meanwhile, back at Princeton the three friends, Mark, Kathy and Calvin sit together trying to make sense of this latest revelation. "I'm glad that Marty's name has been exonerated," Kathy tells Calvin and Mark. "Maybe now the people at the Herald will be able to get some cooperation from the Justice Department in investigating Marty's death," Calvin hopes. The savvy journalism student, Mark, shakes his head. "No. I think that the Justice Department is trying to cut their ties to this case. An investigation would only serve to put them right back in the middle of it," Mark deduces.

The three Princeton friends come to the same final conclusion as Sue and Bradley in Miami. There is but one thread remaining that can tie all of these elements together, and that thread is Warden Shiffield. Unfortunately for them and for the truth Senator Morgan has come to the same conclusion.

Rain pelts against the windows of the Penal Institute. Warden Shiffield looks out of his office window and out over the grounds of his kingdom. Now more than ever he feels secure of his dominion over this estate. After all he is owed a favor by persons of great power. Almost with hesitancy the man turns

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out the lights and exits the world he feels most comfortable in.

It's a long and lonely ride down the highway from the prison to Shifffield's home. There is only one other car on the otherwise empty highway, a very familiar blue Chevy truck. As Shifffield pulls into his driveway the vehicle behind him passes by his property and drives on down the road.

After parking the warden sits in his car for a few minutes. The lonely man reflects on the life he has chosen for himself. His wife had left him a few years ago. Not that he wished otherwise, but he had never been close to his children. The prison didn't leave him much time for his family. Now he comes home to an empty house. On rare occasions he will have a beautiful call girl come to the house, but for the most part his life revolves around his job.

As Shifffield exits his car he is surprised to find his co-conspirator, Kilpatrick, standing in his driveway. The guard had driven around to the other side of the house where he had parked his blue Chevy truck then made his way to the front driveway. "What are you doing here?" Shifffield asks. Without answering Kilpatrick pulls out a gun and fires. The sound of the shots is muffled by a silencer on the weapon. The quiet of the night is broken by two pfftt ... pfftt sounds and the dying groan from Shifffield: "Ugh!"

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With all ties to Castle Keep severed, the friends will have to be satisfied with the fact that Marty's name has been cleared and the architect of his demise has also paid the highest price possible.

CHAPTER 10 LIFE GOES ON

The ridiculous togas he wore, that scruffy old man type beard that scratched when he kissed her cheek, the innocent way he flirted with Dennis and Gary just to see them squirm that is what she remembers. Like some great weight upon her heart is the memory of Marty's death for Kathy. This burden is made even heavier for her by a sense of helplessness to bring him what she would call "true justice".

A year has passed since Marty's murder and life goes on. The friend, Mark, graduated the previous June. Predictably he is now a full time reporter at the Miami Herald. The newsman writes and calls his friends often. Now sophomores in this year's Fall/Winter semester at Princeton, Kathy and Calvin again walk the grounds of the campus hand in hand.

There is a hunger inside of Kathy to embrace life once more. Looking at Calvin beside her reminds her that she still has a great deal to be thankful for. Suddenly she breaks away from Calvin's grasp and runs away. The enamored young man gives chase. The two lovers laugh. They're giddy with a bitter sweet happiness. The sweetheart leads Calvin into the quad once more. There the moment is lost. Kathy is annoyed to find Elaine and Daryl already under the Mating Oak. Her first impulse is to turn and leave, but Calvin grabs her by the hand. "We aren't going to let those snobs have sole custody of the Oak ... are we?" Grinning, two mischievously grunt letting

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themselves be noisily known. Turning toward the intruders Elaine glares at them. After all, they are imposing on her and Daryl's courtship. The two men stare at one another. Neither is going to be pushed around by the other. Surrendering to the intrusion, Elaine takes her boyfriend's hand and leads him away from the Oak. The young black couple laugh triumphantly.

Taking Kathy by the waist, Calvin swings her in the air. It's almost as if they are ten-years -old once more. Higher he lifts her into the air then lowers her until they are face to face. Coquettishly she leans her head against Calvin's chest and enjoys the ride as he carries her beneath the Mating Oak. At first they kiss tenderly then more fervently. Losing his balance Calvin tumbles backwards and softly to the ground with Kathy still in his arms. They stare lovingly at one another. To watch them in this moment one might be fooled into believing that the world is a perfect place to live.

Miles away Senator Morgan walks briskly across the capitol grounds. He is followed by his aide, Carol. "What did Miller say after he examined the space program allocations?" he asks her. "I couldn't get him to read the file," she admits. "You go to bed with the man and you can't get him to read a file?" he berates the aide. "I didn't realize one had anything to do with the other," she counters. "If

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that's what you truly believe then I overestimated your political savvy," he answers then stares into Carol's eyes, stone faced. Realizing what is expected of her the aide assures him, "He will not only read it he will commit to it before the end of the week." In response Daryl promises, "You come through for me and I will come through for you. That bureau head appointment will be yours." The unprincipled Carol smiles.

There is more to do to assure that the NASA funding passes. Later that evening the female Senator from Rhode Island, Christy Sands, sits across from Senator Morgan at dinner. Half a bottle of red wine has already been consumed between the two of them. "What do I have to do to get your support for these special allocations for NASA?" the elder Morgan asks. The slightly overweight, but attractive middle-aged woman licks her lips, trying to be provocative, but failing miserably. "My back hasn't been scratched in a long time Senator," she flirts less than subtly. Daryl laughs.

"I find that hard to believe Senator," he flirts in return. "I need one hundred million for the repair of Rhode Island's bridges," she requests in return for her assistance. "I feel fingernails on my back," he kids. "As gently or as rough as you would like, Senator," Christy answers suggestively.

The door to Christy's condo has barely closed behind

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them when the two political opponents begin tugging at each other's clothes. Lips interlocked they kiss as they stumble toward her bedroom. Falling through the bedroom door they tumble to the floor. Laughter fills the room. Moaning and sighs quickly replace the laughter. The last of their clothes lay in a heap on the floor as they climb onto the bed. A single, liberal, Democrat from modest beginnings seduced by a married, older, conservative, Republican from the American aristocracy. It's true what they say, politics makes for strange bedfellows.

Life isn't as complicated for Calvin and Kathy as it is for the two senators. Between their scholarships and work study combined they manage to afford a small apartment near the Princeton campus. The two lay in each other's arms in bed. The national news is on the local Princeton station. "NASA is happy to have found an unlikely supporter for the shuttle program which is an integral part of their space exploration plans," the local newscaster discusses Senator Morgan's newfound involvement with the agency. The television screen is filled with the senator's image.

"The technology that has come out of the space program has made America stronger. We cannot afford not to continue on with space exploration. The resulting technological advancements are something

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we can not afford to lose if we hope to remain leaders in world affairs," Senator Morgan lays out his position to the reporter.

Laughing Kathy and Calvin turn to one another. "Do you think anyone bought that line of crap?" she asks. "As P.T. Barnum would say - there's a sucker born every minute," Calvin quotes. Still laughing, Kathy answers, "I thought that was every day."

Uptown in a luxury condo, Elaine and the young Mr. Morgan are sitting in a hot tub on a balcony that looks out over the city. The cork pops from a bottle of champagne. The bubbly overflows onto the balcony deck. "To good living may it always be limited to the privileged few," the arrogant younger Morgan toasts and boasts. A reticent Elaine taps her glass against his. These two are also oblivious to the changes that are occurring in their nation's capital.

The Senate Appropriations Committee is meeting. The pair of oak doors which lead into the grand meeting room are closed by two security guards. At the long oblong table sit the twelve members of the committee. Christy smiles knowingly at Daryl. Standing up to address the committee is Carol's lover-Senator Miller. The pensive expression Daryl wears says that he is unsure if his aide can deliver on her promise. "I saw Senator Morgan's speech on TV the other night. To tell the truth I thought that

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with the budget deficit there were greater priorities for America than exploring space, but after listening to the Senator I was convinced. Space exploration isn't some idle ego prompt for the nation. It is the highway to new scientific discoveries which enhance life here in America." Miller is turned around. Not surprisingly Daryl knows to whom he owes his thanks and exactly how to thank her.

The vote on the space program appropriations is a mere formality after Miller throws in his support. As the committee members exit the meeting room everyone is seeking an opportunity to pat Morgan on his back for his unexpected victory.

Three friends are suspicious of the Senator's new involvement with the space agency. "What is the connection between the space program and Castle Keep?" Kathy, Mark and Calvin all wonder. The two men also wonder if there is any way that they can prevent the dark organization's next plot even if they can find out the truth. Kathy knows win or lose they must at least try.

Yes, a year has passed and Marty is gone, but no ... life doesn't simply go on as if he had never lived.

CHAPTER 11 SHARPENING THE SWORD

Sometimes life is most cruel to those least deserving. Yet even when tragedy does touch the evil ones all that they can see is its affect on them personally. The young Mr. Morgan is angrier that he can't control things that happen in his life than he is disappointed that Elaine has to skip her junior year. The spoiled brat glares at Kathy and Calvin as they share their third year kiss under the Mating Oak. Jealousy clouds Daryl's mind instead of thoughts of concern over Elaine's mother - Greta -- coping with cancer.

For the first time Kathy looks at Daryl with pity and empathy. Little does she know that he would have preferred that she had spat on him rather than show him pity. "It's a shame about Elaine's mother," she says to Calvin. The young man looks at the woman he loves and understands even more why he loves her. "Do you think that she would give you a second thought if it were your mother?" Calvin asks, not knowing how wrong he is about Elaine. "Probably not, but I'm not going to let that make me an unfeeling monster," Kathy replies. They take each other's hand and stroll away from the Oak. Daggers of envy shoot from Daryl's eyes as they walk by him. Without thinking of the cruelty of his act Calvin looks back and shoots Daryl a knowing grin.

While one relationship is being forged stronger and another is being tested, mischief is afoot once more

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in our nation's capital. Sometimes the most covert meetings are the ones done in plain sight. Three long time friends seem to be having a reunion luncheon. The three friends are Daryl Morgan II, five-star General Marcus Hardtack and Admiral Phillip Nelson. They sit in a booth away from other patrons of the restaurant. The three men order their drinks. The waiter leaves to fill their orders. Turning to the others Morgan chants, "The peasants are at the castle gate. What shall you do my knights?" The two military men answer, "Protect the Caste Keep my lord, protect the Castle Keep."

Ever cautious a cloak of silence falls once more as the waiter returns with their drinks. They stare up at the waiter as he takes their drinks from the tray and places them onto the table. "That will be \$21.00," the man informs them. "\$21.00! We said three drinks not three B-1 bombers!" the general exclaims. The waiter smiles politely and waits for payment. The Senator takes a credit card out and hands it to the man. "Would you like me to add the gratuity?" The waiter asks. "That won't be necessary," Daryl replies. "I'll be right back," the waiter answers then frowning he leaves once more.

"So why are we really here?" Hardtack demands. "The initial financing for Gideon's Sword will come from NASA's budget. Maintaining it is going to come out of the armed forces' budget," Morgan instructs the

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other two men. "How do we justify this?" Phillip questions. "It will all be laid out in the next Castle Keep assembly," Morgan answers.

Smiling across the table at Daryl the Admiral kids him, "Are you going to give him a tip?" A scowl comes to Daryl's face. "The reason they question our rule now is because we've given them too much. A hungry peasant will quietly and gratefully accept scraps from the table. Fatten them up and they demand a whole boar," the callous man answers.

Later the same week Mark comes to Princeton to visit with his friends. The couple barely recognizes him. Instead of his old scruffy self, Mark is "GQ". A stylish and expensive haircut along with a designer suit, shirt, and tie adorn the newsman. "Who is this impostor to the revolution?" Calvin kids. "If I knew you cleaned up this good I might not have wasted my kisses on this rag tag would be computer geek," Kathy has fun at Calvin's expense. "Keep talking like that and you may not get that fourth kiss," he teases her in return.

Like most colleges Princeton has its version of Rathskeller - a college pub. The quaint college hangout resembles hundreds more just like it all over the country. The treat is on Mark as they sit having beer and catching up. "Man, I thought Toby Smith was going to have a coronary when that expose on his father's insider trading came to light. Great

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work," Calvin reminds his friend of the story which brought him his newfound success and notoriety. "He probably would have if they hadn't found a scapegoat to take the fall for his father." Mark reminds Calvin that Castle Keep came out of that scandal almost totally unscathed.

Changing the subject, Mark turns to Kathy and asks, "Are you going to intern with me over the Summer months?" The young woman looks at Calvin and answers, "I don't know if I can go a whole three months without seeing his adorable puss." The two men laugh. "It's not that adorable. Besides this is the opportunity of a lifetime for a young journalism major. That is still your major ... isn't it?" the older friend points out- now that it seems that Kathy has decided. As if the decision is Calvin's to make Mark and Kathy look at him. "... I agree with Mark. Besides I can come down to Miami a few times this Summer break," he shows support for Kathy's ambitions. The choice of careers was simple. Kathy believes this is the vehicle to take down Castle Keep. "... then it's settled," Kathy concludes.

It seems as if the specter of death has walked into the campus pub. The three friends glare across the room as Daryl Morgan II leads his party into the Rathskeller. His son, Princeton's dean of admissions and the head of the law department are having a late lunch with the Senator. Noticing the three friends

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glaring over at them the elder Morgan asks "Who are the three young people over there who keep staring at us?" The young Daryl answers, "The older guy is Mark Wallman ..." The father interrupts his son. "Not the newspaper reporter?" Nodding his head he answers, "The one and only." One can almost see the machinations of the Senator's mind. "... and the other two?" he persists. "A computer major and a journalism major. A by-product of affirmative action," he tosses in what is meant as a racial slur. The elder Daryl Morgan turns to the dean of admissions. "Ronald, do you think I could get a look at the transcripts of those two students?" The dean smiles and answers, "I think that a little quid pro quo is in order. After all you are thinking about a very generous endowment for the university this year ... are you not?" Laughing the older Morgan assures the dean he intends nothing less.

Meanwhile across the room the three friends toast to Marty. They raise their glasses of beer into the air and declare, "To Marty! The reason we will bring down Castle Keep."

Almost forgotten is his encounter earlier in the week with his son's school mates and the newsman. There are bigger fish to fry today. Sitting in his office Daryl contemplates his upcoming meeting with the director of NASA, Cody Ericson. A month earlier when the two men met Ericson was open arms and bent

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knee, but now that moneys have been appropriated Daryl doesn't expect as cordial a meeting. All agency heads resent being told to modify their programs by those with outside interests that is unless they have a gun to their heads. Fortunately for Morgan he has a big gun.

A ridiculous little man, Cody Ericson, is far from what one might expect when one thinks of the head of a multi-billion dollar a year agency. The man walks through the streets of D.C. wearing a Stetson cowboy hat and boots. One can almost hear spurs jingling as he walks. The truth is Cody likes the looks he gets from the city folk. It's hard to stand out in the nation's capital and he has found his niche.

Perpetuating this persona, instead of meeting with Morgan in his plush Capitol Hill office, Cody has invited him to the park for chili dogs with sauerkraut and cokes.

The cowboy is surprised to find Daryl is already sitting on a bench "chowing" down on one of these infamous sandwiches. They are infamous for the gas that they produce. "Hi yah doin' Senator," the happy-go-lucky man greets his co-conspirator. The Senator stands up, wipes a hand on his pants' leg, pretending to be just another down home boy, then they shake hands. Pointing to the vendor Cody says, "I'm just gonna get me a couple 'a dose dogs then

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I'll join you." The two men nod in agreement. Daryl sits back down. Realizing Cody's back is now to him Daryl throws his hot dog in a nearby trash can.

The NASA director sits down beside the Senator placing his lunch beside him on the bench. "When you came to me with talk of helping us get all of the financing we would ever need I figured you were either a liar or you wanted something. Since I've gotten the first installment on the money I have to figure you want something. What do you want from me Senator?" Cody asks.

"That's what I like, straight talk. The military is going to want to place some gear on your shuttles." Not surprising, Daryl is less than forthcoming with any details. "I'm not going to be culpable in some nuclear accident that destroys the human race," Cody accuses. "The equipment is a matter of national security, but what I can tell you is that it is not 'Star Wars' or any other type of weaponry," Morgan counters. Ericson laughs. "I'm a country boy, but I'm not stupid. If it is weaponry you would still say it is not."

The Senator laughs. "You're right, so let's not dance around in circles. Why don't we just cut to the chase? No one sees any sense in continuing the race to space, but my agenda includes the space program. Work with me and manned space exploration has no limits. Work against me and I will shut you

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down." Morgan promises him. "You say no weaponry," the NASA director restates his understanding. The two men laugh.

It takes the rumor mill a couple of days to regurgitate the details of the meeting between Cody and Daryl. An agitated General Hardtack rushes by Carol's desk in the reception area of Senator Morgan's office. Knowing the nature of the meeting now in progress Carol jumps up from her desk. "General .. General ... you can't go in there!" she screams at him. Ignoring her Hardtack opens the door to the office and rushes in anyway. Hastily Christy and Daryl are doing up buttons to their clothing as the door opens. The female senator rushes by Hardtack and Carol then out into the reception area to finish making herself presentable. The aide stares helplessly at her boss. "I told him that he couldn't come in," she excuses. "That's all right," Daryl assures her. Carol exits.

Slamming the door after her the general glares at Daryl. "I don't care about who you're screwing up here on the Hill ... as long as it isn't me," he admonishes Daryl. "What the hell are you talking about?" a flustered Daryl asks. "The scuttlebutt around Washington is that we aren't talking about 'Star Wars' or any other type of weaponry from the military budget for the space program," the general repeats the rumors. "It never was the plan. Besides,

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have you forgotten who I am?" Daryl demands. "No. My lord," Hardtack backs down. "Because I respect you I am going to tell you this much ... what Castle Keep stands to gain from this is far greater than any weapon could ever deliver," the Senator assures him. The General shakes his head in disbelief. "How sharp is Gideon's Sword?" Hardtack asks. His question goes unanswered.

CHAPTER 12 NEW EYES

A naive America only sees life as usual. Summer is over and baseball, the great American pastime, is winding down. An Okai police patrol car cruises by the local baseball field. The Okai Beavers are playing the Brown Bears in a pony league divisional playoff game. The patrol car comes to a halt. Taking off his cap Gary Washington climbs from the patrol car. He walks over to the fence and looks out over the ball field. Childhood memories of being on this same field brings a smile to his face. The deputy sheriff yells out at one of his younger cousins, who plays for the Beavers "Knock it out of the park Ronny!"

Several of the older Okai residents in attendance at the game spy Gary and shake their heads. "Who would have believed that rascal would end up a policeman?" one woman asks. "More likely to be arrested I would have bet," the other woman answers. The two laugh, agreeing with one another.

The residents of Okai are a very simple people; they don't get excited about much other than baseball, gossip or a national disaster. As Gary makes his way around the fence and up the bleachers to take a seat, today doesn't seem to be any exception to that rule.

Sitting together watching the game is Calvin's mother- Darlene and Kathy's mother- Shirley. Missing his friends Gary decides to sit down beside

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the two women. "Hi Mrs. Harris ... Mrs. Watts," he greets them. "Hi Gary," they answer in unison. "Great game ... isn't it?" the deputy notes. "It would be if that darn Ronny Washington would hit something," Shirley answers without thinking. Darlene laughs because she remembers that Ronny is Gary's cousin. Embarrassed, Gary changes the subject. "How are Calvin and Kathy doing? They haven't run off and got married yet, have they?" he jokes. Shirley glares at the young man. "They had better not get married without us being there! I'd skin them both alive," Shirley answers. In agreement, Calvin's mother laughs then adds, "... and I would provide the knife." It seems as if he can't win with the two mothers of his best friends. Again he changes the subject. The deputy boasts of the U.S. space program, "Next week another shuttle takes off. Those commies won't have a man on Mars before us." The mothers smile. Finally something they agree with this brash young man on. "The first time I saw a shuttle take off I just raised my head in pride and awe of American ingenuity. There isn't anything we can't do if we set our minds to it," Shirley regales her native America.

"I just wonder what those scoundrels in the capital are truly up to besides exploring space," Darlene ponders. "You and that son of yours, you are always looking for the worst in people. There are some dedicated people working for the little people

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there," Kathy's mother assures her friend. "If you send a hundred men into Sodom or Gomorrah believe me no more than one of them will return a good man," The cynical Mrs. Watts answers her friend.

While the two mothers argue about the nature of our government representatives, two Princeton seniors stand with their arms wrapped around one another under the Mating Oak. An anxious Calvin leans in to give Kathy that magical fourth year kiss. To his surprise she steps away from his embrace. "Not yet. I want this moment to last," she elongates their ceremonial last kiss. "Suppose I change my mind while I'm waiting?" Calvin teases. Balling up her fists playfully Kathy answers, "Suppose I bop you in your nose?" Then the young woman playfully jabs Calvin in the nose. "Ow!" A surprised Calvin feels the sting of his overzealous lover. Then Kathy leans in and kisses his nose. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hit you so hard," she apologizes. The ardent lover grabs her into his arms and kisses her passionately. "Now we are sealed together for life. We are guaranteed to have a long and happy marriage," Calvin reminds her of the legend. "Is that a proposal?" Kathy asks. "It's coming ... it is coming. I just want everything to be perfect," he replies. "If it's you asking me it couldn't be more perfect, no matter what," the young woman assures the man she loves. Smiling Calvin takes the hand of the woman he loves and they walk away. The two head

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back to their apartment to watch the upcoming launch of the space shuttle.

There is the tinkle of crystal against crystal as Mark Wallman takes wine glasses from his kitchen cupboard. His date and co-worker, Susan Nichols, calls out from the living room to him, "Is there anything I can do to help?" With a devilish laugh he answers, "You can be naked when I get back in there." Sue laughs and jokingly accuses, "Wallman you are a pig." With two glasses and a bottle of wine in his hand Mark reenters the living room. Smiling he answers Sue's accusation, "I'm not just a pig. I am the king of pigs." Then he licks his tongue in a lascivious fashion. Feeling mischievous Sue smiles a wicked knowing smile. "Don't advertise goods you aren't selling." The two continue to flirt with one another as they get comfortable on Mark's couch preparing to watch the shuttle liftoff together.

The special television newscast covering the launch has already begun. Ignoring the pre-launch coverage Kathy and Calvin lay in each other's arms in front of the television, kissing. Pulling away Kathy asks, "Do you have any idea when I can expect this perfect proposal?" It seems Kathy is unwilling to let the subject go. Without speaking Calvin jumps up then leaves the room.

His sweetheart calls after him. "I'm not trying to

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pressure you, but a girl would like to know if it's going to happen in this decade or the next," she half kids. The sound of running comes from down the hallway. Like a mischievous child Calvin rushes into the room and dives across the small room onto the bed. Laughing Kathy moves slightly to the side, so as not to be crushed. It is then that she sees Calvin's hand is extended outward and holding a small diamond ring. Tears of happiness begin to fill her eyes. "Katherine Margaret Harris will you marry me?" he asks. Kathy pulls Calvin's face close and showers it with kisses. The happy young man laughs and says, "I'll take that for a yes." Yelping for joy she answers him, "Yess, yess, yess!"

Unlike the mood of celebration that fills Calvin and Kathy's apartment, in Mark Wallman's apartment the mood has become somber. "What are you thinking about?" Sue asks. "The shuttle launch reminds me of Senator Morgan. I know he's dangerous to America and all that it stands for, but I just can't seem to get a handle on what kind of threat he poses." Smiling, Sue poses the question, "Maybe there's nothing to get a handle on. From what you've told me all you have is an all rich folks club and a radical friend who may or may not have stepped on any number of important people's toes." Mark can't be dissuaded. "Just as sure as I'm a horny dog there is something unsavory about Morgan's alliance with NASA," he jokingly states his hunch to Sue. "If you are that

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sure I trust your professional nose. We just have to figure it out before it's too late," the lady reporter lends her support.

For two women the shuttle launch has a more personal meaning. Cancer is eating away at the vibrant person Greta once was. Her hair is gone—thanks to chemotherapy, a once voluptuous woman is now a frail remembrance of herself and though she was once an intelligent conversationalist she now stares blankly at a world quickly slipping away from her. While Elaine holds her mother in her arms in front of the television she speaks quietly and comfortingly to her, "When that shuttle takes off your soul will ride with it through the sky and land at God's feet. I will envy you for your grace." The mother's heart is heavy because she can feel her daughter's tears falling on her forehead, even though she can't speak.

In Okai the friend of Kathy and Calvin - Gary, along with the mothers - Shirley and Darlene and many other Okai residents are gathered in the local bar. Everyone stares at the large screen television. As the launch countdown begins they all begin to cheer.

Meanwhile Calvin and Kathy are hugged together across the bed in their apartment. The newly engaged Kathy stares at her engagement ring more intently than the shuttle countdown.

At Cape Canaveral the scoundrel-Senator Daryl

NEW EYES

Morgan II is in a VIP lounge with the director of NASA, the President of the United States and several other dignitaries. As the countdown moves forward Daryl thinks to himself, "This is the beginning." The technician counts down to blastoff "10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1."

In Okai loud screams of exultation fill the bar. People are hugging one another. A few fools even drench one another with glasses of beer.

Hugged close together in their bed even the cynical Calvin and a suspicious Kathy are in awe of the majesty of the feat that they are watching.

In Miami Sue turns to Mark. "This is the greatness that man is capable of when he doesn't waste his energies on hate, prejudice and greed." The optimism in her is fed by the launch. All Mark can see is the millions of kids who could have been fed or educated with the money spent on this venture.

On the Sparrow estate in Newburg, Maine, Elaine leans over and kisses her mother's head as the shuttle lifts up and away from the Earth. It's over, Greta's head slumps against her daughter's breasts. The mother is riding to God's feet.

In the NASA VIP lounge, the Senator thinks to himself, "New Eyes for the ruling class."

CHAPTER 13 PLANS ARE MADE

The love of another, the love of self, the love of an idea- success in love requires planning. There is a plush green estate in the Hamptons which belongs to Daryl Morgan I- father to the Senator and grandfather to Daryl Morgan III. It is usually very quiet and empty at the estate, but not today. The youngest Mr. Morgan and his fiancée enter the study of the main house. The eldest Morgan sits at his grand oak desk drinking a glass of 100-year-old scotch and puffing on a Cuban cigar. This man is a perfect example of western decadence and excess. "Grandfather ... " Daryl takes Elaine's hand and leads her closer to his grandfather. "I want you to meet my fiancée, Miss Elaine Sparrow," he introduces her. Putting on a show of being gallant, the grandfather puts down his drink and cigar, gets up and walks around the desk to greet Elaine.

"Sparrow ..." he says as he takes Elaine's hand. "You're Greta Sparrow's daughter, aren't you?" he asks. Saddened by the mere mention of her mother's name, she answers, "Yes sir." He shakes his head. "Sad thing ... You have my condolences. Your mother was a beautiful woman. Not just physically ..." A nodding Elaine interrupts him. "Thank you, sir." The grandfather smiles then notes, "Enough talk of sadness. This is supposed to be the happiest time of a young woman's life. I promise I will personally do everything I can to see to it that it is for you," the elder Morgan promises earnestly. A kiss on the

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cheek is his reward. "Thank you, sir. Despite everything I am in good spirits and it's all because of having your grandson in my life." Placing his arms around each of the young lovers the grandfather walks them out of the study. "Let's get a look at the grounds and start planning your nuptials," he instructs the couple.

