

TO CAGE THE EAGLE

BY

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Chapter One

The Kremlin, Russia

Thursday, June 3 - 1900 Moscow Time

Thursday, June 3 - 0900 EST

Nikolai Vorishov stared blankly into the fierce eyes of his superior. He could not blink, and he could not tear his eyes away. He wanted to run, run far away, but he was paralyzed. Such was the power of the steel gray eyes of Andres Prominev, Chairman of the KGB.

"What do you mean? You have been unable to communicate with your contacts? Can you not get your point across, or are you having problems operating a phone?" Nikolai was sure he could feel the breath of the tirade, even from across the room.

"No, sir. It is more difficult than that."

"Is he dead?" Nikolai could see the a vein flex on the balding forehead of the man across the desk from him.

"No, sir." He stopped himself before he added the 'not yet'. He would not let himself take the entire brunt of an angry Andres Prominev. A man of such a violent temper that he was said to have beaten his children for failing to wash behind their ears. Such a man, surely, would not put up with failure.

"It seems that our contact is under surveillance, and any attempt to renew communications would surely jeopardize our operations there."

"Surveillance by whom? Surely those amateurs at CSIS cannot be aware of what has been going on?"

"The Canadians are not the problem." Neither man had much respect for the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service. Compared to the KGB, they were babies in a field of men, inexperienced, unaware, and lazy. Canada was also the third most important country in the world, its location dictating its rank. More operations could be carried out in Canada than in the States, for a variety of reasons. They had, in Prominev's well known opinion, a spineless government that refused to stand up to anyone. They had an inept security system, which was easy to penetrate. And they had almost unrestricted access to the country to the south.

"The CIA then?"

"No sir, not the CIA. It's the Chinese. It seems our friend has double-crossed us. He was not satisfied with our compensation, and has looked for higher bidders. Apparently the Chinese have provided him with what he wants." Nikolai did not mention that he had ordered his operatives to spend as little as possible for the information. Saying that at this point would be signing his death warrant.

"Damn capitalists. I will not tolerate this. If he will not deal with us, we will deal with him. Is that understood?" The vein on his forehead surged briefly as he pounded his fist on the desktop, shaking the old dial-type telephone into giving a slight jingle of a ring.

"Sir, that, will not be difficult. However, now that we have competition, we must deal with them as well. They may not be as willing to cooperate." Nikolai knew full well that the Chinese

would not cooperate at all. The border between the two countries was huge, and had been the location of many battles in the past century. Cooperation meant not going to war.

Andres paused, unsure of what to do. This was a new feeling for him, being unable to make decisions. He had always been the take charge man, who made decisions as if he were folding a paper. No one had ever come up with a question he had not answered immediately. He stood quickly, sending the chair he was sitting in flying up to the back wall of his office. He paced slowly across the plush, red carpet that seemed to be in every office in the Kremlin. He rubbed his eyes and massaged his temples. This was a difficult decision. His response now would break every moral of his nature. It was a gentlemen's agreement between spies, never spoken, but understood. You do not kill other spies in a foreign country. You may have them sent home. You may try to turn them. But you do not *kill* them.

Nikolai had never seen Andres stumble like this before. It scared him, but thrilled him at the same time. It excited him that the man was actually human, and could be stumped. It scared him that he was alone in the room, and any decision Andres made would be carried out through his hands.

"We cannot let the Chinese get those plans, even if it means we don't get them. We can't let the Americans have them either. That would cause just as many problems." He stopped to consider what orders he could give.

"Take whatever means necessary to stop the Chinese, preferably before they leave Canada. Confiscate any copies they or the Canadians have, and do not leave them anything to work from. If they leave Canada, we will find another way. Do you understand?"

"Do you want the boy killed?" Nikolai wanted his orders clarified. He too knew the agreement, and had been saved by it not so long ago, in the same part of the world.

"If he is willing to defect, let him defect. If not... kill him." Prominev made up his mind. This decision would change the spy game for a long time, and an enemy motivated by revenge could become very dangerous. The chain of KGB spies throughout the world would have to be put on guard.

"Yes, sir." Nikolai turned to leave.

"Nikolai." Andres sounded like a man prepared to drop a bombshell.

"Yes, sir." Nikolai turned to face the man, once again looking into those cold, steel eyes.

"You are personally responsible for this mission. If you fail, do not bother to return to the *Rodina*. Our friends in the government may be pushing *glasnost*, but Comrade, if you fail me, you will wish that you were dead. Is that clear?" A smirk crossed Andres' lips, and his eyebrows tilted radically inward. Andres Prominev could not accept failure, especially not this time.

"Yes, Sir." Nikolai did not wait for further instructions. He marched quickly from the office, straight to his own, and stopped in front of his secretary.

"Katrina, please arrange a flight from here to Toronto, Canada for me as soon as possible, but take the long way. And inform the consulate there that I will be arriving. Have them arrange transportation for me. I will also need my diplomatic status updated." Katrina nodded, and Nikolai strode into his office to hurriedly put together the information he needed to complete the mission.

Five minutes later, Katrina knocked and entered.

"I have booked you on an Aeroflot jet for Tokyo, leaving in half an hour. It connects with a United Airlines plane to Jakarta. From there to Vancouver, and then to Toronto. You'll be flying under the name Joseph Yurenko, a businessman from St. Petersburg. The information is in this envelope. Your driver is downstairs, waiting." She handed him a thick, yellow, manila envelope. Katrina had been on this job for fifteen years, and had seen many men sit at this desk. Katrina had served them all efficiently and had been able to keep this position on the recommendation of each man as he left.

"You're incredible, Kat. Thanks." He smiled at her to relax both of them. "I don't know how long I'll be gone, but I'm sure it will be at least a week. Take a couple of days off, spend them with those beautiful kids of yours."

"Thank-you Mr. Vorishov. I will." She quickly left him to finish packing his briefcase. He had a set of bags prepacked for quick trips, so he pulled these out of the closet, and checked over the contents. When he was sure he had everything, he shouldered his suit bag, and left, taking a careful glance around the room on the off chance that it was the last time he would ever see it. He felt confident he would be back soon, but, deep in his mind, he knew there was a chance. He wondered, as his driver made his way to the airport, how big a chance that might be.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada - Addams Aerospace

Thursday June 3rd - 1100 EST

Jason McAlpine found working in a cramped, windowless office incredibly disturbing and disheartening. He longed for the summers back at his parents' farm, where the work was hard, but the air was clean, and there was open space to do whatever he pleased. Stuck in a sterile basement office, he felt like a caged animal. The clock on the wall ticked slowly. He made a game out of passing the time, trying hard not to look at the clock for long periods of time, and then trying to guess how much time had indeed passed since he last looked. Unless something distracted him, he was usually within a minute or two.

