

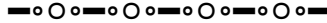
Jay Fiondella



# Trust and Betrayal

## *Trust*

*firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something*



The man, whose car was parked under the canopy of several willow trees on a dirt road that ran just beyond the back fence of the private Dallas airfield, finished his brief conversation and hit the end button as he quietly watched the fading image of the small private jet quickly disappear into the low overcast morning clouds, as the sun broke through the thick fog. Walking toward his vehicle, he began thinking how he would spend the funds transferred into his account by the time the bank opened at 9 am – a cool one hundred grand for tracking Roger Simpson for the last seven weeks. Easy job, he smirked. A smile began to form on his rough-looking, unshaven face when he abruptly stopped, nearly jumping out of his shoes. He gasped in surprise and saw two young men standing between him and his late-model black Ford sedan. The startled man, Russ Peterson, was a freelance investigator and a seasoned and stealthy pro with a long, sordid history and connections with unsavory characters.

He asked little of his employers and had no problem being unethical if it meant a handsome profit.

He quickly regained his composure and assessed this new scenario while calmly reaching into his coat pocket, retrieving a pack of Camels and a lighter. Regaining his composure, his facial expression now unreadable, he lit the cigarette, took a long drag, and felt the reassuring pressure of the 45-caliber pistol tucked into the concealed breast holster. The two men remained silent and motionless. As he took another drag off his unfiltered cigarette, he broke the silence, choosing his words carefully as he began engaging the men.

“Good morning, guys,” he smiled, revealing tobacco and coffee-stained teeth. “I was startled to see you since I did not hear your approach.”

Scanning the immediate area, he saw no sign of a vehicle. Where in the hell did they come from? It was uncharacteristic for anyone to surprise him, and he supposed the sound of the aircraft engines masked any sounds of their approach. The fact that they had caught him off guard left an unpleasant knot in his stomach, and he felt embarrassed and, in fact, damn right angry – he had been sloppy. He sounded flippant, forcing himself to relax and take another drag from his cigarette.

“Listen, guys, uh, if this is private property and I am trespassing, I apologize. I come here now and again because I enjoy watching these small planes take off and land. It amazes me every time I see one of these birds or choppers do their thing,” Russ said convincingly, proud of his portrayal of sincerity.

However, he knew there was little air traffic in and out of the airport owned and operated by The Simpson Group, which is exclusively reserved for and utilized by their clients and associates. Thoughts danced in his mind as he tried to formulate a believable lie. He was about to put the cherry on top when one of the two men suddenly spoke.

## Project Earth

“We are sorry to have startled you, sir,” he said in an unthreatening, almost boyish tone. “This is a restricted area, and we must ask you to come with us.”

I’ll be going nowhere with you boys, Russ smirked to himself, contemplating his options.

His confidence rose as he assessed the young men wearing flannel shirts, blue jeans, and tennis shoes. He saw what looked like a cell phone on the right hip of one of the men, but other than that, no apparent signs of weaponry. Then, Russ started to believe he held the upper hand, as his previous scouting of the location left no evidence of surveillance cameras. He thought he could quickly overtake these two, leaving them in the bushes, and by the time they awoke, he would have adequate time to hit the bank and be well on his way. I won’t need to kill them, but if they give me no choice... But as he reached for his weapon, Russ noticed a sudden movement, drawing his attention like a moth to a flame.

Staring at a surreal scene in a low open meadow, the air seemed to bend and shimmer as his whole field of vision fogged. Dropping his weapon to his side, he shook his head in disbelief, not trusting what he saw. What is that? Am I seeing a door in the middle of nowhere? Unknown to him, he was seeing a cloaked ship, a technology that existed nowhere on Earth. Typically, the human eye would be unaware of its presence in flight. Still, one could detect an almost negligible outline on the ground as its edges fought to blend in with their surroundings, and the air below unnaturally whipped the vegetation. It was precisely like a highway mirage – an atmospheric refraction of light on a sizzling summer road.

His heart raced even quicker, beating in his ears, and he again reached for his gun. However, he had no time to pull the trigger when struck with such intensity that he immediately fell

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unconscious, crumbling to the ground like a marionette with severed strings.

The man who fired the weapon returned it to his belt before he and his associate walked toward the limp, unconscious body. Bending down, one of them briskly lifted Russ Peterson onto his shoulder while the other picked up Russ's gun, then hurried to his car, taking anything of interest except the keys – someone would be returning for it. Once satisfied, they both headed toward the door in the middle of the field as a warm gust blew, swaying any vegetation within a thirty-yard perimeter of the craft. Then the last man entering paused momentarily, surveying the area, before the door closed and the cleverly camouflaged craft ascended into the air. Rising two hundred feet, it hovered momentarily, then vacating the airspace, it sped to the east coast at hypersonic speed.

