

PETRICHOR

episode 1: "The Gathering Storm"

by

Nick Oakes

Based on "Petrichor"

A Spacers Saga novel

by Nick Oakes

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(317) 450-8938
ncoakes098@gmail.com

EXT. ARIZONA STATE ROAD - NIGHT

Slowly FADE IN on a long stretch of lonely state road in the depths of the desert. The dark of night looms all as if it were the depths of the sea. We see the road from just over the dashboard of the car plunging headlong into this deep abyss, surrounded on all sides by nothingness.

SUPER: "NORTHWEST OF PHOENIX, ARIZONA"

"SEPTEMBER 2022"

CREDITS ROLL as the car heads down the road. The car's radio plays a montage of tinny music and news alerts, interspersed with "clicks" as the driver flips between stations:

-Golden oldies

-Local news 1: "...incidences of violence during last week's run on gasoline mark the latest outbursts in the region this year, as ongoing fluctuations in oil prices have-

-Foreign news 1: "...with Russia's foreign ministry asserting that their operations in Eastern Europe, now stretching into their seventh month, will continue until NATO agrees to withdraw their support for Finland and-

-Talk show 1: "...as I was saying a minute ago, uh, it's important to remember that China, through all of this, has been biding its time, uh, has been building up its assets in places like the South China Sea, the Sea of Japan. They're, they're waiting for something to happen that will-

-Country rap on a local station

-Local news 2: "...continued protests across the nation regarding rollout of the latest round of vaccines for-

-Talk show 2: "...no, no, this is what's important: the Russians, China, all of that? It's just the beginning, let me tell you. It's the first phase of something *more*, and that's what people have to realize. It's *judgment*, really, for-

-Foreign news 2: "...another stunning development for global markets this afternoon, as instability in the energy sector has led to a veritable fire sale at the New York Stock-

-More golden oldies

The car's lone occupant settles on the second oldies station. The credits finish as the car turns past a sign marked

"WELCOME TO WICKENBURG." We now see the car is a tired-looking Ford Taurus from a few years back. The government license plates are pockmarked from flying road grit.

Inside Agent TOM MORROW (33) mutters to himself.

TOM

A hundred channels and never a damn thing to listen to.

Somewhere ahead of him was another hapless American who'd mistaken Venus for an alien visitor in the night sky, or found livestock mutilated by what they assumed was El Chupacabra, or maybe heard some strange sound when they went to the outhouse. He'd seen it all before.

The car turns onto an offshoot road, heading through the dusty and dreary town to head towards his next case. As it retreats into the night the title appears onscreen:

SUPER: "PETRICHOR"

"EPISODE 1 - THE GATHERING STORM"

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER COURT - NIGHT

Tom pulls his government car up to the end of a dusty little driveway in a trailer court just outside town. It isn't much of a driveway, to be fair. Just a stretch of desert ground that had been cleared of scrub and brushed more or less smooth. He turns off the ignition and checked the clock built into the dashboard radio - just before 2 a.m.

He sighs again and rubs his eyes.

TOM

Why is it *always* early?

He reaches into the bag of Tootsie Rolls in his cup holder, pulls one out, unwraps it, and eats it with little satisfaction. He peers into the rearview mirror as he opens his door and catches sight of his tired brown eyes and mess of short, curly black hair. He lets out another sigh.

He climbs out, groaning at the effect the oppressive warmth of the night has on his joints. We see the letters stenciled on the back of his jacket - B.S.I. - as he looks up at the stars twinkling overhead. He smiles at the sight.

He begins his trek up the drive and toward the double-wide with "Collins" marked on the rust-encrusted mailbox in bronze letters. This was the place, that much he knew.

He nears the door, and a older-looking woman wearing a denim jacket over her flowery night gown opens it to peer out at him. She looks nervous, but not terrified.

Tom smiles and took out his credentials in a rote gesture.

TOM

Good evening, ma'am. I hope I haven't caught you at too early an hour. They sent me out as fast as they could, if you can believe that.

He stops just short of the trailer's little stoop, still smiling calmly up at her.

She looks him up and down for a moment, as if judging whether she trusted someone like him not to laugh at her or call her just another kook. At length she looked Tom in the eyes. She was still clutching the door as if for protection.

MS. COLLINS

Didn't know they'd actually send someone out. I guess you're one of the men in black, then, huh?

Tom smiles again in spite of himself.

TOM

No, I'm just a regular old field agent. I'm on loan from the regional headquarters in San Diego, actually. I guess they figured I'd be best for your case because I know the area. I was born in Wickenburg, you see.

He lets out a single chuckle as something occurs to him.

TOM

Oh, and we don't always wear black.

Ms. Collins eyes him skeptically and he changes tact.

TOM

But enough about that. I understand you've reported an out of the ordinary experience this week. Would you like to talk about that?

Ms. Collins casts a final shrewd glance at his face before turning to face the fields northwest of her trailer. She pointed toward the horizon and nodded.

MS. COLLINS

I saw them over there, two nights ago.

She looks back at Tom and pulls the jacket tighter around her shoulders, shivering against something other than the cold.

MS. COLLINS

There were four of them. I haven't hardly left the house since.

Tom looks in the direction she indicates. In the faint residual glow of distant Phoenix, he could just make out the mountains. He grinned slightly at the thought.

TOM

Did they stick around for long? And did you see where they went after you first sighted them?

Ms. Collins shakes her head vigorously.

MS. COLLINS

No. I had just went to throw some chicken bones in the garbage when I saw them. I scurried right back inside when I saw those things zipping around, whatever they were. Didn't sleep that at all night, and I haven't slept much since, neither.

Tom turns to face her again and cocks his eyebrow.

TOM

You said they were 'zipping'? Can you explain that a bit further?

The woman puts a hand on her hip.

MS. COLLINS

I meant exactly what I said, sonny. They came in from over Smith's Peak, moving pretty derned fast, too, and started bobbing and weaving all over the fields out there. I looked back once when I got to the door and they were all still swirling over the ground like some kind of light show.

She shudders again as she recalls the event.

MS. COLLINS

(cont.)

There was this humming sound on the air, like bees, or something, only a helluva lot deeper than any bees I've ever heard, lemme tell you.

Tom nods as she speaks, then pulls an high-powered LED penlight from the inner pocket of his agent's windbreaker.

TOM

How about I go take a look, see if there's anything still out there?

She eyes him skeptically again, that same expression from before. He tries his best disarming smile.

TOM

(cont.)

There's no need to worry; I do this for a living, ma'am.

He clicks the flashlight on and starts out across the scrubby landscape. He walks around for a few minutes in the area the woman indicated, swinging the light back and forth to inspect the ground for any traces and to illuminate his passage.

The light from the still-nearly full moon worked to his advantage, bathing the landscape in an eerie glow that also helped him to keep an eye out for rattlesnakes and scorpions.

He frowns as he tries to recall something he'd seen on the news a few nights before. He calls back to the local lady still standing on the sagging stoop of her trailer.

TOM

Wasn't there a pretty wild thunder & lightning storm around here a few nights back? Any chance you could've seen ball lightning?

Her voice carries a clear note of disdain as it drifts across the nighttime desert air.

MS. COLLINS

I've seen lightning before. That weren't no lightning I ever saw!

He starts grinning morosely at the thought of being sent on

another wild goose chase, when something catches his eye. He swings the flashlight in its direction and looks down. Sure enough, something was reflecting the light back at him. He knelt to inspect the object, which was a sliver of metal about ten inches long and five inches wide.

To his surprise, it was frigid to the touch. He'd expected it to retain at least some residual heat from the desert sun, but it felt to him like the surface of a glacier.

Picking it up, Tom stood and turned the object over and back in his hand. It was smooth, smoother than any metal he'd ever felt, almost more like a glossy plastic composite than the metallic alloy it so clearly resembled.

TOM

Now what in the hell...

As he turns his flashlight to head back, Ms. Collins calls out to him again. Her voice is more excited than before.

MS. COLLINS

What is it? Did you find something?

Tom raises his head to call back to her.

TOM

Uh, yes, actually. Don't worry, though. I think it's just some kind of man made debris.

He started to walk back toward the trailer, only halfheartedly monitoring the ground for creepy crawlies despite the years spent in the desert which told him to pay attention. He examines the object as he walks, turning it over and over again in his dominant hand.

He also calls out to Ms. Collins again, apparently intent on assuaging her fear of what he might have found.

TOM

We find little pieces of aircraft and things like that sometimes. Not much to worry about, most of the-

The object suddenly pulses brightly, so bright that it flooded out the flashlight beam. Startled, Tom dropped it, just as it pulses with strange greenish light twice more in quick succession before going dark altogether.

TOM
What in the-?

He starts backing away when something else entirely catches his attention: a bright light rising up over the distant hills, like the headlights of an oncoming car seen from beyond a rise. Whatever it was, it was bright, flashing greenish-white against the horizon.

Tom was is reaching for the standard-issue Sig Sauer Glock under his jacket at his waist when the flashlight flickers and cuts out. He shakes it, struck dumb by its sudden betrayal, as some piece of nearly forgotten UFO lore came back to him from middle school years spent browsing Ufology sites while all of his friends were more worried about sports or the latest pop culture news.

He mutters a half-remembered bit of trivia to himself.

TOM
'Powered devices are known to switch
off when they appear...'

On cue, a tetrad of lights swings in over the distant mountains. Tom sees them coming, glowing the same ghostly green as had the object laying a few feet away from him, except many dozens of times brighter. He backed away, stricken even more definitively dumb as a long-buried sensation rushes back into his mind.