Jason was a summer intern, a university student, hired on to fill the company's quota so they could obtain more government grants. At first, he had loved it. He had worked research before, but, finally, after his third year at university, he got a job at a company that dealt in his specialty, the aerospace industry. He had envisioned himself hob knobbing with jet pilots, astronauts, top-notch scientists from all over the world. Instead, after a brief introduction to the people from the various departments, he was shown an office, given a computer terminal and a stack of paper filled file folders, all of which had to be sorted, indexed and filed. Those written by hand, or which they did not have on computer, had to be hand scanned and indexed. It was not nearly as interesting as it sounded.

He sat alone in his off-white cell of a room, contemplating what he would do next summer. The initial stack of paper was long gone, and five or six more had followed it, but all he had to do was walk down the corridor to the storage room, pick up the next box, and continue. Jason had been at this since the first of May, and it was now the third day of June. It was too late to go out and find another job, and he was under contract until August 31. It would be nearly

impossible to break that contract, without severe implications. The government owned him. They paid most of his summer wages. They gave him the loans necessary for him to finish his schooling. Quitting now would not only make him ineligible for further loans, but would make his current loans come under review, which meant he might have to pay them back now, instead of after graduation. Quitting was not an option. Not when you worked for, or rather, were owned by, the Canadian government.

The documents, although most of them were short inter-office memos sent in the days before email, did have some interesting points. At the beginning of the summer, the files he handled were fifteen or twenty years old. He now dealt with items as close as two years previous, and by examining some of them, he now understood a great deal about the company, probably more than many of the investors who had poured their money into it just before the bottom fell out of the aerospace industry in the late eighties. The company dealt mainly in aviation system design and testing, usually the smaller parts of the aircraft, the bearings, the brake systems, coolant systems, etcetera. Within the last few years however, with operation Iraqi Freedom and the action in Afghanistan, the leaders of the company decided the time was right to expand, and began to bid on multi-billion dollar deals to supply parts for fighter jets, helicopters and any other war accessory that they could handle. They had even bid to supply the Canadian Navy with new SAR helicopters, a contract worth five billion dollars over the next ten years. They lasted until the last cut in the bidding, when the contract went to Sikorsky Helicopters. The name Addams Aviation was now known in the aviation industry, and feared by the one-time giants like Hughes and Lockheed.

Jason lifted the last folder from the box next to his desk, and slid it next to his computer, into the spot left vacant by the last empty file folder. Each document and folder was to be shredded upon saving the contents to disk, and making two backups. Jason kept one extra backup for reference and cross listing, one backup tape was given to Harry Addams, the president, for storage in his personal office safe for his use, and the other copy went into a lead lined off-site vault for safe keeping. Addams was vigilant in his system protection. The reason Jason was spending all this time now, was because some idiot had left a box containing the original tapes next to a high amperage test transformer in one of the labs while looking for the specs on the transformer. When he turned the transformer on, the magnetic field it generated turned the information into Swiss cheese. Some documents were recoverable, but many, mainly graphics files, were useless. Addams was determined not to have that happen again. The only people who had access to all three sets of tapes were Addams, and Jason. Addams had given Jason limited access to his safe to deposit the tapes should he not be around, but that happened very rarely, and Jason was nervous whenever he had to try to open the wall safe. Two errors in trying the code, and the security would be there in two minutes. Jason never made himself try the second time.

Jason crumpled up the cardboard file box as best he could. He compressed it with his hands into a small, flat, rectangle. He pushed himself out of his chair and shook his feet to make sure that they were not asleep. Sitting for more than an hour at a time was not only mentally demanding for Jason, but physically as well. His long legs stiffened quickly when confined to the tight area under his desk. His back ached from sitting at the computer for so long, and his vision blurred as he tried to focus on the door in front of him. Remembering that he still had his

glasses on, he took them off, and the door quickly came into focus. Jason was slightly farsighted, and had to wear glasses only for close up work. He was finding now, after a straight month of computer work, that it took longer and longer for his eyes to adjust to seeing distant objects, and his peripheral vision was not near what it used to be. He glanced at the clock as he opened the door. It was shortly after eleven thirty am.

He began his walk down the corridor to the recycling bin, out behind the office building. Most doors were closed, they almost always were. Behind them were the original environmental labs that the company used for testing of components. As the contracts grew bigger, the facilities also had to become bigger, and so the labs had be moved to the new complex across the road from what once was CFB Downsview, the former Toronto home of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Many of the labs had been converted to new office space or conference rooms, but were filled slowly, as very few chose to take an office with no windows, when space was still available on some of the upper floors of the eight story building. The new offices generally belonged to students, or consultants from another company on short term contracts. Jason walked slowly past an open door where his friend Collin DesRoches, also a summer student, sat at his terminal, rolling the mouse about on a drawing tablet. Colin had a year's worth of seniority with the company, and was doing what Jason thought he should be doing now. Colin was actively involved in a new project that very few people knew about. Whenever Jason went in to talk, Colin locked the session on his computer. He also locked the door to his office when he went to the washroom. Jason looked at Colin as a mentor, a person who had chosen the same

path as Jason, and was succeeding. Jason stopped at his door and knocked, giving Colin warning he was coming in. Colin switched locked his screen before even checking who it was.

"Working away as usual, I see." Jason said, leaning up against the door jamb, shifting his weight to his right foot.

"How's it goin' Jase." Colin turned in his chair to see who was at the door. He put his hands behind his head and stretched his back. He gave a brief yawn, and excused himself.

"About seventy five percent done. Only two more years to go." Jason added sarcastically. "Two long damn years." He grimaced. Colin, unlike Jason, was extremely clean cut, and without a doubt could have easily been mistaken for a preacher in the way he talked, walked and treated people. He was an all-around nice guy that everybody had to like, and pissed everyone off every once in a while for not sticking up for himself when he got into trouble. The thing was, Jason had admitted to himself, many months before, the guy almost never got into trouble. He had near perfect grades, didn't drink, smoke, or play around. He had a steady girlfriend who was as much like Colin as could be, and as far as Jason knew, they had never fought. The guy was an All-Canadian boy.

