BROKEN UNION

PROLOGUE

Brisket BBQ

15 Smolensky Boulevard

Moscow, Russia

September 30, 1030 hours MSK (Moscow Standard Time)

"A strange place to find you, Mr. President," said General Grigory Gerasimov, as he strolled into the nearly empty barbecue restaurant.

His security team and those of the President of the Russian Republic glared at each other as the two men greeted as old friends.

"What can I say? I developed a taste for American barbecue the last time I was there," said Russian President Vladimirovich Morozov, as he and the general exchanged hugs.

"If this is truly American, then you can get the food to go, Mr. President. I would suggest that you make it a takeout order," the general said, as he removed a chair and sat across from the President.

"So, Grigory, my old Russian bear who is now a fox . . . what is the hurry?"

"Vladimirovich, my friend of so many years, I told you a few weeks ago that my little birds would find out for sure what the Chinese were up to. I just received a report that they will be detonating our two RDS-220s in less than six hours. If they are successful, the Americans will be crippled . . . permanently. I would recommend that you move to some place a little more . . . secure."

"And what do your little birds tell you of their chances for success?"

"Better than 50/50. If either one succeeds, the Americans will lose most of their military assets on that coast. If both succeed, they will no longer be a factor on the world stage. We need to be prepared to move immediately. I would suggest that we prepare to move on Alaska, as previously discussed, and move our fleet into the North Atlantic. Either way we will be prepared to take advantage of the situation as it develops."

"And if neither Chinese operation is successful?"

"Then we have been conducting field operations . . . training."

"You have my blessing, Grigory. Move your chess pieces. But I will stay and enjoy my meal."

"As you wish, Mr. President!' General Gerasimov said, as he stood up to leave.

"Grigory, one more thing! Do not activate our nuclear forces beyond their current state of readiness. Understood?" President Morozov said, as the waiter stood nearby with his 'Texas Mix' order of brisket, coleslaw, corn bread and a large sweet tea.

"Understood, Mr. President! Enjoy your meal!"

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Ranch of the Tres Mezquites

Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico

September 30, 0408 hours UTC-7

**One minute after detonation of the 100-megaton 'Fire Dragon'**

**4.6 miles below the Gulf of California.**

Alberto Mota sat on the front porch of his ranch house. He rocked gently back and forth in the rocking chair that had been his father's. The scent of the morning's first cup of coffee reminded him there was work to be done.

"Papa would have been in the barn by now. He would have told me, 'Alberto! You lazy boy! The sheep do not milk themselves! No milk, no cheese. No cheese, we starve!' Yes, Papa! I'm on my way, Papa!" Alberto said, and laughed at the memory of an exchange he had heard throughout his youth.

"Papa, I am now 'el hombre cabeza' (the head man). The sheep will wait for a few more minutes," Alberto said, as he glanced under the grouping of mesquite trees that surrounded the family cemetery.

"Three years, Papa! Over three years, and I still miss your wisdom and your love. But . . . at least Mama has company now," Alberto said, as he raised the full mug of coffee to his mouth.

The coffee splashed and burnt his lips. He cursed and jumped up . . . then stared at the coffee as the dark liquid began to ripple in the mug. The house began to shake as he jumped off the porch and ran away from his home. A hundred sheep began screaming in the barn as the ground began trembling. He turned and stared as his ancestral home began to crumble.

"Charo!" he yelled, as he threw the mug aside, and ran back toward the house and his sleeping wife. He was thrown off his feet by a sharp jolt.

The ground began violently rolling. Alberto sat bouncing on the dry soil, his hands covering his ears, as the sound of a hundred storms rose from the earth. He could only stare as lightning rose from the ground to the south, lighting the early morning sky.

The shaking stopped for a few brief seconds. As he began crawling toward his home on hands and knees, the earth dropped, then rose, tossing him into the air. He crashed to the ground, rolled to his side, and stared as the ground 50 yards to his right disappeared.

"The trees . . . the cemetery . . . they're gone!" Alberto said, as yard by yard the ground began to fall away.

Over everything else, he heard the sound of rushing water. His last thoughts were of his wife. His last words were, "Papa! I'm coming . . ."

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91 Avenida Galaxia

Mexicali Industrial Park

Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico

September 30, 0409 UTC-7

Site Director Jorge Alvarez sat at his computer staring at numbers. Chromalloy had significant contracts with the United States military, but all that was now in jeopardy.

"Canada? Why would they go with Canada? Their labor costs are ten times ours. The maquiladoras (duty-free factories) here can't be matched. They send us parts, we put them together and ship them back. Our quality control is excellent. It doesn't make any sense!" Jorge said, as he began calculating how much of a price cut he could take and still make a profit.

