

MagNanoTron, A *Bond Of Brothers* Thriller.

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MagNanoTron

A Bond of Brothers Thriller

by

Robert J. Saniscalchi

Acknowledgements

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Reader comments and praise for
Robert's award-winning *Bond of
Brothers* series

"The story of this gripping thriller develops as a monument to the combined might of the men and women who have fought for our freedom."

A review of *Bond of Brothers: Danger Close*;
David B., *Danger Close's Epic Military Symphony*

"High-action, breakneck pacing and political intrigue mark Saniscalchi's latest. The action is almost nonstop, with bodies galore and nice twists right to the end. Amid all the high-profile action and violence, Jason and Emma's romance brings lightheartedness to the narrative."

A review of *Bond of Brothers: Danger Close*;
The Prairies Book Review

"The China Connection emerges as a thrilling sequel, picking up the momentum from Danger Close. The

narrative is a high-octane blend of action, intrigue and the unbreakable bonds of brotherhood.”

A review of *Black Water: The China Connection*; Nancy.

“Black Water surges through the pages, bringing with it a cataclysmic wave of suspense. The hostile president’s plan to unleash a toxic chemical nightmare on American soil is a pulse-pounding premise that keeps readers hooked from start to finish.”

A review of *Black Water: The China Connection*;

Robert M.

Dedication

This story is dedicated to law enforcement, the intelligence community and especially the U.S. Army Special Forces. We owe them more than we will ever know.

Chapter 1

Fort Bragg And Family

Time moves on. Two years had gone by since Jason Patrick and his Special Forces Delta Team took down the evil and daring Chinese “Black Water” threat. The long, hot summer had turned to autumn and the trees were a tempest of red, yellow and orange colors. It was the 15th of October – a cool, crisp evening in Fayetteville, North Carolina – as Jason walked outside to check the mail.

He went back into his garage to gather up the last of his hunting gear, reminding himself to give his dirty SUV a much-needed wash, as he put the hunting gear in the rear cargo area. Early the next morning, his dad Robert Patrick Sr. was coming up for some small-game hunting, at a sprawling wildlife management area not too far of a drive northwest, in the foothills of Blue Ridge Mountains.

Jason was happy his mom and dad had decided to leave the old house in Jersey and move down, close to Fayetteville. They had got into a nice senior community, about ten miles south of the Fort Bragg base.

Jason went back inside, to the sound of a commotion going on in the kitchen. He could hear his loving wife, Emma. “No, no! You’re both making a mess!” she yelled.

Jason held back his laughter. What a sight: little Rob’s face was full of mac’n’cheese.

“What is going on in here?” Jason said, trying to keep a straight face, as he noticed the food was all over Rob’s high-chair and the floor. Young Laura was laughing and adding to the chaos, until Dad yelled: “Okay, knock it off!”

Little Rob’s face went from smile to frown, and he started crying at the sight of his father standing over him. Laura ran up the stairs to her room, with her mother behind her.

“Good,” Emma said. “You’re grounded. Stay in your room, young lady.”

Jason pulled his son from his high-chair and gave him a hug, until he calmed down. He then got a towel and cleaned up the little guy’s face. Jason could see Emma trying not to smile as she came over.

“It was Laura again. She started the fooling around when I was on the phone, throwing food at her brother.”

“I see that Mom was right on it,” Jason said, with a smile. “You remind me of my old drill sergeant.”

“Somebody’s got to get tough around here,” Emma said, as she hugged Jason and they both laughed about it.

Jason had come to realize that it was the simple things that made him happy, like a food fight in the kitchen – and being home to be part of it.

In Fort Bragg, Chief Warrant Officer Tex Larson was going over his paperwork, and a report on the new group of recruits trying to qualify for Special Forces. His Delta Team members were Jorge Morales, Julius Dudash, Andrew McDonough and some new faces, to round them off to a six-man team. The addition of communications and medical specialist Blair Crouse, and weapons specialist Thomas Blaknal, were a welcome addition; Tex liked them both. Blaknal reminded him of Derek, and Blair, as a seasoned veteran, was a good fit.

Jorge Morales walked in and handed Tex a folder. “Sir, today’s trials are done. The complainer quit today; he’s gone. But we still have a problem with the big guy who’s overweight.”

“Hmm, okay,” Tex replied. “We’re better off without the first one.” Then he paused for a moment, thinking. “What’s

the other guy's name?"

"It's Frank Wagston, sir," Morales replied. "He's from West Point. Top of his class, but he's not cutting the physical stuff."

"Okay, Jorge," Tex replied, "send him over. I need to talk with him."

History has shown how the training standards to qualify for Special Forces are so demanding and rigorous; only about twenty men make the cut, out of the hundred or more who sign on.

Jorge left and Tex sat finishing up his report, which base commander Colonel Jason Patrick would be expecting when he got back. Tex was learning, over time, that with his promotion to Chief Warrant Officer came decisions, and the responsibility that goes with them.

Before long, Wagston walked into Tex's office and saluted. "Yes, sir? You wanted to see me, sir?"

Tex looked at his recruit. "At ease. Have a seat, soldier," he replied.

As Wagston took a seat, Tex noticed that his uniform was neat and clean, his shoes polished, but he could tell that the man was nervous. Wagston looked tired, worn out.

Tex pulled out Wagston's file. "I see here that you were

an excellent student. Very impressive.” He paused for a moment, studying the file.

“I may have something – an open position, as far as I know. I think it may be a better fit for you.”

Wagston seemed to brighten up. “Yes, sir. It sounds interesting.”

“They’re looking for leadership in Logistics and Support,” Tex said, as he handed over the paperwork with some of the details. “What I can do is run it by the base commander. If it goes well, it could be your big chance, soldier.” Wagston was smiling as Tex continued: “Perhaps the commander will put the good word in for you. I will let you know.”

Wagston smiled as he saluted. “Yes, sir. Thank you, sir!”

Tex stood up as the recruit left with a smile.

That went better than I thought, he thought to himself. Now I hope Jason will agree.

Early the following morning, Jason woke to the sound of Emma’s voice, and could feel her shaking his arm. “Wake up! Wake up! Are you okay?” Emma was saying.

“Okay, okay, I’m up,” Jason replied, his t-shirt soaked in sweat. He looked at Emma. “I had the crazy dream about the bad guys again... Please, go back to sleep, baby.”

Jason then noticed that it was 5:30, and time to get up for today’s hunting trip, anyway. He quietly got dressed as Emma went back under the covers.

It was the same nightmare he’d had before. He could see it all so clearly: standing outside the Black Water compound, the intense firefight and, after it was over, the smell of the battlefield still in the air. Then Derek came to the doorway, smiling...

He started to say something, and—

Boom! Derek’s blood splattered everywhere. His head disintegrated before Jason’s eyes.

Everything seemed to be in slow motion, as Jason went down low and Dudash, with a wild look in his eyes, moved out, his gun blazing as he ran inside the cartel compound...

Jason felt better after washing up and sipping his coffee. He would tell his doctor about his dream again, but for the most part he accepted that they were part of his memories, and instead tried to focus on the good times he’d had with his lost friend, Derek.

Dad arrived right on time, and they got settled in Jason’s

car for the ride north.

His father smiled, “A little frosty this morning, son,” as he sipped his coffee. “They said it would be in the low forties and they were right.”

“A little cold for this time of year, but I like it,” Jason added. “We’re dressed right. It’s cold but there’s no wind; good weather for walking in the woods.”

Jason pulled off the interstate and onto the winding road leading up to the hunting area. Out in the distance, the yellow-orange sun was making its grand appearance on the cloudless horizon.

“Will you look at that?” Jason’s father said, pointing to the trees that lined the road. The maples and elms were catching the first rays of sunlight, and showing their fall colors in full glory.

“It doesn’t get any better than that,” Jason said with a smile, as he made his last turn into the wildlife management area.

Before long, the two were getting their gear from the back of Jason’s SUV. Jason grabbed his old favorite, a 12-gauge Remington 1100 Deluxe field model, the gun his

father gave him when he turned sixteen.

Dad smiled. “I see you’re still taking good care of that baby. You know, it’s worth more now – probably double what I paid for it – especially with the deluxe field upgrade.”

“Not as much as that ancient Parker shotgun you carry,” Jason replied. The friendly banter continued as they made their way up the gravel access road.

On the two pushed, up the long hill winding through pines and hemlocks, until they came to some large cornfields. The first field was cut down to nubs, but the rest of the corn was left for winter feed.

“You okay, Dad?” Jason asked, as he handed his father some water. “Let’s take a break.”

“Thanks,” Dad said, as he took a sip. “The water is good, but I’m okay.”

He pointed: “I say we head to the corn. Get in the middle of it and split up.”

“Sounds good,” Jason replied, as the two walked across the first field of cut corn. They soon got to the edge of the other field.

As they started to move through it, a huge, male pheasant flushed up, cocking and moving out slowly over

the cut corn. Dad had it covered and fired. The bird exploded in a cloud of feathers.

Just then, another big one flushed. This time Jason was on it. He fired twice with his autoloader and the second shot found the mark.

Jason looked back, and could see his father running to get his game, so he went for his own bird.

He was putting it into his game bag when he noticed, out in the distance, his dad was slowly trying to stand up. Jason ran over.

“What happened?” he asked. He noticed that Dad was flustered a little.

Dad gathered himself and lied: “Oh, no problem, I just got my boot caught on one of those damn corn nubs and tripped.”

What really happened was that Dad blacked out as he was running, and hit the ground hard. His left shoulder was now hurting, but not too bad. Stubborn man as he was, he decided to keep things to himself until he’d had a chance to see his doctor.

“Besides,” Dad said, trying to change the subject, as he picked up the big bird, “this one is a world record!”

Jason was relieved; his father was shaken, but okay.

“That cocker bird is a winner for sure, Pop. And I got me a nice one, too.”

“I will dress them later,” Dad replied. “Susan will make a nice meal for us.”

The two continued hunting the corn and Jason bagged another pheasant, but it was not long before Dad said he’d had enough – not surprising, considering what had happened to him.

On the way back to the SUV, Jason thought about his dear mother. Besides being a wonderful, always-happy mom, she was a great cook. The pheasant dinner would be really good.

Chapter 2

Magnanotron – The Science

In Maryland, at the U.S. Army Futures Laboratory, Devcom, a group of scientists led by Peter S. Androvski were working on a new, top-secret project. Androvski – an MIT graduate and brilliant scientist – was reviewing the latest results of the “Magnanotron” project with his staff. Magnanotron was initially developed to protect computer systems and servers, but now, in the ever-changing world of nanotechnology and other scientific knowledge, it had been taken to new, breathtaking levels. The scientists at Devcom were a tight-knit, loyal and dedicated group.

They stood silent as Androvski stood, pointing to the large display screen.

“It has taken years of hard work,” he said, full of excitement, “but now I believe we finally have it in our grasp! By using all the technology available from the base project, and discovering many new things along the way, it has finally happened. It is still hard to believe that the final piece of the puzzle has come down to the basic theory of

magnetics.”

Another picture appeared, showing a light-blue-colored, luminescent circle. “Our grounding problem is no more; the pulse width modulation is sequential,” Androvski added. “With the help of fellow scientist Darius Patil, we’ve added a special, rare chemical additive, combined with precise electro-nano technology. The Magnatron sequence is finally in order! It maintains maximum flux density and ultra-magnified electron flow.”

Androvski sipped his water, full of excitement, and continued: “Now we have it! The positively-charged atoms are repulsing and, as you can see, the negative ones are retro-acting. The end result has created a chain reaction – a high-intensity, continuous-flowing pulse modulation.

“I believe we have landed upon an electro-magnetic forcefield. And, if enough initial energy is applied, one that should be self-sustaining and virtually impenetrable!”

The room erupted in cheers and handshakes went around.

Androvski continued as he walked around the large glass table: “Everyone must understand the importance of this phenomenon. This discovery must stay within these walls; not a word to anyone!”

With that said, security services joined the group, and the meeting went on for hours. Everyone, with the exception of Androvski and Patel, had to hand over all paperwork and files that were involved with the Magnanotron project. Every computer, with the exception of Androvski's desktop and laptop, was scrubbed clean after the meeting was adjourned.

Afterward, Androvski headed for his office and his secure line. He had some important calls to make.

A few days later, at the Pentagon, U.S. Army General and Commander of Special Forces Ryan A. Thompson entered one of the meeting rooms, and walked toward a large wooden table.

Devcom Science Specialist Peter Androvski and his assistant, the well-known scientist Darius Patel, were excited. Androvski got up with a smile and came over.

“Welcome, sir. Thanks for meeting with us. Please have a seat; we have some important news for you.”

Ryan smiled as he shook Androvski's hand. “From our last conversation, it seems that you and your team have come up with something very interesting.”

“Yes, sir, we do have something exciting,” Androvski replied, as he moved to a large display screen and brought up a picture of the Magnatron circle. “These are the results of our promising new project.”

Androvski pointed to the screen. “We have found a way to flow the electro-magnetic atoms we have created, with the use of micro-magnetics and advanced nanotron technology. The result is a super-intense modulation; a circular pulse-flow. Once the device is charged, the loop is self-sustaining, sir.”

Commander Ryan smiled. “It seems you’re very excited about this, but you lost me with the ‘nano’ thing. I need you to give me the scoop on this stuff in layman’s terms.”

Androvski smiled. “I’m sorry, sir. I get carried away by the science of it. What we have here is a self-sustaining, high-energy forcefield.”

Ryan hesitated for a moment as the words sunk in. “A forcefield? Like a... shield thing, or what?”

Ryan looked at some of the familiar faces. “My god. This sounds like *Star Trek* or something.”

With that said, laughs broke out around the table. “Beam me up, Scotty!” Androvski added, and the laughter continued.

When Ryan stopped laughing, Androvski continued: “Thanks for the compliment, sir. We believe that, once the device is at full operational intensity, the Magnanotron shield will be virtually impenetrable. We would like to give a demonstration, sir.”

Commander Ryan looked at his associates, smiling, then stood up, full of excitement himself. “Yes, indeed we need to see your demonstration as soon as possible!”

He paused, looking at the display screen, then at Androvski. “Please, let me know if you need anything from me when getting things ready. I have some people that will be very interested in this one, for sure.”

“Thank you, sir,” Androvski replied. “Just to let you know, we are being very cautious with our information, and Army security services are closely involved, sir. I will let you know when we have the Magnanotron demonstration ready.”

After the meeting, Ryan went back to his office and called his old friend, Joint Chief of Staff General Mark Stanis, and told him to keep his schedule open; Ryan had something very important for him to see.

*

Some things never change. Russia – and now China – were always watching, waiting, for ways to steal the latest cutting-edge technology from America...

Inside Devcom, there was a middle-aged man walking the hallways. Gregory Wallis was the new night-shift janitor. But, truth be known, he was also a long-time Russian SRV spy.

For the last week, usually during the last hours of his shift, he had noticed increased activity, lots of hustle and bustle in the science lab area. He made a mental note to keep an eye out for a chance to get into the lab, and to report the recent activity to his contact.

Chapter 3

The Game Begins; Spies Afoot

Back in North Carolina, the long weekend was over and Jason was on base, in his office, looking over some new paperwork, when Tex and Morales came in.

“Good morning, sir,” Tex said, as they both saluted their leader. “We wanted to give you an update on the recruit training.”

“Good morning. Grab a seat, gentlemen,” Jason replied, as Tex handed him a large folder.

“The training has been going well,” Tex said.

“We have some promising men out there, sir,” Morales added, “but we also have our share of candidates who have either quit on us or need to be let go.”

“I see,” Jason replied, looking over the files. “I trust you guys to do the right thing.” As Colonel Hogerbee had said: “It’s tough for a reason. The standards are what make us who we are.”

Jason signed off on their recommendations and handed the folder back to Morales.

“Oh, one more thing, sir,” Tex said, as he handed Jason a few papers: “we got a Corporal Wagston, sir; he’s a West Point graduate but he’s not cutting the physical stuff. I talked with an advisor at the school; it seems Wagston has a brilliant mind – top of his class, sir.”

“Hmm, so what are you thinking, my friend?” Jason asked.

“I think he would be a great fit over at Logistics,” Tex replied. “I heard they are looking for some new blood over there.”

“Good idea; let’s give the man a chance,” Jason replied. “I like it; I see you are learning how to think outside the window. Let me make a call; I have an old friend over there.”

“Thank you, sir,” Tex replied, then the two left for another meeting with Delta Team.

Later that day, Jason finished his call home to Emma, and was glad to hear that all was quiet on the home front. He went outside with his coffee and walked over to an old wooden bench, as he did most every day. He enjoyed his time out of the office, getting a look at the troops and the

busy airfield. Jason noticed that Delta Team was forming up out on the tarmac.

It was good to hear that Specialists Blair Crouse and Thomas Blacknal were fitting in with the team nicely. Blacknal, an African American from Philadelphia, reminded him of a young Derek, and Blair – a tall, lean fellow from Florida – was an airborne soldier with combat experience; he seemed a natural fit for Special Forces.

Jason stood watching as Delta moved out toward the firing range. He missed it dearly, being part of the team. *But now, my friend, you are part of every team on base,* he told himself.

Jason heard that his old friend Colonel Hogerbee was back for the weekend. It was hard for him to believe that Hogerbee was now Secretary of State, but Jason was glad that he kept his condo in town. *Once Army, always Army,* he thought to himself. He reminded himself to give Hogerbee a call, to meet at the officers' club for some dinner.

In Maryland, Victor Mikal, a Russian foreign-intelligence spy, an SRV operative, sat out on the balcony of his newly-

leased condo and took in the view. With him was his friend Niki Ivanov. Both of these high-tech SRV spies had been living in America and spying for years, under a false identity. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Smith, a married couple, were now new residents of Maryland.

SRV Deputy Director Sergey Nashkin had received word of increased activity at Devcom, and called in his spies for a closer look at their lead scientist. At his request, the Smiths took a nice place, one floor above and directly across the small courtyard from Andropov's brand-new condo.

Victor Mikal was going over his files and the information he had received from their newly-planted mole. Gregory Wallis was a simple but time-proven and trusted SRV spy, with all the right paperwork. Gregory came into the U.S. over ten years ago, and had been the ideal citizen, working hard and paying taxes.

Just a few days ago, Gregory had told Victor about all the activity and excitement going on at the Devcom facility, and especially from one of the science labs. He had found a crunched-up piece of paper in one of the garbage cans, with the words "*Magnanotron*", "*Androvski*" and "*testing*" scribbled on it.

Victor's phone rang and Niki answered. "It's the boss," she said, as she handed it to him.

It was Deputy Director Nashkin. "Hello, my friend. I have received your latest report. How is the new place going for you?"

"All is very well, sir," Victor replied, "and the view is just what Niki and I wanted."

"That is good news, Victor," Nashkin replied. "By tomorrow noon you will receive a special delivery. Read it carefully; it is of the utmost importance." He hesitated for a moment. "I have talked with Director Malov; there is a lot of interest and concern about the things in the note our friend Gregory found. Call me if you have any questions about your further instructions."

With that, Nashkin hung up and the two spies got busy, setting up a high-tech camera system. Victor had two cameras: one for the balcony and a remote device for the parking lot. They needed to monitor Androvski's movements, to learn his routine and his habits.

Back in the Fayetteville area, Jason's dad had just finished washing up, and sat thinking about what happened to him

during the hunting trip. He remembered that he was moving toward the downed bird, then the next thing he knew, he was sprawled out in the corn nubs.

Musta passed out. Maybe too much excitement. Besides, been feeling fine, he told himself. He decided that he would wait to see his doctor; he had his yearly physical due next month.

The following morning, Jason was in his office early when his phone rang. To his surprise, it was Commander Ryan on the line.

“Hello, my friend. How are things going for you?” Ryan asked.

“We’re good, thanks, sir,” Jason replied.

“I got another one for Delta Team,” Ryan added. “Seems that we got some cartel trouble, down by the border again. I will get the information to you within the hour.”

“Okay, sir,” Jason replied, “I will brief Delta. They’ve been wanting another round; not much action since Black Water.”

The two friends talked for a while about family and friends, then Jason hung up, grabbed his coffee cup and

decided to take a walk, to stop by and talk with Delta. Once outside, Jason buttoned up his jacket. The early-November air had a bite to it, but it felt good to be outdoors.

He made his way over to the barracks area and found Tex sitting in his jeep, smoking one of his Marlboros.

“Good morning, soldier,” Jason said, as he moved closer.

“Good to see you, sir,” Tex replied with a smile. “It’s a little cold out, but a good day for a hike with the men.”

“Yes, crispy it is. Good idea; we need to keep the troops in shape.” Jason hesitated for a moment. “We got us another one coming; Commander Ryan called this morning. I expect the details shortly. Tell the men we have a meeting in two hours.”

“Roger on that, sir,” Tex said, as Jason left for his walk back.

Tex found his team having breakfast, filled his plate and joined them. “We have a meeting coming up. The boss has another one for us,” he said, as he settled in at the table.

“Good, it has been too quiet,” Morales said.

“Sounds like fun,” Blair added. “You might want to sharpen that big blade of yours, boss.”

Everyone was excited, got a laugh in and teased Tex

about his big blade, but Tex didn't mind. He always sharpened his deadly knife before a mission. He prayed, in silence, that he would not have to use it again.

Back in Maryland, a few days went by. Victor and his friend Niki were looking over the camera recordings of Androvski's movements. It looked like he left the condo around seven every morning and returned to the condo by six p.m. He also went out on his balcony, on and off, to have a cup of coffee and a smoke, or talk on his cell phone.

The two spies went through their latest instructions from Deputy Director Sergey Nashkin. They were to get information from their mole at Devcom, and security measures needed to possibly sneak into Androvski's office. Nashkin demanded that everything be done very carefully; the need to be undetected by the Americans was of the utmost importance. Also, he added, when it was decided to happen, there could be a need to get into Androvski's residence.

Back at Devcom, the big day came for Androvski and

Darious Patel. They were finishing the last touches on the Magnanotron, and getting things ready for testing at the Maryland, Aberdeen proving grounds. They had a specially designed, 600-volt generator set up, connected to their device, and had hooked up several connectors to a sensor-filled test dummy, which was sitting in front of a large concrete-and-steel wall. The dummy looked like a man dressed in Army formals, holding a rifle. There was also a series of cameras set up, to film the entire demonstration. Out in the distance was big brass, including Special Forces Commander Ryan and Chief of Staff General Stanis.

Androvski was excited as he did a final check on everything, then looked at his trusted friend Darious Patel.

“Okay,” Androvski said, “let’s begin the charging sequence.”

The generator started and, after a few minutes, the main switch was thrown.

At first, nothing happened. Then, a light-blue, luminescent arc began rotating around the dummy, slowly intensifying. Androvski disconnected the power and the generator was shut down. Then, the science team quickly moved back away to the Army group.

About 100 yards away, a Special Forces soldier was set

up, with an M-60 machine gun at the ready. Commander Ryan watched the blue circle as the M-60 gunner opened fire. There was a series of flashes and sparks, as the loud report of the gun filled the air.

To Androvski's surprise, the Magnanotron shield seemed to be intensifying as the gun laid down a blistering attack on the figure. The soldier fired until he ran out of ammo.

"Everyone, please wait here a moment," Androvski said, as both he and Darious ran across the smoke-filled field.

"Look, it is intact!" Darious yelled out, as they got close.

"Yes, yes!" Androvski said, jumping with joy. "Okay, okay, let's shut it down," he told Darious, as pulled out his remote device and punched in the code. After a few seconds, the blue arcs of light faded away. The Army group, including the gunner, moved across the smoky field for a look.

General Stanis could not believe it, as he looked at the fully intact replica. *Oh, my god! This has to go right to the president*, he thought to himself. Everyone else looked at the dummy in disbelief.

Ryan and Stanis moved over to Androvski. "Congratulations! This discovery... it's amazing!" Stanis

said. “You need to be with us when we take this one to the Oval Office.”

“Yes, sir; whatever you need, you got it,” Androvski replied, as handshakes and cheers went around.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, I don’t have to tell all of you how important this is!” Commander Ryan yelled out. “No one saw anything today. Remember, as tight a drum on this.” Everyone nodded in agreement. It would be a career-ending move to even think about breaching security on the Magnanotron discovery.

As the officers and scientists dispersed, Ryan and Stanis walked over to a nearby bench and sat down.

Ryan looked at his friend. “I don’t know about you, but what we just witnessed was surreal to me. To take that much heavy machine gun, at max velocity... and the shield withstood the firepower – no damage!”

“I know. It’s hard to believe,” Stanis replied. “What we have, my friend, is a shielding device; an electronic forcefield the likes of which this world has never seen before. We have to keep this discovery secure; our enemies would love to get their hands on it.”

“You know my thinking?” Ryan added. “We need to get our friend Rob Tanner from the CIA to head up the security

on Magnanotron. He did a great job with Black Water. I will make the call.”

“Good, you do that,” General Stanis replied, “and I will make the arrangements for a meeting with the president. I figure the Secretaries of Defense and State need to be included in the meeting.”

“Okay, General,” Ryan added. “As you know, we have another mission coming up on the border, but I will be available, so keep me in the loop.”

“Thanks for reminding me: the border mission,” General Stanis added. “I hope we can get that behind us. After the mission, I may call on you, if needed, to get this Magnanotron thing settled down.”

“The men are ready for the mission; they’ve been itching for it, sir,” Ryan replied. “But I understand, General. As always, we’ll be ready for the call.”

The two leaders left Aberdeen with wonder and excitement about Androvski’s Magnanotron.

Commander Ryan had to get in touch with Tanner, and the sooner the better. As he drove, he thought: *This could be a game-changing breakthrough.* He figured it wouldn’t be long before he sat down to tell the president about Magnanotron.

Chapter 4

The Cartel And Things

Back at Fort Bragg, Jason stood before his Delta team and a large display screen. Some paperwork was passed around, and the image of what looked like a large, camouflaged building came up on the screen.

“This is another Chinese-backed cartel drug compound,” Jason said, as he pointed at the screen. “The cartel and their operatives have been distributing a new, even deadlier version of fentanyl; it’s mixed with a strong form of methamphetamine. This is a serious problem: our young are dying by the thousands from this poison. The cartel doesn’t care about anything but profits, and we are going to do something about it.”

“Where is this compound located, sir?” McDonough asked.

“It’s in Texas; the Davis Mountain Range area,” Jason said, as a new screen came on the display, with a detailed map of southern Texas. “It’s in a remote area, about twenty miles west of the Pecos River.”

“I picked up some horses down that way, some years ago,” Tex replied. “Got some thick cover in that area; lots of trees.”

“Same drill, people,” Jason added: “we go in, shut it down, get some pictures and destroy the compound on the way out. If possible, capture a few cartel members, but eliminate anyone who tries to stop us.”

Jason handed Tex a large folder. “I have some other business: it seems the commander wants a meeting again, so I will leave it to you to go over the details with Delta.” Jason grabbed his briefcase. “Good luck, and please keep me up to date on things.”

“No problem, sir, I got it from here,” Tex replied.

The meeting went on, as Delta discussed and reviewed the details of the mission ahead. The plan was in hand; now, as always, it was up to the boots on the ground to make it happen.