"Well, another couple of weeks, and you'll be all caught up. They have to give you something decent then. I hear they're bidding on a couple of new testing contracts, big ones. Probably need some new equipment designed and built then. Keep an ear to the ground. Get that paperwork done as soon as you can, and they'll really put you to work."

"Yeah, probably putting screw A into Slot B down at the plant for the rest of the summer." The comment elicited a chuckle from Colin.

"You're becoming too sarcastic in your old age, buddy. Be optimistic. I did the same stuff for my first two months last year. Who do you think did 80 to 88. They finally gave me a shot, and here I am."

"Really?" Jason had always assumed that they had put Colin right to work on designing a new helicopter or something. Jason paused for a moment, trying to think up a loaded question to ask Colin to find out what he was working on. If there was one thing in the world that Jason really hated it was not knowing what was going on. Friends told him he should get a job as a spy, since he was so good at getting information out of people without anyone noticing. He always enjoyed sitting with his friends and listening to them tell each other things about other people that they had just found out. Jason, of course, had already known for a week, and the smile he gave the group never failed to get a reaction of surprise from the gossip spreader. People started saying that Jason knew twice as much about someone as they did about themselves. The scary part was, they didn't realize how close that was to the truth.

"Are you getting to think now, or just edit?" Jason asked his question slowly. People who were suspicious by nature, never liked, or answered questions that ran by faster than Carl Lewis. Colin paused briefly to make sure he wasn't giving anything away.

"Let's just say that I'm exercising my artistic license. Maybe you'll know what it is when you get finished with your paperwork." Colin smiled when he realized that his project was burning Jason up from the inside. Colin was glad to finally know something Jason didn't, and it made him feel slightly superior.

"Yeah, sure..." Jason shifted his weight to his left foot, and swung his right like a large, slow pendulum. "Well, I gotta get back to work. See ya." He turned to resume his path to the recycling bins.

Colin sat for a minute, then got up and called Jason back.

"Have you got any of those boxes around. I need one to bring some books home tonight." He pointed to the crushed box in Jason's hand.

"This one's screwed. Check the storeroom." He reached into his pocket and tossed his keys to Colin. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Thanks." The throw was near perfect, but Colin dropped it just the same. Jason heard the keys hit the carpet, and mildly shook his head as he walked away. If there was one thing Colin would never be better than Jason at, it was sports. Jason inhaled deeply as he neared the top of the stairs to the outside world, preparing for the blast furnace temperatures that awaited him. In stark contrast to the climate controlled environment of the office, the hundred degree temperature outside was ridiculous. Toronto was in the beginning of what would be the hottest summer on record. Compared to the English style summer of the year before, where it rained almost every day, this heat reminded Jason of his trip to Jamaica the previous February, only there was a distinct lack of beach here, and way too much pavement.

Colin bent over to pick up the keys and brushed his hair back into place with his hand. He pulled his door shut while simultaneously checking that his keys were in his pocket. The door locked automatically, but Colin double checked anyway. He walked quickly to the storeroom, five doors down, about halfway between Jason's and his office. He went directly to where the

new boxes should have been. Apparently there had been a run on file boxes since the last supply shipment, for none were to be found. He glanced around the room. The stack of seven boxes that contained the documents Jason was scanning in sat in one corner, set in a stack of three, and two stacks of two. Colin lifted the top box on each stack to see how full they were. Each was at least three-quarters full. He set the top boxes down and checked the second box. Those too were unavailable. He lifted off the box obscuring the bottom one on the triple-decker, and was quite glad to find that box had only a couple of files in it. He pulled them out and stuffed them in the middle of the box that had been on the top of that pile. He replaced the boxes into three stacks of two, picked up his box, and exited the storeroom, double checking this lock as well.

He went to Jason's office first, to return the keys to Jason. Jason had not returned yet, but his door was unlocked, so Colin set the keys on his desk, and proceeded back to his office. He threw the box into a corner beside his desk. Jason entered the corridor just after Colin's door had closed, and did not think about stopping again. He was still trying to catch his breath after inhaling that super heated air from outside. He returned to his terminal, picked his keys up from his desk, shoved them into his pants pocket, and continued his typing where he left off.

Neither student could have guessed that a simple box could be responsible for the incidents which would change so many lives forever.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada - Addams Aerospace

Thursday, June 3 - 1145 EST

Jason slid the next box into the slot between his filing cabinet and his desk, lifed the lid off and tossed it behind the office door. He immediately got back to work, glancing at his watch as he did so. He had worked right through lunch, stuffing a home-made ham sandwich into his mouth as he typed. It was nearing three o'clock, and the sandwich still sat like a rock in his stomach. He tried washing it down with a cup of coffee, but all that did was aggravate the problem, sending his stomach ulcer into short painful spasms. Jason was constantly worrying about something or other as he struggled through the school year, and the doctors had diagnosed his ulcer after the final exams of his first year. Since then, he had been on medication which he was supposed to take twice daily, but had slacked off to only when it hurt. He reached into his desk drawer, pulled out a small vial of pills, and popped one into his mouth, and washed it down with another gulp of the lukewarm coffee.

He pulled the first file from the box, and flipped through it. It was fairly thin, and contained many of same items he had already entered. This simplified his task, and greatly sped up the process. Even so, as the clock approached five o'clock, he itched to leave. But in effort to get Friday off, he had worked two hours late on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. He had two more hours to put in tonight if he didn't want to come in tomorrow. He had plans to be at his girlfriend's cottage at Wasaga Beach tomorrow, and he was riding up to it after work. He hadn't seen his girlfriend since school let out, and it would be a great reunion. He kept typing.

As the clock ticked its way towards seven, Jason's typing mistakes increased. He tried stretching his fingers, told himself to relax and take his time. Finally, after fumbling his way through the last document in a folder, he decided to call it a day. He made the backups, put his

copy in his desk, took the second down to a vault and deposited it in a slot where the morning staff would send it to the off-site storage, and proceeded up to the penthouse office where Mr. Addams' kept his personal safe. The door to the office was open, and Harry Addams sat staring rather blankly at a stack of papers in front of him. He looked rather disheveled, his tie loose around his neck, and his shirt wrinkled. It was the end of another long day, Jason figured, and anyone who ran a multi-million dollar business would look like that if he kept up with everything the way Harry did. Jason knocked once, and stepped in.

"Hi, Mr. Addams. Working late tonight?" Jason and Harry were friendly to each other, but Jason could not yet bring himself to speak to Addams on a first name basis, as requested by Mr. Addams.

