

DESTINIES



By Michel Poulin

DESTINIES

A SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

BY MICHEL POULIN

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND SEX AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT REFLECT HISTORICAL EVENTS AND ONLY DESCRIBE ALTERNATE HISTORICAL SCENARIOS. RELIGION-RELATED EVENTS DEPICTED IN THIS NOVEL IN NO WAY REFLECT THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE AUTHOR.

ABOUT THIS NOVEL

This science-fiction novel is the fifth installment in a collection of novels depicting the adventures through time of Nancy Laplante, a female Canadian war correspondent from 2017 and the chief of operations of the Time Patrol, an organization originating from the 34th Century. Those novels were written prior to the fictionalized events of the 21st Century depicted in them, thus should be treated as novels about alternate realities. The year in the dates shown in the headings are followed by the letters 'A', 'B' or 'C', denoting in which timeline the action is happening. Timeline 'A' is the original historical line, while Timeline 'B' is a parallel alternate history created accidentally by Nancy Laplante when she was transported against her will from 2012 to the year 1940 and changed history by her actions. Timeline 'C' is a second parallel history created from 1941 'B' when enemies of Nancy tried to kill her and thus change history in their favor.

The sixth novel in the collection, *TIMELINE TWIN*, will be published in 2014.

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CHAPTER 1 – TESTIMONY

13:16 (Washington Time)

Monday, March 6, 2017 ‘A’

United States Senate public hearings chamber

Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.

USA

Senator Robert Menendez (Democrat – New Jersey) scanned quickly the room full of reporters and spectators as his colleagues from the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations took their seats at the head table. There definitely was expectation, if not excitement, in the air as this latest part of the special hearings on the situation in Pakistan was about to start. That was not surprising in view of the identity of the next witness due to testify in front of his committee. That witness, apart from having saved the famous CNN anchor person, Anderson Cooper, from the clutches of the Taliban in Pakistan barely three weeks ago, had also won the Oscar for best actress less than two weeks ago. Allied to her many past sensational and daring news reports from numerous war zones around the planet, these achievements had made the oncoming witness a true World celebrity. That witness was already seated at the witnesses' table, along with a representative from the State Department, which had requested her expertise concerning the complex and threatening situation in Pakistan. Menendez took a few seconds to visually detail that witness, a tall and athletic woman of 34 years of age with long black hair and sparkling green eyes. From the information folder on her that he had, Menendez knew that Nancy Laplante stood an even 183 centimeters in height and that she could be a very dangerous woman indeed, with or without weapons in her hands, to anyone attacking her. The tall Canadian had already proved that point a number of times in the past, most recently in Pakistan, where she was reputed to have killed by herself over twenty Taliban extremists, including their spiritual leader, Mullah Omar. She also happened to be the current female World champion in Kyokushin karate and had even beaten the male World champion in a public match after the latter had insulted her and had accepted a challenge from Laplante. In view of all this, it was

not surprising that this woman was presently all the rage in Hollywood as a female action movie character.

Scanning next the first rows of spectators, Menendez stopped his eyes for a moment on a slightly overweight man in his fifties wearing a good quality suit sitting just behind Laplante: he had seen him before during a visit to the headquarters of the CIA in Langley, Virginia. Menendez could not remember his name but the man was definitely a senior executive of the CIA. In view of the many delicate implications of the present crisis with Pakistan, the presence of a senior CIA officer here was however not so surprising to Menendez. The situation in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state that had for all intents and purposes lost effective control of its borders to Islamist extremists and terrorists that had been attacking and killing American soldiers for years, was indeed tense and threatening. Filling the other front row seats was a collection of media reporters and political think tank experts interested in the outcome of these hearings, in which drastic changes to the United States' policies concerning Pakistan could well be proposed and debated.

With his fifteen Democrat and Republican colleagues now seated, Menendez took hold of his wooden gavel and banged it three times, calling the room to order.