The setting sun was an orange glow in the long, purple-gray clouds that lined the horizon, as Jason pulled onto his driveway. Outside, the north wind had a bite to it, as Jason headed for the front door and inside the house.

Jason lifted up Laura, who was watching cartoons in the living room. *She is growing fast, getting taller*, he said to himself. Laura was five years old now and in kindergarten.

Laura pointed: “Mom’s cooking. I was helping her.”

Jason set her back down, to finish watching her cartoons on the T.V., and made his way to the smell of something good to eat.

“Look who’s here,” Emma said. “Dinner is about ready. It’s your favorite,” she smiled: “my special meatloaf and mashed potatoes.”

Jason looked around. “Ah, baby, that sounds really good. Where’s my little guy?”

“He’s in his crib. It’s time to get him up,” Emma said with a smile, and Jason went upstairs.

“Hey, little man,” he said, as Robby opened his eyes and smiled at his dad. Robert Patrick was named after Jason’s dad when he was born, about a year-and-a-half ago.

As Jason picked up his son, he felt something extra warm in his diaper. He went downstairs. “It’s a stinker!”

Emma laughed as she handed Jason a diaper. “Welcome to the club.”

Later that night, the kids were asleep, and Jason and Emma sat enjoying the quiet.

“So, soldier, when are you going to tell me there’s another mission coming?” Emma said, smiling. “I can tell; you always get so preoccupied.”

“Right on that one, again,” Jason replied. “They lift off tomorrow night. It’s another cartel drug thing.” Jason hesitated, then added: “I’ll have to be on base for a few days.”

“I know you miss it,” Emma added, “but you’re the boss now. No more worrying about bullets for me.”

“I’m happy for you and the kids, dear,” Jason replied, smiling; “it’s a relief to know you won’t be worrying, and that I’m out of the fray, but now I’m the one who carries the responsibility of the mission and its success.” Jason took a sip of his wine. “You know I care about the men, and I do worry when they’re on a mission. I’m afraid that will never change.”

“You need to relax, Jason; you’re too uptight,” Emma said, with a sheepish grin. “And I happen to know just the right thing for it.”

In Langley, Virginia, CIA Specialist Rob Tanner got a late-night call at Commander Ryan’s request. Half asleep, he

grabbed his secure line and, to his surprise, it was CIA Deputy Director Norman Scout.

“Hello, Tanner, it’s Norman. This one comes from the top. We’ve got something big. In fact, the particulars of ‘big’ are on a need-to-know basis, so I can’t tell you what it is right now.”

“Yes, sir. What can I do for you?” Tanner replied.

“What I do know is that there is a scientist over at Devcom – his name is Peter Androvski. He and his team of scientists have come up with an incredible discovery. It could be a game changer.”

“Sounds very interesting, sir,” Tanner replied.

“We need you to get yourself and your assets over to Adelphi, Maryland, and the Army Devcom facility,” Norman said. “I have been in touch with Devcom; gave them a heads-up. We want you to check out the security of the science labs and the entire research facility. Get a feel for what is going on and, for now, post a twenty-four-hour watch on their lead scientist, Peter Androvski.”

Norm hesitated for a moment, thinking. “Get the people you trust and need; cost is not an issue on this one. I also strongly suggest you grab a red-eye, and get on scene as soon as possible.”

“I got it, sir,” Tanner replied. “I should be in town no later than tomorrow, early afternoon. And I will bring two of my top agents with me, to start things off.”

“Good. I will forward more of the information and details to you. I don’t have to tell you to be careful.” Norm then added: “Call me with an update once you have assessed the situation.”

“Copy that, sir,” Tanner added. “I will keep you in the loop.”

The conversation ended and Tanner got busy, making calls and getting packed for his trip to Maryland.

Back at Fort Bragg, Jason walked into the briefing room and took a seat at the head of the table.

“Good to see you, sir,” Tex said. “Delta is good to go.”

Jason looked at his men. “Commander Ryan sends his regards. After this mission we have something big coming up – really big – and the commander wants us in on it, ready to go.” Jason added: “For now, though, we are dealing with the cartel again. They are armed foreign criminals and enemy combatants; lethal force is justified.”

After going over some details, the pre-mission meeting

ended and the team headed back to quarters, talking and wondering what “really big” was going to mean.

Back in Maryland, Agent Tanner and his top agents had grabbed a flight, and were at the Devcom facility by seven in the morning. They made their way through tight security and were finally escorted to the science building, where Peter Androvski had his research laboratory.

“He’s right in there.” The escort pointed to a large steel-and-glass doorway.

“Good. We’re going to have a look around first,” Agent Tanner replied. “Thanks for the help.”

Tanner turned to his assistants. “You guys take a walk; check inside and out, all the exits and camera systems. When you’re done, give me a call.”

Before going into the lab, Tanner noticed that the lock system on the lab door was electronic. He decided on a custom pick-proof, keyed deadbolt to be installed, in addition to it. Tanner tried the door, and was happy that it was locked. He knocked on the door.

Darius Patil smiled as he let Tanner in. “Welcome, Mr. Tanner. We have been expecting you.”

Tanner made a mental note: *He let me in before checking my I.D. – not good.*

A husky, dark-haired, young fellow with a beard came over to Tanner.

“How was your trip?” Androvski asked. “We have a busy day ahead. A driver will be picking us up in a half-hour; we are going to The White House.”

“The trip was good. You must be Peter Androvski,” Tanner said, smiling. “I’m CIA Special Agent Rob Tanner. Two of my associates are looking over security in this building as we speak. I got some details about your work, but perhaps you can let me know what it is you have discovered that has my people so concerned. And, please don’t worry...” Tanner paused as he pulled out his badge; “I have top-level security clearance.”

“We are still learning about Magnanotron,” Androvski replied, “but the nano-electron magnetics have been remarkable.”

He looked at Tanner, who seemed confused. “Perhaps you should look at this,” the scientist added, as Darius Patel went over and turned on a large display screen.

Tanner watched in silence as the testing scene unfolded before his eyes: the blue circle, the arcs of light rotating

around the figure, and then the machine gun opened up, with flashes and sparks coming from the impacts against the rotating arcs of light. The smoke then dissipated and still standing was the figure; it looked untouched, nothing out of place.

“Wow! So, the blue light protected the figure inside it?” Tanner said, full of excitement and disbelief.

“Yes, it did. Not a scratch on it,” Androvski said, and smiled. “We have a working forcefield, but there’s much more work to do.”

Tanner looked at Androvski and Darius Patil, thinking: *My god! No wonder we need to lock this place down now.*

“Okay, Peter, okay,” Tanner said, his mind going at a thousand miles an hour, “tell me, where do you keep this device and all the data that goes with it?”

Peter Androvski pointed to a large doorway. “Magnanotron is in the vault, along with my laptop and all the files – with the exception of the files on my desktop, which are locked in my office.”

Tanner wrote down some notes. The desktop files were to be copied and scrubbed. “Okay, Peter, how about other people? Do they have files or information? And who are they?”

Peter pointed: “My friend and associate Darios Patil – he has helped me in the creation of Magnanotron.”

Patil smiled. “We also have three other scientists, who have limited involvement. That makes five of us, plus security. But the two of us are the only ones with the intricate technical knowledge needed to create Magnanotron.”

“None of the other scientists have the files, nor access to any of them,” Androvski added. “Security, Darios and I are the only ones who can get into the vault.”

Tanner finished his notes. “Good. I see some very good precautions have been made,” he replied. “However, I was allowed into this lab without showing any credentials, which will stop today; I will have a talk with security about it. Oh, and let’s have a look at the vault.”

Tanner entered through the heavy-steel vault door. He noted it was of good quality, made by Seico. The vault’s interior, Tanner noted, was constructed of reinforced concrete and heavily-plated steel, all around. “How thick is the concrete?” Tanner asked, as he noted a motion detector and camera facing the doorway.

“I believe it is made of engineered concrete,” Peter replied. “I was told the entire vault, walls, floor and ceilings

are twenty-four inches thick.”

“Good, I feel this is a secure place,” Tanner replied, as he handed Androvski and Patel his cards. “Thanks for the information.”

Handshakes went around as Tanner was set to leave the lab. “I’m here at the president’s order. I intend to keep you guys and this place safe.”

Tanner added, as he was at the door: “I will be onsite for a good while, so, please, guys, call me if you have any concerns at all.”

Once outside the lab, Tanner talked with the other agents, and was relieved to hear that all the exits were locked and alarmed. The only way into the complex was via the front entrance with a keycard, and security cameras were everywhere.

Tanner and his crew decided to head back to the hotel, get something to eat and catch some much-needed sleep.

When at the hotel, Tanner’s phone rang as he was undressing. It was the boss, Deputy Director Norman Scout.

“Hello, sir. I was just about to call you.”

“How are things going?” Norman asked.

“Good, sir. We have the package secured,” Tanner replied. “There is more work to do, and I have some minor changes underway.”

“Alright,” Norman replied. “I got a heads-up for you: we won’t need to worry about guarding the exterior, the building or grounds: the Army is on the way; the whole perimeter is going to be sealed off. That order just came in from Chief of Staff General Stanis.”

“Are we pulling out, or what?” Tanner asked.

“No way,” Norman added; “we may need you at a moment’s notice, and I feel better with you hanging around, keeping an eye on things.”

After the call, Agent Tanner decided to take a drive around town, to get a feel for the area.

Chapter 5

The War On Drugs

At Fort Bragg, the pre-dawn morning was cool. A patchy fog hung along the low-lying areas, as Jason drove onto base. He parked and went into his office at four a.m.

He was waiting and hoping for his uplink to light up, with word that Delta had finished their night-drop. Before long, they should be on location and moving to their target. Jason sipped his coffee, thinking and looking at the blank display screen. *Nothing like a night-drop to wake you up*, he thought to himself. Jason missed being in the action, but, as a father with a growing family, he also appreciated the time off afforded him since he was promoted to colonel, and commander in charge of Fort Bragg.

Jason looked at one of the pictures sitting on the edge of his desk. The Delta Team picture was taken just before the Black Water mission; Jason was standing next to his old friend, Derek. He missed his friend, with his smile and his corny jokes. Jason could still see it, from his dreams: the image of Derek standing in the doorway of the cartel base,

when a bullet ended his life.

In southern Texas, about twenty miles west of the Pecos River, Delta Team had just finished their drop through the clear, starlit night and were gathering up. With all accounted for, Tex gave the order for Delta to move into the cover and set up a defensive perimeter.

Tex lit up his uplink com. “Capcom, Capcom, the bird has landed. Copy?”

“We copy that,” Capcom replied: “the bird has landed.”

Back at Fort Bragg, Jason was relieved as he watched the display screen light up, six yellow dots blinking on the screen. *Yes, the uplinks are working. All is good to go*, he thought to himself.

Jason grabbed his uplink and called in to Capcom: “Let’s make it happen. Delta is go.” Jason then set the uplink down and prayed for his men, and a successful mission.

*

In south Texas, Delta was about a mile or so due east of their target. Intel had confirmed it was the drug-processing cartel base; the building was spotted by one of their recon drones. It was a large, camouflaged pole barn, which was set up in a heavily-wooded area.

Inside the barn, the cartel criminals were in a good mood, laughing and joking with one another. With open borders, their profits had been through the roof. They were now unpacking a fresh shipment from their friends in China. It was a big shipment of the new and improved, even deadlier fentanyl mix.

Back in the cover, Delta was on the move, single file, low and fast, with Jorge Morales on point.

After a long run, Tex signaled hold as his uplink lit up.

“Delta, Delta – Capcom. Do you copy?”

“We copy that,” Tex replied.

“You have the green light,” Capcom replied.

Tex signed off and checked their headings. “We are green for go, people. Let’s move; we’ve got a long way to go.”

“I got it, boss,” McDonough added. “Let’s kick some cartel ass!”

With that said, Delta continued onward, making their

way through the dense cover. On they pushed, with the speed, determination and unending endurance that set them apart. If the cartel criminals only knew what was coming for them, they would have run for their lives.

Back in NC, Jason left his office and made his way over to Capcom, to stay with the ongoing Delta mission. But his stomach decided it was time to take a break and stop for some breakfast. Once there, Jason talked with some of his direct reports. He was learning that with his promotion came much more responsibility.

Back in south Texas, a large, white van came off the dirt-and-gravel road, and pulled into the cartel base: the drivers who would help spread the fentanyl up into the heart of America. The cartel leader heard them and opened the large bay doors, bringing light into the darkness, and the sight of his driver friends. Quickly, they went inside and a very large amount of cash changed hands. The cartel leader smiled as he stuffed his jacket full of cash.

He turned to the drivers. "Come, sit down, take a rest.

Let us have a drink. Tonight we celebrate.”

Out in the cover of night, Delta was getting closer. Tex and Morales scanned up ahead, and out into the tree line in the distance. To the east, they could see slivers of light coming through the cover.

“That must be it,” Morales said.

“Yes, that’s got to be our cartel friends,” Tex replied, as he scanned with his night-vision scope.

Back into the cover they ran, and Delta went into stealth mode.

At Fort Bragg, Jason was at Capcom, drinking coffee to stay awake. Everyone was watching the display screen as the blinking lights moved toward the target.

“It won’t be long now,” Jason said to one of the Capcom operators.

At the Texas cartel base, Delta had moved in, making their way up close. They could see the building ahead, and a van

parked in front of the open bay doors.

“I see two armed guards,” Blair said. “They’re out in front of the driveway.”

“Okay, I see them,” Tex replied. “McDonough, you and Blair use your silencers; take them out. We’ll move to the doors and wait for you.” Tex took out a stun grenade. “Once were set, I’m going to flip this through the doors and we move in.”

“Got it, boss: back to the doors,” Blair said, as he was attaching the custom silencer onto his Glock 19. As Blair and McDonough slipped into the darkness, Delta crawled their way to the side of the bay doors.

Before long, they could hear talking and laughing going on inside the building. Tex could feel the tension building; the unique feeling of fear mixed with excitement that always came to him before battle.

Out in the cover, Blair and McDonough were making their way in the cover, along the side of the driveway.

“Smell that?” Blair whispered.

“Copy that,” McDonough replied, to the distinct smell of marijuana smoke. Standing at the end of the driveway, the two cartel members had their weapons shouldered and were sharing a joint. They were laughing about something.

Slowly, the two soldiers pushed on through the cover, until they were very close. Then, weapons at the ready, they moved in for the kill.

Each man ran out of the cover, handguns up, and fired: *Pop! Pop! Pop!*

One of the criminals pulled out his handgun, and somehow managed to let out a scream before a bullet tore through his head.

“Oh, shit,” Morales said. “Let’s head back.”

Inside the building, the cartel leader jumped out of his chair. “What the hell was that?! Get the weapons!”

Everyone inside was yelling, as they scrambled for their guns.

Tex wasted no time, and pulled the pin on his stun grenade. He moved up and flipped it through the doorway. Delta stayed low as the grenade detonated with a thunderous boom.

Inside the building, the powerful blast had taken down three of the six criminals. One of the criminals, up in the loft sleeping area, was rocked awake; he got up and fumbled for his shotgun.

The cartel leader and his assistant were shaken, but had managed to roll themselves out of the blast area. They were

disorientated and fumbling with their weapons.

Guns at the ready, Delta made their move inside the building.

Tex caught movement to his right and opened fire, with two short bursts. The cartel leader screamed, his blood flowing, and went down for good. His assistants opened fire with their AK-47s, as Tex and Morales ducked under a large wooden table. Dudash swung in low; he was on them in an instant, and took them down in a hail of gunfire.

McDonough and Blair ran in and took another suspect down, as he was shooting and screaming.

The gunfire stopped and Tex looked around.

“Okay, nice and slow, let’s check them out,” Tex said, and pointed.

“Got it,” Blair replied, and they moved to the criminals sprawled out on the floor. One was dead and the other two were yelling, in pain from bullet wounds to their legs. McDonough picked up their weapons and Blair secured them with wrist locks. Blair got his med-kit out and tried to get them to calm down, to hold still so that he could treat them.

Tex was relieved to see his teammates were all good. “Okay, everybody, let’s check for weapons and any intel

we can use.”

“Look here: all these boxes are packed full of drugs,” Blacknal said, as he pulled a bag filled with white powder from one of them.

Tex turned to Morales, his explosive expert. “Make sure it’s all destroyed. Level the place.”

“Yes, sir – I like it,” Jorge replied with a grin. Everybody knew how he loved to blow up things.

Unbeknown to Delta, the suspect up in the loft was trying to compose himself, as he slowly crawled his way to the front of the loft for a look. Slowly, he brought his shotgun loaded with buckshot into firing position. Thomas Blacknal and McDonough were just below the loft, looking at the cartel leader, his cash scattered about the floor. He was shot up bad and lying in a pool of blood. McDonough knelt down to pick up a weapon, when the man in the loft opened fire.

Boom! Boom!

Blacknal screamed as the buckshot hit him in the chest and the shoulder. He was knocked backward off his feet and went down hard.

McDonough popped up and opened fire, and Tex was moving toward the loft, firing. The cartel man was caught

in a rain of crossfire and came rolling down the stairway, blood spurting from his mouth.

Blacknal was on the floor, moaning: “Oh, shit, I’m hit! I’m hit!”

“Get the med-kit!” Tex yelled, as he ran to help Blacknal.

“I got it!” Blair said, as he ran to Blacknal and started to take off his bloody shirt. Tex tried to hold Blacknal still as Blair went to work.

“The rest of you, go check the area,” Tex said. “We don’t want any more surprises.”

Morales checked over the wounded suspects. One of them must have been close to the grenade blast and he had serious bullet wounds; he never stood a chance. The other two had leg wounds, but none seemed too serious. They were talking, trying to blame their leader for everything, as Morales applied a tourniquet to one man’s leg and treated their wounds. Afterward, the two suspects were moved and tied to one of the bay doors.

Blair had Blacknal’s body armor off. He had heavy bruising on his upper chest area and a bullet wound on his upper shoulder, just above the collarbone. Blair applied some pressure bandages, to slow the bleeding.

Blacknal screamed: “Oh, fuck, that hurts! It’s not too bad, is it?”

Tex got a close look at Blacknal. His body armor had saved his life, but one of the buckshot hit the top of his armor, before going into the shoulder – there was no exit wound. “Hold tight, buddy,” Tex said. “You’re going to be okay. We’re going to get you some help.”

Blair pulled a morphine ampule from the med-pack and popped it into Blacknal’s vein. Before long, the powerful med calmed Blacknal. “Oh... that’s better,” he said, before he slowly drifted off.

Tex tried to calm himself, his body running on adrenalin. He moved to the doorway and lit up the uplink. “Capcom! Capcom! We need medevac and evac. Copy.” Tex looked at Blacknal and the suspects. “Capcom, we have three wounded, ready for extraction.”

Jason heard the call. *Oh, fuck! Three wounded!* he said to himself, as he listened...

“We copy that, Delta,” Capcom replied: “extraction and medevac to the target area.”

*

Tex and Morales gave Blair a hand, helping to get Blacknal situated. They found a blanket and some pillows in the loft, and did what they could for him.

Blair moved to the wounded criminals and checked on them again, while Tex and Morales went outside to check on the perimeter. They found Dudash and McDonough out by the dirt road.

“All is quiet out here. How’s Blacknal doing?” Dudash asked.

“He’s beat up pretty good, but he’ll be okay,” Tex replied, as he lit up a smoke. “He got some buckshot in his shoulder. Medevac is en route. We need to set this place to blow.”

“I’m on it,” Morales replied, and ran with a spring in his step.

Tex looked up at the sky and, as always, thanked God they had made it through another one. He noticed the sky was getting lighter to the east. *Sunrise is not far away*, he thought to himself. He started back, and found Dudash and Blair.

“Okay, guys, we need to take pictures of everything –

especially the drugs.”

“We got it,” Dudash said, as they got started.

Tex looked around for intel, and found some cell phones, some files and another big pile of cash.

After taking pictures, McDonough stacked all the cartel’s weapons and ammo. Morales, who had the place wired to blow, went over to the piles of weapons and drugs, and soaked them in gasoline.

Out in the pre-dawn skies, closing in on Delta’s location, were two Boeing CH-47 choppers. On board one of them was a medical team and three fully-armed soldiers, the Army chopper dispatched from Fort Sam Houston. One of the pilots grabbed the com. “Delta, Delta, Stalker is inbound. Copy?”

Tex grabbed his com. “We copy that: Stalker is inbound. What’s your E.T.A., copy?”

“We got about five minutes or less,” the pilot replied. “Give me a mark. Copy?”

“Copy that, Stalker,” Tex replied; “on my red marks.”

Tex signed off and turned to Blair. “As soon as we hear the thumpers, set up the L.Z. with two flares, out on the road.”

“I got it,” Blair replied, and ran out the door.

Everyone was outside waiting, as Morales pulled the van inside the building and closed the doors. The high explosives were mixed with thermite and Morales had them all in place; once he activated his handset, the fireworks were twenty seconds away.

Tex checked on Blacknal. He was drowsy, but seemed to be holding up okay. Then, it was not long before they heard the thumping in the distance. “Okay, set the flares; Stalker is inbound!” Tex yelled out.

The choppers banked into a wide turn, closing into the target, then suddenly, up ahead to the west, the pilots saw two bright-red lights. The pilots eased off and started their descent toward the road.

At the cartel base, everyone stood watching and waiting as the choppers came hovering down, blowing dust and debris everywhere as they touched down. One of the choppers’ doors opened and two men came running out, with stretchers in hand. The Army troops helped Delta carry out the wounded.

An Army sergeant looked at the dead guards lying out on the road, and came over to Tex. He saluted. “Looks like the cartel had a real bad day.”

“You got it, soldier. That was the idea!” Tex replied,

“Good to see you and our ride home.”

Before long, everyone was aboard the CH-47s and lifting away.

“Okay,” Morales said with a grin, “fireworks time!”

“I like fireworks,” Blair added.

Tex moved for a look and, suddenly... *boom!* A blast rang out and a big, bright, rumbling fireball came thundering up out of the tree line. Everyone was then cheering, the reality that it was over helping ease the tension.

Delta found out that they would be touching down at Fort Sam Houston, to catch a connecting flight – a transport – for the ride back to North Carolina.

Aboard the medevac, the medics were swarming over Blacknal, starting him on an I.V. drip and some meds. Four of his upper ribs were broken, and there was muscle and tendon damage on his chest from the impacts. His left shoulder was stabilized and ready for surgery.

Back at Capcom, the call finally came in and a cheer went around for another success. Jason was sorry to hear about Blacknal, but relieved that he was expected to fully recover.

He was thankful for another successful mission – another feather in the hat for him and the Delta Team.

The mood was good at Capcom but, with only an hour or two of sleep, Jason was tired, yet happy. *Now all I need is some sleep*, he thought to himself, as he headed for his quarters.

The final report on Delta's successful mission indicated that the amount of drugs destroyed had a street value of over five million dollars – and, most importantly, the mission would save countless American lives. Two prisoners were captured, most likely to become the source of more cartel secrets, and over a million dollars in cash was confiscated, along with valuable intel. It was a major blow to the drug business and the cartel.

Thomas Blacknal underwent surgery and was soon in full recovery. After healing up, and some time in physical therapy, he was expected to be back with his friends in Delta soon.

Chapter 6

Discovery

At The White House, it was just past noon. The skies were gray and gloomy when scientists Darius Patel and Peter Androvski arrived, and were escorted inside. They passed through security and walked down a long hallway, to the meeting-room entrance.

Inside the meeting room, President Andrew Moore was with Defense Secretary Baker, Secretary of State Hogerbee and Chief of Staff General Stanis. Androvski and Darius were escorted inside, then handshakes and introductions went around the table.

“Well, young man,” President Moore said, as he stood at the head of the table, “I hear you have a big discovery for us.”

It took Androvski a moment to get his mouth working, as he was so excited at shaking hands with the president. “Yes, sir, Mr. President. Darius and I have created Magnanotron.”

Darius nervously passed around some folders and

pictures. “Some of the details are in the folders,” Darius said, “but we would like to show a video of the testing, sir.”

“Of course; we’ll get things set up,” Defense Secretary Baker replied. “From what General Stanis has told us, Magnanotron has transformed into a shielding device.”

“Yes, Mr. Secretary, it is an actual forcefield,” Androvski replied. “And, after studying the results of the testing, and to our surprise, the electromagnetic flux modulation increased intensity as it absorbed the inertial energy of the impacts from the projectiles.”

The president smiled at his secretaries. “I think we got it, young man, but perhaps you can leave the tech stuff out of it; give us a clearer picture?”

“Yes, Mr. President, a clear picture,” Darius replied. “The data shows that the forcefield – the shielding of Magnanotron – gets stronger the more it is attacked.”

“Stronger?! Are you sure of it?” the president asked, while thinking to himself: *This thing seems unbelievable. The possibilities are endless.*

“Yes, sir,” Androvski replied. “We went over the data three times, with the same results.”

“What about testing on a live subject?” Baker asked. “Do you think it will work?”

“After going over the testing data...” Androvski hesitated, “it is possible, sir, but there is more work to do.”

Darius added: “We do believe that live testing will be the next important step for Magnanotron.”

The room was quiet, as the lights dimmed and the large display screen came on. They watched the bright-blue arc start pulsing around the replica soldier, and then the machine gun booming, with flashes of light, smoke and sparks flying around in the air. Then, as the smoke slowly cleared, the figure of the soldier stood untouched. When the lights came on, there was a moment of silence, as almost everyone was trying to believe what they had seen.

“Since witnessing the testing, Mr. President, Commander Ryan and I have been in touch with the CIA director,” General Stanis said. “As of this morning, they have their top specialist on the scene, going over security at Devcom.”

“Good thinking, General,” the president slowly replied. “We need to stay secure on this, for sure.”

“We sent some Army troops over immediately,” Defense Secretary Baker added, both excited and concerned. “We have developed a secure perimeter around Devcom.”

“Good thinking, gentlemen,” President Moore replied. “This Magnanotron information is at the highest security classification: top of the top.”

The meeting went on, coffee and lunch were brought in, more decisions were taken and calls were made. It was decided that both Patel and Androvski would be under Secret Service protection around the clock.

The two scientists were thanked by the president, then escorted out to a private jet, for their ride back to Maryland.

In Russia, Deputy Director Sergey Nashkin was entering the Kremlin for his meeting with his boss, Director of SRV, Ivan Malov, and President Baranov. He was nervous; he had got a call earlier from his operative in America, Victor Mikal. Victor told him that Devcom looked like an Army base, with troops and security everywhere. As Nashkin entered the large meeting room, he noticed some military brass and his boss sitting with the president.

President Baranov stood up. “Ah, just the man I need to talk to. Please, have a seat, Deputy Nashkin. I’ve learned some things from my sources, and I am interested to learn more. Tell us, comrade, what is going on that has the

Americans so excited?”

Nashkin tried to calm himself. “Sir, let’s go to our first contact, our operative at Devcom. He reported a flurry of activity at some of their research labs; lots of important people have been coming and going. We have learned that their scientist Peter Androvski and his head assistant, Darius Patel, are working on something big.”

“Yes, yes, Sergey, I already know that,” President Baranov said, as he stared at Nashkin. “Please continue, and don’t leave anything out.”

