

# P R O L O G U E

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## THE APOCALYPSE

### *Lebanon*

Hamilton Fisk spread his body flat against the tile rooftop and eased closer to the edge. He'd been waiting there all night, staring at the Beirut skyline and Lebanese sky. All the while his ears had been tuned to the street below, listening for the sound of the truck he knew was coming. As the sun broke through the eastern sky, the truck finally arrived and backed up to the loading dock. Fisk adjusted the earphone in his right ear and pressed the button on his radio.

"Someone's here."

"Do they have it?"

Fisk watched the truck for a moment then keyed the microphone once more. "Truck's empty. Looks like they're loading some crates."

"Crates?"

"Wooden crates."

"I thought you said they were making a delivery." Fisk did not respond. The voice on the radio continued. "We need to find out exactly what they have inside."

"Yeah," Fisk replied. He pulled the earphone from his ear and stuffed the radio in his pocket. "That's easier said than done," he grumbled. Moving slowly, he pushed back from the edge of the

roof and crept to the far side of the building. Using a downspout as a ladder, he swung his legs off the roof and carefully lowered himself to the ground.

When the truck was gone, Fisk slipped around the corner to a door along the left side of the building. Stealthily he picked the lock and eased open the door. Inside, he found a large room filled with crates and boxes. He closed the door behind him and worked his way across the room. A few minutes later, he reached a workroom near the loading dock at the rear of the building.

In the workroom he found packing material—straw, Bubble Wrap, and clear, shrink-wrap plastic. Along the wall was a workbench. Cubbyholes for tools lined the wall above it. He scanned the spaces looking for something, anything that might give him a clue. On a shelf to the right, he found a radiation exposure badge. He took it out of the cubby and held it up to the light. An LCD panel showed a reading of 95 mrem.

Lying on the bench was a worn diamond-tipped saw blade from a circular saw. Fisk picked it up for a closer look. Beneath the blade was a shipping receipt. Four crates sent to Kornheiser Museum in New York. Fisk stuffed the documents in his pocket, picked up the radiation tag, and started toward the door. Just then, he heard footsteps approaching from behind him. He turned in that direction.

Fisk grinned and nodded toward the pistol. “Tabas, you sure you know which end of that thing to hold?”

Tabas chuckled. “Glad to see you haven’t lost your sense of humor, Bill. Or is that your name now?”

“I haven’t been Bill in a long time,” Fisk shrugged. “Most people call me Hamilton now.”

“I liked you better as Bill.” Tabas gestured with the pistol. “Move away from the door. I don’t want your body to block the entrance.”

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“What’s going on, Tabas? I thought we had a deal.”

“Deals change.”

“Where’s the plutonium?”

“We found a better use for it.” Tabas gestured again with the gun. “Move away from the door.”

Reluctantly Fisk stepped to one side and moved slowly along the workbench. As he steadied himself, his hand slid across the saw blade. Without taking his eyes off Tabas, he curled his fingers around the blade and flung it across the room toward Tabas’ head. Tabas lurched to the side and ducked to avoid the spinning blade. Caught off guard, he stumbled and banged his shoulder against the wall. Fisk lunged for the pistol.

Tabas avoided Fisk’s outstretched fingers and brought the pistol around to the side. He pressed the muzzle against Fisk’s temple and in the same motion squeezed the trigger. Fisk’s skull exploded against the wall.

Late that afternoon Nasir Hamid sat in a café in Beirut, smoking a cigarette. From his table in the corner he had a full view of the dining room. Through the front window he could see all the way to the opposite side of the street.

In a few minutes, the door opened and Fareed Ashwan entered. A slender man about Hamid’s height, he had intense dark eyes that constantly darted from side to side. Hamid did not like him but he was the contact Tehran had designated. He caught Ashwan’s eye and motioned him over with a nod of the head. Ashwan crossed the room and took a seat at the table.

Hamid stubbed out the cigarette in an ashtray and leaned forward. “You know where it is?”

“Yes.”

“And where is it?”

“In a safe place.”

“You have it?”

“No. Tabas has it.”

“Tabas?”

“Yes,” Ashwan nodded. “I told you this would happen.”

“So, he didn’t trade it like we planned?”

“No.”

