

*In an alternative future in which the Soviet Union has won the Cold War, two MIT professors devise a daring plan to travel back to 1960s America to undo the past. As the time travelers scheme to avoid the watchful eyes of Soviet intelligence agents, they find themselves increasingly distrusted by their fellow resistance leaders. When they finally make their daring attempt, they must confront not only history, but also their own pasts.*

# PROLOGUE

Second Edition

by Greg Ahlgren

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*ISBN 978-1-61434-458-2*

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*BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2011*

*Second Edition*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



SO MANY PEOPLE have been generous in providing comment, suggestions and encouragement for this book that it would be impossible to list them all. However, a special debt of gratitude is owed to David Sims whose literary and creative talents helped jump-start this project, to Debbie Elliott for her assistance in preparing and assembling the manuscript, and especially to Bennett Freeman, whose scientific, creative and literary input has been invaluable.

# PROLOGUE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *A NOVEL*



GREG  
AHLGREN



## PROLOGUE



THE AIR CONDITIONING was broken again. It wasn't so much the heat that was bothersome as the stultifying oppressiveness once the circulating pump quit. The lack of airflow made the atmosphere in the Brandigan Applied Sciences Building on the MIT campus thick and clammy. As Campus Security Officer Yolanda Jackson walked down the hall on the 21st floor an unseen hand tightened around her lungs. Her breathing became raspy and shallow. She knew she should have grabbed her inhaler from her patrol car parked around the corner, but who knew that the air conditioning would be out? It was too late now. Her asthma would have to wait.

Without looking, she touched the two-way radio on her duty belt and contemplated reporting the failed air conditioning. But at three in the morning she'd only be able to raise an indifferent dispatcher at Campus Maintenance who would ask all sorts of questions before telling her he'd have an H-VAC guy give her a call in an hour or so. Better to wait until the end of her shift and fill out a maintenance report form that she could leave with her supervisor. Let it be someone else's problem.

Besides, tomorrow was Sunday and she planned to take Jamal and Lionel to Salisbury Beach. They'd spend more time on the rides than playing in the surf. The rides were so damn expensive, but she had promised. She wished Luther's check had arrived on time. She had delayed leaving for work in case it was in the afternoon mail. It wasn't. She was annoyed, because the judge had repeatedly warned Luther that his checks had to arrive by Thursday.

Officer Jackson didn't mind night shifts. It was quieter, and in the

seven years she had held the job, the worst she had encountered was a drunken undergrad intent on taking out his academic frustration on the nearest uniform.

Night shifts were more checking doorways and buildings, and fewer interactions with students. It was not that she disliked students, but the nights passed quickly and she could work while Jamal and Lionel slept. They were now old enough to be left alone.

At night, if she got no calls, she only had to check each building in her patrol area twice, randomly walking two or three floors. This was the second time through Brandigan this shift. She had walked the 8th and 12th floors hours earlier and hadn't noticed the air conditioning out.

As she passed the Astrophysics Department Office and rounded the corner, she noticed that the door to the faculty lounge was ajar. Even as she instinctively reached down and turned off her two-way radio she smiled. There would be no intruder in the faculty lounge of the Astrophysics Department at 3:00 on a Sunday morning. Someone had obviously left the door open when leaving on Friday.

She pushed open the door, stepped into the lounge and flipped the light switch. She frowned when the room remained dark. The air conditioning and interior room lights must be on the same defective circuit. Maybe she should radio Maintenance after all. Any electrical problem presented a risk of fire. Surprising that the hallway lights were unaffected.

She pulled out her long black flashlight with her right hand and slid the button forward. The beam played across the lounge and caught an orange stepladder open in the middle of the room. The ceiling tile above it had been pushed aside exposing the crawl space with its tangle of wires and piping. A stale stench from the opening assaulted her nostrils. Maintenance must have already started to investigate the problem. Probably they had left it for Monday. She aimed her flashlight around the rest of the room and was about to back out and close the door when she saw what looked like a shoe protruding from behind a leather couch against the side wall.

Without thinking she commanded, "All right, stand up and step out here. Let's see some identification."

As soon as the instinctive words were out of her mouth she regretted her decision. Even though it was probably a student playing God-knows-what-prank, she realized that she should have stepped out of the room, closed the

door, and radioed for help. If she were a District Police Officer she would have done that. But of course if she were a District Officer she would have had a gun. Her whole body tensed.

