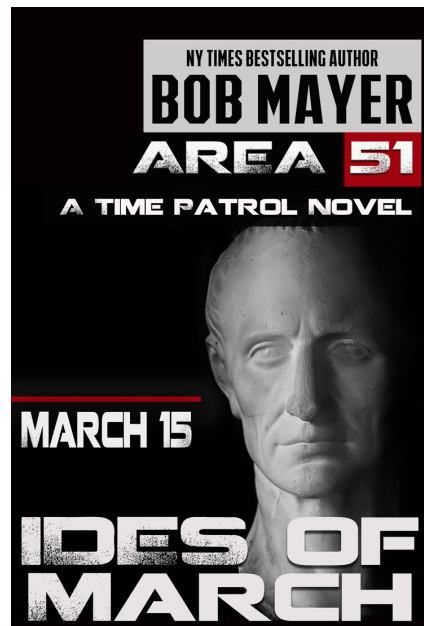


# QuickRead

## Eagle's Time Patrol Mission an excerpt from: Ides of March



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# The Time Patrol

*There once was a place called Atlantis. Ten thousand years ago, it was attacked by a force known only as the Shadow, on the same day over the course of six years. The last attack led to Atlantis being obliterated to the point where it is just a legend.*

*There are many Earth timelines. The Shadow comes from one of those alternate timelines (or perhaps more than one). It is attacking our timeline by punching bubbles into our past that can last no more than twenty-four hours. In each bubble, the Shadow is trying to change our history and cause a time ripple.*

*By itself, a single time ripple can be dealt with, corrected, and absorbed. But a significant time ripple that is unchecked can become a Cascade. And six Cascades combine to become a Time Tsunami.*

*That would be the end of our timeline, and our existence .*

*To achieve its goal, the Shadow attacks six points in time simultaneously; the same date, in different years.*

*The Time Patrol's job is to keep our timeline intact.*

*The Time Patrol sends an agent back to each of those six dates to keep history the same.*

*This is one of those dates: **6 June** .*

## The Missions Phase I

**Newburgh, New York, 1783 A.D.**

EAGLE WASN'T THERE AND THEN HE was there, but he'd sort of always been there. It was the best way to explain how he arrived, becoming part of his current time and place without fanfare or excitement among those around him. He was in the bubble of this day, not before, and hopefully he wouldn't be here afterward.

A thought he held on to as the whip cut into the young woman's back.

Tripped, he sprawled face down into straw covered dirt, hearing the whip strike home once more.

"Easy," a deep voice hissed. "Easy."

The hand belonged to an older black man, kneeling next to Eagle, shaking his head. Eagle looked back at the other four slaves, standing shoulder to shoulder, held back from helping by the invisible line of their status. No matter how much Eagle had prepared himself mentally for this role in this mission in the brief time he had, the reality of being thrust into this specific scenario had brought an instinctive reaction.

*It is 1783 A.D. The world's population is roughly 900 million humans, of which only 3.6 million are part of the fledgling United States (less than one half of one percent); of the 3.6 million, approximately 600,000 are slaves (eighteen percent) and 60,00 free blacks (one point five percent); the Montgolfier brothers 'invent flight', demonstrating the first balloon in front King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette (the birds were not as impressed); an English clergyman concludes that some stars might have enough gravity to prevent light from escaping and he calls them Dark Stars, later to be known as Black Holes; the Two-Headed Boy of Bengal is born and would die four years later; Laki, a volcanic fissure in Iceland, begins a series of eruptions that continue for eight months and spewed forth gas which killed over half of Iceland's livestock, caused a famine which killed a quarter of Iceland's humans and caused crop failures and drought around the world, killing an estimated six million people.*

*Some things change; some don't.*

"I do not take pleasure from this," George Washington said. "It is the law and we must respect the law. It is what makes us a nation. You know this is only a last resort. But she did not attempt to just run away. She tried to go to the British carrying some of my correspondence. That is treason and I have had white men executed for less. I am being merciful."

He gestured to the overseer. "That's enough." He stepped forward and looked at the other slaves. He gestured at the half-naked woman being unhooked by the overseer: "This is a waste and unnecessary."

*Unnecessary*, Eagle thought, taking a deep breath, trying to get his emotion under control. Washington might have executed white men for treason, but he didn't own them, so he had no financial investment; killing a slave was wasting money.

Eagle got to his feet, the man who'd tripped him also stood. Eagle stole a glance. The other slave's gazes were downcast, so he followed suit. A bit too late as Washington's boots appeared in front of him. He could sense the man's presence, his aura. One of those who commanded the room, or barn, they were in.

Eagle had to fight not to raise his eyes to look at the man who'd led this country to victory in the Revolution and would be its first President in six years. And was a slave-owner.

"Hercules?" Washington asked.

"Sir?" The man who'd tripped Eagle answered.

"Is everything under control?"

"Yes, sir. He just fell, sir. Not feeling well. Not a problem at all, sir. You know his head ain't ever been right since the fire."

"I want—" Washington began, but a voice called to him from outside

"General!"

Washington sighed and turned toward the barn door. "Yes?"

“Colonel Caldwell is waiting in headquarters, as requested, sir. And the officers are assembling at the New Building. General Gates is already there.”

Eagle gave a quick glance, not quick enough as Hercules sharply elbowed him. He caught a glimpse of Washington leaving the barn, accompanied by another officer.

“Get back to work,” the overseer ordered. “Hercules, take care of her.”

The other four slaves immediately dispersed. Eagle had no idea what his work was or where it was, so he remained in place.

“What is wrong with you?” Hercules demanded of Eagle. He was already moving toward the young woman. “Easy, girl, easy.”

Eagle followed him. “I’m sorry. Just lost my head for a second.”

“Get some of that axle grease.” Hercules pulled a clean piece of cloth out of his pocket.

