

# **EXTERMINATION DAY**

## **Book One**

**William Turnage**

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### **EXTERMINATION DAY**

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## Synopsis

### AN EPIC FAST-PACED POST APOCALYPTIC THRILLER

Survivors of a deadly virus must time travel into the past and warn the world of the coming Apocalypse.

January 15, 2038 – Extermination Day. A surprise meteor shower comes cascading down from the sky one winter night. Most people think it's beautiful. Others fear it, as civilizations have throughout recorded history. They are right to be scared. Several hours later people start to die. It begins with a simple cold. Within an hour, a horrible cough. Finally your lungs fill with fluid and you drown in your own blood—a painful, crippling death. The horrible virus spreads through the world, viciously killing everyone in its path. U.S. Congressman Jeff Madison is one of the few survivors. He and a team of scientists at the secret underground government base called Project Chronos try to figure out the truth of who is behind the attack.

But the virus is only the beginning.

What ensues is a desperate struggle against an overwhelming malevolent force bent on the total extermination of the human race. The survivor's only hope may be to escape into the past and try to warn humanity of the impending attack in the future. But what can they do when the very air they breathe can kill them in under an hour? Time is running out, something is hunting them, and there is a traitor trying to undermine their efforts at every turn.

Can Madison and his team survive this disaster and figure out who is trying to kill them, or will humanity become just another extinct species?

## Chapter 1

8:45 pm EST January 15, 2038

Washington, D.C.

President Martin Diaz slammed the door to the Oval Office. He was sick of all the damned bureaucrats and their endless doubletalk. No one on Capitol Hill—the scared little rats—wanted to take risks. Diaz didn't make it to the highest office in the land by playing it safe. He didn't make it out of the Cuban ghettos of Miami by being timid, and he wasn't about to run scared today.

He had just finished up a meeting with the Speaker of the House, a mealy-mouthed, fat little man who'd been in office far too long to remember what the real world tasted like. If Diaz had had to deal with him back in the barrio, he would've bitch-slapped his fat face. But here in Washington, he had to be civil.

"You can come out now, Natalia," Diaz said.

A young Venezuelan intern emerged from the closet with a coy smile on her face. Diaz kissed her on the forehead.

"You don't want to forget these," he said, reaching under his desk and pulling out her bright red panties.

Natalia smiled and quickly put them back on under her short skirt. "Sounded like you were ready to punch that guy," she purred in her thick Latina accent. "That's so sexy."

Diaz smiled and kissed her again, then swatted her ass to scoot her out of the room.

"Budget talks, dear. That's how we do it here in Washington. Now run along; I have to get back to my speech."

Natalia was young and beautiful, but he didn't want her to get too clingy, to ask too many questions. Their little affair was nothing more than that, just heated physical attraction. Anything more and people would talk. His wife might even get wind of it and that was the last thing he needed. Diaz wasn't intimidated by anyone, but when his jealous wife's fiery blood started boiling, he knew to get the hell out of the way.

He sat behind his desk and pulled up his speech on his portable again. He'd been reading it over for about the tenth time when Natalia had walked in with coffee, looking sultry and sexy and wearing that perfume that drove him crazy. He figured he could take a quick fifteen-minute break from his speech.

But then the damned Speaker came knocking on the door before Natalia had a chance to leave. He was worried about Diaz's latest proposed cuts to Social Security. The system was going to go bankrupt this year if something wasn't done, so Diaz was taking a bold initiative to solve the problem, something the "old" Washington was fighting him on.

He threw his feet up on the antique desk and sipped his coffee as he scrolled his fingers across the pad of his portable and smiled.

Among her other talents, Natalia did make a damned fine cup of coffee.

It was Diaz's second time addressing Congress and the American people as president, and he wanted everything to go perfectly. His had been a hard-fought campaign, as he supposed they all must be. But he'd come out on top largely because of his raw determination and the fighting spirit gained from the streets of Little Havana.

As he was going over the wording on his closing remarks, Diaz received a call from the Secretary of Defense. He quickly punched up the video showing the Secretary's stern face.

