

ETERNAL PATROL

Chapter 1

A single bead of sweat ran down the side of his forehead and dropped onto the stopwatch crystal in the palm of his hand. The red night vision light that illuminated the confined space in the periscope room reflected off the droplet as the second hand ticked forward and made the only sound in the tense silence, which filled the sub. With a stern but quiet voice, Commander Anderson softly and carefully enunciated his words to the talker next to him. "Fire aft tubes one and two."

The crewman, with perspiration on his forehead, blew a puff of cigarette smoke from the corner of his mouth and repeated the command into the large curved microphone that hung around his neck and rested on his chest. Anderson watched the smoke dance into the mass of pipes over his head with a nervous anticipation as he waited to hear his fish hit the water.

A fading hiss echoed down the hull from the sudden release of pressure in the tubes. The sound relieved Anderson's anxiousness but transformed it to an uneasy feeling in his stomach. The talker with the headphones over his ears tilted up at the commander. "Torpedoes away."

Lofting up through the hatch near his feet, from the control room below, Anderson heard his executive officer call out, "Pump from forward trim to aft. Watch that gauge above your shoulder."

He rolled his eyes back at his talker with raised brows indicating he wanted a report. While the captain waited, wanting to take the edge off his nerves, he stashed a cigarette between his lips and pulled out a brass lighter with

an open wheel flint. He flicked the wheel several times and sent sparks across the wick but it did not light.

“Stupid French piece of junk,” he said as he slipped it back in his pocket.

From the large brass navigation wheel, the helmsman reached over and offered a small box of wooden matches. Anderson pulled one out and struck it on a pipe above his head. The crackle of lit tobacco filled the quiet room as the sailors awaited the report.

The talker held his hand to one of his headphones and spoke up. “Two fish in the water running hot and-”

The commander quickly pulled the cigarette from his lips and turned in uneasiness toward the seaman with the black microphone. “Are they running straight?”

The talker pressed his headphones against his ears and shook his head with confusion. “Uh-”

He snapped the smoke in half between his fingers and with one giant step. Anderson vanished down the hatch tunnel from the upper part of the conning tower. He pressed his shoes and the elbow patches of his gray sweater against the handrails of the ladder and slid straight down into the control room.

Crewmen gave a startled glance at the sudden appearance of their commander. The skipper cast an intense stare at the soundman on the far end of the confined space just past the hatch door. Tension built in his voice as he focused all of his attention on the single person sitting at the small table. “Talk to me. It’s imperative I know where our torpedoes are headed.”

The seaman pressed his headphones tight against his ears. “One of um’s running straight and-” He glanced up wide-eyed at Anderson with panic written across his face. “One of um’s coming back on us.”

“Full right rudder! Flank speed!” The commander called out as he braced himself against the rail. “Bring us back to periscope depth.” Turning back to his soundman,

he asked, "Where's that fish Mr. Smith?"

He watched the station just beyond the control room as the crew jerked to the left with the abrupt turn. The stern planesman called out, "Periscope depth."

Still trained on the sailor with the headphones, Anderson again asked, "Where's that torpedo, Joe?"

The soundman continued to cover his earpieces with his palms. "It's bearing down on our stern."

"Zero rudder. If it's pointed at us, we're going to give it as little a target as possible."

The control room fell silent as the whirr of the torpedo motor grew louder and resonated off the hull. Anderson glanced at the rotating compass and said, "I told you zero rudder sailor!"

The seaman checked his settings and replied, "We have a zero rudder. Something's messing with our readings."

Anderson dug into his pants pocket and pulled out a small engineer's compass in a brass case. He flipped open the cover and saw the needle spin to the right, stop and rotate to the left.

"I guess I expected this to happen."

The pitch of the torpedo increased and reverberated through the boat. As the commander placed the compass back in his pocket, he wrapped his arm around the rail next to him and scrunched his eyes. His heart beat strong with anxious fear at the thought of his own torpedo sinking his boat. The advancing propellers filled the control room with a vexing high whine.

Anderson squeezed the rail so tight that his knuckles cracked. The motor reached its peak as it closed in on the hull. He took in a deep breath. Color drained from the faces of the crew. No one moved or made a sound. The high-pitched whirr reached a maddening level, only to turn flat and fade as it passed the stern of the sub. At that point, Commander Anderson remembered to breathe again. He

took a breath, quickly scrambled up the ladder, and back into the conning tower.