"Devil's work is never done. You know how it is." Addams smiled a weak grin. Addams had not been smiling lately, Jason had noted to Colin earlier in the week. Colin had quickly informed Jason that about a year ago at this time, Addams had been devastated when his wife was involved in a hit and run car accident, and had been left for dead. She had died shortly after arrival at the hospital, but might have survived if she had been helped immediately. The driver had been the only witness, and it took a half hour before someone discovered her body lying in the bottom of the ditch next to the road. The driver had never been caught, and that, as much as anything else, tore at Addams the most.

"Yeah, I suppose I do." Jason paused, trying to clear the image of the car accident from his mind. While Jason had never met Mrs. Addams, he had seen her picture in Mr. Addam's office, and Jason had a vivid imagination.

"I just came up to drop off this week's tapes, since I won't be in tomorrow."

"Great. Thanks a lot. How much do you have left to go?"

"I don't know. Six or seven boxes. Not near as many as when I started." Jason didn't want to sound too fed up, but Harry Addams was not a dullard.

"Well, you should be done in two weeks or so, gauging by your current pace, and then you can get back to real science. I'm sorry you had to do all this, but somebody had to." He tipped his head in gratitude, a look that was honest and compassionate.

"Well, at least I know this place inside out now. I won't feel too out of place when the guys start talking about the 'good ole' days'. I'll remember them better than they do." Addams finally let out a good, hearty laugh. Jason chuckled as well. It was good to see the man laugh. Jason walked over to the desk, and set the tape on the edge.

"Sometimes the biggest diamonds are mixed in with the dullest coal. Knowing the history of this place will help you in the long run." Addams looked at Jason as though he was looking into Jason's soul. It was an eerie feeling for Jason. The man was always friendly to everyone, helped out when he could, and demanded nothing but hard work in return. The man was about as closed with his emotions as anyone Jason had ever met, but the look on his face was that of a person reaching out. Jason had no clue what to do.

"Sure hope I find that diamond soon." Jason had no real idea of what the cryptic expression meant, but his reply garnished a smile from his boss.

"I'll see you Monday. Take care now." Jason turned to leave, but was forced to give Addams a look of innocence when he heard the next comment.

"Have fun with your girl....and don't do anything I wouldn't do." Addams enjoyed teasing Jason. He had no children of his own, and the young summer students were as close to relatives as anyone he knew. He kept hiring students from his alma mater, York University, partially out of tradition, partially out of need, and partially because it reminded him of his days at the university, now nearly twenty years ago, long before York became the science school it now was. Jason, more than any other student, reminded him of himself, tall, slim, athletic and smart, but not graced with any extraordinary abilities. He and Jason had to work very hard for the opportunities they were given. When Harry had met Jason during the preliminary interviews, he had known that Jason was the one he wanted. Many students had better marks, and some had more experience, but few had shown the ability to be diverse and adaptable. Harry openly hoped that Jason would come back to the company after he graduated, and prayed that Jason would not be turned off by the nature of the project he now worked on. Harry would have to find a bone to throw him near the end of the summer, to make sure he would return. Harry Addams saw potential in Jason McAlpine. The kid had a real future.

By the time Harry had finished his little introspective, Jason had left, closing the door slightly as he went. Addams didn't see the men approach the door until they were in his office.

Jason took the elevator back down to his office, and rushed to get changed, and tossed his tie, shirt and pants over the box of folders next to his desk. He pulled a pair of blue jeans and a white T-shirt out of his knapsack stashed in a corner, and put them on quickly. He exchanged his

dress shoes for a pair of brown leather boots, and stretched the jeans over the top of the boots. He pulled a denim jacket out of the nap sack and closed the half full bag. He stepped towards the door, but remembered, at the last minute, that his keys and wallet were still in his slacks. He picked them up, and pulled out what he needed, folded the pants neatly, and set them back on the box. He picked up the shirt, folded it as well, and did the same with the tie. If he was lucky, none of them would be wrinkled when he returned. He grabbed his backpack, slung it over his right shoulder, picked up his helmet, and left, turning out the lights and locking the door. He hummed a few bars of 'Everybody's waiting for the weekend' as he ran up the stairs to the outside world.

Ever since Jason was eight years old, he had been driving motorbikes. He had driven dirt bikes right up until he left for university, but had not got around to buying a street bike until the beginning of the summer, when he finally started to commute. The bike, an old Honda 250 XL, a half street, half dirt motorcycle, had a lot of miles on it. While it did not impress many people with its looks, it had more than enough power for riding in the city. It had none of the faring of the new Japanese street bikes, and certainly did not match the speed of those bikes, but it surprised a lot of people. It had a top speed of over 140 KPH, about 90 MPH, sipped gas at about 100 miles per gallon, which was damn good, even for a bike, and had never been beaten by a car from zero to 80 KPH at a stoplight. Jason had bought it from a friend for three hundred bucks, paid minimum insurance, and had a great time fixing it up. It was his baby.

Jason pulled his helmet over his head as he left the building and trotted over to the bike, parked in a small corner spot that no cars dared use because of its small size. He pulled the

backpack up over his left shoulder, and fastened the belt across his chest, so it wouldn't fly up when he got to the highway. The heat had subsided somewhat, but the black seat was still warm to the touch, and Jason was glad he had decided not to wear shorts. He straddled the seat, put the key in the ignition, and turned it to the run position. The bike had an electric starter, but the battery was iffy, so Jason usually used the kick starter. It made him feel more manly at the same time. The bike caught on the first kick. He flipped the kick-stand up with his foot, snapped his tinted visor down with his left hand, and revved the engine slightly, to make sure it would not die when put in gear. He popped it into first, slowly released the clutch, and wound his way towards the exit of the parking lot.

There were very few cars left, and he knew who was working late. He spotted Addams' BMW, and Len Connors' Lexus, and one other car he could not identify. It would not have stood out to him if it were not such a nice car, an immaculately polished black Mercedes, with windows so darkly tinted, they were more like mirrors. Jason stopped next to it to check his reflection in the windows. Nothing looked out of place, so he let out the clutch, and rode off, accelerating rapidly towards the street. It would be dark in two and a half hours, and Jason wanted to be at the cottage by then.

He did not notice the man watching him from the driver's seat of the black car.

Beijing, China - The Defense Ministry

*Friday, June 4 - 0900 Beijing Time**Thursday, June 3 - 2000 EST*

Literally halfway around the world, a meeting in the office of Five Star General Chin Lee, sought to find a solution to a problem that had suddenly put Lee's career at risk. As the Supreme Commander of the People's Republic of China Army, a post he had created when he arrived, just a few short years ago. Lee was one of few people who had influence over the Chairman of the Party. He had been key to the destruction of the Beijing Student Demonstrations a so many years before. He had given the order to initiate the first volley of the guns, and he had given the order to round up and 'terminate' the leaders of the demonstrations. He was in a position of extreme power, and it was a power he did not hesitate to use.

