

CHAPTER ONE

Detroit Michigan: December 5th, 2063.

The holo-com in the ancient Daimler-Benz blared incessant government propaganda, made even more repulsive thanks to a tiny holographic DJ who babbled on in the “1970s top 40 AM radio” voice favored by America’s dictator. Only the Great General George Brinton McLellan and certain eminent scientists in Psychological Operations could tell you exactly why such an archaic style of communication remained so popular.

“Hi y’all! This is DJ Jazzy J coming to you on Armed Forces Comm-Rad 1. Hope you’re having an absolutely fantastic morning no matter what part of the Grand Old Republic you’re tuning in from! This next one is going out to all you brave troops in our cities continuing the fight for truth, justice and the American Way against those cowardly anarchist traitors. Here it is—a real classic for your listening enjoyment—one of our Glorious Leader General McLellan’s all-time favorites—The Beastie Boys, You Gotta Fight...”

“Turn that shit off! I’m tryin’ to sleep, dammit!” grunted the still-groggy Special Forces trooper sitting in the passenger seat. Sergeant Danny Trumbell stretched his powerfully built frame like an angry grizzly bear roused from hibernation. With scraggly hair, unshaven face, and crazy eyes, he could have been kin to a savage from another era.

The Daimler’s driver, Captain Alan Haig, glanced over and smirked. Trumbell was an annoying son of a bitch but his renowned combat skills would definitely be an asset on this assignment.

The captain’s chiseled and weathered features, always deadly serious, became even more severe as he recalled the details concerning their being ordered into a probable suicide mission. The initial briefing with 1st Division’s intelligence chief, Colonel Baldwin had been quick and to the point. Someone important (possibly the General himself) wanted Special Forces to retrieve an ex-Navy pilot from the burning cauldron of what used to be known as Detroit before it was declared a dead city. Detroit was the third metropolitan area to gain that dubious label.

At least the briefing provided some much needed entertainment, especially when it came to the VIP’s bio.

The guy’s name was Commander Rance Edwards. Ancestors included an aristocratic Wehrmacht General who fought on the Eastern Front in the Second World War, a 1940s swashbuckling Hollywood movie star, one of the Sioux Indian chiefs who defeated Custer, an Ottoman sultan and a Jewish freedom fighter who later became active in Israeli politics in the 60s and 70s.

Unbelievable. He’d love to be a fly on the wall during this guy’s family reunions.

Commander Edwards had been a hotshot Navy fighter pilot. Went to Annapolis but didn’t reveal any exceptional talents until the brief Euro–American war thrust him into the American consciousness as the only notable quasi hero in that entire ill-fated affair. Flying an F-22 off the USS *Washington* (later sunk during a naval debacle now known as the Battle of the North Sea), he shot down ten Euro fighters over northern Germany before a Robotic Hunter-Killer unit finally took him down. Edwards sustained life-threatening injuries on bail out, and spent a month in hospital before being flown to the US after the peace accord between World Leader Antonio Lanza and the General ended the war and brought the isolationist United States into the new

world order. Of course, General McLellan tried to put the best spin on things and briefly turned Edwards into The Great American Hero. Problem was hero boy didn't want to play the game. Even though the left side of his face had been severely disfigured, he refused to get reconstruction to be aesthetically appealing for the propaganda campaign. He resigned his commission and broke up with long-time girlfriend Lieutenant Commander Christine St. James.

Edwards was now apparently completely devoted to his cancer-afflicted father. According to Intel gathered before the Detroit situation became totally chaotic, he might be visiting his dad at one of the city's hospitals. This target wouldn't be easy to find. Normally, locating anyone was simple. You just needed to do a mind interface scan of the military database and find the targets GPS signature via the chip implanted in their hand or forehead. Although still imperfect, this technique of mentally linking with the global consciousness of the Supernet had become increasingly important, especially for a totalitarian regime wanting to track every citizen. Unfortunately for the two Special Forces troopers assigned to find him, Edwards seemed to be one of the few crazies who didn't have an implant, even if the penalty for not having one often meant receiving a free bullet courtesy of the Security Ministry.

Intel also indicated he and his father might belong to one of those damn Christian cult groups that in spite of the government's best efforts somehow avoided complete elimination. Apparently the bastards didn't believe in getting chips. They would have no alternative but to find Edwards the old fashioned way and The New God Lanza only knew how bad things were in Detroit, or more correctly Dead City 3 at this moment...