“Mr. President, I’ve spoken with several scientific organizations, and they confirmed that those lights in the sky earlier were simply small meteors burning up as they entered the atmosphere. Basically, it was just Earth passing through a dust cloud, nothing else.”

Diaz had seen the millions of tiny meteor trails earlier that night just after sunset. News broadcasts from all over the world reported the same event. It had been quite spectacular, lasting about an hour, and had terrified most of those who’d observed it.

“Any danger?” he asked.

“No, sir. The end result was simply an elaborate fireworks show around the world.”

“Why didn’t anyone know this was coming? Aren’t there scientists, astrophysicists or something, who search for this type of thing?”

“There are, sir, but they tell me that the dust cloud was spread over too wide an area to be seen clearly with our telescopes and Earth passed through it quickly. We had minor damage to several satellites, but nothing else.”

“Okay, thanks for the update, David. I’ll make a short mention of it in my speech since so many got worked up by it. You know, all that talk of the end of the world.”

“No, Mr. President, the sun will come up tomorrow just fine, and we’ll all have to get up and go to work, same as always.”

Diaz smiled. “Yeah, and some of us have to go to work right now. Back to my speech, David. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

He ended the call and touched the screen to return to his speech. As he was looking down, a clear stream of fluid dripped from his nose onto the screen.

“Damn.” *I can’t be sniffing and blowing my nose on camera in front of millions of Americans and everyone else watching around the world.*

“Patty,” he said to his secretary through the intercom, “get me some cold medicine please. I feel like my head is going to explode in here.”

Diaz made a couple of last-minute changes to his speech and sent it over to the teleprompter in the House chamber. Then he closed up his portable and reattached it to his wristband.

As he was preparing to leave, he noticed an unfamiliar folder on his desk, one marked “Top Secret.”

Where’d that come from? And who the hell used physical files rather than digital anymore?

Patty hadn’t brought it in, had she?

Had Natalia been carrying it?

When she’d walked in earlier, Diaz wasn’t paying attention to what she was holding, only to what she was wearing. Or not wearing, as was the case. She could have left it.

“Patty did you leave this old file on my desk?” he yelled out the door.

“Yes, one of the Secretary of State’s assistants just gave it to me. The assistant said he found it in a pile of documents in the in-box on Farrow’s desk when he was looking for something else. He saw the date and the Presidential Seal and thought it best to pass it along to me. I don’t think the Secretary ever saw it.”

The Secretary was always traveling, so the document could’ve easily gotten buried under all the other information vying for his attention. Damn, Diaz knew he should check it out before he left to give his speech.

He picked up the folder. The edges were worn and the paper was old and faded. It was had been sealed shut with the official Presidential Seal of William Jefferson Clinton, forty-second President of the United States of America.

The damned thing was over forty years old.

Diaz was born during the first Clinton administration, so he had no memory of the man as president, only what he could recall from history books. His interest piqued, Diaz broke the seal and looked inside. The cover page said, "Project Chronos: For the President's Eyes Only, January 14, 2038."

He grunted and shook his head in disgust. A day late, of course. Somebody screwed up, as usual.

The next page was a handwritten letter from President Clinton.

"Dear Mr. President, I hope this letter has made it into your hands in time. An overwhelming disaster is about to overtake you and the nation. In fact, the entire world is at risk. You need to be prepared. This file contains data on a top-secret project we have only just begun working on but that will prove to be crucial for the survival of the United States of America."

"Knock, knock!" yelled Brent, Diaz's chief of staff, poking his head in the door.

What the hell was Patty doing? She should be screening people, keeping them from just opening the door like that. He was the president, after all, and deserved a little privacy.

"Sir, they're ready for you," Brent said as he bounced into the Oval Office full of his usual energy. "Now's the time to make your mark. You ready?"

"Aaaaa-cho!" Diaz couldn't hold back a nose-clearing sneeze.

"You should take care of that before you head out," Brent said, gesturing toward Diaz's nose.

"No shit, Brent. Patty! Where the hell is that cold medicine!"

His secretary came running in, frazzled even more than usual, and handed him a pill.

