

## **9:12 P.M.—GROUND ZERO, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Without warning, the capital of the United States was obliterated.

At precisely 9:12 p.m. Eastern, in a millisecond of time, in a blinding flash of light, the White House simply ceased to exist, as did everything and everyone else for miles in every direction.

The firestorm and blast wave that followed consumed everything in its path. Gone was the Treasury building, and with it the headquarters of the United States Secret Service. Gone was the FBI building, and the National Archives, and the Supreme Court, and the U.S. Capitol and all of its surrounding buildings. Wiped away was every monument, every museum, every restaurant, every hotel, every hospital, every library and landmark of any kind, every sign of civilization.

Across the Potomac River, the Pentagon shuddered violently from the blast wave and then began to partially collapse. What remained standing was utterly ablaze, as was every structure not flattened for as far as the eye could see.

Moments after the first missile hit D.C., a second missile struck the CIA building at Langley directly, its superheated fireball and cataclysmic blast wave obliterating the nation's premier intelligence headquarters in the tree-lined suburbs of northern Virginia and vaporizing every home and office building, every church and mall for mile after mile in every direction. Those poor, unfortunate souls who didn't die instantly suddenly found themselves blinded and burning and unable to move. Some would hang on for hours. Some would endure for days or even weeks. But there was no hope of survival. Nor was there any hope of rescue or evacuation.

Manhattan took the next hit.

The Scud C hit Times Square, and it, too, carried a nuclear warhead. The detonation eradicated every life-form in a half-mile radius within a fraction of a second. Every building from the theater district and the New York Times Building to Grand Central station and beyond was vaporized in the blink of an eye. The firestorm ignited by the detonation spread at speeds upwards of six hundred miles an hour. The Lincoln Tunnel imploded. A billion gallons of the Hudson River—now superheated by the thermonuclear blast—surged into Chelsea, annihilated Penn Station, and boiled everything and everyone south of Broadway.

Seattle was next in line.

When the fifty-kiloton nuclear warhead detonated, it instantly and completely vaporized anything and everything for miles in all directions. The Space Needle. The aquarium and the science center. Amazon.com's headquarters. Safeco Field. And every Starbucks in between. All of it was gone in the snap of a finger.

Untold thousands lay dead and dying. More would join them soon. Indeed, the death toll in Seattle alone would soar into the hundreds of thousands within hours. An enormous mushroom cloud, crackling with toxic radioactive dust, now formed over the city. As the killer winds began to blow, death and destruction soon followed.

And then the City of Angels became the City of Demons.