



Blood
Memory
Society

BOOK 1

A Novel by

D.A. Field

MISS. 1

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO:

Carla, Madeline and Tripp. Without your constant support and love, I would not have been able to achieve this milestone.

To Ed and Norma. Thank you for instilling a burning need for knowledge and learning in your son's life.

To all of those along the way who have encouraged and inspired me, here's to many more memories to come.

OUR VIRTUES AND OUR FAILINGS ARE INSEPARABLE, LIKE FORCE
AND MATTER. WHEN THEY SEPARATE, MAN IS NO MORE.

—Nikola Tesla (1856-1943)

Blood Memory Society

BOOK I



DEATH AND A DIME BAG. Those were the words the man in the long trench coat kept tossing around in his brain. It was simple. After completing this day of death, he would reach into his “dime bag” stash of homegrown marijuana and smoke away the memories.

On this bitterly cold day in Atlanta, the temperature was falling fast under a rapidly graying sky. Approaching a large almost anonymous-looking cement building, the man’s coat was so bulky and out of proportion to his thin frame that he slightly stumbled as he walked. Although early spring, the winter had lingered this year, and at three in the afternoon small slick patches of ice hazardously speckled the concrete sidewalk outside of the National Fertility Clinic.

The clinic, located just a block from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was a four-story dull gray building with a curious lack of windows and just one nondescript dense metal entrance door painted solid black. Out front, there was no signage, no identification of any sort except for its address on Clifton

Road etched into the bulletproof glass transom window above the door. Another odd fact about this building was that the lights and power supply never failed. Even when the rest of Atlanta was in the dark, in the cold clutches of an energy blackout, the lights at the National Fertility Clinic never blinked, never even flickered. Only a select handful of people in the country were aware that this drab, unimpressive building had its own power grid, separate and isolated from the entire city.

The National Fertility Clinic, or NFC to those elite few who actually knew of its existence, was a fully functioning fertility clinic where patients both male and female were seen and evaluated on regular intervals. However, this clinic, with its large physical size and stealthy importance, seemed to be out of proportion for the small number of actual patients. A true state-of-the-art facility and fully funded by the United States government, the NFC was staffed by only one physician, two nurses, and one receptionist to serve its total patient count of twenty-seven. The average woman who was interested in starting a family and possibly needing some medical advice could not simply call the clinic to schedule a checkup or an evaluation. The truth was that only a few people in the country were ever granted access to this facility.

On this cold day in March, with foul weather about, it wasn't unusual to see a man in Atlanta dressed in a long warm coat. No one took note that such a man was approaching the NFC. At the front door, he swiped an access keycard, leaned down to allow a laser beam to cross his eyes, replaced his broad dark sunglasses, and then entered the building. With the collar of his coat turned up and a black wool cap pulled tightly over his short-cropped blond hair and chafed ears, hardly any of his pale facial features were discernible; even the large scar on his neck was well covered. Pausing on the threshold to stamp his well-polished leather shoes and wipe away a few flecks of sleet from his

crisply pressed slacks, he shuffled through the front door and approached the appointment desk. A biting wind blew in from behind him.

The receptionist, a cute young black woman with a round friendly face and large brown expressive eyes, sat behind a sliding glass window and looked up from her computer monitor.

“Whew, it’s cold out there,” she said with a playful shudder, her smile brilliantly white. “You must be Mr. Fredrickson? We’ve been expecting you. I’m Rochelle.” She spoke in a soft drawl as she placed her hands on her heart, having been instructed never to shake the hands of NFC patients, for sanitary reasons.

“Yes,” the man uttered, standing motionless and not removing his sunglasses.

Most NFC patients wore dark glasses throughout the duration of their visit. Rochelle always thought it odd and had not dared to ask them why, having simply been advised by one of the nurses that most NFC patients had sensitive eyes and preferred to shade them from the bright sun and clinic’s intense lights.

Rochelle preferred it that way, having been unnerved at the sight of one patient’s eyes three months ago. She had only recently started the job and while checking in a patient one day, his sunglasses fell off and landed on her desk. When she grabbed them and looked up to hand the sunglasses to the man, she let out a low shriek as his eyes were sickly green and seemed to dart erratically in their sockets, as though bouncing almost uncontrollably.

