

War Games

Jack English

Prologue: Massive spheres crisscrossed the heavens, pulling on one another, nudging one another, all trying to change the course of history.

Which ones would meet their aims?

Which ones go down in flames?

“What the fates impose, men must abide; one cannot resist both wind and tide,”

~William Shakespeare *Henry VI*.

Chapter One: Agenda

Gloria Stegman was a South Jersey congresswoman in her third term. So far, she had failed to distinguish herself in any way. She hoped to change that. The Speaker of the House of Representatives allows any member to make a one-minute speech on any topic before the start of regular business.

Stegman stepped in front of her house colleagues.

“Madame Speaker, fellow representatives, ladies, and gentlemen. It is time to ban all nuclear weapons within the continental United States. We would like to think that the people who build, maintain, and handle nuclear weapons are smarter than us. They are not. Their methods are so slipshod it is frightening. Losing nuclear weapons is so common it has a name. It is called a Broken Arrow. The Department of Defense admits to at least thirty-two Broken Arrow incidents since the dawn of the atomic age. If they admit to thirty-two incidents, how many have they covered up? It may be ten times that number.

“The dirty little secret is that nuclear weapons are not just a threat to our enemies, they are a threat to us through mishap and misadventure. Three nuclear weapons have been lost and never recovered. One of those was a 1.7 megaton nuclear weapon lost near Tybee Island, Georgia. I, and my colleagues, plan to introduce legislation making it illegal to manufacture, store, transport, or maintain nuclear weapons within the continental United States. Not only would that make us safer, but it would also make it easier for other countries to disarm. We must not let the military-industrial complex drive policy.

“Fellow members of the House of Representatives, ladies, and gentlemen, it is time for the United States of America to take the high ground. It is time for the United States of America to lead the way. Thank you.”

Congresswoman Stegman stepped down from the lectern and returned to her seat. Of the 435 members of the House of Representatives, there were less than two dozen in the

chamber when she spoke, and they were chatting with their staffs and each other, or they were on their phones during her speech. But it was a start. She planned to make a one-minute speech every week until her colleagues took her seriously.

As she sat, she heard whispering behind her from members of her own party. “She is nuts. It will never happen.” But a handful of people said, “A ban is long overdue.”

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That afternoon, Congresswoman Gloria Stegman lectured her staff, “Banning nuclear weapons on U.S. soil is only the first step. I want to ban all U.S. nuclear weapons.”

Stegman represented a largely rural South Jersey congressional district. She grew up in Estell Manor, a rural town ten miles west of Atlantic City. That was close enough to give Gloria Stegman a taste of the bright lights, a taste that drove her to do whatever it takes to get out of Estell Manor. After getting a degree in Genocide Studies, she found no one wanted to hire her. Then, she talked herself into a job on the staff of a state senator. She parlayed that job into a job on the staff of a South Jersey Congressman where she worked until he was forced to resign over a sexual harassment scandal. Trying to repair its image, the party put forward Gloria Stegman as a congressional candidate. No one expected her to win -- least of all her party. But she won and was now in her third term.

Stegman continued haranguing her staff, “Once we get nukes banned, we go after the Defense Department budget. I would like to cut it in half next year and half again the year after that. Disarmament is going to be my signature cause.”

“Even if we disarm,” Preston Spenser, her chief of staff said, “how will you get the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians and the North Koreans to disarm?”

Preston Spenser, despite his preppy name, was a grassroots union organizer who got into politics by accident. He was working at a Maple Shade plastics factory for \$15 an hour when he organized a union there. After getting most of his co-workers to sign union cards and winning an election, he tried to negotiate a \$35 an hour pay rate. He figured the company would counteroffer at \$25 and he would accept \$30 on behalf of the union.

The company was not having it and offered a 10% pay raise to \$16.50.

Preston found himself in a bind. He told his coworkers they could expect at least a 50% pay bump if they signed union cards. Then he convinced his coworkers to go on strike. So, they set up picket lines and shut down the factory.

Thereafter, the owner of the company, Michael Constans, called Preston and the other union representatives into his office. “Gentlemen,” Constans said, “I am fifty years old; I have made all the money I am ever going to need. So, I am closing the business.”

“What?!” Preston sprung to his feet. “You cannot do that! You must negotiate with us!”

“The decision has been made,” Constans said. “I sold the molding machines to a Korean start-up and a realtor will put a ‘for sale’ sign on the building today. I am going fishing in Canada, and I will not be in touch for a month.” And with that, Constans left.

