

CHAPTER ONE

Michael Neilly placed the phone back in its cradle and wondered what the call from Calvin Greves might mean. Greves, an old FBI colleague, was minutes away and wanted to meet "...on issues important to both of us." This was not something Neilly had planned or wanted on a bright spring morning when he was finally satisfied that the sketches of the St. Alban's remodeling project were right. He felt a knot of anxiety rising in his stomach. Greves had hinted of something linked to Jack Sutton's death, something that had to be heard.

When Jack had been killed, Neilly felt as if a door had closed suddenly on a favorite room, sealing it off forever. The gritty noncom had once been his ears and eyes in the ways of military staff politics. Sutton made the low-level Intelligence section they'd manned in early '80s Korea effective in ways the twenty-three-year-old Neilly could not have conceived, much less managed. Their mutual respect had grown into a friendship that outlasted twenty years until that windy, rain-sodden, October night when someone put a bullet through Jack Sutton's head.

Never accept the official attitude. It doesn't belong to anybody. Value anyone who knows that. Sutton's voice reached him even now, a year after the murder. The crime remained unsolved. Neilly's loss and Jack's wife's and son's grief remained unrequited. It had been Sutton who had drawn him to Morton City when he had quit the Bureau—when his first marriage failed. The two crises were seamed together in his memory.

Neilly had longed to settle somewhere among honest, ordinary people. He wanted to put his neglected architecture degree into practice against his continuous disillusionment with his post-army years. The small town in central Washington State had seemed the right choice. He'd met Trudy Smith, a hazel-eyed blond, whose easy smile and sharp wit captured him at a town meeting he had not succeeded in avoiding. They were married a year before Sutton's murder and the happiness they shared had softened the shock. Still, when Sutton was killed, Neilly noticed that a feeling of anxiety began to permeate the town as though to parallel his own loss, while apparently unrelated to its immediate cause. Few people had really known Jack Sutton. He had been an humble man of good works without popular recognition. Neilly sat quietly, wondering

what umbra shadowed the public spirit as if it were bound to his own.

He broke his reverie and finished the check of his sketches and then closed them into a vinyl folder. The larger altar platform, the new baptistery, and the redesigned social hall would satisfy Father Sims and assure the assent of the building committee. It was not the sort of thing he'd done before, but it was a good contract. He set the folder aside as the doorbell summoned. Shortly, he opened the door to welcome Calvin Greves.

"Mike, I'm glad you were home." Greves stepped inside as Neilly shook the proffered hand and spoke as warmly as he could.

"Glad you called, Cal, it's been a while. Come in." Neilly led Greves through the living room into the study he'd fashioned from an extra bedroom at the rear of his small house.

"Take the armchair. What can I get you, coffee?"

"Coffee is fine, thanks. Sugar, no cream." Greves sat down, laying his jacket and briefcase on a small table. He looked around the room. "Not bad, Mike, maybe I ought to retire too."

"My life's been better here, Cal. Maybe they *could* get along without you."

"Sure, but I'm not ready to let them. There's too much facing us now, both at home and abroad—all the troubles that have sprung up since Waco, you know."

Neilly knew all right.

"I was about to arrange a design conference this morning, Cal, but it can wait," he said, as he left to get the coffee.

His life had been good in Morton City and he wanted to keep it that way, keep doing the work he'd been schooled for and had abandoned for years: work he had now finally reestablished. He was glad Trudy was busy at school. Whatever Greves had to say, he hoped he'd be done with it quickly. He poured two cups from the coffeemaker he kept going most of the day, got out sugar and the non-dairy creamer and returned to the study.

Greves was thumbing through one of his design magazines.

"Must be a satisfying profession, Mike."

Neilly nodded, sipped his coffee, and waited for the other to declare himself. The clatter of someone delivering a load of lumber across the road carried through the open window. Neilly stood, closed it, and got to the point.

“Is this really a social visit, Cal, or are you here on Bureau business? What is it you have to say about Jack Sutton?”

Greves looked sharply over his raised cup.

“Just a hunch I have, Mike. Let me get to it in my own way. Besides, can’t we just be friends for five minutes after all these years?”

“Sure, but is this really about you and me?”

“In one way, if it weren’t, I wouldn’t be here, Mike. But yes, I need your help on something. I think if you’ll listen I can convince you there’s a human duty involved. If it’s not yours, it’s still mine and someone else’s. But I know you, Mike. I hope we’ll be together on this.”

“It’s not just the Bureau, then? Something personal?”

Greves shrugged. “Will you listen?”

Neilly knew the man. He knew he would have to wait for whatever the hunch was that involved Sutton. He calmed the edginess from his voice.

“I know you’re a good man, Cal. I’ll listen, but I have to tell you my attitude hasn’t changed toward what I saw the Bureau turning into—a paramilitary force with the powers of a secret police agency.”

“Neither has mine, and I think I know more about your anger than anyone else’s in the organization and how it affected your family. I know you had a hard time with the Bureau’s background, COINTELPRO and all, when you first started. And I know the Waco mess seemed like the last straw to you. That’s the human aspect of the organization: people screw up. You can’t just ignore all the things that have gone right...”

“I missed the Murrah Building bombing. I’d already quit,” Neilly said grimly.