In the periscope room, still lit by the red night vision lights, he continued to fire off rapid commands. “Up periscope. Shut bow buoyancy vents. Shut main vents. Open negative flood. Where’s that Destroyer?”

His talker repeated the question in his microphone then responded. “They’re coming about, Sir.”

Water from the periscope-well dumped on top of Anderson as it extended next to him. “Fantastic American engineering,” he said with a sarcastic tone as he shook off the seawater.

He pressed his eyes to the sight and swiveled starboard. “There she is.”

Through the scope, illuminated by the full moon, he could see the bubble trail, left by the second torpedo, stream toward the Destroyer that turned into the oncoming weapon.

“She’s giving us a broadside. This will be all too easy. Three...two...one and-” His heart stopped beating. “What the-“

He watched the stream reach the ship and pulled away from the scope sight in shock. “No!”

He pressed his face back to the periscope. “It didn’t detonate.” Anderson turned to the sparse crewmembers that packed the conning tower. “What the hell did they load on this boat?”

“One minute till contact skipper,” the navigator called out.

The commander yelled orders as he pressed back against the sight. “Bring us back on course. Maintain a zero bubble. Bleed air.”

“Aye, aye, Sir.” The navigator said as he dropped down the hatch tunnel back to the control room.

Anderson swung the periscope around and watched the sky. “How long till the Destroyer’s on top of us? It could

be a big problem if they follow us through.”

The talker repeated the question and pressed his headphones tight to hear the answer. “They’re steaming away from us and cutting off pursuit.”

Through the scope, Anderson saw the intense white ball of light grow in size as it fell from the stars on a collision course with his boat. “Here’s why. They don’t want any part of this thing.”

The commander pulled away from the periscope. “I hope those scientists and that damn journal are right about this.”

He yelled down the hatch tunnel. “Alarm! Alarm! Brace for impact!”

* * *

The glare from the florescent lights reflected off the old brown map he had spread across the library table. Next to the tattered roll sat his grandfather’s journal with the worn leather cover. George thumbed through several of the yellowed pages splayed apart by time and water damage.

A cell phone vibrated on the table across the aisle from him. He looked up to see a young man around twenty open the phone and say in a voice too loud for the library, “Dude, we need to hook up tonight.”

With the long hours George spent in the library doing research, he had little patience for people just hanging out and getting in his way. He shot the man a diminished scowl and the loud phone talker quieted his voice and said, “I’m at the library right now. Let me call you back in a little while.”

George turned back to the map spread across the table. “I think this is it,” he quietly said as he pointed in the journal to a faded sketch of three islands that formed a triangle and matched the ones on the old map.

“These are the islands. They don’t show up on the current charts because they eroded away from decades of typhoons and high tides. They must have used these as a

fixed reference point when they took their soundings.”

After years of research, he felt a strange sense of completion. It seemed ironic the answer he had searched for over three continents and two oceans so easily appeared in front of him on a table in the library only blocks from his house.

As he crossed back from the journal to the sea chart, two gray haired men approached the table his short-stature boss, Mr. Burk, and a gentleman who wore a Stetson Shasta cowboy hat. “Dr. Washington.” George stood up from the table and smoothed the wrinkles in his shirt with his hands. “I’d like you to meet Alan Penders. He’s the person I’ve told you about,” Burk leaned forward and lowered his voice, “the person you need to meet.”

George ran his fingers through his dark hair to comb it back off his forehead while he shook hands with Penders.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Penders.”

Burk continued. “He’s flown all the way out here to Honolulu to meet with us. We’ve been talking business and after some acute negotiations-”

George interrupted. “As in drinking beer and telling stories of your glory days?” He looked at Penders. “Did he tell you the story about the bear and his cell phone?”

Burk cut him off by clearing his throat and continued. “Yes some beer was consumed. But, most important, Mr. Penders has agreed to give your little treasure search unlimited funding.”

Penders with the shirt that struggled to close over his beer belly and a thick Texan accent responded, “He’s kiddin-a course about the unlimited funding.” He pushed up the brim of his Stetson. “I’ll pick up the tab for fuel and some satellite time on the initial venture. If ya’ll show some results, then we’ll talk about a long term budget.”

George pulled his hand back from Penders. “Excellent, I’ve just now nailed the coordinates of what has to be the site,” he said as he pointed to the table covered with maps,

documents and his grandfather's journal.

Penders glanced at the large aged map in the center of the table. "Ya'lls boss tells me that ya have some kinda secret information that's given ya an advantage." He reached out and ran a finger across the pages of the journal. "Stuff the Collins Institute has wanted to get their hands on for some time."