Nashkin could feel the noose tightening. “Comrade President, our operatives reported to me less than an hour ago; I have a team of operatives in place, watching the scientists as we speak. The latest news is that Devcom has been locked down, Army troops and security everywhere.”

“They must be onto us!” Chief of Staff General Valery Grekov said. “We’d better get our assets out of there, Mr. President.”

“Calm down, General,” Director Malov said. “We have a golden opportunity here, and my people are very careful.”

The president hesitated, thinking and pacing around. “No, no, they are not onto us yet. I don’t think so, General.” He continued pacing. “I know the Americans, and they’re

very protective. My gut tells me they have a breakthrough. We are at the tip of an iceberg. I believe they have this ‘Magnatron’ thing, but what the fuck is it?” Then he yelled out: “We must have the answer!”

The room went silent for a moment.

“Sir, we know about their brilliant scientist,” Director Malov replied. “He’s an MIT graduate, a renowned expert in electro-nano technology. The man is a genius. He is called Peter Androvski.”

“Yes, we do know that,” the president added, “and we know that Mr. Darius Patil is also a brilliant scientist, with doctorates in physics and chemistry. I believe they’ve completed some testing on what could possibly be this ‘Magnatron’ thing, and they must have been successful. That is why the Americans acted so quickly.”

“I agree. Good thinking, Mr. President,” Malov replied: “the sudden move, locking down Devcom. It will be difficult getting into that place.”

“Okay, gentlemen, let’s keep our options open,” the president said. “We must not let the Americans see our cards. For now, we keep everything as it is, and watch as closely as possible.”

The meeting was adjourned, and Nashkin felt the tension

in his arms ease up. *No mistakes, just keep watching*, he thought to himself as he walked out.

Back in Fayetteville, the winds were picking up and it was getting colder outside. The news playing on Jason's radio said that a cold front from Canada was bringing a chance of some rare, early-November snow.

Jason passed through security, parked his car and made his way to his quarters at Fort Bragg. He was thinking about his kids, and how happy Emma was that the mission was over. It had been a nice weekend; they had taken the kids to the park, and Jason got a chance to get a few things done around the house.

Over in Delta's quarters, Tex checked his watch as he walked around his men. "Okay, people, we got us a meeting with the gods above in fifteen minutes." He stopped and looked at Dudash. "Get that collar straightened out, and those shoes need a little wipe down."

"Yes, sir," Dudash replied, noticing some giggling going on behind Tex.

“It’s not funny, guys,” Tex replied. “You all know we got to be sharp, always in good order.”

Before long, the men formed up. Tex smiled as he looked them over. “Much better. Let’s go.”

Delta looked great as they headed out, over toward the headquarters building and their briefing.

At the condo complex in Maryland, the Russian spies, Victor and Niki, were in their car, waiting for Androvski to come out on the sidewalk and walk his dog, as he did every day at around 7:15 a.m.

“Here he comes,” Niki said, “but, look, there’s a man with him today.” A young, tough-looking guy in a long overcoat was looking around nearby.

“Hmm, he looks like a cop, maybe Secret Service.” Victor paused as he got a good look with his field glasses. “He’s armed. We must be very careful with this. No need to follow them.”

“I agree he’s Secret Service,” Niki added. “We just keep an eye on him from the distance. We need to report in, tell them about this new development.”

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Back at Fort Bragg, Jason was excited about his recent meeting with Commander Ryan, as he walked into the briefing room and greeted his team. Everyone grabbed a seat around the large oak table.

“I think you guys will be happy to know that the Navy Seals just hit another cartel base, along the southern coast,” Jason said, as he read his notes. “One man in the squad is critical and a few sustained some frag wounds, but the cartel base was burned to the ground and, once again, millions in drugs were destroyed.”

“That’s good to hear, sir,” Tex replied. “We need to get out there, put the cartel out of business.”

“Yes, I know,” Jason replied, “but good things come to those who wait.”

“Good things?” Morales said. “We need good things – maybe a big, fat raise for us, sir!” Laughs went around the table, Jason included; laughing was good for morale.

“Okay, gentlemen,” Jason said, as he looked around at the familiar faces, “first off, the information you hear today is for your ears only.”

He passed around some paperwork on Magnanotron.

“Commander Ryan has briefed me and sent me some data on a new discovery: a technology that could bring our military to a new level.”

Jason removed a DVD disc from his locked briefcase and handed it to Tex. “I believe you all need to see this, to get a grasp of what I am talking about.” Anyone who knew Jason could tell that he was excited.

Tex worked the DVD player and got the display screen ready, thinking: *This must be something, alright.*

The Magnatron testing came on, the scene of the soldier in full dress, holding a rifle, with the tall cement wall in the background. They watched as the blue arc started rotating and intensifying, and the room lights dimmed. It was dead quiet as the screen panned out to show the machine gunner, as he opened fire; the red bullet tracers were lancing and exploding as they struck the pulsating blue arc. On and on it went, until finally stopping, the smoke from the intense gunfire drifting over the field. Soon, the smoke cleared some, and the blue arc stopped rotating and went out. The camera zoomed in on the soldier figure; the wall around him was full of holes, but the figure was still standing and completely intact.

Tex jumped up first. “Sir, is this real? Wow! What the

hell is this thing?"

"I could be Superman!" Blair added.

Chatter filled the room, everyone in disbelief.

"Yes, sir. It's like that sci-fi movie, *Dune*," Dudash said: "the slow blade penetrates the shield."

"Okay, okay, people, settle down," Jason replied. "I know it's overwhelming, to say the least. Commander Ryan was on site to witness this Magnanotron, and he still can't believe it."

Jason stood up and walked around the table as he talked. "Gentlemen, I can't say enough about the importance of this one. With that in mind, the technical information and other personal items concerning the development will be provided on a need-to-know basis."

"Sir, have they tested it on a live subject, or on a bigger scale?" Morales asked.

"That is coming up," Jason said, "and Commander Ryan wants Delta Force to be involved." He hesitated, looking at his men. "Right now, some good people are doing everything possible to protect this vital secret. I was told to have Delta ready at a moment's notice."

"Sir, when you say 'involved'," Tex asked, "do you mean testing?"

“To be honest,” Jason replied, “I don’t know, but something is afoot. The president and his chief of staff are closely involved. We should be prepared for it – or anything else, for that matter. When you think about it, this thing is right up there with splitting the atom – and that, gentlemen, is very serious business.”

Jason took a seat and continued: “Right now, gentlemen, one of the president’s concerns is the spy community: China, Russia... those nasty fucks would do anything for it. I believe we may be going up to a level-three DEFCON status until this project is fully developed.”

After more discussion, the meeting was finally adjourned. Jason left to make some calls while, full of excitement and wonder, Delta left for some food and their quarters.

Back at the Devcom proving grounds, scientists Darius Patel and Peter Androvski had finished a busy week of work and were preparing the testing subject: a small spider monkey. General Stanis and Secretary Baker were sitting and watching in the background. The monkey was in good health, and was given a sedative to help it stay as calm as

possible through the testing.

Androvski finished up the last of over a dozen sensors placed on the monkey's body, and put a set of earmuffs on him. Androvski then carefully attached a fully-charged, wristband-mounted Magnanotron device. The monkey was sitting up, dozing on and off, as it leaned against a small wooden chair. Darius and Androvski stepped back and turned on the Magnanotron.

The familiar blue, pulsing field was not an arc; it was following the contours of the monkey's body, as the scientists expected. As the forcefield started to slowly intensify, Darius was glad to see the monkey was still dozing.

"Okay, let's get back," Androvski said, and they moved toward a safe location.

The Army gunner got the call and opened fire with his heavy machine gun, his bullets smashing into Magnanotron with bright flashes of light and sparks. As the bullets rained down, the monkey was clearly scared and shaken, and it let out a series of loud screeches as it moved underneath the chair.

Finally, the gunfire stopped, a layer of smoke drifting across the field, as everyone waited for it to clear.

Androvski turned off Magnanotron and got the first look. “He’s scared to death, but okay!”

“Yes, he is!” Darious said, jumping with excitement.

Baker and Stanis came over and stared in disbelief. “Look, he’s up on his feet!” Baker said.

“Imagine a platoon of Magnanotrons!” Stanis yelled. “This thing is bigger than we could have ever imagined!”

Androvski lifted the monkey and held it in his arms, as Darious removed the sensors. They gave him a big banana and carefully put him into a large cage.

“Congratulations,” Stanis said, as he shook hands with the scientists: “a successful testing of Magnanotron again, my friends.”

“Yes, sir, it looks good, General,” Androvski replied. “But we have to look at the data to be sure.”

“You do that, young man,” Baker added; “I’m sure there will be plenty of questions for you. As you may know, there’s going to be another meeting with the president.”

Baker and General Stanis departed with the good news in hand, while Darious and Androvski got busy putting things back in their van.

Two seasoned Secret Service agents were standing in the distance, with their field glasses, and had witnessed the

testing.

“Man, was that the shit, or what?! Like out of a sci-fi movie or something,” one of the agents said, smiling.

“I hope we get a few of those things,” the other replied, and they busted out laughing, joking as they moved toward the scientists.

Chapter 7

Game Plans

Russian SRV operatives Victor and Niki were parked in their car, about a quarter-mile away from the proving-grounds entrance. Earlier, they had carefully followed Androvski and his Secret Service escorts from the condo. From their vantage point, they could see the place was swarming with military troops. Then, about an hour-and-a-half ago, two long, black limos with Secret Service protection arrived, and five minutes ago the same entourage left.

“They must have been testing again,” Victor said.

“Yes, they are up to something again,” Niki replied. “Looks like the top American players came, watched and then left.”

“Indeed they did,” Victor added. “We must report this to Moscow immediately.”

It was a bitter-cold early-evening in Moscow. In the

Kremlin, the president, his top generals, Prime Minister Mikhail Kushtin and SRV Director Malov gathered around a long glass-and-wood table, to discuss the latest news on the Americans.

“So, comrades, we believe the Americans have tested this Magnanotron thing again?” President Baranov said.

“Yes, sir, we do,” Malov replied. “Our operatives are sure of it. There were some important people in black limos, with Secret Service escorts showing up, staying an hour or so and then leaving.”

“Hmm, I see,” President Baranov said, as he got up. “We must disrupt these Americans.” He downed his vodka, pounded his fist on the table and started pacing around, with a wild look in his eyes.

“I need details. This has to be cutting-edge – a new bomb, perhaps... Find out about this fucking Magnanotron thing.”

“I have looked over the files, Mr. President,” his chief of staff, General Valery Grekov, said. “Unfortunately, now there is no way to get into Devcom, with it locked down tight. We should pull our operative out of there, before he gets caught doing something stupid and it all goes to hell.”

Director Malov took a pull on his vodka. “I believe there

is a way to get this technology, sir.”

“Tell me your thoughts, comrade,” the president replied. “We must do something.”

“I am also concerned, Mr. President,” the prime minister added. “Perhaps the general is right: we should withdraw, wait until things settle down.”

“Comrade President,” Chief of Staff General Valery Grekov added, “we need to be very careful with the Americans.”

“I understand the concern,” Baranov replied, “please let Director Malov continue.”

“There are two scientists working at Devcom,” Malov continued. “We need to capture one of them and get him out of America.”

At first, you could hear a pin drop, then General Grekov busted out laughing. Before long, all joined in.

“Okay, General, let’s go get him,” the president replied, to more laughter. It took a while for everyone to recover from laughing so hard.

“Funny it may seem, but, Mr. President, we actually may have something here,” Director Malov added. “This scientist, Darius Patil, as far as we know, has only one Secret Service escort.”

The president slammed his fist on the table. “Ah, nothing like a good laugh! I understand there’s concern, but it could be too late if we wait. We must act, comrades! Perhaps Director Malov is right.” He turned to Malov. “Get your ass moving, come up with a plan and I will consider it.”

The president grabbed his bottle of fine Russian vodka and, as he was leaving, he smiled. “Think it through; whatever is needed. Mother Russia needs all of you.”

Back in Maryland, CIA Specialist Rob Tanner had just finished his rounds, checking on security at Devcom. He then drove by Androvski’s condo, and noticed two individuals getting into a black BMW.

Where did I see that car before? he said to himself, as he drove on. He had a feeling something was going on; things were too quiet.

Aha! It was at the proving grounds, he thought to himself. He remembered now: the BMW was parked along the street leading to the compound.

Quickly, he turned his car around and headed back to the condo.

*

Back in Washington, Commander Ryan walked into the meeting room, and was greeted by General Stanis and Secretary Baker. Ryan noticed that the two scientists, Androvski and Darious, had another video set up, as he took his seat.

President Moore arrived and stood at the head of the table. “Thanks to all for being here on short notice. Our scientist friends have something for us to see.”

“Thank you, Mr. President,” Androvski said. “We have examined the data on the test subject: other than discomfort and stress from the testing, our subject did not receive any injuries.”

Darious Patel started the video and dimmed the lights. Ryan was excited as he looked at the monkey and the blue Magnatron light, which conformed to the subject’s features as it pulsed and cycled around his body. Then the rain of gunfire started, bright arcs of light and sparks flying from the impacts.

President Moore watched as the smoke slowly cleared, and saw the subject moving out from under a small chair. “My god! No injuries! This... this Magnatron thing is a

miracle!”

“What we have discovered, Mr. President, is that Magnanotron conforms to the body’s features,” Darius Patel added. “Like a hand in a glove, sir.”

Androvski looked at his friend, smiling. “We believe that Magnanotron is safe and ready for further testing, sir.”

“Of course more testing is needed,” President Moore added, as he looked around. “That’s why I have my team here.”

The president’s private secretary hurried in. “Mr. President, an important call in your office.”

“Okay, gentlemen,” the president said, “I’ve got to run.” He turned to his chief of staff, General Stanis. “You have my full authority on this project. Keep me informed.”

The president left and Stanis smiled at Secretary Baker. “I believe we have the best troops for testing – and it just so happens that their commander is right here with us,” he said, pointing to Ryan with a smile.

Full of excitement, Ryan looked at Androvski. “Seems that it conforms to the body like a suit. What about if a man has a weapon? Can he fire it?”

“Yes, sir,” Androvski replied. “As far as we know, the Magnanotron flow connects with and cycles around the

body and its own magnetics, not on something the body holds or interacts with.”

Lively discussion went back and forth around the table. In the end, it was decided that Magnanotron was coming to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Back in Maryland, Rob Tanner arrived at the condo and drove through, looking for the BMW, but it was gone. His gut told him that it could be the Russians or China. He decided to have his agents search the area for a black BMW, and let him know if they found it.

Our enemies would die to get Magnanotron, he thought to himself, as he drove on to his office.

In Fayetteville, Jason was up early, and went outside with his coffee, where he sat on his backyard deck to take in the view. It was a cold, bright, sunny morning, with the last of the November snow clinging to the grass in little white clumps. The blue jays were singing, the little brown sparrows flitting about.

Thanksgiving weekend was over. The food had been

great and the family went to church. Jason always found peace when he sat and prayed with his family. He thought about all the times he missed being home when he was out on duty. Just two years ago was the Thanksgiving Black Water mission. Jason smiled and thought for a moment.

It was a good holiday weekend, but now I've got to get my ass back to work.

In Maryland, Russian operatives Victor and Niki were lying low for a few days, waiting for new orders. They were unaware that the CIA was out looking for their car, or they would not have decided to break their boredom and drive over to the proving grounds after lunch.

Back in Fort Bragg, Jason arrived and decided to take a walk. He found Delta at the firing range. Jason told them Commander Ryan was on his way, to give them an update.

An hour later, Jason and Ryan were sitting around the meeting-room table, having some tea. Ryan brought a big bag of crispy donuts – everyone's favorite.

“You guys look good. See you got all shined up for me,”

Ryan said with a smile, as Delta arrived.

“We would do anything for you, sir,” Tex saluted, with a grin.

Jason smiled and turned to Ryan; “You see, sir? I got these men broke in right.”

Ryan smiled and looked around the table.

“Magnanotron is coming here,” he said. “I’m proud to announce that Delta was chosen and there will be some live testing.”

Delta Team lit up, chatter going about as Jason stood up. “Wow, we are honored, sir!”

“When will this all take place, sir?” McDonough asked.

“I believe by the end of the week, but I will have to confirm that,” Ryan replied. “I do know that we can expect the science team here soon; they need a few days to get things ready.”

“Imagine being in battle with Magnanotron!” Tex added. “We would be unstoppable!”

Before long, Commander Ryan left the meeting, as lively discussion continued. It was exciting news, for sure.

As Delta headed back to their quarters, Tex got teased a little about his “*We would do anything for you, sir*” comment to Commander Ryan.

Chapter 8

A Good Man Down

Back in Maryland, Victor and Niki were heading for the interstate and the proving grounds.

CIA Agent Walter Beck was parked under one of the interstate overpasses, watching the comings and goings as cars took the exit. Suddenly, he had to take a second look as a black BMW drove by. The windows were tinted but he could see one occupant; it looked like a female with long, dark hair was driving.

Beck pulled out and fell in a few cars behind, as the BMW made the left turn, heading for the south side of the interstate. He noticed the black car was moving fast, as it merged onto the interstate.

Beck accelerated and moved in closer. “Fox Three – I repeat: Fox Three – has the black BMW ahead,” Beck said on his radio. “Looks like a dark-haired female is driving, and we’re southbound at exit twelve, interstate four. Looks like NY tags: victor-delta-Charlie-four-eight-four.”

“Copy that, Fox Three: victor-delta-Charlie...” Rob

Tanner replied. “They may be armed; proceed with caution. Help is on the way.”

Beck turned on his blue flashers and tried to stay calm, then he hit the gas, and the big V-8 in the Ford Interceptor roared. Beck’s adrenaline was pumping as he moved in directly behind the BMW.

“Oh, fuck!” Niki said as she floored it, and the BMW surged ahead.

“Shit! It could be F.B.I. or something!” Victor said, as he grabbed his Uzi automatic. “We need to pull over, before we have the whole cavalry behind us.”

He looked at Niki’s wild eyes. “Don’t worry, baby. I’ll take care of it.”

Rob Tanner called all units to converge on the southbound interstate. He got to his vehicle, turned on his flashers and took off, tires screeching. He headed for the interstate.

Back on the interstate, Victor was crouched down against

his seat, his left hand on the door handle as Niki slowed down, with Agent Beck right behind her. She moved her vehicle to the shoulder and stopped.

Beck parked about twenty-five feet behind the BMW. He hesitated, thinking: *I'll move slow, stay tight along the cars, my gun ready...*

“Here he comes,” Niki said, as she nervously watched Beck slowly get out of his car. “Oh, shit – he’s got body armor on and his sidearm is out!”

“Keep it together, baby,” Victor said, still crouched low behind the seat. “Tell me when he’s about halfway here.”

Agent Beck tried to focus. His nerves were on edge as he moved slowly, his gun drawn as he passed the front of his vehicle. Time seemed to stand still, until...

“He’s there now!” Niki said.

Victor moved fast; he swung his door open, jumped out of the car and brought his Uzi in line with Beck.

The agent was caught by surprise, but managed to turn his gun and fire wildly, as a barrage of bullets impacted his body armor. Unfortunately, the fatal rounds hit under his right armpit, and another the side of his head. Down the agent went, blood spurting from his mouth.

Out on the interstate, one of the Uzi’s rounds hit a car,

smashing the passenger-side window and causing the driver to swerve out of control. The end result was several high-speed, multi-vehicle collisions, scattered across the southbound lanes.

Victor, his hands shaking, ran and jumped back into the BMW.

Niki looked at the chaos out on the road, as she drove on the grass until she was able to get clear of the wreckage. “What a fucking mess!” she said, accelerating the Beamer to ninety miles an hour.

“The road is clear behind us,” she soon added.

Victor was holding his cell. “We need to take the next exit, get the fuck away from this highway.” He paused as he checked the G.P.S. “There’s another road about four miles south; that will take us in the direction leading to the safehouse.”

The safehouse was actually a large, old farmhouse. Once a working farm, with twenty-five acres of assorted apple trees, it went into foreclosure. Russia got a good deal, and paid Gregory Wallis for the cash purchase years ago. The old farm was used by various Russian operatives, as a hiding or staging place for their covert operations in northeast America.

*

Back on the interstate, Agent Tanner was not getting any communication from Beck. He called in several times, to check on him, but he was not responding.

Tanner was driving fast when he caught the view of brake lights ahead. *Damn it, it must be another accident*, he said to himself. He slowed down and pulled onto the left-side shoulder.

My god, what a mess. I've got to get past this shit! he thought, as he came to the start of the wreckage. Finally, he found two police cars. He could see more wreckage ahead; a car was smashed up and turned over behind them.

Tanner parked off the shoulder and walked over to the officers. He showed his I.D. "Agent Tanner here. What the hell happened? I got a suspect on the run from one of my people."

One of the officers looked at Tanner and checked the I.D. "We have one dead; it looks like there was a shootout. We believe a car was hit on the interstate."

One of the police officers pointed: "Lots of ammo casings along the road, by that SUV. I'm sorry, Agent Tanner, you'd better go see for yourself."

With sirens blaring in the background, two firetrucks arrived and a group of firemen ran out to help. Tanner walked through the smashed-up cars and debris scattered on the roadway, as the police officers were helping people, yelling and arguing about who was at fault.

Tanner saw the blue flasher on the black interceptor and his heart sank. *Oh, my god!* he thought, as he started to run. Tanner was shocked and dismayed to find Walter Beck lying face down in a pool of blood; he had a massive head wound, no pulse and his sidearm lying next to him. Tanner backed off, his stomach churning. He walked to the side of the road and threw up.

After calming down, Tanner walked around the scene. He could see all the brass casings glowing in the sunlight. *Looks like the bastards had an automatic weapon,* Tanner thought. He was angry and upset. He realized the suspects could be anywhere by now. He sat on the grass, thinking about the man that was Walter Beck, who had died – gunned down while doing his duty – and his tears flowed.

More police, several CIA agents and medical transport arrived at the wreckage. Tanner talked with his men and the police, and an A.P.B. was put out for the BMW.

Tanner made a call in to CIA Director Norman Scout,

and Scout called Commander Ryan. It was only a matter of time before the news would spread through the grapevine; the local newspaper headline would read:

*“DEADLY SHOOTOUT ON INTERSTATE.
“Officer killed, many injured in huge, multi-car
pileup, suspects on the run.”*

Russian spies Victor and Niki had slipped out of sight before things got hot, and were on a country road leading to the safehouse. Victor had called Gregory Wallis and let him know that they were coming. Before long, they pulled onto a long dirt-and-gravel driveway, and parked their BMW in front of a large barn.

Gregory Wallis came out of the farmhouse, wearing a sidearm, and found his friends standing next to the barn. “What the hell happened?” Wallis asked.

“Had an agent hot on our tail,” Victor replied; “had to take him out.”

“Damn it! Okay, let’s lock this car up and get inside,” Wallis added. “No one else is here; we should be okay for now.”

“A fucking mess, it was! We need to stay out of sight,” Niki added; “the cops will be swarming the roads.”

As the three spies hurried to get in the farmhouse, Victor was thinking, dreading the call he had to make to SRV Deputy Director Sergey Nashkin.

The local police called in the vast resources of the FBI. After close analysis of the crime scene, it was determined that the shooter had to come from the passenger side of the vehicle. After examining the type and amount of shell casings, it was suspected that a submachine gun, possibly an Uzi, was used in the assault. In all probability, there were two suspects: one male – the shooter – and one female, driving the BMW. Everyone was out, everywhere, searching for the killers. A few unlucky residents had the scare of their lives, because of the color and make of the car they were driving, but no suspects. The intense manhunt continued.

A week later, in Maryland, it was a cold, gray, early-December day at the cemetery. Walter Beck was an Army veteran, with twenty years in law enforcement, and he was being buried with full military honors.

His flag-draped coffin was slowly carried to the gravesite by his fellow CIA agents, while a crowd of friends and family, along with a large presence of police officers and agents, stood watching. A line of soldiers in full dress stood at attention, as a priest said some heartfelt prayers.

Tanner had talked with the shaken family. Beck left behind a loving wife, a daughter getting ready for college and a twelve-year-old son who looked just like him. It was a sad, somber day. Afterward, the soldiers slowly moved into formation, mounted their rifles and fired off a salute. Tanner was flooded with emotion, and almost lost it when “Taps” was played, and the soldiers slowly and meticulously folded the flag.

He had a bad taste in his mouth about the nasty spies who had shot Walter. He wanted to kill them all.

In Fort Bragg, Androvski and Darious were on base, and working on the preparations for testing. Commander Ryan was in his office when he got a call from General Stanis. He was shocked to hear about the slain CIA agent, and that two operatives suspected to have a Russian connection

were spying on the Devcom facilities.

“Sorry to hear about this, sir,” Ryan said. “Do we have any leads on these creeps?”

“Unfortunately, they got away for now,” Stanis replied; “the police, CIA and FBI are still searching. The president was briefed and has been assured that all assets for Magnatron were safe and secured. Stanis told him, after looking through the details of the assault on the agent, that his gut tells him it’s the Russians, but he could be wrong.

“Oh, and, as of midnight tonight,” Stanis added, “we’re going to DEFCON-three alert status.”

“Well, sir, Magnatron and the scientists are here on base, with hundreds of Special Forces troops,” Ryan replied. “I can’t think of a safer place in the world.”

“Agreed, Commander,” Stanis added. “We need to keep Magnatron on base for now, and get this spy thing sorted out.”

Ryan sipped his coffee. “Devcom is good. It’s locked down tight and we got Army airborne troops over there.”

“I will keep you informed, Commander,” General Stanis replied. “Please let me know how the testing goes.”

The two leaders talked about the general’s hunch on the Russian thing. Ryan leaned that way as well, and had the

same feeling; it had to be the Russians.

At Delta's quarters, the men were taking it easy. Blair and McDonough were playing the video game they would go nuts with, when Thomas Blacknal came walking in with a smile.

"I'm back!"

"Goddamn, look what the wind blew in!" Dudash said, as he jumped up from his bed.

"Good to see you, Tommy. You look good," Tex said with a smile. "I knew you would be okay."

"The doctors said the body armor saved my life, for sure. Shoulder's still a little sore," Blacknal replied, "but I got my mojo back."

Blacknal's eyes grew wide. "You shoulda seen them nurses! They was mighty fine. Got me motivated, yes, sir."

Tex had to laugh, as everyone welcomed their friend and fellow soldier back home.

The friendly banter went on, and later Tex asked Blacknal to step outside.

"Medical cleared you, but I think you may be back too soon. I will talk with the boss about it."

“The doc said the wound is healed,” Blacknal replied, “but the folks in rehab said the nerves take longer.”

“Alright, soldier, let’s see how it goes. For now, take it easy; no heavy lifting,” Tex replied. “We got us some big plans ahead.”

Chapter 8

The Men In Blue

In Moscow, the president, his top generals and advisors, along with SRV Director Malov, were in the Kremlin discussing the latest news on Magnanotron. The president was not happy about the shooting incident, and was pacing around the table.

He stopped and looked at Malov. “A dead CIA agent is not good! Did they blow their cover?”

