



Start Wearing Purple



WRITTEN AS A 'NOVEL IN A DAY'
ON OCTOBER 28th 2017

Start Wearing Purple

written as a
Novel-in-a-Day



START WEARING PURPLE

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In Memoriam

I was incredibly saddened to learn recently that our good friend Montrée Whiles passed away earlier this year, after her car was struck by a drunk driver.

Montrée was one of the most enthusiastic members of the NiaD family, and her passion (and chasing) certainly helped keep the event running this long! The more I've learnt over the past few weeks about this remarkable woman, the more and more respect I have for her. I won't share specific details here since she deliberately chose to use a pen name for her writing, but trust me — she was one of the good ones.

Taken far too young. We'll miss you.

Also by Novel-in-a-Day:

The Dark
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Section7
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Time is no substitute for talent

There is a well-known saying that if you give a monkey a typewriter and an infinite amount of time then it will eventually produce the complete works of Shakespeare. In 2003, the staff at Paignton Zoo gave a computer to six crested macaques and categorically proved that what you actually get is five pages of the letter 'S' and a broken keyboard. Time, it seems, is no substitute for talent. But can talent substitute for time...?

The book you are about to read was written over the course of a single day in October 2017. For those unfamiliar with the concept of Novel-in-a-Day, it's simple:

- A skeleton of a plot is worked out in advance of the day
- That plot is broken into sections, which are divided amongst the participants randomly
- The writers have most of the rest of the day to write and return their chapters, working with no knowledge of the wider story or their place in it.

I hope you enjoy reading the book as much as we loved putting it together.

Tim

October 28, 2017

Start Wearing Purple

chapter one

Ian Philpot

AUGUST 2005

From three hundred meters up, the Terrordon blended in with the night. Mostly. His new vantablack supersuit was created just for operations like this — where dropping out of the sky onto a heavily guarded island with thirty hostiles could get him killed. The suit actually absorbs light, which was really cool until the Terrordon stepped in front of a mirror. Where did the muscles he worked for years to sculpt go? And the pteranodon symbol on his chest had disappeared into the black of his chest, which disappeared into the black blob that was the rest of his body. He was an outline of a human, though his eyes and the lower half of his face were still visible thanks to the cutouts in his cowl.

Tonight's suit was a variation of that first extra dark suit. Instead of using vantablack over the whole thing, he used it to cover main pieces and as a sinewed texture over the rest. The logo on his chest was painted in black chrome.

The drone carrying the Terrordon at three hundred

meters in the air above Alcatraz Island released, and he began his controlled descent. From his night vision lenses, he could see the dark dots on the ground below moving slowly. Those were the Sleepwalker's henchmen, each outfitted with a rifle. Some carried the gun in front of their bodies, but most of them just had it slung over their shoulder.

For a moment, he had thought about whether the metallic logo could give him away, so he adjusted his body. He began to fall faster, so he activated his cape's hang gliding ability. He was very quickly approaching the ground and at the wrong angle. He gave up his concern about the logo to do whatever he could to slow his fall. But it wasn't enough. The Terrordon thought quickly and aimed for the top of the roof of the quartermaster's building on the northwest corner instead of the ground between the water tower and the laundry building, which was the ideal landing site for him to have a tactical advantage.

His body landed with a crash, and, though he was concerned at the noise from going sixty-five kilometers per hour to zero by slamming against a rusted metal roof, he knew all of the henchmen had been on the other side of the island, congregating around the lighthouse. He was going to be safe if even for a minute. The Terrordon figured that the Sleepwalker was keeping his hostages in the lighthouse, so, while his landing may draw some attention, he had time to form a new plan. But he figured he would be better off forming it from the powerhouse next door rather than staying right where the crashing sound came from.

Each step crunched against the metal of the roof. As powerful as his supersuit was, the boots were still clunky and more utilitarian than super. He jumped from one roof to the next, and moved quickly to the access door. It was open, and

he squeezed his muscular frame through the small square opening and onto the access ladder that led him down into a dark room.

When he reached the floor, he leaned against the ladder to catch his breath. And then he gasped.

This entire floor of the powerhouse was lined with barrels, each had some wiring connected to the top and a simple electrical interface. The Terrordon took a look at one of them, and he recognized it as the type of bomb that could be detonated from a cell phone. As he walked from one barrel to the next, they all had an identification number — probably the code identifying the barrel so the Sleepwalker could be confident which bomb he was detonating.

“But why would he leave his bombs unguarded?” the Terrordon asked himself.

“I didn’t,” came a reply.

The lights in the powerhouse turned on, and the Terrordon’s night vision lenses glowed so bright that they blinded him. He deactivated them, but it was too late. He tried to duck behind a barrel, but he could hear footsteps approaching. In this suit, it was impossible for him to rub his eyes without messing up the makeup and cowl, so he clenched them tightly and reach for a small smoke bomb from his utility belt. He pressed a button on the ball slightly larger than a marble and rolled it toward the part of the room he hadn’t yet explored.

An ominous laugh echoed. The Terrordon still couldn’t place it, but he wasn’t impressed by it.

“Still working on the laugh, huh?” the Terrordon asked to the room he was now squinting to see.

“Why do you have to do that?” the Sleepwalker asked angrily.

The Terrordon was using this as an opportunity to buy some time. “Why do you need to keep changing your laugh? It screams of insecurity. The Timekeeper never changed his laugh.”

“The Timekeeper got caught his first time out,” the Sleepwalker defended. “And his laugh was a childish cackle.”

“And what would you call your laugh? A maniacal giggle?”

“Maniacal? What are you implying?”

“You’re imbalanced. Have you noticed how all of the supervillains always end up in the asylum instead of a penitentiary? You need professional help.”

“I’m the one who’s imbalanced? You’ve copied a comic book character down to the armored car and ninja-style throwing weapons.”

“But you’re trying to kill innocent people. Women and children and moms and dads...”

The Sleepwalker scoffed. In all of Terrordon’s time fighting villains, he’d heard a lot of them scoff at the idea of killing people, but this scoff was different. It was more apprehensive than uncaring. It was almost as if the Sleepwalker hadn’t thought through how others might be affected by his actions.

The Terrordon got to his feet and took in the room around him. There was a group approaching him through the smoke about ten feet away. They would be on him in a moment. There was also a single figure over by the stairs to the room. That was probably the Sleepwalker. But, even if he sprinted at him, he would end up being tackled — or worse, shot — by the group approaching him. He crouched with his cape around him and positioned his body to prepare to fight.

As the people stepped through the smoke, they were dressed in plain clothes and seemed to shuffle more than walk.

They looked like the photos of the civilians that he remembered from the news, and their eyelids were droopy. They were sleepwalking.

The Terrordon thought it through. These were civilians, moms and dads. They didn't deserve to be hurt in any way. But, if he didn't hurt them, many more people could be killed from these bombs. He figured his best option would be to run at the Sleepwalker in the other direction in hopes of forcing him to stop the approaching group. So he pivoted and ran the twenty strides over the the stairs, and, to his surprise, the Sleepwalker wasn't there. The Terrordon blinked hard twice in an effort to fully recover from the flash and saw that it was just another sleepwalking civilian, the largest of the bunch, approaching him.

He jumped up on the nearest barrel, but, before he could catch his balance, a figure popped up and pushed him back. It was the Sleepwalker! If only the Terrordon had jumped onto a barrel on the other side...

The small mob grabbed onto the Terrordon, and, though he thrashed a bit, he didn't want to hurt any innocents, so he eventually stopped fighting. The group tied his hands behind his back and forced him to sit on the group.

"Too many rules," the Sleepwalker said shamingly. "You have too many rules about the safety of others to be effective. If only you would've fought these mindless drones, you would probably have me tied up on the floor right now. But you don't."

The Terrordon tried buying a little bit of time. "Now that you have me, why don't you tell me your whole evil plan?"

"Well..." the Sleepwalker started, "...I've got these barrels and...they're going to be delivered to highly populated areas around San Francisco for maximum...umm..." The Sleepwalker

trailed off and gave his uncertain scoff. And then again. “It’s not that I feel...” And he scoffed again.

The Terrordon tried freeing his hands, but he just couldn’t get himself free. They had bound his wrists with a belt, and he hadn’t spent time trying to escape from leather bindings. Sure, he’d gotten out of handcuffs or zip ties or rope hundreds of times, but he never thought to test against a leather belt.

“Kill him,” the Sleepwalker said to the only member of his hostage group with a gun. It was a large man with a cropped haircut. He looked like he’d done military service and could probably hit a target from a hundred meters away, which would make the Terrordon an easy target at 3 meters. But the man didn’t even raise the gun. “Kill him,” the Sleepwalker repeated angrily. But the man didn’t move.

“It seems that even sleeping people have more conscience than a crazy person like you.

“If I’m so crazy, then I’ll do it myself,” the Sleepwalker said defiantly and he barged over to the man carrying the gun, took it from his arm, hoisted it, and aimed for the Terrordon’s chest.

Then a moment passed. Then another. Then the Terrordon had an idea. He adjusted his body and caught one of the ceiling lights on the black chrome logo on his chest and aimed the reflection right into the eyes of the Sleepwalker. The Sleepwalker jumped and dropped the gun. The Terrordon jumped to his feet and charged at the Sleepwalker. He gave the Sleepwalker a headbutt, and the Sleepwalker fell to the floor unconscious.

When the Sleepwalker woke, he found himself in a daze on the roof of the powerhouse. He was sitting and his hands were bound behind his back, and the lights from approaching helicopters shone in the distance. Nearby was the group of

hostages, all looking awake, pointing guns at a group of the Sleepwalker's henchmen, who were also bound and sitting. The Sleepwalker had failed.

chapter two

Luscinia Evan

AUGUST 2017

The slouch in his shoulders was especially pronounced now, and Jacob's voice had gone nearly monotonous, a far cry from his enthusiasm on their first stop. A guest in the crowd was reading the day's newspaper, flipping the pages loudly; another was typing almost aggressively on his phone. Pete had to interrupt the session *twice* within half-an-hour in order to remind some people in the room to *shut the hell up or get out*. All expressed in professionally polite words, of course.

Why have they even bothered to show up, Pete sighed inwardly, if they weren't all that interested anyway?

San Francisco, being the home city stop, had a seminar waiting for Jacob the moment they hit town. There was a sizeable amount of people who turned out, too. Enough to fill up more than half the room and make it seemed not-as-empty as some of their previous stops.

Problem was, the people that showed up ranged from people who were genuinely interested to random passing

acquaintances of Jacob who had dropped by to because the guy they knew was holding a talk, and Pete had gotten sick of saying “no” to people who had come up to him claiming that, “I know this guy, he’s my friend. Think I can get a free copy of whatever book that is?”

Those were the people could never understand the amount of work Jacob had put into every line, the amount of dedication that he had poured into the very soul of his works. Jacob was not exactly *famous*, but his books were enough to earn him this book tour, which was steadily getting less appealing as the days went by. Pete could only do his best as Jacob’s literary agent to lighten the burden, but as far as he could tell, Jacob wasn’t faring all that well, not with the strain that was taking its toll on him.

The audience could not see the dark bags under Jacob’s eyes beneath the makeups, nor the gaunt in his frames hidden by long sleeves. Jacob had one of the best body build for someone his age, especially since he had picked up cycling due to Lance Armstrong, but Pete still worry. Worried about Jacob and how obsessed he got when writing a new book; even more so because he knew about how the writer barely looked after himself when between projects. Pete had to shove granola bars at the younger male because he had nearly forgotten about needing to eat, and there was even this one time he realised Jacob had not eaten anything save for those cups of black coffee throughout the entire day because Pete wasn’t there to constantly remind him.

Goodness, Jacob was turning the fifty-year-old him into a *mother-ben*. Bless his greying hair.

Pete shook his head, trying to focus and stay on task. The reading session had dragged on for some time, and they had finally moved on to the Q&A session. He passed a bottle of

water to Jacob, who accepted it without much acknowledgement. Pete could hardly blame him; the day had been long.

“Hey,” someone shouted from the crowd during the lull, “how much have you earned so far?”

There was a moment of disbelieving silence as Pete just stared at the lad who had voiced that out with no small amount of concealed horror. Jacob, on the other hand, stilled. “Pardon me?”

“I mean, writing biography is easy, right? All you need to do is write down what the guy has been through his life,” the same person continued, unbothered by the looks he was getting. “Man, I’d do it if I could, it sounds so easy.”

That person had just about mocked every biographer out there. His comments were nothing new with regards to the general writing industry, but at that point of time, Pete could tell that the last of Jacob’s restraint had snapped.

“If it sounds so easy, why don’t you do it?” Jacob’s smile was sharp and tight, and Pete resisted the need to take a step back. This was the prelude of a outburst, the calm before the storm. The room was eerily quite, the people giving Jacob their full attention for the first time since the session started.

The guy had the galls to *laugh*. “Nah, I have an actual day job.”

“So you’re saying that writing is not a proper job?” Jacob’s voice bordered on incredulous. “You know what? I’m— I’m out of here. I can’t do this any longer.”

And he stood up, strode over to the door, resting a hand on the knob. For a split second, it was as if the man was truly debating about leaving, but the moment was up when the knob was twisted open, and Jacob stepped through the door.

The door clicked shut with Jacob’s departure, the sound

amplified and reverberated around the dead silence of the room.

Ah, the remaining dates on the tour would have to be cancelled, Pete decided, stifling the urge to sigh again. There was simply no way Jacob could continue, not after what had happened. He ran a hand through his hair, mind already planning his next step. Time to do some damage control.

chapter three

Marc Cooper

“NAME?”, SAID THE BARISTA. She was holding up a paper cup in one hand and jiggled a black Sharpie in the other. Her smile seemed genuine enough to him, but then so did Armstrong’s Tour de France victories, once upon a time.

“Pharmstrong,” said Jacob, making it sound like a suggestion. He was still viewing the world through the warped lens of the cheating cyclist, and the fact that it permeated his thoughts was beginning to grind his gears.

“I’m sorry?” said the barista.

“Tex,” said Jacob. “That’ll do.”

The barista turned away and scribbled on the cup. Jacob took a window seat and placed his phone on the table. The phone began to vibrate and Peter’s name appeared on its screen. Jacob flipped it over, and it fell silent.

The book, the tour, everything about the Armstrong project had gone to hell, yet he couldn’t shake himself free of it. Like a dark stain on a favourite t-shirt that wouldn’t wash out, it was a persistent reminder that things were once better.

At the outset he’d wanted to understand the man; to get

deep inside his mind and find reasons for his behaviour. He'd applied his own "method writing" technique to his research, which he'd always had success with in the past. And succeed he did. What he found there, however, was greed and ego and a plethora of transgressions that, when placed on a balance scale, would comfortably outweigh the seven deadly sins.

Despite the disappointment and resulting unpleasantness, the experience sharpened his observational and analytical skills, and these were rewarding additions to method writing. Scratching the surface of a man's life and mind were merely the launch pad from which he could now propel himself. Should he wish, he could go deep inside his subject's motivations and heave apart any deeply buried cupboards then haul out the skeletons hidden therein and shake them loose of their secrets. In Armstrong's case, the cupboards were uncountable and contained an army of skeletons alongside still putrefying flesh. The writer's journey had been unpleasant, but now it was over. Or it would be, if only he could shake it from his every waking moment.

The barista called out the name he'd given her, and he pottered over to collect his coffee. As he turned to go back to his seat, he stopped to let a child run past. The child was wearing a black mask over its head and a black cape trailed in its wake.

"Batman!" the child, a boy, shouted.

After turning at the door, the child rushed over to Jacob's table and picked up his phone.

"We've gotta get back to the Batcave, Robin," the boy said into the phone. "The Riddler left us a riddle and we gotta put it in the Batputer."

Jacob had hurried over, and as the child finished speaking he lifted the phone from the boy's hand.

“Thank you, Batman.” said Jacob earnestly. “And good luck catching the Riddler.”

The boy stared up at him; his eyes dark and distant behind his mask. Then he shouted, “Batman!” and ran back to his mother who was seated a few tables along.

Jacob came here because it didn’t have the hubbub that polluted most cafes. It was small and friendly, and he could think and work without disturbance. And besides, the coffee was always excellent. He’d never understood, however, how the place stayed in business. It was not unusual for there to be only a handful of customers passing through its door for hours at a time. Today, besides himself and the barista, the only other people present were the boy and his mother.

Suddenly, a man burst through the door and began to yell.

“Okay. Everybody keep quiet, and no-one will get hurt.”

The barista let out a sharp yelp and raised her hands. Jacob turned slowly to face the man. He was standing beside the door waving a pistol in his outstretched arm. His loose-fitting clothing disguised his shape, though he appeared to be slight, and his face was covered by a balaclava. From the tone of his voice, Jacob guessed that the man was young. Perhaps not yet in his twenties.

The man brandished the pistol at Jacob.

“I said sit down! I won’t say it again.”

“You didn’t actually ask us to sit,” said Jacob. “But I’m happy to oblige.”

“Obli-what? What you saying? Just sit the fuck down.”

Jacob sat.

The gunman swung his gun around and pointed it at the barista.

“Now,” he said, “give me the takings.”

The barista opened the till and handed the gunman a tiny

bundle of notes. He then leaned forward and look into the till and, as he did so, the Batman-clothed boy ran up and snatched the gun from his hand.

“Batman!” the boy shouted and ran back to his mother holding aloft his trophy.

A moment of stillness followed. The gunman stood motionless staring at the boy and his mother. Then, realisation crossed the gunman’s face, and he fled, in so doing, dropping all of his intended ill-gotten gains.

Immediately, Jacob rushed over to the barista, who still had her hands in the air, and helped her to a seat. The poor young woman was trembling and quietly sobbing to herself. Jacob grabbed a handful of napkins and placed them on the table in front of her.

“You sit here,” he said, “while I take care of things.”

He first scooped up the money from the floor and handed it to her then he took out his phone. But as he prepared to dial, the barista placed her hand on his.

“No police,” she said.

“But...” Jacob started.

Her swollen eyes appeared almost as fearful as when the gunman first pointed his gun at her. She gently shook her head and repeated herself. “No police, please.”

The boy and his mother had joined them. She threw the gun onto the table.

“It’s a toy,” she said. “I’m pretty sure I know that punk. Who would rob a café for fifty bucks? You gotta be some kind of stupid to do that.”

“No police,” said the barista, once again.

“If it’s who I think it is, then his mother’s punishment will do more good that getting the cops involved.”

At one time, Jacob had been mostly black and white about

the use of punishment for law breakers. Break the law. Take the punishment. The Armstrong experience had changed him. After all, he reasoned. it was impossible to achieve justice for the millions of innocent people Armstrong deceived with his years of skulduggery. Not all of those wrongs can ever be righted. The criminal justice system is a deterrent to wrongdoing, but it is only one deterrent. Bad people still do bad things. Social pressure, in its own way, ensures people behave with limits, just as the prospect of a mother's rage has its own influence. The law in its own is not a sufficient deterrent.

He looked at the boy standing there in his costume. Batman took to the streets of Gotham City to help rid them of criminals, and he brought his own form of justice.

Back when Jacob worked on the Chronicle, San Francisco had its own Batman. He called himself Terrorodon. Instead of a bat, he used a stylised Pteranodon as his logo. He had a cool armoured car, of course, and utility belt, and he climbed walls with the aid of grappling hooks and flew from buildings using his cape as a hang-glider. For five years he cleaned up the city, and then he disappeared. To be heard of never again.