Eagle was confused for a second, then saw a small bucket near one of the stalls. He brought it over. Hercules put his fingers in, pulled out a dab and gently began applying it to the open wounds.

“What about infection?” Eagle asked.

“You’re really not right in the head,” Hercules said. “That old beating coming back on you? The fire?” It was a question, but Eagle got the feeling they were suggestions for possible excuses.

The download confirmed that axle grease was a poor man’s, a slave’s, field expedient way of packing an open wound. It actually helped prevent infection.

Hercules was better dressed than Eagle. A black frock coat over a white shirt and black trousers, all relatively clean. His shoes were polished and, unlike Eagle’s, intact. His name, surprisingly, was in the download: the head cook at Mount Vernon, also known as Uncle Harkless. Technically, he would become the first head chef for the President of the United States in 1790, when Washington moved the capitol to Philadelphia and established the ‘President’s House’. Eagle found it interesting that despite his apparent subservient demeanor, Hercules escaped Mount Vernon in 1797 and disappeared from the annals of history and thus from the download.

“Must be,” Eagle said, running his hand over the scars scrolled on the right side of his skull.

“Now Nancy, you need be still,” he said to the woman.

She wasn’t paying attention to the ministrations on her back. A slight flinch was the only indication she felt the pain as Hercules packed the wounds. She was in her late teens, her skin black as coal, her face set in what appeared to be a permanent scowl.

“Get her blouse,” Hercules ordered.

Eagle fetched it. Hercules helped her stand up. Eagle held the blouse and carefully slipped it on as she extended one arm and then the other.

She shook off any further help, buttoning it herself.

Hercules moved to a position in front of her and reached out, none so gently, gripping her chin. “Listen here, girl. The Master is right. White men *have* been hung for what you did. I’ve seen it. You know Master’s a decent man. He took a chance bringing us up north with him. And you try to repay him by stealing and running?”

“No good man owns slaves, Uncle,” Nancy said, shaking his hand off her chin. “And this new country he’s fought to make? Not going to be any different. The British say any slave who comes to them will be free. And they ain’t gonna be around much longer in the City.”

“They say any slave who *fights* for them will be freed,” Hercules said. “Big difference. How you going to fight in a man’s war?”

“I was bringing them papers. They’d taken me in for that.”

“Don’t matter anyway.” Hercules shook his head. “This war is over.”

“Not over yet, or else why all the grumbling here?” Nancy gave a bitter laugh. “Why’d that man give me the papers to take to the British then, telling me they’d earn my freedom?”

“What man?” Hercules asked.

“Don’ matter,” Nancy said. “They say they’re fighting for freedom, yet we’re not going to see ours.”

“It’s called hypocrisy,” Eagle said.

Both of them turned to him. Eagle belatedly put a hand to his head. “My head isn’t right.”

“That’s for sure,” Hercules said. “You get on back and rest,” he said to Nancy. “I’ve got to go to the General.” He looked at Eagle. “You take her place in the General’s quarters today since you seem to want to be looking at everything and saying fancy words. Try some fancy words in there and you’d be getting a beating too.”

Hercules walked out, leaving Eagle with Nancy.

“What’s wrong with you,” Nancy said, as soon as he was gone.

“My head,” Eagle began, but she cut him off.

“You don’t stand right,” Nancy said. “Uncle Harkless saw it, but don’ know what to think. He keeps what he sees real small and don’ see nothing he don’ want to that might cause him to use his God-given smarts.”

“Your back,” Eagle said, but was cut off once more.

Nancy pointed out the barn. “Get going. You keep acting like this, you’ll get worse than me. As the man say, we got to know our place.”

## **The Missions Phase II**

**Newburgh, New York, 1783 A.D.**

EAGLE STOOD OUTSIDE THE CLOSED door leading to Washington’s office, having little clue what he was to do. Nancy’s instructions had indicated he was to be some sort of waiter, but he wasn’t sure of the protocol. Just walk in? Knock?

Hercules came bustling by, carrying a tray with bread on it. Eagle could hear muffled voices from the room, but nothing distinct.

Hercules came back out and poked Eagle in the ribs. "What are you standing out here for? I know you're a field man and not used to inside, but you got common sense. Get in there. Fill the wine. The beer. The water. Otherwise stand in the corner. And don't say nothin'. And don' act like you hear nothin'. Cause you don't hear nothin'. You don't see nothin'. Understand?"

Eagle nodded and went in, discreetly checked the wine glass in front of Washington, full, the beer mug in front of the other man, also still full, water glasses, still full, and went to the darkest corner. Washington's office was inside a one-story log building. Much like dozens of other log plank buildings haphazardly scattered about the cantonment. There were also numerous tents of varying sizes.

The download informed him that there were over five thousand troops here, with about five hundred family members. This was what was left of the majority of the Continental Army, with men drifting away every day to go home, now that the fighting was over and there had been no pay for eight months. In fact, many of the officers were using personal funds to pay for food and supplies for their soldiers. Not only weren't the soldiers being paid, the officers knew that the promise Congress had made in May 1778, right after the awful winter at Valley Forge, of a pension of half their pay once they were discharged, was now an empty one.

The country had a fundamental problem: Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress had no power to tax. It had to ask the states for funds; which was rarely forthcoming. The previous year a delegation of officers had been deputized to appeal to Congress about the pay issue. Their appeal was rejected. The issue had simmered all winter, with officers and troops confined to the Newburgh Cantonment and mostly indoors, with little else to discuss while the winter raged outside.

"Let me talk to the officers," the other man in the room said. He wore a blue uniform, the left sleeve empty and pinned to his lapel. His one hand rested on a black, leather-bound book.

