

FACTS:

1. The United States power grid is divided into three largely independent systems, considered one of the most complex machines ever built with over 160,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines. Large portions of the grid infrastructure are decades old.
2. Modern societies rely on electricity for nearly every critical system including: water treatment plants, fuel pipelines, telecommunications networks, hospitals, and transportation systems.
3. GPS signals are surprisingly weak and vulnerable to interference.
4. The largest blackout in North American history affected 50 million people in August 2023 involving eight states and Canada.
5. Small inexpensive drones can now carry lethal payloads.
6. The U.S. military (under DARPA's OFFSET program) have tested drone swarm "curtain" formations.

CHAPTER 1

Friday, September 27 - 8:49 a.m. -

AIRPLANE #1 - Private Gulfstream Jet - Coast of Venezuela

The day was perfect for flying, sipping Russo-Baltique vodka—and an assassination.

In exactly eleven minutes.

Ominous black clouds churned miles beneath the Gulfstream cruising high above the Atlantic. Far away, 1,600 miles north, thick fog rolled across the runway at Tampa International Airport—with Air Force One descending on approach.

Tracy strode the cabin aisle, air thick with sweat and heavy leather. Her smartwatch pinged. Florida ground team: *Eight minutes to launch. All good.*

Fiddling with her charcoal pearl necklace, she eyed the dozen technicians, each tracking a sliver of the covert op. *Right on schedule.* She halted behind her lead coordinator, Boris, bent over a pulsing, colorful weather map.

When Tracy placed her hand on his shoulder, Boris stopped typing and adjusted his headset. She stood erect, arms crossed and chin high, her gold silk blouse complementing her team's black combat uniforms like a leather-banded Swiss watch.

Seeds of anarchy thrive in a nation stripped of electric power.

The enormous gravity of today's operation weighed on everyone aboard. Their goal: to plant kernels of chaos.

She clucked her tongue, gave a sharp nod and pointed to a green and yellow blob on his screen. "Tell me that's not fog."

Successfully executing their mission—polished for years—would bring infamy to her name and enter Tracy Daniela Ciacchella into the history books alongside John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald. Not desirable, but *exitus acta probat*: the outcome justifies the deeds.

"It is, but ma'am, your yacht is in perfect position in Old Tampa Bay," Boris said, a hint of a Russian accent slipping through on certain syllables. "All four hundred drones fully programmed, ready for activation and deployment from boat deck. We have new problem."

A sitting US president hadn't fallen since '63. Today's mission was the culmination of years of planning, subversion, and digital sleight of hand. No bullets. No lone gunman. Just 400 Semtex-laden drones guided by a matrix of stolen GPS coordinates and a rigged FAA exemption buried three years ago by one of her assets.

A clean kill.

Boris nodded. "Not worried about fog, ma'am, but light rain, not good for drones. Moved in faster than expected."

Each drone carried a two-pound brick of homemade Semtex.

Washington had talked counter-drone defense for years. But as was typical with US leadership, nothing actually got done. No productive decisions. Only political wrangling and posturing—mixed with unhealthy levels of toxic masculinity.

Incompetent politicians. Yet another reason to raise my curtain of death—weather permitting.

For the final time, Tracy confirmed the ground team in position. On her iPad, she tapped open the video chat app connected with her two generals: first, the captain on her yacht in Old Tampa Bay, Florida; and second, her trusted, longtime friend Bob Huffington—nicknamed Huff—perched atop the Macy's roof near I-275. Positioned a mile south, Huff had an unobstructed view of the final approach flight path for runway 1R at Tampa International.

Although Tracy herself was nowhere near Florida, both video feeds from her team streamed clean and crisp via satellite. Rolling fog thickened, obscuring her views.

"Wind speed?" she asked Huff.

“Twenty-two knots. For now, acceptable, but if gusts start pushing above twenty-five, our chances drop to ten percent.”

Getting Goldberg into place had been her masterpiece. After today, with President Whitehead out of the picture, Vice President Goldberg would give Tracy direct access to the power levers controlling the federal government. Her puppet would be in perfect position for the next phase of world domination.

It was now or never. Time for the all-important decision.

Even if the wind began gusting, the drones might still fly close enough to do catastrophic damage.

Tracy brought her iPad close and announced into the tiny speaker, “Green. Repeat, we are green for Operation Black Flock.”

On her screen, both generals nodded in confirmation. Now—shadowy iPad feeds showed Huff entering the launch code while workers on the boat peeled off a massive blue tarp to reveal a cargo container with four hundred off-the-shelf quadcopter drones—all made in China—packed inside a customized carbon fiber lattice. Each carried a two-pound payload of Semtex and a pre-programmed set of GPS-coordinated waypoints—latitude, longitude and elevation—to travel to.

“Gusts up to twenty-four knots,” Huff said, nervously tugging at his earlobe before giving her a thumbs up, indicating her ground team had programmed the drones and activated them. Assuming the weather cooperated, the small black machines would follow precise paths using exact signals from dozens of GPS satellites—all in working order as of five minutes ago, according to her inside man at the Department of Defense. Her DOD contact had also confirmed the Air Force One plane on descent was, in fact, carrying President Whitehead, not a decoy.

Boris leaned back in his chair, away from his laptop, and squinted at Tracy. “I still think we could have come up with a better name for this op.”

She nodded, anxiety rising, wondering whether the drones would perform as intended. “Perhaps.”

“How about Operation Kill Racist Xenophobic Pedophile?”

“Come now, Boris. Way too long.” Tracy gave a silent smirk.

A tiny matrix of red and green lights blinked on her iPad, communicating status from every craft, as propellers whirled, creating a bee-like buzzing sound crackling from the embedded speaker.

The swarm of drones lifted skyward and disappeared into the gray blur of rolling fog.