Oddly enough another - more modest wedding is being planned at the same time in Okai, Oklahoma. Waiting outside of the one room Protestant Church the two have attended most of their lives is Calvin and Kathy. As Calvin steals a kiss Kathy's father - Butch, and her mother - Shirley, park then exit their car. The father is a huge man, six feet four inches tall and weighs 310 pounds. Lumbering toward the couple his massive frame almost hides from view the delicate, small Shirley. "You'll have more than enough time for that after the wedding," the father says. Loving to needle and shock her dad Kathy answers, "You didn't think I was still a virgin?" Both parents frown. "I don't want to discuss that," Butch replies blushing. Shirley grabs her daughter by the ear. "Owww!" Kathy yells. "You deserve worse than that, gutter mouth," the mother scolds her.

The couple and the parents head up the steps of the church. "Where are your parents?" Shirley asks. "My parents and the other wedding party members are already inside," Calvin informs them. The groom-to-be opens the door and holds it for the others then

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follows them inside. The sight of Calvin's parents-Darlene and Marvin, along with their friends-Dennis, Gary and Mark warms the couple's hearts.

Though the small church is modest in its appearance one can feel the warmth, love and fellowship that abounds here. The couple could not have found a more perfect place to join together in the eyes of God and man.

While the senator's son and father make the wedding arrangements elsewhere another matter is first on the Senator's agenda. Skirting White House security Daryl Morgan II and other members of the Castle Keep pass through a secret alcove into a secret chamber in the White House (*after all 75% of all presidents have been members of the Castle Keep.*) Tonight there is an emergency meeting concerning implementation of the second stage of Gideon's Sword.

Dressed in a purple robe, the color of royalty, Daryl stands before members of Castle Keep. The other members are dressed in blue robes, the color of the elite. "The peasants are at the castle gate. What shall you do my knights?" Daryl begins. "Protect the Castle Keep my lord ..." the chant and answer have been given once more.

The floor is opened to discussion. "We shall skip the reading of the minutes and old business and get right to the purpose for this emergency meeting, the passing of the Homeland Security Act--the second leg

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of Gideon's Sword." Phillip Nelson stands up. "I recognize Sir Nelson," Daryl acknowledges. The admiral speaks, "We don't have a rat's ass of a chance to get this Act passed. Everyone will cry infringement on civil rights."

The leader shakes his head. "Wasn't that the same objection brought up when I said we could redefine the RICO Act so that almost any crime could be considered organized crime, thus enabling us to monitor almost anyone under investigation? The public are pawns. Direct them and they will follow," the arrogant man insists. Still Phillip disagrees. "I think this is more than they will swallow, but I will do whatever I can to assist my lord," he concedes. "Your time will come my knight, but for this task I need other knights to drum up support for this Act," the leader solicits support.

At the Hampton Estate of Daryl Morgan I the caterers along with an assortment of design persons, wedding planners and a small army of workers are preparing the grounds for the upcoming momentous occasion. The bride-to-be grabs her fiancée' by his hand and pulls him from the main house and out into the garden. "What...?" Daryl whines. "You have got to see this!" Elaine exclaims. A large ice sculpture stands in the center of the rose garden. The young man can't help but smile.

Hundreds of miles away, Calvin and Kathy walk hand in hand through the local park in Okai. A shooting

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star falls from the sky. "Look!" Kathy points up at the star. "Make a wish!" she declares. The two look at one another and laugh. "What did you wish for ...?" Calvin asks. "I'm not going to tell you. Then it won't come true," she warns.

The two lovers continue on. They are simply enjoying being together. "I'm scared," Kathy admits to Calvin. They stop walking and he turns Kathy toward himself. "We're going to have a great life together. Didn't we kiss four times under the mating tree?" he chided her. Playfully Kathy slaps him on his arm. "Don't make fun of me. It's just that there are so many terrible people and things out there in the world. How do we make things better? Can we make things better? Is it fair to bring children into a world such as this?" she ponders the future. "You're right to be scared, but never doubt that we can make a difference or that our children will be able to do the same. With my brains and your looks how can they fail?" The fiancée laughs. "I thought it was going to be my brains and your looks." she teases. "Either way they're going to be some smart good looking kids," the young man brags jokingly. The two lovers laugh then kiss.

For the first time in a long time Kathy brings up a sensitive subject, "... and what of Castle Keep and Marty's killers?" A stern expression comes on Calvin's face. "We will expose them all," he promises.

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The Crown's Pedestals, Elaine and Daryl, lay in each other's arms upon a hill overlooking the estate. "I love you," Elaine declares. "I would hope so ..."

Daryl answers without returning her declaration. Looking into his eyes in search of some indication of his feelings Elaine finds none, so she pushes harder. "I was hoping you would say I love you too."

He kisses his Elaine then replies, "Of course I do. Why else would I have asked you to marry me?" She looks closely, but fails to see the glint in his eyes that she has seen before from other suitors. "Why indeed?" she can't help but wonder. The youngest Morgan points out over the grand estate. "All of this is nothing. Together you and I will have it all. I will be President of the United States someday." He smiles down at her then continues, "... and you will be my First Lady." Now she sees the light in his eyes that she had been searching for before. "Hell, you and I may even be more important than that," he speculates. The young woman laughs. "What could be more important than the President of the United States?" she asks. Slyly he smiles then changes the subject. "I'm going to lay the world at your feet." Elaine shakes her head. "I don't need the world. All I need is to know that you truly love me," is her simple request. "If I could prove it I would. Would you like me to fight a bull ... climb Mount Everest ... swim the length of the Pacific Ocean ... or maybe I should crush a piece of coal into a diamond?" the cocky man offers. She laughs. "Are you my Superman? Would you do all

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of those things just for me?" Elaine asks. "Yes I am. And yes I will." Daryl assures her. "You are my Lady, the other half of the Crowns Pedestal and I shall protect the Castle Keep." It seems more an oath than a declaration of love. The woman can't help but wonder, "Does he love me or the Crown's Pedestal? Would we be getting married if I were not the matron of the second house of Castle Keep?"

Two weddings, by coincidence or fate, are planned for the same day. While behind the scenes the knights of the Castle Keep work diligently to drum up enough support for the Homeland Security Act--the second leg of Gideon's Sword.

CHAPTER 14 DENNIS RETURNS

Coming home almost always is accompanied by tears. Most often tears of joy is the companion, but too often it's tears of loss. There's a cloud of mourning which has settled over the almost always merry town of Okai. Their beloved sheriff, Tim Washington, has died. For the first time since his mother's death Gary truly misses his father. Although his heart is truly heavy from the loss he is proud to take up his father's mantle and become the new sheriff of Okai.

Even though Gary is preparing for his father's funeral he doesn't shirk his new duties as sheriff. As usual the road into Okai is nearly barren as the new sheriff patrols. Spotting an out-of-state license plate and suspecting drug dealers he turns on his siren, makes a U-turn then pursues the vehicle. The white Corvette pulls off to the side of the road. Cautiously Gary pulls up behind it then exits his car.

As the sheriff approaches the car the tinted driver's side window is rolled down. The driver and Gary begin to laugh. "I thought you were a drug dealer or gun runner. Fast cars on these empty highways usually mean one or the other," he explains his paranoia. "... just a good ole boy come home," Dennis greets him. The car door opens and Dennis then exits his car. The two men hug one another.

"God it's good to see you home. How long are you gonna be here? What are you up to ...? Where are you

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staying?" Gary rattles off one question after another. "Whoa ... whoa ... let me get settled in at my parent's then we'll get together this evening and I'll tell you everything. By the way, I was sorry to hear about your father. I'm going to miss him. He was like a third father to me," Dennis answers Gary.

Later that evening the two friends meet at the local restaurant-and-bar. As Dennis sits with Gary a beautiful Donna Smith walks over to their table. The somewhat younger woman flirts with Dennis. "Don't I know you?" she asks. Smiling Dennis shakes his head. "I don't think so. It ain't likely that I would have forgotten someone as lovely as you," he replies. Now she smiles. "Why thank you." Donna takes a pen from her purse and begins writing something on a napkin. She hands the napkin to Dennis. "Call me sometime," she tells him. Batting her eyelashes Donna turns then walks away, her hips swinging a little more provocatively than before. "I surely will," Dennis assures her. Gary laughs. "The nerd is now a lover," the sheriff teases his friend.

The dinner conversation flows effortlessly. It's like Dennis had never left. He has come home bringing his provocative course study to the local college.

While catching up Gary tells him that Calvin and Kathy are coming to the funeral. Though they always believed that Calvin and Kathy would make an impact

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on the world the idea of one owning his own computer software company and the other being a reporter seems unreal. "We're all grownups. Doing real grownup things," Gary points out. "Hard to believe that it's been nine years since the last time we were all together. I just wish it could have been under happier circumstances," the friend laments. "Life is what it is. He died quietly in his sleep. I guess that's all we can hope for when our time comes, that we slip away painlessly," Gary answers philosophically.

The two men sit at the bar most of the evening with drinks in hand. The camaraderie and liquor help take Gary's mind off of his loss. They flirt with women, dance up a storm and generally let their hair down. It is a lot like their senior year in High School, except they are having a lot more success with the ladies.

Come the morning Gary tries to shake the fog of a hangover. With all that he faces today he decides to stay out in order to complete the funeral arrangements and clear his head. His deputy is understanding and agrees to cover for him.

When Gary arrives at the funeral home he is glad to find Dennis, Kathy and Calvin standing there waiting along with a man he doesn't know, Mark. The four friends share a group hug. When they separate Gary grabs Kathy, bends her backwards and kisses her hard. Calvin pulls them up then apart then playfully

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pushes Gary away. "That's my future wife you're slobbering all over," he declares. The four friends and Mark all laugh. "You get her for a lifetime. You can't begrudge me a stolen kiss," Gary counters. "The heck I can't ...," Calvin assures him.

Kathy turns to Mark. "These are our friends, Gary Washington and Dennis Walls. Believe it or not this one is the sheriff," she points to Gary. "The other one is a college professor. This is our friend Mark Wallman. He works with me at the Miami Herald," The men are introduced to one another. They each shake hands in turn. "Nice to meet you," Gary says. "Aren't you the reporter who did the expose on that billionaire Harold Smith?" Dennis asks. "That's me. Although it didn't turn out the way I would have liked it to ..." Mark answers. "All you can do is expose them for who they are. It's up to the public to demand that the system punish men like Smith," Dennis offers his opinion.

A sullen mood falls over the gathering as they all have reached and stand over Tim's open coffin, viewing the body. "We're a little less safe now that you're gone Big Tim," Dennis flatters the dead man. "I'm gonna miss you Dad," Gary says. The friends hug once more then leave the funeral home.

The next day, cars fill the graveyard where Tim is being buried. The town is out in full force. Many of the women and children cry for the loss of this

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father figure. The friends stand holding hands, each drawing strength from the other.

Soon all the cars are gone except the ones which belong to the four friends and the new acquaintance. A broken shell of a man, Gary, stands frozen over his father's grave site. "I'll never be the sheriff he was. People still expect me to screw up somehow. I hear them talking. Figured he'd end up in jail not putting anyone in jail," Gary berates himself. "You're just as good a man as your father ever was. In time people will see that and give you the credit due you," Kathy assures him. "That's right!" Dennis and Calvin answer in unison. "I'm gonna try to live up to the confidence you all have in me," Gary promises.

The weekend has gone all too quickly. Dennis and Gary stand at the edge of town watching as Kathy, Calvin and Mark drive away from Okai. None of them could know what would bring them together next. Looking at Dennis Gary is glad that his old friend has returned home.

Days later Dennis stands at the blackboard writing his name. He turns to his students, all young adults. "I'm Dennis Walls. You may call me Dennis. That does not mean that I will allow you to treat this class lightly. Political Science is more than a civics lesson. In here we will discuss the dynamics of a working government. I shall impose upon you some of my own personal views about how

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government can be misused. Everything we discuss will be on the tests. Now let's begin," he instructs them. The students open their notebooks, turn on tape recorders and some open their laptops.

First Dennis tells them the text books they will need for the class then he jumps right into his first lecture. "Any of you ever hear of the RICO Act?" There is a pause of silence then one of the students, Cary Fisher, slowly raises her hand. "The bold young lady hiding in the back," Dennis teases. Standing up Cary answers, "Doesn't that give law enforcement special authorities to act when investigating organized crime?" The teacher points at the young lady and smiles, delighted. "Give that young lady a gold star. Now can any of you tell me why an ordinary citizen should be worried about RICO?" Everyone looks at his or her neighbor. "The original definition for organized crime has been expanded since the act was first passed. We are watching the slow erosion of our right to privacy. You may ask why should that worry law abiding citizens? Your privacy can be invaded, your personal information can be misused, besides these, if you allow one right to be taken, what's to stop the government from taking another and another? Instead of serving you suddenly you are serving your government ... or serving those who control your government." Dennis pauses. "I hope your silence means that you are giving deep thought to my words and not that you are just found dumb," he comments

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hopefully. As the bell rings Dennis notices that Gary has been standing in the doorway to his classroom. "Chapters 1-5 of Chilean's Theory on The Dangerous Five Percent," he announces the reading assignment. Moans and groans fill the room.

The students lead the way out. Dennis follows. He smiles when he finds Gary waiting. "I didn't even know that you were enrolled," he jokes. "I've audited a few classes before," a defensive Gary replies. "Did we have a date for lunch?" Dennis changes the subject. "No, but I figured I'd take a chance and come on by." The friend closes the door to his classroom and begins heading down the hallway. Close behind Gary follows. "Whose treat?" Dennis wonders. "I drove all the way down here. The least you can do is treat me," Gary pleads his case.

The two friends are having lunch at their old hangout, "Mickey D's. You are the cheapest guy I have ever known," Gary berates his friend. "Yes I am," Dennis admits.

The expression Gary wears becomes more serious. "I only caught the end of your lecture, but you piqued my curiosity. What is The Dangerous Five Percent?" the friend wonders aloud. "Who ... not what, the Dangerous Five Percent is a group of people, rich people. They are the five percent in this country who control more than eighty percent of this nation's assets," Dennis explains. "I'd like to be

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one of them," the law man laughs. Frowning Dennis replies, "No you wouldn't. They're obsessed with acquisition of power no matter what the cost," The teacher teaches.

Not taking his friend seriously, Gary laughs. "There's no Dangerous Five Percent. It's a product of conspiracy nuts like your friend Marty," Gary assures his friend. "Whatever happened to him? One day he was here and the next day no one seemed to know where he was," Gary remembers. "You need to read the national newspapers more often. Marty was killed some time ago," Dennis informs his friend. "I'm sorry to hear that. I truly liked him," Gary tells Dennis. The teacher instructs his friend, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince people that he doesn't exist. Read Chilean's Theory."

CHAPTER 15 SWEET OR BITTER FRUITS

Each of us envisions the tapestry that we shall weave our futures to be. Often to complete the picture that we desire others have to weave their threads into our patterns.

Simplicity can be considered the theme for Kathy and Calvin's wedding. The Protestant church where the ceremony is held is as simple a house of God as one might find. Only a few close friends and family are gathered. A few understated bouquets of flowers adorn the church. A single piano player and one singer provide the music. The groom and men of the wedding party are in simple black rented tuxedos. The bride wears a lovely white gown without many frills. The bridesmaids and maid of honor all are dressed in light powder blue dresses. Everyone drove to the church in their personal cars, except the bride and groom. The betrothed left their car in Miami so Dennis has donated the use of his corvette for their honeymoon. The minister who is performing the wedding ceremony is nothing more than the shepherd of his small flock.

In contrast Elaine Sparrow and Daryl Morgan III are being married in the grand cathedral in Manhattan. Dignitaries from all over the world, including presidents and movie stars are in attendance. Noticeably absent and sorely missed is Greta Sparrow. Flowers, ice sculptures and decorations that defy explanation adorn the halls of the church. Grammy-winning singers and musicians from the Boston

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Symphony Orchestra provide the wedding music. The groom and the men of the wedding party are all dressed in Armani Tuxedos and have been given Rolex watches as bridal gifts. The bridesmaids and maid of honor are dressed in designer gowns and given Tiffany diamond earrings as bridal gifts. The bride's wedding dress has a frilled veil and a twenty foot long beaded train. The bridal party arrives at the church and will travel up to the Hamptons for the reception by helicopter. The remaining guests have the streets near the cathedral blocked with limousines and other luxury vehicles. And of course a mere minister could never oversee the marriage between the Crowns Pedestal. The Cardinal William Delow of New York--expected to be the next Pope and a Castle Keep himself--is performing the ceremony.

The doors to the Okai church open wide. The guests file out ahead of the husband and wife. The husband and wife stop at the top of the church stairs. The guests shower them with rice. Turning her back Kathy tosses the wedding bouquet. It is Donna Smith who catches the bouquet then turns and smiles at Dennis. Quickly he turns away. Calvin and Kathy make their way to Dennis' car which has shoes and cans tied to the rear bumper and a "Just Married" sign on the back.

Everyone gets into their cars and follows the couple back to the home of Butch and Shirley Harris, where

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the reception is being held. The mothers, Shirley and Daphne, have prepared the food that is being served to the guests. There are cases of beer and bottles of wine in the pantry and bags of ice in the freezer. Decorations which were bought at a local greeting card store adorn the house. The local bakery made the cake. Despite the simplicity of it all it is rich with the love and personal touch of family and friends.

The doors to the grand cathedral open wide. After some twenty minutes all of the guests manage to make their way outside of the church and await the newlyweds. The husband and wife exit and stop at the top of the church stairs. The guests toss flowers at the couple. Looking out over the crowd Elaine seeks, finds then tosses her bouquet at her friend and maid of honor, Shelly Spencer. The friend has to push one woman in order to grab the bouquet. The other woman glares at Shelly. The couple makes their way to a waiting limousine, which will carry them to the Morgan Building where they will take a helicopter ride across the Bay to the Hamptons. Some other guests are also taking helicopters. Others decide to brave the New York traffic and drive up in their limos or other luxury rides. Instead of tin cans and shoes the father has the electronic billboard in Times Square lit up with the message: "Congratulations Daryl & Elaine."

The Morgans' Hampton estate is always breathtakingly

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beautiful, but today it looks like a small piece of heaven. Imported tropical orchids set off the magnificent gardens. Statues and other decorations not usually found on the estate have been brought in just for this occasion. There is a champagne fountain some twelve feet tall and tables of crystal goblets with which to dip the drink from the fountain. Wine stewards walk among the guests offering them the most expensive of wines from the Morgan wine cellar. The cake is a monument. It sits aside from all else, but for all of the expense and craftsmanship there is a cold sterile feel to the gathering.

At the Harris house the happy couple sneaks away to the garden to be alone. Sitting in a lawn chair Calvin has Kathy sitting on his lap. "How are you doing Mrs. Watts?" the new husband asks his new wife. "Just fine Mr. Watts," Kathy laughs as she answers him. The two kiss.

The green monster of envy lurks mere feet away in the guise of a friend. Gary glares at Calvin and wonders; why he is the smart one, why is he the one people expect to change the world and why is he the one who gets the girl? Undetected Dennis comes up behind Gary and places his hand on Gary's shoulder. The friend jumps, a bit startled. "He's a lucky son of a gun, isn't he?" Dennis is glad for his friend, but a little jealous of the moment. "We're the lucky ones. We can chase after any woman we want," Gary

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pretends to be content. "The luck isn't in the chasing, it's in the catching," Dennis assures his friend. The two friends walk away, leaving Kathy and Calvin to share their private moment.

"So ... I guess I'll be moving to Miami," Calvin offers more than states. "If it's not too much of a hardship," Kathy allows Calvin an out. "I was hoping to raise our family here, but I know how important it is that you be in the big city right now. We have plenty of time to come home after you've established yourself career-wise." It's settled. Kathy hugs then kisses her understanding new husband.

Miles away, through the large Morgan estate Elaine rambles in search of her new husband. The familiar sound of Daryl's laughter catches her ear. At first she starts to enter the room, but eavesdrops instead. Her new husband's words turn her blood cold. "Did you see Shelly's firm round butt? Unh, unh, unh. I can't wait to get back from my honeymoon and get with her again," he boasts. "You're a married man now. Show some decorum," Toby teases. "I'm going to show Shelly something, but it won't be decorum." The fool brags. In the hallway Elaine backs slowly away from the room. Leaning back against the wall she cries.

The men continue to brag about their anticipated conquests. "Shelly isn't the only woman looking good at your wedding. Can somebody hook me up with that young lady who was wearing the tight fitting beige

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dress with sparklers everywhere?" Toby asks. The friend laughs. "That was my new step mom, you dweeb," Daryl warns him. "Do you think your dad would mind if I bang her just once?" Toby teases. "I don't know. Do you want me to ask him for you?" the son threatens. Throwing up his hands in surrender Toby answers, "Nooo! Nooo! Nooo! That won't be necessary. Like I said there were quite a few hotties downstairs."

On wobbly legs Elaine makes her way down the stairs of the main house. "Is this what I've waited so long for and hoped so much to have? I'm not going to be his fool. If that is truly the game he wants to play two can play that game," she threatens.

The new wife is in a daze as she wanders the grounds of the Morgan estate. "My best friend Shelly," she laughs in resignation. "Just goes to show you that with these people it is all about deceit and betrayal. They act as though they have some special entitlement to live above morality and rules. In truth they're only trying to fill the empty void that their lives are with things and conquests. They don't understand what truly matters," she condemns them in her thoughts.

All that matters to Senator Daryl Morgan II is getting the Homeland Security Act passed. Even at his son's wedding he has Senator Christy Sands cornered and is trying to acquire her support for the bill. "Senator, you don't have anything that I

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want that will make me change my mind about that piece of legislature. It is dangerous and it is un-American," she charges. "Those are some mighty inflammatory accusations," he tries to put the liberal Senator on the defensive. "It's meant to be," she doesn't pull any punches. "I can make life difficult for you lady," he threatens. "That's a double edged sword mister. It will surely cut both ways," she reminds him. Frustrated, he turns and walks away.

Two weeks later both honeymoons are over. The couples have returned home and are beginning their new lives together. Elated, but missing their family and friends, Kathy and Calvin are settling into their new home in Miami. They can almost taste the sweet fruit their lives are going to bear.

Meanwhile Daryl has already lied to Elaine about a meeting with his new boss, Carol Dawkins -- his father's old aide, who is now the new director of the EPA. The son already has the job as assistant director with the agency. It will pad his resume when he moves on to community activism then after a time on to politics.

Elaine calls Carol pretending she wants to have lunch. Unbeknownst to Daryl his boss informs Elaine that she will have to take a rain check because she has a meeting with an environmental group. Her first bitter fruit is tasted. Elaine doesn't fool herself.

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She knows that there will be many more to come.

A month later in the chamber of the Senate the Homeland Security Act comes to a vote. When the final tally is taken the legislation has taken a resounding beating. The elder Morgan is unaccustomed to defeat, much less one so humiliatingly lopsided. It is a bitter fruit for him to swallow. A taste he doesn't intend to make a staple of his diet. The plotting of how to turn this around starts immediately. He believes that a patient and well thought out attack must be their next step.

CHAPTER 16 THE PLAYERS

Business, Politics, Life and Love the true measure of a game player is how he fares in these fields. Power is a game best left to those who are willing to win at any cost. Two weeks before the Homeland Security Act failed Dennis had brought his political science class to Washington D.C. to protest the bill. They found themselves among a throng of protesters. The teacher carried a sign which read Eye Spy Senator Morgan Spying On Me. Other clever invasion-of- privacy quips were written on other protest signs.

Needing distance between her and her philandering husband Elaine had left him at home to have lunch among the common folk. Seeing the protesters, she decided nothing would irritate her husband more than if the press spotted her protesting against his father's bill, so of course she couldn't resist. The vengeful woman marches across the street and joins Dennis and his group. "Do you have a sign for me?" Elaine asks Dennis. He smiles and hands her one of the signs at his feet. "Too much security means too little freedom," Elaine's sign reads.

The protesters march and scream out their various slogans in front of the White House. Elaine is disappointed that the press is so spread out that no one notices her participation. Still she is glad that she joined in on the protest. The protesters are right. This is a dangerous bill, she notes.

After their participation in the protest is over

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Elaine sits having lunch with Dennis at one table while his students are having lunch at the tables around them. "So ... what made you join our protest?" the inquisitive man asks. Laughing, Elaine tells him that she would rather not say. "I look at your Prada purse and your jewelry and I might speculate that you are a rich bored housewife," he accuses. "Being rich doesn't exclude one from believing in the things that are important to this country," she answers his charge. As if blinders have been lifted from his eyes Dennis notices how beautiful Elaine is. "You're a very beautiful woman," the compliment slips out. "Like you said, I'm married," Elaine answers. "I didn't mean anything by it. It just suddenly hit me just how beautiful you are," he continues to flatter her. "I think I had better go," the frightened woman gets up from the table. Throwing caution to the wind Dennis grabs her hand in his. "Wait!" He writes his name and number on a napkin and hands it to Elaine. More frightened of herself than this brash man she pulls away then walks out of the restaurant.

Once outside Elaine looks down at the piece of paper she holds, balls it up then throws it down. After going only two steps she turns around and chases after the balled up napkin. Picking it up, she puts it inside her purse then walks away.

Another decade passes all so quickly. Daryl Morgan III has done his time in government and community

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service and is now preparing to run for the Senate. Name recognition has him far ahead of his incumbent opposition in the polls. The husband and wife are doing a television spot for his campaign. The director has given them their instructions and is preparing to shoot the commercial. "Action!" the director calls out. Elaine sits holding her husband's hand. "My husband believes in a strong America. He wants to serve you because for him service is a family tradition." The director stands up and shouts, "Cut! That was great Mrs. Morgan. Now let's shoot the spots with you alone senator Morgan."

Turning to Elaine Daryl begins his lies, "I'll catch up with you later sweetheart." Elaine gets up and starts to leave. Well rehearsed in his mind Daryl grabs her hand. "Oh that's right ... I forgot. I have a meeting with my campaign advisers tonight. I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you when this is all over," he promises. The wife knows he is lying, but she no longer cares.

Miles away Mark kneels down and begins going through some papers. A mysterious woman starts walking in the opposite direction of two reporters, Mark and Kathy.

Calling after the woman Kathy asks, "What if we need to contact you?" The woman reminds Kathy, "Don't even try. Our deal was a onetime contact to give you the information that you now have." Then the cloaked

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mysterious woman is gone.

"Let's not hang around here. We can check out the information back at the office," a nervous Kathy warns. Lifting the box Mark nods his head in agreement. The two reporters leave the parking garage wearing big grins on their faces. "Maybe if we get him the Homeland Security Act will fall permanently to the wayside," Kathy speculates. Laughing, Mark answers, "We can always dream."

Clouds of doom are forming over Daryl Morgan II's head, but he is oblivious to the approaching storm. If he had been aware he would have been trying to prepare a defense. Instead he is busy with another piece of Castle Keep business.

It is one of those odd times when the President of the United States isn't a Castle Keep. The elder Senator Morgan has already secured the support of the committee on national security for Toby Smith, but for his candidate to move into the position of assistant to the director of the C.I.A. he needs the President to come on board. The mystique of the Oval Office is obvious whenever one enters this seat of power. It is the elder Senator's intention to sit behind that desk very soon. "May I sit down sir?" he asks. "Surely Senator ..." the president points to the chair in front of his desk. "What can I do for you Senator?" he asks. "I'm sure that you know that I have a personal interest in the career of Toby Smith. He's my godchild. Besides that, he has the

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best interest of this country at heart." Hammond interrupts. "Assistant director of the C.I.A. carries a lot of power with it. Why shouldn't I put my own man in there?" Smiling, Daryl understands that now the bargaining has begun. "I know that you want the Seniors' Prescription Assistance package to pass. I can get you the votes that you need," he offers. "He seems inexperienced," the President holds out for more. "Five years in Special Ops-Military Intelligence, a field agent for the C.I.A. and served as a district supervisor of covert operations in the Middle East. I would hardly call that ..." then Daryl smiles, "... inexperienced?" The Senator laughs and waits for the other shoe to drop. The President obliges him. "I want a five percent increase in the Department of Education budget." Hands extended the two men shake. A deal has been struck.

