

TIMELESS

A NOVEL TRILOGY

BOOK I



M.R.M. PARROTT

rimric press

A NOVEL TRILOGY

Timeless: Book I

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mrmparrott.com

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(PREVIEW)

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UN Intelligence Operations Director Laurent Zhang spoke only seconds after the major entered his office. It was furnished, like all administrative spaces on board, with beige walls and flooring, along with the usual tan paneled, black glass top interactive desk, but Milona also noticed tasteful touches from Director Zhang, such as his black display shelves, many Oriental artifacts and artwork, and the distant sound of Japanese reed music he was playing in the background. When she had briefly met him before, she remembered finding him a striking man, well-built and tall, with dark eyes and greying hair at his temples. He wore his highly decorated red Intelligence dress uniform coat and trousers very elegantly, she noted, as he stood from his chair. She saluted the lieutenant general, noticing the light flicker across the three separate gold squares on his collars, as he motioned for her to sit down in the black chair near the other side of his desk.

"Major Devon. Welcome. At ease," he said in a calming tone while sitting back down.

Zhang looked back to his desk where he had been

passing through a dossier rendered on his desk surface, tapping on the surface to turn the pages.

"Thank you, sir," she said as she sat down.

"So," he began, referring to the file, "Milona Kaatje Devon, thirty-two years old, born in Amsterdam to your French mother, Belina, and well known Dutch father, Dr. Gotthard Devon."

Milona hardened her face for a moment as she blushed.

"You attended the International School of Brussels after your father's accidental death, and later the Royal Military Academy there, and even earned a performance Certificate for cello at the Ecole Normale de Musique after moving to Paris to rejoin your mother."

Milona pulled her eyes away from the director as memories of youth flooded over her. How cut and dried one's life sounds, she thought, when read back from a dossier!

"You were offered commission as a second lieutenant by the UNC, tested well for reconnaissance, moved up to captain and major quickly enough, and eventually your assignments led to your intelligence agent clearances and then to these latest training visits to the past."

The director paused for a moment, allowing the major to catch up, sensing that she probably felt as if she were on trial here.

"Major, the references in your 201 from your previous COs, including a special note from the Science Director, tell me you come highly recommended. You've been an invaluable special agent. I hope General Venda hasn't noticed you missing from Recon lately," he said as they both laughed. "I was the one who authorized you be

given case officer clearance under your sec-chief Colonel Ford a few weeks ago, and then unit chief for advance with Lieutenant Mathis for Operation Tempo."

Milona could not avoid allowing a little smile as she nodded her head. She was not aware the Operations Director himself authorized her latest clearances, and it seemed now that all of her nervous worry might be unfounded.

"As they used to say, Major, 'let me get down to brass tacks'," he said, joking with an older American drawl and closing the viewing image on his desk surface, to which Milona allowed a slight snicker under her breath. "Do you think we've got an accurate theory? I mean, if Peter Nexin did not detail his thoughts to scientists and engineers of the period," he continued, "then how can we account for the later published theories and personal journals on time travel machines and subspace theory coming out of MIT, some of which place the breakthrough with him?"

"I..."

"But if," he interrupted, "the published accounts lead to Nexin, and he wasn't the progenitor..."

"Respectfully, Director, I can't tell you at this point, until I can get closer to him," Milona said, having recovered her nerve.

Zhang looked only slightly perturbed by the interruption from the junior officer before him, but briefly took a second to study her stern pose and quickly wiped his face of any concern. Certainly, her qualifications are exemplary, he thought, and of course, we were more deeply troubled with the matter at hand than with the major's future career.

"Well, we can't very well ask the man, can we?" he

added, trying to keep the major on her toes.

"No, we cannot, sir. He is far too intelligent for that. If I ask him directly, I might plant the idea directly into his thoughts, triggering, if you will, the very thing we are trying to discover," Milona deduced.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"We can't be sure that... We can't know... Well, sir, this operation gives me a strange feeling," she fumbled.

Milona found herself trying to brighten her face in the soft light of Zhang's office. For a moment, she only noticed the faint light falling onto the director's face, realizing her thoughts must have seemed incoherent.

"Need I remind you how dire our situation is, Major?" he said, dropping his head toward her. "The latest intel coming through *Atlantis*," he continued, "puts this slow, massive and mysterious temporal distortion field within reach of our orbit sometime within the week!"

The Operations Director was under tremendous pressure from the Director-General and the other chiefs to get Operation Tempo right on the first try, something they all found patently obvious considering the possibilities. His difficulty, he found, was in keeping the major from being too intimidated by the mission while at the same time making her understand the realities involved. Milona stiffened her back as she listened.

"We've already lost several deep-space scouts," he continued, "and we could expect anything from mildly odd electromagnetic disturbances of communications, to dispersions of energies which could destroy the solar power stations right in their orbits. Any number of our other sensitive installations could be vulnerable, not to mention the space stations and colonies."

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Zhang hesitated to push the point further with the major, as he could tell she well understood the possibilities. He leaned toward her and softened his voice slightly. "We don't want to see the chaos that reigned during the depressions, not after so much has been accomplished internationally. But what really worries us, Major," he said as he sat back in his chair, "is if there is an even more devastating possibility."

