

STAR REVELATIONS

A NOVEL

STEVEN PAUL TERRY



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Steven Paul Terry/Hero Acts LLC
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Printed in the United States of America

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Star Revelations/Steven Paul Terry. -- 1st ed.
ISBN 9798761653856 Print Edition

To all the warriors of light in this world and others...
And to all who are on their way to becoming one...

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come,
From God, who is our home.

-Wordsworth

PROLOGUE

It is a future time in a distant world. A woman sits on an elegant chair arranged by a fountain in a courtyard surrounded by a sumptuous garden. She is dressed in a silvery robe and her long blonde hair lies draped over one shoulder. She appears to be in her mid-forties but is many years older, and those who know her consider her strikingly beautiful.

Birds and insects flutter among the blossoms. In the distance, majestic spacecraft streak silently through the sky. The ambiance is one of harmony and balance, between human and nature, between individual and society.

The woman knows that such peace and balance are not by accident, that nature itself is always in a state of entropy, that humans are disposed to fear and violence. But her people have learned how to rise to and maintain themselves at a higher level of being, above ignorance, greed, hypocrisy, vindictiveness, and prejudice. She knows there are dark forces within the galaxy keen on disrupting her kind's way of life and interrupting their message of faith and progression.

She is one of the chosen messengers of a special communications group called Secret Transmissions Allied Response (STAR). She receives telepathic messages through the chasm of time and space,

calls for help from a faraway planet named Earth, specifically from a group of people gathered at a place known to them as Mt. Shasta.

The messages are frantic and the distress they evoke is immediate and visceral.

Help us, there is a bomb...

Many will die...

We are waiting...

You are our liberator...

On her lap rests a small open book; as she receives these messages, she thinks of a response and its words appear on the blank pages.

The bifurcation of your world has begun...

Control and fear or Love and Freedom...

Dystopia or Utopia...

Your choice...

Part I
MESSAGES

CHAPTER ONE

Y*ou might think you know what I am doing, but it goes beyond anything you imagine. You don't know I am borrowed from another galaxy, from another time. I arrived shortly after you detonated the two atomic bombs in the middle of your last century. My work of infiltration, subversion, and transformation began immediately.*

The woman stumbled over the uneven ground, dazed, confused.

Thoughts trickled into her head.

Where am I? What is going on?

She realized there were cold, wet stones beneath her bare feet.

What happened to my shoes?

Through a veil of pain, she tried to discern what appeared around her, but her eyes couldn't focus in the dawn light because a fog blurred the details.

A chill poured over her skin, and when she hugged herself for warmth, she discovered that her clothes were ragged and torn. When she brought up one hand, she noticed blood smeared across her fingers.

She heard waves lapping against rocks. A humid mineral smell filled her nostrils.

The ocean?

She turned to the sound of the surf and saw, on the water's edge, a large, unusual formation of rocks, shaped like a pyramid. In the distance, past the rocks, she noticed a light shining through the mist. This light was also unusual in the way its reflection cast a strange trail of sparkles across the water.

What is that?

For a moment, she stared, transfixed, then realized she'd been holding something in her hand. As she brought the object closer to her eyes, she saw her bloody fingers gripping a small red book with a silver pinecone embossed on its cover.

She realized someone was behind her. The abrupt presence startled her, and she dropped the book. Just as she was about to turn around, the stranger said, "Get their attention before it's too late."



On the nightstand, a cell phone chirped and vibrated.

Diana Willis jolted awake. She groped for the phone. Through bleary eyes, she read the caller ID: Larry Reynolds. Senior Production Editor at West Coast Broadcasting. Her boss.

She glanced at the time: 5:01 AM.

Diana spent a moment trying to talk herself out of answering. She let her mind transition from last night's pleasant memories—a date with a Deutsche Bank investment manager, and way too much partying — to the harsh reality of another day at work.

She fumbled for the switch on the table lamp. In the abrupt glare of light, she blinked the sleepiness from her eyes and threw off the bedcovers. Sitting up, she drew her knees close and regarded the

phone as it kept chirping and buzzing. A call from Larry at this time of the morning spelled only one thing: *CRISIS STORY*.

Her thumb hit the phone's answer button.

"Hi, Larry, what's up?"

He blurted, "We've got a fire drill." Despite the urgency, Larry sounded upbeat. The man thrived on calamity.

"And?"

"Seven thirty AM meeting. You. Maggie. Gabe. My conference room."

Diana swung her legs off the bed. "Can I get a heads up?"

He laughed. "Not over the phone." That was his way of telling her the news was a red-hot emergency. So red hot he could only share it face to face.