In a more unlikely spot one could not have expected to find two Castle Keep. Toby Smith and Senator Daryl Morgan II are having lunch at a Union Station coffee shop in D.C. "Well ... how did it go?" Toby wonders aloud. "You are in," the older man assures him. "You know what you're to do once you're in place?" Nodding his head Toby answers, "Sharpen Gideon's Sword."

Meanwhile the Miami Herald is the first to break the story on the Senator Morgan's campaign contribution violations, and soon the Associated Press and United

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Press pick up on the story. It isn't long before Daryl is under pressure to resign. The surprise is from where the pressure comes. "I'm firmly entrenched in the political machinery, but the longer this thing drags out the more dirt that will cling to me," the youngest Morgan outlines the situation. "I could have been President," the father states in a matter-of-fact like fashion. "The peasants are at the castle gate. What shall you do my knight?" the son asks. "Protect the Castle Keep my lord, protect the Castle Keep ...," the father answers.

A week later the long time Senator, Daryl Morgan II, resigns quietly and retires to the family's Maine Estate to watch his son complete what he had started.

An irate General Hardtack bursts into Daryl Morgan III's office the day after the father resigns. "What the hell is going on?" he demands. Calmly the younger Morgan walks to the door to his office and closes it behind Hardtack. "My father threw himself on the sword for us. As I expect any knight to do," the young Mr. Morgan instructs the general. "What of Gideon's Sword?" he asks. "All is moving ahead as my father laid it out. We all simply need to be a little more patient and cautious," the newly elected Senator warns. "What of the assistance that I need?" the General is questioning everything at this point.

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"... in due time, my knight. Do not waver in your commitment to the cause, to the Castle Keep," young Daryl reminds Hardtack. The General softens in his demeanor. "Never my lord," he pledges.

The old have trouble trusting their fate to the hands of youth. Admiral Nelson and General Hardtack sit at a Washington eatery. "Do you think the young pup can pull it off?" Nelson asks. "Just because his father isn't here doesn't mean he would leave our fate in the boy's hands. I'm confident that Castle Keep will win out in the end," The old soldier reaffirms. The Admiral smiles. "Then we will wait and see." Nelson replies.

The players are in place. The game is afoot.

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Major pieces may bring the final victory, but often it is the placement of minor pieces that lay the ground work. A pawn is in place. Kevin Altair is now Diya al din Kharouf. This name is given to him by Toby Smith. The name is Arabic for faithful lamb. Little does the man realize that to the assistant CIA director he is little more than a sacrificial lamb. A second generation Arab American Diya wants more than anything to prove that he is a good American and that he belongs. The psychological profile that Toby reviews tells him that Diya will do anything to prove his allegiance to his country. The foul man who is the patriot's boss has no compunctions about using this to his benefit and to the benefit of Castle Keep.

Months earlier in the sterile white office of the assistant director of the CIA the nervous agent then Kevin Altair sits waiting for his boss. The agent should have known that he was being observed through the two way mirror-window, but he is totally oblivious to the fact. Senator Daryl Morgan III stands with Toby watching the unsuspecting agent. "Maybe someone as naive as he seems to be won't be able to pull this off," the Senator questions. "He's an American patriot. That's why he trusts the Agency. Make no mistake he is an excellent field agent and won't be as trusting of his Arab brothers," Toby reassures his Castle Keep brethren.

"In that case set things in motion," Daryl orders

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then turns to leave. As he goes he adds, "Keep me abreast of his progress."

The little used side door to Toby's office opens and Daryl leaves. Entering into the other part of his office Toby sees that his agent waits patiently. Kevin spots his boss and starts to stand up. Raising his hand Toby signals for him to remain seated, which he does. "Relax agent Diya." The agent is amused by his new name. "I haven't quite gotten use to being called the faithful lamb," he explains his amusement. A stern Toby scolds him. "If you don't quickly become accustomed to it you may not live to be called anything else." It's Kevin's turn to wear an icy mask. "I'm aware of that sir. I would never let my guard down in the field." Nodding his head in approval of his agent's reply the assistant director of the CIA answers him, "Glad to hear that." Making his way around his desk Toby sits down and stares over the desk at his pawn. "Have you read the file?" Succinct is the agent's answer. "Yes." Scratching his chin Toby continues. "The middle East is getting more and more volatile every day. We have to set in place a preemptive scenario," the man explains to his underling. "I understand sir, but even if I didn't it wouldn't stop me from doing my duty," Kevin assures him. The evil man smiles knowingly. He then gets up, reaches across the desk and shakes his agent's hand. "Good luck," the scoundrel wishes for the fool. Smiling with pride Kevin believes that the task he has been given will make his America a safer

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place. "Thank you sir," he answers.

A week after that meeting Kevin, now calling himself Diya, finds himself being jarred about in a vehicle. The road is dusty as he makes his way across the Iranian desert in a jeep. As he looks out across the seemingly endless desert he wonders is he being faithful to his country or betraying his "people?" Confidently he answers himself, "I am an American."

After a week of traveling across the desert and making sure he avoids all authorities Diya meets up with his Iranian contact Hashim. The two men get him acclimated then they move into one of the small villages of Iran. In typical Arab dress Diya makes his way through the marketplace of the town of Aban. His eyes meet the eyes of the daughter of the fruit merchant Samman. The daughter's name is Abir. Though her face is covered with a veil Diya is sure that she must be beautiful beneath it because of those shimmering brown eyes. In fluent Arabic Diya orders a variety of fruits from Abir. His contact and guide, Hashim, pulls him along. "There is much to do," the guide insists. As the two men walk hurriedly away Diya stares back at the fruit merchant's daughter. The crinkling of her eyes tells him that she is smiling.

Months pass and Diya becomes a part of the Aban community. His cover is that he is the son of a wealthy Arab American businessman, but he himself hates the West and what they have done to his Arab

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brothers around the world. Hashim, Diya and several Arab young men sit around Diya's bountiful table having dinner and sharing drinks. "My father has forgotten the ways of our people. The West has tainted him. I have come back to find myself and to help my people rid themselves of Western influence and thievery," Diya tries to convince the men of his sincerity. "It is easy to have high ideals when you are rich, but what do we stand to gain by standing against the Westerners?" Baghel, one of the Arab men, questions. "Take back control of this region and we, not the Westerners, will control the wealth from the oil," Diya answers Baghel. "There are Arab leaders who control their country's oil," Hashim counters. "Most of them are pawns of the Western businessmen. You can tell because the people under those regimes don't benefit from the great wealth that comes from the oil," Diya explains. "What do you have in mind?" Baghel asks. The double agent lays out his plans.

In the next few months the following of the "Prodigal Son" grows. To Arab men he is becoming known as the Western savior come home. Money his followers believe is coming from his rich father instead comes from Toby. The funds are used to buy weapons and to prepare for the war that he is intending to begin between the east and the west.

A year later Diya's following has grown to other Arab countries outside of Iran. Terrorist acts that

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are meant to put the fear of God in the west are being planned. "First our enemies close to home then our enemies who think that they are beyond our reach. Today begins a taking back of our rightful place in the world. We shall be the economic and spiritual leaders for all Arab people. Let the infidels be damned!" Diya curses all non-Arabs.

As the leader of the Abd al Jabbar, (*followers of the almighty*), it is difficult for Diya to get time away from his followers to contact Toby. In order to cover his tracks he begins courting Abir.

A knock on the door of Samman's home announces the beginning of the courtship. The door opens. The father appears in the doorway with a smile on his face. The wealthy American who is to be the savior of his people has chosen to court his daughter. The man beams with pride. "May Allah bless all who inhabit this home," Diya greets Samman. "Thank you. Come in," the father ushers the suitor inside. Face veiled Abir sits beside her mother, Zahirah, who just may be the most beautiful woman Diya has ever seen. Again Samman beams with pride when he sees the look of admiration for his wife's beauty that Diya wears. Quickly the suitor turns his attention back to the daughter. The four gather in the dining room for the evening.

Hours later Diya says his goodbyes, thanks them then leaves. Finally alone in the streets of Aban he makes

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his way to Hashim's new home. This is where he has stashed all of his communication equipment. Believing the West is the best chance his people have of freeing themselves from the tyranny of religious zealots Hashim aids Diya. The door opens and the agent is led into his co-conspirator's home.

Once Diya has insured that his communication line is secure he contacts the assistant director. "Yes sir. The line is secure," he assures Toby. "You're coming up on all the right warning screens as the terrorist to be watched. Now I want you to take it to the next level," he instructs. To confirm the parameters of his operation Diya questions, "Are friends expendable?" An evil Toby laughs. "Everyone is expendable. A few lives will be sacrificed to save many," Toby excuses his orders. "Contact me in three months. If I need to contact you sooner I will do it through Hashim," is Toby's last command. The two men break contact. Turning to Diya the Iranian-Hashim says, "Now it truly begins."

Peace is a tenuous thing in the Middle East, but some work hard trying to make it a permanent state of being.

One of the men working toward a lasting peace is the President Cheops of Egypt. The leader has taken a bold first step. This president is the first Middle Eastern leader to meet with the representatives of the Israeli government. A tentative peace agreement has been carved out. All parties are hopeful.

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Days later President Cheops returns home to Egypt. Sitting together in the presidential palace he and his wife, Femi, hold one another lovingly. "There are many right here in our own country who do not want this peace to come about," he warns. Smiling at her husband Femi tells him, "Those who do not embrace peace will be consumed by war." The husband wraps his arms around his wife and answers, "Some who embrace peace will be consumed by those who want war." A tear comes to Femi's eyes. "If that is the sacrifice we must make, so be it." Cheops kisses his wife. "My dear brave Femi ... Without your direction and support I would never have opened my eyes to the truth of war and peace." Tenderly she caresses his cheek then replies, "You give me too much credit my love."

Meanwhile devilment has began. One of the most secure airports in the world is the one at Tel Aviv, Israel. A specially trained security force watches and evaluates every passenger disembarking. The terrorist Hashim enters the airport. Being specially trained by the American CIA allows him to go unseen by even this security force. The terrorist passes through without objections.

Followers of Diya's movement have led him and a group of dissidents into the presidential palace in Egypt by way of a security tunnel. They only await the cover of night to proceed into the main chambers of the palace.

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Many miles away a coordinated effort is being led by Hashim. Along with many young Palestinian men he skulks through the streets of Jerusalem under the cover of darkness. They plant bombs in the Jewish market places, a Temple and a Jewish politician's home. The young men are full of glee, as if this were some game that they were playing instead of deadly and cruel acts of terror.

Out of the tunnels Gadiel, an Egyptian rebel, leads Diya into the bedroom where the President and his wife sleep. Icy cold Gadiel's blood runs as he points his gun toward the heads of Cheops then Femi, each in turn. Pulling the trigger twice he kills them both. The muffled sound of the silencer on the gun enables this assassin to do his dirty work without raising an alarm. The blind patriot Diya never thinks twice that these were people of peace and America's friends. Having been told that it is his duty to see that this act is carried out, so presently without regret, his duty has been done.

As a plane takes off from the Tev Aviv Airport the next morning Hashim can see the series of timed explosions from the air. With no hint of conscious he leans back and goes to sleep. Abd al Jabbar is quick to claim credit for these terrorist acts. The world shakes its collective heads in horror and in mourning for the loss of two champions of peace.

Many Arabs see these horrors as acts of bravery and patriotism and rally to Diya's cause. All are too

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blinded by hatred, prejudice and ignorance to see that they are being used. The rally call now is "Israel, America and then all of the western world shall bend to the will of Allah." It seems to have been forgotten by all of them that Islam means peace.

CHAPTER 18 THE FOX RULES THE HENHOUSE

What is the measure of a leader. In America we pick our leaders like we pick toothpaste, whatever brand the media sells us on we buy. The world is a different place in 1991. There are pornography channels on television, abortions are legal, war rages in almost every area of the globe, children are killing children in the streets of America and the run for U.S. president has began. Most are confident that the economic resurgence in America will assure another Democratic president, but Castle Keep has other plans.

The scuttlebutt going around Washington these days is that Democrats have taken the black vote for granted. Of course the source for these allegations is the opposition. This is an obvious attempt to split the party's vote.

Senator Daryl Morgan III and Senator Christy Sands are at opposite ends of the spectrum on almost any issue one may bring up. Despite this fact like his father before him a mutual sexual attraction and their desire to use one another politically keeps bringing the pair back together. As they lay together in bed he turns to her. "Our two parties aren't that different," he claims. Christy laughs. "If I believed that I would become an independent tomorrow," she assures him. Ignoring her skepticism Daryl continues his rehearsed diatribe, "Take affirmative action for instance. Your party talks the talk, but how many times have you had a non-male

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or non-white candidate on your presidential ticket? And you never will have a black candidate on that ticket. For both parties it's not so much about what you believe in as it is about winning. Now, tell me that I'm wrong," he dares her.

A seasoned politician should have been wary, but she knows that there is more than a touch of truth to his allegations. It is always first about a candidate who can win. Right or wrong, no one in the party believes that they can win with a black candidate on the ticket, at least not in the climate of racism that still exist today.

Later the same day the powerful political leader, Christy Sands, meets with other Democratic Party leaders. "I think that we have to make a stand this year. This year we are in the strongest position ever to challenge the Republicans on our terms. We need to consider running a minority candidate for vice president. If not now when?" she asks.

There is a snake among them. Representative Leonard Gross is a Castle Keep. As instructed he supports Christy's initiative. "I agree with Christy. There are no strong candidates on the horizon for the Republican Party in the upcoming election. If we find the right black candidate for vice President we can make a historical statement in this election."

The black Senator from Maryland, Archie Dawkins, shakes his head in disagreement. "These are dangerous

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times. As much as I would like to see a black candidate on the presidential ticket we can ill afford losing the presidency to the Republican Party right now." The others stare at Archie in disbelief. "Do you think there will ever be a time in American history where the world isn't a dangerous place, Archie?" Leonard challenges him. "I respect the position that you are taking, but at some point we have to trust in the judgment of the American people. We must believe that they will elect the best candidate regardless of the color of his skin ..." Christy interrupts Leonard, "... or their sex." They all laugh. "Yes ... or their sex," Leonard adds. Still, Archie shakes his head. He is politically savvy and knows that this is not that time.

At a D.C. eatery Toby and Daryl sit having lunch. "So how is it going?" Toby asks the Senator. "Before the end of the day I believe the Democrats will agree to commit political suicide and add a black candidate to their next presidential ticket," Daryl answers. "What about our man in the Middle East?" the Senator wonders. "He has started the chaos we sought overseas and will be coming home to us soon," Toby catches him up on Diya's status.

It is late December and the Democratic Party candidates have begun to declare themselves for the presidential election. Senator Clifford Manning of Iowa has separated himself from the field and is now

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the lead Democratic choice for President. Not only does he seem to have an insurmountable lead on his fellow Democrats he is well ahead of all of his expected Republican contenders in the straw polls. Despite this good news there is turmoil in the Democratic Party ranks. The rumors persist that there is going to be a black candidate on the presidential ticket and feelings run strong pro and con.

Several leading Senators and one governor have entered the presidential race on the Republican side. The Democrats look at the Republican contenders and become overconfident.

Later in the election season Democratic Party leaders, including Dawkins and Sands, gather for one last strategy meeting. "If we're going to do this I think we need to commit to it early in order to sell a black Vice Presidential candidate to the American people," Christy advises. "Do you people even have someone in mind or will any black face do?" Archie questions their judgment. "I have someone in mind. How about Reverend Thomas Goodman? He's a prominent and well respected national and international figure," Christy offers in response. Leonard smiles. "I think that we can sell the American people on him. The fact that he's a religious leader like Martin Luther King makes him less adversarial to many whites. Yes. I think he's our man." Gross tosses in his support. Still, Dawkins declares again

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his reservations, but agrees to go along with whatever the party decides.

Reporters from all of the major newspapers and some smaller papers have gathered for a news conference with the leading Democratic candidate, Clifford Manning. The candidate enters the room. The questions start almost immediately. "We keep hearing rumors that there will be something historical about your candidacy Senator, but nothing concrete." Mark Wallman tries to solicit the big secret from the Senator. "That's why you are here today. I would like you all to meet my running mate--the candidate for Vice President of the United States--Reverend Thomas Goodman." The black candidate enters the room to the stunned reaction of the press.

The die has been cast. The reaction is mixed, but strong on both sides as to a black Vice Presidential candidate. The "cons" cover their opposition to a black candidate by saying they object to this particular candidate because of lack of political experience, lack of national security experience or his religious affiliation. The "pros" haven't examined the weaknesses of this candidate as they should have. They are overzealous to see this historical step taken.

A week later another surprise news conference is held. The three-term Senator Daryl Morgan III announces that he will be a candidate for the Presidency. Some Republicans and Democrats are taken

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back by this surprise announcement. There is a scramble to rethink strategies.

Wearing an expression of exasperation Archie sits before the Democratic leaders who had put forth the black Vice Presidential initiative and frowns a knowing I-told-you-so. "This was their plan from the beginning. They waited for us to commit to a vulnerable ticket before they brought out their most viable candidate," he points out the obvious. "Then let's not let them make it about the Vice Presidency. Let's run our strong top of the ticket against their inexperienced top of the ticket and keep Goodman as much under wraps as we can," Christy lays out a sound strategy. Little does she know that Gross is taking this information back to Castle Keep. The strategy for Castle Keep will be to attack this strategy at the right moment.

With help from Castle Keep Daryl selects a Vice Presidential candidate with strong national security experience and many years in the senate, Senator Michael Torrence of New Mexico. The seasoned candidate immediately goes to the media demanding face-off debates between himself and Goodman.

In response to the Castle Keep's strategy the Democrats demand debates between the candidates for President of the United States while they continue to hide Goodman from the press as much as possible.

At the Democratic National Convention the fanfare is

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outrageous. There is more media coverage than ever before. There are civil rights groups from all over America there in support of Reverend Goodman. Racist groups gather in protest outside the convention hall. A few violent confrontations between the two groups are heavily covered in the media, but thanks to law enforcement these events don't really amount to much more than skirmishes.

It is now official. Reverend Thomas Goodman is the first African American candidate of either party for the office of Vice President of the United States.

There is no like interest in the Republican National Convention. The only controversy that arises there is when the media tries to drum up the story of Daryl Morgan II resigning because of campaign fund raising irregularities. The issue is one that no one seems to have any interest in , so it quickly fades from the press' agenda.

The young Daryl and other Republicans throw down the gauntlet. The Senator says that he will gladly debate Manning provided that the Democrats aren't afraid to allow their Vice Presidential candidate to debate Senator Torrence.

The first series of debates between the Presidential candidates is held. The inexperienced candidate, Daryl, doesn't fare very well against his seasoned opponent. The ticket of Manning and Goodman moves dramatically ahead in the polls.

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The Republicans and Castle Keep have the same agenda. The two groups have planned well. Confident that the veteran politician Torrence will stand head and shoulders above the political novice Goodman, they have asked for those debates to come late in the campaign season, so the victor will stick in the minds of the voters.

The debates between Goodman and Torrence are a disaster for the Democratic Party. The poll numbers for Goodman and Manning begin a downward spiral that increases after each debate.

Despite the race issue and the poor showings by Goodman, the Democratic ticket maintains a slim lead in the polls going into election eve. The Castle Keep has a lot vested in the outcome of this election so they aren't going to allow this opportunity to slip away. Senator Morgan meets with several Castle Keep members, some of whom head up state trooper organizations or are election supervisors in key swing states. A secret plan is made on how to deal with this upcoming election.

In three targeted swing states, where the vote is predicted to be close, minority voters meet with unexpected obstacles when trying to exercise their right to vote. State troopers are actually stopping and redirecting minority voters away from the polling places. Evelyn Singular, a black woman, manages to make it to the polls only to be told that her voter's registration isn't current and that she won't be allowed to vote. This scene repeats itself

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in numerous polling places in these swing states.

It is late into the evening after many of the polls have closed before the national media even begins to report on these irregularities and other problems related to voting machines.

Late into the next morning the final tally is still being made. Manning and Goodman have won the popular vote, but lost in the all-important electoral vote. The three states where the discrepancies occurred were pivotal in the Democratic loss. There is talk of lawsuits and recounts but in the end the results stands. Castle Keep is once again in control of the White House.

It is the first day after the inauguration of Daryl Morgan III. The new President sits behind his desk. This evil man fully understands the power of the position he holds. He looks around the Oval Office and smiles an evil smirk. "Today America, tomorrow the world," he thinks.

A flea is about to attack an elephant. Approximately twelve hundred miles from D.C. in the classroom of Dennis Walls a campaign to start a protest movement has begun. This movement's purpose is to undermine Daryl's presidency. "Carrie ... how many fraternities and sororities have you been able to get to commit to joining us?" Dennis asks. "All six of the major fraternities on campus are going to join our protest movement. In addition they are seeking commitments from the nationals to join us too," she informs the teacher. Almost laughingly Dennis looks at the student biker, Michael Hands. The instructor knows all too well that it is difficult enough to get Michael to hand in a required assignment on time. The young man seems to care about nothing save his motorcycle. "Michael ... what are you willing to do?" Dennis asks. "This is all voluntary right?" Michael asks. "That's right," Dennis assures him. "No bribe of a better grade? No threat of a worse grade?" The biker wants to know if he is being coerced. "Right again. All you will get out of this is the knowledge that you are trying to make a difference," he instructs the biker. " then

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I'm in. Which means over ten thousand bikers around this country will be in," he promises. A surprised Dennis grins from ear to ear. The flea is becoming a dangerous swarm.

A week later outside of the White House the new President and his staff see a horde of student protesters and a throng of bikers with protest signs. The different signs read everything from "We didn't elect you " to " Your Gestapo stopped us from voting." The gathering of leaders in the White House are amused by the protesters. "Give the public a week and these flakes will be forgotten," Daryl promises.

A week goes by, but instead of being forgotten the number of protesters and locations for protests grows. This is the least of Daryl and Castle Keep's problems. The editor of the Miami Herald has given Mark Wallman an editorial column. From this platform Mark blasts the inequities of the last election and points out every failing of the present administration. This Castle Keep presidency is lower in popularity in the public polls than any presidency in history. Because of the low poll numbers the Democrats and some Republicans are quick to speak out against this President.

Assistant director for the CIA, Toby Smith, sits across the desk in the Oval Office from the President. A copy of the Miami Herald flies across the desk and hits Toby aside his head. "What the hell

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is going on? How did we allow a non-Castle Keep to own a newspaper as powerful as this?" Daryl demands. Flustered Toby answers, "Castle Keep has its rivals. We've done everything we can to acquire control of all media sources, but this is still a democracy ... for the moment." Shaking his head Daryl orders, "Sharpen Gideon's Sword!"

In the city of Miami Mark exits his newspaper's office building. The exhausted man crosses the street toward the paper's parking lot when two men who are crossing from the other side attack Mark. The first man knocks him to the ground then begins kicking him right there in the middle of the street. Then the second man stands over Mark demanding, "Give me your wallet!" As the newsman reaches inside his coat for his wallet the second man pulls out a gun. A shot is fired. The second man falls to the ground next to Mark. The attacker is wounded and drops his gun. "Get your ass on the ground!" Sue yells from across the street. The first attacker sees that Sue has a gun aimed at him. The coward jumps to the ground. Getting up slowly Mark takes out a cell phone then dials 911. By now Sue has made it across the street and stands next to her lover and co- worker. Turning to Sue he smiles and says, "Thank you. I don't think that they were truly after my wallet." The woman smiles at Mark lovingly then answers, "You can thank me properly later."

Across town in their comfortable condo Kathy leans

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over Calvin's shoulder and wraps her arms around his neck. Turning his head towards her, she smiles, kisses him on the cheek then asks, "What are you up to Mr. Watts?" Typing at a frenzied pace Calvin answers her, "My small contribution to bringing down Castle Keep." Laughing, Kathy inquires further, "You have my interest piqued. Exactly what do you have in mind?" A large blazing bird icon appears on the screen of Calvin's computer. "I've created this untraceable software that will email my electronic newspaper to any email address on the Net. I call it The Phoenix." Kathy decides to tease Calvin. "So, we have another reporter in the family?" Calvin shakes his head. "very funny ... hardly, my paper is strictly editorials."

In CIA headquarters Barns, a desk agent, knocks on Toby's office door. "Come in." Toby calls out. The desk agent enters wearing a frown. "I have something I think you need to see sir," the agent informs his boss. "I'm kind of busy. Can this wait?" Toby asks. The agent is persistent. "We have an Internet conspiracy tabloid paper that is able to access even secured email addresses. It accuses the President of conspiring with the state police to prevent citizens from voting in the last election ... and worse."

The assistant director is only annoyed at that moment. "When Gideon's Sword is implemented these many nuisances will cease," Toby assures himself as he turns on his computer. He reads the message of

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the Phoenix

"Your President belongs to a secret society known as Castle Keep ...!" An enraged Toby knocks a family photo from his desk. Face up on the floor featured In the photograph is his younger sister, Donna Smith.

A grumbling goes through the halls of Congress over all of the information being disseminated by The Phoenix and other media.

Because of the bad press all of the Gideon' Sword-related legislature that Daryl is sending to Congress is being met with opposition on both sides. Other legislature is being viewed with suspicion.

A secret meeting of the Democratic leadership includes Christy Sands. This woman dares to ask what the others are thinking, "Do you think the stories are true?" Dawkins answers, "If you're asking me do I believe that the President belongs to some secretive elitist order, I would say almost definitely yes. If you're asking me if I think that this is something that should concern us, I would say no," Again Christy can barely believe the man. "This time I think that you're the one who's being naive. Have you truly dissected his Homeland Security Act or some of the other security related Bills he's tried to get passed?" she pushes her colleague to be more thorough. "The man is paranoid. That may be a good thing in a President. Besides, I

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just can't see someone with his family history being the threat to democracy that you and this so called Phoenix seem to want to paint him to be. In any case this expose' has clipped the eagle's claws. His own party is suspect of his actions," Dawkins further makes light of the threat.

In the secret chamber of the White House, leaders of Castle Keep gather. The Crown Pedestal glares at Toby. "Are you my head of security or not?" he demands. "Yes I am," Toby replies. "Then find The Phoenix and put him out of business. Also quiet these reporters who are stirring up resentment against me. Push our other plan ahead. Give the public something else to worry about besides how I was elected," he orders.

A week later the assistant director for the CIA has made no progress in finding the Phoenix. "This person behind The Phoenix is an encryption genius. We can't track down the program or prevent it from invading other programs," Toby explains. "I don't want excuses I want action. Action! Damn it!" the President demands. "Whatever you wish my lord." Toby turns and leaves. The President sits thinking back over the last few months and wonders where he had lost control of things.

In Okai a contented Elaine lays in Dennis' arms. Rolling over she kisses his lips. Without a thought Dennis stares into her eyes and says, "I love you." Pulling away from her lover Elaine sits up in bed.

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"Don't say that." He sits up and turns Elaine to face him. "I'm going to say it again and again unless you tell me that you don't feel the same." Half a smile escapes her lips. "I don't have the right to say that," she answers. "After all of the pain that you've known in your life you are more entitled than most to love someone and to have someone love you in return," he assures her. "You don't know what would happen if I left him" A cryptic warning she offers. "We would be happy, nothing more, nothing less," Dennis promises. "We are the Crowns Pedestal. One doesn't turn your back on that without paying a severe penalty," she again warns. "With the information that you give me we will put an end to Daryl's presidency and Castle Keep," her sweetheart promises. "I wish I could believe that. I truly do," a doubtful Elaine replies.

