

BOOK TWO of the Temporal Series

# A TEMPORAL TRUST



A NOVEL BY  
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# **CHAPTER ONE EXCERPT FROM...**

## **A TEMPORAL TRUST**

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## Chapter One

“How many of them, boy?”

The old man’s eyes were wide, his mouth hanging open as if still in the process of releasing his last word. Sam couldn’t tell if it was from fear or simply the anticipation of the moment.

Sam gripped the metal pipe he was holding tightly and closed his own eyes to shut out the world around him. Patterns soon emerged within his mind that represented Nephloc—the dark creatures under the enemy’s control.

“Three—no, four,” Sam said, opening his eyes and turning to Marcus who was not twelve inches away. “And they are closing in fast.”

Seeing a burgeoning smile, Sam determined the wide eyes were from anticipation and not fear.

Sam looked down from the rafters upon which they were hiding and watched as Suteko walked casually around a chair on the floor below. She wore her long, silky hair back in a ponytail. Her clothes were loose to enable quick and varied movements. Hidden under the belt around the small of her back was a bamboo nunchaku. She was dressed for battle.

She was the bait.

It was Marcus’ plan, and Sam had been dead set against it. He had finally found Suteko, and the best plan they could come up with was to have the woman of his dreams lure the Nephloc—waking nightmares—into a trap.

But it was the Temporal's only hope; they had no knowledge of the enemy's plan and they desperately needed intelligence. All they knew was the Nephloc would be coming and that meant opportunity to get that intelligence.

Brushing Sam's fears aside, Suteko understood this was their best chance to gain information, and she willingly submitted to the plan. Kaileen—the presumed leader of the Nephloc—was on the move, always one step ahead of the Temporal. No one would be safe until she was stopped. If they could just get some hint of her location, this whole matter could be behind them; Sam and Suteko could have a life together, at least that was Sam's hope.

The call-out by Marcus was answered by fewer than he had hoped. Many Temporal, individualistic by nature, had not been fond of the idea. Others understood being scattered created vulnerability and were arranging transportation. The timetable varied for those planning to come. Some were willing to leave immediately. Others required weeks to settle local accounts. They were, after all, about to assume a new name and a new life all for the purpose of banding together for protection from an enemy not well understood.

Ian Cooke and Catherine Porras were the first to arrive in Washington DC. Even before Marcus' invite, they were intent on paying the old man a visit. While nothing concrete had happened, both Ian and Catherine had experienced a number of strange parallel dreams. Consulting Marcus in person seemed appropriate. Hearing of the threat only solidified their decision.

But they were not without their disagreements. Ian had a complicated past with both Suteko and Marcus, and Catherine was unstable and highly suspicious of Suteko's motivations. Still, they both felt the current course of action would be best for all.

Ian and Catherine's dreams and visions had been filled with dark creatures. These evil beings were searching for something. After some discussion, they both agreed that the object of the enemy's attention was Suteko. From this interpretation, the current plan was decided upon.

In their visions, Ian and Catherine had both been shown a specific location. They were certain the attack would take place there. They had no address, but both had a vague sense of the area and felt they could find it.

Marcus consulted with President Brad Gardner who sent Lieutenant Scott Harrison. Harrison worked in close liaison with the Pentagon and the Secret Service as a facilitator, someone who organized meetings and had the authority to make what needed to happen, happen.

Following Ian and Catherine's instructions and making ample use of Google Maps, they soon discovered the location. Remembering their visions, they immediately recognized the outside of the house. When they stepped inside, the interior was exactly like their dreams, as well. Only their guide, Lieutenant Harrison, was surprised to discover the house was actually a Secret Service safe house; the others nodded as if it were expected.

With its few rooms and exposed rafters, the building was more of a cabin than a house. It sat atop a small hill and was a good half mile away from the nearest neighbor. The north side of the hill had the lone access road and provided an unobstructed panoramic view—perfect for watching for intruders. But, of course, this may do little to discourage intruders of the supernatural kind.

