

Novels By Russ Fine

February, 2025

I want to wish all of you a happy Valentines Day. Winter has been cold and miserable, but it is half over. We are only six weeks from spring.

Many have you have mentioned to me that you thought that the Future World History Trilogy would make a great movie or TV series. I wanted to let you know that it is now being evaluated for conversion into a screen play.

As a member of a local authors group I was given assignments to write a short story about an object or contained a specific phrase. At one point the assignment was to write a story with the phrase "his naked buttocks were exposed for all the world to see". The first Frank Carver short story, *Backfire*, was the result of that assignment. That story is attached to this newsletter.

There are now two paper back books containing Frank Carver short stories. Also, all the short stories have been combined into a single hard cover edition. There are also five Frank Carver novels that are available in paperback or electronic versions.

If you have any comments or suggestions regarding my novels please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you.



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Book Signing Events

February 13-15

11:00 - 4:30

Kroger

**1820 Roane State Highway
Harriman, TN 37748**

February 27 - March 1

11:00 - 4:00

Kroger

**507 N. Foothills Plaza
Maryville, TN 37801**

Backfire

A Frank Carver Mystery

My name is Frank Carver. I've lived in Norfolk County my whole life, except for the four years I spent in the Army. I was always athletic. In high school I played football and baseball, but off the athletic field I was shy and introverted. That was probably the result of being an only child, which made it difficult to even ask a girl for a date. So, aside from my athletic endeavors, my high school years were spent immersed in schoolwork. I graduated second in my class. I could have gone to almost any college, but since my parents didn't have a lot of money, I decided to go to the local university where I earned a BS degree in Electrical Engineering. After graduation, I joined the Army. Before starting basic training, they gave me a series of tests and told me I would be perfect for a position in Army Intelligence.

After basic they sent me to another school where I was trained as a spy. During that training, they realized I had a knack for languages, so they sent me to a school to learn Arabic. When they thought I was sufficiently proficient, I was sent to a base in Kuwait. As it turned out, I never had the chance to work on any secret missions. My job was to evaluate information supplied by the field agents.

As the end of my enlistment approached, I decided I wanted a change. The Army offered to pay for graduate school if I joined the reserve, so I agreed. After I was discharged, I went back home. My parents gave me a big "welcome home" party.

The day after the party, I went to the university to register for graduate school. It was April and classes wouldn't start until September, so I had some time on my hands. My parents had been planning to take a vacation for some time, but didn't want to board Chester, their collie. Since I was home, I would be able to take care of him while they were gone.

They were going to drive to Maine and spend a few days at Acadia National Park. Then, they were going to drive into Canada and spend some time in Quebec before coming home. They never made it to Canada. On Interstate 95, just south of Houlton, Maine, a truck driver on the south bound side fell asleep. His truck crossed the median and hit my parents' car head on. They were killed instantly.

I suddenly found myself on my own. I had very little money and my parents had no life insurance. I consulted a lawyer in anticipation of suing the trucking company, or the driver, but the driver was an illegal alien from somewhere in Central America and didn't even have a driver's license. The company that owned the truck carried minimal insurance. The small settlement from the insurance company paid the lawyer, and there was just enough left over to give my parents a decent burial. I made a small profit when I sold their house, but I knew I was going to have to go to work instead of school.

The Norfolk County police department was looking for people, and they preferred to hire veterans. I was hired immediately as a patrolman. I worked in that position for two years and became eligible to take the examination to become a sergeant. I passed the exam, and when a sergeant's position became available six months later, I was promoted. That was four years ago.

It was my first day as a homicide detective. After receiving my promotion two weeks earlier, I decided to use up some of my unused vacation time and go on a fishing trip that I had been thinking about for a long time. I had been back on the job only two hours when the call came in. A male victim was found in a motel room. I got into my unmarked car and made the short drive to the Goodnight Motel. When I arrived in the room, I saw Mike Stevens, the local beat cop, standing next to the bed. On it was a naked man, his buttocks exposed for all the world to see.

It was hard to tell the victim's age without looking at his face, but I guessed he was in his mid-forties. There were no apparent signs of violence, so I was confused about why I had been called to the scene. Before I could ask, Mike said, "Hi Frank, if you're wondering why you're here, it's because this is victim number three. Since you were on vacation for a couple of weeks, I wasn't sure you knew there were two other bodies found in the past ten days under identical circumstances."

"You're right, I don't know anything about it."

"The other two victims were found in the Stardust Motel. They were both found naked on a bed in the same pose as our current victim. In all three cases, the rooms weren't rented for the night, there was no clothing or other personal items found in the rooms, and the desk clerk had never seen the victims."

I was thinking about the case and was about to ask Mike a question, but at that moment Jill Tanner, the smart shapely county medical examiner, walked in with her assistant. She looked at me, smiled, and said, "Hi Frank, I hope you had a good vacation, because I suspect this case is going to ruin the next several weeks for you."

"Hi Jill," I responded. "I was about to ask Mike about the cause of death in the other two cases, but since you're here, please tell me what you know about our victims."

"Obviously, I haven't checked out our most current one, but both of the others were middle aged males. We haven't been able to identify either of them. We tried both fingerprints and facial recognition, but there were no hits. The autopsies revealed both men died because some of their internal organs disappeared."

"Please define 'disappeared'. I don't understand how somebody's organs can disappear. Were they surgically removed?"

"No, the organs weren't surgically removed. There was no indication on either victim they were cut open. In the first victim, his liver, left kidney, and right lung were gone. Our second victim was missing his heart and a substantial portion of his brain. I have no idea how the organs were removed, so I thought the word disappeared would be appropriate."

"Okay, this is really creepy. Who has been investigating this so far?"

"The chief has been working on this himself, and he got the state police involved too. But there hasn't been much progress made as far as I know. I'm sure the chief will dump this case on you now that you're back from vacation."

"I haven't seen him since I returned, but I'll discuss the case with him when I'm at the station. Please let me know what you find out about victim number three as soon as possible," I said as I walked out of the room.

I had no idea where to even start. None of the victims had been identified. Their naked bodies were somehow placed into locked rooms, and they died as a result of having some of their organs removed. I suddenly remembered I hadn't asked Mike who found the body, so I turned around and started to go back to the room.

Before I got there, Mike walked out and I asked him my question.

"In all three cases, a call was received by the front desk to report a problem with the room. When somebody went to check out the problem, they found the body."

"Can I assume the calls were placed from the rooms?"

