

# PROLOGUE



The Virginia Colony, 1776

He crouched close to the horse's neck, his cape flapping in the wind. One hand gripped the reins; with the other he clasped his tricorn hat. The hammering rain and darkness of night made it almost impossible to see. He trusted his galloping steed to sense the well-worn path ahead. The glimmer of a swinging lantern appeared in the distance, then grew near. His destination, at last.

He pulled sharply on the reins and dismounted. A dark-skinned slave greeted him with a deferential nod, then took his horse to shelter. He sprinted up the stairs of the new home located on land that he had sold to his good friend. Some of his own slaves had helped to make and lay the bricks used to construct this fine, modestly-sized residence. On a clear day from a hill to the west, his home at Mount Vernon could be seen in the distance.

The front door flew open and he was warmly welcomed inside. His friend took his drenched hat and cape, then wrapped a dark wool blanket around his broad shoulders. To their left was the dining room, lit by the fire in the fireplace and the flickering candles in three silver candlestick holders. A large walnut table with ornate pedestal legs filled the center of the room. A carpenter's square, a compass, and an open Bible lay on the table, and a large heavy cloth decorated with ancient symbols lay on the floor before the fireplace. The marble above the fireplace was adorned with two crossed keys suspended from a five-pointed star. Either side of the opening was flanked by a narrow wooden panel stretching from the floor to the ceiling, each decorated with various symbols. Several men were seated at the table, dressed in breeches and waistcoats graced with lace ruffles at the neck.

"Welcome, Brother Washington," said the man seated to the right of the empty chair at the head of the table. "I am pleased you received my

message.” The flames dancing above the burning logs shone on his ruddy complexion and reddish hair. “The Governor dissolved our official gatherings. We are now, in essence, a government unto ourselves, but with no official status. Our world is turned upside down.” He nodded toward a rotund bespectacled man with side-whiskers seated directly across from himself. “Brother Franklin came as soon as he got word.”

“Yes, I came immediately. Brother Jefferson’s message was anticipated,” Franklin said, turning in his chair toward Washington. “You know I came to this with great reluctance. I was loyal as long as it was possible. Now it is time, time to plant the seeds of the Novus Ordo Seclorum—the New Order of the Ages. Further delay, endless committees discussing what to do, these make it appear we lack will and earnestness.” He waved his hand as if dismissing an invisible foe.

“Yes, my Brothers, it is time,” Washington replied as he took his place at the head of the table. “The harvest will be the task of others, long after we pass. But the planting . . . the planting is our sacred duty. First, we must carefully consider our rationale for independence. It is the bedrock upon which our people’s government shall be built.”

Jefferson leaned forward, his forearm resting on the table. “We must build a bulwark against governmental and religious tyranny over the minds of the People. I have prepared some notes.”

“The Great Architect has provided us tools for assuring strength and endurance,” Franklin added. “I am eager to help formulate the structure we will need, and can solicit the aid of certain other of our Brothers.”

“Yes,” Washington said, nodding, folding his hands. “Let us imagine the unimaginable—a Nation that, in the fullness of time, embodies freedom, the Master’s justice, equality. A new way of governing and of being governed. Let us begin.”