

***The Adventures of Cyber Sam*®**

By Chris Brenk

***“The Fight”*®**

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Prologue: (Mexico – One week earlier)

Carlos turned off the gravel road onto a rutted trail, turned off his headlights and brought the beat up van to a stop. He glanced out the window at his remote surroundings then checked his watch – 11:25 pm. The next hour would drastically change his life. The only question was which way.

It was five minutes until the scheduled rendezvous. If it went well and he was able to load and move the cargo sixty miles north to his destination, life would be good. If something went wrong or he was caught it would mean death or even worse - life in a Mexican prison.

Cloaked by an eerie moonless night he stepped out of the van and anxiously scanned the nearby woods. After two minutes he saw the flash sequence he was expecting flicker from the trees. He immediately held up his phone and sent the return signal.

A figure emerged from the woods and approached the van. Carlos stepped out to meet him.

“You must be Juan?”

Juan nodded and handed Carlos the paperwork.

“All there. Passports, ID’s everything that was requested,” Juan said, his nervous eyes darting the landscape.

“Ok good. And the cargo?” Carlos replied.

Juan looked back at the woods and whistled. Three men came out toting backpacks. No one spoke. Carlos opened the side door of the van and Juan motioned the men in. Carlos closed the door and then handed Juan a package in return. Juan counted the cash and once satisfied he nodded. He then disappeared back into the woods.

Carlos climbed back into the van, set the paperwork on the passenger side, checked the men in the back from the rearview mirror and sighed.

“So far so good.”

As the van crept back onto the gravel road he turned on the headlights, gripped the wheel tight and headed north toward El Paso.

An hour later he was approaching the city. He smiled for the first time all evening.

“Fifty thousand US dollars all mine. Just have to drop the men off at the ranch and collect my money. I don’t even have to get them across the border,” he thought. His life really was about to change.

Ten minutes later the van pulled out from a trail onto a road on the outskirts of El Paso. Two of the three men being transported were in the back seat. The other one was driving.

Carlos lifeless body lay bloodied in the dense woods next to the trail. His last thoughts on this side of eternity were how black everything was getting.

Part 1

Chapter One: (San Diego California)

Skeeter grabbed the last of his socks scattered about his room and rammed them into the hamper with an attitude. He then sighed and plopped on his bed as if he were a West Virginia coal miner punching out after a grueling twelve hour shift.

His mother the slave driver was relentless.

“What’s next,” he mumbled, “make my bed, take out the garbage.”

When would it all end? Just then a text came in from Sam and his eyes lit up.

“Ya. Sounds better than doing homework,” he said to himself.

Grabbing his backpack and sneaking down the stairs he hustled out the back door. He straddled his Schwinn bike and peddled with all he had skirting through eight blocks of San Diego’s suburban Church Hill district. Arriving at the vacant RJ Lumber Mill warehouse he smiled when he saw Sam’s bike already parked at the side door.

“Oh ya,” he said into the starlit night sky.

“Definitely no studying tonight.”

Sam already had the drone set up on an old wooden bench and was tinkering with the controls when Skeeter caught up with him. Sam looked up,

“Hey Skeet. Good you’re just in time. We’re just about ready. Can you grab that Allan wrench over there?”

“Yep, here you go. You really think this’ll work?”

Skeeter asked looking over Sam’s shoulder with excitement in his voice.

“Should,” Sam replied, still focused on his final adjustment.

“There, that should do it. Fire up the monitors and we’ll test it out right here in the warehouse,”

he said looking up at Skeeter with a smile and mischievous sparkle in his eyes.

Skeeter turned on the dual twenty four inch monitors then glanced around the warehouse nervously, as if they were cooking up a batch of meth and the feds were on the verge of busting in.

Sam noticed and chuckled,

“Take it easy Skeet, we’re not really breaking any laws here, just having a little fun and getting a chance to watch a great boxing match at the same time! Ok AJ, Let’s see what you can do,”

The drone began to climb and fly over them just below the warehouse ceiling beams. Named after the term Ajna, meaning third eye, AJ was jet black and carried an eighteen inch wingspan. Adjusting the controls and manning the joystick, Sam intently maneuvered the drone around the building.

“Awesome Sam! And it’s quiet-can’t hear a thing. Can you make it hover?” Skeeter chimed in as he looked at Sam and then back at the two monitors on the table.

One monitor was linked to a GPS and displayed a Google map of the city and a flashing red beacon above the warehouse representing AJ. The other was blank, waiting for the drones’ four cameras to begin sending a signal back to them.

Sam’s face shone with a sense of accomplishment and maybe a bit of perspiration from the pressure he felt not to crash the drone into a wall. The four cameras, HD Canon XD Mini Opticals, represented about \$800 with the modifications Sam had added. Toss in the cost of the drone itself and it put their little project in at about \$4500. A number Sam knew he could never come up with again if AJ went down. They had already beat the odds by mustering up the cash for AJ in the first place.

Curt Middleton, a retired navy seal, and uncle to Sam, had come up with the cash after the boys had shared their idea with him. Of course it helped that Sam had built an App for Curt to use with his thriving construction business. Curt’s only conditions were that this was a one-time deal and that if anyone asked, they didn’t get any money from him.

Sam figured he got some of his adventurous nature from his uncle, and felt a kinship with him like he had with no one else.

“Ok Skeet let’s see if AJ here can setup in hover mode,”

Sam announced, as he pressed a sequence of buttons on the controller.

AJ moved up over the center of the warehouse, and began hovering in one spot via its engineered air ports that jettisoned air to keep it perfectly still and balanced.

“It’s working Sam, I can’t believe it. How long will it stay like that?”

“Right now about two hours but I’m hoping with a few adjustments to get another hour out of it,” Sam replied as he kept working the controller.

He then looked over at Skeeter, “Camera time?”

Skeeter nodded, “Ready when you are”

Sam activated the four cameras and the second monitor came to life with a single crisp view of the warehouse floor, the table and two proud young boys;

The millennial generation of Orville and Wilbur Wright.

They stood staring at the two monitors in awe. One showing AJ’s location for navigation and tracking, the other a constant video feed. They looked back to the hovering drone for a moment without saying a word then both spewed out a series of cheers and high fived each other.

Testing was over. It was game on!

Chapter Two:

Skeeter grabbed two cokes out of his backpack and they sat down on the floor and leaned against the wall after landing AJ back on the table. Sam took a sip then looked at his watch.

“About thirty minutes until the two main bouts start. I think Virgil fights second, but even if both fights go the distance AJ should be able to capture them both.”

Skeeter nodded, “Works for me. I can’t wait and I can’t believe we are actually going to get to see the fight. I mean there’s not a ticket even to be scalped from what I hear.”

Sam smiled back at Skeeter.

“Right and I heard the actual price for the cheap seats was somewhere around \$400. But our seats will be as good as ringside.”

“Yep. Hey Sam, we got about \$4500 into AJ here, that would make our seats about the cost of actual ringside right?”

Sam stood and walked over to AJ and picked up the drone.

“If this were it, yes. But remember Skeet, AJ can be used for different events and all kinds of things. Think of the \$4500 like an investment. We’ll be able to get all sorts of return on our money over time.”

Skeeter guzzled the last of his coke and tossed it in the garbage.

“Makes sense. So what’s next?”

They walked outside the warehouse into the warm evening air with AJ in hand.

“There it is,”

said Sam as they looked across town to the towering lights of Cargill outdoor stadium broadcasting into the heaven. Joining the lights and drumming in the background were the noise of the crowd and the voice of the emcee calling the scorecard for the last fight.

“We send AJ in above the lights and have him hover right above the ring. Out of sight from anyone and yet giving us a ringside view to the action,”

Sam said as he began working the controller to send AJ into the night sky on his maiden voyage.

Skeeter just stood there smiling.

As AJ faded off into the sky the boys returned into the warehouse to track things on the monitor. Rapping off a series of keystrokes, Sam positioned the GPS over Cargill stadium. A red beacon appeared on the monitor moving inward. As Sam concentrated on the navigation monitor he felt like an air traffic controller.

Skeeter meantime was grabbing a couple of old stools he found and setting them up by the second monitor to view the fights.

“Hey Sam, next time we can just set everything up at home right?”
Skeeter said as he dug out some chips and licorice from his backpack.
Sam looked up,

“Yep, we just wanted to be close to AJ for the first run here to make sure it all goes ok. Ok looks like AJ is above the stadium and in hover mode. Let’s see what our video looks like.”

The boys perched themselves on the stools, stared at the second monitor, and were elated when they saw the boxing match come alive on the screen with vivid clarity.

Cheering, slurping coke, chomping licorice, pacing, and high fives filled the old warehouse as Macho Angel Hernandez took out Clark Witherford in eight rounds of the first main fight.

“That was awesome!”
Skeeter said as he stood up and stretched his arms.

“Okay. Gotta find a bathroom, be right back”.
Sam peering at the navigation monitor reviewing AJ’s system readings, replied without looking up,

“Ya it’s down on the left second door I think. You got about ten minutes before Virgil takes to the ring.”

“Can’t wait for that one. Virgil! The big fight!”
Sam replied as he headed off to the bathroom.

Sam worked a few more clicks then leaned back with his hands behind his head and sighed.

“It’s actually working Sam”, he said to himself.

Skeeter returned and started digging in his backpack to grab another coke.

“Hey Sam you want another pop?”

When Sam didn't respond Skeeter looked up.

"Hey Sam you want...Sam? What? What's wrong?"

Chapter Three:

Sam was zoned in on the navigation monitor pounding the keyboard, his playful smile now replaced with a concerned frown.

“Not good Skeet.”

Skeeter walked over and viewed the screen.

“What is it Sam?”

Sam looked up and sighed,

“Houston, have a problem.”

Skeeter stared blankly,

“What is it? I mean all looks fine on the video screen.”

Sam stood and kicked the box with spare parts that was lying on the floor.

“It’s the power. The readings say AJ only has about eighteen minutes left.”

“What does that mean?” Skeeter said.

“It means we gotta get AJ back here right now or he’ll crash in eighteen minutes.

I don’t get it. The power should have been good for another hour and a half.

Well it doesn’t matter right now, let’s just get him back here and we can figure out what happened later.”

