Pacing around the room, arms crossed below his chest, the man struggles to hear everything going on in the tightly packed room around him. The long table that is the centerpiece to the room is surrounded by more than a dozen men, some talking to each other, more than one trying to talk to everyone at once. Stacks of papers are piled all across the table, pens strewn about like driftwood on the lakeshore. Even in all the noise, he can still follow most of the conversations, a gift or a curse depending on how he felt at the moment.

“...our action might undermine our alliance. On September the 4th you said: “There is no evidence of any organized combat force”...”

The man looks up as his recent words, words that have haunted his dreams, are tossed carelessly about. Pausing at the fireplace, he absentmindedly toys with the model of a ship, one of several in the room.

“...these plans are based on one very important assumption: that we would attack with conventional weapons against an enemy who is not equipped with nuclear weapons. If there is any possibility the enemy is equipped with operational nuclear weapons...very limited air strikes against very limited targets would be quite inconclusive...”

Leaning over the back of a chair, the consequences of these actions sink in, weighing heavily on his soul. He starts pacing again almost immediately, hoping the slight physical effort will provide some distraction.

“...argument against the blockade, is that it’s a very slow death. It builds up over a period of months and during that period of time you get all these people yelling and screaming...”

This prompts an immediate response from the man to the room. “A blockade wouldn’t be sufficient, he could go on developing the things he’s got there. And we don’t know how much he’s got there.”

Silence engulfs the room. Pensive stares grow from each person’s eyes, passing slowly across the faces of the others seated at the table. They all know the truth of this statement, and the finality of the results.
“…a strike, without preliminary discussion…”

Disastrous, the man thinks. There can’t be any good way to manage this, but deep down he still feels as if diplomacy should be explored more. It’s in his nature.

“…I think that the price is going to be high. It may still be worth paying to eliminate the missiles. But I think we must assume it is going to be high…”

Deep in conversation, his brother looks up and gives him a sympathetic glance, knowing that the decisions made at this table tonight have the potential to change the face of the world. Continuing on his trip around the room, the man answers questions, asks his own, and struggles with putting it all together. As if timed for just that moment, the room falls silent as he stops at the head of the table. All eyes turn on him, expectantly. The only noise in the room is the hum of the air conditioner and, probably imagined, the clicking of the reels from the tape recorder only two men knew to be running.

“Gentlemen,” he says. “Legally the only way we can proceed with any of these actions is with a declaration of war. Our allies will not stand for it otherwise. Therefore I find that I must agree with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and push for a full-scale invasion of Cuba and the overthrow of Castro. May God have mercy on my soul.”
Gabriel lay on the corrugated table, straps encircling his ankles, wrists, chest, and neck, his entire body immobilized. His eyes were open but vacant, the level of his consciousness monitored and maintained by the array of wires and tubes attached to him. A young woman with satiny shoulder-length honey blonde hair stood next to him, making notes on a chart attached to a metal hospital clipboard. On the wall opposite Gabriel, a thin LCD television was attached to a bracket, a green cable running out the back of it and up into the ceiling. Behind him, the cable exited the ceiling and fed into the rear of a digital video recorder. The front of the recorder had a readout that showed the date and time. The date and time, however, were not the current date and time; they were flashing backward and forward through dates and times in the past, the images shown on the display across the room flashing backward and forward as well. And those images were coming from Gabriel’s mind.

Looking up from her clipboard, Amanda walked toward the wall to her right, her movements targeting the window at its center. Through the window she could see Dr. Martin, his tired eyes poring over the readouts spitting from the printers and the images on the small screens in the control console. After standing there for a moment, tapping her foot in a show of impatience, Amanda finally knocked on the window to get his attention. Looking up, Dr. Martin saw her through the window and smiled. Flipping a switch in the console, a burst of static issued from a speaker over her head followed by his gentle though slightly distorted voice.

“How are we looking, Amanda?” he asked

“Really good, Xavier. Gabriel seems to have had no problem connecting this time.” Turning around she glanced at him before speaking again. “I’m not really sure what happened with the last program run but this one is golden”

Xavier rubbed his chin thoughtfully, the days-old stubble scratching beneath his fingertips. “I ran through all the diagnostic programs multiple
times and never found anything out of spec.”

“What about the interviews with Gabriel? Did he have any ideas about what happened?” Amanda asked.

“Actually, I think it’s what he didn’t say that may be more important.” Xavier furrowed his brow, as if caught somewhere between deep thought and anger. “I have a strong feeling that he wasn’t telling me everything about that session.”

