

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF MEG & DOMAIN

STEVE ALTEN



RESURRECTION



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PART TWO OF THE DOMAIN SERIES

RESURRECTION

Resurrection

Domain 02

by

Steve Alten

A wisp of thought, in the consciousness of existence.

I am anger.

A black hole of rage.

Lost in eternity.

God's abandoned child.

Seething with the mortar of indignation, imprisoned within its invisible walls.

The confluence of bitterness ferments my soul.

I am the product of injustice, and self-servitude, and greed.

I am the void that tasted love and lost it forever.

Loathing existence.

Set adrift in my own ocean of hatred.

I am the end of humanity and its beginning.

I am One Hunahpu and the universe laughs at me.

I am . . . Michael Gabriel.

Prologue

THE JOURNAL OF JULIUS GABRIEL

Excerpt taken from video recording at Harvard Symposium
August 24, 2001

"The End of Humanity. What has time to contemplate such folly? Job security, the falling Dow, overdue bills, or diminishing retirement funds—these are daily burdens that occupy our minds, not humanity's extinction."

"My name is Julius Gabriel. I am an archaeologist, a scientist who hunts humanity's past in search of the truth. For the last 32 years, my family and I have been searching for the truth behind the Mayan calendar, a 2000-year-old instrument of time and space more accurate than its latter-day European counterpart. Believed to have been created by the mysterious Mayan wise man, Kukulcán, the calendar abruptly ends with humanity's demise on a date equating to December 21 in the year 2012. As if to remind us of the event, the shadow of a giant serpent will again appear on Kukulcán's pyramid in Chichén Itzá in 29 days, just as it has each autumn and spring equinox for over 1,000 years. Let me assure you, this baffling special effect was not intended as a tourist attraction."

"Who was the great Kukulcán? The Mayans describe him as a tall, Caucasian man with long flowing white hair and beard and blazing aqua blue eyes. Quite the mystery, considering the first white man didn't arrive in Mesoamerica until the early 1500s . . . 500 years after Kukulcán's passing. Adding to this mystery is the fact that, in every successful ancient culture, there has been a great teacher whose description is almost identical to Kukulcán's. In Giza, Egyptians worshiped this wise man as Osiris, at Stonehenge he was Merlin, in Nazca and Sacsayahuman, the Incas revered him as Virococha, and among the Aztecs he was Quetzalcoatl."

"Mysterious wise men . . . each introducing science and civilization to their assigned peoples. The Bible describes them as giants, men of reknown. I've identified them as extraterrestrials, humans from another time, another place. And they came here to save us from the cataclysm that will arrive on the winter solstice of 2012."

"I am not here to debate the existence of ETs and UFOs with Mr. Borgia. As archaeologists, we know real doomsday events have overwhelmed our planet's inhabitants throughout its history. As scientists, we know our Earth lies within a cosmic shooting gallery of asteroids and comets. We know that 65 million years ago, an asteroid, seven miles in diameter, struck our world at the same ground zero that would eventually have become the Mayan homeland, ending the dinosaurs almost 200 million-year reign. Was it predestined or an accident? Could such an event happen again? It's been estimated that 2,000 such civilization killers continue to cross Earth's orbit, though to date, we've only accounted for one in ten."

"The Mayan calendar was left to us 2,000 years ago as a warning. Should we heed it, then perhaps

we can save ourselves for whatever cataclysm lies ahead."

~~*"Or, as is the nature of our species, we could simply ignore the warning signs until something terrible happens . . ."*~~

*Footnote:

Professor Gabriel suffered a fatal heart attack moments after delivering his speech.

All grants supporting archaeological investigations into the Mayan calendar were suspended three weeks later following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Part One

Conception

"Time is not all what it seems. It does not flow in only one direction, and the future exists simultaneously with the past.

—Albert Einstein

We cannot change anything until we accept it.

—Carl Jung

January 21, 2013
30 Days A.N.D.E.
(After Near-Doomsday Event)
Wellington, Florida

The *Dojo* is sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, its walls covered in mirrors, its floor made of polished wood. Master Gustafu Pope, fifth-degree black belt and former karate champion of Argentina, turns to his "Bushi" warriors, all seated along one wall in a lotus position. "Richard Rappaport, Andrea Smith."

Hearing her alias, thirty-one-year-old Dominique Vazquez jumps to her feet. Like the rest of Master Pope's students, the ebony-haired, Hispanic beauty is dressed in full *Bogu*—protective armor. Her chest and stomach is covered by the *Do*, her waist in the *Tare*, her hands and wrists by the *Ko* gloves. She slips the headpiece known as the *Men* over her long ponytail, the heavily padded band protecting her face, throat, and the sides of her skull.

In her hand is the *Shinai*, a sword consisting of four staves of bamboo, joined together at the handle and tip by leather straps. Designed to flex as it strikes an object, the *Shinai*, though infinitely safer than its predecessors, the *Fukurojinai* and *Bokuto*, is still a weapon that can kill.

She takes her place across from her opponent. Rich Rappaport is bigger, stronger, and more experienced than Dominique, but lacks her tenacity.

Master Pope calls out "*Rei*."

The two student combatants face each other and bow.

"On your marks."

Bracing their bamboo swords, each moves into a crouching posture.

"Begin!"

Dominique attacks, shouting out "*Men!*" as she launches an overhead blow to her opponent's head. Rappaport blocks the strike, but the woman's furious barrage continues, her *Shinai* a blur as it lashes out at the man's forearms and chest. Dominique calls out body part names before each strike, her brown eyes focused intently on her fellow Kendo student through the bars of her headpiece.

"Oosh!" Master Pope awards Dominique a point for a strike to the top of the head.

The two students return to their spots.

"One to zero. On your marks . . . begin!"