She stared up at Fredrickson’s well-hidden face. “Okay. It looks like we’ve received all of your information and documentation. Everything seems in order. I just need to see some identification.”

Fredrickson removed one black leather glove, shoved his slightly soiled hand into his pocket, and retrieved a plastic identification card. The receptionist took a cursory glance at the ID and ignored the dirt under his fingernails.

“Great. If you’ll kindly have a seat, the nurse will be out shortly

to collect you,” she said, wrinkling her nose at the odor of cigarette smoke emanating from him.

The brightly lit waiting room had a high windowless atrium, a couch, four chairs, a large flat-screen hi-def television, books and magazines. The shiny white tiled floors, hygienic cream-colored walls, and piped-in classical music created a calming yet sterile environment. Shortly after he was seated, a petite, middle-aged nurse, with tired but knowledgeable eyes and long auburn hair, arrived to escort Fredrickson to the examination room.

He followed her through the hallway, past the doors of two empty examination rooms on the left and a large metal door on the right with a sign that read “Specimen Room,” to the next examination room on the right.

“This is your room, sir. If you don’t mind, please remove your clothes and slip into this gown. The doctor is slightly delayed but will be here shortly to give you further instructions,” she said, holding out a blue gauze gown.

Fredrickson grabbed the gown and the nurse left the room, closing the solid wooden door behind her. He set the gown upon the crinkled paper of the examination bed and began to unbutton his trench coat, one slow button at a time. A bead of perspiration trickled down his cheek as he wriggled free of the heavy coat and laid it on the bed.

The coat unfurled, exposing a ring of explosives interconnected with electrical wiring, all masterfully woven into the garment’s fabric. Calmly, he grabbed the ends of several shiny wires and sank them deep into the bricks of C4 plastic explosives before him. With his finger, he flipped a small switch that was sewn into the lining. A white light began to blink. He then carefully picked up the trench coat bomb and placed it on the floor next to the wall adjacent to the “Specimen Room.” Quietly, he slid a small stainless steel table in front of the jacket to cover it. With sunglasses and cap still in place, he silently exited the room.

As he made his way to the front door of the clinic, the young receptionist looked up from her monitor with puzzlement. “Sir?”

He did not answer, and his pace quickened.

Rochelle tried again. “Sir, are you okay? Did you leave your jacket?”

After leaving the building and rounding the street corner, the sound of squealing rubber echoed off the surrounding buildings as a black SUV slid to a stop beside him. He pulled out a cell phone, pressed dial, then got into the SUV, which sped away.

The blast came one minute later, as Rochelle was standing just inside the partially opened front door, scanning the street outside for Fredrickson. The enormous explosion plowed through the hallway towards her, violently jolting her through the door, shattering her eardrums and scorching her flesh. As she lay on the sidewalk, struggling to breathe, she batted her eyes open and saw a wave of flames rush along the crushed ceiling of the hallway. The fireball compressed into a tight inferno, and she felt the intense heat singe her eyelashes as its fiery fingers surged through the front door, searing the building into black char. The National Fertility Clinic was engulfed with a tremendous roar of flames. Everyone and everything inside was destroyed.

The “everything” was the real target.



IT WAS A CRITICAL DAY at Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, probably the most important day in the storied history of this federally funded research and development facility. The atmosphere on campus, inside the secured gates and high electric fences that surrounded the property, festered with tempered excitement. As always, on the first day of such an event, a sober tension suffused the air.

Located just a few dozen miles from Los Angeles and nestled among the sprawling brown foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, or JPL, is home to some of the world's most elite scientists, engineers, and physicists. But even among the elite, there exists one exceptionally gifted group of scientists who are so important to national security that their identities are, and have always been, hidden from the public. Team X was the name given to this secret group of eight men and nine women, this collection of individuals with supreme intelligence that on this day was on the technological precipice of changing the world forever.

