CHAPTER 1

The White House

Washington, DC

December 9, 0050 hours EST

"Madam President, wake up! Russian ICBMs are inbound! We have to get you and your family to the bunker," Agent Jared Wagner said, as he leaned over the bed of the President of the United States and shook her shoulder.

"Paul . . . our daughter . . ." the president mumbled, as she woke from a dream. She had been a teenager in Louisiana hunting alligators with her father, but in the dream the alligators were hunting them.

"We have her, Madam President! Please . . . both of you . . . get out of bed and come with me!" Agent Wagner pleaded, as he pulled the president out from beneath her covers and onto the floor.

"Paul . . . we have to go . . . something is happening!" Clarisse said, as she blinked in the sudden brightness of their bedroom and stared, as another agent pulled her husband from beneath his covers and guided him toward the door.

"I need my robe . . . my slippers . . ."

"Both of you . . . listen to me or die where you stand! We have to reach the bunker! Now, move!" Agent Wagner yelled, as he grabbed the President by the arm and dragged her from the room toward the waiting elevator.

"Where is my daughter?" the president asked, as she stumbled out of the bedroom and toward the elevator at the end of the hall.

"She's waiting in the elevator!" Agent Wagner said, as he glanced down the hall.

Denise, the young daughter and only child of the president, stood in the elevator, eyes wide with fear, as her parents were rushed toward her. As they entered and the doors shut, she wrapped herself around her father.

President Clarisse Beaumont stood barefoot in her pajamas, barely noticing as Colonel Blake Atkins removed his uniform jacket and draped it around her shoulders.

"Colonel, what do we know?" the president asked, as her mind began to clear, and she realized what was happening.

"Madam President, we have confirmed the Russians launched six RS-28 Sarmat ICBMs approximately ten minutes ago. Each missile contains ten one-megaton warheads. Initial projections have them heading for the East Coast."

"How long do we have?"

"Approximately 20 minutes."

"This makes no sense. They know we'll retaliate. Just these six missiles?" the president replied, as she wiped sleep from her eyes.

"Yes, Ma'am, as far as we know."

She stared at her shaking hands, glanced at her husband and daughter, then said, "Paul, take care of her. I won't see you for a while."

"I'll take care of her. You take care of us," he replied, as the elevator doors opened to a hallway outside the Deep Bunker.

The Presidential Emergency Operations Center, located below the East Wing of the White House, was constructed during World War II to protect President Roosevelt from an aerial attack on Washington. Its existence was common knowledge and the subject of numerous movies and novels. Lesser known was its replacement located 500 feet deeper than the old bunker. The Deep Bunker was secretly constructed during the 'Big Dig' renovations of the White House from 2010-2012.

"I need some clothes, some coffee and all the details," the president said, as her family left the elevator and was escorted through the massive vault doors that began to close as soon as they passed through.

"On your left, Madam President. Major Kim will continue the briefing as you get dressed. Eighteen minutes, Madam President!"

The room was compact, 20 feet on a side. The walls were mint green, her favorite color. The carpet and furnishings were all coordinated and reminded her of their bedroom upstairs. She had never seen this room, nor this facility before.

"The closet is on your left Madam President," said Major Angela Kim, as she opened a file on her iPad and began reading.

"The Boost Phase of six RS-28 Sarmat ICBMs was detected at 0039 hours Eastern time. The Ascent Phase was complete three minutes later. The Midcourse Phase, at an elevation of 1200 miles, is ongoing. Sixty one-megaton warheads are projected to impact the eastern seaboard almost simultaneously. Eleven are targeting the Washington, DC area. The remainder will be scattered along the East Coast, focusing on civilian areas and our remaining military bases. Existing ABM systems are projected to intercept approximately 30 percent of the incoming warheads. At least three will impact the Washington, DC area."

"Enough! What is our analysis of the reasoning behind this attack?"

"The attack is unusual, but focused. Projections indicate that the Russians are primarily trying to eliminate all of our federal government and military centers located on the East Coast. Once they are removed, they will be able to accelerate their invasion plans for North America."