"This session of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has now resumed. I invite Miss Nancy Laplante to present her testimony about Pakistan and to answer the questions of the members of this committee. Miss Laplante, welcome to the United States Senate."

"Thank you, Senator!" Replied Nancy in a clear and strong voice. "I hope that what I will say will help the United States establish an effective policy to deal with the extremism problem in Pakistan."

"I am confident that you will be indeed helpful to us, Miss Laplante. May I first congratulate you on your Presidential Medal of Freedom that you just received last week from the President?"

Nancy smiled at that and nodded her head.

"Thank you, Senator!"

"You are welcome, Miss Laplante. Could you first present yourself and then tell us how you came to go to Pakistan to deliver Anderson Cooper, the CNN anchor person

that had been kidnapped in Afghanistan by the Taliban and was then brought to Pakistan?”

“With pleasure, Senator Menendez. I was born in 1982 in Montreal, Canada, and still resides on the South Shore of Montreal. I am a retired officer of the Canadian Army, in which I attained the rank of captain, and am a war correspondent working part-time for CNN. I also publish periodically geostrategic analysis and opinion papers in various world media outlets, plus work from time to time as an actress when offered roles by various Hollywood producers. As for the kidnapping of Anderson Cooper, I heard about it first from televised news and then decided on my own to immediately go and try rescue him. I subsequently left Montreal and flew to Dubai, arriving there on February the sixteenth and then taking a connecting flight to Quetta, Pakistan, where I was hoping to find Anderson Cooper and his abductors. Thankfully, I was quickly able to find him and then infiltrated the Taliban compound in Quetta where he was being held, freeing him after killing his captors. That was in the early morning of February the seventeenth. We then went to the Quetta airport, hoping to find there a way to escape Pakistan, but we were then captured by the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI. While the ISI eventually let go Anderson Cooper after a couple of hours and allowed him to fly out to Dubai, I was held and tortured by the ISI for over twelve hours before I could escape and flee to the Quetta airport, where I borrowed a civilian helicopter and flew to Kabul, Afghanistan. There, the American embassy arranged for me to fly out to the United States in an Air Force C-17 cargo plane. I arrived in the United States on February the eighteenth and was then brought to Washington, where I met with President Rodham-Clinton. The rest is history.”

“A fascinating story indeed, Miss Laplante.” Said Menendez, smiling to her before looking at her with seriousness. “I know that you already told your story in detail on a number of occasions since then, but could you tell us if the Pakistani government at any point assisted in the freeing of Mister Anderson Cooper?”

“Not one bit, Senator! In fact, the Pakistani government was closing a blind eye to the activities of the Taliban in Quetta and was giving a total free rein to those extremists in town. Mullah Omar’s compound was well known in Quetta and was openly guarded by more than twenty armed extremists, yet the Pakistani Army was nowhere in sight near that compound. The Pakistani ISI only grudgingly let go Anderson Cooper when it saw that it could not accuse him of any crime, but tortured me to try make me

name my contacts and allies in Quetta. They wanted in particular to find if any CIA agents had helped me deliver Cooper.”

“And, in your opinion, what would the ISI have done to those presumed CIA agents if they had found them, miss?”

“Then, those CIA agents would have been arrested, tortured and then probably paraded in Pakistani courts in order to embarrass the United States, Senator.”

A wave of whispers and low voice exclamations through the audience greeted her answer, while Menendez grimly nodded his head.

“I see! I will now let my colleagues ask you questions, Miss Laplante. The Honorable Robert Corker Junior, Ranking Republican Member, now has the floor.”

“Thank you, Mister Chairman!” Said the graying senator from Tennessee before staring at Nancy, a friendly smile on his face. “Miss Laplante, let me first salute your courage in risking all to save an American citizen from the Taliban.”

“Thank you, Senator! I however would have done the same for any other friend of mine. The price I paid in Pakistan was well worth it, even though the utter lack of help from the Pakistani authorities bitterly disappointed me.”