"*More* devastating, sir?" Milona said with pause, as she felt Zhang studying her facial expressions.

"As everyone knows from the news, we may have potential new friends out there. Or, we may have enemies. Of course, there are still a handful of small separatist and seditious regimes and organizations down there who oppose UN world government at every turn. They could take the opportunity given by any disruption to launch attacks."

"I see, sir."

"It could even turn out that this distortion cloud-field, or whatever you want to call it, is a part of an extrasolar plan, or the anomaly could just be something of which extrasolar enemies could take advantage. We just don't know, but any of these outcomes could reduce us to a plague-stricken desperation not seen since the dark ages in ancient Europe or the more recent global depressions. Major, the world was ravaged for decades by collapsing governments, vast inequities, plagues and terror. Most family histories, as you well know, government data, and whole libraries of information were lost. We have to be very careful with this, because we cannot trace every contingency through the historical record."

"Yes sir," Milona said, recalling all too clearly that her

family history, like most, was known in very little detail.

"To even think of any of these possibilities is disturbing, I think you'll agree, and of course, the chiefs will go through this all over again later today, but I just wanted to prepare you."

"Of course, sir."

"We anticipate a go on this, but it is not certain. We cannot predict what the Chancellor or senators will decide, but unless they shoot us down, you will only have a two forward days, in our time frame, to complete your passive probe, ensure executive action is required and carry it out with impunity."

"This is the benefit of keeping our temporal experiments separate from our other research and developments," Milona offered, realizing she was stating the obvious, wondering if the director was telling her everything.

"Yes, Major," he agreed before adding a pause, "I suggest you get some rest this afternoon, because I'm moving up your mission schedule. If we are go, you will return to the past by sixteen-hundred UTC today. You therefore must find out for sure if Professor Nexin initiated this temporal subspace research through his writings. This is a career-maker, Major."

"Understood, sir," she replied.

Milona fully understood the implications of her mission, but felt a slight quiver about considering the fate of a future which must outweigh even one unique individual.

"Carry on then, Major, the clock is ticking," the director quipped as he stood, fully aware of the irony of his turn of phrase. "I will see you when we all greet the Chancellor," he said with a pleasant smile.

"Thank you sir," Milona responded.

Milona's thoughts were interrupted by his dismissal, but she smiled back to him as she stood and nodded, then turned to leave. She walked through the doors into the outer office, passing his lieutenant, who nodded her way as she continued out toward the corridors.

Zhang watched as his brilliant, beautiful, highly trained asset walked across the office, thinking about how she was so much more than just that. Major Devon has legitimate concerns about this mission, just as we all have, he thought. She will make a fine section chief one day, as soon as she makes lieutenant colonel, even if I didn't let her get a word in edgeways.

Zhang felt he had detected a slight hesitation in the major's thoughts, perhaps it was due to the gravity of the situation, he wondered, but it sure seemed like a deeper problem. Actually, she reminds me of myself, he mused. That transition from being a lieutenant to a colonel can be difficult. Zhang was drawn to his past, recalling his early Reconnaissance Counter-Terrorism missions under the Intel Asia Chief, and reflected for a second. He saw a quick succession of images in his mind, people talking, laser fire, small explosions, but then he thought about how long ago it all was, and then quickly brought his thoughts back to Tempo.

"Get me a work pad with the major's reports," he said through the doors to Lieutenant Whitaker, expecting to look them over while he took lunch, to ensure he would be ready for the meeting.

"I've been reading them over, sir," Doctor Olen Nadimov responded.

Nadimov was a strongly-built figure with short, dark

hair, dressed in a sparsely decorated Intelligence uniform coat and trousers showing his three brass and one ivory rank squares on his collars. He had just arrived at the station, spoke with the lieutenant, then appeared at Zhang's office with the dark, anodized duty tablet, as well as a larger, polished model in his hands.

"The major's mission involves too many questions," Nadimov continued. "I think there must be another way."

"Well, Colonel," the director said, nodding a negative to Lieutenant Whitaker across Nadimov's shoulder and reaching for Nadimov to hand over the tablet. "When I conferred with the SD on your being put in control of the techs in Berlin, I hadn't thought you would be taking such a quick lead. What have you got in mind?"

Zhang was irritated by Nadimov's interruption, as he took the tablet and looked it over, but also realized the Science Director's wizards, her section chief Nadimov included, should also be given some leeway under the circumstances.

"We've been working on something, sir," Nadimov said, passing the larger polished metal tablet he brought.

Zhang put the tablet on top of the smaller one on his desk and looked it over.

"It's a shield at the very quantum level," Nadimov continued. "We've made great strides developing it in the lab. We just need further authorization to conduct some tests."

Zhang looked up at the bold scientist before him. Director Franklin's new technical lead for Tempo was moving fast, Zhang thought, remembering that Nadimov was a physicist and now section chief who had, after all, participated in the UN's recent discoveries from the start, but

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he wasn't making friends easily.

"Sir," Nadimov continued, uninterrupted by Zhang, "I also do not believe the temporal mission can work without mangling the timeline."

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