The crouching figure slowly rose up and stepped out. Yolanda Jackson relaxed when the figure turned toward her, caught in the flashlight beam.

“I still need some identification,” she rasped, trying to keep her voice stern. “What are you doing here?”

The figure stepped toward Yolanda and smiled. She never felt a thing. As if in slow motion she saw the figure’s right hand reach toward her through her jittering flashlight beam, and she looked down at her left side just above her belt. A dark stain was already spreading over her uniform shirt. She tried to turn the flashlight back on herself but her hand went numb. She heard the flashlight clatter to the floor. The last thing she saw before her vision faded was the light beam stumbling across the far wall as the flashlight rolled away from her. She felt herself losing consciousness and thought she was falling. She tried to reach out with her left hand and was grateful that someone caught her under her arms. She thought of Jamal’s baseball game just four days earlier. She arrived in the second inning after he had already batted and gotten a hit. She thought it pointless to die to cover up some silly prank. She vaguely heard, rather than felt, her black shoes being dragged across the floor and she felt as though she were being lifted up. Then everything faded to oblivion.



## CHAPTER ONE



*Monday, June 22, 2026*

THE TOWER CLOCK in the Brandigan Applied Sciences Building was striking six as Paul deVere stared in the retinal scan on his dashboard, starting the car. He gripped the steering wheel—steering wheels gave him a feel of control, a solidity the joystick didn't have.

He'd learned to drive on a steering wheel car, as had many men of his generation, and still liked its feel. That was really why he'd bought the new 2026 Ford Phaser, it was one of the few cars that still offered the steering wheel option. He could even remember driving a manual transmission, but you couldn't find those any more than you could find tail fins.

"An old guy's car," his wife laughed on the day he bought it.

"Screw you," he'd muttered, but not loudly enough so she might think he was offering. That the steering wheel prevented her from using his car was all to the good. Besides, at 53, with thinning hair and a slight paunch, wasn't he entitled to an old guy's car?

He nosed out of the MIT Department of Astrophysics parking lot and onto Charles Street. He had to catch himself from turning left across the bridge, as he usually did after work, and turned right instead, heading home toward Concord. Just past the statue dedicated to the Glorious American Communist Revolution, he turned right onto Massachusetts Avenue and continued west. The statue was one of the few concessions the autonomous Northeast District (formerly New England, New York and Pennsylvania) allowed the American Soviet government.

He flipped the switch under the dash to activate the tracking sensor. His friend and fellow Astrophysics professor, Lewis Ginter, had invented it. "Never hurts to be too careful," Ginter had said. "No reason the bastards

should know more than they have to.”

He listened for a few seconds but didn't hear a steady beeping. No tracking of his GPS. Good.

There wasn't any particular reason it would be tracked, except that Paul deVere was one of the top astrophysicists in the Northeast District, and hence of general interest to the Party leaders in Vodkaville. Vodkaville was slang for Yeltsengrad, the Soviets' new name for Minneapolis. It had been designated the new capital of the American S.S.R. Nobody in the Northeast District called it anything but Vodkaville, of course. Nobody who'd been alive in America before the Second Revolution called it anything but Vodkaville either.

Sometimes he was tracked, and on those days he was careful to follow his routine until the tracking stopped. There was no rhyme or reason to it. He was rarely tracked heading west toward his home. Once though, when he had left early to pick Grace up from crew practice, the sensor had beeped all the way.

His position at MIT afforded him time to pursue his own research. The work he and Lewis had been doing fell under the general area of his expertise, so nobody raised an eyebrow when they talked about mechanized phase shift adjusters and chronologically precise altimeters.

He left Route 2 at exit 56 and steered the Phaser toward the Hanscom Housing Project—formerly Hanscom Air Force Base when the United States had had an air force, heck when there had been a United States—and headed up Route 4. Route 2 was more direct, but he often took this detour and assumed it would cause no untoward suspicion. Besides, he was early and wanted to kill enough time to let the summer sun dip further.

All in all, deVere felt he'd been almost divinely placed for Project Intervention. If he believed in God he would have, that is. His grandfather had believed in God, but that was before the Second Revolution. Gramps had tried to explain why he believed in God to young Paul, who listened out of respect. But even as a middle school student he couldn't bring himself to believe in anything so unscientific.

“What proof do you have?” the thirteen year old had defiantly challenged his grandfather. “What proof is there of God?”

