

# THE GENESIS TREE

## PART ONE THE SALEM INCIDENT

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Frank Pollard sat in his rocking chair on the front porch and watched as the semi-tractor brought death into Salem.

The sun was bright for six o'clock in the morning on this balmy June day. Frank first noticed the tractor-trailer as it crested the hill by the hospital, its stacks filling the air with a steady roar as the driver down shifted coming into the city limits. The morning sunlight reflected from the windshield and massive chromed bumper, startling Frank as it shined into his eyes.

"Damn it!" He swore as he sloshed hot coffee over his hand when he jerked his head at the reflected light blinding him.

"Oh, Frank! Are you OK?" His wife, Ami, dabbed at his hand with a napkin as she took the cup. Setting it on the small table next to them she wiped at the spill.

"The light, honey - caught my eyes. Sorry. From that truck." Frank pointed at the big rig passing the house.

Ami stopped her wiping to look where her husband was pointing.

"My, my. That sure is a beautiful truck, Frank. I declare, that must be about the shiniest one I ever saw."

"Probably brand new. Too clean to come far. Mebbe St. Lou, they sell them big rigs up there." Frank studied the passing rig, noting the shiny black tractor loaded with chrome. He tried to see if the driver was a man or a woman, but the darkly tinted windows prevented this.

"It's a moving van, Ami. Somebody must be awful loaded with money to hire that fancy rig." Frank again pointed, this time to the lettering along the side of the forty-foot trailer.

"Says DANIS VAN LINES, hon. Say they move the world." Frank read out loud to his wife. "Says it's from New York."

"New York! My, my, Frank. Somebody must be moving a long way." She nodded her head, adjusting her bifocals as they slipped down her nose. "Wonder where they're moving too?"

"Probably California. Bet on it, hon." Frank's voice was certain. "People nowadays always moving, can't sit still. Always jumping up and going some place else. People's crazy nowadays." Frank spoke with conviction, having lived in this house for almost fifty years he felt he had the right to judge.

"That's peculiar. Look, Ami. Them cars in front and back of the truck, there's something funny about them." Frank pointed at the vehicles as he spoke, first at the black SUV in front, then again at the one following the semi.

"Something don't fit, woman. It just don't. See those cars? They're called SUVs, kinda like a car and kinda like a pickup. Government people drive them kinda cars." Frank tensed as he carefully observed the vehicles.

"See there! See how they are spaced out? One in front is distanced same as

the one following. And, Ami, all three are shiny black with windows all tinted. And look at all the antennas on them SUVs.” He glanced at his wife, who was also watching closely now.

“That ain’t no moving van. No way, Ami. It sure as hell ain’t.” Frank’s voice was puzzled now. “Whatever they’re carrying, you can bet my butt it ain’t somebody’s furniture.” Frank watched the vehicles as they traveled the S curve leading to the town square a mile away.

Picking up his coffee, he blew on it as he raised it to his lips.

“No, Sir. That there is some kind of government secret stuff. Whatever it is, I hope they just take it way the hell away from here. Yep!” The old man allowed his thoughts to be distracted as a purple pickup zoomed past, radio blaring.

“Damn kids! Gonna ruin their ears in a month with all that noise. Yep!” He again leaned back in his rocker, enjoying the morning warmth.

The black tractor-trailer slowed to a halt at the stop sign. Ahead of it, at the traffic light blinking red several blocks away, traffic was being directed by a county deputy and a city police officer both.

As the driver reached for the radio on the seat beside him, it erupted with sound.

“We see it. Take it slow and relax. We’ll handle anything that comes up. We turn right at the light onto the main highway. You copy?” The voice was curt, a voice of command.

Raising the radio to his mouth, the driver spoke into it. “Yes, sir. I copy. Right at the light.”

The voice came again. “Crow 3, do you copy?”

“Affirmative, sir. We’re alert.”

The SUV pulled ahead, swung to the right as the semi geared forward, followed immediately by the other SUV. Horns blared as other cars were forced to wait until the three vehicles cleared the intersection.

The semi driver glanced to the right, noticing the courthouse square which dominated the small town. Almost every parking slot was filled completely around the square. ‘Court must be in session.’, he thought to himself. He passed the corner of the square, seeing the police and sheriff department buildings next to each other. Then past the electric company building, it’s lawn neat and green. The digital sign at the roadside glowed with the temperature - 74 degrees.

“Watch it! There is a drop off here. Maybe eight inches. Take it very slow. Copy” The voice on the radio was nervous.

The driver did not reply. Studying the road in front of him he slowed to ten miles an hour, tensing as the tractor wheels hit the drop. Sweat broke out on his face as he felt the trailer bounce.