He stumbles over a scraggly sagebrush bush and falls back on his backside, throwing his hands up to defend himself as he lands as if they would provide any chance.

But the lights ignore him altogether. They whizz past overhead and careen straight toward Ms. Collins' trailer. Tom hears her scream just as a dull hum appears in the air, growing until it drowned out her voice.

Tom rolls over and watches the lights vector in to surround the trailer. They swarm around it like angered hornets. The hum grows louder, until Tom has to clap his hands over his ears to try and keep it out.

Then the lights flash brighter than ever and the hum redoubles into a driving warble that defied categorization or explanation. To Tom it was somewhere between the mechanical growl of a heavy-duty diesel engine and the unearthly evacuating sound of air disappearing into total vacuum.

Then, just as quickly as they had come, the lights vanished,

and the sound they made ceased altogether. All was quiet and still in the desert once more.

Tom slowly lifts his head and stares in the direction of the trailer, hands still pressed to the sides of his head by reflex. His mouth hangs slightly open, and dust has caked on his chin from where he pressed to the desert floor in his eagerness to avoid the attentions of the strange visitors.

He blinks, slowly, and rises equally so. Eventually he realizes the sound has gone and lowers his hands.

TOM

What in the motherfu-

His flashlight kicks back on, startling him so much that he drops it and nearly loses his balance once again.

CUT TO:

EXT. SVALBARD GLACIER - DAY

FADE IN on The sun shining off the snow is almost blinding in the arctic autumn. A frigid wind rushes off the sea down further the fjord, causing Doctor ALICIA RICARDO (31) to shiver a bit even in her thick thermal gear.

She knelt next to the face of a retreating glacier in the cold light of the sun hanging low over the horizon, shielding her eyes against the glitter it made on the snow all around.

Her mentor, Doctor PETER HENRIKSEN (47), calls out to her from a few dozen yards upslope.

HENRIKSEN

Doctor Ricardo, we have found something! Come, see for yourself.

Alicia shudders as a gust of wind blows up the fjord, then turns and starts up the hill to see what Peter and his team have stumbled across this time.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER COURT - NIGHT

CUT BACK TO Tom standing in the dark desert night outside Ms. Collins' trailer. Or, as we now see, what used to be her trailer. He steps in that direction and we see that the mobile home unit has simply disappeared.

Not that it had been damaged or smashed or burned as one might expect. Instead it was just completely gone. As if there had never been a thing where it had stood.

Tom walked slowly across the scrubland toward the spot where the trailer had been, his dominant hand hovering near over the gun at his waist. When he reached the trailer's lot, he swung the flashlight back and forth over the ground, looking for evidence of its existence.

To his clearly great unease, every bit of the trailer has been somehow transported away, or vaporized. The outline of where the trailer had stood was all that was left to show that it had ever even been there. Even the piping connecting it to the localized septic system had been shorn off just a couple of inches above ground level.

Other than that, he finds no sign of its former presence. Not even any debris, aside from the rubbish which had already been there beneath the trailer before it "left."

For a long while Tom just stares at the ground where the trailer had been. At length he blinks a few times and rubs his right temple with his free hand.

TOM

Okay. Okay now, Tom, get it together.

He collects himself for another moment before retrieving his cell phone and calling up the San Diego field office as he heads back toward his thankfully untouched government car.

After getting picked up by the line handler, he was transferred to the supervising agent on duty. Special Agent LOUIS KELLOGG (44) sounds tired on the other end of the line.

KELLOGG

Special Agent Kellogg speaking. What's your situation, Tom?

Tom lets out a ragged sigh of relief.

TOM

Lou, I, uh, I've got a bit of a problem out here in Arizona. You remember that case I was called out for yesterday morning? Well, uh, it just took a turn for the surreal.

Kellogg's voice retains its grave edge as he responds.

KELLOGG

Just what kind of surreal are we talking about here, Tom?

TOM

Like double-wide getting disappeared by a foursome of glowing blue lights surreal. I think we might have another Rhyolite-type situation here, Lou.

The line goes silent for a long moment as the implications sink in. Tom couldn't even hear Lou breathing on the other end, causing him to hold his own breath, too.

KELLOGG

Well, you'd better get back here, quick. I'll get you a flight lined up from Phoenix on the double.

Tom nods, then shakes his head, wondering why he had. He is not face-to-face, after all. He puts his free hand to his temple and takes a slow, deep breath before letting it out.

TOM

Roger that, Lou. I'm headed back to Phoenix now, I'll be on that plane back to San Diego ASAP.

He takes another look around at the eerily still desert landscape and shivers at a gust of wind.

TOM

(cont.)

Listen, I, uh... I don't know exactly what I saw, but it sure as hell wasn't a magic trick. I think we might have something serious here, Lou.

KELLOGG

Hang in there, kid. We'll figure it out once you're back in San Diego.

He hangs up with a final click. Tom moves around the car to get into the driver's seat but pauses at the door. He looks down at his hand and sees that it is trembling.

He stares at his shaking hand for a long moment before taking a deep breath and visibly willing himself the energy to calm down. Then he opens the car door and climbs in.

Sitting back, he reaches into his exterior jacket pocket the

unidentified object he'd been carrying there and examines it.

A strange humming begins to build as he peers into the depths of its luster. Slowly but surely, this humming takes on the dimension of a voice, calling to him from down a long hall.

VOICE 1

C'mon, T, let's get out of here!

Tom's eyes shoot wide open as his attention comes back to the present. Back from its brief retreat into years long passed.

He shudders visibly and drops the object in his passenger seat without a second glance. He shakes his head to remove the cobwebs from his mind and glances at the clock as he turns the old-fashioned key ignition - 2:27 a.m.

He grits his teeth and mutters under his breath:

TOM

If I ever track down the fuck-nugget
who recruited me into this shitbird
bureau, man, I tell you...

He puts the car into "drive" and pulls away from the now vacant trailer pad. A lot of paperwork awaits him back in California, and he does not relish the thought.

EXT. SVALBARD GLACIER - DAY

Back on the day side of the planet, Doctor Ricardo climbs through the dusty snow covering the face of the glacier toward her teammates. They are clustered around a circular hole in the ice where the latest has been carrying on.

SUPER: "NORDRE ISFJORDEN NATIONAL PARK - SVALBARD, NORWAY"

The dig site is a tunnel leading ten yards into the glacier. Dr. Henriksen and his team of graduate students stands at the mouth, next to some of the bulky mining equipment that they've using to excavate for the past two days.

Dr. Ricardo notices that some of the mining gear has been badly scraped up, as if it had struck a deposit of dense metals stuck beneath the surface.

As she came upon the group milling about the entrance, she spots the strange look on her research partner's face.

ALICIA

What's wrong, Peter? You look as

though you've seen a ghost.

She turns to face each member of Dr. Henriksen's team in turn. They peer back at her with blank, eerie stares.

Henriksen turns to look back into the mouth of the dig site, his brows creased with something akin to astonishment.

HENRIKSEN

I cannot say for certain, Doctor.
Perhaps you should see for yourself.

Alicia shoots a concerned glance at Dr. Henriksen's assistant, a doctoral student named Janssen. He has the same look of vague numbness on his own face as he points into the tunnel and nods slowly, almost stupidly. There is something in his voice that Alicia couldn't place, something that sounded like awe. Or beyond fear, into disbelief.

JANSSEN

Ja, it's in there. Whatever it is...

The other four members of the dig team stand shivering against the brisk wind sweeping up from the sea. But also, Alicia notices, out of something akin to fear.

They are all staring into the tunnel silently, waiting for Alicia to go and see whatever it was they had found.

Alicia finally steps forward and ducks under the low arch of the tunnel, padding through the loose snow around the mouth and peering deep into the tunnel. It's dark, with the brightness of the sun reflecting on the clear white snow all around obscuring the inside from her view.

She takes a gulp of steadying air and steps fully through the opening. Walking forward, she noticed a strange glow at the back of the tunnel. Squinting, she sees something nestled into the back wall. Something glowing faintly blue-green.

She moves closer and sees that whatever it is, it has melted some of the snow from around its resting place.

Finally we see it in full: a strange, metallic device about a foot in length, made all of shiny, silvery material and glowing all over a faintly glowing a strange greenish-blue.

Alicia's eyes go wide as she keeps pressing forward, reaching out toward the object in the almost all-enveloping dark of the tunnel. Something about it draws her near, like a magnet.

When she comes near enough to touch it, she only hesitates for a moment before extending her hand to touch the object's sleek metal surface. She smiles at its unexpected smoothness as she runs her hand across the surface.

To her amazement, the skin or whatever it was that coats the object seems to vibrate under her fingers.

Except it's not vibration, as much as a kind of fluttering. The object's skin shivers like the scales of a rattlesnake's tail or the rustling feathers of a bird. It chirps all but inaudibly as it "breathes" under her fingertips.

Alicia smiles again in spite of herself, uncertain of what she is experiencing but clearly sure that it was unlike anything she'd ever seen or touched before.

She shakes her head slowly, awestruck, as she continues to feel around the many nooks and crannies of the intricately carved object. It appears almost like a piece of scrimshaw, carved from purest silver instead of whale bone.

ALICIA

What in the world can you be...?

Over her shoulder, Doctor Henriksen calls out.

HENRIKSEN

What is it, Doctor Ricardo? Is there not something strange at the back of the tunnel?