The president held up some files. “I have reports of heightened military and intelligence activity now! The American military is on high alert.”

“The operatives Victor Mikal and Niki Ivanov are one of our best teams,” Malov replied. “This is the first time for any trouble with them.”

Malov hesitated, trying to cover his ass. “I understand your concerns, Mr. President, but our operatives reported they had no reason to suspect they were uncovered. For them, the only means of escape was deadly force. Right now, they are lying low at a safehouse, with our operative

Gregory Wallis. He's the one we pulled out of Devcom."

"Killing a CIA agent! This mess is what I was talking about!" Prime Minister Kushtin added. "If they are caught, it all goes to hell. I believe the time has come to pull them out."

"Think about it, Mr. President," General Grekov added. "If they talk, the consequences will not be good for Russia."

The president hesitated. "I know that, comrades. We are fortunate they escaped."

"Right now, Mr. President, the Americans don't have their identity; no proof at all that it was Russia," Malov replied. "We have three operatives in a safe place, waiting for further instructions, sir. I have a suggestion, if I may, Mr. President."

Baranov sipped his tea. "And what is that, Director?"

"Why not hit them now?" Malov replied. "Proceed now, when you know they're thinking we won't."

The president pulled on his vodka and smiled. "Yes, good thinking. Why not? A big surprise! It could work. Let's have a look at the plan."

Dinner was brought in – and, of course, more vodka. The meeting and planning went well into the night.

After the meeting, Prime Minister Kushtin and General Grekov stayed on.

“I tried to reason with him; it sounds too risky,” Kushtin said. “But, as you know, he’s obsessed with this fucking Magnanotron thing.”

“You’re right, comrade,” Grekov added. “Why not let the Americans develop it, let it spread through their networks and *then* do something?”

Kushtin smiled. “My thinking, as well. Something more subversive is what we need, General.” Kustin paused. “We need to keep the pressure on the president.”

The little gathering went on, both leaders intent on getting President Baranov to change his mind.

Back at Fort Bragg, the big testing day had finally come. Delta Team was grabbing some lunch before catching a ride to the proving grounds. Everyone wanted to be the first one to try out Magnanotron. Morales said that he should be first, because he was the tech expert, but Tex said that he outranked him – and so the friendly banter continued.

It was finally decided to throw dice and let the highest number decide. Morales went first and, to his dismay, came

up with snake eyes; Dudash threw a nine; Blair had seven; Blacknal, mournfully, had three; and McDonough joyfully came up with ten. McDonough thought that he had won, until Tex threw down and came up on top, with a twelve.

“Wow! Will you look at that?” Tex said, grinning. “Looks like it’s me!”

Everyone was still complaining as Tex checked his watch. “Shit, we’re gonna be late for testing! Let’s get going.”

Delta jumped in their Humvee and made the short drive. The entrance to the proving grounds and nearby area was swarming with security troops as they drove in and parked.

Jason was with Commander Ryan, sitting in the viewing area at the proving grounds, watching the scientists out in the testing area when Delta arrived. They were greeted by Androvski and Darius Patel.

“Okay, so who is the subject for today?” Androvski asked.

“You’re looking at him,” Tex replied. “I won the lottery today.”

“We think he cheated,” Morales added, smiling at Tex.

“Cheating or not, we’re almost ready,” Androvski replied. “The rest of the squad can go to the viewing area

for now.”

Darrious Patel shut down the generator; the Magnanotron was fully charged. Androvski then handed Tex an M-16 rifle and pointed to a large bullseye, set up out in the field. “I will let you know when it’s target-practice time.”

“I got it,” Tex replied, as he looked over the gun.

Androvski and Darrious attached several sensors to Tex’s body, while Tex prayed and thought to himself: *This thing better not kill me*. Androvski attached the Magnanotron to Tex’s left wrist. Tex thought it looked like a huge watch, with a blue glow emanating from within it.

“There is a white button on the side of the Magnanotron. You see it?” Darrious asked.

“I got it,” Tex replied.

“You have any problems,” Darrious added, “turn and push in the white button; it will shut the unit down.”

Tex gave them a thumbs-up and the scientists started backing away. Androvski pulled out his keypad device and punched in the startup code.

“Okay, the unit is starting!” Androvski yelled out, as he backed off.

Tex waited, feeling nothing, but slowly noticed a pale-blue light glowing around his fingers, then his arms. He

waited for something bad to happen to him, but all seemed to be okay. Tex gave the scientists a thumbs-up.

“Look, guys, Tex is Blue Man!” Morales said from the viewing area.

“This thing is cool,” McDonough added, smiling.

Commander Ryan watched, full of excitement. He prayed the test would be successful.

“Okay, Tex, you are free to move around,” Darious said. “Get yourself into firing position.”

Tex walked a little, then ran over to the target area. He got into a prone position and started firing.

He stopped firing and moved, then fired at his target again. Tex kept firing until his clip was empty.

Everyone in the viewing area watched the blue arcs of light, as the wonder of Magnatron flowed around Tex’s body.

Tex could see Androvski waving to him, so he walked back over. “How do you feel, Tex?” Androvski asked.

Tex smiled. “I’m good; don’t feel a thing. But it’s a little weird; my hands look blue!”

“We have the gunfire test on the shield,” Androvski added, “but it is solely up to you to proceed.”

“Jason knows me,” Tex replied; “I’m here for a reason,

so let's get it done.”

“You do have your full body armor on, right?” Darius asked.

Tex smiled. “Full battle dress – yes, it is on. And I will raise my hands up out of the way. Jorge Morales will do the shooting. We need to remind him to make sure that the shots go center mass.” Tex moved in front of the cement wall, his body outlined in a blue, luminescent light.

Jorge Morales was nervous as Darius handed him the weapon and said: “Your friend told me center mass on the shots.”

“Yes, of course,” Jorge replied, then slowly moved into firing position. He looked out at his friend, standing in the distance, and took a moment to gather himself.

Jason and Commander Ryan sat in silence. Not a sound from anyone. It all came down to life or death.

Jorge went into a prone position. He held the rifle and could see that Tex had his hands up. Jorge slowly brought the crosshairs on his target. He fired one round.

Tex still had his hands up.

Jorge fired two bursts at the center of Tex's chest, the impacts sparking and flashing as the bullets struck the shield. Then Jorge stood up and Tex started walking toward

him.

“I’m good!” Tex yelled out. “A little scared, but good.”

Jorge was relieved, happy to see his friend smiling at him.

Cheers broke out in the viewing area, and Jason and Ryan felt a flood of relief as they shook hands. “Now we know for sure,” Ryan said: “the Magnatron is a shield. It’s history in the making!”

Androvski and Darius walked out to the two men standing together in the field. “I see it went well,” Androvski said, then turned to Morales. “Now try to hit him with your rifle.”

“My rifle? Hit him?” Jorge Morales asked, a puzzled look on his face.

“We want to see what happens,” Darius added. “It’s part of the testing.”

Tex was smiling, the blue arcs of light rotating around his body as he bent over. “Go ahead, buddy, give me a good whack in the ass!”

“Okay, friend,” Morales replied, “here it comes!”

Morales unloaded the weapon and swung his rifle hard. It slammed into Magnatron with a bright flash of light. Jorge was knocked back off his feet as his rifle was ripped

out of his hands; it flew twenty feet in the air and landed in the grass.

With the big test finally over, Androvski had to laugh at the two soldiers, as he keyed in the code and the Magnanotron shield shut down.

“Look, I’ve not got blue skin anymore,” Tex said, and started laughing.

“It’s my turn to be Blue Man next,” Morales replied. And the joking went on; it helped ease the tension.

Commander Ryan and Jason had watched the rifle fly through the air. Full of excitement, they walked out and headed to the testing area, with the rest of Delta Team right behind them. Everyone was excited, Delta laughing and joking with Tex.

After things settled down at the test site, Jason had Delta Team report for a briefing with Commander Ryan. Everyone, including Androvski and Darius, was sitting around the table when Ryan walked in, with a smile on his face. He shook hands with the scientists and looked at Tex.

“Well, soldier, we gotta know, how did it feel to be Superman?” Ryan asked with a smile.

Tex hesitated. “It was both scary and exciting for me, sir. I could see the blue light moving around my body, but

felt nothing abnormal. When Morales was shooting at me, I was scared at first; there were flashes and sparks, but I was not injured. After that I felt confident, and when Jorge swung on me, and his gun went flying in the air, I felt like nothing could stop me.”

“That part about Morales and the gun being repelled,” Androvski replied, “we find that very interesting.” He looked at Darius. “We will have to look at the core flux data on that.”

“Okay, gentlemen,” Ryan said, as he stood up and looked around the table, “as you know, we have gone to DEFCON three. We had an incident, and a good man got killed by what could be a Russian spy, but we’re not completely sure of that yet.”

“Yes, sir. Everyone is on their toes around here,” Jason added. “Our troops have the entire area locked in.”

Ryan looked at Androvski. “What we have accomplished today is unimaginable,” he turned to Tex: “a man shielded from automatic weapon fire. He moves, he shoots and he repels.” Ryan paused. “Try to imagine what a battalion of Magnanotrons could do in a firefight.”

Ryan walked over to Androvski. “I would like to have one for each man on Delta. Is that possible?”

Androvski looked at his notes. “Yes, we can make more units, but it will take some time; everything has to be precise and carefully tested.”

“I am sure we will discover new things as we look over today’s data,” Darious added.

“I will talk with our chief, General Stanis,” Ryan replied. “I will need a copy of the video for him. I will also be briefing the president.”

Ryan gathered up his things and turned, before slipping out the door. “For now, consider it a formal request. I’m sure the president will agree. And please, let me know if you need anything at all.”

The meeting went on for another few minutes. Tex got teased by a lot of laughing and joking over the Superman thing, but everyone was excited about Magnanotron.

Chapter 9

Back And Forth

Back in Moscow, SRV Director Malov had just finished the last of his meetings with President Baranov and his advisors.

The president was desperate. His staff warned him about the tight security surrounding access to Magnanotron; together, they decided it was impossible to get anywhere near Devcom, now that the Americans were on high alert.

Still, Director Malov pushed his point of view that, even though Magnanotron was heavily guarded, there was a weak link in the American armor. President Baranov, with the encouragement of Director Malov, made the decision: after the meeting, they worked up a bold and daring plan to abduct Darious Patel.

Malov went to his office feeling nervous; the weight of the plan was heavy on his shoulders. His operatives, Victor and Niki, were good, but it was his neck on this one. Malov thought about how a success could be his ticket for the directorship and nice big pay raise. He decided to send his

very best: the renowned operative Demetri Romanov. Malov would arrange a meeting with him and go over every detail of their plan. A flight to America would be arranged and, before long, his ace in the hole, Demetri Romanov, would be on his way to the safehouse.

In Maryland it was another rainy day, and the boredom of being stuck in one place was eating at Victor and Niki, until they got a call from Deputy Director Nashkin. They got the news that something big was going to happen, and that Agent Demetri Romanov was coming soon to take over operations.

“It’s about time we do something,” Victor said, looking at Niki, who was smiling for a change.

“This is good news,” Niki replied. “I have worked with Romanov; a deadly one he is.”

“Yes, comrade,” Victor replied, “and the fact that he’s coming means we will have some action. A chance to make a name for ourselves.”

“What about me?” Gregory Wallis asked. “A chance for me, too?”

Victor smiled. “Of course, you are very important,

Gregory. You keep house – keep us safe.” Victor smiled at Niki. “Without you, we have nothing.”

“Yes, comrade,” Gregory replied, “I keep everyone safe.”

Back in Fort Bragg, Jason was in a meeting when his secretary told him there was an important call in his office. Jason excused himself, thinking: *Must be the kids again.*

Jason picked up and could sense something in Emma’s voice. “Jason, it... it’s your dad... he... I just found out from your mom. He’s at the hospital.”

“Oh, no!” Jason replied. “Where... where is he? County or Saint Joseph? Is he okay? What happened?”

“He’s at Saint Joseph,” Emma replied. “I don’t know what’s wrong with him. My sister is coming over for the kids; I will get over there soon.”

“Okay, see you there.”

Jason grabbed his things and, on the way out, told his secretary there was a family emergency. Then Jason bolted through the doors and ran out to his car. *Dear Lord, let me see his smile again*, he thought to himself, as he started the car and hit the gas.

Jason drove hard and fast. He arrived at the hospital as the sun was slipping behind the purple-gray clouds on the horizon. He ran inside and made his way to the front desk.

He found out that his father Robert Patrick was on the fourth floor. *Oh, no, that's I.C.U.*, he said to himself, as he hurried down the long hallways leading to the main elevators.

Jason got off the elevator and hurried over to the nurses' station. He asked for his dad.

One of the nurses looked at her chart and pointed: "He's three rooms down on the left."

Jason found his father peacefully sleeping, tubes in his nose and arms. The machines showed his blood pressure and heart rate were a little low, and he was on two intravenous drips of some kind.

Jason went back to the nurses' station. "My father, in 407, how is he doing?"

A young nurse with a bright smile looked at her charts. "Mr. Patrick... Yes, he's stable now. The doctor gave him a mild sedative." She looked at her watch. "Dr. Gardner will be here any minute; he can give you more details."

Jason felt a little better as he walked back to the room and sat next to his father. He prayed to have more time with

him. Now that he was base commander, he had planned on making up on lost time, so he prayed his father would be okay.

At a few inches shy of seven feet tall, Dr. Gardner had to duck his head as he came through the doorway. “Hello. How are you?” he asked Jason, as he walked over to the monitors, taking some notes.

“How’s he doing?” Jason asked, as they shook hands.

“He has had a heart attack – not too severe,” Gardner replied. “I gave him some meds; his heart rate and stats look stable for now. We will be doing more testing, to see if there is any heart damage or other complications.”

“A heart attack...” Jason said. “Hmm... at least it wasn’t a bad one and he’s stable. Thanks, Doctor.”

“You know, I can hear you two talking about me,” Jason’s father said, as he sat up in bed.

“Dad, I was so worried,” Jason said, as he hugged his father. “How do you feel?”

Robert smiled as he looked around. “Actually, I feel pretty good now, but I was a bit scared.”

Gardner came over and checked his patient’s heartbeat, pulse and breathing. “Are you having any chest pain or discomfort?”

“No, not now. I feel good, Doc.”

“Okay, you get some rest,” Dr. Gardner replied. “They will be doing some testing later tonight – and please tell the nurses if you need anything.”

Dr. Gardner left the room and Jason sat with his father.

“You know, Jason,” he said, “I did something stupid: I had a fall – got dizzy when we were hunting – and I ignored it.”

Jason hugged his father. “That’s okay, Pop, we all make mistakes. Thank God you’re here now and you will get better.”

Emma arrived, and was relieved Grandpa was up and talking with Jason. The nurses then brought in some food for their patient and the three watched some T.V. together. Emma and Jason didn’t stay too long; Pop needed his rest.

One the way home, Jason prayed his dad would be well.

Back at Devcom, lead scientists Peter Androvski and Darios Patil were in their new, updated and expanded Magnanotron research facility. They had just finished making backup copies of their files on two SSD data storage devices.

“The sensor data on Tex and the recent testing results are better than expected,” Androvski said: “the electro-Magnatron flux modulation stayed consistent, and again the core intensified when attacked.”

“Yes, Peter, I agree, its performance is better than expected,” Darius replied. “But what will happen to the shielding, the core intensity, when there is more than one subject? How will each Magnatron interact?”

“That is the big question. We will soon find out, my friend. This is amazing; we’re on the brink of discovery,” Androvski replied. “The last of the parts are due tomorrow; once we get them assembled, we use the same algorithms, the same formulas; the micro-tuning and data transfer should be identical.”

Darius smiled at his friend. “Yes, the exact procedures and methods that brought our prototype to life... This has been so exciting for me. I believe we have crossed into a new scientific threshold.”

“Agreed,” Androvski added. “It has been and will continue to be intensely interesting.”

The scientists continued their discussion and unlocked the vault room. They placed the SSD boards inside, next to the prototype and two laptops; these special laptops also

had the Magnanotron files on them. No other hardware, files or paperwork on Magnanotron existed anywhere, except in the Devcom vault.

A new visitor arrived in Maryland: top SRV agent Demetri Romanov had checked in at the Hilton, just 25 miles from the safehouse. He was briefed in Moscow, on the recent shooting and the heightened security in the area.

When Romanov heard about the shooting incident, he decided to hang out and have a good look around by himself, before going to deal with the idiots at the safehouse. During the past two days, he had spent his time in the Devcom area, slowly and carefully watching the movements of Darius Patel. Satisfied he had what he was looking for, Romanov packed up his things, checked out of the hotel and got in his rental car. Before long he was in the countryside, driving on an icy, snow-patched road not far from the safehouse.

SRV agent Gregory Wallis was out sweeping and scraping snow from the front porch, when he noticed a large, dark sedan waiting out by the gate. “We got company coming,” Wallis yelled, as he stepped inside the house.

Victor ran down the stairs. “Who’s coming? Where are they?”

“A car; it’s out at the gate,” Wallis replied.

“It might be Romanov,” Niki added, as she grabbed her jacket and sidearm.

Victor put on his coat and checked his sidearm. He looked at Gregory. “You stay here with your shotgun ready; we’ll go take a look. It may be our new leader.”

Back in Washington, Special Forces Commander Ryan took his seat next to Chief of Staff General Stanis and Defense Secretary Baker. Before long, Secretary of State Hogerbee and President Moore walked into the White House situation room, and took their seats around a large glass-and-oak table.

President Moore smiled as he looked around. “I was sorry to hear about the shooting incident and the mess on the interstate. People were seriously injured and we lost a good man. We will discuss that matter further.”

He paused and sipped his coffee. “The good news I hear is that the Magnatron testing went well. Things are getting exciting.”

“Yes, sir,” Ryan replied. “My man on Delta, Tex Larson, was Superman for the day. But I think the video will give everyone the full picture.”

The lights dimmed and Tex came on the screen – a menacing figure, his face painted brown and green; he was holding his rifle in full battle gear. Tex had a blue, luminescent light pulsing along his features.

The president and his staff watched in amazement, almost disbelief. When the film was over, the president stood up. “Superman it is! We need more of these Magnanotron things.”

“No matter the cost,” Secretary Baker added, “I believe we *must* have them.”

“To start, I have requested one for each man on Delta Team,” Ryan replied. “They’re working on it as we speak sir.”

“Good, then it’s settled,” the president replied. “Now, tell me, Commander, what do we know about the Russian idea and the shooting incident?”

“Both Agent Tanner and I know, after studying the case details, that there were two individuals,” Ryan replied, “one female and the other male; the female was driving and our male was the shooter. The gun and ammo used, along with

the type of car, leads us to believe that they are possible Russian spies, although we can't count out China; CIA agent Rob Tanner also believes it's the Russians. Besides, the deceased agent, Tanner, is the only one who saw the BMW and had a brief look at the suspects." Ryan paused, looking at his notes. "Tanner ran the car's license plates; they were fake. The suspects were parked at the Devcom proving grounds entrance road, and at Androvski's condo, on more than one occasion."

President Moore got up and paced back and forth. "I don't like this shit one bit! How in the hell did they find out?"

"Were not sure, sir," General Stanis replied, "but I assure you that security on the Magnanotron is locked tight."

"I can put some inquiries out," Secretary Hogerbee added. "We can start putting some diplomatic pressure on the Russians, sir."

"I got a feeling it's the Russians, too," President Moore said. "I will make some calls; I got a lot of friends in high places. For now, we have all the major players up, doing what they do, to make this thing a success." He sipped his coffee. "I have a meeting with the CIA and FBI directors

tonight.

“I want them to sweep the Devcom area clean,” the president smiled. “I would love to catch us some Russian spies.”

Later on in the evening, CIA Specialist Rob Tanner and the FBI arrived at The White House for their meeting.

“Sorry we’re late, Mr. President,” Tanner said; “my flight was delayed.”

“No problem, there’s always something to do around here,” President Moore added.

Tanner and the FBI officials took a seat, as Secretary of State Hogerbee handed out some highly classified files. The meeting went on, and around the table discussion on the Russians and Magnanotron continued. They also discussed a plan for staying on top of the cartel and tightening security at the southern border. Dinner was brought in; it was a long night.

Chapter 10

Demetri Romanov

Back at the safehouse, Victor was walking toward the gate with Niki, when a tall man stepped out of his car and took his hat off. Victor immediately recognized him: it was Demetri Romanov; same tall, lanky body, bald head and sunglasses. He had heard about Romanov, also a member of the elite Spetsnaz operations. A master of disguise and deception. A deadly, no-nonsense, cut-throat killer.

“Welcome!” Victor said, as he opened the gate. “We have been expecting you.”

Without comment, Romanov got in his car and drove up to the farmhouse. As he came out of his car, he turned to Niki with a smile. “I see you are as beautiful as ever.”

Niki Ivanov was 37 years old – an attractive brunette with a slim, tight body. She smiled as he took her hand. “Thanks, comrade, you look good yourself. It has been a long while,” she said. “Please, my friend, come inside. You must be tired and we have lots to talk about.”

Niki was once in a romantic relationship with Romanov.

They went to the same preparatory school, back when they were both young and horny. Niki grinned; she could sense the warmth of their attraction again.

The three Russian spies went in from the cold and sat by the fireplace. Gregory Wallis came over, smiling, with a select bottle of Russian vodka. “Welcome, sir. Can I get you anything else?” Handshakes went around and Gregory poured the drinks.

“Thanks, the vodka will do fine for now,” Romanov replied, as he opened his briefcase and set it on the coffee table. Romanov looked over some papers and took a pull on his vodka. “I have been here for a few days; I decided to have a look around.”

He looked at Victor and then Niki. “I heard about the shooting incident. What the fuck happened? That’s not good. You do realize that means the Americans were onto you; it’s possible you both have been identified. Where is the vehicle?”

“It’s locked in the barn,” Niki smiled at her old friend. “We’re sorry about the shooting, but there was no way out of it. We don’t know who saw us. We took every precaution.”

“The car was stolen long ago; it has fake plates,” Victor

added. “The only man who could have identified us is dead. The Americans have no documents – nothing.”

Romanov turned to Gregory. “I want you to strip the car of papers – anything that was left in it. Wipe the inside of the car down clean and cover it with a tarp.”

Romanov sipped his drink, and took a sheet of paper with some pencil drawings out of his briefcase. He pinned the drawing on the mantle of the fireplace and pointed: “This is Mr. Darius Patél’s house and grounds. Around seven a.m., he’s off to work. A Secret Service agent escorts Darius out of the house and they both get into a large, black SUV that is parked on the driveway in front of the garage.”

“How did you get to see all this?” Niki asked.

Romanov pointed at the drawings: “You see this wooded area here? This runs all the way along the side of the property. I parked a block away, behind the house, and found a way to get myself into that cover.” He took a long pull on his vodka.

“This is how we strike: we get ourselves in here,” he pointed, “then we wait, then move in from the cover as they are walking to the car. I will take down the agent, we grab Darius, handcuff him and run for the road.”

Romanov turned to Gregory. “You will be our driver, parked nearby. Come for us as soon as you hear the gunfire.”

“I like it!” Victor said. “We will get the jump on them.”

“True. Three of us against one,” Niki added, “we could make it happen.”

“Good, then that is our plan. But we have much to do,” Romanov replied. “I still have to find a way to get our subject out of America.”

He turned to Niki. “Enough work for today. I need a shower and some bed.”

Later that night, Victor woke to a thumping sound and moaning from upstairs. He thought: *It seems that Romanov has found his way again – this time into Niki’s panties.*

Back in Fayetteville, an arctic front had seeped its way down into the area, from Canada. Jason put on his heavy jacket and stepped outside for more firewood. He had a few days at home, and it did a world of good for him. He went to see his doctor again about his dreams, though was thankful the dreams and thoughts seemed less frequent now.

Jason was also excited about the Magnatron project, and that Commander Ryan had picked Delta to be first in line.

Once back inside, Jason found Emma in the kitchen. “That smells really good. What you cooking?” Jason said, as he gave her a hug.

“Oh, Jason, you’re freezing cold – stay away from me,” Emma said, as she pulled away. “It’s my special beef stew.”

Jason took off his jacket and sat at the table. “Hmm... smells mighty good. I’ve got to get my butt back to base after lunch. We got that project coming up.”

Emma had been nagging Jason about why he was so preoccupied. He finally told her about Magnatron, and that it was his career if she said a word to anyone.

“Oh, I think the Superman thing is exciting,” Emma said, smiling, as she came over and sat on Jason’s lap. “Besides, I have my own Superman.”

Back in Maryland, Rob Tanner was in his office. He had just finished a conference call with CIA Director Norman Scout and Commander Ryan. He was happy to hear that

Magnanotron was going ahead at full speed, but disappointed to tell them the shooting suspects had disappeared, no leads; nothing for now. Ryan told him the word from the president was to keep tight surveillance of the Devcom area. Director Scott also informed Tanner to expect three more CIA agents; they were coming from out west, to assist as needed.

Tanner sat at his desk, thinking what to do with the extra help. He needed to work on a plan, but first he wanted to get out on the streets. Tanner grabbed his long coat and walked out into the cold December air. As he jumped into his car, he thought: *Something is afoot. I can feel it.*

A few days went by at the safehouse, and Demetri Romanov made his arrangements.

He caught a five a.m. flight to NYC. It was a rough flight, the plane hitting lots of bumpy air coming into the NYC area, and Romanov was relieved to be on the ground again. He made his way through the busy airport, grabbed his baggage and was in his rental car before too long. He drove the parkway north, toward a small town by a railroad station.

The plan was in motion to secure a way to get Darius Patel out of America. Romanov was number one for a reason: he had the intangible ability to think outside the window, to solve complex problems and find a way forward.

Romanov had done his homework and a lot of meticulous digging. He found that the engineer of one of the freight trains which ran up to the Canadian border was an ex-con, with a record of robbery from ten years ago – Ronnie Oaks was his name. He was around 35 years old, and in serious debt from a recent divorce.

Romanov grabbed his backpack. He had his sunglasses and baseball cap on, and he was wearing jeans, sneakers and an old hoodie as he walked into the town diner and sat down. He checked his watch and ordered some eggs over medium and some coffee. According to his contacts, Ronnie Oaks came in for a late breakfast every weekday, at eleven a.m. The coffee was good, and Romanov dug into his eggs and toast.

Before long, a long-haired man wearing a heavy, brown Carhartt jacket walked in and sat down at a booth. *It's him*, Romanov thought, as he sipped his coffee and put a twenty on the counter. Romanov grabbed his pack and casually

walked over to Oaks.

“Hello. Is that you, Ron?” Romanov asked.

Oaks looked surprised. “Hello, sir... I don’t think I know you.”

“It’s Jim from high school,” Romanov replied. “You went to Colonia, right?”

“Yeah, I did,” Oaks added, “but, for some reason... I don’t seem to remember you.”

“That’s because you were so busy chasing the cheerleaders around,” Romanov replied. “You played cornerback, right?”

“Damn, those were the days. I think I remember now... you... still wearing a baseball cap? You were on the baseball team?” Oaks replied. “Have a seat, Jim. Good to see an old Colonia High friend.”