“I think I will close up for today,” said the barista, whose composure had mostly returned, although she still wore the look of an experience best forgotten.

Jacob followed the mother and her little batman to the exit, which the barista then locked behind them. Jacob gave her a little wave goodbye before heading off down the street with his thoughts, which were now fermenting into a plan.

He needed to excise the muck that stuck to him and the stench that surrounded him from the Armstrong job. There was only one way he knew how to do that. He needed to write a book. A new project that would absorb him and in which he

could lose himself entirely. Terrordon.

The only thing people knew about Terrordon were his exploits. Nothing else. What was his motivation? What or who was his source of funding? Who was he? What was his name? These were questions that no-one had answered. By getting into Terrordon's mind he'd have an excellent chance of identifying who the man behind the mask might be. This, he knew in his bones, was a book. It might even be *the* book.

Jacob leaned against a streetlamp then took out his phone and placed a call.

"Peter," he said when the call was answered, "I have the most exciting book idea I've ever had. This time it's not about a bottom feeder. It's about an apex predator."

chapter four

Kaide Li

JACOB, WITH HIS RIGHT arm folded behind his back, slowly extended his left arm holding onto the pull-up bar, relaxing his muscles slightly. Taking a deep breath, he clenched his right fist and pulled himself up again, beads of perspiration rolling down the side of his face onto the ground. It was quiet in the 24-hours gym at 2 A.M., and there was no one else besides him and another middle-aged man over by the weights - perfect for when he needed to sort out his thoughts, even more so for carrying out deeds in the dark cover of the night.

He pulled himself up again and looked at his reflection in the mirror in front, his tensed muscles vibrating slightly under the strain. He had already swiftly improved from what he could do in the past, all that he needed was some discipline. Watching himself lift his entire weight up with his left arm, he considered that physically, he did not look that much different from the Terrordon. They are not that much different in terms of physique. Strength and agility-wise, he was confident about his frequent work-outs and if he were to rate himself, the score would not be too bad. To know how well he would really

do against the Terrordon, he would have to come face-to-face with him but just where had he gone?

Lowering himself onto the ground, Jacob walked over to where the glass ceiling to floor windows would have typically given him a birds' eye view of the streets below during the day. However, it was too dark outside and he could only see himself staring back at him. Even if a crime were to occur right beneath his nose in those darkened alley streets, he would not be able to know it. He took a quick glance at the clock. It was just a few hours more before his appointment with the Police Commissioner. The Police was the most obvious candidate he could think of to get further information on the Terrordon. The front-line officers were ultimately the ones who were right where the action occurred. Even for people in the back-line support, they would have encountered people with direct exchanges with the Terrordon. So, a few weeks earlier, he had gotten in touch with his old contact at the Police Department from his journalist days and was surprised to hear that the Commissioner would like to meet him. Initially, he was furious that his contact actually sold him out to the Commissioner. Such betrayal would not be tolerated back in those days but he remembered that he was no longer a journalist and had probably long since lost his privilege with the Police. Then, calming down and giving it more thought, he realised it might not be too bad a situation to be in after all. Through the Commissioner, if he was lucky, he might be able to get access to more police files on the Terrordon than he could ever imagine and such official records would give his book the credibility it is currently lacking with only theories and no evidence to support who the man behind the Terrordon was. The next person he must find would be Amy Kennedy from San Francisco Chronicle where he used to

work. She had been responsible for most of the paper's coverage of the Terrordon since the time she joined.

"I must find an opportunity to talk to her but now, I must start getting ready," he thought. "First impressions count especially for such an important deal I have to negotiate, hopefully not to wrangle, my way though."

Jacob had chosen his outfit carefully that morning and took extra effort to style his hair. While his hands worked quickly, his mind was deep in thought, playing out a mental game of the prospective exchange he would have with the Commissioner later. Things would go well if he played his cards right. He arrived at the Police Headquarters about 30 minutes early, sufficient time to allow him to mingle with the staff with a valid reason without arousing suspicions. The receptionist politely told him to have a seat while she informs the Commissioner of his arrival. He was just starting to make small talk with the receptionist, charming her into girly giggles when the Commissioner himself appeared at the hallway to receive him personally, much to his dismay. "Mr. Jacob Heath, I hope you did not have to wait long," the Commissioner said and extended his hand. "He seemed as eager to meet me as I am to meet him," Jacob wondered to himself as he took his hand into a firm handshake.

He followed several steps behind the Commissioner as he led him briskly into a room down the corridor. He hardly had any time to take a good look of his surroundings and lost his bearings after several turns. The room was small and had a clinical feel about it. He wondered if it was one of those rooms where they held their interviews and whether there was anyone watching them from behind the darkened glass windows.

"Please sit down Mr. Heath and make yourself comfortable. Would you like to have some coffee or tea?" The Commissioner gestured to the two pots of steaming beverages on the table and poured himself a cup of coffee. "I'll have some coffee please," Jacob stood up to help himself but the Commissioner was one step ahead of him, his left hand grabbing another mug and pouring him a share too. It did not take too long into their discussion before he realised that the Commissioner was in more ways than one already several steps in front of him. When he left the building moments later, Jacob felt frustrated. It seemed that the Commissioner had simply wanted to fish information from him regarding the Terrordon. The Commissioner was tactful with his words but his intention was clear to him - he had met enough people like him to know, especially the ones in positions like his. It was precisely for this reason that he had built up his network of liaisons from people in the lower rungs of the ladder, people who are perhaps more gullible and unreliable but less scheming and less selfish. It was not difficult to get people like them to talk. He could use money or invest some well-calculated time and emotions. It was people like the Commissioner that he had barely anything to offer up for a trade. The Commissioner had assumed Jacob would have some details that had not reached his ears yet. For the entire length of the exchange, Jacob maintained his composure, putting up an agreeable yet firm front but could not glean any new information from him as well. All that resulted as an impasse, a stalemate of information exchange. The meeting ended up as nothing more than a courtesy call. It was a lousy set of cards played on both their parts. However, the Commissioner did share that the Mayor may have some insights if he could get him to talk, a heavy emphasis on the

word "if".

"It is most certain the Commissioner must have tried and failed, so now he is expecting me to try and do it" Jacob muttered to himself, "and why not."

He stopped and took out the name card the Commissioner passed him earlier from his pocket. He flipped it to the back where the Commissioner's handwriting was strong and clear and dialled the number written behind.

It had been days since the Mayor's Office said they would call Jacob back but it would appear that his luck in that direction had run dry too. "It is only to be expected," he grumbled. While he surmised that would happen, he still held within his heart a slight hope that things would change but once again was sorely disappointed. Fortunately though, during the time of futile waiting, Jacob had managed to contact Amy Kennedy. He had already failed once, no, twice. At this point, besides Amy, he could not think of anyone else he could approach. If he were to fail again, no - he could not, or rather would not try to imagine it. Since the last conversation he had with Pete, Jacob had already started blocking his calls for a while until he could keep his thoughts straight without Pete's constant pestering about the progress of his research.

Jacob and Amy were not close when he was still working with the paper so she only came to mind when he was collecting articles about the Terrordon where he noticed her name coming up several times. It seemed that the Terrordon had almost become a pet project of hers since she joined so there could be something she could tell him. Sensing her passion for the Terrordon, he approached her upfront and told her about the biography of the Terrordon that he was working on. She had immediately agreed to grant him her

assistance.

Jacob could not recall if she was married so he opted for a safe, risk-free ensemble that night for their first meeting after so many years. He decided it was best not to put her off right at the beginning and burst his own chances of getting new information about the Terrordon. They had arranged to catch up over dinner at a quaint cafe not too far from the San Francisco Chronicle so that Amy could come right over after her work was done. The food was not great but it had its old-school charms. However, the best thing about the place was that there would be no crazy, rowdy millennials and their constant self-gratification. Sometimes, he really hated how the new media was destroying the world's interpretation of what was considered news and what was not.

As usual, Jacob reached his venue early and being early had its advantages. From where he sat by the window, he had a vantage view of all the passer-bys. In his mind, he pictured the image of Amy from what little he remembered, filling in bits of her appearances with memories of their brief encounters, her voice reading out loud in his head the articles she had written on the Terrordon in the past as he pored over them again, flipping through them sorted out chronologically in a file in front of him. Absentmindedly, he fiddled with his fountain pen and turned to look outside, running his eyes through the faces for one that struck a sense of familiarity. From the distance, he spotted an elegant blonde that looked like the Amy in his mind's eye. Clearing the table to make some space, he called out to the waiter and ordered a coffee while patiently waiting for Amy to make her way over. She was at the door when the waiter brought him his coffee and he looked up just in time to see her enter, take a quick sweeping glance through the cafe and finally met his eyes. She waved at

him and came over with a bag load of documents and papers.

"How have you been?" Amy asked. "It's been a while, hasn't it?" she said as she tugged her hair behind her ear and reached out to shake Jacob's hand as he stood up.

"Yes, it's been a while indeed. I've been fine, how about you?" Jacob asked in return and helped her with her bag. It was actually quite heavy, especially for someone of her size and stature.

"I'm good too. I hope you hadn't been waiting long. Shall we get something to eat? I'm famished. We'll talk as we eat if you're okay with it." Before Jacob could answer, she was already picking up the menu and flipping through it. Although Jacob did not know Amy well enough, she had a respectable reputation for being serious about her work. Jacob prayed hard that it would not be yet another wasted trip banging at the wall.

"Aren't you hungry?" she glanced up to see him still watching her. "There is only one way going forward," he thought to himself and called the waiter over for a second time.

"So what are your thoughts on the Terrordon?" Amy suddenly asked between mouthfuls of her pasta. "Who do you think he is?" Jacob was caught by surprise and chewed his steak thoughtfully.

"Aren't we here to talk about him?" Amy prompted him again, slightly impatient. "I saw you running through the articles I wrote, I suppose you don't know much then..." Her face almost appeared downcast as she said that.

"Well... I'm after all here to ask you about him but I did hear some rumours..." Jacob began slowly.

"Really?" Amy's face lit up as she said it but Jacob thought he could have imagined it as her bright-eyed look disappeared

when he gave it quick check as he cut another piece of his steak and put it into his mouth. "Why you go first then, tell me what you know," Amy continued.

Inwardly, Jacob weighed the pros and cons of sharing what he knew with Amy. Sharing something with her would be crucial to earning her trust at this point. Yet, a part of him was unwilling to disclose his hard-earned secrets so easily. "It must be a fair trade," he thought.

"Well... I heard sources that the Terrordon could be a Senator." Jacob made a great show of drawing out his words.

"No way! Who...?" Amy gasped and covered her mouth. Jacob thought her reaction was exaggerated and wondered if she was putting up an act with him. In any case, if she already knew that, it meant that he hardly lost anything so he actually felt rather relieved.

"Think about it, Amy," Jacob carried on, ignoring the shocked look on her face, "who else had the motivation, the power and the money? It couldn't have been just anybody and how many billionaires do we have anyway that could afford the time researching into the technology? It has to be someone with influence and military links."

"Or it could be just a thief that did it," Amy interjected. "Have you forgotten the case where there was a huge leak of military information? Although it was not revealed that anything was lost, my personal sources told me that some technical blueprints were released due to the hacking. As a result, the military had to ditch their original plans and come up with new ones in order to cover up and avoid public outrage."

"So he was just a hacker?"

"Not just any hacker - a brilliant one at that too."

"And the money-?"

"He could have hacked it too. And did you realise how he was always able to reach the crime scene in such a short time? He must have the police's communication system bugged."

"I'm sure not everything could be obtained by simply hacking alone. We are still missing an important point. So let's say he got the blueprints, how did he get anyone to manufacture the gadgets he got? Did he make them himself? Shouldn't those require some connections at the least? Wait... don't tell me, let me guess. He hacked an online Batman merchandise store? Even then, it would have been possible to trace anyone through the Internet."

Amy rolled her eyes and Jacob regretted what he said almost immediately. "Not if he was really skilful, he could easily cover his tracks. Have you actually tried buying anything from the Internet? Products? Services? Have you at least heard of Craigslist? There is almost nothing you can't buy online. As long as there is a demand, there is a supply. You just need to know which door to knock, no questions asked. That's the power of anonymity on the Internet."

"Well... if you put it that way..." Jacob's voice dropped and he conceded that Amy could be right about it too.

"You know what? Listening to us arguing like this, it was almost as if each of us knew in our hearts who the Terrordon really is." Amy switched to a light-hearted tone, as if she sensed Jacob's dispiritedness. "But what if we're both wrong, that will be really ironic. Like if he was actually a robot or something, that will be funny. Or..."

"OR HE COULD ACTUALLY BE MORE THAN ONE PERSON!" They called out in unison and Amy slapped her palm against the table. The two of them broke out in laughter at the absurdity of what they just said, drawing several turned heads and stares from the other cafe patrons.

"Actually," Amy began again, sounding suddenly serious, "there could perhaps be some truth to that." She dug into her huge bag and started pulling out some folders. "These are some photos people managed to capture, purportedly of the Terrordon. Most of them were of too poor a quality to be used in the newsprint but I did notice something strange about them." She shoved the photo albums in his direction, flipping through them quickly and pointed a few ones out. "Notice anything?"

Jacob picked up the photos and examined them under the warm fluorescent light of the cafe. The photos were either blur or really grainy due to the poor resolution. At first glance, they did not seem very helpful at all. Then, it suddenly dawned onto him. "He was holding his gun with his left hand and here, in this photo he had the gun in his right. Not only that, you can also see him holding his spiked throwing stars in his left hand here and then his right hand in this other photo..."

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Exactly! There was something else I wasn't able to figure out previously as well but things might be clearer now." Digging into her bag yet again, she pulled out a rolled document and gently unfurled it on the table as Jacob hastily pushed their plates aside. He saw that it was a map with several clusters of coloured stickers. "I had always wondered about these," she muttered softly, almost to herself. Each coloured sticker represented a sighted appearance of the Terrordon. "I will need to go right back and see what else I can find."

For the rest of their meal, Jacob and Amy ate in thoughtful silence in view of their new-found insights. It seemed like a far-fetched idea but it was absolutely plausible, not entirely impossible.

"Thank you for the dinner and for everything else

tonight. I must admit, I had an enjoyable time. It was fun to find someone who shares the same amount of passion and dedication." Amy said as they walked out to the street. Before Jacob could venture a reply, Amy turned to face him and gave him a quick peck on the cheek before hurrying out into the night, in the direction of the San Francisco Chronicle.

chapter five

Nick Calvert

JACOB HAD BEEN PACING the floor of his apartment for the last twenty minutes. He had a route. From the kitchen counter, around the table, down the corridor past his bedroom and bathroom and into the open plan living area. Here, he had a choice. Left or right behind the couch. Either way he ended up at the large picture with its view over the Tenderloin. Again, he had a choice. Sit at his desk and get on with it, or continue being indecisive and carry on pacing. Jacob took a deep breath, chuckled, sat, and jiggled the mouse. The screensaver vanished and his notes on Terrordon popped into view. He examined them for a few minutes, then sat back and clicked his fingers.

“Siri, open Skype and call Pete.”

“Opening Skype and calling Pete Schlamme,” Siri purred back with a psychotropic voice that Jacob had paid a good deal extra for. Frankly, he didn’t care that it was computer generated, and wasn’t entirely real. On occasion, when he asked it to read a novel, it still managed to turn him on.

After a short delay Jon, Pete’s boyfriend, answered.

“Jacob! Nice to see you. It’s been ages. To what do we owe

the pleasure?”

“Well, nice to see you too, Jon. You’re looking well, but much as I’d like to chat, I need to talk to Pete about my next project.”

“Ah ha. Finally!” Jon said, “I can’t wait to hear.” He turned away from camera. “Sweetheart, it’s Pete for you,” he hollered, turning back to smile at Jacob. “Are you going to go undercover and be gay again? What was it you called it... oh yes, ‘method writing.’” He giggled and winked at Jacob. “Call me anytime I can help with your method, dear.”

“Stop winding him up, Jon,” Pete’s voice came from off screen.

“See ya.” Jon said, and winked again as he got up. Pete came into view as he sat down, a towel around his shoulders.

“Sorry, I was in the shower. Sorry about about Jon, too. He still can’t believe the method writing thing.”

“No problem. So, I’m calling because I’ve decided.”

“Yes?” Pete looked apprehensive.

“Terrordon. The Myth, The Man.”

“Excellent, Jacob! I knew you’d make the right choice. So, what’s the next step?”

“Well, as Terrordon has vanished the next logical move is to interview Sleepwalker. To do that I need get an introduction to his doctor at the Rampworth State Hospital. I’ve tried all my contacts. Have you any ideas?”

Pete smiled. “Oddly enough, I have. Have I told you about my younger brother, Paul?”

“No.”

“Ah. Well, he’s a doctor. Works in a practice in Berkeley, and is straight as a die. Anyway, the last time we had dinner he brought along the delightful Lisa Appleton Warne.”

“You look like her name should ring a bell, Pete. Sorry, but

it doesn't.”

“Well, if you will use Wikipedia as a research tool, Jacob, then I'm not surprised. Okay. More properly her name is Doctor Lisa Appleton Warne, with a D.Clin.Psych after it. She works at Rampworth, and one of her patients is Sleepwalker and his merry band.”

It was bleak and drizzling as Jacob pulled up a hundred yards from the gatehouse of Rampworth State hospital. Except for his hire car the road had been deserted for the last few miles as it exited a thickly forested area and crossed an open plain. Now Jacob saw why. The road terminated here. As if in a Hollywood movie, a tall razor wire topped fence stretched from both sides of the armoured gatehouse as far as his eyes could see. Rather than reassuring, it was dark, ominous, depressing, and didn't give Jacob a good feeling.

He put the car into drive, pulled up to the gatehouse, and lowered his window. He waited while a camera on top of the fence panned around until he could see his face in its lens. After a minute the gatehouse door opened and an armed, uniformed man with a PDA, came out.

“Jacob Heath to see Doctor Warne,” Jacob said.

“Yes, Mr. Heath,” the guard replied, handing him an encapsulated badge with his Name and photo on it. He tapped his PDA. “Please wear this I.D. at all times. You wouldn't want us to mistake you for an inmate.” The guard smiled. “Doctor Warne is waiting for you at the main building. The route is programmed into the car's Sat-Nav. Good day, sir.” The guard retired into the gatehouse and shut the door as the gates slid smoothly open. Jacob pursed his lips, then tapped ‘start’ on the Sat-Nav's new screen.

Jacob has spent the drive wondering what Doctor Lisa Appleton Warne would be like. Normally, he skyped with potential interviewees, as he liked to see their expressions as they talked. Doctor Warne, on the other hand, wouldn't Skype. She would only talk on the phone, and as she was British and Jacob was unused to the accent, he hadn't managed to get a lot out of the short conversation other than 'Appleton was her middle name and he shouldn't forget it.' Not that she'd come across as domineering, just that Appleton seemed to be important to her.

Jacob was pondering this as he reversed the car into a 'visitors' parking slot outside the main building. He was reaching for his shoulder bag when there was a tap on the side window. He turned to find a petite brunette smiling down at him.

"Doctor Warne?"

"The same," she said. He got out and closed the door, realising that she was not only petite but short with it.

"Lock the car, please, Mr. Heath. And please make sure your security badge is visible at all times. You wouldn't want to be mistaken..."

"For a patient?" he interrupted her. "The guard said that, too."

