



## PROLOGUE

**April 18, 1906**

**Sonoma County, Northern California**

Thunder shook the unlit cavern as an immense, blue-white spark jumped between a pair of towering, metal columns. Instead of fading, the shimmering charge split in two and the twin streams of plasma began to circle their respective pillars. They moved like flames chasing the wind, racing around the columns and snaking their way upward toward the underside of a curved, metallic dome. There, they swirled together like the arms of a spiral galaxy, joining each other once again before vanishing in a final, eye-searing flash.

Darkness followed.

Ozone lingered in the air.

On the floor of the cavern, a group of men and women stood motionless, night-blind from the display. The flash had

been impressive, but they'd all seen electricity before. Every one of them expected something more.

"Is that it?" a gruff voice asked.

The words came from Brigadier General Hal Cortland, a burly, squat figure of a man. They were directed at thirty-eight-year-old Daniel Watterson, a slight, blond-haired man wearing spectacles who stood by the controls of the great machine from which the artificial lightning had come.

Watterson studied a bank of dimly lit gauges. "I'm not actually sure," he whispered to himself. No one had ever gotten this far, not even Michael Faraday or the great Nikola Tesla. But if Watterson was right—if his calculations and his theory and years of serving as Tesla's apprentice had led him to understand what was about to occur—then the display of light they'd just witnessed should be only the beginning.

He switched off the main power, stepped away from the controls, and pulled the wire-rimmed glasses from his face. Despite the darkness, he could make out a soft blue glow coming from the columns. He raised his eyes to the dome above. An effervescent hue could be seen coursing around its inner surface.

"Well?" Cortland demanded.

Back at the console, one of the needles ticked up. Watterson saw it from the corner of his eye.

"No, General," he said quietly, "I don't think it's quite finished."

As Watterson spoke, a low rumble made its way through the cave. It sounded like heavy stones tumbling in some distant quarry, muffled and distorted, as if the vibration had to traverse

miles of solid rock just to reach them. It rose for several seconds, then faded and ceased.

The general began to snicker. He switched on a flashlight. "Uncle Sam ain't paying for a show with wet fireworks, son."

Watterson didn't reply. He was listening, feeling for something, for anything, at this point.

The general seemed to give up. "Come on, people," he said, "the party's over. Let's get out of this mole hole."

The group began to move. Their shuffling and mumbling made it impossible to hear.

Watterson raised a hand. "Please!" he called out loudly. "Everyone, stay where you are!"

The observers stopped in their tracks, and Watterson edged over to where the steel columns penetrated the rock floor. From there, they descended another five hundred feet "to get a firm grip on the Earth," as Tesla once put it.

Laying a hand on one of the columns, Watterson felt a cold vibration. It surged through his body as if he'd become a part of the circuit. It wasn't painful like electricity and didn't make his muscles spasm, nor did it find its way to the ground and electrocute him. It was almost soothing, leaving him slightly dizzy, even a bit euphoric.

"It's coming," he whispered.

"What's coming?" the general asked.

Watterson looked back. "The return."

Cortland waited a few seconds before scowling. "You scientists are like barkers at a carnival: you think if you say something loud enough, and often enough, the rest of us will begin to believe it. But I don't hear any—"

The general swallowed his words as the deep rumble made a second appearance. It surged through the cavern more emphatically this time, and the blue glow around the towers intensified, pulsing and matching the sound waves identically.

This time, when the waves faded, everyone held still. They were waiting for more. Forty seconds later they were rewarded. A third wave came through like a freight train passing by. It shook the cave underfoot and brought the swirl of lightning back to the polished surface of the dome above. The visible spiral of energy began descending the pillars, making it halfway down to the ground before vanishing.

Watterson pulled back, stepping away from the danger zone.

Moments later, a fourth reverberation surged into the cavern. The columns flared as it hit. Flashes of light jumped back and forth between them. The cavern began shaking. Dust and tiny bits of stone rained down from above, sending the witnesses scurrying for cover.

Watterson caught sight of General Cortland bathed in the light and grinning manically. Their roles had reversed. Now it was Cortland looking satisfied as Watterson began to worry. The scientist stepped toward the panel, slid his glasses back on, and studied the display. He couldn't account for the vibration.

Before he could determine anything, a fifth wave hit. The vibration and the artificial lightning grew so intense, even the general seemed to realize something was wrong. "What's happening?"

Watterson could barely hear him, but he was wondering the same thing. The power gauges—all but dead moments before—were heading toward their redlines.