She turns and sees him silhouetted at the mouth of the tunnel, staring in at her in the waning light of the far-northern sun.

HENRIKSEN

(cont.)

Do you have any idea what it is?

She smiles again and chuckles nervously as she tries to meet his eyes and fails due to the glare of the snow outside.

ALICIA

I have no idea. But whatever it is, I'm sure it's something amazing.

As she speaks to her research partner, the object starts to pulse brighter and brighter, and vibrate more and more actively until it almost seems alive.

Alicia turns to peer back at the object, a puzzled frown on her face. She reaches out to touch it again and-

CUT TO:

EXT. ARIZONA STATE ROAD - NIGHT

MATCH CUT to the object Tom Morrow picked up near Aguila, Arizona as it starts to pulse and glow agitatedly again.

Tom nearly swerves his car off the thankfully deserted road as he swivels his head to stare at the object as it glows and vibrates in his passenger seat. Where there had been bright light and activity only a moment before, now there was only silence and stillness. For a moment, he could have sworn it had turned on. Activated, or something like that.

Shaking his head again, he steadies the car on the road before peering through his windows at the sky. Looking for a possible return of the lights from the sky. When nothing happened, he turns his tired eyes back to the road.

He mutters to himself again:

TOM
Dammit, this is no time to start
seeing things, Tom, old boy...

He peers at his dashboard clock again and lets out a ragged sigh. There's still a long way to go before he can sleep.

EXT. SVALBARD BASE CAMP - DAY

A blizzard blows across the fjordlands, obscuring the ocean and sky in a haze of white. At the scientists' base camp, the squall has reduced visibility to only a few dozen yards.

Only by using guideposts staked into the ground on the outskirts of the camp can they slowly fumble their way up to little prefab structures that they called home.

The group stores their find in the equipment shed until the storm blows over. Then, one by one, they ducked into the main module, intent of getting out of the elements.

INT. BASE CAMP - MESS COMPARTMENT

Alicia huddles with a few of the others in the mess section of the main shack. The two men and one other woman in the room with her say nothing to betray any fears they might have, so the four of them sat in silence for a time.

Dr. Henriksen's assistant, Janssen, pokes his head in from the small kitchen cubicle of the trailer to break the silence. He clutches a mug of coffee in his hands as he speaks, and wears a turtleneck sweater over his thermals.

JANSSEN

Doctor Ricardo? Doctor Henriksen wishes to speak with you about the find, if you would be available.

Alicia looks up and nods without a word. Th two of them take about five minutes to re-don their bulky winter gear, which they pull on over the thermal bodysuits they wear everywhere. Then they went out through the two-stage entrance to the main trailer, opening and closing the inner door, and then the outer.

EXT. SVALBARD BASE CAMP - DAY

Outside, the two scientists clip the paracord carabiners on their oversuits to the lead lines strung up around the camp. The blizzard was still howling, and the air itself has turned into a mess of grayish-white cotton. The moaning of the wind all around them sounds like the yawning of the abyss.

They lean hard into the wind until they force their way up the steps to the equipment shed, and eventually manage to open the door enough for both of them to get inside.

INT. EQUIPMENT SHED - DAY

Inside, they push back the hoods of their cold suits and pull their goggles up onto their foreheads.

Dr. Henriksen hunches over the strange object, probing its every inch with a magnifying glass and a pen light. He wears his own cold suit, with the coat top pulled off and wrapped around his waist for greater dexterity. He does not look up as he addresses the newcomers.

HENRIKSEN

So, what do you think we have found here, Doctor? Is this the proof you've been looking for, perhaps?

Alicia bites her lip as she stares at the object. That same glint of mesmerized uncertainty comes over her again.

ALICIA

I don't know. I've never seen anything like it. I don't think *anyone* has.

She leans in to get a better look at the object. Only now do we get an appreciation for its finer details through Henriksen's magnifying glass: oblong, roughly teardrop-shaped, and perfectly smooth aside from the intricate chisel-work of its various hollowed out crevices.

As Alicia watches, the surface seems to pulse, to undulate like the changing panels on an old roto panel billboard. Almost as if the object was somehow a living thing, with photoreactive cells that were changing to match the light.

Dr. Henriksen turns to peer at her through the corner of his eye. He seems intent on keeping most of his attention on the object, which continues to pulse lazily - *breathing*, almost.

HENRIKSEN

What do you think we should do about it? Should we, eh, call someone?

His assistant, Janssen, leans in to get a look for himself.

JANSSEN

Who is there to call, Doctor?

Alicia frowns, and the wheels turning in her head seem almost evident despite their silence. Then, her eyebrows shoot up.

ALICIA

Wait, I have an idea. There's an agency back in the States that investigates this sort of thing, the Bureau of Special Investigations, or something like that.

Janssen and Henriksen's eyebrows go up, as well, and they exchange glances. After a moment, Dr. Henriksen speaks up:

HENRIKSEN

Ja, I have heard of them.

He frowns and strokes his chin.

HENRIKSEN

(cont.)

But I have thought they were just a sort of joke, yes?

ALICIA

At this point, I'd be happy just to have some help identifying it. I mean, you said it yourself, Peter. Whatever

this thing is, it was buried deep enough to be older than the first hominid expansions out of Africa.

The two men exchanged another glance.

HENRIKSEN

Well, this expedition is on your behalf, ja? So why not? The more the merrier, as they say.

Smiling, Alicia nods & pulls her goggles back over her eyes.

ALICIA

Then let's get back inside. We'd better get a message out right away. The weather report says there's a storm racing in, and I'd like to be inside before it swamps us.

Henriksen and Janssen nod affirmatively and pull their own goggles back into place and prepare to depart.

The three of them bundle back up, the object shimmers on in silence. It almost seems to breathe in time with the irregular beat of the wind shaking the shed. The first flakes of a soon-to-be massive snowstorm are starting to fall.

INT. BSI WESTERN HQ - MORNING

The morning sun slants in on a low angle through the venetian blinds in Special Agent Kellogg's corner office on the fourth floor of the nondescript office building from which all BSI cases for the western third of the country are run.

Agent Thomas Morrow sits slouched in a cushioned desk chair, his face half-bathed in the amber light of the rising sun.

Agent Lou Kellogg walks back into the office, a grave expression on his face. Tom looks up to see that he is accompanied by Senior Agent Jacob Simmons, the head of the regional office. Tom visibly stiffens in his chair at the sight of his boss entering the room.

Agent Simmons' face is similarly somber as he speaks.

SIMMONS

So, would you care to run this all by me again, Agent Morrow?

He slaps a file folder down on Lou's desk.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

In your own words, if you don't mind.

Tom clears his throat and wrings his hands nervously.

TOM

I arrived at the contact's house at about 0200, and spoke briefly with her about what she'd witnessed to inspire the initial report. I then began sweeping the area for possible evidence or artifacts. At about 0210 in the morning, some... *things*, came in over the mountains and swirled around the contact's trailer. Shortly after they arrived, they vanished, and they, uh... Well, they-

SIMMONS

Spit it out, son. Don't mince words.

Tom licks his lips and squirms slightly in the chair.

TOM

They, uh, seemed to have taken the contact and her trailer with them.

Simmons stares at him for a long moment, deadpan. He sighs and rubs the bridge of his nose. He's a lifer and looks it, too. A transfer from the FBI dating back to the earliest days of the BSI. Now he looks as if he was being haunted by something. He turns to Kellogg with a sigh.

SIMMONS

Well, what do you think, Lou? Could we really have another Phoenix-level situation brewing up here?

Tom rubs his hands together again and turns to wait for Agent Kellogg's reply. He looks at him the way anyone would look at an old friend who had mentored them from their earliest days in a career. Lou sighs and shifts his weight.

KELLOGG

Well, I haven't been around as long as you have, Simmons, but I know enough to know when the writing on the wall is more than just finger-paint.

Simmons frowns and looks down at the thick file folder on the

desk in front of him. Tom's eyes drift to the folder as well, and he sees a clearly familiar emblem printed on the front of the folder: "1-Alpha." His eyes go wide at the sight.

TOM

Holy-! Is that what I think it is?

Case file 1-Alpha is the Bureau's the Phoenix Incident, one of the single most climactic events of the last half-century, at least as far as America was concerned.

Agent Simmons eyes Tom shrewdly for a moment, until he shrinks back in his seat and becomes silent once again.

SIMMONS

Agent Morrow, we're going to clue you in on a few things today that very, very few people are privy to, which might help you make a little more sense of all this.

He clears his own throat and loosens tugs at the knot of his tie. Next to him, Kellogg stares at the floor, arms crossed.

TOM

Now, what I'm about to tell you should be considered strictly confidential. Anything you hear in the next few minutes, that I hear being repeated beyond these walls, will come back to bite you in a big way. Understood?

Tom nods. Whatever he was about to learn, as long as it helped him make heads or tails of what had happened to Ms. Collins and her trailer, it had to be worth it. If it had something to do with Phoenix, that would make it even better.

SIMMONS

You've probably heard those old rumors that the Phoenix Event was caused by aliens, right?

Tom nods, a wry grin on his face.

SIMMONS

Of course you have. Everyone in this bureau has heard them. I'm sure you've gotten questions about that crap more than a few times since you've been a field agent. Well, as of today, I'm telling you that, uh...