"Yes." Warne nodded. "There's a bit of an unfortunate story attached to that. But never fear. It was a while ago, and the person involved has quite recovered.... So I'm told."

"Anyway, Mr. Heath, you're not here for *that*. You're here for The Sleepwalker."

"Please, call me Jacob, Doctor Warne," Jacob said with his most winning smile. Doctor Warne cocked her head up to look at him.

"Very well. I shall. In private you may call me Lisa, but I

must insist you call me Doctor Warne in front of Sleepwalker. He is a very manipulative man and I cannot allow him to have the slightest hold on my psyche. Neither, Jacob, can you.”

It was unfortunate that the weather was so bleak, Jacob thought, otherwise Lisa’s office would have been cosy and delightful. With several doors off it, that she had said were kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. It was a large space warmly decorated in rich colours, with a royal blue carpet. Two couches facing each other over a large coffee table were in the middle of the room. An overflowing bookcase took one wall, her desk another, a large bank of monitors a third, and then there was a fire. A real, honest to goodness, log fire. Jacob found he was gawping and shut his mouth.

Lisa laughed delightedly.

“How...?”

“I insisted on it as part of my contract. Honestly, I have no idea how they did it. But it is real, and I get logs delivered! It’s almost like being at home.”

“I’m impressed. Especially as it’s not on an outside wall.”

“Yes, well. Let’s sit.” Lisa gestured at the couches and they sat opposite one another. Jacob rummaged in his bag and took out his old digital recorder.

“Do you mind if I record our conversation?”

“I must apologise, but it is not allowed. You may make notes, of course. But be aware Rampworth records everything.” Lisa gestured to the inset ceiling lights, and Jacob saw they each had a small glowing red dot in their rim.

“All of them?”

Lisa nodded. “Yes.”

“Is that not a tad... intrusive?”

“Yes. But it is part of the contract, and one does get used

to it... after a fashion. Tea, or coffee?”

“Coffee, please.”

“You Americans and your coffee,” Lisa smiled. “Alright. I’ll play mother while you get your notebook out.” Jacob watched as Lisa went through the kitchen door, then pulled his bag onto his lap. He’d come across the ‘no recording’ problem on the Harvey Milk project, and had kitted his bag out accordingly. The old digital recorder he had produced was a working dummy. The real recorder was the bag itself, with tiny top-of-the-range microphones, and a solid state recorder fitted into the bag’s bottom. It could, with the right settings, record for a week without problem. He turned it on.

By the time Lisa returned with a tray Jacob had his notebook and biro out and ready. He passed her the plate with biscuits and poured her a cup of tea, then coffee for himself out of a cafetiere. He cleared his that.

“So, tell me about The Sleepwalker.”

It’s probably better that you tell me what you know first,” Lisa said. “In outline will be fine. Then I can fill in the gaps for you.”

“Okay. As you know I wrote a biography of Harvey Milk. My next project has the working title of ‘Terrordon: The Man, The Myth.’

“In a nutshell Terrordon vanished after catching Sleepwalker in 2005. Sleepwalker was judged unfit to stand trial due to insanity, and has been here, at Rampworth, ever since.”

“You’re correct, in as far as it goes. But what you don’t know is that The Sleepwalker suffers from Dissociative identity disorder, or DID, which was previously known as multiple personality disorder, or MPD. It’s why Sleepwalker couldn’t be prosecuted.”

“What?”

“He has several different identities. Seven, in fact. All different. I should say all very different.

“What?” Jacob could feel a headache coming on. He was more than confused, and wasn’t sure what to ask Lisa next.

“It would be best if you meet them, Jacob. Though honestly there’s no telling who you will get to meet. There’s no routine, no changing of the personality every ‘X’ number of hours of days. They come and go as they please.

“I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I, and I’ve been working with them since I arrived. DID is controversial

“The first of the seven is Doug. Doug’s a tough New Jersey builder. He’s great with his hands, but is very quick to temper.

“Billy is a farmer from Alabama. He likes photography, though he doesn’t get much chance in here.

“Rog is a very quiet Californian. He generally wants to be left alone to read.” Lisa waved at her bookcase. “Rog has read most of these, and some more than once.

“James is also Californian, and hasn’t grown any older since he arrived. He’s perpetually 18 years old, he’s gay and very camp with it.

“Tim is an Australian. He’s got a typical out going personality, and is quite the showman and actor.

“Joe is English. A real British ‘gent.’ This psyche often appears after any conflict, and is the most remorseful personality. Joe, like me, loves tea.

“Finally, there’s Charlotte, who is 6 years old, and the only known female personality. Or, the only female that shows herself. She loves to draw and, for her age, she’s very good at it. Any questions?”

“Umm, yes. Could you give me a minute here,” Jacob said, finally glad that he’d taken a course in shorthand. He checked back over his notes for mistakes, then frowned. “You haven’t mentioned Sleepwalker.”

“Ah. Yes. Sleepwalker himself hasn’t been seen in ten years. There is a possibility that he’s dead.”

“Dead?”

“Yes. Or maybe subsumed would be a better choice of word.”

“Subsumed? Who on earth would, could, have subsumed him? He was villainous. Truly evil, and none of the other psyches you’ve described sound like they’d have stood a chance against him.

“That, Mr. Heath, is indeed a question that needs an answer.” Lisa smiled. “Now, if you’re ready we’ll go and meet... one of them.”

Apart from the lack of a stone lined corridor, the room where Doctor Warne took Jacob to meet Sleepwalker reminded him of ‘Silence of The Lambs.’ They arrived on one side of a thick glass wall, and on the other, in a comfortable armchair, sat Sleepwalker, reading. To Jacob the man seemed quite normal. He was in his early forties, some six feet tall, with an average build, short dark hair, and, when he finally looked up at them, piercing green eyes.

“Go away Doctor Warne. I’m reading.”

“I can see that, Rog. I thought you’d like to meet a new friend. This is....”

“Go away Doctor, I... ooh. Oh yes!”

Jacob couldn’t believe his eyes. The man in the chair exploded out of it and sashayed towards the glass partition, his entire demeanour changing to one of unbridled lust, his eyes

unwaveringly fixed on Jacob, his hands roaming across his groin, squeezing and rubbing as they went.

“Who is this delightful man you’ve brought to see me, Doctor Warne? I want him. I need him, now!”

“This is Mr. Heath, James.”

“Hello James,” Jacob managed, as the man who was Sleepwalker, but also James and six others, flung his arms wide and began to rub himself up and down on the glass partition.

“Get rid of the bitch and come in here and fuck me, Mr. Heath. Or I’ll fuck you. I don’t mind either way.

“If you answer me a question I’ll see what I can do,” Jacob said, throwing himself back into ‘method.’

“You will?” James said, running his tongue over his lips and slipping his hand under his waistband. “Mmm, it sounds wonderful. Alright then, ask away.”

“I’m writing a biography of The Terradon, and I was wondering if you could tell me anything about him.”

“A biography of who? I’ve never heard of the man. I’ve....”

Jacob watched as the oversexed man seemed to fold in upon himself and shrank to the floor on his knees.

“Where’s my paper and crayons, Doctor Warne?” A young girl’s voice said, looking at them both. “And who is that new man standing there?”

They stayed for the next hour, talking to Charlotte about her drawings; waiting to see if they’d be another change of psyche. Jacob noticed one thing, though he didn’t think to mention it. Charlotte liked to draw with purple crayons. She liked that a lot.

Jacob said his goodbyes to Charlotte, then Lisa.

He unlocked his car, got in and let out a deep breath he

hadn't been aware he'd been holding. "Jesus Christ," he said quietly, starting the engine. He stopped at the gatehouse, handed his security pass to the guard, then slowly drove away.

chapter six

S.R. Martin

THE TAPPING CONTINUED. AN attractive brunette in a smart grey business suit peered past her male companion and furrowed her brow.

The glint of her earring caught Jacob's attention. He looked up to see her glaring at him. She looked down at his metal-tipped mechanical pencil which still impacted his black marble table.

Jacob mouthed a silent, "Sorry." The tapping ceased. The woman turned her attention back to her companion.

He put the pencil into his shirt pocket, clipping it in one smooth motion, its sharp tip appearing below a ragged hole poked into creation several years before.

The late afternoon sun peeked through incoming banks of fog. The light hit his notebook, dividing the exposed pages into light and dark sections.

Jacob stared at his notes from his perch in the northwest corner of the Top of the Mark, a lone seat he preferred over all other locations in San Francisco. It had become his own, except for some occasions when tourists forced him to seek

other venues. Even then, he went across the street to the Tonga Room, or to the lounge on the floor above it at the Fairmont Hotel. He could think more clearly at any of these places on Nob Hill, generally.

But not on this day.

His research into the Terrordon project had yet to produce any new leads or evidence as to the mysterious vigilante's identity, or why he suddenly disappeared twelve years before. The scribbles of his notebook included names scratched through in frustration. The SFPD was seemingly ignorant of the existence of the man. Jacob had done little to form a working relationship with the office, and was ineffective in working sources there during his tenure at the Chronicle.

Nor were contacts at City Hall of any help. Many of his old friends from the Milk biography days were gone...that was back in the days of Gavin Newsom, now the Lieutenant Governor for the state.

"Should I drive to Sacramento?" Jacob thought, before dismissing it. "Gavin won't remember me. I was just a pest to him."

The waitress, a short blonde woman of middle age in the standard pseudo-tuxedo uniform of the staff, stopped by his table.

"Are you good, Mr. Heath?"

Jacob picked up his martini glass, a lemon peel curled in the bottom. "Another," he said, handing her the glass. He drank straight vodka with the lemon peel for no other reason than it was the preferred beverage of his favorite journalist.

"I am still no Herb Caen," he thought, twisting to observe the setting sun behind him. "But then again, Herb didn't try to write whole biographies. A few short sentences, three dots, and that was it."

The waitress returned with his martini. He took a long sip and contemplated the final meeting of the day. "I should get dinner out of it..."

The bus was packed with people of the city. Jacob bumped and pressed against a man who exhibited all the hallmarks of homelessness, most notably a pungent smell of stale urine. The man got off at the next stop. Jacob noticed several of the patrons began breathing as if they had been underwater for several minutes.

He left the bus on Fulton street two blocks away from Emmy's house. His sister lived around the corner of the so-called Jefferson Airplane house, famous to no one now except Jacob, who habitually stopped for a moment outside its gated entrance, pausing to sing quietly the first few bars of "Volunteers". He always looked up at the window from which he believed Marty Balin viewed the inspiration for the song, a lorry that hauled charitable donations.

He remembered the time he saw Grace Slick in person at an art exhibition in Sausalito in early 2001. He had been shocked by her mane of white hair. "We all get old," he thought, and he moved past the house at 2400 Fulton Street.

Rounding the corning, he saw his sister driving into the garage level of her Victorian. The car disappeared just as Jacob reached the concrete steps to her front door. Before he could knock, the door swung open and she appeared before him, looking a bit tired from a day's work at her gift shop in Noe Valley. Locks of her auburn hair fell over her eyes.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Why didn't you call me?"

He moved past her into the house. "Ah, ah, ah! We agreed last week I would come over tonight. Right? And dinner?"

Emmy shut the door and huffed. "Tom will not be too happy. Something big going is going on at the firm, and he's under a lot of stress."

"Okay, no dinner," said Jacob. "Maybe I will just raid your fridge."

Emmy laughed. "Good luck. I haven't gone shopping this week. Maybe a stalk of leeks..."

"I'll take 'em," said Jacob.

He stopped his sister and hugged her as she moved to pass him.

"How is your novel?" she asked, still in his arms.

"It's not a novel."

"Biography. Whatever." She broke his embrace and continued to the kitchen. "Pacey will be home from basketball soon. I have to get dinner started, at least."

"But I cannot stay?"

"No, not tonight. Sorry." She opened the refrigerator, bent down and pivoted to face Jacob holding a plastic bag. "Here are your leeks."

He surveyed the bag as he took it from her. "One leek. Singular." He pinched off a leaf and began chewing. "Did you close the shop?"

"No, I left it to Harold. Summertime hours. I need him to stay longer."

"Oh."

"I have a family and he doesn't. Kind of like..."

"Me." Jacob tore off another leaf of leek.

Emmy cocked her head, then lowered it in dismay. She opened a cabinet. "Tea?"

"Yeah. It will help me shake off the two martinis I just had."

"Top of the Mark again?"

"You bet. And the sunset through the clouds was glorious." Jacob sat down at the kitchenette table. He ran his gaze around to the top of the high cabinets, cataloguing the knick-knacks Emmy had fastidiously arranged. "So let's talk about me."

Emmy laughed dryly. "Of course. So, your novel."

"Biography. I can't seem to find any leads. I'm starting to believe I should pick another subject."

"Is this your John Muir book?"

"No," said Jacob. "Wow, you really pulled that one out of your hat. I haven't thought about the Muir book in ages."

"So what is it? Willie Brown? Jerry Brown?"

Jacob rapped his fingers on the polished wooden tabletop and looked out the window at the street below. He thought better of telling Emmy he was taking up the subject of a street fighter. "Just an anonymous local hero."

"Anonymous?"

"A do-gooder who tried to help the...uh, homeless and the oppressed here in the City."

"Soup kitchen type?"

"I guess you could say that."

Emmy started a kettle of water on the stove, and took out two Chinese takeout boxes from the fridge. "These aren't for you, by the way. So, how are you going to write a book about an anonymous welfare worker? Why is he anonymous?"

"He sort of helped people without their knowing it. Surreptitiously."

Emmy tore the metal handles off the boxes and put each box in the microwave. "Are you writing about that guy who used to play trumpet at Fisherman's Wharf?"

"What?"

"Don't you remember? The human juke box."

Jacob laughed. "Grimes Poznikov? No, but thanks for reminding me. Suffice to say, I am running into a dead end on my research."

Emmy pulled out the boxes from the microwave and stirred their contents with a fork. "Do you remember what you did the last time you hit a serious dead end?"

"Yes, of course. During the Milk article for the Chronicle."

"What did you call it? Method acting?"

"Method writing," said Jacob, standing up and moving toward the stove. "The concept was that if I ran out of data, I would create it."

"By immersing yourself in the environment," said Emmy. She dumped the contents of the boxes out onto one plate. She picked the plate up and shoved it at Jacob. "Here."

He smiled at her and said, "Chopsticks?" She produced a pair out of a drawer next to the stove.

As he ate, Emmy poured green tea and sat down across from him. "You know, I am still a little...I still don't understand your willingness to dive into the Milk book so - "

"Go ahead and say it. You suspect me of being gay." He shoved a shrimp into his mouth. Between chews, he said, "Would you say the same of Sean Penn?"

Emmy frowned. "You have used that argument before."

"He used method acting," said Jacob. "It got him an Oscar. And he is still the same guy afterward." He gulped down some tea. "I used method writing. I did my research and got out. And I got published."

Emmy sighed. "You dated that guy Troy for over a month."

Jacob put down his chopsticks. "No. Just a month. Not a day over. His name was Travis. And I kept my...well,

distance."

Emmy looked askance. "Okay. Sure. But Mom and Dad -"

"Still don't look at it as just research. Harvey Milk's was a life that was very interesting to me, and his impact on this city, on this country, is still being felt. I thought it was worth a closer look."

Emmy reached across the table and held his hand. "Jacob. You are forty years old, single. You are in good shape. You are neat. A little too neat. And you live in San Francisco. Mom and Dad are a little...suspicious. Who was the last girl you dated?"

Jacob nodded. "Okay, it's been a while, but I've been busy."

"Busy with leads for some anonymous helper of the homeless. And freelancing for little or no money. And bumming off your big sister -"

"Come on," said Jacob. "I hold my own. I pay my bills. And," he said, holding up his empty plate and smiling, "I take leftovers."

The next day, Jacob walked down the hill from his North Beach apartment to the favorite restaurant of his agent. He found Pete grinning and waving at a window seat inside The Stinking Rose. The smell of basil, tomatoes and roasted garlic hit Jacob like a brick as he entered off Columbus Street.

Pete sat at the usual table, on the side that gave him a good view of the TransAmerica Building. He wiped his hand over his thinning hair as Jacob sat down. "So, how did the follow-up go? Got anything?"

"Not a damn thing, Pete. And I have decided to take matters into my own hands."

Pete dipped a piece of bread into a small pan of olive oil and garlic cloves. After a big bite, he said, "You're not going to go native again?"

"Yes, I am," said Jacob.

"This is not 'Milk'," said Pete. "You're talking about a masked vigilante who used violent methods to fight crime on the streets."

"Milk was murdered, Pete. That's violence, too."

"Why don't you stick to interviews? Do you think there are people on the street who can tell you more about Terrordon?"

"Maybe. But I'll thinking of a different angle. I want to know what was in Terrordon's head. What made him tick. What made him decide to confront criminals face to face."

Pete dabbed the last of the olive oil in the pan. "How would you do that?"

Jacob leaned back in his chair. "Hands-on."

Pete pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes.

Jacob drew a circle in the air with his finger. "Terrordon struck crime at its heart, where it happened, as it happened, or before it happened. The police couldn't do that. And Terrordon was watching for an opportunity, seemingly all the time. We don't know who he was, or what he did during the daytime hours, but at night, he was a consistent menace to drug dealers, would-be murderers, pimps and all manner of thugs. Since his departure, vice has come back to the night streets. And we are back to square one."

"I don't like the way you sound, Jake. You can't mix in with the underworld. You have absolutely no experience - "

"Did I have experience in The Castro?"

"No," said Pete, "but I was there to guide you, and it wasn't dangerous. Not like the world of Terrordon. Now you are talking about a different ballgame altogether."

"I'm talking about creating data," said Jacob.

"Making it up?"

"No, but...I believe I can learn more about Terrordon by living the way he might have lived, by practicing his techniques..."

"With ropes and blades and...guns?"

Jacob winced. "I don't know. Maybe."

Pete shook his head. "You know nothing about any of that."

"I can learn. Isn't that what an investigative journalist does?"

Pete glowered at him. He lifted his chin and looked down his nose at Jacob. He tapped the menu on the table. "I'm having the meatloaf. How about you?"

It took only two hours to find a room in the Tenderloin, the central hub of Terrordon's activities from 2001 to 2005, until his disappearance. Jacob found a suitable rate at the Admiral Hotel, a run-down Single Room Occupancy high-rise on O'Farrell Street. It looked safe enough to Jacob in the daylight, but he knew that the night brought out a different set of characters.

On several occasions over the previous decades he had found himself smack dab in the middle of the Tenderloin, often after buses had stopped running for the night. Two o'clock in the morning was the witching hour. Most businesses were closed, and the inhabitants of the street were of the seedier variety. All one needed to do was walk, quickly north of Geary Street to reenter civilization.

Jacob Heath chose to remove himself from such civilization and apply his methods among the seedy.

He brought with him a suitcase of basic clothes which he

planned to hand wash. Another suitcase contained what he imagined were the tools of Terrordon's trade, except one: a gun. He could not bring himself to cross that bridge. Having never owned one, and never even touched one, it was new territory. He didn't quite know what to do about it.

Nevertheless, Jacob's spirits were high as he established his new "residence" and began observing, watching and waiting for some opportunity.

He brought a chin-up bar to place in the bathroom doorframe. He did multiple sets of pushups daily. He ran up the steps of the hotel to his room, religiously. He believed he was in better shape than any time in his life, including his twenties.

And yet...something wasn't right.