The two talked about life and how things were going. Romanov was sorry to hear Oaks had gone through a nasty divorce.

“I have a golden opportunity for you,” Romanov said, with a smile. He put his pack between them. “Your money worries could be over for you... if you can do me a big favor.”

“What do you need from me?” Oaks replied. “Hell, man,

I need money.”

“You work for Norfolk? Drive a freight train up into Canada two times a week?”

Oaks had a puzzled look as Romanov continued: “I need to take something up by the Canadian border. I will need a car for me and my friends – something decent, but we’re not too choosy. I prefer the last car on the train – and no questions asked.”

“How the hell did you know that I’m a train operator?” Oaks asked, getting nervous.

“Never mind that, Ronnie; you don’t need to know anything, just drive the train,” Romanov replied, softly. He opened his pack. “This is all for you... That, my friend, is two-hundred thousand in small bills.”

“Wow... look at that!” Oaks replied, his eyes bulging as he took out a stack of twenties. “I don’t know, man; this is my job! But I sure as hell could use the cash.”

“It’s all yours, my friend,” Romanov added; “half right now and half when we get to the border.”

Oaks hesitated, thinking. “Okay, Jim, I should be able to arrange the caboose, or the car next to it, but I will need my good friend at security to take a few hours off; he’ll be gone when the train arrives. I know him well; he will want a bite

of the cash.”

“No problem,” Romanov replied, “I’ll add another twenty-five grand for the security man.” Romanov smiled as he thought: *The fish has taken the bait.*

“We should be ready for our ride within ten days,” Romanov added. “Our party will have five people, including me.” Romanov hesitated, then noticed Oaks seemed more relaxed. “I will make the final arrangements on my side once you give me a schedule of the locations, dates and times of your run up north.”

“Of course, Jim,” Oaks replied. “I will look things over, talk with my friend, and we will have a private car at the station, ready and waiting for you.”

Romanov left the diner with his new, excited friend and they went into his car. Romanov counted out the money and handed it over to Oaks, who was all smiles.

“You do know that, once we arrive and start across the border, we have to pass customs?” Oaks said, as he stuffed his jacket full of bills. “Those fucking guys check everything. And, if they find something good, they keep it for themselves.”

“Not a problem,” Romanov added; “we will be getting off at the Malone, NY station – that is well before customs.

I believe it's your last stop before crossing.”

The two men shook hands and the deal was done.

Satisfied, Romanov left for a hotel by the airport and some much-needed sleep.

Chapter 11

Shields Up For Delta

Back in Maryland, Androvski and Darious Patel were worn out from a week of twelve- and fourteen-hour days. The mechanical work building the physical part of Magnanotron was hard enough, but the chemistry and the nano-electronic technology to create shielding was at a whole new level. Tired, but happy, the scientists were glad to be finishing up the slow and highly meticulous process of creating and tuning the engines that drove the six new Magnanotron devices.

“Look: the flux density; the core reaction is increasing to normal pre-charge levels,” Darious said.

“Yes! The units look good,” Androvski replied, as he took off his headset, “and the nano-electron flow is almost stable on all units.” He sipped his iced water. “We are only a day or two away from completion.”

“Yes, my friend, we are finally there,” Patel said with a smile.

The two scientists then talked about easing their

workload. They selected a group of assistants and discussed a plan to train them on the mechanics of building the Magnatron units, though the actual equations, the theory to create Magnatron, would of course be off limits to them. Once their plan was approved, it would be critical in expanding the program.

The scientists shut down the equipment and moved everything inside the vault. Before long, they were escorted out of the building by two Secret Service agents. On the way out, Androvski made a mental note: *I need to call Commander Ryan tomorrow, give him the good news.*

In Fayetteville, NC, the cold front seized the land in its icy grip. It had been a record cold and stormy December night; the morning found icy roads, accidents abound and school closures. Jason was up early, slowly driving his four-wheel-drive SUV to base.

Damn, he said to himself, *that fucking hurts*. Too lazy to go into the house and get his gloves, Jason was thawing out his frozen hands on the car's heater vents. It had taken him a good ten minutes to clear the ice off the car's windows. He thought to himself: *Dumbass needs to clear the garage;*

no ice in there.

Jason drove carefully as he made his way through the slippery spots; he was relieved to see most of the main roads were salted. Before long, he found his parking spot at Fort Bragg and headed inside, for a much-needed cup of hot coffee.

Jason read the newspaper as he waited for a call from Commander Ryan. He read an article about a memorial fund being set up for the family of slain CIA Agent Walter Beck. Another article was about the ongoing manhunt; the police and FBI were not going to stop looking for Beck's killers.

Inside their quarters, Delta Team was up getting ready for another big day. In a few days, Commander Ryan and the Devcom scientists were coming to the base for more testing, this time of the new Magnanotron units.

Tex checked his cell phone. "Damn, it's twenty-eight degrees outside right now. I'm putting on another layer."

"Supposed to warm up later, though," Blair Crouse added. "I heard the news last night: sunny and forty-five degrees by this afternoon."

“Cold or not, the testing is a few days away,” Morales added.

“Amen to that, brother. We can take the cold,” Thomas Blacknal said with a smile.

Before long, Delta Team headed for some chow, before their routine workout and weapons training; more new recruits needed their expertise at the firing range.

In Moscow, SRV Director Malov arrived for his meeting at the Kremlin, to give President Baranov an update on their devious and daring plan to abduct Darius Patil. With the Russian president were key party members and his trusted advisors. Malov had a large display board set up at the front of the meeting room.

“We seem to have some progress. I hear we have a plan,” President Baranov said, as he looked at Malov.

“Yes, Mr. President, we do,” Malov replied. “I have my top agents in place and, with your approval, we should have a big surprise for the Americans.”

Malov moved to the drawing of Darius Patil’s property and the surrounding area. “Our man Demetri Romanov has found a way to get himself right here.” He pointed to a

wood line between the houses. “Our team will set up an ambush, take out the Secret Service protection and snatch Darius as they come out of the house in the morning.”

“Hmm... it seems possible,” the president replied. “What happens next?”

“Romanov has made preparations to get Darius on his way north, to the Canadian border,” Malov replied. “But, Mr. President, he has not yet given the final details of getting Darius out of America.”

“Excuse me, Mr. President,” Prime Minister Mikhail Kushtin said, “I do respect your authority, but I must advise you to think very carefully.” Kushtin sipped his spiced, black tea. “I still believe that this abduction idea is very risky. The American secretary of state has sent word – more like a warning – about any covert operations going on over there. I advise letting this thing settle, then use the old ways to gather this technology.”

“The opportunity is there Mr. President,” SRV Director Malov added. “As you know, our comrade Demetri Romanov is the best; he would have let us know if it felt wrong.”

“Once again, I must concur with the prime minister,” Chief of Staff Valery Grekov added. “We have operatives

on the run and the Americans are at DEFCON three.” He paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts. “Sir, I know this Magnanotron thing is big, but we should wait for things to settle. I believe the Americans may suspect us already, and could be waiting for us.”

The president was quiet. He got up and started pacing around. “I understand everyone’s concerns but, if we have Darius Patel, we have this Magnanotron thing that the Americans are going nuts over.”

He looked at Director Malov. “I will think this over and make my final decision once we have the final details of Romanov’s plan.”

Director Malov got a dirty look from Grekov. He was tense and worried; he left the meeting feeling that he could be a hero if the plan went well, or the one with a noose around his neck if it all went to hell.

After the meeting, Prime Minister Kushtin stayed on with General Grekov. “So, General, you agree with me on this?” Kushtin said. “The president is totally obsessed with this fucking Magnanotron thing... I believe, no matter what we say, the fool is actually going to do it.”

“I know, comrade, he’s not thinking clearly on this,” General Grekov replied. “The last thing we need is to get

caught with our hand in the cookie jar. Like I said, let the Americans develop it and spread it around, then we hack into their servers.”

“My thinking, as well,” Kushtin added. “Something more subversive.”

The meeting ended, and the two top Russian officials agreed to keep up the pressure on the president, and to keep their options open.

Back at Fort Bragg, the testing day had come. Special Forces Commander Ryan was in Jason’s office, talking with him about Magnanotron.

Jason handed Ryan a cup of black coffee and said: “You know, sir, the team is really excited. I can’t wait to see how the testing goes.”

“Yes, Jason, we’re all excited,” Ryan said. “This Magnanotron thing is about as big as it gets.” He sipped his coffee. “If the time comes, it would be a huge advantage on the battlefield.”

“I guess that eventually the world will know Magnanotron exists,” Jason replied. “It just might be another deterrent to prevent a war.”

“I agree on that,” Ryan added with a smile; “who would want to mess with a battalion of supermen?”

Jason looked at his watch. “We’d better get going, sir; testing will begin soon.”

The two officers left for the testing area, which was out in the remote proving grounds area of the base. The area was cleaned up from the snowstorm and the road leading to it was sealed off to all visitors, including other military personal.

Delta Team was gathering out in front of a large outbuilding, talking with Androvski and Darious Patel when the big brass arrived. Delta stood at attention and saluted them as they came over.

“At ease, gentlemen,” Commander Ryan said with a smile, as he looked at Delta, all dressed up in their battle gear. Ryan shook hands with the scientists and looked around, smiling. “I see Delta is ready to go. That’s good. I can’t wait myself.”

“Yes, sir, we’re ready,” Tex replied. “Let’s get this party started!”

“Amen to that, brother,” Thomas Blacknal added, full of excitement. “Been wanting to be Superman since I was a kid.”

Everyone got a laugh in, including Ryan. It helped ease the tension.

Androvski had the Magnanotron wristbands laid out on a long wooden table. The units were fully charged and ready to go. A group of targets were set up at the end of the testing field, with a large hill behind them.

“Okay, Delta,” Darius said, “come on over, let’s get you guys hooked up. Everything is going to go just as we rehearsed yesterday. As you guys know, the final test will be with a live grenade.”

Jason and Ryan sat a distance away in the viewing area, watching as Delta headed out onto the field.

“Who goes first?” McDonough asked, as Darius attached one of the wrist-mounted Magnanotron devices to him.

“The boss goes first,” Tex replied with a smile. “Try to relax, guys; you won’t feel a thing.”

“Once you’re activated,” Androvski said, “it’s important to stay apart from each other for now, and move to use your weapons at the firing range.”

Tex was Blue Man first, followed by Morales. Before long, all of Delta was blued up and getting ready, each man looking at the other as the pulsing, blue shield conformed to

their bodies.

“It seems weird – almost like a dream – but I’m good,” Blair said, as he followed his teammates out to the firing range.

Jason watched as the men carefully moved into position and opened fire on their targets. All shots were well placed; no abnormalities with the weapons. Once finished, the team stood at attention.

Androvski moved out to Delta. “Okay, Delta, everyone stay in line except Morales and Tex.” Androvski pointed at a marker out in the field, “Walk on out there and hold hands for a while.”

The two walked to the marker and faced each other.

“Okay, buddy,” Tex said. “I sure hope we don’t knock each other out.”

The blue men joined hands and there was a bright flash of light; Androvski had to look twice. The two men were still silhouetted in blue, but now there was a blue dome of arcing light – a bubble – surrounding them.

“You guys okay? How do you feel?” Androvski asked.

“We’re good,” Morales replied.

“Good to hear,” Androvski said. “I’m sending the rest of Delta to you, one by one. Keep holding hands.”

“We copy that,” Tex added.

Androvski signaled and Darious brought the rest of Delta out to the blue dome area. McDonough, Blacknal, Blair and Dudash stood at attention.

“Okay, we need to space it out.” Darious pointed: “Go hold hands.”

Ryan watched in disbelief as Blair and the rest of the team went into the blue bubble of light, with a series of white flashes.

“My god, will you look at that!” Androvski said. “Magnanotron has grown and intensified!”

“Interesting. More data to analyze,” Darious said, trying to believe his eyes. “Are you men okay in there?”

“We’re all fine, sir,” Tex replied. “The blue arcs and flashes were weird at first.”

“Great news,” Darious added. “I need you guys to keep your hands together for one more test. Please go down on your knees and brace yourselves.”

“Here we go,” Tex said, and prayed for their lives.

Ryan and Jason went back behind a building in the viewing area, followed by the scientists. Then a Special Forces soldier walked out to a pre-determined location, with grenade in hand. When Commander Ryan gave the

okay and Patel gave the signal, the soldier pulled the pin on the grenade, tossed it and ran like hell...

Boom! A loud explosion thundered and smoke drifted across the field.

As the smoke cleared, Jason moved for a look and was flooded with relief. "Look, they're okay!" Jason said, as he saw his men waving at him from inside the bubble.

"Man, I forgot how loud those things are!" Ryan said, as everyone headed to the big, blue Magnatron dome.

Delta Team was all smiles.

"That's some shit. Never felt a thing," Blacknal said.

"Good thing we got our headsets on," Dudash added. "That sucker was loud."

"Okay, men, you can separate now, one by one," Androvski said.

As each man left the blue sphere, there were no bright flashes; the sphere simply got smaller and then disappeared.

"This is amazing, my friend," Darius said with excitement, as the two scientists shook hands.

"We certainly do have a lot of data to analyze now," Androvski added, and handshakes went around the happy group.

Magnatron excitement filled the air, as Delta stripped

off the wrist units and the scientists unhooked some electronic sensors placed on each soldier. Exciting it was, to say the least, for Darius and Androvski. With true scientists, there is always the curious mind. With the world of scientific discovery comes more data to see, more calculations to be made; it is a part of who they are.

Before leaving to give General Stanis an update, Ryan followed Jason into his office.

“Coffee or sweet tea with lemon, sir?” Jason asked.

“Sweet tea sounds good, thanks,” Ryan replied. “I’m so darn impressed with the shielding devices. That was good work, Jason; your men did well with them.”

“Thank you, sir. The men told me they never felt the blast. I would be lying if I told you I didn’t want to try one of those things out myself,” Jason said, as he took two hot cups of tea out of the microwave.

“Well, Jason, I believe you on that. It really does seem like a dream sometimes,” Ryan replied with a smile, and sipped his tea. “So, soldier friend, what is the agenda for Magnanotron?”

“The scientists are finishing out the week here on base, making sure the men are comfortable using their devices,” Jason replied. “All the Magnanotrons and related materials

will be locked up and guarded inside our weapons storage facility.”

“Good. The president told me the six devices will stay in our custody, to keep them safe and use as needed,” Ryan said.

“Oh, yeah, Jason, I found out these things are not cheap to build. Besides long hours of work by the scientists, there’s some kind of exotic alloys and microchips in them. But, when you think about it, saving lives makes them priceless.”

Chapter 12

Games, Plans And Suspicions

Back at the safehouse, Agent Romanov had an important call to make, to SRV Deputy Director Nashkin. He hoped to receive approval for the final details, and to be able to proceed with the abduction plan.

Romanov found his friends and they went outside the farmhouse. The cold morning air had a windy bite to it, as Romanov had Gregory Wallis and Niki help him unload a variety of items out of his large SUV. Wallis felt the weight of some of the cases, and realized they were full of weapons or ammo. The SUV was packed tight; it took them a good while to unload, and get everything in place in Romanov's bedroom. Once inside the farmhouse, Wallis piled some wood in the fireplace, to help warm up the drafty old house.

Romanov grabbed his bottle, went to the kitchen table and poured himself a drink. He sat for a while, thinking and looking over his notes.

“So, comrade,” Victor asked, as he and Niki walked into

the kitchen, “how is our plan coming along?”

“Good. I finally have all the details worked out,” Romanov replied. “Takes a lot of work and a whole lot of American money. As you know, the train takes us upstate, to Malone Station. I have a contact that will meet us there in a van, and drive us to a remote airstrip.”

“I hope it’s a big plane,” Niki added; “it’s a long way to Russia.”

Romanov smiled and handed out his bottle of fine Russian vodka. “Yes, comrades, it is.” He sipped his vodka on ice. “I have arranged for an operative who is an excellent pilot. He has an expensive Cessna, and the experience to get us north across the border, and up to our closest Arctic airbase.” He smiled. “Then, comrades, the big airplane flight to the motherland.”

“It’s a busy plan, a long journey back to home,” Victor said, and pulled on his vodka, “but, comrades, we can do it.”

Niki smiled. “I like it.”

Unknown to Romanov, Gregory Wallis was just outside the kitchen doorway, listening to the plan. *Say nothing; they will tell me what I need to know*, Wallis said to himself, as he walked toward the front door.

*

Romanov was in his room, looking at his favorite weapon – the new Shak-12 assault rifle – when his throwaway phone rang. It was his contact in Malone, NY.

“We have a bit of a problem, comrade,” he said: “our pilot called me; he wants another fifty grand. He tells me there’s the chance of an arctic front; bad weather may be coming during our timeframe.”

“That’s bullshit!” Romanov was angry. “We agreed on one hundred and that’s it.”

“He told me part of the increase is for accommodation,” the operative replied, “in case we have to wait out the weather. Plus, word of heightened security increases the risk factor.”

“Fucking bloodsucker!” Romanov replied. “I have no choice; we are almost ready.”

The call ended and the operative was happy. He sat down, thinking: *It worked! I get my half.* The greedy operative then made a call to his pilot friend, who was happy to hear about the okay on the extra twenty-five grand he had asked for.

*

Back in Fayetteville, the cold snap eased up and the snow was all but gone. Jason was outside in the garage, rummaging through the Christmas decorations. Mom and the kids were in holiday mode; Santa Claus was coming to town. Jason found Frosty the Snowman and thought to himself: *Get you set up by the pine tree and I'm done.*

Then Jason remembered that he was not done. No football game today; it was lunch and some Christmas shopping with Emma this afternoon. Still, Jason smiled as he thought: *It's all good.*

In Fort Bragg, a few more days of training on Magnatron were completed, and Androvski was relieved things had gone well so far. He found it remarkable, the way that Delta had adapted to their new devices and completed a variety of tasks. For today, it was another training exercise, and the scientists were busy getting things ready out in the training area.

Jason walked out of his office and closed his coat to the windy December air. He was in a good mood as he headed

over to meet Delta and get an update from Androvski. Jason went through security and found the usual training area empty. He walked while looking around and spotted the scientists: they were set up out in the distance, by an old outbuilding and large tree line. *Oh, that's right: today it's the firefight simulation*, he said to himself as he walked.

A few minutes later, Delta arrived by the field. Each man grabbed a bag of gear for their training and formed up.

“Okay, guys, we’re gonna have us some fun,” Tex said, and pointed. “Remember, when we get into position, we move out to defend the woods.”

Jason found the scientists and was relieved to hear Androvski had good news: everything was on schedule.

“We have our new team with us today,” Darius added; “Bravo Team will be participating in the training.”

“Yes, Bravo is a good fit,” Jason replied. “I need to talk with them as soon as they arrive.”

“Yes, sir,” Androvski said, as he looked past Jason. “Delta is coming now, and Bravo should be right behind them.”

For the training, each man on Delta would have a high-power paintball gun, and the Bravo Team members would be carrying them, too, but in different colors. Delta would

disperse into the woods and take up defensive positions, then Bravo Team would try to perform an assault on the Delta troops.

The Special Forces teams arrived and Bravo formed up, next to Delta. They stood at attention. “Bravo is ready, sir,” the Bravo leader said, as he saluted Jason.

Morales turned to Tex and whispered: “I can’t wait to blast these guys.”

“Like I said,” Tex smiled, “it’s going to be fun.”

Jason walked in front of Bravo. “What you see and do here is for your eyes and ears only; not a word to anyone else, on base or off.” Jason looked over the men.

“Today, we want to see how our new technology interacts in the field. We need your feedback on what happens, what it was like to go against Delta... As we move forward with Magnanotron, Bravo could be next in line for activation.”

“Yes, sir. It would be an honor, sir,” the Bravo leader replied, as he saluted.

The scientists went over the details of the exercise, then Delta moved out, single file, and disappeared into the woods. They found plenty of leaves to hide under, and a big, downed tree for cover. After a few minutes, Bravo

began their slow approach; dressed in full battle gear, they spread out and headed into the wood line. Jason and the scientists sat on a bench by the outbuilding.

“Let’s fire ‘em up,” Tex said on the com, as Delta waited in the cover.

“Shields up, Scotty; Blue Man is ready,” Blacknal replied, as the rest of the team activated their shields.

Bravo spread out and entered the woods. It took a while, before Jason heard some yelling.

“Here we go,” he said, as they heard shouting and the popping noise of the paint guns.

Slowly, over time, it grew quiet. Jason and the scientists waited, wondering how things went. Then Tex came on the com:

“Okay, everyone hold fire; time’s up. It’s over. We’re coming out.”

Bravo formed up. Their leader had splotches of paint all over him as he turned to Tex. “Look at you guys: not a spot of paint anywhere! You were like blue ghosts. Damn cool! I want one of those suckers.”

Jason moved closer and watched, as Bravo slowly came out of the cover and headed over to Androvski.

“Looks like somebody got a paint job,” Androvski said

with a smile, as the group watched Bravo Team form up, all splotted up in yellow and red paint.

“So, what was it like out there?” Jason asked Bravo.

“We never had a chance,” the Bravo leader said. “We returned fire when we could, but Delta was concealed well, and hit us as we moved in – then they kept moving... It was so weird – like blue shadows in the woods. They shot us up.”

Delta shut down their Magnanotrons and slowly formed up. They moved in single file, not a mark on them. Tex came over to Jason. “That was some fun, sir. I never knew I would like paintball.”

“Fun? Really?” Jason replied, smiling as he pointed at Bravo. “Look at those poor guys, all painted up.”

With that said, Jason stopped, then Tex busted out laughing. Before long, everyone – including Bravo – joined in.

“Sir, since we have plenty of paintballs left,” Tex asked, “do you mind if we go back for another round?”

“Yeah, let’s do it. And *no* Magnanotrons,” the Bravo leader added.

“We’re all dressed up for it, boss,” McDonough added, with his goofy smile.

Jason nodded. He wanted to join in the fun, as the teams split up and ran for the woods.

“Yes, sir, things look very good,” Darious said to Jason, as he watched Delta and Bravo disappear into the woods.

With the training and testing done, Darious and Androvski left for their trip back to Maryland. The custody of Delta’s six Magnanotron units was now Jason’s responsibility.

Back in Maryland, Rob Tanner had made his rounds around town, checking with his fellow agents. Everything was quiet, and that’s what bothered Tanner. He went to his office and read through his files on the shooting incident, thinking perhaps he had missed something.

Tanner was interrupted by a call. He was surprised to hear it was his boss, CIA Deputy Director Norman Scout.

“Hello, sir. What’s up?” Tanner asked.

“I got a report from one of our deep operatives in Russia,” the director replied. “Seems one of our contacts overheard some drunk Russian operatives arguing at a bar in Moscow. They mentioned Romanov and America, and a big job.”

“Romanov? You’re sure?” Tanner asked. “I’ve heard of him before; he’s a top Russian agent who has managed to fuck us a few times. There’s a file on him with some pictures; he’s been on our wanted list for years.”

“Our man in Russia has never been wrong,” the director replied; “Romanov it is, and I bet he has top-level operatives working with him. We’re concerned.” Scout added: “It shows the Russians are desperate; they want Magnanotron.”

“I agree, sir,” Tanner replied. “We’ve got things locked down, but I will stay on it.”

After further discussion, the call ended and it was decided to double the Secret Service protection for Peter Androvski and Darius Patil.

An hour of searching through files went by. On top of Tanner’s desk was a mess: piles of papers and empty folders.

He was frustrated, and felt like throwing it all in his garbage can when something caught his eye: one of his scribbled notes. “*She is medium height, dark hair, he is tall, hat and sunglasses.*”

Tanner wanted Romanov bad; wanted to put a bullet in his head. He recalled the fleeting image of the two suspects

in his mind. *It happened so damn fast. Was that Romanov?*
he asked himself.

Chapter 13

The Russians

It was a few weeks before Christmas, in Fayetteville. Jason was home, after a long and busy week at the base. It was Sunday, after church, and he was alone; Emma had taken the kids over to visit Grandpa, then she had some shopping to do for herself. Jason had just finished getting the family Christmas tree set up; to his relief, all the colorful lights were working. *They should do; damn tree cost me a fortune!* he said to himself, and sipped his coffee.

Last year, Jason was away on an emergency call when the old tree took a poop, so Emma went out and bought the most expensive, fancy, ultra-deluxe model. This one played music and the lights twinkled to the sound. The kids loved it. Jason smiled as he thought: *It really is a nice, big tree – but I'm done.* He grabbed the remote; it was time for some football.

Back in Moscow, the president was with SRV Director

Malov and his advisors, for another meeting in the Kremlin, on the Americans and the Magnanotron problem. Malov had already briefed the president, earlier in the day, on the final details of Romanov's plan and, after some thought, the president was ready to work out the timeframe for it to happen. The president wanted Malov to try and get the military and Prime Minister Kushtin to lighten up a little.

"Thanks to all of you for coming on short notice," the president said, and smiled at the familiar faces. "I have some good news for everyone – Director Malov will explain."

Malov tried to calm himself as he looked over his notes. "Thank you, Mr. President. Demetri Romanov has made arrangements for getting Darious Patel to Russia. Through SRV contacts and Romanov, we have a key operative in place – he's an experienced pilot who has flown north many times. He will fly our party across the Canadian border, and north to our Arctic airbase."

"An Arctic airbase? Hmm... this seems dangerous, with the weather up there this time of year," Prime Minister Kushtin replied.

"It is true, Mr. President; some bad snowstorms up there," General Grekov added.

“This is why we have an experienced pilot. He has looked at the forecast,” Malov replied, “and I’m sure he will consider all factors before taking any unneeded risks.”

“Good weather will come,” the president said, as he got up and started pacing. “Everything is in place. We must act!” He looked at the prime minister. “It’s my decision: for the good of the motherland, we move forward.”

The meeting went on, lively discussion went around the table and, as the meeting ended, it was clear to Malov that Kushtin and the military were concerned about the heightened military stance America was now implementing. Kushtin and General Grekov wanted to pull out and wait, to use other time-proven methods to get the data on Magnanotron, but, with help from Malov and a few key supporters, the president talked his way around it. The timeframe for the abduction of Darious Patel was the only thing left to work out.

Before leaving, the president shook hands with Malov. “I think we should have the majority on our side. You did a good job trying, but that Kushtin, he’s a stubborn son of a bitch.”

After the meeting, General Grekov and Prime Minister Kushtin stayed on again.

Kushtin sipped his tea. “That fucking Malov! He is up the president’s ass! I don’t like him at all.”

“He’s a weasel, that Malov,” General Grekov replied, full of anger. “If he fucks it up, I will have him serving the rest of his time up in Siberia.”

The two leaders talked about what party members they could count on, and both agreed to push for the removal of the president and Malov if their plan went to hell.

Back at the farmhouse, Romanov received word from Deputy Director Nashkin to proceed with caution. The president and the military needed the date Romanov was planning for the abduction to take place. Romanov was at his desk, going over his notes.