“So you did,” Greves said. For a moment his face reddened. He shifted restlessly, leaned forward as if about to retort, then relaxed and settled back again. “I didn’t come here for an argument, Mike. I need your help in this town: Morton City, Washington. Right here. Right now.”

There was muted desperation in his words. Sympathy and curiosity weakened Neilly's resistance. He regretted mentioning the Murrah Building.

"Okay. I'm listening. How does this involve me?"

"It starts with the project at Yellow Butte. What do you know about that, Mike?"

"I've heard things about it. Nobody's heard much more than gossip."

"It's being built by a loosely organized consortium of industry and it is controlled by the government through the Pentagon. The Eramond Corporation is the main contractor."

"Eramond—computers and electronics?" Neilly began to sense what Greves was worried about. "How do you mean loosely organized?"

"Congress has too little effective oversight on directed energy technology. You can count the congressional experts on the fingers of one hand. Without careful oversight, Eramond might dominate more than the project. I'm disturbed by the man representing Eramond here. If what I suspect is true, we're dealing with people likely to abuse power."

Outside, a group of children shouted over their street game. Their voices brought Neilly a sudden memory of other children's voices: his daughter, Lynette's, and her playmates' in the early twilights of other years. She was fourteen now, with a fragile prettiness that made his heart ache to see her again, a privilege he'd denied himself for too long.

This possible detour in his simple life could make it impossible to bring his daughter out for the visit he had been planning. He would not put Lynette or her mother in harm's way again. He remembered the mixed surge of anguish and anger he'd felt one hot summer night when Lynette was seven. He'd been lying awake, unable to sleep, when suddenly, the child's scream of terror had sent him instantly out of bed and halfway up the hall stairway. He hadn't finished the climb. Adrenaline and fear had urged a leap upward to pull himself over the rail of the landing and into Lynette's bedroom. There, she huddled, trembling, against the corner of her bed and the wall. She had heard a strangled, growling sound loud enough to wake her. Mike had heard the same sound: it seemed the sound of someone struggling to breathe through a cut throat. With the lights on, Lynette's "nightmare" was gone, but not his own. To his wife, Jennifer's, sleepy questions he had said the obvious, "...a nightmare. She's okay." What else was there to

say?

And now there was Trudy. Could he keep her clear of danger?

What could Yellow Butte have to do with Sutton's death? Greves spoke of anger. Neilly knew from experience that it was more than that: it was also fear. What Greves said about directed energy and Eramond reminded him of his own sleepless nights, listening to whispering voices that no one else would hear. If he had not understood what radio wave technology could do, those episodes would have sent him to a psychiatrist.

Whatever he had done in the military or in the Bureau to attract abuse, he had understood the moral ground of what was happening: ethical promise twisted by arrogant stupidity and twisted surely with the cover of national security. He had decided to wait. It *had* to come out and become public knowledge sooner or later, so he had thought. It hadn't. His own nightmares had come and gone, but he wasn't convinced they were gone forever. What was Yellow Butte designed to be? Was it a legitimate defense system? Directed energy as light or sound waves translated into humanity's benefit—or was it some new proof of inhumanity? He sympathized with Greves' concern. He balanced a question between that sympathy and well-experienced caution.

"Is it the Yellow Butte project you're worried about, the product, or the people in control?" Neilly allowed himself to be drawn further in.

"All three, but what's your guess about the product?"

"The Eramond Company leads me to guess that it might be part of an electronic anti-missile shield or a ground defense system."

"I thought you'd guess that much." Greves nodded.

"Is it operating?"

"No, the planning is complete, though. I can give you more detail on what I'm immediately worried about, if I have a deal."

"You'll have to tell me more," Neilly insisted.

"Okay. I'll tell you about the Bureau's interest, the *official* reason I'm here."

His caustic emphasis told Neilly that Greves was pushing beyond his orders and probably catching heat. He'd done that before and been reprimanded, even when it turned out well. But Greves' willingness to risk for a just outcome was one of the characteristics of the man Neilly liked most.

“Okay, fill me in.”

“We can’t pin it down to formal charges yet, but it involves a tip we’ve had from the Treasury on a flow of money into the local bank. The source is an investment company, but the amounts are sometimes large enough to be suspicious as dividends. The funds seem to be staying in town or going out slowly, so it’s tough to follow through the reporting system.” Greves reached inside his attaché briefcase, pulled out a manila envelope and dropped it on the table between them.

“You’ll recognize someone there.”

The photo was of two men standing on a boat landing. An obscured sailboat mast rose up behind them. The visible shore suggested a vacation place. Smiling into the camera was Dr. Morris Reiger, Chairman of the Morton City School Board. The doctor’s taller companion held his arm about the doctor’s shoulders in a way that seemed almost threatening.

“What about the other guy,” Greves asked, “does he seem at all familiar?”

Neilly stared at the tall, unsmiling figure, and then shook his head.

“He’s not anyone I know. What’s this about? How is Reiger connected to this?”

