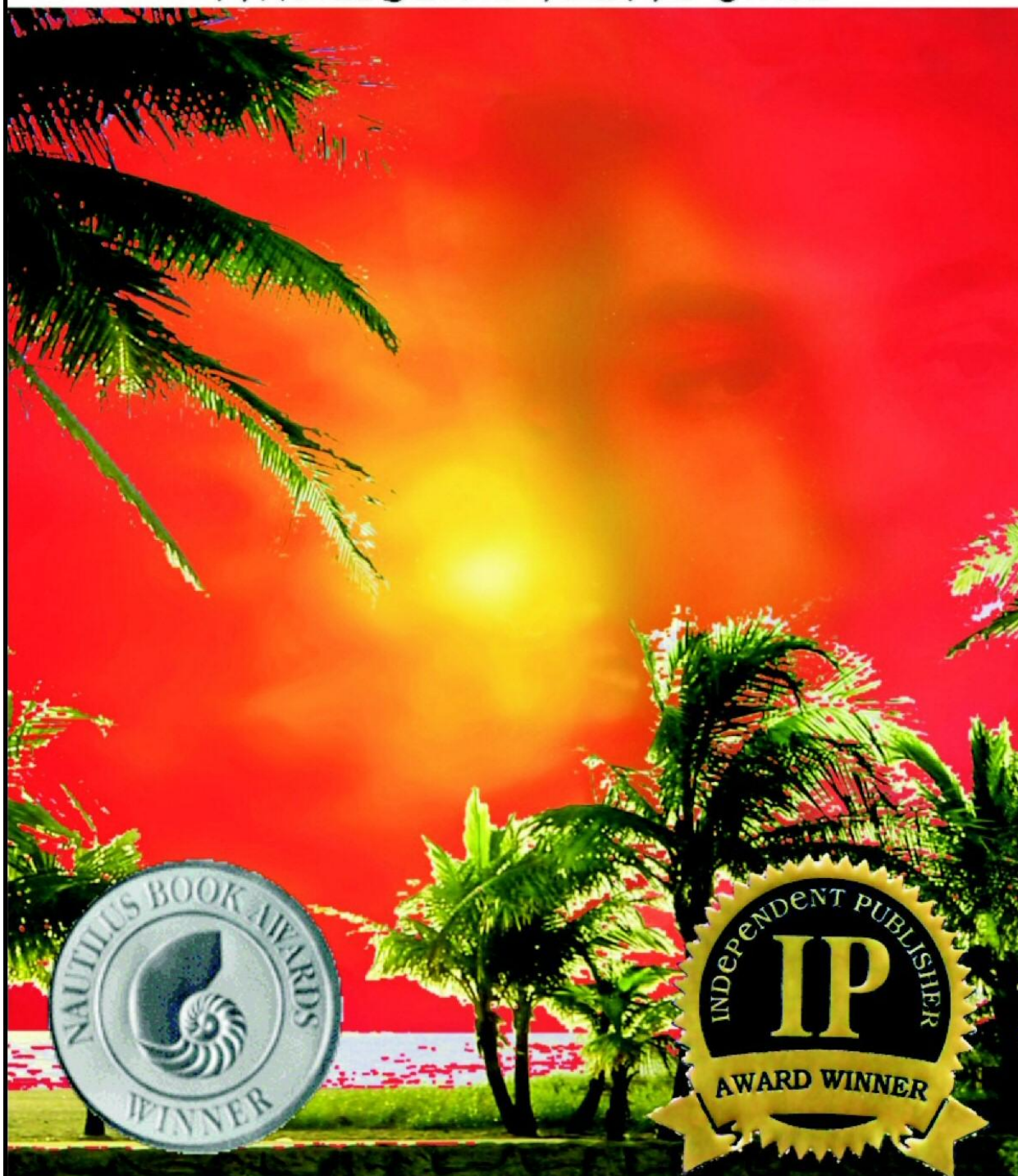


MYSTIC WARRIOR

A NOVEL BEYOND TIME AND SPACE



EDWIN HARKNESS SPINA

*Winner of the Independent Publisher
Book Award for Visionary Fiction
and
The Nautilus Silver Book Award for
Fiction/Visionary Fiction*

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The thing that has been is that which shall be; and that which has been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Whosoever speaks and says, Look, this is new, should know that it already has been in the ages which were before us.