CHAPTER 20 SCANDALS

It's Toby's job to take care of the Crown's Pedestal above all else. After a lot of forethought he decides the best way to do that is to sacrifice some of the followers of Castle Keep. Their sacrifice can divert attention away from the last election, the rumors and innuendos that have arisen from the media and the Phoenix.

On the surface it seems a bull market on Wall Street, but behind the scenes Castle Keep has been up to much mischief and the market is very vulnerable. All it needs is a little push.

It has been months since Mark Wallman has been to Manhattan. The cold weather and even colder people make him reticent to venture here unless he must. The reporter wonders why it is that informers never invite him to some classy restaurant in the Bahamas to spill their guts. As he enters the 41st Street bus station coffee shop he looks around for a man wearing a Boston Red Sox baseball cap.

In a corner booth Mark spots a thirty something black man wearing the cap he seeks. The black man, Donald Henderson, waves to him signaling for the reporter to join him. Mark makes his way across the shop to the booth then sits down. "A Red Sox fan ...? I thought they were a dying breed," Mark kids to break the tension. With a serious expression on his face Donald answers, "Naw. I just figured you weren't likely to find any Red Sox fans in this coffee shop."

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The two men sit there silently for a moment. It is Mark who breaks the silence. "What do I call you?" he asks. "You can call me by my name, Donald Henderson. I'm not the criminal around here. My bosses at Communika, Inc. are the ones," he assures the reporter. "Can you backup that accusation with proof? That kind of accusation can bring lawsuits with it," Mark warns. "Look, if you're just another puppet for big business then I've chosen the wrong person to tell my story." The informer starts to get up. Mark grabs him by his wrist. "You chose me because you've read my stories and you know that I'm no one's lackey. That said, you are still going to have to prove to me that you have the real goods. I'm not going to jeopardize my reputation, my job or create legal problems for my paper just on your say so," the reporter lays down the rules.

Little does Mark know that Donald is a paid agent of Castle Keep. The information is real. Someone high up is intended to fall. The fallout will take pressure off of Daryl, so that they can implement the next stage of Gideon's Sword.

Not taking any chances, Toby has planted whistle blowers seemingly everywhere. Also in New York, across town from Mark's meeting, Kathy Harris Watts meets someone in an upscale establishment, The Rock n' City Cafe. Her story involves one of the largest companies in the world. The accusations range from illegal campaign donations to both Democrats and

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Republicans, to stock fraud and other criminal activities by the members of the company's executive board.

The female reporter walks through the bar looking down at each table in search of a children's book, "Saving Mr. Watson." Finally the reporter sees a woman who looks totally out of place in a bar at ten in the morning. She walks over to the woman and looks down. Staring back up at her is the children's book she seeks. "Melissa?" Kathy asks. "What's your name?" the stranger asks. "I'm Kathy Harris Watts of the Miami Herald." The nervous woman smiles, relieved that the person she has waited for is finally here. "Yes. I'm Melissa ... Melissa Cartwright," she answers.

Though it is unusual for either woman to have a drink this early in the day both order drinks. "I never drink this time of the morning, but if I don't have something I may lose my courage," Melissa performs her role well. After a few drinks the whistle blower begins weaving a tale of political corruption, fraudulent book keeping and much-much more. The most dramatic accusation is that this highly regarded company is little more than smoke and mirrors. No real business has been done since the company's conception. Only planning of projects and the collecting of more and more of investors' money has occupied their agenda.

The public has been sold on the concept that great

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ideas will result from the collection of great business minds assembled by this company. Multiple sets of books create the illusion that business is being done when actually the company is paying itself for consultation on the so-called planned projects, creating an illusion of money being earned. Donations to powerful politicians have kept the Federal Trade Commission and IRS at bay.

As Kathy jots down the names she is struck by how few Castle Keep are mentioned and how many Democrats and middle-of-the-road Republicans appear on this list. The reporter should have heeded the warning bells, but she is trying to be an objective journalist. The information she is given will devastate Multi-Task Inc. and end many a political career.

In Los Angeles, the third of the "Pencil Warriors," as Bradley Avril calls his three best reporters - Sue Nichols meets in a modest mid-Wilshire Cafe with Kenny Barrett, the former assistant to film producer Claire Long. It is his job to accuse his boss of making most of her investment decisions with the benefit of insider information. The scandals follow one after another in the media. Soon the protest against President Morgan takes a back seat to the many corporate scandals.

Communica, Inc. and Multi-Tasks Inc. both are already on shaky ground before the stories come out about their illegal business practices. Afterwards

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the bottom falls out. Of course the Castle Keep investors manage to get out of their investments before the worst of it. The producer Claire Long is surprised that she receives almost as much backlash as the executives of the other targeted companies. There is no way she expected that she would be brought up on charges for what she did. "Everyone does it," she tells herself.

Like a child's ball Toby is bouncing all around in an attempt to keep the fires he has started under control. A nervous Donald Henderson meets with Toby on the New York side of Niagara Falls. The spray from the Falls is almost as annoying to Toby as having to make this trip. He feigns a smile as he nears Donald. "Mr. Henderson. I thought our business was concluded," Toby tells the man. "You never said anything about me having to testify in court!" The man is angry. "We paid you five million dollars. Did you think that was for your good looks?" Toby answers sarcastically. "You promised me that I would be protected," a scared Henderson reminds him. "You know who I am, don't you?" Toby asks. "Yes," the stool pigeon replies. "Then why are we having this conversation?" Toby wonders. "I'm sorry Mr. Smith. It all seemed to blow up bigger than I ever expected and I found myself in the eye of the storm. I got nervous. I'm alright now," Donald assures him. "You don't need any extra compensation or anything like that?" Henderson shakes his head vigorously. "No sir. I would never try to hold you up for more money

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I'm fine now," he pleads his case, frightened of Toby.

There are two more similar meetings with Melissa and Kenny.

A tired Toby Smith finally sets down at LAX. He makes his way through the airport terminal. There he spots a friendly face. Claire Long is there to meet him. Her driver walks over to Toby and takes his bags. The movie producer wraps her arms around Toby's neck and kisses him on the cheek. Whispering in his ear she asks, "You bastards aren't going to hang me out to dry are you?" Laughing Toby answers, "Not if we can help it my dear. Not if we can help it."

CHAPTER 21 A BLIND EYE

Border security in the Middle Eastern countries has been beefed up. Despite this fact Hashim, Diya and their Iranian followers are able to exit Iran. More difficult is Gadiel and his followers' exit from Egypt, but they do manage. Baghel, who has been leading the cause of the Pakistani rebels, has also been charged to leave Pakistan with some of his followers.

Seemingly undetected, these three groups arrive in America, having little difficulty making it through international security check points.

In Manhattan's Greenwich Village Diya and Hashim's group set up their terror network. A small town called Hawksville, just outside of Atlanta, finds that Middle Easterners have come to town in the form of Gadiel and his group. The last of the terrorists, led by Baghel, sets up their network in a town called Flagstaff, outside of Phoenix, Arizona. With money supplied to them by Toby, they open businesses to establish themselves in their communities.

Agent Diya needs to complete his cover so he writes Samman requesting permission for Abir to come to America and be his wife. Instead of responding to Diya's letter Samman sends his daughter to America.

Among all of the conspiracies there is one happy event. Samman and Zahirah come to America for the wedding of their daughter to the man they know as Diya al din Kharouf.

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Many of the Abd al Jabbar members in the United States attend the ceremony between Diya and Abir. Thanks to Toby no law enforcement people are spying on this gathering. The wedding is a beautiful blending of an Islamic ceremony and a western ceremony. Shortly after the wedding, to the disappointment of Abir, her parents return home to Iran. Except for her husband Abir is now alone in a strange land. Maybe it is this isolation that causes the newlywed to be suspicious of her husband's activities. The wife notices that intermittently her husband makes his way down into their basement. Though she knows that he is alone down there she can hear him talking to someone.

Curiosity gets the best of her and she creeps to a vent that connects to the basement and eavesdrops upon her husband, a very non-Eastern way for a wife to behave.

"We're ready to begin training," Diya informs Toby over the secured line. "I don't want to hear from you again until after the target is destroyed," Abir hears Toby instruct her husband. The woman doesn't know what to make of these secret communications, but she is fearful.

As Toby walks down the hallways of the Capitol building he's approached by the director of the FBI, Lawrence Benton. "Smith ... Smith." Toby stops and faces Larry. "How are you doing Larry?" he asks. "... just fine. Look. I just finished talking with the

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president and he sent me to you. I'm getting the red light from local law enforcement around the country. They say some Abd al Jabbar have set up house in their jurisdictions and they want to know do we want them to work with us on this. What's going on?" he asks. "We have a very sensitive situation. We have a double agent inside the organization who is going to help us round up the whole lot, so what we need you and the locals to do is to give these people a wide berth ... for now," Toby requests. Larry looks at him in disbelief. "I promise that we know their every move," he assures the FBI director. "If this thing goes sour I'm pointing my finger directly at you and the President," Benton warns. Toby nods his head in agreement. "I understand. It won't," Toby promises.

It's a warm beautiful Spring day when Diya takes Abir out to a local air strip. A frightened Abir pulls away from her husband laughing. "No Diya," she protests. "I do not want to learn to fly," she insists. "You are in America. You must open yourself to learning and experiencing new things," he instructs her. Gently he tugs at her arm. Moe Jackson sees the couple and walks toward them laughing. "I promise you in two weeks time she will be running to get into the air. There isn't anything that matches the thrill of flying," the longtime pilot assures the couple.

Innocent in appearance, this scene is being repeated

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among the Abd al Jabbar followers at different small airports around the country. In the Arizona desert another part of the plan is being set into motion. There are abandoned shacks all along the Arizona desert outside of Flagstaff. Baghel and his group have purchased stolen munitions and are training in the making of bombs in the abandoned shacks.

Unbeknownst to the terrorist members the men who are training them are CIA agents, not mercenaries as they have been told.

In Georgia Bubba and Terry Hanson sneak up onto one of the properties that Gadiel has purchased. They spy on the man and his followers as they train with automatic weapons. Bubba turns to Terry. "We should tell somebody. Ain't no tellin' what dem A-rabs are up to," he warns. While the two men talk Gadiel has managed to move around behind them. Terry shakes his head in disagreement. "I don't really give a damn what dey's up to. You and I and most of this town was near to starving til dey come to town. Dey opened back up the restaurant, the bar, the discount store and the super mart, just to name a few. Now most of us are working for the first time in two years. We ain't gonna do nothin' to jeopardize dat," Terry insists. The two men slip quietly away. Neither man realizes how close they had come to dying.

The evil Gadiel was standing behind them the whole time listening to their conversation. If they had

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decided to betray him and his men the assassin would have happily killed them both.

The city of New York is almost overwhelming to the shy Abir. The many people rushing by at a blistering pace, the deafening sounds, the bright lights and the wide array of peculiar people are beyond anything the woman had imagined. She and Diya are finally doing some of the touristy things, shopping, seeing shows and visiting the Statue of Liberty.

Abir is awestruck when she looks up at the magnificent lady who reigns over the New York harbor. "This is a great country my husband," she acclaims her adoration. Reflecting back on growing up in America, remembering the good and the bad of it, Diya nods in agreement. "Yes it is my wife. Yes it is."

A year has passed since Abir first came to America. She has taken to Western ways and feels much more at home now. Despite becoming accustomed to her new home she is still thrilled whenever she visits the lady of the harbor. Parents and children shop for souvenirs, eat an inordinate amount of junk food and get lost in the majesty of Lady Liberty. A hopeful Abir looks at the smiling faces of the children. Turning to Diya she says, "Soon ...!" He doesn't answer. Diya simply smiles.

There are scorpions slithering around unnoticed. Gadiel, Hashim, Baghel and the others mill among the

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crowd. Missing are the men from Diya's immediate cell of the organization. An ever vigilant Diya spots those who are there. He watches as they set their bombs around the island. The wife notices her husband watching her countrymen and wonder what is going on. Above their heads three small planes circle the island. The children stare up at the planes in awe. Most believe the planes are part of some sort of air show. Turning to Abir the husband says, "I'm tired. Let's call it a day." A suspicious Abir begs of him, "What are you going to do Diya?" Insistently he drags her along toward the ferry. "I don't know what you mean," he answers innocently. Looking around her Abir is now aware that all of her countrymen are moving toward the ferry as quickly as her husband is pulling at her. Tears fill her eyes. "Don't do this thing Diya. There are children here for God's sake!" she pleads. The man continues to drag his wife until they are finally boarding the ferry.

The last of the terrorist on shore, Baghel, takes out a flare gun and fires a shot into the air. People ohh and ahh when they see the red flames of the flare shoot through the sky. The ferry pulls away from the dock just as Baghel leaps aboard. The planes circle in smaller and smaller circles around the monument. The first of the bombs explode. Panic grips the crowd. People begin to scatter in many different directions. Children are separated from their parents. Parents cry out their children's name

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In the rush some people are knocked to the ground. Fear grips the crowd. The fallen are crunched under the herding crowd. The bombs begin to explode one after another. Concrete, wood, metal and even people are being tossed through the air by the power of the explosions.

Staring back at the island from the ferry Abir's face is a mask of horror and disbelief. She knows that her husband is responsible for these terrible acts. Then it happens, the first plane crashes into the monument itself. A section of Lady Liberty is sheared away like hair by a barber. Some on the ground freeze as they watch the horrific sight of people falling to the ground from the wreckage of the monument. To everyone's astonishment the second plane slams into the monument, then the third. The lady topples over - half of her on the island the other half below the harbor waters. The bellowing smoke, the raging fires, scattered bodies and debris tell the tale better than any words can speak it.

The island becomes ever smaller from the deck of the ferry, but the carnage is still evident even from this vantage point. Abir glares at her husband in disgust. "For our people," the double agent lies. The gentle woman pulls her hand from his and walks away. Having watched the whole scene play out Gadiel is wary. The assassin walks over to Diya. "Is she with us or against us?" he asks. "She is my wife," Diya answers. Still Gadiel nods his head toward one

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of his men, signaling for the man to keep an eye on Abir.

That night, in the home of Abir and Diya, the wife and husband watch the evening news together. Again and again the horror of this afternoon plays out. The wife can stand no more. She goes upstairs to their bedroom, closes then locks the door behind herself.

Down to the basement Diya makes his way. "I'm watching my TV now," Toby tells Diya. "You did a great job, but now I need you and as many of the others as you can contact to get out of the country tonight," he instructs his underling. "When can I come home?" Diya asks. "Hashim will let you know when it is safe," the assistant director of the CIA informs his agent.

There is a barrier between Abir and Diya that he fears may never be bridged again. He asks her to come with him back to Iran. His wife refuses. Abir tells her husband that she needs time to think about all that has come to pass.

Following orders Diya contacts the others, makes the necessary arrangements and leaves. Reticently he leaves Abir behind.

Just like the FBI, the CIA has turned a blind eye to Diya and his men. Americans are oblivious to their President's involvement in the plot he will now call

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out as repugnant. Even those who stand against
Castle Keep fail to make the connection.

CHAPTER 22 A SIGH OF RELIEF

One cannot begin to measure the horror and outrage of the American people over the "Liberty Incident"--as it is called. There is an outcry for revenge that rings throughout the nation. How dare anyone attack Americans on American soil! President Morgan holds an emergency State of the Union Address. "Dear American people. I know that like myself and my family you are appalled over and grieve the loss of American lives that occurred today. Like me I know that you are outraged that an American symbol of peace has been brought low by these cowardly despots. This you should know also ... I will not rest until all of the parties involved in this incident are brought to justice!" his speech is repeatedly shown.

To America's shame the villain almost immediately jumps in his popularity in the polls.

Mere days after the incident celebrities, dignitaries and leading business persons are exiting private and commercial flights at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. They are making their way to the Morgan Estate for a special meeting of Castle Keep.

The Morgan and Hancock families are dressed in purple. Claire Long and executives from Communika, Inc. and Multi-Tasks, Inc. are dressed in blue. The President stands before the assembled members and begins, "The peasants are at the castle gate ..."
After all the protocol has been fulfilled Claire Long

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stands up. The leader of Castle Keep acknowledges her. She speaks, "My lord the peasants truly were at the castle gate. Thank you for ending the siege." The Castle Keep all laugh rambunctiously. The gathering becomes a celebration.

The business of Castle Keep is in full gear after the attack upon the Statue of Liberty. A familiar face is seen in the hallways of the White House. Daryl Morgan II heads toward the Oval Office. He and his son have a lunch date. The two men intend to iron out the last details of the plan to direct the public's attention to the need for a heightened vigilance against terrorists. The form of this vigilance shall be "The Homeland Security Act."

The father and son make their way to a secure location, where their conversations won't be recorded or overheard. "Tell Toby what his man must do for us. Insure him that his sacrifice will be duly rewarded at a later date," the father instructs the son.

Even if their conversations had been overheard by someone the message is so cryptic no outsider could have made any sense of it.

The next day in the White House garden the President meets with the assistant director of the CIA. "Diya must put himself in a position to be captured. He must then implicate the Iranian leader in the attacks upon the Statue of Liberty," Daryl instructs

A SIGH OF RELIEF

Toby. "It's as good as done," Toby assures him.

With his jump in popularity suddenly Daryl is no longer a "lame duck" President. When a popular President comes to your office and asks for your ear you know it amounts to an order. Daryl Morgan III is as discreet as a President can be when he meets with the U.S. Attorney General, Neely MacNamara. "Good morning Attorney General MacNamara," the President surprises the man. Neely jumps to his feet. "Good morning Mr. President." "I hope I'm not catching you at a bad time," Daryl feigns concern. The Attorney General points to the piles of paperwork upon his desk. "As you know there's no such thing as a good time, but I always have time for the President," he assures Daryl.

The two men converse for hours about what is a priority for the American people. The President tries to convince Neely that the corporate matters are taking attention away from America's fight on drugs and its new fight against terrorism. The astute man listens without speaking; in the end the gist of Daryl's talk is for the attorney general to work out deals in the corporate matters.

As the President leaves he is annoyed that Neely hasn't committed to working with him on this matter. Walking down the Capitol building hallways Daryl makes up his mind at that point that if he has to then he will simply pardon the Castle Keep members.

A SIGH OF RELIEF

The plot thickens as a staged event unfurls, serving to push Daryl even further ahead in the popularity polls. Newspapers and wire services around the world report the capture of the leader of Abd al Jabbar. In a news conference before the nation the President congratulates the U.S. special forces for their covert action in Iran which led to the capture of the terrorist leader. He also assures the American people that any persons or countries that were involved in the incident shall feel the full wrath of America.

This story dominates the news coverage. There is barely a mention of any of the principal characters involved in the business scandals that have rocked the American economy. Castle Keep all sigh a collective sigh of relief.

CHAPTER 23 AMERICA GOES TO WAR

In an isolated area in rural Virginia the interrogation of Diya al din Kharouf continues. The hot lights beat down upon this tired man. Sweat pours from his forehead. A constant barrage of questions doesn't leave Diya even a moment to rest and collect his thoughts. There is no need to feel an iota of sympathy for this double agent. This is all an act on his part. Once he has lulled his captors into believing he has been beaten into submission he will then tell them what he has been instructed to say. What they all want most to hear.

On the other side of the two way mirror/window a second fiend, Toby, stands with his subordinate, Terry Davis. "He'll never break," Terry warns. "He'll break. One way or another, he will break," Toby threatens, playing out his role.

The interrogators find that somehow the man has been able to build up an immunity to the drugs that they use to extract information. The game goes on, but only for as long as Diya feels it is necessary to convince his captors he has been broken. After a week of torture and only being allowed to sleep three hours a day and being given barely enough food and water to survive, one can see pleading in Diya's eyes. He should have been given an "Oscar" for his performance. "Tell us what we want to know then you can rest and eat," Terry promises. The false confession begins, "Abd al Jabbar is partially funded by the Iranian government. They provide us

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with sanctuary from our enemies." False documentation has been created to support some of Diya's lies. "The Iranian dictator, Abdul Ammar, met with me in person. I told him of our plans to attack the Statue of Liberty. He praised my boldness and pledged any financial support I might need to achieve my goal," the lies continue.

All of the faces in the interrogation room light up. No one cares if he is telling the truth or not. The fact that he is willing to implicate the man America most hates is enough for all gathered. A close scrutiny of the evidence would have revealed him for the liar that he is. The time schedule that he gave for these so called meetings coincided with periods when he was under surveillance by the CIA on American soil, but no one here has any desire to disprove his claims.

A few days later at the United Nations Building in New York all are abuzz with rumors about why the President of the United States has requested this special session. The meeting hall for the U.N. delegates is filled to capacity. Not a single member is absent as the President of the United States stands to plead his case for military action against Iran. "It was a sad day when over 3,000 Americans and thousands of visiting guests to our country were murdered by heartless, cowardly terrorists. What is more unthinkable is that a world leader had a part in this horrific act. If he is arrogant enough to

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take this kind of action against a super power, what acts of terrorism are to follow? We must act unilaterally to let him know that these types of acts will not go unanswered." As Daryl ends his speech many of the delegates to the U.N. stand up and applaud. Others watch, unswayed.

A vote is taken. In the end the membership of the U.N. are not persuaded by the non-corroborated testimony of one terrorist. Daryl pledges that America will tend to its own security with or without the international community. Arab voices are raised in protest, but the sound goes unheard by Daryl Morgan III or the American people.

In the presidential limo headed back to the White House, Toby speaks to the President. "I was so sure that they would have to go along with you sir." The experienced leader answers, "I knew that they wouldn't. It was just a formality I have to go through before taking my case to the Congress and then to the American people." A puzzled Toby questions, "Why would the Congress turn you down?" The President admits that the U.N. members are right, that there isn't enough evidence to act on, but he also knows that the American people won't care. Someone must pay for this act of violence upon our house. That they will demand.

Conferring with Senators and representatives of both parties, Daryl finds that the consensus is that they should wait for the support of their international

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allies. Waiting doesn't fit in with this villain's plans.

The President calls for another State of the Union address, but in truth this will be a Gideon's Sword address. "America ... we have been the victim of a foul and cowardly act. I sought the assistance of the international community, but no one wants to be the next target of these hooligans. I sought the support of the Congress, but they aren't as outraged as I am that a foreign dictator assisted in an attack upon Americans on American soil. It is up to you America. You must demand of your representatives that someone be held accountable for these acts. You must demand that America protect America. It is unpatriotic not to do so ...," he accuses.

There is quite a reaction from members of Congress to the inflammatory accusation that to not follow the President's lead into war is unpatriotic. Unfortunately, calmer heads do not prevail. The American public once more is hoodwinked by Daryl's shenanigans. Polls show that Americans are demanding that someone, anyone be held accountable, even if that means war. The politicians succumb to public pressure and send American youth off to die in a foreign land once more.

The news media covers the war in Iran. The bombs are a constant reminder to the world of the awesome wrath of the American people. Dust and debris create huge clouds which blight out the sun during

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the day. The burst of explosions from a barrage of bombs light the Iranian sky at night. The hulking juggernauts of American Army tanks trudge through the streets of its cities. Iranian civilians and soldiers alike cringe in fear from the onslaught. The once boastful leadership is now in hiding, hopeful that the international community will intercede. No help is forthcoming.

Of particular interest to the news media is showing American youth being ambushed by those proclaiming themselves to be Iranian freedom fighters. As this President watches the evening news he knows that this will bring about a double reward. No one is watching what happens in the Castle Keep trials and secondly the deaths of American youth will make it easier to pass his Homeland Security Act and finally implement Gideon's Sword.

America goes to war seeking revenge, only to open herself up to the manipulations of evil men and true terrorism.

CHAPTER 24 FRIENDSHIPS END

In these trying times two have ignored the perils of their personal choices to continue their very dangerous relationship. Outside of Dennis' home secret service men are parked. They are there to protect the First Lady. By now Daryl and Elaine are aware of each other's indiscretions and have chosen to live separate private lives while setting forth a very different public image.

The sheriff of Okai, Gary Washington, notices the strange vehicles parked outside his friend's home. He parks behind the first vehicle and exits his car. One of the Secret Service men exits his car. "Stop right there!" Gary orders. Slowly the man reaches inside his jacket. "I'm taking out my ID," agent Josh Taylor informs Gary. Flashing his Secret Service badge and ID card the agent hopes to appease the local sheriff. Although he is still confused Gary is more at ease, but still wonders what the hell the Secret Service is doing in his town.

At that moment the front door to Dennis' home opens. You could have knocked Gary over with a feather when he sees the First Lady exit. "What the hell is going on?" an excited Gary demands. Everyone looks at him like children caught with their hands in the cookie jar. His friend then exits and sees Gary. The expression on Dennis' face tells all. How many times had Gary seen Dennis in love before and wearing the same goofy expression he wears now throughout the life of those relationships. Not knowing who he is

FRIENDSHIPS END

Elaine hurries pass the sheriff and gets into the first car. Agent Josh climbs into the vehicle with the First Lady and they drive away followed by the second car.

An angry Gary walks toward his friend with a scowl upon his face. "Have you lost your mind? That was the First Lady of these United States. You damned fool! You are having an affair with the wife of the most powerful man in the world," he chastises his friend. "I'm not going to talk with you about this," Dennis assures his friend. "Don't you think that it's kind of like betraying your country?" Gary accuses. Laughing Dennis enters his home and closes the door in his friend's face.

The two Okai friends had gotten into the habit of having lunch together at least twice a week. It has been two weeks since the "First Lady Incident" and neither has made any effort to contact the other. As Gary drives toward the college he thinks to himself, "She's just another piece of tail. Why am I getting all crazy about this? First Lady ... First Ho is what she is."

One can hear a pin drop in Dennis' classroom. It isn't often that the teacher gets angry, but today it is evident from his tone and dialog that someone or something has hit a nerve. "You and other young people are being sent off to die for no apparent reason. The only proof that has been presented so far is the testimony of an admitted terrorist. The

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man is also someone who underwent interrogation under somewhat questionable circumstances, to say the least. I'm not a father, but I know that before anyone could ask me to sacrifice my child's life they had damned sure better give me absolute proof of the validity of their cause!" he screams. "Yeah!" some enthusiastic students answer.

Standing just outside the door to Dennis' classroom Gary listens to the anti-war rhetoric. Disappointed the politically naive friend wonders if this man is the friend he had grown up with at all.

Just as Gary turns to leave the lecture ends and Dennis spots him. "Gary!" the friend calls out. The sheriff stops and turns to his friend. Walking over to his friend Dennis asks, "You weren't about to leave were you?" Shaking his head in denial the man lies, "Of course not. I was just going to get something from my car."

There is an icy silence that settles between these two old friends as they share a luncheon date. Finally Dennis speaks up. "I love her. She loves me. Her marriage is a public facade for the benefit of her husband's political career." It has been explained. Now the friend hopes to put the uneasiness to rest. Gary laughs. "I'm not bothered by your little affair. I admit that at first I had a problem with it. First Lady or no First Lady she's just a woman and women cheat." His resentment of women is made apparent. "Then what's the problem?"

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Dennis asks. "We're Americans. We owe our country some allegiance, right or wrong," Gary states his naive political philosophy. "No we don't. We owe it to our country to raise our voices in protest when we believe that our leaders are taking us down any path pith with folly and hazards. That's what a democracy is all about," Dennis explains. The Sheriff of Okai feels that he's in the right, but knows that he can't articulate his views as well as his friend, so in frustration he gives up. "Look ... I have to be getting back to work. Lee took the day off so I'm shorthanded," he excuses himself.