“As it disappointed all of us here, Miss Laplante. I understand that, since your escape from Quetta, the Pakistani government has publicly accused you of multiple murders and of stealing a privately-owned helicopter. Is Pakistan still pursuing those charges against you?”

“The Pakistanis still do, Senator Corker. Concerning the charge of stealing a helicopter, that helicopter has since then been returned to its Pakistani owner, with CNN paying that owner a fair sum to cover its use and fuel costs. That owner has since then withdrawn all the charges of theft concerning that helicopter. As for the accusations of murder against me, they are still in the books and concern the 23 Taliban extremists I had to kill to free Anderson Cooper, including Mullah Omar, as well as the three ISI members that had tortured me and that I killed in order to escape. While Pakistan tried to have me arrested on an international warrant, Interpol refused to execute or validate that warrant, in view of the utter inaction of the Pakistanis regarding the kidnapping and detention of Anderson Cooper in Quetta. As for the United States, it publicly declared that warrant as worthless.”

“And what was the Canadian government’s reaction to that Pakistani warrant against you, Miss Laplante?”

Nancy then had to take a deep breath to contain the resentment and disappointment that this question brought back to her. The utterly gutless reaction of her own government then had embittered her and had struck hard at her pride of being a Canadian citizen.

"I have to say that it proved to be rather shocking to me, Senator. On arrival back in Montreal, the Canadian intelligence services, the CSIS, and the federal police, the RCMP, detained me for three days and interrogated me at length, even debating whether to send me back to Pakistan to face murder charges there. I was finally released when the public outrage at my detention and the political pressure from Washington became too much for the Canadian federal justice minister, who by the way is an ethnic Pakistani. As for the Canadian Prime Minister, he stayed silent during the whole affair, dodging responsibility and refusing to act one way or the other."

"Incredible!" Exclaimed Corker, visibly and truly outraged by that. "And have the Canadian authorities now left you alone since then?"

"Mostly, but they warned me not to get in trouble again overseas before releasing me. I basically told them then to grow a pair of balls for a change."

A few laughs greeted that last sentence, including a chuckle from elderly Senator John McCain, who had grown increasingly frail in the last few years. Robert Corker then passed back the floor to Menendez, who in turn passed it to Barbara Boxer, the 76 year-old democratic veteran from California. The female senator looked briefly at her notes before looking benevolently at Nancy.

"Miss Laplante, you are highly respected as a professional world affairs analyst and war correspondent and you have extensive first-hand experience of the Middle East and of South Asia. In view of the present state of affair in and around Pakistan, what would be your suggested conduct towards Pakistan, from the point of view of the United States?"

Nancy put both forearms on her table and linked her fingers as she bent forward to answer, her expression dead serious.

"Simple, Madam Senator: Washington should stop pretending that Pakistan is an ally and should treat it for what it is in reality: a quasi-failed state that has been harboring Islamist extremists and terrorists for decades. The Pakistani ISI has been in bed with the Taliban and with other violent extremist groups for decades now, playing a dubious game of political influence over Afghanistan at the expense of the lives of thousands of American servicemen and servicewomen killed by the Taliban. Furthermore, the influence of Islamist extremists and fanatics is growing constantly inside the ISI and the

Pakistani armed forces, while its government doesn't really control its own army. As for the nuclear weapons and missiles owned by the Pakistanis, nobody really knows how safe those weapons are, or who controls them in reality. I have to remind you that it was a Pakistani nuclear scientist who initially sold years ago the secrets of atomic bomb-making to both North Korea and Iran. The security of Pakistani Army bases, while theoretically good, is in reality questionable, with unknown but growing numbers of Pakistani soldiers being actually Islamist extremists sympathetic to the Taliban. You just have to think back at the attack by extremists on a Pakistani Navy base a few years ago that destroyed on the ground a number of maritime patrol aircraft. More recently, media reports revealed that the Pakistani Air Force shot down two American drones sent over the Quetta region in order to find Anderson Cooper and his abductors. In my opinion, it is only a matter of years before Pakistan loses one or more of its nuclear weapons at the hands of Muslim fanatics, or even sells one secretly to another Islamic country. My counsel would be to cut all military aid to Pakistan and to treat it as a hostile nation harboring terrorists. While I do not advocate for the United States to start a war with Pakistan, Washington should at the very least watch that country very carefully and be ready to straighten it if it threatens the United States in any way."