He slept during the daytime. At night, he opened his window to listen to the noises of the street. The window was blocked from opening more than about four inches. Jacob climbed the stairs of the building to its highest floor hoping for access to the roof. He found the door, but it was locked.

Days passed. He was wary about walking the streets in the early morning hours. He couldn't bring himself to dive in, to actually begin to live in and among the minions of the Tenderloin. He wondered if the Terrordon may have also felt this way...

...and if so, then how did the masked vigilante detect the advent of crime? How and when did he decide to jump into the action?

Jacob grew frustrated. His attempts to get through the roof access amounted to nothing.

"I am certainly not going to climb outside to get to the roof," he said aloud to himself while surveying the building from street level. "But he did."

Terrordon did, he thought again and again as the days past. And I cannot. Am I such a coward? Do I really want to get into Terrordon's head, or is this whole project beyond me?

He did it...from whatever building he perched atop, he watched. He knew where the culprits were, and where they were going...and he knew when to strike. He knew which tools, which weapons to use...he knew how to use them to debilitate his targets...

And sometimes he killed.

"I cannot do that," thought Jacob.

Ten days into his Tenderloin residency, Jacob decided he needed another tool. He found a parabolic microphone on the internet and had it shipped directly to the hotel. It cost him an arm and a leg. With the addition of the hotel bill, he anticipated going behind in the rent of his North Beach apartment.

One night, he walked up the stairs to the roof access door again. For whatever reason it had been left open. Jacob emerged onto the roof, in the quiet, blowing fog. Neon signs and street lights reflected light off the clouds.

Jacob walked over the tarpapered roof to the edge of the building, a ledge that came up to his waist. Looking over, careful to hold on to rusty iron bars along the ledge, he saw people moving about on O'Farrell. He walked along the edge of the roof to see down to the alleys between buildings and the rear service road.

"This is my observation deck," he thought. "Finally."

He studied the access door, looking for a way to jam the lock so that he could be guaranteed access, but it did not look promising. The next time the janitor remembered to use his key, that would be the end of easy access to the roof.

Jacob decided to run down the stairs and retrieve his

parabolic microphone. Upon return to the roof, he pointed the clear plastic dome downward at a lone figure under a streetlight on O-Farrell. It was a dark-skinned girl dressed in a black catsuit and faux-fur jacket, the same girl he had seen there each night since he moved in.

He had not seen her up close, but from the roof, he could now hear that she was chewing gum. He smiled at the prospect of listening in on her conversations. He didn't have to wait long.

A Caucasian man in a long black raincoat walked toward her and stopped. Jacob listened intently through his earphones.

"How much?" said the man, without so much as a salutation.

"How much for what?" said the girl, with a thick accent that Jacob didn't recognize.

"Whatever you are selling," said the man.

"Standard is two hundred," she responded. "No discount."

"I don't have that much."

"Move on," she said with a motion of her hand.

"How about one hundred and we duck into this corner over here?"

"I don't think you want to duck into that corner, mister," she said, pointing to the shadowed alley next to the hotel.

Jacob watched as the man turned, paused, and then continued down O'Farrell without another word. He increased his pace, taking advantage of the downward slope of the sidewalk. In a minute he was out of sight.

Jacob watched as the girl went back to standing under the streetlight. He turned off his microphone.

His was curiosity about the alley. Someone is there, he thought.

Looking at the open roof access door, he realized suddenly that he could be locked out if someone were to close the door. He picked up the microphone and earphones and jogged to the door, leaving it slightly open behind him, and then went down the stairs.

From his own room, he looked down at the girl. He pulled his windbreaker from the closet and decided to walk down to the street.

Outside the front door of the Admiral, he saw her again. She lazily moved up the sidewalk, illuminated from above by the streetlight. She stopped, looked at Jacob, then slowly turned around and walked in the other direction, her high-heels sandals tapping lightly on the concrete.

Jacob approached her, keeping the dark alley in his peripheral vision. He made no attempt to look in that direction. He turned slightly to point down the sidewalk. Passing her, he said, "Hello," and continue on around the corner.

Moving out of view, he peeked back around at her to see her walking lazily again in the opposite direction.

Okay, good enough for first contact, thought Jacob. He continued to the Pinecrest Diner on Geary and popped in for a cup of coffee.

After a half hour, he walked back to the hotel, and saw the girl again. She faced him, and stopped walking. This time, he took longer to observe the form of her body, the lines of her face, and the expression of her eyes.

She looked at him, but her countenance did not change from a languid, blank stare.

He drew closer toward her. "Hello," he said again. This time, he added, "How are you doing?"

She did not speak. Jacob continued on and made his way

to his room.

From his seventh floor window, he watched her again. He stayed by the window until the first grey and blue tinges of dawn appeared in the sky. The cool night was becoming a cool morning. The girl, who did not seem to do any business all night long, disappeared while Jacob wasn't looking.

She was the only person who haunted the street each evening, aside from an occasionally vagrant passing through. Jacob watched her night after night, going out on his coffee run, noticing when she was approached by men for her services.

And then he started to see a pattern. She got one or two patrons within the entire week. Yet, she always returned. The occasional police car caused her to move temporarily into the alleyway, but otherwise, she stayed under the light, quietly marking her territory with spiked heels.

Jacob began to wonder if the vigilante Terrordon had permanently cleaned out the Tenderloin. He even wondered if there had never been real trouble there. Perhaps it was all just a ruse, and the Terrordon created the trouble that he was credited with dispelling.

The next week, Jacob decided to up the ante. Upon exiting the hotel for his nightly jaunt to the Pinecrest, he stopped beside the girl.

She moved closer to him. This time, it was she who spoke. "Hello."

"Hi," said Jacob. "I see you here every night."

"Yes," she said, darting her eyes past him toward the alley.

"Listen," said Jacob, "I know you have work to do, but could I interest you in breakfast when your shift is over?"

Her eyes widened with incredulity. She smacked her lips and looked to the side.

“Just offering,” said Jacob. “I’d like to treat you to breakfast.”

“Some other time,” she said in her thick accent, and motioned for him to move on.

He did. Baby steps, thought Jacob.

He still could not place the accent, although it occurred to him that she could be Jamaican. He went to get his coffee, thought some more about what to do next, and walked back.

When he got to her position under the streetlight, he handed her a piece of paper from the hotel. He had scrawled a message on it:

PINECREST DINER, 11:30 AM — J.

She took it and read it while he walked away. Once Jacob was at the door of the hotel he looked around at her and nodded.

She took his card and ripped it in half, dropping the pieces on the ground. Jacob saw that she glanced up at the alleyway. Then he went up to his room.

Staring down at the street, he realized he was not going to see whoever was in the alley. It was no mystery that it was her pimp.

The real mystery was that this seemed to be the only action in the Tenderloin, and it was slow, painfully so to Jacob.

Sitting in the Pinecrest Diner at what had become his usual time, 11:30 AM, and his usual booth, the one farthest from the door, Jacob scratched notes in his hidebound notebook. The project on Terrordon was feeling more like a failure. He was ready to shift over to something else. Willie Brown. Or Jerry Brown. Or John Muir. Maybe even Gavin Newsom.

But the current project was not moving along. It hurt him

to assess the money expended thus far. He had no advance from a publisher to cover his research. The work was strictly on speculation. Pete had not returned his most recent calls. Maybe that was a message.

Jacob poured a third container of coffee creamer into his cup. It was all the nutrition he expected to get that day. A visit to his sister seemed to be in order. He placed his head down on the unused paper placemat in front of him.

He started to drift off to sleep, in spite of the four cups of coffee he had imbibed. A pleasant image of Land's End played in the cinematic screen of his mind. He tried to recall the exact location of Seal Rocks in relation to the back wall of the Cliff House. He listened for the pounding surf below him. He noted the squawks of passing sea gulls.

It had been a long time since he let his mind relax and forget about the current project. He had placed too much emphasis on something that was insubstantial. He saw the mistake clearly now.

It's simple, he thought. I chose something that cannot be pursued to a conclusion, that I am not equipped to pursue, and that nobody cares about anymore.

Everybody cares about John Muir...

A sharp poke on his shoulder pulled him out of his near-slumber. He lifted his head and through bleary eyes made out the face of a dark-skinned woman. He caught the fragrance of her perfume, a loud announcement of tropical spices that stung his nose.

Pushing against the table and into an upright position, he saw her clearly. It was the girl from in front of the Admiral. She smiled and sat down opposite him.

It was only then that Jacob realized that she wore a wig during her nightly vigils. She now wore a different wig, in the

style of a China doll, slick, straight black hair which framed her face in rectangular lines.

He thus saw her face for the first time in daylight. In spite of his interest in her as a research subject, he saw a disturbing, uncanny beauty in front of him. She had smooth dark skin, the color of dark chocolate. Her white irises contrasts sharply with her hair and her face. Her only blemish was a scar across her right cheek which she covered with makeup. From her ears hung bright green hoops about two inches in diameter.

He smiled widely, surprised by her appearance, having written her off as a past acquaintance, and a minimal one, at that. She smiled back at him and revealed a toothy blast of white enamel which again contrasted nicely with her face and hair.

Then he walked his gaze downward. She wore a catsuit, similar or the same as she wore on O'Farrell. The plunging neckline revealed broad, smooth breasts the same darkness as her face. Her long fingers, tipped with metallic copper nails, wrapped around the table's round glass candle holder. She held it in front of her, feeling its warmth on her hands and face. Her eyes beamed a calmness he had not detected during his quick passes to and from the hotel.

He could not take his eyes off her.

What is this, he thought, that has arrived from the vast universe to my front door?

"Breakfast?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "You did say you would buy me breakfast."

Again, the origin of the accent alluded Jacob. He motioned for the waitress, who brought over a menu for the girl.

"My name is Jake," he said, holding out his hand.

"Sika," she said, returning his grip lightly. "You can call

me Sika. S - I - K - A. Get that right for your newspaper.”

Jacob let go of her hand. His jaw slackened and he froze.

Sika returned to hold her candle. She smiled and looked into the flame.

Jacob said, “What makes you think I work for a newspaper?”

“You’re not a cop. I know cops. You are not a social worker. I know them, too. And you are not clergy. I would know that as well.” She continued to smile and gaze into the flame of the candle.

“Then what leads you to think - “

“Do you think I didn’t know when you moved in? Do you think I don’t see you staring at me from your window? I even recall the night you watched me from the roof. A cop would not be so obvious. A social worker would actually try to talk to me. A clergyman...well, let’s just say they are some of my best customers.” She looked up from the flame and locked onto Jacob’s eyes. “But I am not here for you.” The smile left her lips.

“Okay,” said Jacob, “okay. So, why are you here?”

“The same as anybody trying to make it in this country. Some of us don’t have the connections, the assistance, the... support. We must do what we can to survive.” She tapped his wrist with the sharp, copper nail of her index finger. “And where I come from was much worse.”

“Which was?”

“Sierra Leone.”

Ah, Jacob thought. Africa. It makes sense, I suppose.

“So I will take your breakfast, and ask that you do not follow me, or say hello to me, or anything else. Unless you want to be one of my customers. If your intent is to write about me, I don’t need that. You don’t need that either,

mister newspaper reporter. There is nothing creative about documenting the life of a hooker.”

Jacob gazed at her and nodded.

She continued. “And the next time you want to write about someone in my line of business, please realize that the exposure you give us only hurts us more. I just want to be left alone, to make the little money I can to survive here.”

Her eyes calmed slightly, and her shoulders drooped. She pushed the candle to the side of the table next to a napkin container.

She looked briefly at the menu. “Order a number three for me.”

“Okay,” said Jacob.

“And thank you,” said Sika.

The next few hours left Jacob numb. Something about the girl, the woman he had covertly observed in order to seek trouble had shook his foundation. And yet, like that, she exited his life. He understood her rationale, and he decided to abide by it.

He spent the afternoon walking the streets of the Tenderloin, all the way down Geary to Van Ness, and up O’Farrell to Market. The experience of the breakfast with Sika forced a shift in his priorities. As enamored as he had been in becoming the first author to document the true story of Terrordon, he had now lost faith in the tactic of creating data, or method writing for this particular subject. Looking for trouble where none was...perhaps that was a bridge too far for him.

As night settled in, his sleep cycle upended by the day spent awake, he began to pack his clothes and “special” tools. The distance would be too long to walk with the suitcase and

the duffel bag to North Beach, but he had a small wad of money for a bus or a cab.

He looked around the room once more to ensure he had not forgotten anything. The hotel would probably charge him one more night since he didn't check out early enough. So be it, thought Jacob. Serves me right.

He picked up the two bags and set the duffel down while he reached for the doorknob.

A piercing scream emanated from somewhere below.

He paused and looked toward the window.

Another scream tore through the evening.

Jacob dropped the suitcase and opened the window to its four-inch stop. A scream again, and a female crying and wailing.

He looked down at the sidewalk. It was barren.

His mind raced...the alley....

Jacob threw open the door and hesitated. He briefly considered running up to the roof where he could look down ten stories into the alley. He discounted it.

“What good would that do?” he muttered aloud. “I am not Terrordon....”

He ran down to the elevator, which he rarely used, and now discovered was ancient and slow. As the seconds ticked by, he darted his eyes to the stairwell door, and bolted for it.

On the street, he immediately shot to the corner of the building, stood against the wall and slowly peered around the corner.

In the darkness of the alley, some fifty feet inward from the street, Jacob saw the shape of a large man holding a female form by the collar. It was Sika, and she was mostly crumpled onto the ground, held up only by the man's grip at her throat. She gasped and emitted sputtering cries.

Jacob's heart raced, as did his mind.

Okay, he thought, this is what you wanted - an invitation to trouble. This is trouble! Get in there, dammit! Go!

He straightened up, pulled down on the front of his jacket, and took a deep breath. He pivoted around the corner and into the alleyway.

Facing the man, he cleared his throat and said, "Excuse me."

The man did not respond to Jacob.

Jacob advanced several yards and spoke again. "Excuse me, I would like to talk to you."

The man pulled Sika up from the ground and turned to face Jacob.

"What do you want, m*****f*****?" he growled, still holding Sika by the collar.

She whimpered and said what Jacob perceived to be a name...Ricardo.

Jacob puffed out his chest and bellowed. "I'm a customer. For the girl."

Two eyes glinted in the reflected streetlight. The man lifted Sika up, and she stood, shaking. He took his hand away from her collar. She collapsed back down on the ground.

"We are closed for business," said the man.

Jacob advanced several more yards, slowly. "Well, I have cash. That's what this is all about, right?" He pulled out the thin stack of folded bills from his pocket.

"Don't come any closer," said the man. "I said, we are closed for business tonight."

Sika stumbled up to the wall of the hotel and leaned against it. "Go away, Jake," she uttered in a low, cracked voice.

"Listen, mac... Ricardo, I have one thousand dollars here.

Come on, what do you say? Let me have her for one night.” He waved the paper money in front of his face.

A new scream erupted from Sika.

Jacob felt his hand go numb and the side of his face hit hard on the ground. His eyes saw shapes in the dark moving away from him. He heard heavy footsteps, more crying and the slamming of car doors, followed by a squeal of tire rubber.

He lay in the alley for an unknown number of hours. He didn't try to move. His face hurt, his body was numb, and the ground was cold. But he just wanted to stay there, trembling in a fetal position.

Defeat. Pure, unadulterated, and embarrassing. How could it come to this, he thought. What have I done....

He heard the scuffle of rough shod feet moving toward him. Jacob's vision was blurry, but he could see in the sideways orientation of the alley relative to his head that the sky was lightening. Morning was here.

And so was a homeless man who had apparent need to relieve himself, very close to Jacob.

With the first splatter against the nearby hotel wall, Jacob leaped up. His first steps were tentative, but he regained his balanced.

The homeless man croaked, “Sorry about that. Can I have some spare change?”

Jacob shook his head and looked at his fingers, bruised when Ricardo grabbed the money from his hand.

“I'm a little low myself, mac,” said Jacob.

He went upstairs to his room, retrieved his bags, and took the elevator down to the lobby.

He wobbled out to O'Farrell street and made a left, and another left at Leavenworth, embarking on a long walk to North Beach.

chapter seven

Sanusha S Sritharan

THE THUNDER RUMBLED OMINOUSLY, the sky grey and overcast. It seemed to mirror Jacob's mood, though he knew that was wishful thinking. Stuff like that only happened in storybooks. He was off to see Pete again for their regular quarterly update and he had no progress to show. For all he knew, he had just walked past the Terrordon carrying a kale smoothie. Probably not though, the Terrordon was definitely taller. Though, maybe his outfit incorporated hidden heels to make him look taller and more intimidating – now, that was a thought. He laughed to himself as he stepped into his agent's office.

“Hi Pete. It's the same as ever. Zip, zilch, nada. I'm even out of synonyms for nothing. This is depressing.”

“Hello to you too, Jacob.”

Jacob slams a massive ring binder on Pete's table, “Do you know what this is? 16 years of research on the Terrordon. 16 years. And I still don't know who he is. I clearly wasn't cut out for journalism. Good thing I quit, aye?”

“You'd said you had a new lead to chase...,” Pete stopped

talking, gaping as Jacob extracted a folded document from within the binder and unfolded it to cover his entire desk. It was an evidence board, clearly, but he had not been prepared for the sheer number of pictures, post-its (and were those ribbons? Oh yes, probably from his sister Emmy working in some gift shop, Blue and Brown was it?) covering every square inch of that sheet. Clearly, tracking down the Terrordon's identity had moved past being a passion project. Pete wondered how he had missed the signs – surely he should have picked up on it ages ago. But this was the first time that Jacob had no other ongoing project but the Terrordon book; he had always been prompt with deadlines, there had been no reason to suspect just how obsessed he had become.

“Explain to me why you have a magically expanding evidence board?”

“Had to watch Harry Potter with Pacey a while ago. The Maurader's Map is seriously cool, so thought I'd create my own version. And I had all those origami skills from when I wrote Haruki Murakami's biography,” Jacob replied absently, poring over the board.

“Oh yeah, and that lead from a while ago turned out to be a bust,” he continued. “I thought I was going to get a breakthrough from the comic books. You know how he's clearly been inspired by Batman? Anyway, I thought I could try to cross-reference that with what little other data points I have to figure out his identity. Seems logical right? But do you know how many comic book stores there are in San Francisco? Well I do. Not that you care about the number. But trust me, it's a lot. And not all of them keep records. Because none of them ever think that one day they would be responsible for the sale of a comic book that might just inspire a kid somewhere to become a vigilante. As if that's too far a stretch.”

Pete raised his eyebrow, bemused at the sight of Jacob ranting.

“And libraries, don’t get me started on libraries. Return a book just 1 day late, and they’ve got the records to charge you that fine. But go in asking for who has borrowed Batman comics in the past 30 years and suddenly they don’t have any records.”

He ran his hand through his coiffed hair. “I’m at a dead end. There just isn’t enough information available for me to figure out who the Terrordon is. Or was, he might be dead now for all we know.”

“Well, then just write what you do know. And maybe you’ll inspire other readers out there to join you in figuring out his identity.”

“You know I don’t write speculative fiction. You’re going soft in your old age. Seriously, write a story without all the facts? No way, that would undermine my credibility,” Jacob scoffed.

“Then it’s time to move on. I mean, Jacob, look at this evidence board.”