Lee paced along the window to his office, and casually glanced out over the beautiful courtyard below. He watched the guards patrol, their paces evenly spaced, their automatic rifles ready to fire. Even during the riots of 1989, no one had attempted to obtain access to this building. It was more heavily defended than the President's own palace. The items stored in here were more important. Lee considered himself to be more important. Such cockiness was not without reason. His meteoric rise to this position was a result of careful planning. Not just his, but his father's and some very good, very secret friends of the family.

He walked over to a painting on the wall to the right of his desk, neatly spaced between the bookcase that hid a secret passage way, and a pillar-mounted bust of the late Chairman Mao. He brushed the tip of his finger along the frame of the painting, and checked for dust. It was spotless. The room was cleaned thoroughly daily, and was checked for listening devices three or

more times. It was as secure to talk in as any place in the world, as long as the person you were talking to was to be trusted. Lee had total trust in no one, not even his mother or father. The business he was in made him realize that information could be found in a variety of ways, and the fewer people who knew about an operation, the fewer heads would have to roll if something went wrong.

He stared at the painting for a length of time, carefully examining the brushwork of the artist. It was exquisite. Even at a small distance, individual brush strokes could not be made out, not without a magnifying glass. Lee stepped back to study the picture as a whole. It depicted the peasant uprising of 1911, with their scythes raised to attack a group of sword wielding mounted soldiers. The horse in the front of the group bucked its front hooves skyward to evade the blade of an attacking scythe, while the knight struggled for control. The story behind the painting was legendary to the people of China, the popular revolt against the oppression of the warlords who once ruled the land. It eventually led to the establishment of the Communist system of government, which in reality, was no better, but it was a system which had given Lee the power he and his predecessors enjoyed.

"It is amazing, is it not, Comrade Min." He addressed the figure sitting in front of General Lee's desk, nervously trying to blend into the furniture. Lieutenant Tai Min had arrived two minutes earlier, but Lee had not spoken to him yet. Lee's assistant had shown Min where to sit, and closed the door behind him with a solid slam. Min had no idea why he had been called here, and being in the office of one who was undoubtedly the most powerful man in the world, according to Min's colleagues, was quite unsettling.

"Sir?" Min's voice cracked with the nervousness. Waiting for Lee to speak had nearly driven him crazy, and the question asked of Min was far too broad for him to even chance answering. Unconsciously he straightened his posture as much as possible as the General turned to face him.

"Do not be so nervous, my young friend. I was merely admiring my latest acquisition. What do you think of it." Lee let a fake smile of friendship cross his lips. It was much too hard to deal with people when they were not relaxed. He watched the man as he tried not to squirm, and took a certain delight in it. *Being powerful and not being known, has its advantages*, he thought to himself, *but true power is affecting people with them knowing it. Fear is an amazing component of the human psyche.*

"Sir, I...I think it is very beautiful." Min was embarrassed by his stammering and his comment, and forced himself to steady his emotions. He tried to convince himself that Lee was just another General, and he had dealt with many of those quite competently. Min could not help but be nervous. *If the stories of this man were true...*

"One could look at it that way, but then it would just be another painting, would it not? Tell me, what do you see there?"

Tai turned his head and relaxed slightly, but did not let his posture falter. He studied the painting for a moment before answering. This time he would try to find an answer that would impress the general.

"I see the fight of a people against an invading army, the power of the people." Min thought his answer was too short, but he also knew brevity and quality were more important than quantity.

"Yes, Comrade. The power of the people. The will of the people. The way of the people. It is for these people that we work, to try to let the people have pride in their country. To know that our China is a China of the citizens." It was a speech delivered in a tone that Marx might have found compelling.

"Yes, Sir." Min was familiar with the Communist theory. It was inscribed into his memory from the day of his birth. He knew no other way. He had not been in the cities when the trouble had begun. He had been on the Soviet Border, guarding a bridge over some god forsaken river that almost no one crossed.

"I understand that you forwent your final year of university to serve full time in our service. Would you care to tell me why?"

The question caught Min off guard. Min knew about the round up of the imperialist infiltrators. Was he suspected? He could not be. He was not within two hundred miles of any city when the riots had begun. Min paused to answer. Thinking of the days before he joined brought back a waterfall of memories that Min would rather have not discussed. He knew however, that it was not an option.

"My father's dying wish was that I serve the country that had treated him so well. This was the way of my father, and of his father as well. My family believes deeply in tradition, and I shall continue that belief." Min sounded as dedicated to his country as any man could be.

"I see." Lee had already known of Min's father's death, and his service to his country during the Korean War. Lee had met Wy-he Min when beginning his service. Wy-he had been Lee's instructor in his weapons demonstrations, an excellent teacher and a devoted countryman. It was in part because of Wy-he that Lee was alive. Wy-he had shown Lee how to increase the sensitivity of his peripheral vision, how to maintain awareness of his situation at all times. Lee's peripheral vision had enabled him enough time to jump into a shallow trench to avoid being cut in half by a round from a sniper during the short Chinese-Vietnam conflict of 1979. Many of Lee's friends had not learned so well, and had suffered and died for their country in that brief journey into hell. Lee owed Wy-he a great debt. Since he had not repaid Wy-he, it was his obligation to repay Tai Min.

"I knew your father. He was a great man. I was sorrowed by the news of his passing." Lee's eyes finally showed a touch of emotion, and from that Min knew that Lee was sincere.

"Thank you. It has been over five years since his passing. My grief has passed. May yours pass as well." Min made direct eye contact with Lee, something very few people did these days, and they exchanged nods.

Lee turned from Tai, and glanced back at the painting. Did the soldiers not have round eyes and pale skin, or was that his imagination? Lee blinked and the image was gone. He swiveled his chair towards himself, and sat, turning back towards Min, now directly across the desk from him. He pulled open the right desk drawer and removed a large file folder from the top of a stack, and placed it on the large mahogany desk top, carefully sliding the drawer of the centuries old desk shut and opening the folder. Min craned his neck slightly to see what the folder

contained, but the angle made it impossible to read. He sat back in his chair, maintaining a sense of posture, but trying to look more relaxed. Lee's approach had been to get him relaxed, and it was working. Lee flipped a couple of pages and stopped.