Mexicali was the capital city of the Mexican state of Baja California. Tucked up against the U.S. border, its highly educated and skilled population provided low-cost labor that dozens of major US companies utilized to maximize their profits. Over a million people were crammed into 40 square miles. The city was 80 miles northwest of the Gulf of California and 27 feet above sea level . . .

"The meeting with the US Defense Department representative is in less than three hours. This is our biggest contract. If I lose this, I'll lose my job. I'll wind up selling insurance and used cars in Tijuana."

Small quakes were common in Mexicali. After all, the San Andreas Fault ran directly under the city. Jorge felt the small tremor but ignored it. The second tremor was more significant. His monitor began dancing across his desk. He stood up when a pane in the window in front of him cracked. His last thoughts, as he ducked under the heavy oak desk, were not of his family, but the delay this might cause in his upcoming meeting . . .

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Aviation Enforcement Flight 32

Elevation 200 feet above

Jacumba Hot Springs, California

0412 hours PST

Stacy Thomas had been Air Interdiction Agent with U.S. Customs and Border Protection for seven years. The Beechcraft King Air 200 was cruising at 250 mph. In another hour he'd be landing at the small airstrip outside Jacumba Hot Springs for refueling, and more importantly, breakfast.

"Nice to have a quiet shift for a change," said Agent Cristy Davis, from the co-pilot seat.

"Yeah, I can't remember a flight when we didn't see someone trying to cross the border illegally. Must be a holiday or something."

The sunrise wasn't due for another two hours. Cristy was still glued to the infrared monitor mounted between them. Anything alive that moved through the empty spaces by the border, glowed like a furnace.

"What the hell was that?" Stacy asked, as he stared to the south.

"What? Did you see another aircraft?" Cristy asked, as her head popped up from the monitor.

"No, look south. It was some kind of weird lightning."

"I don't see . . . whoa! What is that? There's a bunch of them! It looks like it's coming from the ground. It must be an illusion! That's impossible."

"Well, the illusion is getting worse, and it seems to be heading this way!" Stacy said, as he pulled the nose of the aircraft up and turned to the north.

"Never thought I'd see you spooked by a little lightning!"

"The sky is perfectly clear . . . no clouds. That lightning is coming from the ground. I've heard about this phenomenon. I even saw a few videos on YouTube. Shit! Look at that!" Stacy said, as fingers of lightning leapt from the ground.

"What causes it?"

"Earthquakes . . . real big earthquakes! Scientists aren't sure what causes it. Contact Boulevard Border Patrol Station. Tell them there may be a big quake in Mexico!"

The lightning grew more violent and seemed to be marching northward toward them at a rapid pace, as Cristy contacted Boulevard Station.

"They haven't been notified of anything and . . . shit! What was that?" she yelled, as the cockpit lit up.

"Ball lightning! Never seen that before!"

"There's another one! It just hovers . . . then disappears."

The sky and the ground below were lit up by the constant lightning rising from the earth.

"Turn the plane to the south!" Cristy said.

"We're too close to the border. We don't have permission to cross."

"Turn south and go lower! Look!"

The full moon was almost set, casting long shadows on the terrain below.

"Look there!" Cristy said, while pointing to the southeast.

Stacy pointed the nose of the aircraft in that direction and began decreasing altitude. They continued south as the aircraft leveled off at 500 feet. The ground below was moving. They could see ripples and huge cracks appear in the surface. Behind it all came water. As the ground sank, a wall of water began flowing northward toward the border. The bright lights of Mexicali glistened below them, unaware of the approaching doom,

"Oh, God! What's happening?" Cristy asked, as the city began to disappear into the ground, to be replaced by an expanding body of water.

"The ground is splitting! Something has triggered the San Andreas Fault! Look! The cracks are passing the border and heading northwest. Find an emergency channel! There are a dozen cities up that way! El Centro, Imperial, Brawley . . . then the Salton Sea. After that, it's Palm Springs, San Bernardino . . . then right through LA!" Stacy said, as he turned the aircraft and began following the disaster northward.

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Headquarters Building

Naval Amphibious Base Coronado

3632 Tulagi Road

Coronado, California

0415 hours PST

"Admiral! We just received a comm from the Pentagon! They say the mission failed. They expect the device to detonate at . . ." Captain Harold Turner began, as the building began to shake.

"Sir?"

"I think we know when the device detonated, Captain. I would suggest that you hold on to something," Admiral Turner said, as the room lurched to one side, hurling books from a nearby shelf.