"*Kote!*" Dominique prances ahead, her *Shinai* raised to strike Rappaport's forearms—

"*Men!*" as the tip of her opponent's sword strikes her in the throat.

"Oosh!"

Dominique drops one knee, swallowing hard against the throbbing pain.

Master Pope bends to her. "Can you continue, Ms. Smith?"

She nods.

"One to one. Back to your marks."

She hustles back to her place, her blood pressure seething.

"And . . . begin!"

Dominique is an erupting volcano, her anger raging, her arm and shoulder muscles bulging beneath

her armor as she whirls the *Shinai* at the retreating Rappaport—

~~—who deftly blocks each of her strikes, then slices her across the midsection.~~

"Oosh!" Master Pope signals to Rappaport. "Two to one, point and match. *Rei* to me, to each other . . . and shake hands."

Rappaport offers his hand, his face expressionless in victory.

Dominique shakes his hand, averting the eyes of the senior student.

* * * * *

"Ms. Smith, may I see you?"

Dominique tucks her headpiece into her gym bag and joins Master Pope in his office. "Yes, sir?"

"How's your throat?"

"Fine."

Master Pope smiles. "It's good you were wearing *Bogu* or you'd be speaking out of a second mouth."

She nods politely, her cheeks flushing beneath her Hispanic complexion.

"Andrea, you're an excellent student, truthfully, I've never met anyone who trains as hard as you. But in battle, technique is not everything. Kendo teaches us to observe our opponent and devise the appropriate strategy in order to achieve victory. You fight with anger, you fight to kill, and in doing so, you reveal your weaknesses to your opponent."

"Yes, sir."

"The Way of the Sword is the moral teaching of the Samurai. The art of Zen must go hand in hand with the art of war. Enlightenment is the realization of the nature of ordinary life."

Ordinary life? Ha. I'd give my right tit to have an ordinary life . . .

Master Pope stares at her as if reading her mind. "The teaching of *Ai Uchi* is to cut your opponent just as he cuts you, to train without anger, to abandon your life to throw away your fear."

"Do I seem afraid to you?"

"What I perceive is not important. Each of us has his demons, Andrea. I hope Kendo will help you one day to face yours."

* * * * *

Dominique changes into an old Florida State tee shirt, shorts, and her cross-training shoes, then stuffs her equipment bag into a locker and heads for the weight room.

Chris Adair, her personal trainer, is waiting for her by the rack of dumbbells, his dreaded clipboard in hand. "How was Kendo?"

"Good," she lies.

"Then it's time for a little pain." He sets the bench press at an incline, then hands her the two thirty-five-pound dumbbells. "I want twenty reps out of you, then we jump to the forty-fives."

* * * * *

Dominique emerges from the gym two hours later, her freshly showered and massaged body still trembling with fatigue. The gym bag filled with wet clothes and equipment causes her right shoulder to ache, and she leans on the heavy bamboo cane for support.

The older woman with the burnt orange hair pulled into a bun is standing by her Jeep, the grin of a cultist pasted on her face. Her eyes are shielded behind the wide wraparound sunglasses preferred by seniors.

Dominique approaches warily, gripping the handle of the bamboo cane tightly in her right hand. Concealed within its false bamboo outer casing is a *Katana*, the double-edged carbon steel blade of the Japanese sword deadly sharp.

"Hello, Dominique."

"I'm sorry, you must have me confused with someone else."

"Relax, my dear, I'm not going to hurt you."

Dominique remains at sword-striking distance from the older woman. "Is there something you want?"

"Simply to talk, but not here. Perhaps you could follow me to my home in St. Augustine."

"St. Augustine? Lady, I don't even know you. Now if you'll excuse me—"

"I'm not a reporter, Dominique. I'm more of a messenger."

"Okay, I'll bite. Who's the message from?"

"Maria Gabriel, Michael's mother."

In her peripheral vision, Dominique notices the two Homeland Security agents approaching, one from each end of the parking lot. "Sorry, I don't know anyone named Michael, now I have to go." She turns and walks away.

"Maria knows you carry her unborn grandsons in your womb."

Dominique freezes, the blood draining from her face.

"Maria's energy force reaches out across the spiritual world to contact you. You are in grave danger, my dear. Let us help."

"Who are you?" she whispers. "Why should I trust you?"

"My name is Evelyn Strongin." The older woman removes her sunglasses, revealing bright blue irises. "Maria Rosen-Gabriel was my sister."

* * * * *

Dallas Texas

The three-thousand-seat arena is standing room only, as it has been every evening over the last four weeks. The television cameras and Internet videocams are manned and ready, the studio audience prepped.

Houselights dim, igniting a fresh buzz of energy.

The candy-apple red curtains flutter, then part, revealing center stage and a charred, seven-foot-high cross.

Mirroring the symbol, his arms outstretched, is the televangelist.

Peter Mabus is a heavyset Caucasian in his early fifties. His Alabama accent is thick, his thinning black hair slicked back and combed over. His pasty pale complexion matches his suit and tie and shoes.

The flock grows silent as he raises his head to speak.

"I'm going to tell you a story, ladies and gentlemen, a story about a man whose existence was riddled with disease, a disease that affects the mind and the body and the spirit. A disease that contaminates the soul. A disease that nearly destroyed society. Yes, my friends, I'm talk'n 'bout the

disease known as Greed. This man had all the symptoms. Selfishness. Dishonesty. Malice. Jealousy. Envy. He was a liar and a cheat, and he was corrupt as corrupt can be. He was CEO of one of the largest defense contractors in the world, and he was heavily invested in oil. He was a man who treated women as objects, and bathed in the nectar of their sex until their flower withered and died. And then one day, ladies and gentlemen, as this despicable wretch of a human being lay in his mahogany four-poster bed in his fourteen-thousand-square-foot mansion, an Angel appeared before him. And the Angel brought with it a vision. And the man saw this vision, and in it was the Rapture. And he saw devastation and pestilence and death. And he saw the end of humanity, charred and ruined, buried beneath smoldering rubble. And then he saw the Lord."