"Your file is most excellent. You have not one report of a negative nature. Your commanding officers have written many commendations. They say you are born to lead." Lee checked for a reaction from Min. Min had quickly recovered from the shock of finding out that was his folder under Lee's scrutiny. Every soldier knew a file was kept, but none knew what went in, and what stayed off. Min was also surprised at the thickness, easily more than two inches. Min did a quick calculation in his head. An inch of paper amounted to about four hundred pieces of paper. Min had been in the army for just over five years. That worked out to one hundred sixty pieces per year. What could possibly be on it, Min had no idea. If there were a file like this for every person in the army, the paperwork must be astonishing. Min did not know that the file included a small dossier on every friend or family member in Min's life, and that had only been added a week before, at the request of General Lee.

"You have been assigned to the Guangzhou Province Communications Facility for the last eighteen months have you not?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You have now completed your studies at the university as well"

"Yes, Sir. I completed them in March. I was forced to finish a course by correspondence, but I did graduate."

"Top of your class. You should be proud. I was never very strong in mathematics. Engineering was not a choice for me when I graduated." Lee's attempt at humor aroused a slight smile from both men. "I take it you will soon be leaving the army to pursue your career in the engineering discipline."

"Actually, Sir, I consider the army to be my career. I hope to put my training to use here." That was exactly what Lee had hoped to hear. Many who join because of tradition, stay, because of tradition. They know nothing else but the army way.

"Excellent. You are a true patriot, and exactly who I am looking for to be my new assistant. As of this moment, you report to me, and to me only. You have also been promoted three full ranks to Colonel. My steward will show you to your new office, and will arrange for a place to stay."

Min was taken aback by the turn of events. A dozen questions ran through his mind. He was sure his mouth was agape, but he could not close it. He had been wondering why he had be sent from his post in Guangzhou yesterday, to Beijing, a two thousand mile flight without any notice, or any reason. He had assumed he was in trouble, or that his mother, who lived in a small village outside of Beijing had become ill, or worse. Suddenly, he was an assistant to the most powerful man in the Chinese Army, and was being brought back home. *What changes twenty four hours could bring!*

"I don't know what to say. I did not expect this." Min stumbled through his thoughts. "What will I be doing? What of my belongings in Guangzhou?" He did not ask '*What of my girlfriend Mai-Ling in Guangzhou?*', although that was very much on his mind.

"All your paperwork will be taken care of, and your things brought up to your new residence in the next day or so. Be here at nine am tomorrow, and I will describe your duties to you. Be assured that you will find them highly interesting. I have left some reading for you in your office, in case you can't control your curiosity until then." Lee stopped to let it sink in some more. Min rubbed the tip of his thumbs and index fingers together, gathering his thoughts.

"However, you may not tell anyone you are here, not yet. Absolutely no one. Arrangements have been made for you to stay on base while you are here. It will all be clear in the morning. I will see you then." With that, Lee pressed the button on his intercom, and ordered his steward to show Min to his new quarters and office. The steward entered, bowed slightly to Lee, introducing himself as Louk Hi Wong and waved for Min to follow. Min turned slightly, glanced back at Lee, and then followed the steward, shaking his head as he rounded the corner. The steward slowed to pull the door closed behind them, and saw a smiling General Lee, flipping through the file on his desk.

The steward first led Min back to the elevator that he had come up on. He watched as the lights dropped from seventeen to B2, the second floor of the basement. After a short walk, they entered a room which had a long counter top along the front. The sounds of a busy office were clear. The tapping on keyboards, the whir of cooling fans in computer terminals, the noise of photocopiers going at full tilt. The steward tapped a bell on the counter top, and a short, aging woman appeared in front of them. It seemed as though she could barely see over the counter, but it was clear that she was in charge here.

"Good afternoon, Louk. What can I do for you?" The woman's rapid fire Cantonese caught Min by surprise. Min was fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin and English, but was not expecting Cantonese in the capitol of Communist China, dominated by the Mandarin language.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Chang. I require a pass card and documents for my new comrade. Clearance Gamma Sigma Mu." The steward waved a thumb to Min. Mrs. Chang gave a low, quick whistle. Gamma Sigma Mu meant top clearance. Min's card would give him clearance to almost every room in the building, and access to documents usually reserved for the most important people in the government.

"Colonel Tai Min, meet Mrs. Fou-Ta Chang. She's in charge down here. She handles supplies, special orders, and arranges passes. The building would not run without her." Mrs. Chang bowed slightly to Min, and waved for Min to follow. Louk lifted up a board separating the office from the waiting area, and allowed Min to pass under it, before lowering it gently. Louk waited on the other side of the counter while Min was led to a small bright room where his photo was taken. As the technician unloaded the camera, he was led to Mrs. Chang's desk, and asked to sit.

"Your full name and rank please."

"Lieutenant Tai Min...I mean Colonel Tai Min" Mrs. Chang's fingers completed a series of deft key strokes as she echoed his answer into the computer.

"Identification Number"

"88A690318001" The id number was easily broken down, with year of enlistment, spacer letter, year, month and day of birth, and if the last three digits were anything but 001, that meant

someone else enlisted into the army under the same circumstances. If, by some amazing set of coincidences, more than 999 people had the same set, the spacer letter would be incremented, leaving access to another twenty-five thousand registry numbers. Min knew no one with a B in his or her serial number, but he was sure there were some.

"Expiration date?" Min's lack of a quick answer made Mrs. Chang look to Louk for assistance.

"June 2, next year." Louk had been expecting this question. Min tossed the date around in his head. Exactly a year from today. It did not seem to be a permanent position. Mrs. Chang got up from her chair, and walked quickly across the room to a large console that looked like an ATM machine. She punched in a quick code, and out slid a small id card. She handed it to Min and sat back down.

"That card will get you into just about everything around here. Some places require two cards. Those locks need the approval of a second person of equal, or higher status. It works on a magnetic code, so keep it away from magnets, heaters, TV screens, everything like that. And if you lose it, call us, and we'll shut it out of the system. But don't lose it. Not if you value your job, Colonel." Mrs. Chang knew better than to ask how a man so young was a Colonel, but still she was curious. She knew that soon enough the talk around the cafeteria would turn to the new arrival, and she would have her curiosity satisfied then.

