

himself off the chair and walked over to sit behind his desk instead. At least he had stopped fuming about China for the moment. His two men saw this as an opportunity to give their meeting a clean start, so they swiftly made their way over to a pair of chairs in front of the desk. Watts, the NSA chief, decided maybe he'd try to get everyone on the same page.

"Mister President, I assume you've heard about the broadcast last night from Europe. The one with the kidnapped executive."

"Kidnapped? Are you sure about that?" The President had finally seemed to let go of his rant. "I didn't hear anything about a kidnapping."

"We strongly suspect he was, sir", Watts continued. "Thomas Peterson is a prominent figure in high tech, and he's exceptionally wealthy. He makes for an ideal kidnapping target, and we've received confirmation from his personal assistant that he went missing from the Davos conference two days ago."

"So did the kidnappers do this video you're talking about?"

"Yes, sir, we believe they compelled Peterson to do it against his will. Here, if you didn't see it, just watch this clip from yesterday." Watts pulled his phone out of his jacket pocket and placed it on the desk in front of Wright. Just before he pressed the play button, Watts said, "The man doing the speaking is Thomas Peterson."

*"The time has come for humanity to turn its back on the technological monster that I've been a part of creating. TK 46 tells us that we attribute the social and psychological problems of modern society to the fact that that society requires people to live under conditions radically different from those under which the human race evolved and to behave in ways that conflict with the patterns of behavior that the human race developed while living under the earlier conditions."*

Watts paused the video, and the President stared at the still image for a couple of moments. He then looked up and asked his chief of

staff, “George, what did he mention there? Tee Kay? Is that some kind of Chinese name?”

“No, Mister President, it’s the letters T and K. We believe those are the initials of a convicted felon named Ted Kaczynski, who was a terrorist back in the 1980s. He wrote a long anti-technology manifesto, sort of his philosophy, and he numbered each of the paragraphs. So he’s just reading the 46th paragraph from it. So...TK 46.”

“Is this Kaczynski guy involved?”

“No, sir, he died in prison in 2025. This terrorist group seems to be using his rantings as some kind of playbook.”

Watts decided to interject a remark in order to speed up the conversation. “Sir, the group behind this message is one we’ve been tracking for years. They called themselves The Liberators, and they’re based in Eastern Europe with ties to both North Korea and Iran.”

Wright stared blankly. “And?”

“They’re an anarcho-primitivist group, which is a radical organization that promotes a worldwide return to a pre-industrial way of life. They’re against big business, big cities, and basically anything else that’s come along in the past three hundred years or so.”

Wright leaned back in his chair, the blood vessels in his neck evidently tightening. “And what exactly do these wackos want?”

“We’re not sure of that yet, sir. The video broadcast last night was the only one so far, and they didn’t make any specific demands. It seems more of a vague threat, and if it weren’t for their capture of Peterson to act as their spokesman, I doubt they’d be getting any attention at all.”

President Wright stood up and walked behind his chair, gazing out the window to the snowy scene outside. “So we’ve got a high-profile American captured by a gang of fringe lunatics. We don’t know what they want, and we don’t know where they are. Am I right?”

Reid looked over at Watts and made a spinning gesture with his index finger to hurry up with an answer. Watts said, “Mister President, there are actually two actions already underway. First, the organizers

of the Davos conference have decided to cancel the remainder of the event in the interest of the well-being of the attendees. Most of them are already heading home.”

Wright continued to gaze in the distance past his window. “Good. What else?”

“And second, with your authorization, we would like to engage our own team in a search and rescue operation. The threat seems credible, and this group is plausibly dangerous.”

The President turned around to Watts and said, “Goddamn right we should do a snatch and grab. I’m not going to have a high-end American paraded around by terrorists in an election year. I’ll sign off on whatever you want. Just get it done.”

Watts sat up a bit straighter and he nodded at his boss. “Yes, sir.”

“And, Dan, let me have a few minutes with George, OK? That’ll be all for now.”

“Of course. Thank you, Mister President.” Watts gave a quick nod to Reid then picked up his phone from the desk before heading out the door. Now that he had the President’s authorization, there was no time to waste.



Ethan Wesley bent over and eased himself into the driving pod, admiring the interior. “Hey, this is pretty slick!”

Tobias was in the opposite seat. His round baby-like face and rotund belly gave him a cherubic appearance, and he was quite cozy in his oversized chair. The pod was designed for four passengers, but it was just the two men inside, which gave them plenty of space. Tobias said, “Yeah, it’s only got a couple of thousand miles on it, and