

CHAPTER ONE

DISSOLVING REPUBLIC

The deal brokered by Chandler Scott dissolved after two months. Cyber warfare returned to the nation with the capital city of Washington, D.C. being the epicenter.

Omni often shouldered blame for any cyber attack not assignable to an individual hacker or an organization. Omni was the infamous hacker group responsible for cyber-attacks on businesses and governments. The authorities could not figure out who they were or where they came from. This proved almost inconceivable, given how much the National Security Agency (NSA) and other agencies sampled and collected a plethora of digital data.

Omni proved themselves a benevolent group. They could come to the rescue of organizations held hostage by cyber crooks placing ransomware on their devices. Ransomware was a malware preventing users from accessing their system. They also knocked down web sites of Middle Eastern terror organizations. They could also disable an airline reservation system to settle an employee's grievance. Omni operated by its own set of rules and had become an enigma, friend to some and foe to others.

There were other culprits such as the Five Tribes and various cyber terrorists without affiliation. Identifying suspects in cyberspace proved a challenging endeavor.

Fighting cyber mayhem were domestic cyber counter-terror organizations of the United States government such as the NSA, United States Cyber Command and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Both hackers and government blamed the other for ending the "cease fire" brokered by journalist, Chandler Scott. Government counter-terror agencies stabilized the capital so the business of government could continue.

The Convention of States organization prepared for a new Article V convention in Dallas, Texas after hackers, some reputed to have domestic intelligence roots, disrupted the prior year's convention in Winter Park, Colorado. Former President Benjamin Jefferson's convention appearance didn't help either. Many viewed his abduction in Colorado and safe return as a political stunt designed to enhance his chances of reelection in the House. Chandler, as an unfortunate hostage, had his own doubts. Spending extended time with Jefferson, however, convinced him the abduction was no stunt. The abduction showed how far technology had advanced that a group like the Five Tribes could thwart presidential security — it was asymmetric warfare at its best.

In the final days of the Jefferson presidency, there was a mass resignation of his cabinet. Former Secretary of Defense Trent Carter spearheaded this effort. Carter attempted to mobilize a 25th Amendment removal of former President Jefferson on grounds of mental instability — he felt Jefferson's secessionist sympathies resulted from Stockholm Syndrome affliction during captivity by the Five Tribes.

When Carter realized his presidential removal efforts resulted in failure, he resigned his position as secretary. That did not mean he'd resigned from being influential within the current military and intelligence establishment.

Carter, the patriot, saw his country slipping away and wanted to put an end to niceties extended to those who were speeding up the Union's dissolution. Carter operated in the shadows, thwarting President

Scarborough's attempted diplomacy with breakaway states. He had many adherents within the military and intelligence establishment, though only a few key players would defy their Commander-In-Chief.

Secession movements had matured to the point of regular communication with legal scholars and the Scarborough administration. As expected, many within government, including intelligence agencies, expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment afforded the movements by President Scarborough. The Cascadia movement that included northern California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, used the same name for their new country. Likewise, Cal Sí, which included southern California, Arizona and New Mexico, decided on Calxico for their name. Aristides Zamora established himself as primary spokesperson and negotiator for Calxico, and Justin Tremblay had done the same for Cascadia.

Lawmakers in the nation's capital, fearful of more defections, enacted legislation creating a Loyalty Board. The Loyalty Board had authority to work with the Financial Stability Board (FSB) to grant loyalty points to citizens who'd submit to greater invasions of privacy. These invasions comprised retinal scans for Internet access, vehicle trackers, DNA samples, monthly blood draws for disease detection, and reviews of social media posts.

The Loyalty Board used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to determine points awarded by culling massive amounts of data from those willing to expose themselves to further government scrutiny. The Financial Stability Board would apply loyalty points to reduce individual or business financial reporting and grant tax credits. For those submitting to household monitoring, the FSB granted financial payouts.

The Loyalty Board conducted an aggressive social media campaign attempting to lower the common denominator — free money — to create a hive mind embracing increased authority. Loyalty Board measures became ensconced in the Plan for Prosperity (PFP), a campaign enacted by the Jefferson administration to give the nation economic hope — surveillance and scrutiny implied financial salvation.

Government also used data collected to predict secessionist tendencies. The plan was to use this data in recommending treatment in the form of reeducation.

Civil libertarians lamented how the promise of AI and technology made the country more susceptible to authority. It was a case of forced transparency for individuals and opacity for the State.

AI and the Internet made some people eschew technology altogether. These people looked to secure places of refuge, somewhere the government apparatus couldn't reach them, yet it was difficult to operate in a world devoid of technology.

The President of the United States (POTUS), Alicia Scarborough, juggled many balls and she could afford to drop none. With the nation economically teetering and politically fracturing, perhaps at no time in America's history was hope required to such a profound extent.

Chandler Scott, a journalist with independent news organization Veritas, would thrust himself into the fray once again.