"Thank you ma'am. It is in good hands." Min got up from his chair, gave a polite bow to Mrs. Chang, and followed Louk as he quickly strode to the elevators. Mrs. Chang's words of caution did not fall on deaf ears. He smiled as he glanced at the picture on the card. He never

did take good pictures, he thought to himself. As he inwardly chuckled, he felt himself relax. He shook his shoulders to get rid of the tension, and smiled at Louk. It was good to feel comfortable again. Confidence had been drilled into him by his father, and many officers of higher rank had admired him for his abilities under pressure. Of course those officers were generally inferior to him in rank now. He was quickly calculating the prestige the new promotion would bring to his family. A colonel, no less. Even his father had never made it past commissary, equivalent to sergeant in this new system. Min marveled at the new position, barely able to keep his innate curiosity in check, and breathed deeply as they approached the elevator. Min thought he was settling in quite nicely. While a lot of things would still be new to him, nothing would take him by surprise like General Lee's bombshell. Or so he hoped.

Beijing, China - The Defense Ministry

Friday, June 4 - 0930 Beijing Time

Thursday, June 3 - 2030 EST

Min had mentally prepared himself to be put in some cubbyhole of an office with the rest of the people who worked under General Lee, but he need not have, he quickly realized. He was led to a room, on the floor immediately below the General's office, and directed to use his pass card to open the oak door, which Min quickly discovered wasn't all oak, but reinforced with a

thin, but very strong sheet of Kevlar, and lined with insulation to make the room practically sound proof, and effectively spy proof. The walls, Min assumed, were also reinforced in the same manner.

The room was completely equipped with everything Min dreamed he might use. A large oak desk sat on the south end, backed by a large bay window overlooking the same gardens which General Lee viewed through his window. Behind the desk was a large comfortable looking swivel office chair, the likes of which Min had never seen before. On the desk sat twin, black 24" widescreen displays, obviously state of the art Japanese technology, Min determined as he looked it over. Cables disappeared into the desktop, where a door hid a sleek, powerful desktop computer. He ran his hand over the top of the monitor, and contemplated what could be done with a machine such as this. After all the military ideals were stripped from him, Min was one thing, a hacker, and probably one of the best that China had ever turned out, and been able to keep.

Having access to this equipment was a thrill to Min, and it meant that he had been brought here to do the thing he loved most, hack. No more night watches over some god forsaken river in Mongolia, no more days listening to colonels complain and harass him about the shape of his uniform. Of course, he would be doing something, something important, he knew that, but it was something he enjoyed, and jobs like this came few and far between in the Chinese Army. Many a night in school he had spent working on devilishly clever programs. Many a night in the army he had spent doing nothing but thinking about those days of the past. Not with a lot of

regret, that wasn't how Min was wired, but it wasn't until he lay eyes on this machine that he realized just how much he missed it.

The steward waited by the door for a few moments, and then entered, letting the heavy door swing shut behind him.

"As you can see, we have provided the latest in computer technology for your use. I assume you know how to use it, but just in case, there is a complete set of manuals on disk." He pointed to a large bookcase on the east wall, lined with books and packaged DVDs that hadn't even been removed from their wrappers. Min walked over to glance at the book titles. Many were familiar to him, the Communist Manifesto, which he had been forced to memorize by his father. A collection of history books on China and its origins, volumes deemed necessary by the current Chair of the Communist Party, and various collections of literature by famous Chinese authors. These books were mainly decoration, but they were permanent decorations in the office of every commissioned officer in the armed services.

The second shelf intrigued Min, and gave him his first hint of what he might get to work on. Books on modern cryptography, special mathematical functions, microchip evolution, and algorithm design. The top shelf, from what he could see, contained many books he had studied at the university: engineering and metallurgy, fluid and gas mechanics, semiconductor physics, classical mechanics, electrodynamics, and chemistry. Min was familiar with many of these topics, and was genuinely interested in picking one up and looking it over, to refresh his memory, but he could feel the eyes of the steward waiting for him, so he made a note in his mind to get to it as soon as he could.

When the steward finally had his attention back, he directed him to sit down, and pay attention. The phone was the next item on the agenda.

"This phone has a series of preprogrammed numbers in it. You can set more if you need them, but here are the important ones. General Lee's number is first. This line is secure, but the General prefers to do business in person. The second one is temporarily a line to my desk. You will be getting an assistant of your own in the next day or so. We'll reprogram it then. The third button gets you someone in the computer archives, in case you need access to a stored set of files, they'll get you what you need. The fourth button will get security. If you are having a problem, they'll be here in a second or two. The fifth button will give you a secure line to anywhere in the world, as long as the other end is secure. Hit it once, and dial out like you would any other number. Hit it again to close the line. Don't forget that if you don't hit it, and dial out, the line is not secure. That's how General Lee's last assistant lost his job, if you know what I mean." It didn't take long for Min to figure out what was actually meant. He made another mental note.

"Over here," Louk led Min over to a painting on the wall, "is your wall safe. Press this button." He pressed a button on the top of the painting, and the painting swung toward the window. "Once the painting is open, you have thirty seconds or three chances to open the safe itself. Failure to enter the correct six digit code will cause a two hour lock out, and alert security." Louk quickly revealed a piece of paper cupped in his hand, and entered the combination. He handed the paper to Min, and popped the door open. Inside was a small stack of papers that he handed to Min as well.

"The instructions on how to change the combination are pasted to the inside of the door." Louk pointed to the safe door. "I recommend you change it immediately, and don't use your birthday, it's too obvious."

"Those papers are the ones General Lee would like you to read before tomorrow's briefing. They don't leave the office. Any notes you make on them must also be left here. You don't take your work home with you when you work here. Of course, this will basically be your home for the next little while, so get used to it."

"I'll let you get settled in your new office before I show you your quarters. I have some work I must take care of, so if you need anything, remember, line two. Is there anything I can get you before I leave?" Louk was a fast talker, who always seemed to be in a hurry, and usually was.

"Just wondering where the men's room is. It's been a long morning."

"Of course. Two doors down on your right. Don't forget your pass key. Most people clip it to their lapel. Hard to forget that way."

"Thank you."

"It's what I'm paid to do. Enjoy yourself." Louk spun, and walked quickly to the door and was gone in a flash, leaving Min a huge new world, all alone.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Thursday, June 3 - 2255 EST

Len Connors received the telephone call at his home shortly before eleven on Thursday night. He had been expecting a call, waiting impatiently by the phone, trying to read the Toronto Star, but instead he looked more at the phone than at the paper. He tugged at his beard and folded the paper back up, tossing it to the other end of the couch. He began biting his fingernails, a nervous habit he had tried to break for years, with little or no success. He would hire a hypnotherapist, he told himself, as soon as they got him the money, and he was far away in the Swiss Alps, or maybe the Bahamas. He couldn't decide whether he wanted to ski or scuba dive. Hell, he figured, he'd have enough money to do both. The shrill electronic ring of his phone brought him out of his dream. He hustled over to the phone and nervously picked it up.