Most of the senators on the committee nodded their heads at that, while none questioned or criticized her opinion then. Barbara Boxer then thanked Nancy and passed the floor to another senator.

All went well in Nancy's perspective until a new member of the committee, Senator Benjamin Koch of New York, got the floor. Despite his apparently unctuous attitude towards her, Nancy could easily detect his hidden hostility via her power of telepathy, one of the mental powers she possessed as a Chosen of The One. She thus braced herself mentally as Koch spoke while reading from a document in his hands.

"Miss Laplante, you said that you killed a total of 23 Taliban extremists, as well as three ISI agents, during your short stay in Quetta in February. In fact, you made it sound as if it had been easy for you to kill all of these men. In their warrant filed against you, the Pakistani government said that you killed those Taliban by cutting their throats, while you either crushed or broke the necks of three ISI officers during your escape from Quetta. Now, if I can believe some past media reports from Japan, you were called in by the Japanese National Police to their headquarters on October 31 of 2015, to answer questions concerning the deaths of four Russian nationals killed in Tokyo three days

prior to your convocation. The autopsy report on those Russians, who were found to be armed by the way, stated that two of them had their necks crushed by a very strong person. Barely three days later, on November the third, while you were still in Tokyo, the Israeli commercial attaché was gunned down and killed in the underground garage of his residential tower by an unknown assailant. If we go further back in time, in 2013, the Israeli government put out an international warrant for your arrest, accusing you of murdering two Israeli security officers on November 21 and of being a supporter of Islamist terrorist groups. You subsequently fled Israel via its border with Lebanon, where you met the head of the Hezbollah, a known terrorist organization linked to Iran. On November 24, you flew out of Beirut and went to Teheran, where you met a number of high level Iranian officials. My first question to you, Miss Laplante, is about all the deaths that seem to happen in your wake. You say that you are a war correspondent by trade, but you certainly have shown talents more akin to those of a secret agent, or of an assassin.”

While the other senators looked with either shock or confusion at Koch, a concert of exclamations ran through the crowd of spectators, forcing Senator Menendez in knocking his gavel twice to reestablish calm.

“ORDER! ORDER PLEASE, OR I WILL BE FORCED TO HAVE THE SPECTATORS LEAVE THIS ROOM.”

Menendez then gave a jaundiced look at his democratic colleague from New York.

“Senator Koch, I do not see the point of your line of questioning towards Miss Laplante. We are here to debate our future foreign policy towards Pakistan.”

Koch, unrepentant, returned his stare and answered in a strong, loud voice.

“Mister Chairman, what I intend to do is to demonstrate that Miss Laplante’s opinions and advice may be biased and that she may be in reality a clandestine foreign agent bent on circulating disinformation.”

As more exclamations went around the audience chamber, Nancy spoke up in her microphone, in order to be heard by all.

“Mister Chairman, I wish to be able to reply to the Senator from New York.”

Menendez, still upset at Koch, looked at her briefly before nodding his head.

“You may reply to Senator Koch, Miss Laplante.”

