

THE RED WOODPECKER

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1.1.1 NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR AND DISCLAIMER

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, locations, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, or to current events is purely coincidental, except where noted.

Historical Context: This novel uses real historical events as a backdrop, including the Tunguska Event (1908), the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster (1986), the Collapse of the Arecibo Observatory (2020), and the Conflict in Ukraine (2022). While technical accuracy has been prioritized regarding geographic locations and machinery (e.g., the Duga-1 radar and RBMK reactor), the hidden causes, motivations, and consequences depicted here are speculative and serve narrative purposes only.

Space Technology and Project “McMoon”: Explicit reference is made to real space missions, such as the Voyager probes (launched in 1977) and the ISEE-3 satellite. The civilian effort to regain control of the latter in 2014, operating from an abandoned fast-food restaurant at NASA’s Ames Research Center (the true “Project McMoon”), is a verified historical event. However, the alleged detection of anomalous

signals by these devices and the modification of their transmission protocols described in the plot are creative liberties and do not reflect the actual operational history of these missions.

Gratitude and Respect: Actions attributed to real historical figures or groups (e.g., the Chernobyl Liquidators, Arecibo engineers, ISEE-3 Reboot Project volunteers, or military personnel) have been dramatized. The author expresses profound respect for the real sacrifices of firefighters, engineers, soldiers, and civilians who have dedicated their lives to exploring and protecting our world. Their heroism needs no fictional embellishment.

Technical License: Certain principles of theoretical physics, cryptography protocols, and intelligence agency operational procedures have been simplified. Do not attempt to replicate the resonance experiments described in this book.

CLASSIFICATION: EYES ONLY / LEVEL
MAJESTIC COPY: 1 OF 1



PREFACE

LEGACY FILE: 0.1

DATE: 24 December 2055.

LOCATION: SETTLEMENT "NEW DAWN",
REPUBLIC OF KARELIA (NORTHERN
NEUTRAL ZONE).

SUBJECT: ANYA PETROVA (ALIAS
"GRANDMOTHER CHASKA").

RECIPIENT: SERGEI (14 YEARS OLD).

"Sit here, Sergei. In the light. My eyes aren't what they used to be; the Red Forest claimed its price from my retinas thirty years ago, and the darkness tires me.

Don't look at the book like that. I know it looks like a brick of dirty paper. I know they teach you to read on liquid crystal sheets in school, and that paper smells like death to you. But this... this is not a novel. It's not an adventure story to fall asleep to.

This is an autopsy report.

It is the autopsy of the world that existed before you were born. Before the 'Great Pause' of 2025. Before we learned to look at the sky with fear and respect.

You see the fusion generators and the silence-shields that protect the village and they seem normal to you. You don't know what it cost to build them. You don't know there was a time when humanity screamed into space twenty-four hours a day, with radios, televisions, and radars, like a lost child crying in a jungle full of

tigers. We were loud. We were stupid. And they almost devoured us for it.

Your name is Sergei for a reason, boy. Like that man who was left floating in a metal can in space while his country vanished beneath his feet. He was the last citizen of a dead empire. You are a citizen of a world that survived by a miracle.

What you are going to read on these pages is the truth about **how** we survived. It wasn't thanks to governments, or armies. It was thanks to a man who knew how to listen to the silence, and a group of madmen who dared to enter the metal tomb of Chernobyl to turn off the porch light before **They** arrived.

His name was Markus Thorne. And if today you can sit here and watch the sunset without the sky tearing open and raining fire, it's because he had the courage to break the world in order to save it.

Take it. It's heavy, isn't it? Real history always is heavy. Open the first page. Let's go back to the beginning.

What they teach you is the most efficient lie humanity has ever constructed. It is a cognitive firewall. It makes us victims of an indifferent universe, a random solar storm. It keeps us innocent. And innocence, my boy, is a design flaw our species lost a long time ago, in a forest where pine trees learned to grow red and twisted.

Read these reports. Decipher the wiring schematics. Look at these coarse-grained photographs. But do it here, by combustion-light, away from any network. Because when you finish, when you connect the telemetry from a Siberian surveyor's 1908 journal with the Voyager records, you will understand why your old grandmother spends nights on the terrace, wrapped in wool, staring at the black spaces between the stars.

Inside this metal box you will find two artifacts. One heavy polymer magnetic tape spool. It no longer has sound, but if you hold it, you will feel the static raising the hairs on your arms. The other is my old Radex dosimeter. Its needle is fused at the end of the scale, jammed on a number human biology should not tolerate.

This is the story of the Red Covenant.

Guard it. And when I am just ashes in a lead urn, decide if the world is ready to know that, on the longest night, we shouted back at the abyss.

— Anya Petrova."