Sam began the sequence to take AJ out of hover mode and beeline him back to the warehouse. Skeeter watched the screen as the red beacon began moving away from Cargill stadium. He felt a sense of loss knowing that there would be no ringside seat to the Virgil fight.

He wondered if this was how the Apollo 13 crew felt when they had trouble on their mission and lost the moon.

He then leaned against the stool dejected and stared at the video monitor watching the view of the stadium be replaced with Cargill’s vast parking lot full of cars, empty of course, as everyone was inside having the time of their lives. The stadium faded and the nearby City Center Mall came into view.

Then something caught his eye. He leaned in and focused on a tan SUV in the malls east side parking lot.

“Hey Sam,” he said with a concerned voice.

“Take a look at this.”

Sam pushed his sweat laced hair out of his face and looked up at Skeeter.

"What is it?"

"Just come and look at this will ya?" Sam walked over to the monitor.

"Right here," Skeeter said pointing to the SUV.

On the screen, in real-time, a woman was unlocking her SUV about to get in. At the same time a black suburban had sped up and stopped behind her car blocking her in. Two people in black jackets and stocking caps jumped out of the back seat and were approaching her quickly. The startled woman noticed them, then dropped her keys and purse as she began to run toward the east end mall entrance.

"Holy crap!"

Sam said as he darted back to grab the controller.

He clicked and maneuvered the joystick to circle AJ back and put him in hover mode right above the action.

"Sam quick what do we do? Look at this! They just grabbed that lady!"

Skeeter cried out as he stood up and leaned into the monitor.

The drama unfolded in front of them as the two assailants wrestled the woman into the suburban and sped off. It all happened so quick that it took a moment for Sam to realize what they had just witnessed.

Skeeter banged his hands on the table looking at the screen that now showed the tan SUV with driver door ajar and a purse on the ground and no one in sight.

"Now what? That lady just got abducted right there in the parking lot, unbelievable. Look! There goes the suburban out of the lot on to Penn Ave."

Sam had already noticed and was navigating the controls, moving AJ in hot pursuit of the getaway. He tried to zoom in with AJ's cameras on the suburban to see if he could capture the license plate but they were conveniently covered with mud.

"Nothing," he carped at the screen.

The suburban accelerated North on Michigan Ave and was already a block away. Sam clicked a few buttons and AJ streaked off toward the vehicle like the Millennium Falcon jumping to light speed.

“Wow AJ!” Skeeter exclaimed, “Where did that come from?”

Sam licking his lip nodded to Skeeter.

“Turbo option. I built it in just in case. Figured there might be a chance that AJ would be chased sometime by law enforcement or some noob who spots him. I never thought we’d use it to chase something else.”

The suburban took a sharp left on Williams Drive, zoomed several blocks to Benton Ave and finally pulled into a welding shop garage. One of the assailants jumped out and closed the garage door after the vehicle had entered the building. All the action witnessed by Sam and Skeeter inside the warehouse thanks to their third eye – AJ.

“We got trouble now,”

Sam stated solemnly as he was looking at the nav. screen.

“AJ’s power is down to five minutes, guess turbo mode sucks the juice. We don’t have enough power to get him back. In fact I gotta land him real soon.”

Skeeter was now pacing,

“This is not good. What are we gunna do?”

Sam’s adrenaline was now pulsing through his veins in waves as his mind was flying through the options.

“Working on it...Here Skeet...See this building?”

He pointed on the monitor to a three story apartment complex kitty corner from where the suburban entered the garage.

“Let’s land AJ right on the roof. That way we can conserve what power he has left to use with the cameras. Then we can watch the garage.”

“Sounds good to me. How long will the cameras work? Then what?”

“Not sure yet, but I know one thing”

“What’s that?”

“We gotta get AJ back.”

“What about that lady Sam? Who’s gunna get her back?”

They looked at each other neither saying a word.

Sam refocused and brought AJ to rest atop the apartment building and the screen now illuminated the front of the garage door to the welding shop. They both were having the same thoughts; behind that door were three assailants, a black suburban and most likely a woman who was scared to death, if she was even alive.

They were quiet for a moment then Skeeter rubbed his forehead and started pacing again.

“This is a nightmare. I was just cleaning my room getting ready to study derivatives for calc. class.”

He wiped face with his sweaty hands.

“Then it was gunna be the greatest night in my sports viewing history watching the fight. Virgil Ortiz defending his heavy weight title...and now it’s...”

He looked back at Sam.

“...Oh man Sam...what did we get ourselves into?”

Sam hardly heard a word Skeeter said, he was busy scribbling notes on the wooden table, finally he put his pen down and looked up.

“I think I have a plan.”

Part Two

Chapter Four:

Sam stood on the apartment complex roof for a moment and looked into the night and the city streets below. Crouching down he scurried across the roof toward to the East side of the building. AJ sat powerless on the corner of the flat asphalt roof.

“There you are.”

He set his backpack down, removed the spare battery pack, hooked it up to AJ and began charging the drone.

He texted back to Skeeter,

On roof got AJ charging him now.

He then peered across the street to the doors of the welding shop – all quiet.

Skeeter still watching the monitors in the warehouse texted Sam back.

No activity yet.

Then he began packing things up in the boxes and hiding them in the corner of the warehouse as Sam had instructed. The plan was for him to watch the welding shop on the monitor until Sam had arrived or AJ’s camera lost juice. Then to pack up the monitors and equipment, hide them and meet him on the roof.

He let Sam know.

On my way.

Meanwhile Sam was on the roof about to adjust AJ’s right wing when he noticed a man emerge from the welding shop door. Sam eyed him carefully as he stood on the sidewalk and lit up a cigarette. Another man then came out and joined him. Sam knew they couldn’t see him, but he instinctively crouched down and watched.

Then Sam made a decision.

AJ would need another thirty minutes to charge. So he would try and get close to the welding shop and see if he could pick up any of the two men’s conversation.

He grabbed his Biodish-7400 from his backpack and made a few adjustments. The electronic listening device, looked like a miniature satellite dish, and was state of the art, amplifying sound up to 1500 feet with astounding results.

He descended the apartment building and ran around the block, approaching the welding shop from the back side. Darting along the side between several shrubs, Sam was now sensing the danger of what he was doing.

Tucked behind one of the shrubs, he looked up and saw the two men about 150 feet away. He pointed the Bio dish at them and connected his phone to record any conversation it could pick up.

Garbled text scrolled across Sam's phone and then it began to clear up.

"...They're ready inside. Pull the truck out and let's get ready to roll," one of them said. Tossing his cigarette on the ground, the other replied, "Five minutes then we move out. No delays you got that?" "Don't worry about me."

Then it went quiet for a moment.

"Hey what if He won't do it?"

The other guy got in his face,

"What'da mean? Of course he'll do it. It's his wife. The message sent was clear, don't say a word to anyone including the cops and make the wire transfer tomorrow at 10:00 am or your wife is dead."

The other man shook his head,

"I don't know. I still think that's a lot of money he might not do it."

"He will – price is too high not to – a dead wife."

"Ya maybe...but she dies anyway, even if he does it."

"Right, but he doesn't know that."

Sam began to panic.

"Oh no" he whispered.

He could hardly believe it. A drop of sweat from his forehead smeared his phones display.

"Gotta calm down and think this through," he thought. The whole evening was beginning to feel surreal.

The two men moved back inside. Sam knew he was out of time. He noticed a boxwood hedge about four feet high that ran parallel to and was about ten feet from the driveway. He looked at his phone and then at the hedge. He had an idea.

The app was one he came up with last summer. He pulled it up on his phone and programmed it with the setting he would need. Fifteen seconds later he dashed off with phone in hand toward the hedge. If anyone came out the welding door and looked his way now he was as good as dead.

Diving in behind the hedge, Sam lay there for a moment not breathing. Then he slowly let his aching lungs take air in and out as he tried to be quiet. After a few seconds he pushed some of the bush aside to look through at the driveway.

He sighed, all clear.

He fired off a quick text to Skeeter.

They gunna move her then kill her. Meet me on roof by AJ.

Just then the welding shop garage door began to open and a Semi truck emerged backing out into the driveway. The driver stopped, got out and walked to the back and opened up the trailer doors and then climbed inside.

Taking it all in, Sam was frantic.

He took a deep breath and then jumped up and took off completely exposed running for the semi. He rolled underneath it, pulled out his phone and turned the GPS app on. Then he pulled a shoelace off his shoe and tied the phone to an iron crossbar on the underbelly of the truck.

"That should do it," he thought.

Still underneath the truck, he heard the sound of the trailer doors being shut.

"Dang,"

he hissed as he tried to pull himself up off the ground hanging from the axle frame. He could see the feet of two men walking back toward the cab.

"Let's do it", he heard from one of them.

Sam struggled as his grip was slipping from the sweat as he tried to hang on. The cab doors closed and the semi began to grind into gear. The semi began to

roll backwards out of the driveway. It then shifted and began to move forward. Sam hesitated as the eighteen wheels began rolling down the street.

Then he just let go.

He closed his eyes and lay prone on the ground in the middle of the street

He then did something he hadn't done in a long time. He prayed to God that the truck tires would not squash him and that no one would see him. And he knew, somehow, that his prayer was being heard.

What the results would be, he didn't have a clue. After all he wasn't exactly on speaking terms with Him.

Chapter Five:

The rumbling of the truck began to fade away and a lingering of exhaust hovered over Sam. Still lying flat in the street he slowly tilted his head up and saw the semi barreling down Penn Avenue.

“No brake lights, maybe they don’t see me,” he thought.

When the truck was out of sight he looked over at the warehouse – all clear. He quickly got up and ran back by the hedge. Not sure if anyone was left in the warehouse he decided to sneak around to the back entrance to investigate. After several minutes of checking different rooms and not finding any clues, he hurried back to the apartment roof to meet up with Skeeter.

“Sam! There you are. I kept texting you but didn’t hear back. I thought something happened.”

“I planted my phone with a GPS app on a Semi truck that they took off in. I think the lady was in it. There was nobody left in the warehouse,” Sam replied still catching his breathe.

“Oh wow! Good thinking! How’d you get it on the truck?”