He saw the deputy glance at them, then wave them on, pointing to the right as he observed their flashing turn signals. The lead vehicle made the turn, again swinging wide to block oncoming traffic as the semi began its turn.

“God Damn!” The oath escaped the driver as the trailer wheels hit the drop-off, bouncing hard. His hands were slippery on the steering wheel. “God Damnnit!” He said it again, wiping the sweat from his face as he released his pent up breath.

“Road bumps again, then it’s clear. Slow and easy.” The nervousness was more pronounced.

The driver barely heard the voice; he was concentrating completely on the road,

waiting for the next bump. It came, but it was less severe. He geared up, increasing speed.

Damn, he'd be glad when his stretch was over and somebody else was behind the wheel. He was wiped! He'd slid behind the wheel at Cabool, Missouri, and he had it until Fort Smith, Arkansas. Then he would be handed an envelope with cash in it, and a vacation for him - until the next run. He had earned it, that was for damn sure. He didn't know what the hell he was hauling - and he didn't want to know.

All he knew was the same as always - nothing. Get behind the wheel, drive the truck, speak to no one, and follow orders on the radio. He had never even gotten a close look at the people in the SUVs. When he pulled over to fill his diesel tanks, he got out to work the pump, went to the bathroom if he needed to, paid the bill in cash and returned to the cab of his truck.

He had found a small cash box bolted to the floorboard when he first entered the truck, filled with fifty and hundred dollar bills. From these he paid the fuel bills and placed all receipts on a clipboard next to the cash box. He had made thirty-five trips now, never to the same place. Never had he pulled into a chicken coop (weigh station). Usually the rear vehicle would pull around, pass him, and then drive ahead to the weigh station. Within a few minutes it would again pull in behind him, sitting in the 'rocking chair' of his wind draft.

He could hear the chatter of other trucks on the CB above his head, but he was not allowed to ever speak on it. Many times he had been hailed by drivers on these trips, and then heard them wonder out loud as his rig sped on along the highway.

This trip really had him nervous. The voice on the radio had given him terse instructions, and an unusual warning. He had been emphatically told to watch for bumps - and go as slow as needed to ease over them. He had unwisely asked why, and the commanding voice had replied with an abrupt comment that scared the hell out of him.

"One wrong bump and all of us are nothing but a spot of grease - instantly. Is that clear!" It was definitely NOT a question. Hellfire, he could be hauling nitro for all he knew. When he dieseled up the SUVs would gas up a lane or two away. It was weird! Only one person ever got out of the vehicles at a time. Some premonition had almost made him back out of this run. Almost, but he couldn't turn down the money.

Curiosity, and a lot of fear, had gotten the best of him at one point. All receipts were removed when he finished his stretch of driving, this he knew. Each driver did his turn, clipped the receipts and then forgot about it. But someone had gotten careless and he saw the corner of a ticket caught behind the cash box. It drove him crazy until he finally had carefully pulled it loose. The ticket was a carbon, from a truck stop in Nevada, dated two days ago. His mind constantly worked at the puzzle. Nevada? Nevada meant some strange and nasty shit. Although he never knew what he hauled, he had heard a lot of talk about things out of Nevada and New Mexico, even Arizona. Why would this load come from Nevada and circle around to get to Fort Smith? It made more sense to run through Oklahoma. Of course, he had no idea where it went after he left the segment he drove. For all he knew the trailer stayed on the highways, constantly traveling.

Right now he wished he was on a regular run and money be damned. He would even be willing to keep a decent log book again. And that was another thing which bothered him, on these runs he never had to log - at all. To him, this meant some big power and money were involved.

“Watch it! Look alert, you asshole.” The voice startled him. He shifted in the air ride seat as he crested the hill by a shopping mall and a dentist’s office.

Harold Rogers glanced at his wife worriedly as the Ford pickup raced over the dirt road.

“Bethy! You OK, girl?”

“No, Harry. Hurry! It hurts! The baby’s close, I know it.” She held her arms across her stomach as she grimaced with pain. “I hope we make it, Harry. Or else you’ll deliver it in this truck yourself.”

Harry responded by pressing down on the gas pedal, the truck leaping forward with a burst of speed. This was their first baby and nothing could possibly go wrong - not if he had any say about it.

“Hang in there, Beth. Hang in there. Just about ten minutes more and we’ll be at the hospital.” His worried voice shook in concern.

“I’m trying. I am, but hurry.”

The semi rounded a curve and started down the hill as the driver shifted up through the gears. “Better, Thank God.” The driver was referring to the smoothness of the two lane highway. It would please him if the pavement was as smooth as glass. The last thing he wanted was any kind of pothole or big bump. The voice spoke from the radio.