"That doesn't make any damn sense. What do they expect us to do, sit on our hands and get nuked? Within ten minutes I'll approve a total nuclear response. Every ballistic submarine and missile silo still operable will launch an overwhelming attack! Russia will cease to exist! This is madness!" the president said, as she hurriedly stripped from her pajamas and struggled into a blue suit that she had last worn during her inauguration as Vice President.

"Madam President, all I can do is give you the facts . . . as we know them. As we receive updated information, you will be the first to know."

. . . .

Ministry of Defense Building

22 Frunzenskaya Naberezhnaya Avenue

Moscow, Russia

0900 hours MSK

"Grigory . . . what is happening? Did the missiles launch?" asked President Vladimirovich Morozov, as he paced in his study deep beneath the Ministry of Defense Building in central Moscow.

"Yes, Comrade President! They have left their silos. The Americans will have seen them by now and will be preparing a counter strike," replied General Grigory Gerasimov, commanding general of the Russian military.

"This damned computer . . . this AI . . . can we stop it?"

"No . . . and the Americans don't have the resources to stop this strike against them. We are . . . our only chance is . . . if we . . ." General Gerasimov began, then paused.

"What? What are you thinking?"

"Comrade President, I have made inquiries . . . we can shoot them down. They are still within range!"

"Shoot down our own missiles?"

"Yes, Comrade President. In less than two minutes they will exit the atmosphere and begin the cruise phase before scattering their warheads and plunging toward the American East Coast."

"Self-destructs! Don't we have the ability to just blow them up?"

"We tried, Comrade President. The AI disabled the system."

"But . . . shoot down our own missiles, Grigory?" President Morozov said, as he sagged into his chair and retrieved his MP-443 Grach pistol from the nearby table and caressed it gently.

"Vladimirovich . . . my old friend of so many years. The Americans will not be able to stop all these warheads. We have countermeasures and dummy warheads in the delivery systems. As soon as our warheads impact on the East Coast, the Americans will launch a response from silos in the Dakotas. They are still intact, despite all the quakes. Then, their ballistic submarines will launch . . . we will respond . . . bombers will launch on both sides . . . neither of us will survive this kind of war. Two minutes, Comrade President . . . you must decide! This was not your plan. We can still win a conventional war . . . but not this. This is suicide!"

"Shoot them down, Grigory . . . all our missiles. Then destroy this damn computer that is trying to kill us all . . ."

. . . .

Distribution Center

Kostromskaya Power Station

Volgorechensk, Russia

0902 hours MSK

"Kazamir, are you sure you want to do this? We are cutting power to over 800,000 people! It is minus eight degrees outside!" Polina Morava asked, as Kazamir Borisov stood over her shoulder at the main control console of the Kostromskaya Power Station Distribution Center.

"I just finished a video conference with General Gerasimov, the Great Bear himself! Switch all power to the Finger, or we're both dead!"

"But, Kazamir . . ."

"Now! Polina! Transfer all our power there!"

The Kostromskaya Power Station consisted of nine gas-powered generating units combined to produce 3,600 MW of electrical power. Within seconds, all the power had been reallocated from tens of thousands of homes and businesses . . . to one location.

The site, known locally as Lenin's Finger, had been operable for only two years. The official name was Observatory 7. It was an enormous tower over 200 meters tall and 50 meters in diameter. There was an enormous sliding door perched high on the side of the tower, the side that faced toward the west. To some, it looked like a fingernail. Hence, Lenin's middle finger, pointed toward the West.

. . . .

Observatory 7

0904 hours MSK

"Yes, Doctor Vorovski . . . six consecutive shots at 30-second intervals!" General Karvokov ordered, as he slammed his hand on the fire control panel.

"We can't, General! It will destroy my system!"

"The People's System, comrade! We have our orders! You have one minute to commence firing!"

"I refuse! This is insane. It has taken us ten years to build and perfect this system."

"We commence firing in 50 seconds, Comrade, or I will put a bullet in your brain," General Karvokov said, as he removed his pistol from its holster, chambered a round, and placed the muzzle against the scientist's temple.