Peter Mabus looks up as an overhead light casts its heavenly beam upon his face.

"And the Lord said to the man, 'My son, see what your sinful ways have brought? My children have forsaken me, allowing the serpent to take root in their garden.' And the man became frightened and he dropped to his knees and repented. And the Lord said, 'Because you have asked me for forgiveness, I will spare humanity, but only if you rise to lead the flock.' And the man bowed his head, and the Lord touched his heart.

"Gone were the greed and hatred that had corrupted the man for so long. Gone were the lies and the deceit. And the man rose from his knees and was embraced by the light, and the covenant was made.

Mabus steps away from the crucifix.

"I was that man, ladies and gentlemen, and that vision came to me four months ago, ninety days before the winter solstice of 2012. From that day forward, I have served the Lord as his humble servant, carrying His word to the flock. And when the Rapture arrived, and the bombs fell, the Lord kept His word to me, and spared our people."

A chorus of Amens.

"And when the serpent showed his face, that wily Devil, the Lord smote him with His light and saved us again."

"Amen, amen."

"Divine intervention, children, it was divine intervention. And now, as I stand before you, changed man, a servant of the Lord, I ask for your support. It was our leadership in Washington that brought the Rapture, it was the policies of Clinton and Bush and Maller and Chaney that nearly destroyed us. God has given me a vision, my friends, and the vision is to carry his word from Washington, then to the rest of the world. America's strength as a Christian nation has been compromised, along with our values as human beings. The Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with a second chance, one we cannot forsake. Support us now. Rise with me, rise up—"

Small sections of pre-seated worshipers rise, encouraging others to do the same.

"—take your neighbor's hand, children. Go on. Hold your hands high to the heavens and praise God. Will you praise Him with me?"

"Yes!"

"Will you rise above your sins with me?"

"Yes!"

"Will you support my campaign to restore godliness to our nation, so that we may finally conquer the diseases that still plague mankind."

A small army of men in white suits appear in the aisles, their empty buckets aimed at the chanting crowd.

Mabus looks directly into the camera lens. "It's time to go forth and spread the word, ladies and gentlemen. Call tonight and pledge your deductible donation. Call tonight and join God's party, s

that together we can create a groundswell of love that will sweep us into the White House. This is the vision our Lord and Savior gave unto me, it is the covenant He made when He spared us from death. Remember back to that day, then reach deep into your wallets and show the Man upstairs that you deserve this second chance. Stand tall with me, my children, support the Lord so that we can walk together, hand in hand in the spirit of Jesus Christ, our Savior, into the Ever-After.

"Amen."

* * * * *

The makeup artist touches up the last bit of shine beneath Richard K. Phillips's eyes as the host of the political forum takes his place opposite Peter Mabus.

The television producer pauses as instructions are relayed from his producer over his earpiece. "All right, gentlemen, we're rolling in three . . . two . . ."

Richard Phillips looks into camera one. "Good evening. Tonight, *World News* speaks with Peter Mabus, former CEO of Mabus Enterprises, and presidential candidate for the 2016 election."

"Good evening, Richard, and good evening to all our supporters. God loves you."

"Mr. Mabus, let's get right to it. The next presidential election isn't for another three years, when do you begin campaigning so early?"

"Richard, the message I carry knows no political timetable. Now is the time for sweeping change and even though we're not in office yet, we believe the current administration needs to feel the will of the American people. Ennis Chaney had failed to restore faith in the United States government, and without faith, this administration will collapse, America with it. We simply cannot wait four years to make a difference."

"To be fair, President Chaney's only held office for little over a month."

"You either have the faith of the people or you don't. Chaney doesn't."

"Mr. Mabus, you've openly blamed society's near demise on the previous administration's policies that led to global isolation. And yet, your own company profited heavily from the new regimes that rose to power in the Middle East, as well as Asia."

"And Richard, who better to institute change than one who knows what it's like to walk down society's dark path? Having been there, I know what it will take to root out the evil that shadows our society. More than anything, I believe that is why God chose me to lead postapocalyptic America."

"Interesting. However, isn't it also possible, as your critics are quick to point out, that your sudden foray into politics has more to do with simply reading the writing on the wall. Chaney's already talking about canceling the Space Defense Initiative that's been blamed for fueling nuclear buildups in Russia and China, and your company was its main supplier."

"You mean my former company. I resigned four weeks ago."

"Still, you walked away with almost \$200 million dollars."

"Those were stock options I had coming to me. George Bush's vice president received \$20 million from Haliburton when he left, and they lost money under his leadership. The money I received was earned. God has no problem with that, especially when I'm investing it into a campaign that is doing so much good."

"Let's talk about your new political party, People-First."

"I think our name pretty much says it all."

"Some have labeled it extremism."

"Extremism? Richard, if the majority of Americans share our beliefs, then how is that extremism?"

We believe in the strength of the family unit. We feel the good ol' Christian values that made this country great have been replaced by promiscuousness and a generation of children who fail to give back to society."

"When you say Christian values, you are aware of how those words frighten most non-Christian Americans?"

"It's just an expression, Richard. I love all Americans, be they Jew or Hindu, or whatever, as long as they respect the values of a Christian society, which is what we preach."

"You realize what you're saying flies in the face of the Constitution."