“Don’t ask”

“Now what?”

“Let’s head back to my house and regroup,” Sam said as he picked up AJ. They descended from the roof and peddled back across town.

Upstairs in Sam’s bedroom, the boys were tracking the truck on Sam’s 32 inch monitor. The Dell computer was running Sam’s tracker program and receiving a signal from his phone that was tied under the truck.

“Looks like there heading for the Old Timber Lane road,” Sam said.

“I know that area, pretty desolated out that way. I wonder where they’re going?” Skeeter added.

“Couple of farmsteads is all I see,” Sam said as he pulled up a Google map on another screen. He rubbed his face with his hands and looked at Skeeter.

"Sam you up there?" came a voice from downstairs.

Sam gave Skeeter a startled look.

"Ya mom, Skeeter and I just going over some homework."

"Ok good. Can you please feed Rusty? I have to meet your father at the Parkers and I'm already late."

"Yep."

"And don't stay up too long, we'll be back late."

"Ok. Bye"

Skeeter looked at Sam.

"Feed the dog...save a lady's life. Homework isn't sounding so bad about now."

Sam nodded.

"Ya. And something tells me this night is far from over."

"Sam we're in way over our head. We should call the police or something," Skeeter said pacing around the room.

"I thought about that Skeet but I heard what those guys said."

"What was that?"

"They left a message for the lady's husband to pay some ransom or they'd kill her and specifically not to go to the cops. Then I heard they're gunna kill her anyway after they get their money."

Skeeter sat down in a chair by the desk,

"But we need some help."

Sam was quiet then said,

"Curt. We can call my uncle Curt. He was with the Special Forces in the military. I think he would help us and stay under the radar."

"Let's do it," Skeeter said.

Sam grabbed his other phone he had in his room, activated it and called Curt. Thirty minutes later Curt pulled up to Sam's house in his 2002 Buick and Sam and Skeeter jumped in.

"Hey Curt thanks for coming,"

Sam said smiling from the passenger side.

“Ya no problem. I thought I got into trouble when I was in high school but you guys take it to a whole nother level,”
Curt said shaking his head.

The boys brought Curt up to speed on the evening. Sam pulled out his laptop out and began tracking the Semi as it was winding up the Old Timber Lane road.

“How’s AJ doing?”
Sam asked looking at Skeeter in the back seat.

“Just getting there now.”

AJ, with batteries recharged, had been dispatched back to the mall parking lot to check on the lady’s vehicle for any more clues.

“Looks like her car is still there. Door still ajar and her purse on the ground yet,” Skeeter said as he pecked away on his own laptop.

“Ok. See if you can get her license plate then get AJ back to garage patio at my house and land him.”

“Will do,”
Skeeter said proudly as he was now manning the controls for AJ.

“Got it. RKL-M31 California plates. Ok AJ lets go home.”
Sam typed away for a few minutes.

“Laura Rollings, 22135 East Clifford Drive San Diego. Husband is Richard W. Rollings. Just a sec... Ok looks like he’s a Pastor at Calvary Hill Church.”
Sam reported to Curt and Skeeter.

“How did you find that out so quickly?” Curt asked.
“DMV records from the license plate. I...let myself into the system,”
Sam said with a smirk.

Skeeter laughed,
“I’m glad you’re on our side Sam. What’s the plan now?”

Chapter Six:

The tracking beacon stopped about two miles up the Old Timber Lane road. Sam checked his Google map and it showed a layout of a farmstead. They decided to get as close as possible without being noticed and check it out. They turned on the Old Timber Lane road and parked the Buick about a half mile from the farm on a small gravel trail. Curt then checked the Google map as well and the lay of the land.

"This looks like the best route," he said pointing to the map. He grabbed his back pack.

"Ok guys let's roll."

They maneuvered through a wooded area until they were at the edge of the field. About a hundred yards across the field was the farm building, as well as a Semi parked nearby. The clouds were moving out and the stars lit up the night sky. They could see the farm now had several lights on inside.

They all three watched in eerie silence for a moment. Curt pulled out a tactical army Porro Prism Binoculars and scanned the house. Meanwhile Sam setup his handy Biodish-7400 and pointed it at the house to see if he could pick up any conversations. Curt reported a total of four people in the house. It looked like one was sitting on the floor chained to a center support beam in the main living room. The heat sensing military binoculars made him fairly confident that they had accounted for all the people in the house.

"Starting to get something," Sam whispered.

He adjusted the bio dish so the conversations were scrolling across his laptop. They all huddled up and watched the screen.

...that's our best option...I don't like waiting...Shut up Azad we stick to the plan...The guy emailed us back and said he would do it...So tomorrow at 10:00 we verify the money transfer. Then we give her the phone with the detonator and...

"No! We lost the signal. What's with the Detonator? They gunna blow something up?" Skeeter said looking at Curt.

Curt was stunned.

"Gotta be terrorists...right here...on the homeland...in San Diego. What are they up to?" he fumed.

"It's 10:15 now. That means we got about twelve hours until the deadline," Sam replied.

"And until that lady's dead," Skeeter added.

Curt seemed to be processing everything, his demeanor now resolute, his eyes showing fire. He was in battle mode and he wasn't even in Afghanistan.

"Let's go back to my house and lay out a plan," Curt said as he put his binoculars away.

"I'll call your mom Sam and tell her I asked you to come over and help me with getting some materials moved over night for a rush construction job. She'll be ok with it. Skeeter not sure about you? Can you sell your parents on that as well?"

"I think so. I'm pretty sure they trust you."

"Ok good because we only have twelve hours and sleep is out of the question. We're gunna need every minute."

They packed up and returned through the forest to their waiting Buick. Then they sped off to Curt Middleton's house, all of them wondering what the next few hours would bring.

Part Three

Chapter Seven:

Curt and the boys were huddled around his kitchen table pouring over maps and the rough plan they had sketched out. Skeeter got up and brought the coffee pot over.

"More coffee anyone?"

"Sure. Thanks," Curt said.

"Keep it coming," Sam added.

"What do you think Sam? Can it be done?"

Curt asked circling a spot on the map representing the farm house.

Sam scowled and nodded.

"It's doable but it'll be tricky dropping the pod. But I've got an idea for that."

"Ok. Then I think we're set. What time do you have?"

Curt said standing up and rubbing his neck.

"Two fifteen," Skeeter noted.

"Alright daybreak isn't for another three and a half hours. Sam go ahead and get AJ in place. Skeeter and I will pack the Buick. At Three o'clock sharp we'll reconvene and see if AJ can get us eyes and ears inside the farm house."

AJ was loaded with three battery packs, the micro pod camera, microphone as well as a transmitter. Curt had a pile of equipment from his Special Ops days and was glad he had hung on to it all. It was still cutting edge technology and expensive even though it had been sitting in his basement for five years since he left the military.

Sam brought up the two monitors he had set up and punched in several commands into his laptop. They watched as AJ ascended from Curt's backyard and began its stealth mission back to Old Timber Lane road.

"Ok AJ don't let me down. I know you didn't sign up for this either but we're in this together,"

Sam said to the monitor with AJ fading into the night sky.

Curt was all about precision and accuracy as it was engrained in him from his time with the Special Ops. So he was struggling with the crudeness and time constraints of his own plan. But that's how it rolled many times in the past. Here he would rely on his instincts and intuition which had carried the day many a times before.

"That's everything on the checklist Skeeter. It's almost three o'clock. Let's go back inside and check on Sam."

"Ok," Skeeter said shutting the trunk of the Buick.

"AJ's all set guys. Check this out,"
Sam said pointing to the monitor.

"Our winged warrior's perched right on top of the fireplace chimney on the roof of the farm house."

"Nice work Sam,"
Curt said patting him on the back and pulling up a chair.

"Thanks. You were right Curt. There's no fire active in the fireplace - too warm outside."

"Ya but how are you going to get the mic and camera down the chimney?"
Skeeter asked.

"Five pound test,"
Sam said smiling and navigating the remote and keyboard.

The magnet on AJ's underbelly released and the miniature pod the size of marble with a camera lens and powerful omnidirectional mic began to descend down the chimney as Sam controlled the release of the string.

"Fish line! You've got AJ lowering it down with fish line! Sweet Sam."
Skeeter said excitedly.

"I might have to give a call into my old commander Sam. Tell'em I got a line on a good recruit for the OP's team,"
Curt said shaking his head.

The black marble looking pod made its way to the bottom of the chimney hanging just above the ashes by the nearly invisible fish line. The pod blended in

with the backdrop of the fireplace and was for the most part undetectable. Sam powered up the mic and camera remotely. They all three watched as the second monitor come to life.

“Excellent it’s working,” Skeeter said.

“Well well what do we have here? Mind if we join your little party you scumbags”

Curt said leaning into the monitor and almost whispering.

The pods view from the fireplace was astounding. The farm house had a central room with an open layout and a rustic kitchen in the background. There was a large vertical pine beam in the middle of the room. Chained to the beam was the woman that had been abducted from her SUV.

Three men were sitting at the kitchen table with laptops, papers and passports spread out. Three backpacks were on the floor next to the west wall.

But it was the next thing they all saw that nearly stopped their hearts from beating.

Chapter Eight:

It took several moments for any of them to register what they were seeing. Finally Skeeter said,

“Look at that you guys. Drugs right? I mean it looks like stacks of white and tannish bricks. Wrapped in plastic. Cocaine huh?”

“Must be hundreds of them,”

Sam added looking at what looked like four pallets of the cargo all stacked along the north wall. Sam and Skeeter both looked at Curt.

“Sam can you zoom the camera in on it?”

Curt asked as he focused on the screen.

“Ya just a sec. Ok. How’s that?”

Sam said as he worked his laptop.

“Ya right there. That’s what I thought,”

Curt said somberly after looking at the packages closely.

“It’s not drugs boys. Its blocks of C-4.”

“C-4?” Sam replied.

“Explosives. Bombs. A lot. And I mean a lot,”

Curt said looking directly at Sam and Skeeter. Sam knew his Uncle well but he’d never seen Curt this worked up. He was always even keeled.

“What’re they up to with that? Blow something up? What kind of damage can all that do?”