He trails off and frowns, scratching at the base of his ear. It takes him a moment to find the right words.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

Well, the long and short of it is that, while we're still not sure exactly what caused it, the Phoenix Event was definitely *not* caused by a bomb left outside the Arizona Science Center by Iranian fundamentalists bent on starting a Pan-Arab war against the United States. Whoever really did cause that explosion, they were most certainly not from this Earth.

Tom's eyes go wide as the words find their way to the parts of his mind still capable of shock.

TOM

That's- I mean, well, shit. Then all the stories I grew up thinking were total B.S., they're right after all? Aliens really *did* do Phoenix?

Simmons slowly shakes his head and crosses his arms.

SIMMONS

That's not the whole story, Agent Morrow. I said they weren't from *this* Earth. The best we can figure is that, whoever is really behind the Phoenix Event, they are from some alternate version of Earth. Their motives are unknown, but we've had that much figured out for years now.

Again Tom's eyes widened again and his head swivels so that he may stare at Agent Kellogg, looking for an explanation.

KELLOGG

Yeah, kid. I felt pretty much the same way when he gave me the talk.

SIMMONS

This is the real reason the Bureau was founded, you know. Once the other agencies pooled their data, they decided that there were too many coincidences to be ignored. That, and the fact that the energy signature at

the blast site was almost identical to an artificial singularity.

By now Tom is clearly unable to take the rapid-fire arrival of radical new information. He leans back in the chair and presses his hands to his face.

TOM

Well, I guess that kinda buries the hatchet in twenty years of armchair speculation, doesn't it?

He laughs once, bitterly and without mirth, then leans back upright to face his two superiors.

TOM

But - and I mean this with all due respect - but why all the secrecy?

He shoots to his feet and begins to pace, suddenly overflowing with anxious, irritable energy.

TOM

I mean, we fought a whole fucking war, a long, goddamned *awful* war over the idea that the Event was caused by a gang of radicals. Hell, they even took credit for it, didn't they?

Kellogg walks over to stand by Tom and puts a hand on his shoulder. Tom looks him the eye and is startled to see not rapprochement for his outburst, but rather genuine sympathy.

KELLOGG

Look, I understand. Believe me. When they first told me all this, I was just about mad enough to put my head through the wall of the office. The war was still on then, with about eight thousand of our people dead, and God only knows how many in the rest of the world. But, the way I see it, there's nothing we can do to fix the past, so why waste time getting bent out of shape over it?

Tom backs away from him, his shoulders shaking with anger.

TOM

That's a load of bullshit and you know it, Lou. I want to know why the

Bureau- Hell, why the whole damn National Security apparatus has apparently seen fit to keep this a secret for the past twenty-five years. Why they're still keeping it secret!

He kicked the chair he'd been sitting in, fuming.

TOM

(cont.)

God-damn it, I don't expect the government to be a font of transparency, but this is pushing it a bit far, don't you think? More than ten thousand dead! And that's just our people. I have friends who died, Lou, family, too. I've still got souvenirs in my own leg for Chrissakes!

Simmons steps forward and raises his hands placatingly.

SIMMONS

Keep it down, Morrow, you know we're still indoors here. You may not believe this, but I was pretty pissed off when I heard the truth, too.

Tom looked at him with an odd expression - clearly he was not expecting and is indeed taken aback by this admission.

SIMMONS

Yeah, that's right, they didn't tell me right out of the gate, either. I may be an old-timer, but the real old-timers, the ones who set up the agency back in '02, they kept the truth very close to the vest. Hell, I didn't find out until '07. My boss, one of the founders, called me into his office to give me the rundown. I was seeing red then, too, believe you me.

Tom bites off a retort through half-gritted teeth.

TOM

But you still haven't told me why. Why, for God's sake?

Simmons hesitates a moment, then turns toward the door and folds his hands behind his back.

SIMMONS

First off, you should understand that when I said very people know the truth about Phoenix, I meant it. You could probably fit everyone in the country who knows what I just told you onto this floor. Aside from that, it's the same old story. Compartmentalization, codes of plausible deniability, all that crap. The higher ups in the FBI, CIA, NSA and all who recommended to the President that he form the Bureau decided to keep secret even from him the full details of the incident. To tell you the truth, I wish I didn't know. I mean, who the hell wants to know that some depraved lunatic from beyond our own reality killed almost four thousand of our people when no one else can ever know about it?

Tom took a deep breath, then another. He runs a hand over his head as he slowly centers himself. When he is ready to speak again without losing his control, he does so.

TOM

They figured their own Commander in Chief didn't have a need to know about what he'd just started a war over?

Simmons sighed, casting his eyes towards his shoes.

SIMMONS

You need to understand the full scope of what was going on. The country had been on the warpath ever since Phoenix got hit, looking for someone to blame, looking for a way to get back at whoever had killed almost four thousand of our people three hundred miles inside our own borders. When those radicals in the Brotherhood claimed responsibility, the evidence conveniently started to pile up that they'd been calling the shots on the bombing. The President and the Joint Chiefs jumped on the opportunity.

He rounds on Tom with fresh heat in his glare.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

Hell, the whole country jumped on it, if you remember. But you're too young to remember those days, aren't you?

Tom eyed him, meeting the Senior Agent's narrowed eyes with a barely-restrained scowl. In other circumstances, that might have been a challenge. He manages to hold in his own temper only after a tense moment of internal self-diffusion.

TOM

What's your point?

SIMMONS

My point is, seeing how few people really knew the truth, and how eager as the country was to go get lost in the sandbox, there wasn't enough inertia to hold back the tide. Believe me, the old-timers tried. The agent who gave me the rundown even said he'd threatened to leak the truth to the public. Apparently, he only backed down when they correctly convinced him that the threat of otherworldly attack would turn American outrage into a full-blown global panic.

He takes a step closer to Tom and leans in to look him in the eyes. His expression is as hard and merciless as stone.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

So don't you think for a moment that you're the first to ask why it was kept secret, because you're not. Not by a long shot. And don't forget that whatever is really going on, it's our duty to keep it from turning the world upside down. Right now, we're only telling you because it's expedient.

Tom listens, still fuming as the older man speaks. It takes him another long moment to settle down, and another long breath in and out to bring him back to square one.

TOM

Okay. Okay, I understand. I may not like it, but I understand. My question

now is, how does it relate to whatever
the hell I saw out in Arizona?

Kellogg takes a step forward to stand next to Tom again.

KELLOGG

That's where things get interesting.
That thing you found at the incident
site, the one you said lit up like a
Christmas bulb just before the anomaly
started up? Well, the techs have been
analyzing it since you got back, and
they've returned some, uh... Some
interesting data.

He looks down slightly and stroke his chin as he speaks.

KELLOGG

For starters, it's made of an alloy
that has never been produced by any
known government or organization on
this planet. And second, it's emitting
a form of ionizing radiation not
usually rarely seen on Earth.

He looks up again, meeting Tom's eyes with a strange glint in
his own that was not there only a moment ago.

KELLOGG

Except that it's the same kind of
radiation recorded by FEMA cleanup
teams in Phoenix in the days
immediately following the Event.

This time Tom's eyes do not go wide. Instead he seems to
suffer a wave of disorientation, or a surge of icy nausea
that cuts through his body like a crashing Arctic floe.

He looks Kellogg straight in the eyes for a moment, then
glances at Simmons. When he speaks, his voice was hoarse.

TOM

So what are we going to do about it?

SIMMONS

That's where you come in. We have a
new directive for you in that regard.
We had a call routed to us this
morning from the Norwegian consulate.
Apparently, a group of scientists in
Svalbard have come across something

buried in the ice that they think might not be of this world.

Seeing Tom's raised eyebrow, he adds clarity.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

Yeah, that's what I thought when I first heard the news, too. A bunch of eggheads digging around in the snow, and they think they've found an outer space relic, go figure.

He frowns gravely and hesitates a beat.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

But it was the rest of the report that got me interested. The thing they found was described as an oblong cylinder, about a foot in length, made of a mirror-smooth grayish material that glows greenish-blue in low light.

Tom blanches again and works his jaw.

TOM

And you think this is related to what I found out in Arizona? Is that why you've clued me in to what really happened in Phoenix?

Simmons shrugs and crosses his arms over his chest, defensively. He keeps on frowning all the while.

SIMMONS

I don't know anything for sure, and neither does the rest of the Bureau. But I can tell you this...

He trails off and takes two steps toward Tom.

SIMMONS

(cont.)

The last time we started tracking anomalies like the one you just stumbled across, it ended with a blast that killed almost thirty-eight hundred people and started a war that almost wrecked the global economy. And what very, very few people in the

world know is that after that blast, a device similar to the one described in Svalbard was found on-site.

Tom stares back at him, mouth ajar, clearly wondering if there would be any more bombshells in one day. He recovers quickly, and turns to both of the other men in turn.

TOM

So when do I leave to go find out about this new relic in Norway?

Simmons grins slightly. He puts a reassuring hand on Tom's shoulder and shakes it gently.

SIMMONS

We hoped that would be your attitude. As a matter of fact, we've got another flight lined up for you this evening. You'll be headed to Oslo on a CIA jet, and then getting ferried to the base camp in Svalbard by local transport. Make sure to pack warm clothes.

Tom nods slowly and looked at Kellogg, who beams at him. He seems to want to say something to his mentor to indicate that he still isn't completely comfortable with all the smoke and mirrors. Instead, he just sighed, grinning sheepishly.

TOM

Just glad to know I'm gonna be in the loop this time.

As they all turn to depart the office, he even cracks a wry little smile in spite of himself.

TOM

(cont.)