“Tabas is Hezbollah? Why is Hezbollah interested in this?”

Hamid continued.

“Everyone is interested. First Iran has the bomb, then Syria. Now everyone wants the weapon. Even Saudi Arabia has a program, though the Americans are too stupid to see it.”

“What does Tabas plan to do with it?”

“Right now he is negotiating with the Syrians. They have access to plutonium, but no bomb. Tabas has both, but he is willing to take...partners. Thinks maybe he can make two bombs.”

“So this is how Hezbollah works now? They steal from their friends?”

A smile flickered across Ashwan’s face. “Something like that.”

“And where did Syria get their plutonium?”

Ashwan shrugged. “Who can say?”

“They can trace it, you know. What Tabas got from us. The Americans can trace it. You realize that, don’t you?”

“By then it will be too late. The bomb will be on its way.”

“No. I mean after the bomb explodes. The key has never been exploding the bomb; it’s always been about avoiding a counter-strike. They will examine the debris and obtain a signature for the plutonium. It has definite characteristics. They will know exactly where it came from.”

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“You watch too many movies,” Ashwan scoffed. “No one can do that. Only in the movies.”

“Believe me. They can do it. So whoever supplied the plutonium will get the blame—and the counterstrike.”

“The Americans are too stupid to see this coming and too weak to launch a counterstrike.”

Hamid leaned away from the table. He took a pack of Gauloises from his pocket and shook a cigarette free. “You cleaned out the warehouse?”

“Yes.”

Hamid stuck the cigarette between his lips and lit it. “And you disposed of the body?”

“The American sleeps in peace.”

Hamid sighed. “This gets more complicated every moment.” He shoved the cigarette package in his pocket and took out a wad of cash. Smoke circled his head as he counted off several bills and tossed them on the table. “Meet me tomorrow.” The cigarette hung from his bottom lip as he counted off four more bills, then slid them across the table to Ashwan. “And tell Tabas I want to see him.”

*Arlington, Virginia*

Jim Martin stood in the Operations Control Center and stared at the screen on the wall. A career CIA officer, he had worked through many crises, but none as mystifying as the one he faced this day. Conversation and chatter in the room swirled around his head as analysts and researchers pecked away on their keyboards and worked the phones. Still, Martin’s eyes were fixed on the screen and the image of the warehouse in Beirut. Hamilton Fisk was a good man and a capable field officer. They had worked the plan perfectly.

SEAL Team Six was waiting to pounce. Then the whole thing vanished and Fisk was dead.

Martin ran the tips of his fingers over his cheek and whispered to himself. "How did we lose it? Where did it go? What else was in that warehouse besides the package they received from Iran?" Finally he turned to face the others in the room. "Okay, we know for a fact Fisk is dead. Who else can we send into that warehouse?"

Russ Williams glanced up from his desk. "We don't have time for that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, we know the plutonium reached the warehouse, and we know it's gone."

Martin frowned, "And?"

"We should assume the worst."

"That they made a bomb."

"Yes. And we should concentrate on where it's going."

"Yeah, well, that's fine. Take you all of five minutes to think that up? There's a big world out there, in case you haven't looked lately. A big scary world. Getting scarier every minute. Everybody from Jordan to Afghanistan has a nuclear program. The ones who don't are scouring the black market for a bomb." He ran his fingers through his hair and continued, talking now to no one in particular. "We never should have believed the Iranians. I tried to tell them eight years ago not to do it. But no, they had to send Neyshabur fuel for his reactor. All on a promise they'd never use it to make bombs. Who in their right mind would believe an Iranian president?"

Someone across the room piped up, "Democrats loved him."

"Ahh," Martin growled. "It's not just the Democrats. Republicans went along with it too. I didn't hear any of them complaining when we made Israel back down. Forced them to do it." He turned to face

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Williams once again. “So, Mr. Williams, what do you think they did with it?”

“Plutonium isn’t traded out of warehouses just for the fun of it. They made a bomb and shipped it out in the crates Fisk saw them loading on that truck.”

“And what did they do with it after that?” Martin chortled. “Where did the truck go?”

“The building is owned by an antiquities dealer named Salaam Katami. Two weeks ago he received a shipment of artifacts from a dig in Sidon, on the Mediterranean coast. The dig was sponsored by Kornheiser Museum in New York.”