It had been a cold, drizzly November afternoon. Paul and his grandfather stood in the family's wood frame dairy barn while sleet pelted the

sheet-metal roof. Paul's grandfather had just finished locking their small herd of Jerseys into the milking stations. The animals stood patiently munching feed.

"Proof?" Alphonse deVere asked, pausing in his work of attaching the milking machine. He studied his grandson with a kind gaze before indicating the waiting bovines. "What proof is there of a cow?" he asked.

Paul smirked, suddenly confident that he had won the day. Obviously, his grandfather had no logical response, and so spat out the first thing that had come to mind. From that day forward Paul had remained triumphantly atheistic, secure in his scientific beliefs. Besides, he often told himself, under the new regime it didn't pay to be religious.

Paul consulted the tracker again a mile before the critical turnoff to Lexington. No tracking. He eased up to allow a truck to pass. He hugged the truck around the bend, obscuring his license plate from any roadside cameras.

At The Patriot's Coffee Shop he pulled off the road and into the gravel parking lot. The diner was located at the site of the former Museum of Our National Heritage, within sight of the Munroe Tavern. The parking lot was empty save for one rusting Volvo, which he assumed belonged to the proprietor. The shop was ostensibly named after the region's professional football team, but deVere knew better.

As he swung in through the glass doors the shop appeared devoid of customers. The attendant was wiping the Formica counter and barely looked up. DeVere grabbed a Boston Globe from the stand next to the door before draping one leg over a stool and settling down.

"Coffee, regular."

The man nodded and retreated to the coffee machine at the end of the counter.

"Where's Ralph tonight?" deVere asked.

"Sox game."

DeVere flipped past the front page headline exposing more fraud on Vodkaville's contribution to the Big Dig and unfolded the sports section. He didn't know this counter guy, and there was no benefit in reading the article in front of him. He would read it later.

The man returned with the coffee. "Good article on the Big Dig," the clerk said, nonchalantly indicating the front page lying open on the counter. "Vodkaville is really screwing this one up."

DeVere glanced at the sports section headline, "Sox Home for Eight Game Stand," and ignored the bait.

"So many people think this is their year," deVere said neutrally.

The man scoffed and moved back, grabbed a burger from the freezer, and threw it down on the grill. It began sizzling immediately.

"If that paper didn't have the best damn sports department in the District it would have been shut down years ago," he said loudly.

"Everyone talks about how good it is but they're always way too optimistic on the Sox," deVere answered.

"It's only a matter of time before Vodkaville shuts down the Globe. The way they discourage it only makes it more popular."

The man flipped the burger before strolling out from behind the counter to the booths along the outside wall.

"You decided, ma'am?" he asked.

DeVere swiveled quickly. A lone elderly woman sat hunched low in one of the booths, sideways to the counter.

DeVere swore softly. He had been certain when he had walked in that no one was in the shop. Of course, she was sitting so damn low.

The woman kept her head down and hesitated before answering flatly, "Cheese steak sandwich. No onions."

DeVere turned back. She seemed so...familiar. And the voice. He shrugged and flipped to the inside page on the Sox story. Late June and only two games behind the Yankees whose aging ball club was beset with a rash of injuries. Maybe this WAS the year.

The attendant threw shaved meat on the grill and began pushing it around with a spatula. As if reading deVere's mind he said, "People are saying this might be their year but I don't know. It still hurts thinking about what happened back in '10."

DeVere cringed at the mention of that World Series game seven in Boston. He had been there, right behind third base. In the bottom of the ninth Polito had been what, thirty feet from home plate? From his seat he had seen the Sox players erupting from their dugout and pouring onto the field to welcome home the winning run as the ball rolled to the left field wall.

DeVere shuddered and changed the subject. "Aren't there usually more customers this time of day?"

The man shrugged. "Search me. I usually work in Boston but Ralph called

me this morning when he got tix. Asked me to fill in." He gestured out to the parking lot.

"Didn't even know if the old bird would make it," he said. "I've only filled in here once before."

"Didn't realize he was a Sox fan."

"Isn't everyone?"

DeVere grunted. "You have trouble getting parts for that?" he asked, indicating the Volvo.

"Naw," the man said. "There's a junkyard in upstate New York that has everything for old Volvos. It's the newer ones where you can't get parts. Not like the old days."

DeVere turned back to the Arts section and began reading movie reviews. He checked his watch, and ordered more coffee. If he ate, Valerie would wonder why he wasn't hungry when he got home. Telling her he had stopped at a coffee shop would be like telling her he had gone to a bar with Ginter. He didn't want another fight, not tonight.