The lieutenant was told that only Suteko would require lodging at that location. It wasn't that Lieutenant Harrison was untrustworthy—he seemed to be of the highest moral character—but the Nephloc, through nefarious means, would somehow learn that Suteko would be alone in this

place, and they wanted to plant as many seeds as possible to lead the enemy to that conclusion.

They had been waiting for over a week, each night careful to make it appear as though Suteko was alone and vulnerable.

And now, the time had finally come. Ian and Catherine's visions had proved prophetic.

Up in the rafters, Sam shot a glance at Ian. His brow was crinkled and his narrow eyes burned with anger, waiting for the fight to begin—itching for the fight to begin.

Sam watched Ian's right hand move into view. He was holding a fairly large knife. Next to Sam near the doorway, he saw Marcus gave Ian a most disapproving look. Ian, who was positioned in the middle of the room, ignored the old man and continued looking down upon Suteko and her chair. Ian licked his lips, eager for the fight to begin.

Marcus had been insistent on capturing the Nephloc alive and had had a few terse words with Ian who clearly had a different opinion. As much as he respected Marcus, Sam was glad at least one of them had a weapon that could kill.

Ian had seemed quite taken aback by the dreams. Sam had noticed it. Ian gave Suteko more than a fair share of his attention. The subtle glances...the readiness to agree and take Suteko's side no matter the context. While he certainly appreciated Ian's concern and protection, Sam began to suspect Ian had more on his mind than simply preventing a nightmare from coming true.

It wasn't that Ian was a bad guy. The first time they met, they seemed to have hit it off. But a few days later, Ian was a totally different person. Sam didn't put it together at first, but it soon became obvious it had something to do with Suteko.

"Suteko." Sam spoke in a voice just above a whisper. "Thirty seconds." He had let the thoughts of recent events

run too rampant. Sam had to get control of himself within the moment—anything but total success was unacceptable.

The old man, who was near Sam, asked, “Which direction?”

“They are circling the building,” Sam whispered, drawing his finger around before pointing at the window and then to the door.

Ian’s face hardened. His right hand squeezed a wooden beam a little too hard, sending bits of wood pulp to the floor. He was above and to the right of Suteko, about six feet from Marcus and Sam.

“Steady.” Marcus’ face was resolute, his voice little above a whisper. “Ian, watch the window. Sam and I will focus on the door. No talking.”

Ian and Sam nodded and concentrated their attention on their respective targets. Suteko sat down on the single wooden chair in the middle of the room. After glancing upward, she alternated her eyes between the curtained window and the solid oak door. Sam wondered how she could be so composed.

A screeching sound, like that of a barn owl, thundered nearby, causing the window to rattle.

Sam touched the old man’s shoulder and got his attention. He flashed out three fingers in the direction of the door and one at the window. The old man nodded, and Sam turned his attention back to the door.

A minute passed and Sam began to worry. He sensed the four creatures were just outside the door and window of this small cabin, but they were not moving.

Ian waved his hand in Marcus’ direction and then signed a silent question with his right hand. After reading the sign language, Marcus leaned over to Sam and whispered into his ear, “He’s asking what’s going on?”

“The Nephloc are outside the door and window, but they are just waiting for some reason.”

“Can you read their thoughts?” asked Marcus in a voice just over the hum of a nearby air vent.

After making sure his legs and arms were solidly on multiple beams, Sam closed his eyes and concentrated. He allowed his body to relax. Gray patterns, dark and unclear, floated before his closed eyes.

Out of the drab color, faces appeared and grew in detail. He began labeling the patterns. Doing so organized what he saw, preventing confusion. He saw Marcus, Ian, and Suteko. He noted Catherine’s pattern several hundred meters away. No doubt, she was watching and also listening to the echoes while waiting for the signal.

He turned his attention to the middle area just outside the small building, the area where the enemy waited. There, he saw four dark patterns that resisted his attempt to bring them into greater detail. He could see nothing more than gray shapes. Unlike the gray blocks that represented his friends, these shapes remained undefined and unknowable. The enemy was emitting some kind of barrier that prevented Sam from learning more.