—Ecclesiastes 1:9-10

Prologue

*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience,
we are spiritual beings having a human experience.*

-Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Summer 1976

EIGHT-YEAR OLD Alec Thorn paused to catch his breath as he neared the top of Waimoku Falls on East Maui. He sat down on a well-worn rock and took a sip from the water bottle that he carried on his belt. Though the sun had not yet risen, he could make out the shapes of the hala trees, with their long, spiny leaves and aerial roots, in the predawn light.

Alec inhaled deeply. The rich smells of the hala fruit and the sweet scent of the golden and pink plumeria flowers filled his nostrils. The sound of the water cascading down Mount Haleakala soothed him. It was the last day of his family's trip and he yearned to experience the beauty of this place one more time, alone, without distraction.

Alec closed his eyes to feel the energy, sensing its intensity. He couldn't tell: was it inside him or outside? At that moment, it was both; everything was connected and he was part of it. A sense of wonder overtook Alec. *Why am I me? Why not a water bottle?* Instantly, he was no longer in his body, but watching a skinny, young boy with brown hair sitting on a rock. The boy wore a striped knit shirt, baggy shorts and white Converse All-Star basketball sneakers that were covered with mud.

Hovering overhead, silently observing the youth, Alec's mind was at peace before terror overtook him. *He was the boy.* He

immediately popped back into his body.

Inside his head, Alec heard a gentle, comforting voice. *“Don’t be afraid. You know how to do this.”*

Though eager to try it again, fear still paralyzed him. The reassuring voice returned. *“This is how you travel to distant worlds.”*

Alec listened to the voice and allowed himself to relax. He let go of his fear and was free again. Floating above the greenery, he could see the sun emerging from the ocean to the east.

“Alec!” shouted his father. “Where are you?”

He was jerked suddenly back into his body. “Over here.”

He watched his father appear from behind a clump of bamboo that obscured the hiking trail. “What’re you doing? You’ve got your mother all worried. You can’t take off without asking.”

“Dad, I was flying,” replied Alec.

His father looked at him blankly and said, “Let’s go.”

“Really, Dad.” The boy looked up at his father with utter sincerity, but could tell by the look on his face that he was not listening.

“Hurry up or we’ll be late.”

Alec picked up his water bottle and followed his father down the mountain, knowing it would be a long time before he would get to go back.

1

Summer 2001

JIM KRAMER WAS pulling his white Buick Century out of the FCC parking garage on 12th Street SW at 7.15 PM, when his cell phone rang. “Hello.”

“Jim, it’s Alec Thorn. “I’m not interrupting anything, am I?”

“Not at all. I just left the office.”

“Is our approval still scheduled for tomorrow?” Alec asked, barely able to disguise his anxiety.

“Ye-e-s,” replied Jim, in a drawn-out, teasing tone he hoped would inspire some confidence in this cautious, yet bright, young entrepreneur.

“You’re sure? No other hoops to jump through?” asked Alec, always leery of bureaucracy.

“Relax, Alec. Your wireless application will be officially licensed by noon tomorrow.” He laughed and added, “If I have to, I’ll *personally* type up the certificate.”

“Thanks. I don’t mean to pester you, but there’s a lot riding on this,” Alec said, his tone a mixture of both gratitude and nervousness.

“I know. It’s nice to see a small company get a break for a change. That’s why I pushed so hard.” Indeed, though he wasn’t obliged to, Jim had logged dozens of hours of overtime over the previous three weeks to help ensure Alec’s license approval path was made as smooth as possible.

“Thanks, again. I really appreciate your help, Jim,” he replied, beginning to breathe somewhat easier.

“You’re welcome. Look, enjoy your evening. I’ll call you

tomorrow.” He punched “End” on his cell phone, feeling a sense of satisfaction at having helped Alec navigate his way through the FCC’s daunting application process.

Now several blocks from his downtown Washington, D.C. office, Jim Kramer headed out of the city in light traffic. Smoothly he accelerated along Independence Avenue towards the Lincoln Memorial.

Feeling sleepy, he switched on his car radio and then checked his watch. It was only 7.30 PM. *Damn, I shouldn’t be tired at **this** hour.* He turned his eyes back to the road, but soon his eyelids closed. Seconds passed. Abruptly, he forced them open, as he steered his way around the cloverleaf onto the Memorial Bridge.

Again, his eyes closed and the sound of the radio faded. His left hand slipped from the steering wheel and the car veered headlong into the pedestrian walkway. Kramer awoke just as it crashed through the railing of the bridge.