A brief respite gave way to a sixth harmonic return, and the

needles went off the scales. The shuddering was unbearable. Rocks were falling from above. A huge crack began to zigzag its way across the reinforced wall of the cave where the army had poured concrete to shore it up. Watterson had to grip the panel to stop from falling down.

“What’s happening?” the general repeated. Watterson wasn’t sure, but it couldn’t be good.

“Get everybody out of here,” he yelled. “Get them out—now!”

The general pointed toward the cagelike elevator that would take them four hundred feet to the surface. The group ran for it like a stampeding herd. But the tremors intensified and the far wall gave way before they could climb inside.

A thousand tons of rock and concrete plunged down on them. Those too close were crushed instantly. Others scrambled away just in time as the scaffolding-like frame of the elevator was bent and shoved aside.

Watterson began to panic. His hands flew back and forth across the controls, flicking switches and tapping gauges. The vibration was constant. The sound deafening.

Cortland grabbed him by the shoulder. “Turn it off!”

Watterson ignored him. He was trying to understand.

“Did you hear me?!” the general shouted. “*Turn the damned thing off!*”

“It is off!” Watterson shouted, pulling free of the general’s grasp.

“What?”

“It’s been off since after the first spark,” Watterson explained.

The latest wave faded, but on the panel he could see the next

wave building. The needles went off the scale and Watterson's face went white. Each wave had been bigger than the last. He feared to imagine what kind of power was on its way.

"Then where's the energy coming from?" Cortland demanded.

"From everywhere," Watterson said. "From all around us. That's what the experiment was supposed to prove."

The cavern began to shake once again. This time the lightning was not contained on the columns, it jumped around the room, flying into the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. Shards of stone and clouds of dust blasted out into the open space.

Amid the screams and panic, Watterson stood helpless, his moment of victory fading to utter catastrophe. From above him came the ominous sound of cracking.

With the cave shaking so badly they could barely stand, both Watterson and the general looked up. A dark fissure snaked across the ceiling. It went from wall to wall and then spidered in different directions.

The ceiling collapsed all at once and a million tons of rock dropped toward them.

Death came instantly, and neither Watterson nor General Cortland would ever know the fury they'd unleashed or the utter devastation that the ensuing earthquake caused in the city of San Francisco.

# ONE

**December 2009**

In the midst of a growing tempest, Patrick Devlin stood on the aft deck of the *Java Dawn*, an oceangoing tug linked by a single massive cable to the rusting hulk of a cruise ship known as the *Pacific Voyager*.

Huge swells came at the tug sideways, slamming against the hull with the sound of a shotgun blast. The rain fell in diagonal sheets, though it was hard to distinguish from the wind-whipped spray.

Surrounded by towing and loading equipment, including a fifty-foot crane and a powerful winch array, Devlin looked positively small. In truth, he stood nearly six feet tall, with broad shoulders that were hunched against the cold.

With gray stubble on his cheeks and folds of burnished flesh hooding his eyes, Devlin appeared every bit the wizened old sailor he was. Taking stock of the deteriorating weather, the in-

creasing strain on the cable, and the condition of the sea, he came to a grave conclusion: they'd made a ruinous choice to leave port, one they'd be lucky to survive.

As Devlin grabbed the ship's phone, another swell rolled the tug severely. The captain picked up on the other end.

"What's our heading?" Devlin yelled into the receiver.

"Due south," the captain said.

"It's no good," Devlin replied. "We'll never survive this side-on beating. We have to turn into the swells."

"We can't, Padi," the captain insisted. "That'll take us into the teeth of the storm."

Gripping the bulkhead to keep from falling, Devlin watched a wave crash over the deck. "This is madness," he said. "We should've never left Tarakan."

Tarakan was the primitive, almost backwater port where they'd picked up the *Voyager*. The old liner had berthed there for repairs some years ago after an accident. She'd ended up marooned when her shipping line went bankrupt several days later.

At some point, the ship was sold to a mystery buyer, but, for reasons unknown, the *Voyager* sat and rusted at Tarakan for three more years. Issues with the bankruptcy and squabbles about who would pay for the repairs, Devlin guessed.

Whatever it was, the ship looked like a derelict when they'd found her; covered in corrosion from stem to stern, barely seaworthy. The hastily repaired damage from where the freighter had holed her looked like a jagged H near the bow.

Now, caught up in a storm that was rapidly getting worse, she was certain to go down.