Dennis watches as his friend exits the diner. In his heart he knows that they have already grown too far apart to maintain their friendship and that the gap will only grow wider.

The chill between the two friends hasn't even had a chance to thaw when Gary is called to the college campus the next day to quiet protesters. The sheriff isn't the least bit surprised when he finds the political science instructor leading the protest.

The teacher and his students carry signs protesting the war and the fact that the ROTC is on their college campus. "We are not war mongers. College is for breeding leaders not the next generation of sword bearers!" the professor rages against the powers that be.

The sheriff wades through the protesters until he

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stands in front of Dennis. "This is an illegal assembly and you will break it up or I will have to arrest each and every one of you," Gary informs Dennis. "Free speech ...! Right to assembly! Free speech! Right to assembly!" the students chant. Dennis shrugs his shoulders in resignation. "Do what you have to do, friend," he tests Gary's resolve. "I will, friend," Gary replies with animosity. The sheriff walks to his car and calls for backup.

In less than a half an hour later several more police cars and a paddy wagon pull up to the spot of the protest. Quietly and peacefully all of the protesters, including Dennis, are arrested and taken away.

In the White House Daryl and Elaine sit together watching the evening news. The fireplace is ablaze. A brandy sits within reach of the husband. Elaine is sipping on a sherry. The news reporter begins his report, "Reminiscent of the anti-Vietnam rallies of the sixties, an Oklahoma political science professor, Dennis Walls, and some of his students were arrested today for holding an illegal assembly on campus against the war in Iran." The husband and wife's eyes meet. No words need be spoken. The relationship between Elaine and a now-public figure, Dennis Walls, is too risky to Daryl's presidency. Castle Keep will not stand for that.

One of the student's parents bails Dennis out along with the other protesters. The scene of celebration

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believes the serious nature of what brought them all to this point. Still they wave their hands and cheer the hero of the moment, Dennis Walls. The instructor stands on the police station steps and cries out, "Many a patriot has gone to jail. We must not fail to speak out because we fear the consequences."

The crowd grows suddenly silent when Gary exits the station. "This is also an illegal assembly. Unless you move on all of you will be arrested again," he threatens. The crowd boos and jeers the sheriff. One of the parents speaks, "You can gather at my pub. The first drink is on the house. This is still America and a man has the right to speak out."

As the group begins to disperse Dennis walks by Gary. He stares at his friend as if he is staring at a stranger. "I remember when you were a rebel. Now you're trying to be your father's clone, but you don't understand the kind of man he truly was. If you remember he ended up joining our protest." Gary starts to answer Dennis, but the teacher follows quickly after his students. The sheriff stands on the station steps staring after his onetime friend and wondering why things have to change.

After all of the celebration and rhetoric have ended Dennis makes his way home to an empty house. As he sits alone at home he wonders what the woman he loves is doing. The phone rings. He answers. To his delight it is the chime of Elaine's sweet voice on the other end of the phone. After the initial joy he

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is overcome by apprehension. "Is there something wrong? You never call me," he acknowledges. Dennis listens then tries to dissuade Elaine from the course she has chosen, but to no avail. After she has concluded he places the phone upon its hook.

Age doesn't make it any easier to deal with a broken heart. The phone call was Elaine ending their relationship. Although Dennis knew he would have to make sacrifices for what he believes this he had never anticipated. There are two choices left to him, sit at home and wallow in his misery or get out and find a diversion.

The lovely Donna Smith sits at the bar having drinks alone when the sheriff of Okai enters. He notices her. She smiles. Smiling in return he then walks over and joins her. "I know you ... don't I?" Gary asks. Donna laughs. "That is so feeble. You have to have a better line than that one," she assures him. "It's not a line. I remember you from somewhere, but I can't place where," he struggles to recall. "Then I must not have made much of an impression," she teases him.

The door to the bar opens and Dennis enters. Turning toward the door and spotting Dennis as he enters Donna's eyes light up with anticipation. Wondering what has or who has won the woman's attention Gary turns toward the door. The man is livid when he sees that her attention has been diverted by Dennis.

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The teacher and Donna's eyes meet. Although he is captivated by the young woman it's hard for him to miss his glaring friend. Not sure what to do he decides to try and salvage their friendship before it's too late. Dennis walks over to the two then stops. "Hi Gary. Hello Miss," Dennis greets the two. Donna shakes her head. "I don't seem to be making much of an impression on any of the men in Okai. You don't remember me either," she accuses. Staring at her intently Dennis doesn't recall their brief dating before Elaine. "I apologize but I don't," he answers the charge. She laughs. "I gave you my number when I first moved to town, we dated three times," she reminds him. Like a bolt of lightning it strikes Dennis. "Donna ... yes ... I remember ... I'm sorry. I became involved about the same time and so ..." the young woman frowns. "Where is the lucky lady tonight?" Donna looks around. "That seems to have run its course," he laments. "Then I'll have to do something to lift your spirits," the forward young woman declares. "I guess I should be going," Gary states matter of fact like. Donna and Dennis stare at him without saying a word. The friend isn't sure what he could or should say to the lawman. The dejected policeman walks away.

As Gary drives home alone he remembers a time when he and Dennis had pledged never to let a woman come in between them. It seems that pledges and loyalties mean nothing to this new Dennis, Gary rationalizes. "I don't need anyone in my life, friends or women.

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They take and take until there's nothing left for you," he lies to himself. "Sex and money, that's what life is all about and I'm gonna get my share of both," is his foolish self declaration.

That is how friendships end. Not with some grand fanfare, but a slow parting of the ways, like driftwood on the ocean of life.

CHAPTER 25 THE BLADE CUTS

The war in Iran rages on. The media feeds America only what the Morgan administration spoon feeds them. The media is prompted to accompany the troops into the most hostile of territories, where there they are sure to find deadly encounters. Intentionally these dangerous jaunts are almost always undermanned. The war effort is directed by General Hardtack. Its main purpose is to drum up popular support for The Homeland Security Act. What better way than to have America watch its youth die away from home.

Meanwhile at home the President introduces the man he says is responsible for exposing the connection between the Iranian dictator and the terrorist Diya al din Kharouf, this man is Toby Smith. This man is the one whom the President wants to head up his new security department, the Office of Homeland Security. In a presidential press conference Daryl tells Americans that we need one agency that can coordinate all of the intelligence collected by all police agencies in America, so that nothing is "lost between the cracks." Daryl also explains that when it comes to national security we must grant our police forces extraordinary powers. His rationale is that the terrorists and foreign dictators are not limited in the actions that they are able and willing to take to harm Americans.

Held in the clutches of fear and revenge, America ignores the warnings of our forefathers. "Those who

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surrender their liberties for the sake of security shall neither find nor are they deserving of either."

The President's approval rating is the highest a President's rating has ever been. Using his new popularity he leverages support from Democrats and Republicans who had previously stood steadfast against the Homeland Security Act. The evil despot even dares to face off with his staunchest opposition, Senator Christy Sands. "You know that those who stand against this bill are going to be held accountable by the American public come the next election," he issues a veiled threat. The Senator laughs. "If my constituency is so foolish as to vote me out because I oppose this dangerous legislation than it's time for me to find a new occupation." Christy seems content with the choices she faces.

Other Senators and representatives don't stand as strongly as Senator Sands. The label of "unpatriotic" is one they don't care to enter into a dialog on. The continued deaths of American youth in the country of the dictator accused of supporting the Statue of Liberty attack doesn't sit well with Americans. Public opinion is growing stronger in favor of Homeland Security or any action that appears to escalate the war on terrorism.

A group of Castle Keep members in the House put

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forth a new and tougher version of the act which had previously failed. The cowardly Representatives pass the bill overwhelmingly. It is not going to be so easy a fight in the Senate though.

There is a hostile air to the gathering of Democratic Senators which include Leonard Gross, Archie Dawkins and Christy Sands. "You're damned right I'm going to say I told you so. I knew that black people and all Americans had more to lose if your idealistic venture failed than we could have ever hoped to gain. Now we find ourselves at the brink of opening Pandora's Box. It's a lot easier to give up civil liberties than it will ever be to get them back," the black Senator warns. Gross laughs. "All of you are over- dramatizing this bill. Only a handful of people will ever be affected by it," he argues. "Either you're the most naive man on the Hill or you're a fox in the hen house," the perceptive Christy accuses Gross. "Fuck you Senator. You're lucky I don't sue you for slander!" he threatens. Dawkins has always been suspicious of Gross also, but he tries to play peacemaker. He knows that they are going to have to stick together if they want to defeat this bill. "Take it easy everyone. Accusing one another isn't going to achieve anything except what the opposition wants - to divide us. We have to stick together," he instructs all of his colleagues.

Senator Gross stands up. "My constituency is crying out--blood for blood. I have to support the Homeland

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Security Act," he excuses his decision then walks out of the meeting.

With Gross gone there is no need to hide his true feelings anymore. "I never trusted that bastard anyway," Archie answers Gross' claims. The other Democrats laugh.

At the Luncheon on the Green restaurant in New York, the Cajun Treat in New Orleans, the local pubs in Highlandtown - Baltimore, the Mickey D's in Okai and at recreation and work spots all over America the debate rages on. A lawyer shouts at a tavern patron that he must be an idiot if he doesn't see the harm in allowing someone to be arrested and cross-examined without a lawyer simply because some bureaucrat says he's a national security risk. The patron counters that the lawyer is just seeking another payday at the expense of his soul. The attack then becomes even more personal when the attorney counters, "Let's see how much you worry about how much I make when they come for you ... and they will. Or maybe you won't mind taking it in the rear." A fist fight ensues.

All over America the dialog and confrontations are being repeated with varying degrees of animosity.

The news media is split. Conservative papers like the Okai News say, "Terrorists shouldn't have any rights under our system of government." Most newspapers such as the Miami Herald say, "Giving up

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a little liberty is like being a little bit pregnant."

The weeks of debating go on. The turmoil in America rages on. Young men and women continue to die. More parents are left with the lost promise of what their children's future could have been, but as in all things eventually a decision has to be made. The vote is taken and the Homeland Security Act passes with all of its new and rigorous violations of legal and human rights.

Three generations of Morgan's, the Smiths and other Castle Keep families gather to celebrate their great victory. Champagne flows like Victoria Falls. Music fills the air. There is laughter and dancing. Daryl I, II and III look out over the gathering and smile. "It's a new day," the grandfather announces. "Soon it will all be under our control. The peasants will be where they belong--in the fields, not at the castle gate," the father acknowledges. "There is still much to do," the son warns. "There is still much to do," the young Mr. Morgan repeats.

The Matron of Castle Keep, Elaine, stands in the shadow of a great oak and listens. A shiver of despair runs down her spine. "I helped to get him elected," she thinks. "What kind of monster sits in the most powerful seat in America? How could I have ever thought that I was in love with such a despicable man?" she ponders further. Tears fill her

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eyes. She cries because she now understands what her country is about to endure and knows that it is too late for her to stop it even if she ever could have before.

CHAPTER 26 IMPLEMENTING GIDEON'S SWORD

The war in Iran winds down. Troops march into the city of Tehraz. The populace cheers as the soldiers topple the dictator's statue. Thousands of miles away, in front of their television sets, Americans cheer. Their hearts are lighter because they believe that the first of the guilty parties has tasted our retribution.

In Afghanistan other American troops search for Hashim. Now he has been labeled the leader of the radical forces there. The media is still being fed that Abd al Jabbar operatives are active around the world. This is Castle Keep's rationale behind implementing the first leg of Gideon's Sword, elimination of the right to counsel under Homeland Security. First the perceived enemy of the people shall be denied their rights as protected by the Constitution; then the enemies of Castle Keep.

All around America people look at Arab Americans with suspicion. No one cries out when innocent people are arrested without any evidence of wrongdoing then denied legal representation. Many Arab Americans make the mistake of believing that being a good American means not challenging these unfair practices.

Mehemet Mukhtar is a student at Cornell University. He is a second generation American citizen. The young man has never been in any trouble with the law. One time he goes to an Internet site which provides news of the Iran war. The student signs in

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with his true Arab name and the red light eaves drop system set up under Homeland Security red-flags him as a possible terrorist. A week later he is arrested. To his surprise he is held without bail, not allowed an attorney and even denied a single phone call. His family only learns of his arrest because his friends at college had actually witnessed the Homeland Security men when they had come to the campus to arrest Mehemet.

After three months of legal battles the lawyer that his parents have hired finally finds a judge willing to demand that his family and a lawyer be allowed to see him. The young man refuses to allow this. He declares, "If the national security of my country demands that I be held, so be it." The self-made martyr doesn't realize that he only helps to weaken the principles he hopes to uphold.

The Miami Herald's Pencil Warriors blanket the country in an attempt to awaken the people to the dangers of The Homeland Security Act. At Penn Station in Baltimore, Maryland, Sue interviews passengers buying tickets to ride the train. The first patron hands the ticket seller his driver's license. Sticking a microphone in the patron's face the reporter asks, "Don't you think it's an invasion of your privacy to have the government monitor your every movement?" The man shakes his head in agreement, but rationalizes the action, "Of course it is, but what can we do. It's a crazy world we live

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in. They need to know to protect us." The reporter snaps back, "Why? ... and exactly how is this making you safer?" The patron isn't really sure, but answers. "If they know where everyone is then hopefully they know where the bad guys are." Sue shakes her head in resignation. "All the evidence says that they knew where the bad guys were before the Liberty attacks, but did nothing to stop them. Do you honestly believe that rationale justifies the bar-coding of America?" In an honest reply the man says, "I don't know exactly what that means, but I want to feel safe when I ride the train. No price is too high." Similar scenes play out in L. A. for Kathy and in New York for Mark Wallman.

Special cameras which can feed a person's photo back to a main database where Castle Keep can designate them as friend or foe are being placed in airports, train stations, bus stations and on our nation's highways. The rationale: a seemingly good idea, the Child Abduction Alert System. It is said to be intended to assist law enforcement in the recovery of kidnapped or lost children, but is being piggybacked by Homeland Security to monitor all citizens the agency deems a threat to Castle Keep's security. One can no longer take a public mode of transportation or talk by any electronic means without "Big Brother" eavesdropping.

No one is suspicious when the Castle Keep lackeys

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offer a series of bills increasing the salary of armed forces members and policemen across the country through a federal subsidy. Many argue about where the money will come from, but few challenge this initiative. Few notice when Internal Affairs and other police watchdog programs are cut out or limited in their powers by new legislation.

In the Okai sheriff's station Gary Washington reads the morning paper and yelps with glee. "Finally a President who understands how important the job we do is." The deputy scratches his head in puzzlement. "I ain't never known a politician to give away anything. What do they want from us?" Gary's deputy wonders. "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. We just jumped up several rungs on the food chain ladder in this country and I think that's a good thing," Gary gloats.

A slightly chilly breeze wafts in from the waters of Newport Harbor. Despite the cool night the ambiance is warm and welcoming inside the luxury eatery The Blue Lady where General Hardtack, Admiral Nelson and two ladies of questionable occupations sit enjoying a luxury dinner. The dinner and the ladies are being billed to the new officer's gratuity account established by the new legislation. "It won't be hard to keep my soldiers in line now," Hardtack assures Nelson. "With the special treatment they're receiving now versus before not a sailor in the fleet will want to go back to the old way of doing

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things," Nelson is confident.

"Ladies can you service a couple of old servicemen," General Hardtack half-kids with the women. The blonde reaches under the table and smiles at him. "You don't feel so old to me," she jokes with him in return.

Many soldiers who had thought of giving up a career in the service now speak of it with renewed vigor. No one asks what price they will have to pay to keep this new status.

There is a rumbling in Washington, D.C. the morning Senator Sands disappears. When a Secret Service agent reports that she was picked up by Homeland Security the agent is told to keep his mouth shut and file no report. Despite the attempted intimidation the agent tells the news media.

The judge in the Mehemet case is arrested by Homeland Security agents. Newspapermen all over the country are being arrested also. By the time most realize the extent of the abuses everyone who can speak up has been arrested or is too scared to do so.

Castle Keep now has control of the military, law enforcement, the legislature, the media and the judicial system. Those who can do something about it are benefiting from the new policies or are too

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frightened of becoming a victim, so they ignore what is happening. The average American seems oblivious to the fact that their government no longer belongs to the people.

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The world of the average American is changing quickly and for the worse. Most wages drop below the onetime minimum wage. Those who protest find themselves under arrest. Prices skyrocket for fuel, food, clothing, rent and almost anything else one can imagine. Again any protest is met with quick and harsh consequences. Police burst into the homes of registered gun owners and confiscate their weapons. It is now that America begins to understand what true terror is all about.

The double agent Donna Smith goes with Dennis and his students into the Okai underground. Mark, Kathy, Sue and Bradley Avril in Miami; along with Calvin Watts, who is traveling the country, they have all seen the writing on the wall. They too have gone underground; obtained fake identification, secure communications, acquired non-traceable transportation and gathered weapons with which they intend to wage a war.

It is beneath the floors of an old abandoned factory outside of Okai that Dennis and his people have established their headquarters. Often through hidden scopes they can see Gary and the Okai police force scouring the area in search of them. In Okai the police force has sold out completely. They've been given an extravagant lifestyle and granted almost complete immunity for their police and personal actions.

A beautiful young local woman, Lillith Hart, made

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the mistake of going out with Gary. When she refused his attentions he raped her and beat her half to death. No charges were ever brought. Soon after the incident Lillith disappeared. The townsfolk of Okai whisper that this is the Gary Washington they have expected him to be all of his life, but no one dares challenge the new ways. Other towns which have done so were first visited by a hostile state trooper force, then, when necessary, the National Guard. Whatever amount of force it took to quiet their meddlesome protests.

There seems no more need for the First Lady to be protected by the Secret Service since she is little more than a figurehead for Castle Keep, so Elaine is allowed to come and go as she pleases. Arrogance can be a fool's folly. With little more than idle curiosity Daryl watches as the first lady drives away from the White House.

Later in Okai a neighbor and sympathizer of Dennis and his group watches as the First Lady knocks upon the door of the vacated home of Dennis Walls. The neighbor's door creeps open. The old woman peeks out of her door then signals by crooking a finger at Elaine. Cautiously Elaine makes her way across the street and onto the neighbor's porch. The woman snatches the First Lady into her home. "You never know who is watching," the woman cautions. "Who are you?" Elaine quizzes. The neighbor answers, "Just a nosy busybody neighbor. I used to see you sneak in

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to see Mr. Walls ... before the country went to hell in a hand basket," she openly admits.

A somewhat embarrassed Elaine wonders aloud, "Do you know where he is?" The woman hesitates. "How do I know you aren't one of them?" she asks. "All I can tell you is that I love him," Elaine assures the neighbor. "Drive out to Ole Miller's Crossing. He'll find you ... if he still trusts you." the neighbor deduces.

The First Lady follows the neighbor's instructions. Her car rides around and around in circles near the old abandoned factory. Soon two cars pull up on either side of her. There are two young students with weapons in each of the cars. One window rolls down and a young man calls to Elaine, "Stop the car!" Slowly the three vehicles come to a halt. A second young man exits one of the cars and ushers Elaine from her car.

Minutes later a frightened and blindfolded Elaine is led into the secret headquarters of the Okai rebels. Relief embraces her when the blindfold comes off and she sees Dennis. The one-time lover runs to him and wraps her arms around his neck. A jealous Donna grimaces. Not moving, Dennis stands with his arms dangling beside him. Realizing that Dennis hasn't returned her show of affection the First Lady releases him and looks up into his eyes. "I guess I shouldn't expect much," the dejected lover notes.

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"Why are you here?" Dennis asks. "Many reasons; I realized that I have made mistakes in my choices, I also wanted to see you, mostly I hoped that there was something I could do to help my country," she explains. "How do I know we can trust you", the rebel leader asks. A cynical laugh escapes Elaine. "If I have to answer that then maybe you shouldn't trust me," she responds.

A group of the rebels, including Donna and Dennis, huddle together. The pros and cons are weighed and most believe that they have far more to gain by believing her than they stand to lose by distrusting her. A jealous Donna weighs in on the side of distrusting her. It is agreed by the group that Dennis will use his relationship with her to determine the truth of the matter.

The huddle is broken. Dennis wraps his arm around Elaine's shoulder and they walk off together, alone. Daggers shoot from Donna's eyes at the First Lady. A rebel by the name of Alicia comments, "Pull back your claws. He's doing this for the country, not because he still cares." Laughing, Donna answers, "That's easy for you to say; you aren't involved with him."

Spirits are low at the Miami Herald and other large newspapers. New administrations and new reporters have been installed to replace those who oppose Castle Keep. The unthinkable has happened in

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television and radio news. There is a new FCC policy. Nothing is aired without a five minute delay, so that it can be reviewed by the Homeland Security Agency. The smaller papers which have supported the new system of government are allowed to continue as before. Other small presses have been shut down. Only Castle Keep studios and stage production companies are still operational. The products they produce entertain only. No examination of social issues is permitted.

Despite all of Daryl's and Castle Keep's efforts there is still a voice that has risen from the ashes. The lawyer and computer geek, Calvin Watts, still has the internet press paper, "The Phoenix." The ex-Miami Herald staff members do the journalistic work while Calvin gets the editorial word out to the people.

As if this isn't enough, Calvin and other computer geeks take on a more dangerous task. A black van pulls up to the rear of station JXH TV in Miami. Security guards exit the station. "You're going to have to move that van! No one is allowed to park here without a special H.S. security pass." The back to the van rises up then Calvin and Gerald along with another computer geek fire wired Tazer weapons, rendering the guards helpless. Several men, including Gerald and Calvin, exit the van carrying satchels. All of the men except one rush inside the

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building. The remaining man stands watch over the security guards. Holding two Tazer weapons he occasionally administers another dose of electrical shock. Some of the tormenting is necessary and some is for the sake of his amusement.

Once inside the others hurry about their work. They intend to use the television station as a jumping off point to block the surveillance capabilities of the Homeland Security technology. Calvin sits down in front of a large electronic terminal. He turns to Gerald. "Hand me the ostometer." Gerald hands him a meter with two metal clasps attached. The computer geek attaches the clasps to the motherboard of the terminal. "Here goes nothing," Calvin declares. Sparks fly then the whole station goes black. "It'll be days before any northeastern surveillance is back on line," Gerald gloats. "By then we will have planted viruses or scramblers into most of their systems," Calvin adds triumphantly. "Yeah!" the others join in gleefully.

The men rush from the building. The rebels, including the man who had watched over the security guards, jump into the van and they drive off. Policemen and Homeland Security agents pull up to the station after the rebels are long gone.

It's ominously quiet in the sheriff's station of Okai, Oklahoma. Okai's sheriff sits alone at his desk. The man reviews his life as it is now. Money is

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no longer an issue in his life. In his town there is nothing anyone can do to him. There is a "but." Opening his desk drawer he looks down and sees a picture of himself, Dennis, Calvin and Kathy. He remembers. These are memories of happier times. They wash over him and fill his heart with regret. The sheriff slams the drawer shut. His eyes fill with tears.

So far the new rebels are waging a war of education and disruption. They will need to do more.

It is a heartbroken Abir who discovers that her husband has betrayed two nations. First Diya seems to have betrayed America by creating the terrorist organization which attacked the Statue of Liberty. Now it is as if he has betrayed his Arab brothers by revealing the Iranian connection. "What kind of man have I married? Does he believe in anything?" she asks herself. "How should she feel about the price he will surely have to pay now that he's been caught?" The frazzled woman is about to be surprised by her husband once more. The door to their home opens and Diya enters. Abir faints dead away.

A few minutes later Abir awakens to find that it is true. Her husband is home. The husband reaches his hand out to caress her cheek and she pulls away, repulsed by him. "What is wrong my love?" Diya asks. The disappointed wife pulls away from the grasp of this contemptuous man and makes her way to her feet. First she glares at him then she spats on the floor in front of him. "I hate you. You are my husband, but I have no respect for you as a man!" she tells him. Like cracks in a pane of glass the hurt shows in his eyes. "It is not what you think. I am not who you think I am," he begins to explain the very complicated circumstances of his life.

Hours pass as Abir listens to her husband's incredulous tale. So unbelievable it all seems. She doesn't know what the truth could be.

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"Is this the world you worked to create?" she asks as he finishes. "They lied to me," he answers. "So what do you do now?" she asks. Her husband stands silent.

Villains love the night and so does a villainess. Under the cloak of darkness two figures meet outside the Okai train station. A car passes by them for a split second. The identity of the two are revealed. Brother and sister meet clandestinely. Toby and Donna Smith of Castle Keep meet to keep the head of Homeland Security informed of the activities of the Okai rebel group. "So, when should I shut them down?" he asks. The sister laughs. "Right now they're just a rag tag bunch of idealists slinging pebbles at Goliath. Leave them alone. Someday soon they will lead us to the real threats, the Phoenix and the group who are knocking out our surveillance systems," she promises. "I'll let them stand for now, but if they get any stronger then they will have to go," the brother assures her.

As Toby turns and walks away Donna wonders if she should expose her sister Castle Keep to Toby. She decides she can not do it. No sister Castle Keep has ever betrayed another. If Elaine becomes a threat to Castle Keep she will just have to kill her rather than betray her. Their sick credo requires this.

After returning from Okai Elaine lies sleeping in the Lincoln Room. One of the reasons she likes it

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here is because he was not a Castle Keep and he is the President that Daryl finds most repugnant. Maybe that is why Daryl never comes to this room, not until tonight. He stands in the doorway staring across the room at Elaine as she sleeps. "Where have you been my love? Where have you been?" he wonders to himself. Walking across the room he sits gently upon the edge of the bed trying to be careful not to awaken his wife. The husband runs his fingers lightly through her hair then laughs quietly as he speaks out loud to himself. "It's a funny thing ... I thought that I wanted you because you were the Crown's Pedestal. I've been with some of the most beautiful women in the world, but you are the only one who touches me. I watch you ride off to your lover ... I don't fool myself ... I know that is where you go ... and a piece of me dies each time you leave. I will either stop loving you, die or kill you and/or your lover.

This will not end well for anyone concerned," he assures the sleeping Elaine. Then the world leader leans down and tenderly kisses his First Lady's forehead. Daryl then gets up from the bed and exits the room.

The next day in the Oval Office Toby and Daryl are briefing one another when Elaine enters the room. Toby stops speaking when she enters. Daryl laughs. "This is your Lady," he says pointing to Elaine. She

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is the Crown's Pedestal. If she should ask you to throw open the castle gates and let the peasants in you must do so. We have no secrets from her." he instructs the head of Homeland Security. The man continues his briefing, but leaves out the part about his sister infiltrating the Okai group. For Toby the Castle Keep credo of superiority is more akin to a religion. Therefore he disagrees that he should throw open those gates if told.

In a private room in the warehouse hideout of the Okai rebels Donna lies in Dennis' arms. She turns over and looks into his eyes. "What is the first thing that came to your mind today when you saw Elaine on the monitor driving around our secured area?" she jealously wonders. "... that someone had betrayed us," Dennis answers. A knot of guilt ties tightly in Donna's gut. "Once you knew that hadn't happened, what did you think?" she continues cross examining him. "Like I asked her ... I wondered why she had come" He kisses Donna passionately then looks into her eyes. "That is over. You are the woman in my life. You have my complete allegiance. I will never betray you," he promises. His choice of words causes the knot in Donna's stomach to tighten once more.

As she lies there in his arms the words echo through her mind again and again, "I will never betray you. I will never betray you."

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Almost a week has passed. Now Toby Smith sits at his desk staring out the huge window which looks out over Washington, D.C. and he sighs. Castle Keep is in power, so he feels invincible this morning. Arguably he is the second most powerful man in the world. The smile he wears speaks volumes as to his state of delight with himself. It is then that his office door opens and Diya enters.

