

CATAclysm

“A momentous and violent event marked by
overwhelming upheaval and demolition. Broadly:
an event that brings great changes.”

By

R.J. SMITH



A Storyteller Novel

(MMXIV – 01)

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In Memory Of

John Scheifele

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My FRIEND and BELIEVER

FOR

OSCAR THOMAS

From the Womb,
To the tomb!

“If aliens ever visit us, I think the outcome would be much as when Christopher Columbus first landed in America, which didn't turn out very well for the Native Americans.”

Stephen William Hawking
Professor of Mathematics

The Most Brilliant Theoretical
Physicists since Albert Einstein

JUST BECAUSE

There's nothing more precious than the breath I gasp, the sight I behold, and the sound filtering through these lonely old ears.

Life has a way of reaching out and grabbing you.

When I sat down to write this book, it was my belief this story was nothing more than a yarn of fiction based on an age old volcano looming on the island of La Palma in the Canary Islands.

Boy, was I wrong.

Halfway through, it became apparent Cataclysm was shaping up to be an unexpected thriller of monumental proportions.

Much like my last novel, *The Santa Claus Killer*, I had little choice other than to get out of the way of my characters and let them reveal their intentions.

I don't gaze at life the same way anymore, not since researching realities, which work their way through this manuscript.

Now, I realize something quite unsettling.

I'm not a writer; I'm a messenger, nothing more.

RJ Smith
Miami Beach, 2014

Chapter 1

EARTHQUAKE

THE ISLAND of La Palma was deadly.

It was the fifth largest of seven Canary Islands hosting a hundred thousand residents.

That meant trouble... *big trouble!*

The volcanic ocean landmass contained three ridges. One of these, Cumbre Vieja, towered four miles from seabed to summit and it was a slumbering demon.

Locals supposed the volcano was primed for catastrophe, believing one day the beast would awake in a noxious, fiery explosion of ash and lava.

When that transpired, everyone would die.

Home to the world's most sophisticated telescopes, the William Herschel stood majestically atop the caldera with its optical near-infrared reflectors monitoring the heavens.

If E.T. existed, this lens made contact.

Through a layer of wispy, fibrous white clouds, a Beechcraft Baron twin-engine airplane lined up for landing on a short blacktop runway. The plane belonged to the U.S. Geological Survey and ferried scientists to the volcano.

"This is a hot blooded monster," Dr. Tish Harriet stated exiting the plane and leading her team of six men into a bunker. "It could take out the United States."

They'd been watching the Old Summit closely due to alarming steam vents which recently erupted.

"The data is disturbing," Professor Chris Grossman agreed checking the latest AFM readings on his tablet. "If we have lahar activity, this could very well mean massive slippage of the ridge."

"We need to check the monitoring poles," Tish answered. "See if the data confirms our suspicions."

She was lead volcanologist and had spent her entire life studying stratovolcanoes' tall, pointed summits... built up by countless layers of hardened lava, tephra, pumice, and volcanic ash.

Beeeeep
Beeeeeeeeeeep–Beeeeeeeeeeep

“We have a problem!” Chris shouted, glancing at a seismogram display. “This is huge seismic activity.”

Seismograms were records produced by seismographs calculating the location and magnitude of an earthquake.

On the graph, lines now spiked.

“Damn,” Tish shrieked hurrying to the monitor.

Installed along the ridge, seismographs detected, amplified, and recorded ground vibrations before sending signals back to the bunker during earthquakes. They were securely mounted into the earth... so when the ground shook, the unit wobbled with it. As it vibrated, the device recorded motion between itself and the rest of the instrument, thus recording ground motion.

“A minor quake,” Chris muttered watching a spike elevate on the screen. “3.3 is the current reading.”

Then, it shot up.

Each second, it rose higher, until passing through 5.5 on the graph. Nobody here sought to openly proclaim a prediction of doom; yet privately, behind their silent stares... they nodded, winked, and made escape plans.

“Maybe Dr. May is right,” someone whispered.