"Yeah, but the rooms were all thoroughly checked for fingerprints, and we were able to match all the prints we found to people who worked at the motel in either maintenance or housekeeping. There were no other fingerprints, so the rooms must have been meticulously cleaned since the last guest had stayed there. Also, all the people from the motel staff who were in the room have been employed by the motel for several years. The forensics people will be here shortly. As soon as Jill is done, they'll get started."

"Thanks Mike. You know, the more I learn about this case the more confusing it gets."

I went back to my desk at the station and sat there thinking about the case. My mind was wandering. While I was sitting there I felt a tap on my shoulder. Chief Mitchell, a large heavy-set man with red hair, bushy mustache, and a loud gruff voice, asked, "Did I wake you up?"

"No chief, I was thinking about this case. Jill told me you were doing the investigation yourself. Can you tell me what you found so far?"

"So far we haven't found much. We questioned the employees at both motels, but none of them could provide any additional information. The night clerk at the Goodnight Motel said that a few hours before the body was discovered, a woman called the motel and asked to be connected with the room where the victim was found. The clerk told her the room was empty and the woman hung up."

"So, you think the woman called to find out if the room was occupied? I guess that makes sense, but how did she get into the room?"

"Frank, this is your investigation now. I put you into this position in homicide because I think you're probably the most intelligent and logical person in the department. I have confidence in you and I'm sure you will figure this out." The chief smiled and walked toward his office.

I found myself deep in thought again when the phone rang. It was Jill. She said, "I think you should know our latest victim wasn't from around here. During a quick examination I found evidence of recent dental work, and the materials used haven't been utilized in the United States for twenty years. I think the only place they're still used is in Eastern Europe and Russia."

"Maybe the Russian embassy can help us identify the guy. Please send some pictures of our victim along with his fingerprints to the Russian embassy in Washington."

"I'll do that in the next fifteen minutes. As soon as I'm done with the autopsy, I'll call you."

I suddenly realized I was hungry, so I went to nearby a restaurant to get something to eat. I always think more clearly when I'm not hungry. I had the unhappy feeling that when we finally discover the identity of our victims, it wasn't going to help solve our mystery. Aside from the obvious questions, I was wondering why all of our victims were middle aged males.

When I returned to my desk, there was a message to call Jill, so I called her immediately.

"Hi Jill, it's Frank."

"Our latest victim had his larynx and pancreas removed. You don't need a larynx and you can live, at least for a while, without a pancreas, so I have to try and figure out what actually killed him. I think perhaps all of the victims were killed before their organs were removed."

"Do you still have the other bodies?"

"Yes, I plan on checking the first two victims shortly. I'll keep you informed."

"Thanks Jill," I said and hung up the phone.

I stuck around the office for another hour before I decided to go home. On the way home, my cellphone rang. It was Jill again.

"I found out what killed our victims. There was an almost microscopic incision made on the back of the necks of all the victims. All of them had their spinal cords severed at the base of the brain by something that was substantially thinner and sharper than a scalpel. In fact, I needed a microscope to find the injury. I've never seen anything like this before. I'm not aware of any medical instrument that could make a cut that small and precise. This makes a laser cut look like it was made with a chainsaw."

"The unknown seems to be par for the course with this case. Did you hear anything from the Russian embassy?"

"Not yet. You'll know as soon as I hear anything."

I know the chief wanted to keep the details quiet, but I decided I was going to send out a notification to all the police departments in the country. I should be able to determine if similar incidents occurred at any other place.

I had trouble sleeping that night. At 4:00 I gave up, showered, dressed, and was at my desk by 5:30. I sent a message to the chief asking him if he had any objections to send out a request to other police departments asking for information. I was going to do it without his permission, but I thought that was probably not a good idea since I had only been on this job for one day.

At 7:15 my cellphone rang. I looked at the screen on my phone and saw it was Jill.

"Good morning Jill. I hope you slept better than I did last night."

"I probably didn't. I was up most of the night researching surgical devices that could have made the incision and sever the spinal cord in a way that matched our victims, but there's nothing I found that could do it. But the reason for my call is that I received a response from the Russians. They said the finger prints and the picture match a prisoner who is awaiting execution for murder in a prison near Moscow. His name is Stefan Petrowsky, and they indicated he was still there."

"So, does Stefan have a twin brother?"

"I doubt it. Anyway, I'm going to send them pictures and fingerprints from the first two victims this morning. Perhaps they were all from Russia and that's the connection between them."

"That sounds like a good idea. But, if they are all from Russia, how did they end up here?"

Jill laughed and said, "You're the detective, so detect. I only supply information."

"Okay, I promise I'll spend the morning detecting. Anyway, please let me know what you find out about our first two victims."

"I'll do that. Bye."

"Bye Jill."

It was as I suspected, knowing who the victims were wasn't very helpful. If all the victims were from Russia, it would explain why they aren't in any of our databases. Even if all the men were from a Russian prison, there's no explanation as to how they got here or into a locked motel room. I have no idea what weapon was used to kill them, or why they were killed.

A few minutes later the chief walked by. He looked at me and asked, "Have you found our killer yet?"

"All I have so far are more questions, and other than the cause of death, absolutely no answers."

"I thought the deaths were caused by organs being removed. Is that wrong?"

"Yes, Jill examined all three bodies and discovered they were killed by having their spinal cords severed at the base of the brain by some unknown device."

"What makes Jill think the murder weapon is an unknown device?"

"She said the cuts were made with a device much sharper and more precise than a surgical scalpel. She spent the night doing research and couldn't find anything capable of making those cuts."

The chief just shook his head and walked away. I decided to go to the Stardust Motel and examine the other two crime scenes.

I walked into the lobby of the motel and up to the front desk. A young woman looked up from the magazine she was reading and said cheerfully, "Good morning, sir. How can I help you?"

"Good morning." I showed her my badge and said, "I'm Lieutenant Carver. I would like to look at the rooms where the bodies were found."

"Sure, we've been waiting for you guys to tell us when it's okay to rent those rooms again, so they are still empty. The room numbers are 120 and 121. You can use my passkey," she said and handed me her card key.

I looked at the card key for a moment and then asked, "Will this open any room?"

"Yeah, actually it will open any room in any motel that uses the same key system, which is probably half the motels in the city."

Now I was fairly sure I knew how the bodies got into a locked room. I asked, "Are these rooms near another entrance?"

"Yes, there's an entrance at the end of each hallway and these rooms are located at the end of the hallway next to the outside door."

"Thank you, you've been very helpful."