"I'm sorry, sir. We'd run out, and I had to go to medical to get more. Apparently a lot of colds are going around." She was sniffing as well, and pulling a tissue out of the sleeve of her sweater.

He popped the pill and put down the top-secret folder. It had certainly grabbed his attention, but it would have to wait until after his speech. He couldn't keep Congress, or the American people, waiting. As he stood, he felt faint and pressed his hand to the desk to steady his legs.

"Are you okay, sir?" Brent asked, reaching over to grab his arm.

"Aaaachoo!" This time it was Brent doing the sneezing.

"I'm fine," Diaz said. "Just a headache from this cold. Sounds like you've got one too."

"I think we all do," Brent said as he wiped his nose with a tissue he pulled from a fancy box on Diaz's desk. "This one's come on quick." He sneezed again. "Maybe it's allergies."

Diaz left the Oval Office and hopped in his limousine for the short drive over to the House chamber. Once inside, he paused to greet and shake hands with staffers and well-wishers along with a crowd of elected officials, reporters, and other audience members. Everyone wanted his attention so they could get their picture taken with him or just wave a greeting.

Diaz loved all of it, loved being the center of attention. But more than that, he loved the power. He loved being the man in control, the one they all listened to, the President of the United States of America. Diaz made his way to the podium at the front of the chamber, continuing to shake hands and smile. He knew all the senators, and many of the House members, personally. He asked several how their families and children were doing.

As he stepped up behind the podium, he felt a lump in his throat and coughed lightly. His nose was still running and his head was killing him. He'd just ignore all the crap for now, though, and power through the speech.

The main thing was not looking weak. He shook hands with the Speaker of the House and then the Senate Majority Leader. The vice president was traveling that night, flying the friendly skies on Air Force Two, and not in attendance.

Diaz stepped up behind the podium, and thunderous applause rose from the floor of the Congressional Chamber. He smiled and waved, feeling the excitement and energy from the crowd. When the applause started to die down, he began his speech by thanking everyone for coming out and wishing them all the best. Then he went into a short moment of silence as he asked everyone to remember the fallen soldiers from the recent conflict in Venezuela. The U.S. was conducting joint operations with several Latin American countries to try to control the chaos that had sprung up after the recent death of Venezuela's latest quasi-dictator.

"Vaya con Dios, go with God," Diaz said at the end of the moment of silence. He then started on the meat of his speech. As he was talking, Diaz noticed a lot of people sneezing and blowing their noses, far more than normal even for a cold January day. His head was throbbing, and his body was icy cold one minute, burning hot the next. Combine that with aches and pains and he knew it was more than just a cold and likely a full-blown nasty flu coming on. When he got to the section of his speech on the budget, he had to stop to sneeze. There was no holding that one in.

When he turned back to the podium he joked, "I think I'm allergic to deficit spending." Everyone laughed, even some opposing-party members. "From the sound of it, I think we all are." More laughs and scattered applause followed.

Diaz continued with his speech for a few more minutes until excessively loud coughing drowned him out. Perhaps the guy was truly going to cough up a lung. It might prove to be a medical emergency, but it could be some ploy, a protestor determined to disrupt his speech.

Then more coughing started—a spreading pestilence through the room.

*What the hell!*

He tried to say something into the microphone, but choked over a huge lump in his throat. Then he started coughing. Just a little at first, then deep, body-heaving coughs. Struggling to take a breath, he felt fluid fill his lungs, as if he were deep underwater, drowning. He covered his mouth as he hacked, trying to clear his lungs, then looked down at his wet hands to discover they were covered in blood. It was suddenly pouring from his nose and mouth.

"Can't breathe," he tried to say, but nothing came out except a gurgle and more blood.

He fell to his knees as his legs gave out, still coughing in heaving spurts, his whole body convulsing. The pain was searing as he struggled to draw air into his burning lungs. Secret Service agents ran to his aid, but they too were coughing and then falling to their knees, blood pouring from their noses.

Was he dying? Was it a terrorist attack?

Waves of horrible pain pulsed throughout his body.

Hell no, he wasn't going out this way.