Sam said pointing to the screen. Curt stood rubbed his eyes and walked over to the window and looked out for a moment. Then he turned back to the boys.

“Just what they have right there that we can see. That’ll take out half a city block. I mean nothing left. That is some serious payload. And from what we heard about them using the hostage to detonate with her cell phone...They are definitely planning to blow something up.”

The boys were quiet. Curt turned back to the screen.

“Let’s listen in and see if we can piece any of this together.”

Sam adjusted the mic and they began to pick up the men's conversation.

"What are they saying? Must be some foreign language right?" Skeeter asked.

"Ya it's Farsi. Middle Eastern language. I know some but not much."

Curt replied. Sam worked the keyboard and moments later the sound was in English.

"How'd you do that?" Curt asked.

"Language converter program. I loaded up the Farsi to English option."

Sam said.

"Nice."

Curt said as they continued to listen in.

Chapter Nine:

Assad put his smart phone down on the table.

"I have just received our instructions."

He pointed to a spot on the map.

"This is the target."

Saheim and Taha both smiled.

"You are the chosen one Saheim. You will receive your honor and glory from Allah for your great sacrifice. Go now and prepare yourself. You will soon be on your way. Everything is in place."

Saheim stood, gathered up some paperwork and left the room.

"Taha. You and I will finish loading the explosives into the truck. Is the woman's cell phone setup as the detonator?"

"It is. Nothing has changed by appearance. When she selects her husband's number to dial, it will trigger."

Taha said as he held up the woman's cell phone up.

"Excellent. At ten o'clock Saheim should be in place. Once the wire transfer is verified, we text him to proceed. How is our visitor doing?"

Taha nodded.

"The sedative will last another three hours. We'll put her in the cab after finishing with the explosives."

"Yes. That should work." Assad replied with a dark grin.

Curt sat back, folded his arms and glanced at his watch.

"Its four thirty now. We got five and a half hours until they hit. The question is what are they going to hit?"

He said leaning forward toward the monitor.

"Sam is there any way to get visual of the table and that map?"

"No chance. Not with what we have. We'd have to fly AJ right into the house and that's not an option." Sam replied.

"That's what I thought."

Curt stood rubbing his chin.

“What are you thinking Curt?” Skeeter asked

“We stay on plan boys.”

He sat back down.

“Skeeter you and I will meet with Pastor Rollings at 7:00 am as scheduled. Sam we’ll drop you off at the staging area near the farm house at 6:30 on our way.”

“Ok,” Sam said.

“We don’t know the target so we’re going to need to be able to track that truck when it leaves the farm. If you can make sure your old phone and GPS that you planted are still working. Then keep us updated on where it’s going.”

“Will do,” Sam said as he started to pack up his laptop and other electronics.

Curt leaned his arms on the table and addressed them both.

“One more thing boys. This is obviously becoming a very dangerous situation. The stakes are high. Lives are at risk here including yours and mine. If either of you want to back off this mission I have no problem with it. You have already done more than could ever be expected.”

Sam shook his head.

“No way. I’m all in. Let’s see it through.”

Skeeter gave Sam fist bump.

“Me too. We gotta help that lady.”

“Ok. I thought you might say that. Listen you guys, get things ready to move. I’m gunna make a phone call to my old Op’s commander at Langley.”

“The CIA?”

Sam said looking over at Skeeter then Curt.

“Ya. I think might need some help.”

Chapter Ten:

The predawn gave way to an orange hue breaking the eastern horizon as the Buick rolled up Old Timer Lane road. After five minutes of silence Curt looked at the boys.

"This is it guys. Sam we'll drop you off here. The farms about a quarter mile down that trail. You good?"

"Ya got the new tracker right here. I'll get close then wait for my chance and fasten it on the semi before they leave."

"Sounds good. Skeeter and I will go meet with Pastor Rolling's. Then I'll meet the Op's team from Langley at the airport and we'll meet you back at the base by the farm at 8:30. Skeeter will stay with the Pastor and get the background info you requested and email it to you. Right Skeet?"

"Yep got it." Skeeter replied.

"And boys?"

"Ya?" Sam said.

"I'm not much for the whole church thing but I do know God is the real deal and He cares."

"Amen to that," Skeeter said.

Sam looked away and registered a slight nod.

"Lord we ask for your help and protection on this mission,"
Curt prayed as he placed a hand on each of the boy's shoulders.

Then Sam jumped out and skirted into the woods toward the farm. Curt and Skeeter sped off in the Buick to meet with Pastor Rollings. All three were thinking the same thing:

The magnitude of what hung in the balance over the next couple hours was enormous and they were in the middle of it.

Sam reached their make shift staging area just out of sight from the farm and set up his equipment. He scanned the area with his binoculars.

"Looking quiet," he thought.

He then checked his laptop to see what their chimney spy AJ was reporting. He

could see two of the three men at the table but one was missing as was the lady who was previously tied to the beam.

“What’s up with that?” he whispered.

He grabbed the binoculars and rechecked the grounds. All clear. He then decided to make his move to the semi and retrieve his old phone, which had run out of battery, from the axle frame and plant the new tracker. Then he could maybe take a closer look around for the missing lady and terrorist.

He looked up at the starlit sky for a moment and thought about saying something then changed his mind. Then he took a swig from a water bottle and made his move.

The side of the semi was blocking the view from the farm window so he felt relieved when he made it and crouched down along the side of the trailer. He quickly looked around, all quiet. He crawled underneath and swapped out his old phone for the new tracker.

Crawling back out from underneath he began to stand up then felt an excruciating pain from the back of his head. He collapsed to the ground and the last thing that registered as consciousness faded away was a man looking over him with a lead pipe in his hand. He had dark eyes and was smiling.

He couldn’t be sure but it looked like the man was wearing a UPS uniform. Then everything went black.

Part Four

Chapter Eleven:

Pastor Rolling's office in the back of Calvary Hill church was proportionally small and quaint compared to the size of the church with its 3,000 seat sanctuary and modern design. Nor did it have the latest technology as the rest of the church had, even void a computer. Sitting behind his weathered solid oak desk with a timeworn and tattered bible open he stood up to welcome his visitors.

"Come in gentlemen. Please have a seat,"

Pastor said as he shook hands with Curt and Skeeter. He had a weary and concerned look in his eyes.

"You must be Curt?"

"Curt Middleton and this is my nephew's friend Skeeter. Sorry to meet under these circumstances,"

Curt replied sitting down across from his desk. Skeeter did the same. The six foot two Pastor in jeans and a white tee shirt folded his ripped arms with bulging biceps and shook his head and spoke in a deep gentle voice.

"This is as tough as it gets Curt. I've been pastoring for twenty four years and have seen just about everything. But this. This is uncharted ground. It's my wife...", he said trailing off and eyes misting.

"I can't imagine," curt replied.

Pastor nodded at his open bible in front of him and looked back at curt and Skeeter.

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. Isaiah 43:2."

He rubbed his face with his hands.

"This verse has been popping up for me all night as I have been praying. I can feel the anxiety dropping and peace building but it's not easy. Laura's everything to me. But I am trusting God will direct us."

"I'm sure of it Pastor. I mean how else could Skeeter and I be sitting here with you and how else could Sam be watching the terrorists," Curt said.

Feeling his spirit lifting Pastor looked at Curt and Skeeter with resolve.

"Ok then let's do this. I got the general idea from your call but can you fill in the details?"

"Absolutely. Skeeter can you pull up the laptop?"

Skeeter opened it up and turned the screen for Pastor and Curt to see.

"Sam said all you have to do is click this icon when you are ready to make the wire transfer," Skeeter said.

"It will then ask for the banking information. Did they send that yet?"

Curt asked.

"Not yet," Pastor said.

"Probably waiting until the last minute. You'll more than likely get an email from them I suspect. So just copy the info into the window that pops up and that's it."

"Ok. But remember all I have in the account is one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Not even close to what they were asking for."

"It's ok Pastor. Sam knows that and he seems confident it will fool them,"

Skeeter added.

"That's right. The kid's an absolute wizard with this stuff. He tried to explain to us how it works but I think I only got about ten percent of what he was saying,"

Curt said wryly.

"Ya I think the gist of it all is that the transfer will look like it completed. The money will show as two million dollars deposited successfully into their account. Then somehow a digital tracer gets activated with the electronic transfer that will relay back where the money goes," Skeeter noted.

"Like a tracking beacon? But only electronic?"

Paster asked quizzically.

"I guess so but like I said I have no idea how it works. All I know is that if they redirect the funds through a maze of banks and accounts, we will still know

where it is. And that will be a big break for locating who's behind the attack," Curt said.

"Ok. So I wait until I get the information, and then set it all in motion with one click?" Pastor asked.

"That's right. Now if you guys are good I need to get to the airport to meet with the special OP's team from Langley."

"Ok," said Pastor.

"Yep. And I'll stay here and get the background info from Pastor that Sam requested. Then check in with Sam and get it to him," Skeeter added.

Curt stood and turned toward the door.

"Hey Curt?"

Curt turned back toward the Pastor.

"Thanks. And to you as well Skeeter."

Curt looked into the Pastor's grateful eyes and nodded.

"And Godspeed," Pastor added.

Curt left the office and sped off in his Buick toward the airport. Pastor Rolling's sat down across from Skeeter.

"Ok what do you want to know?"

Chapter Twelve:

Sam woke up to a splitting headache. He must be blindfolded he thought as everything was black. Then he felt his face and knew that wasn't true. Am I blind? He thought. Then he sat up blinking his eyes forcefully and noticed a dull amber light from his watch. Slowly his eyes adjusted as he fingered the welt on the back of his head. Then he stood up somewhat dizzy and felt the walls.

"Where am I? Ah ok. I must be in the semi-trailer truck," he said to himself. He pushed a button on his watch and the amber light intensified. He could see the interior of the truck now.

It was empty.

"What's with that?" he said.

A sense of panic flooded his mind as he felt for his phone but could not find it. Then he moved along the trucks interior for anything. Finally checking the trailer door but of course it was locked from the outside.

"They took my phone then locked me in here. But why?" He asked himself. He began to hyperventilate as his mind raced with scenarios.

"It was the one called Saheim. He's the one who hit me."