Haig's thoughts were interrupted as they pulled up to the army checkpoint, code named Joy Division. Two mean looking MP's leveled their M-30's at the decrepit looking old Daimler before approaching. One of them pointed his scanner at the center of Haig's forehead and read the holographic images that danced in the air displaying data from a microscopic info chip planted just under the skin. Somebody nearby was playing "Good" by Better Than Ezra.

"Sorry Captain. Had to make sure. The damned radicals hit us with a guerrilla attack earlier today and we took some pretty heavy casualties. Our orders are to give you any necessary support but I have to advise you for the record that I don't recommend going into that hellhole. The situation is..."

Haig cut him off.

"I appreciate the concern Sergeant, but we've got a mission to complete. Now if you'll kindly get the hell out of our way and raise the gate we can get on with it."

The MP's just shook their heads as the Daimler hummed by them. You didn't argue with Special Forces troops... not if you wanted to stay healthy that is.

Other than having to bypass a few crude roadblocks thrown up during the recent hostilities they didn't encounter any visible signs of trouble. Even so, a peaceful appearance didn't guarantee the surrounding buildings weren't full of fanatics just itching for a chance to hit them with an RPG or some other nasty surprise. Not exactly the way he wanted to test the integrity of the Daimlers hidden composite armor plating.

In spite of the savage fighting and obvious anti-Government sentiment in this area, a propaganda billboard along the freeway popped out of the vanishing morning mist, appearing nearly intact. The stylized picture reminded Haig of images circa the 1960's glorifying Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser he once observed in a history studies holo documentary. It depicted an unrealistically youthful, beaming General McLellan, resplendent in a Five Star General's uniform shaking hands with the World Leader, Antonio Lanza. Lanza looked handsome as always, with his slicked back hair, vintage Ray-Ban sunglasses and brilliant smile

mimicking some Italian movie star from the mid-20th century. The caption emblazoned across the poster declared “Together we can achieve the impossible!”

Yeah right, thought Haig as they drove past. Lately, the world felt like it was careening down a slippery downward slope, the descent of which no one, McLellan and Lanza included seemed capable of stopping or even slowing down for that matter. The recent Russo/Islamic/Afro/Israeli nuclear war circulated fallout over an already toxic planet, making many contaminated areas uninhabitable. The Russian/Arab/African confederacy had made a dramatic but reckless grab for Israel, launching a joint land invasion in hopes of ridding the world once and for all of the troublesome Israeli’s. Not to mention seizing all of that tiny countries valuable oil and mineral rights in the process. The Russian leader Alexander Mikhail Gromeko obviously miscalculated thinking that Benevolent Dictator Lanza would not interfere in such a blatant violation of his celebrated Middle East non-aggression pact. Sudden destruction met eighty percent of the Russian led land forces, being nuked into oblivion before they got anywhere close to Israel. Nuclear warheads also hit a few large Arab cities, most notably Damascus. The Russians annihilated Madrid, Copenhagen, Dresden, Milan and Marseilles in retaliation, but somehow the world stopped on the very brink of complete nuclear extermination.

The crazy thing was many Israelis insisted the One True God deserved the credit for their salvation from Russia, claiming Lanza (that damned Roman as some Jews called him) had nothing to do with saving them. “Fire from God” they called it. A usually reliable, high level CIA analyst that Haig knew swore up and down the Israelis were right, saying only a few European nukes were launched that day even though most credible sources applauded Lanza on his great victory. Once such a stupid rumor got going it usually gained its own momentum, becoming impossible to stop. Almost all of the Jewish people now worshiped their “God” and even more disturbing, many were also becoming converts of the hated Christian sect.

Apparently Lanza planned on taking drastic steps to straighten out the Israelis, moving his headquarters from New Babylon to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem rebuilt several years before (actually one of the chief catalysts behind the recent war) and installing himself as the new Godhead. After all, he, World Leader Antonio Lanza best typified the True Doctrine of how all men are God and God is in all men. How else to explain his meteoric rise from a poor neighborhood in Naples to Emperor of the entire planet? What other possible explanation could there be for his miraculous healing from the seemingly fatal assassination attempt back in 2059 when a Christian fundamentalist shot him in the head before a horrified world live on holovision?

As Pope Gregory XVII lovingly taught, no longer were corrupt false religions like Christianity needed. Such primitive creeds caused nothing but pain and suffering throughout mankind’s history and it would soon be time for the human race to transcend into the next level, becoming the Gods destiny always intended them to be.

His Teachings of Love released all mankind from feelings of guilt caused by the outdated belief systems of the past, most especially Christianity, allowing human beings to express themselves sexually in any way they wished. Goddess of Love Sensual Worship gatherings, although at first causing some controversy had now become an established feature of all New Church services, an innovation that allowed human sexuality to be celebrated and embraced.