"Hello." he calmed himself so he did not sound too eager.

"Mr. Leonard Connors, please." The voice was unfamiliar, and made Len even more nervous.

"Speaking." he tried to act as normal as possible, half expecting a salesman to go into a pitch about donating to this charity or that relief fund.

"Mr. Connors. This is Detective Ray Needham, Metro Toronto Police. I am afraid there has been a break in at Addams Aerospace."

"There has?" Len had expected to hear this, but not this soon. Tomorrow perhaps, while sunning himself on a white sand beach somewhere, but not tonight, at his own home. "What's happened?" He tried to act like the concerned head of engineering he was supposed to be.

"Sir, we don't exactly know. I'm sorry to inform you, but we found Mr. Addams in his office. He's dead." The detective tried to break the news the best way possible, the straightforward way.

"Dead! My God...!" Len's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. A large lump formed in his throat and breathing became difficult. He was sure his heartbeat had tripled its rate. He managed to stop his knees from buckling, but they barely held. He leaned up against the wall for support.

"Sir. We would like you to come down here."

"Yes. Of course." He stammered. "I'll be right there." He hung up the phone, his hand still glued to the receiver. It took him a moment to compose his thoughts.

"Dead... That wasn't part of the deal." He spoke out loud. "Oh my God. What have I done?" He made his way slowly towards his garage, the world slowly spun like it had the last time he got drunk. This time he couldn't stop it. On his way, he passed two packed suitcases by the door, ready to be taken out of the country. The only thing he had been waiting for was the briefcase full of money that had been arranged to be dropped off after the break in was finished.

He slipped on his deck shoes, and pulled his keys off the rack. His mind could only register one thought. Over and over again he asked himself one all-meaningful question.

Did I just kill my best friend?

He got into his metallic silver Lexus and started it up. After going over that one question, for what seemed like the hundredth time, he knew, he could not live with himself. He took his hand

off the garage door opener button, rolled the window down, and pressed down on the accelerator.

Twenty minutes later, he was dead.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Thursday, June 3 - 2257 EST

About the same time Len Connors was breathing his last few breaths, Colin DesRoches sat in his bed, a reading lamp shining brightly over his head. He slowly turned the page on the book in his hand, finishing the last few words on the page before hooking it with his thumb to reveal the next page. With his right hand he reached over to his night-stand, picked up his cup of tea, and methodically brought it up to his mouth. He ended almost every day this way, with a cup of tea, and a book in his hand. The tea made him sleep, although most doctors would say the caffeine it contained should have kept him awake. It was a tradition.

The book he was reading was a technical manual on high speed electronics, not normal night table reading for most people, but it was Colin's life. He glanced down at the file box at the foot of his bed that held five more volumes on other subjects related to his work. He scanned the next page, decides he had read just about enough for the night, closed the book, and placed it on his night-stand. He finished off the tea in his cup, shoved the covers down and pushed himself up out of bed. He proceeded out of his bedroom and past the living room, to the kitchen where he washed his tea cup and set it on the dish rack to dry.

He followed the rest of his ritual, heading to the bathroom next. His task half completed, he heard a knock at the door to his apartment.

"Shit." He tried to rush, but it just wasn't working. He was just finished when the knock came again.

"Just a sec!" He quickly rinsed his hands and pulled the towel off the rack as he passed by, heading to the door. He opened it without checking the peephole, figuring his girlfriend Shelly had forgotten something when she left. He undid the deadbolt, and opened the door. Two large, middle aged Asian men stood by the door, sandwiching a smaller but man between them, looking at him expectantly.

"Can I help you?" Colin pushed the door closed slightly, leaving only a six inch gap.

"Mr. DesRoches?" The shortest one in the group began speaking in clear English.

"Yes. What can I do for you?" Colin scanned his mind to place the faces, but he was sure he had never seen them before.

"We were hoping you would come with us." The short one spoke again, making it more of a statement than a question.

"Huh?" Colin was puzzled. "Who?" He stopped in mid sentence as the second man reached into his jacket, and pulled out a large black pistol. The third man pushed the door open, knocking Colin backward. Colin tried to regain his balance, but the third man grabbed him before he could steady himself, and slammed him face first into the floor.

"You should be more careful who you let in, Mr. DesRoches." The second stepped in, and planted the muzzle of the pistol into the base of Colin's skull. The first man stepped by Colin's prone body, and closed the door behind him.

"Now Mr. DesRoches, should you make any noise, my friend Chun here would gladly introduce rapid lead poisoning to your body. Is that understood?"

"Yes." Colin had never been so frightened in all his life. Small beads of sweat formed on his forehead and his throat clamped shut as the man grabbed him by the neck and lifted him to his feet.

"Good." Colin was turned to face the short man.

"What do you want? I have no money..." His voice was raspy, the grip on his neck so tight that the involuntary muscle tightness in his larynx had no way to relax.

"Yes, I know, but that is not what I'm after." The man stopped when he heard a crash from the living room. Colin quickly realized that the third man had disappeared.

"What do you want?" Colin heard another crash and became more frantic.

"Where are your plans for the AIM-260."

"How do you know about that? Why do you think I have them? Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter how we know, or who we are. You do not ask the questions. Is that clear?" Colin gave a short nod, but that was apparently not enough. The man with the gun changed his grip on Colin, wrapping his forearm around Colin's throat, restricting his breath even further.

"Yes." Colin managed to blurt out a short confirmation and the pressure was somewhat relieved.

"Now where are the plans?"

"I don't have them."

"I think you do."

"I left them all with Mr. Addams. He has them." The pressure was again increasing.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Addams does not. We met with him earlier. He was not very cooperative either. Now unless you wish to join him, I suggest you tell me now."

"I don't know!"

"Wrong answer again, my good fellow. I forgot to tell you that Mr. Addams has had a most terrible accident. Quite a mess it was." The short man grinned. Colin could not believe what he was hearing. The grip got tighter again, and Colin began to see large blue and black dots appear before his eyes.

"It seems our young friend has a problem with authority. I think we should take him home to teach him some respect. Don't you, Mr. Chun?"

Chun agreed by placing slightly more pressure on Colin's wind pipe. Colin heard another crash from the living room, and blacked out.