“I’m not sure. That’s the problem. The big guy is Alden Kornwith. He and Reiger got chummy about six years ago over at Port Haley on the Sound. He’s *my* problem because he’s here. He was here about two years ago. Now he’s here again. He keeps showing up in places where there’s trouble brewing, or where the Bureau expects trouble.” Greves paused. “Right now, the Bureau’s concerned about the political climate here. This new environmental group, the Terra League, for example, and the ranchers’ group, the Sunset Union, are headed by some troubling reactionaries.”

Anything threatening the status quo would be troubling to some FBI people, Neilly well knew. Greves was suggesting the Terra League and the Sunset Union were more the Bureau’s concern than his own. His concern was over something else that had turned up the burners. “Resistance from Washington,” he’d said. Neilly was beginning to surmise it involved a political agenda connected to Eramond. What Greves feared would be the subversion of a troubling, though legitimate Defense project.

“We thought since you are on the scene here and part of the town life, that you might help us to cover this guy, Kornwith. Your position on the School Planning

Commission, for example, puts you next to his pal Reiger, an *ex-officio* on the Commission as school board chairman, right?”

“That’s right. He’s irritating, but good at it.”

“It’s a connection.” Greves paused again. “I should tell you, Mike, when I suggested bringing you in, nobody upstairs objected. It seems you still rate pretty high with the Special Agent in Seattle and with the Internal Security section chief, too.”

Beyond the flattery, mention of the SAC and the IS chief meant big doings were afoot.

“You mentioned this suspicious money flow in the context of the Yellow Butte project. Are they connected?”

“I think so, Mike. I think the Eramond Company, the money and the potential for trouble are all there together. But I can’t guarantee Washington will see it that way.” Greves stood, paced his side of the small room once and sat down again.

“I do know that Yellow Butte is a legitimate and necessary national defense project.”

“It’s the people involved you’re concerned about.”

“It’s the people involved and the dangerous power Yellow Butte can put into their hands. Can we deal, Mike?”

“We can deal. I don’t know much about the project, but I can guess you’re talking about the abuse of electronics as internal control, that there is somebody setting up to manipulate people for purposes you’re suspicious of.”

Greves put the photo back in its envelope and then the envelope back in his briefcase. With the briefcase shut and glasses readjusted from their droop down his nose, he finally answered. “Security concerns turned into control by electronic manipulation, yes. That *may* be what we’re talking about. If that’s the case, it can become governmental by wrongful authority. It can be controlled by people who hide in the shadow of national necessity.”

Greves paused as if to settle his feelings and went on.

“Covert work is what I do. Still, how and why it’s done have always been my measure of it, Mike. I’m here talking to you because I know your measure—you’ve proven it. We’ve talked about the troubles brewing here. If people are manipulating

conflict to serve private agendas, that threatens all of us. With all the advances in equipment and weapons, we're a long way down the road from Tesla's making lightning with machines. Technology won't go away. Its uses and abuses have become crucial."

No doubt about that or the sincerity of the man saying it. He understood Greves by the gold wedding band, the slightly frayed shirtsleeve, and the conservative tie under the square jaw. Neilly nodded agreement and probed Greves further.

"You suggested being held out on by the Bureau . . ."

"I said Washington. That *could* be the Bureau. There's power by influence that even the Bureau has to be wary of. Politics has sharp teeth, strange weapons."

"I understand." Neilly wondered if he did understand or only accepted the sad fact that *necessity*, whether real or politically convenient, rarely lost its war with democratic values. Neilly caught himself fingering the skin above his right ear where a boyhood accident had left a sensitive spot. He stopped when he saw Greves smile.

"I used to see you doing that when a case was going badly," Greves said.

"I guess one is now, Cal. I can't think of any way of turning you down."

Greves pulled the briefcase onto his knees and reached for his windbreaker on the table.

"Okay. What else do you want to know?"

Neilly repressed a moment's irritation.

"Jack Sutton," he said. "What is it you have on that? Sutton and I were in the Army together. We were close. The shooting happened three years after I got here. Sutton retired about the time I left the job. Is there something new on the shooting?"

"Nothing solid, but my hunches have a pretty fair rating. Between you and me, I'm not convinced Jack Sutton was killed in what the police called it, 'a robbery gone wrong.' I have a feeling it was something different, maybe something connected to what we've talked about."

Neilly was somehow not surprised.

"How?"

Greves gave a shrug of helplessness. "I can't say. It is just a hunch involving Kornwith's comings and goings. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything at all. But Sutton's son, Glen, doesn't accept the robbery story either. He's angry and he could make

trouble for himself. If we could discover a link, that might do the young man and his mother a real service—not to mention the rest of us—if I’m right about Kornwith.”

Neilly felt both disappointed and hopeful. He swallowed the disappointment. “That it might.” he said. If Kornwith was the key, he had to know more about both Kornwith and Reiger.

“You think this Kornwith is a troublemaker with the connections to make it nasty and that could explain the resistance you’re feeling in the Bureau?”

“Right.”

“But how is Reiger involved? He’s practically the citizen activist personified.”

“What I’ve said about Kornwith is based on observation more than information and nothing I could act on. But if we can uncover part of his line, maybe we’ll be able to follow it and know how Reiger’s involved. You don’t like the doctor much, do you?”

“No. But it’s mainly just his lining up with Roy Severs at the School Planning Commission meetings. The Reverend Severs is a real pain in the ass—he wants a course called ‘Social Values for a Christian Nation’ in the schools. You get the idea.” Greves chuckled.