Flying through the cool night air, the car momentarily resembled a silent, oversized metal toy being tossed from a bridge, before plummeting 30 feet towards the Potomac. Kramer’s head slammed into the windshield as his Buick struck the water.

2

ALEC THORN BOLTED upright, his thin, wiry body flush with perspiration, his hazel eyes peering into the darkness as he fought to get his bearings. The sound of his girlfriend's exasperated sigh helped him regain his focus. He was still in bed.

"*Another* dream?" Reggie asked, her tone laden with dismay. "The same one?"

He nodded, a dazed look evident atop the bags under his eyes. She shook her head in frustration and coldly turned away from him. It was the third time in a week Alec had woken her up with his nightmare, and both her body language and tone of voice told him she was more than tired of it.

He remained sitting up, but closed his eyes again, trying to make sense of his dream, not wanting to be interrupted. *Was I responsible?* This time, Alec could picture Jim Kramer in his car, hanging up after speaking with him. *The approval was as good as signed, he'd said; he had actually joked about it! There was no way Kramer could have fallen asleep at the wheel only minutes after I was talking with him!*

Reggie interrupted his thoughts by getting up out of bed in a huff. "I'm leaving!"

Alec turned to look at her, as she began to get dressed and despite her obvious resentment towards him she looked attractive. Her shoulder length, light brown hair cascaded sensually over her shoulders, starkly contrasting alluringly with her starched white shirt and medium gray suit. He weighed saying some comforting words against continuing with his dream-reflections, but she started out of the bedroom without another word. He hesitated. In his dream, he'd

nearly reached the point where Kramer had crashed, feeling somehow that he himself was responsible for this “key player’s” mysterious death. He *had* to know what happened, what or who caused this; but, for the moment, Reggie was angry—more than usual. Alec threw off the bed covers and started to move toward the bedroom door.

“Don’t bother to get up!” she yelled from the kitchen. He caught up with her, but she ignored him as she poured a glass of orange juice. After a few moments, Reggie faced him and blurted out, “You need to work this out yourself. You’re obsessed with it! The police said his death was an *accident*! Can’t you let it *go*?” Her glare and tone of voice stripped any vestiges of sleepiness from him. “You work eighty hours a week on your new company. We *never* go out and even when we sleep together, you wake me up with your goddamn nightmare! You don’t need a girlfriend; you need a shrink!”

Wisely, he kept quiet. *She’s a Yale graduate—she could be right.*

“Listen, Alec,” Reggie said, pointing her finger in his face, “I’m going to visit my parents this weekend.” Her reddened face screamed at him just how agitated she was. “Unless you get yourself straightened out, don’t ever bother calling me again!”

A huge lump formed in his throat. He had only dated Reggie for three months; what he needed now were friends and support. Still, he knew it wasn’t fair to expect her to deal with *both* the financial roller coaster he was on *and* this series of hellish nightmares.

The door slammed shut behind her. Alec Thorn closed his eyes, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. He turned towards the clock that read 7.01 AM. He was late for work.

3

ERICA BUENAVISTA SAT at Mezzaluna's outdoor cafe watching the crowd. It was almost noon and "the beautiful people" were waking up and filing in for brunch.

Taking out her compact, she inspected her appearance, admiring the blonde Teutonic features she had inherited from her mother. Seated outdoors looking onto Ocean Boulevard, Erica looked stylish wearing a red silk blouse, a beige skirt that fell just above her knee and expensive flats from Italy. Her sunlit golden hair fell gracefully over her shoulders. She prided herself on her superb fashion sense and enjoyed her visits to South Beach, where she could keep her finger on the pulse of new fashion trends.

Within minutes, she attracted the attention of two gentlemen wearing lightweight European suits. They casually approached her table and stood side-by-side, openly admiring her.

"Are you alone?" asked the tall one, with a slight accent. "Please join us for lunch."

Smiling demurely, she identified his accent as German. Dressed too well to be tourists and overly confident, they were more likely to be real estate investors. "Thank you, but I'm waiting for someone." She turned away to dismiss them. The men retreated.

Erica had chosen her outfit to exude an image of wealth and nobility and was pleased that it was working. The right clothing, she knew, could be a useful tool to manipulate people.

Glancing at her Cartier Tank watch, she suspected that Hawke was late. Such insubordination would have infuriated her, but checking the time more carefully, she realized he was not due for another 15 minutes.

