

Handshake Continuum (*Excerpt*)

Part One: Julian

We must be willing to let go of the life that is waiting for us so as to have the life we planned.

~Joseph Campbell

The life of Julian Winston Greaves was unfolding exactly as they planned it. Scratching his ruffled blond hair, Julian stared at the green computer screen. An Apple IIe. His father's computer, and Julian's first introduction to the world of bits and bytes. It was an ancient archetype. The kind of bland manilla prototypes displayed in the historical wing of the Denver Museum of Technology, down the block. Not one you'd expect to find in a temporal research lab. It was retrofitted, of course, with the best the 21st century had to offer. His boss, Derek Penione, insisted on it. Despite a world filled with smartphones and even smarter houses, Julian relished the innovations of an earlier time. When a simple cursor changed everything.

He took a large gulp of his lukewarm coffee and frowned. The formulas weren't right. Not yet. He had been working on developing a Chaotic Inflation Device for years and was so close to a breakthrough. He could taste it on his tongue, the thick sweetness of an almost epiphany. If it worked, his device would recreate the Big Bang and change mankind's understanding of the world. It would also mean Julian was one step closer to proving the existence of the Akashic Field – the memory of the Universe. A record of all that has happened, all that will happen, and from which all things arise. If he could just *think* it would all come together. The blinking white square glared back. Nothing. He wanted to throw his stained metal travel mug across the room and curse the Universe. Instead, he logged off.

Nearly molded into his black leather chair, Julian stretched out his long legs, which had become stiff and slightly atrophied. He glanced at his watch. It was an old, worn contraption. A relic from a grandfather he could barely recollect. Despite its age, it ran just as smoothly as the day he put it on, if he remembered to wind it.

Which he always did. Julian wasn't sure his watch had anything to do with anything, but he didn't want to take any chances. Everything in his life depended on a specific path and stringent routine. He was not about to ruin it over something as mundane as what watch he wore. The second hand ticked steadily by, and the standard clock face read 2:22.

"Curses," he groaned, his stomach growling. Actually, it was more of a shout than a growl.

Julian estimated that he had been working for nearly eight hours straight, and this wasn't the first time he neglected his stomach. He wished he didn't have to worry about inconveniences like eating or commuting or small talk. On any normal day, he would have already eaten at the diner across the street. A two-egg breakfast, coffee, and cherry pie served by his favorite waitress, Annie. But today wasn't just any other day. After years of waffling, he had finally decided to ask Annie on a date. Working through six cups of coffee, a protein bar, and a couple of doughnuts left out the night before, wasn't eating. It was procrastinating.

"Fine, fine," Julian said, pushing aside the towering stack of pea-green folders. "You win."

Staggering upright, he removed his tarnished wire glasses and rubbed his eyes. They felt red. Raw, overused. After a few squirts of eye drops, he stumbled toward the door, which until he put his glasses back on, was just a faded oak blob. Leaning bleary eyed against the pale-blue walls in the hallway, he double-checked the automatic locks.

Walking toward the elevator, Julian kept his eyes fixated on his Blackberry. Annie had teased him about it once – calling him an old-fashioned man in a high-tech world. He supposed he was. He had the same computer, the same briefcase, the same coffee mug, and the same outdated phone. Relics of simpler times. When the elevator doors opened, Julian checked his watch – 2:30. Plenty of time to see Annie.