Hearing the mention of the Collins Institute raised suspicions for George and quickly soured his attitude. He reached over and closed the journal, still protective of his data source. "It's not exactly classified intelligence. My Grandfather, Clement Washington, kept a journal when he served aboard the Corvina. It does contain data no one else knows of, reference points, coordinates, small but important details."

Penders tapped his finger on the cover of the journal. "The Corvina? What's a Corvina?"

George slid the book away just out of reach of the investor. "Yes, the Corvina's the submarine my grandfather served on during the war." He placed the journal into a small leather pouch with a few other books. "According to his entries they observed the German research vessel for hours."

The Texan eyed the pouch with the journal. He even shifted his stance to get a better view. "Why'd an American sub waste its time watching some scientists in a little boat? Doesn't seem that it would do much for the war effort at the time."

"Germans that far into the South Pacific drew more than just our curiosity. I studied reams of captured documents, from all the Axis powers. The Japanese and Australian Island spotters also kept track of this vessel. It appears the Germans tried to keep their presence hidden even from their own comrades."

Penders ran his fingers around the three islands on the map. "And did your granddaddy tell you what-all the

Nazi's found? I mean this all sounds like good intrigue but let's hear what they were doing."

"The patrol logs show that they sank the vessel."

George pulled the map closer to him. "German documents offer little information other than something called Operation Zeitgatter. It appears most German reports didn't offer much information unless they had something positive to report back to the Fuehrer."

Penders glanced up. "Operation Zeit-a-what?"

"Zeitgatter. The best I can translate is something like time-gate or time-door. It may have been code or it could have been improperly translated from Enigma."

"What-all's Enigma?"

George felt that someone about to invest in a project such as this should have at least known some basics of history. He took a deep breath to calm himself and tried not to sound condescending. "It's the code machine the Germans used during the war. The Allies had several captured versions and used them to decode all intercepted transmissions. Sometimes they didn't translate correctly."

The Texan took off his hat and ran his palm across the top of his thinning gray hair. "You don't sound all too confident about what ya'll have found."

George's boss then interjected with a nervous tone directed at Penders. "And since then, the whole world has been looking for the legendary lost shipment of Nazi Gold."

As he shook his head, George rolled up the map on the table. "If this is gold."

Penders asked, "What else could it be?"

George slid the map into a cardboard tube. "There are some indications that the Germans had developed and were about to launch a nuclear weapon on top of a modified V2. The best place for them to hide it would be in the South Pacific under the protection of the Japanese Navy."

"I'm not fronting you millions of dollars to find some

damn rusted-out German rocket.” Penders gave a suspicious eye to George then to Mr. Burk. “I want to know exactly what it is we’re going to find before I give ya’ll a wad of my cash. I’d like to hear that we’re looking for something shiny.”

George’s boss chimed in. “Oh don’t worry, all indications point toward gold. Before the Black Out day, the Nazi High Command tried to set up a nice retirement for after the war. You need to remember at this point in time they were about to be defeated and were making plans for the future.”

With the map and journal tucked under his arm, George walked away from the table with the two older men in stride next to him. Penders asked, “What else did your granddaddy say in his journal?”

“Shortly after they sank the research vessel, his boat came under attack by a German cruiser and a U-Boat. It was the only American sub captured by the Germans.”

Penders asked, “What were a German cruiser and U-Boat doing in the South Pacific?”

Mr. Burk answered. “Most likely they were there in support of the scientist vessel and to protect the gold.”

Penders pointed to the journal. “What else does your little book say about this German boat full of eggheads?”

George held the journal tighter to his body not sure if he could trust the Texan. “Nothing after that event. The entire crew was taken prisoner by the Germans.”

“Taken prisoner, that couldn’t have been good. What happened to your granpappy?”

“My grandfather spent the rest of the war in a Nazi prison camp. The remainder of his entries documented his time in Stalag IIIA in Luckenwalde.”

Penders raised his eyebrows. “Damn that must’a been rough on your Granddad.”

George nodded his head in agreement. “A Navy man in a prison camp full of Jarheads and Sky Jockeys. He had to

battle both the Nazi's and fellow prisoners. But if you knew him, you'd know he was as tough as they come. Plus, he knew how to distill fruit and vegetables so the other prisoners found he had a value."

George's boss interjected, "So what do ya say? Do we have your financial support?"