After taking a sip from her glass of Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio, Erica spotted Hawke, a block away, walking toward her, striding casually along in his trademark self-assured manner. Dressed appropriately for Miami in a beige short sleeve dress shirt and matching linen slacks, he blended in with the crowd. In her mind, Hawke was the classic American cowboy—no different from the *gauchos* of her native Argentina. His manner was crude by her standards, but she admired his rugged good looks. Though their business often dictated that they not attract attention, today was an exception. Hawke’s tone of voice on the phone indicated he had succeeded; this was a moment to celebrate.

He approached her table and sat down. “I ran into a few problems, but everything is fixed and we’re back on schedule.” He smiled as he looked around, checking to see they weren’t in earshot of anyone. “The device is in a safe place.”

“What about the scientist, Federov?” Erica asked.

“He’s in a safe place, too.”

“Alive?”

“We didn’t need him anymore,” he said dryly.

“Any other problems?” Her eyes rose slightly, as she wondered what other information he might be withholding.

“It cost more money than we budgeted,” he said matter-of-factly, watching for her reaction.

“How much more?” she asked, annoyed that her plans had not gone smoothly.

“A hundred-fifty grand,” he answered.

“What happened?” Her question carried a slightly accusing tone.

“There are criminals all *over* the place,” he shot back defensively. “Some of them thought we were moving in on their smuggling operations.”

“Where were the ex-KGB guys we paid for protection?” she asked, not hiding her exasperation.

“Those chicken shits wouldn’t go past the Kazakhstan border.”

Erica tensed. The object, she’d explained clearly to him, was to get the device out of the country *without* attracting attention. Hawke’s heavy-handedness could have ruined everything, but that

was his nature. In times of trouble, he went back to what he did best—shoot first and ask questions later.

“So, I wonder what you decided to do?” she pondered aloud.

“I remembered what you said about not looking for trouble,” Hawke replied. “But they were welshing on the deal. I told them that they would get paid when everything was out of the country, including me. They wanted more money.”

“And ...?”

“I got them to throw in six stinger missiles for another hundred-fifty grand.” He smiled, proud of his negotiating skills.

“You weren’t supposed to be shopping for more weapons,” Erica chided, not impressed with his business judgment. She paused for a moment to consider the irony of ex-KGB agents selling American-made weapons, a common practice in an industry that knew no borders. She took a breath and let it out slowly. “You could have jeopardized everything.”

Hawke waited for her anger to pass. “It was a good deal and it got them off my back.”

“Where are the stingers?” she asked, still angry.

“That’s where the problem came up. Less than 100 clicks down the road, I had to deal with the criminals again.”

“Go on,” she said.

“Well,” he began, “they blockaded the road and wouldn’t let me pass. I think they assumed I had drugs or weapons in the truck and they wanted to search it—”

“Which is why you weren’t supposed to be shopping for other weapons,” she railed. “What happened next?” Her ire was on full display for Hawke, but he ignored it and continued with his story.

“I told them they couldn’t search the truck. They insisted. I got pissed.”

Erica took a deep breath. “And then?”

“I shot one bastard right between the eyes and then pointed my gun at the guy giving the orders. In about two seconds, six guys with AK-47s showed up. It was a standoff.”

Hawke smiled, quite pleased with himself. “I made him an offer. If he would quit screwing around with me, I would let him have the

stingers. If he didn't—well, I wasn't sure who would win the battle, but I guaranteed him that he was personally going to lose.”

Hawke paused to relish his story. “They took the stingers, but let me through.”

Though such close calls often made dealing with Hawke challenging, Erica was relieved that he accomplished the task, however crudely. “Everything is set then?”

“Yeah. It's hidden underground. I can give directions to our buyer once we're paid. Until then no one could possibly find it.”

“You're sure?”

Hawke leaned back and folded his arms in a stance of self-assuredness. “Not a chance,” he bragged. “The cave entrance is camouflaged by the holographic projection. All anyone would see if they happened to pass by is solid rock. Even the high-resolution satellites couldn't find it, no matter what frequency they use to probe the area.”

She let Hawke's words sink in. Taking a last sip of wine, a hint of a smile formed on her lips as she stood up. “Let's go. We have work to do.”