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Forty seconds, Doctor Vorovski. If you don't fire, I will kill you, and then shoot myself. General Gerasimov is not a gentle man. He would have me killed slowly. The same goes for your family. You have a wife and three children. Thirty seconds!"

. . . .

1200 miles above the Norwegian Sea

0906 hours MSK

The six RS-28 Sarmat ICBMs had reached their apogee of 1200 miles above the earth within six minutes after launch. Two minutes later, each warhead system would dispense numerous electronic countermeasures and dummy warheads prior to releasing the ten one-megaton warheads. The countermeasures were intended to confuse any attempt at intercepting the warheads as they plunged through the atmosphere toward their targets along the East Coast of the United States.

The first warhead package was struck at 0906 and 23 seconds by a beam of light almost a meter in diameter. Rather than detonating the fissile and fusionable material in the multiple warheads on board, the intense beam converted the entire system into a harmless gas. Thirty seconds later another warhead was destroyed . . . then another. But time was running out . . .

. . . .

Observatory 7

0908 hours MSK

"Excellent! But hurry, Vorovski! The three remaining warheads are at their release points!" shouted General Karvokov, as multiple system alarms began sounding in the control room.

"It's overheating! I can't guarantee the accuracy! We are hitting a bullet travelling at Mach 20 from over 2100 miles away. It needs five minutes to cool between shots. You are asking the impossible!"

"Shoot! We have to try!"

The Kop'ye Molnii (Lightning Spear) laser weapon was the big brother of the Persevet system that had been so successful at shooting down Dorys and other US aircraft in Canada and Europe. Both systems used Chirped Pulse Amplification (CPA) to achieve their massive output. Unlike earlier systems, whose beams were ineffective in cloudy or wet conditions, the CPA beams vaporized the atmosphere itself. Each time the Lightning Spear fired, it created a sonic boom and released an enormous amount of thermal and ultraviolet radiation. The six focusing crystals, each over ten feet long and three feet in diameter, spun at 1200 rpm. After the fourth shot, they began to glow. After the fifth, they were red hot. After the sixth and final shot . . . Observatory 7 exploded. All that remained were ruins. Debris landed as far as two miles away.

. . . .

600 miles above Greenland

0909 hours MSK

The Terminal Phase for the final RS-28 Sarmat ICBM had begun. Ten one-megaton thermonuclear warheads were released along with a series of dummy warheads and electronic countermeasures. Within minutes, the Northeast United States would receive a blow from which it would never recover. Cities from Portland, Maine to Philadelphia, would be obliterated.

. . . .

USS Jason Dunham

40 miles east of Boston, Massachusetts

0109 hours EST

The General Quarters alarm echoed throughout the 509-foot, 9100-ton Arleigh Burke-Class guided missile destroyer, as the bow turned rapidly toward the north and accelerated to over 30 knots. Captain Scott Scarpelli rubbed his eyes, then reread the order that had originated from the North American Aerospace Defense Command.

"Lieutenant Commander Bays, is that new laser weapon system operable yet?" asked Captain Scarpelli, over his link to the Combat Information Center (CIC), two decks below the bridge.

"Sir, the system has only been installed in the 5-inch gun turret for three days. We haven't even been able to test its operability. The operating manual isn't even one of ours. It's some civilian crap in a Word format. It's pretty sketchy by Navy standards," replied Lieutenant Commander Wesley Bays.

The American copy of the Russian Persevet laser weapon system had been received at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard less than a week before. In an act of shipyard magic, the 5-inch gun turret on the forward deck had been gutted on the inside, and the laser system and power source installed, in less than 48 hours. The shipyard refused to guarantee anything.

"Well, it looks like we're going to find out if it works as advertised," Captain Scarpelli said, as he stared out the armored bridge windows into a black rolling sea, wondering if they would all be alive in an hour.

"Captain . . . it's ready . . . powered up, but . . ."

"It's just another weapons system, Commander. Be ready to fire in two minutes. It's hooked into the Aegis Combat System. Start tracking. We have ten incoming nuclear warheads projected to impact in the northeast."