Toby believes there may be use for this man again, so he gets to his feet and crosses the room to the agent his hand extended. "Diya ... I mean Kevin. Welcome home." Kevin feigns a smile. "It's been a long time since I've heard my own name called. Kevin Altair, it's a nice name. I like hearing it again," he says proudly. Crossing back to his desk Toby leads the once double agent across the room with him. "So, how is it being home ... being a hero?" the evil man falsely portrays his pawn's role. "I don't think that many people are going to think of me as a hero," Kevin answers his boss. "Few will ever know of your work. We are careful to make sure of that, but those who do know hold you as an American hero. Then again we don't do this work for the accolades. We do it to keep America safe, right?" Toby asserts. Barely able to hide his contempt for this man Kevin answers, "That's true."

The head of Homeland Security takes a seat then stares across the desk at his subordinate. "So, what

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can I do for you?" Brow arched, Kevin tries to evaluate the man across from him. "I'm a field agent. I don't want to sit behind a desk. What I want is to go back to work." Kevin lays the ground work for his plan of redemption. "You're no good to us overseas." Then Toby pauses to think. "There is something that is right up your alley. You're a computer specialist also, aren't you?" Kevin nods his head and waits. "I want you to track down some computer terrorists who have been tapping into sensitive security areas of our systems, infiltrate them then reveal their leadership to us." Leaning across the desk Kevin shakes Toby's hand. "I won't let you down," he assures Toby. The villain smiles and answers, "You never have." Smiling the evil man thinks, "I knew there was a good reason why I didn't simply kill you after you had served your purpose."

Castle Keep operatives around the world carry out acts of terrorism against other nations while pointing the finger at Arab groups such as Abd al Jabbar. Innocent Arab American citizens are being arrested and accused of plotting acts of terrorism. The store owner, your child's school teacher, your next door neighbor are being portrayed as a threat to America. Too easily manipulated is the American public. They begin to see terrorists everywhere. Almost every citizen becomes so preoccupied with this non-existent enemy that they don't see Gideon's Sword about to fall and sever all remnants of democracy.

A bill is introduced to grant the American President an unlimited number of terms and to have Congress, not the American people, vote every six years instead of four to elect the President. There is no Senator Sands to raise her voice in protest. Archie Dawkins knows that he must bide his time. Now is not the time to challenge the new regime. Most others are afraid or benefit from the new situation. The bill passes.

The Internet is aflame with a message from the Phoenix. "For those of you who were too busy watching your next door neighbor, worrying that he might be a terrorist, you probably missed the passing of a great friend. America died today. There is no democracy here, no true freedom. A dictator

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sits in the White House. Well, at least you don't have to worry about foreign terrorists anymore. You're about to taste home grown terror."

A frantic Toby yells at his tech people back at the Homeland Security cryptic coding section, "Find out how they're broadcasting and shut them down, damn it!"

Quickly America answers the message of the Phoenix. There is rioting in the streets. Businesses are attacked. Gangs dare to fire shots into police stations. The police answer back. Chaos reigns in America's streets.

Castle Keep is equally as swift in its response to America. The paid off sentinels rush to the defense of the new regime. Police break out their riot gear. The National Guard and armed forces march against American citizens in the same fashion that they had marched against Iranian forces. The streets of America run red with blood. Mothers cry out in anguish as they see their children murdered by the pawns of Castle Keep.

Days after the first of the revolts began the streets are relatively quiet. Martial law has been instituted. Other than police and the military one needs a special badge from Homeland Security in order to be on the streets. There are only two exceptions-- the four hour span between 9am and 1 pm

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when people are allowed to shop for items for the home or 911 emergencies.

There is a roar of joy when Calvin enters the base of operations for the Miami rebels. A relieved Kathy runs to her husband, wraps her arms around his neck and kisses him. There are whistles, catcalls and laughter. For a moment the gravity of their situation is forgotten. The two sweethearts break their embrace. The wife and rebel leader looks at the others and smiles, embarrassed. Relieved over his friend's return Mark walks over to the couple then shakes Calvin's hand. "I'm glad you're here. I didn't think that it could ever come to this, but here we are." Calvin nods his head in agreement. "We'll climb out of this. Their bigger fools than even I thought if they believe that we aren't going to fight for our country," Calvin assures everyone. "Yeahhhh ...!" everyone screams in answer.

In an attempt to quiet the masses the President addresses the country on television again. Attempting more of his trickery he has the audacity to try to shift the blame for his military action. "My fellow Americans these are trying times. Using our democratic system of government legal changes in the executive branch of government have been made. Terrorists within our own country decided that legal forms of recourse are too slow for their liking so the very fiber of our democracy has come under

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attack. Appropriately I acted to end this unwarranted attack upon our government. My director of Homeland Security, Mr. Toby Smith, has coordinated the defense of our nation and shall have things back to normal soon. I ask you for your patience in this matter and promise you that I shall bring back peace and harmony to the streets of America."

At the conclusion of the President's address he brings out Toby Smith to speak to America. "I am happy to say that your police and armed forces have put down most of the disturbances. Because of their good work the daylight portion of the curfew has been lifted. If the hours that you are supposed to report to work are between sunup and sundown you may resume that part of your life beginning tomorrow morning. Children and teachers may report to schools. All medical and emergency personnel shall receive Homeland Security badges in order that they may return to their duties. As the President has said we will have things back to normal soon. We just ask you to bear with us," the evil man promises.

No one is fooled this time. Eyes wide open America realizes it has given up too much for the phantom of security. Friends want to call friends and shout out against the lies that they've just heard, but now they know that they have allowed unrestricted access

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to wiretapping. There is always someone listening. Many want to take their guns to the street and take back America, but they have allowed the sentinels to take their weapons, because warrants became all too easy to acquire. Most wonder, " ... where are those who once stood steadfast for the people," but they have allowed arrests without due process in the name of national security. Now, the guardians have been taken.

The next day begins much like it had before the betrayal of America. Kids are off to school and many of the parents have gone back to their jobs. There is only the presence of the military alongside the police in the streets to remind Americans what they have given up.

A little boy raises his hand in class. The teacher calls on him. "Yes Brian." The boy stands up. The look he wears is one of fear and bewilderment. "Are they gonna kill us ... like Hitler did the Jewish people?" he wonders. The teacher stands stone faced. Honestly she doesn't have an answer for him. She knows in her heart of hearts that when one group has absolute power over another it can come to that.

After his meeting with Toby, Kevin returns to Abir. As he enters his home he places his finger over his lips signaling for her to remain silent. In his hands he holds a state-of-the-art bug detection device. The cautious man sweeps through the house with the device closely followed by his wife. In their arrogance Castle Keep has decided that Kevin is a pawn that they control and therefore no threat to them. They have failed to bug his home. An apprehensive Abir watches silently as her husband makes his way throughout their home.

Once the former double agent is confident that there are no listening devices in his home he sits his wife down. "I guess they're sure that I'm still a willing puppet in their game. The house is clear." An emotional Abir kisses her husband's face as tears roll down her cheeks. "What shall we do?" she asks. "I have to contact the rebels. I can help them make things right. Or at least try." The steadfast wife's face lights up with pride once more. "What can I do to help?" she wonders aloud. The two set to work.

Days later a woman's coat flaps in the wind. It's a foggy sort of day. The figure of Abir can barely be made out through the gray mist. Covertly she presses the button of the jamming device her husband has given her before entering the electronics store. The device scrambles the signal from the store's security cameras. The door closes behind Abir as she

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enters. Looking up she checks to be sure that the cameras have been rendered inactive. It is just as Kevin had told her, all of the lights on the cameras flash red, signaling that they are off. A smile of relief shows on her face.

Hurriedly, Abir makes her way around the store picking up most of the items on her list. Some of the items she seek are unavailable. Taking the items that she has found she brings them to the counter. The clerk looks at her suspiciously. "To look at you one wouldn't take you to be a computer geek," the clerk comments. Abir smiles. "Just goes to show you that you can't judge a book by its cover," she curtly answers the man. Looking down at her watch Abir realizes that she has little time left before Homeland Security will send someone to check on the security cameras. Taking money from her pocketbook she pays the clerk then rushes from the store.

As she pulls away from the store she presses the button on the scramble device and returns the store's security cameras to operational.

Mere minutes later the door to the electronics store opens and agents from Homeland Security burst into the store. A nervous clerk questions the agents, "What's wrong?" The agents look up at the cameras and see the green lights flashing, signifying that the cameras are operational. Tyrone Gant, head field

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agent, turns angrily toward the clerk. "Do you realize that we aren't receiving a signal from your cameras?" The clerk looks up and spots the green lights. "That's impossible! Look for yourself!" the man points to the green lights. Tyrone dials his cell phone. He waits impatiently. "Are you receiving that signal now?" he asks. After waiting a short while the person on the other end answers him. "Do you know why we lost the signal?" the field agent inquires further. Again he waits. The agent is satisfied with the tech person's answer so he ends his phone call.

Turning to the clerk Tyrone informs him of the tech person's answer. "It seems it was just a normal glitch in the works." The clerk sighs, relieved. The field supervisor turns to his men. "Let's get out of here," he orders. As they head toward the door with the clerk walking behind them the clerk comments, "... for a minute there I thought it might have been that pretty young lady ..." The security men stop. "Why would you think that?" Tyrone asks. "Someone that pretty couldn't be a geek," the clerk responds. The agents all laugh. The clerk opens the door and the agents exit.

Meanwhile across town Kevin stands outside of one of the warehouses of Homeland Security. Punching the security code of a fellow agent into the keypad he covers his tracks. Door opens slowly then he enters

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cautiously. He looks around the warehouse. No one is here. There are weapons, electronics, papers and other supplies and sensitive information stored here. The Castle Keep is so arrogant that they don't think there is any reason to guard these items. Once Kevin is satisfied that he is alone he begins collecting the items not on Abir's list and the one's that aren't available in any retail establishment. These items he will need to build the tracking piggyback system he hopes to create.

After taking the items he's collected to his van Kevin returns for weapons. As he is loading the weapons onto a cart the door to the supply warehouse opens. The agent ducks down behind a forklift. Entering the warehouse is Toby and another Homeland Security agent. They pass right by the forklift behind which Kevin hides. The two men stop inches away from where the anxious man is hiding.

"We're going to have to crack down on all cells of the rebellion. The more success they have the more others are inspired to try their hands at rebelling," Toby informs his subordinate. "For every camera they knock out or supply depot they raid we kill at least two of them. How can that be seen as a success?" the agent ponders. "I don't try to understand the workings of the minds of the common man. I just take care of any problems resulting from their faulty way of thinking," Toby assures the man.

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A cramp in Kevin's leg is slowly compromising his ability to stay bent down behind the forklift. The now patriot grimaces and bites his lip. "What do you have in mind?" the agent asks Toby. "My sister has infiltrated the Okai cell. I think we had better kill them off to make an example of them," he threatens. "When ...," the other man asks. "She thinks that she may be able to find out who the Phoenix is and where he may be so I'll give her one more week to try," Toby lays out his plan.

The two Castle Keep agents move deeper into the warehouse, making their way across the warehouse then into the warehouse office. The door closes behind them.

At last Kevin feels safe enough to stand up and stretch his leg. "Uggghh! Those bastards ...!" Kevin mutters under his breath. "It's even more urgent that Abir and I find and contact the rebels," he tells himself. The door to the office opens. Quickly he ducks back down behind the machinery. Toby and his lackey exit the warehouse's office, make their way across the warehouse then exit the building. The only reason he doesn't kill them right then is he thinks it may put Castle Keep on the alert before he is ready.

After the two men leave Kevin goes back to loading the cart with weapons. Stealthily he exits the warehouse then loads the last of his bounty into his

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van. The blue van pulls away.

A couple of hours later Abir enters their home to find Kevin already hard at work cannibalizing the electronic devices he has taken in order to create something totally new. The relieved husband drops his work and runs over to his wife. He takes her in his arms and kisses her as if it has been years since they have seen one another. Abir laughs as her husband releases her. "I need to risk my life more often if that's the kind of greeting I'm going to receive on my return," she teases him. The two share a light moment. Quickly Kevin remembers the threat hanging over the heads of the rebels. No more secrets he has vowed, so he relates the story to Abir. The wife gasps in horror. "We have to find them before the villains make good on their threats," she pleads with the man she loves. Taking his wife into his arms he assures her, "We will my love. We will."

The hours drag by slowly as Abir stands over Kevin like a mother hen watching over her baby chick. The meticulous man looks up occasionally at her and smiles while he continues his painstaking and delicate work on the signal piggyback device. Abir leaves the room. The husband assumes she has tired of her vigil and has decided to rest until he truly needs her. To his surprise Abir returns minutes later carrying a tray of food and drinks. He had been

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so consumed with the tasks at hand he hadn't given any thought to how tired, thirsty and hungry he has become. Standing up he kisses Abir on the cheek then takes the tray of food and drinks from her arms then sits it down.

The wife lights up as she watches her husband ravenously consume the meal. The truth is that she has felt a little helpless just watching him work. Now she feels as though she is making a contribution.

The phone rings. The couple jumps, startled. They stare at one another. Turning around Abir looks at the wall clock. It is two fifteen in the morning. "Who could that be at this hour?" she asks. "There's only one person it could be ... Toby Smith," Kevin answers. He walks over to the phone and answers it, feigning being groggy. "Hello ..." he listens. "I haven't made any progress yet, but I'm still working on some ideas." Again Kevin listens. "It's after two a.m. sir." Abir hears Toby's evil laughter over the phone. "No sir. The enemy never sleeps. I'll have something for you in a few days," Kevin assures his boss. An expression of exasperation is worn by his wife. "I hope that man gets what he has coming to him in the end." The acid filled words surprise Kevin. "He will. His kind always meets a bad end," the husband assures his wife.

"It's more important than ever that I complete this

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task quickly. I'm not going to be able to put Smith off for long without raising his suspicions," he relays his fears to Abir. The work begins again. Now the clock seems to tick louder than before.

The night is finally broken by the rising sun. Near exhaustion Kevin can barely hold his head up. Getting up from where she has sat the whole night Abir walks over to her husband and wraps her arms around him. "You had better get you some sleep. You won't do anyone much good if you work yourself to death." Smiling up at Abir he answers, "I'm finished." An elated Abir laughs and shakes her head in disbelief. "Nooooo. You couldn't be ..." Her laughter is shared by Kevin. "Yes I am. Didn't I tell you that your husband is a genius?" he jokes.

Now that the tracking system has been constructed Abir and Diya sit in front of the computer terminal waiting patiently for the Phoenix to begin his next broadcast. They know it could be days before this happens, but they pray that it is sooner, for all of their sake.

Meanwhile, miles away in the White House, President Morgan sits behind his desk in the Oval Office. The door opens and Toby Smith enters. "You called for me Mr. President?" Toby asks. Daryl glares at his head of security. "The number of attacks on this government is increasing daily. How much longer do you think we can maintain order if you can't silence

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a bunch of poorly armed rebels?" the chief executive demands.

"It's the Phoenix. He continues to stir up the people," Toby excuses. "Then find him and kill him!" The President commands. "I have my best man on it. The Phoenix won't be able to evade him for much longer," a confident Toby assures the president.

Never suspecting the threat looming over the heads of their friends Calvin and Kathy lay in bed in their private quarters of the hidden rebel base in Miami. The husband kisses his wife's forehead tenderly and lovingly. "Ummm ..." a quiet sigh escapes Kathy's lips. "It's hard to believe that Castle Keep succeeded in gaining control of America. Even more difficult to have imagined is that there would be people fighting in the streets against our very own government as you hold me safely in your arms." Calvin nods his head in agreement. "It won't always be this way. We're reaching more and more people every day with our message. Soon our numbers will be too great for them to contend with. Soon Daryl Morgan and his crew will be behind bars awaiting the death penalty for treason," Calvin predicts. Unlike her usual self Kathy smiles over the grim prospect.

Their moment is interrupted by Mark Wallman as he enters their quarters. "Sorry, but I think that it's time for another message of truth from the Phoenix

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to the masses," he offers as his excuse.

Anxiously Abir and Kevin watch the ticking clock as if it were the blade of a guillotine lowering closer and closer to its deadly task of severing the heads of the Okai rebels. "You've got mail," the message beckons from the computer. Hurriedly Kevin goes to his email account and finds an email whose heading reads - To True Americans. He opens the email. An icon of a flaming bird beckons for him to click on it. With a click of his mouse he finds the home page of the Phoenix. A clouded figure begins to speak.

In Washington, D.C. Toby Smith rushes into the Oval Office. "Mr. President, the Phoenix is once more broadcasting." The head of Homeland Security walks over to a computer and repeats the actions of Kevin, finding the home page of the Phoenix.

Jumping up from his seat Kevin bends down over the keyboard of the piggyback system and begins to type. Mesmerized, Abir stares intently at the clouded figure and listens to his words. "You are supposed to be the sentinels of democracy. Instead you are the lap dogs of tyranny. To protect and serve, you once swore. Have the oaths you took been forgotten? Are thirty pieces of silver a fair price for your honor? Help us take back America. Without you we are lost. Freedom is lost."

The home page of the Phoenix scrambles into just so

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much static. The signal is dead. Abir looks over at her husband with hopeful eyes. Kevin holds a thumb's up, signifying that he has a location for the signal. The couple smile at one another.

An irate Daryl turns to Toby as the signal is lost. "If that isn't the last broadcast of the Phoenix some heads will roll," the man threatens. Toby jumps to his feet. "It will be, Mr. President. It will be."

Three hours after the broadcast Toby bursts into the home of Abir and Kevin. The place is ominously silent. The head of Homeland Security has tried in vain to contact his best operative after the broadcast. "Kevin!" Toby screams at the top of his lungs. "Kevin!" he screams again. Two agents have followed him into the home of the onetime double agent. Turning to his men he instructs them, "Tear this place apart. I want Kevin or I want to know where he's gone and what he's up to ... He knows too much and he is far too dangerous a man to be left to his own devices," he warns.

The agents rush throughout the house. They not only search the usual places, but they also tear holes in the walls and rip up floor boards looking for hidden compartments.

The Director of Homeland Security stands in the center of the living room and stares into space. He

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ponders, "Where are you Kevin? What are you up to ...? Whose side are you on now?"

The double agent is too good at what he does. No clues are left behind. There is no way for Homeland Security to track him. Like phantoms he and Abir have vanished. The security cameras which pick up everyone else are overlaid with a false signal which loops the previous ten minutes of recorded signals from ten minutes before he and Abir reach a camera until ten minutes after they have passed.

Abir looks down at the portable monitor which shows the location of the piggybacked signal while Kevin drives. The two are headed toward Miami and a confrontation with the Phoenix.

Feeling guilty about his part in his nation's ruination Kevin can only hope that saving the rebels will be the beginning of his road to redemption.

CHAPTER 31 THE HYDRA AFFECT

The streets of Baltimore have become a battlefield. Homeland Security forces are firing on a group of rebels headed by the onetime private security for Greta and Elaine - Melvin Taylor. Pinned down and out manned Melvin sits awaiting the worst when people come out of their homes with hand guns, knives, sticks whatever weapons they can find. They begin to rush the Homeland Security forces. Taylor and a few others manage to escape with the help of the others. The People, almost every one of them, now accept the fact that it is their government and not terrorists who are at fault for the chaos in America.

Many miles away from Baltimore, alarms blare throughout the rebel facility in Miami. Again it is Calvin and Kathy who react first. The two rush into the main security room of the complex. There Mark stands in front of the security monitors. He watches as an unknown man and woman, Kevin and Abir, drive around in circles just outside the entrance to their hideout. Turning to Mark, Calvin asks, "Is it Homeland Security?" The reply is definite, "No. If it were them there would be a lot more of them and they would be armed to the teeth," Mark assures the nervous leader.

The car stops. Abir and Kevin exit the car. Leaning closer to the monitor Mark gasps in surprise. "Do you know who that is?" Now it is Calvin and Kathy who

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stare more closely at the monitor. "It can't be!" Kathy exclaims. "It is," Mark assures them. The three friends turn away from the monitor. "He was one of the terrorists responsible for the attack on the Statue of Liberty. How could he have gotten free?" Mark questions. "More important is how did he come to be outside of our facility and why is he here?" Calvin begs answered.

Although Calvin is concerned he's even more puzzled. "Send security out there and bring them in. Tell security not to take any chances. If they offer any resistance or present any kind of threat, kill them!" he instructs.

The husband and wife walk around the seemingly vacant warehouse. The warehouse is in great disrepair. One would be hard pressed to conceive of the secret facility beneath the abandoned warehouse. Abir looks down at the piggyback device. "Are you sure this is the place?" she asks. Looking around Kevin nods his head. "I'm sure. This is just the kind of front I would expect for a rebel base." Suddenly the doors open and armed men and women exit different parts of the building. The armed forces surround Abir and Kevin. Gently Abir lays down the device. The husband and wife raise their hands into the air.

Meanwhile hundreds of miles away in D.C. Toby stands in front of the desk of the President of the United

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States. Daryl wears a scowl. "So you are telling me that not only hasn't your double agent found the Phoenix for me, but this very dangerous man with very dangerous information and skills set is somewhere out there and you don't have any idea where?" The head of Homeland Security grimaces then answers the president, "Not exactly sir. I gave Kevin a task to do. To complete his assignment he can't seem to have any connection to us. He will report back to me in a few days with the Phoenix's location," Toby offers an empty promise.

An angry and cynical Daryl shakes his head. "I don't believe you. I think that you have lost control of a very deadly weapon and that it's going to come back to bite us in the ass," the leader warns. "If it does, like every security problem I'll deal with it," Toby assures his friend.

For the first time in his life Kevin wonders if he has overplayed his hand. Looking around the room he sees the faces of angry armed rebels. "Mr. Kharouf can you tell me why I shouldn't kill the man responsible for the deaths of many of my fellow Americans?" Calvin asks. "Because you know that things aren't always as they seem Mr. Walls. Or should I say Phoenix?" Kevin surprises the rebel leader. "Still, you have killed a lot of innocent people." Calvin states. "There's no denying my involvement in that," Kevin admits. "Then what reason

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do I have not to kill you?" Mark interrupts. "Because if you do a lot more innocent people are going to die," Kevin begins. He tells them of how he became involved with Homeland Security and how it was our own government who had given the orders for the terrorist attack. It was all a part of the plot to pass the Homeland Security Act. They intended from the start to use the new powers therein to take total control of our government. He admits to having been a naive pawn in the plot.

If looks could kill Kevin would have been dead many times over. The icy glares from the rebels left Abir a little more than uneasy. "My husband could have enjoyed the rewards offered him for his part in all of this, but once he realized that his efforts weren't in protection of this country, but against it he turned his back on those in power," she defends him. "Excuse us if we don't trustingly welcome him in with open arms," Calvin cynically answers Abir. "If you do not your friends in Okai will be dead before the week is out," the wife warns.

Stepping forward Kathy asks, "What about Okai?" Protectively Kevin takes Abir's arm and pulls her behind him. "Recently I found out that the head of Homeland Security has a spy planted in your Okai cell. His plan is to kill every one of the rebels there by week's end," he answers Kathy's query. "Why

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hasn't he done it already?" a suspicious Calvin questions. "He was hoping that she could find out where or who the Phoenix is," Abir jumps in. "Do you know who the spy is?" Mark asks. "Not by name. All I know is that she is the sister of the head of Homeland Security," Kevin answers.

The husband and wife look at one another knowingly. "Toby Smith, the last name rings a familiar bell ... Donna Smith. Keep an eye on him," Calvin instructs Mark and the others. "I'm going to check out his story. If it turns out that you're telling the truth maybe we can use your help. If it turns out that you're lying. I'm probably going to have to kill both of you," the leader threatens then leaves the room.

Moments later in Okai Dennis receives an urgent phone call from Calvin. "Is your line secured?" Calvin asks the Okai rebel leader. "Of course," his friend replies. "Are you totally alone?" the cautious Miami leader asks. "Yes," the friend answers all too quickly. "I mean totally alone." Calvin repeats. "There's no one here, but myself and Donna," Dennis answers. "For security reasons this message is for you and you alone," Calvin justifies excluding Donna from this briefing.

"You have to go," Dennis informs her. The woman frowns. "Now I'm the one who can't be trusted!" she screams at Dennis. "It's just as much for your own

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protection as it is for all of us," Dennis excuses Calvin's caution. The hurt lover puts on a skirt and blouse and marches out of the room in a huff. "Make sure that she isn't eavesdropping," Calvin instructs Dennis. "Now just wait a minute!" an annoyed Dennis begins. "She may be a Castle Keep plant," Calvin interrupts his friend's objections.

Rushing, Dennis jumps up from the bed and heads toward the door. When he opens the door and looks out he sees Donna running around the corner at the end of the hall. Reentering the room he closes the door after himself. "She was listening. What the hell is going on?" Dennis wants to know. His friend informs him of the day's revelations. "We'll relocate. I'll keep a close eye on her, but I won't let her know that we know, yet. We may be able to use her later," the Okai leader tells his friend.

An hour later all of the Okai rebels and their equipment are loaded up and moving out. "What's going on?" Donna asks Dennis. "Homeland Security has developed some sort of signal tracking device and Calvin is worried that they may already know where some of the less secure hideout locations such as ours are, so we're moving." An expression of skepticism is worn by Donna. The woman wonders if her role has been discovered. She dismisses that possibility, reasoning that if it had been she would probably be dead.

As the trucks roll out Dennis takes Elaine to the

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and whispers to her. "Keep a close eye on Donna for me. If she takes a shit I want you to be sitting in the next stall," he instructs her. "Why?" Elaine asks, wondering if this is some sort of test. "Because I trust you with my life," Dennis admits. Believing him Elaine smiles. Donna watches the two ex-lovers closely. She is more jealous than suspicious of their conversation.

When his sister fails to make contact at her appointed time Toby decides not to wait any longer. Six hours after the Okai hideout has been abandoned Toby and a platoon of agents and soldiers converge on the facility armed to the teeth. Mercy, a young female rebel, watches from a discrete distance through binoculars.

It is the Head of Homeland Security who kicks open the door to the warehouse. Several of the soldiers take the point, rushing into the facility brandishing their weapons. Toby and other soldiers and agents follow them in. The men spread throughout the facility searching for the rebels. After a few minutes a Sergeant Bose returns to Toby's side. "Sir there was someone here, but they are long gone now. I would guess that we didn't miss them by more than a few hours." the Sergeant stands at attention awaiting Toby's response. "Kevinnnnn...!"

Mercy hears Toby's scream. She decides that she has seen and heard enough. The rebel jumps into her jeep

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and drives quickly away.

Fearing for their lives Abir and Kevin are huddled together in a room alone. Two armed guards stand outside the room. Security cameras point down at them from the ceiling. "What is to become of us?" Abir asks her husband. "I don't care what happens to me, but somehow--no matter what I must do--I am going to get you out of this," Kevin promises. "You are my husband. Whatever your fate is I will gladly share it," the heroine answers her beloved.

It is then that Calvin pushes past the guards. A stern expression he wears on his face. Kevin moves toward Calvin. The two guards point their weapons at Kevin. "She is innocent of any wrongdoing. In the name of justice you must let her go," the husband pleads. "Either of you or both of you may go or stay as you please. I hope you will stay and help us. We could use someone with your skills," Calvin answers with a smile. Abir and Kevin laugh in relief. "Thank you. You saved a lot of my friends' lives today," Calvin offers Kevin his hand. The two men shake.