“It’s great, isn’t it?” Jacob returned to scrutinising all the information he has on the Terrordon, tuning out Pete’s nattering. Probably just him expounding on his latest theory of who the Terrordon could be. His personal favourite was when Pete decided that the “don” was significant – he had been convinced that the Terrordon was Japanese, and existed on a diet of salmon dons. Or was an English lecturer from Oxford or Cambridge. Or was Spanish because, Don Juan of course. Or was ex-mafia and was paying homage to his roots. Little had he realised that it was just wordplay on Pteranodon, a flying reptile that existed in the time of dinosaurs, which Terrordon had adopted as his symbol. Probably just a

derivative of Batman, though the Pteranodon, was not actually an ancient ancestor of the modern bat – the wings are completely different as anyone who had done just the slightest bit of research could have told him.

Something in Pete's voice catches Jacob's attention again. "You're clearly obsessed with him. It's a good thing I know you're straight or this would look like stalking. Listen. You're one of the best and that's why I'm your agent. You're able to inhabit someone else's shoes like nobody else I've met. You bring another person's story to life. But maybe it's at the expense of yourself – I mean, when was the last time you were just Jacob Heath?"

Pete raised his hand, stopping Jacob from, no doubt, protesting that of course he was being himself.

"And not undercover somewhere pretending to be something or someone you're not, just for research purposes. Listen to me Jacob, let this one go. It's been 16 years, you've been writing about him from your Chronicle days. You've given it your best shot. You've tracked down every lead. There's nothing to be ashamed of. There are plenty of other books you could be working on. Look, the proposals are all right here," gesturing to the pile of files stacked precariously on one corner of his desk, carelessly pushed aside earlier by Jacob when he was unfolding the evidence board.

"The man simply does not want to be found. The only way you're going to get the details you need is if you get him to come out of retirement so that you can meet him yourself."

"I know. Why do you think I..." Jacob trailed off, realising he hadn't actually told Pete about his 'adventures' for the past few months. He winced, this was not going to go well.

"Why do I think you did...Wait. What exactly did you do?" Pete said, rising to his feet.

“Nothing much, just the usual investigative stuff. Never reveal the sources and all that,” he said in an increasingly high pitched voice.

“Don’t even try Jacob. I recognise that face. You looked like that the entire time you were ‘dating’ Travis. I know what you get like when you’re gathering material. You go full method on me.” He started gesticulating agitatedly. “For Pete’s sake, you pretended to be in a gay relationship for a whole month just to understand Harvey Milk. Spill, what have you done now?”

“Er, Pete. You know you of all people should never use the expression for Pete’s sake right?” he grinned, hoping to defuse the situation.

Pete glared. Jacob squirmed, knowing he wouldn’t be able to get out of this easily.

“I might have tried to immerse myself in the same lifestyle as the Terrordon,” he mumbled, “you know, fighting crime undercover. I had to understand why he did it. And how he could stand to just walk away from it all.” Forgetting himself, his eyes light up as carried on excitedly, “Oh Pete, that rush from knowing you just saved a target from being mugged, it’s indescribable. And that’s just the start of it.”

He stopped abruptly realising Pete had collapsed back into his chair and was looking at him aghast.

“You. You were the Terrordon wannabe that everyone was talking about? What on earth were you thinking? You could have gotten yourself killed! Not to mention the police were looking for you.”

Jacob absent-mindedly rubbed his stomach, feeling the faint scar through the shirt. “I know, and I’ve stopped. I promise,” he said, holding Pete’s gaze. “I just needed to know what it might have been like to have been him. Good chance

to put into practice the martial arts skills I learnt for Jackie Chan's biography." He shuffled his feet. "And I was hoping I would get his attention. You know, show him he had an ally, and that he wouldn't have to bear the burden alone. God knows the city could do with him coming back."

"And pray tell, where did you get this marvellous idea from?"

A few heartbeats passed. "Pacey."

"Pacey? As in your 5 year old nephew Pacey?"

"Yes, the same Pacey we spoke about earlier. And he's 4 actually."

"And what exactly did obsessed with Harry Potter and comic books and lives in a fantasy world Pacey have to say about the Terrordon that convinced you that you should become a vigilante yourself?"

"Well he said that in comic books, the only people that seem to know anything about the superhero are his journalist or photographer friend, his sidekicks or his arch-nemesis. I covered him extensively for 4 years, in fact those were the only articles I ever enjoyed writing. I was the Iris West to his Barry Allen and he never once reached out. So clearly that avenue was closed."

"And instead of doing what any sane person would do and letting sleeping dragons lie, you decide to try and take the law into your own hands on the slim chance that it might get his attention?" Pete asked incredulously.

"A Pteranodon is a flying reptile actually." Jacob quailed at Pete's expression "But fine, dragons are close enough," he hastily added.

Jacob had never seen him this angry. He didn't understand why though, surely Pete knew that he was always going to take any chance possible to find out who the Terrordon was. That's

what he did – find out what made a person tick in order to write a compelling story. Admittedly, he'd never had to track down someone's identity first as well though, usually his clients were more willing.

“That’s it. I’m pulling the plug on this project. It has gone on for far too long. I don’t even need you to look at the rest of these proposals. In fact, remember how you once told me you had written an outline for a novel? I want you to go back to that for a while.”

“What? Pete, come on, you’re overreacting. I’m so close to figuring out who he is. I can feel it. Don’t do this to me,” Jacob pleaded.

“You just came in here, not 30 mins ago, complaining about how you’d hit a complete dead end! Jacob, you know you’re not any closer to finding him than you were a year ago. I shouldn’t have let this go on for this long; I hadn’t realised how method your ‘method writing’ had become.”

Pete carried on talking over Jacob’s futile protests.

“Take the next few weeks off. I’ll see you once I’m back from Connecticut after Thanksgiving. If you’re lucky, maybe you did do enough to get his attention and he’ll come out of retirement. In which case, happy Thanksgiving indeed and we can celebrate when I’m back. Otherwise, I expect to see some progress on that novel. God help me, I can’t even remember the last fiction book I represented. Have I made myself clear?”

Realising that Pete would not take no for an answer, Jacob nodded meekly. He would just have to carry on without Pete. It would be like writing Harvey Milk’s biography all over again – researching on his own.

“Very well. Looks like there is nothing left to say. I’ll get out of your hair then. Happy Thanksgiving in advance,” Jacob offered as he folded up his evidence board and packed it away.

As he bid Pete farewell and made his way out of the office, he realised that maybe Pete had gotten one thing right though. Maybe he could afford to take a few days off before getting back to the investigation. It had been a tough few months after all.

He should probably get started on Pacey's Halloween costume, August wasn't too early after all. He frowned, trying to remember what options Pacey had given him. It definitely hadn't been the Terrordon, no matter how much he had tried to cajole his nephew into dressing up as the coolest local superhero ever. Villains were way more popular apparently. He stopped in his tracks.

That was it.

That was how he would be able to get the Terrordon out of retirement. Normal crime didn't seem to warrant the Terrordon's attention anymore. But he'd watched all the movies. The superhero always turned up to meet the villain.

He would have to do it himself of course. He nodded grimly to himself. San Francisco, watch out, there's a new Super Villain in town. Time to raise hell. Pete would thank him later for the bestseller, he was sure. What should he call himself though? Ah yes, Pacey would know a cool name. He continued walking down the street.

chapter eight

Ioa Petra'ka

1,600 KILOMETRES OF SEWER tunnels and pipes wend beneath the city of San Francisco. Unlike most sewer systems built in the modern era, it handles both the waste water output of its human inhabitants above, and the runoff of the storm sewers pocked throughout the hills and streets of the city. Later in the year, through the months of September and October, the larger networks of these brick-lined warrens would be crawling with technicians, tasked with scrubbing accumulated grit and slime from the walls and ensuring its fitness for the rainy season.

But in August? In August the unlit and stifling stretches of domed tunnel are untroubled by all but the ever present gurgle of a million kitchen sinks. That is, until this particular morning of August, when several hundred different stretches of sewer tunnel awoke—dimly lit by the activation of a network of peculiar devices fastened to walls, and the sudden flurry of activity as clustered roaches made haste into nearby cracks in the masonry.

For a moment it might have even been beautiful, if one

could have seen them all together with their green lights blinking out the status of synchronisation attempts with the rest of the devices in the grid. But it would have only been for that moment. In the next they all synchronised, and then it was a roar of small detonations that laced the honeycombed hillside beneath the city. Gas lines were jolted, ruptured, ignited—and once that got started, far beneath all of anything civilisation had drilled into the soil, the interconnected Rodgers Creek and Hayward fault lines rumbled to life.

Morning came on like a sickness; a coughing in the back of the throat and a steady stream of denials rubbed out of puffy eyes. The futile attempt to spit a dream out of the mouth, a dream that became an irritating hair on the tongue and something important to remember about the Tuesday sirens. Something beyond the closing curtains had left an oddly physical ringing in his ears.

Something, something. Jacob thumbed the glass of his phone. Black. The button was never on the right side of the damn thing. Nothing. The charging cable was coiled useless on the floor. It didn't matter, his plans for this morning did not include the ritual of swatting aside bedsheets and slipping on spandex for his morning ride down the Pinecrest on Geary. They did not include needing a phone, or his backpack full of notes and writing materials.

He sat on the side of his sagging mattress, feet cold on the tile and revelling in the night vision that comes from waking up in the dead hours of the morning in a house perched within a rare lightless bend of road facing the sea. The earlier agitation from his dream had become soothed a little by the lunar light, save for that odd ringing in his ears and an unfamiliar odour that had crept in through the cracks in his

house.

Shaking his head, he made his way over to the closet and on hands and knees reached into a small gap between the wall and the floor. After a moment of cautious probing, he found the little lever he had installed and with a click, the false back to the closet swung upon and a red light fluttered and buzzed into incandescence. Here was an altogether different sort of spandex; the sort not meant to be easily seen in the dark.

As Jacob donned gadgets and tights, and his mind was fixed upon only one thing: taking down Violeta Guillema.

It might be a little premature, but he considered this night to be his primary achievement to date. The years of planning and physical training had all been orchestrated to bring him here, a night where, if all went according to plan, he could say he tracked down a murderer and menace to the community—and to at last know what it was that Terrordon felt when he brought all of his talent and training to that same point, and sunk the blade of that effort into the chest of some vile person. What does justice feel like, then, when it is still 37° hot and dripping through your fingers?

Not for the first time he shook his head to clear the daydream (can one daydream at 4am, his mind giggled) and wondered if he'd perhaps gone too far; Travis sobbing across a decade of time, the accusations, all so terribly deserved.

It wasn't until he had slouched down around the corner of his road where the view went from seaside to cityscape that he realised something was not right. The city was still draped thick with night fog, but it seemed dark where it shouldn't be, and angry knots of orange boiled beneath belts of something much darker than fog. That ringing in his ears was still going on, and for the first time he realised it wasn't in his ears at all. It was the civil alert sirens.

He pulled a small pair of binoculars from his utility belt and flicked the night vision on. It was the cheap stuff, no doubt Terrordon managed to get his hands on some of that great next gen military gear back when he was operating, but a biographer that rarely publishes and moonlights as a wannabe avenger has to be contended with what you can pick up at hunting goods store. All thoughts of Violeta and Terrordon slipped away when his eyes made out the city. A numb recollection of those waking moments resurfaced—the roar of something, of dishes falling, dogs howling against their chains. Jacob gradually began to feel foolish, standing there in his black spandex and his makeshift pointed blade of justice.

Before him the city of San Francisco shimmered in dust and fire.

It was a mindless period of time that followed. The power was out, but with a moon as yet only reddened by smoke he could see well enough to finally notice the complete disarray of his flat. But as for the time between then and now, racing his bike through the dark and rubble-strewn Nob Hill, he couldn't say, nor could he say why he had decided to ride into the thick of catastrophe. Perhaps it was the stain of journalism that drew him into the embrace of misery. Or maybe it was just that he was human.

It was somewhere between putting down the binoculars and puncturing his tire on Sutter ST that he overheard people talking about it being an attack. At first he paid no credence to what was clearly paranoia over what was clearly the aftermath of an earthquake, but the closer he got to the centre the less certain he was of his scorn. A vast interdepartmental turf war was being waged between police, rescue workers and what appeared to be more than a few men in black.

Though his mind was still in a state of numbed shock, it

was somewhere between Sutter and Market, crawling over chunks of street and bodies alike, that Jacob realised there was finally a reason for Terrordon to come out of whatever hole he had crawled into for the past twelve years. Well, to be fair, there wasn't a reason just yet.

But he would make one.

Jacob reached for his backpack before realising he was still wearing his ridiculous superhero uniform, and thus quite without pen, paper or even phone to write with. It was probably just as well, he thought, this isn't the sort of thing one should write in their own hand. He needed a way to get a manifesto to the cops. With this many agencies investigating the whole of downtown, it shouldn't be too difficult to use his old press jargon and a little name dropping to get into the right place to leave a conspicuously marked package where it would be found—preferably a few minutes after he had left.

Through the screaming and the panic he jogged over to Van Ness, just another frightened citizen by all accounts, and rounded the corner, barking out a laugh. It was still there after all these years, the typewriter repair store. Ten minutes later he yanked a sheet of old yellow onionskin paper from a battered Remington:

There are many who will try to explain what I have accomplished today. They will all be mistaken.

This is not about war. This is not about politics. This is not about fear. Their mistake will be in assuming that it is about them. They will say this is about you. It is not.

You are irrelevant. Those that have died today are only notable for the power they have given me. Today I cast a knot around the heart of San Francisco and pulled tight the net.

There will be more. The trawl has only begun.

This is the only warning you will get.

—*The Fisherman*—

He'll never be able to say how he got to the shelter that night, caked in dust, blood and mind ablaze with attempted conspiracy. The seed was planted, but would it be found? Would it go viral? Jacob lay curled around his handheld radio on the FEMA cot, twisting the knob from one frequency to another, yearning for the snippets of news he wanted to hear.

“Already taxed from an unprecedented summer of fires, volunteers have been worked to a state of utter exhaustion as conflagration devours the Tenderloin, Market Street and, we're just getting word in now that mandatory evacuations are being conducted in the following areas...”

Click.

“It has yet to be corroborated, but the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the deadly string of alleged explosive attacks made on the infrastructure of San Francisco this morning at 3:42, which is now believed to have triggered the 7.1 mag...”

Click.

“...We're just now getting reports that the eastern span of the Bay Bridge has collapsed. I can't—I can't see through the...”

Click.

“...The magnitude 7.1 earthquake that has devastated San Francisco in the early hours this morning is now known to be caused by an intentional act of terror, though it is not known if the earthquake itself was...”

Click.

“...as the White House is preparing to announce a state of emergency in the State of California, the president has again

caused outrage with a series of tweets—can we get this on the screen Ralph?—he said, ‘Failing San Francisco made sanctuary and now see what they got. They owe a lot of people a lot of debt you know we’ll see. Maybe we lettem...’, I’m not sure what that last, can we—okay here’s the next tweet: ‘God bless our brave ones there. We are proud of the strong ones. Not like that poorly rated mayer and low I.Q. police chief.’”

“Do we have an official response, is this the...”

Click.

“It was absolutely not a coincidence! I have it on good word that what we now know for sure was a terrorist attack, and my listeners know I’ve been saying that all day long, we know that. We know it was deliberately designed to trigger a quake. I don’t care how many scientists say that’s not possible. Let’s hear what some of you think. Chuck, you’re on the air...”

Click. Click. Click.

chapter nine

Conrad Gempf

IT WAS 9:30 in the morning. Jacob had been back from the gym for a couple of hours already. On the table sat his laptop, a copy of today's *Chronicle*, folded open to an article called "We're Clueless, Admit Police," and an empty saucer. From back in the kitchen came the sound of his grumbling old pastel green espresso machine as it grudgingly spat out his third cup of coffee. One hand on the machine, muscles in his arm tensed, both eyes searching the skyline out his kitchen window, Jacob was not a happy man.

It was worse than disappointing. It was downright frustrating. His plan hadn't worked at all. The dozen or so tabs open in his web browser each represented another news source and the most recent articles on the case. Some sources had nothing since yesterday — the story growing cold. And there was nothing in the news anywhere that he could see that mentioned the claim of responsibility he'd fabricated and gotten to the police. No one was writing about The Fisherman. Web searches for "fisherman" turned up nothing of relevance, just as news-radio on the short drive back from

the gym had been annoyingly vacuous. And, as he might have guessed, without the involvement of such a super-villain, there was also no mention in the media of Terrordon. Why should there be?

In a way, he knew he was lucky that the police were stymied. Their ignoring his fictional clue was inconvenient for sure, but if they *had* found some real clues and were able to pursue the real culprits, that would be a whole different thing. And he knew he'd be honour-bound not to derail a real investigation with a real chance of bringing a criminal to justice. So all in all, just as well the police were baffled.

Still, he needed to inject something into this story somehow or find some other way of trying to provoke the missing vigilante Terrordon into reacting. Another man might have added the option “or give up.” But that was not an option for Jacob Heath. He would throw together a makeshift fisherman's costume and rob something himself rather than abandon this idea.

Back at the table, sipping strong caffeine and smooth steamed milk, he again scanned the *Chronicle's* coverage. There were extended quotations taken from an interview with the investigating detective, one Brian Browning. The byline of the article read: Amy Kennedy. That was the blonde woman he'd talked to a while ago. He liked her.

And it occurred to him that it was possible the press would take notice where the police obviously had not. The papers would always be interested in something sensational — sensational sells — where the police would be inclined to dismiss it. “Fisherman” could contact the press as he'd done the police. Or maybe he, as Jacob, could talk to Amy Kennedy again and, this time, suggest the Fisherman had a role in the attack. But no. How would *he* know of the Fisherman or his

responsibility? Best for the Fisherman to claim responsibility to Amy and the *Chronicle*.

Jacob finished his coffee. A wry smile reached his face as he set the cup back down. Or maybe *both*: Fisherman could send a claim of responsibility to the *Chronicle* — it would be certain to reach Amy's desk. He could then have another meeting with her, ostensibly to talk some more about the Terrordon back in 2005 and the biography she knew he was writing. And then maybe he could “just so happen” to get her to talk about what she's been working on... “Any new leads?” he could ask innocently. Best of all, perhaps talking about Terrordon *and* Fisherman in the same evening would link the two together in her mind and perhaps in her writing.

Happy to have a way forward, he swiped his way through the contacts on his phone till he found her name, pushed the button, and, standing up from the table, put the device to his ear, talking while walking around the living room.

“Hey, yeah, it's Jacob,” he smiled.

“Jacob Heath,” he clarified, “Right — Terrordon book. Listen, I was wondering... I've worked through another chapter and there are some more inconsistencies that are worrying me — I know you must be busy with all the...”

“Yeah,” he nodded to what she was saying in response. “I know. I can imagine... Oh, is it?”

“Well, anyway,” he continued when appropriate, “You have to break to eat *some time* right? Maybe I could buy you dinner and get your take on things while we work through the appetiser?”

With a little disappointment, “Yeah, I understand, no, Friday would be fine.” Without any progress in the police investigation till then, there was a real risk of another story coming along and knocking the attack off the front page. Still,

Friday was better than nothing.

“Shall I pick you up or...?”

“Right, sure, fine. I’ll meet you at the restaurant. I was thinking Joker.”

He loved the idea of meeting her to eat at Joker — the name was like a super-villain, of course, but also it was a fish restaurant. Ordering their “Catch of the Day” might suggest Fisherman to her subconscious. If you believe in that kind of stuff. He did.

