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BIRTH
OF A
REMNANT

TRIBULATION CULT BOOK 2:
A NOVEL



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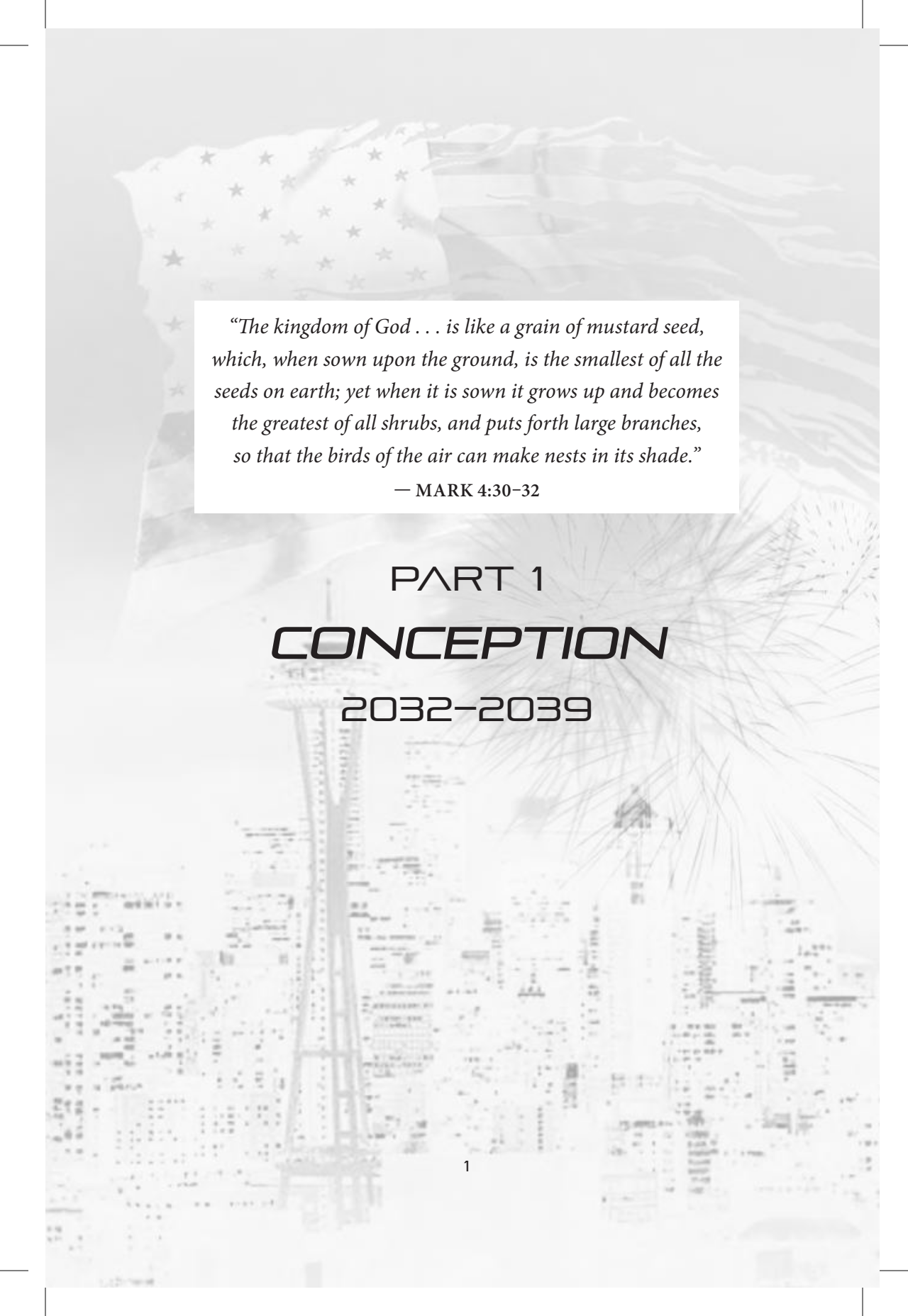
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*“The kingdom of God . . . is like a grain of mustard seed,
which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the
seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes
the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

— MARK 4:30–32

PART 1
CONCEPTION
2032–2039

PALLADIUM
IN THE OVAL OFFICE
OCTOBER 2033

WHEN NEW president Xavier Pérez named Akilah Samara, granddaughter of liberal financier Viktor Domokos, his new vice president in the second week of October of 2033, no one watching the televised announcement on the large screen at the Roswell estate in Mira Monte, California, was surprised. They had orchestrated the selection in highly confidential meetings with Pérez days after his swearing in.

The news media and entire country was still reeling from the events of the past ten days. No one was quite sure what to call the late president Adriana Carmella Hunt's death less than a year after her election. *Assassination* was the correct technical term. It had only been used previously, however, for the four US presidents who had died from gunshot wounds. It sounded peculiar to use the word for poisoning. *Murder* carried the subtle suggestion of organized crime or a gang hit. That didn't feel quite right either. But all three terms, used by pundits and commentators interchangeably, got the point across. She was dead, and after her state funeral, the country was trying to move on.