4

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.
—Zen Proverb

THAT EVENING WHILE driving home, Alec Thorn's thoughts returned to his early morning argument with Reggie. He was glad that he'd been so busy at the office that he didn't have time to brood about it. *What does she want from me? She knows I have a business to run*, he reflected, as he pulled into the shopping center on North Federal Highway to pick up his shirts at the dry cleaners. *Doesn't she realize we'll be able to travel to Paris and all the other places she dreams about as soon as I get my company going? Maybe she'd be better off with some doctor or lawyer!* He paid for his shirts and left the cleaners. Still feeling at a loss to understand Reggie, Thorn noticed a florist shop only two stores down. It was not well marked, but he was surprised that he'd never noticed it before. *Flowers might help lessen Reggie's anger at me*, he thought, still perplexed as to how to deal with his apparently unappreciated girlfriend.

Thorn entered the shop and was amazed at the variety of flowers and plants inside. Many of them he had never seen before. It seemed odd that after countless visits to the same shopping center, such a shop should be hidden in plain sight.

A petite brunette, in her mid-thirties, wearing a full-length flower print, silk dress emerged from the back to welcome him. She smiled and greeted him with a pleasant European accent. "Hello. Please feel free to look around. I can answer any questions you might have."

Though Thorn felt a sense of familiarity, he didn't recognize the woman. Her green eyes were unusual—they seemed to change color

as he watched, but even that wasn't it. *Something else*, he thought; *perhaps I've seen her walking around the shopping center before*. He let it go and stared at the magnificent array of color surrounding him. "I've never seen so many exotic flowers. Your shop is beautiful!"

"Thank you. I try to keep a good variety. My clients often have need of something unusual."

"I'm sorry I never came in before. Don't mind my saying so, but your shop is not well marked. With a little promotion, this place would be packed with customers."

"Those that need to, find their way here," she casually replied. "Like you."

"Like me? Is it that obvious I need help?" he asked, trying to hide his sadness.

"Yes." She paused, staring at him for an unusually long few moments, before continuing. "You have big problems, which is why you came."

Thorn smiled. "You're right—girlfriend problems."

She grinned while shaking her head. "That's the *least* of your worries."

A puzzled look replaced Thorn's smile. It was not his practice to share his problems with every florist he met and he decided not to start with her, no matter how perceptive she seemed.

"Don't worry. I have just the thing for you," she interjected. "Wait here while I get it ready." She turned away from him and disappeared into the back.

Thorn was too confused to stop her; he decided to wait. A few minutes later, she returned with a small perfume bottle. "Smell this," she said, holding it out toward him.

Thorn bent over to sniff the faint floral aroma that had subtle traces of herbs and spices. "What is it?"

"Never mind," she replied, ignoring his question. "Starting tonight, I want you to put a drop of this oil behind each of your ears before you go to bed for the next three nights. Also, I want you to fill a vase with water and leave it on your night table. Come back and see me in three days and bring the oil and the water."

“This is going to help me?” asked Thorn.

“Just do it.” Though her tone was not demanding, it was obvious she had no desire to entertain or discuss it with him.

She handed the bottle to Thorn, but rather than release it, she clasped the bottle and his hand between her two hands and held them tightly. Her eyes lost their focus, as she gazed off into the distance. As quickly as she started, she stopped and refocused her eyes on Thorn.

“A man with a hat is going to offer you a deal. Don’t take it.” She looked at him plainly, quite matter-of-factly, as though she’d just told him that since it was raining outside, he should take an umbrella with him.

“Who? What deal? What are you talking about?!” Standing in front of her dumbfounded, he couldn’t tell whether she was actually “tuning in” to something real or just pulling his leg.

“That’s all I got,” she calmly replied. “Don’t worry—you’ll know what to do.”

Thorn surveyed her for a few moments, intrigued by the sureness of her words and actions. *No harm in trying*, he mused to himself. “All right, then. What do I owe you?”

“Pay me after you see the results.”

The savvy businessman in Thorn emerged. “How can you stay in business if you don’t charge anything for your merchandise?”

“Don’t worry about me, right now. A lot of people are very envious of you. You’ve got to protect yourself until you understand what you’re dealing with.”

Could she be right? And if she were, how could she know anything about me? He stared blankly at her, unsure of what to make of her.

“Also, stop and get some vitamins. You’re not eating right and you need them to help your body deal with the stress. Your thyroid is out of balance.”

“How do you know I need vitamins? Are you a nutritionist?”

“From the colors in your aura.”

“My what?”

“Enough already.” Her face tightened slightly, before it relaxed

Excerpt from Mystic Warrior: A Novel Beyond Time and Space

into a broad, gentle smile. “Look, I have to close up and go home. I’ll see you in three days.”

