

[25] An Infinite Potential?

“We lost four good and brave men,” intoned Leighton. “Men who believed in what we’re doing and gave their lives in the line of duty. We will not dishonor them and their memory—or the bereaved families they left behind—by abandoning the noble cause to which they had dedicated themselves. Let this be a time of solemn rededication to the high-minded ideals of international goodwill among all peoples and nations.”

The occasion was a memorial service held in the large theater in the center of the main building the day after the slain guards had been interred. It was now four days after the Russian attack. Carla was surprised at the large number of personnel involved at the secret complex. There were about 50 employees present from scientists, lab assistants, and secretaries; to cooks, janitors, and of course the internal security force—which had now been increased by eight men in addition to replacing the four who had been killed. The entire staff was in attendance—a staff that had come through a terrible ordeal with obviously high morale in spite of the losses it had sustained.

Leighton finished his speech on a positive note: “We will carry on without looking back. We will let nothing and no one deter us from our goal. We are working for a New World of peace, love, and brotherhood—a world without fear of war or crime, a world without hunger, a model society of equal opportunity and of long life for all. We are within sight of that goal and it will be achieved!” From here and there came the staccato of enthusiastic applause.

“This very auditorium in which you now sit will soon be filled with leaders from all nations, who will meet to implement the Plan for that New World. That Plan, as you all know, is still too highly classified to share openly even on this occasion. Your individual contributions to the program and your confidence in me as your director have brought us to the very brink of success, and I am grateful for the spirit of loyalty and dedication that continues to motivate each of you. It will not be long now until everyone in the world will know the secret and reap the benefits of your persistent efforts here. I am pleased to say that I have

just received confirmation of the full backing of the President of the United States. Preliminary contacts are being made with key leaders in the Senate and House, but of course no details can be shared with them until that time comes—which I assure you will be very soon.” There was another burst of applause.

Leighton pulled an envelope out of his pocket, opened it, and unfolded a piece of paper. “I want to read to you part of a telegram received from the president only a few moments before this gathering convened. The rest is confidential, but will be disclosed to you later. Here it is: ‘I have spoken by phone with the Russian president and described to him the attack by Russian agents upon your installation, which is dedicated to the peaceful use of psychic development for all peoples. He has assured me that he was not aware of this assault team and is taking steps to prevent such an occurrence from ever happening again. He has given me his personal word that peace is his top priority and that his country will participate in the forthcoming Congress for which you are now preparing. I congratulate you and your colleagues for the part you have played and will continue to play in the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world for all mankind.’” Leighton paused dramatically, and again there was an enthusiastic response from his listeners.

“You can see that our president backs our mission 100 percent. You also know that, while not doubting the sincerity of the Russian president, and being thankful for his promise of peace, we shall not relax our vigilance until our goal has been reached. I am determined in my own heart and I call upon you as well to join with me in a pledge to our higher selves, that those whose memory we honor today will not have died in vain!”

There was thunderous applause, and the audience stood to its feet. Leighton acknowledged their endorsement of his leadership graciously for a few moments before stepping down from the podium to mark the end of the meeting. There was a brief babble of voices as staff members came up to shake his hand and express their support once more, before returning to interrupted tasks in labs and offices.

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Back in his office at last Leighton held a council with his inner circle. Present were Morris, Del Sasso, Khorev, Bertelli, and Mike Bradford, head of security. It was a solemn gathering.

“I think you all know Mike,” began Leighton. “I’ve asked him to meet with us to discuss the most troubling aspect of the recent attack.”

Mike was a veteran of CIA covert operations from Cuba to Vietnam and

Angola—and most places in between. He was as tough and smart as they came, and he was clearly very disturbed. He scanned the faces of those present carefully, then cleared his throat and began.

“We were hit bad the other night I still don’t believe it. I’ve been puzzling over this thing ever since. What happened was impossible. The Russian assault team entered our complex without triggering any electronic alarms. That is possible only if they entered at one particular place—which leaves only one explanation, and it isn’t a pleasant one: Someone from the inside let them in!”

The stunned silence spoke louder than words. Mike folded his arms and watched the reactions.

“Are you certain?” asked Viktor at last obviously badly shaken.

“Nothing is 100 percent certain,” admitted Mike. “They might have tricked our men somehow, but that’s so unlikely it can be categorically ruled out.”