None of Palladium's members gathered at Mira Monte knew who had poisoned Pérez's predecessor. Even behind closed doors, they didn't allow themselves to go so far as to openly celebrate, though their toasts to the new president following his speech were buoyantly optimistic if not downright jovial.

Whoever was responsible had their undying gratitude. They could not have foreseen a more propitious series of events had they orchestrated ACH's demise themselves. Suddenly one of their own was sitting in the Oval Office. Pérez's most pressing immediate decision was whether to reinstate the name *White House* and repaint it and, while the painters were busy, strip off the hideous black paint and redo the Washington Monument according to its original design. That would also entail removing the Martin Luther King signs and shrine. BLM would probably instigate riots if he tried it.

One of their number, seeing events unfold, was not thinking of the crime so much as the potential opportunity. He and centuries of his forebears had been watching the West for signs of weakness. Though his grandfather had immigrated to the United States after the Second World War, and he and his father were natural born American citizens, their ancient loyalties were ever vigilant . . . watching . . . waiting. A moment would come. They could not predict when, but they must be ready. His father's bold and controversial vision to infiltrate the progressive movement was slowly and inexorably proving as prophetic as he had foreseen.

Sonrab Bahram realized that it was time he instituted more determined moves to get his son, Hamad, into Palladium's membership. Hamad was slowly making a name for himself at Harvard. But Sonrab must get him into this select circle where world events were secretly forged, just as his father, Nasim, one of Palladium's earliest members, had paved the way for his own elevation within the organization. It was the stepping stone. Who could tell? Perhaps it would be *his* son who would rise to the pinnacle.

He was sixty-five, thought Sonrab—old enough to think seriously about his legacy . . . and his son's. Hamad would carry the future of their cause on his shoulders. He needed the full weight of Palladium at his disposal to enable him to do so.

Sonrab reflected another moment. He would talk to Loring Bardolf at his earliest opportunity.

Meanwhile the FBI had no fewer than two hundred agents assigned to the assassination though they still had nothing solid to go

on. Fingerprints, surveillance footage, a hot line fielding a thousand calls a day—nothing had turned up a single substantial lead. That the president was seen descending the stairs out of Air Force One with nothing in her hands but was seen holding the tainted water bottle when leaving the limousine, to walk through the crowd into the park, was the great unsolved mystery. Where had the bottle come from, and when? Never had such an insignificant item been the subject of such a thorough analysis. But every lab test known to man had revealed nothing other than the late president's fingerprints, and the presence of the rare poison homobatrachotoxin mixed with nondescript bottled water.

In the weeks that followed, FBI director Greg Telford, a Palladium voting member, said all the right things in nightly appearances on the network news programs—that whoever was responsible for the heinous crime, whether a single individual or a conspiracy, would be brought to justice, that the vast resources of the FBI would leave no stone unturned, that the manhunt for the perpetrator or perpetrators would not stop until the assassin, *or* murderer—he adjusted his terms as seemed appropriate—was apprehended.

Behind closed doors, though in public he maintained his stern and determined FBI persona, neither Telford nor his fellows among the seventy-two were especially anxious for the case to be solved. One never knew what worms might come to light if too many lids were pried off too many cans that lay comfortably hidden in darkness.

Palladium's League of Seven and their closest associates were discussing several misinformation options to make sure nothing pointed in *their* direction—though who could tell? Their concocted stories *might* be true. That hardly mattered. The public could easily be made to believe any of the three.

The simplest scenario was to let everything fade unsolved into the past, to be debated ever after along with the Kennedy assassination. The only drawback was that uncertainty left open the possibility of some ambitious reporter digging up something that might not be advantageous to the organization. Even if they had no hand in the thing, they didn't like surprises.

Better to control the narrative. A rumored foreign conspiracy involving the usual suspects—Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea—would fit the bill nicely. Better yet, all four countries together. The public would love that. The case would remain unsolved of course. But the rumor would keep conspiracy buffs looking offshore—assisted by a barrage of vague evidence they would set circulating in the conspiracy networks.

The third option might actually prove the most useful—killing two birds with one stone, as it were. That would be to pin it on right-wing Christians, some militia group, or the Trumpites. Or again, all three—a consortium of treasonous kooks. Advance the cause and solve ACH's murder in one fell swoop.

They could also set a match again to the 2018 Russian collusion scandal, implicating the next generation of Trumps in league with Vladimir Putin's daughter, Katerina, in an attempt to reinstate the rumored Trump/Putin alliance in Washington and Moscow. It was the kind of thing the public couldn't get enough of. They might even be able to orchestrate the arrest of Don Jr., Ivanka, Tiffany, Eric, and Barron in the bargain! The conspiracy of all conspiracies.

With his face suddenly one of the most recognized in America, the FBI director would not be visiting Mira Monte anytime soon. What Palladium feared more than anything was the spotlight. For the foreseeable future, Greg Telford's contacts with his clandestine colleagues, however their plans developed, would be carried out through multiple layers of secrecy.

His frequent meetings with Secret Service Director Erin Parva, understandable given her role in the events at Patterson Park, provided a natural conduit for information to flow in both directions through the Palladium pipeline without raising inquisitive eyebrows.

In spite of their affiliation, Telford's discussions with President Pérez in the Oval Office remained formal and detached. Listening ears were everywhere.