He sat down and leaned against the trailer wall with his face in his hands. After a couple of minutes he looked up.

"There are no explosives in here. Why?" Then his mind started to piece things together and it all fell in place.

"Saheim was wearing a UPS uniform. There must be another truck with the explosives. A UPS truck. That's where he and the pastor's wife were along with all the C-4."

Sam felt helpless. A feeling he was not used to dealing with. He was trapped in the Semi. No phone to communicate with Curt or Skeeter. No way to stop the bomb now being shipped via UPS to who knows where. He had no way to do anything. He banged his fists on the wall and then tried the door again unsuccessfully and finally he crouched down in the corner of the trailer and began to weep.

Chapter Thirteen:

Skeeter went thru the questions Sam had put together with Pastor Rollings. The goal was to gather as much background information on the Pastor, his wife, family and his church to see if there was any link to why he and his wife Laura were in the middle of all this. Skeeter was to then email it to Sam so he could run some analysis on it.

Twenty minutes later Skeeter stopped typing on his laptop and looked up at Pastor Rollings.

"That's it for all the questions Pastor. I really appreciate you sharing everything. I know it gets kind of personal but like Sam said, you just don't know what might apply here."

"Anything to help. I'm just praying God will intervene here and help bring Laura home safe."

"Ya me to."

"Excuse me for a minute I need to check on my Saturday morning bible study group. They are expecting me and I don't want them wondering what's going on. I'll be right back,"

Pastor said as he stood up and made his way to one of the Sunday school rooms.

Skeeter nodded and then pecked away on his laptop sending Sam all the background information. He then grabbed his phone and sent him a text as well:

Just sent u the Pastor's info. Let me know when u get it.

"There. Now we wait," he said to himself.

Ten minutes later the Pastor returned.

"Anything wrong Skeeter? You look as distraught as me."

Skeeter gestured to his laptop and then his phone.

"Not sure. It's just that I haven't heard anything back from Sam. I sent him an email and a text but nothing. That's not like him anytime especially with what's going on now."

"You think something might have happened to him?"

"It's crossed my mind," Skeeter said looking up at Pastor with concern.

"You try calling him?"

"Ya. It goes right to voice mail."

"Maybe we should let Curt know."

"Ya we better," Skeeter said as he dialed up Curt.

Curt tried to act calm but Skeeter knew from his voice he was worried. Skeeter hung up the phone and looked at Pastor.

"He said not to worry and hold tight and wait for Sam to contact us. But I could tell he was worked up. He just met up with the team from Langley and they were going to head to the farm right away to check on Sam. He said if we hear anything to let him know."

"Ok then we wait. Best thing we can do now Skeeter is pray," he said sitting down and laying his hand on his bible.

Skeeter nodded, "let's pray."

Chapter Fourteen:

Entombed in the semi and surrounded by blackness, Sam sat hovered in the corner staring out but seeing nothing.

He was clueless that outside of the semi a UPS van was just leaving the farm. The two occupants a man driving and in the passenger side a woman who was slouched over. Nor did he know that they drove off with plans to deliver a package that would change the city of San Diego forever and propel numerous souls into eternity.

Sam felt his cheek and then realized the tears he had shed were the first ones since losing his little brother four years ago.

His mind took him back to the summer camp when he was twelve, the night when he gave his life to Christ. The assurance he had that he was God's child and that God would never abandon him. He remembered the joy and peace that overcame him that night and how it changed his life.

Then he thought back to his little brother Ryan and the cancer that robbed him of life at the age of six. He remembered how the family including he had prayed fervently for God to heal Ryan

Then he recalled how angry he felt at the funeral and the vivid taste of bitterness at death and resentment toward God.

But something was welling up inside him and he realized the tears that had surfaced earlier were not from the fear of dying. They were tears of remorse. He slowly wiped his face with his hands and sat up a bit. He felt strange yet at peace. Then he looked upward.

"Oh God I've had it all wrong. Please forgive me for blaming you. I don't understand why Ryan died, why you didn't heal him but I trust you and I need you. I've tried to run from you and do everything on my own. Forgive me Father."

The peace he felt was now stirring a fountain of hope that was building inside him.

"God If I die tonight I know I'll be with you because you promised me that when I became your child. But Father if it's not my time, please help me."

Sam closed his eyes. He knew there was nothing he could do on his own. He also knew he had access to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the one true living God who loved him dearly and would never abandon him.

So he bowed his head and continued to pray.

Chapter Fifteen:

Curt lowered his binoculars and looked over at Jake Guthrie and shook his head. Jake pointed back toward the woods and Curt crawled back from the edge of the woods to the secluded base station hidden across the field from the farm. Jake joined him.

"I don't see any activity outside Jake."

Jake, the leader from the Special OP's team from Langley, unfolded a map on their makeshift table housed in a tent which was now command central. He pointed to locations on the map.

"That's consistent with what my guys are telling me. I've got men stationed here and over this ridge and then one more on that west slope. They say there's nothing outside expect that semi."

"What about the farm house?" Curt asked.

"We're only accounting for two people in there at the moment. I've got Mitch O'Connell my second in command double checking that as we speak."

"I don't like this Jake. There's no sign of Sam and we're missing two people from the house."

Jake nodded in agreement, "Ya somethings up."

Then he picked up his cell phone that was vibrating and walked away. He returned several minutes later.

"Curt we're getting attention from the top now. That was Ken Fowler, Deputy Director of the CIA, my boss's boss. He answers only to the Director himself and the President. We're got orders to make sure that semi does not leave this farm."

"So what does that mean?"

"I've gotta send some men in there now to check on that semi. Verify what we're dealing with for explosives."

"What about the hostage?"

"We'll do everything we can to keep her alive. My men will go in under the radar for the recon. And I have more men that will move in on the farm

house. Nobody will make a move until I say. And until I have a plan to remove the hostage safely.”

“If she’s even there. Remember there’s two missing plus Sam,” Curt added.

“Right,” Jake said looking stoically at Curt.

Jake dispatched two of his men to the semi. Approaching the truck undetected, they began scanning the surroundings. One had a sophisticated hand scanner for detecting anything radioactive, as well as infrared and other parameters. The other man Tanner Wilson checked the semi doors and noticed it was paddle locked. He removed a tool from his vest and began to pick the lock.

In the darkness inside the truck, Sam thought he heard something from the semi doors. He opened his eyes and stood up. Slowly he moved toward the door and put his ear up against it. Then he jumped back.

“Someone’s opening the door,” he thought.

Then he back stepped to the other end of the trailer and stood staring down the trailer at the door, preparing to die.

The door clicked and began to slowly open silently. Sam stood there looking, part of him wondering why they were being so quiet. Then a light shone on him back and forth as it scanned the trailers interior.

Every member of the OP’s team had pictures and bio’s memorized for everyone involved in the operation, and when Tanner saw Sam standing in the back of the trailer he displayed no reaction.

“Are you Sam?”

“Ya. Who are you?” Sam replied confused.

“Don’t say a word and come with me please. I’m a friend of Curt.”

Sam moved toward the door his legs wobbly. Tanner relayed his findings thru his headset to Jake. Then he took Sam by the arm and they stepped out of the trailer and moved quickly across the field toward safety. The other team member was still gathering information.

Curt had a big grin on his face when he saw Tanner step into the tent with Sam.

“Sam! You’re alive!”

“Only by the grace of God. And you,” Sam replied.

“Here have a seat Sam,” Jake said pulling up a chair.

“Jake there are no explosives in the semi,” Tanner said solemnly.
Both Jake and Curt looked surprised.

“Sam. What’s going on?” Jake asked.

Chapter Sixteen:

Sam brought Jake and Curt up to speed on everything he knew then tried to pull up a current video feed of inside the farm house from AJ's camera pod. Sam looked up from his laptop and shook his head.

"Sorry Jake, AJ's not going to give us anything. As far as I can tell the pod and camera are not transmitting and I'm not sure why."

"That's ok Sam the last video feed we got from AJ gave us the farm house layout and location of Assad and Taha. That's valuable Intel. If you can, bring AJ off the roof and back here. Maybe we can see why the camera went down and redeploy him," Jake said.

Ten minutes later Jake was back on the phone with Langley. He finished up and walked back into the tent where Curt and Tanner were going over maps and Sam with AJ in hand was inspecting the drone's camera pod.

"Here's the latest intel we have. Mitch got ahold of the CEO at UPS and they are cooperating. It looks like they have over 100,000 trucks that deliver fifteen million packages a day. We should have the number in the San Diego area shortly. They track each truck with electronics and Mitch says that they have looked at all the trucks in the area over the last twelve hours."

"Is there any with activity in Old Timber lane road area?" Curt asked.

"Not that we found. Although the trackers are in the hand held devices so if a truck was hijacked and the device removed we wouldn't know where it is."

Mitch came in and handed Jake a note.

"Ok. UPS says they have accounted for every truck in California and Arizona and each driver. Nothing going to Old Timber Lane road," Jake announced.

"That means Saheim may have a counterfeit truck and uniform. Or at least the uniform as we have no witnesses of an actual UPS truck leaving the farm," Tanner said. Jake and Curt nodded with concern.

"Mitch get word out to authorities to check every UPS truck they can find in the San Diego area. Saheim has a beard so have them be watching for any drivers with facial hair"

"Facial hair?"

“That’s right. UPS policy frowns on facial hair. Also look for any trucks making left turns as that will be a red flag as well.”

“I’m on it.”

“And Mitch. Tell them to be careful. To say they are armed and dangerous would be an understatement.”

Mitch nodded as he picked up his phone and left.

Jake turned to Curt, Sam and Tanner.

“It’s eight thirty now that leaves ninety minutes until the deadline. That means the UPS fleet is already on the march for the day in the city. We’re running out of time and I don’t like the odds of finding our truck. Any other ideas?”

“I’ll follow up on where the possible target might be. I see I got an email from Skeeter on Pastor Rolling’s wife, family and his church. Maybe there’s something in there that can help,” Sam replied.

“Good idea. Curt and Tanner come with me. There’s no time left and we need a plan to get into that farm house now and capture the two holed up in there – alive.”

“And find out what they know about where that truck is heading,” Tanner added.