"How's the line?" the captain asked.



Devlin glanced at the thick cable that stretched from the gigantic winch across the aft end of the tug and out toward the *Voyager*. The cable tensed and strained with the load before going slack again.

“The cable’s taut,” Devlin said. “That rust bucket is starting to pitch with these waves. She’s definitely riding lower as well. We need to get the inspection crew back.”

Against Devlin’s wishes, the captain had allowed three men to stay aboard the cruise ship to watch for leaks. It was dangerous in these conditions and a waste of time as well. If she was taking on water, there was nothing they could do to stop it. And if she started to go down—like Devlin thought she was—they would need to cut the cable and let her go before she dragged the *Java Dawn* into the depths alongside her. But with three men on the ship, cutting that cable would be the closest thing to murder Devlin had ever done.

The big tug nosed over and dropped into the largest trough yet. As it did, the cable stretched so tight that it actually began to sing. The tension pulled the aft end of the tug backward, the water churning around the hull as the propellers fought against the strain.

By the time the tug rose up on the next swell, the *Voyager* must have been dipping into a trough of her own because the tow cable pulled downward, bending over the reinforced-steel plating at the tug’s transom and forcing the aft end of the deck into the water.

Devlin raised binoculars to his eyes. The action of the waves had a way of obscuring the truth, but only to a point. The *Voyager* was definitely riding lower.

“She’s down at the bow, Captain. Listing slightly to port.”

The captain hesitated. Devlin knew why: this tow was worth a small fortune, but not if the ship didn't make it.

"Call them back!" Devlin shouted. "For God sakes, Captain, at least call the men back."

Finally, the captain spoke. "We've been calling them, Padi. They're not answering. Something must have gone wrong."

The words chilled Devlin's core. "We have to send a boat out."

"In this? It's too dangerous."

As if to emphasize the point, another wave hit them broadside and a thousand gallons of water crashed over the rail, flooding the aft deck.

The sturdy tug quickly shed the water, but moments later another wave swamped it more drastically than the first.

As the *Java Dawn* recovered, Devlin looked toward the *Voyager*.

She was definitely going down. Either a couple of hatches had blown or the shoddy repair job had caved in.

The captain must have seen it too. "We have to let her go," he said.

"No, Captain!"

"We have to, Padi. Release the cable. The men have a boat of their own. And we can't help them if we go down."

Another wave crashed over the deck.

"For God sakes, Captain, have pity."

"Cut the cable, Padi! That's an order!"

Devlin knew the captain was right. He let go of the phone and took a step toward the emergency release lever.

The deck pitched hard as another swell overran the stern

and sloshed toward him. It hit like a wave at the beach, knocking him off his feet and dragging him.

As he got up, Devlin saw that the cable was now disappearing into the water. Through the rain and spray, he could see that half the cruise ship was submerged. She was going down fast, plunging to the abyss and about to drag the tug down with her. The back quarter of the tug's rear deck was already awash.

"Padi!"

The shout came over the dangling phone, but Devlin needed no more urging. He pulled himself up, grabbed the emergency release handle, and wrenched it down with all his might.

A loud crack rang out. The giant cable snapped loose and flung itself across the deck like a speeding python. The tug lurched forward and upward, and Devlin was thrown into the bulkhead, splitting his lip and bruising his eye.

Stunned for a moment, he gathered his wits and turned. The old liner was sliding beneath the waves at a gentle, almost peaceful angle. Seconds later, it was gone. The men they'd left behind were almost certainly dead. But the *Java Dawn* was free.

Devlin grabbed the phone.

"Take us back around," he demanded. "The men may have gone overboard."

The deck shifted as the rudder and the directional propellers kicked in. The tug began a sharp, dangerous turn. By the time she'd made it around, Devlin was at the bow.

It was almost dark. The sky held a silver hue above the black sea. The whole scene so devoid of color, it was like living in a black-and-white movie.

Devlin gazed into it. He saw nothing.

As darkness enveloped them, the tug's spotlights swept the area. No doubt every available eye was straining to find the men just as Devlin was. It was all to no avail.

The *Java Dawn* would spend the next eighteen hours searching in vain for her lost crewmen.

They would never be found at sea.



## TWO

### **Present day**

Sebastian Panos made his way through the narrow corridor like an alley cat on a dark street behind restaurant row. The passage was dank and wet, more like a sewer tunnel than a gangway. Condensation dripped so persistently that he often wondered if the poisonous waters from outside the submerged station were leaching through the walls and slowly killing them all.