“Right,” he said, “Seven suits me too. Hey, thanks for your time; I really appreciate it. See you then!”

He was still smiling and feeling warm feelings toward her as he put the phone on the table and got to work setting up the Fisherman’s claim of responsibility for the *San Francisco Chronicle* — a claim that would reach the desk of ace reporter Amy Kennedy before Friday at 7.

He had managed to make up enough biography questions to take them way past the appetiser and into the main course. But finally, it was time for him to get around to his real reason for the dinner with Amy. He closed his notebook and set his pen down and picked up his wine glass again. “But enough about my work. Thank you so much. I guess they’ve got you working really hard on that recent attack,” he said, looking over the glass, and watching Amy sip from hers.

“Well, it’s all sort of drying up....” she shrugged.

“Police without any ideas?”

“Exactly,” she said, “no real trace of forensics, and the detective in charge...”

“Browning,” he supplied the name and she nodded.

“...he’s just scratching his head.”

“So... organised terrorism?”

“For lack of a better explanation...”

He stopped himself from asking *Hasn't anyone claimed responsibility?* ... Too direct. Instead he hinted: “I guess there are all kinds of nut-cases out there, wanting to cause random damage just to show themselves that they can have *some* impact in the world.”

She paused, staring down at what was left of her fettuccini, and he knew she was thinking of the claim of responsibility that she didn't know came from Jacob, and not from The Fisherman.

He put down his knife and fork. He made as if to change the subject, but ... “How's the pasta? My fish was...”

She said, “There is a possibility. We had a claim for responsibility come to the paper.”

“Oh?” He tried not to let her hear the relief flooding his body.

She nodded, “One that would be up your street.”

“*My* street? I'm not sure I want to live on a street with terrorists!”

“No, no,” she said, smiling, “I mean, given your interest in Terrordon — vigilantes and villains.”

“What? Terrordon has claimed responsibility? Turned terrorist?”

“Sorry, no, that's not what I mean. There's no *direct* connection to Terrordon. It's just that someone calling himself The Fisherman has claimed responsibility for the attack.”

“Fisherman,” he repeated, to keep the sound of the name in the air.

“Yeah. That doesn't sound so deadly, does it?”

“Strikes terror into the heart of every turbot,” he joked, looking at his plate, while also second-guessing his name choice.

She chuckled softly, “Well, the name might be a little lacklustre but it’s like he sees himself as a villain of the sort that Terrordon used to tackle.”

“I see. So the police *do* have a lead?” he asked.

“Not really. They’re not actively following that up; they’ve dismissed the claim.”

“But...?”

“Browning and his partner have only been on the force a few years. Super-villains are off his radar, outside of his experience. And no one’s ever heard of The Fisherman.”

Jacob nodded sympathetically, “New guys on the force who weren’t around back in the day — they don’t remember Terrordon or his opponents like we do. Twelve years is a long time. To people without our history, it’ll all seem like fantasy and comic books. But maybe they’re right.”

And to his great satisfaction, Amy Kennedy’s normally bright, inquisitive eyes were focussed on the middle distance over his shoulder as she parroted distractedly, “Yeah, maybe they’re right.” The tone in her voice clearly betrayed to her dining companion — a fellow writer, a former journalist himself — that she was thinking precisely the opposite to what she was saying. He knew that she was already composing lead sentences of an article about the possibility of The Fisherman.

His work here was done. “Dessert?” he asked casually, signalling the waiter over.

chapter ten

Adela Torres

HE WENT TO THE store. Usually his shopping was hit and run: go to the corner convenience store, get what he wanted and a couple of impulse items, get out. But this time he took his time, trying to catch conversations among the patrons, or any hint that the Fisherman was starting to catch people's attention.

While he was there he browsed the newspapers. It was getting rarer for stores to carry them, but this one did. Jacob bought the San Francisco Chronicle, making sure there was an A. Kennedy byline there.

"Bad stuff, this attack, eh?," he tried on the store manager as he was paying. He received a blank stare as an answer.

"This guy, the Fisherman," he tried again, pointing at Amy's article in the paper he'd just bought. "Seems like a really crazy guy." He made a bit of a show of muttering some choice sentences written in the article, and shook his head sadly.

"It's all crazy guys out there lately, man," the manager shrugged. "Do you want anything else?"

"No, thank you."

Undaunted by this glimpse into the man-on-the-street mind, he went home with his purchases, got online, and googled 'Fisherman'. 79 million results. Yeah, maybe not the most distinctive name for his supervillain. Then he googled 'Fisherman attack'. Eleven million hits, mostly about fishermen attacked by sharks. Then he googled 'Fisherman terror attack'. Jackpot. There was the Kennedy article and also a smattering of articles, either op-eds and starkly informative, in a number of online media. There was also some chatter on social networks, not a lot, but satisfying enough.

He spent about an hour browsing through social media sites and comments sections. It was predictably depressing, and also failed to produce any hint that he had sparked Terrordon's interest. Maybe it was too soon, maybe it was too unclear. What would draw him out?

He tried to think like the Fisherman: his fake villain would not *really* want to attract Terrordon's attention, of course, so he couldn't be too blatant. But he also would want to carry out his 'mission', and do so garnering better media attention than he was getting right now. Strike now, when the iron is hot, is what his gut told him. The Fisherman would need to feed his ego, his need for attention.

A bomb threat would really hit the mark, he thought. These days there weren't enough of them to be fashionable as a kid's prank, it would be taken seriously, and it would get a lot of attention.

He jotted down the essentials:

BOMB THREAT. NEXT TUESDAY. 1 pm (this was crossed over) 3PM. LOCATION? MAKE SURE ALL PAPERS GET IT, BE PUBLIC. DIRECT CALL (crossed over). EMAIL? RECORDED MESSAGE

BETTER.

He refined the details, got the numbers for all major newspapers in the city and spent a busy half hour drafting a script. He had to sound unhinged but intelligent, credible and also just enough over-the-top to be a believable supervillain. A lone wolf with a bit of flair, not so mundane to make Terrordon think that this would be a matter best left to the police, but not so crazy to be dismissed as a prank.

It took him some tries to record the message correctly because he kept cracking up, mostly because he was so nervous. When he was done he left it alone and went for a workout; he needed to unwind a bit.

It did him good; as soon as he got back he re-played the message and edited it to distort his voice. Once distorted and edited, the message worked even better than he had thought: he sounded menacing, believable, and with just the right amount of style to be the Fisherman.

Then he took the burner phone he had bought earlier and started making calls.

It was much later and Jacob was still at the computer. The reaction to his message had been rather quick and, to his mind, mixed. He was currently in Twitter, reading with a mixture of chagrin and fascinated horror:

@IllPatriot692

*Another Islam threat on American soil!!! When will we wake up and destroy the a**holes!!! #MAGA #terrorthreat #PatriotsforJesus*

@Blndgrrlx:xoo

Whys nobody saying THE TRUTH! Real threat are the white domestic terrorists stop blowing smook into our eyes

@JacelynMrsBumbi

Open you'r eyes this is a FALSE FLAG operation to keep the people scared and not think about how Congress is DESTROYING AMERICA!!!!!!!

@AryyaStarrk

That someone would believe this is actually the work of a lone wolf is SO ridiculous is laughable! #BombThreat #AmericaUnderSiege

He had also seen a number of quick-fire articles on his bomb threat; the reaction and tone was generally right, but the analysis was—disappointing. They'd all gone with the international terrorism angle, some even going so far as to dedicate some time pointing out how the terrorists seemed to be 'changing their tactics'. He googled 'Fisherman' again and the relevant articles had dropped to page 4. Also, the Kennedy piece in the Chronicle had suffered a rash of comments, all of which were basically laughing at her angle:

Anonymous:

In this day and age where the world has turned into a hotbed for radicals this naive talk about supervillains is dated and counter-productive. I'm disappointed in the Chronicle's coverage and would recommend that you reporter gets her facts straight before committing her wild theories to paper.

K. Johnson:

YEAH RIGHT! So we now have what, a supervillain in our

midst? Call Spiderman! Or whatever fourteen-year-old power fantasy the writer thinks should save us from this threat. With this kind of journalism is no wonder the country's in the dumps.

Stalker99666:

*You dumb b*tch you cant write to save you're life and your ugly as f*ck why dont you die and stop writing dumb sh*t theres no*

Fisherman its the illuminati

[EDITOR'S NOTE: please be advised that this user has been flagged by our readers and the comment is being reviewed for content and abusive language]

Babs H. Newton:

If this is the best that the Chronicle can produce in a matter as serious as terrorism I'm canceling my subscription. This frivolous take on the issue only helps terrorists and keep us from adopting the real and bold measures that we need to take as a country and as a society.

Jacob pinched the bridge of his nose. This was *not* going in the direction he had hoped. Most of the articles dealing with the bomb threat had been either dismissive or openly ridiculing the Chronicle's take and Amy herself. There was a short op-ed called 'This is not a story of heroes and villains' that directly cited Amy's article and called it 'silly' and 'childish', and a famous journalist had published a post in her Facebook account in which she called the Chronicle's coverage 'shameful'. The post had received more than 5,000 likes and upwards of a hundred comments, most of them supportive.

He felt a little bad for Amy; after all what she'd been doing was only what he had wanted her to do and now she was receiving quite a lot of heat for it. On the other hand, what if

it had worked? He knew the pitfalls of journalism and he told himself that Amy would survive. Besides, he could always vindicate her, make the Fisherman real despite this setback. The question was, of course, how.

Maybe he had rushed things a bit—or maybe not? This would be exactly how the Fisherman would act, and if answered with the same level of derision he would—what?

Quit?

He, Jacob, would. What he'd been doing was dangerous enough, no matter how interesting or useful for his project. He was weaving through the red line, in and out, putting himself in some rather compromising situations for the sake of drawing out someone who most likely would not reappear.

But the Fisherman wouldn't quit. He would feel enraged and insulted and he would definitely step up his game at this point. If a bomb threat would not set him up as the credible villain he needed to be for Terrordon to come back, then he'd have to do something else. Something more radical.

He opened a new browser window and fired up the VPN and the secure link he'd learned to set a few months ago. He'd been nervous about the Dark Net at the beginning, but after some intensive—and intense—research he found he could navigate it with some confidence. Most of it was surprisingly practical and very trade-oriented and he could skirt the places he really didn't want to go into. He valued the insight into this underside of the internet, and although his only aim at getting access had been research for his book (he thought Terrordon would use it even if he was retired), now he was finding he could really use it some other, hitherto unexpected ways.

He started looking for information on how to make a bomb.

chapter eleven

Alex Brantham

THE BRIGHT YELLOW SOU'WESTER hat made a great finishing touch. Jacob wasn't quite so sure about the full-length black lycra skin suit and brown satchel, but he had no time to change his mind now. He put on the dark glasses and checked carefully in the mirror: there were no distinguishing features leaking out between them and the balaclava mask. Everything was in position, and he had to go.

He closed his eyes, let both hands relax by his sides, and allowed his usual self to drift downwards through the soles of his feet and away. Stand perfectly still. Deep breaths. Now his body was ready to welcome its new occupant – The Fisherman.

As he rode BART into the City, The Fisherman felt many pairs of eyes staring at him. Fools! Let them stare. They think they are merely looking at another Californian freak, or a failed actor on his way to earn a few dimes performing for an unappreciative public on the sidewalk. But by tonight they will know with whom they shared a train upon this day.

At Powell Street, he first approached the cable car terminus, but it was inconceivable that a figure of his stature could be required to stand in

line for forty minutes, so he took the bus instead. Sitting opposite him, two Japanese tourists giggled to one another, mouths inadequately concealed behind their hands.

The man leaned forward and spoke. "Excuse me, sir, but would you mind if we took your photograph?" He raised an eyebrow and an iPhone.

The Fisherman briefly considered smiting this man for his insolence but, after a brief reflection, merely gave a nod of acquiescence. The more people that saw him the better: he sat a little straighter and thrust forward his jaw as the camera clicked.

At Pier 39, the couple rose to get off and nodded in thanks as they departed.

"Make sure you keep that picture safe," The Fisherman said. "You might find it valuable tomorrow."

When the bus arrived at Jefferson Street, Jacob alighted and reached for the notebook in his satchel. There was a substantial risk that whatever was about to happen would make him forget those experiences, which would be a terrible waste. Where are supervillains, or heroes come to that, supposed to keep the change for their fare on the bus? In this skinsuit, he also had to hope that he wouldn't be needing to go to the bathroom any time soon, either.

As always, the area heaved with tourists from all over the world. They'd been told they had to visit Fisherman's Wharf and, like sheep, they did, without having the first idea of what they were seeing or why. Whole flocks of them blocked the sidewalks, none of them inclined to give way to a man wearing a fancy-dress suit.

The air filled with a heady mix of smells; the sea, the sealions, the fast food restaurants, the gasoline. Not a pleasant place to be, but he wasn't there for pleasure.

At Hyde Street, he glanced to his right towards the pier.

Everything appeared normal. Visitors drifted to and fro, there was no unusual concentration of police, no striped tape securing the scene, and no forensics crew in white boiler suits. An ordinary day, at least for now.

He turned left into Aquatic Park where another long line for the cable car snaked around upon itself. It was 11.30. These were the tourists who'd got here early to beat the rush and, having discovered that there was nothing much here to detain them, were moving on to try to find entertainment elsewhere.

Time to get ready.

The Fisherman strode on, across the street and up the steps of the mall. He knew the position he needed to take up, a particular spot on the balcony where he would have the requisite viewpoint over proceedings.

A young couple stood, exactly where he wished to be, deeply engrossed with each other and with their ice creams. After monitoring their progress for a minute or two, he concluded that they would finish soon enough and that no action would be necessary on this occasion.

At last, they finished their chocolate fudge and moved on, so The Fisherman could occupy his place. He removed the camera from his bag, twisted the ring to full telephoto mode and took aim, leaning forward with his elbows resting on the railing.

The Hyde Street Pier was as busy as expected. From here, through his long lens, he had a clear view of the people as they ambled back and forth along the long, thin, wooden pier as it stretched away from him. On either side, four or five old boats bobbed gently in the swell. Ten minutes remaining.

A sharp thwack on his backside brought Jacob back, accompanied by "Hey, I'd know that ass anywhere, how're you doing, you old sonofabitch?" from a deep voice behind him.

Jacob spun round, almost hitting his assailant in the face with the extended lens of his camera. He was an older man

wearing the apron of a café waiter, in his early fifties, with the first signs of grey appearing at the temples. It had been ten years or more, but Jacob's conscience would never let him forget Travis.

Travis, on the other hand, was not now so sure. He stared intently at the mask and sunglasses, searching for a clue. He looked up and down at Jacob and tilted his head on one side. "Pardon me, sir, but – do I know you?"

Jacob hesitated. He contemplated trying to bluff this out, but could not bear the thought of causing any further pain to this fine man. He took off the shades.

Travis beamed. "Thank Christ for that! I thought I was about to get arrested for assault, or sexual harassment." He indicated the logo on his apron: "I'm working just a block from here." Then the beam faded, and transformed into a frown as he began to take in the scene. "What's all this about, Jacob? Are you up to your games again? I hope you aren't about to hurt anyone else like you did me." He edged away, shaking his head.

Jacob lowered his camera. "Look, Travis, I'm sorry. I've said so a thousand times. I didn't mean to hurt you, but I just needed to understand the Bay Area scene. And it was fifteen years ago—"

"Thirteen, actually." Travis looked down. There was a pause while both of them remembered. "Was it worth it? Your Harvey Milk book?"

Jacob shrugged. "Who's to say?" He glanced at the clock, high on the wall behind Travis' head. Two minutes to twelve. "Look, you're right, I am working, and I'm sorry but I really need to—"

"That's ok, I get it. Work ahead of people, every time. Someday you'll understand what that leads to. I'll leave you to

it.” Travis, head bowed, trudged up the steps to the upper area of the mall, away from the bay.

Jacob replaced the glasses, turned around, and trained his camera on the critical spot.

A smattering of people on the pier were coming and going. A group of three on their way out; a couple coming back. A child on her own, followed by a larger group. He checked his watch – two minutes past.

A family of four went out. Now there was a gap; he reached for the burner phone and selected the number for the first message.

Damn! A woman with a stroller walked back. He lowered the phone and waited. She passed, and a space opened up where he needed it to be. One last check – and the message was sent.

A second later, as if his command had flown on the wings of one of the gulls, came a bright flash as though the sun itself had fallen upon the bay, followed immediately by a loud bang. A thousand birds scattered upwards, and every head turned to look.

Pieces of broken timber fell from the sky, and a gaping hole appeared on the left of the pier.

Jacob’s heart was in his mouth as he assessed the results. It was perfect – all those calculations had not been in vain. Just a small explosion, enough to damage but not destroy, and sufficient to encourage everybody to get the hell out of there.

Which they surely did.

Those on the far side of the crater were looking at the damaged pier section, trying to judge if it was safe to cross on the remaining boards. A woman in uniform took the lead, testing the surface cautiously with a pole. She must have decided it was secure as she beckoned those on the other side to follow. One by one, holding hands or in huddled family groups, they came by the splintered hole and then, as soon as they were past, ran for their lives.

Meanwhile, those on the shore side of the blast site had

long gone, sprinting up Hyde Street and then fanning out in all directions. Jacob could hear the shouts and screams as the contagion of terror spread. The line at the cable car had already dissolved, its constituent people scattered like leaves in the wind.

Now for the main event. Jacob needed to wait until the pier had been completely evacuated: it didn't take long.

The Fisherman set up the next message on his phone. This next blast would be the real message. He looked again at the target, to make one last check. All clear. His finger hovered over the button, and was just in the action of pressing when –

A small figure ran into the frame of his viewfinder. A child, perhaps three or four years old. It stopped, only a few feet away from the location of the second, much larger, bomb. The child bent down to pick up an unseen object, perhaps a dropped toy. From the side, another figure, a woman waved her arms as she ran, her long red hair flowing behind her.

Jacob froze. It was Emmy, so that must be Pacey – he'd been a millisecond away from blowing up his own sister and nephew. His stomach churned and he fought to keep control, resisting the urge to rip off his mask and scream at them to get out.

It wasn't necessary. Emmy grabbed hold of Pacey and carried him off, running with her head down to protect her precious cargo.

Now the pier really was clear.

He'd come this far; he might as well see it through. As first one siren and then another wailed in the distance, he looked down at the phone, and pressed the button.

This time it wasn't a bang, it was the end of the world, or at least sounded like it. After the initial flash, a huge cloud covered the remains of the pier and the sky turned red as dust obscured the noonday sun.

The Fisherman had just one remaining aim: to see The Terrordon, should he dare to appear. If this double explosion didn't bring him running from his lair, what would? All of those pathetic little creatures, scattered and screaming below, were surely hoping for their hero to come and save them, if he can.

A scan of the sea and the skies yielded nothing but some pathetic police helicopters, buzzing uselessly over the bay. They had no idea what they were looking for or with whom they were dealing, and could safely be ignored.

But wait – a different sound, coming across the water. A roar, as of a waterfall? The Fisherman could not identify its nature or origin until his eye was caught by a streak of foam on the surface.

A circular fan, behind a tilted platform, kicked up the spray; a hovercraft, no less. On it stood a single figure, masked and suited like himself, with a flowing cape. It was The Terrordon.

Jacob snapped away with his camera. The hovercraft was a nice touch, a new gimmick and very handy for reaching the shoreline. Quicker than taking the bus, for sure.