“We’re behind schedule. Pick it up, people. Road is fine now, so let’s make up some time.” The lead SUV picked up speed, widening the distance between it and the semi. “Bring it on.” The driver responded with power, the big rig’s pipes growling their exhaust. The trio of vehicles now traveled at just over sixty mile an hour.

The driver reached to the cassette deck, picking out a Dick Curless tape. He glanced through the windshield at the lead SUV - too close, better back off a little. His foot eased on the pedal as he leaned over to insert the cassette tape, taking his eyes from the road for a brief instant.

Harry slowed as he neared the paved highway, his eyes again glancing at his wife. He better get to the hospital fast!

Quickly looking both ways at the paved road, Harry saw only a semi cresting the hill on his left and nothing to the right. The pickup slid onto the pavement in a tire screaming wail as Harry spun the steering wheel.

“Harry! Look out! Harry!”

Harry saw the SUV in front of the semi bearing down on him. He had not noticed it at first because it’s black color matched the big rig behind it.

“No! Oh, God, no-o-o!” Beth’s screams were lost as the pickup smashed into the left front of the SUV. Harry’s head hit the windshield, killing him instantly. Beth was thrown against the door at the impact, pain coursing through her in fresh waves as her bones broke in her right shoulder.

The pickup spun to the right from the impact as the SUV flipped sideways to the left. Screams could be heard inside the vehicle as it rolled over in a series of crushing moves.

“Holy Shit!” The driver applied the air brakes with all his force as the semi contacted the SUV. He heard the wheels lock, heard the screech of the tires on pavement, then he felt the shudder in the cab as the massive bumper slammed into the

rolling SUV.

Risking a glance in his driver's side mirror, he could see the SUV behind him swinging to the left in an effort to avoid a collision. He felt the trailer begin to jack knife as he jerked the steering wheel. In the mirror he saw the trailer swing around to the left, seemingly in slow motion. He registered the pickup hurtling across the highway and the escaping SUV hitting the driver's side of the other vehicle, then the trailer ponderously slammed into both vehicles as it swept along the pavement. He felt the tractor tearing loose from the trailer, beginning to flip end over end as the SUV caught beneath the bumper.

The next moment he was hanging upside down, supported by his seat belt. Miraculously, he felt no pain, no broken bones, not even a little cut. He was unscathed! He became aware that the cab was lodged atop the SUV. The shriek of tortured metal registered in his consciousness as he watched the trailer continue its path of destruction. It seemed to be moving slowly as it crushed both the pickup and the second SUV, sweeping them under itself like garbage, and then continue to slide in a closing arc - toward the tractor itself.

He had to get out of here! Releasing the latch of the seat belt, he fell to the now floor, then punched the electric window button, urging it to open faster. He had to get out, he had to. Terror engulfed him completely as he kicked at the door. It seemed to take forever for the window to open enough for him to squeeze out.

He shoved his upper body through the opening, pushing with his legs. He could see the rear of the trailer as it swung closer. The trailer doors swung open, slamming against the side of the trailer.

"Oh God! Shit, NO! Don't let it blow, please." The prayer was unconscious as he saw the movement at the open rear. Something was there, leaving the trailer. In the brief moment before the trailer slammed into the cab, crushing him, the driver saw a mercury like figure hurtle from the trailer. In a moment of total clarity, his vision seemed to narrow upon this action.

The form was metallic, shiny, yet appeared liquid as it seemed to hover stationary in the air for a moment, then fell to the road. It splattered into droplets which immediately began to turn into a silvery mist. More of the mercury like stuff flowed from the trailer, joining the droplets already on the road. . What the Hell?

His vision was blocked by the trailer impacting the cab. He never saw nor felt the resultant explosions as the SUV gas tanks detonated. The diesel tanks on the tractor caught fire and exploded also as the ground shook with the force of the detonations.

No one saw the silvery cloud-like mist which swiftly crossed the pavement with a rippling motion and entered the woods. Strangely, a flock of birds caught in the path of the silvery ripple dropped like stones, one moment they were flying and the next they laid lifeless upon the ground. From each bird a plume of steam arose, smelling like sulphur or something rotted.

The silvery mist flowed between the oak trees, leaving a brown, dead trail in its wake. The light breeze blowing did not affect the mist at all, it merely flowed onward. As it flowed it metamorphisized, the destructive wake no longer being so obvious. In less than two miles it did not affect anything it passed.

Floating at about tree-top level now, the mist approached Salem City Park and the five acre lake at the center. It flowed down to the water and came to rest gently upon the surface, then began to spread outward over the lake.

