

## The Sun Shall Be Darkened

“Mr. President, I’m no expert on Volynsky’s wild theories. I’m not sure what he believes is happening to our planet, but I’ll tell you what I know about science.” John Holden turned, sat down on one of the comfortable plush sofas. He gripped his briefcase in front of him like a shield—not happy to be in the Oval office.

The president sat behind the large, highly polished Resolute Desk, the most famous desk in the world. He leaned back in his chair, steepled his fingers together in front of his face. “Oh, come on John, you have a degree in plasma physics. You teach this stuff.”

John was here at the president’s command. Ordinarily, as the senior science advisor on the president’s cabinet, he would have been happy to have his ear. He enjoyed the times when he could explain some promising state-of-the-art technology that needed development funds.

“No, I teach real science,” John said. “What Volynsky bandies about is pseudo-science. It sounds like science but it’s not based on empirical evidence. He made it up from stories he found in old religious texts and obscure ancient history.”

John pulled at his too tight collar. He didn’t like talking about things every scientist he knew had already debunked. He had been asked by the President of the United State if what Manny Volynsky’s said in his speech to the annual Astronomical Society conference last night in Washington, D.C. could really happen.

The president's hands slapped the desk. "Well, give it to me in a nutshell," President Sanchez said, "I'm meeting with Manny in ten minutes. I need to know if the man knows what he's talking about. He's got the whole world believing he has the answers."

John let his breath out slowly. "Manny is an advocate of the Electric Universe model."

"The what?"

John gritted his teeth. "It's an alternative theory about how the universe works. It mainly suggests that everything is connected by plasma – an electric stream of energy. Of course we know that gravity is the driving force behind everything in the known universe."

"How does that explain what's happening with the sun?" President Sanchez said, his black eyes focused on John's face making John squirm.

"One of the strangest theories to come out of their model is the idea that the sun is not thermonuclear. That's contrary to everything we know about how the sun operates."

"Then how—"

"They say the sun is powered by electromagnetic energy from another source, outside of our solar system." John couldn't believe he was spewing this stuff.

"What other source?"

"Well, that's the strange part. They call them galactic currents."

"Galactic currents..." President Sanchez stifled a laugh behind a cough. "I've never heard anything so bizarre in all my life."

Neither had John, yet something about the old man's theories intrigued him. He wished he had six months to study the science behind the claims. But nobody had that kind of time.

John opened his briefcase and removed a sheet of paper with notes he'd taken last night.

"They say the currents explain the sunspot cycles. This rotating electric current flows through the spiral arms of the galaxy. It connects our sun to all the stars around us."

Now the president did laugh. "Oh, come on. You're making this stuff up."

"No, I'm not." John remembered his own reaction the first time he heard Manny try to deliver his lecture the previous year. He felt a twinge of regret that he hadn't really given the man a chance. He had been mostly responsible for having him thrown out.

"According to this theory, the plasma weakens and strengthens as it flows through the sun. We then have more or fewer sunspots, depending on the strength of the current."

"So, in other words," the president's face sobered, "you're saying the sun is just a big anode; a light bulb in the sky." He thought for a minute, then pushed back from his desk to pace..

"What's to prevent the power from being switched off someday?"

"See, that's the thing." John could see the eye rolls of his old professors at M.I.T.

"Conceivably, and again this is all theoretical, the sun could slip out of the path of one of these filaments for a little while. Then it would stop giving light."

President Sanchez stopped pacing to stare out the windows overlooking the back White House lawn, his back turned away from John. "Is that what happened a few weeks ago?"

"Mr. President?"

"You know, when the sun went dark for a few hours, just before they found that comet or planet or whatever it is that's coming at us."

"Oh, that." John squirmed again. "Um, well, we're still not sure what caused that. We've been analyzing data that we just got back from the STEREO and SDO satellites."

The president looked at John a long time. Did he suspect something?

“For how long?”

“How long what?” John said.

“You said the sun could stop giving light. For how long?”

John smiled, relieved. “Nobody knows. Maybe a few days to a few weeks. Could be months. That’s the problem with these theories. They have no history to back them up.”

“The earth won’t survive without the sun. It would freeze in just a few weeks.”

“Not if there were some other source nearby to heat it up.”

President Sanchez turned to face John, his expression incredulous. “Now what the hell are you talking about?”

John moved to the edge of the sofa, placed his briefcase on the floor. What he was about to say went against every principle of science he’d ever studied, against all his beliefs. He gulped in a huge breath like it could be his last and let it out slowly.

“The planet that’s almost here, Mr. President... Again, this is all according to the theory of the Electric Universe. As the planet gets closer, it’s going to cause all kinds of shaking of the earth. There will be huge earthquakes and accelerated volcanic activity across the globe.”

“So this increased volcanic activity would keep the earth from freezing. It would offset the lack of sunlight that comes and goes. Have I got that right?”

“You got it. But there’s one more thing.”

The president pulled one of the wooden chairs from in front of the fireplace, placed it in front of John, sat so he could face him. “What’s that, John?”

John swallowed a big lump in his throat. “The moon.”

“What about it?”

“It’s also going to heat up. Big time.”

“Why?”

“Because of the approaching planet. According to the theory, when two large planetary bodies come close together, their electromagnetic fields begin to interact.”

“And that causes heat?”

“Inductive heat.” John felt a thrill at something that just popped into his head. “But you know what?”

The president’s eyes narrowed. “What?”

“The moon doesn’t have an atmosphere.”

“So?”

“So the moon will get so hot that it will glow.”

“Red hot?”

“It will be incandescent, like a light shining through rich red blood.”

President Sanchez looked frozen for a moment, shook his head back and forth, clasped his hands together in his lap until his knuckles turned white. He looked down and muttered to himself. “The sun shall be darkened and the moon turned to blood...”

“What’s that, Mr. President?” John said, curiosity burning inside.

“Nothing,” the president looked up. “Just remembering something I read somewhere, a long time ago. From the Bible I think.”

“Manny Volynsky is here to see you, Mr. President,” a secretary’s voice announced.

“Show him in.”