While Preston thought he was going to raise his union’s 160 members into the middle class, he instead got them laid off and he took a considerable amount of personal abuse for it. After that, he found it tough to find a job, so he drifted into politics and eventually

worked his way up to a position as Congresswoman Stegman's chief of staff. He soon learned the most important thing in keeping a job was not creating value but avoiding risk. That newfound pragmatism often manifest itself in saying no to most of the congresswoman's ideas.

Stegman blathered on. "I do not care about other countries! I only care about getting the U.S. out of the arms race. If we disarm, the others will disarm. I feel it."

"I am not sure other countries will disarm if we do," Preston Spenser said. "And I see a zero chance of the U.S. giving up its nuclear weapons. Pick a more modest goal."

"Like what?" Stegman asked.

"How about an arms limitation treaty?"

"Not enough. I want tangible action and clear, easy-to-understand goals."

"What if we push for a ten-percent reduction in the number of our nuclear weapons?"

"You are not listening," Stegman said. "I want to push for something dramatic, something that is going to change national policy, something I can run on."

"But if you push for a ban on all nuclear weapons within the continental U.S., that will mean no more Montana missile silos." Preston Spenser said.

"I represent the people of New Jersey, not Montana cattle ranchers. Besides, they will probably be happy to get rid of their missile silos; they will not be a target anymore."

"What about strategic bomber bases? They employ thousands of people."

"Do you see any bomber bases in New Jersey?"

"There is Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. They employ thousands, including some of your constituents."

"As far as I know, there are no bomber squadrons at the Joint Base. And if there are, we do not want them. Let us make peace, not war."

"What about our nuclear missile subs?" Spenser asked. "Are you going to let them dock in Groton?"

"People in Connecticut are not in my congressional district and do not vote for me. So, no, I would not let nuclear armed subs dock in Groton or anywhere else in the U.S."

"How do you expect them to get reprovisioned?"

"That is not my problem," Stegman said. "Let them get reprovisioned from ships at sea. I want to make it so difficult and expensive to have nuclear weapons, even on subs, that the Defense Department gives up."

"Where will our nuclear weapons be made and stored if not in the continental U.S.?"

"That's not my problem," Congresswoman Stegman said.

"The last administration tried to cut nuclear weapons ten percent and got a massive push back from the defense-industrial complex," Spenser said. "How are you going to get a ban on nuclear weapons?"

"Public opinion."

"And exactly how are you going to rally public opinion?" Spenser asked.

Congresswoman Stegman raised one eyebrow as a flat smile spread across her face. "You do not want to know."

Chapter Two: Target

Things were afoot in an abandoned industrial building on Virginia Avenue in Atlantic City. Long neglected, it was a property rotting away in the shadows of gleaming casinos.

The electric had long since been cut off, but sunlight streamed in through a couple of skylights. Several men with dark beards and with darker purposes huddled around a cheap folding table.

A shadowy figure jammed his finger down on a map of McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. “This is our target.”

“The base?”

“No. What is on the base. The last administration decided to cut the defense budget and he targeted nuclear weapons.”

“So?”

“They removed twenty B61 tactical nuclear warheads from their arsenal, but never allocated money to decommission them.”

“What do you mean ‘decommission’?” Ahmed.

“Disassemble them and render their nuclear material useless by blending it with non-radioactive isotopes of the same element.”

“How does that help us?”

“The twenty tactical nuclear weapons removed from the arsenal are sitting in bunkers at the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.”

“Ahmed, how do you know this?”

“We have been studying Congressional reports, public budgets, and other communications for years. It is all there if you know what to look for. We also obtained several war game summaries. One of them involved theft of tactical nuclear weapons.”

“How did you get access to their war game?”

“One of our sympathizers participated in one.”

“How are you going to get the weapons off base without being caught?”

“We’re not going to take the weapons off base; they are going to come to us.”

“I do not understand. What should we do?”

“The weapons are to be decommissioned at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. When they move the weapons, we strike.”

“How do you know when they will move the weapons?”

“One of Congresswoman Stegman’s operatives, James Taylor, is organizing a protest designed to intercept the weapons as soon as they arrive in Aberdeen. Except that if all goes well, they will never arrive.”

“How do you know?”

“Taylor is using social media to round up protestors. He let slip to some of them that they were not just protesting nuclear material, but actual nuclear weapons.”

“What is your plan?”

“The only way it makes sense to transport nuclear weapons is on limited-access highways like the New Jersey Turnpike. It is easier to control traffic on them, but it is also easier for us to target their shipments.”

“How will it work?”

“I picked a spot on the turnpike that borders a field. We will use two trucks to force their weapons truck off the road into that field. The weapons will be loaded into a cargo net. A helicopter will pick up the net and be gone before they know what happened.”