Amanda walked back toward Gabriel, setting her clipboard down on a tray. Moving slowly around him, she checked each connection for what seemed like the hundredth time. Satisfied they were stable, she moved to the head of the table. Reaching out her hand she brushed his dark brown hair away from his forehead and looked into his emerald-green eyes.

“It’s a shame we can’t pry the information out of him while he’s like this.” Kissing him on the forehead, she smiled. “Maybe I can get it out of him later.”

Dr. Martin chuckled and switched off the intercom, still looking through the window at Gabriel. That one man represented more than anyone but a few people in the world could imagine and was the culmination of his life’s work.
“I think he’s coming around,” Amanda said. Laying her hand on his forehead, she anxiously waited to see what he came back with this time.

As his eyes slowly opened, Gabriel felt surrounded by a bright cottony gauze. When he became acclimated to the light, he could see that he was still in the lab, Amanda leaning over his body.

“You’re invading my personal space again,” he croaked, the dryness in his voice making his voice rough. “Am I going to have to file a harassment suit to get this to stop?”

“Shut it, you,” she replied, slapping him lightly on his stomach. She undid the straps holding him down and slowly raised the table so he was sitting up. “Have some water before you attract all the frogs in the forest.”

Chuckling, Gabriel sipped at the ice water she handed him, relishing the coolness spreading down his throat. They hadn’t been able to figure out why the procedure was dehydrating yet but it was a minor annoyance.

As he was finishing the glass and looking expectantly at Amanda for a refill, the door opened and Dr. Martin walked in, clipboard in hand and a smile on his face.

“So what’s the big secret Gabriel? What is this mystery event you wanted to tap into today?”

“As you both know, General Alexander has been running me through some test sessions of his own. That man never does anything without a purpose, and it’s become increasingly obvious to me that he’s on to something major. At least he thinks he is.”

A small coughing fit erupted, and Gabriel stopped to drink some more water. When he seemed back to normal, he continued.

“He’s had me poking around some pretty significant events in the last fifty years or so, things that we, as a project team, agreed would be too detrimental to go fiddling around with. The last session we ran yesterday afternoon was too much to ignore, even as just an observer. I had to go back and see again just what he might be trying to mess with. And I think I found it.”
Dr. Martin was deep in thought, the worry inside of him pinching his features as he listened. Amanda held Gabriel’s hands in her own, absentmindedly stroking the backs of them as she listened. Dr. Martin was the first to reply.

“I assume you went in as more than an observer this time, then”, half-question, half-statement.

“Correct. After yesterday’s session I replayed the recordings to see what specific changes he might be trying to influence. After a bit of analysis I narrowed it down to one thing, fairly obvious, as always, once the pieces were put together.”

“So why, exactly, did he stick you not just in the White House Cabinet Room in the middle of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but in the President himself?”

“Well, Amanda, think of it this way - what happened that day was one of the most pivotal points in not only U.S. but world history. The decisions made in that room in those final days kept us from a potential worldwide nuclear war. And General Alexander seemed determined to push things in that direction.”

Dr. Martin was now pacing around the room. It reminded Gabriel of President Kennedy pacing around the Cabinet Room as the decisions swam around in his mind. He suppressed a grin as Dr. Martin crossed his arms across his chest, in an unknowing pantomime of the late President. His face tight in thought that transformed to anger, he stopped pacing and faced the two of them.

“Gabriel, how certain are you of his goal to push things that far? Do you think he would really want to force a war or is there something else beneath his actions that we just can’t see?”

“I’ve thought about that a lot, most of the day yesterday and as events unfolded in this last run. I’d like to think we’ve learned from this program so far that people can’t be forced into decisions or actions that they wouldn’t make of their own accord, just nudged in one direction or
another. Declaring war on Cuba and, for all intents and purposes, a de facto war on the U.S.S.R., doesn’t necessarily mean an all-out nuclear battle. Historians have discussed this many times and several feel Kennedy would have eventually caved in anyways. I think the general is after what would the end result be if that were to happen.”

Now it was Gabriel’s turn to shuffle around the room. Walking over to the computer on the corner desk, he logged in to the monitoring system and starting scanning through the timestamps from the most recent run. Pointing at a prominent spike amidst the different wave patterns, he said “This is where it was. Up until this point I was just observing, as I did yesterday. This is where the general coached me to suggest the change in the time stream. Everything from this point on is post-change. We’d need to run this out longer to see anything for certain, but you can tell just from this graph that the outcome was substantially altered.”

He let his fingers trace across the screen as he continued the playback, noting the increased level in the waveform and the fact that it remained above the peak level until they dropped the connection about a minute later.