Interesting. And maybe, just maybe, worth getting out of bed at such an ungodly hour.

"See you there," she said.

"Awesome." He clicked off.

Diana set her phone down. Her nose wrinkled as if she were a wolf sniffing distant prey. *Another hunt.*

She slept in an oversized t-shirt, which she peeled off on her way to the bathroom. Moments later, she slipped into exercise clothes and unrolled a yoga mat on the floor. She ordered, "Alexa, yoga routine twelve."

The little speaker on her nightstand answered. "Good morning, Diana. Yoga routine twelve."

The lights adjusted for mood and Alexa began guiding Diana through the routine's asanas and Pilates moves. When she held warrior's pose, the floor-to-ceiling window changed from opaque black,

like a sheet of obsidian, to transparent. From this vantage, thirty-six floors above street level, she watched the morning darkness fade away and the fog envelop the Golden Gate Bridge. Lights from the bridge and the pulsing arteries of traffic diffused through the diaphanous haze. Across the bay, dawn's bronzed illumination outlined the hills of Marin, and for a moment, the world hovered in that brief magical interlude between night and day.

After years of practice, Diana's morning ritual clicked with the precision of her favorite Rolex watch. At 5:35, flush with sweat, she had completed her morning exercise.

She said, "Alexa, shower. Regular temperature. Brew coffee."

"Shower started," Alexa answered. "And for coffee, latte, or regular?"

"Latte."

"Latte started."

From the kitchen, the overhead lights flickered on and the coffeemaker gurgled.

"Commute to West Coast Broadcasting?" Alexa asked.

"Yes. Six forty-five pick-up."

"Valet summoned. Your car will be waiting."

Diana returned to the bathroom and quickly jumped into the shower. By 6:05, she had dried and styled her hair, applied makeup, and was ready to get dressed. "Alexa," she asked, "what's the weather forecast?"

"Partly sunny. Current temperature, fifty-three degrees. High today, seventy degrees. No precipitation."

Thus informed, Diana padded into her bedroom-sized wardrobe closet, wasting not one movement, spending not more than one

second necessary in selecting and putting on her clothes, a suit-dress ensemble in navy blue with an ivory silk blouse and a scarf tie in regimental colors. Next, she headed into her shoe closet, itself the size of a bedroom, albeit smaller.

At 6:23, fully dressed and expertly coiffed, she walked into her kitchen, where a steaming latte waited. She sipped the latte for the caffeine kick, then munched on a fresh banana and downed a fruit-protein smoothie. As she finished the latte, she gazed out her window and watched the thinning tendrils of fog drag from the bridge as the early morning light washed over the bay.

Typical Larry, she thought, keeping the details of some juicy emergency close to his vest, and making me wonder what in the hell kind of hoops I'm going to have to jump through for another Diana Willis exclusive. No matter, I'm ready.

Even as she worked to keep her mind clear, her spirit compressed like a spring ready to hurl itself into the task at hand.

At 6:42, she was finished with breakfast and collected her purse, phone, tablet, and computer into her leather briefcase. She paused in front of a full-length mirror by the entrance. She appraised her reflection—shoulder-length blonde hair, of medium-tall height, fit, smooth complexion. At 36, she still possessed a fashion model's good looks—and made certain she was outfitted to the last detail. Today she wore diamond stud earrings. She pivoted to check herself from behind and glanced at her beautifully toned legs. Diana liked to turn heads and keep them turned her way.

But sometimes those heads turned for the wrong reasons. As the lead journalist and anchor of the megahit TV news show *World Primetime Now*, she had plenty of haters.

Next, she ticked down the checklist taped to the mirror:

Wallet? *Check.*

Phone? *Check.*

Computer? *Check.*

Homework? *Check.*

Attitude? *Check.*

Though this ritual cost her a full minute of precious time during those hectic mornings, the delay centered her. It was like the count-down before the launching of a rocket. Or the tensing of muscles before delivering a knockout blow. Whatever the metaphor, she was on the path to conquer the day, and nothing would stop her.

Then, as she was about to step from the mirror, her gaze remained transfixed on her own eyes—radiantly green, as though light shined from them instead of into them. It was as if there was more to her than even she knew, another personality imbedded within? But how was that possible?

This awareness brought with it a sense of dislocation—but a dislocation from what?

Diana felt herself off balance and tipping to one side. When shifting weight to regain equilibrium, she looked away and broke focus with the mirror. That spell—or whatever it was—was broken, and the urgency of the day flooded through her, washing away whatever uncertainties had poked at her.