"I believe in the Constitution, but let's face facts. It's been less than forty-five days since our political leaders nearly wiped out the entire species. If that's what the Constitution protected, then it needs some serious amending. Our Lord and Savior didn't save our butts just to watch us commit the same sins all over again. We need to learn from the events of 2012, and move on."

"Again, you credit Jesus with saving humanity, giving no credence to the administration's report about Michael Gabriel."

"That crock about a race of superior humans building the pyramids? Please." Mabus leaned forward, his eyebrows knitting. "Let me tell you something about this Michael Gabriel. I've spoken with many clergymen who are absolutely convinced he was the Antichrist."

"Mr. Mabus, by every account, Michael Gabriel died a hero."

"According to who? The government responsible for nearly getting us nuked? It's well documented that Gabriel's father, Julius, was a wacko, and so was Gabriel. He spent eleven years in a mental asylum for assaulting former Secretary of State Pierre Borgia. Does that sound like a hero to you? For all we know, Michael Gabriel may have been the one responsible for causing that alien to awaken in the first place. He did claim he had entered its vessel in the Gulf, right? He even said he was in communication with that demon."

"True, but—"

"But nothing. We've all seen the footage. Gabriel entered the serpent's mouth, and the two of them disappeared. Poof!"

"What are you implying?"

"Ain't implying anything. I'm tellin' you straight out that our Lord and Savior intervened at our darkest hour, sending Gabriel and his serpent back to Hell whence they came. Divine intervention, Richard, not some Mayan malarkey. Now humanity's at a crossroads. We either learn from this brush with extinction and elect leaders who will help us become the God-fearing people Jesus always wanted us to be, or we stick our heads in the guillotine and wait for the next Judgment Day."

* * * * *

Peter Mabus signs three more autographs, then boards his private jet.

Campaign organizers line up to greet him in the aisle.

"Beautiful job, Peter. The latest polls show us approaching 22 percent."

"The Dallas speech netted just under two million. Well done."

"Salt Lake City booked us for three more trips. The Mormons love you."

Mabus acknowledges each assistant as he makes his way to his private office located in the rear of the 707 airbus.

An older, white-haired gentleman is waiting for him inside.

Mabus's campaign manager, Texas billionaire Joseph H. Randolph, Sr., looks up from watching the

CNN broadcast. "You did well on the family values crap, but you lost points when you labeled Gabriel the Antichrist. This campaign's success may be fueled by a faith-based initiative, but the public still views Gabriel as a hero. In the end, his close ties to Cheney may be our undoing."

"Michael Gabriel will be old news by the 2015 New Hampshire primary."

"Maybe, but his child won't be."

"His child?"

Randolph nods. Hands him the report.

Mabus scans the document, his blood pressure rising. "The Vazquez woman's pregnant?"

"Yes, and when the public finds out, and they will, they'll flock to her like she's the second coming of the Virgin Mary, her newborn worshiped like the baby Jesus. Chaney won't even have to campaign, he'll waltz right into the White House for a second term, and we'll never get his kind out of power."

"Christ!" Mabus punches the closest wall, then rubs his knuckles as he collapses into an empty chair. "So? What do we do?"

"Only one thing to do, we get rid of this Vazquez woman before the public finds out she's pregnant. I've already got my sources working on finding her. Fortunately, Homeland Security's overseeing her case, so it should be relatively easy to get to her."

"Do it. Spare no expense. I want that bitch and her demon seed dead by the weekend."

January 25, 2013 St. Augustine, Florida

"Attention. Lead vehicle now approaching final destination. Have a nice day."

The sound of the Jeep's autopilot awakens Dominique. She stretches, inclines her seat, then glances at the digital clock. *Seven-thirty. I've been asleep for two hours.*

Evelyn Strongin's black Toyota is three car lengths ahead, both vehicles exiting Smart Highway 9 following the ramp into St. Augustine, America's oldest city.

* * * * *

It was in 1513 that famed explorer and treasure hunter Don Juan Ponce de León first arrived in Florida, claiming the 'Land of Flowers' for Spain. Fifty-two years later, King Phillip II appointed Admiral Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles as governor of Florida to protect the colony from the French. Menendez arrived on August 28, 1565, the Feast Day of St. Augustine and quickly fortified the coastal town, naming it after the holiday.

St. Augustine's history would be a bloody one. In 1586, Sir Francis Drake attacked and burned much of the city; in 1668, the pirate John Davis pillaged the town, murdering sixty people. With the British establishing colonies in the Carolinas and Georgia, Spain authorized the construction of the Castillo de San Marcos, a stone fort that surrounded the city, preventing it from being seized.

In 1763, Florida was ceded to England in exchange for Cuba, then returned to Spain twenty-three years later. The American Revolution forced Spain to relinquish Florida to the United States, and eventually became the twenty-seventh state to be admitted to the union. America's oldest city would fall prey to a yellow fever epidemic, then see its borders occupied by the Union Army during the Civil War.

St. Augustine's bad run of luck would change in 1865, with the arrival of Henry Flagler.

The cofounder of Standard Oil saw the city's potential as a winter resort, and was soon investing heavily in lavish hotels and a railway linking New York to St. Augustine. A new city hall, hospital, and several churches would follow, making the city founded fifty-five years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock the jewel of the South.

More than a century later, St. Augustine remains a popular tourist attraction, maintaining much of its old Spanish ambiance. The stone fort still remains, as do many of the city's original cobblestone streets and dwellings. One home dates back some four hundred years, and locals claim the old sections of the city are haunted by the souls of the dead. 'Ghost' walking tours are given nightly in the old quarter, passing through dark streets and cemeteries where the spirits are said to be especially active.

* * * * *

Dominique disengages the autopilot, directing the Jeep along Orange Street and past the two looming stone pillars that once served as gateposts to the fortified city. The Toyota continues on f

several blocks, then pulls into a parking lot across the street from an old brick drugstore.