I walked over to the rooms. There was nothing special about them except for the location. I went back to the front desk, returned the card key, and asked, "How hard is it to get one of these passkeys?"

"If you have an account with the company that makes the locks, you can buy them for \$3.00."

"Thanks. We're done with the rooms, so you can rent them again."

I went back to my desk and found a message from the chief telling me it was okay to send out the request for information to other police departments. It took about fifteen minutes to complete the paperwork. I scanned it and sent it to the state police who would forward the request. By tomorrow morning it would be distributed all across the country.

Jill called me that afternoon to tell me she heard from the Russians again. The first two victims were also residents of the same prison as our last victim. There was obviously a pattern.

That evening I was home watching some lousy TV show when my phone rang. It was the dispatcher. She said, "There was another body found in the Goodnight Motel."

"Perfect," I responded with more than a little sarcasm. "That's just what I wanted to hear. I'm on my way."

When I got to the scene Mike was already there. He just waved when he saw me.

There was another naked man on the bed in the same pose as the other victims. He looked older, probably in his sixties. I couldn't tell if any of his internal organs were missing, but most of his left leg was gone. It appeared to be severed at mid-thigh. The wound on his thigh looked fresh, but there was no sign of blood. The wound appeared to have been cauterized.

Jill and her crew arrived a few minutes later. She said, "Hi Frank, I assume this is our fourth victim?"

"Yes, but look at the wound on his left leg."

Jill examined the wound for a minute and then looked at the back of his neck.

"The wound on his leg looks identical to the internal wounds we found on our other victims where their organs had disappeared. There is a small mark on his neck that's identical to our other victims as well. I'll bet you he has been a recent resident of a prison near Moscow."

"I won't take that bet. I'm sure you're right." Turning towards Mike I said, "I assume the forensics guys will be here soon. Ask them to send me a report as soon as possible."

"Okay."

Just like the rooms at the Goodnight Motel, this room was next to an outside door. I was sure I knew how they got in, but there were still a lot of unanswered questions.

When I arrived at the station the following morning, there was a man sitting on the chair next to my desk. He was wearing a dark blue suit and appeared to be about thirty-five, black hair, tall, and very muscular. He looked like a cop. I walked up to him and said, "I'm Lieutenant Carver. Can I help you?"

"Yes, is there someplace we can talk privately?"

"Sure, follow me."

We went over to the interview room. He walked in and sat down. I followed him into the room and closed the door.

As soon as I sat down he showed me his identification. His name was Marvin Gerber and he was with the CIA. I asked, "What brings you here this morning, Mr. Gerber?"

"Your request for information regarding the bodies that have been found. I think I may have some information for you. However, some of what I'm about to tell you is classified and must not leave this room. I checked your record and found you worked in Army Intelligence for a few years, so I'm sure I can trust you with this information."

"Okay, I won't discuss what you tell me with anyone, but if the information leads to an arrest, it may become public knowledge."

"I understand, but that's a risk we have to take. Four years ago, we learned Russia was developing a device that could transport objects electronically. I'm sure you have seen the transporters on Star Trek. It was something like that. The early tests with inanimate objects were reasonably successful. Things like wood blocks and metal tools worked perfectly. More complex objects were destroyed by the process. They continued to refine the technology, and about a year ago, they were able to transport everything except living things."

I didn't believe a word he said, but I thought I knew where his line of thought was leading.

"They began testing with things like apples and other fruit. The tests all failed initially. But as they continued to improve the device, these tests became successful. We knew they were going to begin testing on animals, but our contact, who was part of the development team, was killed in an auto accident. I think we have to assume they have now advanced to the point where they are experimenting with human subjects."

He paused for a moment to let the information he just gave me sink in. It was all beginning to make sense. "Why send the subjects here? Why not someplace inside Russia?"

"I suspect there are two reasons. They wanted to know if the device would work over a longer distance and the KGB has a known agent here. Her name is Samantha Clarke, or at least that's the name she is currently using. We've known about her for several years and have been watching her from a distance. We don't want her to know we're aware of her."

"I think we're going to have to keep a close watch on her now."

"I agree, but our ultimate goal is to destroy or steal the transporter device, and I think this may be an opportunity to do that."

"It obviously doesn't work with human subjects. Every one they transported lost body parts. The body we found yesterday was missing most of his left leg. Why would we want that technology?"

"Even if they are never able to send a human successfully, they may be able to transport a nuclear weapon here. We need the same technology to prevent that from happening. I'm sure you remember the idea behind 'mutual assured destruction'."

"Yeah, I do. But I don't understand how catching our spy gets us any closer to the device."

"I'm hoping our spy will be able to tell us where the device is, or perhaps, since we know they can transport non-living material, we can get them to transport a bomb back to their location."

"I'm guessing you have an address for Ms. Clarke?"

"Yes, I do. It's 1231 Avenue C. We have to find some ruse to get into her house. Then we can plant some devices that will let us keep track of her movements. I think she's too well trained for us to follow her. I'm going to assign two of my best guys to this case. I'll probably need your help too, but for now, just keep me informed regarding anything new in the case."

I handed him my business card and said, "This is my card. It has my cellphone number on it. Can you give me something with a number where I can contact you?"

He took a card out of his shirt pocket and handed it to me. Then he asked, "You never met me before, so why did you believe I worked for the CIA?"

"I wasn't sure until you mentioned I worked for Army Intelligence. That information isn't in my service record. It could only be obtained through classified channels."

"Good, I'm glad you were skeptical. Thanks for agreeing to help. I'll keep in touch."

"You're welcome."

We both got up and left the interview room. Marvin walked out of the station and I went back to my desk. I found a report from forensics on last night's murder. Like before, there were no unknown fingerprints found.

Nothing happened for two days. Then Jill called to tell me our latest victim was from the same Russian prison as the others. At the end of the day, Marvin called and asked me to meet him at a restaurant a few miles away. I told him I would be there in a half hour.

I arrived right on schedule. When I walked in I saw Marvin sitting in a booth at the back of the restaurant. The hostess began to ask me something, but I told her I was meeting a friend, and I walked past her to Marvin's booth.

I sat down and Marvin said, "Dinner is on me. We were able to install a few devices in Samantha's house. She just uses a cellphone, so we'll only be able to hear half the conversations, but we also placed a few video cameras in her house."

"I won't ask you how you did that, because if you told me, I'd probably have to arrest you. Anyway, what do we do now? Sit and wait for something to happen?"

"Pretty much, it looks like they test a prisoner every five or six days, so I don't think we'll have to wait very long. I'll bet you're getting pressure from your chief to resolve these murders."