Washington was seated behind a wood table, leaning back, legs stretched out, staring out a window toward an open field where some troops were drilling without much enthusiasm. Eagle figured the speaker was Colonel Caldwell and—

Eagle stiffened as the facts from the download belied what he was seeing: James Caldwell was killed on 24 November, 1781. Shot by an American sentry after he refused to have a package he was carrying inspected. The sentry was hanged for murder just two months later. The suspicion was heavy that he had been bribed to kill Caldwell. By whom or for what reason, the download had a gap.

Prior to his death, the British had dubbed Caldwell the High Priest of the Rebellion. His church was burned down and he'd taken up arms, flanking his Bible with pistols on the podium whenever he preached. Up until he was killed.

But here he was.

Washington glanced over at Caldwell. "Put the fear of God in them, James?"

"It works when all else fails."

"Money works," Washington said. "If Congress would follow through on the promises it made my officers, we wouldn't have this issue."

"If Congress had followed through on half its promises," Caldwell said, "our country would be in much better shape, General. I fear the states will spin off once a treaty is signed with Britain. We'll have thirteen weak, bickering siblings instead of a nation. And what of the west? There are agitators already whispering about starting their own little kingdoms. That Sevier fellow in North Carolina over the mountains is acting like he wants his own country." He shook his head. "You said you would not go to the meeting, because you didn't want to sanction it with your presence. Who is to speak then?"

"I was thinking General Gates. His adjutant wrote the damn letter of discontent. And Gates is already at the New Building."

"You mean the Temple?"

Washington chuckled. "You spend more time in there than anyone, I will admit that."

Caldwell wasn't put off so easily. "Gates? Sir, he actively went against you in '78. Tried to get you replaced. You place too much trust in those who have proven themselves unfit. Camden was a disaster. He should have been court-martialed."

Washington was back to watching the troops. He waved a hand without much vigor. "We've had enough of the past, James."

Caldwell leaned forward. "Sir. Hamilton is playing this. Surely you know that? Leveraging the Army against Congress to advance his agenda. I fear he will destroy all in order to achieve his own goals."

"Hamilton is a man of contradictions," Washington said. "He is very smart. Smarter than both of us. I don't waste time trying to unravel his machinations. I just watch for them." He reached out, fingers grasping, found the water glass and took a deep drink, putting it back down, still focused out of the building. "Hamilton and his cronies are indeed leveraging some of the officers. They play a bigger game than funding the army. They want a stronger Federal government. Not, as you said, thirteen bickering siblings. Hamilton also wants a Federal bank. I'm sure he sees himself at the head of it."

"But you know," Washington mused, "he might just be right about that issue. Time will tell. We need peace first. True peace before we can tackle so many of the issues confronting us. And I fear—" he glanced in Eagle's direction for the first time, and then back at the soldiers—"that there are some that will have to be put off for a future generation. Country first."

Eagle didn't need the download to confirm that line of thought amongst most of the Founding Fathers. They were, mostly, very smart men, some brilliant. Most knew intellectually that slavery was a doomed institution. Many even objected to it on moral grounds. But it was a reality and to fight that battle before the country was on solid footing threatened to divide the northern colonies from the southern before they were even joined.

The issue had been put off and the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those men would pay the price in blood during the Civil War. Eagle wanted to speak up, to warn of that storm over the horizon, of the hundreds of thousands who would die, white men. Of the millions of blacks who would live their lives as slaves before that great war would decide the issue.

Caldwell interrupted Eagle's dark musings. "Hamilton is a dangerous man, sir. He's a bastard and—"

"Let us not hold his birth against him," Washington said, a slight edge to his voice. "A person's birth is not their choice."

*Exactly!* Eagle wanted to scream.

"Hamilton served me well at critical times in the war," Washington said. "I could send him to relay a verbal order and be assured he would deliver it correctly. That is a rare talent and essential in an aide-de-camp."

"Jefferson and Adams despise him, sir," Caldwell said.

Eagle had to wonder, through his anger and frustration, what agenda Caldwell was pushing. Hamilton had been, would be, instrumental in the formation of the United States. Not in the framing of the Constitution, but in the area of financing. And no country could survive without financing.

"I know they do," Washington said. "But you and I understand something that Jefferson and Adams do not. We have faced the enemy. So has Hamilton. Such men hold a special place in my heart. As you do, my friend."

"Nevertheless, we must beware." Washington waved a hand toward a pile of correspondence, without looking at it. "There's a letter in there from him. He tried to enlist me in the effort against Congress. To take charge of the officers' efforts. That is why I cannot be at that meeting. It will reflect poorly on me and send the wrong message to Hamilton and to Congress."

"He asked that directly, sir?" Caldwell was surprised. "In writing?"

"Yes. I replied to him immediately. Informed him I would not introduce the army into this matter of a central government. Down that path lies a dangerous forest. The army must be separate from politics."

"The war is not over, sir," Caldwell argued. "All assume peace is a given, but what if the British change their minds? We are counting on the same fools who cannot pay us to negotiate the peace in Paris. We should not be waiting. We should force British government to negotiate in faith. Take New York City and—"

Washington's low murmur cut through Caldwell's exhortations. "They have no spirit."

"Sir?"

"The soldiers," Washington said, nodding toward the parade field. "In some ways, this winter was worse than Valley Forge. There was little spirit. No common foe, other than Congress."

Eagle came forward with a jug and began filling the glass. Washington turned his chair, wood scraping on wood. Eagle retreated back to the corner.

*If he were a demon*, Eagle thought, then Caldwell was a ghost. A sign of history already changed before this bubble in time.

Washington looked at Caldwell. "I know you hate the British, James. You have every reason to. Far more than most."

The information was there: Caldwell's wife had been killed by the British during the Battle of Connecticut Farms the previous year, the last major attempt by the British to gain victory. A Hessian General had led an attack out of New York City toward Washington's old encampment in Morristown, but had failed. The event of her death was also hazy in the download, as the records indicated she'd either been shot accidentally; or had been targeted by the British who'd already put a price on her husband's head.