For decades, Team X had been instrumental in enabling a once far-fetched notion of space exploration, once only fodder for comic books and sci-fi novels, into an obtainable reality. Over seventy-five years, they had devised a number of successful missions using robotic space explorers, hi-tech machines sent to survey and analyze every corner of our solar system, to peer deep into the Milky Way and beyond, and to keep a watchful eye on Earth. Known as the Deep Space Network, this program was responsible for achievements like the Voyager's mission to the outer planets, the Viking's excursion to Mars, and Galileo's quest to the Jupiter system. All of these achievements were made possible by a culture at JPL based upon scientific truth and rational thought. So the idea that the brilliant minds at this institution could succumb to an irrational concept, such as a superstition, was beyond the pale.

But such was the case after a particularly painful time at JPL in the early 1960s.

As the story goes, it happened after the Ranger Program had experienced heart-wrenching failure after failure when trying to land a spacecraft on the moon. Finally in 1963, they succeeded. Previous attempts at lunar landings had failed so abysmally that this success caught the mission control team completely off guard, amazed at what they had done that day. And after such an unprecedented achievement, the scientists incredibly bowed to the primal belief in superstition.

It began with one of the JPL mission control specialists nervously eating peanuts as he watched the lunar landing. In their celebratory haze, the JPL staff turned to each other and jokingly decided that the peanuts must have been a good luck charm and they should adopt the habit. From then on, "Lucky Peanuts" would be eaten just before and during every critical mission event. It became tradition, never questioned, never broken. Peanuts were to be delivered at T-minus one hour and consumed with pride by all staff, administration, and mission specialists. Everyone at JPL would eat Lucky Peanuts, like it or not.

Today's campus excitement revolved around the actions in building 321, known to the 5,000 employees of JPL as the Team X Mission Control Center. Over 150 years in the making, the Genesis Project was so highly classified that only a handful of politicians and military officials, among them the president, were aware of its designs and intentions. All the preliminary tests, mathematical computations, and three dry runs had been performed flawlessly. It was now time to go live. All of JPL knew something big, whatever it might be, was about to happen.

Team X Mission Control Center was a multi-tiered, large oval dome much like a planetarium. With three levels of continuously flickering computer monitors atop long uninterrupted oak countertops, two dozen black leather chairs were positioned in front of the monitors in an auditorium-style arrangement. A six-foot-tall, multicolored electronic banner trimmed the entire room in pixilations of light as live video and data streamed continuously from deep-space machines and satellites. On the ceiling, a plethora of small lights scattered throughout the pitch black darkness like tiny stars, representing the exact make-up of the Milky Way. A halo of royal blue light rimmed the ceiling and cascaded in gentle waves down the walls to the floor, bathing the room in a calming hue. Team X was ready.



AN HOUR BEFORE THE FIRE engulfed the NFC in Atlanta, a food-delivery van approached the security gate at JPL. The guard, a stocky woman with short black hair and Asian features, slid open the darkly tinted glass window of the guardhouse. The driver of the white van, a rugged-looking young man with blond hair, a black mole on his cheek, wore a white ball cap pulled low over his ears. He rolled down his window. "Big exciting day today, huh?" he said, extending a lanyard around his neck with an attached ID card.

The guard narrowed her eyebrows as she examined the man's face and matched it to the ID. She did not recognize the driver, yet it wasn't that unusual to have high employee turnover in the delivery business. Driving a food truck was obviously not a well-paying job and this was the fifth driver for this particular company in just over a year.

"Why would you say that?" the guard asked, staring at the man's daunting black eyes. "Can you lift your hat up, sir? I can't quite see your face."

The man pushed up the bill of his cap. "Because I'm delivering the Lucky Peanuts today," he said with a knowing look.

The security guard looked at the ID again. "Oh, okay. Yeah, it's been kind of tense around here for the last month or so. I hope you got some peanuts for me too 'cause I don't want to be the one to jinx this one today."

The driver smiled and handed her a small wicker basket lined with red, white, and blue craft paper and a frilly American ribbon on the handle. A clear plastic bag of roasted peanuts rested on top of the paper and a white label on the bag of peanuts read Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Building 321.