He'd fought too long and too hard to be president, and he still had so much to do. And what about his wife and son? He couldn't leave them behind. He wanted to see his son grow up, he wanted to kiss his wife again. Despite all the many affairs, he loved her. She was in the front row, close to the podium. He looked down to where she was seated—she was sprawled out, convulsing on the carpet.

As President Diaz lay in a pool of his own blood on the side of the podium in the House Chamber of the United States of America, he watched his wife reach for him. Her beautiful face was painted in blood. The color of death streamed from her eyes, nose, and mouth. She struggled to raise a quivering hand toward him. Martin Diaz's last thoughts as the world faded to darkness were of his wife and his love for her.

"Goodbye, mi amor," he whispered without sound. His eyes closed and all was quiet.

## Chapter 2

9:30 pm EST January 15, 2038

Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico, USA

Thirty-five-year-old Congressman Jeff Madison sat watching TV, drinking a delicious glass of Pinot Noir, and reading the day's news on his portable. He was alone in a small conference room furnished with a table and a few hard chairs. The State of the Union address was droning on in its usual boring monotony, senators and congressmen rising to applaud on cue. Jeff half listened and gave half his attention to the news. His thoughts were turned more toward next fall's election. He was gearing up for his second term as a congressman from Virginia and was preparing to move into full money-raising mode. That meant a lot of meetings with business owners and so-called powerful people in his district. Jeff thrived on the action—on making things happen.

He loved seeing his name in the papers. He loved having strangers come up and shake his hand. He loved having his picture taken with female fans from his district. His minor fame as a good-looking, energetic young congressman was intoxicating. In his field, Jeff was a mover and a shaker, and people came to him to get things done. The main desire he had, however, was to play on a bigger field. Outside of his district, no one knew who he was. He intended for that to change. In a few years, after a successful run in Congress, Jeff planned to make a grab for the governor's office or even a senate seat.

In the meantime he'd enjoy the perks of the job, which right now included a glass of wine, a couple of Secret Service agents guarding him, and a private plane ride back to Washington tomorrow morning. Jeff pictured the flight attendant who'd waited on him on the way to this base. Not more than a seven, but she had a killer body and she'd been quite flirtatious, leaning over him when she served his food and touching him on the arm and shoulder frequently. Jeff knew all the cues. On the way back, he'd definitely see if she wanted membership in the exclusive Jeff Madison mile-high club.

Well, not all that exclusive, Jeff thought, chuckling slightly.

He wished he was in Washington today, but this was his day in a secure location playing "designated survivor." To maintain continuity of the government in case of a disaster or terrorist attack, one member of the government was sent to a secure location and given the full protection of the president. It should have been the vice president here today, but a member of his staff asked that Jeff switch places with him. So that made him kind of the backup designated survivor. The VP had more pressing issues to take care of, so Jeff was left with this year's short straw. Of course nothing exciting ever happened.

The secure location seemed pretty secure to Jeff, to the point of overkill. The secret base was located just outside of Carlsbad, New Mexico, near the Carlsbad and Lechuguilla caverns. When he'd arrived at the base around two p.m. this afternoon, he'd been taken underground at least ten floors. They told him the base had been built into the cavern system of the Carlsbad Caverns National Park. What they used the base for, he had no idea. It was curious, though, that they built a base this far out, basically in the middle of nowhere, and buried it deep in a hole.

Jeff finished reading the news and had started loading a movie from NetCloud onto his portable when his attention was caught by odd noises from the House chamber.

One of the distinguished gentlemen in the audience was coughing obnoxiously loud, disrupting Diaz's speech.

How rude.

Jeff didn't agree with the president on every issue, but he'd never dream of interrupting a public speech. He had too much respect for the office, if not necessarily the man in that office.

What started as a single cough progressed into a cacophony; another senator or congressman chimed in with outrageously loud coughs.

"What the hell is going on?" Jeff said. "A ploy to direct attention away from the president's message?"

The president stopped talking and grabbed at his throat. The camera wobbled as Diaz started coughing up blood. Then it was running, almost gushing, from his nose and mouth.

The news anchor raised his voice to say, "There appears to be an attack of some type, invisible gas, we can't make out . . . Oh my God!"