"More the reason to allow me to speak to the officers," Caldwell said. "I can redirect their anger from Congress to the British."

"What good would that do?" Washington asked. "Our fighting is over. Men would die needlessly attacking New York City. It would violate the truce. If the British come back in force, they might well win back what they believe they have lost. The French have gone



home. They have their own problems because of the war. They lent us quite a bit of money. Something else the Congress is unable to pay. Also," Washington gave a low laugh, "I imagine the British government listens to their soldiers about as well as ours does. Which is to say, not much at all."

"Then let me appeal to the officers' faith, sir."

Washington seemed to be considering it. "Remember, though, that you have enemies inside the ranks. We know that." He indicated the empty sleeve.

Eagle was invisible, a nothingness. A void whose only use was to fill glasses. His status made him inconsequential, not even human.

"General," Caldwell repeated. "We need to draw out the ringleaders."

"We do need to stop the discontent," Washington said.

"You cannot trust Gates, sir," Caldwell insisted. "We have to find out who else is in his inner circle of malcontents."

Washington nodded. "You have a point. My loyalty blinds me at times." He drummed his fingers on the desk in contemplation.

Caldwell shifted in his chair, looked at Eagle with a frown on his forehead, as if he could sense the raging turmoil inside Eagle.

"Perhaps," Washington began, "it *might* be for the best if you addressed the officers. Appeal to their faith yes, but we must give them more than that. We must appeal to their hope for the future. Like you, many of these men lost everything in the war. Their homes gone. Their livelihood gone. They must believe they have not lost what they were promised in order to rebuild their lives."

"How will I do that, sir?" Caldwell asked. "We can make no promises beyond those that were already made."

"Tell them I sympathize with their grievances. Most know that, but they should be reminded. And words are not enough on my part. They must know that I am taking action. I will go to Philadelphia. I will make a personal appeal to Congress."

*Washington never did that, Eagle thought. Of more pressing concern: Why was Caldwell still alive? Why was he so opposed to Hamilton? Why did he want to address the officers?*

Washington pulled a pocket watch out of his uniform vest. "The meeting will convene in under an hour. I will prepare to leave. Even though it is nearly dark, I will ride out, past the New Building, and they will all be able to see me depart, knowing that what you tell them is not only true, but being acted upon immediately. I will stop at the first inn on the way to Philadelphia and continue on in the morning." Washington looked to the door. "Hercules!" he shouted.

The door swung open. "Sir?" Hercules glanced over at Eagle, then back at Washington.

"Prepare my valise. We depart for Philadelphia within the half hour."

"Yes, sir."

Eagle knew this was not how it needed to play out. Caldwell was a wild card, perhaps an agent of the Shadow? Perhaps merely saved by the Shadow, the musket ball that should have killed him, instead just taking an arm? What would happen if Washington were out of the Cantonment and Caldwell had free rein to say whatever he wished to a cauldron of unhappy officers? The wheels of history were sliding off the tracks.

Washington stood. "Keep things in check until I return, James."

Caldwell got up. "Yes, sir."

Washington strode around the desk and out of the room. Caldwell stood up and gave a slight bow as the General passed him. Eagle was trying to determine his best course of action; but Caldwell didn't leave. He stopped at the door, then swung it shut and turned back to the room.

Eagle was gathering the various glasses, while trying to figure out how to get to Washington and change the course of action. He was surprised when Caldwell pushed by him to Washington's desk and began rifling through the stack of correspondence.

"Sir!"

Caldwell was surprised. He glared at Eagle. "What is it?"

"That's the Generals' private—"

"Shut up," Caldwell said. With only one hand, he had to shove the papers along the top of the desk, scanning the parchments.

Given that Caldwell shouldn't even be here, Eagle wasn't about to walk away. He could hear Nada's advice when in an uncertain situation: look for the wild card. The one that doesn't belong.

Eagle looked down as Caldwell paused at a certain document. A letter. Signed by Alexander Hamilton.

Eagle reached out. "Sir—"

Caldwell drew a flintlock pistol from inside his frock coat, pulling back the hammer and aiming it at Eagle. "How dare you talk to me like that."

Caldwell stepped back from the desk, keeping the pistol trained on Eagle who was also backing up, around the desk, getting some space between them.

"Open the door," Caldwell ordered. "You say nothing, nigra, you get to live."

The muzzle of the flintlock was huge, fitting a round bigger than .50 caliber: a huge round ball of lead. Mass times velocity. At this range, Caldwell couldn't miss. Eagle moved sideways, reaching out, grasping the latch and swinging the door open.

"Hercules. Get in here!" Caldwell yelled.

The chef appeared in less than 10 seconds, taking in tableau. "Sir. No need for that. Samuel, here, he got hurt in the head. He's never been right since."

"He questioned me," Caldwell said.

"He was going through—" Eagle began, but then he saw Caldwell's finger twitch.

It happened in slow motion, as events like that happened when a surge of adrenaline exploded into a person's system. The finger twitching, pulling back. The click of the release. The hammer rotating forward toward the priming pan.

Eagle was moving, throwing himself to the side, toward Hercules.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the flash as the flint on the hammer hit the steel of the frizzen, then the spark struck the powder in the pan.

The roar of the pistol reverberated in the office.

The heavy lead ball hit Eagle, slamming him against the log wall.

# The Missions Phase III

Newburgh, New York, 1783 A.D.

EAGLE HEARD VOICES RAISED IN ANGER. His ears were ringing, his head throbbing.

Déjà vu all over again. Much like after the IED; but at least he wasn't on fire.

He opened his eyes. He was on his back. A rough plank ceiling above. It was dusk outside the dirty window, indicating he'd been out for a little while. He turned his head and heard the shattered bones grind in his shoulder as the pain stunned him with its intensity. He groaned and Hercules' face appeared over his.