Still, it wasn't as bad as the island where the main work was done, with the notorious quarry at its heart. Compared to that place, this station was a pleasure. And yet, Panos had become obsessed with thoughts of escape.

A Cypriot engineer of mixed Greek and Turkish background, Panos had been lured to this underwater nightmare by the promise of a big contract and enough money to set his family up for a generation. All it required was three years of his life

and utter secrecy. Six months in, he'd begun to feel uneasy. Before the year rolled over, he knew he'd made a terrible mistake.

Requests to leave were denied. All communications were monitored and often interrupted. The slightest hint of protest resulted in veiled threats. *Something might happen to his family if he didn't stay and complete the work.*

As the project neared fruition, Panos and the other engineers were played off against one another. It was impossible to know who to trust and who to fear, so they feared one another, did as they were told, and one year stretched into two.

All that time Panos lived like a sailor press-ganged onto a ship. He had no choice but to do the master's bidding or forfeit his life, though he felt certain that his end would come that way eventually. The project was so secret and dark that his logical mind told him there would be no witnesses left when it was done.

*No one gets out alive*, a fellow worker had joked. One day later, the man disappeared, so perhaps it was true.

Panos remembered an offer to bring his family along. He wasn't a religious man, but he thanked whatever god or fate or random instinct had caused him to decline. Others had brought their families in. He'd seen them on the island, wretched and miserable, prisoners to an even greater degree than he. He knew not to trust them. They were the easiest to control, they had more to lose than their own lives. Some had even borne children in the depths of that putrid, sulfur-tinged world. They lived like indentured servants, like slaves building a modern-day pyramid.

Panos was at least free to *think* about escape, though he'd never had any real expectation of pulling it off. At least, not until the note appeared in his locker.

It was the first in a set of mysterious contacts from an unseen angel of mercy.

Initially, he assumed it was a trap, a little test to see if he would lunge at the bait. But he'd reached a point where it no longer mattered. Freedom beckoned. Whether it came through escape or the cold sting of death, he welcomed it either way.

He tested the offer and received more notes. They arrived at odd times. Help to escape would be made available, the notes promised, but it would come with strings attached. He was to bring the plans of this terrible weapon to those who might stop the madman constructing it. A drop had been arranged. All Panos had to do was make it to the location alive.

With that goal in mind, he continued down the wet gangway and into the dive room. It was late, well past the hour for anyone to be there. Using a key left in his locker by his unknown contact, Panos opened the door and slipped inside. He shut the door and switched on a desk lamp.

The dive room was a twenty-by-forty rectangle with a sealed airlock protruding at its center. Visible through the airlock's thick observation glass was a circular pool of dark water.

Panos switched on the pool lights. The water lit up perfectly clear, for the poisons filling it made it absolutely sterile. But instead of blue or turquoise or green, the water shimmered in a reddish tint, a color like translucent blood.

He took a deep breath. He would be all right. The dry suit would keep the toxins out. At least he hoped it would.

He glanced over at a whiteboard. Three numbers had been scrawled on it: 3, 10, and 075. His unseen helper had been there before him, just as he'd promised.

Panos memorized the figures and then quickly erased them.

He went to the third locker and opened it. A dry suit and an oxygen tank had been prepared for him. A dive watch, hanging with the suit, had its bezel twisted to the ten-minute mark. This was the time it would take him to ascend, moving at thirty feet per minute, a pace calculated to help him avoid the bends. A handheld compass had also been left for him. When he surfaced, he would look to a heading: 075 degrees. In that direction, he would find help.

A dive knife would be his only weapon, if he needed it.

He strapped the watch around his wrist and carried the tanks to the airlock. He slipped the compass into his pocket and then double-checked that the cargo he'd promised to carry—the schematics of the station and a portable hard drive filled with data—were secured in a watertight container.

He shoved them back inside his shirt and grabbed the bulky suit, sitting down to pull it on. Before he could get a leg in, a clicking noise sounded from across the room.

A key in the lock.

The handle turned and the door swung open. Two figures stepped in, chatting between themselves.

For a second, they didn't notice Panos. When they did, they looked more confused and surprised than angry. But Panos knew the suit and tanks would give him away.

He charged the men before they could react, swinging the knife downward at the closest figure, stabbing the man in the shoulder. The man fell back, grabbing at Panos and dragging him to the desk. The second man jumped on him, putting an arm around his neck.