“But it is a possibility,” interjected Kay Morris.

“Very unlikely. Can you imagine how our men could have been induced to open the door to their fortified station and let someone in? And we were on alert!”

“Hypnotic control, perhaps,” mused Viktor. “I can tell you that Chernov had incredible psychic powers.”

“Let’s get the picture,” said Frank. The gate was closed, but both doors to the guard station were wide open. That is the only possible entrance route—and apparently an exit as well for at least one Russian.”

In response to the questioning looks, Mike explained, “One of the flak jackets is missing and was probably being worn by someone who left in a hurry. How many others there were, we don’t know.”

“This really bothers me,” said Kay. “I don’t think we should even suggest it was an inside job until we’re absolutely certain. The thought of a traitor within our own ranks is not only repugnant, it breeds an atmosphere of suspicion that I, for one, would find impossible to work in. If that assault team has been able to leave us with a suspicion that will eat at us, then in a sense they’ve won after all, and I don’t want to concede that!”

Leighton was taken by the thought and nodded in agreement. “I agree with Kay. You all realize that an atmosphere of mistrust could literally shut us down—it would be a psychic victory for the Russians. It takes faith not only in the Archons but in ourselves and in one another for the Plan to succeed.”

“That’s what concerns me,” continued Kay. “I can’t imagine how they got in. But suppose the Russians were able to cover all trace of their entry? That

would accomplish two things: It would leave that method secret for a future team to use; and it would allow them to leave ‘evidence’ that they got in by way of the guard station, which would seem to point to an inside job and breed suspicion among us all.”

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. “What about this possibility?” suggested Carla at last. “The Russians got inside—we don’t know how—and the two guards at the gate were the first to discover them. They came out of their station and were killed, dragged back in there out of sight—”

“They were shot inside the station,” interrupted Mike, who had been listening quietly, while shaking his head with evident displeasure.

“So they were captured and then taken into the station and executed to further the ‘inside job’ theory,” said Morris quickly.

Leighton turned to Del Sasso. “You’ve been awfully quiet, Antonio. Have the Archons given you the answer?”

“They don’t tell us everything, for reasons that I don’t entirely understand—something to do with responsibility and personal growth. I thought the FBI was investigating, so I’d like to know what they think.”

Frank gestured toward Mike. “Well?”

Mike looked embarrassed. “Actually they have pretty much thrown out the inside-job theory. They seem to favor something more like what Dr. Morris is suggesting.”

Leighton looked pleased. His protégé had proven her analytical capabilities once again, and the dread pall of suspicion had been lifted. “I’ll buy that,” he declared emphatically. Noticing Mike’s disappointment, Frank patted him on the shoulder. “Of course, if Mike comes up with substantial evidence, that’s another matter. But until then I think we ought to lay aside suspicions and get on with our work. And for you, Mike, that means somehow finding how they really got in!”

Leighton stood to dismiss the meeting. “I needn’t remind you that what we have discussed here must be held in the strictest confidence. For the sake of morale we can’t allow even the slightest suggestion to leak out that it might have been an inside job. It would poison the atmosphere among the entire staff.”

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Carla dialed a familiar number and leaned back comfortably at her desk. She had finally moved into her own office just down the hall from Leighton’s and was enjoying the privacy. At Frank’s suggestion she was belatedly returning a string of phone calls to her hotel from her editor friend at *Time* magazine.

Project Archon was back on schedule, and she was now authorized to drop some tantalizing pieces of information. It took a few minutes to get through, and when he came on the line, George Conklin was upset.

“Carla! Aren’t you getting my phone messages? ‘Two FBI agents slain in Palo Alto—routine line of duty’ comes over the wires. Maybe it is routine, but my journalistic nose is twitching and I think I smell something—maybe some connection to your big story? But I can’t even reach you. Where’ve you been? Vacationing in Hawaii?”

“I’ve been *involved*, George, right in the middle of this thing. It’s not just a *big* story, it’s the *biggest* you or I will ever see. I literally haven’t been able to get to a phone. This is my first chance.”

“So you’re telling me there is some connection?”

“You better believe it!”

“We’ve had a team of our best bloodhounds out there sniffing everywhere and they came up with nothing. We’re printing next week’s edition tomorrow, so what’s the connection, and what’s the story? Can you tell me yet?”