Dr. Samuel May was the premier researcher of volcano doomsday theories and prophecies... who, up until that point... was the laughingstock of volcanology. So, for the last couple years, he'd been hidden away in the isolated wasteland of Iceland.

Up there, in the middle of nowhere, his public predictions of disaster could be silenced.

And everyone could breathe a sigh of relief.

That was, until the bunker quaked.

That caused Tish to glance out a fortified window where the dome of the William Herschel Telescope collapsed.

SCREEEEEECH–BOOM!

With a tired shrieking roar, the telescope gave up its ghost and plummeted to the ground with a thunderous crash.

“Notify the Hazard Center,” Tish yelled. “Send out an immediate satellite dispatch!”

The team was clustered around an array of computer screens struggling to balance themselves in the violently quaking chamber. Rows of florescent lights flickered. An alarm WHOOPED, a siren SHRIEKED, and shelves packed with research equipment fell from cracking walls.

“It’s going to erupt!” Chris hollered glancing at the quaking wall of video screens. The room shook violently, and a three-foot wide monitor blinked 8.9. “Look at the size of this! We may have flank collapse! Notify GDACS and locate Sam, immediately!”

Tish rushed to a satellite phone and punched her finger onto its dial pad. “This is the Palisades Hydrophone Station at Cumbre Vieja Volcano! We are experiencing a major earthquake!”

Then, the ceiling cracked, bowed, and collapsed onto the researchers. The wall displays broke free of their hangers and crashed to the ground.

One by one, the florescent lights exploded, thrusting the chamber into darkness.

Chapter 2

ACT OF GOD

TOM ANDERSON was the network's fluff man.

He was the correspondent *Network News* tossed across the globe when *the package* was a sidebar of public interest. His assignments were filler for dead air... to thistle down the violent coverage pouring in from around the globe. Israel, Iran, Egypt... that's where the *real* news was. Hidden away in tempestuous countries where violent threats and acts of extinction were everyday occurrences.

Unlike this event of the newly elected pope,
And his attendance at:

Nothingville!

This was filler, capital-F for fluff.

“Good morning from the Canary Islands,” Tom smiled into the camera as the *Emissary of God* stepped from the pope-mobile surrounded by cardinals and Swiss Guard. “The popular Spanish Pope, Callixtus the Fourth, just three weeks from his election by the conclave of cardinals, has arrived here at the Patron Saint of the Canary Islands for what has been dubbed the seaside salvation of souls.”

The WHAT?

The pope cut his hand through the air and made the sign of the cross, a humble expression lining his face. He'd

traveled to *Basilica of Candelaria* to attend and celebrate the famed apparition of Mother Mary on the Island of Tenerife. According to legend, a statue of The Virgin appeared on this beach in 1392 bearing a child in one hand and a green candle in the other.

(How that came to pass... a statue
sloshing from the ocean... that little
detail was never fully explained)

But, it happened all right, just as sure as the day is bright. There were eyewitnesses.

Two Guanche goat herders claimed they saw Mary trudging from the sea, dragging her feet along the frothy sand. Approaching, one of the men tried to throw a stone at her, but his arm became paralyzed.

When the second man attempted to stab *The Virgin* with a knife, he ended up wounding himself.

Stories and LORE!

“Papa!” an old woman cried falling at the pope’s feet. “Bless me, Father!” Beside her loomed nine bronze Guanches King Statues of the aboriginal kings. These were the Menceys of Candelaria and were mounted along the seashore beside the basilica. Some claimed they had worked alongside people from another planet centuries before to build this paradise.

“Bless you all,” Callixtus muttered to thousands of onlookers lining the route. “Go with God, my children.”

Alongside the pope strolled Cardinal Jonathan, the pontiff’s handsome Italian personal assistant. He grinned while explaining the significance and antiquity of the bronze sentinels.

Yet, Callixtus was Spanish and knew the history.