He had studied the long-range forecasts for Canada and north: Tuesday, December 12th through December 21st looked to be their best chance for decent weather. After weighing his options, Romanov finally decided it would be Monday, December 11th, the start of the work week. Darius Patil would be on his way to work, like he is every weekday morning. Romanov figured a day of traveling, to get to his contact by the train station in New York, and

another day to get everyone aboard the train and up to Malone, NY. Then, he figured, a day to meet his pilot contact and get set at the airfield. If all went well, Romanov estimated they should be airborne on the 14th or thereabouts. *That's it*, Romanov thought to himself, as he called in to Nashkin with the final details.

Out by the fireplace, Niki and Victor were cleaning their weapons. Victor was admiring the shine on his. He had stripped down and cleaned his Dragunov PP-71 submachine gun. Niki had a Dragunov and an MP-443 handgun apart, and was loading up extra clips of ammo.

“I always take at least three clips for each weapon on a mission,” Niki said, looking at her Dragunov. “You’d better take at least that many for that beast; it sucks up the ammo.”

“Of course, comrade; what is this?” Victor said, smiling and holding up an ammo belt full of clips.

“My Glock is nice and clean,” Gregory Wallis said, as he came inside. “I’m loaded up and ready to go.”

Niki smiled. “That’s good, Gregory. You stay in the car... keep it safe for us.”

Romanov walked by the fireplace with his weapon in hand. “I see we are getting prepared – that’s good. We’re

going to snatch Mr. Patel Monday morning. The codename for the mission is ‘Nightfall’.”

Romanov turned to Gregory. “There’s a big cardboard box in front of my bed. Bring it here.”

As Gregory ran off, Romanov looked at Victor and placed his AK-12 assault rifle on the table. “The Dragunov is okay, but this, comrade...” he held up his gun, “this is pure firepower.” Romanov handed the weapon to Victor. “Go ahead and play with it. Give it a little cleaning up while you’re at it.”

Gregory came stumbling in and dropped the big box with a thump.

Romanov smiled at Niki. “Make sure you have your armor on,” he said; “got to keep that body nice for me.”

“Yes, I know,” Niki said, as she sat on Romanov’s lap and kissed his cheek. “You’d better have yours on, too.”

“That goes for everyone: full armor on,” Romanov said, as he opened the box and started throwing things onto the floor.

Romanov grabbed a blond wig from the pile of things now spread out on the floor. “When I travel, whenever going on a mission or moving around in public places,” he slipped on a pair of sunglasses, “I hide my identity. It has

saved my ass many times.”

Romanov grabbed a baseball cap and put it on Niki. “For Nightfall, everyone needs a disguise.”

Everyone was up and going through the pile when Romanov’s phone lit up. It was Nashkin, returning his call.

“Nightfall is a go,” he said. “Keep us in the loop.”

Short and sweet, Romanov thought to himself, as Nashkin hung up.

He looked at his ragtag team. “That’s it, comrades. Now we make it happen.”

Chapter 14

Army And Navy

At Fort Bragg, Delta Team had finished a long week of training. They had become accustomed to using the Magnanotron units under various conditions, and Tex was happy to report to Jason that not one unit had malfunctioned. Inside Delta's quarters, another intense game of cards was in progress,

“That’s it; no luck, I’m out,” Jorge Morales said as he got up. “I need all my money for Jessica and the holidays.”

“It’s only five bucks a hand,” Dudash replied. “But you’re right, Jorge; I think I’ve had enough, too.” Julius Dudash smiled. “Besides... I think the cards are marked.”

It was quiet at first, then the laughing and joking started, about who was cheating or not.

When the game ended, Andrew McDonough was happy. He had clearly won, for the first time. “I got two kids; Santa could use the money.”

“We’d better hope this Russia threat bottoms out,” Tex smiled; “it would be nice, two weeks off for holiday leave.

I can't wait to see my horses again.”

“So, boss, when do we get to go?” Thomas Blacknal asked. “Santa got to do some shopping.”

“December twentieth, or maybe a day or two before,” Tex replied. “It will depend on Jason.”

Delta Team then talked about their well-deserved leave, the holidays at home and their plans.

In the Pentagon, Chief of Staff General Stanis and Defense Secretary Baker were in a meeting with Chief of Naval Operations William Halohan. With the success of Magnatron came opportunity, and the president and his cabinet decided it was time to let a few key players in on the top-secret Magnatron game.

Stanis handed Halohan the Magnatron files. “For your eyes only, for now. Not many people know of our secret, and we want to keep it that way.”

“Of course, General,” Halohan replied, looking at his files. “What is this Magnatron thing about?”

Baker smiled. “We can talk about some of the technical details later.” He had the lights dimmed. “For now, Chief, I believe you need to watch the video to get the full picture.”

Baker took his seat, as Delta Team came on the large display screen and activated their Magnanotron units. Chief Halohan then watched in disbelief as light-blue arcs of light outlined the soldiers, while Tex and Morales ran out onto the field and shook hands in a flash of light. “This is amazing!” Halohan said, as a blue, pulsating dome surrounded both soldiers. The blue dome of light grew as the rest of Delta joined in.

“Wait, Chief, it gets better,” Baker said, as Delta went into defensive positions. A Special Forces soldier ran out in front of Delta, released the pin on his grenade and ran like hell. There was a bright flash of light from the explosion, impacts on the dome and sparks flying. Then, when the smoke cleared, Delta was smiling and waving.

“Wow! Look at that! No wonder you guys are so damn excited!” Chief Halohan replied. “This... this Magnanotron thing... it’s a working forcefield, right out of my favorite sci-fi movie.”

Halohan got up from his seat, full of excitement. “So, each man is shielded and expands this shield...? My god... imagine if it could be a squadron of F-35s in blue.”

“Right now, Magnanotron is on a smaller scale,” Stanis added, “but the scientists are looking at all the

possibilities.”

“We’ve tested and trained our Special Forces Delta Team on Magnanotron,” General Stanis replied. “Delta was hit with heavy machine-gun fire, with no effect on them except a lot of flashes, and some sparks coming off the shield.” Stanis smiled at Halohan. “You may find this hard to believe, Chief, but the inventor of Magnanotron – a brilliant scientist, whose name is Peter Androvski – has confirmed that the shield actually intensifies and grows stronger when attacked.”

“Holy hell! Is this a fucking dream, or what?!” Halohan replied. Stanis and Baker started laughing.

“I felt the same way when I first saw it,” Baker replied. “But it’s reality, for sure.”

Chief Halohan was astonished, to say the least. He smiled as he took his seat. “I must say, General, congrats on this one. For our military, it’s bigger than big; this is a mother of a game-changer.”

The chief sipped his water, trying to calm down, and continued: “You have the full support of all naval ground, sea and air assets. We would love to have a piece of the Magnanotron pie.”

The meeting went on, and it was decided that Navy

MAGNANOTRON: A BOND OF BROTHERS THRILLER

Chief Halohan, and a handpicked group of aviation engineers, would spend time at Devcom, to discover the seemingly never-ending possibilities of Magnatron.

Chapter 15

Nightfall; The Abduction

At the safehouse, Romanov was up and in the shower at around three on Monday morning. He dressed and made some coffee, then finished up looking over his notes. He walked up the creaky, old staircase, opened the bedroom doors and turned the lights on. “Okay, wake up, everybody! It’s time to get ready!” he yelled out, as he poked his head in the bedrooms. Before long, Victor, George and Niki were up and downstairs, having breakfast.

Romanov and George Wallis went outside and checked the van; everything was loaded last night. George turned to Romanov, as he took out his sidearm. “Is it okay if I keep this under the driver’s seat?”

“Yes, George, keep it handy,” Romanov smiled. “I need you to concentrate on your driving. Remember, we go in slow and quiet, lights out. For now, start the engine; let’s warm things up.”

“I got it, boss,” George replied, as he jumped in the driver’s seat.

Romanov grabbed a few things inside the van, and put a freshly-loaded clip in his assault rifle. For the Nightfall mission, Romanov chose his ski-mask and black jumpsuit disguise. He went back inside, and looked over Niki and Victor. Victor had on a gray jacket, a black hat and a full, gray beard. Niki had on a blonde wig, a hoodie, high, black boots and blue jeans. Romanov smiled.

“I see we are getting much better.” He laughed as he looked at Niki. “Very good. I like those sexy boots.”

“Better to kick you in the ass,” Niki replied, as she gave her lover a hug.

Before long, the SRV operatives left the old farmhouse. Gregory drove out along the dark country roads, heading to the interstate and the Patel residence.

“Remember, slow and quiet.” Romanov looked around. “No talking when we get out of the van. Follow me; stay low as we make our way into position.”

“I got it, boss: low and quiet,” Victor replied, trying to stay calm.

Romanov noticed they were going too fast. “Hey, idiot, slow the hell down!” he yelled at Gregory. “We don’t need any attention. Speed limit only.”

“Sorry, boss,” Gregory replied, as he hit the brakes. “I’m

excited is all.”

Niki was nervous as the van turned off the interstate. *We're getting close*, she thought to herself. She couldn't seem to shake the bad feeling about the mission that had been bothering her.

George remembered all the street names and markers as he slowed down and drove onward. Finally, he turned onto a side road, where he found the street and object he was looking for: up ahead, he could see the fire hydrant. He cut the lights, as he parked the van along a tree line on the shoulder of the road. They were directly behind the Patel residence.

“Okay, now, nice and quiet,” Romanov said, as he slowly opened the van's rear doors. He grabbed his rifle and waited until all was ready.

Slowly, the group moved, low and quiet, into the tree line. Romanov found a few of the red markers he had left, as the group moved along the cover. Romanov stopped. To his right, he could see the light on above the garage doors. They moved a little closer. Romanov whispered as they took cover: “Okay, we sit. We wait.”

*

Inside the Patel residence, a wake-up alarm sounded from Darius's cell phone. He woke at 5:45 a.m., as he did every workday morning. He quietly went out to the kitchen, turned on the lights and put on a pot of coffee. He could see the lights already on in the spare bedrooms. His Secret Service friends, Herman and a friendly guy named Alex – a new addition, introduced last week for added protection – would be joining him for orange juice, buttered toast and coffee.

Out in the woods, Romanov pointed and spoke softly: “Look, the lights are on; they’re up. Remember, it goes down just like we talked about. If possible, I take the agent down, but whoever has a clear field of fire can go for it. We grab Patel and we run like hell for the van.”

Inside the house, Darius and the agents finished breakfast and were ready to head out. Darius grabbed his briefcase, his Thermos full of coffee, and followed Alex out the front door.

“Oh, shit, I forgot my cell phone,” Herman said, as he

started back to his bedroom.

Outside, the night had started to change into day, as Darius and Alex started along the walkway and headed toward the driveway. The motion-sensor lights outside the garage turned on.

In the woods, Romanov saw the lights. He could hear the footsteps approaching. “They’re coming,” he whispered.

Alex and Darius reached the driveway, and were heading for a large, black SUV. Alex approached the driver’s side of the vehicle, took out his keys and clicked open the locked doors.

Then... all hell broke loose.

Romanov had his target in sight and he jumped out of the woods, firing his AK-12 on full auto. Victor also fired on the agent, as he moved toward the car.

Alex had no chance. He started to react, to reach for his weapon, but a barrage of rounds impacted his body and sent him backward, off his feet.

Darius was frightened. The shock of it, the gun blasts, sent him down behind the car.

Inside the house, Herman was just opening the front door when he heard the intense gunfire. His adrenalin

pumping, he pulled out his MP-5 submachine gun as he carefully moved outside. Herman stayed low alongside the house, as he made his way toward the driveway. He could hear talking and yelling ahead.

Victor moved fast, grabbing onto Darius Patel as he tried to run, and tackling him to the ground. Darius was screaming for help as Romanov grabbed his arms, locked his hands behind his back and got him up off the ground. Niki ran to help Romanov, and quickly the two pulled and dragged a struggling Darius Patel into the woods. As fast as possible, they headed for the van.

Herman came around the corner. *What the fuck?!* he said to himself, as he looked at Alex lying in a pool of blood. Looking for Darius, he picked up movement: the fleeting sight of Victor, as he was running into the woods. Herman, on the run, opened fire on Victor.

The barrage of deadly rounds slammed into his body armor and a few bullets smashed into his legs. From the force of the impacts, Victor went down hard, screaming: “Ahhh! Comrades! Help me, comrades!”

Romanov and Niki were getting close to the van when they heard the intense gunfire.

As Romanov looked back, he could hear Victor

screaming for help and turned to Niki. “Oh, fuck! They must have had extra men in the house! We must keep moving. No turning back now.”

The two operatives reached the back of the van, pushing and pulling a struggling, screaming Darious Patel inside. “Go, George, go!” Romanov yelled, and George hit the gas.

Herman heard the commotion, the screaming and yelling out in the woods. He ran past Victor and heard the sound of a vehicle accelerating away. He ran on, made his way through the cover and out onto the road, but the vehicle had already turned the corner and was out of sight.

Need to check Alex, get some help out here, he said to himself as he ran. Herman noticed Victor, moaning and trying to crawl away. *He’s not going far,* he said to himself, as he headed back toward the house.

Herman knelt over Alex. No pulse, one of his eyes hanging out and some bloody brain matter coming out the side of his head. Herman turned away, his stomach churning, and threw up. After a moment to compose himself, Herman ran back inside and grabbed his cell; he needed to call for help.

Herman then got a first-aid kit from the car and ran to his suspect. Victor was struggling and yelling at Herman, as

the agent put a set of wristlocks on him and started treating his gunshot wounds. It wouldn't be long before the Patel residence would seem like the center of the world.

Back on the road, the van was just turning onto the interstate. Romanov and Niki had Darius gagged and immobilized; his legs and hands were bound and tied together.

“You need to slow the hell down, George; only five miles over the speed limit,” Romanov said. “Only normal driving; we don't want to bring any attention.” He checked if they were being followed. “We're lucky they don't know what we're driving.”

“What about Victor?” Niki asked. “Do you think he's dead?”

“There was a lot of shooting,” Romanov replied. “Victor could be dead or he could be in custody. We had no choice but to keep moving with Patel.”

Inside the van, Darius was holding on, praying and trying to calm down. He realized that he was caught by some bad people, and it was no use resisting any longer.

Niki smiled as she brought out a syringe and a vial of

powerful sedative. “Time for some happy juice,” she said, while Romanov held Darius as still as possible. Niki found a vein and slowly injected the sedative.

Romanov smiled. “Go to sleep, my friend,” he said, as he saw the tension ease on Darius’s face.

Romanov then remembered that he had to make a quick call, to let the boss know they had Patel in hand.

Darius had felt the pinch, there was numbness spreading up his arm and along the side of his face, and then... his world went black.

Darius Patel’s frightened neighbors had heard the gunfire and called the police. Before long, they arrived on scene, tires screeching, sirens blaring. Herman knew of the top-level security clearance on information surrounding the protection of Darius Patel, and he stood next to Victor and showed his I.D. as the police swarmed in, their guns drawn. “Hands up! Hands up!” they said, as they moved close.

“What the hell happened here?” a police sergeant asked, as he checked Herman’s I.D.

“They attacked us – at least three of them,” Herman said. Then he lied: “We had been watching this suspect, and

I came to his residence with my fellow agent, Alex, to make an arrest. We went to the front door, but no one answered. We didn't expect our man had visitors. They must have been tipped off, or seen us coming, and hit us as soon as we went back to the car." Herman pointed: "Alex is over there, on the ground. He's dead."

"Sorry to hear that," the sergeant replied.

"I wounded this one," Herman added, "but the others ran out of sight, into the woods, and got away."

"Okay, Agent, for now we will search the area," the sergeant replied. "EMT is en route; your suspect needs medical attention."

Herman went into the house and placed a call to headquarters. He asked for help and informed his boss of the shooting, that he had one operative in custody, that Darious Patel was missing and, sadly, that Alex was shot dead. The two agents talked things over and Herman was informed to hold everything tight; help was on the way.

Chapter 16

America Reacts

Before long, word of the deadly shootout spread to the FBI and the intelligence community grapevine. With the report to police of the shooting, local news reporters were on the way.

Rob Tanner got the call just as he was stepping into his car. CIA Deputy Director Norman Scout was on the line.

“Hello, sir. What’s up?” Tanner asked.

“We just had a shooting and abduction at the Patel residence,” the director said. “One agent is dead, the other is okay; he wounded one of the Russians and our man has him at the location, under arrest.” He paused for a moment. “I’m sorry to say that Darios Patell is missing. He’s gone.”

“Gone?! Patell is gone?! Shit, I knew it! The Russian fucks!” Tanner said, as he started his car and began driving quickly. “Do we have any idea of an I.D., on a vehicle or person?”

“No I.D., but we have one of them,” Director Scout replied. “Some troops are on the way, to seal off the area,

and our own medical team is on the way, to take care of the wounded suspect.”

Scout hesitated. “Listen, Tanner, don’t let anyone take the suspect anywhere; he’s in our custody now. You have my full authority on this one. Get some men over there now; get things under control. And please keep me informed.”

The call ended and Tanner was angry. *We must find Darius Patel*, he thought to himself, as he accelerated. He drove hard, his mind running on overdrive.

Tanner was at a hundred miles an hour when he started to slow down and get off the interstate; he estimated he was about five minutes away.

He reminded himself to call to his old friend, Big Max, the legendary interrogator of all interrogators, as he drove the side streets, heading for the Patel residence.

On he drove, until up ahead he could see blue lights flashing. *Have to deal with the cops again*, he thought to himself, as he drove toward the house.

On the other side of town, Peter Androvski had just arrived at Devcom and was in his lab, going over some notes, when

both of his Secret Service agents came to the doorway and keyed themselves in.

“Sir, we just got word: I’m afraid Darius Patel has been abducted this morning. We have our orders: we’re not to let you out of our sight.”

“Darius abducted?! Oh, God... how... where... is he okay?” Androvski asked, full of emotion.

“We don’t have the details yet,” one of the agents replied. “We should have an update soon. I don’t think we will be going anywhere for now; the Army has this place totally locked down – no one in or out.”

Androvski tried to calm down, to grasp the situation. *Magnatron is safe in the vault... but, Darius... he can recreate it!* he thought to himself.

He sat alone, thinking, and prayed for his friend, and that he would see his smile again.

Rob Tanner pulled into the Patel residence and showed his I.D. to a tall, young police officer. Right off, he noticed two more policemen and what looked like his suspect, laid out with bandages covering his legs. He turned to the officer.

“Who is in charge here?”

“That would be Sergeant Bennet, sir,” the officer replied. “He’s inside the house.”

As Tanner was looking around, he found Herman, at the same time a whole lot of cars and CIA agents pulled up at the front of the house.

“So, Agent, tell me how it went down,” Tanner asked.

“We were leaving. I had to go back inside to get my cell, so I was late getting out the front door; they were ahead of me. Then I heard rapid gunfire and went down, alongside the house. I turned the corner and caught sight of one of the suspects, running in the cover, so I ran after him and took him down.” He paused for a moment and pointed. “I heard some yelling and then a vehicle pulling away but, by the time I got through the woods, to the back road, they were out of sight.” Herman picked up the Dragunov. “This is the suspect’s weapon. It’s been fired recently.”

“Good work,” Tanner replied, as he carefully looked over the weapon. “No doubt it’s the Russians – and, thanks to you, at least we have one suspect. I pray we can get him to talk.”

“One other thing,” Herman said: “the cops were asking a lot of questions. I made up a story and kept Darious Patel out of it.”

“Good thinking,” Tanner replied; “we need to keep a tight lid on things for now.”

Tanner stepped inside the house, where an older officer introduced himself as Sergeant Bennet. Tanner showed his I.D.

“Okay, Sergeant, we’re going to be taking over. This is a CIA matter, one of national security.”

“Security or not, Agent Tanner, this is our jurisdiction,” Bennet replied, in a stern tone of voice.

Tanner opened the door. “I appreciate your help, Sergeant, but I’m here on the president’s orders. You need to call your boss – perhaps he can help you – and let us do our jobs.” Tanner pointed outside: “There’s about ten CIA agents out there, and...” he checked his watch, “...in about five minutes, a medical team with a platoon of Army airborne troops will be arriving, to seal off the area.”

“We will see what happens,” Bennet said, as he left the house to make his call.

Tanner went outside and gathered up the agents. “Let’s get the suspect inside the house.” He pointed: “The two of you stay with him, the rest need to search the property.” Tanner pointed again: “Search the wooded area back to the next roadway.”

One of the agents had pre-med experience, and had checked out the suspect. “Sir, his wounds are not too serious. He has a bullet wound to his right calf muscle and his left hamstring is punctured.”

“Okay, stay with him,” Tanner replied, his mind going in different directions.

He walked over to the deceased agent and looked at the position of his body, in relation to the SUV. He walked around and found a set of car keys, and some empty shell casings. *The killers came out of the woods as Alex was unlocking the car*, Tanner thought to himself.

He could hear vehicles out front and moved for a look. The Army had arrived.

Tanner found Herman and showed him a picture of Romanov. “I forgot to ask, did you happen to see this man during the escape?”

“No, sir, I never got a look. They were already in the woods, running,” Herman replied.

Tanner walked over to Sergeant Bennet and pointed: “See, Sergeant? I told you the Army would be here.”

“I was looking to talk to you,” Bennet replied. “Chief said this one is way over our heads. If you have an I.D. on a vehicle or person; we can put out an A.P.B. on it.”

“No I.D. yet on the vehicle,” Tanner said, as he handed Bennet a picture of Romanov. “This is one of the suspects on the run; let’s get one out for him.”

“I’ll get on it right away,” Sergeant Bennet replied.

“Good. Thanks,” Tanner replied, thinking that time was not on his side.

He made a few calls and was somewhat relieved: his main man Max was already close to town, from a previous assignment, and only an hour away.

The press arrived, a news van, and some reporters were walking around, asking what had happened; they were trying to move close, but the Army had control and the property was sealed off.

The news reporters found Sergeant Bennet as he was attempting to drive out, and flooded him with questions. Bennet loved the attention and decided to make a brief statement. “Yes, yes, it’s true, there was gunfire: a shootout early this morning, at the residence.” He paused for a moment. “There’s some wounded and suspects are on the run. A statewide A.P.B. has been posted.”

Bennet then paused again, thinking: *Oh, shit, said too much*. He added: “I’m not allowed to discuss this matter any further, as this is an ongoing investigation.”

The local newspaper's headline would read:

*“SHOOTOUT WITH CASUALTIES, POLICE HAVE
SUSPECTS ON THE RUN.*

*“Army troops, law enforcement activity ongoing at
local residence.”*

That evening, Sergeant Bennet found out that he *did* say too much, without approval from the chief of police. The press did some digging of their own, went around the neighborhood asking questions, and found out that the residence in question belonged to a Mr. Darius Patil, a well-known scientist who worked at Devcom. So far, no one had been able to locate him for questioning.

At The White House, the president got the word about the abduction and called for an emergency meeting. Secretary of State Hogerbee, Defense Secretary Baker, General Stanis and CIA Director Norman Scout were now in the situation room, discussing the latest news about Darius Patil and his abduction. The president was furious.

“The nerve of these goddamn Russians, killing one of

ours! The abduction of our Magnatron scientist! We must find Mr. Patel!”

“The problem is, sir, that we have nothing on the vehicle they used to escape the scene,” CIA Director Norman Scout replied.

He handed the president a picture of Romanov. “That’s the man we’re searching for. We have one suspect in custody and our top specialist, Rob Tanner, is on scene with his people. The FBI is also on it, looking for the Russians.”

“We need to squeeze this suspect, Mr. President,” General Stanis added, “get some information, so that we can find these fuckers before they disappear.”

“Do whatever it takes. Lock down the airports, all modes of transportation... Whatever the cost, we need to find Darius Patel,” President Moore said, as he got up to leave. “I’m going to request a call with the Russian president. I need to make things clear, put the pressure on him.”

After lively discussion, the meeting ended and everyone left with calls to make, things to do. The fight was on to find Darius Patel.

Chapter 17

On The Run. Desperate Times

The next day, at the Kremlin, word came in to President Baranov that the first phase of the abduction was successful. All concerned parties were present in the meeting room when the president arrived, and stood at the head of the table.

“I have good news: we have completed the start of Operation Nightfall,” he said. “Darius Patel is in our custody and on his way out of America.”

“Yes, comrades! Success is at hand,” SRV Director Malov added. “I’m expecting an update from Romanov within a few hours.”

“What’s done is done, Mr. President,” Chief of Staff General Grekov replied. “Do you have a location on Romanov? I pray the Americans don’t get their hands on our operatives.”

“We know they are traveling northeast,” Malov replied. “Like I said, we will have more information shortly.”

Grekov pounded his fist on the table and turned to

Malov. “I didn’t ask to hear more bullshit from you.”

“Please calm down, General,” President Baranov replied. “I understand your concerns, but soon Magnanotron will be in our hands.”

“Speaking of concerns, Mr. President,” Prime Minister Kushtin added, “I just got word from my sources in Washington: there was a shootout in Maryland, near Devcom, at Darius Patél’s residence. A newspaper had the article about a shooting, people wounded, suspects on the run... I’m concerned alright, Mr. President. What if they have wounded one of our operatives and he is in custody? What do we do then?”

The room was dead quiet, the president trying to deal with what he had heard, before he jumped out of his chair. He turned to Malov. “Why didn’t you know about this?”

“Comrade President, it’s not Romanov! I told you, I spoke with Romanov briefly; he’s on the run with Darius Patél. I have heard nothing about a wounded or captured operative,” Malov replied, trying to stay calm. “I will get more details to you when I get the update call.”

The president raised his voice as he pointed at Malov. “You’re supposed to know everything! Do your fucking job, or you won’t have one!”

The president then turned to the prime minister. “Thanks for the information. I am sure you will be keeping an eye on the American press.”

The president adjourned the meeting; he had to get to his office and prepare for an urgent call request from the American president.

Malov left the meeting with a knot in his stomach. The pressure of the mission was getting to him as he went to his office, for a call to Deputy Director Nashkin. He prayed the news was good.

As usual, General Grekov and Prime Minister Kushtin had a long talk about their concerns, and what would happen if it was one of their SRV operatives that was wounded and in custody. They discussed the implications and what to do if it were true.

Back in America, the van’s tank was empty as Gregory pulled into a fuel stop and rest area, along the interstate in northern New Jersey. “Everyone stay inside. I will check things out and gas up,” Romanov said as he headed out.

“Okay, but hurry up; I gotta take a piss,” Niki replied.

“Hold on just a minute,” Romanov said, as he inserted a

card and hooked up the gas nozzle. Then Romanov walked around. No police; the place was quiet. “Okay, sweetie, you can go. Just be quick about it.”

“I got to go, too,” Gregory said, as he followed Niki into the store.

As the van was gassing up, Romanov called his contact, Ronnie Oaks. “Hey, my Colonia High friend. We’re getting close.”

“I was going to call you... I just found out today’s afternoon run has been canceled,” Oaks replied. “Sorry, there is nothing I can do about that. It seems they have some repairs to make on the locomotive. But I’m assured the freight will run tomorrow morning, at eight a.m.”

“Fucking bad news it is, my friend! We’re ready to go,” Romanov replied. “I need to get this van off the road and out of sight.”

“No problem,” Oaks replied. “Drive to my place and I’ll get you and your party to the local hotel.”

“Okay, that will work. I’ve got your address; see you soon,” Romanov said, as his operatives jumped back in the van.