“Surely, they will have armed men protecting the shipment.”

“And we will have more armed men than they do. We will overwhelm and crush them.”

“How many?”

“There are ten men in each of our trucks. As Stalin used to say, quantity has a quality all its own.”

“Won't they call reinforcements?”

“Not before we get away with the weapons.”

“What about our men? What will happen to them?”

“If they are clever, they will escape. If not...sacrifices must be made.”

Chapter Three: Scoop

Cynthia Graham was a tall thin, coltish young woman. Her deep, rich, coffee-colored skin contrasted nicely with her short-cropped, curly blonde hair. Though she grew up in Atlantic City, her good looks were a gift from her Afro-Cuban parents. She had a wicked, million-watt smile and was destined to be a heartbreaker. She was also the *Atlantic City Press*'s newest reporter.

After graduating from Atlantic County Community College, she went looking for a job. She knew she did not want to get suffocated working in a big corporation, and working the Atlantic City Boardwalk just did not seem adventurous enough. She decided to be a journalist. When Graham wanted something, she relentlessly, and good naturedly, worked on it until she got what she wanted. But with newspapers downsizing, she just could not get an in anywhere, so she decided to write freelance until she could find a job.

Her break came when she staked out the men's room on the fifth floor of the Atlantic City City Hall. The fifth-floor men's room was used by Mario Bianchi, Director of Public Works, and his staff. At first, she just watched who came and went. Public Works officials went in; contractors looking for work went in; public works officials came out; contractors came out. Sometimes they shook hands as they left. Then she decided to stake out the men's room from the inside. She got into the building early, placed an out of order sign on one of the men's room stalls, waited and listened.

The director of the parking authority got a kickback from a tow truck operator. She got their conversation on tape. The head of the sanitation department got a kickback from a casino when he agreed to collect their trash so the casino would not have to pay a private contractor. She got that conversation on tape, too. A purchasing manager got a kickback for buying paint at \$200 per gallon. And so it went, with nearly every petty bureaucrat skimming something from somebody.

It was all good, but she was almost caught. Someone jerked the door handle of the stall trying to get in. Then she heard someone say the janitor was coming to fix the problem, she snuck out before he arrived.

After that, she planted a voice-activated tape recorder in a men's room ventilator. Out of forty hours of recordings, she got two and a half hours of people discussing bribes and kickbacks.

She pulled it all together into a series of articles about corruption in City Hall. She started with articles on the lowest level crooks and worked her way up to Mario Bianchi himself. Then she went to the *Atlantic City Press* with her draft articles and tape recordings. They made her a job offer on the spot. Once the articles were published, a grand jury was convened, and indictments were made. Now she was looking for her next big scoop.

Cynthia Graham put her outstretched hands onto Jack English's desk and leaned across toward him. "Come on, you must have something for me, an off-the-wall case, a weird client, something."

"I'm just a simple country lawyer," Jack English said. "All I have are a few personal injury cases and a criminal defense now and then; nothing unusual; nothing newsworthy."

She met Jack English when he represented her parents in an auto crash. The settlement he negotiated paid off their house and paid for her college.

Graham tilted her head slightly, "I heard you get into trouble a lot."

"I deny everything. I was not there, and I did not hear about it."

"I heard you have gotten into some knock-down, drag-out fights."

"I was only defending myself and that's all in the past."

"Defending yourself from what?"

"Let's just say negotiations that got out of hand."

Graham stood; planted her fists on her hips; and just stared at him.

"I tend to get clients who find themselves in a crack," he said.

Graham continued standing there staring at him.

"My clients sometimes get themselves in a crack with bad people," English continued. "And that's all I'm going to say."

"I heard you were hit by an airplane once," Graham held out a hand toward him. "Is that true?"

"Yes, and once is enough."

"And the governor's yacht ran over a cabin cruiser you were on and left you to drown."

"Well, yes, but that is all in the past. Look, Cynthia, I assure you, I am not doing anything worthy of mention in the *Atlantic City Press*. Why don't you talk to Will McDuff? He is the best detective in Atlantic County. Maybe he has something."

She folded her arms. "Mr. English, are you giving me the brush-off?"

"Please, call me Jack. If I had a story, I would tell you."

Graham heard a noise; turned toward the reception area and looked at something English could not see from his desk. "Bad boy, bad boy, whacha' gonna' do? Whatca' going to do when they come for you?" She pointed out his office door. "They've come for you." She dropped her business card on his desk, and mouthed, "Call me," and slipped out the door.

A moment later, an army bird colonel in full dress uniform appeared at his office door.