“Yes, but that’s his right, isn’t it? Reiger’s supporting him is interesting, though. Keep your eye on how that develops. I won’t contact you this way again. If it gets difficult, we’ll set up a contact code for meetings. You know the drill. If you want to phone or write me, use this number and address and I’ll get back to you.”

He handed Neilly a card, extended his hand in thanks, and turned to leave. As he closed the door, Neilly was thinking that it wasn’t like Greves to express mere hunches about crimes like the Sutton death. Neilly deduced that he must know more about Jack Sutton, Eramond and Sutton’s connection to Kornwith than he’d said. It would have done little good to push him to reveal what he wouldn’t or couldn’t reveal. Still, it suggested a different, more personal kind of evil than Neilly had considered. If that evil had already touched not only Jack, but also young Glen Sutton, how many others would it threaten?

* * *

Father Joel Sims was pleased with the plans Neilly brought him. He rattled on as Neilly tried to shake the upheaval of uncertainty and strange hope his meeting with Greves had evoked.

“You’ve done a fine job, Michael. I like the sense of airiness and space you’ve provided. Churches should be welcoming, open, not closed and barricaded in the way they have seemed in the past”

They sat in Sims’s office in the parish house attached to the church. Sims looked up from the pages of Neilly’s design and grinned.

“How about a little drink to celebrate?”

“I’ll take the drink, but isn’t the celebration a little premature?”

“You mean the Building Committee’s response?” Sims took a bottle and two glasses from the cabinet behind his desk and poured a short, straight Scotch for each of them, offering Neilly water for mix.

“They’re good people Michael. They’ll support my approval.” Neilly wished it weren’t so easy.

“I’d like to discuss the design with them, of course.”

“Oh yes, no question about that.” They fell silent for a moment, sipping their drinks. Finishing his, Sims broke the silence.

“You’ve got a sense of what I mentioned, Michael, being bold with a religious space while maintaining a sense of its sanctity. I know the committee will feel the same. That puts me in mind of a question I’ve had about you. I know you’ve been a Catholic—do you ever think of coming back?”

Neilly had known this would be coming sooner or later. “I think of it, but not often and not with any conviction that I should. I think the Church’s answers are too easy.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“I believe in the good. If good has a mysterious source and that is God, then I believe in God.”

“You’ll do it all by yourself then. I could call *your* answers easy. No help, no community to share the terrible burden of seeking out God?”

Neilly was growing weary. He’d been over this ground too many times.

“I know good when I experience it. I try to support it. If that is seeking out God, the burden is not always terrible. But I have to have some sleep tonight, father. Thanks for the drink.”

He stood to shake the priest's hand and went out into the night wondering how heavy that burden might be.

CHAPTER TWO

Simon Ross, Eramond's Vice President for Security Management, scanned the faces of the civilian review board gathered around the Pentagon conference table. His corporate management experience, though brief, gave him experience in dealing with groups like this. His CIA background made him cynical about them. In his estimation, they were the usual futile mix of academics and business people: political appointees required by congressional oversight. Thin in their knowledge of what was really involved, these people were given over primarily to self-satisfied posturing. But now, with the Review Board's work almost finished, two or three had raised questions he would have to answer without revealing too much. The Yellow Butte project was too vital to be troubled by peevish doubts over the necessary use of electronic populace controls. It was Ross's job to put those doubts aside so the Powercast Station could be approved without a dangerous level of public involvement. Ross opened his organizer, scanned his notes and began with his routine warning.

"Gentlemen, I remind you that we remain under security restrictions. Nothing discussed here goes beyond this room without top clearance." He met the gaze of each man around the table.

"We've been discussing the Yellow Butte Project in terms of the current Command-Control-Communications-Intelligence system, known as the C3-I. I want to clarify some questions raised concerning Yellow Butte's role in developing C3-I in its own critical surroundings."

Ross then turned and spoke to a smallish, gray-haired man seated at mid-table.

"Dr. Cyrus, I think your difficulty last time was with what I called *the local feed arrangements*: the potential use of the Powercast facility in its local area. Is that correct?"

"That is exactly correct. My question involves how this groundwave electronic pulse facility operates in relation to ordinary citizens in its frequency range and what use it might be put to beyond its national defense function. I'm an engineer and I understand the mechanics of the communication system we're putting together and its military necessity. But, I also have enough knowledge of physics to surmise that electromagnetic pulse energy combined with cyclotron resonance can penetrate human neurology, affect the brain and thereby affect thought and behavior."

Ross smiled confidently. "I can't comment on your guesswork, professor, but the use of

electromagnetic energy as you describe is common in medicine: in PET scans, for example. I'm sure you wouldn't reject those as being unethical or dangerous."

There was a general chuckle of agreement across the room.

"For medical purposes in the right hands, of course not." Cyrus said.

"And, I'm sure you know, sir, that there is no proven evidence that human biology is affected by microwaves, beyond the effects of the heat they produce."

Cyrus reacted angrily. "I'm sure *you* know, Ross, that animal studies have shown the biological effects of this energy. The long range effects on humans are unknown."