“No ride today for us today; the damn train is broke. We have to spend the night at a hotel,” Romanov said, as he

punched in the address on his G.P.S. and handed it to Gregory. “The place is about twenty-five miles northeast.”

“A warm bed sounds good. Anything to get out of this bitchin’ freezing cold van,” Niki added, as Gregory pulled back onto the interstate.

Back at the Patel residence, Rob Tanner was with a paramedic. They were waiting for Tanner’s old friend, Max the interrogator, to arrive. Victor was strapped into his medical stretcher.

“I need something for the pain. My legs are killing me,” he said.

“We got a nice shot of morphine for you,” Tanner replied as he held up a syringe. “Just tell us where your friends are going with Darius Patil and it’s all yours.”

“They never told me,” Victor lied. “Please, please, just give me something.”

Out on the road, Max checked his watch; he had made good time. He made his way down a few side streets and was stopped by security. He showed his I.D. and was let

through the sealed-off perimeter.

Damn, they got this place wired tight, Max said to himself, as he parked out in front of the house. He grabbed his black bag and headed for the front door of the Patel residence. Max was quite the imposing sight: a tall, muscular African American, with a shaved head and a neatly trimmed beard.

The doorbell rang and Tanner greeted his friend at the door. “Welcome to the party,” he said, as Max stepped inside.

Victor caught sight of Max and immediately forgot his pain, the feeling of fear spreading through his body.

Max smiled at Victor. “So, is this the subject, hmm... the one who killed our man?” he said, as he placed his black bag on the table.

“Yes, he is,” Tanner replied. “Sorry, but no introductions: he won’t tell us his name – or anything, for that matter.”

“I see. Hmm... let’s get the subject into one of the bedrooms,” Max replied, smiling. He took off his coat and grabbed his big, black bag.

Victor screamed, struggling to get free, as they rolled him down a long hallway and into the master suite.

Max turned to Tanner as he was putting on a pair of blue nitrile gloves. “You might want to take your friends out for a snack; this one is going to be noisy.”

“I got it, Max. Good idea,” Tanner replied. “We could use some food about now. You want anything?”

Max smiled. “A large coffee, light and sweet – like me.”

“You got it. And I’ll get a few of those donuts you like,” Tanner replied, as he headed for the front door.

With the house empty, Max closed and locked the bedroom door.

In The White House, President Moore was holding Victor’s Dragunov rifle. He admired the Russian weapon, and decided to add it to his collection. He had just finished a call with President Baranov, who, of course, denied having anything to do with Patel’s abduction. The Russian was given a choice: either hand over Patel or the U.S. would ramp up oil production, flood the market with cheap American oil and put Russia out of the oil business.

In the Kremlin, after the call, Baranov poured himself a drink and sat thinking about the call. He had never thought about the oil. With his prime minister on his ass, he wisely

decided to keep the American threat to himself.

Back in the van, Gregory drove over the state line and into the state of New York. After a few miles, he turned off the interstate and drove the back streets. The skies were gray, with little puffs of snow coming down now and then, when they finally arrived at the house.

Romanov liked that it was a big property, set back off the road. “Looks like a good place to ditch the van,” he said, as they pulled up the long driveway.

Ronnie Oaks came out of his Cape Cod-style home. “Welcome. You guys can park that out back, behind the garage,” he said, and shook hands with Romanov.

“I was thinking; why don’t you guys stay here the night?” Oaks asked. “Got plenty of room and a big pot of beef stew on the stove.”

Romanov decided it was better to stay off the grid. “Remember what I said, Ron: no talking about what you see – like it never happened, right?”

“Of course. This is all business,” Oaks replied, “all cash. Never happened.”

Romanov walked to the van. “Okay, guys, we’re staying

here for the night.” He pointed to Gregory. “Park the van over there, behind the garage.”

Gregory parked the car, as Niki and Romanov moved the drugged Darious Patel inside the warm, cozy home. Oaks said to take him into one of the upstairs bedrooms.

At Fort Bragg, Jason Patrick got the bad news from Commander Ryan, and was waiting in the meeting room when Delta arrived. Jason smiled at the familiar faces, as everyone took a seat around the table.

“I just got off the phone with the boss. Darious Patel was abducted this morning. There was a shootout at Patel’s residence.”

“What?! Darious? Who the hell did that?” Tex asked.

“It’s the fucking Russians this time; a group of their operatives,” Jason replied. “We believe they are led by Demetri Romanov.” He passed around Romanov’s picture. “They killed one of the Secret Service agents. The other agent on scene survived. He wounded one of the Russians and we have him in custody.”

“We all like Darious; he’s a good man,” Morales said. “Now the bastards took him! We need to find him.”

Jason could feel and sense the anger in his men. “Yes, Jorge, we must not let them get away. Commander Ryan told me they should have more intel on the Russians coming in. We need to be ready at a moment’s notice, so get yourselves geared up for it.”

“Does that include shielding?” Tex asked.

“Magnanotron is part of Delta now,” Jason replied; “it goes where you go.”

As Jason watched his men, he could tell it from their faces: this one hit home and they were angry. He sat there, thinking it would be a few long days and nights. He prayed for Darious, and reminded himself to call home.

Back in NY, Ronnie Oaks made his stew, and it was as good as he said.

Darious was tied up and in bed. He started to come around, his vision blurred some. He moved his foot and felt something: it was the bad girl with her needle again. Niki gave Darious the injection and, slowly, he drifted off into the darkness again.

Niki went downstairs, walked to the kitchen and found Romanov at the table. Oaks and Gregory were doing the

dishes. “Hey, Ron,” she said, “you mind if I get a shower?”

“Good idea. I need one myself. Mind if I join you?” Romanov said with a grin.

“Oh, no, no more showers with you, bad boy,” Niki replied, smiling as she headed to the bathroom.

Oaks and Victor started laughing about the “bad boy” thing.

Shit, I forgot to call Nashkin, Romanov said to himself, as he grabbed his cell. He went out back for a smoke and made the call. Deputy Director Nashkin picked up.

“Hello, sir. Sorry I’m late with the call; we had to make a few changes.”

“Do the Americans have one of our people?” Nashkin asked. “It seems that the news over there says they do. I almost got my head ripped off for not knowing that. Why the hell didn’t you tell me?”

“Sorry, sir,” Romanov replied, “but I thought Victor was shot dead and, with all the excitement, I wanted to let you know we had Patel.”

“Are you on the train, or what?” Nashkin asked.

“Not yet; there has been a delay: engine repairs,” Romanov replied. “But, first thing in the morning we will be on our way to grab our flight.”

“A fucking delay, of all the things we need! Time, comrade, is not on our side. This Victor, how much does he know about the plan?” Nashkin nervously asked.

“He knows it all,” Romanov said. “I see where you’re going, sir, but by the time the Americans get him to talk, we will be long gone.”

“I pray you are, comrade,” Nashkin added. “He talks and there will be a whole lot of shit coming our way. Call me as soon as you’re on the train.”

After the call, Nashkin tried to calm down. He poured himself a drink, his nerves shot. He dreaded the call he had to make to Director Malov.

Chapter 18

Danger Games

Back at the Patel residence, Tanner came back inside and found Max sitting on the sofa, with a small, silver flask in hand. Max smiled and offered it. “Have a sip. It’ll warm you up.”

“Thanks. This cold weather is getting old,” Tanner said, as he took a sip of the warming liquid. “So, my friend, what have we got so far?” he asked.

“Well, Rob, this sucker is a tough one. Got his first name and that he is an SRV operative, but he’s resisting me and my usual methods.”

“Never heard you say that before,” Tanner replied. “We need the info; we’re running out of time.”

“He will talk,” Max replied, as he got up. “Break’s over. It’s time to take it to the top.”

Max took a pull on his flask and walked back into the bedroom. Victor screamed at the sight of Max, as he took some items out of his black bag. Max slowly cut Victor’s bandages off, and the screaming and yelling started again.

Tanner stepped outside and made some calls to his contacts: so far, no news of the spies on the run.

Back at Fort Bragg, Jason was in his office when his old friend, now Secretary of State Hogerbee, walked in. “Hello, Jason. Feels good to be back on base.”

Jason shook his old commander’s hand. “You’re always welcome here, boss.”

Hogerbee took a seat. “Some shit going on with these Russians. My gut tells me Ryan is handing over to Delta on this one... My thoughts and prayers are with them.”

“Thanks, sir,” Jason replied. “The men are ready, as always.”

Jason poured the coffee and the two talked about Russia’s aggressive actions. They discussed what the options were to save Darius Patel and Magnanotron.

Tex and Delta Team were in their quarters, going over their gear. After a few hours of practice with Magnanotrons, everything was in place and ready to go. As Tex looked over his men, he sensed the call was coming; felt it in his

bones.

“Okay, men, time for some food and rest; you’re gonna need it.”

Back in Moscow, SRV Director Malov had just finished his call with Deputy Director Nashkin. Malov was pissed off; he didn’t believe Nashkin’s story that it was Agent Romanov’s mistake which may have jeopardized the mission. Now he had the truth: it seemed that Victor Mikal was in custody. *I will deal with Nashkin later*, Malov thought to himself. *The president is going to go nuts on me.*

In the Kremlin, President Andrei Baranov was at his desk, in his plush office suite, when he was notified he had the important call he was waiting for. American President Andrew Moore came on the line.

“Hello, Andrei, how are you?” President Moore asked.

“I am well... thank you, President Moore,” Baranov replied. “What can I do for you?”

“Let’s take the cards off the table,” Moore replied. “I’m very concerned. One of our top scientists has been

abducted, and everything we have is pointing to Russia and SRV operatives.”

“Russia, you say?” Baranov replied. “I assure you that we have no knowledge of this. Perhaps it is a rogue agent, or something.”

“That is exactly what I thought you would say,” Moore said. “One needs to remember that these are dangerous times; bad things can happen to people who do nasty to others. Oh, and, President Baranov, I hear your oil exports are doing very well.”

“I told you the truth. There’s no need for threats,” Baranov lied.

“Here is the truth, President Baranov: like I said before, we lose our scientist, and America will be back in and stay in the oil export business. We will flood the market with clean, cheap, American crude. The choice is yours.”

Baranov tried to reply, but President Moore hung up on him.

Fuck! They’re going hit us in the pocket, he thought to himself, as he realized the billions that could be lost. *The prime minister must not know. Not until after we have Patel*, he thought, as he poured another drink.

*

Back at the Patel residence, Rob Tanner was thankful the yelling from the bedroom had finally stopped. He stretched out on the couch to relax, and dozed off.

Sometime later, he woke to the feeling of something tapping on his hand.

“Hey, man, you was really out,” Max said, as he took a seat. “Damn tired myself. Vicktor Mikal is his name. It was long and tough, but he finally broke.”

Tanner tried to shake the dust that settled in his brain. “Shit. How long have I been out? What time is it?” Tanner checked his cell: it was nine p.m.

“You’ve been out for a few hours,” Max replied, as he took a notepad out of his bag. “I got the information – most all of it, I think.”

“Okay, great. Let me grab my files,” Tanner said, as he went to the kitchen and scrambled through his briefcase. “Okay, Max, what we got?”

“First off, Romanov is the ringleader. The female is his girlfriend and SRV operative, Niki Ivanov. Our friend Victor is an experienced SRV operative and our fourth suspect is the driver: a low-level spy whose name is

Gregory Wallis. They are well-armed and on the run in a white Ford van. They're heading northeast to the NY area, to catch a train ride up north to Malone, New York."

"Damn good work, Max," Tanner said, as he finished writing. "That's what we needed."

Tanner put his coat on. "I've got to make some calls, head back to the office," he said, as the two shook hands. "We've got to get this thing moving."

Max smiled. "Our friend Victor needs medical attention right about now. Like I said, it was long and tough."

Tanner went outside and told one of his agents to get medical back in, to check on Victor. There was no more time for meetings; he made a direct call to CIA Director Norman Scout and gave him the full details.

And so the word spread around, eventually to the top.

In the Fort Bragg area, Commander Ryan was watching a movie at home when his cell lit up; to his surprise, it was Chief of Staff General Stanis.

"We have the intel on the Russians. Get your team ready; the president has called for an emergency meeting."

Ryan left his favorite chair and said goodbye to family

movie night. Before long, he was on the road, heading to base.

At President Moore's order, startup activities at all oil refining facilities in Texas and the Gulf of Mexico were underway, along with activity at key components of the Keystone Pipeline System. Oil industry executives and workers were excited at the turnaround, and eager to get the oil flowing again.

Chapter 19

Battle Stations

Back at Fort Bragg, the base alarm sounded at 9:23 p.m., with red lights flashing and sirens blaring. Jason had received a call from Commander Ryan and gave the order. Jason put on some coffee, and was now getting himself dressed for a meeting with Delta.

Tex heard the alarms and jumped out of bed. “Oh, shit! Let’s go, people; full battle gear,” he yelled out. “We got us some trouble.”

“Maybe it’s the Russian thing,” Morales added, as everyone was scrambling to get ready.

Tex got the call from Jason: Delta was to report to Capcom as soon as possible.

Back in Maryland, Tanner was on the way home when he received another call from Director Scout, thanking him for all the hard work, and the success in getting the vital intel on the Russians.

Tanner was finally relieved. He had done what needed to be done and they had a chance to get Darius Patil back. Now it was up to the gods above to make it happen.

With little sleep for hours, and a whole lot of worry, Tanner was bone-tired and headed for home, his lady and his warm bed.

Late at night, in The White House, the president and some of his staff had gathered on short notice, and were on a video call with Commander Ryan, who had a large map of the northeast on the display screen.

Ryan pointed at the map: “According to our calculations, the Russians could have driven the distance to New York and be on the train already. It’s about two-and-a-half hours for an Osprey to get us from the base to Malone, New York.” Ryan paused for a moment, looking over his notes. “With all the stops along the way, it takes a train several hours to get from NYC to the Malone train station; it may take more or less time, considering we don’t know exactly where they are departing from. We are looking into how many stops there are. Malone, New York is the last stop before crossing into Canada.”

“Thank you, Commander. I see you did your homework,” President Moore replied. “Sounds like we could be waiting at Malone Station for them, with a Magnatron surprise.”

“Let’s shut down what trains we can,” General Stanis added. “We need to place a call to Malone Station and give them a heads up.”

“I don’t advise shutting things down,” Ryan replied; “it could tip them off. They could get off the train and disappear on us.”

“Good thinking, Commander,” President Moore replied; “let them come to us. But I do like the idea of giving Malone a heads-up. We need to send the FBI in to secure the station until Delta arrives. All trains traveling north will be stopped at Malone Station until further notice.”

“One other option, sir,” General Stanis added, “something for you to consider: we could have our F-35s ready. The train may be controlled by the Russians, and if for some reason they decide not to stop at Malone—”

“Taking out a train? Killing Americans? That’s not a good option,” Moore hesitated. “But... considering what the Russians will do with Magnatron... Okay, have them ready, General. Let’s pray it doesn’t come to that.”

“We have a V-2 Osprey ready and waiting, sir,” Ryan added. “Fort Drum, in upstate New York, is our drop-off point; from there, it’s not far to the train station. We will get that train stopped, sir, and get our man out, one way or another.”

“Okay, Ryan,” President Moore said, as he was leaving. “I have faith in you and your men. God be with you all. Let’s make it happen.”

Back at Fort Bragg, the alarms had shut off and there was an aircrew out on the tarmac, prepping the V-2 Osprey – the turbo-prop plane that can also fly like a helicopter.

Jason was in Capcom with Delta Team. Discussion about the mission was going around the table, and a detailed map of the train station was on display. Jason passed some paperwork around. “I just got word: the mission is a go.”

Jason pointed at the display: “Your Osprey will touch down here, at Fort Drum, and Delta takes a short drive to the train station. Once on site,” Jason pointed to the display, “we disperse and cover the train station area. All northbound trains have orders to stop at Malone; you need

to check them out. Do whatever it takes to get our man, but be careful; we got a friendly aboard that train.”

“Copy that, sir. We are ready,” Tex replied. “We will find him and set him free. The Russians are going to fight, but with Delta on Magnatron they’re in for a big surprise.”

“Roger on that,” Jason replied, and cheers went around the table.

“I did some research on Malone Station.” Jason pointed: “You see this set of blocks, between the two rail lines? These are the signal stations. When the arms are down, warning lamps come on in the area and, if the train breaks the signal arm, the engine shuts down and the brakes in the engine car automatically apply.”

The meeting went on for another few minutes before Delta left to grab their gear and get aboard the Osprey.

A few minutes or so later, Jason stood outside in the freezing cold, the whirring sound of the Osprey’s engines in the background. He watched his Delta team as they were forming up in full battle gear. He watched as they moved out, single file, into the transport. Once again, all eyes were watching, hoping and praying. Jason wanted to be with his team. He prayed for a good mission, and to see them all

again. The stakes were incredibly high. Now, as in the past, it was handed to the boots on the ground and the men of Special Forces.

In New York, it was a cold, gray early-morning. The Russian operatives were up early and getting ready.

Niki went to check on Darius; he was up, and asked for water. She gave him a water bottle and a protein bar, and today Niki was told by Romanov to slack off on the happy juice.

Ronnie Oaks poured the coffee. “I checked the weather: it looks like we’re gonna have some snow squalls today.” He smiled. “Trains don’t mind the snow.”

Romanov sipped his coffee. “Snow or not, we got to get moving soon. I want to check the station out before we get on the train.”

He handed out some small communication radios. “Gregory, you are going to ride with our friend Ronnie here, keep him company.”

“No problem, sir. In the engine – cool stuff!” Gregory replied, smiling, his mouth full of food.

Before long, the Russians and Darius Patel were out in

the early-morning light, on their way to the station in Ronnie's car.

On board the Osprey, the ride was getting bumpy. The small talk was over as everyone focused on the coming mission. The only sound was the drumming of the plane's engines.

Then the pilot came on the com: "Good morning, Delta. We're starting our descent into Fort Drum shortly. You might want to put an extra layer on: it's eighteen degrees out there."

"Only eighteen? Hell, I got it; that's no problem," Dudash said with a smile.

"Cold? I'll take it, considering we don't have to jump out of an airplane today," McDonough added.

"Were like the mail: we've got to be there," Blair added, smiling.

"Alright, Delta, let's button up," Tex said, as the plane started to descend into the Fort Drum landing area.

At the train station in south New York, the operatives

followed Oaks to an enclosed waiting area under a large, covered platform.

“There she is,” Oaks said, looking at the freight train.

Niki was complaining about the cold, as usual, as Oaks went for a walk and checked in with his friend. All was good to get aboard the freight train; the caboose car was attached at the end.

Gregory and Romanov had Darius Patel covered in a blanket and on his stretcher. Niki went first, with Oaks leading the way. She checked that no one was in the area and radioed back that it was clear. The operatives stayed low, moving as quickly as possible. They carried Darius down the long line of freight cars, into the caboose. Then Romanov and Gregory made another run, to get the rest of the gear.

The sun was just peeking over the horizon as the freight train pulled out of the station and rumbled on, for the run up to Canada. It took a while, but everyone was finally settled down.

Romanov did a radio check on Gregory, who was excited about riding up front. Then Romanov took out his cell. *Time to let them know*, he said to himself, as he waited for Deputy Director Nashkin to pick up.

Chapter 20

The Train Is Coming

Up at the Malone, New York station, FBI SAC Leader Jim Smith and three other agents walked into the empty train station terminal. Smith talked with the station manager and operators. He confirmed that they initiated the alert and emergency stop system for all trains, and the next train coming north was expected to arrive in ninety minutes.

FBI Agent Smith was given a heads-up that the Army was on the way. He was ordered to shut down and seal off the station; no one in or out. Jim and his men went around the station, checking things, and waited.

Outside, in the bitter cold, little puffs of snow were flowing in the breeze, which was starting to pick up. Seemed another snowstorm was on the way.

In Russia, SRV Director Malov got word Darius Patil was on the train, and his operatives were heading north to catch their plane ride. The plan was working. This was good

news and he was eager to share it, as he got in his car for the drive over to the Kremlin, and a meeting with the president.

At Fort Drum, New York, the Osprey had touched down, and Delta was greeted by the base commander and a formation of soldiers, who stood at attention. “I see you’re ready for some business,” the base commander said, as he looked at Tex and his team, in full battle gear.

“Yes, sir, we’re needed at the train station,” Tex replied.

“Here comes your ride,” the commander pointed, as a transport truck pulled up. Delta started to get on board.

“It’s about an hour or so to the train station but, with the snow that’s coming, it could be longer. Good luck,” the commander said, as the truck was pulling away.

Fifteen minutes later, the truck was rumbling down the road, and the little puffs of snow had turned into a steady snowfall, with gusts of wind. The transport driver had to slow down a bit. With things turning white, and the heavy snowfall, he struggled to keep his eyes on the road.

“Look at that. I’m going to be Frosty the Snowman,” Dudash said, as he looked out the back of the truck, at the

snow blowing around.

“You can be Frosty later,” Blacknal said with a smile; “maybe I’m gonna give you a nice snowball sandwich.”

The laughing and joking spread around. It helped ease the tension.

Tex held a map of the train station. “Remember, no Magnatron until a train arrives. Be careful with the weapons; there could be a lot of people on the train.”

“Once at the station, are we going to move out of the cover, or what?” Morales asked.

“Yes, Jorge, we’re going to set up along this outbuilding; it’s at the bottom of the stairway.” Tex pointed to the map. “I want us nice and close to the railroad tracks. When a train stops, we disperse, we shield up and we search it.”

At the Kremlin, President Baranov decided to keep General Grekov and his prime minister out of the loop until the Nightfall mission was complete. He got word that they were talking with other party members and meeting in private.

President Baranov was on edge. He decided that Malov

would be his way out, held responsible if things went bad.

He arrived for his meeting and found SRV Director Malov sitting at the table, smiling at him. “Hello, sir. I have some good news for you.”

“Good news? Let’s have it,” the president said, as he took his seat.

“Darius Patil is on the train,” Malov replied. “They’re heading north to New York for their plane ride.”

“Good news it is, but I’m concerned,” the president replied, and poured himself a glass of vodka on ice. “I got the prime minister up my ass on this. Reports are coming in that the Americans are scrambling.”

“Comrade President, I need to tell you I suspect our operative Victor Mikal could be in custody,” Malov said, nervously. “If the Americans have him, there’s the possibility he could talk.”

The president stood up, pacing again. “Why did your man Romanov leave him behind? ‘If’ is a big word. A fucking mess it could be!”

“Even if they do have him and he talks, sir,” Malov replied, trying to cover his ass, “I don’t think they’re going to be able to stop Romanov in time. Victor has some knowledge of the plan, but only Romanov has the contacts

and timeframe. I expect an update soon, and will let you know how it's going."

"I hope it turns out that you're right. Oh, and, for now, I need you to stay here as my guest, Director," the president replied. "Let us see what happens with Darius Patil. My staff will show you to your quarters."

As the president left, Malov nervously thought to himself: *Why does he want me here? And I don't like the way he said, "Let us see what happens."*

Back in Fayetteville, Emma and her children left the peace and comfort of the church. She had prayed for Delta and the mission to save Darius Patil. She was relieved that Jason was no longer on the frontlines of the fight, but knew in her heart that he would always be with them.

Somewhere in upstate New York, Gregory was looking out the front window of the engine, as the train barreled through the snow. He turned to Ronnie Oaks and yelled over the roaring engine noise: "You ever have to stop because of the weather?"

“Not yet,” Oaks replied. “With this kinda weather, it’s better to slow a little, but to keep moving at a good pace. We don’t have any stops until Malone, so we’re good.”

In the caboose car, Niki pulled up her blanket, cuddled next to Romanov and tried to catch a little sleep.

Darius Patel was starting to come around. He opened his eyes and slowly realized, in disbelief, that he was on a train ride with the bad people. He looked at Romanov’s rifle, lying on one of the benches, thinking that he wanted to kill them all. *Maybe I can get my hands free*, he thought, as he pulled at his wrist locks. But it was no use.

As the train barreled through the snow, Romanov called his pilot contact, and was happy to hear that everything was in place and waiting for his arrival. He then found himself nodding off to the rhythmic sound of the train, and the warmth of Niki’s body leaning against his.

Commander Ryan had never considered a freight train – a train with no stops along the way. It would be a close one for Delta, as the minutes ticked by. At the station, the snowfall had tapered off and the winds had died down some, by the time Delta finally arrived at the train station.

FBI Agent Jim Smith was outside the entrance, smoking and watching as an Army truck pulled in. Agent Smith watched as Delta jumped out and Tex gathered up his men. *Damn – looks like they brought in the heavy hitters*, he thought to himself.

Tex walked toward the station entrance, and noticed outside the building that there was a large, covered platform and a main set of stairs, which led down to a long walkway along the rails. He spotted Smith. *The FBI is here*, he thought, as he motioned him over.

“We were told you were coming,” Smith said, as he pulled out his I.D. and badge.

“Good to meet you, Agent Smith,” Tex replied. “I have my team on site. Is there anyone else inside the station?”

“There were some people waiting,” Smith replied; “we checked them out and advised them to leave.” He pointed at the station. “Right now, it’s just the station manager and three of my agents.”

“Good,” Tex replied. “When the train arrives, have the station manager tell his people to get the passengers off the train and up the stairs.” Tex pointed at the platform. “We’ll check the passengers out as they move along the walkway and up the stairs.”

“Good idea,” Smith replied, “but I don’t think there are many people on a freight train. It’s due anytime now.”

“A freight train? Clever idea. It must be them,” Tex replied. “You guys stay ready and out of sight, for now.”

“We got your back,” Smith said, as Tex took off.

They’re coming, Tex thought to himself, as he headed back to Delta.

They moved out, making their way through the ice and snow. Quickly, they moved down toward the railroad tracks and the outbuilding, behind some large hemlock trees. Tex made a quick call in to Capcom and let them know that Delta was in place. No more small talk; everyone focused on the mission as Tex gathered his team.

“We got a freight train inbound; it has to be them.” Tex pointed: “Dudash, you and Blair cover the engine and the front of the train. Blacknal and McDonough, you two at the rear, and Jorge and I will cover the rest. No one shields up or moves out until the train pulls in and stops.”

Back on the freight train, Romanov placed a call to his pilot contact, and was told the good news that the snow was tapering off. His pilot was en route, but most of the roads

were unplowed and slippery as hell. Romanov was not happy at the news; no doubt his ride to the airstrip would be late.

Romanov grabbed his radio. “Gregory, do you copy?”

“Yes, comrade,” Gregory replied,

“Tell our friend Ronnie that, when the train arrives at the station, we will be waiting onboard until our ride arrives,” Romanov said. “And remember to get your ass back here, to help me with our sleepy friend.”

“Yes, comrade,” Gregory replied. “I got it.”

“Seems our sleepy friend is not so sleepy,” Niki said, as she noticed Darious watching them. She moved to him. “How you feeling?”

“I’m thirsty as hell – and stiff,” Darious replied.

Nicki got Darious off the stretcher, gave him some water and checked his wrist locks.

Romanov smiled at Darious. “Good, it will be much easier to walk you off the train. But don’t try anything stupid, or you get the needle again.”