"Hush! Keep your voice down. Master ain't happy."

Eagle smelled something and it took a few moments to recognize it: axle grease. Eagle looked at his left shoulder: wrapped in not-so-clean linen.

"Did you get the bullet out?" Eagle asked.

"Went through," Hercules said. "Hole on both sides."

A door slammed open and Washington came into the room, Caldwell right behind him. "We don't have time for this, General. I told you. The nigra tried to attack me. Your own man said he isn't in the head. He needs to be put down like a mad dog. And you need to be on to Philadelphia."

Washington folded his arms, staring down at Eagle. "He's never given trouble before."

Being talked about like he was a pet that had strayed pained Eagle as much as the shoulder. Hercules was glaring at him, eyes imploring him not to say a word.

"He was going through your correspondence, General, sir," Eagle said.

Hercules grimaced.

"He's a liar," Caldwell snapped. "He attacked me."

"Did you attack him?" Washington asked Eagle.

A red vein bulged on Caldwell's forehead.

"No, General, sir," Eagle replied. "Simply told him he should not be going through your private papers."

"You're questioning my word by asking a nigra?" Caldwell had pushed up next to Washington. The General shifted away from the intrusion ever so slightly.

Eagle noted the lack of military formality in the words and he was sure Washington noted it also. In the short time he'd been around the General, Eagle appreciated he was a man who observed everything.

"I'm trying to ascertain what caused my property to be damaged," Washington said. "And how damaged it is, not just from your shot, but in the head. I will allow that he was acting strange in the barn earlier." He shifted his direction of questioning. "Hercules. Where was Samuel when you entered my office? Was he attacking Colonel Caldwell?"

Hercules stood straight and didn't answer right away.

Washington's right eyebrow arched ever so slightly. "Hercules?"

"Didn't look like it, Master. Looked like he was trying to get away. The Colonel was on the other side of the deck and Samuel was near the door and—"

"My side of the desk?" Washington asked.

"Yes, sir. But I don't know what happened before then, Master," Hercules added.

The General turned toward Caldwell. "An explanation, sir."

"I don't have to explain myself against the words of nigra, sir. This is out of line."

"A simple question," Washington said. "Were you on my side of the desk?"

"Yes, but I was at the window, looking out at the troops on the drill field. Concerned about your comment reference their demeanor. Then your boy here attacked me."

"Why?"

Caldwell was outraged. "How would I know, General? Even you said he isn't right in the head."

"You might well be right," Washington said.

Eagle opened his mouth to say something and was surprised to see the slightest shake of Washington's head.

"I will deal with the matter," Washington said in a cold, even voice. "I am distressed that you were put in such a position, Colonel. Please wait for me in my office, if you would." It was not phrased as a request.

"I should be addressing the officers," Caldwell said. "They've been gathered for a bit and you know how a crowd grows restless."

"We'll get to that matter," Washington said. "I need to instruct Hercules on what is to be done with Samuel."

"Should be hanged for attacking a white man," Caldwell said.

"It's a consideration," Washington said.

Eagle noted that Washington's tone was consistent, level, neither angry nor threatening. Not without affect, but affable. As if everything were no large trouble and could be dealt with. Eagle had experienced the same a few times before in his military career. Moms had it; Nada also.

A smart person, though, would hear the undertone of a command.

Several seconds of silence ticked off before Caldwell finally accepted the inevitable and left the room.

"How is the wound?" Washington asked Hercules.

"Shoulder done, Master. He won't be working the fields no more."

"You stand by your words, Hercules?"

The General's chef licked his lips, glanced at Eagle, then back at his master. "No, sir. I was wrong, sir. Never meant to speak against the Colonel. Sam, he was running. He might have gone after the Colonel for some crazy reason. Got the gun pulled on him and thought better of it."

Eagle half-lifted up, the pain in his shoulder sharp rocks of pain grinding. "Sir! My shirt pocket."

Eagle held the position despite the searing pain.

Washington reached down and slid two fingers into the pocket. He pulled out a piece of purple cloth with the word MERIT sewn on it, edged with lace. His eyes widened. Then he reached inside his blue frock coat.

“Hercules,” Washington said without taking his eyes off Eagle. “Leave me with Samuel for a moment. Be right outside.”

Hercules was trapped by his status, unable to protest. He slipped out the door.

“What is this?” Washington demanded, holding up the cloth.

Eagle didn’t say anything, slumping back onto the cot.

Washington pulled his hand out from inside the coat. An exact replica of the badge was in his hand. He compared the two. “They are the same. Exactly. Down to the stitching. That is not possible.”

This was a paradox. Eagle was suddenly aware of that. Because it was the same object. At the same time. In the same room.

What would Doc make of this? Roland? Eagle settled on somewhere in between; of interest, but not of importance at the moment.

“How did you get this?” Washington held up the one he’d taken from Eagle.

“A friend gave it to me, sir.”

“This makes no sense,” Washington said. “None at all. You have this, which you cannot. There was only the one made at my personal request.”

“Sir, the only issue right now is the officer assembly. You must give the speech.”

Washington would not have been a successful combat commander if he couldn’t regroup and gather himself together in a chaotic situation.

“A slave telling me what to do,” Washington said. “A slave trying to run off with some of my correspondence. The day is full of marvels.” He clenched the Badge of Merits in his fists. “What was Colonel Caldwell looking for?”

“The letter from Mister Hamilton, sir.” Eagle had to swallow to get enough moisture to talk. “Sir. He shouldn’t be here. Colonel Caldwell.”

Washington was still as a statue. “What do you mean Colonel Caldwell shouldn’t be here?”

“Sir. He should have died when the sentry shot him last year.”