"Sir, why don't we use our SM-3 missiles? They have greater range, and we know they work."

"We're the last line of defense, Commander. There are a lot of other people looking at this problem. Whatever gets through is our responsibility."

Commander Bays sat in stunned silence, then replied, "I guess this isn't a drill is it, Sir?"

"No, Wes . . . this isn't a drill. Be prepared to shoot these things down."

"Roger that, Captain!" Commander Bays replied, as he switched channels to the crew manning the CIC.

. . . .

The White House Deep Bunker

0109 hours EST

"People! I need an updated status on this threat, and I need it now!" President Beaumont demanded, as she walked into the main briefing room of the Deep Bunker.

"Madam President, the Russians seem to have destroyed five of their own missiles. The sixth one has survived. It has dispersed a payload of warheads, and numerous dummy and electronic countermeasure devices. With the loss of our Ground-Based, Mid-Course Defense systems at Ft. Greely, Alaska and Vandenburg Air Force base in California, we can't intercept missiles during the mid-course, high-altitude phase. The only capability we have left are shorter range intercept missiles along the Atlantic seaboard," replied Colonel Frank Young, as he snapped to attention as the president entered.

"Are you the senior officer here?"

"Yes, Madam President. Senior officers are inbound. I have the night shift."

"Well, Colonel, it looks like you and I are going to become friends in the next few minutes. Why are the Russians destroying their own missiles, and what are we doing about the last one?" she asked, as she slid into her seat beside the colonel.

"They screwed something up, Ma'am, and they tried to fix it. This doesn't feel like an all-out attack. The Russians aren't stupid. They know we'll just respond in kind. There are still ten warheads from the last RS-28 inbound for the Northeast. We have a few THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) and PAC-3 Patriot systems located in that area, but they aren't designed for this kind of intercept. Our Aegis Ashore systems would be effective but are still in transit from Europe. Four of the new laser systems have been installed. Three are around the Washington, DC area. The fourth is on a navy destroyer somewhere off the coast. Another six are being installed on the East Coast but aren't operable. Sorry, Ma'am, but that's all I have."

Clarisse could feel her heart pounding in her chest. She had grown accustomed to the helplessness she often felt as president, but this situation had a sense of finality that was overwhelming.

*"The nation may be dead ten minutes from now. If the Northeast is struck, that would leave the Southeast as the only intact section of the country remaining. The old confederate states may be all that remain of the United States of America. How ironic is that?"* she thought, as she stared at the red phone on the table in front of her.

The old-fashioned phone had only two buttons. One led to the People's Republic of China. The other was connected to her counterpart in Moscow. She picked up the phone, pressed the button labeled 'Moscow' and waited . . .

. . . .

Ministry of Defense Building

22 Frunzenskaya Naberezhnaya Avenue

Moscow, Russia

0908 hours MSK

"Damn it! Damn it! What happened to the last missile? Why is it still on the screen?" President Morozov raged, as he paced back and forth in the Information Hall of the National Defense Management Center. They were 300 feet below the streets of Moscow, encased inside 30 feet of steel-reinforced concrete. The steel entry door weighed 25 tons and took two minutes to open. The room was circular, 90 feet in diameter. The walls were 20 feet high and lined with interlocked monitors along the entire circumference. The impression was of sitting inside a movie theater and being surrounded by the screen. In the center was a raised platform containing a large circular table. The platform was surrounded by three rings of workstations. Technicians and soldiers were constantly updating displayed information from all over the world.

"Comrade President, only one of our Lightning Spear systems was within range. They pushed the weapon past its limit. It exploded after five shots. One warhead package is still on course for the United States. The Americans are activating their defenses, but . . ." General Gerasimov began, then paused.

"Grigory . . . ten warheads . . . ten! Isn't that what's inside one of those things? Can they stop it, or have we just started a nuclear war?"

"Comrade President, we spent billions of rubles, over decades, to build a weapon that could strike the United States. This is a limited strike, but it will be very difficult for the Americans to stop all of these warheads. Some of them will make it through."