Dominique parks next to Evelyn's car.

The old woman climbs out, stretching to ease her stiff back. "I'm not used to sitting for so long. Come, my dear, we'll pay our respects, then you'll join me for dinner."

Dominique follows Evelyn across the street and into the centuries-old drugstore.

"This dwelling and its parking lot were built over a sacred Indian burial site. The souls of the desecrated are still quite restless." She points at the front window where the headstone of Seminole Chief Tolomato sits. A wooden sign stands next to the gravestone.

"NOTIS THIS WERRY ELABORTE PILE IS EREKTED IN MEMORY OF TOLOMATO, A SEMINOLE INJINE CHEEF WHOOS WIGWARM STUUD ON THIS SPOT AND SURROUNDINGS. WERE CHERIS HIS MEMERY AS HE WAS A GOOD HARTED CHEEF HE WOOD KNOT TAKE YOOUR SKALP WITHOUT YOU BEGGED HIM TO DO SO OPADE HIM SUM MUNNY. HE ALWAYS AKTED MORE LIKE A CHRISTSUN GENTLE MEN THAN A SAVAGE INGINE. LET HIM R.I.P."

"Lovely."

Evelyn stands before the grave marker, her eyes closed, her lips mumbling something incomprehensible. After several moments she opens her eyes, then leaves the dwelling without saying a word.

Dominique follows her outside. "Look, maybe this isn't such a—"

"One must adhere to proper etiquette, child. Let's walk, my home's not far from here."

They continue to the corner, turning right on Cordova Street, its sidewalks shaded by oak trees. After several minutes they arrive at the sealed metal gates of an ancient cemetery.

Evelyn nods. "Tolomato Cemetery, one of the oldest graveyards in North America. Prior to 1763 the site was occupied by the Christian Indian village of Tolomato. The first bishop of St. Augustine was buried in the mortuary chapel at the rear of the cemetery. Most of the Spanish settlers preferred to be placed in stone crypts, our 'New World' soil never considered holy ground."

Evelyn continues walking.

Dominique remains by her side, the thought of so many old dead people lying so close sending chills down her spine. *What am I doing here? Get back in you car and drive home to Palm Beach County where the blue-hairs are still alive and kicking.*

Evelyn closes her eyes and bellows a bizarre laugh, as if sharing a private joke with a ghost.

Jesus, she's a lunatic. Wonderful. You've wasted all evening escorting a nut job back to her loon bin. "Evelyn? Hello, Earth to Evelyn?"

The old woman turns, her azure blue eyes radiant.

"Listen, it's getting late, and I have an early self-defense class. How about we do this another time?"

"Your grandmother says she misses working the onion crops with you in the Guatemala Highlands. Her knees and back always felt so much better after your evening swim in Lake Atitlán."

Dominique's skin tingles. "I was six. How did you . . ."

"My place is just over there." She points to a two-story redbrick, its paved walkway lined in white and purple impatiens.

The house is over two hundred years old, its security pad brand-new. Evelyn touches her fingertip to the soft rubber pad.

A *click* and the front door swings open.

Dominique follows the old woman through an arched corridor into a library, its floors made of beechwood, its furnishings contemporary. An entertainment center activates along one entire wall, broadcasting a CNN NewsFlash:

" . . .and in Antarctica, another glacier has separated from the Ross Ice Shelf, this one estimated at three times the size of the Irish Republic. Environmental scientists working with the United Nations insist that global warming has not escalated beyond anticipated figures for this year, despite the multiple pure-fusion detonations that vaporized large sections of Australia and Asia three months earlier. In other news—"

"Shut down, please."

The screen blackens.

"That's better." Evelyn turns to Dominique. "You must be famished. I took the liberty of ordering a few things on the trip up, they should be in the delivery pantry."

Too hungry to argue, Dominique follows her into the kitchen, a room harboring the latest in voice-activated appliances. "Mmm, is that fresh garlic bread I smell?"

"Yes. And pasta with marinara sauce." Evelyn opens the pantry door. Built into the exterior wall is a three-foot-by-five-foot stainless-steel hot box, one end opening to the pantry, the other to the outside of the house, allowing access for local deliveries.

The old woman removes the hot pouch containing their dinner and sets it on the black pearl granite kitchen table.

"Come. We'll talk while we eat."

Dominique takes a seat as her host sets the table, then opens the Styrofoam containers, unleashing the aroma of fresh Italian food into the room.

"You miss him, don't you?"

Dominique breaks off a piece of bread and stuffs it into her mouth. "Miss who?"

Evelyn smiles, placing her palm on top of Dominique's hand. "My dear, dancing around the truth will only wear both of us out. Do you know what necromancy is?"

"No."

"Necromancy is the art of communicating with the souls of the dead. Some believe it's a black art, but that all depends upon who's doing the communicating. The practice can be traced back to the ancient Egyptians and their leader, Osiris, creator of Giza, who summoned the dead to obtain valuable guidance."

"So . . . you're telling me you communicate with dead people?"

"With their souls."

Dominique scoops up a forkful of pasta. "I don't mean to be skeptical, but—"

"The body is made of physical matter. At creation, each of us is linked to a specific soul, our life force, or spirit, is the energy force that strengthens the body-soul connection."

"Okay, let me stop you there. First, I'm not a very religious person. Second, Ouija boards and all that hokey crap give me the creeps."

"but you've used them recently, haven't you?"

Dominique swallows hard.

"Because you're seeking answers to something."

"Yes."

"You want to know if Michael is still alive."

Dominique holds back her tears. ~~"I just need some sense of closure. You know, so I can go on."~~

"What does your heart tell you?"