Amanda shook her head, her reticence obvious. “We’ve never gone that far into a stream before, Gabriel. I’m not even sure if it’s possible to carry something out to that much of an extreme. Dr. Martin, what do you think? The only thing I can think of that even comes close is the time we tried to keep your niece from meeting Tim, just to see if we could do it.”

An evil little smirk crept up on his face. “Yeah, I remember how mad Elizabeth was when she found out. Never could take a joke, just like her mother.”

Gabriel was still looking over the results when a voice emitted from a speaker in the ceiling.

“Dr. Martin, please report to General Alexander’s office. Dr. Martin, please report to General Alexander’s office.”

After a deep sigh, Dr. Martin started towards the lab door. “I’d like the
two of you to go over the data again. See what you can find that we can use. If we can make it work and push things further on the timeline it might give us a better idea as to what he is up to. I doubt he’s ahead of us on the science on this one which means he knows, or thinks he knows, something we don’t. We can’t afford any surprises, especially ones that we can’t correct.”

“Sounds good, Doc. Amanda and I can tear this last run to pieces and see how it lines up with what he was pushing me on yesterday.”

“Great. And please, for the last time, stop calling me that!”
Normally Dr. Martin would force the general to meet in his office; he preferred keeping things on his terms as much as possible, and the general was a little too territorial inside his own space. With the discoveries they had just made, though, he didn’t want to push any of his buttons at the moment. His concessions ended there, though, and he simply walked into General Alexander’s office, not bothering to knock.

“You were looking for me? At least, I’m pretty sure that’s what the entire facility would say.”

The general stared at him, obviously not amused, and Xavier caring not at all. “As a matter of fact, yes. I wanted to discuss the results for the last few days. I was hoping you could explain to me how we can have so many successful operations and yet the project is still sitting in an at-risk state.”

“As you know, sir,” said with just the right amount of snarkiness, “we have three parallel tracks running in this project. The main track focuses on our prime candidate Gabriel, and the secondary track focuses on our additional subjects. Both of these are critical to the ongoing success of the project. The third track, the Regenesis program, isn’t as impactful since it’s primary focus is, by design, a long-term view. Gabriel is doing well, but the other two tracks are not as positive. Consequently, the project health is brought down.”

Smoke from his cigar curling around his shaved head, General Alexander leaned in closer to his desk, resting his arms on the surface. “Let’s talk about Regenesis for a minute. Gabriel was part of the Genesis program for this project, and it took surprisingly little time and research to come up with this product. So why is it that we are not able to apply the exact same research to replicate it?”

Dr. Martin removed his glasses, rubbing his eyes in a cliche but necessary move. “The basic answer to that question is that we got lucky the first time around, extremely lucky. Once we understood the mechanics and physics behind what we wanted to do, it was a fairly rudimentary process to work out the subjects we would need. Finding them was
difficult but not impossible. It wasn’t until we had our first successful candidate in Gabriel that we realized there were other factors that we had not accounted for.”

General Alexander slammed his hand down on his desk. “I don’t care about the details, dammit! I want to see results and I want them now.”

In a slow, practiced move, Dr. Martin folded his glasses and slipped them into his lab coat pocket. “It’s the details that matter, as we’ve discussed many times over. This is like baking a cake, having it be the most perfect cake ever made, and then realizing afterwards that you bumped your spice rack and added five or six things you didn’t know about. For us we have to isolate what the missing factors are before we can replicate it. Even then, it will be at least a decade from inception until development is far enough along to be usable. After all, we’ve had Gabriel from infancy and his full potential wasn’t realized until he was thirteen.”

His irritation obviously growing, General Alexander stood up behind his desk and leaned over it, pushing his face nearly into Xavier’s. Not one to be bullied, Xavier held his ground and waited for the next tirade to erupt. Instead what he got was something far more worrisome.

“I want you to restart the sideline experiments that were part of the original Regenesis program. You have been under my oversight in what has been largely treated as a private enterprise under government contract. However, your little enterprise was just bought out. You are now officially a black government program, which means whether you like it or not you now take direct orders from me. And, because the oversight for this program falls under the directorate of the CIA, you have no choice but to move forward as ordered.”

This did actually cause Xavier to flinch. Losing complete control seemed inevitable; they had worked out a way to keep it from swallowing them up completely. Restarting the experimentation was not something he expected to happen, though.

“You can’t be serious, General”, renewed but false deference in his
voice. “The survival rate on those experiments was measured in single
digits. We can’t go back to that level again.”