Now his day was nearly done, all missions accomplished. He'd carried out the attack as promised, and been seen by enough people that no-one else would be able to claim credit for HIS bombs. He'd flushed The Terrordon out from his cover, and was getting some great shots to prove it.

The craft pulled up to the shoreline and its passenger alighted, leaping over the barriers and thrusting himself into the air with his cape acting as a glider.

So now he should quit while he was ahead. He had no intention of embroiling himself in a fight with a well-armed psychotic vigilante, especially as he had nothing more lethal than a Nikon in his hand.

The plan was sound: the crowds were, as anticipated, fleeing in every direction at once. All he had to do was dip out

of sight, change out of this costume – which had been carefully designed for exactly this situation – and then mingle with everyone else.

He dropped the burner phone into a fire bucket and raced into the mall and then downstairs into the basement where the restrooms were located. A cubicle might be slightly less glamorous than a phone box, but it would have to do.

Just as he reached the door of the men’s room, it opened from the inside and a burly uniformed figure stood in the entrance, blocking the way. “Sorry, sir, this facility is closed. Part of our emergency evacuation plan. Please go back up the stairs to the street.”

Shit. This wasn’t in the script. Of course, if he’d been a real supervillain this would have presented no problem at all: by now the janitor would be lying dead on the floor, and The Fisherman would have been going wherever he wanted.

But he wasn’t The Fisherman, he was Jacob Heath, and he couldn’t kill anyone.

The janitor wouldn’t take “no” for an answer, and Jacob had no option but to allow himself to be shepherded up to the main level and then out onto the street. Here, although there were plenty of people, they didn’t constitute what you might call a crowd, certainly nowhere near enough to provide meaningful cover.

He couldn’t ditch any part of his costume without risking revealing his real identity to those nearby, but this bright yellow hat didn’t now seem like such a good idea. A swoosh in the air above confirmed his fear: The Terrordon was swooping around on his hang glider, scanning the street below like an eagle looking for a stray rabbit.

And Jacob was the rabbit.

He started to run up the road, but it was too late.

The Terrordon's voice, amplified as if by a Marshall stack, boomed down: "I see you, little Fisherman."

Jacob glanced up: the glider was diving towards him, howling through the air. He knew what would be coming next, and threw himself to the left as a weighted net bounced off the sidewalk where he had just been.

Now The Terrordon swished past, and had wheeled up and around to face him head on, before beginning another attack dive.

Jacob sprinted directly towards his attacker, hoping to close the gap before the glider could complete its descent. At the last millisecond he dropped to the ground and felt the rip of a claw bouncing off his right shoulder. Missed!

He jumped to his feet. He was running out of road, and out of options. Just to his left, a café door stood open. Standing in the doorway was a man in his fifties, wearing a waiter's apron and a resigned expression. While the glider was still turning upwards and away, the man reached out a hand and pulled Jacob in as he ran past.

"I really don't know why I did that, Jacob," said Travis.

chapter twelve

David Johnson

THE SLEEPWALKER STIRRED IN Rampworth State Hospital. He's been a patient in the secure mental facility since 2005, with his 7 year reign of terror throughout the San Francisco area being brought to an end a long time ago. How odd that his capture and incarceration had been at the hands of his archenemy, the masked vigilante Terrordon. As a moniker, the 'Don of Terror' should surely have been an accomplice, but no, Terrordon had been the foil to every underhand notion the Sleepwalker had contrived. Was it really appropriate to call this guy of average build, who was wearily rubbing his eyes, the Sleepwalker anymore? It was now the summer of 2017 and the Sleepwalker personality, or any vestige of its sadistic impulses, hadn't surfaced in over a decade. Declared insane and unfit to stand trial for his crimes back in 2005, these days he was little more than a curiosity, having been diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder. Who was the former Sleepwalker, super-villain, going to be today?

Charlotte, his only known female personality, reached for coloured pencils and a sketch pad off the bedside cabinet,

pushed her feet back down under the duvet and rested her back against the headboard. “Leo the lion likes to be yellow.” Her short dark hair really didn’t sit well with Charlotte, as she’d love to twirl it around her fingers as she concentrated to stay within the lines of the magnificent mane on the lion. An orderly arrived and offered Charlotte a glass of water, “What a handsome lion. He looks like he’s king of all he surveys.” Charlotte glanced up from the page, took the glass, and asked, “What does survey mean?” She’s only 6 years old. “It means everything he can see. Breakfast is ready in the canteen area when you’re ready sweetie.” Charlotte returned her attention to the lion, only taking a sip of water before awkwardly placing the glass down.

Ten minutes later and she’s skipping along the corridor towards the smell of bacon. Her gait moved from a skip to a stride as Tim takes over the body. Tim’s Australian, and another personality that belies the fact that the Sleepwalker used to hold dominion over this frame. “G’day mate!” he beams as he arrives at the counter. “What you got cooking on the barbie?” The guy serving rolls his eyes. He’s heard this routine a thousand times before, and slides the plate filled with a full English towards Tim. “Strewth, I’m gonna bust a gut!” His eyes are devouring the food as he turns and heads towards the nearest table, shouting “Thanks mate!” seemingly to no one in particular.

Although the facility was secure, with thick iron bars declaring the fact at every window, it was run in a fairly relaxed manner. Yes, guards were never far away, and a nurse with a syringe full of sedatives à la *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* would plunge at the first sign of danger, but the day-to-day routine was calm and easygoing. Tim sat at a table with three other patients. Sit at any table in the hospital and you could be

with a schizophrenic, someone with an acute bipolar disorder, epilepsy or Asperger's syndrome to name but a few of the diagnosed ailments abound. Tim's outgoing and bombastic personality typically made everyone else at the table uneasy.

"G'day, g'day, g'day!" Sausages were rolled with blunt knives, and baked beans pushed around in response, as both men and a woman averted engagement. Tim was typically unfazed when his gregarious intent was ignored, but as quickly as Charlotte had skipped into Tim, Joe wasn't happy. He had no recollection of why he wasn't happy, but doctors at Rampworth State Hospital has recognised a pattern. Joe often appeared after a situation had involved conflict. Nothing of note had occurred in this instance, but the probable slight rise in tension for Tim may have triggered the arrival of Joe. It would seem that none of the personalities that the Sleepwalker proffered could recall the memories of any other. Apart from the Sleepwalker. It has been a while, but careful observation of the Sleepwalker all those years ago had revealed reactions to and utterances about matters that had occurred whilst other personalities had inhabited the body.

"I say, would you be so kind as to pass me some tea old chap?" said Joe. "It might quell my jitters." It would appear that every personality was quite the stereotype, with Joe being an English gent. There was no tea to pass, but Joe certainly loved a cuppa. He turned from the table and his untouched breakfast and headed back to the counter for a dainty cup with saucer of Earl Grey. Breakfast was concluded in a civil manner, with Joe even engaging the lady at the table in a delightful conversation centring around a documentary he'd seen regarding the production of tea in plantation in Munnar, India.

Medication followed breakfast. Joe stood in line, patiently waiting for his concoction of pills. He'd never understood why he had to wash the assortment down with water rather than tea, but he obliged on every occasion. Each patient was medically assessed for a period during the day, but as there were only so many doctors to patients. The ratio meant there was plenty of leisure time available. Charlotte would always play or draw. Tim's exuberance would scare other patients back to their rooms. Rog was another personality, there were seven in total that had been uniquely identified, not counting the Sleepwalker, and Rog was a very quiet Californian. He basically wasn't there, a void, simply wanting to be left alone to read. It was Rog that shuffled away from the dispensary towards the library. It wasn't an extensive library in the hospital, but Rog settled onto an obscurely positioned beanbag with a well worn copy of the Bhagavad Gita.

His harmonious repose was disturbed by a commotion emanating from the common room. The television has been turned up much louder than usual, with people watching, both patients and staff, bellowing indistinctly. Although his instinct was to slink further into the recesses of the library, his state was further dislodged when he thought he heard the name Terrordon mentioned on the TV. Joe was back, purposely up to his feet and striding towards the corner of the common room that had rows of chairs in front of a television. Patients were agitated, as breaking news headlines scrolled with the names Fisherman and Terrordon emblazoned. There was a new super-villain terrorising San Francisco, and his name was the Fisherman!

At the same time as the Sleepwalker had been captured back in 2005, the Terrordon had disappeared. With the superhero's work complete, his nemesis defeated and

humiliated, he'd gone off the radar and hadn't been heard from or seen over the last 12 years. It would appear with the coming of the Fisherman, Terrordon had reemerged from slumber to take care of the good people of San Francisco. Looped video footage showed the Fisherman blowing apart suspension sections of the Golden Gate Bridge, with the athletically built Terrordon gliding into scene on his cape, lashing the shattered strands back together and thus preventing the bridge from losing stability.

Joe was feeling uneasy. There was definitely something much worse afoot than using milk with Darjeeling tea. He cramped to his knees, holding onto the back of one of the TV chairs. What would the world be like having Terrordon back to cheer, without the Sleepwalker adding balance? Would the Sleepwalker and Fisherman be able to unite together against a common enemy? Joe was gone, and the most dissociative identity was about to cause disorder. The Sleepwalker was back, and he was in a ruthless mood! The chair arched and smashed into the TV screen, catapulted with a force that belied the frame that had tossed it so effortlessly. The nurse with syringe was comically dispatched. Due to the severity of the situation, she'd had her hand wrapped around the syringe with thumb ready on the plunger, arm leverage thrusting everything down towards the neck of the Sleepwalker. Like taking candy from Charlotte, he'd dodged the lunge and used the momentum of the nurse's arm to follow through into her abdomen, pushing on her own thumb to dispense the contents of the vial into her.

With terrifying speed and agility he was onto one of the guards before they'd even managed to make it to the scene of the commotion. The guard's sidearm was cocked to his own head, as the Sleepwalker backed him down a corridor towards

a secure door. It took little negotiation to convince the guard that he ought to be fumbling for his keys. An alarm sounded as the door opened, but the Sleepwalker was free again. As a sign of intent, he shot the guard twice before disappearing into the bushes and away from Rampworth State Hospital for the first time in 12 years! News channels thought they'd already had their scoop of the day, but they were sorely mistaken.

chapter thirteen

Kirt van der Woude

PURPLE. BEAUTIFUL, MAGICAL, ENIGMATIC purple. The hallmark colour of Roman magistrates, Byzantine rulers, Japanese emperors, Catholic bishops, and Mayor Nenshi could now count the Sleepwalker as an aficionado. Seductive, ambiguous, villainous purple. Enrobed in rich purple like some resplendent monk of an alternate reality, the Sleepwalker swept down a shabby San Francisco sidewalk through an even shabbier neighbourhood. This was not the San Francisco of your summer holidays – far removed from the clam chowder crowds and clattering cable cars.

With Rampworth State Hospital now far behind, the Sleepwalker's progress was purposeful and single-minded. Money is what mattered right now, and cash was king of conscience. The Sleepwalker coldly sized up those along the way as if a calculating stare were enough to discern who might have the financial means to satisfy. Gangsters, drug dealers and two-bit crooks, all with filthy wads of bills rolled up in their pockets – but none with enough to matter. Threatening, dangerous even to you or I, they shrank away as the

Sleepwalker passed, whether from the icy gaze or an equally imposing purple presence. It made no matter. Sleepwalker had a plan.

The Terrordon clumsily stepped off the Transamerica Pyramid and as the ground rushed up to meet him, spread his cape wide. “Goddammit,” he cursed under his breath as he fought to shape the fabric to effectively create enough lift before he became a Terrorsplat. “I’m getting too old for this shit!” His arms ached from the effort. It had been too long of a hiatus and he knew it, but it couldn’t be helped. The Sleepwalker had escaped from Rampworth, and who but him to bring that turd to justice? He felt sorry for himself as his muscle memory slowly kicked in and his control came back. Dusk was falling, and for a moment the Terrordon was distracted by the beauty of the city lights twinkling below. A digital, almost antique sounding ring broke his reverie, reminding him that the Sleepwalker was on the lam somewhere in the city below. Terrordon fumbled with his belt and put a vintage Nokia mobile phone to his ear, nearly losing it to the streets below in the process. “Hello?” His voice cracked like a flustered teenager that he was not.

“I think we have a lead,” said the voice on the other end of the line. “SFPD just told us that security at the Union Trust Branch of Wells Fargo Bank apprehended a guy dressed in purple who was – get this – sitting on the floor in the middle of the bank drawing a detailed picture of the place. He was even labelling where all the guards were and stuff. Dressed all in purple though. Gotta think that’s our guy, right?”

Charlotte. It had to be, thought the Terrordon. “Are they holding on to him?”

“That the problem. Security guard was talking to him,

waiting for the cops to come and...”

“And what?” the Terrordon barked back with irritation.

“Well, he had to go take a shit, and...”

“He couldn’t wait?” Goddammit, he thought.

“He took off while he was gone. Figures, hey?” There was an awkward pause on the line. “Anyway, I’ve got the address for you. The security guard’s going to stick around ‘til you get there. Hey, do you have Google Maps on the Terrordon-a-phone?”

“Don’t call it that. And no, I don’t,” snapped the Terrordon. He wasn’t sure if he was more irritated about ‘Terrordon-a-phone’ or the fact he still had a Nokia phone from 2005. Without Google Maps. “Just text the address to me, okay?” He punched the end call button without waiting for a response and sulked until the text came through. Holstering the Nokia back in his tactical belt, Terrordon wheeled down towards the bank. Where they *weren’t* holding the Sleepwalker.

The bank guard was exactly what he imagined he would be like – middle-aged, overweight and balding. And pale, like someone who didn’t get outside enough and sat in front of a computer too much, drinking Red Bulls and playing *Dota*.

“I’m sorry, mister Terrordon. I really am. I had two roast beef sandwiches and a large curly fries from Arby’s on my lunch break and I just couldn’t...”

“Don’t worry about it, I mean I just don’t give a shit,” snapped the Terrordon, realizing too late his poor choice of words. He sighed with exasperation. The guard looked like he didn’t know whether to laugh or be embarrassed. “Just tell me everything you know.”

“Well there’s really not too much to say I guess,” the guard

said. “Like I told SFPD, it was the strangest thing. This guy came in, all dressed in purple, and just sat down in the middle of the bank and started drawing. Just sat, right on the floor, cross-legged like a kid. Now this is San Fran, and we get weirdos in here all the time, so we just watched him for a bit. After about ten minutes or so, I walked quietly behind him and that’s when I saw what he was drawing and started to get worried. It was a map of the whole bank, and the level of detail was incredible. He was even drawing what me and the other guards look like.”

The Terrordon looked thoughtful. “Then what happened?”

“Well, I told him that we needed to talk about what he was up to. Then he shrieked in a really high-pitched voice that his name was Charlotte, he didn’t have to listen to me, it’s a free country, and his favourite colour was purple. And then he crossed his arms and held his breath. That’s when me and one of the other guys literally had to pick him up and carry him to the security office. After that, he calmed down but didn’t seem with it. It was the strangest thing – it was just like talking to my six-year-old nephew.”

The Terrordon smiled smugly with satisfaction. He was right. It was Charlotte. It was the Sleepwalker. “Is that when you called the cops?”

“Yeah,” the security guard confirmed. “Then I told him we thought his drawing might be part of a plan to rob the bank. I told him that was the dumbest thing to do nowadays since most of the money is in a time delayed safe. I told him that banks have robbery bags loaded with ink bombs that will go off as soon as they leave the bank. I told him that the serial numbers of the bills are all recorded, and that the best the robbers can do is get away with a couple thousand bucks these days, tops. I told him the bank robbery game just doesn’t pay

anymore. A bitcoin heist would make more sense these days!” The guard laughed, clearly impressed with his own cleverness. “I think he was really paying attention at that point.”

“And then you...” The Terrordon trailed off.

“Yeah, then I had to go,” the guard said. “I thought he would just stay there. He just seemed so... calm at that point. It’s almost like I forgot I was talking to an adult. And then he was gone when I came back, and no one saw where he went.”

The Terrordon thanked the guard insincerely and politely, and walked out of the bank into the cool night and ocean breeze outside. A lead and a dead end. What a night. His arms were still stiff from gliding as he walked home for the night.

The next morning, the Terrordon woke to more antique ringing from the Nokia. Fumbling for the phone on the nightstand, he cursed as he knocked it off the nightstand and under the bed. Finally coming up with the phone, he rolled on to his back and answered it.

“Up and at ‘em! We just got another tip on the Sleepwalker from the wanted spots they’re running on the local news. Seems he put in an all-nighter at a local library before the staff opened up this morning and found him in all his purple glory. He’s gone already, but I’ll text you the address.”

One greasy breakfast and a pot of coffee later, the Terrordon shuffled into the library and was promptly greeted by the head librarian, a queen bee-type who wasted no time in bringing him up to speed.

“Well, I’ll tell you it was the strangest thing! We came in this morning and were going about our business for about an hour when all of a sudden we heard some wild cackling from a study area near the back of the library.”

“Cackling?” The Terrordon shook his head as if to clear

the cobwebs.

“Yes, and when we made our way over to find out what was going on, he was going on and on about something. Cryptocurrency is for fools, the Luddites will be proud of me, and I think he said something about the Gold Standard too? When he saw us, and we asked what he was doing there, the Purple Man freaked out and started going on about how he just wanted to be left alone to read his books in peace. When we said we were calling the police, that’s when he just ran right out with his arms flailing like a madman!”

Sounded like Rog, the Terrordon thought to himself. Rog the book lover, Rog the bookworm. “Any idea what he was doing here?”

“Oh yes, it’s clear he was very interested in bitcoin! He left a pile of books where he was sitting, about everything you can imagine on bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. And he had a webpage open to a bitcoin conference that’s going on in town right now on the computer in the study area.” The librarian passed him a printed copy of the conference information page.

“Thanks,” said the Terrordon over his shoulder, already on the way out the door. The trail was warming up again.

By the time the Terrordon made it back to the Terrordon-mobile, texts were rolling in on the Nokia about a disturbance at CryptoCon, a marquee gathering in town of movers and shakers in the bitcoin and cryptocurrency world. He threw the armoured car into gear, and with a cloud of blue diesel smoke, lumbered across town.

At the convention centre, it quickly became clear something traumatic had occurred. Two of the event staff, a set of raven-haired identical twins, were being consoled by

other staff at the registration desk. The girls seemed visibly relieved to see the Terrordon there, and in a brief, fleeting moment he felt redeemed to be back, in a reminiscent but strangely stale ‘has-been’ sort of way.

“It was terrible,” the girls chorused together. One of them wrapped her arm around the other as she continued, “he was such an asshole!”

The Terrordon winced. It could only be Tim, he thought. That swaggering, jaw-wagging, pompous fool. Asshole indeed. “Australian, right?”

“How’d you know?” The girls chorused again, sniffing through their tears. “He was just so mean, and so purple. I mean he was dressed all in purple, but even his face was purple with rage! Veins popping out and everything!” The girl continued with a traumatized, far away look. “We were just checking people in. He shoved his way in front of the line and demanded a delegate package. Said he was Lord Steve Irwin, and rumors of his death were greatly exaggerated. Isn’t that the Crocodile Hunter guy?” A look of confused recognition crossed her face. “Then he said he damn well better be allowed in, since he was the Inventor of Bitcoin, the Lord of Cryptocurrency, the Defender of something-else-I-can’t-quite-remember. But everyone knows Satoshi Nakamoto is the creator of bitcoin! I can’t even tell you what he said after that – it would make a sailor blush. An Australian sailor!”