"Howard Arnold as I live and breathe," English stood and walked toward him. "I haven't seen you since we were..." He stuck out his hand.

Arnold shook it, "I know. Do not remind me."

English pointed to the eagles on his shoulders, “You’ve come a long way from being Lieutenant Arnold.”

“You’ve come a long way from being Lieutenant English,” Arnold said.

“Sit, sit!” English pointed to a wing chair opposite his desk. “What brings you to our blessed isle? It cannot be vacation, or you would not be decked out the way you are. Is there a convention in town or something?”

“We should grab a beer and catch up some time. And who was that breath taking beauty that just left?”

“Cynthia Graham, she is a reporter for the *Atlantic City Press*.”

“How did you meet her? Is she your squeeze?”

“She is not my squeeze. Her parents were clients, so I got to know her a little.”

“Jack, if your goal in life is anything less than getting to know her a lot better, you are not half the man I thought you were. Is she married? Going with someone? What?”

“Howie, I just don’t know.”

“You are slipping.”

English spoke in a low raspy voice, “So you come to me on the day of my daughter’s wedding, and you are looking for a hook-up?”

“You have a daughter?” Arnold asked. “I didn’t even know you were married.”

“I am not married, and I have no daughter...or son for that matter...that I know of. So, what is up?”

“I came to ask for a favor.”

“Name it.”

“I am stationed at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. The Pentagon tasked me with managing our annual war game.”

“What kind of war game?”

“It’s basically two teams of people sitting around a conference room interacting with computer simulations trying to...well...out maneuver each other.”

“I’m lost as to how I can help,” English said.

“The A Team is comprised of career army people, mostly West Point grads. The B Team is comprised of...well...shall we say lateral thinkers, college professors, novelists, and scientists. You get the idea.”

“I still don’t see how I can help,” English said.

“I had a Princeton political science professor lined up for the B Team and he dropped out at the last minute. I know it is a big ask, but could you step in for the B Team?”

“What is involved?”

“There are three Friday orientation sessions. The idea is to give the B Team as much information as possible about what the A Team is likely to try. Then, the following week, we start the game on Monday, and it runs until one side wins.”

“What if nobody wins?”

“One way or the other, the game ends Thursday.”

“Gee, Howey, I am busy right now, I cannot afford to take that much time off. It is not like I am on salary. If I am not out there shaking the tree, no money comes in. So, let me ask, why me? There must be hundreds of more qualified people.”

“Two reasons. First, I looked at your file. You had the security clearance I need for the games. I had the FBI investigate your background a little and it should not be hard to get your security clearance updated.”

“The FBI? I have had trouble with the FBI.”

“The hacking case, I know. But your discretion in not blabbing about their rogue agent earned you some points.”

“What’s the other reason you picked me?”

“You are available. Game orientation starts Friday.”

“What makes you think I’m available?”

“It’s not a motion day and you don’t have conferences with any judges, so I figured...”

“How do you know I don’t have anything planned?”

“Your secretary told me.”

“Buick!” English put his hand over his eyes and bowed his head a little.

“She was very cooperative,” Arnold said.

“What did she say?”

“She said she could use the time off. She hinted that you were working her to death.”

“Working her to death? Did you see the pile of magazines on her desk?”

“Yeah, I saw a few. Why?”

“Most of her day consists of reading *Vanity Fair*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vogue*.”

“You have clients in fashion?” Arnold asked.

“No. I do not have clients in fashion. Buick spends most of her day reading magazines, not transcribing tapes or typing briefs.”

“Then why do you keep her?” Arnold asked.

“I do not know. I just do not know.” English sighed deeply. It was a sigh of frustration.

“Anyway,” Arnold said, “once you are commissioned, you are commissioned for life. You are just placed in the inactive reserve. I can reactivate you with or without your permission. Which is better?”

“You know, Arnie, courts are good at injunctions barring people from doing something. But they are terrible at orders for specific performance. For example, a judge could order a comedian to play a casino, but how would the judge make sure he was funny? If you ordered me to play the game, how would you know whether I was playing my best game?”

“Forget what I said about involuntary activation. That was just a joke. The gig pays a week’s pay for every day spent on the game.”

“Seven weeks’ pay at what rank?”

“I can probably reactivate you as a major.”

“So, you are willing to pay me seven weeks’ pay, at a major’s pay rate, for this game. Right?”

“Right.”

“How many years of service is that pay based on?”

“I think I can swing 12 years. What do you say?”

“Bring me back as a Lieutenant Colonel and you have got a deal. It will be good to get out of the office.”

“That is great, Jack. I will cut the orders today. One thing, though.”

“What is that?”

“You must wear a uniform.”