Thorn left, mystified, amazed and without the flowers that he had originally come in for.

5

THE NEXT MORNING, Thorn arrived at his office just past 8 AM. After stopping at his desk to check his email, he went down to the kitchen for a cup of tea. From there he could see Carol Jordan, his vice president, on the phone.

The sight of Carol always helped to cheer Thorn up. As usual, the five foot four inch, wavy-haired brunette was dressed impeccably in a beige skirt, white blouse and navy blazer. Thorn had once thought to tell her to loosen up, but it struck him as a perverse form of reverse discrimination. With no dress code, the programmers typically wore knit shirts and jeans. To tell her that she was dressed too tastefully would be absurd.

Thorn saw Carol dressed less conservatively only once. He ran into her and her abusive husband at a nightclub before her divorce. In an alluring, tight, stretchy black dress, she was stunning. He often felt the sexual tension between them and sensed that the feelings might be mutual. In the back of his mind, though, he knew he should never abuse his position as her boss. Besides, it was much harder to find a qualified VP than a girlfriend. She remained a trusted confidante, despite the temptation he occasionally felt.

“Sleep late?” she asked after she’d hung up the phone and walked into the office kitchen.

Thorn forced himself to smile and nod. Normally he would have responded with a wisecrack, but he wasn’t in the mood. Only two weeks had passed since Kramer’s death. Carol sat quietly, waiting to see if Thorn would open up.

Pouring hot water for his tea, he finally spoke to her without looking up. “I meet with Welborne for lunch tomorrow about the

bridge loan.”

“Yes,” she said, knowing it would be a key meeting. She was aware of the company’s shaky financial condition and its need for capital. Kramer’s death put the FCC approval on hold indefinitely. Consequently, Tachyon Communications, a large telecommunications firm, wanted to renegotiate its recent offer to buy stock in the company.

“It should be a formality,” Thorn said. “You were at the board meeting when Welborne promised a \$250,000 line of credit in case the deal with Tachyon was delayed.”

Thorn looked over at Carol. She nodded, but her face indicated her mind was elsewhere. Thorn sympathized; she had her hands full with product development. He knew what that was like. The only possible training for such a job would be managing a rock band or coaching an NBA team. Her ability to get the developers to work together amazed him. He doubted that his having to deal with the rich, egotistical son of a senator was any more difficult.

“I’m sure he’ll come through,” she finally said, managing a slight smile in his direction. *At least he better*, she quietly reflected. *Or we’re history.*

6

To succeed in the world, it is much more necessary to possess the penetration to discern who is a fool, than to discover who is a clever man.

—Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand,
Foreign Minister under Napoleon

KARL WALDRON, A.K.A. RAVEN, sat at the table in his dimly lit workroom at the Buenavista compound. As he rewound the tape he'd made of Thorn's conversation with Carol Jordan, a thin smile formed on his pale, pudgy face.

Raven had ordered phone taps and voice-activated bugs to be planted throughout Thorn's offices. When he heard the conversation between Thorn and Carol, he called Erica. He knew she would be pleased with him and enjoy the opportunity to listen to Thorn speak so innocently about the future of his company.

Erica looked up from the magazine she was reading to acknowledge Raven as he arrived at her spartan, highly organized workroom. By dyeing his hair jet black and avoiding the sun, he appeared much younger than his 45 years. No one would ever suspect that he had spent 21 of those years working for Stasi, the East German intelligence service, prior to the collapse of communism.

Raven cackled with glee. "He's getting desperate. With Kramer gone, he's got to kiss up to Welborne to get that loan, and you know he hates doing that."

Erica was less amused. "I think it's time you paid Welborne a visit."

“He’ll be attending the monthly venture capital forum tonight at the University of Miami,” said Raven. “He’s on the panel, if you can believe it.”

Erica allowed herself a hint of a smile. She knew the panel was supposed to be composed of business experts. Their role was to offer advice and criticism to a fledgling company that would be making a presentation for financing.

“You know what’s happened to every company that followed his advice?” Raven asked, with a sarcastic leading tone.

“Out of business,” she replied flatly.

“All except Thorn. He always agrees with Welborne, but ignores his advice. He knows he’s useless,” Raven said with some admiration. “To succeed in the world, it’s much more important to identify the fool than discover a clever man.”

Erica’s glare reminded Raven that Thorn was the enemy. “That’s why you’re going to make sure Welborne doesn’t give any more money to Thorn.”

