

## *Chapter 1: A Crisis of Despair*

**Date: January 31, 2033, Monday**

Location: Seattle, Washington: Lakewood Estate

Ken was up early this morning. He started the day taking some devotional time in his Lakewood office at the main lodge. Already dressed smartly, and he looked business casual in his dark dress slacks, light blue dress shirt left unbuttoned at the top and no tie. He was reading his Bible and praying in his quiet office. No one else was up yet, with the others sleeping in the adjacent guest lodge. Out the large picture window, he could see the ground was covered by a very thin blanket of snow that would probably be gone by lunch. The sun was shining. It was beautiful. Some blue Steller Jays were busy at the bird feeders getting their breakfast. He was so much at peace with himself, but was missing Lorraine. She was working at Washington, D.C., installing a Phoenix system for the new President.

The sound of a loud alarm suddenly pierced the quietness, echoing throughout the building. Ken dropped everything and began running down the hall to the Communications Room. On the central panel, a red light flashed. He hit a reset button near the light, and the alarm went silent, but the red light stayed on. On the nearby monitor, he read the message “All communications to Sunodia are lost,” with today’s date and a time stamp. He knew what that meant. Their Phoenix base station, deep in the Wenatchee National Park northwest of Entiat in Washington, was no longer operational. On the keyboard, he brought up the local log file that would have been tracking everything as it came in from the Sunodia server. Ken’s heart sank as he read the log of the temperature sensors – all were way, way too high before they quit working. Then Ken switched to look at the webcam recordings in the log. The series of videos from the different cameras played as a recorded movie, eventually stopping as the fire he saw progressed from cam to cam. Ken turned on the large video monitor at the side of the room and switched the video output to that monitor.

About that time Ken heard the rumble as Tom, Roger, George, and Melody thundered into the building from the lodge where they lived. The alarm would have tripped there as well. Soon they arrived at the Communications Room. All of them looked half-dressed as if they tumbled out of bed and ran over. Roger just stared at the video and realized what they saw, trying not to believe it. Melody sank into a nearby chair, weeping. Roger just stood there in shock. Ken stepped aside as Tom went to the keyboard, working the keys and hoping against hope what he was seeing was not real.

Tom’s phone rang. Tom’s phone displayed the phone number of Charlie, their helicopter pilot at Entiat, and Tom picked the phone up.

“Tom, this is Charlie. I’m at the Entiat Ranger Station now, on my encrypted phone. Sunodia is gone.”

Tom’s voice was breaking. “I see that, Charlie.”

“Tom, was there anybody you know at Sunodia?”