Jeff leaned forward as the scene played out on his portable.

There was a long pause and then the anchor screamed, "Get them out of there!"

With cameras rolling, everyone in the House chamber started to drop, kicking convulsively, blood streaming from their faces. Secret Service agents tried to help the president, but they too collapsed and fell helplessly, grabbing their throats in the throes of death.

Jeff sat watching in disbelief. Someone had to do something! *Do something*, he silently urged.

The door to the room where he was waiting burst open.

In rushed two of the Secret Service agents who'd accompanied him to New Mexico.

"Congressman, we need to move you immediately," said the younger of the two agents. "There's been an attack,"

"What's going on, does anyone know?" Jeff asked, panic rising in his voice.

"We don't know, sir. We were just given orders to take you deeper into this facility."

"We're already ten floors underground; how much deeper does this thing go?" Jeff had assumed they were at the bottom of the base.

"Quickly, sir." One of the agents grabbed him gruffly by the arm, and they all headed into the corridor. Down the hallway was the elevator where another man, in a white lab coat, was waiting, holding open the elevator door. The guy seemed to be late sixties, bald, with a thin build. A gold cross dangled from his neck.

Jeff ran with the agents to the open elevator. After they were inside, the man in the lab coat placed his hand on a scanner by the elevator panel and said, "Research level, Dr. Abraham Conner, alpha nine nine eight five." Then he typed something into the keypad on the wall and turned to Jeff.

"Congressman Madison, I'm Abraham Conner, assistant director of this facility. There's been an attack of some type, as you've seen on LiveStream. None of us know what's going on, but the facility director said we needed to take you deeper until we understand the extent of the attack."

"Just point me where I need to go. How deep is this place; are we safe?"

"The main facility is located in a cavern about a mile down or in structural terms, four-hundred-stories down," Dr. Conner said.

"Jesus!" Jeff's breath caught. "What the hell do you do down there?"

"I'm sorry, sir, that information is classified. The director, Dr. Patrick Chen, may be able to give you more information."

As they descended deeper and deeper into the bowels of the research facility, Jeff wondered what was happening above. He pulled out his portable and immediately logged on to the Stream to get the latest report. The LiveStream from the Capitol was still running, but there was no movement from the House chamber. It had been maybe five minutes, five measly minutes, since the attack had started, but there appeared to be no survivors, at least from what he could make out on the feed.

*Jesus!* He couldn't believe this was happening.

The newscasters were trying to get information from a reporter on the scene outside the Capitol. She broke in with a panicked voice, saying, "Brian, it looks like there's been a vicious terrorist attack inside the Capitol, maybe focused on the House chamber. We're flying a camera drone in to get a better picture. Let's head over to that feed." She turned her head to sneeze.

She continued to sneeze and seconds later started to cough just as deeply and horribly as the president had moments earlier. She stared at the camera, eyes wide with horror, and coughed up thick, deep blood right into the lens. As the blood dripped down, obscuring the view, the reporter fell to the ground, clawing at her throat.

Behind the reporter, the typical large crowd of protestors had gathered to promote their various causes. People in that group started to bend over, choking and coughing horribly as well. Soon they were jerking in convulsive fits. The signs they'd been waving dropped to the ground like a forest of fallen trees. Some of the protestors tried to crawl when they hit the ground. They didn't get far and collapsed in bloody messes.

It was the most horrible scene of gore and agony Jeff had ever witnessed.

Finally the cameraman succumbed, dropping his camera but leaving it running. Soon all was quiet and there was no movement at all.

They were all dead.

*Jesus.*

Dr. Conner, his breathing rough, watched from over Jeff's shoulder. His face was pale. The Secret Service agents had pressed close, and their faces held the same shock Conner's showed. Jeff imagined he was just as white.

Conner started mumbling to himself. "It's actually happening," he said.

When he repeated himself, louder, and backed away. Jeff asked, "What do you mean? Did you know about this threat?"

Conner looked down for a second. Then his eyes went wide and he pulled out his own portable and frantically yelled into it, "Call Gwen!"