PROLOGUE

THE ECHO

FILE 0.2 - GROUND ZERO

DATE: 30 JUNE 1908

LOCATION: STONY TUNGUSKA RIVER,
SIBERIA. TIME: 07:14 (LOCAL)

Silence did not exist.

That was the first datum Ilya's brain processed upon rebooting. It was not an absence of sound; it was a negative pressure, an acoustic vacuum so dense it seemed to suck the air from his ear canals.

Ilya Stepanov, surveyor for the Imperial Academy, was face down, half his face

submerged in mud that was no longer mud. It was a vitrified paste, hot and black, a substance that grated between his teeth like fused silica sand. The air above him had texture. It smelled of concentrated ozone—that metallic, pungent smell of industrial generator rooms—mixed with the sickly sweetness of thousands of pines vaporized instantaneously. Resin and ash. And beneath it, a deeper smell: that of the atmosphere torn open, like a broken neon sign but on a planetary scale.

He tried to move. His vestibular system failed. The world lurched ninety degrees. With a wet groan, he dragged himself forward on his elbows. His teeth hurt. Not his gums, but the nerve pulp inside the teeth, vibrating at a sympathetic frequency with something happening in the ground.

He looked around. His analytical mind, trained for triangulation and logic, sought references. It found none.

The taiga had been erased. Millions of trees, wooden sentinels that had stood there since before the Romanovs, lay flattened in an

obscenely perfect radial pattern. There was no chaos. There was geometry. Every trunk pointed outward, away from an invisible epicenter, stripped of branches and bark as if passed through a giant lathe. There was no roaring fire, only thick columns of steam rising from wood cooked by a heat wave so fast it had consumed the oxygen before it could ignite a flame.

Ilya peeled off his shredded glove. His hand was red, the skin taut as if scalded by boiling water. He touched the ground.

It was not still. *Tap. Tap. Tap.*

A mechanical percussion rose from the earth's mantle. Ten beats per second. 10 Hz. Infrasound. Ilya felt immediate nausea; his eyeballs began to vibrate in their sockets, creating ghostly grey smears in his peripheral vision. It was the sound of a planetary heart, but one made of iron forged in a foundry that did not obey our laws. It was a rhythm the human body instinctively rejected, a predator's frequency, of imminent earthquake.

He got to his feet, staggering like a drunk. His German theodolite lay nearby, transformed into abstract art of twisted brass. He ignored it. He walked toward the center of the clearing, toward Ground Zero.

There was no impact crater. No meteorite. Only density.

At the exact center, the air shimmered like oil on water. The dawn light curved, refusing to travel in a straight line. And there, half-buried in the black crystal dust, something pulsed.

He fell to his knees, bile rising in his throat from the sonic vibration. It was a mineral fragment, barely the size of a fist. It did not reflect light; it strangled it. It looked like crystal, but its edges defied perspective. If Ilya tried to focus on one edge, his eye slipped; the object seemed to have more internal depth than external volume. Non-Euclidean geometry. It hurt to look at. Physically. A sharp stab behind the frontal lobe, as if the brain was trying and failing to render a cursed polygon.

He touched it. The cold was absolute. A thermal shock that turned his fingers blue instantly, burning by freezing in the middle of the Siberian summer. And then, the transmission began.

It was not a sound. It was an injection of data directly into the cortex. A needle of luminous ice inserted into the superior temporal sulcus.

‘-----’

A mathematical sequence. A binary pattern of pressure and absence. It repeated in a closed loop, drilling into the synapses. Thirty-one. Pause. Thirty-one. It was a prime number. A key. Or a diagnosis.

Ilya screamed, but could not hear himself. He pulled out his notebook with spasming hands. The pencil snapped. With his fingernail, with blood, he tore at the paper. He began to jot down dots and dashes, possessed by an urgency that overrode the pain. His nose began to bleed, thick dark drops falling onto the notes. They were not mere stains. Where the blood fell on the vitrified paper of the ground, it boiled and evaporated with an acidic hiss.

Tap-tap-tap. The 10 Hz signal increased in intensity. The capillaries in his eyes burst, dyeing his vision red. "It is not natural," he whispered, his mouth full of blood and the taste of a battery. "It is architecture. Someone... or something... is driving a support beam."

The sequence ended. The fragment became inert, just a cold stone. But the damage was done. Ilya looked at what he had written. An incomplete equation. A greeting. And an implicit warning in the syntax: the repetition was not an echo. It was a timer. A countdown.