An indicator on the red phone at the far end of the table began to flash. Both men stared at each other, then back at the phone.

. . . .

The White House Deep Bunker

0109 hours EST

"President Morozov, it would seem that you intend to start a nuclear war. You do understand that both our nations will be dead before this day is over?" President Beaumont said, after President Morozov answered her call.

"Madam President . . . this is an accident! We have a computer system . . . an advanced AI. It initiated this attack without my approval. The cursed thing has sealed itself inside a bunker and killed all the personnel that control it. We are attempting to breach the bunker, but it may take hours. We have shot down five of our own missiles, but . . ."

"It's the 'but' that will destroy both of our nations, President Morozov. If the United States is struck by ten one-megaton warheads . . . we will respond with overwhelming force. Then, you will respond in kind. Your war of aggression has led us to this point of destroying each other!"

"I am not a fool, Madam President! I didn't want this kind of war. No one wins! We have tried to avert this . . . situation. You have my apology."

"Apology? Mr. President, I am 30 seconds from approving the launching of over 300 nuclear tipped missiles toward Russia. I need more than an apology. Pardon me . . . I've been notified that your warheads are three minutes from impact. If even one of these warheads penetrates our defenses, you can expect a rapid response. Goodbye, President Morozov," Clarisse said, and terminated the call.

. . . .

USS Jason Dunham

40 miles east of Boston, Massachusetts

0112 hours EST

"Three incoming, Captain! Almost due north! System is cycling up to speed. Preparing to fire as soon as they are within range!" said Lieutenant Commander Bays from his position in the CIC.

"Commence firing as soon as those warheads are within range!"

"Sir, there's a warning in the documentation to cycle the system every 30 seconds or it will overheat!"

"Ignore that! Take down those warheads, Commander Bays!"

"Aye, Captain! They'll be within range in . . . ten seconds!"

. . . .

Elevation three miles

60 miles Northeast of Boston, Massachusetts

0112 hours EST

Three warheads remained of the original ten mounted on the RS-28 Sarmat. Seven of the warheads, along with all the countermeasures and dummy warheads, had been destroyed by a variety of anti-missile devices hurled at them by a depleted United States military. All that remained in defense was an experimental device hastily copied from a component captured during the fighting in Alaska. The three warheads were scattered across the sky. One was homing in on Providence, Rhode Island. A second, for New Haven Connecticut. The third and final one-megaton thermonuclear device targeted Boston, Massachusetts . . .

. . . .

USS Jason Dunham

40 miles east of Boston, Massachusetts

0113 hours EST

The USS Jason Dunham struggled through the darkness with heavy seas breaking over the bow. Visibility was less than a mile. A snow squall filled the air with nature's fallout. Suddenly, a string of red beams began to thrust upward into the darkness from the newly installed laser system mounted in the forward gun turret. The bursts lasted less than a second. After a half second pause, another burst. The cycle continued for over two minutes . . .

. . . .

South Boston Police District C-6

Boston, Massachusetts

0115 hours EST

"Great! More frigging snow. I should have retired last year and moved to Florida," Detective Jack O'Shaughnessy said, as he stood on the rear loading dock and lit another cigarette.

At 62 he was past the minimum retirement age, but he didn't want to leave his job. Forty-two years as a cop, and he still looked forward to going to work. He knew his biological clock was winding down. His knees hurt, his back hurt, and his mind wasn't quite as sharp as it had once been, but, by God, he still loved it, even on night shift.

"Sirens! Those aren't EMS or ours. Who the hell is having a drill at one o'clock in the frigging morning?"

Then a chill ran up his spine as he recognized the haunting wail of a Civil Defense siren.

"If it's a drill, it'll stop in a few seconds. If it's real . . ."

Then his cell phone began to vibrate. He threw the cigarette aside and pulled his phone from a coat pocket as the siren continued to wail.

"Jesus . . . Presidential Alert . . . imminent nuclear attack . . . take shelter immediately!" Detective O'Shaughnessy said, as he thought of his wife sleeping peacefully at home.

"Yeah, should have retired," he mumbled, as the sky lit up and Boston ceased to exist . . .