A woman answered, and Conner said, "Honey, remember what I told you last night? Get down to the safe room right now. You need—" He collapsed against the elevator's wall. "Why are you in the car? I told you to stay there the whole night." He was screaming, his face turning red and his eyes getting wider and more desperate.

"I can't hear you . . . What wreck? Just slow down. Where are you? Honey, where are you?" He started to cry. "No, honey, don't help them. Just turn around and get out of there! Gwen? Gwen!"

Rasping coughs spewed from the phone.

"Gwen, Gwen!" Conner screamed louder and wilder. He dropped his portable and reached over to the elevator pad. He tried to hit the button for a return to the ground level of the facility, but one of the Secret Service agents grabbed his arm and pulled it away.

"But I have to get my wife. I need to save her!" Conner screamed, tears flowing as he struggled with the agent.

“We have our orders,” the agent—*Tom*—said. Jeff thought the agent’s name was Tom. “We need to get the congressman to a secure location.” Tom spoke sternly, but he was clearly shaken; his voice was cracking.

Conner made a sudden lunge for the agent’s gun, but Tom was too quick and smacked his hand away. Then the other agent grabbed Conner from behind, putting him in a full nelson submission hold. Conner slumped down, still struggling. Then he started kicking and fighting violently.

Jeff moved to the far side of the elevator.

“No, no, let me go, you motherfuckers!” he yelled. “I need to get to the surface!” When he couldn’t free himself, he spat furiously at the agents.

The elevator continued its smooth descent. Jeff tried to stay out of the way as best he could, but he easily understood why Conner was distraught. Jeff had no way of knowing if his own ex-wife and his son and daughter were okay. Virginia Beach, where they lived, was about four hours from Washington, D.C. It wasn’t that close, but he didn’t know the extent of the attacks. He didn’t know where Dr. Conner’s wife was driving, but he assumed she was nearby, probably right in Carlsbad. If they were being attacked here, then it could very well be happening all across the country, including in Virginia Beach.

Could it be that widespread? Why would terrorists target Carlsbad?

More unsettling was Dr. Conner’s knowledge that something dangerous was going to happen, today specifically, and that he’d apparently had built a safe room for his wife to hide in. Jeff needed to find out more, but first he needed to call his ex-wife and check on Amanda and Aiden. His hands shook as he called her portable, but it went straight to voicemail.

What the hell was going on out there?

He tried to make eye contact with Tom, but the man was busy with Conner. The other agent stared at the wall, eyes unblinking. The elevator stopped and the doors opened to reveal a long hallway. They all stepped out and the elevator slammed shut behind them. As they walked forward an alarm began to sound.

“What about him?” Jeff asked, gesturing toward the doctor.

Tom said, “I’m going to let you go now, and you can do whatever you want. Just don’t go for my gun again, or I’ll take you into custody.”

Conner’s head tipped forward and his shoulders slumped. “There’s nothing I can do now,” he said in a soft, defeated voice. “The alarm has sounded, so the facility is in lockdown. The elevators no longer work; no one can go in or out.” He inhaled a long breath and lifted his head. “Let’s find Dr. Chen. Perhaps he can tell us more.”

They walked the length of the hallway and opened the doors at the end. As they entered, Jeff was overwhelmed. Spreading out as far as he could see was a sprawling base built under a cavernous dome of smooth rock. He couldn’t take it all in immediately, but it looked to be the size of two or three football fields, with a roof rising several stories.

The base—what he was looking at *had* to be the main base, the heart of the facility—was mostly quiet. There was activity, however, centered on a large white dome in the middle of the cavern where welding sparks were flying. A variety of metal tubes, pipes, circuits, and other pieces of plastic and glass protruded from the dome, and trails of steam hissed out from the bottom. The dome was connected to a metal pipeline that extended around the entire underground structure and outward, into the rocky cavern that surrounded everything. Around the center dome were several smaller buildings and one three-story tower that looked like a command center.

As they walked, men in white coats sped by in small golf carts and on Segways.

It was an amazing sight this deep underground, cut into the limestone cavern in New Mexico. Jeff didn't know how much more he could absorb.