Then and there, thousands of Eurasian Sparrow Hawks flapped from nearby trees, filling the sky with shrieking,

echoing cries. They were small, bluish-gray *birds of prey* who specialized in catching woodland birds.

Now, they fled in fear of something else.

“Oh, vaya, mira thos criaturas hermosas!” Callixtus excitedly exclaimed at the sight.

“Si Padre, sono belle!” Cardinal Jonathan nodded. “They are beautiful, aren’t they?”

“Strange,” Callixtus muttered in broken English. “I’ve never seen them fly in panic before.”

The reporter pointed in the distance:

“A flock of sparrows have jolted from nearby perches. They’re soaring over the guardian sculptures lining the shore. With their backs to the sea and facing the basilica, these eternal monuments watch over the faithful in attendance today, just as they have for an eternity.”

Then, the sculptures shook as the earth violently quaked.

It reminded the reporter of Universal Studio’s Earthquake Ride in Orlando.

“It’s a quake!” he yelled to his viewers, pandemonium breaking out around him, people sprinting for their lives.

“Watch out!” someone shouted. “The church is collapsing!”

Unexpectedly, the statue’s stone foundations crumbled and the Guanches toppled to the pavement.

“The cathedral is shaking violently,” Tom yelled into the camera. “Behind me, you can hear its bells gonging oddly inside the twin stone towers of the old stone apostolic.”

At that second, a loud screech escaped the pylon and everything collapsed in a cloud of crumbling cement.

Piece by piece, the tower released its clutch on history and sent its enormous brass bells plummeting to the ground.

“Look out!” a priest screamed. “Everybody run!”

They were the last words he’d offer, as one of the mammoth carillons crashed onto his head sending his soul to Saint Peter.

“Oh, no!” Callixtus bellowed to the sky while studying the scene. “Not yet! I haven’t had enough time!”

“We have to get you out of here, Holy Father!” Cardinal Jonathan shouted as guards frantically ushered them towards the motorcade.

“Quickly!” the papal protectors shouted. “Get to the vehicle, Your Holiness!”

However, Heaven had other plans.

The destruction of faith was underway.

Belief was being tested.

Just a millisecond before Callixtus reached the safety of his pope-mobile, an enormous sinkhole swallowed the holy chariot into its cavernous jaws.

Oh, Dios Mío! Callixtus thought. *The dismantling of the world has begun!*

Chapter 3

MR. VOLCANO

GRÍMSVÖTN VOLCANO hulked over Iceland.

Its icecap, Vatnajökull, loomed magnificently on the northwestern ridge and boasted the highest eruption frequency of all volcanoes in the country. Because most of its mass lay beneath ice, its eruptions were sub-glacial.

That's what held the attention of researchers the world over... *deadly, fiery, magma...* bubbling deep below. It brought survey grants because sleeping giants like this one had the ability to end a lot of things.

It threatened life on planet Earth.

Everybody agreed a super-volcano explosion could marshal in a new ice age; ash from the eruption would travel the globe and block out sunlight for years.

And, without sunshine, crops would *fail...* plant life would *perish* and food would become *scarce*.

That would cause famine, the breakdown of civilization and, quite possibly... the *end of mankind*.

Game! Set! Match!

In 2011, an eruption began here that continued over four days. Spewing plumes of ash and lava into the atmosphere, it complemented several earthquakes resulting in the cancellation of nine hundred flights in Iceland, the United Kingdom, Greenland, Germany, Ireland, and Norway.

Planes were forced to land, and international travel crawled to an economy crushing halt.

Airports became parking lots.

Some said it was the *beginning* of the *end*.

When natural disasters like that happened, directing airliners to their nearest tarmacs—well, money poured in and prominent researchers the globe over were assembled for predictions of doom.

Those prophecies and fears are what brought a team to Geological Base Camp *FIRESIDE* to lead the way.

The plan: to save the world from destruction.

One of the team members was American geologist, William Squire. On this morning, he celebrated his forty-eighth birthday by staring into a hole in the ground; this is what he lived for, *science*.