In anger Toby alongside his agents and the soldiers attack the unknowing citizens of Okai in hopes that some may be rebels. To their misfortune Mercy and some of the rebels are still hiding out in the town. The rebels come to the defense of the town. The soldiers are killing off the rebels and some of the citizens of Okai. A wounded Mercy lies behind a rock

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awaiting the seemingly inevitable end. Other citizens of Okai have tired of the tyranny and rush from their homes shooting or brandishing whatever makeshift weapons they can find.

As the citizens begin to overrun Toby's forces he remarks, "Seems every time I cut off one head two more grow to replace it." The citizens' numbers are too great. "Let's get out of here!" Toby orders his men. What's left of his men jump into their vehicles and make a hasty retreat.

The citizens of Okai help Mercy and the other wounded rebels. One might have expected some small celebration, but that is not the case. Expressions of fear not victory are painted on everyone's faces. No one is fooling themselves. They know the government forces will return, only this time with heavier weapons and in greater numbers. It's merely a question of when.

CHAPTER 32 THE BEST DEFENSE

Two jeeps, filled with rebels, pass by Union Station in Washington, D.C. headed toward the White House. Three rebels are from the Miami cell. Calvin sits next to Kevin. Abir sits behind the two men. In the second jeep are the Okai rebels -Donna, Dennis and Elaine. "Do you think this is smart?" Donna asks. "They can't pick us up on their security cameras thanks to this little device," Dennis holds up the signal scrambler.

"Why are we doing this?" Abir wonders aloud. "To keep the enemy off balance you have to let them know that you are prepared to bring the fight to their front doorstep at any moment," Kevin answers.

In the Oval Office the leaders of Castle Keep stand. Hardtack frowns at Toby. "I respectfully offer, sir, that you shouldn't have sent a spy to handle a military action." Not to be disrespected Toby answers, "Yeah ... you and your trained forces have been doing such a great job keeping those rag tag rebels under control, haven't you?" The general is angered. He jumps at the younger man. Admiral Nelson steps in between the two men. "You are brothers Castle Keep. Don't forget that," he reminds them. The two men smile at one another. They reach their hands out and shake. "I'm sorry," the two men apologize to one another.

Four of the rebels, Kevin, Dennis, Elaine and Donna have exited the jeeps and now walk along Pennsylvania

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Pennsylvania Avenue while Calvin drives one vehicle and Abir now drives the other vehicle. Lagging behind Donna and Kevin is Elaine and Dennis. "Remember it's important that you keep a close eye on Donna." He slips Elaine a gun. Looking down she gasps in horror. "What is this for ...?" Elaine asks, already knowing the answer. "If you have to ... kill her," Dennis instructs Elaine.

A visibly upset Elaine answers, "I don't know if I can do that." The First Lady puts the gun inside her pocketbook. "If you don't a lot of people could end up dying because of her," Dennis explains. Staring resolutely at Donna the First Lady replies, "I'll do what I must."

As Kevin places an explosive device into the gutters of the walkway outside of the grounds of the White House Dennis takes Donna by her arm. The jeep Calvin drives stops beside them. They climb into the back of the jeep. Right after them Elaine climbs in the front of the jeep, beside Calvin. They drive off. Slowly Kevin continues to walk away from the device.

An explosion rocks the grounds outside of the White House. The men of Castle Keep rush to the window of the Oval Office. It is Toby who spots a familiar face in the distance. Hastily Abir pulls up beside Kevin. Her husband jumps into the jeep. Wife and husband drive off.

The headlines in the evening newspapers read "DIYA

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AL DIN KHAROUF HAS ESCAPED." The story claims that Kevin, known to the public now as the terrorist Kharouf, has escaped from a maximum security facility with the aid of other terrorists. It also claims that the group has attacked the White House in retaliation for his captivity.

Few Americans believe anything that they read in the propaganda rags still in operation, but there are still a few die hard supporters of the government, come what may.

In disbelief Kevin tosses a copy of the evening newspaper on a table in the motel room where the rebels are staying while in Washington. The picture of Kevin jumps out at Calvin. The leader shakes his head. "We have to get out of here! Now!" he declares. The group grabs their things and rushes from the room. As they are climbing into their jeeps a patron of the motel notices Kevin. The stranger grabs Kevin's arm and turns him until they are face to face. "You're him!" the man screams at the top of his lungs. Quick to act Calvin strikes the man knocking him down and out. The group looks around to see if anyone has noticed.

A few of the other patrons of the motel spot the commotion, but turn their backs, not wanting to get involved. Kevin lifts the man from the ground. He then drags the man into an alcove and rests him against a wall. The rebels jump into the two jeeps

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and speed away.

The rebels are gone less than fifteen minutes before Homeland Security agents swarm all over the motel. The stranger is being interrogated by Toby. Bragging to the head of Homeland Security he says that he tried to hold the terrorist. The man then looks around at the other patrons with disdain. "No one would help me!" he shouts.

In his travels Calvin has connected with a nationwide network of rebels. In their time of need Calvin contacts a local cell of the rebellion. The group is now in a safe house in Washington. "What's next?" Donna asks. Without meaning to Elaine stares at the woman. The spy turns to Elaine. "What is your problem? Donna asks. "You've been staring at me like I was a carrier of the plague for the last few hours," she accuses. Realizing she has been careless Elaine tries to cover her blunder. Turning away from the woman she excuses, "It's just your imagination." It's then that the First lady realizes she will have to be a lot more subtle in her observations of the spy.

"We have to prepare to escalate this war. If we truly expect to take back control of our government," Kevin tells the others. Laughter is Donna's response. "They control the armed forces, the police, the courts and through the media they control public opinion. How in the world can you is

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it possible that you believe even remotely that a handful of rebels can overcome those impossible odds?" Donna asks. "We must because the only other choice is to give up. I don't know about you, but I'm not ready to surrender our Democracy to some make believe royalty. At least not without fighting to my death," Kevin answers. "Then you'll die," the infiltrator promises. Donna looks around the room then echoes her sentiment, "You will all die."

Helicopter search lights help pierce the darkness of the areas around the motel that are still being searched for the rebels. Meanwhile Toby and Hardtack stand in the motel parking lot watching as the police and security agents wrap up their search of the grounds. It is Sergeant Bose who reports to Toby once more. "They have found nothing sir." The head of homeland security dismisses the man with a wave of his hand. As Bose walks away Smith turns to Hardtack. "We have a serious problem. It appears that Kevin is on their side now," he informs the general of his suspicions. The general laughs. "He's just one man. Remember ... before he was able to do what he did because he had our help. Now he's on his own. We'll bring him down soon enough," Hardtack promises.

Wire cutters slice through the fence of the Aberdeen Proving Grounds - now a weapons depot - in Maryland. Shadowy figures pass through the hole and into the

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compound. The moonlight reveals the faces of Kevin, Donna, Abir, Dennis, Elaine, Calvin and approximately twenty local rebels as they make their way across the grounds. A knife is stuck into the back of one security guard by Calvin while at the same time Kevin slices across the throat of a second guard with his blade. Repulsed Elaine turns her head away from the horrid acts. Looking at her "sister" Castle Keep Donna smiles with contempt at what she perceives as a show of weakness.

A listening device is placed upon the keypad of the security lock by Kevin.

Meanwhile Calvin rushes across the grounds to a large truck, climbs inside then behind the steering wheel. He hot wires the vehicle. Others do the same with other vehicles. The stolen trucks back up to the building where Kevin and still others wait. With distrust Elaine and Donna stare at one another. The door to the warehouse opens. First Kevin then Abir enters the building. As Calvin exits the truck Donna and Elaine enter the warehouse.

All of the group except Elaine, rush about loading weapons into hand trucks. It is her one and only duty to watch out for security which includes keeping an eye on the traitor. One dolly after another is rolled out to the trucks then their contents loaded on board. After a time Kevin warns the others that they had better settle for what they

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have loaded already. It is because he is satisfied that they have done enough. Calvin nods his head in agreement.

Everyone except Kevin climbs into the trucks. It is his dangerous duty to go back and set charges of plastic explosives. After setting the charges he rejoins the others.

Ten minutes later the trucks with the weapons and rebels aboard roll down Interstate Route 95 South. The night is lit up by the fireworks display as the plastic explosives blow. They set off a chain reaction of explosions back at the weapons depot. The rebels all laugh, well almost everyone. Donna grimaces. "A couple of raindrops against a mountain," Donna assures them. "That's how it always begins," Kevin reminds her.

The Day Sergeant stands in front of the day shift of Los Angeles police officers. It is Alvin Dirk, a patrolman in the Compton area, who listens as his name is called. "Dirk, your report didn't describe the terrorists who attacked the Homeland Security van on your beat yesterday," the Sergeant reminds the officer. "I didn't get a good look at the suspects and the witnesses all claim that they didn't see anything either," Alvin replies. "Then you should have arrested some of 'em. A couple of days in jail would have improved their memories," the Sergeant comments. "I had no grounds to arrest them," the officer answered. "Under the Homeland Security Act you don't need grounds," his superior points out. Having some sense of duty left and therefore disagreeing with the sergeant's suggestion Dirk chooses not to answer him.

The television in the report room of LAPD is showing the morning news. The news broadcast is interrupted by a pirate signal. With Kevin's assistance Calvin has developed an improved software that not only pirates emails, but also pirates digital television and digital radio signals. The Phoenix begins speaking. "Policemen, soldiers are you the protectors of democracy? If not, think about this ... what if you or someone you love is the next to be arrested or worst? You hold the fate of Democracy in your hand. Find us. Help us. America can be free once more." The broadcast ends.

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Beavers aren't the only things busy in the woods of Oregon. In one heavily wooded area a man made clearing is a hub of activity. Here Kevin stands beside a young man who is on his stomach aiming a rifle at targets some fifty feet away. "Squeeze, don't jerk the trigger," he instructs. The young man follows his instructions. At the same time a line of rebels fire their weapons. Most of the targets are hit. The young man Kevin instructs has hit close to a bulls eye on his target.

Yards away others are being trained by Dennis to operate heavier weapons. The weapons shatter huge rocks into bits.

In order for Elaine to be able to keep an eye on Donna, Dennis assigns the two to teach hand to hand combat to a platoon of rebels. One new rebel, Floyd, moves menacingly toward Donna. The skilled fighter grabs the large man's arm and easily tosses him through the air. Reaching down Donna offers Floyd a hand up, but the man shakes his head and climbs up under his own power. The others laugh. Turning to Elaine, her Castle Keep sister- Donna addresses her, "We should spar for them." Smiling Elaine gets up then moves into a defensive pose. "Whenever you're ready," she tells Donna. The bout begins; Donna kicks out, Elaine blocks the kick then kicks out at Donna, the kick catches Donna aside her head. The traitor hits the ground then rolls over and jumps to

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her feet. The two women stand glaring at one another.

Alvin Dirk stares at his partner, Kent Howe, as they patrol the streets of Compton. "What are we doing out here?" Alvin asks. Kent shakes his head. "You take things too seriously. The world is what it is. We can't change that. Relax and enjoy the perks of the job," he advises. "I wish I could, but the message of the Phoenix has been echoing in my mind all day long." His partner stares at Alvin in disbelief and shakes his head disapprovingly.

Hours after their shift ends, the two police officers have decided to let their hair down. The music blasts at the Club Entree. The club is full of beautiful women. The male patrons are mostly police, security, or military personnel. Other than the elite these are the only people who can afford this kind of extravagance anymore.

Two beautiful young ladies, Wanda and Sheila, come over to Alvin and Kent. "Are you going to buy us a drink?" Wanda asks Kent. "Why don't you buy us a drink? Or do I have to arrest you for soliciting?" Kent kids the women. The look on Wanda, Sheila and Alvin's faces show that they aren't sure that he is kidding. The policeman's laughter breaks the tension. The others smile. Alvin turns to the bartender and orders drinks for the four of them.

An unheard voice echoes still in Alvin's mind. To

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quiet the voice Alvin drinks one drink after another after another after another. As Alvin dances with Sheila he becomes so drunk that the woman has to literally hold him up. As he leans upon Sheila's shoulder she helps him across the dance floor to a nearby couch.

The inebriated man plops down upon the couch. The young lady joins him there. Soon after Kent and Wanda come over. They stare down at Alvin. "You used to be able to hold your liquor," Kent chastises his partner. "That was before I had a little demon whispering in my head," Alvin answers. The two women stare at Kent. "Is your friend crazy or something?" Wanda wonders aloud. Whack! The policeman-Kent slaps his date hard aside her head. A bruise appears on the side of her face and a trickle of blood flows from the corner of her mouth. Sheila jumps up and grabs her friend by the hand and leads Wanda away, crying. Looking back over her shoulder Wanda gets out one last tirade as she leaves, "You bastards think that you own the world. You're all nothing but little Hitlers and you'll get yours in the end."

Sitting down next to his partner Kent curses him, "Damn you Alvin. I was really digging that chick. Why can't you just enjoy what we have?" Barely able to lift his head he looks at his friend and speaks, "We're all traitors. To protect and serve, hah," he laughs cynically. "It's just like the Phoenix says, we sold out for thirty pieces of silver." It is then

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that his partner looks around to see who is taking note of their conversation. Many of the soldiers and security agents are staring at the two men. An angry Kent grabs Alvin by his collar. "Listen to me you asshole. If you don't get your shit together you may be the next person arrested and I'm not going down with you," Kent promises.

An annoying throbbing of his head awakens Alvin the next morning. The policeman is in the clutches of a raging hangover. As hard as he tries he can't even remember how he got home last night. Dragging himself from his bed he finds his way to the bathroom. An hour later he is in his car on the freeway headed to work. The dull thud in his head from the hangover has muffled the sound of his demons this morning.

Something isn't quite right as Alvin makes his way past the other officers and some suspects to his desk. The queer looks he gets from his fellow officers tells him that something is amiss.

As Alvin sits down his Captain and two Internal Affairs officers walk up to his desk. "Dirk ... I.A. wants to interview you this morning," The captain informs him.

Since the Homeland Security Act IA has been almost neutered, so Alvin glances back and forth from one I.A. officer to the other wondering what business IA

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could possibly have with him. "You look awful familiar," he says to one of the men. "Maybe you remember me from the club Entree last night," the man answers. Alvin laughs. The others frown. "This isn't a laughing matter," The captain assures Alvin. "The joke is that I don't remember much at all from the club Entree. I was drunk. I'm still in the vice like grip of a hangover," Alvin answers.

A relieved expression comes over the Captain's face. The Captain turns to the I.A. officers. "That explains everything. He was drunk and talking out of his head. I told you he's a good cop," the captain explains. Walter, the first Internal Affairs officer, looks down at Alvin wearing a stern expression. His expression changes to a slight smile. "I guess we can't hold a man responsible for a drunken tirade," Walter concedes.

"What is this all about?" Alvin asks. "Just slow down on the bottle officer Dirk. It could get you into a lot of trouble," the I.A. officer warns Alvin. The two men walk away. The Captain leans down and whispers in Dirk's ear, "We are going to have to have a serious talk later about whether or not I'm going to let you keep your job."

In these times Alvin should consider himself lucky for there have been many other policemen, security guards and soldiers who have not fared as well. In

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in all of America a misspoken word, a lie or a suspicion has sent many a man and woman to jail since Castle Keep has taken control.

New words echo through Alvin's head on his drive home, "They were here to arrest you. The fact that I hadn't reported you as a dissident had me under suspicion. I could have been arrested also. Unless you can assure me that there won't be a repeat of last night's fiasco I want you out of here," the Captain had demanded.

It was hard for Alvin to grasp. He had almost been arrested. All he had done was rant in a drunken rage and he had almost been arrested. "If that's all it takes for them to lock up a policeman what chance does anyone else have?" Alvin asks himself. Instead of heading home Alvin keeps on driving aimlessly up the road.

As fate would have it Kevin, Abir, Dennis, Elaine and Donna sit in a greasy spoon diner along the same Interstate that Alvin has chosen. They are having dinner. The door to the diner opens and Alvin enters. As if in a haze the policeman makes his way to an isolated table.

"What do you suppose is his problem?" Elaine asks. The others look over at Alvin. "Probably had a fight with his wife," Kevin teases. Playfully Abir slaps Kevin on his shoulder.

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A waitress comes over to Alvin's table and takes his order. With all that had transpired today he had yet to eat. Famished Alvin gobbles down his meal in haste. To her companions Elaine seems mesmerized by the stranger, watching his every move. "There is definitely something bothering him," Elaine repeats her concern for the man. "The world is going to hell in a hand basket. Excuse me if one man's problems don't concern me," a cynical Dennis answers. "Everything begins with one man or one woman. Never be fooled into thinking it's a game of numbers or you'll become just like my husband and Castle Keep," Elaine warns. No one notices Donna's reaction when Elaine speaks the name of their secret organization. After regaining her composure Donna concludes that the first chance she gets she must kill her Castle Keep sister.

Her empathy drives Elaine to get up and walk over to the stranger's table. Wary of all strangers Dennis follows her. They look down at Alvin. The lost man looks up at the two strangers. "May we join you?" Elaine asks. "I don't think that would be such a good idea," Alvin issues a veiled warning. Ignoring his warning Elaine sits down. Shaking his head, Dennis resigns himself to the fact that they are going to help this fellow whether he likes it or not. Dennis sits down. "Do you want to talk about it?" Elaine asks. Alvin laughs. "I don't think talking is going to help me." He pauses. He looks at

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the kindhearted woman then begins to relate parts of his tale. "I just walked away from my life. I have no idea what I'm going to do next. And worst of all I will probably end up in jail before the end of the week. Me, a policeman, locked up. I never thought it could happen to me."

All the more wary now he knows that the man is a policeman, Dennis looks over at Kevin. The husband and wife, Kevin and Abir, sense that something is wrong. They stare across the room at the stranger that sits with Dennis and Elaine. Alvin catches the looks Dennis and Kevin are exchanging while staring across the diner at the all so familiar stranger. It is after that look that Kevin grabs Donna and Abir by their hands and starts to get up from the table. It is too late. The policeman recognizes Kevin from the newspaper photos. He shouts across the room. "No! Don't go!" Kevin, Abir and Donna head for the front door. Now it is Elaine and Dennis who start to get up. Looking up at the two of them Alvin grabs Elaine's hand. "Don't leave me. I have nowhere to go," he pleads.

Standing at the front door to the diner waiting Kevin, Donna and Abir all turn toward Dennis, Elaine and the stranger. They can't hear what is being said, but they know that a decision is being made about whether to trust the man.

Finally Elaine reaches down and helps Alvin up from

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his seat. The relieved man takes out his wallet and starts to pay his bill with a credit card. The cautious Dennis grabs the credit card and wallet from the man's hands. The experienced freedom fighter then takes money from the wallet and pays Alvin's bill. "You wouldn't last long making that kind of mistake," Dennis assures Alvin. "I'm kind of new at breaking the law," the ex-policeman offers in his own defense. "No you're not. Defending the illegal regime was tantamount to breaking the law," the rebel tells his new recruit.

Over the next few months Alvin recruits other police officers. Many security officers and soldiers begin to see their fellow officers arbitrarily thrown in jail. It is only then for some that they begin to understand the dangers of this illegal new government that they have served. Some seek out and join the rebels. Others start their own rebel cells.

The sentinels are slowly coming home to their roles as the protectors of Democracy. The future is beginning to show promise.

CHAPTER 34 OFFERING UP THE LAMBS

The quiet of the rebel stronghold belies the turmoil of their situation. The numbers of the rebels are multiplying, but still they are too few to overcome the forces of Castle Keep. Sitting alone Calvin ponders their dilemma. How can he awaken the sleeping giant, America's collective consciousness?

One couple sleeps huddled together while an odd threesome lay side by side in the room across from Calvin and Kathy. Through the pane glass window of the security room Calvin can see Kevin and Abir clinging to one another while Dennis lies in between Elaine and Donna. As Calvin watches them a plan develops. As unfair as it will be to ask he knows that he must ask two of them to take a great risk, but war is seldom fair.

While Calvin struggles with his future choices, Daryl lies across his bed re-examining his past choices. Burdened is the heart that too late realizes the value of love. So casually he has pushed the one woman he had ever loved away from him. Now he realizes that the strokes to his ego were a poor trade off for the hurt he had caused her. And for the first time in his life he wonders if the reign of power is the greatest bauble a man can possess. "Too long have I allowed her to drift away from me," he tells himself. "Where is she now? Who is she with?" Suddenly a frightening thought comes to him. "Is she safe? Would the rebels dare to

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harm the First Lady of the United States?" He bounds from his bed. Grabbing his robe, he exits the bedroom and heads down the main hallway of the White House.

Elsewhere, Calvin shakes first Kevin then Elaine. He awakens the two people necessary for his new plan. As Kevin stands up he awakens Abir. The husband then bends back down and kisses his wife's forehead. He instructs her to go back to sleep. The wife rolls over and pretends to go back to sleep. Trying to not awaken either Dennis or Donna, Elaine steps carefully over the two. A groggy Dennis sits up after Elaine steps over him. "What's going on?" he asks. "You'll know soon enough," Calvin answers. That's not good enough for Dennis. Concerned for Elaine's safety he stands up and follows the three of them into the security room. The door closes behind Calvin, Elaine, Kevin and Dennis.

As the rebel leader speaks Elaine peers across the hallway, keeping an eye on Donna. Feigning sleep Donna has rolled over toward the security room. Slightly parting her eyelashes she spies on them without them being aware. The traitor hopes for a chance to get to her cell phone and contact her brother. By now Donna is sure that she is at least under suspicion. Every time she looks in Elaine's direction the woman's eyes are upon her. Since she and Elaine have never met she wonders is it mere intuition on the woman's part or has her betrayal

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been discovered.

"Soon enough isn't soon enough," Dennis tells Calvin. The door opens again and Abir enters. Wary she looks from one face to another. "I was coming to get my husband, but it looks like I've walked into a wake," she notes the somberness of the moment.

"We must increase our numbers if we're going to win this war," Calvin declares. "We all know this. What does that have to do with Elaine?" Dennis wants to know. Kevin raises his hand mockingly - as if he is a student in school who wants to be recognized by his teacher. "... or me?" Kevin asks. A question is the beginning of Calvin's explanation, "How many more recruits do you think that we would get if Kevin goes on the Phoenix broadcast and tells America that it was the President and the CIA who had planned and allowed the Statue of Liberty attack?" Everyone glares at Calvin. "Kevin is probably already the number one target on Castle Keep's hit list, but that would make him a must-kill target," Abir answers for her husband. "Besides, no one will believe an accused terrorist," Dennis reminds Calvin.

"They may if the First Lady of the United States corroborated his story," Calvin points out. "You're asking the two of them to put bulls-eyes on their backs!" an excited and angry Dennis declares.

Caring more for the country she loves than her own

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safety Elaine places a calming hand over Dennis' hand. "How much do you think this will help?" is all she needs to know. The others look at her with admiration. "It could bring in enough new recruits to turn the tide," Calvin answers her. Turning to the man she loves Elaine says to Dennis. "Then it has to be done." Then turning to Kevin she adds, "That is ... if Mr. Altair agrees." Everyone turns their attention to Kevin. "Just tell me what to say," he answers.

While deciding, Elaine's attention had been diverted for only a few moments. When she looks over to where Donna had been sleeping the woman is gone. Their eyes meet as Donna returns from down the hallway. The spy feigns innocence. She lies back down onto the floor.

The President and Toby are conferencing in the Oval Office. "I just received a message from my sister. I have her location, that of the First Lady, Kevin and the Phoenix," he informs Daryl. A huge smile lights up the President's face. "Bring your sister and my wife home. Kill the others!" he orders.

An abandoned factory in Tallahendrix, Florida is being surrounded by Homeland Security agents, local police, and national guardsmen. Sergeant Bose walks over to Toby. "There's no way they can get away this time sir," an eager Bose assures Toby. "Don't bet on it Sergeant. Altair is the best agent I've ever

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put into the field. I just don't see him letting himself being trapped somewhere that there are no exits." The head of Homeland Security knows his onetime agent. "Everyone makes a mistake sooner or later, sir. That's why we always get our man." The Sergeant is confident. "Then let's do this Sergeant. Just remind your men that my sister and the First Lady are hostages in there. We don't want any trigger happy soldiers putting a bullet into either one of them," Toby warns. "It's covered," Bose assures him.

Armed men burst through the windows and doors of the abandoned factory. Again they find nothing save the remnants of a rebel base. There are only the shreds of paper, equipment too heavy for a hasty retreat and some mattresses left behind to remind Toby of one more failure to capture his nemesis, the Phoenix.

"The President isn't going to be happy." Bose remarks snidely. Toby turns to the man and shoots him in the head in cold blood. "Damn the President! I ain't happy!" The man seems to have gone mad. His men stare at Toby in disbelief. They are all frozen with fear.

Now Donna knows that she is under suspicion. One minute after Elaine spied her returning to her spot on the floor Calvin, Elaine and the others rush out of the security room and begin shouting orders at all

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the others. Their orders are instructions on abandoning their location. The two Castle Keep sisters glare at one another knowingly. Everyone else makes haste gathering what they can to take to the next location.

From their new location Donna can now look out a window and see her brother and his men in the distance converging on their old location. "If only there were some way to signal them," but she knows that she doesn't dare try. The traitor can feel Elaine's eyes upon her without turning to see.

"Come with me," Elaine instructs Donna. "Why?" a frightened Donna asks. "I want you to witness something," is Elaine's cryptic answer. A new security room has been set up. Computers and other electronic equipment are all around the room. Kevin sits in front of a computer terminal with camera mounted. Elaine crosses the room and pulls a chair up beside the one in which Kevin sits. Bewildered and frightened Donna watches, also curious. Sitting at the computer keypad typing sits a determined Calvin. Watching, wearing expressions of apprehension are Dennis, Kathy and Abir. "... just about ready. How are you two doing?" Calvin asks the two heroes. A nervous laughter escapes Kevin and Elaine then they answer in unison. "We're just fine for lambs being led to the slaughter."

"... 4 ... 3 ... 2 ... 1 ... you are broadcasting,"

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Calvin alerts them. The broadcast begins. "People of America, I know that you know me as the terrorist Diya al din Kharouf, but my real name is Kevin Altair. I, just like all of you, am a citizen of these United States. Foolishly, like many of you, I believed in the leaders of this country, even to the point of carrying out a horrendous act because I was told it was in the best interest of our national security. Yes, I planned and took part in the Statue of Liberty attacks, but know this America: it was under the instructions and authority of our present President and his head of Homeland Security, who at the time was assistant director of the CIA. What I didn't know at the time was that they and others in the government in positions of power wanted to scare America into passing the Homeland Security Act. This was so that they could come into power. The democracy we once knew is dead. Take your heads out of the sand then take back your America."

The onetime agent, Kevin pauses. "I know that you have no reason to believe me, but there is one American that you should believe." Sliding his chair to the left Kevin moves from under the computer's camera. Then Elaine slides over in front of the camera. America gasps a collective gasp of shock upon seeing the First lady of the United States seemingly in cahoots with an alleged terrorist. "America, my heart aches that it has come to this. I feel that I have to speak out against the

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man that I once was in love with, your President, Daryl Morgan III. More important than my personal feelings is my allegiance to my country and you. All of the accusations you have heard are true. Worse still, your President has conspired with an elitist group called Castle Keep to take control of your government and limit your liberties. No doubt my name will be dragged through the mud in order to convince you that none of this is true, so don't take my word for it or the newspapers' or anyone's word. Look around you and ask yourself; Are people being arrested without due process? Do you see military forces in the streets of American cities? Do you even have the right to elect your next President? There are a thousand other questions that you can ask yourself to find the truth, but if you don't want to see the truth it doesn't matter what anyone says you will turn a blind eye to it. America, don't ignore the truth. Take back your government!" the First Lady challenges America. An elated Calvin terminates the broadcast.

