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## A Thomas Locke Mystery

### The Delta Factor

Thomas Locke

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#1) persons, living or dead, is intended.

Cover illustration by Joe Nordstrom

“Man cannot play God and still stay sane. And the progress of biology is inescapably placing in man’s hands the power to play God. . . . The risks of recombinant DNA technology are historically unparalleled because the consequences of letting a new living creature loose in the world may be irreversible.”

Dr. Freeman Dyson

*Disturbing the Universe*

This book is dedicated to  
Nicholas Pediaditakis—  
a friend for life.

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## **Prologue**

If Hank Aaron Jones's daddy could see his land now, he would keel over and The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) die a second time. For The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) certain and for sure.

The thought gave Hank pause from time to time, but not for very long. As far as Hank Aaron Jones was concerned, the best thing that had ever happened to his family's land was having Pharmacon move in as a neighbor.

Hank Aaron Jones had been named after his daddy's number one hero, and he hated his name almost as much as he loved his farm. The Jones family had toiled their land for eleven generations, through three colonial governors and every president since Washington refused to become king of the new United States. They had The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) lost family to every war except the one with Mexico. They had even known the misery of losing great-great uncles to both sides of the War Between the States. The Jones family was American to the core, and they had bought the right to stand tall through the sweat of their brow and the blood of their kin.

News of Hank Aaron Jones's new neighbor, The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) the ones who had purchased the derelict farm on the other side of the forest, the one between him and the new bypass, had come by way of a stranger. The man in his city suit and big polished car had pulled up unannounced three years ago, and offered The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) Hank so The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) much money for his east forty that Hank's wife, Mildred, had been forced to go lie down. Hank had The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) figured the man for a big talker with

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more mouth than sense, until The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) another group had showed up three days later and doubled the first offer.

Hank Aaron Jones was not selling. Not then, not now. His boy was up studying modern agriculture at the state university in Raleigh, preparing for a future that fair boggled Hank's mind. There was not a thing Hank Aaron Jones wanted doing, nor a place The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) he wanted seeing, that lay outside Chowan County, North Carolina. But Hank was a forward-looking fellow, and he felt in his bones that Pharmacon's arrival was good for the area and good for the farm.

Not that it had all been easy street. Pharmacon's arrival had meant a revaluation of his property. That had brought on higher taxes, right when the federal government had The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) looked ready to slice a chunk out of tobacco price subsidies. But before Hank Aaron Jones had reached the point where he needed to approach the bank for another loan, Pharmacon had come to his rescue. In a very big way.

Two scientists had stopped by and asked if he would be willing to set aside some of his The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) acreage and grow some plants for them. That would depend, Hank had replied, on what they were willing to pay. They asked, how much was he making from his tobacco and soybean crops? Hank Aaron Jones's daddy hadn't raised no fool for a son. Hank had picked the amount he'd made from his very finest year, set his face in rock-solid lines, and lofted the sum skyward. Without even batting an eye, the scientists had offered him twice again as much.

Now Hank Aaron Jones stood on his back porch, looked out over his fields, and respectfully asked his daddy's memory to shut up. If those scientists were willing to pay good money for him to The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) grow weeds, then so be it.

Mildred was busy in the kitchen with the breakfast dishes. Through the window over the sink, she spotted a plume of dust rising from their dirt road and said, "Trouble's a'comin'."

"Naw it ain't," Hank replied. The only person who'd come by that early was their neighbor to the southwest, Jude Taylor. Jude wasn't more trouble than any other neighbor. Jude was just Jude.

The old Ford pickup did a four-point turn in their The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) swept front yard, scattering chickens and dust in every direction. Through the open window a beefy, red-faced man called, "What you know, Hank?"

"Mornin', Jude."

"Got to run into town for some feed. I swear I got me a heap of prize hogs in the makin'. You need anything?"

Hank The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) swiveled about and called back, "We need anything from town, Mildred?"

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His wife answered by clattering the dishes as hard as she could without breaking them. She would just as soon have walked around the block than given The Delta Factor (Thomas Locke Mystery Book #1) Jude Taylor the time of day.

Hank hid his smile behind a swig of coffee. Jude was a buddy from high school, and goodness knows there weren't many of those still around. He was lazy and he drank and word was he wasn't any easier on his wife than he was on his truck. But Hank found reason to forgive Jude much by remembering the good old days. "Looks like we're set, Jude. Thanks for stopping by."

"Ain't no problem. What you been up to?"

"Been goin' like a ten-mule team in a mudhole since spring."

"That a fact?"

Hank nodded. "Them scientists fellers, they got me runnin' in seventeen directions at once. Come by three weeks ago, told me to plow back thirty acres of soybeans I've been sweatin' over since April. Want me to put in some more weeds. You believe that?"

"They figure on havin' a crop come up, plantin' in July?"

"Ain't interested in holding to the season," Hank answered. "They say it's a perennial, brought it all the way from Hungary, I think I got that right. This is the second crop of it I put in for them. All they want is the roots."

"Roots?"

"That's what they said. Aim on makin' a potion from the roots. Strange thing, too. Them new plants are already bigger'n the ones I planted back in June." Hank stretched and looked out to where Jude's distant fields blazed yellow, like an earthbound sunrise. "How're your crops doin'?"

## **The Delta Factor Thomas Locke Mystery Book 1**

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