“Good morning, Sunshine,” Will muttered to an Acoustic Flow Monitor sitting exposed in excavated earth.

He specialized in the study of solid and liquid matter that constituted the Earth, the processes and history that shaped it, and all things related. When compared to scientists in other fields, he was more exposed to the outdoors than those remaining in laboratories.

Will treasured the frontiers of hazard and thrived on the forefront of natural danger and disaster warnings.

His *thing* was studying earthquakes, volcanic activity, tsunamis, weather storms, and the technologies used to warn governments of the infrequent occurrence of those events.

Sometimes, that works just fine, he considered glancing to the towering icecap and then back into the hole. *And sometimes, all hell breaks loose*.

The rumble of an engine brought his attention out of the hole... and when he peered across the tundra, he grunted at the sight of a muddy Jeep Wrangler Rubicon. In the background, far beyond it, the volcano spewed superheated steam into the brisk morning air.

As the Jeep slid to a stop in a patch of mud beside the excavation, a British man winked at Will and jumped to the ground. He was Dr. Samuel May, a rugged crackerjack of a man, steady as the volcanoes he studied.

“You don’t look a day over forty, Will,” Sam grunted.

“Is that right?”

“Right as can be, dear boy!” Sam snickered, slapping his junior researcher on the back before pointing his thumb excitedly back towards the volcano. “She’s all mouth and no trousers, I tell you; day six of moaning and groaning!”

“That’s what you get when you mess with women.”

“Huh? What’s that?”

“Never mind, Professor,” Will waved dismissively. “Women are women, even when they’re volcanoes!”

“Oh, yes! You have learned a thing or two.”

Interrupted by the sound of an approaching helicopter, Sam raised his hand to block the glare of the sun cresting the apex of the icecap.

“Bollocks! What the hell is this tosh, the newsies again? Haven’t you told them to stay out of our testing area?”

A white *UNITED NATIONS* helicopter swooped out of the clear blue sky, landed, and deposited a man wearing a U.N. GDACS bomber jacket.

Crouching beneath the blades, he hurried to Sam.

“Professor May, I’m Oscar Thomas, from the United Nations Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System here in Iceland.”

“Is that right?” Sam chuckled pushing forth his hand. “You must be new at the post; your accent sounds like you spring from the Caribbean.”

“The Virgin Islands, my friends call me *V.I.* for short; I was born in St. Thomas.”

“No kidding?” Sam chuckled. “Well, Mr. Virgin Islands, you must be out of your element here in Iceland!” Motioning towards the excavation, he introduced Will. “Professor Will Squire and I know the U.N. well. Besides, that bird you sprang from gave you straight-away. How’re the lackeys back at GDACS, huh?”

V.I. shook his head. “Not good, I’m afraid. We received word from Secretary Soma that the U.N. requests your presence in New York!”

The mention of his longtime *frenemy* brought a grin to Sam’s face. “Karin dispatched you to pull my chain, eh? What’s biting her rump these fine days?”

“It’s Cumbre Vieja, Professor,” V.I. sighed.

“The Old Summit?” Will snorted. “What’s happening in La Palma, Spain?”

“The U.S.G.S. Volcano Hazards Program has confirmed seismological data on the ground. They have catastrophic seismic activity in the Canaries and are concerned the western flank of the volcano might be unstable.”

“Son of a gun!” Sam exclaimed. “They’ve realized their *cock up* and have come to their senses? Are they actually *talking* about collapse?”

“Yes, Sir,” V.I. stated pointing at the chopper. “I need to get you to New York at once!”

“Should we deactivate the AFM monitors?” Will asked, pointing at the hole in the ground.

“There’s no time, Dr. May!” V.I. urgently answered. “If your past predictions of Cumbre Vieja are true, Africa could only have hours!”

“Leave them to the elements, William,” Sam ordered. “Grab our bug-out bags. We have to move with the wind, dear boy.”

Gathering the bags, which were always ready for immediate escape, the researchers hurried beneath the helicopter’s spinning blades and climbed aboard.