One could have fried an egg upon Daryl's head as he watches and listens to Elaine and Kevin telling the world about Castle Keep. Daggers shoot from his eyes across the room at Toby. "This is your fault, damn it! If you had only caught the Phoenix or dealt with this Kevin once we no longer needed him. If only you had been able to squash a handful of rebels with the technology and armed forces under your command," he

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offers a laundry list of failures that he attributes to his head of security. Toby glares at the President and answers. "No one would have believed a word he has said if it wasn't for your wife sitting beside him corroborating his story," Toby points the finger of guilt right back at Daryl.

In Castle Keep a man is charged with maintaining control of his household, so Daryl must excuse Elaine's defection. "It's obvious that Elaine is under duress. That's another of your failures. How could you let the rebels kidnap the First Lady?" the leader questions. Toby laughs. "If she's under duress I will cut my own balls off," he snidely remarks. "Don't overstep your station or our friendship," the Crown's Pedestal reminds his subordinate. "We aren't helping ourselves pointing fingers," the head of Homeland Security offers a truce. "We need to act quickly to answer these charges."

In the security room of the new rebel base Calvin, Kevin, Elaine, Abir, Kathy and Dennis laugh and pat one another on the back in celebration of their perceived victory. A subdued Donna watches. "No matter what happens to us now the world knows the truth," a pride filled Kevin notes. "Only the conspiracy nuts will believe a single word of your broadcast," Donna mocks them. "You mean our broadcast?" Elaine quickly points out Donna's faux

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pas. "...no, your broadcast. I still don't trust this terrorist or you, First Lady." Donna counters. Nothing that Donna has said affects the celebration. To celebrate Calvin and Kathy take out a bottle of wine and some glasses. They wake the others then they all celebrate in earnest.

Less than thirty minutes later, Homeland Security begins their campaign to undermine the broadcast. Every television station in the country is broadcasting a special Presidential address to the nation. Newspapers are rushing off the press with an answer to the allegations. In every bar and living room around America, activity stops. Americans stare up at or across to the idiot box that molds their morals, ideals and opinions.

"My fellow Americans, I come to you tonight to rebut the repugnant charge that a murdering terrorist and a captive First Lady have brought against me and many of the noble people who serve you and this great country. You and I know that Diya al din Kharouf is a terrorist. Distrust and chaos are the currency in which his kind trade. As to my wife, I hope that your prayers are with her tonight. Homeland Security is doing everything in its power to return her safely to my side. When she is safely home she will tell you that she was forced to participate in this farce of a broadcast. If America is to remain strong we must stand together against

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our enemies, whether here or abroad," Daryl ends his broadcast.

In the new rebel stronghold Daryl's speech has been watched. The rebels are more subdued in their celebration after hearing the President's response. Their leader smiles knowingly. "We knew that this would be their response. Those who want to believe will, but most people are going to begin to question. That's where we will find our base of support," Calvin assures them.

In whispers most Americans now question which side is speaking the truth. Others loudly let be known their opinions. A carpenter named Shane sits in his local bar watching a basketball game with some buddies from work. He turns to his friend, Hank. "Can you believe those bastards? They sit up there on Pennsylvania Avenue lording it over us when they're the ones who killed those people," he accuses. "Shut up Shane! You'll get us arrested," Hank warns. Shane jumps up from his seat and stares around the bar. Having had enough Shane shouts out for all to hear, "This is still America! A man can still speak his mind freely. Can't he?" A few nod their heads in agreement. Most frown and turn away from the loud bar patron. Taking his friend's hand Hank pulls the man back down into his seat. "Suppose they did kidnap the First Lady? Don't you think she would say whatever she is told to stay alive?" the

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friend plays devil's advocate. "I saw the broadcast. There was no fear in the First Lady's eyes. All I saw was a woman who was determined to protect America, but let's say that you are right, that she spoke under duress. If what you say is true why are there so many troops in the streets of America? And explain this ... just one week ago one of my neighbors was arrested. I had never known this guy to so much as litter on the street. His wife says that not only couldn't she put up bail for him, the police won't even tell her where he is being held. Could this have happened before the Statue of Liberty attacks?" Shane questions everything. Many of the bar's patrons listen and they are affected by the stranger's words. Similar conversations are going on all over America. Many opinions are being changed.

As news of the growing resistance reaches Daryl's ears the President sits face to face with his head of security. The veins on Daryl's head are so swollen from anger they seem about to pop. "I want him dead! I want him dead! There is a ten million dollar bounty on Kevin Altair, Diya al din Kharouf or whatever you call him. That man must die!" he orders. "What about the First Lady?" Toby asks. "Bring her home to me if you can. If you can't bring her home then kill her too!" Daryl screams.

The fool- Daryl has chosen what is most important in

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his life. Love is just one more lamb to be sacrificed.

CHAPTER 35 VICTORY IN OKAI

Three companions; Dennis, Elaine and Donna have returned to Okai. The husband and wife, Kathy and Calvin, have set up a new base in Miami fearing that their association with Donna Smith may have compromised the old base. The one time terrorist and his wife, Kevin and Abir, have found a home in the training facility in Oregon. To the delight of all there is an incredible influx of new recruits after Kevin's and Elaine's broadcast. The rebels are becoming a formidable force.

A light blanket of snow covers the small town of Okai. Although it is Wintry cold in Okai the chill in the air is barely noticeable to its residents. What is noticeable is the chill in the citizens' hearts. Things have deteriorated quickly. The National Guard is for all intents and purposes working directly under the tyrant sheriff of Okai, Gary Washington. With the big sword that he holds over his neighbors' heads the man and his fellow officers run roughshod over them.

The sheriff - Gary, along with his deputy - Newt, enter the local Okai Cadillac dealership. The owner Canton Brill smiles when he sees the two men enter. "A customer is a customer," he tells himself, besides nowadays only police, security, armed forces and the elite can afford his products.

"Can I help you gentlemen this morning?" Brill goes right into his spiel. "I know exactly what gentlemen

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of your good taste and large bankrolls want. You want the top of the line ... the Cadillac Escalade. Am I right or am I right?" Canton laughs as part of his sales facade. Turning to Newt the evil Gary winks his eye. "Is that what we want Newt? Do we want the top of the line? Do we want the Cadillac Escalade?" Gary mocks the salesman. Grinning from ear to ear Newt answers, "Boss, I think that is exactly what we want. Two of them Escalades. Yes, two of them ... one for you and one for me" Not realizing the intent of the two men, Brill smiles with delight. He leads the two men toward his office. "Well then ... let me get you two started on the paperwork," the salesman offers as the three men enter his office. Instead of sitting down Gary reaches out and takes two sets of keys from the office wall. "That won't be necessary Brill. We'll just take these keys and be on our way," Gary informs the dealership owner. Now realizing that the men don't intend to pay Brill steps in between Gary and the door to his office. "You can't just come in here and take my cars from me," Brill answers Gary. The sheriff hits the man, knocking him to the floor. Newt and Gary look down at Brill. "Yes he can," Newt answers. The sheriff and his deputy leave the office. They step over the salesman, laughing as they go.

The abuses pile up; some small, some large, some property, some very personal.

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The former teacher, Dennis, sits across from Donna and Elaine staring first at one then the other. "I would have thought that Elaine would have been the one. After all she is married to Daryl." This runs through his thoughts. Suddenly there is a commotion in the hallway. A battered Mercy leans on the shoulder of Juan - her fiancée as he practically carries her into the room. Her face is a bloodied bruised mess. Tears flow from her eyes. "I'm going to kill him!" Juan assures everyone. Dennis doesn't have to ask. He knows what has happened and who is responsible. "No you won't," Dennis answers Juan. The young man becomes irate. "What the hell do you mean?" he questions his leader. "This isn't just your problem Juan. We've waited long enough. It is time to act," Dennis issues his declaration of war. Cheers fill the room from all of the rebels, save one. Donna sits stoic. "I have to find a chance to escape and soon," is her only thought.

The usually quiet town of Okai is anything but quiet on this day.

An anxious Sheriff Gary Washington and his deputy stand at the window to the sheriff's station with weapons at the ready. Outside the office Dennis and his rebel group have surrounded the law enforcement officers. "Come out Gary. If you surrender we will let you live. You will be brought up on charges of war crimes," Dennis offers. Gunshots ring out from

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the station in response to Dennis' ultimatum. The air is filled with gunfire from both sides. Windows shatter, wood from the building splinters under the relentless barrage, outside bullets strike cars, bounce inches in front of and behind rebels in hiding.

Then it happens. The first rebel is hit and killed. Seeing his fallen comrade, Juan stands up and tosses a grenade through the air. The grenade falls at the door to the sheriff's office. Spotting the deadly projectile Gary shouts, "Run!" A frightened Gary and Newt rush to the back of the station. An explosion rings out loudly. The door is rocked from its hinges and splintered.

The rebels are poised to rush the building when they hear the roar of vehicles. They turn to face the coming juggernaut. Hardtack leads the National Guard forces. Gunfire rings out over the rebels' heads. Mortar fire strikes cars. Cars roll and gas tanks explode. A fiery inferno lights the skies of the sleepy little town. National Guardsmen and rebels are hit by gunfire. Some are wounded. Some are killed. It seems inevitable that the rebel forces will be overrun. Suddenly gunfire comes from behind the National Guard forces. The surprised men turn to find a new enemy has joined the fracas. The townspeople have learned their lesson. Freedom is not a gift. A death cry escapes the lips of Hardtack

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as a bullet rips through his chest. The General falls dead to the ground. The National Guard forces disband and scatter to the winds.

Inside the station Gary and Newt cower in the back cell. "Don't worry. Hardtack will chase these cockroaches back into the walls to hide. After he does I intend to make this town pay for this in spades," Gary threatens. "If I get out of this alive I'm getting the hell out of here and finding me a new career," too late the deputy has second thoughts about the choices he has made.

The two men hear the sound of the front door being kicked open. They hope that the sounds they hear of feet scraping across the front office floor are the guardsmen coming to their rescue.

Hoping to reason with his old friend Dennis leads the charge into the sheriff's office. At Elaine's urging Donna follows Dennis into the sheriff's office. Brandishing her weapon Elaine watches the traitor like a hawk. The rebels cautiously approach the back of the office.

The door to the cell area opens. Gary doesn't wait. He opens fire immediately upon the intruders. Reacting quickly Dennis dives into the room. While still in the air Dennis fires his weapon and hits Newt. The deputy places his hand over his chest wound. "I didn't do anything," is Newt's epitaph.

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Dennis lands on the floor. He has Gary in his gun sights. "You don't have to die here today," Dennis warns. Smiling, Gary lowers his weapon. A shot rings out. Looking toward the sound of the gunfire Dennis sees Donna slump to the floor in the doorway. Stepping over the fallen Donna, Elaine enters the back cell area. Standing over the dead body of her "sister" Castle Keep Elaine drops her weapon to the floor. "She was going to kill you," the First Lady points out. "Watch out!" Elaine shouts out a warning. Gary has raised his weapon and fires at Dennis. A bullet rips into Dennis' shoulder. The rebel leader manages to get off a shot himself. The bullet strikes his former friend in the gut. The sheriff slumps down to his knees in the back cell area.

A tearful Dennis and Elaine make their way to Gary's side. The couple looks down upon the dying man. "I just couldn't do the right thing ... could I?" Gary denigrates himself. The former friend holds his wounded shoulder and looks down upon the dying Gary with tears in his eyes. "I loved you like you were my own brother. It didn't have to end this way," Dennis tells Gary. "I'm the black sheep. It couldn't have ended any other way," Gary assures him. The sheriff's head slumps downward. A onetime dear friend is dead.

A sullen Admiral Phillip Nelson enters the Oval Office with his head held down. Sitting across from

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Daryl is Toby. The head of Homeland Security notices that the President's attention has been diverted from him. The man turns around to see Nelson. Standing up the head of security asks, "What's wrong now?" Knowing all that has transpired in Okai Phillip can't even look Toby in the face. "Hardtack was killed by rebel forces in Okai. The sheriff and Guardsmen there were soundly defeated," the Admiral delays the worst of his news. In frustration Toby lashes out, "How incompetent can you people be? You're supposed to be the best trained, best equipped fighting force in the world and you can't beat a bunch of rag tag rebels? This is ridiculous."

The President stands up. "I have to agree with Smith. Maybe it's time I made some changes in the military leadership," Daryl threatens. "He hasn't had any more success than the military. If he had maybe his sister would still be alive," it is finally revealed. A stunned Toby buckles visibly at the knees. "You're lying!" Toby screams. Nelson regrets the way he has told his Castle Keep brother this world shattering news. "I want them dead. I want them all dead!" Toby screams then cries hysterically.

CHAPTER 36 THE 2nd AMERICAN REVOLUTION

It's July 4, 2006. Castle Keep makes a mockery of this day. The children are blessed with an ignorance of the harsh reality of their times. They join in on the hollow celebration of liberties, liberties which for now do not exist. A little boy waves his sparkler and smiles with delight. Another lights a firecracker and mischievously tosses it at the feet of his little sister. The loud pop that follows scares the little girl. She runs crying to her parents. This scene of innocence is repeated by the families of Americans everywhere.

At the Morgan estate in Hampton, New York many Castle Keep leaders have gathered to hold their own celebration. They celebrate the success of Gideon's Sword, not the freedoms of the masses. They are not yet aware of the turning tide. A hundred thousand dollar fireworks display lights up the New York skies. The many privileged children run around gleefully enjoying the spoils of their parents' treachery.

There is at least one Castle Keep who knows that there is no reason to celebrate. Looking out the window of the Oval Office Toby watches the elite celebrate and thinks to himself, "Soon they will lose as much as I have, yet they seem blind to the coming storm. Maybe we aren't as special as we've been taught. Maybe we're just one more group of tyrants. One who have tried to smother the fire in

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the souls of men only to find out the flame cannot be doused." A hand on his shoulder brings Toby back to the now. "We will avenge your sister," Daryl promises. An empty laugh escapes Toby's lips. "What is there to avenge? She was just as guilty as any of us of the crimes we've committed and justice has been served," a repentant Toby answers. Daryl takes him by the shoulders and shakes him. "Get it together man! I need you more than ever. No! We need you more than ever," he assures his brother Castle Keep.

Miles away the aromas of honey flavored pancakes, smoked bacon, grits and eggs fill the air. With their eyes closed the Miami rebels can almost fool themselves into believing that they're back at home with their loved ones, enjoying a family Fourth of July breakfast.

The shrill voice of Mercy breaks the illusion, "Come and get it!" Smiles light the faces of all. It has been a long time since the rebels have had this kind of plenty. They rush into the main dining hall of the compound. As the men and women take their seats, Dennis and Elaine enter the room. Elaine turns to the one she loves. "You have to say something," she insists. After a moment of forethought Dennis turns to the others. "Before we eat I want to thank God for the successes we've had against the superior forces of Castle Keep, also a moment of silence for

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our fallen comrades and the fallen enemy who were once our brothers and sisters- Americans all." Many of the rebels grumble over Dennis' suggestion, but all of them bow their heads in respect. "Dear Lord, protect us in what we must do. Put us on the right path that we might return freedom to all Americans for no man is meant to bow to anyone save You." The group lets out a collective, "Amen."

The citizens of Okai now have control of their town once more. Castle Keep doesn't see any strategic advantage to holding the town, so they aren't willing to expend any more troops in an attempt to retake it. Believing the town no longer needs them, Elaine and Dennis along with other Okai rebels have returned to the rebel group in D.C. to aid them in their struggle. Many of the D.C. rebels reach out to touch the heroine First Lady. "Thank you. Thank you," they offer their gratitude. "I wasn't sure what to believe until you spoke out," an elderly gentleman admits. As they continue down the hallways of the D.C. compound one can see the light that glows in the eyes of the rebels. The light of hope had been dim, but with the presence of the First Lady and the victory in Okai, it now burns brightly. It has everyone believing that someday soon America will be celebrating Independence Day in earnest once more. Maybe that day is today.

Several buses and trucks are loaded down with the

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Oregon rebels. It is Kevin and Abir who stand at the front of one of the buses looking out over the men and women they have been charged to lead. Maybe it's because they have been riding all night. Maybe it's because unlike the Miami and D.C. rebels the Oregon group has only trained for battle. They have yet to face the enemy with weapons in hand. Tension shows on everyone's face, except Kevin.

In three more hours a well coordinated nationwide attack on the Castle Keep forces is scheduled to begin. Los Angeles is the Oregon rebels' destination. It is where they are expected to encounter their first taste of combat. With the scrambler device Kevin has the rebels can evade the security cameras which monitor the Interstates, but a party this large can't go long undetected by state troopers.

Many troopers assume a force this large must be National Guard troops under the command of Homeland Security, but one officer, Donald Suttcliff, is conscientious in his duty. Spotting the convoy of vehicles moving down the Interstate Suttcliff calls it in as he moves closer to the vehicles to check their license plate numbers. As the trooper talks to his dispatch, conveying the plate numbers, the covering off of the back of one of the trucks is thrown open and one rebel opens fire on Donald's car. Bullets riddle the front of the trooper's car.

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The vehicle skids along the highway as Donald slams upon his brakes. The patrol car twists sideways. Cars which had been behind the trooper slam into his vehicle causing a domino effect to occur, with car after car slamming into the cars in front of each. The covering on the truck is dropped. The rebels know that they have prematurely alerted the Castle Keep forces to their presence and intent.

In Miami Kathy and Calvin receive an urgent message while at the same time Dennis and Elaine in Washington, D.C. are alerted--the enemy has been prematurely engaged. The man considered to be the national leader, Calvin, coordinates the change in the timetable of the assault, moving it up all around the country.

All the rebel forces are now in a hurry-up mode as they prepare to begin the 2nd American Revolution. They are rushing to initiate their attack beginning in twenty minutes. Equipment and weapons are being loaded onto trucks and buses. Ammunition and supplies are being double-checked. The heart of every rebel is beating as fast and as hard as a trip hammer. Eyes are glazed over with anticipation and fear.

Battle strategy has been changed by Kevin taking in account the resistance he is sure to meet now. He has realigned the trucks and buses under his command

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The trucks are now lined up across the Interstate, blocking passage. The buses are lined up behind them. Kevin and Abir have moved from the bus that they were in to one of the lead trucks. Maybe the state troopers have cleared the road. Perhaps travelers have gotten wind that something is about to happen. Or maybe it is just coincidence, but the long stretch of road ahead of the convoy is as empty as it has ever been before.

A wary Kevin and his group have traveled for some twenty or more minutes unabated along the Interstate when he spots them. There is a barricade made up of over twenty state trooper patrol cars blocking the Interstate ahead of them. Picking up his walkie-talkie Kevin communicates with the other rebel vehicles. "Put your pedal to the metal, ramming speed ladies and gentlemen. I also want two gunners on top of every vehicle. Light into them like it's the Fourth of July ... after all, it is," he tries to make light of the situation. There are makeshift hatches on the top of each vehicle. The gunners are climbing through these hatches and taking their positions on top of the vehicles as they rapidly move closer to the blockade. Shots ring out from both sides. Bullets ricochet off of the rebel trucks and the state troopers' patrol cars. Bullets rip through the bodies of many of the troopers and a couple of the rebels. Blood bathes the Interstate. As the behemoth-like trucks near the blockade the state troopers begin to disperse in every direction.

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The trucks slam into the patrol cars. The cars are pushed aside. Patrol cars are also pushed over the side of the interstate then crash onto the road below, some bursting into flames, others being crushed like aluminum soda cans. A few more rounds are unleashed from the passing vehicles upon the state troopers. Most of the rebels cheer victoriously as they head away from their first confrontation. Some find no reason to cheer as they stand over or kneel next to a slain comrade.

All around America the rebels are in position to strike. Most of the Castle Keep leadership are attending the mock liberty celebrations. The first shots ring out almost simultaneously around America. The message from all of the rebel leaders is clear. "Citizens are not targets. They are the ones we are fighting to free." The Castle Keep forces have no such regard for the citizenry. They let loose wild bursts of gunfire, spraying different areas. Bullets rip into the skin, tearing through layer after layer, shredding and burning, then continuing their deadly flight until lodged in the bodies or exiting through the backs of innocent bystanders. Panic and fear have the citizens in their iron clutches.

Once again chaos reigns in America's streets. People run in a thousand different directions. Some are knocked down. The fallen are trampled like grass. Some cowardly Castle Keep forces grab the innocent bystanders and use them as shields against these

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attacks. The battles rage on.

It has become apparent to some of the Castle Keep leaders that things are going badly. They leave their celebrations to confer with one another over the phone and Internet. "Mr. President, you and the director should get out of D.C. and go into hiding. If things continue to go badly we can always regroup in the aftermath of whatever results," Admiral Nelson advises from a Castle Keep bunker hideaway. An irate Daryl screams over the phone's intercom, "No! I am the President of the United States. I won't be chased from the White House by a bunch of street thugs." Others are sending e-mails and other forms of communications to Daryl urging him to be prudent. Toby watches his brother Castle Keep and understands that this man would rather die than relinquish his position of power for even a moment. Shaking his head Toby resigns himself to what he believes is inevitable. Toby Smith feels death's hand upon his shoulder and the voice of his father whispering, "... with what shall you defend the Castle Keep my knights?" He answers the imagined voice aloud, "With mind, body and soul my Lord - with mind, body and soul my Lord."

Bloody battles rage in the streets of America. Citizens cower behind cars and in doorways. Rebel forces and Castle Keep forces continue to fire on one another. Bullets whiz through the air. Windows

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are shattered. Cars are pelted with the deadly rain. Rebels and Castle Keep forces fall to the ground dead or wounded. The rebels are winning.

A woman falls sideways to the ground holding and shielding her child from gunfire. The bullets riddle her body. The infant cries in the arms of its dead mother. The madness of war has consumed all. Citizens not involved in the battle smash storefront windows, these hoodlums loot and pillage.

The rebels are stunned when many of the Castle Keep forces begin waving white flags. Most of these men and women not only surrender, they join the rebel forces.

At the Morgan estate and other strongholds for the leaders of Castle Keep, people like Harold Smith gather whatever portable valuables are there. "It's not going well," Harold points out to the other leaders here. "Arrangements have been made for just such a contingency. We will go into hiding. When the battle is over if we should win everything will be as before. If we lose we will pretend that we had no part in any of this and resume our positions of power to live and try another day," Harold Smith has laid out the plan as the leaders of Castle Keep finish preparing to leave.

Two men sit awaiting the defeat each knows is coming. They stare at one another across the oval

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office at the President's desk. "For a moment we were the masters of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth," Toby concedes that it is over. "How could a handful of peasants have been the undoing of Castle Keep?" Daryl wonders aloud. "In our arrogance we underestimated them," is the head of Homeland Security's simple and exacting explanation.

CHAPTER 37 DEMOCRACY RECLAIMED

After all of the betrayals, redemption's, sacrifices and determination there is a light glowing brightly at the end of the tunnel, America makes its way toward the light. Men and women who had only a few hours before been engaged in battle against one another now walk side by side patrolling America's streets. The looters are arrested. The Castle Keep forces who will not give up the fight become some of the last unnecessary casualties of this war.

In Washington D.C. Dennis, Elaine and the rebel forces that they lead march down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the White House. A sniper's bullet whizzes by Dennis' head. The rebels return the sniper's fire. From a nearby rooftop the gunman falls to the ground. A horrific thump heralds his death. The whimpering sound of a woman grabs Dennis' attention. He turns to find Elaine bent over the body of their friend Mercy. "Aaaawwuuhhhh ...!" Dennis screams out in anguish. "The war is won, so what sense does the death of this twenty-two year old woman make?" he wonders. Then it becomes all so clear. No sense, no logic nor reason is ever found in war. There is only horror, death, victory and defeat.

A weeping Juan bends down, picks up the body of his beloved and carries her away. Again the remaining rebels move forward toward the White House. They spread out and move a lot more cautiously. Their weapons are at the ready, prepared for the unlikely

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possibility of another attack.

There are minor skirmishes as they make their way toward the White House, but for the most part Castle Keep forces are done.

A few shots ring out from the interior of the White House as they enter, but quickly the outnumbered forces retreat deeper into the building. Dennis, Elaine and the others move forward. Their hearts are pounding so hard they hear the thumping noise inside their heads. Mouths are too dry to speak. Fingers are so tense that each is afraid that he or she might fire their weapon involuntarily. A door creaks open. Kathy fires her weapon. An elderly black man dives to the floor. Staring up at the group the man pleads with them, "I'm just a janitor. I'm just a janitor." The First Lady makes her way over to him. She kneels down beside the elderly black man then helps him to his feet. Trying to calm the man Elaine speaks to him in a soft and soothing tone, "No one is going to hurt you. I promise." Her words have a calming effect on him. He leans back against the wall and watches as the rebels make their way further inside.

After hearing the gunshots Daryl and Toby jump. "We should leave," Toby instructs the President. Taking a gun from his desk drawer Daryl twirls the gun around on his finger. "I was the President ... I am the President of the United States. You have no idea what that means. You can't ... no one can until they

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sit in this seat." Daryl pats the chair he sits in with the gun he holds.

"The peasants are at the castle gate. What shall you do my knight?" Daryl chants one last time as he and Toby smile at one another. "Defend the Castle Keep my lord. Defend the Castle Keep," Toby answers." The two men look toward the door of the Oval Office. They hear footsteps in the hallway. "... and with what shall you defend the Castle Keep my knight? With what shall you defend the Castle Keep?" Daryl continues. " ... with mind, body and soul my lord - with mind, body and soul," Toby solemnly answers. The door to the Oval Office opens. Elaine is the first to enter. She is followed by Dennis and the others.

When Daryl and Toby see Elaine they burst into laughter. "This has been one hell of a day," the President sighs in resignation. The rebels point their weapons at Daryl and Toby. The head of Homeland Security raises his hands into the air. Defiantly Daryl stares at the rebels, still holding his weapon.

"Drop it or I'll drop you!" Dennis orders. Tenderly Elaine places her hand on Dennis' hand then steps in between the two men. Dennis lowers his weapon. The gun Daryl holds is pointed toward the floor. Elaine reaches out toward the man she once loved. "The peasants have now captured the Castle Keep. Shall you

DEMOCRACY RECLAIMED

surrender, my lord?" she offers more than asks. Smiling Daryl stares at the only woman he has ever loved. "I only have one regret my love and that is that I didn't know how to show you my love." Tears fill his eyes. "... but to answer your question ... no, my lady. I shall not surrender," he answers, then places the gun under his chin. "Instead I shall fall upon my sword," he answers calmly and resolutely. Now it is Elaine who cries. "Don't ... please," she pleads with him. The two stare at one another. In that moment they know this could not have ended any other way.

A gunshot rings out. Blood is splattered all over the desk and carpet of the Oval Office. Seemingly in slow motion Daryl falls to the floor as the others watch. "Nooooo ...!" Toby and Elaine scream out as one. The once Crown's Pedestal hits the floor with an unceremonious thud.

The gun has fallen beside Daryl's body, so when Toby moves toward the body some of the rebels raise their weapons. Dennis signals for them to lower their guns. In a daze, Toby moves toward his brother Castle Keep, as if unaware that anyone else exists. He lifts him into his arms and heads toward the door to the Oval Office. Elaine opens the door. They allow him to exit with his friend. Democracy has been returned to this great country, but at all so high a price for all.

The rebels look out the window of the Oval Office.

DEMOCRACY RECLAIMED

There are a few gun fights still going on, but what affects them most is seeing the fires that burn all around the capital city. "I hope that we will never again be so trusting of our leaders or so fearful of our enemies that we are willing to surrender a single liberty of the people again," Kevin offers in warning to his comrades.

THE END