“Where’s Katami?”

Someone else spoke up, “Beirut police found his body this morning.”

“So Katami was killed to keep him from talking?”

Williams responded. “Katami was killed to get the warehouse.”

“So they could send a bomb in a shipment of artifacts? Come on,” Martin grimaced. “How would they get something like that past our scanners?”

“Thousands of containers arrive every day. Not everything gets scanned.”

“Still, that’s a lot of risk. I mean, it gets caught, we’re gonna know who sent it.”

Someone else spoke up, “Trigger it with a cell phone. Have someone watching. Inspectors get too interested, press the button on the cell phone. Bomb detonates where it sits.”

“That would be one huge suicide bomb.”

Martin fell silent for a moment. A frown wrinkled his forehead. “I don’t know, Williams. It’s a nice idea but it sounds thin.”

In frustration, Martin tugged at his hair with both hands. “Feels like we’re making this up.”

“We’ve been working this for hours,” Williams replied. “You got any better ideas?”

Martin’s countenance changed. “All right.” His voice took an authoritative tone. “Get up to New York. Find out what Kornheiser Museum knows about those four crates.”

“Me?” Williams gave him a blank look. “I’m an analyst.”

“It was your idea,” Martin replied. “I don’t have time to find somebody else. Go see what you can find.”

Williams took his jacket from the back of the chair and started toward the door.

### *Lebanon*

That evening Hamid sat on the floor of an apartment just off The Corniche near Beirut’s entertainment district. Seated across from him was Yosef Jiroft. He sipped from a cup of tea and glanced over at Hamid.

“Maskutan wants to know where things stand.”

“Hezbollah has the item,” Hamid replied.

“They made the exchange?”

“No.”

“What have they done with it?”

“They have placed it in the bomb, but now they are bargaining with the Syrians.”

“And where did they get this bomb?”

Hamid looked Jiroft in the eye. “From you.”

“From me?” Jiroft glanced away. “You think that is possible?”

“They have a Mark 4 aerial bomb.” Hamid’s voice grew tense. “It came from our arsenal in Tehran. How else could they have obtained it if you didn’t give it to them?”

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“You seem upset.”

“I am upset.”

“These things will work out.” Jiroft folded his hands in his lap and glanced in Hamid’s direction. “Didn’t we want them to receive the item?”

“Yes. The plutonium, but not—”

Jiroft cut him off with a wave of the hand. He leaned forward and lowered his voice to a whisper. “Do not use that word. People are always listening.”

Hamid straightened his shoulders and then continued, “You knew this would happen.” Jiroft did not answer. Hamid pressed, “You wanted it to happen.”

“You do not need to know everything. Your job is delivery. Not policy. That is why you were chosen.” He looked Hamid in the eye. “That is why you have held your job all this time. Working from your offices in Masqat, Dubai, and wherever you were needed. With the cars and planes and women. Privileges others do not have nor seek. No one asked questions of you, because you did not ask questions of us.” His eyes bore in on Hamid. “You wish to change all that now? When we are so close? So close to all we have worked for?”

“They will blame us,” Hamid replied.

“Who?”

“The Americans.”

“How? How will they know it was us?”

“They will measure the fallout, the radiation from the blast, and they will develop a signature.”

A frown wrinkled Jiroft’s brow. “A signature?”

“The characteristics.” Hamid leaned forward and put his lips near Jiroft’s ear. “Plutonium can only be made in a reactor. Each reactor creates it with slight differences. They will measure all the radia-

tion from the residue and use that to determine where it came from.” Hamid leaned away. “And then they will know it was from us.”

Jiroft dismissed him with the wave of a hand. “You worry too much. Even if they do as you suggest, it will take years to locate the reactor.”

Hamid wagged his finger. “They built our reactor.”

“Yes, but I do not think—”

“And they supplied the fuel. Your friends in Washington arranged it.”