“I’m sorry, George, but the answer’s ‘no.’ This thing is still getting bigger every day. But I’m going to give you some info that you can print if you want to—without my name. You’ll be quoting ‘a reliable inside source,’ and what I’m going to tell you is the unvarnished truth. Okay?”

“My tape recorder’s running.”

“George! You bury that tape!”

“Don’t worry. It doesn’t exist unless I have to resurrect it. So what’s going on?”

“Your ‘reliable source’ informs you that the two FBI agents were killed when they tried to intercept a special Russian combat team here on a secret mission.”

“You’re kidding!”

“I wish I were! I saw this thing firsthand and almost got killed myself. But delete that. Back to the printable stuff. The Russians attacked a top-secret psychic research lab near Palo Alto run by the CIA. Why? Because the Americans have made a research breakthrough that puts them light-years ahead of the Russians and everyone else in the development of incredible psychic powers.”

“I already told you,” interrupted George, “this psychic stuff is strictly for the sleaze tabloids.”

“The Russians apparently have a different view,” returned Carla pointedly.

“I saw the team they sent with my own eyes, and I can tell you this is top-priority stuff with them—and with our own government as well. Get your head out of the sand, George!”

“I’ll admit,” came the grudging response, “there are Congressmen and ex-astronauts and Nobel scientists involved in this thing. Why, I can’t imagine.”

“Give them credit for some intelligence, okay, George? And listen—I haven’t gotten to the real point yet. And I don’t want you to print any of the above if you leave this part out. The reason why the Americans are so far ahead is—hang onto your chair—they’ve made contact with higher intelligences that have been guiding our evolution and—”

“Is this your idea of a joke?” interrupted George. “Come on, Carla, you’re wasting my time.”

“This is the absolute truth. You think humans are the only intelligent life in the universe?”

“So ‘we’re not alone.’ How many sci-fi films have used those lines! ‘They’ve’ been here and now we’ve got some ‘little green men’ on ice at an air base.”

“I said nothing like that!”

“You said the CIA is in touch with ‘higher intelligences.’ We can’t print that.”

“Then I guess I’ll have to go to *The Washington Post*. I want to give you the hottest story of your career. This is just the tip of the iceberg. But you know your standards, and if you can’t handle it, then—”

“Carla, they’d laugh us out of business. *Higher intelligences* are taking over? I suppose they’re arriving in UFOs! You know how crazy people are. You could start a nationwide panic—like Orson Wells’ ‘Martian invasion!’”

“I didn’t say they’re taking over—and they’re not arriving in UFOs. You’re the one who’s making it ludicrous. I’m telling you, George, psychic contact has been made.”

“Do you know how far out this is?”

“And have you forgotten that ‘truth is stranger than fiction’? If you need an angle, here’s one: Tie it in with the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence that Carl Sagan founded and has only grown larger since his death. Would you print it if they made *radio* contact? But that’s a whole lot less likely than what I’m talking about. It could take hundreds or thousands of years for radio to get to the nearest inhabited planet, but psychic contact is instantaneous. It’s happened, George! I know that for sure! But say it however you want to—hint at it as a

possibility suggested by your ‘inside source.’ I don’t have to tell you what to do.”

There was a long silence. Finally George mumbled, “This is really the story behind the deaths of the two FBI agents?”

“The tip of the iceberg—with more to come if you want it.”

“It’s the story of the century, if it’s true.”

“‘If it’s true’? Now you’re insulting me! Look, George, you’ve known me for how long—six years? Did I ever exaggerate or give you any information that wasn’t solid gold? I’m telling you that something bigger than you or I have ever imagined is going to break soon. And don’t try to verify this—you’ll only get denials from the White House on down.”

“Carla, you know I’ve got to have confirmation from someone.”

“Not on this story, you don’t George! This is from a ‘reliable inside source.’ There’s no way you can get verification. You either print it that way, or you’ve got nothing.”

“You give me fits, Carla. I’ve got to be crazy to print this. Listen—do a better job of keeping in touch, will you?”

“I’ll do my best. Take care.”

As soon as she put the phone down, she dialed Leighton on the intercom. “I just finished talking to George. He’s going to print it but you were sure right about resistance. He climbed the wall when I mentioned ‘higher intelligences.’ Even suggested that such a report—if people believed it—could cause worldwide panic.”