The guard accepted the basket with a smile and waved the van through. The driver nodded, tucked his credentials back into his shirt, casually waved and drove to building 321.

The deliveryman, wearing a white jumpsuit and white sneakers, entered building 321 pushing a plastic cart stacked tall with the patriotic baskets and proceeded to the security check point just inside double glass doors.

Two security guards, one seated at a large metal desk and the other standing by a standard-size metal detector, greeted him as though Santa Claus had just arrived.

"There he is. We were starting to wonder what happened to you, man. Damn," the heavier of the two guards said. He picked up a handheld radio off of the desk. "Peanuts are here. Be there in five."

“Sorry, I got held up for a few minutes. How late am I?”

The guard looked at his watch. “We got eight minutes. Hurry.” He motioned the deliveryman through the metal detector without glancing at his ID.

Officer Jenkins, a plump black man with a receding hairline and an awkward gait, grabbed two baskets of peanuts from the cart and set them down on the desk before leading the deliveryman and his cart down a grandiose hallway with shiny granite floors. White columns stood against dark brown marble walls where photographs of historic space achievements hung. The guard stopped just past a brilliant photograph of the Mars Rover, turned his head towards the deliveryman, and grabbed three baskets from the cart. He hurriedly pushed open a glass door on his right and hobbled inside to deliver the peanuts to three secretaries in the administration office, who thanked him enthusiastically. Exiting the office, he motioned the deliveryman to follow.

“They’ve called me five times already looking for these damn peanuts. Bunch of superstitious nerds as far as I’m concerned but I’m just glad you made it. We only got five minutes till T-minus one hour, you know. Didn’t your boss tell you to be here an hour early?” he said, breathing heavily as they walked rapidly toward the Team X Control Center.

“Yeah. I know. Like I said, I got held up.”

“Traffic?”

The deliveryman did not answer but walked faster, his cart squeaking.

When they reached the control room door, Jenkins knocked firmly. The door swung open and another security guard, the largest human being the deliveryman had ever seen, blocked the entrance. Standing close to seven feet tall, barrel-chested with deep ebony skin and arms the size of cannons, he grabbed the cart, pulled it inside, and slammed the door without a word.

It was a little thing. But no one in building 321 noticed that the roasted peanut husks were slightly browner that day, a little darker than usual. However, the taste wasn't altered, the size was consistent and they were just as crunchy as always. The secretaries enjoyed them and discussed the superstition surrounding the nuts. The security guards ate them and complained about how much of a pain in the ass it was to ensure their timely delivery. And most importantly to the deliveryman, Team X nervously nibbled them as the T-minus-one-hour countdown began.

The deliveryman sat in the van parked outside for almost fifteen minutes before re-entering the building along with his accomplice, a tall, ghostly pale man with a bald head, eyes with eerily blue sclera. He had sweat on his brow from stowing away in the back of the hot van for the past hour. The two men slipped on black cotton masks, leaving only cutouts for eyes, and opened the double front doors. The security guards slumped lifelessly over the metal desk. The pale man shook the heavier guard but he did not move, his dead black eyes fixed open and a frothy white foam slathering his mouth.

With a firm tug, the blond deliveryman snatched the set of keys from Officer Jenkins' belt and the two men sprinted to the administration office. Swinging the glass door open, they entered a scene that would have revolted a normal person. Two women lay motionless on their desks, white foam and chunky moist vomit oozing from all facial orifices. A third woman gyrated violently on the floor, convulsing as her eyes bulged from their sockets. The deliveryman pointed a small pistol and put a single bullet into her right temple; bright red blood pooled on the off-white carpet.

The two men sprinted down the hallway to the Team X Control Center. After fumbling through several wrong keys, the deliveryman sank the correct key into the keyhole. With gun drawn and clenched jaws, he twisted the key and the door heaved open with a clatter as the enormous security guard fell through the doorway

and crashed to the floor, a white froth exuding from his nostrils. The two killers smiled.



MINUTES LATER, AS THE VAN sped away, the assassins witnessed an enormous explosion in their rearview mirror. A ball of fire rose from building 321, angry black columns of smoke swirling high above JPL in deadly concentric circles.