“I’ve got some ideas on getting them to talk,” Curt said with resolve.

Chapter Seventeen:

Sam was pouring over the information he received from Skeeter and had called him several times as well. Nothing was popping out that looked useful. Then he noticed something with the Pastor's children. He and Laura have four children, three daughters and a son. They are all married and living in the area. It was the son that was drawing Sam's attention. He dialed up Skeeter.

"Hey Skeet it's me again. I was looking at Ben Rolling's bio, specifically his wife Amina. You have anything else on her?"

"Sam let me put you on speaker phone. I have Pastor here with me."

"Can you hear me Sam?" Pastor said leaning into the speaker phone.

"Yep."

"Ben and Amina were married about six months ago. She's a very nice young lady. She started attending our church some three years ago. Seemed very lost when I first met her. I believe she was living with her grandmother at the time. She became a Christian shortly after she started attending, maybe three months in. That's when she started dating Ben."

There was a pause on the line. Then Sam asked,

"What nationality is she? I see from the pictures she has a dark complexion."

"I think originally from Amman Jordan. I do know that's where her mother lives. She and a sister flew in for the wedding. Seemed like a nice family."

"Ok. Just looking for any connection. Do you know her maiden name by chance?" Sam asked.

"Ya it was Hassan," Pastor replied.

"Ok thanks. I'll keep digging,"

Sam said as he hung up and started working his laptop.

Curt and Tanner were checking their tactical gear and guns when Jake walked up to them.

"Ok boys we're a go. Langley gave us a window of twenty minutes. Pastor Rolling's just informed us that Assad emailed him with the wire instructions. So in ten minutes he will initiate the transfer. At that point you two will move in on the farmhouse. I'll watch the video and audio feed the whole time from the

cameras on your helmets. Finish getting ready and meet Mitch by the edge of the trees on the south side of the field. He'll coordinate from that spot. Any questions?"

"What's with the ammo you gave us? They're not standard,"

Tanner asked as he finished loading his weapon.

"SG7's. They'll perform pretty much like a glorified stun gun, locks the electrical system of the body as soon as they penetrate. Not fatal right away but if you get hit by one you're not moving. Then you have two minutes to inject them with this after the hit or else they will die,"

He said handing them each a vial of antidote.

"Got it," Curt said.

"Once you neutralize the targets and get them breathing again I'll send in the interrogation team. At that point you guys exit the farm house and provide cover while they get setup. Then get back here and join the intercept team which will wait for results."

Curt stood and looked at Jake.

"Jake will they be able to extract the target from Assad and his partner? What I mean is, are they going to be able to use whatever means needed to extract the intel? I'm not into risking my life and then have our hands tied by some politically correct policy that says we need to treat them like they committed their first speeding violation,"

Curt said with a tone of frustration.

Jake paused as if contemplating how much he could share with Curt.

"I know your frustration Curt. I was working command at Langley for several of your tours. You guys were outstanding only to have Washington step in and limit your results due to political pressure. I shouldn't tell you this as you're not officially in the agency now but what the heck."

He rubbed his jaw and looked around the room then continued.

"There's still a core in the military and intel sectors that knows what to do and how to do it. And they do it. The team that's here is in that camp. We're not on the official radar nor will we be. Any results we render good or bad will never be public. I can't count the number of threats that have been stopped in

their tracks by this team and others like it. And believe me they don't get those results from checking the winds of popularity or political correctness.

I know what you're asking and yes waterboarding and a lot more are on the table for the combatants we face. These aren't thieves or bank robbers, they are mass killers that are out to destroy our country and way of life. And they will be treated that way. If they know the target, we will have it within thirty minutes."

Tanner and Curt were both moved by the emotion and tone Jake was displaying, as well as the openness for him to share. By nature these guys were tight lipped.

"Once we have extracted a target you two and I will join the intercept team and head for the target."

"And hope we're in time," Curt added.

They looked at each other without saying anything. Everyone knew time was not on their side.

Chapter Eighteen:

Sam was running several programs on his laptop in a quest for any correlation between the terrorists and Pastor Rolling's church and family. The frustration was building as he kept running into dead ends while the precious minutes were ticking away.

"What am I missing here," he mumbled. Then he stood up and looked back at the notes from Skeeter. Twenty seconds passed and then his laptop beeped. Sam viewed the screen then sat down and furiously began typing. Then he paused.

"It can't be. But it is...He's her uncle!"
He said with surprise. He kept working the keyboard for several minutes then leaned back in his chair.

"Saheim Hassan. There's my link."

Tucked in the trees along the south side of the field, Mitch scanned the farm house one more time. He never liked operations in daylight but knew you didn't get to pick all the variables. He checked his watch. It was time. He whispered into his mic and a moment later Curt and Tanner emerged from the trees and scurried across the field toward the farm house.

Jake was in direct communication with Curt and Tanner as he watched the live feed on his monitor. Things moved quickly and with precision. Curt was now just outside to the left of the front door crouched below the window. Tanner was on the west side below that window. Both entries would give them clear shots at both targets which were sitting at the kitchen table.

"All clear. Go in ten," Jake relayed to them both.

"Check," Tanner whispered into his mic.

"Check," Curt replied.

Ten seconds later Curt burst through the door and Tanner the west side window. Assad barely registered the noise when he took two shots in the back and slumped over the table. Taha took three in the chest area and toppled backwards to the floor.

“Targets down,”

Tanner relayed as he was putting restraints on the two men and administering the antidote. Curt was busy checking the house for other threats.

“Farm house clear of other targets, those were the only two,” Curt said.

“Targets restrained and are starting to regain conscious,” Tanner replied.

“Nice work men. Move outside and cover the yard. I’m sending in the interrogation team,” Jake announced.

Chapter Nineteen:

Sam grabbed his phone and dialed up Skeeter.

"Skeet I think I found something. Is Pastor still there with you?"

"I'm right here Sam," Pastor replied as he turned the speaker phone on.

"One of the terrorists is Saheim Hassan. I think he's Amina's uncle."

"What?" Pastor said standing up.

"Ya I'm pretty sure. I've double checked it and even found some pictures. He currently lives in Afghanistan but is from Jordan. But I have nothing on Amina's father."

Still stunned Pastor Rolling's slowly sat down.

"Ya she doesn't talk much about her family. But I believe her dad was killed in Afghanistan when Amina was only three. Not sure of the circumstances though. I never knew she had an uncle."

"Ya. That's not all. Listen to this. He's a devout Muslim and from best I can tell had a daughter named Sidra. She died two years ago and they called it an honor killing. She had met a missionary and became a Christian. Apparently Saheim killed her for converting," Sam reported.

"You're kidding! No of course you're not. This is unbelievable. What do you think

it means Sam?" Skeeter chimed in.

"It means he's going after Amina," Pastor added.

"That's where I'm at guys. I believe he wants to take out Amina. An honor killing if you will for converting to Christianity. So he takes out Ben and Laura at the same time," Sam replied.

"And with all the explosives probably a couple thousand more as well," Pastor added.

"Do you know where Amina is now?" Sam asked with an urgent tone.

Pastor thought a minute then gave Skeeter a stunned look. Then he grabbed his phone and looked at his calendar.

“She’s speaking at the Bayside Civic Center at 11:00 this morning! She’s an architect and is giving a presentation. It’s an annual home show that draws in thousands of people each year. I went last year. There are all sorts of speakers and events. And Ben always goes to show support,” Pastor said almost yelling.

“That’s it! That’s the target,” Sam screamed in the phone.

“Ya and I’m sure it’s packed with people by now. It’s Saturday – their big day. The doors opened at 8:00 this morning,” Pastor said.

“Ok. I gotta let Jake know right away! I’ll call you back in a bit,”
Sam said as he hung up and dashed off toward the command central tent.

He was running with all he had yelling Jake’s name when he was suddenly blinded by a massive flash. Then a thundering explosive noise pierced his ears and hurled him backwards knocking him to the ground. He swirled in a state of semiconscious then everything went away.

Chapter Twenty:

Pastor grabbed his phone as he was putting on his coat.

“What are you doing?” Skeeter asked all worked up.

“I can’t just wait here for Sam to call back. I’ve gotta find Laura.”

“You’re going to the Civic Center?”

“Yes I am,” he said heading for the door then looking back, “Well?”

“I’m in,” Skeeter said as he scooped up his laptop and phone. They run out the church and sped off in the Pastor’s old seventy two Ford pickup.

The fog slowly dissipated and Sam could see he was walking along some kind of ridge running between two bodies of water. Where was he? Was he dead? He could sense he was alive yet maybe it was a dream.

Looking up ahead he noticed the waters were raging over the ridge. He would need to get off before that point or he’d be swept away. But where should he go? Then the wind came up and the fog completely blew off and he could see clearly the bodies of water on both sides of the ridge.

On the left side was a wooden bridge arcing over the body of water. A path to safety? On the right side the water had what looked like a reflection from the clouds above, a reflection of a hand reaching out.

He knew. The hand that was in the reflection had a hole in the wrist – Jesus. And he knew the bridge to the left was the world. It had the logical path, the tangible one he could see, the path that would serve his flesh, the safe path?

His spirit told him to step off the ridge into the water to the right, into God’s hand. His flesh said that makes no sense, you’ll drown. Take the bridge over the water on the left it’ll keep you safe.

Sam’s mind and spirit swirled within his being. He thought of Peter when he walked on the water after Jesus called him. But didn’t he sink after a bit? But Jesus rescued him. This was it. God was asking him what he believed. It was all about his faith or his lack of it.

He stood still for a moment and then stepped off the ridge to the right on to the water.

Chapter Twenty One:

Skeeter liked speed but he was clutching the dash with both hands as Pastor roared thru the suburbs of San Diego in route to the Civic Center.

"I hope there are a couple of angels watching over us. I had no idea this piece of junk... I mean this old truck could go this fast."

"Angels, arch angels, Jesus Himself, we need the whole cavalry. And ya I've done a little remodeling on this baby,"

Pastor said with a voice of confidence. Skeeter looked at his watch.

"I just tried calling Sam but he's not answering. I hope Jake and his team know the target and are on their way the way there because I don't know if we'll make it by ten."

"What time is it now?"