“That’s a major problem. Scornful denial or panic—those are the two reactions that could kill us. The Archons have to be introduced to the world in a way that generates acceptance of them and their mission, and faith in their abilities and good intentions. That’s why you have such a crucial role to play.”

“Well, I can see it isn’t going to be easy. I’m working on my first article. I’ll have it to the point where you can go over it by tomorrow or the next day.”

“Great! Don’t forget: We’re meeting in my office again right after dinner.”

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Kay Morris excused herself from the planning meeting in Leighton’s office that evening—there were three labs to prepare for the next day’s experiments. All the others were present Viktor, Antonio, Carla—and, of course, Frank himself. Frank had noticed that Viktor had seemed withdrawn the last few days and finally decided to find out what was wrong.

“Something’s bothering you, Viktor. We’re in this together, and one of the

rules is that we don't keep any secrets from each other. What's the problem?"

"It's something I have to work out in my own mind."

"Well, come out with it. We'd all like to help."

Hesitantly, Viktor began: "You have to understand my background of a lifetime under oppressive totalitarianism. Yes, the Iron Curtain came down, and we supposedly have new 'freedoms' and there's plenty of talk about democracy, but in actual fact an elite inner circle runs the country and no one else can do anything about it."

"But you've left that behind," said Leighton, trying to be encouraging. "And you won't be cooped up behind these walls for too much longer."

"I've got no complaints, Frank. I'm very grateful for all of that. What troubles me—well, it's like we've sold our souls to the Archons. Whatever they say goes. Period. We're told that the Plan will be implemented soon. A council of superior beings who've been watching over our evolution are about to intervene to keep us from destroying ourselves. Why not just admit that they're going to take over the world? That's what it amounts to. Don't you see why it looks to me like we're helping to put the whole world in the grip of a new totalitarianism that could be even worse than the one I escaped?"

Frank smiled benignly. "There are some huge differences, Viktor, between the old Soviet and now the new Russian system and the New Age the Archons will bring to earth. For one thing, the Archons have no selfish interests. They get nothing out of this—no money, power, property. They're benefiting us, not taking anything from us. They're so far beyond our evolutionary stage of development that they don't want anything from us."

"That's true," conceded Viktor, "but something still troubles me about the whole thing. It's not that I want to back out; please don't think that at all. I believe in what we're doing, but I'm just trying to understand some aspects."

Del Sasso, who had been listening quietly, now stood to his feet and walked over to sit on one end of Leighton's huge desk where he could command a view of everyone's face. "There's something much deeper that you're missing," he began confidentially, "and this is probably as good a time as any to explain it."

Carla noticed gladly that this was not the Del Sasso of a few nights ago—the psychic warrior who had exuded such a palpable evil and who had committed such an atrocity against Chernov. Now he emanated an equally superhuman love and compassion that was no less tangible.

"I've been in communication with the Archons for about two years," Antonio continued, "and know them better than anyone." He turned to Viktor

and Carla. “You’ve read or listened to only a fraction of the transmissions from them so far. Let me explain that the Plan involves a whole lot more than psychic power and peace and prosperity. The Archons’ ultimate goal is to bring out the best in mankind, the true inner goodness that has been put down by thousands of years of negative religions exalting false and oppressive deities. They want us to realize that we are goodness personified and really gods ourselves.”

“Now that’s something I can really get excited about!” exclaimed Carla. “It resonates so truly with my own experience! You can’t imagine the put-downs I suffered growing up with a father who pastored a fundamentalist church. His one mission in life seemed to be to drive into the congregation—and especially into me, his only child—what worthless wretches we all were and that we were under condemnation by a God who would send us all to hell to burn forever if we didn’t knuckle down and live the straight-laced, sober and sad, self-denying, miserable life that was required of all Christians. It almost destroyed me, especially when I found out that my father didn’t live the kind of life he forced on others!” She turned to Viktor. “Talk about totalitarianism and oppressive systems! You can’t imagine the liberating sense of freedom when I realized that I didn’t have to believe in any god but myself!”