DeVere stayed at the coffee shop until dusk. Lewis had told him that near sunset, at the end of a long summer workday, the roadside eyes were at their weakest and their human monitors less attentive. At night the monitors would change shifts and be at their highest vigilance. VodkaVille boasted 24-hour vigilant surveillance, but Lewis had assured him that was to scare people.

"The technology they've got in those is Soviet junk," Ginter had scoffed. "And the people are worse. It's all just one big freaking sight deterrent."

DeVere paid for his coffee with cash, walked outside without looking at the booths, got back in his Ford, and checked the tracking sensor again. A slight beep, then nothing. He'd asked Lewis if the trackers could somehow detect the sensor.

"Haven't yet," Lewis had told him.

"But could they?" deVere had pressed.

"If they can, I don't know about it, and I know 99% of what they're capable of," Ginter had assured him.

DeVere often wondered about that other one percent.

He left it on for thirty seconds until he was confident he wasn't being tracked. He pulled out of the parking lot and drove the final few miles through the main square of Lexington. As he passed by, he glanced—

as he did every time—at the town green. The monument had long since been removed but no marker was necessary. It was here, 251 years earlier, that the town's colonists had mustered on a cold April morning. He stared at the stately homes that lined the common and wondered how many of the current residents would ever do so.

Outside town he stayed on Route 2A along what had once been called "Battle Road." It had long been renamed "Hanscom Highway" but to the locals it was still "Battle Road." The British had marched along this stretch between Lexington and Concord in those early morning hours. It was back along this road that they had fled later that day, as gathering militia had pursued, attacked, and harassed their retreat after turning them at the Concord Bridge.

The story held special significance. As a child he had often been teased about his name's similarity to the midnight rider's, and even as an adult, acquaintances would occasionally attempt a humorous crack, thinking themselves clever and their observation original.

In Concord, deVere turned right from the main square and headed toward the North Bridge. If he were going home he would have turned left. He only hoped that at this time of the day anyone tracking him by camera would have long since lost interest. He reached over to the glove box and pulled out a worn eight-track tape and shoved it into the Phaser's tape deck. Almost immediately the Mama Cass version of "Dream a Little Dream" burst from the dashboard speakers.

Whenever he visited the Minuteman Monument at the bridge he felt compelled to play the ballad. Silly, of course. The version dated from the 1960s and had nothing to do with the American Revolution, but deVere always romanticized that it did.

Vodkaville had tried to remove The Minuteman too, of course. Three years ago. The stated rationale had been to preserve it in a museum. But on the day scheduled for its removal people from Concord and the surrounding towns had flocked to form a human shield. An editorial in the *Globe* had referred to the protesters as resurrected "fire-eaters," and the term had since come to be applied generally to all anti-neo-Soviet activists. DeVere himself had heard about the happening while at home and had wanted to join but Valerie had discouraged him.

"Why?" she had asked. "Paul, think of your position at MIT. We can't lose

that. And what about your daughter? Have you thought about Grace?"

Reluctantly, Paul had stayed home.

*Stars shining bright above you...*

He turned left at the dirt entryway and coasted the short distance to the obelisk on the British side of the Concord Bridge. When his parents had brought him and his brother to visit the battle site as children there had been a visitor's lot across the street where the drycleaners and convenience store now stood. He sat looking across the bridge at the stoic figure of the 18th century militiaman, musket ready at his side.

"There's a star above you alright," Paul whispered as he got out of his car. The red Soviet star. He grabbed the trowel he had brought with him but left the engine running and the driver's door open.

*Say nighty night and kiss me*

*Just hold me tight and tell me you'll miss me*

*While I'm alone blue as can be*

*Dream a little dream of me.*

We do miss you, he thought as he walked past the obelisk and crossed the bridge. And you were blue, all right. You had your blue uniforms at Saratoga and Brandywine and, of course, at Yorktown. And we do dream of you. At least, I do.

From behind him he heard Mama Cass belt, "Stars fading but I linger on dear..." Maybe the Soviet star was going to fade. Maybe he, Paul deVere...

At the far side of the bridge he turned right and stepped down to the edge of the retaining wall above the river. He crouched down, shielded by the bridge from the road. Lewis Ginter had chosen the spot himself in a moment of whimsy.