Darious closed his eyes, wishing it was all a bad dream.

Romanov checked his Glock-19 and turned to Niki. “Okay, baby, our ride is on the way. Let’s get ready for it!”

She smiled and opened her coat, revealing a small,

compact Vityaz submachine gun. “I’m always ready for it.”

“Good, baby,” Romanov said, as he strapped his own Vityaz over his shoulder.

From The White House to Commander Ryan at Capcom, and the FBI, the tension was high. All were hoping – and some praying – that Darious Patel would be a free man again.

Inside Capcom, the time had come. Ryan sat alone in his office and poured himself a drink. He sat staring at the phone on his desk, waiting for it to ring. He was confident in Jason and Delta; when the stakes were high, they always found a way to pull through.

On the president’s order, two Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning aircraft had taken off from McGuire Airforce Base in New Jersey. Their target was the Norfolk rail lines, north of Malone, NY. Their orders were to be ready for attack, and stay in the area until further instruction. On board the aircraft, the pilots did a systems check and prepared for the rough weather ahead.

Chapter 21

The Storm

Back at Malone Station, the snow and wind were back again with a vengeance. Delta was under the outbuilding overhang, huddled against a retaining wall, trying to stay warm.

“Remember, a friendly is involved here,” Tex said, “so shields only; no shooting unless a clear field of fire, until we locate Darius.”

Dudash passed around some water and power bars. The minutes seemed like hours as Tex watched the big, puffy snowflakes blowing along the railroad tracks. Suddenly, Tex noticed something out in the distance: a red light blinking through the white. Then another came, this one closer.

“Incoming!” Tex said, as he noticed a faint rumbling sound.

The station stops engaged, more red lights blinking in contrast to the whiteness of the snowfall.

*

Inside the caboose, Romanov saw the red lights and jumped up. “Oh, fuck! The Americans must know we’re coming! We must keep moving!”

Gregory came on the radio: “Comrade, they’re telling us to stop! What do we do?”

Romanov keyed in. “Keep going! Don’t stop! It’s a trap!”

Darius was now fully awake. He realized something was happening, and for once had hope in his heart, as he watched the bad people scrambling around the car. *Maybe there’s a way out of this hell, after all*, he thought to himself.

Inside the engine, Ronnie Oaks was a nervous wreck; Gregory had his handgun pointed at him, telling him to speed up. Oaks had no choice but to hit the throttle and pray for his life.

At the station, Delta could hear the rumbling and clanking of the train as it approached but, with the heavy snowfall, all they could see was white in the distance. Then the

rambling train broke through the snow and came into view, as it barreled toward the station.

“Look at the speed!” McDonough yelled out. “They aren’t stopping!”

Tex looked on. “Get ready; shields up!” he yelled out as the freight train roared by, bringing gusts of swirling snow and a rush of wind, as it passed the emergency stop signal.

The auto-stop system kicked in, cut the engine and applied emergency braking. The drive wheels locked, steel on steel, with sprays of red sparks along the rails. The train screeched and moaned as it started to slow down.

Inside the engine, Gregory was thrown backward, off his feet; his head slammed into the back wall. He went down to the floor, hard, as Oaks struggled to keep from the same fate. In the caboose, everyone was thrown about and trying to recover.

“I’m going to kill those fucking idiots!” Romanov said, holding his bloody nose. “I told them not to stop!”

Tex jumped up in surprise, as Delta watched the freight

train slowing and grinding its way down the rails, before finally coming to a halt about three hundred yards north of the station.

“Okay, shields up. Move out,” Tex said. “Let’s go get our man.”

“At last, I’m Blue Man again,” Blacknal said with a smile, as he started to run.

Delta quickly moved out and up onto the tracks, blue arcs of light in the snow. The Magnanotron shields outlined their bodies as they headed out, single file, and ran down the tracks.

Romanov and Niki ran out the back door and onto the stairway platform. Romanov could make out some blue arcs of light in the white; as he watched, they were moving closer. “They’re coming!” Romanov said, as he readied his weapon.

Delta Team split formation; half moved to each side of the rails as they closed in on target.

“What the hell is that?” Niki said, as they looked at the arcs of blue light outlining the shielded soldiers.

“It must be Magnanotron!” Romanov said as he opened

fire, his gun blazing. He emptied two clips, then looked in disbelief as the soldiers kept coming at them. Romanov yelled for Niki, opened the door and ran back inside the train.

Niki wasn't moving. With a wild look in her eyes, she dropped her machine gun and started firing her MP-443 handgun.

Flashes and sparks flying off their shields, Delta moved in to almost point-blank range. Quickly, Blair moved around and up close, and took Niki out with a headshot; she rolled down the car's stairway, into the snow.

Up on the platform, FBI Agent Smith and his team, with their weapons ready, watched Delta Team in their Magnanotron shields. The blue arcs of light were pulsing around them as they ran through the snow and into the intense gunfire, sparks of light flashing off their shields as the bullets rained down on them.

"My god, will you look at that?! They keep moving!" Smith said, as he looked at his men. "Stay down, but be ready for backup."

Delta formed up.

"There's at least one inside the car," Tex said. "Morales, you stay with me. The rest of you guys spread out, search

the train.”

Tex and Morales moved up the stairway and onto the caboose platform. Tex tried the door. “It’s locked,” he said to Morales. “I bust in, you cover me.”

“I got your back,” Morales said, as he moved to the side of the doorway.

Inside the caboose, Romanov had seen the door handle turning. Nervously, he moved to the back corner of the car. He was holding Darious in front of him, with his handgun pointed at his head.

Up along the train, the rest of Delta moved and searched in the blowing snow. Blair and McDonough came to the engine first. Blair opened the door and McDonough jumped inside, with his handgun at the ready. He almost tripped over George’s body, lying by the doorway, as he moved on Ronnie Oaks. “Hands up! Let’s go! Get the hell out!” McDonough said.

Oaks was shocked and trying to get his mouth working, as he looked at McDonough and the blue arcs of light rotating around his body. “They hijacked the train! I had no choice!” he said, with his hands up.

McDonough moved quickly, grabbed the handgun on the floor and locked Ronnie’s wrists. Blair came aboard and

checked George over.

Back in the caboose, Tex slammed the door hard, and almost broke it off its hinges with the power of the shield. Slowly, Tex stepped inside and spotted Darious Patel.

“Ah, the infamous Mr. Romanov. I’ve been wanting to meet you,” he said, as he took in the situation.

Romanov was trembling as he looked at Tex, his cold stare and the wonder of Magnatron. “Look at you! Now I can see what all the fuss is about. Remember this, soldier: you get too close and I will do it!” Romanov said, his gun cocked and pointed at Darious’s head.

“I want everyone to back off,” he added. “Bring a car and a driver for me, and everything will be okay.”

Tex gradually turned his body at an angle, to hide the blade strapped to his leg, and slowly inched his way forward. He looked at Darious, bound and gagged, his eyes bulging.

“No problem,” Tex replied, and told Morales to back off. He keyed his radio. “Have the station manager request a car, for pickup at the station.”

Tex deactivated his shield and moved a little closer. “There, you see? Leave Darious and you go free.”

Romanov tried to smile. “I’ve grown fond of my friend.

Why not let him live to see another day?”

Slowly, Tex moved his right hand down toward his blade, inching forward as he spoke. “I agree; we all want Darios to live. Why not leave him be and go back Russia, where you belong?”

Morales had his gun ready, as he watched the standoff from the doorway. He noticed the way Tex was talking and moving, his hand creeping down for his blade.

At the front of the train, Blacknal and Dudash headed back, with Ronnie Oaks in tow, but Blair was unable to wake Gregory, who had a nasty wound on the side of his forehead. McDonough applied some bandages, as they prepared to get him back to the station.

Tex was almost where he wanted to be, his hand on his knife handle, when he dropped his gun. “You win, Romanov.” Then Tex pointed to a back window; “Who the hell is that?!”

For one precious moment, Romanov’s eyes diverted to the window, and Tex reached for and grabbed Romanov’s gun hand with his left hand. But, as he pulled it away, the gun went off. At the same time, his right hand came up, full and hard, the big blade catching Romanov under his chin, and up into his brain. Romanov’s eyes went wide with

surprise, his blood spurting, then the dead Russian spy dropped to the floor.

Tex turned to check Darious and, at the same time, Morales came running in. Darious was on the floor, face down and not moving, as Tex bent over him.

“Oh, Christ, he’s hit!” Tex yelled, as he turned Darious over, to see a bloody wound at the top of his forehead.

Morales saw it, too, and grabbed his radio. “Blair, we need the med-kit, asap!”

Blair had heard the gunshot and was close; it wasn’t long before he was inside the car. Quickly, he applied a pressure bandage to stop the bleeding.

“This is not good, we need to get him to the hospital,” Tex said, as he checked his Magnatron and turned on his uplink. “Capcom, Capcom, Delta needs extraction and medevac at the station! Copy.”

“We copy that, Delta,” Capcom replied. “Incoming to your location.”

With the shooting over, the rest of Delta came to the caboose and deactivated. McDonough stepped inside, to the sight of Romanov sprawled out in a pool of blood. He looked at Tex and Darious on the floor. “We got two of them in custody; one is banged up. What the hell

happened?”

“That fuckin’ rat Romanov! Looks like Darious was shot,” Tex replied, as he stood up and wiped his bloody blade on his pants. “Darious is unconscious. Not sure how bad it is.”

Tex tried to calm down, think clearly. “Okay, let’s get everyone inside the station.”

Blair and McDonough wrapped Darious in a blanket and carried him out of the caboose. Blacknal and Dudash were waiting, with the two suspects in custody.

Slowly, Tex followed his men as they made their way through the snow and headed up the platform stairway. Agent Smith greeted them, as Tex came up on the covered platform, and Delta followed him into the warmth of the train station.

Chapter 22

Darious Patel

Back at Capcom, Jason was concerned as he got the news of Delta's request for medevac. He found the operator who took the call. "Did they say anything else about the mission?" he asked.

"No, sir, just the call for help," the operator replied.

Wondering and worrying, Jason thought, *What the hell is going on?* as he went to his office to give Ryan a call.

"I had two years of pre-med; let me have a look at him," Agent Smith said, back at the station, as they placed Darious on a bench. Smith checked Darious's pulse and looked him over. "His heart is good. Let's have a look at his head," he said, as Blair slowly unwrapped the bandages on the head wound.

"Hmm, let's see," Smith said, as he moved close, his hands touching the wound. "It's not too bad. Some impact, but not sure of the penetration." Smith started probing the

wound and, to everyone's surprise, Darios's eyes opened and he let out a scream from the pain.

"Hold on, soldier; you're going to be okay," Smith said to Darios, as everyone gathered around.

Darios was awake, his eyes blinking. He looked around at all the smiling faces staring down at him.

"How do you feel, my friend?" Tex asked.

"My... my head hurts. My ears are ringing." He looked at Tex. "What happened?"

The chatter and joy spread as Tex replied: "Thank God you're okay, buddy. It was the spy; he shot you when I was pulling the gun away."

"I remember now," Darios replied. "The bad man."

"No more worrying about him; he's done," Tex replied, as he grabbed his uplink.

"Yeah, the bad people... they had to go to sleep for a while," Blacknal said with a grin, and the laughing and joking started.

"Can you move your legs?" Smith asked. Darios moved his legs, then tried to get up.

"No, no, that's enough, young man," Tex said. "You need to rest. We believe you might have a concussion."

Darios looked up at Tex, then took hold of his hand.

“God bless you; you saved my life.”

“Thanks. Now try to rest,” Tex replied.

Flooded with emotion and relief, Tex called in: “Capcom, Capcom, mission is complete; we have the package secured. Copy?”

“Copy that, Delta: package is secured,” Capcom replied.

“Your ride is on the way.”

Back at Fort Bragg, the cheer erupted at Capcom and Jason was flooded with relief. Delta had pulled through again.

I need more details, but it can wait, Jason thought to himself, as he headed to his office, and the good-news call to Commander Ryan.

In the skies over northern NY, the F-35 pilots got the word to stand down, and the extraction choppers were inbound for Malone Station. The chopper pilots were relieved that the winds and snow had died down; the storm was over, in more ways than one.

*

Back at the station, a flood of FBI agents showed up and sealed off the area. Delta handed Ronnie Oaks to the FBI, for further investigation of his story about being abducted. SRV operative Gregory Wallis was recovering and Agent Smith was treating his wounds. Gregory would be coming back with Delta and, after his recovery, perhaps a talk with Rob Tanner and his friend Max. One thing was for sure: his days in Russia were over.

Before long, Tex got the call from the inbound choppers: “Delta, Delta, E.T.A. about five minutes. Mark us an L.Z. Copy?”

“Copy that: mark the L.Z.,” Tex replied. “Okay, people, let’s get out front; our ride is coming in.” Tex looked around. “McDonough, you and Blacknal mark off the parking lot with some flares.”

In the town of Malone, the rapid gunfire was heard in the area and local police arrived; sirens blaring, they came to the front entrance. FBI agents stopped them and one of the police officers got out of his car. “What the hell is going on?” he asked.

“No one in or out,” one of the FBI agents replied, as he

showed his I.D. “The Army is in control.”

Back in Moscow, it was late at night. Deputy Director Nashkin was up and worried that there was no word, no update from Romanov. *Why is he not answering his calls?* Nashkin thought, then wondered what to do when his phone started ringing. It was their Nightfall operative and pilot.

“Comrade Director,” he said, “Demetri Romanov told me to call if there was a problem. When I arrived at the train station entrance, there was gunfire, a whole lot of shit going down. I had to turn back.”

His worst fear realized, Nashkin hung up the phone. *I have to get the hell out of here now*, he said to himself, his hands shaking as he poured some vodka. Nashkin thought to himself: *I will go to Kursk, to visit Mama*. Before long, Nashkin had his car packed and was nervously driving on the cold, dark and snowy roads leading away from Moscow.

At Malone Station, Tex heard it first: the unmistakable, faint thumping sound – and it was getting louder. “Here

they come!”

Back at the front road entrance, everyone watched as one helicopter, followed by another, slowly descended toward the parking lot. They touched down, their rotor wash sending up huge clouds of swirling snow.

A team of Army medics dispersed, and soon escorted Darious and Gregory for their ride back to Fort Drum. Delta formed up and everyone followed Tex into the other waiting chopper.

“Man, will you look at that?” a police officer said, as the group at the entrance watched Delta moving in the snow. “It must have been some kinda show.”

“It sure as hell was,” one of the FBI agents replied, as the choppers began lifting off. “We’ll all be reading about it in the newspapers, for sure.”

Aboard their ride, Tex was feeling pretty good. He looked at his team, smiling. “You guys, we did it again. Another big one!”

He looked at Blacknal. “How’s the shoulder doing?”

“It feels better after I saw what you did to Romanov,” Blacknal replied. “I bet it was up close and personal.”

“Another one for the history books,” Dudash added.

“It was very close. That scum Romanov got what he

deserved,” Tex said. “God was with me; another fraction of an inch and our friend Darius would be going home in a body bag.”

“Damn shame that Russian chick with the machine gun had to go,” Blair said; “she was hot!”

“I say thank God for Tex and his big blade,” Morales said, smiling... and the laughing and teasing started.

Back at Fort Bragg, Jason settled in his office and made his call to Ryan.

The Commander picked up. “Yes, Jason, what’s going on?”

“We got him, sir,” Jason replied; “the word just came in. I should have more details for you soon.”

“Fantastic news! Congratulations to Delta!” Ryan replied. “You know, we were all worried on this one. I’ll give General Stanis the update we’ve all been waiting and hoping for.”

The two officers discussed the good news and made some plans. When the call ended, a weary but relieved Jason headed for the office couch. He figured he could catch a few hours of sleep before Delta arrived.

*

Back at Malone Station, Agent Smith and his team of FBI agents searched the freight train and found a stack of weapons, a large sum of cash and, most importantly, Romanov's personal notebook. It was full of details that would be helpful in exposing the Russian spy network.

With the area investigation and search complete, the Malone station manager was given the okay to get things running again.

Agent Smith still could not find anything to link their suspect Ronnie Oaks with the Russians. He decided to hold him for another twenty-four hours, to see what panned out.

Chapter 23

The News

At The White House, President Moore had just got a call from Chief of Staff General Stanis, and was elated to hear that his prayers were answered: Darious Patel was a free man again.

“So, when do you think more details will be coming your way?” the president asked.

“Commander Ryan expects an update within the hour or so,” Stanis replied.

“Good, General. Please bring Ryan along. Gather what evidence is out there on the Russians,” President Moore said. “We will have a meeting here at ten a.m. tomorrow. After the meeting, I will issue a statement to the press and expose the Russian aggression.”

The call ended and Ryan got busy making plans to be at The White House.

Back at Fort Drum, Delta had arrived, with Gregory and

Darious going straight to medical. Delta was now resting in their temporary quarters. The base commander was proud to have them, and told them that their Osprey was getting refueled and checked over, but would be ready shortly for their trip back to Fort Bragg.

Tex was looking over some of the pictures Morales had taken, of the deceased Russian spies and their weapons. He was thinking that he had to call Jason and give him some details, when his uplink came on. To his surprise, it was Jason.

“Hello, sir. I was just thinking to call you.”

“I heard the good news,” Jason said. “How are you guys doing?”

“We’re okay, sir. It was crazy there for a while, when the train ran the stop, the snowstorm... I thought Darious Patel was shot in the head but, thank God, it turned out it was a graze wound and concussion. Magnanotron was with us. We took out the female agent first, then it was a standoff, with Romanov holding a gun to Patel’s head – it was risky; he had to take out Romanov up close and personal. That’s when Patel got injured. We also have one operative in custody; he has some head trauma. I’m not sure if medical will let him or Darious ride back with us.”

“No problem. I’m damn proud of Delta. Good work, soldier,” Jason replied. “So now we can be sure it was the Russians?”

“Yes, sir, it was Romanov; we have some pictures,” Tex replied. “And I would think more evidence was recovered by the FBI, along with the dead operatives.”

“Good work, Tex. I’ll see you soon,” Jason replied. “Right now, I have to pass on the update to Commander Ryan.”

The call ended right on time, as word came: the Osprey was out on the tarmac, warming up.

In the Kremlin, Director Malov was waiting for word on the operatives. *What the fuck is going on? We should have some news by now*, he thought to himself. He was pissed off that Deputy Director Nashkin did not update him and was not returning his calls. Malov knew that President Baranov would be pressing him for news on Nightfall.

Running out of time and patience, Malov sent a team over to Nashkin’s residence, with orders to bring him to his office immediately.

*

At Fort Bragg, it was a blustery, cold sunset, as Jason stood waiting in his spot by the airfield. Delta was inbound and minutes away. Jason had given Commander Ryan the new details of the mission. Before long, the Osprey touched down, as Delta grabbed their gear and moved off the aircraft.

Jason came to his men and saluted them back as they stood at attention. “Congratulations to all of you. Commander Ryan and I are damn proud of Delta.”

Tex moved forward. “Thank you, sir. Everyone did what had to be done.”

Handshakes went around. “I know it has been a long day for you guys,” Jason said, “so let’s get inside. It won’t take long to run through the mission.”

In Maryland, CIA Specialist Rob Tanner was at home when he got a call from his boss, Director Norman Scout, with the good news. He was thanked for his unwavering efforts to help stop the Russian threat. He was informed that they had a Russian spy in custody, and more intel on their spy

network would be forthcoming. When the call ended, Tanner was happy to have another feather in his hat, and relieved that Darius Patil and the Magnatron secret were safe again.

The following morning, a long list of concerned parties were at The White House to meet with President Moore. General, Stanis along with the CIA and FBI directors, were going over a pile of evidence that confirmed it was Russian-based aggression.

The president walked in, and anyone who knew him could tell that he was happy and excited. He looked around at the familiar faces. “Welcome, everyone. I see a lot of smiles in here, for a change,” President Moore said, as he took his seat. “I was relieved and excited to hear the good news. Thank God the Russians were stopped, and Darius Patil is back in our hands again.”

“Yes, sir, Mr. President. It turned out well,” General Stanis added. “From what I understand, it was a close one – the Russians were determined and fought to the end – but Delta came through again.”

The FBI director handed over the files. “There’s plenty

of proof and some good intel on the Russians, Mr. President. And we have one spy in custody.”

President Moore smiled as he looked at some of the pictures. “I want to thank all parties involved. It was great teamwork. Your country owes you more than they will ever know. Most importantly, Darious Patel and Magnanotron are here in America, and will be used for the good of mankind.”

“Well said, Mr. President!” Defense Secretary Baker said, as cheers broke out and handshakes went around.

Discussion then went around the table as the evidence was passed around.

President Moore stood up and checked his watch. “Christmas is coming. I know everyone has someplace to go or things to do, so enjoy some time off – you deserve it. For me, I have one last thing to do: after my press conference, the world will know just how evil and desperate for power the Russians are.”

Back at Fort Bragg, the debriefing was over and the Delta Team members were happy, and busy making plans for their two-week holiday break. Tex was happy that he was

going back to his ranch, the land he loved and his horses.

Jason emailed copies of the last of the intel they gathered on the Russians off to Commander Ryan. He was thankful, relieved at how the mission had turned out, and eager to be home again. Then he got in his car, thinking about his love for Emma and the kids.

Christmas is less than a week away! Better get my ass out and do some shopping. Santa Claus is coming to town!

At The White House, the cameramen were ready. A large group of reporters was gathered, waiting and wondering what President Moore had to say. Before long, Chief of Staff General Stanis came up to the podium, and did a fine introduction for President Moore.

President Moore walked in, all smiles, and shook hands with General Stanis. He looked around at the familiar faces. “I have something to share with the American people and the world.” The president hesitated, looking at his notes.

“In the past week or so, Russian operatives devised and implemented their hideous plan to abduct one of our top scientists, Mr. Darious Patel. They wanted to steal him away and get highly classified information from him, on

some very sensitive material.” President Moore sipped some water. “The Russians attacked us and lives were lost, but I thank God for the teamwork of our intelligence community, law enforcement and our Army Special Forces. Through our combined efforts, we stopped and eliminated the Russian threat, as they attempted to bring Darious Patel back to Russia.”

The room erupted in chatter, and the reporters jumped up out of their seats, asking all kinds of questions.

President Moore stood there, taking in the moment, and finally the room settled down some. “I assure you, Russia will be held accountable for their unprovoked aggression; we will hit them with stiff economic sanctions and other methods at our disposal. For now, I will hand things over to General Stanis; he has more details and will take some questions.”

Moore held his hand over his heart. “Thank you, and God bless America.” Then the president waved to everyone as he left the room.

Back in Maryland, Peter Androvski was in the science lab when he received the good news, the words he was hoping

and praying for, from Agent Tanner.

Early the following morning, Androvski was at breakfast when he got a call, and was elated to hear his friend Darious. The two scientists talked about what had happened and, before the call ended, Darious told his friend that he was cleared to fly back.

Later in the day, Androvski decided that he wanted to go to the airport, to be there for his friend. He pleaded and begged his Secret Service agents to take him to the airport, and finally they gave in.

Before long, two Secret Service cars, with seven Secret Service agents and Androvski, pulled up to Arrivals at the busy airport. Three agents went inside the terminal and headed for Darious's gate. A few minutes later, they gave the okay. Androvski was excited; he was finally being escorted up to the gate.

Androvski remembered the worrying; he could only imagine how it must have been for Darious. For a time, he thought he would never see his friend again. He sat playing with his cell phone, until he noticed more people coming through the gate.

"There he is!" Androvski yelled out, and waved to Darious, noticing a large bandage on his forehead. The two

came together in a hug.

“It’s good to be back,” Darius said.

“Ah, my friend, I was so worried about you,” Androvski said. “How’s your head?”

Darius hesitated, looking at Androvski and all the Secret Service protection. “It’s better now, but... I was really scared. It was the bad people...” For a moment, Darius could see their faces again, and his eyes teared up. “I prayed for this day. The blue soldiers saved me; thanks to them, I’m back home.”

“Men in blue... Magnanotron... I thank God for it,” Androvski replied, as the group headed downstairs for the airport exit.

Chapter 24

Reactions

The news of the daring and deadly abduction of Darius Patel by Russian spies went viral. It was all over, on all the major news networks and newspapers. The front-page headline of *The Washington Post* read:

*“LEADING SCIENTIST ABDUCTED BY RUSSIAN SPIES.
ARMY SPECIAL FORCES SAVE THE DAY.”*

The world community and the United Nations came together to condemn the unprovoked and aggressive action, calling it: *“A despicable and dangerous act that could have escalated to war.”*

At the Kremlin, Director Malov was in his quarters, half drunk. He had received word from his men that Nashkin was nowhere to be found; his personal belongings, along with his car, were gone. *That son of a bitch. I’ll kill him,*

Malov said to himself, over and over.

He was sure that something had gone wrong with Nightfall, and decided to get the hell out of town himself.

Malov was a bundle of nerves as he grabbed his suitcase, left his room and looked around. The hallway was clear, so he headed for the back stairway.

He was almost there when two men grabbed him.

“Where the hell are you going?” one of the men said. “We were just coming to get you. The president wants you in his office.”

President Baranov was pacing around when Malov was brought in, with handcuffs on. “Aha, here he is: my fucking idiot!”

Baranov moved closer and showed Malov a printout from a major American newspaper. “The Americans must have known all along. Look! Look at what you have done!”

“But, comrade, sir,” Malov said, “it— it was that Nashkin; he’s the one who fucked it up!”

Baranov was furious, and gave Malov a stiff backhand blow as he yelled out: “Get him out of my sight, before I kill him myself!”

Within a few days, the Russian government issued an official statement. They apologized for the unfortunate incident, declaring it was caused by rogue factions of the SRV, and that the individuals involved were being disciplined for their actions.

Not wanting to make their actions obvious, the Russians then waited until things calmed down a little. Months later, under extreme pressure from Prime Minister Kushtin, General Grekov and other key party members, President Baranov was forced to resign, taking early retirement for health concerns.

SRV Directors Malov and Nashkin disappeared, and were never seen or heard from again.

In America, President Moore was good to his word. American oil was flowing again and the economy was improving. The Russian spy network was in shambles and key members were arrested, their operatives on the run.

CIA Specialist Rob Tanner was promoted to Deputy Director, while Jason and Delta Team received awards and citations, along with a nice step up in rank.

And, most importantly, Magnanotron was home, where

it belonged – and the world was a better place for it.

Glossary Of Terms

- 1) *SRV* – Russia’s external intelligence agency.
- 2) *Uplink* – a communication network.
- 3) *Capcom* – Captain of command.
- 4) *Devcom* – Army Futures Command.
- 5) *DEFCON* – levels of alert for U.S. armed forces.
- 6) *Nano* – manipulation of matter at the atom level.
- 7) *L.Z.* – landing zone.
- 8) *Electron* – a subatomic particle, carrier of electricity.
- 9) *Magnetic* – caused by a motion of electric charges.
Also a basic force of nature and the Earth itself.

About The Author

Robert is an award-winning author with eight published novels to date. He has a passion for writing; through research and imagination, his stories come to life.

Robert is especially thankful to his readers for their kind words about his work; it helps to keep him writing for more.