Del Sasso had been nodding with approval. “You know I’m a Jesuit priest, but what Carla has just said is exactly what I believe. I’m ashamed that my own church has been a major force in oppressing mankind—especially women—in just the way Carla experienced. Yet a Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, is credited with being ‘The Father of the New Age.’ And by the way, Teilhard wrote of the very Omega point at which psychic contact is first made with the Archons—the point at which he said mankind would merge into godhood.”

“Those ideas are quite a departure from what both Catholics and Protestants have always taught,” remarked Leighton. “It takes a great deal of courage to break with so many centuries of tradition.”

“It has to be done,” affirmed Del Sasso. “The Bible is an unfortunate perversion of the ancient nature myths held in common by all peoples. As one very popular Catholic priest has pointed out so-called ‘original sin’ was really the ‘original blessing.’ The ‘serpent’ is not the enemy of mankind but its savior and truest friend. There is much wisdom hidden in the myth of the Garden of Eden. The serpent’s offer of godhood was not a lie, but the liberating truth that delivers us from the oppressive belief in a jealous god who sets himself up as superior to all others. That’s an insult to the integrity of any human being! In fact we’re all equal because the force latent in the universe is available to all.”

“You don’t know how good that makes me feel!” declared Carla with conviction. “It’s so great to hear a man of the cloth speak out like this and vindicate ideals I’ve tried to promote for years! It’s like a breath of fresh air. I only wish my mother could have heard this before she died.”

Del Sasso walked over and sat down beside Viktor. He put his hand on Viktor’s shoulder and looked at him compassionately. “So you see, Viktor, the New World we are working for is not at all like the oppressive system of a Stalin or Khrushchev, or the unjust superstructure of capitalism. The very reason why you reject those systems is that you’re a god who must be free—you can’t be ruled by anyone. We’re a race of gods who have lost our way, forgotten our true identity, and need to remember who we really are. The Archons don’t want to take over; they want to set us free to experience our own infinite potential. Their ultimate purpose is to restore a positive self-image, a glorious sense of self esteem to a world of beings broken under a load of negativism that has stifled their full development as creatures of the cosmos.”

Carla’s eyes were sparkling. She leaned over and gave Viktor a hug. “Can’t you see the truth in what he’s saying?” she asked.

“I think so,” said Viktor. “I think so.” He was smiling as he had not smiled since facing Chernov and apparent death four nights earlier. And the man who had saved him then was now pointing the way to a brighter future than he had ever imagined possible.

“I think I understand something a little better now,” mused Carla.

“You mean about the way I acted the first time we met,” said Antonio, as though he were reading her mind.

“Exactly. I can see why my ex-fiancée’s presence enraged you. He’s a narrow-minded Christian fundamentalist who represents the very antithesis of the liberating truth you’ve just explained so beautifully. That’s why the Archons identified him as the ‘enemy.’”

“You do understand!” said Del Sasso warmly. There was something infinitely gentle and comforting in his voice.

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Lying in bed at her hotel that night Carla found sleep eluding her once again. For all of her enthusiasm earlier that evening when Del Sasso had explained things so well, here she was plagued by some of the same old doubts. *How can I be so sure one moment that the Archons and Del Sasso are goodness personified—after all, he’s their only representative—and the next moment be troubled by basic concerns? And why don’t I ever think of the right questions to ask when*

I'm with Del Sasso? I'm so overwhelmed by his charisma that I lose the ability to think for myself!

Del Sasso's persuasive pronouncements about infinite human potential and the innate goodness and power in everyone had been very appealing. Yet now she remembered distinctly that he had said just as clearly, when they had first met that such a belief was a delusion. After all, the recognition that humans didn't have psychic powers within themselves but that they came from these 'higher beings' had been the whole basis for the great breakthrough that had come in psychic research. Their willingness to honor the Archons as the source of psychic power was why the Americans had leaped ahead of the Russians.

What was the truth, and why did Del Sasso contradict himself? Were there two truths—one to be told to the world at large, and the other to be known only to the inner circle? Why had Del Sasso been presenting as truth that evening what he had formerly identified as a lie? Of course she no longer believed it, but it did trouble her to remember that the Bible definitely identified the idea that man is a god with infinite potential as the great lie of Satan. She remembered, too, as a girl, hearing revival preachers warn of a man who would speak great lies and deceive the whole world. It would be paranoid to connect that biblical myth with Del Sasso, the Archons, and the Plan, but there was a troubling similarity that she found difficult to dismiss.