“How do you know that?” Washington demanded. “We kept that quiet. You were back at Mount Vernon. The official report was that he was wounded by a British dragoon while returning to camp. Few know a sentry shot him. And we hung the man.”

Eagle remained silent.

“You’re not Samuel,” Washington said. “You look like him. But you’re not him. You don’t speak like him. You don’t act like him.”

Eagle felt as if he were over a void, ready to fall in a bottomless pit. “I am what you see, sir.”

Washington opened his left hand. He was running the piece of cloth through his fingers. “We haven’t awarded one yet. Yet now I have two.” He was almost speaking to himself.

Eagle felt faint. The wound. Being here. What was at stake. “The road to glory in a patriot army and a free country is open to all’.”

“My own words,” Washington said. “It’s forbidden for slaves to read. How did you know them? If you knew Caldwell was looking at Hamilton’s letter, you can read. Who taught you?”

“That doesn’t matter, sir. You must make the speech to the officers. Not Colonel Caldwell.”

“Caldwell is popular with the men,” Washington said. “An effective orator. And he will use his Bible as a final persuasion.”

“The Bible?” Eagle couldn’t hold it in, forgetting the situation, the mission, spurred by the pain and shame of his current situation. “The Bible helps keep my brothers and sisters in chains. Keeps them for trying for a better life *now*, not in the promise of a next life.”

“Insurrection and sacrilege.” Yet Washington didn’t seem upset. “I can hear these words you speak and understand, but few can. I have had a higher cause for years now: this country.”

“The same with your officers, sir,” Eagle urged. “Appeal to their sense of duty. Honor. Their loyalty to the cause for which they have fought and suffered. If they are the men you believe them to be, that will be more than sufficient.”

Washington held up the Badge of Military Merit which Edith Frobish had given Eagle. “You will have to explain this to me. How you have this. How you learned to read. How you know the things you do. There is not time now, though. You will do this on the ‘morrow.’”

That would be a hell of a conversation, Eagle thought.

But it was never going to happen.

“Your officers are waiting, sir.”

Washington stuffed both Badges of Merit into his pocket. “We *will* speak later.”

## **The Missions Phase IV**

**Newburgh, New York, 1783 A.D.**

“GENTLEMEN.” WASHINGTON’S VOICE was level, soft, but it carried clearly through the ‘Temple’, which was what the largest open building in the Newburgh Cantonment had been dubbed since Colonel Caldwell conducted services in it every morning. A forty by seventy foot building in the center of camp.

Sitting with his back against the sidewall, on the outside, just underneath an open window, Eagle accepted there was no position in which his shoulder would not be in agony. The wound was bleeding through the bandage. Eagle was uncertain how many more hours he had left here, but if Washington could just get through this speech, Eagle could get back to the cot, lie down, and just wait.

Then get some proper medical care, not a packing of axle grease.

Washington spoke: “By an anonymous summons, an attempt has been made to convene you together. How inconsistent with the rules of propriety, how unmilitary and how

subversive of all order and discipline, let the good sense of the army decide. In the moment of this summons, another anonymous production was sent into circulation, addressed more to the feelings and passions than to the reason and judgment of the army. The author of this piece . . .”

Washington continued, but Eagle already knew the speech. Besides being a military leader, Washington was a superb orator.

After discussing the letter which had been circulating, Washington zeroed in. “This dreadful alternative of either deserting our country in the extremist hour of her distress, or turning our arms against it, which is the apparent object, unless Congress can be compelled into instant compliance, has something so shocking in it, that humanity revolts at the idea.”

Washington’s voice rose. “My God! What can this writer have in view, by recommending such measures? Can he be a friend to the army? Can he be a friend to this country? Rather is he not an insidious foe? Some emissary, plotting the ruin of both, by sowing the seeds of discord and separation between the civil and military powers of the continent? But, here, gentlemen—” There was a long pause. Eagle forced himself to turn toward the building and get to his knees, peering in one corner of the window.

Washington stood at the pulpit, both hands on the edge, looking out over his blue-clad audience. Eagle saw that he had something clenched in one of his hands and realized it was the Badge.

Washington repeated himself. “But, here, gentlemen, I will drop the curtain, because it would be as imprudent in me to assign my reasons for this opinion, as it would be insulting to your conception to suppose you stood in need of them. A moment’s reflection will convince every dispassionate mind of the physical impossibility of carrying either proposal into execution.

Eagle could well imagine Roland’s reaction listening to such a speech. His head would explode. Doc would probably deplore the run on sentences, but an edge was creeping into Washington’s voice, indicating he was speaking from the heart, letting it lead to the words.

“By thus determining, and thus acting, you will pursue the plain and direct road to the attainment of your wishes; you will defeat the insidious designs of our enemies, who are compelled to resort from open force to secret artifice. You will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism and patient virtue, rising superior to the pressure of the most complicated sufferings: and you will, by the dignity of your conduct, afford occasion for posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to mankind—‘had this day been wanting, the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining’.”

Washington stopped and there was absolute stillness in the room. The General’s shoulders slumped, perhaps from exhaustion, perhaps from despair. Eagle knew that was the end. Yet he didn’t sense that the officers were swayed.

Washington held up a single finger, as if asking for a moment. He reached inside his coat and retrieved a letter. “I have here a letter from a friend in Congress I would like to read to you. To show that your cause is not futile and lying forgotten.” He unfolded it. Peered at it, his hand visibly shaking. He gave a slight shake of his head. “Forgive me,” he whispered. He pulled a pair of reading glasses out of a pocket. “Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my new spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.”

That broke the officers. Eagle could see the ripple pass through the rows of benches at this simple movement. As Washington began reading, several men were crying, seeing that their commander had paid like they had; given his health, his years, his life to the cause.

Eagle blinked and realized he too was crying.