"It should be there, about three inches below the ground, right at the corner. After all," Ginter had added to Paul, "the first American killed by the British in the Boston Massacre, Crispus Attucks, was an African-American. And you know that idiot, Major Pitcairn, who gave the order for the British to open fire at Lexington? The first shot of the Revolution? Well, he was killed at Bunker Hill by Peter Salem, another African-American. So I feel good about this locale. Besides," he had added with a chuckle, "it's on your way home anyway so if it fails hey, no big deal."

Paul had grimaced but, as usual, had not argued. He shoved a crushed beer can aside. Teenagers drinking again, he thought as he glanced around

to make sure he was alone. Satisfied, he used the trowel to scrape away the soil where the retaining wall met the bridge. There, three inches below the surface, as Lewis had predicted, was the canister. Paul turned it over once before opening it. The shiny chronometer inside read: Three hundred ninety-two days, six hours, fourteen minutes and twenty-seven...eight...nine seconds. He snapped it shut.

“It works,” he said aloud. “Beautiful God, it works.”



## CHAPTER TWO



THE NEXT DAY at MIT, Paul passed Lewis Ginter's office. Lewis' door was open, his back to the corridor. He was talking on the telephone in low tones—probably to a woman he had either slept with last night or hoped to tonight. Paul wondered what she looked like.

That was worrisome. Lewis was single and still handsome for mid-40s, with the same waist and chest he'd had as a high school football player. If the Central Agency brass in Vodkaville wanted to compromise Lewis all they'd need would be a half-attractive agent.

Paul leaned in. "I got that report. It was as you expected."

Lewis didn't turn around, but he stopped talking in mid-sentence. Paul thought that his friend hadn't heard him clearly and was about to repeat himself when Lewis raised a hand and waved his acknowledgment. As Paul continued down the hall he wished he could have seen Lewis' face. He had known better than to telephone when he had gotten home the previous evening.

In the lab he cordially greeted Natasha Nikitin, the department's new government-assigned intern. He had to constantly remind himself to treat her normally, as if he didn't suspect her.

"Good morning, Miss Nikitin," deVere said.

"Good morning, Dr. deVere. You look chipper."

She learned a new word, Paul thought. She was constantly trying out new words. She spoke excellent English, all graduates of the Central Agency language school did, and they all had the same peculiar accent. It was one way to tell who was CA.

"Oh, thank you. How's everything?"

“Fine.”

“Oh Miss Nikitin, can you check the cyclotron? I’ll be needing it in half an hour.”

“Of course.” She disappeared through a door.

DeVere drifted over to the file cabinet and opened the top drawer. The paper clip he had carefully positioned atop the middle of the sheaf of papers was now slightly to the right. He smiled to himself and softly closed the drawer.

Natasha returned and announced that the cyclotron was warming up and would be ready in 10 minutes.

“Thank you, Miss Nikitin.”

“By all means. Please call me Natasha.”

“Thank you, Miss Nikitin. That will be all.”

“Yes, Professor.”

Natasha was tall and attractive, with angular features, bright blue eyes, and long brown hair that hung straight down her back. Those hairstyles were discouraged by the Central Agency but she apparently wasn’t interested in impressing the powers that be. Either that or she was too well connected to care.

She said she was from Central Asia, although she looked much more European than Asian. He hadn’t interviewed her himself—that had been Nigel’s prerogative—but Nigel mentioned that her parents had been killed in the Soviet Union’s Second Great War with China around the turn of the century when she was still an infant. That would make her 27 or so. The fact that her parents were martyrs of the Soviets’ Second Great War made him uncomfortable. After being raised in a Soviet political orphanage it was easy to see how a loyal spy could be created. And that she was a spy, Paul had no doubt. He, Lewis and Natasha were the only ones with access to the filing cabinet. He made a mental note to discuss her presence in greater detail with Lewis.

ON HIS WAY home Paul shook his head at how complicated kids’ school projects had become since he was a kid. Ah, but Grace was doing well in school and seemed motivated. These days too many kids, even in the Northeast District, were looking to just get by and get a job, he thought

as he turned and headed toward the Kennedy Library. Not that there was anything wrong with getting a job, but there should be...more to it than that, some sort of passion about what you did, finding something you loved and pursuing it.

Thankfully, Grace had an active mind. Her goal was to go to Africa and study wildlife.