Penders rubbed his chin. "It seems like fate wants me to do this. This morning I found a dime from 1944, and just a few minutes ago some stranger walked up to me and said I was about to fund a venture that would change history."

Burk asked, "What did he mean by that?"

"Don't know he walked away before I could ask."

Penders turned back to George. "Did your granddad ever try to escape?"

"Yes, according to his entries--"

George's boss cut him off to speak to Penders. "Any way, Dr. Washington can head out tomorrow and mark the site with some GPS readings." He stared at George with a discriminating eye and turned back to the Texan. "Once we get your check, we'll load up the research ship and catch up with him."

George stopped as the two gray haired men took a few more steps. With wide-open eyes he exclaimed, "I'm leaving tomorrow?"

Preceded with a nervous laugh, his boss answered, "Of course you are. I mean why wouldn't you?" Burk quickly mumbled, "Before he changes his mind."

"There's a lot I have to do to prepare. This is a major expedition. I have equipment that needs to be calibrated. There's the logistics of diving gear, sonar, food, fuel. My charts expire next week. I need to update them before I can head out."

"You should be able to get that taken care of tonight. Your charts will be just fine. I'm sure the Pacific Ocean will still be in the same place next week."

George shook his head. "It'll take three days to get

there. Plus, I have a plumber coming tomorrow to fix my shower and most important I have movies I need to return.”

His boss smiled and turned to Penders. “Like I said he’ll leave tomorrow.”

Chapter 2

Secluded below deck in his forty foot boat, George hit the transmit button on the yellow satellite phone before he placed it back to his ear. A gentle lean to the starboard made the hull give a slow creak and he grabbed the edge of the table to keep himself stable. “The GPS coordinates should come across the screen on your phone. When you dock it in the cradle, they’ll download into the ship’s navigation computer as a waypoint.”

With a quick glimpse at his navigation radar, he saw a red blip appear a half mile northeast of his position. When he turned his head fully for a better view, the screen flickered and went off. Out of a conditioned reflex, he smacked the side of the radar with the palm of his hand. When nothing happened, he cupped his right hand around his eyebrows and against the window to see through the cabin glare. No lights could be seen on the night ocean.

Still on the satellite phone, he listened to his boss read the numbers back and responded, “Yeah, that’s correct. The German documents and my grandfather’s journal intersect right at this spot. According to my charts, there’s a flat shelf some two hundred feet down. If the weather holds out you guys should be here tomorrow afternoon and we can set up our grid. I won’t be able to go down until you get here because you are bringing the Nitrox tanks. Just in case have the equipment manager pack the dry suits. It shouldn’t be that cold but there are some strange currents down there.”

George heard Penders grab the phone, “Hey George it’s Al. I had some of my boys go over those Nazi documents

ya'll gave me. They didn't say much about this research vessel. Are ya'll sure your granddad's journal's accurate?"

An odd scent of sulfur mixed with the sea air lofted through the cabin. George noticed his GPS screen flicker. Again, he used his basic method of repair by slapping the side of the device. The screen lit back up and recalibrated.

In response to Pender's question, while maintaining an eye on the screen, he said, "The journal is probably the most detailed record of the scientist's location. Trust me; I'm in the correct spot. Hiding this gold wasn't something they really wanted to document. It was all done under the radar. You know on the low down."

George flipped through several pages of the book and glanced back at his GPS. It still displayed the calibration screen and could not lock onto any satellites. With a soft mumble he said, "That's strange, it can't find any birds. There has to be twenty overhead right now."

Pender's voice through the phone brought him back to the conversation. "What birds? Are you night fishing? What're ya'll talking about son?"

"It's nothing." George took his eyes off the GPS. "These events all occurred three days before The Black Out. The Germans changed all focus after that so you'd find little mention of it in their archives if they recorded it at all." He glanced at the calendar hanging on the wall. "Coincidentally, the Corvina made the same observations sixty-eight years ago today."

Penders responded, "I know my history son, but what I want to know is, are ya'll in the right location?"

George turned to the chart spread across the small table with his coffee mug holding down one corner. "This is the right spot. I'm sure of it. You seem to have a copiousness amount of concern about where I am at the moment. Why's that?"

He picked up his brown mug to take a sip and the chart rolled up. With the bottom of the cup, he swept the map back open.

Penders continued. "It's just that I have word the Collins Institute has sent a ship full of eggheads several miles north of your position. It's one of their new ships, the Cassandra II. They also got themselves some University bag-a-hot-air named Lamonte to join their search. So either they're in the wrong spot or you are."