Adoring, hysterical crowds idolized the Pope wherever he went, his popularity almost reaching the paramount level of Leader Lanza’s.

The Beloved One, Pope Gregory had nearly been killed by an IED several months ago while on an official Papal visit to Jerusalem. On the evening of the assassination attempt, an obviously

shaken Pope explained to the world that while lying stunned after the explosion, his Spirit Guides blessed him with a great vision. These “Masters” as the metaphysical beings called themselves, revealed to him the time had now arrived for the Great Leader Lanza to install himself in the New Jerusalem Temple as the Great Savior of the World. The advanced spiritual teachers of ancient wisdom explained to the Pope that by worshipping Lanza as the new ideal, all mankind could then make the leap into the new consciousness and become as Gods themselves. This “paradigm shift” would usher in an age of peace and harmony ending war and strife forever.

After Pope Gregory finished giving his important message, Antonio Lanza himself spoke humbly to the World, thanking the Pope for all of his tireless work and sacrifices made for the noble cause of humanism. The Man of Destiny then went on to say that although he felt inadequate to accept the burden fate had thrust upon him, he knew some causes were much more important than the selfish needs of any one individual. If accepting the worship of all human beings meant everyone on earth could make the spiritual revolution the Pope spoke of possible, then he would be more than willing to face this, his greatest challenge. To aid in this devotion, holographic, interactive images of himself would be placed in all major population centers including most notably, a huge 666-meter replication near Jerusalem. Lanza called upon all true citizens to carry on the fight against the hate filled troublemakers and dissenters such as Christians and Old Catholics idiotically trying to prevent the New World Order. He also swore that the persons responsible for the assassination attempt on the Pope would face immediate justice. Two eccentric, itinerate Jewish Christian preachers of iniquity soon confessed to the crime, being killed in the street like the subversive dogs they were. The world convulsed in a great month long celebration after World Comm broadcast the live execution coverage. Even Haig, usually not a very sociable man, indulged in celebratory drug use and recreational sex with one of the many females freely offering themselves after worship service at the local New Church.

Haig remained constantly thankful of mankind’s progression to this new age of enlightenment when it came to sex and religion. If only the entire world would fall into line and follow Lanza’s orders, then Pope Gregory’s doctrine of the coming glorious age of harmony and love would truly become a reality. Soldiers like he and Sergeant Trumbell would of course be put out of business – but Haig considered the sacrifice of his lifelong military career a small price to pay for the more important cause of peace.

Other than the evil backwards Christians, the only substantial roadblock to world peace now came from the always-troublesome Chinese Asian Federation. Sensing a power vacuum after the defeat of the Russian/Arab/African Confederacy, the Chinese leadership decided to do some very alarming saber rattling by putting a large portion of their two hundred million-troop military on maneuvers. The East also demanded major, audacious concessions from Lanza and the World Empire.

One of the main points of contention quickly became chip implantation. As the Great Leader explained to the world in his famous Amsterdam address of 2059, insertion of microscopic data chips containing personal and financial information into all citizens had been determined by most economists to be the only efficient way to structure the foundation of a global economy. The unified new monetary unit of world credits would replace all national currencies. Initially this program encountered resistance in certain areas of the world, most notably in the Middle East, Africa and China. Although they modified the recipients DNA, some people erroneously thought these chips were developed from alien technology, another silly rumor. Most dissenters found themselves enthusiastically “persuaded” by the Security Forces to participate in the plan.

Those who did not willingly partake received a death sentence under section 168; subsection B of the World Constitution (Threats to World Security).

China somehow remained different however. Even now, over three years after the program began, less than half of the Chinese population had chips. Rumors about these implanted micro devices causing incurable infections in certain cases certainly did not help them get many volunteers. Haig knew from experience how the stories about those illnesses could not be dismissed as mere gossip. One of his best friends in the Special Forces contracted so called “chip disease.” He lingered in agony for weeks until finally dying, most of his brain eaten away. A kindly Army doctor tried to euthanize him but even massive doses of a morphine derivative would not take the poor Trooper out of his misery. The doctor gave a vague explanation about how these super infections rendered medications ineffective in certain cases but Haig knew medical types tended to spout nonsense when they actually had no rational explanation for something so completely baffling. Of course the Government clamped down, with anyone talking about these troubling “incidents” promptly being shot by the Ministry of Security. Haig’s chip hadn’t caused him any issues...so far.