Ross had invited an opening in his own fence. Cyrus was better informed than most of his kind. He had been led away from speculation on thought control, at least, but Ross realized that he had to be more careful. Giving a little ground could be useful.

"Let me put it to you this way, Professor Cyrus. If the Yellow Butte facility we've described here were necessary to defend our country from a terrorist attack, would you support using its energy against such a threat?"

"Of course, but that's not the issue I'm addressing." Cyrus said.

A deep voice from further down the table cut him off.

"Of course it's the issue." Ralph Mason, Colonel, U.S. Air Force, was bent forward, glowering at Cyrus. "It's essential that this system is completed. Yellow Butte's function is vital. If one element is eliminated, the whole Command-Control Program is in jeopardy."

The other faces around the table held varying looks of dismay at the developing conflict, although some nodded agreement with Mason. Ross responded quickly before Mason could offer too much.

"What the Colonel means is that you're forgetting the last element of C3-I, Dr. Cyrus. *That's* Intelligence. Without a proactive Intelligence operation both inside and outside the system, we can't expect the vital command and control elements to function effectively. Intelligence *is* control. Control is often simply effective Intelligence."

Cyrus shook his head. "I don't like the way you use the terms, Ross. I understand defensive Intelligence. My problem is that the active control program you've described will involve the people of Morton City. Why do we need what you call *assured cooperation* from ordinary people going about their own business, people who are likely to have no personal interest in the project beyond the fact that it brings money and a few jobs to their town?"

Ross smiled to cover his irritation. The man had no sense of how ruthless the demands on democracy had become. Cyrus had been told, even shown, how far the nation's enemies had advanced in technological warfare and the way Intelligence must integrate with civilian life or

risk failure. Ross considered how the professor and his kind were quick enough to take government grants without question.

“You’re a good American, Cyrus. We’re all good Americans here. Let’s try to keep that in mind. I understand your objections, but the recent past ought to have taught us something about what terrible disruption can affect our democracy if we’re not watchful. Any good security system controls its environment as well as its personnel. Maybe a few facts about Morton City, Washington will illustrate the problems.”

Cyrus nodded quietly. Others looked relieved. “Radical-liberal and reactionary political elements have been developing there. They often amount to the same thing—creating reactions against projects such as Yellow Butte.”

“I suppose,” Cyrus said. “But let’s define the specifics. What reactions? There is a small, but active anti-government movement among rural land owners there, a group called the – Sunset Union, with a former member of the John Birch Society in the leadership.”

“*That’s* trouble,” someone down the table murmured, and a small chorus of others agreed.

“An environmental group, the Terra League, has set up an office in Morton City. You know what such people, however sincere, can do to a project like this. An environmental impact statement will be demanded, and they’ll try to use the impact statement to kill the project.”

“Is Yellow Butte threatening environmentally?” Senate aide Roland Casey asked.

Ross was grateful for the question. “You know, there are people who would balance the well being of their nation against the fate of a prairie dog colony, Mr. Casey. That’s another reason we need Intelligence controls.”

“The Tahola River Valley is hardly a prairie dog colony,” Casey said.

“No, of course not. But the attitudes I’ve described exist, and we have to find ways to frustrate the behavior that comes from them or support behavior that supports us.”

“And that is where what you call electronic command comes in?” Cyrus asked.

Ross answered cautiously. “That’s part of what the term means, yes. I’ve told you I can’t go into the specifics.”

“You use the term opponents as if you really mean enemies. Have you thought about the resistance you might *create* rather than control?” Cyrus retorted.

“That’s the possibility we have to prepare for. Be assured our agents in the field are well trained to handle the possibilities, sir. I’ve tried to specify the security problems we may face. You will have to accept the assumption that we act here in the best interests of the nation and its people. I’m sure most here present accept that understanding.”

He was rewarded with a chorus of agreement. Cyrus looked unsatisfied, but said nothing more. *He simply doesn't know what direction to take*, Ross thought. He considered that he might have trouble with Cyrus later. But for now, the professor was silent. Ross began again quickly.

"I will offer one piece of information which may help soothe some of these concerns. Our man handling social control in Morton City, our Provider, is Alden Kornwith. He has distinguished credentials both in and out of government and he is thoroughly familiar with his duty and citizens' rights."

"I'm glad to hear it," Cyrus said. "I hope we can constantly reassure ourselves of that."

"You are free to pursue any questions that may come up," Ross said. "We have to move on. Today I had intended to discuss a fourth element of the traditional C3-I paradigm we have been using. That element is the cybernetic link in the command chain. Since we've used this hour to answer your questions, and since the computer phase involves the military, Colonel Mason will chair the next committee. The discussion will begin at our regular hour tomorrow."

"One more question before we adjourn, Dr. Ross?" The questioner was Harold Fenn, a stockbroker and Commerce Department consultant who had been added to the committee at the White House's request.

"Regarding the mining properties that are still held on the land adjacent to Yellow Butte, is there any legal agreement on them yet? I'm wondering if any leases will be considered?"