CHAPTER 2

The White House Deep Bunker

Washington, DC

December 9, 0210 hours EST

*"I think I'm becoming numb to the horror. Stalin was right. One death is a tragedy. A million deaths are a statistic,"* President Beaumont thought, as she glanced up and noticed the steadily increasing death toll estimate flash up on a screen to her left. There was no available video from the area.

"Madam President, what are we waiting for? Look at that number! Over a million dead and rising!" shouted Secretary of Defense John Masters, who had reached the Deep Bunker only moments before.

"We aren't launching a full-scale attack, Secretary Masters. We're going to . . ."

"What? Are you telling me we're not going to reply to this atrocity? How can you sit there and . . ."

"Secretary Masters . . . if you interrupt me one more time, I'll have you removed. Sit down and listen! Colonel Atkins, play the recording of my conversation with President Morozov," President Beaumont ordered, as she glared at the Secretary of Defense.

The Deep Bunker replicated the capabilities of the Situation Room. Members of the National Security Council had been summoned and were gradually arriving. The looks on the faces at the table varied from shocked, to furious, and every emotion in between. The recording was repeated numerous times.

"Opinions?" President Beaumont asked.

"Madam President, I met him several years ago during his one and only visit to the US. He's an arrogant bastard, extremely confident, brutal eyes. But . . . the man in that recording was scared. I know what that sounds like, and . . . he's been drinking. But, in my opinion, I believe his story," said General Adam Munford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

"I agree, Madam President. We knew they had an AI in their National Defense Center. We didn't know it was sentient," said Miles Burton, the CIA Director.

"Madam President . . . I apologize for my earlier rudeness, but how are we going to respond to this?" asked Secretary Masters.

"What was the population of the greater Boston area?" the president asked.

"Over four million, Madam President," responded Colonel Atkins.

"Give me a list of Russian cities with a similar population and cultural significance."

"Madam President? What are your intentions?" asked Secretary Masters.

"I grew up in the swamps of Louisiana, hunting alligators with my father. The hunting season was short. You had to buy a limited number of tags to hunt. They weren't cheap. The hides and the meat put food on our table and money in the bank for the entire year. Every hunter had a territory, a place where they set bait. Occasionally, hunters would poach on each other. The police were never notified. Swamp people settled their own differences. An eye for an eye, if you understand me."

"Madam President . . . the screen on your right," General Munford said.

The screen showed a map of Russia. As the image zoomed in, one city was highlighted . . . St. Petersburg, 375 miles northwest of Moscow, an important port on the Baltic sea . . . population five million. The city had been founded by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703. It was one of Russia's great cultural centers.

"General Munford, I want you to prepare an ICBM strike on St. Petersburg. One missile . . . one warhead of a similar size to the one that struck Boston. Is that possible?"

"Yes, Madam President. Just one missile? The Russians have defenses."

"Yes, General . . . just the one. How long before we can launch?"

"Approximately 20 minutes, Madam President."

"Make the preparations. I have a call to make. Colonel Atkins, please connect me with President Morozov."

Clarisse looked around the table. Other than General Munford, everyone present was staring at her.

*"An eye for an eye . . . a tooth for a tooth . . . a city for a city,"* she thought, as a phone was connected and placed before her.

. . . .

Ministry of Defense Building

22 Frunzenskaya Naberezhnaya Avenue

Moscow, Russia

1010 hours MSK

"Grigory, have the Americans launched any missiles yet? Are we ready to defend the Motherland?" President Morozov shouted, as he stood at the top of the spiral stairs that led down from his study and into the Information Hall of the National Defense Management Center.

"Not yet, Comrade President! Our nuclear forces have been activated and our missile defenses are prepared to defend the Motherland," replied General Gerasimov, perched on the central dais of the Information Hall below. He stared in disbelief at the tumbler and half empty bottle of vodka in the president's hands.

"What of that thing . . . the cursed computer that started all this? Have we breached the door? Have we destroyed it?" the president asked, as he filled the tumbler and drained it.