"That would be a safe bet. I've told him we have names for all our victims, but they were all on death row in a Russian prison. He thinks space aliens are involved, so I told him so far that's the best explanation we have."

We stayed at the restaurant for more than two hours talking about a lot of different things, but neither of us mentioned the case again.

The following day there was a gang shooting that resulted in two deaths. By the end of the day I figured out that the two idiots shot each other over some deal involving a used car.

It was now a week since the last body was found and I was getting concerned that Marvin's assumptions about the case were wrong. I was driving home from the station when my cellphone rang. It was Marvin.

"I think our girl is going to make a pickup tonight. We're going to try and follow her. Do you want to tag along?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Meet me in the 1000 block of C Street. I'm driving a black Hyundai Sonata sedan."

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

It only took eight minutes to get there. I parked behind Marvin's car and walked over to the front passenger door. I looked inside and Marvin waved at me. I got in.

After I sat down, Marvin said, "She received a phone call about two hours ago. She's going to the regular pickup spot to meet somebody at 8:00. I have no idea where the regular pick up spot is, so we have to follow her."

"Okay."

We had been waiting for about an hour when we received a call from one of Marvin's men. He said she left her house, walked to her car, and was driving in our direction. Marvin started the car, and after she passed us, he pulled out and began following her.

She drove a few blocks and pulled into a 7-11. We passed her and parked about two hundred feet farther down. I still had a view of the 7-11. I watched as she went into the store and came back out a few minutes later carrying a brown paper bag, got back into her car, and left. She turned in our direction again. After she passed us Marvin waited for fifteen seconds before he pulled out. Marvin's assistant, who had been reporting her movements, was a block behind us.

Either she wasn't as well trained as Marvin thought, or had become complacent. In any case, she led us right to an old warehouse. We drove past the warehouse and parked our car off the main road on a side street. Marvin's assistant parked there as well.

We got out of our cars and began to walk back to the warehouse. There was no way to approach it without being seen. It was almost nightfall, but as the day transitioned into night, lights around the warehouse lit the area surrounding it. While we were softly discussing the situation, two people walked out. They were carrying something that could have been a body, but we were too far away to be sure. They put whatever they were carrying into the back seat of Samantha's car, got into the car, and drove away.

I said, "If that was another body, they are going to either the Stardust or the Goodnight."

Marvin looked at his man and said, "We'll go to the Stardust. You go to the Goodnight."

We hurried back to our cars and headed to our destinations. When we got to the Stardust we found her car parked near a side entrance. We parked next to her and I ran over to the front of the motel. I walked up to the desk and was surprised to see the same girl there. She looked at me and asked, "Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, I think somebody is about to dump another body in one of your rooms. Are either 120 or 121 empty?"

"They both are."

"Give me your passkey."

She handed me the key and I ran back to Marvin's car. We walked together to the side door which I opened. We listened at the doors of both rooms and we could hear someone talking in room 120. We both took out our guns. I inserted the passkey and the door made a loud click. Marvin kicked in the door and entered the room, gun first.

Marvin yelled, "Get down on the floor and sit on your hands." Samantha began to comply, but the man with her reached into his coat pocket. Marvin shot him without saying another word.

I took out my cellphone and called for backup and an ambulance.

Marvin calmly said, "Ms. Clarke, this can go down two ways. You can agree to cooperate with us and we'll pin the blame on your friend here, or you can spend the rest of your life in a small, uncomfortable, prison cell. The choice is yours."

Samantha looked down at her dead companion and said, "I guess I'll cooperate, but I really don't know much about what's going on. He was just paying me to help him."

Marvin said, "Stand up, clasp your hands behind your back, and turn around."

Samantha complied and Marvin put handcuffs on her. He led her outside to his car. I waited inside with the body.

When Marvin walked back into the room he said, "I just drugged our lady spy so she'll be asleep for the next twelve hours or so. Toby, the guy I sent to the Goodnight, will be here shortly and he'll take charge of the prisoner."

I could hear sirens close by. I said to Marvin, "You have to stay here since you shot him. I'm sure you know there'll be an inquiry."

"Yeah, I'm not going anywhere."

Neither of us touched the body. Two minutes later two other detectives and two guys with a stretcher walked into the room. One of the guys with the stretcher checked the body and confirmed he was dead. They turned him over and found a 45 automatic clutched in his right hand. One of the other detectives took an evidence bag out of his pocket and carefully placed the gun inside. He looked at me and asked, "Hey Frank, who's the stiff on the bed?"

"You probably won't believe this, but he's a Russian who, until recently, was on death row in a prison near Moscow."

"Okay, if you don't want to tell me, that's fine. Who shot the suspect?"

Marvin said, "I did. I'm working with Frank on this case. My name is Marvin Gerber. I work for the CIA. Frank was telling you the truth about the guy on the bed." Marvin showed him his ID and put his gun into an evidence bag the detective was holding."

The detective said, "After we run a ballistics check, you can have your gun back. It's obvious this guy was reaching for his gun when you shot him, but I still have to follow procedures."

"It's okay, we have the same procedures. Just let Frank know when you're finished with the gun."

Marvin and Frank left the motel room and walked back to Marvin's car. After they were inside, Marvin said, "I'm going to interview our spy tomorrow. Do you want to be there?"

"Sure, as long as there are no other murders before then."

"How often do they occur here?"

"We average about twenty-five per year. Our population is about 75,000, so the murder rate is really low. More than half are drug related and the rest are usually domestic disputes. I'm the only homicide detective in the department."

"Well, if you want to be there, call me in the morning."

"Okay."

He dropped me off at my car and once I was inside I called the chief and filled him in. He listened but made no comment until I was finished, then he said, "I told you that you would figure this out. I didn't know it would involve the CIA, but that really doesn't matter. You did a good job Frank. I'll see you in the morning."

"Yes sir."

I didn't mention Samantha Clarke in my conversation with the chief and I was uncomfortable not telling him the whole story, but I couldn't tell him about her without also telling him about the Russian transporter, and that was a secret.

The next morning, I went to the station and spent an hour completing the paperwork required to report the incident. The chief wasn't in yet, so I left it on his desk. I told the dispatcher I would be out for a while and left the station. Once I was in my car, I called Marvin. He gave me an address and told me to be there at 11:00. I told him I would be there.

Something was nagging at me concerning the events of the previous evening. Why would a guy reach for his gun when there was a cop who already had a gun pointed at him? He had to know he was going to get shot. The other thing was, why did Marvin kill him? I was sure he was an excellent marksman; it was part of the CIA training. He could have shot him in the arm or shoulder which would have incapacitated him. That's what I would've done.