"I can tell you nothing whatsoever about that." Ross stood; thereby signaling the meeting was adjourned. As the review board left, he tarried and speculated on their reactions. Most of them would not trouble themselves much over Cyrus' questions. They either didn't understand or want to understand what he had suggested. Cyrus had signed a formal secrecy commitment like all the others. Roland Casey would tell the Senator he served what the Senator wanted to hear, no doubt; and Harold Fenn would strive to discover how to make money for himself and his friends. He wondered if they would be worthy of the world Eramond's program was creating. He wondered about the likes of Fenn and Casey. Only Cyrus had been a worthy challenger, well informed, though not well enough. If he'd understood the Psy Ops used in the Gulf War, he'd be more of a problem.

Ross checked his watch. He'd have just time enough to get to the demonstration of the new digital phaser, he thought. If Cyrus could see what that had done to a lab animal, six weeks ago, he'd have something to justify himself with, alright. It was a terrible instrument at full power. But these were terrible times. So far as Ross knew, it hadn't been used on a human target yet. But some day, inevitably, it would be.

CHAPTER THREE

Alden Kornwith sat in one of the consultation rooms of the Timberwild State Bank and waited for the Vice President for investment accounts. He was amused by the way Carl Welcomer, the bank president, had dodged meeting with him over the months as the program money began coming in; and now, he passed him off to this man, Willard Norland. Morris Reiger was less nervous about the program than Welcomer. Reiger had *been there* as the saying went, had overcome his limitations and arrived with a better social mind willing to risk what real national change required. Norland was taking his damned time about it.

Kornwith shifted restlessly in his chair. He was a large man with straight black hair, grey eyes, strong features, and his face broadened at the cheekbones. He got up to walk about the room, while examining the photos that covered the walls. Finally, he came to a dim portrait of Edward C.M. Morton himself: the town's pioneer founder. The stern-featured, great-great grandson of a Puritan minister seemed to stare back at him with suspicion. Kornwith did not need the information provided on the embossed nameplate. Eramond's research background study already provided all the information he required.

He thought the town's history to be indistinguishable from that of other towns he had been sent to develop: places that were not communities to him but rather derivations of events. In his common expression, these places *were* what they *did*. When what they did could no longer be done, they failed. That was why, beyond the military aspects of Yellow Butte, its development was so important to towns like this. It provided discipline through electronics where social disorder would otherwise prevail. The great restructuring and the development of a truly new society in the nation depended on the creation of an energetic core in just such little places.

Willard Norland finally entered and extended his hand.

"Please be seated, Mr. Kornwith." Norland chose a chair for himself at the oval table and indicated one for Kornwith.

Measuring the bland face across from him, Kornwith concluded there would be no trouble modifying the arrangements. Once shown his credentials, certified in this instance by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Norland would not ask many questions

about funds masked as investment dividends deposited to a local business group.

“How are you authorized by the Commerce Department to arrange private investment deposits?”

Kornwith smiled indulgently. “Eramond, the contractor for the Yellow Butte development, leads a corporate-government consortium which includes several cabinet-level departments. In practice, I represent Eramond as well as the Department of Commerce here. I am authorized to handle company funds. What we do is not entirely public, but I can tell you our concern is with the economic health of small towns such as yours. Our funds are meant to enable those who contribute to that goal.”

“You will be moving funds between accounts, then?” Norland’s tone was cautious.

“That is correct. The deposits will be to the Morton City Development Council Joint Investment Fund. Your bank will act as intermediary to route money to the individuals we designate.”

“Members of the Council Investment Group, you mean?”

“Those members whom we designate.”

Norland didn’t question the ambiguity.

“This is in association with the Yellow Butte project, benefiting Morton City, but requiring the same kind of security that the project does. I’m sure you understand.”

“Very well then, Mr. Kornwith, we’ll see to it.” Norland smiled.

An half-hour later as he took the elevator up to Dr. Morris Reiger’s quarters, Kornwith congratulated himself on having things well in hand. Welcomer and the bank were committed. That morning, he had requested Reiger to invite the rancher, Carter Evans, to meet with them in the Development Council’s chambers in Reiger’s small office building. He wanted to find out what difficulty, if any, the Sunset Union group might pose. Reiger had resisted the idea of their meeting so soon, but Kornwith had insisted the rancher represented a kind of citizen leader who should be brought under control as quickly as possible. His known hostility to government must be either muzzled or turned in a constructive direction.

Reiger’s comfortable waiting room was empty except for a nurse, receptionist, and an elderly woman who whispered to herself as she read a magazine. Kornwith sat

down to consider a small sculpture on the adjacent table and read the nearby printed card announcing the title: “The Eighth Day” and the artist, “M. Neilly.” It appeared to be a vaguely defined human form drawing another from a sculpted, shapeless mass. He didn’t like the piece. In fact, it made him feel irritable. Art should be defining. What could be seen clearly could be understood and thereby classified. This was simply right thinking in Kornwith’s estimation. The concept of humans taking over from God was made plain by the title of the work. It filled him with an amused contempt for the myths people clung to in order to give themselves the sense of some divine connection. He supposed it made it easier for them to excuse the power-thirst, the animal survival struggle.

Alden Kornwith needed no excuse for the power he could use. He looked up as Morris Reiger came into the waiting room and handed a slip of paper to the elderly woman.