"Lamonte?" George said with surprise in his voice as he stood up straight, "Dr. Danforth Lamonte?"

"Yeah, that's the brainiac."

"But he's an Astronomer. He's in the middle of working on some kind of asteroid tracking project. What's he doing on a marine salvage?"

"I don't know what they're doing." George heard Penders blow cigar smoke into the phone and continue. "I just know they brought with them lots of fancy and expensive equipment and this is after they spent forty-million on a damn telescope. I don't want them noticing-ya and hording in on our find."

The cabin lights flickered for a second. George rolled his eyes around to see if any other equipment had turned off. "What? How do you know they bought a forty-million dollar telescope?"

Penders gave a quick laugh. "Because, I'm the damn fool who sold it to them."

George closed the journal and sat back in his chair baffled as to why a marine salvage operation would use an observatory quality transit instrument. "Exactly what kind of telescope did you sell them?"

"Hell-if-I-know. Some kind-a spectrum-gas something or other." Pender sounded flustered. "I only broker the deal. I have eggheads to do the math. For all I know, it looks through woman's dresses. Judging by their appearance,

most of-em still live in their mamma's basement and hadn't had a date in years."

From the marine radio George heard, "Pon-pon, Pon-pon, Pon-pon! This is Australian pleasure boat Maryrose. We're taking on water and need to abandon ship, Latitude 7.38223 North, Longitude 151.64084 East."

Cutting off Penders, George replied, "Sorry, gotta go, just received a distress call. I'll see you tomorrow."

As George docked the satellite phone in the cradle, he heard another ship respond to the emergency signal before he could reach for the microphone on his VHF radio. "Maryrose, this is Australian Coast Guard boat Just Laray. We're twenty minutes from your position. Do you have survival gear?"

"We'll be in the life raft with an emergency beacon."

George turned to the chart that filled the majority of the small cabin to see if he could get to the boat faster. "Let's see, 151.64." He ran his finger down the longitude line and stopped at the red X that marked his location. "I'm right on top of you guys."

He gave one more glance to his GPS to check his position but the screen showed it still had not locked onto any satellites. "Great time for my navigation to go out." As he glanced at his compass, he saw it spinning in one direction, then the other.

That's not right. I'll figure out what the problem is later. Someone is sinking.

With his opposite hand, he grabbed his Seapro Automatic Life Vest off the wall and slipped it over his head and ran the strap around his ribs. Again, he reached for the radio mounted above his head, but this time his arm froze in place and he turned his head to listen.

A strange sound resonated from beneath the hull. He leaned closer to the deck to hear the steady cadence of a deep thumping pass not too far underneath him. "That

almost sounds like an old diesel engine.” He stood up and stared out the portal. “How can it be underwater?”

The deep thudding sound intensified and even vibrated through the hull of the boat. George grabbed his flashlight mounted on the wall and ran up the stairs through the hatch into the darkness on the top deck. He buckled the strap of the life vest without giving it any thought. Against the rail, with his upper torso leaning over the water, he tried to listen for the strange sound but heard nothing. He pointed the light down into the black ocean but the beam could only penetrate the first few feet of water. “Where did you go? I know I didn’t imagine it. I felt the vibrations come through the hull of the boat.”

Off the bow, in the reflection of the moonlight, he saw a strange ripple in the waves move away from his position. He pointed the flashlight on the disturbance but it only reflected off the water.

“That can’t be a whale, it would have come up for air by now.”

A brilliant light lit up the sky and sea. Partially startled, he turned to find the source and had to shade his eyes from the white ball of flames that streaked down from the stars.

“What the... that’s a meteor crashing down. It’s going to hit in this area.” *I have a feeling this is going to hurt.*

The sound of a speeding craft made him turn back to the water. A forty-foot pleasure boat one hundred meters off his starboard side cruised past at full throttle. In the bright illumination from the fireball, he could clearly see the name “Maryrose” painted in black letters on the stern.

He glanced at the meteor and back to the Maryrose. The two speeding projectiles headed on a collision course.

A wave of hot air swept across the deck as the giant object from space streaked over his head still miles above him. In a panic, George scrambled to the bow. He wanted to warn the speeding boat but felt overwhelmed by the current perplexing events.

The giant meteor angled down towards the racing Maryrose. Several hundred yards above the ocean, it exploded into a blinding white light.

George wrapped his arm over his eyes. An intense blast of heat sent him stumbling backwards. As he fell over the rail, he hit his head on the edge of the deck.