There was something else too. Why did Samantha give up so easily? Marvin never told me how he got the bugs into her house. When we followed her she made no effort to determine if anyone was following. When I was in Army intelligence, one of the rules stated that if you are working undercover, never go directly to a meeting. Make some unusual turns and check the cars behind you so you can be sure you aren't being followed.

It was all too easy. Something was going on, and if I wasn't careful I was going to be caught up in the middle of it. I decided to verify that Marvin worked for the CIA. I called one of my friends who still worked in Army Intelligence and asked him to check out Marvin Gerber. Then I called Marvin and told him I wouldn't be able to meet him to witness Samantha's interrogation because something came up at work.

I didn't want to go back to the station or go home, so I just drove around for a while. An hour later, my friend from Army intelligence called back. He said there was an agent named Marvin Gerber who worked at the office in New York. He was sixty-six years old and retired last year. Now I knew I'd been duped. I had to find out who Marvin Gerber really was.

I immediately called Jim Doyle who was in charge of forensics. When he answered I said, "Hi Jim. It's Frank. I need your help with something, and for the time being it's a secret, until after I talk to the chief."

"Okay, I can keep a secret. What do you need?"

"The gun that was used in the shooting last night is in the lab for the standard ballistics tests. I need you to check it for fingerprints. It would appear the CIA agent who shot the suspect last night is a fake. I have to find out who he is."

"I'll check the gun for prints myself. To your knowledge did anyone besides our phony CIA agent touch the gun?"

"No, Marvin just dropped it into an open evidence bag."

"We haven't done the ballistics yet, so I'll check it for prints first and then do the ballistics testing. I'll call you as soon as I get the results."

"Thanks. I'll be waiting for your call."

I thought that was the best chance we had to find out Marvin's real identity, but he also handed me his business card and that may have prints on it as well. I also remembered when we went to dinner he used a credit card. I would have to check on that too. I was beginning to think we would soon know who Marvin really is, so I decided it was time to face the chief and let him know how badly I screwed up.

I went back to the station and walked to the chief's office, half hoping he wouldn't be there. He was there talking on the phone. He looked up, saw me, smiled, and motioned for me to come in. I walked in and sat down across from him. A few seconds later he hung up the phone and asked, "Did you want to talk to me about something?"

I hesitated for a moment and said softly, "Yes, but I really don't want to."

"What's wrong?" he asked with a note of concern in his voice.

"I really screwed up. If you want me to resign or bust me down to patrolman, I'll understand."

Now he was a little annoyed and said, "Just tell me what you did."

"I'm sure you're aware of the CIA agent who shot our suspect yesterday. He's a fake."

The chief didn't say anything for a few seconds and then he said, more calmly than I expected, "Please continue."

When he introduced himself he showed me his ID. I've seen CIA credentials before, and it looked perfect. And he knew something about me even you aren't aware of; I spent several years working in Army Intelligence. That information isn't on my service record; it's classified. Since he knew I assumed he was genuine."

The chief just stared at me so I spent a few minutes telling him the rest of the story.

"You were really snookered son."

"Yeah, I know. But there is more, and this part I believe is true. He told me the Russians developed a device like the transporters they used on Star Trek. It took years to develop to the point where they could transport complex inanimate objects. Then they tried to send living things, but they all died in the process. Apparently, at some point they were able to send animals successfully, so they decided to try humans. They took men from a prison just outside of Moscow who were scheduled to be executed anyway and sent them through the device. However, in the process, every person who was transported lost part of their bodies. For reasons which are still not clear, they decided to send them here. Marvin said something about the Russians having an agent here named Samantha Clarke and she was involved somehow."

I stopped talking and the chief just looked at me for several seconds before he said, "This story sounds like a load of bullshit. Do you have any proof? Do we know anything about Samantha Clarke?"

"We have identified the victims and all of them were residents of the Russian prison until they were found here. I know how it sounds, but I have no other explanation. Marvin and I followed Samantha Clarke to the motel where the shooting occurred. Marvin took her to his car before our guys got there because he wanted to interrogate her."

"You do realize the more you talk the worse this gets. Can I assume that you are making an effort to find out who our fake CIA agent really is?"

"Yes sir. We have the gun he used last night and it should have his fingerprints on it. I also have a card he gave me and I was going to bring that over to forensics when we're finished here. He bought me dinner a few days ago and used a credit card to pay the check. I plan on going to the restaurant and try to get a copy of the charge slip."

"That sounds like a good start. If you really believe Russians have this transporter device, perhaps some kind of receiver is required. If that's the case, do you have any idea where that might be?"

A bell started ringing in my head. "Yes, when we were following Samantha Clarke she stopped at a warehouse on Industrial Parkway. The receiving unit might be there."

The chief, who was obviously pissed off, said very emphatically, "Take two other guys and check out that warehouse NOW!"

"Yes sir," I said meekly as I left his office.

As I walked back towards my desk, two patrolman walked in. I waved them over to my desk and asked, "Are you guys going off duty now?"

"Yeah, we are. Why?"

"Would you like some overtime?"

They both said "Sure."

"Good. Come with me."

We walked to my car and drove to the warehouse that Samantha led us to. On the way, I explained the situation to the two patrolmen. When we got to the warehouse it looked abandoned. It was the first time I saw it during the day. There were several broken windows and the outside of the building was dirty and adorned with graffiti. We walked to the door and my opinion changed instantly. The door was new and it appeared to be made of steel. It was secured by a deadbolt and a huge padlock. On the door was a sign indicating the building was protected by an alarm company.

I immediately called the chief to let him know the situation. There was no way we could legally break in without a warrant. The chief asked for the address and told me to wait by the door. He said he would have the warrant in ten minutes. True to his word, he called me ten minutes later and told me he had the warrant.

Now we had to figure out how to get in. The lock was too big to cut with a bolt cutter, and even if we got the lock off, we still had to deal with the deadbolt. We decided to try the windows. They were probably six or seven feet above the ground and we didn't have a ladder, so I pulled my car up under one of broken windows. One of the patrolmen climbed up on the car and looked through the window.

A moment later he said, "This won't work either. There's a wall on the other side of the window."

We needed a vehicle with a battering ram on the front, but the department didn't own one. I thought about it for a few seconds and called a friend of mine at the fire department. I explained the situation and he said he was sure he could take down the door with the "jaws of life".