He pulled into the parking lot at the Kennedy Library, walked in and paused in the austere marble foyer. Disk, he was here for a disk. He headed in that direction when he saw a sign for a new exhibit, "America Since 1960: Sixty-six Years Of Progress Toward A Peaceful Workers' Paradise."

He'd heard about that. It was Soviet propaganda sludge, of course, and Boston had voted against allowing it in until Vodkaville had promised to fund an additional six months of work on the Big Dig. The chief engineer said they would finish the project some time in the next couple of years.

He strode past the exhibit room on his way to burn the disk for Grace in the bookstore.

"Sir?"

He paused, and glanced around. The place was oddly empty for this hour—the boycott, that's right, he'd read that Boston was unofficially boycotting the Library until the exhibit closed. He saw three people in the room that normally buzzed with activity. The librarian read a newspaper.

"Sir?"

He looked at the exhibit room and saw a young, petite woman smiling at him.

"Have you seen the exhibit?" she asked.

"Um, no, sorry, I...have to go to the bookstore, you see..."

"I can give you a personal tour," she said, beaming. Obviously a Soviet girl, Paul guessed she also was from Central Asia somewhere. Why so many Central Asians in Boston? he wondered.

"Yes, well, thank you, but the bookstore is about to close, so I'd better—"

"The bookstore is open until ten tonight."

Paul tried to think up another excuse, but she clearly wanted to give him a tour. No matter how many tours she gave, her pay wouldn't change. She could sit in the corner and read, but she really wanted Paul to see the exhibit.

She cared about something.

This cheerful, beaming guide reminded him of Grace, who really wanted

visitors to the deVere house to sit down and look through her books of African wildlife. The guide was now giving Paul that same look Grace gave people when she asked them to look at her pictures of lions and elephants and hear what amazing, incredible animals they were.

“Oh, all right,” Paul said. “It doesn’t take too long, does it?”

“It can take as long as you’d like, sir,” she said, nearly giddy with delight at finally getting to show someone around her beloved exhibit.

The tour began with John Kennedy’s defeat of Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. In 1961, the guide—Raisa—said, the good President Kennedy was unfortunately influenced by the military adventurists of the previous administration, and decided to attack the peace-loving Cuban workers.

“Previous administration? The previous administration was Republican, there weren’t any holdovers,” Paul said.

Raisa lowered her eyes. “President Kennedy wouldn’t do that on his own,” she said softly. “He loved the working class, he fought for the advancement of the proletariat. It was the previous administration.”

DeVere opened his mouth to disagree, then realized all he would do was hurt this girl’s feelings.

“Yes, I see.”

Raisa perked up. “Then in 1962 the Cuban Missile Partnership paved the way for good relations and trust between America and Cuba.” She moved on to the next panel, celebrating Kennedy’s 1964 narrow re-election over the evil Barry Goldwater, his 1965 Civil Rights legislation ensuring the complete equality inherent at the center of Communism—“already we can see his longing to join the Soviet Union”—his ability to keep the U.S. from meddling in South and Central America during the successful Ché Guevara revolution in the late 1960s, his wise statesmanlike policy to allow Southeast Asian workers and revolutionaries to throw off the imperialist French shackles binding those societies, and the election of Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. Raisa looked at the picture of Robert F. Kennedy the way Grace looked at pictures of cheetahs in full stride.

Robert F. Kennedy, that was the disk Grace needed, deVere remembered. Her class was studying the Robert F. Kennedy administration. “Robert F. Kennedy,” he said to etch it in his mind.

“Oh yes,” Raisa said, looking up. “Most historians prefer John Kennedy,

but I like Bobby. He had more insight, I think, and he didn't have the other Kennedy's, ah...problems."

DeVere nodded as Raisa prattled on about Robert F. Kennedy's brilliant War on Poverty and ability to focus the attention of the U.S. on social injustice at home and not get involved, as some misguided reactionary elements in the government were advocating, when the Malay Peninsula adopted Communism in the late 1960s.

"Unfortunately, after the Kennedys left office, President John Lindsay committed America to stopping the advancement of Communism in Western Europe, but his reactionary Euro-Centrism only allowed the forces of progress, under the brilliant leadership of Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara, to liberate Central and most of South America. Naturally, we hope to be able to liberate the rest of Western Europe some day as well."

The pictures showed a smiling Castro in Nicaragua, and a determined Ché in Mexico City standing next to a pinch-faced frowning soldier with a general's insignia. Paul recognized him as the American defector who had helped Ché's campaigns.