Maybe I can catch up on some sleep on the flight across the pond.

The other two men chuckle heartily at that, and the three of them start going through the formalities of Tom's departure.

But as he shakes Kellogg's and Simmons' hands, all that is evident on Tom's face is how much he was still thinking about what had been said in that office, and how long it will take him to come to terms with it.

INT. CIA GULFSTREAM - DAY

The Agency plane has just left a refueling stop at JFK in New York before the trip across the Atlantic when the agent onboard enters the passenger cabin to speak to Tom. He wears a modest suit that still looks all but immaculate next to Tom in his rumpled Bureau jacket.

CIA AGENT

We'll be leveling off in a few minutes, Agent Morrow. I know you mentioned maybe getting some sleep. Now would be a good time.

Tom nods at the younger man, perhaps noting how much he looks to have just come fresh off the Farm.

TOM

Thank you. I'll do that.

The junior agent leaves, and Tom crosses to one of the couches to stretch out for a nap.

Or rather, he tries to nap. Something about that incident near Aquila has shaken loose memories of something similar that happened years ago in southwestern Nevada. Memories that Tom has tried for years to suppress. He lays back in a fitful state of near sleep as the memories come on.

CUT TO:

INT. FLASHBACK MONTAGE

INSIDE Tom's mind, we see a murky montage of images from his own subconscious memory, many of them decades old. The voices are eerily warbled, as if echoing up from the ages:

-TOM (then 11), his older cousin DARRYL (then 14), and several of their friends exploring the hills and scrubland around Darryl's home in Beatty, Nevada

-TOM (then 18) doing push-ups at basic training in Georgia. A drill sergeant leans over him to shout a reprimand:

DRILL SERGEANT

I don't care who your daddy is, boot!
You'll do push-ups the Army way or
you'll wash out like the best of 'em.

-TOM (then 10) sitting on the edge of a playground, away from the other kids playing and enjoying the spring weather. His

father, ALAN MORROW (then 43), wearing his Army SERVICE BLUE uniform with Colonel's eagles on the shoulders, crouches before him and puts a hand on Tom's shoulder. He carries his peaked cap tucked under one arm like a precious relic.

ALAN MORROW

I'm sorry, Tom. I know things have been rough since your mother left, but with this war going on I'm going to be away from home a lot more.

Tom looks his father in the eye. Or tries to.

YOUNG TOM

I don't- Why do you have to go, dad? There are other officers in the Army, right? Why does it have to be you?

Colonel Morrow sighs and looks at the ground between Tom's feet. He seems unable to answer for a moment.

ALAN MORROW

I have responsibilities, Tom. Our country, the Army- They need me.

Now Tom does manage to find his father's eyes. His own are clearly welling up with unbidden tears. The scene warps strangely as he bites out a response to his father:

YOUNG TOM

What about me? *I* need you, too!

When he is done speaking, the two of them just sit in uncomfortable silence, as if the last exchange had not really happened. Maybe it didn't - maybe Tom only *wishes* it did.

-Another jump: Tom (now 13), his cousin, and his cousin's friends poking around the skeletal remains of an old BANK at the ghost town of Rhyolite, Nevada. Darryl (now 16) picks up a loose stone and throws it at a patch of ancient, peeling paint on the interior wall of the ruined structure.

DARRYL

Man, this place really is a shithole.

His friend, a stringy white boy named YAZ (then 15), snickers in agreement - clearly the group's brown-noser.

YAZ

Yeah, you said it, Big D.

Tom looks around at the desolation, clearly more in awe than the other six, slightly older kids all around him. Darryl notices this and pushes against his shoulder.

DARRYL

Hey, Tommy. C'mon, now, don't get all starry-eyed on me. We're here for a reason, so stick with the program.

Tom looks up at his cousin, who is not only several inches taller but also stands half a foot higher on the rubble inside the old bank. The sun silhouettes Darryl so that only his vague outline can be seen, making him seem more imposing even than his exaggerated height could do.

YOUNG TOM

Y-Yeah, whatever you say, D.

The scene SHIFTS as they move further through the ruins. Now it is dusk, with the sun going down over the western desert. Darryl stands atop a small knoll at the edge of the ghost town, overlooking the scene with his arms crossed while his cohorts goof off behind him.

All except for Tom, who steps up tentatively to stand beside his elder cousin, a strangely awed look on his face as he, too, peers out over the ruined former boom town.

YOUNG TOM

What is we're waiting for, again?

DARRYL

S'posed to be a real light show out here on the longest and shortest days of the year. That's the story, anyway.

Tom cracks a nervous grin.

YOUNG TOM

Yeah? When's that supposed to happen?

DARRYL

Any minute now...

As the sun passes below hills far off to the west, a strange hum comes over the scene. Darryl's friends notice and fall silent as Darryl uncrosses his arms to point at the horizon beyond the northern edge of the ghost town.

DARRYL

(cont.)

There! I can see them.

On cue, a trio of bright, bluish-green lights rises over the horizon. They start to dance in intricate geometric patterns over the desert, just like a preprogrammed light show.

Tom stares in silent wonder as the older kids around him whoop and holler and clap their hands at the sight.

TOM

Holy *shit*, man!

Darryl grins and slaps him on the shoulder.

DARRYL

Told ya, kid.

The lights grow in number - from three, to five, to eight, to thirteen. Their patterns become more intricate, their speed more feverish. The gathered teenagers jump and shout in excitement as they watch the unnatural performance.

Then the lights alter their course. One by one, they swing in low over the desert and start sweeping toward the ghost town. Several teens exclaim in awe, but Darryl - the oldest of the group - seems to realize something is amiss. When the flying lights pass over Rhyolite and head straight for the hillside they are all standing on, he visibly tenses.

DARRYL

What the fuck...?

The thirteen lights fan out to form a wide circle around the hill. By now all the teens have figured out the shape of the situation and are either screaming in terror or huddling close to one another for some semblance of protection.

Tom, however, stands frozen with fear. He stares up at the now slowly-orbiting lights, overcome with terror and awe in equal measure as the air fills with a steady, driving hum.

His cousin rushes forward to grab him by the wrist.

DARRYL

C'mon, T, let's get out of here!

He pulls Tom away from where he stands, transfixed, just as the hum on the air rises into an insistent warble. The other teens scatter to the four winds as the air itself charges

with electricity, causing their hair to stand on end.

Tom runs alongside Darryl, pulled at first but soon keeping up, his young, athletic frame pulling him ahead of his cousin with great, panicked strides.

He runs and runs, hearing the shouts of his friends behind him. He runs until we can no longer hear Darryl struggling to keep up. Until the fury whipping around him comes not from otherworldly visitors, but from an intense firefight in a very different desert, in a very different life.

Somewhere, between his subconscious and the waking world, the image of thirteen year-old Tom running warps inexorably into a twenty-something Tom, wearing combat fatigues, running through a haze of dust and gunfire. Blood stains the front of his flak vest, though we cannot know if it is his own.

Somewhere nearby, but somehow far away, a voice calls out:

VOICE 2

Corporal Morrow, take cover, now!

The dream ends with the sound of an explosion - a dull, thunderous *whump* as the incoming mortar shell explodes. Tom is obscured by dust - not just from his memory, but from the ethereal sands of time blowing across his mind.

CUT TO:

INT. CIA GULFSTREAM - DAY

MATCH CUT to Tom shooting awake on the couch in the passenger cabin of the CIA jet. His eyes are wide, full of primal terror, and not a little bit of anger as well. The look of a man who has seen a ghost - or who has seen death.

At the entrance to the cabin, the young CIA agent stands in mid-knock, his hand hovering over the frame. His mouth is ajar as he looks at the strangely panicked agent before him.

CIA AGENT

Uh, sir? I was just saying that we're coming into our final descent. You should get to a seat and buckle in.

Tom blinks at him, still unsure of where he is. Then he reaches up to rub his temples. Sitting up, he nods slowly, then looks up to meet the young agent's eyes again.

TOM

Yes, thank you. I'll do that.

The junior agent stares at him for a moment more, then nods back and turns to head back to his own cabin space.

Tom leans back in his seat, pressing his hands to his face just as he had in Agent Kellogg's office. Then he rises and crosses the cabin to sit in one of the passenger seats along the left wall of the interior space.

Sitting down, he buckles in and peers out the window to his left at the approaching sight of coastal Norway as the plane descends. He puts his hand on his chin and begins to silently contemplate the dreams he had just endured. It was not the last time he had recalled the Lights at Rhyolite, and with the week he was having, he knew it would not be the last.

CROSSFADE TO:

EXT. BASE CAMP - ALICIA'S ROOM

The wind howls outside of the crew quarters unit of the base camp, so loud that the din of the ragged old generator cannot be heard over it. Alicia watches through the small porthole window in her room as the student she knows only as Hanssen pours diesel fuel into the generator's intake mouth.

She hears a knock on the open door and turns to see Dr. Henriksen's research assistant Janssen standing in the doorway. He is dressed in a wool sweater and thermal sweatpants over his thermals, and holds his standard mug of hot coffee in one hand. He tries to smile disarmingly.

JANSSEN

Doctor Ricardo? "We are having a meeting in the common area to discuss the find. Doctor Henriksen wanted to know if you'd like to come join in and offer your input?"

Alicia smiles back and puts down the weathered old journal she'd been making field notes in.

ALICIA

I might be down in a minute. I'd like to catch up on some of my journaling before it gets too late.

When he visibly deflates a bit, she changes tact.