Stepping quickly, she exited her condo and made her way to the elevator. Her phone chimed that her car was just arriving. In the basement parking garage, as she stepped out of the elevator, her Mercedes AMG Convertible rolled close and halted. The young valet hopped out of the driver's side and held the door open.

Thanking him, Diana tossed her briefcase onto the front passenger's seat. Her phone synched with the car's audio system and tuned to Star 101.3, which was playing the song "Atomic" by Blondie. She turned up the volume, and once behind the wheel, steered toward the exit ramp.

Already at this hour, trucks and other cars jostled for position on the crowded street. The high-rises towering around her kept the scene in shadow. This was San Francisco, and traffic crawled along at a walking pace. The four-mile drive to West Coast Broadcasting took thirty-one minutes. But all the while, the city teemed around her like she was in a giant machine. A machine, she liked to imagine, that was hers to control.



On the way to work, a commuter bus had stalled, clogging traffic even more than usual, and that delay put her five minutes late. Arriving at West Coast Broadcasting, Diana passed through the security checkpoint in the underground parking garage and steered toward her parking spot.

Her phone chimed, and a text appeared on its screen.

She glanced at the phone. Suddenly, movement flashed in the corner of her eye.

Looking up, she locked eyes with a man in front of her. Panicked, she jammed on the brakes. His piercing blue eyes didn't register surprise. Instead, they beamed with empathy.

Before she could roll down her window to apologize, a thought flooded into her mind. *Be careful.*

He stared at her intensely for a moment before continuing toward the elevators.

She watched him walk away in astonishment. She felt like he looked familiar, though she couldn't place him. He looked to be in his mid-fifties with a pleasant enough, well-sculpted face. He appeared as if he worked here: nicely attired in an expensive suit. She guessed he had to be one of the midlevel executives working in some department in the building.

She shrugged off the incident and was about to proceed toward her parking spot when she reflected on something. This car had a sophisticated anticollision system. It should've detected the man, and both slowed and warned her. But the car had done neither.

Diana scanned the instrument panel. Everything looked okay. This was odd. Very odd.



At 7:25, Diana exited the elevator of the fortieth floor in the West Coast Broadcasting Building, a recently acquired subsidiary of Great Global Media, itself controlled by Grand Mount Equity, one of the largest equity firms in the world. Maintaining her resolute pace, she entered Room 4012, Larry Reynolds' executive conference room.

Maggie LaClair and Gabe Mendoza were already at the table, but Larry's place remained vacant. Maggie was in her mid-forties and wore loud prints to camouflage her expanding middle. Large colorful bangles of jewelry drew attention from her wrinkles. So, she was vain. Who in this business wasn't? Her amber eyes followed Diana.

Gabe's olive complexion was freshly scrubbed and his macho pompadour glistened, still moist from an early morning workout. Dark eyes gazed from a square-shaped face. His custom-made suit emphasized a trim torso. He was handsome enough, and he knew it. Diana knew he checked her out at every opportunity.

She exchanged pleasantries with Maggie and Gabe. Neither offered a clue why they were here so early. Diana mused that the three of them were a talented team, the company's good luck and hers that they happened to be working here. As Diana took her seat, Larry Reynolds entered through a private door that led from his office and eased into the large executive chair at the head of the table.

Larry looked every bit his sixty-three years, dark hair thinning and silver at the temples. A paunch settled against the bottom of his tailored white shirt, and his suit coat draped too snugly against his broad, fleshy shoulders. An athlete's body gone soft by decades behind a desk. But whatever the toll of time and drama had on his physique, his steel-gray eyes radiated intelligence and cunning that burned just as brightly as when Diana first met him, fourteen years ago.

He set a portfolio on the table, then said, "Glad to see everyone here," as if the rest of them had a choice. "Is the door locked?"

Gabe jumped from his seat and verified that it was.

Diana fished a tablet from her briefcase and readied her stylus. Maggie and Gabe also had their tablets on the table.

"You won't need to take notes," Larry said. He pressed a button on a keypad embedded in the table. One panel in the wall lit up with the face of Dan Talbot, Global Media's CEO, and now their top boss. Thin lips smiled from his pink, pulpy visage. Burst capillaries

from too much wine and sun stained his slack cheeks and enormous nose. Beady eyes glinted from slits beneath bushy eyebrows.

Diana's nose crinkled again. *Early morning disaster meeting. Dan Talbot. This is going to be juicy.*

Larry panned the table. "I don't think I have to review Talbot's escapades."

