

THE DOOMSDAY CONSPIRACY

Books by Sidney Sheldon

THE DOOMSDAY CONSPIRACY

MEMORIES OF MIDNIGHT

THE SANDS OF TIME

WINDMILLS OF THE GODS

IF TOMORROW COMES

MASTER OF THE GAME

RAGE OF ANGELS

BLOODLINE

A STRANGER IN THE MIRROR

THE OTHER SIDE OF MIDNIGHT

THE NAKED FACE

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This is for Jerry Davis

Acknowledgment

I wish to express my appreciation to James J. Hurtak, Ph.D., and his wife, Desiree, for making available to me their invaluable technical expertise.

May you live in interesting times.

-ancient Chinese curse

Uetendorf, Switzerland

Sunday, October 14, 1500 Hours

The witnesses standing at the edge of the field were staring in horrified silence, too stunned to speak. The scene that lay before them was grotesque, a primeval nightmare dredged up from some deep, dark depths of primitive man's collective unconscious. Each witness had a different reaction. One fainted. A second one vomited. A woman was shaking uncontrollably. Another one thought: I'm going to have a heart attack! The elderly priest clutched his beads and crossed himself.

Help me, Father. Help us all. Protect us against this evil incarnate.

We have finally seen the face of Satan. It is the end of the world'.

Judgment Day has come. Armageddon is here. -..
Armageddon ...

Armageddon...

Sunday, October 14, 2100 Hours

FLASH MESSAGE TOP SECRET ULTRA

NSA TO DEPUTY DIRECTOR COMSEC EYES ONLY

SUBJECT: OPERATION DOOMSDAY

MESSAGE: ACTIVATE

NOTIFY NORAD CIRVIS, GEPAN DIS GHG VSAF, INS.

END OF MESSAGE

Sunday, October 14, 2115 Hours

FLASH MESSAGE TOP SECRET ULTRA

NSA TO DEPUTY DIRECTOR NAVAL INTELLIGENCE 17TH DISTRICT

EYES ONLY

SUBJECT: COMMANDER ROBERT BELLAMY

ARRANGE TEMPORARY TRANSFER THIS AGENCY, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY.

YOUR CONCURRENCE IN THE ABOVE IS ASSUMED.

END OF MESSAGE

Day One Monday, October 15

Bellamy was back in the crowded hospital ward at Cu Chi Base in Vietnam and Susan was leaning over his bed, lovely in her crisp white nurse's uniform, whispering, "Wake up, sailor. You don't want to die."

And when he heard the magic of her voice, he could almost forget his pain. She was murmuring something else in his ear, but a loud bell was ringing, and he could not hear her clearly. He reached up to pull her closer, and his hands clutched empty air.

It was the sound of the telephone that fully awoke Robert Bellamy.

He opened his eyes reluctantly, not wanting to let go of the dream.

The telephone at his bedside was insistent. He looked at the clock.

Four A.M. He snatched up the instrument, angry at having his dream interrupted.

"Do you know what the hell time it is?"

"Commander Bellamy?" A deep, male voice.

"Yes"

"I have a message for you, Commander. You are ordered to report to General Hilliard at National Security Agency headquarters at Fort Meade at oh six hundred this morning. Is the message understood, Commander?"

"Yes." And no. Mostly no.

Commander Robert Bellamy slowly replaced the receiver, puzzled. What the devil could the NSA want with him? He was assigned to ONI, the Office of Naval Intelligence. And what could be urgent enough to call for a meeting at six o'clock in the morning?

He lay down again and closed his eyes, trying to recapture the dream. It had been so real.

He knew, of course, what had triggered it. Susan had telephoned the evening before.

"Robert..."

The sound of her voice did to him what it always did.

He took a shaky breath. "Hello, Susan."

"Are you all right, Robert?"

"Sure. Fantastic. How's Moneybags?"

"Please, don't."

"All right. How's Monte Banks?"

He could not bring himself to say "your husband." He was her husband.

"He's fine. I just wanted to tell you that we're going to be away for a little while. I didn't want you to worry."

That was so like her, so Susan. He fought to keep his voice steady.

"Where are you going this time?"

"We're flying to Brazil." On Moneybags's private 727. "Monte has some business interests there."

"Really? I thought he owned the country."

"Stop it, Robert. Please."

"Sorry."