Panos reared up and forced himself backward until the two of them collided with the desk, fell to the ground, and separated.



Spurred on by adrenaline, Panos was up first. He kneed the man in the face, then grabbed the desk lamp and slammed it into the man's forehead. The man hit the ground and didn't move again, but the one who'd been stabbed was running out the door.

"No!" Panos exclaimed.

With no way to barricade the door and precious little time before an alarm sounded, he made a fateful decision. He left the dry suit on the floor and stepped into the airlock. Pressing a switch, he closed the inner door and began to pull on the harness and an oxygen tank.

Panos felt his ears popping as a hissing noise told him the airlock was sealed and being pressurized. Even though the station's pressure was twice the normal atmosphere, it wasn't enough to keep the water from flooding in through the open pool. Thus, the airlock was needed.

He pulled on the dive helmet. The seal wasn't too bad. He made sure the air was flowing, pulled his fins on, and dropped into the glowing red water.

Stillness surrounded him. He swam downward, away from the light, and out into the dark. When he'd passed the edge of the submerged structure, he began to kick his way upward. Or what he thought was up.

Three hundred feet down, there was no light. He quickly became disoriented. Vertigo set in, and it seemed like his body was doing summersaults even though he was completely still.

Flicking on a light did little good. The red water gave nothing away. He began to panic, knowing men from the station would be following him soon.

*What had he done?*

He exhaled a cloud of bubbles. Quite by accident, he noticed the direction they raced off in. It seemed to Panos that the bubbles were traveling sideways, but his rational mind knew this was not the case. The bubbles could *only* be moving upward. The laws of nature could not be altered or tricked like his sense of balance.

Forcing his mind to override what his inner ear was telling him, he began to follow the bubbles. It felt like he was swimming into the pit, to the bottom of this great red pool of death, instead of upward.

He kept going until his mind began to accept it. His equilibrium began returning to normal. He exhaled more bubbles and kicked harder, swimming for the surface as fast as he could.

In his haste, Panos forgot about the ten-minute warning. By the time he neared the surface, he was in the grips of pain. His knees, elbows, and back all felt as if they were cramping up.

Despite the pain, Panos broke the surface and stared at the evening sky for the first time in months. It was periwinkle blue. He guessed it was almost dusk.

He looked around. High sandy walls rose up on every side. He'd never seen them before. He didn't even know where he was. Arrivals and departures always took place under sedation. They would fall asleep here and wake up on the island, or vice versa.

Despite the pain in his joints, Panos managed to pull the compass from his pocket. He began to swim, heading 075 degrees. The wretched throbbing in his joints got worse and was soon accompanied by blinding flashes of light that seemed to shoot through his brain.

Still, he fought on, eventually crawling out of the water and onto the sandy beach. He made it several yards before coming to a terraced wall of rock. It rose no more than ten feet, but it might as well have been a mountain.

How could he scale it? He couldn't. Not in this condition. He tried to stand and then collapsed in agony.

The sound of feet rushing toward him signaled his end. But when a pair of hands lifted him up, they did so caringly.

He saw a face hidden by a bandanna.

"You surfaced too quickly," the man behind the bandanna said.

"I . . . had to . . ." Panos managed. "They . . . found me."

"Found you?!"

"In the airlock . . ." Panos said.

"That means they'll be coming."

The unknown helper grabbed Panos and dragged him over the ridge with no concessions to the pain. He carried him to a waiting SUV, tossed him in the back and slammed the tailgate down.

Panos curled up in the fetal position as his savior climbed into the front and turned the key.

The engine roared, and they were soon bouncing over the rough terrain, each jolt spurring new waves of pain. To Panos, it felt as if his body were being crushed and exploding from within all at the same time.

"I'm dying," he cried out.

"No," the driver insisted. "But it's going to get worse before it gets better. Use your regulator. It will help."

Panos managed to get the regulator back in his mouth. He

bit down on it and breathed as deeply as he could. Even with that, a new series of spasms gripped him as the SUV careened across uneven ground.

Panos bent his head closer to his chest. It seemed to ease the agony a bit. He noticed his fingers and arms curling inward.

“Do you have the papers?” the driver asked. “And the computer?”

Panos nodded. “Yes . . . Can you tell me where we’re going?”

The driver hesitated, perhaps afraid to say too much in case they were captured. Finally, he spoke. “To someone who can help,” he said. “To someone who can put a stop to this madness once and for all.”