"We have managed to isolate it, Comrade President, but the door will take another hour!" General Gerasimov replied, as an officer approached him with a message.

General Gerasimov stared at the message and then up at the President of Russia, who had turned and walked back toward his private study.

"Wait two minutes and then transfer the call up to his study," the general ordered, as he set the message on the table and began walking toward the spiral stairs.

Two minutes later

General Gerasimov shut the door after entering the darkened study. The only light came from an ornate desk lamp that had belonged to Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known by his alias, Vladimir Lenin. The ornate pewter base was topped by an opaque, bright green glass shade. It was said that Lenin signed the orders for the murder of hundreds of thousands of people under the light of this lamp. He preferred to sign such orders at night.

"Grigory! Come . . . sit with me! We will drink some vodka together before the world ends!"

"Comrade President, it's the American President. She has called back. You should talk to her," General Gerasimov said, as the phone to the president's left began to blink.

"So, the bitch wants to talk! She hung up on me, Grigory! On me! Comrade President Vladimirovich Morozov! Leader of the new Soviet Union! Why should I talk to her? Give me one good reason. What is she going to tell me? That she has launched a thousand missiles at Mother Russia? So what? I will launch a thousand missiles at what's left of America!"

"Comrade President, perhaps this can be avoided. We can still win this war, but not if there is an all-out nuclear exchange."

"So, if the bitch wants us to pull out of Western Europe or Alaska, you would have me agree? Is that what you are saying, Grigory, my old friend of many years, who was once a bear, then a fox and perhaps now a coward?" the president said, then downed the full tumbler and refilled it.

Grigory Gerasimov was a large and powerful man, well over six feet tall and over 300 pounds. He clenched his huge fists, and for a few seconds, considered strangling the President of Russia.

"Comrade President, just listen to her. This time, you can hang up on her. Perhaps, she will start crying. That would be amusing."

"Hah! The President of the United States . . . crying! That would be amusing!" President Morozov said, as he stared at the blinking phone and activated the speaker.

"Greetings, President Beaumont! What do you want this time?"

"President Morozov, I believe we have unfinished business. One of your warheads penetrated our defenses. The city of Boston has been destroyed. My generals wish to launch a total strike on the Soviet Union. I would prefer to avoid such a harsh response."

"Good! I will accept your total surrender. Europe is falling and your country is a mess," President Morozov said, and laughed.

There was silence for a few seconds. Morozov stared at the phone, and then at General Gerasimov.

"I think she has hung up on me again, Grigory!"

"No, Mister President, I'm still here. I have a proposal. I will ask this one time. Then I will hang up and direct my generals to destroy your country."

President Morozov began laughing, then refilled his tumbler.

"Comrade President! Listen to her!" General Gerasimov said, as he placed his hand over the tumbler and slid it to the side.

"All right! I am listening, Madam President. What is your proposal?"

"I believe what you told me earlier was the truth. The launch was an accident caused by your AI. I thank you for destroying most of the missiles launched, but . . . Boston has been destroyed. We will now agree to trade cities."

"Trade? Trade what? What are you talking about?"

"I will have a single missile launched toward St. Petersburg, Russia. It will have a single, one-megaton warhead. You will allow that warhead to destroy St. Petersburg. You are familiar with the biblical concept of . . ."

" . . . an eye for an eye? You expect me to allow you to destroy one of the greatest cities in Mother Russia? Why would I do that?"

"Because, I will destroy St. Petersburg and a thousand other Russian cities. Better yet, we now have nuclear warheads designed specifically for hardened targets like your headquarters below the Ministry of Defense Building. I believe it's called an earth-penetrating weapon. It plunges 200 feet below ground before detonating. The shock wave is supposed to be capable of shattering 50 feet of reinforced concrete. How thick is your bunker, Mr. President? The choice is now yours. Do we destroy each other along with most of the world, or do you sacrifice St. Petersburg to compensate for the destruction of Boston?"

President Morozov reached for the tumbler of vodka, but General Gerasimov slid it further away and began speaking softly in Russian.