So many problems. Even though Haig remained unquestionably loyal to Antonio Lanza and the New World Order it made a person look back longingly at the simpler days when Dictator General George McLellan still remained the USA’s lone leader. McLellan would always be known as the heroic savior of the United States in the dark days following the terrorist nuking of Washington D.C. in 2019. With the chain of command irrevocably broken and various factions in the Federal Government and military fighting for power the situation threatened to turn into a nation shattering civil war. At that pivotal moment McLellan, a relatively low ranking Army Brigadier General and a group of Colonels staged a coup de tat, seizing control of key government and military installations. He instituted martial law and established an interim Military Junta to rule the nation. The Junta swiftly dissolved as General McLellan eliminated the other high-ranking members of the emergency government, appointing himself Supreme Military Commander. The General made it clear that his absolute rule would only be temporary and that free elections would of course be held once the “situation stabilized.” To no one’s great surprise the situation never did stabilize to the Generals satisfaction and he gradually evolved into the very first American dictator. The most disquieting thing about that whole episode of American history were always the rumors, never proven of course that the General himself masterminded the nuclear destruction of Washington in order to seize power. In order to calm the populace the New American Security Forces organized a show trial of Arab “terrorists” before most citizens gradually settled back into something approaching normalcy.

Almost fifty years had now passed since this single most significant event in American history, making the Glorious General, as the more affectionate citizenry called him, well over one hundred years old. His smiling, iconic countenance became the only leadership image the majority of people had ever really known. That probably explained why nearly everyone loved McLellan like he was their eccentric old Grandfather.

His latest obsessive peculiarity caused him to order that all communication systems broadcast Comm-Rad 1, which started playing music from his younger years in the late 20th century. According to the velvet voiced Dictator in his latest address, the American people needed revitalization by audibly reminding them of the nation’s glory days. More likely thought Haig; it would remind the General of his glory days as a horny little teenager. Yes, the old-fashioned music tended to be annoying but most people, other than radicals in the large cities just shook their heads, followed orders and listened to the shit. Haig once over heard two Intel techs talking

about some supposed profound psychological effect involved in this program but he'd be damned if he could see it. (Or more accurately, hear it).

In spite of everything the citizens of the U.S did owe the General a debt of gratitude they could never repay. By withdrawing the United States into a long overdue ultra-patriotic and strictly isolationist guiding principle, he re-established American pride when the nation faced complete ruin. His unopposed, but for the most part solid leadership lasted a half-century until finally with no other options available he brought the U.S of A into the New World Order. He needed to unify with Leader Lanza after being backed into a corner by the disastrous Euro-American war.

No one really blamed him for the recent misfortunes even though living conditions for nearly everyone in the country continued to worsen. Shortages of food and medical supplies as well as the deteriorating situation in American cities were difficulties that even General McLellan and Leader Lanza hadn't yet been able to improve. Although the problems seemed insurmountable, a great number of citizens still retained a child-like faith the General could somehow supply a miraculous, last minute deliverance. Some high-ranking people even spoke in hushed tones about a secret project, code named Optimus, apparently in the works for the past twenty years and now nearing completion. No one could ever explain the details of this scheme but many agreed that it probably meant salvation for the United States, possibly even for the whole world. A few also alleged that the General offered the unconditional surrender of America in return for Lanza's agreement that Optimus be allowed to continue without interference from the Europeans. If true, then obviously this unknown Optimus thing must be of enormous freakin' importance.

Of course, it didn't really matter what Haig or any other American citizen thought about the dictator selling out their country. Even though the General recently reached his own personal centenary and acted like a foolish adolescent at times, no one dared to question anything he did. Haig shivered when he remembered the coup attempt of 2045. A number of dissenters in the military attempted a rebellion, falsely believing the General's age made him weak and ripe for overthrow. Like an aging medieval Knight having to engage in one last crusade, he personally took command of the Government troops, methodically and ruthlessly crushing the revolt. Haig, only twelve at the time, never forgot the continuous news coverage broadcast on all media outlets showing the execution by firing squad of all the officers involved. Even so, the bulk of American citizens continued to be dedicated to the General, many saying the Rebels deserved what they had received. No one ever attempted an uprising again (at least until the recent problems with Christian radicals) or underestimated the General... except at their own peril.

As they now entered a very dangerous area, Haig snapped out of these irrelevant thoughts of the past and back into his normal state of instant combat readiness. Anyone in his line of work who didn't focus on their work promptly wound up dead. It may now have become a hackneyed cliché but like the old saying said, they had a job to complete and as a professional soldier Haig meant to finish that assignment...or die trying.