“That was the price they had to pay.” Jiroft tipped his head back, jutting his chin forward ever so slightly. “They gave us fuel for our reactor and kept Israel pacified, and we did not send our army to crush the Iraqis when the Americans were gone. In this Neyshabur was brilliant.” Jiroft’s eyes flashed. “The young American president wanted to withdraw his army from Iraq. Neyshabur let them out in exchange for those two favors. Israel and fuel for the reactor.” Jiroft took a deep breath. The muscles in his neck relaxed. “Neyshabur was impetuous and stupid in many ways, but in this he was magnificent.”

Hamid bristled at the mention of Neyshabur’s name. Images flashed through his mind of the short, slender schoolteacher, who somehow convinced the Assembly of Experts that he could run the country. His inept political skills had threatened all their plans and very nearly got Hamid killed. The country had been rescued not by Neyshabur’s strategy with the Americans but by Adnan Karroubi’s decision to allow a student revolution as a means of wresting control from Neyshabur’s allies. With Karroubi’s wise leadership, they had developed nuclear weapons, forged an alliance with Al-Qaeda, made peace with the Wahabi, and used their newfound

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strength to control the region. Hamid took a deep breath, pushed those thoughts aside, and concentrated on the matter at hand.

“The American scientists are smart. They know our reactor and they know our fuel. They will figure out where the plu—...where the item came from.”

A cloud spread over Jiroft’s face. Then, just as quickly, it disappeared. “It does not matter now. There is no stopping it. Things are in motion. As the Imam has decreed, so it shall be.”

***Brooklyn, New York***

That morning Tommy Jones left his apartment in Brooklyn and headed out Prospect Avenue to Red Dot Trucking Company’s dispatch office. He turned in at the main gate, signed the logbook with the guard, and made his way to the office. Fifteen minutes later he climbed in the cab of a White Freightliner truck and drove out the back gate.

As the sun rose over New York, Tommy turned the truck off Columbia Street and entered the main gate at Red Hook Container Port, a facility located across the harbor from Manhattan. A scanner recorded information about the truck from a bar code strip along the side of the cab. A camera perched atop the guardhouse photographed the truck. The guard waved Tommy through without stopping.

In half an hour the Freightliner cab was hooked to a trailer loaded with a standard forty-foot cargo container recently hoisted from the deck of the *Singapore Moon*. An attendant on the ground connected the air hoses from the cab to the brake lines on the trailer. While the attendant worked, Tommy sat behind the steering wheel of the Freightliner sipping coffee from the cap of a thermos. When the lines were in place the attendant called up to him, “Where you going today, Tommy? Pittsburgh?”

“Not today. It’s my daughter’s birthday.” Tommy set the thermos aside and picked up a clipboard from the seat. He gestured with it out the window. “Nothing but local runs today. Gotta get home early. This one’s going to a museum on the west side.”

“What are you doing with a cushy job like that? You must know someone at the union.”

“I know everyone at the union,” Tommy grinned. “I’ll be back in an hour for another one.”

“Okay. We’ll be waiting,” the attendant chuckled.

Tommy turned away and pressed the accelerator. The truck’s engine whined as it started slowly forward.

From Red Hook Tommy took Prospect Expressway to lower Manhattan, then worked his way up the west side. At 11th Avenue he stopped near the corner of 45th Street and got out. A young woman came from the curb and met him as he rounded the front of the truck.

“Hi. I’m Lori Bachman. I work for Kornheiser Museum.”

Tommy checked his clipboard. “Is this the place?”

“Yes. This is the place.”

Tommy gestured over his shoulder toward the truck. “Where do you want the container?”

She pointed to the right. “There’s an alley down by that red car. You can turn in there.”

Tommy glanced in that direction and frowned. “Turn in, or back in?”

“Turn in, I guess. Our loading dock is in back. You can go up the alley and then back around to it. You’ll see it. There’s a sign.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Tommy stepped back to the truck and climbed in behind the steering wheel. He tossed the clipboard on the seat, released the

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brake, and moved the shifter into gear. The truck started slowly down the street. As he neared the entrance to the alley, he maneuvered the Freightliner to the left into the oncoming lane, and then came back hard to the right. The trailer followed the cab in an arc as it made the turn into the alley. Black smoke poured from the exhaust stacks. The engine lugged and lurched.

Shortly before noon Russ Williams stood in the warehouse at the Kornheiser Museum. Nearby were four wooden crates. Just then a door opened behind him and a voice called out. "Mr. Williams! Sorry to keep you waiting."