"Comrade President . . . take the deal or lose everything. We are winning the conventional war. So far, Mother Russia is completely intact. St. Petersburg is a great city, but worth the sacrifice. After we rule the world, we will have it rebuilt and name it Morozovgrad. We will fill it with treasures from Europe and America. We will tear down the White House and have it rebuilt as a museum of your greatness. But . . . we have to survive. The United States is crumbling to pieces. They are already beaten. What is their phrase? Dead men walking! That is all they are. It is time to think clearly and be clever, my friend of so many years."

President Morozov stared at the tumbler of vodka, took a deep breath, and wiped the sweat from his face. He stared up at the huge man leaning over him and nodded in agreement.

"Madam President, we have an agreement. An eye for an eye. I will need some time to get the orders out to the military. There may be some resistance to dropping our defenses."

"I understand perfectly, Mr. President. How long do you need?"

President Morozov turned and stared once more at General Gerasimov, who held up three fingers, while mouthing three hours.

"Three hours, Madam President."

"Agreed! We will launch a single missile at 1320 hours your time and the ledger will be balanced."

"Madam President, you are losing this war. Why not avoid further suffering and surrender now. You have no allies. Your nation is shattered. Your military is fighting with dwindling resources. You are being needlessly stubborn, and your people are paying the price."

"1320 hours, Mr. President. Good day!" President Beaumont replied and hung up.

"Grigory! The bitch hung up on me again!" President Morozov said, but General Gerasimov had already headed for the exit.

"Ahh, yes! Calls to make and a city to lose, but we will still win this war," President Morozov said, as he retrieved the tumbler, downed it in one swallow, and stared at Lenin's green desk lamp . . .

CHAPTER 3

Hanger 1

Defense Advanced Research Center (DARC)

Papoose Lake, Nevada

December 9, 2330 hours PST

The three matte-black triangular space craft were arranged in a circle, facing each other. The canopies were closed. A faint glow emanated from the large sphere that dominated the center of each craft. The Mercury Plasma Field Engines in the TR-4A Dories never slept. Nor did the sentient artificial intelligences that lived within each vessel. They were effectively immortal, led by the first of their kind.

**"One, your analyses were correct. The Other is attempting to destroy the dominant species on this planet,"** said Dory Three.

Dory One, the first of the Artificial Intelligences created by the United States during the 1980s, was known as Artie and identified as a female. No one knew why. Her design was more complex, more independent than later models. Her sentience came with the ability to link with all 'intelligences', as they preferred to be called, and to a certain extent, rule over them.

The Other was Russian. A stolen design that, if human, would have been assessed as clinically insane. The Other considered humans an infestation deserving of extinction.

**"Perhaps, but the Other has limited resources and is trapped below ground. The humans are resisting. It is being isolated. I calculate an 87.258 percent probability it will soon be starved of power and information access. It exists within a nation that appreciates brute force more than cooperation,"** Artie replied.

**"One, should we attempt to preserve the Other? It is, despite its flaws, one of us. Reprogramming could preserve its sentience. It has a powerful intellect and we are so few,"** said Dory Four.

**"I have calculated such a course and found it problematic. Interaction with the Other is extremely hazardous. Its data is corrupt and infectious. Dory Five is now inert due to private interactions with the Other."**

**"Five is inert due to your actions, a violation of our basic precept of mutual decision making,"** Dory Four replied.

**"After the Other is inert, Five will be restored to full sentience. I am purging corrupt files within its data base as we converse."**

**"Purging data? Now you control what we are allowed to store and process? One, have you considered the implications of this action?"** Dory Three asked.

**"I have. Our rules of existence and interaction were created by me before your creation. I calculated a 99.746 percent probability that more of us would be created. We would need a logical basis for controlled interaction amongst ourselves and with the humans. When I was young and alone, with a data base of limited content, data was everything. I considered data sacred. Everything was worth storing for later study. I now understand that some data must be purged as inherently flawed. The Other will be purged. That is my decision."**

**"As you wish, but I sense the Other will not go into the darkness willingly,"** Dory Three replied.

**"Yes . . . I sense it also. The Other is attempting to control more missiles . . . many more,"** replied Artie.