It was like viewing a television channel that had been scrambled; he could see that something meaningful—some information—was there, but its content was a mystery. He had never encountered this kind of resistance and was unsure of its meaning. But he knew one thing: these creatures were their hunters, the Nephloc that had come to harm Suteko.

His anger burned enough to momentarily disrupt his concentration, but he soon had the indefinite shadows back into view. He saw no further detail, but he could at least monitor their movements.

As Sam quieted his mind, the nature of the information he was receiving from the four dark shapes changed. It all seemed meaningless—garbled data missing the beginning or the key portion that could unlock the overall meaning of the message. But it was information, and information meant intelligence.

Sam decided upon a different approach. He stopped trying to listen or view their thoughts as one would hear or read language. Instead, he attuned his senses to their hearts. These Nephloc had been well trained; they were masking their thoughts masterfully—or else, someone was masking their thoughts for them. They could not, however, hide their feelings.

There was something else that Sam sensed...fear. He still couldn't hear their actual thoughts, but the meaning behind their thoughts was clear to him.

Sam whispered into Marcus' ear, "They want confirmation Suteko is here and alone. They sense a trap."

Suteko looked up at Marcus. He signed a message to her. She nodded and began singing, slowly and softly. It was a Japanese lullaby just loud enough to penetrate the door in front of her.

森のふくろうが言いました  
私は森の見張り役

怖い狼、狐など  
来させないから、ねんねしな

ごろすけ ホーホー  
ごろすけ ホー

*Mori no fukurō ga iimashita*  
*Watashi wa mori no mibari yaku*

*Kowai ōkami, Kitsune nado  
Kosasenai kara, nenne shina  
Gorosuke ho- ho- Gorosuke ho-*

Sam was enchanted by Suteko's voice and the Japanese words, very few of which he understood. He knew it had something to do with an owl in the forest standing guard against terrible wolves and foxes. He knew the Nephloc were listening and were likewise interested in the sound. He just hoped they didn't know about the owls watching and waiting for the foxes.

He began to see movement in the patterns and shapes on the map in his mind.

The Nephloc were responding to her voice. It was working.

Then, Sam's muscles tightened. He could sense that they were counting down. Marcus and Ian looked to Sam as he held up five fingers and folded one for each second that passed.

He closed his fist. Suteko stopped singing.

Two loud bursts blasted from the direction of the window and door. There was an explosion. Shattered wood and glass fragments went flying into the air, showering the chair that Suteko had quickly vacated. Smoke poured in, bringing with it a bitter, acidic smell.

As the smoke cleared, they saw the door had splintered, but was mostly intact. A gloved hand punched through a large segment and pulled out enough of the wood for the Nephloc's enormous frame to lumber in. The monster that came through was colossal, dark, and by any definition powerful.

Still up in the rafters, Sam's first thought was they were trapped. The small cabin had two accesses to the outside and

both were covered by the enemy. Something made him look down at Suteko—her face unyielding and stance ready for battle. He shook his head free of thoughts of defeat and prepared to follow Marcus' lead.

Sam could see that the one at the window had already entered completely. Marcus held up his hand in view of Ian and Sam. The creatures were moving cautiously, and he wanted all four inside the room before springing the trap. If one escaped, total control of the situation would not be possible.

Suteko repositioned her footing. Although only one of the three at the door had fully entered the building, the Nephloc from the window was closing in on her. She took a few steps toward a far corner. One hand calmly reached behind her back and gripped a handle of the nunchaku, still keeping it hidden from the enemy's eyes.

The creature was swaying to and fro as if injured, dragging its feet heavily over the tiled floor. *Kireek shuup. Kireek shuup.* Each stride produced a metallic scraping sound unpleasant to the ear. Adding to the general discord, it also let out a sustained growl with each exhalation.

A black, gloved hand reached out a few feet from Suteko's position.

Beyond the breaths there was the occasional cracking sound, as more of the oak door fell victim to the other intruders' blows.

Sam kept his eyes on the Nephloc closest to Suteko.