“Thank you, Mister Chairman.” Said Nancy. She then stared hard at Koch as all the cameras and heads around turned towards her. “Senator Koch, to answer you about your comments on how easily I kill men. In case you didn’t caught on it while

reading your information on me, I was a reserve officer of the Canadian Army for ten years and served in many overseas theatres, including Afghanistan, where I saw combat a number of times. I also happen to be ranked number three worldwide as a combat pistol shooter, on top of being the World champion in Kyokushin karate. Of course I can be deadly, Senator Koch, but that doesn't make me a clandestine agent or an assassin. The Taliban extremists I killed in Quetta were no more than illiterate thugs and I killed them in order to free an American citizen that had been kidnapped and was in danger of execution. As for the three ISI agents I killed, I did that in order to escape and avoid further tortures at the hands of the Pakistani government. I thus acted simply in self-defense, unless torture is for you a legitimate legal tool. The two Israeli agents that I killed near Tel Aviv in 2013 had kidnapped me from my hotel room at night and were about to torture me under the assumption that I was some kind of terrorist sympathizer. First off, I am no terrorist sympathizer, irrespective of what the Israeli government may say about me. The fact that I killed in battle close to a hundred Taliban extremists in Afghanistan in 2012, added to the fact that I killed more Taliban, including their spiritual leader, last month, should be a good indication to anyone without preconceived ideas about me that I am far from being a supporter of terrorists. Second, about me meeting with the head of the Hezbollah and with Iranian officials, I did so as a war correspondent on assignment for CNN. If I avoided or refused to interview foreign officials that may be accused of supporting terrorism, then I might as well pack it in as a reporter. Journalists are supposed to report facts and public statements, not pick and choose who they will listen to or speak with on the basis of their reputation. I in fact came to Israel in November of 2013 to interview both Israeli and Palestinian officials, in order to build a picture of the local conflict. I pride myself in doing a thorough, balanced analysis every time that I report on a conflict. However, for whatever reasons they had, some Israeli security officials put it in their minds that I was somehow a supporter of extremists and had me captured in order that I could then be tortured and later made to disappear."

"So, you are accusing Israel, the only true democracy in the Middle East, of having kidnapped you with the intent of torturing and then killing you, is that it, Miss Laplante?" Replied Koch, raising his voice noticeably. "Didn't you in fact kill those two Israeli officials because they were about to prevent you from entering illegally the Gaza Strip?"

That earned him a contemptuous look from Nancy.

“That is the official excuse that the Israeli government is bantering around, Senator Koch, but it has nothing to do with the truth. I actually entered Gaza from Egypt, which shares a border with the Gaza Strip. Besides, the borders between Israel and the Gaza Strip were then closely guarded and blockaded by the Israeli Army and I don’t recall having fought my way through Israeli Army units to get into Gaza. If that would have happened, I am sure that the Israeli medias would have reported on such a battle.” There were a few laughs and derisive chuckles at her sarcastic response, while Koch reddened with anger.

“We have only your word about this, Miss Laplante. Why should we believe you, instead of the Israeli government?”

“You mean the same government that detained in secret a dual national from Australia without trial, until that man hanged himself in his cell in 2013? You mean the same democracy in which the medias are still subject to daily military censorship, and where one can be put in jail without trial under so-called ‘administrative detention’? Senator Koch, I am no anti-Semite and in fact have many good friends that are both Jewish and Israeli citizens, but those Jewish friends will be the first to agree with me that the Israeli government has for too many years abused its powers concerning human rights and liberties, justifying its conduct on the grounds of national security. I submit to this Senate committee that I was illegally kidnapped without any legal justifications by Israeli officials on November 21 of 2013 and had to escape to avoid being tortured and then killed. If the Israeli government would really have had concrete evidence that I was a supporter of terrorists, then it could have arrested me publicly on my arrival at Tel Aviv Airport and then put me on trial on such charges. It had the power to do that but instead chose to act clandestinely against me. That suggests to me that it in fact had no credible evidence against me but was not ready to allow me to defend myself legally. That makes the Israeli government the criminal, not me, Senator Koch!”

There was a heavy silence for a second before Koch tried to regain the initiative.

“And those suspicious deaths in Tokyo in 2015? Will you tell me that the Japanese National Police called you in by mistake?”