He didn't even listen to the letter and he knew few of the officers were listening either.

It was done.

Eagle turned and slid back to the ground, his back against the wall, blinking the tears out of his eyes. And when he could see, in front of him, outlined against the evening sky was Colonel Caldwell holding a saber, the point less than a foot from Eagle's chest.

"You think you've achieved something, don't you?" Caldwell smiled. "You've failed. And now you die."

## **The Missions Phase V**

**Newburgh, New York, 1783 A.D.**

"WHAT DID I FAIL TO SEE?" Eagle was utterly confounded by Caldwell's statement. So much so that the sword pointed at him was almost a secondary consideration.

Almost.

"Doesn't matter now. You're done." Caldwell pulled his arm back to stab Eagle in the heart when there was a solid thud.

Hercules' frying pan slammed into the side of Caldwell's head, the food in it flying.

The officer dropped to the ground.

"Oh, my dear God," Hercules whispered. "I didn't mean to. I didn't mean to. Lord forgive me. I'm a dead man."

Eagle gritted his teeth, pushing the pain from his shoulder back as he got to his feet. He grabbed onto Caldwell's coat with his good arm. "Help me."

Hercules dropped the pan and took hold.

Together they dragged the body across the grass toward the dark tree line.

"What have you done?" A woman's voice asked as they pulled Caldwell into the cover of the trees.

Eagle let go of the body, half faint from the effort. He saw Nancy come forward, look at the body, then at Hercules who was in a state of shock. "What did you do old man? What did you do? You're gonna have to run with me now." She glanced at Eagle. "You're pure trouble. Pure trouble." Then another practicality hit her. "Where's my food?" she asked Hercules.

*Which explained the frying pan, Eagle thought. What had he missed?*



"I'm a dead man," Hercules sat down, burying his head in his hands.

"What are you doing out here?" Eagle asked Nancy as he knelt next to Caldwell's body.

"Finishing what I started," she said. "Getting out of here. Uncle Harkless bringing me some victuals from the dinner. Now we're *all* dead. You a storm of trouble."

She had the bag, which had been awaiting the contents of the frying pan. A small satchel, several scrolls of paper poking out.

"You still have those papers?" Eagle said. "Why—"

"These be new ones to buy my way out of this place," Nancy said. "All the way to England."

Eagle took a slow, deep breath. "Who gave them to you?"

"That man this fool just done killed," Nancy said.

"He gave you papers before, didn't he?"

"Yes."

Eagle's finger was on Caldwell's neck. "He isn't dead."

"Oh, no," Hercules said. "Oh, no. He'll be seeing us all hung."

Eagle reached toward Nancy. "Let me see what you have."

"Why?"

"Cause you don't know what you're doing," Eagle said. "You bring the wrong papers to the British, *they'll* hang you."

"Why would they?" Nancy was confused, but passed the bag to him.

Eagle began to scan the documents.

"Since when do you read?" Nancy asked. Hercules was moaning something now, over and over.

Letters to Washington about various topics, military and political. Even a few pieces of personal correspondence. But from what Eagle could tell, nothing of history-changing proportions. The speech had been made. The coup averted. If Caldwell's real mission here was to get Nancy to bring this to the British, and the first attempt had been foiled even before Eagle arrived and those papers confiscated, why would he—

"Nancy," Eagle said, focusing on the one constant. He closed his eyes and accessed the download.

"What?"

Edith was thorough, very thorough. The records of every slave Washington had ever owned, laid out on a spreadsheet, much like prized cattle. Nancy was listed there. And then one year she wasn't there. But not this year. The records indicated that she was sold in 1785. Where? To whom?

"I need get going," Nancy said, grabbing her bag back. She kicked Hercules. "Come on, you fool. You got no choice now. Got to run. You too," she added, looking at Eagle. "Even the old General will hang you for hitting a white man. No black can ever do a thing against a white without paying in blood or life."

Eagle stood up. Nancy turned to leave and he grabbed her arm.

"Nancy. Wait."

"What?" She jerked her arm out of his grip and he gasped in pain.

"You can't run away."

"I can't *not* run away now. This fool saw to that."

"Hercules," Eagle said. "Get up. Take Nancy back."

"You're crazy," Nancy said. "You see this?" She shoved her foot at Caldwell. "People gonna miss him. He wakes up, goes back then—"

"He won't be waking up," Eagle said.

That gave Nancy paused. "What you plan on doing?"

"Don't worry." Eagle said. "Both of you go back."

"I'm not going back," Nancy said. "I got my ticket and I'm going. My back is on fire. Not going to be a slave no more. Can't do it. Can't do it for another minute. No way for a person to live."

"It isn't," Eagle agreed. "That's why you have to stay."

Nancy looked at him, dark eyes glinting in the growing glow from the Cantonment as night began to close around them.

"You're talking foolish again."

Eagle put a hand on her shoulder. "You said I was crazy earlier, correct?"

"You're scrambled in the head," she said.

"I am. I have visions. You have to stay because of your son."

"My son? I got no son. Got no husband. I won't *ever* bring a child into this world to be a slave. That's the worst sin in the world. Worse than killing this piece of trash here." She kicked Caldwell's unconscious body, taking some satisfaction in finally getting to strike out against a white person.

"You'll have a husband and you'll have a son," Eagle said. "He'll be important. I've seen it. In a vision."

"How can a black boy, a slave, be important?" Nancy said.

"He won't be a slave all his life," Eagle said. "He'll be free. He'll write a book. An important book. I can't tell you any more than that. But you have to trust me."

"You want me to go back, put my chains back on for a book? You're crazier than Uncle Harkless."

"Both of you go back," Eagle said. "You try running, they'll catch you. Once they know Caldwell's dead and find his body, you won't get far. You know that. Every sheriff, every militia, every white man for a hundred miles around will be hunting you. And when they get you, and they will get you, they'll hang you."