She sits back, wringing her hands nervously against her thighs. "My heart tells me he's alive. My brain tells me something else."

For a long moment the old woman just stares. "I can guide you on part of your journey, Dominique, but I can't give you all the answers. If I did, it could alter the future."

"What journey? What future? What the hell are you talking about?"

Evelyn contemplates. Says nothing.

"I said what journey."

"Your journey, Dominique. Your destiny, and the destiny of your sons."

"Know what—I made a mistake. I'm not ready for this." She stands to leave.

"Leave if you want, but it won't change a thing; in fact, it will only make things worse. For whatever reason, a higher power has chosen you to be part of a greater good, just as I've been chosen to guide you. I'm not your enemy, Dominique, fear is the enemy—fear of the unknown. If you allow me, I can shine a light into the void and help eliminate your fear. I can give you the knowledge you seek."

Dominique pauses, then sits back down. "Say what you have to say."

"The first thing we must overcome is your lack of trust. I'm not a screwball. I'm a psychiatrist who relies on science and scientific observation to guide me. At the same time, I come from a family whose maternal ancestors were always adept at interdimensional communication."

Evelyn holds up a finger, stifling Dominique's question. "To understand inter-dimensional communication, you must first accept that we are surrounded by energy, and energy is everything around all things, it is only our perception within this universe of energy that changes. This table, for example, appears solid, yet it is made up of atoms, all of which are in constant motion. If we examined an atom of this chair under a powerful microscope, we would see mostly empty space. High-speed particles—electrons—would zip by like asteroids, and if we could delve deeper, we'd see even tinier particles called quarks, which oscillate, expanding into other dimensions. Everything is energy and everything is in constant motion."

"The speed at which a living human being perceives energy places us in the world of the physical, the world of the third dimension. Because physical density occupies space, its perception must be processed with time. For most of us, our physical surroundings are perceived within the limitations of our five senses. But there are higher dimensions that exist beyond these capabilities. Mathematically, eleven dimensions have been theorized, taking us into realms of what many have labeled the 'spiritual.' Again, the common bond in all these dimensions is energy."

"As I said, energy is all around us. Our senses may not perceive it, but this room is filled with energy. It emanates from our bodies as heat and brain waves. It bounces around this room in multitudes of frequencies. By discerning an energy pattern, we can tap into it, using devices such as radios and televisions, videophones and satellite dishes . . . devices that would have been labeled the work of the Devil when this city was first christened. But the mind is also a device, and by fine-tuning it, we can communicate with those who have moved on to higher dimensions of energy. Spirits are aspects of God, Dominique, and it is spirits that create souls. Death is not the end, but the beginning of a transitional stage. After we die, our perceptions change, expanding as we acquire the higher dimensions."

"How do you know these things?"

Evelyn's face creases into a smile. "Because, my dear, I've been there. I've crossed over."

Dominique feels her flesh crawl.

"Happened many years ago when I was living in Miami, right after Hurricane Andrew. Once the storm had passed, I went outside to walk my basset hound, Oscar. Stepped right in a puddle of wet leaves and *zap*—never noticing the downed electrical wire. Charge must've hit me like a ton of bricks."

Dominique looks at the older woman as if for the first time. "So what happened? Did you die?"

"As they say, I was dead as a doorknob. The first thing I remember is feeling free, every physical burden instantly gone. My consciousness floated above my body, and it was a strange sensation to look down at myself, sprawled across the sidewalk like a puppet who'd lost her strings. A lifeless body is never very flattering. And poor Oscar, barking his head off. You know, I think he actually sensed my spirit hovering overhead."

"Were you scared?"

"Not in the least, and I've never been scared since."

"What happened next?"

"My consciousness began moving through a dark tunnel, and up ahead, I could see a light. It was God's light, and it bathed me in a kind of love I had never experienced before." She pauses. "This is making you uncomfortable?"

"A little. If this is some sort of sales pitch to convert me—"

"Believe me, I'm the last person to preach religion. Fact is, I died an atheist, and not a very happy one. Of course, none of that ever occurred to me, until I experienced the life review."

"The life review?"

"It's your entire existence, every moment, every deed, every thought and feeling of everyone you've ever been in contact with, and you don't just experience it from your own perspective, but from that of others—the people you hurt, the people you helped. It was amazing and incredibly intense, some of it quite sad, but most of it wonderful, like being immersed in a sea of unconditional love. Still, I saw my shortcomings, and it was quite an awakening. And then I realized I wasn't alone, that my parents' souls were by my side. I didn't want to leave, but they told me it wasn't my time just yet, that I still had things I had to do in order to fulfill my mission in life. And suddenly, just like that, I was back in my body. It felt so heavy, like a lead suit, and I hurt terribly inside. I could hear and feel the paramedics working on me, and I felt sad, because I really wanted to stay with my parents."

"You said you came back to fulfill a mission?"

Evelyn sits back in her chair. "For years, I assumed my mission was simply to help people understand death. When I recovered from my injuries, I went to work on my first book. To date, I've interviewed eighty-seven people, all of whom shared similar near-death experiences with me. I've compiled a library of pertinent data, and I've written two best-sellers. Despite these post-death successes, I always felt something was missing. And then my sister died."

Evelyn stands. Crosses the room. Opens a desk drawer and returns with a color photograph. "Maria and I were inseparable as children, born only thirteen months apart. The two of us attended Cambridge together. I'll never forget the night she told me she was going off on some Mayan expedition with Julius and that jerk, Pierre Borgia. The news about broke my heart."

Dominique stares at the photo of the two sisters, taken while they were in England. "Your eyes? In this photo they're black, like your sisters'."

"Yes. They changed after the accident. In fact, it wasn't until after the lightning strike that I became a necromancer."

"You said earlier that you've been in touch with your sister."