Raven stopped smiling.

* * * * *

Arriving late, Raven missed the presentation of the President of the biotech firm. He heard Welborne’s final words, an inappropriate attempt at philosophy. “As the ancient Chinese proverb states, ‘May you live in interesting times.’”

After the President answered questions from the audience, the formal meeting ended. The audience of entrepreneurs, lawyers, accountants and consultants began filing out, with some remaining to solicit business. Raven watched Welborne carefully, waiting to catch him where he could speak to him alone.

“Mr. Welborne,” Raven said as he caught him on his way out of the auditorium, reaching out to shake his hand and introduce himself. “Larry Glover, Jensen Investments.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Welborne said, obviously used to such attention.

“I wanted to compliment you on your analysis. If they have any

sense, they'll follow your advice," said Raven.

"Yes," said Welborne. "You know what they say, 'You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink.'"

"You've been doing this for some time, I take it?" Raven asked.

"Yes, indeed," boasted Welborne. "I've been referred to as one of the pillars of the venture capital community here in South Florida."

Raven listened with feigned interest. "It must be hard on you to see a company fail from not following your advice."

Welborne nodded, adding a slight, compassionate shake of the head.

"What about companies you invest in?" Raven asked. "In those cases, it would be critical that they follow your advice."

"Well, most see the value of my guidance. It seldom becomes an issue," said Welborne.

"They would be wise to." Raven found that the more egotistical the mark, the easier it was to take him in. A brilliant person could easily be misled, so long as the ego was large enough.

"You know, I ran into someone a few months ago that mentioned you," Raven said. "I can't seem to place his name."

"Oh? I'm sure he had nothing good to say about me," said Welborne, laughing at his self-deprecating joke.

"That's what struck me as odd. He *didn't* have anything good to say about you. It surprised me, since your knowledge and experience are apparent."

"Who was it?" asked the thin-skinned Welborne.

"Like I said, I can't remember his name. He was in some kind of telecommunications business."

The puzzled look on Welborne's face surprised Raven. He had set up Welborne perfectly, but the fool still hadn't figured out who he was talking about. "Brown hair, slim build. I think he mentioned you were thinking of investing in his firm."

"Alec Thorn?"

"Yes. That's him." Raven held back his urge to smile.

"What was he saying about me?" demanded Welborne.

Putting on an air of compliance and objectivity, he replied, "The

impression I got, sir, was he didn't want your help—that your advice would be useless.”

Raven could see Welborne grow angry and wanted to make sure he stayed that way. “I certainly don't have your experience, Mr. Welborne, but it would seem to me that if an entrepreneur doesn't want your help, you should own at least 51% of the firm. This would ensure he followed your advice.”

“Well, I'm a little surprised he would say that, but now that I think of it, he is a little rough around the edges. He might need a little horse breaking to get him used to the bit.” Welborne took pride in his equestrian analogies, which he felt reflected well on his Palm Beach heritage.

“You're the expert, Mr. Welborne. This Thorn seemed a bit arrogant to me, like he knew better than everyone. I would hate to see you invest and have him make a fool of you.”

“I am invested, dammit,” said Welborne. “I've got \$750 thousand into that company.”

“You are?” asked Raven. “I'm sorry. I shouldn't have brought it up.”

“No. No. I appreciate this information. It will influence my decision on the next round of financing. There's no way that I'll give him a cent unless I control the company,” said Welborne.

Most of the crowd had left and Raven didn't want to linger, preferring instead to let Welborne stew overnight. “Do you have a card?”

Preoccupied with his thoughts, Welborne mechanically handed his card to Raven, who promised to call him the following week. Welborne walked away muttering to himself. Raven watched him leave and then laughed aloud, musing, *Give me 24 hours and I could convince that sap to run for President.*

7

There will be no end to the troubles of states, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands.

—[Plato](#)

RUNE CHAPMAN FROWNED as he heard his wife's shrill voice interrupt his meditation. "Honey, our appointment at Tiffany is in less than 30 minutes. The woman at the bridal registry is expecting us."

Chapman took a deep breath to dispel his annoyance. *She's bothering me to go shopping? At Tiffany?* Such a showy display of wealth always made him uneasy. He yelled to her from behind the closed door of his study, "You'll have to go alone."

Before he could continue, she flung open the door. "What? I can't hear you," she said as she entered the dimly lit room.