“You get this filled, Mrs. Parsons. It should help with the stomach upsets. Call us again in a week or so.” Reiger stood waiting as his receptionist helped Mrs. Parsons with her coat and cane, then he held open the door for her as she hobbled through.

When she was gone, the doctor told his receptionist, “We’ll be downstairs for the next hour or so, Judith. If anything serious comes up, ring me.”

He opened the outer hall door again, and Kornwith followed him through. In the Development Council conference room below, Kornwith and the doctor found Carter Evans waiting for them.

“I see you’ve let yourself in with your member’s key, Carter,” Reiger said, as he acknowledged Kornwith.

“This is the government man I told you about. He’s going to be important to us and to the whole community. He particularly wanted to meet you.”

As Evans took the proffered handshake, the rigid set of his shoulders promised resistance. Kornwith made mental note to go softly, at least for now.

“We’ll try not to take too much of your time, Mr. Evans.”

“That’s good. I have to see to a feed delivery.”

The voice was soft but the look he gave Kornwith was not. Kornwith opened the attaché case he had laid on the table, took a file from it and lowered his gaze from Evans as he read it.

Reiger drummed his fingers nervously as a full minute went by in silence. Evans sat silent, his face reddening in irritation.

“What sort of feed are you putting in, Carter?” Reiger broke the silence.

“Silage mix, soy beans, mainly,” Evans said, “but I can’t do it sitting here.”

He then spoke bluntly to Kornwith. “Can we get on with it?”

Kornwith looked up with a smile. “Sorry, I’m just fascinated with the background we have on you.”

He closed the file, put it on top of his attaché case, and folded his hands.

“I understand you head a group called The Sunset Union, Mr. Evans. We are very interested in your work on that.”

The surprised and daunted look that spread over Evans’ features satisfied Kornwith. He went on, his words measured, “I asked Dr. Reiger to set up this meeting so that we could talk about that work and what we are doing that might relate to it.”

Evans looked back steadily with wary interest.

“What is it you want to know?”

“We already know quite a bit, and I must say that organizations like yours can be of great service, *if* they understand their proper role.”

Evans flushed and seemed about to respond angrily. Reiger quickly broke in.

“The Sunset Union is simply an organization of cattlemen and farmers who want to preserve their rights. Alden, I’m sure you realize—”

He stopped suddenly, as Evans turned his glare from Kornwith to him.

“I asked him what he wanted to know, Morris,” the rancher said firmly, swallowing his anger.

Kornwith stopped smiling. He opened the background folder again, slowly turning pages, pausing as if to consider each. When he spoke again, it was with a measured solemnity, touched by something almost like sadness.

“I want to know whether you and your people are capable of cooperating with the technical and social program I’m here to establish. The doctor here has been extremely supportive. I hoped you would be too.”

“We’re capable of doing what we find necessary.”

“No doubt. But to be frank, some of your remarks—including one seeming threat

against the government of the United States—have attracted unfavorable attention, Evans. I want to know if you're willing to let me help you overcome that negative reputation.”

“Maybe I don't watch everything I say, but that's my right, isn't it?”

More surly than defiant, Kornwith thought. As Evans went on, his voice gained conviction.

“It's you people who are trying to tell us what to do with our property, trying to reduce America to fit us in with the rest of the losers in the world. You, that use all your regulations and taxes to get more power.” He stopped, his eyes burning at Kornwith.

Reiger drummed his fingers again in obvious anxiety while Kornwith assumed a more soothing tone.

“I assure you, Mr. Evans, I have nothing to do with taxes or regulations, as you put it. I certainly don't want to reduce our country in any way. Like you, I hope, I *want* to make it more available to people of talent and worth: those who ought to be in charge. I thought you might be among those people, and I wanted to tell you how to accomplish that.”

He shut his file folder, returned it to the case, looked toward Reiger then upward, away from the others.

“You must at least listen, Carter,” Reiger said.

“So, I'm listening,” Evans said, a speculative note now in his voice.

“What's your proposition, Kornwith, or is that the right word?”

Kornwith slowly met Evans' gaze. “Well, let me tell you about what I do and what we have in mind. By we, I mean elements of three government agencies combined with the Eramond Corporation that comprise the consortium I work for. I can show you the credentials I carry from the Cabinet level department that issued them, but I don't consider my work to be strictly linked to that department.”

Evans shrugged off the credentials.

“Let's say I'm something like a Texas Ranger was once, more or less a free agent, operating as the law on his own responsibility when circumstances demanded.”

The effect was subtly transforming. Evans's body language softened as his hunched resistance relaxed.

“We want to encourage groups of people capable of cooperation with us for the better ordering of things,” Kornwith continued. “I mean the ordering of our lives, as well as our commerce. We have selected a group of small towns like Morton City to make a program available in which effective leaders can be given considerable advantages.”

What kind of advantages?” Evans took the bait.

“Those that organize natural human capacities to make your ideas more effective, your good days more productive, so long as you recognize that these advantages have to be controlled. That in a world like ours, government, without question, has to be in charge.”

He paused and looked steadily at Evans, who nodded hesitantly.

“What I am going to discuss is in some ways common knowledge, but it is not in the detail I can provide, for good reason. I will ask you to treat it as privileged, to be kept strictly among us. Do you agree?”

