I’LL SEE YOU AGAIN LAST OCTOBER

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CHAPTER ZERO

 Professor Poltava flattened a lump of modeling clay onto the surface of his desk. He withdrew a milky white sphere from his jacket pocket and pressed it into the flattened clay. Another lump of clay he formed into a cone shape and placed it near the sphere. He motioned toward the dry-erase board and said, “Would you mind getting me that laser pointer?”

 Mallory Childs lifted a chrome cylinder from the tray. “This one?” she asked.

 The professor accepted the tiny laser and placed it atop the clay cone, molding the material into a temporary support. He activated the pointer and carefully aimed the laser into the heart of the milky orb. “Okay. Turn out the lights,” he commanded.

 Mallory flipped the light switch and her breath caught in her chest. The room was filled with a dim red fog. At apparently random intervals, brilliant points of red punctuated the darkness. In awe, she turned to marvel at the holographic image. Opposite the illuminated orb, Mallory and Professor Poltava cast midnight black shadows against the backdrop of the haze. Mallory moved her fingertip to intersect one of the brilliant points of light. “Is this a holographic star chart?” she asked.

 “Not stars,” the professor contradicted. “This is a map of space and time—well, local space and time. There is not enough matter on the earth to generate a map of the entire universe. The red fog that surrounds us is just noise—events in space and time that have very little significance. The bright spots are cosmic events that have shaped the past, the present, and the future. Wait while I try and find something.” He adjusted the position of the laser pointer on its clay mount. What looked like a field of stars spun in a dizzying fashion until the professor found what he was looking for. “There,” he pointed, “There it is.”

 Mallory blinked and shielded her eyes from a point of light so brilliant that it was painful to view. “What is it?”

 “That is the *Eye of the Idol*—it has to be.” The professor grasped Mallory’s hand and tugged. “Over here,” the professor commanded as he guided Mallory into a shadow.

 From her new vantage point, Mallory could not see the brilliant point of light; there appeared to be a cone of darkness as if that bright point were casting a shadow. “What’s the *Eye of the Idol?*” she asked.

 “What the Eye of the Idol is,” the professor answered, “is not as important as what it is doing to space-time. Do you know what a black hole is?”

 Mallory nodded even though she could not be seen in the darkness. “Sort of. I know that it eats matter.”

 “Imagine an infinitesimally tiny black hole, traveling at millions of kilometers per second, passing through the Earth. It would rip a hole through our planet, gaining mass as it progressed. It would leave a cone of destruction, something like what you see here.” The professor traced the outline of the cone with his hand. Outside the cone, his hand glowed eerily red; inside the cone, his hand was invisible in the total darkness.

 “The *Eye of the Idol* is a black hole?” speculated Mallory.

 “In a sense, yes. A black hole only eats matter, the *Eye of the Idol* eats space and time. And our future is directly in its path.”

CHAPTER 1

1962

*Monday, February 5, 1962, 10:35:05 A.M. (local time)*

*Location: South Pacific: 4°13'53.4"S, 178°03'42.5"E (approximate)*

Onboard the Waltzing Matilda, a twenty-three-meter diesel-powered yacht, nine astronomers had already set up their cameras and recording equipment and were capturing their first celestial photographs. The yacht had been chartered six days earlier in Madang, Territory of New Guinea, for the express purpose of being at this exact location at this exact time.

Rumors concerning this particular date in history were various and global in scope. The world (and possibly the entire universe) was predicted to end on that day—it didn’t. A well-known mystic and prophetess, Jeane Dixon, predicted that a child would be born on that day, and that child would bring universal peace and understanding, uniting the entire earth. That didn’t happen either. Still, others predicted that this date was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius (but this was seven years before *The 5th Dimension* released the number one hit single by that name.) It is possible that peace does guide the planets and maybe love does steer the stars but, if so, the peace and love have yet to filter down to our own insignificant orb.

The event that distinguished this particular day from any other day in 1962, or any other day in the entire twentieth century, was the solar eclipse that occurred while all five of the “naked-eye” planets were aligned with less than sixteen degrees of separation, as viewed from the planet Earth. The heavenly objects, in order of distance from the observer, were the Moon, Mercury, the Sun, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. No photographic records of the previous *grand conjunction* are in existence because it occurred on the fourth of March, 1821, just one year before the invention of photography.

The significance of that particular location in the South Pacific was that it was the point of *greatest eclipse*. Because the yacht was in that exact location, the astronomers would experience the total eclipse for a total of four minutes and seven point nine seconds.

Monday, February 5, 1962, 12:10:00 P.M. (local time)

Shutters clicked furiously the very instant the eclipse entered totality. Cameras with longer exposure times were trained on the individual planets, their irises wide, film naked to the universe. Because of the precise location, these should have been the most exquisite photos ever taken of the planets during a full eclipse—except they weren’t. The cameras were mounted to telescopes with polar mounts containing clockwork that would normally have precisely followed the movement of planets across the sky The polar mounts were firmly attached to the deck of the Waltzing Matilda. The photographs, once developed, showed that Matilda did indeed waltz. To the casual observer, the sea appeared to be glass-smooth and calm, undisturbed by the slightest wave. The photographic evidence proved otherwise.

Ironically, the photographs with the most detail and crystal clarity were taken 2200 miles to the west in the Territory of New Guinea, from whence this vessel had begun its journey. Observers there had barely three minutes of darkness, but their camera mounts were firm and unmoving. Because digital photography was still more than a decade in the future, the failure of this expedition would not be revealed until the astronomers returned to port.

Monday, February 5, 1962, 12:12:04 P.M. (local time)

This marks the point in time that the total eclipse of February 5, 1962, was at its maximum.

At that precise moment…