There was a pause. "I wish you sounded better."

"If you were here, I would."

"I want you to find someone wonderful and be happy."

"I did find someone wonderful, Susan."

The damned lump in his throat made it difficult for him to speak.

"And do you know what happened? I lost her."

"If you're going to do this, I won't call you again."

He was filled with sudden panic.

"Don't say that. Please." She was his lifeline. He could not bear the thought of never speaking to her again.

He tried to sound cheerful. "I'm going to go out and find some luscious blonde and screw us both to death."

"I want you to find someone."

"I promise."

"I'm concerned about you, darling."

"No need. I'm really fine." He almost gagged on his lie. If she only knew the truth. But it was nothing he could bring himself to discuss with anyone. Especially Susan. He could not bear the thought of her pity.

"I'll telephone you from Brazil," Susan said. There was a long silence. They could not let go of each other because there was too much to say, too many things that were better left unsaid, that had to be left unsaid.

"I have to go now, Robert."

"Susan?"

"Yes?"

"I love you, baby. I always will."

"I know. I love you too, Robert."

And that was the bittersweet irony of it. They still loved each other so much.

You two have the perfect marriage, all their friends used to say.

What had gone wrong?

Commander Robert Bellamy got out of bed and walked through the silent living room in his bare feet. The room screamed out Susan's absence.

There were dozens of photographs of Susan and himself scattered around, frozen moments in time. The two of them fishing in the Highlands of Scotland, standing in front of a Buddha near a That hlong, riding a carriage in the rain through the Borghese gardens in Rome. And in each picture, they were smiling and hugging, two people wildly in love.

He went into the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee.

The kitchen clock read 4:15 A.M. He hesitated a moment, then dialed a number. There were six rings, and finally he heard Admiral Whittaker's voice at the other end of the line.

"Hello."

"Admiral"

"Yes?"

"It's Robert. I'm terribly sorry to wake you, sir. I just had a rather strange phone call from the National Security Agency."

"The NSA? What did they want?"

"I don't know. I've been ordered to report to General Hilliard at oh six hundred."

There was a thoughtful silence.

"Perhaps you're being transferred there."

"I can't be. It doesn't make sense. Why would they?"

"It's obviously something urgent, Robert. Why don't you give me a call after the meeting?"

"I will. Thank you."

The connection was broken. I shouldn't have bothered the old man, Robert thought.

The admiral had retired as head of Naval Intelligence two years earlier.

Forced to retire, was more like it. The rumor was that as a sop, the

Navy had given him a little office somewhere and put him to work

counting barnacles on the mothball fleet, or some such shit. The

admiral would have no idea about current intelligence activities. But

he was Robert's mentor. He was closer to Robert than anyone in the

world, except, of course, Susan. And Robert had needed to talk to

someone. With Susan gone, he felt as though he were living in a time

warp. He fantasized that somewhere, in another dimension of time and

space, he and Susan were still happily married, laughing and carefree

and loving. Or maybe not, Robert thought wearily. Maybe I just don't

know when to let go.

The coffee was ready. It tasted bitter. He wondered whether the beans came from Brazil.

He carried the coffee cup into the bathroom and studied his image in the mirror. He was looking at a man in his early forties, tall and lean and

physically fit with a craggy face, a strong chin, black hair, and intelligent, probing dark eyes. There was a long, deep scar on his chest, a souvenir from the plane crash. But that was yesterday. That was Susan. This was today. Without Susan.

He shaved and showered and walked over to his clothes closet. What do I wear, he wondered, Navy uniform or civilian clothes? And on the other hand, who gives a damn?

He put on a charcoal gray suit, a white shirt, and a gray silk tie. He knew very little about the National Security Agency, only that the Puzzle Palace, as it was nicknamed, superseded all other American intelligence agencies and was the most secretive of them all. What do they want with me? I'll soon find out.

The National Security Agency is hidden discreetly away on eighty-two rambling acres at Fort Meade, Maryland, in two buildings that together are twice the size of the CIA complex in Langley, Virginia.

The agency, created to give technical support to protect United States communications and acquire worldwide electronic intelligence data, employs thousands of people, and so much information is generated by its operations that it shreds more than forty tons of documents every day.

It was still dark when Commander Robert Bellamy arrived at the first gate. He drove up to an eight-foot-high Cyclone fence with a topping of