* * *

George opened his eyes and coughed the saltwater out of his lungs. He bobbed along with the gentle waves where he floated in the black ocean held up by his inflated life vest. Slowly his vision focused and he regained his eyesight.

Off in the distance, lit by the full moon, he noticed his boat dead in the water. The interior light still illuminated the cabin. Disarray and pain throbbed in his head. "What the hell happened? How did I get over here?"

To check out his surroundings, he circled around in the water. "Where did that boat go? What happened to that meteor? Where's the Coast Guard?"

He reached out with his arm across the surface of the water to swim to his craft. A rotating hiss and a trail of bubbles streaked underneath him through the water on a direct path to his vessel. "What the--"

When the line of bubbles met with his boat, an explosion and fireball disintegrated the craft. "Holy crap!"

Shocked, George watched the flaming pieces of his boat rain back down to the ocean. He bobbed on the surface with his mouth wide open paralyzed with confusion.

"This has got to be a dream. None of this makes any sense. I mean I saw a meteor crash to earth and now my boat blew up. That just doesn't happen." He circled around to look for other boats. "What's going on? I have to be dreaming."

He felt something flat and solid press up against his feet and push him up and out of the water.

"Now what?"

Off balance, he fell backwards on the hard surface and hit his head again. Struggling to remain conscious, he could barely make out the silhouettes of men climbing down a ladder before he blacked out.

* * *

On the deck of the research vessel Cassandra II, Ryan watched the thick black cable disappear into the dark water behind the ship. With all the gas generators operating on deck, he had to yell to the crewman who stood only a few feet away.

“Make sure that cable stays out of the prop wash. Each time we come about it screws up our calibration. The vibrations hit the ROV and mess it all up again.” He gazed up to check the clear night sky as if he expected to see something as he headed down below.

Deep inside the ship, Ryan entered the surveillance room filled with the latest in high technology underwater research equipment and computers. The twenty monitors around the area along with the light table in the center offered the only illumination in the dark room. He took off his tattered jacket and flung it over a chair as he watched one of the screens that scrawled the readout from the ground penetrating radar.

At twenty-four, the sandy haired PhD was ten years junior to the other scientists around him. A fact they never seemed to stop razzing him about even though he's in charge of the salvage operation.

He swung his leg over the back of a chair and sat down in front of the screen, never taking his eyes off the readout. The burly red haired man in the next seat eyeballed Ryan then at his screen. “What's nin?”

Ryan glanced at the front of his shirt with the letters NIN and the last letter upside down.

“It's not nin. It's Nine Inch Nails. Geeze Dwight, if you had ever left you're your mom's basement and went out to try to meet women, you would have heard of them”

From the opposite side of the room, a scientist called out, “We have a monster spike on the metal detector.”

Ryan didn’t turn around or take his attention off the screen in front of him. “It’s probably an iron deposit.”

“I don’t think so.”

Ryan stood from his station keeping his eye on the monitor as long as he could. He moved across the room, grabbed the printout from the metal detector reading, and ran his finger along the spike in the graph.

“That’s a big chunk of metal but we’re looking for some kind of trawler. Most of it should have rusted away after all these years.”

The large man who sat at the station next to Ryan’s pointed at the ground penetrating radar screen and said, “That’s no iron deposit, but what do I know, I’m not a ladies’ man like you.”

Ryan set the metal detector readout down and walked back over to his station with his mouth agape. The continuous wavy lines became more random and varied. He reached over to the printout and pulled the long narrow paper off the floor until he came to the section he saw on the screen.

“That’s no trawler. This metal is too pure.” Ryan grabbed a microphone hanging from the ceiling and brought it to his mouth.

“Captain Lang, I need you to come about and retrace this same grid line.”

Dwight said, “I don’t think Mr. Collins is going to like you altering the mission. He really wants to find that old trawler.”

Ryan looked up from the printout to the screen. “Let me worry about Collins. Even if we find that trawler, it isn’t going to tell us anything. I have a feeling this chunk of metal will give us more than we wanted to know.”

Dwight turned his attention back to the monitor in front of him. “Why will this metal spike on the graph tell us more?”

Quickly flipping through the logbook near his station, Ryan stopped on an entry dated from the previous week. He ran his hand down the page to ascertain the data recorded. With the printout in his hand, he compared their current location to those marked at the top of the page. He shook his head in disbelief at what he saw. “We ran this grid last week before that storm hit. According to the logbook, there should only be sand in this section of the quadrant. This spike was not there last week when we scanned this exact same position.”