"~~She's been my spiritual companion, my guide into the higher dimensions, the higher states of consciousness. The higher states are the forces of God's light, the forces of good. The higher our own frequencies of good, the easier it is for us to attune to their light.~~"

"Are there forces of evil?"

Evelyn pauses, choosing her words carefully. "By creating a world of free will, God allowed for the forces of both good and evil, light and dark. These 'lesser lights' as I call them, fall into several different categories. Ghosts are the deceased who remain too confused to move into the light. Sometimes our negative thoughts of ignorance invites them into our lives. Ouija boards, for instance, set us up for ghostly pranks. By praying for these confused entities, we can help them realize the reality of their situation and guide them into the light."

"More dangerous are poltergeists. Poltergeists have their own agenda. They are dark and evil and believe they can use their knowledge of the universe to manipulate our world. Poltergeists are the false prophets the Bible warns us about. They will entice us with their knowledge, but are not to be trusted. They can cause us great harm."

"The purer sources of light bring us closer to God. These are the spirits. Spirits are our friends. They never judge or manipulate us, they are here only to help us see the truth. Angels are the brightest lights in the spiritual world, the messengers of God's essence. They are always available to help, but it is up to us to ask for their assistance. Among the angels are the cherubim, seraphim, guardian angels, and archangels."

"And you can see them? You can see your sister?"

"No, but I can feel her presence when we communicate."

"And she's told you about Mick?"

Evelyn nods. "Take my hands in yours and close your eyes. Quiet your mind. Breathe in through your nose as slowly and deeply as you can, then gently out through your mouth. Focus on your feelings for Michael. Extinguish your sadness and feel him in your heart. Center yourself upon your love for him."

Dominique breathes. She thinks of Mick and how much she misses him.

Evelyn registers Dominique's increased energy flow as she meditates. She centers herself, moving deeper into her own meditation.

In due course she speaks: "Dear Lord, hold us in your loving light. Allow Your Angels to guide us so that our experiences may be for the highest good. We thank you for all You have done, and as You now to reveal our dearly departed, Maria Rosen-Gabriel, to us."

A long pause, then Evelyn speaks again, this time in a higher, raspy voice not her own.

"My son has not passed into the spiritual realm. Michael has imprisoned himself in purgatory."

Dominique's eyes flash open. "My God . . . Mick's in Hell?"

"There is no Hell. Michael's soul is shackled with anger—an anger that comes from a life devoted to love. He was asked to make a great sacrifice. Now he loathes and curses his existence, marooned on an island of space-time surrounded by an ocean of evil."

"Is . . . he safe?"

"He is in great danger. A powerful poltergeist tortures him and the *Nephilim*—a population of lost souls. Michael's internal rage binds him, preventing him from defeating the poltergeist, and yet he feels compelled to remain, for it is his heavenly light that comforts the Fallen Ones. All are trapped in an equilibrium of existence, a higher temporal plane, what you would call Hell. It is Michael's presence within this existence that has created a third-dimensional loop of space-time. The loop mu

be broken to save Michael, the souls of the Fallen, and humanity."

~~Dominique's fingers ache within Evelyn's steely grip as she stares at the tears streaming down the old woman's cheeks. "Maria . . . will I ever see him again?"~~

"The Creation Story foretold in the Mayan *Popol Vuh* rewrites itself. The final battle will again be waged. The journey of good and evil begins anew with the rebirth of your sons. It is your role to prepare them for a battle that was waged and lost eons ago. If they are successful, then Michael will be resurrected. If they fail, then humanity is lost."

"But beware, for another shall be born on the day of the twins' birth. Negative energy shall flow through this child, tainting its soul while strengthening its spirit. It is this abomination that imprisons my son and disrupts the space-time continuum. It is this unholyest of unholies that tortures the *Nephilim*, feeding off their life force."

"Guard against the Abomination, Dominique. Do not allow it to spawn."

January 26, 2013
White House
Washington, D.C.

Ennis Chaney, the second appointed vice president in history to ascend to the highest office in the land, enters the Oval Office, feeling all his sixty-seven years. African-American, with deeply sorrowful eyes, the former Senator from Pennsylvania has been commander in chief forty-two tumultuous days, ever since his predecessor, Mark Maller, took his own life in an attempt to stave off a global nuclear holocaust.

Since then, every dawn has been a blessing, every day twenty-four hours in hell.

Chaney barely has time to make his way behind his desk when his chief of staff, Katherine Gleason, buzzes him on the intercom. "Jesus, Kathy, at least give me a chance to sit down."

"Sorry, sir. Your seven o'clock appointment is here."

"Fine, send them in, and get me some of those chocolate chip cookies I had yesterday at the G meeting. The wife says I'm gaining weight, but I don't care, I need the caffeine."

"Yes, sir."

A moment later, Kathy opens the outer office door, escorting two men inside. The first is Chaney's friend, Marvin Teperman, a short Canadian exobiologist with a pencil-thin mustache and an annoyingly warm smile. The second man is all business, a gray-haired colonel in full-dress uniform. Chaney notices a slight hitch in the man's step. An attaché case is handcuffed to his left wrist.

Marvin beams his usual smile. "Morning, Mr. President. Great day to be alive, eh? Allow me to present Colonel Jack McClellan, United States Air Force."

"Colonel." Chaney motions to McClellan's leg. "Old war injury?"

"Prosthetic. Damn diabetes."

"Tough break." For a fleeting instant, Chaney feels guilty about ordering the cookies. "Have a seat. You'll forgive me, Colonel, but this is my first MAJESTIC-12 briefing. Maybe you could sort of bring me up to speed? I was never big on those *X-Files* shows."