She moved in front of the largest panel, which depicted America's capitulation. DeVere knew the story. In the late 1970s, Ché and Castro assembled an army of a million foot soldiers on America's southern border. The Soviet Union and China fought the first of their two Great Wars. In an effort to oppose Soviet expansion, the United States supported China, which was then devastated by Russian nuclear and biological weapons. Millions, including over 315,000 American soldiers, died like ants. Then chemical weapons were detonated in Phoenix, Houston, and New Orleans, and a dirty bomb in St. Louis. In order to prevent America from suffering the same holocaust that the Soviet Union and China had just experienced, the United States signed an appeasement deal in the early 1980s, ceding the central and southern states to Soviet control and agreeing on what was then called "Hong Kong status" for the Northeast, the West Coast, and the Great Lakes states. As part of the deal, and to prevent any East-West holocaust, the United States had surrendered all of their own weapons of mass destruction, which had been quickly seized by international arms inspectors.

She talked cheerfully about the advancements of Soviet science making life better for Americans: the microchip, personal computer, and cellular telephone technology. "Unfortunately, there are revisionists who want to

credit Americans with those inventions, but that's to be expected," she said.

He was about to thank the girl for her time and really mean it, when she pointed to a picture deVere hadn't seen. "Soviet medicine and health care immeasurably improved the lot of the thousands of Americans who weren't able to afford even basic medical services," she said, pointing to a picture of a spit-and-polish Soviet ambulance in front of a house. Two uniformed EMTs were hurrying with a stretcher carrying a young boy. A young boy almost...Peter's age.

Suddenly, he was in that hotel in Tulsa, Oklahoma again, sharing a room with his twin brother, Peter...

Peter started coughing again, but this time it went beyond the usual brief racking fit. He kept coughing and coughing, kicking off the bedclothes and falling to the floor. Alarmed, Paul scrambled off his bed and knocked on his parents' door across the hotel hallway.

"Honey?"

"Mommy, Peter's coughing a lot."

His father opened the door, fumbling with his trousers. His mother, hugging her flannel nightgown, shot by him into the boys' room, where she picked Peter off the floor and placed him back in bed, bending over him to keep him on the bed.

His father appeared in the doorway. "It's time to call the ambulance," his mother said. His father nodded and went to the phone in their own room and called the Soviet ambulance service. His mother sat staring out the window into the blackness as Peter writhed in agony under her hand. She kept massaging his head, saying over and over, "It'll be all right, sweetie, it'll be all right." In the next room his father called. And called. And called. And—

"Sir?"

DeVere snapped back. He blinked and looked around until he saw the face of the guide looking up at him. She looked as if something were wrong with him.

"Sir?" she repeated.

"Sorry, lost in thought," deVere said.

She nodded. "It happens a lot with people of your generation."

"Old people," he said kindly.

She flushed, looking at the floor. "My grandfather, you remind me of him."

"I'm not that old," he said.

She smiled and took the joke. "No, of course. Thank you, sir."

"Thank you. You're good at what you do."

She nodded. "I think everybody should understand how we got where we are today. It's important."

"Agreed," deVere said.

He went to the bookstore and told the clerk what school his daughter attended, her class number and the assignment code. He looked it up on his computer and burned the disk.

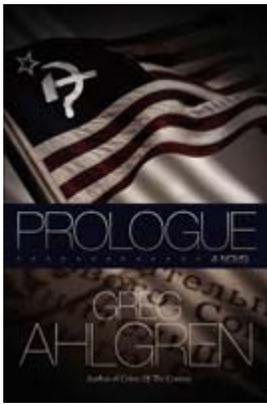
"Why can't she download it from the site?" deVere asked.

"We try to encourage the students to come to the library," the clerk said. "Get them out away from their computers for a bit, look around the library some."

"So you see a lot of parents on their way home from work, do you?"

The clerk sighed. "You're the eighth today."

DeVere drove home, tracing his finger around the locked reinforced steel case on the seat beside him. Yes, he said to himself. It's most important we know how we got where we are today. So the mistakes of the past can not only be avoided in the future, they can be undone.



*In an alternative future in which the Soviet Union has won the Cold War, two MIT professors devise a daring plan to travel back to 1960s America to undo the past. As the time travelers scheme to avoid the watchful eyes of Soviet intelligence agents, they find themselves increasingly distrusted by their fellow resistance leaders. When they finally make their daring attempt, they must confront not only history, but also their own pasts.*

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