“It seems so, since they let me go after a short interview. Are you going to accuse me of all the murders that are committed in the various cities I visit, Senator Koch? I was invited by both this committee and by the State Department to give my professional opinion on the present situation in Pakistan, not to be roasted about old

Israeli accusations that have been long discredited and refuted. Now, do you have a pertinent question for me concerning Pakistan, Senator Koch?”

“Careful about how you talk to me, miss: you could still be accused of contempt of Congress.”

“No, I cannot, Senator!” Replied at once Nancy in a forceful tone. “May I remind you that I am a Canadian citizen and came here at the official invitation of your government. You have absolutely no legal power to even accuse me of contempt of Congress.”

“Miss Laplante is right about that, Senator Koch.” Then said Senator Menendez, having had enough of Koch’s disturbing rants. “Senator Flake of Arizona now has the floor.”

As the proceedings became distinctly more civil, CIA Deputy Director for Operations Julian Moore discreetly blew air in relief. That idiot Koch could have unknowingly caused a lot of irreparable damage by his line of questioning. He in fact had to have a secret agenda to launch such a reckless verbal attack on Laplante. Moore was one of the only nine living Americans to know the full truth about the true nature of Nancy Laplante as a secret time traveler and an holder of some fantastic supernatural powers. That same Nancy Laplante had however rendered some significant, if rather discreet services to the American government, notably as a result of her celebrated visit to Iran in 2013 and, most lately, by finding and freeing Anderson Cooper in Pakistan while killing at the same time the spiritual leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar. In fact, Laplante still had an official CIA identity card in her name and, while Moore was not ready to call her a genuine CIA field agent, he was personally convinced that the Canadian woman would never hurt willingly the United States or, God forbid, support terrorists hostile to the USA. There was still however the question of this Koch idiot: someone connected to the Israeli Mossad, which had vowed to kill Laplante and had in fact tried to do just that a few times already, must have used the good senator from New York in order to try discrediting the Canadian. While the CIA was officially barred from spying on American soil, Moore considered that Laplante’s secrets were too critical and sensitive to let the Mossad a free hand in operating in the United States, especially when it used the services of a member of the United States Senate. Bugging and following Senator Koch to find who had prompted him to lash at Laplante sounded definitely like a necessary evil to Moore.

16:26 (Washington Time)

Offices of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.

Benjamin Koch was both furious and worried when he stormed out of his committee's offices, having just received a sharp verbal lashing from his chairman and from other colleagues about his anti-Laplante rant. Menendez had even questioned his competence about being a member of the committee, something that had particularly irked him. Using a back exit door in order to avoid the horde of reporters that was certain to be waiting for him at the main entrance of the building, Koch took out his cell phone and punched in a number as he walked briskly towards his parked car. He knew that his call recipient, whose name he didn't know, used disposable cell phones with pre-paid cards, thus wasn't worried about his call being traced. He got an answer after two rings.

"Quite a pathetic show you gave this afternoon, Mister Senator." Said off the cuff his contact, the male voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Listen, you! I did my best to sink her but she seemed to have an answer for everything. Besides, your own people haven't been too successful either concerning Laplante, so don't come taunting me like this, mister."

That seemed to hit home, as his contact then spoke in a much more subdued tone.

"Well, you can forget about her: we are going to take care of her for good tonight. Keep a low profile for the next few days and don't call me back. I will be changing phones anyway."

The call was then terminated. Koch looked for a moment at his cell phone before pocketing it: this meant that he was going to have to wait until he got some innocuous message containing the coded number of the next cell phone his contact will use. At least, he could not fault his Mossad contact for being careless.

Erik Johnson could have told Koch that he was wrong about that last point. The CIA action agent had just listened on to the short phone conversation, which had given Johnson a crucial piece of information. Now was the time to get to serious business. Looking at his long-time partner in black operations, Dean Price, he nodded his head.

"They will try to take down Nancy tonight, Dean. Be ready to follow her as soon as she walks out of the Russell Senate Office Building. I will alert our team at her hotel so that they can be ready for those Mossad assholes."