"Nine forty five and Siri says we're twenty five minutes away," Skeeter replied.

"Siri huh? Let's hope Jesus says fifteen minutes or less,"

Pastor said as he swerved through an intersection after running a red light.

Sam gagged and coughed then felt the sharp pain in his left arm and throbbing headache. His ears were ringing as he lay on the ground. He sat up in a haze of smoke and then saw the massive inferno across the field where the farm house used to be.

"Ahhh my arm," he said looking at the gash on his forearm that was bleeding.

"Guess I'm not dead."

Then he slowly stood up and looked around, trying to make sense of things. His mind was slow to recall what was happening but he clearly remembered the dream or vision, whatever it was.

"Hey Sam are you ok?" Mitch yelled running up to him.

"Mitch?" he said still trying to gather his senses.

"Ya it's me. Sam that arm looks bad let's get you back to the command area. We have a make shift medic area being setup."

"What happened?" Sam said staring at Mitch.

Mitch was helping Sam walk toward the command center. There were other OP's members running about the area chirping orders and requests. Mitch stopped and turned toward Sam.

"It's gone Sam. The farm house. There was a massive explosion. We don't know what exactly happened yet."

"What about the team? Was anybody in there?"

"Tanner and Curt had gone in and neutralized Assad and Taha. Then they were to provide cover for the interrogation team. The team was about thirty yards away when the explosion occurred. Nobody killed there but some pretty bad injuries," Mitch paused.

"What about Curt and Tanner?" Sam asked.

Mitch shook his head slowly, "No word from either. We can't get close to the scene yet, the fires too hot. But what I'm hearing from my men is there's no real chance they could have made it. I'm sorry Sam."

Sam leaned over and closed his eyes. His mind flooded with the shock of what just happened, the reality of what it all meant. Curt, his uncle dead and it was his fault. The guilt ready to eat him alive. He wanted to scream but nothing came out. He fell to the ground.

"No this can't be. What happened? God where were you?"
He spewed out as he pounded his fists in the ground.

Then he recalled the ridge and the lakes and the choices. And he remembered the bombs and the target – the Civic Center. This was it he thought. God wants to know if I will trust him even when it's bad. There's still Laura and the UPS truck in route to blow up the Civic Center. He stood up.

"Mitch where's Jake? I know the target. It's the Bayside Civic Center! We gotta get somebody there now to stop it!" Sam shouted.

"Bayside Civic Center! You sure Sam?"

"Ya Ben Rollins wife is Saheim's niece. He wants to take her out and everyone else at the civic. Something about an honor killing because she converted to Christianity"

“That’s unbelievable. Ok you get over to the medic and get that arm looked at. Our radios are sporadic, I’ll find Jake and call the local authorities to get to the Civic,” Mitch said as he ran off.

Chapter Twenty Two:

Saheim smiled as he pulled the UPS truck up alongside the loading dock on the backside of the Bayside Civic Center. He handed the paper work to the elderly security guard who casually scanned it and returned it to him.

“Now that’s a last minute delivery wouldn’t you say? Let’s see now, the vendor you’re looking for is booth number twenty four. If you drive up along to the west doors I’ll have someone let you in. Then take the basement hallway that will be the quickest. It’s already packed up on the concourse,” the guard said.

“That works for me, thank you. And have a nice day,”

Saheim said as he pulled ahead. He checked the rearview mirror to make sure the guard wasn’t giving him the eye. Then he pulled up along the west doors unbuckled his seat belt and stepped into the back of the truck. There were piles of C-4 explosives as well as Laura Rolling’s tied up, lying on the floor fully awake.

Saheim looked at Laura,

“Ok lady I’m gunna take the duct tape off your mouth. Then you’re going to get up and move to the passenger seat. If you scream, yell or try anything I will disfigure your face beyond recognition. Do you understand?”

Laura nodded her fearful eyes watching the knife in his hand.

Sam sat on the cot as the medic finished with the bandages on his arm. He looked out across the field at the fire blazing and men running about. He started to tear up thinking of Curt and Tanner when Mitch walked up.

“Sam how’s the arm?”

“Hey Mitch its better they stopped the bleeding. Is the intercept team in route to the Civic Center?”

“Jake just left with them. We’ve notified state and local authorities as well as homeland security. I just hope they can get there in time.”

“Ya me too. We only have about twelve minutes until the deadline. I don’t see how they can make it,”

Sam said his words trailing off. Then he spotted AJ behind the medical area on the ground where he’d been working on him.

"Excuse me Mitch, I have an idea," he said as he ran back to AJ.

"Hope that's enough power to last for the speed your gunna need," Sam said to AJ as the drone lifted off and screamed into the morning sky with blazing speed. Sam fired up his laptop and started tracking AJ's mission to the Bayside Civic Center.

"I don't know...If you can hold this speed...just maybe you can get there in ten minutes," Sam said as he worked the controller, watched the screen and prayed.

"Godspeed."

Its nine fifty Pastor, we've got ten minutes. How close are we?" Skeeter said clutching the dash as the pickup was bouncing down Carver Boulevard.

Pastor's eyes were wide as saucers and sweat was dripping down his cheeks.

"About seven blocks north but traffic is getting bad," he said as he slammed on the brakes and cut onto the sidewalk to avoid hitting the car ahead of him. The pickup came to a stop and he honked and then hit his hands on the steering wheel in frustration.

"Maybe we should get out and run," Skeeter said.

"Ya ok. No wait a sec," Pastor said as he jumped out and run up to the stalled Volvo ahead of him that was blocking an alley to the east. Then he lifted the back end up and moved the car out of the way. He scurried back to the pickup, jumped in and looked at Skeeter.

"There's a shortcut if we take that alley to the east then north on Williams Ave," he said. Skeeter was smiling his adrenalin pumping fueled by excitement and fear.

"Wow you just picked up that car! How in the world? If we get through this you should sign up for one of those world strongest man contests."

"It wasn't me," Pastor said with a slight grin as he floored the pickup and sped down the alley.

Chapter Twenty Three:

Saheim needed some air so rolled his window down and then checked his watch. It was nine fifty two. He was perspiring and feeling anxious as his time was running out. Laura sitting in the passenger seat looked straight ahead then glanced over at him.

“Why me?” she asked.

“I said to be quiet. Just do as I say if you want to see your husband again.”

The battle in Saheim’s mind was ramping up. He didn’t know why but there was an uneasiness. He just wasn’t sure, ya that was it. He knew in few minutes he would meet Allah and hopefully, because he was a martyr, he would be rewarded. But something was tugging at him. He thought of his daughter Sidra and how she had changed. The peace she had that seemed so real. And the assurance she had that this God of Christianity, this Jesus, who she had asked to come into her life, seemed so real to her.

It made no sense to him. There was no scale of good deeds against all the bad things one did. You couldn’t do enough good things to earn His grace nor could you commit enough sins that He would not forgive.

Everything was covered by this Jesus and then offered to anyone, no matter what they had done. They could simply ask this Jesus into their heart and ask to be forgiven and it was done. And they were assured eternal life in Heaven.

He tried to push it out of his mind, it went against everything he had been told. Then he decided. He knew he had already made all the concessions he would make. He would die a martyr but he would not explode the bomb to kill all the lives. He was ok with being responsible, driving the truck, being involved and even dying himself. But he would not press the trigger. That thinking made no sense and he even knew it.

It was time. Hatred began to well up inside him as he thought of his daughter Sidra and his niece Amina. How they had become traitors. Laura Rolling’s, the mother to the man who talked his niece into becoming a Christian would press the trigger. She would die along with Ben, Amina and many others including himself.

Chapter Twenty Four:

“There’s no way for it to work,” Sam said shaking his head and watching AJ’s power monitor his laptop. The readings told him there was only one minute left of power for AJ.

“I gotta slow AJ down to conserve power but if I do he will never make it to the Civic Center in time,” he added in a tone of frustration. He wasn’t even sure what to do if he did make it in time.

“God I need your help!”

Then he made his decision. He would trust that God would get the drone there in time and then he would look for the UPS truck and relay the information to Jake and the intercept team. If the power ran out his screen would go black as the cameras lost their power and AJ would lose all control and crash.

He watched as AJ kept screaming over houses streets and trees. Then the Civic Center came into view.

“There it is,” he yelled as he focused in on the screen looking for the truck.

Then he heard the warning tone and glanced at AJ’s power meter on his laptop that now showed zero percent. He knew it wasn’t like a gas tank gauge that went to E and then gave a cushion of a few miles. When the power hit zero it was game over.

He looked back at the camera video feed and he could see the UPS truck parked along some doors along the west side of the Civic Center. He was about five hundred yards away so he angled AJ in the trucks direction while desperately trying to see if anyone was in the trucks area. Then his screen started to flicker and his screen went black.

“Nooooo! I needed to get closer!” he yelled as he stood up and grabbed his phone and dialed Jake.

“Jake its Sam. I flew AJ toward the Civic and he got close enough where I could find the truck. It’s parked on the west side by the northwest doors. But I couldn’t tell if there was anybody in it.”

“Great news Sam! We’re on our way in a chopper and Homeland’s in route on the ground. But we’re still a couple minutes out. Were there any local police arriving there yet that you could see?”

“Nothing that I could see but I only got a brief look before AJ ran out of power and went down.”

“Ok. Looks like we’re four minutes from the location you pinpointed. Let’s hope nothing’s happening exactly at ten.”

“Right,” Sam said with guarded optimism. Then Sam hung up and sent off a quick text to Skeeter.

AJ found truck at Civic Ctr Westside, Jake & team on way

He turned back to his blank laptop screen. Just then Mitch burst into the command center.

“Sam you won’t believe it!”

Chapter Twenty Five:

"He loves you."

Saheim looked at Laura and laughed.

"Who would that be?" he said.

"Jesus. Just give Him a chance, He died for you and He really loves you."

Saheim's eyes darkened and his eyes momentarily looked away from Laura.

"Shut up or you will die. Now listen to me carefully," he said as he checked his watch. Nine fifty eight. Then he carefully pulled Laura's cell phone from his pocket.