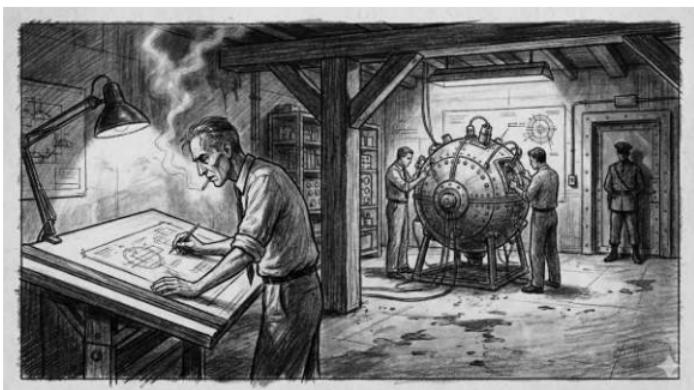
He tried to stand, but his legs would not respond. He collapsed on his side, convulsing as his brain tried to process a syntax for which it had not evolved. His last coherent thoughts were of topography: he had mapped the void between two mountains. Now that void had mapped him, and had found a design flaw. As the darkness took him, he saw figures on horseback at the edge of the clearing. Soldiers. Primitive gas masks. The Tsar already knew something would fall. One of them carried a felt-lined lead box. They had not come to rescue. They had come to contain.

Ilya Stepanov closed his eyes, not from sleep, but because keeping them open and seeing that impossible geometry caused him unbearable pain. He had been the first human to hear the telephone ring. And the price for answering had been his sanity.



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PRELUDE THE ARCHITECTS (1945-1976)



CHAPTER 1

FILE 0.3

"THE WHISPER OF TRINITY"

DATE: 16 July 1945, 05:29:45 (Local Time) / and subsequent days.

LOCATION: Trinity Test Site, Jornada del Muerto Desert, New Mexico. Subsequently, Secret Laboratories, Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

NARRATOR: Dr. Aris Thorne (Theoretical Physicist, Manhattan Project. Grandfather of Markus Thorne).

The lightning came from the earth. That was my first thought. A crack in the world's floor, vomiting a miniature sun. The heat wave hit my face through the welder's glass, a punch both wet and dry. The mushroom cloud rose, dirty, glorious, terrible. I held my breath. We had opened Pandora's box with a hydraulic hammer.

But the anomaly wasn't in the light. Nor the heat. It was in the seismographs.

They were simple, robust machines, buried miles away to measure the baby's power. When we recovered them hours later, the needles had traced the expected curve: a violent peak, then a fall. But then, just as the line stabilized into residual tremor... it pulsed.

A second peak. Weaker. Perfectly spaced. 4.8 seconds after the initial one. It wasn't a seismic echo. Echoes are chaotic; they scatter. This was clean. A reflection. As if the blow had struck a gigantic tuning fork buried in the mantle, and it had responded with a note of its own.

—"Harmonic oscillation of the basalt layer," Oppenheimer said, his eyes empty, already inhabited by his own private Bhagavad Gita. He wanted it to be geology. So did I.

Until I got the data from the Air Force's magnetometer, taken from a high-altitude B-29. The bomb's electromagnetic pulse was brutal, predictable. But thirty minutes later, when the ionosphere should have been dampened chaos, a pattern emerged. A train of ultra-low-band radio pulses. It wasn't random. It was binary. Dots and dashes. `... -- .- --- ...-- .---'. The same damned sequence I would find decades later in the Tunguska reports, that my own grandson Markus would chase to his suicide.

I sent a memorandum. Classification: "Urgent - Unclassified Secondary Phenomenon." I was summoned to a windowless room in Oak Ridge. There were two men. One from Military Intelligence. The other, a psychiatrist in uniform.

—"Doctor Thorne," said the first one, turning the pages of my report without looking at them. "You suggest that nuclear fission, in

addition to releasing atomic energy, might... tune into something. Something *external*?"

—"The data suggests a resonant response in the geomagnetic field," I said, keeping my voice cold. "As if we struck a very, very large crystal."

—"Or as if we knocked on a door," said the psychiatrist, smiling. It was an icy smile. "Have you experienced nightmares, Doctor? A feeling of being watched? Buzzing in your ears at dusk?"

They discredited me. Not directly. They reassigned my research to "atmospheric secondary effect mitigation." My "raw" data vanished from the archive, replaced by "cleansed" versions where the second seismic pulse was instrument failure and the radio signal, interference from a Navy transmitter. The world learned we had tamed the atom. A handful of us learned something else: that in doing so, we had made noise on a frequency to which something might be sensitive. We weren't gods. We were children shouting in a dark library. And something, on the highest shelf, had turned its head.

(Attached note in trembling script, dated 1960): Markus, if you ever read this, do not follow my path. It is a burden that rusts the soul.

****END OF CHAPTER 1****



CHAPTER 2

FILE 0.4

"THE SILENCE CONFERENCE"

DATE: 18 November 1961.

LOCATION: Safe apartment, Alsergrund district, Vienna. A room above a café that smells of boiled cabbage.

PRESENT: Colonel Grigori Volkov (GRU, Department of Applied Sciences) and "Swan" (Real Identity: Silas Mercer, NSA, Signal Phenomena Division).