"Got it!" Answered Price, who was sitting behind the wheel of their rental car, parked in view of the Russell Building. "Those reporters hounding Nancy inside sure are firing lots of questions at her still."

Johnson looked down at the smart phone held by Price, which was tuned to the CNN television news channel. An earphone plugged to the smart phone was inserted in the big agent's right ear.

"How is she doing?"

"Very well indeed, Erik. That girl can bullshit like the best. I will advise you when she will be about to leave the building."

Less than two minutes later, Johnson received a call on his own encrypted cell phone.

"Yes?"

"This is Ian." Said the voice of the geeky but very efficient CIA analyst that was often paired with Johnson's team. "We just intercepted an encrypted radio signal from the area of the Capitol Building. You may have an opposing team on the stakeout near you. If they use their radio again, our crypto-crunching supercomputer should be able to break their encryption algorithm. I will keep you apprised of any developments."

"Thanks, Ian!" Simply said Johnson, who then looked again at his partner.

"Heads up! We may have some opposition nearby. I think that I will go on foot and look around discreetly to see if I can spot them. We will keep in touch by radio."

Price smiled and patted the steering wheel of their location sports car with his gloved hands.

"I will be ready to charge in the moment you ask, Erik."

Johnson nodded, then stepped out of their car, zipping up his light windbreaker coat at the same time. While there was no snow, the wind was still chilly and the sky cloudy and quickly darkening. He then started walking slowly, looking around him discreetly while thinking how a Mossad team would operate in these circumstances. From the message he had eavesdropped on, he doubted that the Mossad would act against Laplante here in proximity to the Capitol Hill. It was more probable that whoever Israeli agent was close by would only be tasked with following the tall Canadian. Since

Laplante had come by taxi to the Russell Building, Johnson thus decided to go do a reconnaissance around the taxi stands situated near the Russell Building. Two minutes of walking got him there, his eyes scanning discreetly the cars and pedestrians visible around. There was quite a lot of people passing by, as it was just past closing time for Congress staffers. It didn't take long before a young woman sitting on a bench near the taxi stands attracted his attention. What caught his eyes was the fact that she was holding up a newspaper, as if reading it, but her eyes were looking up and around at frequent, short intervals. Walking past the rear of the bench, Johnson saw a barely visible ear microphone plugged in her left ear. She still could be some American federal agent engaged in a surveillance or protection task, something very possible around the Capitol Hill, but her slightly Semitic traits would be too much of a coincidence in this case. His attention further sharpened, Johnson continued down the sidewalk, eyeing covertly the inside of every parked car he passed by. A four-door sedan parked about sixty meters away finally caught his attention: two fit-looking young men wearing suits sat in the front, cups of coffee in their hands. They also kept looking nearly constantly towards the taxi stands and the main entrance of the Russell Building. Their hair was cut short, nearly military style, while their skin was darker than the average Caucasian American. One of the men looked at Johnson for a moment as he was passing by the car, then returned his attention on the entrance of the Russell Building. While a very dangerous man indeed, Johnson was actually a rather plain-looking one of medium built, sporting a short goatee and hair falling nearly to his neck. The stereotypes about secret agents and spies that were circulated in James Bond movies actually made him sneer in disdain: a good spy was an anonymous one that didn't attract attention. He refrained from smiling to himself when the driver of the car raised a bagel to his mouth to bite in it: sometimes, the most innocent little habits could give you away. These men probably were Mossad agents flown in from Israel for this mission, rather than long-time resident agents. Johnson thanked his luck for that, as it made them much more easy to spot. He waited until he was a good twenty meters past the car before speaking in his lapel microphone.

"I got a suspect car, a four-door blue Honda ACCORD with rental plate number 4HC 508 and with two men inside. I also have a young woman with brown hair wearing a dark blue ensemble and sitting on a bench near the taxi stands. Ian, can you put a trace quickly on that rental plate?"

"Consider it done, Chief!"

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