“If the summit fails,” V.I. asked, “Is there anything that can be done to save the Atlantic shores?”

“When she erupts,” Sam answered as the chopper lifted, “the only thing we can do is get out of her bloody way!”

Chapter 4

JUST THE FACTS

THE U.N. chopper was a battleship.

V.I. pointed to a string of bullet holes peppering the floor. “This MI-24 was one of the choppers that took on heavy gun fire in the village of Kinshasa.”

“Bob’s your Uncle!” Sam scoffed. “It flew the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Why’re bullet holes still visible in the airframe?”

V.I. shrugged. “Repairs cost more than retiring it for missions like this in non-hostile sectors of the world.”

“And yet, it still has guns attached to the exterior,” Will nodded out the window. “Worried about an invasion?”

“It’s a dangerous world,” V.I. remarked. “We never know when a rocket propelled grenade will streak its way up from the ground.”

That forced Sam to consider the ramifications of such an event. “In that case, we’d be a bit shanghaied, would we not?” Following world affairs with a keen eye, he recognized disasters and military upheavals often dictated his own survival while traversing the globe’s most treacherous environments.

“The U.N. security council,” V.I. continued, “activated a squad of these attack-helicopters to knockout insurgent positions in the eastern Congo in November 2012, after they gained ground in heavy fighting.”

“It’s a *testy* planet,” Sam granted. “Nobody seems to recognize we’re all on this sphere together. We’re fighting one unique enemy, you know?”

William cut into the conversation. “What did President Ronald Reagan say to the U.N. about the human race and aliens? He went to New York, stood before the U.N. Body

in 1987, stared across the Hall and said: ‘How quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.’ How do you like that for disclosure?”

“Aliens exist,” Sam affirmed. “I could tell you stories. Their elongated skulls have been found in tombs on too many of my digs”

“I’ve read your papers,” V.I. quickly changed the subject. “In college I heard about the possibility of flank collapse and read your theory on Cumbre Vieja. Do you really believe an earthquake will cause a tsunami?”

“It could. I was concerned in 2011 when officials on the smallest Canary Island, El Hierro, had to evacuate civilians following a series of quakes. The island experienced over eight thousand tremors during two months, and I feared a major disaster would happen then.”

“But it didn’t,” V.I. stated.

“No, it did not.”

“Do you think this quake will cause an eruption?”

“None has taken place on any of the Canary Islands since the Las Palmas in 1971, but my team has been warning the international community that a La Palma eruption could take place when her magma rises to the surface and produces a series of ruptures that will generate significant seismic activity.”

Will pulled an iPad from his bag and showed it to V.I. “We don’t know if magma will break through the crust, cause an eruption, or worse.” On the screen played a computer generation of what might happen if an eruption did cause flank collapse.

“This is a ridge collapse?” V.I. asked staring at the video of the volcano ridge splashing into the ocean.

“It is,” Sam muttered. Then, motioning for Will to turn the display off, he turned to V.I. and peered into the man’s stare. “So, what do we know so far?”

“La Palma had an 8.9 major earthquake early this morning. Of the thousands of swarm tremors recorded since, only twenty or so have been noticeable to residents. However, the government of Spain is reporting the quakes are continuing across all seven islands. The volcano itself has not seen an eruption, but the Spanish have raised the eruption risk-level to *red*, the highest alert since the swarm of earthquakes began.”

“Bonkers!” Sam grunted. “All seven islands are experiencing quakes! An 8.9 is enormous, it might have displaced La Palma!”

“But there hasn’t been an eruption,” V.I. argued.

“Not yet,” Sam contended glancing out the window at the mountain peaks. “But an eruption is coming, my friend, just as sure as we sit in this bullet ridden deathtrap. Has anyone heard from my wife, Dr. Tish Harriet?”

V.I. reluctantly frowned. “The last we heard was an alert she sent out from Palisades Hydrophone Station.”

Chapter 5

PREDICTION OF DOOM!