He arrived with the tool about twenty minutes later. It took him about five minutes to set up and a minute later the door was down. I wasn't surprised when a very loud alarm began to sound. We walked in and once inside the alarm sounded somewhat softer.

I looked around and saw several large racks of electronic equipment. On the floor was a metal disk that appeared to be eight feet in diameter. There were several thick cables that connected the disk to the racks of equipment. There was also some kind of medical scanner. I called the chief and told him what we found. He said he would send a forensics team immediately.

Jim Doyle and one of his assistants arrived a short time later. When Jim walked in he looked around for a minute or so, then he turned to me and asked, "Why is there a CT scanner here?" Then pointing at the metal disk on the floor continued, "And what the hell is this thing?"

I knew he wouldn't believe me, but I answered, "It's a receiving unit for a Russian transporter."

Jim looked at me and said, "Sure it is. I'll just call Mr. Spock and get him over here to explain how it works."

"I know how that sounds, but it's the truth. The Russians have been experimenting on death row inmates by sending them here. The bodies we have been finding in the motel rooms are the result of the experiments."

Jim looked like he was going to say something, but instead he turned around and began dusting everything for fingerprints. His assistant was busy taking pictures.

I told the two patrolmen to stay until they were relieved and went back to the station. When I got back I told the dispatcher to send two guys over to the warehouse to guard the forensics team and relieve the two patrolmen who were there. Then I went to the chief's office.

He saw me and waved me in. I sat down across from him and he said, "I have some news regarding our friend Marvin. His real name is Igor Restovitch. He's a member of an elite Russian group that's similar to our Secret Service. The guy he killed yesterday isn't in any database, but the medical examiner said he appeared to be from Russia or some other Eastern European country."

"Did you find anything regarding Samantha Clarke?"

"No. There's no record of anybody with that name who has a driver's license, voter's registration, or credit card in the state. We're still waiting for a response from the feds."

"Do you think it's time for me to confront Igor and try to find out what the hell is going on?"

"Yeah, but be careful. Make sure you have backup before you arrange your meeting, and make sure the meeting is in a public place."

"Yes sir, I know the drill. I'll keep you informed."

I walked back to my desk, sat down, and was wondering how I was going to confront Igor when my cellphone rang. It was Marvin, or Igor.

"Hi Marvin, how is the interrogation going?"

"By now I'm sure you realize I'm not Marvin and I don't work for the CIA. But I do want to meet with you to explain what's going on."

"Okay Igor, where do you want to meet? By the way, your English is perfect."

"I know you don't trust me, so let's meet at the park across from City Hall. I know you'll have backup watching us, but I have no intention of harming you. Is four o'clock okay?"

"Yeah, sit on a bench by the fountain. I'll find you."

"I'll be there."

I went over to the chief's office and knocked lightly. He motioned for me to come in. After I sat down I said, "Igor just called me. He's going to meet me at four by the fountain in the park across from City Hall."

"Send three guys in street clothes there at 3:00. Do you think we should arrest Igor?"

I thought about it for a few seconds and said, "Not now, I want to hear what he has to say about a lot of things."

"I understand that, but I'm not taking any chances. I want you to wear a mic so we can listen to your conversation."

"I don't have a problem with that."

"Come back here after the meeting."

"Yes sir."

I left his office and walked over to the dispatcher and told her I needed three people in street clothes to be at my desk by 2:45. Then I went back to my desk to ponder the situation.

At 2:40 two men and a woman walked up to my desk. They were smiling so I smiled back at them and said, "Hi, I hope you're all ready for a very difficult undercover assignment." Their smiles disappeared and they looked at each other. The woman, whose name was Jennifer, said, "Nobody said anything about an undercover assignment. The desk sergeant said you needed some people in street clothes for an hour or so."

"Jennifer relax, the job is easy. At four I'm meeting with a Russian agent by the fountain in the park by City Hall. The chief wants you to keep tabs on me in case the Russian gets aggressive. I don't think that's likely, but he insisted. This should be nothing more than the proverbial 'walk in the park'."

I gave each of them a small earpiece transceiver. Then I said, "I'll be wearing a mic so you will be able to hear our conversation, but I won't be able to hear you."

Jennifer said, "Thanks for clearing that up Frank. I guess we should get going. It'll take us about ten minutes to walk there."

The three of them left and I was trying to figure out what Igor was going to say. By 3:45 I gave up and left the building to go to our meeting. I was going to walk, but once outside I realized I would be unprotected while walking, so I went to my car and made the five-minute drive to the park. I parked in a spot marked "Police Vehicles Only" and walked toward the fountain. I saw Igor, but none of my guards were visible, so I whispered, "If any of you are around, please make yourself visible for a moment."

I saw Jennifer get up and walk to the garbage can to throw something away. I was relieved to see they were there but not very visible. I walked up to Igor and sat down next to him. He looked at me, smiled, and said, "It's good to see you again, my friend."

"Friends don't lie to one another."

"With the exception of telling you I was a CIA agent and Samantha was a spy, everything else I told you was true." He paused for a moment, then said, "Actually, Samantha is a spy so that part is true too. We both work for the Russian government, but we aren't in the KGB or the Secret Police. Our job is resolve problems with potential rebel factions within Russia. The transporter is real, but it wasn't developed by the government. It was developed by a group of disaffected scientists who want to overthrow the government. To do that, they need a lot of money. The transporter is worth billions, and the potential buyers are all Islamic nations

who would use the device to cripple Europe and the United States. Even though they don't have true nuclear weapons, they do have the ability to build a 'dirty bomb' and send it anywhere they have set up a receiving station. Every country on Earth is a potential enemy of these Islamic terrorists. That includes Russia and the United States."

"It would appear the device is near the prison where our victims recently resided. Why can't you just go round up the bad guys and end this mess?"

"Because 'near the prison' covers a lot of territory. The device could be anywhere within a hundred miles of the prison. It's not very large, so it's easy to hide. It doesn't require massive amounts of power or generate unusual radiation. There's no way to find it. However, one thing we do know is that the system is two-way. We know the receiving stations are capable of activating the transporter and sending something back to their primary location. If we can figure out how to do that, we can destroy the device. To the best of our knowledge the only receiving station is here, in the warehouse you raided today."

"Why did they build the receiving station here?"

"Have you ever heard of Dr. Raymond Kravitz?"

"Yes, of course. He's the head of the Science and Engineering School at the university. He's in the news all the time, although I haven't heard anything about him for a while. He's an avowed socialist."