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT, RECOVERED FROM CONCEALED MICROPHONE.

SWAN: *(Sound of ice in a glass)* The Tunguska report from your Academy of Sciences, 1927. The description of the "cold stone" by the surveyor Stepanov. We have a copy. It's not geology.

VOLKOV: *(A dry cough)* And your Project Magnet. The high-altitude flights over the Arctic in the '50s. Recording "cosmic noise." You weren't looking for auroras, Mercer.

SWAN: Silas. Here we can use names. Because outside this room, this meeting does not exist. The Bay of Pigs was a fiasco. The missiles in Turkey and Cuba... are toys. This is bigger. Your people in Krasnoyarsk, ours in Groton... have triangulated the source. It's not solar.

VOLKOV: It's local. Within the system. A busy signal on the cosmos's telephone line. It's been here... for decades. Centuries, perhaps. Since 1908.

SWAN: Since before. Our geologists have ice core samples from Greenland. Peaks of iridium and vitreous carbon at irregular cycles. 31,000 years ago, approximately. Then 12,700. Then 1908. It's a... periodic sounding.

VOLKOV: A sounding?

SWAN: Like radar. But instead of radio waves, it uses impacts of exotic matter. Or something that manifests as such. It strikes, listens for the echo. Measures the response. In 1908, the response was weak. Forests, nomadic tribes. Background noise. In 1945, at Trinity... the response was different. It was organized. It was a technological scream.

VOLKOV: *(A long pause. The sound of a Zippo lighter)* And your conclusion, Silas?

SWAN: That we are bacteria on a petri dish who just discovered fire. And the lab technician has noticed the glow. The "Solar Storm" your politicians and mine talk about... is a useful lie. But we need a better lie. An architecture.

VOLKOV: Mutually Assured Deterrence. But not between us.

SWAN: Between us and *that*. We build a shield. A mirror. Your Duga... it's more than an early-warning radar, isn't it? And our system in Groton... is more than a submarine telegraph. They are buffers. If the signal strikes again, it must not find us naked. It must find a mirage. A controlled echo that says "nothing of interest here."

VOLKOV: A self-imposed quarantine.

SWAN: A "Dark Forest," Grigori. We crouch down, turn off the flashlight, and pray the predator passes by. But for that, we need coordination. A pact. Beneath everything. Above governments.

VOLKOV: *(Sound of a glass being set down hard)* My government does not make pacts.

SWAN: Your *humanity* does. Or it will. Look out the window. Those people, drinking their coffee, going to work... would they want to know this? Could they live with it? Or would they kill each other within a week, believing the end is near. We are the adults in the room. The ones who clean up the monster under the bed so the children can sleep.

VOLKOV: We are the ones who stay in the dark, looking the monster in the eye.

SWAN: That is our burden. Do you accept? *(12-second pause. Sound of distant traffic.)*

VOLKOV: Give me your hand. Not as representatives. As men.

(Sound of a handshake. Tense, firm.)

SWAN: The "Red Covenant" is sealed. Red for the blood it will cost. Red for the flag we have both betrayed. We will communicate through the "Carpenter" channel.

Authentication code: the sequence. Thirty-one.

****VOLKOV:**** Thirty-one. Now, let us destroy this tape.

****(TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE - ADDED LATER):****

This is the birth certificate of our damnation. Two frightened men, playing gods with the fate of the species. All the architecture of the Duga, of Arecibo, of the 2025 lie, is born here. In a room that smells of cabbage.

****END OF CHAPTER 2****



CHAPTER 3

FILE 0.5

"THE HAMMER'S BLUEPRINTS"

DATE: May 1972 – July 1976.

LOCATION: Moscow-Pripyat Railway Corridor / Duga Construction Site.

NARRATOR: Cadet Arkady Volkov (Junior Technical Observer, "Smena" Specialization Program).

I did not arrive as a golden boy. I arrived as a long-term state investment.

I remember the hypnotic rattling of the military train crossing the birch forests, a rhythm of steel on steel that drilled into my bones. The air inside that windowless carriage was a thick, unbreathable soup, laden with the acrid smoke of Belomorkanal tobacco, the smell of old leather from boots, and the metallic aroma of black tea boiling in the samovar in the corridor.

At sixteen, my cadet uniform still hung loose on my shoulders and smelled of cheap starch and reverential fear. While other boys my age in Moscow chased girls in Gorky Park, listened to contraband Beatles records, and dreamed of being cosmonauts, I was there, perched on the upper bunk, clutching my kit bag as if it held the secrets of the universe.

Down below, in the swaying gloom, were *them*.

My traveling companions were not child prodigies. They were combat engineers, long-range antenna specialists, and GRU officers with faces weathered by winds that