KEFLAVÍK INTERNATIONAL was the largest airport in Iceland.

American tourism was big business.

V.I. stood at the top air-stair of a white Lear Jet bearing the seal of the United Nations. “Whenever you’re ready, Dr. May, the pilot has indicated we’re clear to push off.”

“Thank you, Mr. Virgin Islands.” the volcanologist smiled politely staring toward the end of the runway. “I’ll be a few more minutes.” He stood at the bottom stair speaking animatedly to Will. “We have to lay it all out again to the United Nations. Show them our data and the flank failure model. Convince them to close the London Underground and evacuate America’s East Coast”

“Good luck with that!” Will exclaimed. “Do you really think they’ll take our work seriously now? The U.S. Congress practically laughed us out of *The Beltway* the last time we went to Capitol Hill warning of this very issue.”

“It’s those Republicans,” Sam sighed. He *had* stressed to the American leaders that the coastlines of the United States were under threat from a monster wave of Hollywood–*and* Biblical–proportions when the volcano finally collapsed and crashed into the ocean. He’d thought that perhaps bringing God into the equation might have helped–though he really didn’t believe in such an entity.

“Maybe this time they’ll listen,” Will hoped.

Sam grinned. “This quake should bring them around.” Yet, deep down, he wasn’t convinced the White House could be persuaded the earthquake would cause a massive landslide sending a 300-foot wave across the Atlantic.

Will shook his head in disbelief. “We’ve issued countless warnings to the U.S.G.S. predicting that, in the *best-case* scenario, a tsunami would destroy the east coast from Florida to Maine.”

“Maybe now they’ll listen,” Sam stated glancing towards an *Icelandair* commercial plane leaping from the runway and bursting through the sky.

“Don’t hold your breath,” Will chuckled. “People in Washington wait until the last minute to do anything.”

Sam knew this was true.

Actor Samuel Jackson had even gone on the Discovery Channel and warned that of the top five *natural disasters* facing the globe, a volcanic collapse from Cumbre Vieja was one of them.

The problem was this:

Although Hollywood loved *end of the world* disaster predictions, they were slow to climb onboard another disaster, thanks to the Mayan 2012 lunacy. That END OF DAYS prediction claimed a catastrophic event would occur on December 21, 2012, and warned Earth would cease to exist thanks to a collision with Planet X. Some even suggested the North and South Poles would reverse bringing on worldwide earthquakes terminating all life.

That prediction expired on December 22nd 2012.

Sam shrugged as he emerged from those thoughts of disaster. “Nobody, including Washington’s elected officials, is going to jump onto another prediction of catastrophe. Especially one that calls for a tsunami generated by a mountain twice the size of Britain's Isle of Man crashing into the sea following a volcanic eruption.”

Will grunted. “We have to make them believe.”

“I remember,” Sam chuckled glancing at his colleague, “the first time I told U.S. officials a 500-miles-per-hour wave would wipe out the east coast.”

“They were a bunch of grouchy, whining broods,” Will recalled. “The National Weather Service smiled politely, and showed your British rump to the door.”

Not one U.S. Senator or Congressman believed it would happen. They practically threw him off Capitol Hill.

But Sam, Tish, and Will... *they believed.*

“What about Admiral Brancor?” Will asked, remembering the saucy American Admiral. “Is he going to be at the U.N. meeting?”

Sam snorted and pushed his hands into his pockets. “I’ve got a two-finger salute for that chap!”

“What’s that mean?”

“It’s similar to the American middle finger, dear boy.”

“I didn’t know the British were so vulgar.”

“Well, now your doorbell has been rung,” Sam smiled hurrying up the air-stairs. “We’ll put some *welly* into our arguments to the global community. They have to understand the severity of the crisis.”

“We’ll give it all the muscle we have.”

“Cheerio, then; off we go,” Sam grinned stepping onto the plane.

As the door closed, Will wondered if he would ever see Iceland again.

It might be the beginning of a deadly journey.

END OF SAMPLE