"The reason you haven't heard about him recently is because he's not here. He's in Russia working on the transporter. He came back here about a year ago to build the receiving unit. When it was finished he went back to Russia. The guy I killed yesterday was his assistant. His name was Fredrick Kruskov. He must have recognized me and thought his only chance was to kill me before I could kill him. In hindsight, I probably should have shot him in the shoulder, but in dangerous situations we're trained to react first and think later."

"Won't they realize something is wrong when they can't contact him?"

"Yes, I'm sure they will. We probably only have two or three days before they figure out there's a problem."

"What do you need me to do?"

"I need you to keep Fredrick's death a secret and I need you to find your best and brightest engineer to figure out how to activate the transporter from the receiver here. I have a set of plans for both the transporter and the receiver, but they are at least two years old. There have been a lot of changes made to the transporter since these plans were current, but I hope it will be enough."

"You probably guessed that other people are listening to this conversation. Sir, please get over here as soon as possible so we can talk about this."

My cellphone rang almost immediately. It was the chief. He asked me to bring Igor back to the station so we could discuss this in private.

"The chief wants me to bring you back to the station. Is that okay?"

"Yes, I'm willing to do anything to get this problem resolved."

"Good, we'll take my car."

Both of us got up and left. As we walked I asked, "What does Samantha have to do with any of this?"

"Samantha was sent here when we realized Dr. Kravitz was involved. Her job was to find out if any of his close associates were working with him. She made contact with Fredrick and discovered he was still in contact with Dr. Kravitz, so she expressed sympathy for their cause and offered to help. When it became apparent they were going to try sending people through the system, Fredrick was asked to find somebody with medical training who could help him. Samantha went to medical school, but joined our group before she graduated. It pays better than being a doctor in Russia. She had mentioned her medical training to Fredrick before, so he asked her to help him. He needed her and the CT scanner to evaluate the subjects after they were transported."

"Who killed our victims?"

“They were executed right before they were transported here. After they arrived they were scanned, and the scans were sent back to the primary location. I would presume they were also scanned before they were transported and the two scans were compared.”

I thought about what Igor said and then I had to ask, “Why did you lie to me in the first place?”

“I thought if I told you I was a Russian agent, you probably would have dismissed everything I told you. I had to get you involved before I would be able to tell you the truth.”

“Alright, I’ll accept that explanation. But please, no more lies. If what you told me is true, we have to be able to trust each other.”

Igor looked at me and simply said, “Okay.”

I still had more questions, but decided this wasn't the best time to ask them.

When we arrived at the station we walked directly to the chief’s office. He was waiting for us. We walked in and I closed the door before sitting down. Then I said, “Igor, this is Chief Mitchell.”

The chief said, “I wish I could say it’s a pleasure to meet you, but I can’t. I heard your entire conversation including the part in the car on the way here. I already placed a call to the Dean of the Engineering School to ask him for recommendations, but I think we may want to look at people who have more practical experience. So I called one of our Senators and asked him to get me a contact at NASA. We only have one shot at this, so we have to be sure. Do you have the plans with you?”

“No, they’re in my hotel room. Samantha is guarding them.”

Just at that moment the chief’s phone rang. The chief stared at the phone for a moment. He said, “I told the dispatcher not to disturb me unless it was really important.”

Then he picked up the phone and said, “Chief Mitchell, how can I help you?”

He said nothing for about a minute then said, “Yes, sir.”

He spent the next several minutes giving a synopsis of the situation to whoever he was talking to. Then he said, “Yes, sir. I’ll meet him at the airport in an hour,” and he hung up the phone.

“That was the Vice President. Apparently, Senator Morgan called him and explained our situation. He told me they’re sending their top engineer from the Army Weapons Research Center here. His name is Tim Harris. Mr. Harris is also a pilot and will be arriving in an hour in his jet fighter. Frank, I want you and Igor to go to his hotel and get the plans. Then go to the warehouse. I’ll bring Mr. Harris there as quickly as possible.”

Igor and I left the station and went to his hotel. I waited in the car while he went up to get the plans. He was gone less than five minutes. We drove to the warehouse and discovered ten police cars and two men with automatic weapons guarding the entrance. They recognized me and waved us in.

I parked near the missing door and Igor and I walked in. There were more guards inside.

Igor said, “I have never been here, but Samantha described it to me. I’m not an engineer, but this looks very complicated. I hope Mr. Harris will be able to figure this out before the people in Russia realize what’s happening.”

We didn’t have to wait very long. The chief and Tim Harris walked in just a few minutes after we arrived. I looked at Tim Harris and could hardly believe what I saw! He looked like he was no more than twenty-five. The chief introduced us to Tim. We shook hands and then Tim asked, “Where are the plans for the transporter?”

Igor handed Tim the plans and Tim asked, “Is there a desk or table around here where I can study this stuff?”

One of the guards said, “At the end of that hallway on the right there’s a conference room with a big table and several chairs.”

Then Tim said, “I need a cold six pack of Mountain Dew. Would somebody get that for me while I look at these plans?”

The chief looked at one of the guards. The guard said, “I’ll take care of that sir,” and he left.

Tim went to the conference room with the plans. Igor and I had nothing to do, so we looked around the building and found an office with a desk and a few chairs. All we could do at this point was to wait. A few minutes later the chief joined us. After he sat down I said, "It looks like we're trusting the future of the world to a guy who looks like a teenager!"

"I know he looks young, but he's older than he looks. He graduated from high school at fourteen. By the time he was nineteen he had earned degrees in both electrical and mechanical engineering. He decided to join the Airforce and was trained as a pilot. While still in the Airforce he went back to school and earned doctorates in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. After that he transferred to the Army Weapons Research Center. He has been designing and building weapons for our armed forces for more than five years. However, what makes him uniquely qualified for this job, is that he is currently designing a transporter for us."

"Did he give you his life's history on the way here from the airport?" I asked.

"When I first saw him, I thought he was too young to have the experience needed to do the job. I don't remember exactly what I said, but it was some stupid remark. After I said it he gave me a synopsis of his background, and it's very impressive."

"How far has he gotten on designing our transporter?"

"I asked, but the project is classified and he couldn't tell me anything. If you still have security clearance, he might tell you."

"I do still have security clearance, but I'm not going to ask. Actually, I don't think anybody should have a transporter. It completely changes the rules of warfare. It has the potential to be the ultimate weapon."

Igor said, "I agree. Nobody should have one, but there's no way to prevent progress. I'm sure people felt the same way about machine guns and airplanes when they were invented. If somebody has a transporter, I don't want it to be some Islamic fanatic."

