

PALADINS

OF THE SACRED LINE

BOOK ONE: SIEGE OF BOSTON

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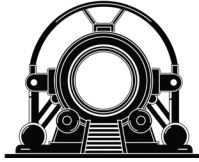
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*To Jill Holder, whose love and support continues to inspire me. –
Timothy D. Holder*

*To boys everywhere who love to read and look for true adventure. –
MB Mooney*

PROLOGUE



“Okay, Captain Henderson. You’re due for a check-in. Overdue, actually.” Delores Henderson spoke into the quantum communicator on the control station in front of her. A tall woman with short dark hair, she had to lean over to initiate the connection.

Moments passed, and Captain Henderson didn’t answer.

Frowning, Delores pushed the button and drew close to the microphone, raising her voice and enunciating more slowly than before. “Captain Henderson, this is your navigator awaiting your final report before reentry.”

Resting her hands on the sprawling workspace in front of her—an odd mix of older levers, tubes, and transistors attached to advanced computers and touchscreens—Delores took a breath to focus herself and reexamined the dials, read-outs, and lines of code. She searched for any sign of a problem.

Delores stood and gazed at the massive metal tubing running from the glowing fusion reactor to the iron arch riveted to the wall. The Era Transit Portal.

Or the “Time Machine.” Sometimes people had to make up

fancy names for simple things. The Paladin organization excelled at coming up with elaborate labels in addition to the extensive, strict rules and regulations. Time travel required these safeguards, though. Like final reports before reentry.

Captain Barry Henderson, Delores's husband, had never missed his final report before returning home.

Delores settled into the swivel chair in front of the quantum comm and pressed the button. "Barry. If you're messing around, it's not funny. I need you to report."

She didn't think he was playing games, but she wanted to believe he was. She *really* wanted this to be nothing to worry about.

Glancing over at the screen to her left, she noted his reentry point would happen in eight seconds. At five seconds, the transit arch began humming and the event horizon appeared, a silver-green color that now obscured the basement wall behind it. The liquid-like surface rippled and settled, and constant static droned on.

She waited, her stare alternating between the countdown screen and the transit arch, willing her husband to appear. She clenched her fists and forced her fingernails to stop digging into her palms. Delores willed the air into her lungs, fighting the quick, shallow breaths beginning to overwhelm her, and tried to ignore the way her heart raced along with the thoughts running through her mind.

Maybe he lost the communicator, or it broke. But he would come back through the portal. He always did. Any second now.

Four, three, two ... one.

The event horizon flashed and fluttered before disappearing. She stared at the basement wall again, her shoulders slumping. For a heartbeat, she forgot her training, her respon-

sibilities. All she could do was say his name in a desperate whisper.

“Barry.”

Turning to the screen on her right, she let her fingers fly over the keyboard. The computer processed and displayed her requested information. The timeline aberrance still existed. Barry hadn’t fixed the split in the Sacred Line.

He was also lost in the past. Without the quantum comm, there was no way to find him other than sending another team, which was dangerous with so many unknowns.

The situation was worse than simply being lost in the past, however. Barry only had a few days, maybe hours—the precise amount of time was uncertain—before he would begin to fade from existence. Humans could only exist outside their sacred time and place for so long before reality started to impose consequences. Harsh ones.

The aberrance still flared on the screen, almost mocking her. A change in the timeline would have epic repercussions too.

The Paladins would have to send back another team. Soon. The kids needed their father. She needed her husband.

And the timeline needed repair.

There were protocols, of course, all for safety and security, and Delores would have to contact the Admiral to assess the risk before organizing any rescue attempts.

As she spun to ascend the stairs, a question popped into her head. What was she going to tell the kids?