Dr. Conner gestured at the huge development before them. "Mr. Madison, welcome to the Chronos Project. We should find Dr. Chen in the control tower."

As they walked, mobiles began pinging like a symphony orchestra as techs and scientists and whatever else they were started getting messages from outside. Shocked looks spread from face to face. A woman screamed. Several people ran for the closed doors leading to the elevator. An argument broke out between two men in white coats and two security guards who'd apparently recently been stationed at the elevators.

Jeff could feel the tension and panic spread as he, Dr. Conner, and the two Secret Service agents hustled toward the control tower.

"Are we locked in here?" Jeff asked.

"The facility is designed to go into automatic shutdown in case of an outside emergency," Conner said. "We have our own fuel source and enough food and water to last for up to a year. We also recycle our own air using the hydroponics lab we constructed in an adjacent chamber." He had himself under control, at least momentarily, and was acting more rationally now. But his voice was still rough, and his eyes were glassy.

"I hope your Dr. Chen can shed light on what's happening. Otherwise he's going to have a riot on his hands with people trying to get out of here," Jeff said. "If you guys knew something was going to happen, and from what I've seen and heard, you did, why didn't you warn the rest of us?"

"Dr. Chen mentioned a few days ago that there was the possibility of an attack, but we had no idea of its nature or scale. The terrorist attack on Washington caught us by surprise."

"Right . . . So what about the safe room you had for your family?"

"I tend to worry more than most people. And I like to be prepared for any contingency. Even the remote ones. My wife, on the other hand, thinks nothing could ever happen to her and that my prognostications are just fairy tales." He paused to press his hand to his heart. "I should've done more to convince her." His voice trailed off, a tear rolled down his cheek, and he looked desperately to the cavern's roof, as if pleading with the heavens to roll back time.

They finally reached the tower and entered an elevator. The smell of fresh paint was still in the air as the elevator gently rose from the ground floor. The busy sounds outside were closed off and they were all left with their own thoughts until a man greeted them when the doors opened.

"Abe, thank God you're here and safe." The speaker was a tall, wiry, olive-skinned man with thick white hair. His accent was slightly British. He had western European features, with a thick jaw and long face, but his eyes were slanted and dark, declaring his Asian ancestry. He looked to be about seventy. "And this gentleman?" he asked, pointing rudely at Jeff.

"Congressman Jeff Madison at your service," Jeff said, extending his hand, pressing his lips together, and nodding in acknowledgment of the gravity of their circumstances.

In return, he got a glare rather than a handshake.

"I thought the vice president was going to be here. What the hell happened?" The man actually yelled at Conner.

"I don't know. When I went to the waiting room, he was the only one there."

Tom, who'd followed at Jeff's heels the whole way, said, "Dr. Chen, I presume?"

"Who else would I be?"

“The vice president had a last-minute change of plans and is currently on Air Force Two being taken to another location. We were sent here to guard Congressman Madison. We don’t have knowledge of the vice president’s current location.”

Dr. Chen snorted. “Last-minute fuck-ups.” He turned abruptly and marched over to the bank of computer screens and started giving orders to the scientists and technicians in the control room. Then he pressed a button and leaned toward a microphone.

“Men and women of Project Chronos, I’ve sure you’ve all seen the news on the Stream by now. We’re closely monitoring the situation. I will be talking with Defense Command momentarily to find out more information. In the meantime, do not panic. Return to your duties. Final preparations need to be completed very quickly now, and I need everyone to focus. Remember, the work we are doing could save everyone. I’ll keep you posted as I find out more.”

Down below, on the other side of large glass panels, a dozen or so people looked up at the control tower as if God himself had just spoken from the clouds. After Chen’s speech, a few of the scientists were still sobbing and milling around; however, most folded away their portables and shuffled back to whatever tasks they’d been working on.

“I think it’s time you told me what the hell this project is and how Dr. Conner here knew that something horrible was going to happen today.” Jeff was pissed off, and the tension of the last few minutes was wearing down his patience.

“I’m sorry, Congressman, but you don’t have clearance to know any more, and you’ve already seen too much as it is,” Chen replied, thrusting his hand dismissively toward Jeff. “I don’t mean to be rude, but I’ve got a lot on my plate. We have a conference room downstairs where you can wait until things settle down.”