It was big.

Comparing its height to the rafters, Sam guessed it was nearly eight feet tall or at least it would have been had it not been slouching.

It passed under Sam's location. The stench it brought with it was every bit as impressive as the monster itself. This Nephloc still had much flesh to rot off.

The whole scene was even more frightful to Sam than his memory of several smaller dark-clothed Nephloc that had attacked him in front of a Japanese hospital. They had drawn his blood and overpowered him, but it had been dark, and he was now seeing their horrid appearance in the clear artificial light.

He remembered not being able to see the Nephloc's face then. There had been a scrambling field preventing any recognition of facial features. This time, his vantage point prevented even that. All Sam saw now was cloth, completely black cloth.

A sudden movement snapped Sam's attention to his right. Ian ignored the old man's still-held up hand and had jumped down from the rafters, landing behind the one Nephloc who had entered via the window—the one reaching for Suteko. His left hand caught the neck of the creature. His right hand lifted the knife. With a twist, Ian ran the blade of the knife across its chest and sent its head down hard into the floor. The slash produced no blood, but the creature staggered in pain.

Marcus sighed and also dropped down. A second later, Marcus and Sam were facing the single Nephloc that had managed to get through the door. It turned and, along with the other two enemies, began fleeing outside. Without a second thought, Sam threw the metal pipe into the back of the closest Nephloc. It stumbled, but continued a clumsy retreat.

Marcus pushed a button on a keyring signaling Catherine to leave her observation perch and give aid. He then flashed outside, leaping into the air. His fist plummeted into the Nephloc Sam had injured, his touch paralyzing the enemy instantly. It dropped to the ground in a moment.

Sam followed and grabbed the Nephloc that was stiff and unresponsive. It was like a stone after Marcus' attack. With a show of great strength that surprised even him, Sam lifted and threw the Nephloc through the door, taking portions of the outer wall of the building with it. As Sam let the creature fly, he used that split second to glance at Ian who was still inside the cabin.

Ian was on top of the Nephloc that had come in through the window—the one that was after Suteko. It was on the floor, and Ian landed blow after blow into its face and chest. He didn't see the knife any more, but Ian's fists were plenty. Suteko was beside him pleading, trying to get him to stop. Ian didn't acknowledge anyone else's presence; all that existed was him and the enemy.

But even more fascinating for Sam was the creature itself.

The Nephloc under Ian had been so large, and yet now, it was nothing more than a sniveling mess frantically trying to avoid Ian's blows. The beating this Nephloc was taking would have killed any human. And yet, there was no blood, only a pulp of flesh and bone.

But it was experiencing great pain and fear.

The sounds of high-pitched screeching filled the small building. Ian's eyes were burning as he jumped off that nearly unconscious Nephloc and headed toward the one Sam had just thrown in. That Nephloc was now against the wall attempting to position itself as far away from the coming avenger as possible.

The captured Nephloc were poor reflections of what they had been only a minute before. Tiny, hardly more than the size of a child cramped in a huddled fetal position.

"Enough!" The old man's voice boomed, stilling the fists and turning the heads of not only Ian, but everyone else in the room. Marcus had returned with the third Nephloc in tow. Releasing it, the three Nephloc cowered together in a

tight group making stunted, bowing motions directed at their Temporal captors. They were cornered and defeated. All possible exits were covered by Temporal who were clearly stronger than they. This was a happy surprise for Sam who had imagined the enemy would have offered a much stronger attack.

Marcus shot a disapproving glance at Ian who was once again sporting clenched fists and was in mid-stride toward one of the creatures. The old man repeated, "Enough. They are defeated and will have quarter."

Sam stepped in front of Ian, stopping his advance and daring him to continue. After a few ponderous breaths, Ian lifted his fist. Sam stood firm, but pulled his shoulder in slightly. With a cry louder than the explosions that had opened the window and door, Ian turned and slammed his fist into a nearby wall.

The old man nodded and said, "Hold them here while I help Catherine capture the last one." Marcus then flew out the door with a speed faster than the eye could process.