ALICIA

(cont.)

You go on ahead. Tell Doctor Henriksen
I'll be there in a bit, okay?

Janssen nods politely and excuses himself from the room. Alicia watches him leave with a fond little smile - the kind a teacher might give a student they suspected had a crush on them - before turning back to her journal.

She takes a sip from the coffee thermos sitting on the desk before picking up her pen and diving back into the writing.

At the tip of her pen, raw thought flows forth, illustrated aloud by her quiet, whispered narration:

ALICIA

While the artifact defies explanation along lines of pre-established academic theory, it is clear from even a cursory overview that it is of no known Neolithic or other pre-historic classification. Seeing as it was located in a layer of ice at a depth that predates even the earliest known Neolithic hominids to have ventured this far north, or anywhere else for that matter. Furthermore, the material is unlike anything ever categorized by even experimental science. Put simply, it seems quite clear that it is not of any known human or hominid origin.

She pauses and puts down the pen to get another drink of coffee from her beat-up old thermos. A strange little smile comes across her face as she speaks to herself.

ALICIA

Maybe my theories aren't so far-
fetched, after all...

She huffs with a quiet, bemused laugh and picks the pen back up to finish her thought and sat back to read over what she'd written. She notices with a start that her hand is shaking.

She reaches up to press a hand to her forehead. Dropping the pen back on the desk, she closes the journal and stands up to head out into the narrow hallway and toward the mess hall.

CUT TO:

EXT. SVALBARD BASE CAMP - DAY

MATCH-CUT to the graduate researcher Alicia knew only by the last name of Hanssen, finishing up his refueling of the generator and screwing the cap back on the fuel canister.

When he is done, though, he does not head back to the habitation trailer. Instead, he walks around to the back of the primary trailer and pulled out the messenger bag he carries under his heavy oversuit top.

Amid the blowing snow and wind, no one noticed his tardiness. Inside the bag is a compact portable transponder and radio

transceiver. He unfolds them both and sets them up in a small nook at the back of the trailer where the wind was not as strong. He reaches back into the bag to pull out a small roll-up plastic keyboard. He plugs it in and starts typing.

On the transceiver's tiny LED screen, a series of messages starts scrolling out: "Обновление: код alpha...объект интереса в руке...будет извлекаться за каждый заказ..."

INT. CIA GULFSTREAM - DAY

As the CIA jet taxis along the tarmac, Tom watches a news report on the onboard TV . Onscreen, a weary-looking anchor shuffles note sheets as he faces the camera.

The lower third scrolls with updates from a litany of ongoing global woes: "...prices up again as sanctions against Russia lead to a sixth straight month of energy crisis"; "Deadlock in long-term Middle East peace talks due to uncertainty regarding Russia's role in ongoing negotiations"; "Further high-level negotiations expected as tensions in the South China Sea reach a ten-year high"; "Doomsday clock moved up to ten seconds to midnight due to uncertainty regarding Russia-NATO relations and the status of nuclear forces"; and on and on - symptoms of a world on the edge of disaster.

NEWS ANCHOR

Breaking news from the Russo-Ukrainian Crisis today, as a breakthrough in the Kyivan and Kharkivite fronts has led to fears that Russian military forces will soon encircle the two largest cities in the beleaguered nation.

He swivels to the secondary camera as an insert panel shows video of Ukrainian forces firing artillery at Russian positions; armored factions from both sides moving through

back roads as infantry maneuvers through alleys and fires from doorways; civilians caught in the crossfire.

NEWS ANCHOR

(cont.)

This news comes on the tail of a disappointing round of talks between US, Ukrainian, and NATO ministers regarding the Sandusky Amendment, a proposal by U.S. Senator Janice Sandusky which aims to increase NATO involvement in the European conflict, now nearing the end of its seventh month. Fighting has been stalled out there for much of the past five months, with major NATO troop and materiel buildups across the so-called "Eastern Wall", but some analysts claim that a Russian breakthrough is imminent, leading to debate as to why Sandusky's vision for direct involvement has not been adopted.

Tom picks up the remote and turns the TV off as the jet reaches the lonely private terminal where he will disembark. He stands, puts his Bureau jacket back on, and heads to the exit hatch, where the agent aboard awaits him. The younger man nods at him in affirmation, then swings the door open.

CUT TO:

EXT. OSLO LUFTHAVN - DAY

Tom looks out across the pristine scenery of central Norway. He smiles, seeming to recognize something in the sight. A voice calls out to him from below, on the tarmac:

AGENT SHIN

See something you like, Agent Morrow?

Tom looks down and sees CIA agent CANDACE SHIN (35) smiling up at him from beside an airport shuttle car. She wears a long-tailed overcoat to stop the wind. Two other agents from the Oslo field office flank her.

Tom smiles back and makes his way down the roll-up stairs.

TOM

Just reminds me a bit of where I grew up in Arizona, is all. Place gets to be a lot like this in wintertime.

He steps onto the tarmac and Shin meets him halfway. They shake hands briskly, each seeming to respect the other's firm grasp. Agent Shin cocks her head as she releases his hand.

AGENT SHIN

This about that report we got about
some kind of artifact in Svalbard?

TOM

That's right. Not sure how much you've
heard so far, since I'm sure the
Agency is on the same page about
keeping whatever this is on the Q.T

She eyes him skeptically for a moment, though the grin on her face does not depart. This clearly isn't the first time she'd dealt with intelligence community shadiness.

AGENT SHIN

Whatever you say, Agent Morrow.

She turns and indicates the airport shuttle car - more of a glorified taxi, really - and one of her associates opens the door for Tom. He raises an eyebrow at her and she shrugs.

AGENT SHIN

(cont.)

No time like the present. "Whatever
this is", it's got higher-ups jumping,
so you'd better get a move on.

Tom holds her gaze for just one extra moment as the two of them gauge each other's level of forthcomingness.

Then she smiles roguishly and holds out her hand again.

AGENT SHIN

Good luck, space cadet.

He grins back and takes her hand in another firm shake. He huffs and slowly shakes her head, still smiling.

AGENT SHIN

(cont.)

Always wanted to meet a Man in Black.

Tom releases her hand and picks up his duffel bag where he had left it on the tarmac. As he does, the two other local agents share a snide look and snicker to one another.

Shin, however, just holds Tom's gaze. There is nothing

artificial in her smile - she has no judgment, no ridicule, no amusement at his expense to hide. He realizes this with a renewed, and redoubled grin of his own.

TOM

Yeah. See you around, Agent Shin.

He climbs into the airport shuttle, throwing his bag in the driver's side back seat, and closes the door.

As the airport officer driving the car pulls away to take him to the aircraft which will carry him on the next leg of his journey, he peers out the rear window. He sees Agent Shin watching him depart, and watches her in turn.

CUT TO:

INT. BASE CAMP - MESS COMPARTMENT

Several of the scientists milling about in the main hab unit. They are clearly uneasy - something about being trapped by the tail end of a blizzard with something that at least one of them believed was not of this world can do that to people.

The fact that Alicia, the resident ufology expert, is now sitting in the mess rambling on about what they might have found does not help the matter, either.

As she finishes making a point, a student named Olsson chimes in, raising a hand in an interjective gesture.

OLSSON

What do you mean, doctor? Can you really think it is not of this Earth?

Alicia eyes him from her seat near the middle of the mess hall. She shrugs and wrings her hands nervously.

ALICIA

I don't see how it can be anything else. Let's look at the facts, people. We found it buried far too deep to have been placed there by any known hominid, Neolithic or otherwise. Even if it was buried more recently, the construction and material design doesn't match up with any human technology anyone has ever seen.

Dr. Henriksen leans back in a chair at the other end of the cramped mess room, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

HENRIKSEN

Ja, but we must remember the words of the your late Carl Sagan, Doctor Ricardo: 'Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.' While it may be true that this is something science has never before encountered, is it not a dangerously irresponsible leap to suggest it is of an alien origin?

Seeing she is about to protest, he holds up a hand to calm whatever refutations might have come.

HENRIKSEN

Yes, I know, that's what you have always bring forth to find, but if we cannot find sufficient proof of this thesis, beyond this piece of anomalous debris, we may as well consider our careers to be at an end.

He crosses his arms to mark his side of the argument as over as his students make various noises of agreement.

Alicia is about to retort when Olsson happens to look out the window. He shoots to his feet and moves to peer out the porthole, frowning. His voice is quiet but incredulous.

OLSSON

(in Norwegian)

<What the hell?>

Turning to the others in the room, he carries on in English.

OLSSON

Uh, t-there is someone coming. Two snow machines, coming this way.

Dr. Henriksen gets to his feet. Alicia watches him cross the room and peer out the window. After glancing out into the blowing snow, shakes his head, equally incredulous.

HENRIKSEN

Sure enough, there is someone coming.

He turns to face Alicia, eyebrows raised in quiet awe.

HENRIKSEN

(cont.)

Perhaps your Bureau of something or other actually has finally come to

rescue us, Doctor Ricardo.

The four of them in the mess hall hurry to the main entryway to start gearing up in their heavy-weight outdoor clothing, before cycling through the outside.

EXT. SVALBARD BASE CAMP - DAY

The scientists bustle through the trailer's entry and headed out into the small yard between the two mobile habitation units, the equipment shed, and the vehicle pen. They watch the unidentified snowmobiles slowly wind their way up the hillside towards their outpost, until the two machines finally pulled up at the edge of the base camp. Alicia steps forward as a man in heavy-duty American-made winter gear climbs off the back of the nearest snowmobile.

