

# The Visitor

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The man at the oak desk peered through the darkness at his uninvited visitor. The man wanted to call his security detail but knew that to do so would mean their deaths and possibly his own. So he sat and listened.

"You understand your instructions?" the visitor asked. He – the man at the desk assumed it was a 'he' – spoke impeccable English but had an odd accent the man couldn't quite place.

"You know we have rules about things like that. I can't just wave a magic wand and promote someone just because it might be politically expedient," the man protested.

"You are the head of state of the most technologically advanced, most powerful, nation on this planet. I'm also told you're quite clever at getting your way."

"And if I can't do it? I mean, we have laws and even I'm not above the law."

"The president of Turkey failed to accede to one of my very simple requests... you know what happened there."

The man was noted for his aplomb under fire, but the visitor's calm statement scared him. Turkey had been hit by an earthquake that had devastated one of her major cities. Thousands of lives had been lost and aftershocks were making it impossible for help to get to the survivors.

"That was your doing?"

The visitor shrugged – at least that's what it looked like in the darkness. The man couldn't discern any details about the visitor aside from height and that 'he' appeared to be wearing a long cloak. "Your planet has flaws and faults that are simple to manipulate," the visitor was saying. "There is a similar fault beneath New York. Do I need to order that city levelled before you realize the seriousness of my request?"

"Jim Henderson isn't going to be happy with me fobbing some political appointee off on him."

"General Henderson's emotional state does not concern me. Nor should it concern you."

The president understood the implied threat. He was many things – one didn't become chief of state of the most powerful country on the planet by being the nicest person around – but he was by no means stupid. He'd also read the packet on the man his visitor wanted installed as General Henderson's assistant. Ed Straker. Straker was young, brilliant and ambitious. Orphaned young, sent to private schools by a trust fund set up by 'relatives', he graduated college at 16 with a degree in astrophysics then spent two more years on a NASA lunar research project. Straker's stated goal was to become an astronaut and he joined the

USAF to get his test pilot's ticket and an appointment to either the USAF space program or NASA.

Straker's performance reviews were decent and he made all his promotions in minimal time, although the president found himself wondering how much his visitor had interfered with the promotions process to get Straker to his current rank. Brilliant scientists usually ended up shunted off to a lab in the hinterlands but that hadn't happened with Straker and there was no indication of why someone who graduated so young **wouldn't** have been put to work in research.

There was only one odd comment in the packet. General Hendriks had noted that Straker had negative views on the United States' involvement in 'Asian adventurism'. Hendriks considered that to be an odd attitude for someone in the US military. The comment was dated one week before Hendriks' fatal stroke.

"May I ask why you want him on Henderson's staff? He doesn't need to be a full colonel to do that job."

"Henderson is correct in that the Earth needs defenses against an extraterrestrial threat. I have every faith that Straker can make that happen, once he is given the opportunity."

"Henderson is a long way from making his project a reality and he won't hand it over to just anybody."

"Again, that is not your concern."

The president shook his head, trying to place the visitor's accent before finally giving up. There was a good chance the visitor wasn't even from Earth.

"And exactly what is your interest in this young man?" the president asked.

The visitor smiled and the president thought he saw sharp teeth in an inhumanly wide mouth. Then what he'd thought was a cloak shifted to look like giant folded bat-wings. The president's mouth went dry.

The visitor spoke again softly. "He is my son."