"We have our money. If you do exactly as I say you will be with your husband in a few minutes. Now you will take your phone and call your husband and tell him where you are. Then tell him we will leave you in this truck and he can pick you up at 10:30 this morning. After you call you will give me the phone back. I don't want you calling anyone else after I leave. Do you understand?"

Laura nodded. "Are you letting me go?"

"Like I said, only if you do exactly as I say."

Saheim showed no emotion but on the inside there was a war raging for his soul. And just like that it was decided. He handed her the phone.

"Allahu Akbar," he whispered to himself.

Laura looked at her phone and moved her right index finger to press the dial button for Richard's number. Then the phone slipped out of her left hand down to the passenger side floor of the truck.

Saheim's body tightened momentarily as he thought it would trigger the explosives.

"What are you doing? Pick it up now and call him," he said looking at his watch that said exactly ten o'clock.

"Sorry it slipped out," she said with a trembling voice.

Laura reached down to grab the phone. Saheim was watching her when suddenly his head exploded with pain. For a split second consciousness flickered and he was sure the explosives went off. Then he was confused and time seemed

to stand still. The left side of his head was bleeding profusely but he was still sitting in the pickup and Laura was still in the passenger seat. How could that be?

Then he saw a miniature airplane flipped over lying on the trucks dash. The nose crumpled with blood and flesh smeared on it and its wings broken.

Then it became dark and death swallowed him up and Saheim's soul entered into its eternal destination.

Chapter Twenty Six:

Laura still bent over trying to pick up the phone but she couldn't move, her body frozen in shock, her eyes staring at the lifeless corpse of her assailant. She tried to scream but nothing came out.

Then she heard a faint banging noise on the passenger window and it became louder. She slowly turned her head. The door burst open and she saw an angel, her angel - Richard.

"Laura, Laura. Are you alright? I love you baby are you ok?" Pastor said as he wrapped his arms around his wife. Laura still in shock was starting to regain her senses.

"Richard oh Richard. Help me!"

"It's ok I'm here now. Its ok you're going to be alright," He said.

"Laura I gotta get you out of here ok?"

She nodded as he lifted her out of the car.

"Wait my phones down there," she said pointing to the floor.

"No! No don't touch the phone!" Skeeter said as he jumped in between her and the floor. Laura looked confused and then her body went limp as she passed out.

"Let's get out of here now!" Skeeter said.

Pastor pulled Laura out of the truck and ran with her in his arms.

Skeeter reached in the truck and grabbed the mangled airplane.

"You don't look so good AJ," he said as he ran to catch up with Pastor and Laura.

Then he saw three black suburban's speeding up to them and not far behind a chopper and all sorts of police cars with lights and sirens converging on the area.

"Hey Pastor we got to Laura at ten o-three and look over there the cavalry has arrived at ten o-five!"

Skeeter said excitedly pointing to all the police and Homeland suburban's.

"I think the cavalry arrived at ten o'clock,"

Pastor said nodding at AJ nestled in Skeeter's hand and then looking up to the Heavens.

Jake jumped out of the chopper and came running up to them with some men.

“Nice work you guys. I don’t know how you got here in time,” he said

“Saheim’s dead. He’s in the truck, the phone’s lying on the passenger side floor,” Skeeter reported excitedly.

“What? He’s dead? Ok. These men will get you back to safety. We got it from here.”

Chapter Twenty Seven:

Twenty four hours later - undisclosed location:

The room had off white walls, a tongue and groove pine vaulted ceiling but no windows. In the center was long oak table with Pastor Rolling's, Laura, Sam and Skeeter sitting on one side and Jake with two other men and two women sitting across from them. Coffee water and donuts dispensed as well.

"I thank you for your patience with this debriefing I know you've been sitting here all morning. But I think we're about done and once again I want to thank all of you for everything you have done,"

Jake said looking across at everyone's eyes then continued.

"Again I'm sorry we can't give you a public recognition but like I said we're an off the radar tentacle of the agency. And I can't state enough the importance for none of you to speak to anyone regarding what happened - ever. Pastor your bank account has already been reimbursed for the money you lost plus a bonus. And even though we can't give you anything public all of you will get some type of compensation."

One of the other men spoke.

"Sam the program you implemented with the wire transfer was able to give us a number of leads for finding the source of the terrorist funding. It's an excellent and very creative piece of programming code. We would be very interested in working with you, even maybe looking at bringing you on the team down the road if you have any interest."

"Thanks I appreciate the offer," Sam said while being nudged by Skeeter.

"Assad, Taha and Saheim are all confirmed dead and we were able to neutralize the explosives in the truck without incident," Jake said smiling.

"What about the Civic Center you evacuated? Didn't you have to tell them what was going on?" Pastor said.

"It was treated as a bomb threat that came in with the threat inside the Center or possibly nearby in a truck. The evacuation was standard procedure. So we

were able to deal with the UPS truck without suspicion. The bomb squad neutralized the explosives then drove the truck to one of our evidence facilities for us to go over,” Jake added.

“One more thing,” Sara Collins an FBI agent, stated.

“Just to be clear on the drone that took out Saheim. Sam you said it ran out of power about five hundred yards from the truck, right?”

“Yes the power meter on my laptop went to zero then I spotted the truck and veered AJ, I mean the drone, in that general direction. Then everything went blank as it lost power.”

“Yet somehow it managed to keep flying, making a number of other maneuvers, then hone in on the UPS truck and drop in altitude to the precise height of the truck’s window. Then it flew into the truck’s driver side window which was half open and struck Saheim perfectly on the left side of his head on his temple?” She added looking at Sam with disbelief.

“Ya I guess so. That’s what all the evidence shows,” Sam replied.

She looked at her colleague next to her who shrugged and said,

“UPI I guess”

Sara nodded and then started to write something in her report.

“What’s UPI?” Pastor asked.

“Unexplained Phenomena Incident. We use it when there isn’t any logical explanation for something,” Jake added.

“Unexplained Phenomena Incident huh? Maybe I could offer you a shorter term for your report. How about miracle,” Pastor stated.

Looking at Pastor then down at her report, “I don’t see that as a choice on our government form,” she said looking back up at Pastor.

“Ya I suppose not,”

Pastor said smiling at Laura, Sam and Skeeter and shaking his head.

“Ok we’re done. Thanks again. Sam could you stay for a moment? The rest of you will be escorted back to the chopper and on your way home. And I apologize for the inconvenience and the need for blindfolding you all. But its

best you don't learn anymore about us than you already have,"
Jake said shaking their hands. Everyone left the room except Jake and Sam.

"Sam I promised you five minutes. Follow me."

They walked down the hall to a closed door.

"Go on in and see your second UPI of this mission,"
Jake said smiling and slapping Sam on the back. Sam opened the door and walked in.

Across the room bandaged up in a bed was another miracle from the mission, his uncle Curt. His face was burned and swollen with all sorts of cuts and he had a broken arm and ankle, but he was alive. Sam smiled and teared up.

"Sam! It's about time you got here. This place is driving me crazy. Can you grab my clothes over there in that closet? Let's get out of here,"
Curt said as he tried to lift up his head then cringed and laid back.

"Curt I thought you were dead then after I thought AJ went down Mitch came running up to me and said they found you and Tanner alive."

"Then Sam paused. "Curt I'm so sorry I brought you into all of this?"

"Hold on Sam don't you try apologizing for any of this. You and Skeeter are hero's man! And Pastor Rolling's. You helped save a lot of lives. And I get myself into things my own messes. Nobody talks me into anything. So there."

Sam smiled and nodded. Curt continued.

"So it's pretty obvious the man upstairs was helping us out, wouldn't you say? Look at me. I should be dead. Part of me wishes He would have taken me home. I mean a mansion with a room, a new incorruptible body with no pain. Living forever with no more brokenness or sin. But instead I'm here and man the body hurts but the docs say I'll make a full recovery. So I guess the Lord isn't done with me yet on this side. That means I'll give Him everything I got until He calls me home."

Sam started to laugh.

"So how about you Sam? You done wrestling with God?"

"Ya I think so. He's really been doing some work on me."

“Good! Because you’re not gunna come out on top with that match. I never did and neither did our Old Testament friend Jacob. Hey maybe you two can exchange stories on your futile efforts when you get to Heaven,”
Curt said laughing.

“Ya maybe,” Sam said laughing as well.

“Now come on over here and give me the details of what went down. Those Langley guys didn’t tell me much. They’re getting tight lipped again.”

Sam walked over and sat down.

Chapter Twenty Eight:

One week later – Sam's house:

Skeeter peddled up the driveway, leaned his Schwinn against the garage and walked up to the house with his backpack and rang the doorbell.

"Hi Skeeter. Come on in. How are you?"

Sam's mom said as she opened the door.

"I'm good."

"Sam's up in his room studying. I'm really proud of you two, putting so much time in on your homework. You can go on up he's expecting you."

"Ok thanks, and ya we're trying to keep the grades up you know," he said heading for the stairs and seeing Sam's dad reading in the den.

"Evening sir," Skeeter said.

"Hi Skeeter. Good to see you. And keep up the good school work and someday you'll be able to contribute to society in a positive way," he said.

"Ya like maybe stopping terrorist from blowing up buildings and people," Skeeter thought as he hiked up the stairs.

"Hey Skeet come on in," Sam said hearing a knock at his bedroom door.

"Hi Sam. Alright there's AJ! Wow he looks good. Is he working yet?"

"Yep he's almost where he was before he got smashed up. Just a few more things to patch up. But look at this."

Sam said showing Skeeter a diagram on his computer.

"No way. You plan on adding all of that to AJ?"

"Sure am. It's just gunna take a while and we might need some more cash. Guess I'll have to hit Curt up again. After he's feeling better of course."

"Ready for some homework?" Sam asked.

"Not really," Skeeter replied eyeing Sam's Calculus book opened up on the desk.

"Good because I got something a little more fun,"

Sam said as he pulled out a box and showed Skeeter.

"No way! Are you kidding me! This is so awesome! Where did you get it?"

"Bought it on E-bay a couple days ago and it just showed up today," Sam said.

“Can we play?”

“Sure. Homework can wait a bit. Check out the controllers cool huh?”

Sam said plugging everything in. Skeeter’s eyes lit up as the music kicked in.

“Nintendo Sixty Four with Super Mario! Sweet!”

The End