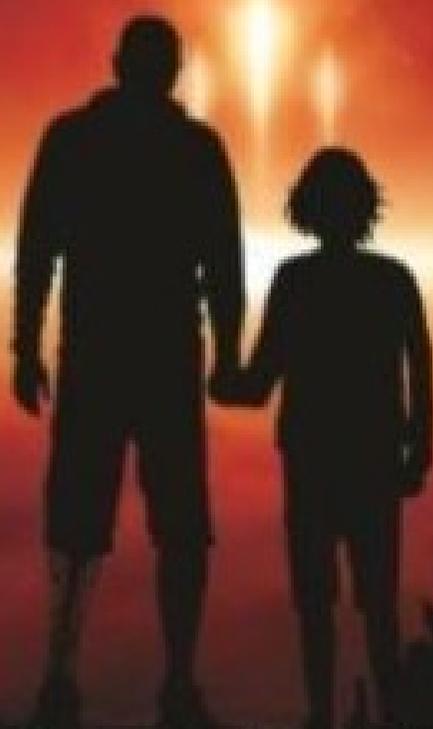


INTO ARMAGEDDON

by Jeff DeMarco



Ruler of Ashes Series – Book 1

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To my wife, without whom this would not be possible.

FOREWORD

Many thanks and my sincerest apologies to U.S. Military and government employees, of whom I've cast both protagonist's and antagonists within the novel. Quick disclaimer: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

I've cast certain characters to be angry, violent, addicted, misguided, arrogant, abusive and downright treasonous. I don't personally know of any such polarizing characters in real life (thank goodness, my life is much less exciting). Furthermore, during my time in the military, I had the honor of serving with some of the finest individuals this country has ever known... but this novel isn't a memoir.

At the end of the day, my characters are all just human (or close to it) and for the sake of the story- their attributes, subversive organizations or actions were necessary to support a particular character arc. Furthermore, the novel is set in the near future as opposed to the present, so fingers crossed that none of this comes to pass.

Additionally, instead of using the standard scene break, I've opted to create a unique icon for all major characters. In the event that a character's entrance into a scene is to be a surprise, I've left their icon off the scene break.

Happy Reading!

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PROLOGUE



Crimson blood pooled outside the threshold, soaking into the dirty grey snow. A blast echoed through the corridor, slamming the metal door against the concrete wall. Seven men in winter camouflage stormed the building, their faces covered with white masks and goggles.

A guard lay lifeless two feet from the door; his chest torn open, exposing the ribs beneath. Blood poured from the fresh corpse and covered the floor. They moved to the stairs, stepping over mangled bodies through the flashing red light. The point-man came to a corner and stopped. He felt the tap on his arm and his suppressor swung into the breach.

Without sound, they moved as one down the stairs to the second level, then down a black corridor. Talons scraped and clicked against the metal floor. It waited for them in darkness. Muffled shots, the contorted flesh dropped to the floor... dead silence.

They wove through a maze of passageways, until they found it. The rear man moved to the front, slamming a battering ram against the door. "Reinforced," his voice muffled through the mask. He pulled a lump from his cargo pocket, slapping it beside the handle. He set the timer for five seconds and ducked behind a corner. Dust filled the room with a crash, slamming the door open.

"Ne strelyat," they pleaded. "Don't shoot". They moved through a haze of smoke, looking into each face. They lined the rest up, hands bound and on their knees. Muffled shots, as blood spread rapidly into white lab coats.

A man keyed the microphone, banded around his neck. "Control, this is Alpha 1, target acquired."



Restrained to a metal folding chair, the Doctor sat in darkness. He felt a chill go up his spine... a fleeting confidence that he would be unharmed. 'Maybe they'll kill me,' he hoped.

"Let me get that for you," a man said. He cut through the restraints and pulled the hood off. "Dr. Bariac?"

The Doctor nodded. His eyes were tired, heavy with stress.

The man slapped his thigh. "Thank God for that!" His face grew into a wide toothy grin. "I'd hate to think we just liberated the wrong man." He had a self-assured air about him. He wore a tailored grey suit under a black overcoat,

dark brown hair, wisps of grey, combed to one side and darker eyes, set back deep in their sockets.