Maggie smirked as if to say, *no you don't. We all know.*

Diana couldn't think of a recent time when Talbot wasn't sidestepping a catastrophe of his own making. The man had insatiable ambitions and equally insatiable appetites. Diana recounted the episodes of sexual harassment and blatantly inappropriate behavior. Like the Ivy League intern whom he had offered a full-ride scholarship, in exchange for the full ride she gave him between her young legs. Or the Parisian waitress/exotic dancer he kept shackled up in luxury digs billed to the company tab. Or the Irish media analyst he consummated trysts with on corporate executive jets. Those were only three examples out of dozens.

For Talbot, Great Global Media was his private piggy bank and brothel. Legal expenses to keep his entitled fat ass out of hot water had their own line account in the corporate budget. Why Great Global Media kept him around remained a mystery to her. So after all that he'd done, if Dan Talbot was the subject of today's meeting, then he must have stepped in it big time.

Larry began. "Our competitor, Apex Real Media, is about to break the story that Dan Talbot has been accused of conflict of interest and sexual harassment."

To the latter part of what Larry just said, Diana went, *huh?* Sexual harassment, no big deal. Talbot might as well have that printed on his business card. But conflict of interest?

“So, they caught Talbot with his hand in the cookie jar?” Gabe asked.

“I’m afraid for his sake it’s more serious than that,” Larry replied. “It was a quid pro quo for advertising dollars.”

Diana shook her head in mild disgust. Apparently, it wasn’t enough for Talbot to satisfy his wanton desires on the company dime. He needed to line his pockets.

“In what way?” Maggie asked.

“That’s not why I brought you here this morning,” Larry explained. “Not directly anyway.” He pressed another button on the keypad. A map of Columbus, Ohio, replaced Talbot’s image. “I need you and Gabe to head ASAP to Columbus, Ohio.”

“What for?” Maggie asked.

“It’s a counterattack that’ll air on your show.” Larry opened the portfolio and passed out file folders and memory chips. “You’re to meet with local whistleblowers who claim to have the goods on city officials colluding with Apex Real Media.”

Sensing a move of corporate skullduggery, Diana asked, “ARM?”

“Indeed,” Larry chortled. He hated Apex Real Media. “Apparently, the city and Apex have been burying reports of water contamination to protect their holdings in municipal government bonds.”

Actually, Diana thought, *the water contamination is old news.*

She flipped through her folder. The documents were mostly reprints of media accounts, confirming her assessment. *But the Apex twist is new.*

But how new? And how extensive was it?

“Larry,” she began, “what exactly is the connection?”

He pointed to her folder. “We’ve reconstructed the paper trail. It’s all right there. The city water services are owned by Green Planet Industrial Resources, itself a sister corporation to Apex Real Media within the Basel-Brussels United corporate umbrella. When Green Planet learned that they’d cut too many corners and thus contaminated the city water supply, they brought Apex in to provide media cover. Which included bribing city officials to go along with their strategy. And funding legal muscle to strong-arm whistleblowers into keeping quiet.”

Something that elaborate couldn’t sneak past Great Global Media without them noticing. The thought prompted Diana: “When did we learn about the Columbus-Apex collusion?”

Larry grinned at her, acknowledging how quick she was to connect the dots. “I’m not at liberty to discuss when we learned about Apex’s crooked dealings.”

“So we’ve been sitting on the story? Waiting?”

“This is spin control?” Maggie pressed. “We’re deflecting public attention from Talbot’s problems to this Columbus-Apex water issue?”

Gabe chimed in. “Saving Talbot’s butt while we deliver a haymaker to the competition?”

“It’s prime-time news.” Larry’s grin deepened. “We’re doing our duty as the Fourth Estate.”

Diana wondered who had thought of this twisted Machiavellian scheme. Maybe it had been Talbot himself, sensing the opportunity for a political smokescreen while he scuttled off center stage. Unscathed. Again.

She shook her head in bemused admiration of the crafty, gluttonous leech. That’s why Talbot kept floating to the top, despite

whatever toilet bowl he found himself in. He knew how to play corporate politics like a champion.

Gabe thumbed through his folder and whistled. This assignment was beyond juicy. A talented journalist could set himself up for years on this story alone.

“While you are both boots on the ground in Ohio validating what we know and digging up whatever else is relevant, Diana and I will strategize an exclusive with Talbot.”

Larry rapped the table. “You should have all the information you need to get a jump on this. If you need help, your file has the contacts to get help. Make me proud.”

The three journalists closed their folders. Diana clipped the memory disk to a ring inside her briefcase, then tucked the folder inside.

Gabe was first out the door, Maggie at his heels, looking back at Diana with a glare of envy.

Larry stood up. “Diana, let’s move to my office.”