He looked solemnly at Evans again, but the silence was broken by Reiger’s quick, “Of course.”

Evans finally said, “I understand you. I’ll keep it private.”

“I can’t tell you everything. I don’t know everything.” Kornwith chuckled at this last admission. “But some of it you will recognize out of your own experience. Dr. Reiger can tell you about the benefits of electronic radiation technology as applied to medicine, I’m sure.”

Reiger nodded his agreement as Kornwith went on.

“Any scientifically educated person now understands our bodies, including our brains, share in the electricity of the earth itself. You’ve probably heard of the effects of biofeedback, people learning to control their blood pressure and heart rate, the effects of stress, even their own brain waves as charted for them by electronic devices. Training in using what are called the alpha and theta brain waves can put people in control of their emotions, reduce stress, even teach them to overcome mental blocks, learn better, and end their anxiety.”

“That’s true, Carter,” Reiger said. “It’s a matter of making people conscious of their own brain functions so they can manipulate them and heal themselves.”

“You’re going to do that for these leaders you spoke of?” Evans was clearly interested now.

“Biofeedback is only an example, one aspect of what can be done electronically to benefit people, to develop their special capacities,” Kornwith said. “The Yellow Butte facility, I can tell you, will bring very special electronic forces to bear on your community: forces that, used wisely, can cause it to bloom with prosperity and physical well being.” Kornwith was silent, watching the mixed expressions of doubt and fascination cross Evans’ face. The rancher wasn’t quite convinced, but he was close.

“I thought Yellow Butte was supposed to be a defense project, something to do with what they used to call *Star Wars*—a missile shield of some kind, that’s the rumor, anyway. So what’s it got to do with all this biofeedback and benefit to the community?”

Kornwith’s voice took on a tone of warning. He looked to Reiger, including him in his comment.

“You are right about the defense project, Evans, but I would be careful about repeating rumors and about associating your country’s defense with motion picture fantasies.”

Evans shrugged apologetically. “Okay, so we won’t call it *Star Wars*, but it just figures that this new radio tower, or whatever, is connected to what the papers have been talking about, what they call the missile shield.”

“That’s pretty much the talk around town, Alden,” Reiger agreed.

“All I can say is that devices like those we’ve talked about might be used in a missile defense system, yes. I have said nothing about Yellow Butte in that way. But you might guess that the organization of an electronic defense system requires the gathering of many local points of transmission. Electromagnetic energy, the force enveloping the earth and visible to us only as light, can be transmitted and used for other purposes than a missile defense shield.”

“Somehow the new plant, whatever it is, can produce energy we can use as the leaders you talked about,” Evans said softly. The rancher’s expression was more than merely interested now. Reiger’s look had intensified as well.

“That’s essentially correct. Electronic stimulation of the brain, ESB as it’s called, can be used in controlled ways to support the energies of those whose talents and sense of cooperation make them valuable citizens.”

“What controlled ways?” Evans challenged. Kornwith shrugged gently, as though

in sympathy with the question.

“I am not allowed to discuss the method, but I can guarantee the results. To some extent, support can be extended into groups or organizations. It can sometimes even be used to direct individual leadership and group cooperation in behavioral ways, among those we know we can trust.”

“That’s the problem—who trusts who!” Evans muttered.

Kornwith looked at him coldly but went on. “You may have already been enjoying some of this simply as a citizen, but without the special support I’m now suggesting.” He turned his face to Reiger, who smiled agreeably.

“This stimulation,” Evans said, “can it be reversed, used against people?”

Kornwith’s smile disappeared. “What’s positive can always be made negative in matters such as this. It requires trust in our good judgment—and yours.”

Reiger was shifting nervously in his chair again.

“There can be a written contract,” Kornwith went on, “or you could call it a written and signed promise. No lawyers need be involved; but if any are, they will be *our* lawyers—for security purposes. You may have witnesses, but all papers will be ours for the same reasons.”

“I know Carter and I will want to support your efforts, Alden, but he probably wants time to think about it,” Reiger said.

“I don’t need to think about it,” Evans said quietly. “As soon as I see what he’s talking about in black and white, you’ll have my response.”

“I’ll see to it, and we’ll talk again.”

Kornwith stood and extended his hand to Evans, who accepted his handshake.

“I’ve got to see to my feed delivery,” the rancher said. He nodded to Reiger and left the room.

Kornwith sat musing for a moment. On the whole, it had been a satisfactory meeting, Evans was smarter than he looked but didn’t pose any problem that couldn’t be handled. He wondered, though, about the ex-Bureau person he’d been warned of. What was the name, *O’Neill? Neilly?* He flipped open a pocket notebook. *Michael Neilly.* That would be the artist of the sculpture in Reiger’s office, he realized.

“What do you know about Michael Neilly, Morris?”

“What’s this contract arrangement, Alden? Why haven’t I been offered any such thing?” Reiger ignored his question, absorbed in the thought of missing out.

“Never mind about that. It’s just form and its not necessary between us. What about Neilly?”

“Neilly is an architect in town. He is on the School Commission with me. He seems dedicated enough. That’s really about all I know, Alden.”

“I see. Well then, perhaps I should try to learn more about him.”

“Yes,” Reiger said. “That seems to be true for both of us.”