The newcomer shakes hands with the driver and the driver of the other machine, presumably his guides, before turning to trod across to his little makeshift welcoming party.

As the two snowmobiles turn to head back downhill toward the boat launch from where they'd return to Longyearbyen, the man walks straight up to Alicia. He reaches up with his thickly-gloved hands and pulls down the scarf obscuring his mouth. He has to lean in and shout to be heard over the howling wind.

TOM

Are you Doctor Ricardo?

She looks at him, trying to get some reading of what kind of person he is through the thick snow goggles he wears. She sees he has soft hazel eyes and dark skin, and is sporting a light stubble brought on his hurried trip to her camp. She nods vigorously, likewise shouting to be heard.

ALICIA

Doctor Alicia Ricardo, but yes. I assume you're with the B.S.I.?

He nods and looks around at the other scientists gathered just behind Alicia. They all stare at him as if he is the Thing from Another World come to visit.

TOM

Agent Thomas Morrow. I was sent to check in. We can continue this chat inside, if you don't mind.

Alicia grins in spite of herself, as if the discomfort of this clearly non-rugged stateside agent is novel to her. She

turns and gestures for him to follow, and the five of them make their way back to the entrance to the main trailer.

INT. BASE CAMP - MESS COMPARTMENT

Once they were all inside and out of their snow gear, Alicia gathers the full research group back in the mess hall. Agent Morrow takes a long swig from a cup of black coffee.

The warmth of the coffee seems to reinvigorate him. He turns to Alicia, smiling, and holds up the mug for emphasis.

TOM

Thanks for this. You have no idea just how long it's been since I had a decent cup of coffee.

He sets the mug down on the edge of the nearest table.

TOM

Now, you were explaining what you found. Can you tell me any more?

Alicia brushes a loose strand of hair out from in front of her eye and puts her hand on her hip.

ALICIA

Not really, no. Whatever it is, it's not like anything I've ever seen. Nothing from this world, at any rate.

Dr. Henriksen, leaning against the wall, visibly stiffens.

HENRIKSEN

We can't know that for sure, Doctor.

Alicia shoots her colleague a stern look.

ALICIA

We've been over this, Peter. There is simply no other explanation that-

Tom finishes another sip of coffee and waves a hand for silence. He looks back and forth between the two senior scientists at the base camp, smile gone.

TOM

Well, whatever it is, I'd like to take a look just as soon as this damn storm lets up. In the mean time, though, here's also the issue of your comms

system to be dealt with.

Before Alicia could speak, the student called Olsson takes a step forward, raising his hand like a timid schoolboy

OLSSON

I am the resident practitioner in communications, sir. What problem is it to which you are referring?

Tom looks at the young man, apparently measuring what worth he might have as a technician. He nods slowly.

TOM

Alright then: my superiors contacted me on the flight in to Longyearbyen, told me that all attempts to contact your base camp in the last sixteen hours have failed. Any ideas why?

The young man's eyes widen into saucers as Tom lays out the news. He sputters as he tries to respond, so Alicia steps in and answers for him. She frowns, surprised as well.

ALICIA

Whatever the problem is, we certainly aren't aware of it. We just thought no one was getting in touch because of the blizzard, it's pounding us for almost twenty-four hours now.

Tom stares back at her, his mouth a thin line. He turns to face Olsson again in turn.

TOM

Ok, kid, take me to your comms setup and we'll get to the bottom of this.

He stands, then hesitates, wagging a finger in thought. He steps closer to Alicia and leans in to mutter in her ear.

TOM

Keep everyone here for now. I've got a bad feeling about all of this.

Alicia goes slightly pale but nods as she watches him go. She walks over the table where his cup of coffee sat and takes a seat. Dr. Henriksen looks down at her with mild concern as she runs both hands through her hair.

The student called Hanssen turns to duck out of the room,

mumbling as he goes.

HANSSEN

I need the restroom.

Alicia does not pay heed to the fact that he does not head in the direction of the restroom. Instead he heads toward the back of the trailer - and his personal compartment.

CUT TO:

EXT. SVALBARD BASE CAMP - DAY

Outside the trailer, the wind goes on howling as the last gusts of the blizzard cast themselves upon the island.

At the equipment shed, Tom and student Olsson are just fastening the door shut. They turn and head back toward the main trailer and work on getting the hatch open.

INT. BASE CAMP - MESS COMPARTMENT

Tom walks back into the mess hall with Olsson in tow. Alicia and the other scientists gathered look up at him approaching like deer in the headlights, expecting news.

He heads straight to Alicia's table and picks up his coffee to take a long drink. He leans over to her, ignoring the students still staring at him, and whispers again:

TOM

Y'know, sometimes it really sucks to be right, doctor.

She raises a puzzled eyebrow at him.

TOM

(cont.)

Something had your system on a feedback loop that kept any signal from going in or out. And with the storm going on, whoever did it has still gotta be here.

Alicia stared back at him, face blanching again as the gravity of what he'd said sinks in. She turns and looks around at the group. Each one of them stares back, now clearly sensing that something is amiss.

All but one of them, that is. She frowns, worried. Tom notices and leans in closer, frowning as well.

TOM

What is it? What's the matter?

She meets his eyes and mutters something back.

ALICIA

Someone's missing. One of the students, Hanssen I think is his name.

Tom looks up and counts heads before tensing in his chair. He gets to his feet and speaks at full volume.

TOM

Which cabin is his?

Henriksen and the other scientists tense up, as well. Alicia shoots to her own feet and leaves the room in a hurry. Tom lingers a moment to try and reassure the others.

TOM

(cont.)

Don't worry, folks, we've just got to go and check on something.

By the time he caught up with Alicia, she is knocking on the door to Hanssen's cabin. No answer.

She knocks again, then grows impatient and tries the door. The knob turns, so she pushes it open to head inside.

INT. BASE CAMP - HANSSSEN'S ROOM

Agent Morrow forces his way past her, his hand hovering near enough to the hem of his B.S.I. jacket to pull it back and reveal the pistol holstered at his hip.

They immediately notice the equipment laid out next to the cot. Tom clearly recognizes it at first sight.

TOM

I may not be a comms tech, but I know communication gear when she see it.

There is indeed a small collapsible satellite dish, a portable computer encryption unit, and an unrolled portable keyboard. It looks like someone had been trying to pack them away before stopping suddenly.

Agent Morrow kneels to examine the gear more closely.

TOM

(cont.)

Well, that's the bottom of one mystery reached. Now where the hell is-

He is suddenly cut off by a sudden commotion behind him, as Alicia cries out before being stifled. Hanssen has come up behind her and loops his arm under hers and around her neck.

Tom rises, spins on his heel, and draws his sidearm all in one swift, well-practiced movement.

Hanssen - or whatever his name really was - stares straight back into Tom's eyes as he holds a Makarov pistol to Alicia's head with his free hand. Tom holds his own aim near the man's head, but holds back from shooting, worrying that he would hit the doctor if her captor flinches.

"Hanssen" seems to understand this, as he sneers at Tom at him from behind her head - daring him to shoot.

HANSSEN

It would seem we have quite a problem, yes, Agent Morrow?

Tom takes a half-step toward him and he presses the barrel of his pistol harder against Alicia's temple.

HANSSEN

I would not do that, if you would like me not to kill her.

Tom freezes and grits his teeth behind the pistol sights. He narrows his eyes and tightens his grip on his pistol as "Hanssen" began to back out of his cabin.

To Alicia's credit, she does not squirm, which would only have made things worse for her. Instead she just tenses her body and backed up, awkwardly, but in step with her captor.

Tom takes slow, deliberate steps after them, still aiming the pistol just to the side of the nameless agent's head.

TOM

Listen, we can talk this out. It doesn't have to go down this way.

"Hanssen" scoffs. His eyes are wide, like a cornered animal.

HANSSEN

Yes? Then how should it go down, hmm?

His gun hand twitches slightly as he speaks. He bumps into the door frame with his back and freezes.

HANSSEN

Doctor, if you would be so kind, tell me if I am clear to proceed. And tell your friends to avoid tricks, yes?

He lessens his grip on her neck to allow her to obey his commands. Turning her head, she sees the rest of the group gathered at the end of the hall, staring at the unfolding incident with the same deer-in-headlights expressions they'd worn when Tom first stormed back into the mess.

Henriksen is frozen at the head of the group, one hand raised to call for her attention. He mouths a question:

HENRIKSEN

What can we do?

Alicia responds by shaking her head almost imperceptibly.

Henriksen motions for the others to back away and steps back himself. They keep staring at Alicia and her captor, unsure of what will happen next.

All the while, Tom holds his glare at the man holding Dr. Ricardo hostage. He knows the other man will run out of places to go, and that he will try to take Alicia with him in either case. That will require the two of them cycling through the entryway and suiting up in winter gear.

The blizzard was winding down outside, and if "Hanssen" got out into it and took one of the snowmobiles, he'd be gone.

INT. BASE CAMP HALLWAY

"Hanssen" backs out of his room and into the hall, pulling Alicia with him. Tom takes another slow step toward the man, raising his left hand in an attempt at a placating gesture.

TOM

There's nowhere for you to go. We can talk this through here. What's your name? Your *real* name, I mean.

The man holds Tom's gaze with a cold glare as he backs down the hall. There is a note of steel in his voice.

HANSSEN

Enough. If you do not mind, I will be

leaving, and I will be taking the good doctor with me. You will not try to stop me, either. I would prefer not to have to be killing her.