Nancy looked down at Caldwell. "But he ain't dead."

"He will be," Eagle said, picking up Caldwell's sword.

"You're crazy," Nancy said. "You can't kill him."

"I can and I will. And then they'll come for me. You'll both be safe if you go back now." Eagle pressed it home. "Take Uncle Harkless back. Once they realize I'm gone and put that together with the confrontation between Caldwell and me earlier? They'll have no doubt I killed him. Give me the papers, too."

"How are you going to get away?" Nancy asked, her resolve weakening in the face of reality.

"Don't worry about that," Eagle said. "As you said. All of this is on me. I'll bear the burden."

Hercules stood, having listened, even through his horror, figuring the angles like a man who'd survived his entire life by seeing them. "You're taking care of this?" He indicated Caldwell.

"He's on me," Eagle said. "You saved me. Gave me my life. I'm giving you yours back."

Hercules turned to Nancy. "He right, Nancy. You won't make five miles before they run you down."

"Go." Eagle pointed with his good arm back to the Cantonment. "That meeting will be breaking up soon. Caldwell will be missed."

Nancy looked uncertain. Eagle got close to her, leaned over to whisper in her ear. "I'm giving you hope. Not for you. But for your son and millions of our brothers and sisters. Your son's book will help lead to freedom for all our people." He reached into her satchel and pulled Washington's papers out.

"How can one book do that?" Nancy asked.

"How can the Bible keep people in chains but also free them in their heads?" Eagle asked in return.

"You got that right," Nancy said. "But . . ." She turned her head, her eyes but inches from his. There were tears in them. "Only if the boy will be free one day. That's the only way. Only if he'll be free one day. You gotta promise me that."

"He will be," Eagle said. "I promise you. On my life."

Hercules tugged on her arm. "Come on."

They moved toward the light of camp, but Nancy paused just before they left the trees and looked back at Eagle. "What's your real name?"

It had been so long since he'd used it, giving it up when he joined the Nightstalkers that Eagle had to actually think for a moment. He smiled, all the pieces falling into place. "Josiah. My name is Josiah."

Eagle watched them scurry back to slavery, feeling the weight of the moment and the hope for the future. Then he looked at Caldwell. He almost wished the preacher would come back to consciousness, to know his fate.

But there was no time to wait on that satisfaction. Eagle placed the papers on top of the body.

Eagle killed him with a single thrust through the papers into heart. He left the sword in the body and stepped back. In just a few seconds the body collapsed on itself, to ash, and then to nothing. Leaving the sword standing in the dirt, Washington's paper pinned under it.

Eagle he turned about, away from the Cantonment. He began walking, cradling his bad arm with the other. Long strides at first. But as he covered more distance, the blood continued to seep out of the bullet wound, pushing past Hercules' axle grease. The shock of being shot, of all that had happened in such a short time span, began to take a toll. His strides became shorter and slower.

Eagle almost fell, half unconscious. He shook his head. Something had alerted him. Then he heard it. The distant bay of hounds on the scent.

*How much longer?* Eagle wondered. He moved faster, but the terrain grew steep. Storm King Mountain, Eagle realized. He was moving south and east and Storm King was that way. And over it? West Point. Where he'd—

The bloodhounds were closer.

Eagle tried to run and it jolted his mangled shoulder so painfully he almost passed out, falling to his knees.

*A man can only take so much,* Eagle thought, as he got back to his feet and staggered forward. So strange. So strange that this had turned out the way it had.

“Uncle Tom,” Eagle whispered as he walked into a tree in the darkness and staggered back. “Uncle Tom.”

He could only take so much. Only so—and then there was only darkness.

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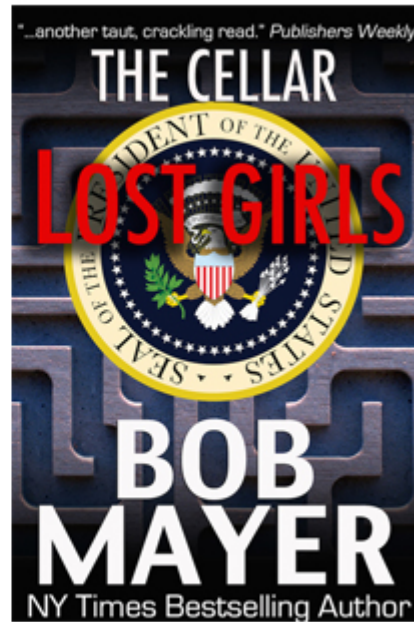
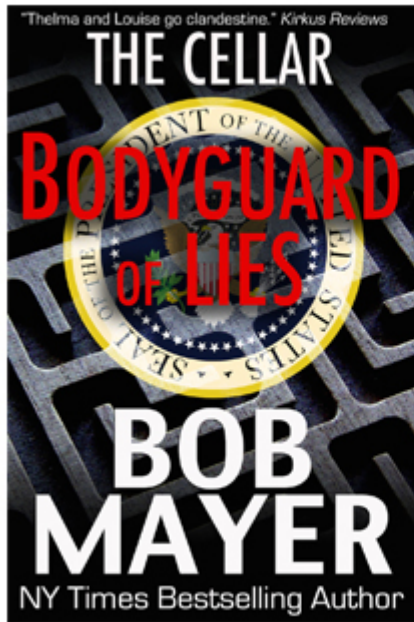
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## About Bob Mayer



Bob Mayer is a NY Times Bestselling author, graduate of West Point, former Green Beret (including commanding an A-Team) and the feeder of two Yellow Labs, most famously Cool Gus. He's had over 60 books published including the #1 series Area 51, Atlantis and The Green Berets. Born in the Bronx, having traveled the world (usually not tourist spots), he now lives peacefully with his wife, and said labs, at Write on the River, TN.

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