“You can and you will, Dr. Martin. You will have plenty of volunteers;
who and from where need not concern you. Believe me, the possibility of
this being a success to them will be much better than their other options in
life.”
Xavier stretched his arms over his head as he headed back to the lab. Outside involvement was something he expected at some point, just not so soon. And the CIA? Ugh. They were bothersome in the past with programs that weren’t close to his heart. For them to take over something he had worked on for over twenty years was painful to say the least. As he approached the lab he could hear heated voices from within; Gabriel and Amanda were definitely excited about something.

“…but you can see right here where this skewed off the last time we tried that, Gabriel.”

Bent over the monitor in the corner, they both turned at the sound of the door.

“Doc, maybe you can settle this for us? I think we can move this timeline forward without risking any permanent alterations to it. Amanda…”

Cutting him off. “And I think that it’s too dangerous. If you look at the timeline feed from Gabe’s last session, the resets didn’t fully take. Which means something is already different.”

Xavier stopped cold. “What do you mean, ‘something is already different’? Did you find a specific change?”

“Not specific yet, no. We were waiting for you to get back.” Amanda was definitely flustered.

Picking up an iPad from a nearby table, Gabriel started sweeping his hands around on the screen. “When in doubt, Google it.” Curious, Amanda and Xavier moved closer so they could look over his shoulder. “The basis of the session was the transcripts from the hidden recordings in the Cabinet Room. So let’s take a look at them and see if they still sync up.”

Amanda shook her head slowly in amazement. “I still can’t get over how that works. It’s like we’re locked up in our own little bubble here.”

Gabriel chuckled as he was searching. “You do realize that’s why we nicknamed our ‘dome’ the Bubble, right? It basically locks us down in the
event that any accidental changes don’t wipe out the program and keep us from fixing it.”

“Be nice. Amanda wasn’t part of the installation and setup team and really hasn’t had much exposure to the tech of this place beyond the program. Heck, it even makes me a little dizzy to think about it at times and it’s my invention!”

“Found it. Ok, here’s the point in the transcript that I made my play.” He tapped his finger on the screen and highlighted the text. “Oh boy.”

Amanda and Xavier leaned in closer, saying ‘What?’ at the same time. Gabriel highlighted the rest of the transcript, fairly short since he waited until near the end before doing anything. “Originally, Kennedy recommended for blockade. I pushed him to the invasion route and it seems those were the top two on his mind, so the push was simple. Here’s the problem; this part here, where there’s a measured pause after ‘proceed with’? That wasn’t there. That’s where the program should have whitewashed it back to normal.”

“That’s what I was trying to tell you before, Gabe. That peak is there on the session recording but not on the original recording. We expected that. What we didn’t expect is any kind of blip in that spot on the after-check. And look here.”

Gathering everyone back around the monitor Amanda called up the files for all three timelines, putting them on screen together and then overlaying the original and post-session timelines. “See? Right there. That aberration in the timeline shouldn’t be there, and I bet if we went right back in to sample the video and audio streams, you would hear the pause. A pause that is now a part of the known record outside this facility.”

Xavier paled at the sight of the data streams. “At this point, is it reparable?”

“Do we even dare try? Gabriel has been in there messing with that point for too long already, based on our guidelines.”

“Those guidelines just changed. General Alexander pulled the rug out
from under us in that meeting. We are now under the oversight of the CIA, which means we pretty much don’t exist. And that means that he can do anything that he wants to with little to no thought of repercussions.”

“I’d accuse you of joking but I know you’re not,” Gabriel said, shutting down the consoles around the room. Reaching up to the camera in the corner, he calmly pointed it to the ceiling. “What did he tell you?”

“He’s restarting Regenesis, only this time with zero regard to safety protocols. I imagine that means he’ll be bringing in prison inmates again, since some of our early work landed there before I refused to experiment any more. And he expects us to somehow clone you in a pretty damn hurry. If I didn’t know better I’d swear he was building an army, or trying to.”

That caught Gabriel’s attention. “You may not be far off there. If he’s restarting Regenesis he’s desperate. And if he’s desperate we will have a hard time keeping a rein on him. Guys, we have to stop this. If he has even a small group of top notch subjects he could do some serious damage, probably things we couldn’t put back.”

Amanda was shutting down more of the equipment. Turning to Gabriel and Xavier, she said “How could we possibly even stop him? There’s no telling what he’s already done even by now. We don’t have a lot of resources at our disposal.” Gabriel grinned. “Oh boy, I know that look. What plan is cooking in that hot little head of yours?”

“Doc, you’ve got contacts in the security team. If we can gather up as much material on the program as possible, do you think we could get it out of here? I have an idea of somebody that can help us but we have got to get out of this facility.”