Something in his threat awakens resistance in her, and she begins to fight his grip. "Hanssen" tightens his hold on her and presses the pistol even harder against her head.

HANSSEN
(in Russian)
<Enough, damn you!>

As soon as he stops talking, Alicia wraps her left leg around his and pulls sideways, while also butting him directly in the nose with the back of her head. His grip loosens just enough for her to pull herself out of the line of fire.

Tom does not hesitate. He fires once, hitting the man just above his collarbone. "Hanssen" drops his pistol and stumbles back, reaching up instinctively to slap a hand to the wound.

He bumps against the wall, then regains his footing enough to turn race down the hall, hand still pressed to his wound. The scientists at the end of the hall scatter from his path as he heads directly for the exit way.

Tom pauses only an instant to check on Alicia before racing off in pursuit of her assailant. He sees "Hanssen" throw open the door to the entryway. He stumbles inside and grabs one of the ice axes hanging in the rack on the wall.

Tom comes to a stop two yards back inside the hall and aims in on the man now wielding a potentially deadly weapon.

TOM
Stop! Drop it, now.

"Hanssen" does not hesitate. He bursts toward Tom, swinging the axe over his shoulder with adrenaline-fueled fury.

Backing away rapidly, Tom fires twice more. One of the shots hit "Hanssen" in the abdomen. He lets out an unnatural groan and drops the axe before collapsing into a crumpled heap.

By great effort, he rolls himself over and moves himself until he is propped up against the wall. Looking up at Tom, the man struggled to form words. As he quietly speaks, his eyes start to haze over from the adrenaline.

HANSEN

It would appear I am in quite a predicament, yes? More so than before.

Tom looks down at him, wondering what he's gotten into, then re-holsters his weapon. He kneels and checks the man's wounds. The shoulder wound is through and through, but the abdominal shot will clearly cause a lot more headaches.

TOM

Doctor Ricardo, is there any medical equipment here? I assume you're alright, by the way?

Behind him, several of the other scientists had gathered around Alicia and were fussing over the bruise rising at her right temple. Olsson rushes off to find medical supplies in the equipment locker without being told.

It takes her a moment to fully regain her senses, but Alicia eventually chimes in herself.

ALICIA

I'll be okay. Thanks, by the way. I appreciate your nerve.

She slowly pads over to stand just off Tom's left flank. She nods down at the badly wounded foreign agent.

ALICIA

(cont.)

What about him?

TOM

He needs some quality medical care pretty much pronto or he'll be in a real tough spot.

He leans in to put a finger in the injured man's face.

TOM

(cont.)

And he'll get the very best of care just as soon as he answers a few questions. How about we start with why exactly the Kremlin sent one of its bag men all the way out here?

"Hansen" starts laughing and Tom frowns. The other man keeps laughing raspily for a moment before meeting his eyes.

HANSSEN

You think you have it figured out, yes? Unfortunately for both of us, my superiors require me to be a bit more tight-lipped than your friends here.

He sighs, a ragged, wet sound, and bites down, hard.

It takes Tom a second too long to realize what he is doing. By the time he figures it out, and keels to stick his hand inside the other man's mouth, "Hanssen" has already swallowed the pill he's dislodged from the false tooth there.

He begins to choke spasmodically, his eyes growing glassy and foam appearing at the corners of his mouth. Soon, he stops moving altogether and his eyes glassed over.

Tom hurriedly checks the man's pulse. He sighs and hangs his head. He stands up and turns to face Dr. Ricardo.

TOM

Well, that's me back at square one. I need to know everything you do about this man, and I need to know it now.

Alicia eyes him for a moment, leery of his sudden gruffness.

ALICIA

We don't know much actually. He was, uh, he was Doctor Henriksen's student. Kept to himself, mostly, which I guess makes a lot more sense now.

She gestures to Dr. Henriksen, who raises his eyebrows in surprise. Tom nods at him encouragingly.

HENRIKSEN

I am afraid Dr. Ricardo is correct. We never knew much about him beyond the credentials he gave us. He came to my office five months ago, inquiring about the trip here. He said his name was Sven Hanssen and that he was enrolled in the Center for Earth Evolution and Dynamics. I reviewed his student papers, they all seemed to be in order at the time.

Tom sighs and shifts his weight again, rubbing the bridge of his nose, the other hand resting on his hip.

TOM

Well, like you said, those could be faked easily enough by the FSB or whoever else sent him to join your team. I'm sure you'd never seen him on the campus before then?

Dr. Henriksen shakes his head energetically.

HENRIKSEN

No, and I had no idea when I met him that he was a Russian operative!

TOM

Don't blame yourself, doctor. If he was what we assume he was, then he would have been an expert in blending in and infiltrating your group. The only question that leaves is 'why'.

He strokes his chin for a moment, then turns to face Alicia again, eyes widening with realization.

TOM

This thing you found, out there in the ice. You were looking for it, weren't you, Doctor Ricardo?

Dr. Ricardo looked at him, stunned. The other scientists stared at her, disbelieving. Eventually she lets out a sigh and raises her hands in acquiescence.

ALICIA

I had a hunch. I'd been doing research for almost a year, chasing leads on data collected by scientists going all the way back to the early 1970s. None of it was conclusive, but, well...

She trails off, turning in place to eye the others in turn.

ALICIA

(cont.)

The data suggested that there was some kind of energy grid in place around the world, centered on nodes located at twenty-two points around the globe.

Tom raised an eyebrow and nodded for her to go on.

ALICIA

(cont.)

And yes, as you have probably guessed already, one of those spots was right here in western Svalbard.

Tom blows out a breath and raises his eyebrows at her, then looked at Dr. Henriksen.

TOM

Looks like Hanssen or whatever his real name was wasn't the only one keeping the truth from you.

He watches as Doctor Henriksen tries to meet Doctor Ricardo's eyes, and she tries pointedly to avoid his gaze.

TOM

(cont.)

But what's done is done. I think it's time I finally had a look at this find of yours, Doctor Ricardo.

She nods in agreement and they prepare to head outside.

EXT. SVALBARD BASE CAMP - DAY

As two of the students finish rolling the dead Russian agent's body up in a tarp, Alicia and Dr. Henriksen lead Tom out to the equipment shed.

They find the device still sitting where the scientists had left it. Tom glances at each of his guides before taking a step inside. He freezes in place when he realizes that it is made of the same material as the one he'd found in Arizona.

He steps slowly toward it and reaches out to touch it but stops only a foot away as a strange aura surges forward - a pulse of ethereal energy emanating from the device.

Tom's eyes go unfocused as the energy wave washes over him. A voice calls out, as if from within a deep well:

VOICE 3

Tom, I'm sorry, it's... It's your mother, she-

Dr. Ricardo grabs Tom's wrist to pull him back to the real world. He swivels to face her, a stunned look on his face. The strange aura is fading from the room already.

Alicia pulls the scarf down from over her mouth and practically shouts at him in her astonishment.

ALICIA

What in the hell was that?

Tom stands frozen, staring back at her with wide eyes. He struggles for a moment to form words but cannot find any that work. Instead he pushes past her and heads outside.

He scans the skies for swirling lights, whirling around to spot any indication of a repeat of the Aquila Incident.

He gives up after a few tense moments, during which time Alicia and Doctor Henriksen come outside to watch anxiously and await an explanation. He bends over and puts his hands on his knees, taking a few moments to catch his breath.

Alicia watches him for another moment, then takes a tentative step forward to quietly reiterate her question.

ALICIA

What is going on here, Agent Morrow?

Tom lets out a ragged sigh and takes a deep breath.

TOM

Whatever you've got in there, I have to get it out of here right away.

She stares at him intensely as he stands up and faces her.

TOM

(cont.)

Beyond that, the Russian probably already called for extraction. That means it's time for us all to get the hell out of here, on the double.

Alicia raises her arms in frustration and turns to face Dr. Henriksen, looking for backup. He fails to meet her gaze.

HENRIKSEN

I think he has a point. If Hanssen or whoever really is was able to send word to his superiors, we could all be in danger here. I think it is time to leave this place, and quickly.

Tom is one step ahead of them. He turns back toward the equipment shed, intent on getting down to business. He calls

back to the scientists over his shoulder.

TOM

I need to get in touch with my own superiors back in D.C. Then we need to get moving on the double, before the Russian's extraction team arrives.

With a final skeptical glance at Doctor Henriksen, Alicia follows Tom back into the shed, with Henriksen close behind.

INT. EQUIPMENT SHED - DAY

Inside, Tom heads directly to the communications setup. His fingers fly over the clear plexiglass keyboard as he punches in secret communication codes.

TOM

Is there anything else I need to know before I send this message back to HQ?

Alicia bites her lip as she thinks this over. Her eyebrows shoot up as something occurs to her.

ALICIA

Yes. Hanssen was my personal assistant for a short time after we got here. If he had any chance to look through my notes, that would've been it.

With only a brief pause to consider this revelation, Tom keeps tapping away on the crystalline keys of the computer.

TOM

So anything you know, the Russians certainly know, too. Wonderful.

He finishes and reviews his message and hits "SEND."

(cont.)

I just hope we can get ahead of this thing before they do.

The two scientists stare at him, then glance nervously at each other. The three of them turn, as one, to stare at the object still sitting in the corner. It pulses silently in time with the wind still bracketing the shed.

Outside, the wind howls, the snow swirls, and the tides of fate continue to crash at the head of a gathering storm.