He rubbed the raw skin of his wrists. "You mean kidnapped..."

"See, that's where you're wrong..." The man said. "Semantically anyway. The Russians kidnapped you. We're Americans. We don't kidnap... we liberate."

The Doctors face soured. "What's this all about?"

The man cocked his leg up on the empty chair. "I run a modest, research facility back in the US... I understand you're doing some really cutting-edge work with genetic modification. I'd like you to work for me."

Dr. Bariac eyed him. "You say that as if I had a choice."

The man pulled out his phone and scrolled through different screens. "Do you know what this is?"

The Doctor examined the photo. "A vial... something red in it, blood perhaps."

"Close... It's biological material."

"Human?"

"Not quite..." The man put his phone back in his pocket. "The Russians didn't give you a choice. I'm not like that... I'll put it to you this way. Behind door number one, access to a private lab, assistants, good pay, benefits and the sweet freedom of American citizenship. Behind door number two... well... you don't really want to go through door number two."

The Doctor's face slacked, realizing the futility of argument. "When do we leave?"

"That's the spirit!" The man reached his hand out with a grin. "I'm Director James Flynn; welcome to the team."



"What do you think of the world today?" she asked.

Airforce Lieutenant Colonel, Clark Petersen sat, rapping his fingers against the desk, thinking about the woman's question. In his early 40's, he had dark hair with wisps of grey at the temples, sharp, off-putting features. A sharp nose and chin, chiseled jawline. His eyes were piercing. He was assigned to Washington D.C. as a strategic forces planner. He had met the woman at his Church of all places. Her question was one in a series of odd philosophical conversations that had occurred over the last three months.

She introduced herself only as ‘Vivian.’ She was a career politician, a senator at the time. Not difficult for him to research. She was in consideration for appointment to the president’s cabinet, but now she sat before him in an empty coffee shop in D.C., discussing God’s will.

“Rrap.. rrap.. rrap..,” His fingers beat against the desk. “Humanity doesn’t deserve the life and grace it’s been granted.” His tone was grave. “Legalized abortions, gays getting married, children confused about their gender and going into schools shooting each other. The traditional family is gone, drug use rampant... legal even. We’ve been at war for the last two decades and no one even notices. It’s like it doesn’t matter. Life doesn’t matter.”

The hint of a smile curled at the edges of her mouth. “Are you saying it’s corrupt?”

“Yes,” he said. “And what’s more, the ones left in the world that are good, are incapable of doing anything about it. So much as speak a word of dissenting, you’re immediately labelled a racist or a bigot... chastised. Your career, your life, ruined.”

Her eyes narrowed on him. “What if you were offered the chance to do something about it? The chance to make the world right again?”

His face near panic at the proposition. “I’d do anything.”

She smiled at him, a look both benevolent and malevolent in her eyes. “Your world is about to get a lot bigger.” She opened her briefcase and slid a coin across the table.

He looked down at the silver, a sword, surrounded by stars. He thought of the book of Revelation, ‘In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double edged sword.’ “What’s this?”

“Your invitation... to make the world a better place for us.”



I’ve never met God, but I came pretty close once. When I was little, I thought my parents were gods. They weren’t, but it didn’t matter. My mother gave birth to me. Together, they created me. Is that close enough, I wonder? Probably not.

God created the heavens and earth, depending on what you choose to believe. I’ve heard most everyone’s take on the matter. ‘He’s everywhere.’ ‘He doesn’t exist.’ ‘He’s up in the sky somewhere.’ ‘He’s in all of us.’ ‘His plan sucks...’ my grandpa said that once. Whatever the case, there are a lot of opinions out there, yet no one’s actually met him. It’s anyone’s guess why folks try to fill

that void in their life. People talk to me a lot, ask questions. I don't know why. I guess they think I have the answers. I don't, but I try to point them in the right direction.

I wish things hadn't happened the way they did, but I can't change it. I guess if I could, I would've never been born. My parents used to tell me that's the reason why "they wouldn't change a thing." My dad told me 'once' I was a mother, I'd understand. (I told him 'if.') I've never created anything, not like my parents. *They* were something special. I hadn't been born yet, but I remember everything. Everything they let me see, anyhow. This is where the story of my parents began.