Williams turned to see a tall, slender man dressed in a gray business suit coming toward him. The man thrust out his hand. "David Lansing. We spoke on the phone earlier."

"Yes." Williams shook his hand.

Lansing gestured to the crates. "These are the items we discussed. Came in this morning in a cargo container from our dealer in Lebanon."

"Have you looked inside them?"

"No. I mean, we would have but after you called I thought perhaps we should wait."

"Good. I have a team outside. I'd like for them to take a look at the contents."

"Certainly."

Williams pressed a key on his cell phone and brought it to his ear. "They're ready."

The rollup door to the right clattered as it rose. Outside, a four-man nuclear assessment team stepped from a white van and climbed onto the loading dock. The first man pointed to the crates. "This is what we're looking for?"

"Yes," Williams nodded. "These are the crates."

Working carefully and methodically they pried the lid off the nearest crate. Inside they found it packed with statues and urns, each encased in bubble-wrap and padded with straw. One of the men took a handheld dosimeter from his jacket and placed it near the center of the crate. He glanced at the screen and shook his head. "Nothing here." They repeated the process with each of the first three crates. None of them showed the presence of radioactive material.

When they pried the lid from the fourth crate they found it held a large stone container. Over six feet long and three feet wide, it was as deep as the crate and filled it completely. Rectangular in shape, it appeared to be made in two pieces with a base and a lid. One end of the lid was square and smooth. The other end was carved in the shape of a man's head and shoulders. Williams glanced over at Lansing. "What is this?"

"A sarcophagus," Lansing replied.

"A what?"

"Sarcophagus. A coffin." Lansing stepped closer. "This one belonged to Eshmunazar II. King of Sidon."

"What's in it?"

"His remains, I hope."

"His remains?"

"Yes. His well preserved body. At least, we hope it's well preserved."

Just then the man with the dosimeter called out. "Hey, we got something here." He held the dosimeter near the seam where the lid of the sarcophagus joined the base. "Got a little chip missing from the edge of the lid. I'm getting something." Williams leaned in for a look. "Not much," the man continued, "but it's more than background."

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Williams nodded. "We need to see what's in there. Get an x-ray machine."

"We have one," Lansing spoke up. "Will ours do?"

Williams gestured toward the sarcophagus. "Can it penetrate that stone? It looks pretty dense."

"It is dense," Lansing smiled. "Made of diorite. But our machine will see through it. It's right down here. We were going to x-ray it anyway."

*Lebanon*

That evening Hamid sat at a corner table in Zawat, a café near the southern edge of Beirut. He sipped from a cup of tea and waited. Ten minutes passed and still there was no sign of Ashwan. After two more sips Hamid took a cell phone from his pocket and scrolled down the contact list. At that moment Ashwan appeared.

"So sorry," he said as he took a seat. "The car."

"You have too much trouble with your car these days." Hamid closed the phone and slipped it in his pocket. "You spoke to Tabas?"

"He is not worried about the Americans."

"No?"

"No." Ashwan shook his head. "He says they do not wish to use it now, anyway. They only want the power it brings. He likes to see the Americans squirm, and he is enjoying his dealings with the Syrians."

"This is no time to play games."

Ashwan leaned forward. "You should not push yourself. Tabas deals directly with Jiroft. He does not have to deal with you."

Hamid peered at Ashwan over the rim of the teacup. "He said that?"

“No.” Ashwan tapped the table with his index finger. “I am telling you.” He sighed and leaned back from the table. “As your friend.”

Hamid took a sip of tea. “You want something to eat?”

“No.” Ashwan leaned forward. “I told Tabas you wanted to see him. He will show you the bomb for yourself.”

“He will?”

“Yes. You would like to see it?”

“When?”

“Tonight, I think.” Ashwan took a cell phone from his pocket. “Let me make a call.” He pressed a button on the phone with his finger, then put it to his ear. After a moment he lowered the phone and flipped it closed. “He does not answer. Perhaps we can see it tomorrow.”

Hamid did not like the sound of Ashwan’s voice. He took another sip of tea and glanced around the café. Something was not right.