The colonel shrugs off the insult. "Sir, Operation MAJESTIC-12 was established on September 2, 1947, by special classified presidential order following the recovery of airborne objects that fell over Roswell, New Mexico, between July 4 and July 6 of that same year."

"By fallen airborne objects, you mean UFOs?"

"Yes, sir, and Hollywood aside, I can assure you that this was no special effect. Technically speaking, our unit originated in 1941 with a UFO retrieval case that took place in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. It wasn't until '47 that Truman officially founded the organization. Over the years, MAJESTIC-12 has utilized the services of some of the most brilliant minds in the world, including Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer. Even after all these years, it remains our government's most supersecret program."

"Guess that explains the little wrist ornament."

The colonel nods. "These aren't your ordinary run-of-the-mill handcuffs either, sir. The bracelet monitors my pulse. Should my heart stop beating, should the chain be severed, or the wrong access code entered, the contents of the briefcase would instantly incinerate from within."

"Well, since there's no smoking permitted in my office, I guess I'd better enter the correct code. Chaney stands, leans over his desk, then carefully enters his access code on the briefcase's security pad.

The locking mechanism deactivates, allowing the colonel to open the case.

McClellan removes a half-inch-thick computerized clipboard, sealed in plastic, and hands it to the president.

"Thank you, Colonel. Now gentlemen, if you'll give me a few minutes—"

"Of course, sir." The colonel sits back in his chair.

Marvin just stares and grins.

The president sighs. He retrieves his reading glasses from his top desk drawer, then peels off the file's plastic wrapper, enters his daily access code to the wafer-thin screen, and begins reading off the LED monitor.

TOP SECRET / MAJESTIC-12

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PROGRESS REPORT ON SPECIAL ACCESS PROGRAM GOLDEN FLEECE

21 January 2013

ORIGINS

1. On 14 December 2012, at approximately 14.30 hours, EST, an electromagnetic force field equivalent to several billion amperes activated across the entire globe, destroying more than 1,000 Russian ICBMs and SLBMs targeted for North America, effectively saving the United States. MAJESTIC teams traced the EM array to exotic crystalline biomemnetic devices serving as transformer nodes and relay junctures within and/or below ancient structures of Angkor. What, the Great Pyramid of Giza, Stonehenge, the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán, Mexico and under the complex at Tiahuanacu in Peru.

2. MAJESTIC teams were able to trace the common origin of the EM pulse to a vessel buried 217 feet beneath the Kukulcán Pyramid in Chichén Itzá (Yucatán Peninsula). The EM pulse itself was transmitted to relay junctures by way of an antenna mast which morphed out of the vertical axis of the buried vessel and up through the core of the 1,000-year-old Maya superstructure. This was later confirmed by Michael Gabriel and his female companion Dominique Vazquez, who were able to access the vessel by way of a freshwater aquifer (cenote) located a mile north of the pyramid.

3. Michael Gabriel is the only child of archaeologists Julius and Maria Gabriel (both deceased) whose body of work centered upon the Mayan calendar and its doomsday prophecy, predicted for 21 December 2012. On 24 August 2001, Julius Gabriel presented 32 years of research at

Harvard symposium attended by rival (and future secretary of state) Pierre Robert Borgia, who verbally assaulted the professor, interrupting his speech. Julius Gabriel suffered a fatal heart attack, dying in the arms of his son and only child, Michael, who then attacked Borgia. The incident cost Borgia his right eye and landed Gabriel in a mental asylum in Massachusetts where he would spend the next eleven years, most of it in solitary confinement. He was subsequently transferred to a facility in Miami in summer of 2012 where he fell under Florida State University intern/grad student Dominique Vazquez's care. Ms. Vazquez subsequently aided Gabriel's escape in early December of 2012.

4 On 21 December, 2012, a "transdimensional" extraterrestrial biological, appearing as a giant serpent, rose from its own buried vessel beneath the Chicxulub Crater, the (Gulf of Mexico) impact site of an asteroid-like object that struck Earth 65 million years ago. The biological immediately targeted the EM pulse originating from Chichén Itzá, making its way to the site through a series of aquifers. U.S. Armed Forces were unable to stop the entity, which appeared to be existing on two dimensional planes at once. Michael Gabriel was able to deactivate the biological, using an energy beam originating from the antenna of the vessel buried beneath the Kukulcán Pyramid. Michael Gabriel then entered the triplex orifice of the entity. Both Gabriel and the biological subsequently disappeared. His status remains unknown.

GOLDEN FLEECE

5. Following the events of 21 December 2012, POTUS completed a new trade agreement with Mexico that included a private addendum placing Chichén Itzá under U.S. jurisdiction. The public park was immediately shut down, security assigned to MAJESTIC-12 under the newly formed GOLDEN FLEECE program. Project Director Dr. David Mohr (formerly of NASA) and exobiologists Marvin Teperman divided GOLDEN FLEECE personnel into the following independent programs.

SECURE & CAMOUFLAGE MAIN STRUCTURE:

Responsible for erecting a prefabricated camouflaged urethane shell resembling the exterior of the Kukulcán pyramid. On the night of 18 January 2013, the shell was set in place above the existing pyramid, thereby preventing discovery of subsequent GOLDEN FLEECE operations via satellite reconnaissance.

EXCAVATION-A:

Responsible for the systematic removal, tagging, and storage of every stone used in the construction of the Kukulcán pyramid, overseen by Mexican archaeologists. Pyramid removal expected to be completed by 15 March 2013.

EXCAVATION-B:

Excavate access pit to buried vessel upon completion of Excavation-A.

EXCAVATION-C:

Access buried vessel via aquifer running beneath Kukulcán Pyramid. Underwater Assessment Team (UAT) made up of MAJESTIC-cleared personnel included laser physicists, theoretical

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