The two officers stared at each other, then the building around them, as the shaking grew more violent. The sounds of cracking masonry and shattering glass increased as the ground beneath them continued to move.

*"This isn't just the bomb. The detonation is 100 miles from here. They were right! The San Andreas . . . it's opening . . ."* Admiral Turner thought, as the brick building around them began to collapse.

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9311 Cardiff Avenue

Los Angeles, California

0417 hours PST

Ryan Powell lay in bed dreaming of a basketball game from long ago. North Carolina State was playing someone, but it was all a blur. Then a man walked on the court and everything stopped. Everyone in Reynolds Coliseum was silent . . . 10,000 people transfixed, as Coach Valvano began to speak. Then he paused and pointed at Ryan.

The old coliseum began to shake as Coach Valvano said, "You better wake up! You have to leave! Now!"

Ryan's eyes popped open. He felt the bed shaking. Anita was oblivious, tucked tightly against his side.

"This is a pretty good one. Ten years living here, and I haven't felt one this strong," Ryan said, as he lay in the dark, listening to things falling off the shelves and dresser of the bedroom.

The shaking continued, growing steadily more violent. Their young daughter began crying down the hall in her bedroom. Anita grabbed his arm.

"Ryan . . . what's happening?"

"Earthquake . . . bad one! I'll go get Beka!" Ryan said, as he jumped out of bed and began staggering down the hall.

Beka met him at the doorway and jumped into his arms.

"Daddy! Make it stop!"

She was shaking as he clutched her tightly and ran back to the bedroom.

"Ryan, this isn't stopping! What should we do?"

"It'll end in a few seconds. They never last very long," he said, as he tossed Beka into the bed beside her mother and climbed in after her.

But the shaking didn't stop. It grew more violent. The bed began dancing across the wooden floor. Flashing lights could be seen through the windows as transformers began exploding across the vast city of Los Angeles. When the bedroom window shattered, they all screamed.

"Get up! Get dressed! We're getting out of the building. Move! I'll get her clothes!" Ryan yelled, as he ran back down the hall.

The sound and the shaking grew ever more violent as the family dressed in the darkness. There was no electricity. Car alarms, awakened by the earthquake, began to add to the chaos. They fled outside and sat together in their small front yard. Beka sat in his lap, her arms wrapped around him. Anita clung to his side as the ground began to roll and tilt.

"Ryan, the 'bug-out' bag!" Anita yelled.

"Hold her!" Ryan said, as he bolted back into the ground floor apartment.

The walls began cracking as he pulled open the front door and ran to a storage closet in the rear of their home. He grabbed the backpack and ran for the front door, only to feel the building lurch, slamming the front door in his face.

"Dammit! It's jammed!" he said, as he yanked on the door handle.

The ceiling began to crumble as he turned, threw the backpack on, and ran for the bedroom. Climbing over the bed, he threw himself out of the broken window and onto the grass outside. Beka was crying hysterically as he ran over to his wife and daughter. They clung to each other as the disaster unfolded around them . . .

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Fire Station 31

San Francisco, California, USA

0420 hours PST

Jamar swore as he sat bolt upright in bed. He had been dreaming of Las Vegas. The casinos had gotten together and thrown him a parade. No one had ever broken the bank at five major casinos on five straight days. He was surrounded by beautiful women while cruising in a red 2018 Dawn Drophead Coupé Rolls Royce convertible filled with $1000 bills. The money blew out as they sped down South Las Vegas Boulevard. He didn't care. It was only money, and he was filthy, stinking rich! Thousands of people were screaming his name as they fought over the flying bills . . .

"Crap! That was sweet!" he said, as he stared around the dimmed interior of the second floor of the firehouse, the fire alarm still ringing in his ears.

"Jesus, Jamar, you're getting slower than Tom! Move your ass!" Heather Moore yelled, while pulling the suspenders of her turnout gear pants up over her shoulders.

"Remind me not to get drunk before I go on shift," Jamar said, as he swung his legs off the bed, and inserted his feet into his fireman's boots.

Heather was heading for the fire pole when she was thrown to the floor by a sudden jolt. She lay sprawled, then turned her head and stared at Jamar.

"Yeah, girl . . . that was a bad one!" Jamar said, as he stood up and pulled up his pants.

They were both thrown across the room as the old brick fire station tilted, then split in half. They huddled together and stared up at the night sky. Bolts of lightning leapt upward. The sounds of buildings being shattered, gas lines and transformers exploding, were overshadowed by a deep rumble that rose in intensity until they both screamed in fear.

Jamar's last thought, as he clung to Heather, was . . . "Why do I smell the ocean?"