### *Brooklyn, New York*

Russ Williams looked up as David Lansing hurried toward him. From the look on his face, Williams knew something was very wrong. In his hand Lansing held an x-ray picture. It flopped at his side with every step. He thrust it toward Williams without a word. Williams took it from him and held it up to the light.

The picture taken with the x-ray machine showed the compartment inside the sarcophagus had been reshaped to fit an aerial bomb. The housing near the top of the bomb was open. Wires and switches protruded from it. Inside the bomb casing was the unmistakable image of a fusion-type nuclear warhead—a pit of plutonium surrounded by a shield of uranium, encased in conventional explosives. But why was

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the casing open? And what was the object to which the wires were attached? Williams stared at the image in silence and tried to make sense of what he saw. Then, from inside the sarcophagus, came the faint sound of a ringing cell phone.

Lansing looked puzzled. "There's a phone in there?"

Williams' face turned white. Wires from the trigger were connected to a cell phone. He shouted as he turned away, "It's a—"

Before Williams could complete the sentence the room disappeared in a brilliant flash.

In a sudden burst of heat and light, the bomb inside the sarcophagus detonated. Instantly the city block on which the museum sat was consumed by an inferno that stretched a mile in every direction. As hot as the sun, it rose in a giant column straight up into the sky.

Within seconds of the blast, a shockwave equivalent to wind traveling at more than seven hundred miles per hour extended in every direction. Traveling at the speed of sound, it rolled quickly north through Harlem and south through the Financial District. Windows shattered, trees were torn from the ground, and cars and buses were tossed about like toys.

Behind the initial shockwave came a rolling firestorm pushing temperatures well over three thousand degrees Fahrenheit. Within minutes every building on Manhattan Island burst into flames. By the time the thermal column above the museum billowed into a cloud, everything from Central Park South to Canal Street was reduced to a gray, ashen wasteland.

Five minutes after the bomb detonated, the firestorm that swept Manhattan reached Newark to the west and Plainview on Long Island to the east. Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx were engulfed in flames. Ships moored at Red Hook Container Port were

lifted from the water and shoved across the container yard. Fuel tanks exploded, sending steel shrapnel flying through the air.

At the same time, an electromagnetic pulse generated by the blast rendered non-shielded electronics instantly inoperable. Communications systems throughout the region went dead. Cell phones, telephones, radios, and televisions fell silent. Computers stopped working. Electronic control systems ceased to function. Engines in cars and trucks, regulated by onboard computers, lurched to a halt. Planes plummeted from the sky. Trains jerked to a stop.

Then the electrical system collapsed. New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania were plunged into a blackout. Unable to communicate, and without water or other supplies, the few available emergency personnel were rendered helpless. Those who survived the blast were trapped in the smoking ruins of a once-proud city. The stench of death hung in the air.

Automatic switches designed to limit catastrophic failure of the electrical power grid proved no match for the excessive load generated by the blast. By mid-afternoon, the blackout that began in New York reached as far south as Washington, D.C. Richmond, Charlotte, and Atlanta quickly followed. As nightfall descended, every state east of the Mississippi River was without electrical power. Darkness prevailed from Maine to Miami and westward as far as New Orleans, Memphis, and Minneapolis. Confusion, terror, and panic gripped the nation.

PROLOGUE

\*This material is used by permission of Dr. Michael D. Evans. It is an excerpt from his latest fiction book. If you would like to be informed when it is to be released, please write to Dr. Michael D. Evans, P.O. Box 30000, Phoenix, AZ 85046. Dr. Evans' last fiction work, *Jerusalem Scroll*, was released in 1999 and was based on a plot by Osama bin Laden to target New York with a nuclear device.

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*You have just read a fictionalized account of events that could happen anywhere around the globe at any moment—in New York, Paris, London, or Jerusalem. This chapter is from a work of fiction to be released in 2010. To receive prior notice upon the release of the book, please contact [memi@jpteam.org](mailto:memi@jpteam.org). Much of the scenario presented is based on the fact that Iran is actively and diligently pursuing the acquisition of nuclear arms. With Iran's history of contempt for the United Nations, the United States, Great Britain, and of course, Israel, such an apocalyptic event could happen at any moment. The clock is ticking...the Countdown to Armageddon has begun.*

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