We continued talking but we were interrupted when Tim walked in and said excitedly, "We have a problem! As soon as I turn on the receiver the guys at the other end will know it. I'm fairly sure I know how to send something to them, but if they are prepared, they may be able to send something to us first. After I turn on the system it will probably take two or three minutes to put the system into 'send' mode. They may be capable of sending a bomb here before I could complete the mode change."

"Tim, do you have any suggestions?" the chief asked.

"Yeah, the first thing I want to do is have a KX device sent here. That's our most powerful conventional weapon. A five-hundred-pound KX device has the explosive power of two tons of TNT. That, I'm sure, will be enough to destroy their facility. We also need to build a containment wall around the receiver deck. The wall will be open at the top so any explosion on the receiver deck would be directed up. We need a thousand concrete blocks, mortar, and people to build the wall here as soon as possible. The wall has to be completed within twelve hours."

"I'll call the mayor. We can probably have a crew and the materials here in less than two hours," the chief said.

Tim said, "I'll have a five-hundred-pound KX bomb and a detonator here in six hours."

Tim and the chief both took out their cellphones and made the calls. An hour and a half later five city workers showed up with a truckload of bags of mortar, a portable cement mixer, and other tools needed to build the wall. Tim explained to them what they had to do and made it clear the wall had to be built as quickly as possible. He looked at the ceiling and told the guys they had to cut a hole above the receiver plate as well.

Two of the guys immediately went to the roof to figure out the best way to cut the hole. While they were on the roof a truck loaded with concrete blocks arrived. Two hours later the hole in the roof was finished. The wall was four feet high, except for a four feet wide opening that was left so the bomb could be placed on the receiver deck. They had to wait until the bomb was in position before they could continue.

Tim went to the conference room to study the transporter plans, but soon came out to tell us the plane with the bomb would arrive in twenty minutes. The chief quickly made arrangements for a truck with a police escort to meet the plane and bring the bomb to the warehouse.

Forty-five minutes later the bomb was wheeled in and placed on the receiver deck. Tim attached the detonator to the bomb and set it for a one-minute delay. The detonator was activated by a small transmitter that Tim placed in his shirt pocket.

I watched him prepare the bomb, and when he was done I asked him, "Is that a safe place for the detonator control? What happens if something accidentally hits the button on the control?"

Tim laughed and said, "Nothing would happen unless the correct four-digit code was set on the controller. That won't happen until I'm ready."

"Good, I don't want to be blown up by accident."

Six hours later the wall was completed. It was twelve inches thick and only six inches from the hole in the roof. It was impressive, but it still didn't make me feel safe. The only thing that would make me feel safe was to be several miles away.

Tim announced he was ready. He had written out the exact instructions to set the device in "send" mode. He told the chief to move everyone out of the building. The chief ordered everyone out, and they all left except for Igor and me. The chief looked at me and said, "Frank, you have to get out of here too. I can't afford to lose my only homicide detective."

I turned to Tim and said, "Would it be helpful if I stayed?"

He thought about it for a few seconds and said, "Yeah, with two people operating the switches, we might be able to reduce the time to change modes by thirty seconds."

"That settles it, I'm staying."

Igor said, "I'm staying too. I started this whole thing and I have to stay until it's finished."

After everybody else was gone, Tim said, "There are thirteen steps to change the mode and they have to be done in sequence. You will perform steps 8, 9, and 10." He spent a minute showing me what to do. Then he walked over to the power switch and asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Once I turn on the power I have to wait until the system is ready to accept a command. That will probably take about thirty seconds. I'll perform the first seven steps and say 'start'. Then you will perform your steps and say 'done'. Then I'll do the final three steps."

Tim turned on the power. Lights began to flash everywhere. I watched Tim. He was staring at something on the panel in front of him. I saw a green light come on and he started changing switch settings. Each time he completed a step he yelled the step number. A few seconds after he said "five" he yelled, "Shit, I think they know what we're doing!"

It didn't stop him. He yelled "seven". A moment later he yelled "start."

I immediately started performing my tasks. I was about to do step ten when I saw a bright light reflecting off the ceiling and the equipment starting to make a loud whining sound. It slowed me down for only a fraction of a second. I completed step ten and yelled "done."

The light got brighter and the sound grew louder as Tim performed the last two steps and then he pushed the button on the detonator control. Suddenly there was an explosion inside the cinder block wall. I heard it and felt it. Then, as suddenly as it started, it disappeared.

Tim turned off the power to the device and the room became silent.

"What the hell happened?" I asked.

"They were obviously ready for us. They sent a bomb here too. It actually exploded inside the wall, but their bomb, which was in the process of exploding, along with ours was sent to them. I don't know what happened on their end, but I would guess our plan worked. Igor, perhaps you can check the news in that area and find out if any explosions were reported."

"I can do better than that. I'll call my office in Moscow and let them know what we did and ask them to confirm there was an explosion in that area. I should know in an hour."

Igor made the call, but since he was speaking Russian, I didn't understand anything he said. After he ended the call he said, "They'll call me back as soon as they know anything."

While Igor was on the phone the chief came back. I told him what happened and we were waiting for confirmation from Igor's contacts in Russia. The chief left three people there to guard the warehouse and everybody else left.

I took Igor back to his hotel. He promised to call me as soon as he heard anything. He also said he was leaving the following day to return to Russia. He gave me another card. This one, I presumed, was real. It had his name, an address in Moscow, and a different phone number. He said if I ever find myself in Moscow, I should call him and he would buy me a bottle of vodka.

He called me an hour after I dropped him off at his hotel to tell me an explosion occurred at a medical research facility just outside of Moscow, but there were no details. I thanked him for the information.

The following morning, I turned on the TV to get the news. The big story was about a probable terrorist attack at a medical research facility near Moscow. Twenty-six people were killed in the attack and the building was demolished by two explosions a minute apart.

Now I knew the Russian rebels no longer had a transporter to sell, and I guessed the people who designed it were dead. Tim probably had enough information to complete his design. The immediate threat was gone, but I had a bad feeling it would be back.

When I arrived at the station that morning I found a note from Jill asking me to call her. The first thought I had was that there was another body. I called her and when she answered I asked, "Is there a problem?"

"No, the rumor is that there won't be any more bodies with missing parts. But I have a much more important subject to discuss with you."

"What is it?"

"I have a ten-year college reunion to go to next week and I don't have a date. Would you like to go with me?"

"Yeah, I'd like that very much."