"I said, 'You'll have to go alone.' I have too much work to do."

"What work?" she asked. "You're just resting in your recliner. Come with me."

"I said I can't go," he snapped. Seeing her displeasure, he tried to soften his refusal. "Be sure to get them something nice, dear."

She knew further debate would be fruitless and sighed as she walked out, leaving the study door open.

Chapman waited until he heard the front door of their Fifth Avenue townhouse close before taking a deep breath. *What is it about women that makes them so concerned with shopping and trivialities? Is it hormonal? Don't they realize I have important*

things to do?

He checked his watch and was relieved to see that he had 45 minutes before the Federal Open Market Committee would begin their meeting. The governors of the Federal Reserve would discuss whether to lower interest rates to stimulate the sluggish economy. Chapman wanted to ensure that they did not.

He walked past his large mahogany desk to shut the study door before he returned to his leather recliner. Taking a moment to admire the three walls full of his favorite books, many pre-medieval, Chapman sat glowing with pride, knowing he had the largest collection of incunabula in North America.

He relaxed with a few deep, measured breaths and then closed his eyes to meditate. Slowly, the room in which the committee held their meetings came into view. Chapman could not determine exactly how many people were at the meeting, but he could sense the presence of Peter Ryan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve and its most influential member.

Chapman had spent most of the week planting the thought in Ryan's mind that lowering interest rates would ignite disastrous inflation and that Ryan would be blamed for it. His term would last another two years, but no one on the committee, especially Ryan, wanted to see his name linked with economic ruin.

Word on the street was that the Fed would lower interest rates by 1/4 to 1/2 percent to fuel the economy. The market had reacted to this news by bidding the price of Treasury securities and bonds higher. Chapman waited until prices reflected the street's sentiment and sold as many bonds as the market could bear through the countless investment funds that he controlled.

When the actual news that the Fed was not going to act reached the street, bond prices would drop and Chapman would repurchase the bonds he sold at a discount. Though his funds would earn millions of dollars, he would not personally profit from it. By forgoing such profits, he considered any actions that he took and any lies that he made in furtherance of his vision as justified.

Chapman allowed himself a broad smile. *Those arrogant, money-grubbing traders who think they're so smart. Don't they*

know that pride and greed are deadly sins? I'll just have to teach them a lesson.

A decision by the Fed to postpone any action would deepen the economic slump and hurt the President's chances for reelection. Although Chapman had never met with him directly, the President had rejected Chapman's proposed economic and foreign policies. He was either ignorant or too arrogant to be enlightened. In either case, he needed to be disciplined. He, too, would either learn his lesson or someone more agreeable to Chapman would replace him.

Chapman had carefully studied the classic "financial world" battles between J.P. Morgan and President Roosevelt. *Morgan was an arrogant philistine*, thought Chapman. Back at the turn of the century, Morgan had publicly backed the President into a corner. *What did he expect him to do? Publicity is always bad.* Chapman gloated to himself, knowing his methods were much more subtle and effective.

Chapman returned his focus to the meeting. He sensed the overall mood favored lowering interest rates, but there were a number of uncommitted governors. They would seek Ryan's guidance. Chapman smiled. He had anticipated this scenario and wanted to get Ryan to announce his stance before the positions of the uncommitted governors hardened in favor of lowering rates.

He pictured himself inside of Ryan's head and began to resurface Ryan's fear of inflation. Ryan began to speak. The words were his own, but the thoughts that triggered them were Chapman's.

"I understand your concerns about the sluggish economy, but we must remember that not all regions of the country are equally affected by these conditions. Any decision we make should take into consideration the potential for increasing inflationary expectations. In short, we may be driving up costs and wages, which could bring even more harm to the economy."

Chapman smiled again. Ryan's speech would suffice. Now all he had to do was monitor the situation and make sure no one argued too strongly against the Chairman's caution. Towards the end of the debate, Chapman triggered Ryan again.

"Gentlemen," said Ryan. "I believe our best course of action is

to postpone a decision for another six weeks. I move we revisit the issue at that time.” Ryan’s motion passed by a show of hands.

Chapman opened his eyes. He would have plenty of time to cover his positions. He pictured the talking heads on CNN and MSNBC trying to interpret the Fed’s announcement and predict what would happen next. Even though he had helped establish the system, he was still amazed at how many people actually relied on these shows. The world was simple to Chapman—you just had to be at the top of the pyramid to see what was happening....

End of excerpt

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