Jeff had no intention of being so cavalierly dismissed. He’d just watched the entire Congress and the president die horrific deaths. He couldn’t get in touch with his ex-wife and son and daughter. People were dying outside the Capitol building and around Washington. He didn’t want to be stuck in some damned conference room while the action was clearly centered right where he was now.

“With all due respect, Dr. Chen, I think I’ll wait right here. As a representative of the U.S. government, I have the right to monitor this situation, and it seems you have just the information I need streaming right into this high-tech control room.”

“As you wish,” Chen said, rushing off to another work station. He was obviously not willing to argue or waste time on Jeff. “Just stay out of the way.”

Jeff looked around the control room and saw maybe twenty workstations, about half of which were filled with scientists. Each workstation had one or two large computer screens flashing information. Some of the screens showed the large domed device—or parts of it—in 3D detail, with pop-up data boxes streaming numbers and other engineering information that Jeff didn’t understand. Several other screens showed data from around the world, including proprietary feeds from news agencies and LiveStream.

LiveStream, developed about twenty years earlier, allowed any user with a mobile device to instantaneously stream video and audio to the web. It became so popular that now all devices were equipped with it. Basically, everyone had their own personal TV station broadcasting their life as it unfolded. With millions of LiveStreams hitting the net, search engines had been developed to sort through the broadcasts. Viewers could find just about anything on the stream and watch every second of someone’s life, from the lives of pro athletes to accountants. There were even pet streams that allowed viewers to follow dogs around all day, if that was their interest.

Jeff clenched one hand; following poodles and Yorkies was one of his daughter's favorite pastimes.

Users could turn off their own streams if they wanted, but most people never did. Personal privacy had become a dated concept left forgotten in the past.

Although a lot of useless crap passed through LiveStream, the system provided real-time coverage and firsthand accounts of what was going on during newsworthy events. So Jeff found a seat at the side of the room and starting checking out the streams.

He quickly discovered that the terrorist attack went far beyond the Washington beltway. People were dropping and dying all over the world. He felt almost numb to all the death, as if it wasn't real, as if he was watching another disaster movie from Hollywood. But the thought that he could've actually lost everyone and everything he ever cared about made him feel like he'd been stabbed deep in the stomach. He swallowed to suppress the bile and vomit building at the back of his throat.

Several Asian scientists were gathered around one screen that showed Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The square was filled with bodies and blood, not a single soul moving. Another screen showed downtown New York City, where cars had crashed and lay smoking in the streets. In Moscow, Red Square was indeed red, with the blood of hundreds. In Paris, trails of smoke rose around the Eiffel Tower as people died. Several planes fell from the sky, crashing in fiery explosions, and chaos made its way across the land.

"It looks like the major cities around the world are being hit at the same time," one young scientist said. "Let's look at a rural area, something like central Iowa."

A view high above a small Corn Belt town appeared on the feed. Using a satellite, they zoomed in on an isolated farm. Outdoor lights were still shining, showing cattle, sheep, chicken, and horses eating and strolling around casually, as if nothing unusual were happening. The map overlay indicated a feed streaming from inside the farmhouse. The scientist touched the screen to access the feed.

The scene changed instantly to a little girl holding her portable in front of her face, talking with someone via video chat. In the background her mom cooked at a stove. Her father walked in the door wearing dirty coveralls. Two steps into the room, he started coughing the same horrible, deep cough Jeff had been hearing all night. Blood starting dripping down his face. The girl screamed, "Daddy, daddy! Mommy, come help daddy please!" He fell to the floor. Then the mother and the little girl started to cough at the same time. As the girl fell forward, she dropped her portable and it slid across the kitchen tile. All that was left of the feed was the ceiling, choking sounds, and then silence.

The room grew quieter as feeds poured in from around the world. What started in major population centers spread within a matter of minutes to even the most rural areas. The human population was being massacred. Jeff searched the faces of the scientists. They had no more answers than he did. But he did recognize one fact.

This was more than just a terrorist attack.

End of this sample.  
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