The Terrordon nodded understandingly. He could only imagine. Tim was prone to explosive tirades of unparalleled profanity when he didn’t get what he wanted. A beration into submission when theatrics failed. “Then what happened?”

“Well, at that point there was no doubt he was a psycho! My boss found an extra package of passes just to get rid of him as she was calling the police on her phone.” She paused

thoughtfully. “And then...”

“And then what?” The Terrordon leaned forward in anticipation.

“And then he was just gone. Disappeared. It was so...”

“Anti-climactic?” The Terrordon finished her sentence. The girl nodded in agreement. For someone so theatrical, Tim sure missed the plot, he thought to himself sarcastically. But the Sleepwalker was gone again. Always a step ahead. Always one frustrating, vexing, infuriating step ahead.

Without a clue to where the Sleepwalker had vanished to, the Terrordon spent the rest of the day wandering CryptoCon, searching fruitlessly for his nemesis. He was plotting something with bitcoin to be sure. But what? Where? When? Why? The questions haunted him as he turned in for the night, tossing and turning himself into a restless sleep.

By the following day, the Terrordon was becoming despondent. The trail was growing cold. It had been a full twenty-four hours since the last reported sighting of the Sleepwalker, but he was still nowhere to be found. Another greasy breakfast and too much coffee blurred into a banal, uninspiring lunch and still no news. The Terrordon had heartburn. It was as if the Sleepwalker had gotten into his stomach, an evil, purple tapeworm, gnawing away at the lining.

With a chug of Pepto-Bismol right from the bottle, the Terrordon was minutes away from a much-needed nap in an unmade bed in equal need of laundering when the Nokia rang.

“Guess what the Sleepwalker did with that CryptoCon pass?” The voice on the other end had a hint of know-it-all.

“What?” He snapped. The Terrordon wasn’t in the mood for games.

“Uh...” The caller’s voice instantly deflated. “Well, turns

out the Sleepwalker was busy last night and this morning,” he continued. “SFPD got a report of – get this – a bitcoin theft from a farming operation this morning in the Bay area.” He paused as if waiting for some reaction from the Terrordon. Not forthcoming, he went on. “From what they can put together, a guy named James, dressed in what was described as a spectacular purple outfit, befriended some bitcoin mogul last night at a super-exclusive CryptoCon soirée at the Fairmont San Francisco. Apparently the guy was really flamboyant, and the life of the party. Made friends with everyone there. No one knew anything was up. I guess none of them were around when he, uh, picked up his conference registration.”

“And what about the bitcoin heist?” The Terrordon asked impatiently.

“Yeah, well here’s where things get bizarre. James made friends with the bitcoin mogul and told him a sob story about his friend Billy from Alabama. How Billy used to be a farmer but photography was his life’s passion, so he had become a feature photographer for the magazine *Farm Life*. And how it turns out he’s really not that great at photography, and needed a really good feature subject for *Farm Life* so he didn’t get canned by the publisher. So James talked this bitcoin mogul into giving his friend Billy access to one of his bitcoin farms in the city this morning to do a photo feature on it. I guess these operations are usually super secret and secure, but that James and his velvet tongue...” He trailed off, then finished, “and now all the blockchains they had stored on site in the local bitcoin wallet are gone.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” the Terrordon remarked. “How much money in bitcoin are we talking about here?”

“Well, they collect it and remove it from site every week, but it’s a pretty big farming operation. There was about forty

thousand bucks in bitcoin at the current market rate.”

“Goddammit!” The Terrordon cursed loudly. “Text me the address and I’ll head straight there.”

“But he was just so kind and friendly,” sobbed the girl at the bitcoin farm, as banks and banks of humming machines toiled in the background. The bitcoin miners of the farm, hard at work hashing data. “I did it exactly how my boss told me. I made him leave his phone with me while he was here, and kept an eye on him the whole time! All he did was take pictures, and with an old-fashioned film camera too! The only time I left his side was when he asked me to stand at the end of the racks for a photo to show the scale of the farm. How could we have been so stupid!”

The Terrordon patted her on the shoulder sympathetically. “It’s okay,” he offered lamely, despite the fact it certainly was not. “Did you figure out how he did it?”

The girl collected her thoughts for a moment, then began. “We didn’t realize anything was wrong until just over an hour after he left. Then I got a panicked call from my boss asking why he just got a bunch of email confirmations about bitcoin transfers from our farm’s local wallet. I can’t believe we were so stupid!” Her story cut off into more sobs.

“I don’t understand,” the Terrordon said with confusion. He knew old Nokia phones, not cryptocurrencies. “How’d he do it?”

“It’s so simple. Stupid simple,” the girl moaned. “I figured it out right away as soon as my boss called and told me the bitcoin was gone!” She sniffled into a tissue, collected herself and continued to explain, “you see, the only way to transfer bitcoin is for the owner to generate a QR code from the local wallet where the bitcoin is stored. Then, the recipient has to

scan the QR code using a smartphone to accept and authenticate the transfer. Hence why I made sure I had his phone while he was in the farm!” Just the thought of what had transpired was clearly distressing to her. “And when I realized how long he had been gone before the bitcoin was stolen, I knew right away. One-hour photo. Photos in one hour! While I was walking to the back of the farm for him to take a picture, he was taking pictures! Pictures of the QR codes on the monitor attached to the server hosting the farm’s local bitcoin wallet! I must have still been logged in to the desktop, and all he had to do was open the wallet up and generate the QR codes. And one hour to develop the pictures and then scan the QR codes on them with his smartphone!”

The Terrordon stood, stunned, as everything soaked in. The Nokia went off again, its flat chirping awkwardly resonating against the girl’s sobs and the mechanical hum of the farm’s cooling systems. Surrounded by the hundreds of thousands of dollars in cutting-edge, high-powered miners in the bitcoin farm, the Terrordon looked painfully at the antiquated monochrome screen but accepted the call anyway.

“Yeah,” he said

“Do you want the good news or the bad news first?”

“Is there ever any good news in this story?” The Terrordon was getting grumpy. “Well, if there is let me hear it.”

“We found the stolen bitcoin.”

“And the bad news?”

“We also found two dead bodies.” There was a pause on the other end of the line as the caller waited for an emotional sort of reaction that never came. The Terrordon was just too tired.

“That’s too bad,” the Terrordon said with flat effect.

“What happened?”

“Seems someone setup a sale and the bitcoin buyers changed their mind after the deal was done. Looks like the seller wasn’t having any of that. This all went down near the Mission Dolores, and the priest there reported he saw the whole thing. He said to stop by so he could fill you in. Name is Father Joe”

“Alright, I’m on my way,” Terrordon sighed.

Passing through the doors to the mission building, the Terrordon looked about the adobe mission chapel, deserted save a young altarboy doing some cleaning. “Hey kid. I’m looking for Father Joe. Is he around?” The boy gestured to the confession booth at the end of the chapel hall.

“Father is doing confession. You’re welcome to go talk to him in there.”

“Thanks kid.” The Terrordon made his way over and sank into the seat inside the confession booth, not totally disappointed for the chance to give his aching legs a break. “Father, you in there?”

“Right I am, old boy. How can I be of service?”

“Afraid I’m not the confessing sort. I’m here to talk about the unfortunate business that went down earlier today next to the mission.”

“Right, right. Unfortunate business that, I’m afraid. Shame for things to go that way I fancy.”

“What happened, Father?”

“Well I’ll tell you. It seems there was this Jersey fellow meeting with two other chaps and things didn’t go well. And I don’t mean one of those blokes from English Jersey mind you, but one with the funny accent from your New Jersey here in America.”

Doug. It had to be. Dangerous Dougy with the temper. “What did it look like they were doing, Father?”

“It was a sale, to be sure. Looked like the two chaps gave a good bit of cash to the fellow from Jersey in return for something else. But then it looks like they had a change of heart after the deal was done, and it was lights out for those chaps. The Jersey fellow clearly wasn’t inclined to part with the proceeds of the sale. Shame really what happened, old boy! Can’t say much more, I’m afraid.”

“Okay, thanks Father.” The Terrordon sat quietly for a moment deep in thought.

“Time to run along for a good strong cuppa, so take care old boy!” Father Joe let himself out of the confession booth, whistling the *Colonel Bogey* as he walked off. Englishmen, the Terrordon thought to himself.

Rising slowly to his feet, he made his way back up to the front of the chapel, where the altarboy was still sweeping the floor. Almost absent-mindedly he mused to the boy as he passed, “how’d you end up with an Englishman for a Father here anyway, kid?”

“What?” The boy stopped sweeping and stared curiously at the Terrordon.

The Terrordon looked at the boy quizzically. “Father Joseph, he’s an Englishman. You don’t see that too often in a Catholic Church in the New World now, do you?”

The boy stared right back with a look of confusion. “Not sure what you mean, sir. Joe is short for Jose. Father Joe is from Argentina, not England.”

chapter fourteen

Julia Pierce

SATURDAY MORNING COULDN'T COME fast enough. Outside, the sun shone down through the late morning haze. That was the thing about San Francisco - no matter what the weather, the promise of fog always lingered. Jacob wished it would roll in now - the brightness only served to highlight the layers of filth that coated his car.

He'd spent the last evening trying to work through his thoughts about the Fisherman and whether he was on the right track with this, taking a trip up to Point Reyes, but torrential rain had seen his back wheels sink into the soft soil of a woodland stop, and relaxation had swiftly deteriorated into a battle with the filth and clinging earth that seemed to want to suck his vehicle into the bowels of the forest. Another glance at the car; he didn't do mess and disorder - it made him agitated.

A noise coming from the rear of the house interrupted his irritation.

"Come back. Belinda... Belinda... come on..." That would be Reyes, his neighbour, having a little pet trouble.

Belinda was a giant rabbit - a Flemish Giant, to be precise. Reyes was training her up to be a therapy animal in his wife's psychology clinic - though now that she was around two foot long, Jacob thought she was more likely to encourage the patients to have nightmares. Better not leave the monster roaming the neighbourhood.

“Hey Reyes - need a little help?”

“Yeah - just need an extra pair of hands to herd her back into her pen. Flemishes are meant to be docile, but I'm thinking that I might have picked the odd one out.”

Jacob lunged at the rabbit and grabbed it about the middle, wrestling its massive body into his arms.

“Woah - you're a ninja,” said Reyes. “My reactions are shot today. I got called in to S.F. General at 2am to embolize an uncontrolled liver bleed in an 18 year old from Oakland who was "mindin my biz-ness" in a dive on Broadway Street when some dudes shot him eight times with an Uzi. I got back, like, a half hour ago.”

“Sounds like a heavy night.”

“Yeah. Though I would have been brought in, even without our good and blameless citizen. There was a breakout at Rampworth. A few casualties - we caught the overflow.”

Jacob froze, gripping the rabbit tighter. It struggled, and he thrust it into its cage, hoping Reyes hadn't noticed the excitement building in him.

“Rampworth Hospital? Really? The mental unit?”

“Sure. They lost one - some guy who calls himself the Sleepwalker. Seemed pretty damn wide awake to me, judging on the damage he caused. Fought his way through seven guards. We got three of them at General - two were rammed into a sandwich between a wall and a truck. Crush injuries. Because what I really needed was another couple of hours

working on a hepatic rupture...”

“Hey Reyes, I... need to go do something - I just remembered... um... get some sleep, yeah?”

Jacob shot back into his house, and made for his computer and the local news. It looked like the next chapter of his book was going to write itself, near enough - and with the Sleepwalker in the wind, Reyes was going to have his work cut out, along with every other surgeon in the Bay Area.

Once the initial thrill had passed, a fresh problem sparked to life in Jacob’s mind. Now that the Sleepwalker was free, the Fisherman was redundant. Compared to a man with multiple personality disorder - and each personality with a shared propensity for pure evil - the Fisherman was decidedly second-rate. That would be unless Jacob took his actions to places where he really didn’t want to go. No, if he were the Terrordon, he wouldn’t even notice this minor minnow of a villain.

There had to be something better he could do, in order to keep himself at the centre of the story - something that would make him more useful to the situation at hand, and that would reveal more about the Terrordon and his motivations. If the Terrordon was here and had just heard that news, what would he think... what would he do? His mind raced. Okay, could he turn this on its head - could he be the hero? Would that work? What better way to get into a hero’s head than if you were acting like the hero yourself, re-enacting one of his most notorious fights, or even fighting alongside him, rather than trying to provoke him. Yes, he’d been going about this all wrong.

Now that taking on a notorious super villain was now part of the plan, Jacob considered the practicalities. Strength, skill -

well, he definitely had the fitness and the discipline for the role. Just one last problem remained - but whether he had the stomach to face someone like the Sleepwalker head on and survive to write the tale was something that he'd only find out when it came to it. That would be the true test. His mind ran on feverishly. He wanted the book to be good; definitive, no less. But that depended on him being around to write it, and the odds were not good. The Sleepwalker was a formidable enemy - even the Terrordon had taken beating after beating from him before finally enlisting the help of the State in getting him put behind bars. Help. Yes - that was it. Now he could see a way forward. But it had to be someone who knew almost as much as he did about the events of the past, and who could think clearly from a vantage point outside of his struggle. He picked up the phone.

“Chronicle. This is Amy.”

“Hi - it's Jacob. Jacob Heath, the writer... I was wondering, Would you like some dinner tonight?” Ugh - it sounded like an invitation to a date, and he didn't have time for anything like that, not now there was a villain to be caught. He needed a third wheel; an extra member for the team. Someone good with people, and who would turn up when required. Of course - the man whose wages he paid, albeit a few cents at a time presently.

“Its... it's with my agent, too - Pete Schlamme. I don't think you've met. Anyway - I've got a proposal for you both - something that's going to tie together what we do and give us a a great story at the end. You'll love it. Maybe... well, it should be interesting at least. How about 7pm at Ardiana on Church Street? I haven't totally confirmed with Pete yet but I'll call if I need to make a change.”

“Sure - sounds fine.” Amy’s voice gave nothing away. He hoped she’d be more enthusiastic when he saw her face to face.

“Hi - Amy, Pete... great to see you both. I got us the table deal. There are some baby beets, avocado, a few dips...”

Jacob tailed off. Suddenly it sounded like the cheap option that it was. His biography of Milk might have brought Jacob fame, but it wasn’t exactly going to be optioned, and money was tight - his only fall back for extra income would be pimping out the details of method writing on talk shows across the nation to audiences who listened politely but were only ever really interested in whether he’d slept with another man in the name of his craft. Unless he could make something of his Terrordon book, that is.

Well, never mind the food - they were here, and he needed them. Or needed Amy, at any rate. His thoughts were serious, but he forced a smile.

“So - okay. If you’re wondering why you’re here, it’s this. Pete - you know some details. I’m currently writing a new book - it’s a biography of the Terrordon. Amy - you know him; you’ve written plenty on him over the years. Superhero. Prehistoric logo, gadget collection, now retired...”

He paused. They looked interested so far, he thought. Now it was time to bring out the good stuff.

At first, Amy couldn’t quite process what she was hearing. She’d been trying to stay professional, but from the very start, the night hadn’t held much promise and she wondered why she’d come. Okay, there was some mild intrigue, but mainly, she’d heard good things about the pizza - only Heath had already pre-ordered a random bunch of starters. That stung.

But it paled in comparison to the words she was hearing. Sure, she knew Heath a little from his journalist days. He'd seemed normal then, but all that biography work and the attention after had clearly taken its toll. He'd lost it. And now he wanted to become a superhero, with her and this ageing agent as his sidekicks - in some sort of 'league'? No, thank you. And all that stuff about the Fisherman - wow. He needed help. Or arresting. She couldn't work out which. It was his agent that broke the silence:

“Jacob... this is...wrong. Definitely wrong. We can't join in... but I think you might need a little help. Some time off? It must be hard trying to write something to match the work you did on Harvey...”

She could see Heath looked shocked. He'd genuinely believed they'd say yes. Her irritation boiled over into anger and she leapt to her feet.

“Heath - you're insane! What are you, a vigilante? A boy playing superheroes?” She pulled out her phone, and held it between them like a weapon. “I'm going to call this in - I need to report you. I mean, it's *great* that you're dangerous, but what's *really great* is that you're trying to drag Pete and I down with you, into your insanity. Now I know this, its my duty. I don't want to be liable - I need to keep people safe... from you!”

Pete got up, moving next to her and putting both his hands round hers, coving the phone.

He spoke softly: “Come on Amy. Let's not inflame the... 'situation'. We don't need to involve anyone else here. Well, not the police. He hasn't told us any details...nothing that puts us in danger, but...” He dropped her hands and reached into his wallet for a card. “Jacob. Here's the number of a close friend. She does some private work and I'll ask her to make room for

you tomorrow. You need to see her immediately. Just to talk it through and put some perspective in place. I know it's hard to hear this from friends, so I think professional advice is needed. Amy - if he seeks help, I guarantee I'll take responsibility for him. Now, would you like a ride? We can talk about this on the way."

Without waiting for an answer, he picked up Amy's purse and led her by the arm to the exit. Jacob remained seated, alone.

chapter fifteen

Tim Edwards-Hart

IT WAS OBVIOUS TO Sleepwalker that The Fisherman was a fraud. He could tell without even considering any of the oh-so-obvious leads. The name itself gave it away. The Fisherman. It was offensive. Insulting. Demeaning. No serious villain would name themselves after a tradesman.

“Better be careful, The Baker might get you! Ooh, look out, The Plumber’s on site,” he muttered. Trades were for honest people, which is probably why Jesus was a carpenter. Smart people worked hard too, but only for the fun of getting what they wanted from the honest people.

The Fisherman. The phrase was intrinsically honest: no mystery, no menace, no style. It was amateur.

It was like someone acting at being a villain, playing the part to get something. But it was the act of someone honest trying to be dishonest. It was predictable.

And what did they get for it?

Riches? Maybe, but that wasn’t enough to give oneself a Title. A good cardshark could probably earn more than what the Fisherman was going to end up with.

Fame? Maybe. He was high profile to bring Terrordon out of retirement, but he wasn't revelling in it. He'd barely scratched the surface of what was possible with social media. No, fame was not his motivation.

Delight in the suffering of others? No. At most there was possibly some *schadenfreude* in the inconvenience caused. Maybe. But it wasn't *fun*. To be fun, suffering should be inevitable and it should be witnessed. Like pulling the legs off a caterpillar and watching it writhe uselessly until it dies. Or telling people that only one of the levers will trigger the death trap—they *want* to believe you—and watching them frantically argue about which to choose until they pull one in desperation. It was as inevitable as the cartoons on Saturday morning TV, but so much more fun!

But not for The Fisherman. He didn't seem to want to hurt others.

So The Fisherman had all the traits of an honest man pretending to be dishonest, and he clearly wanted something other than fortune, fame or fun.

“Why call yourself The Fisherman?” he asked aloud.

Because he's fishing. Fortune and fame weren't pleasurable, they were bait. The Fisherman was *so* honest, he used the name to announce what he was doing. He truly was an amateur!

But what what was he catching? Nothing had changed except... the Terrordon had returned. But who would be stupid enough to bait a vigilante? Who would even *want* to bait a vigilante?

Sleepwalker smiled at a sudden memory, “My dear Terrordon, Someone came to see me during my holiday at Rampworth. Despite all that *I've* done and how interesting *I* am, he came just to ask about you. A visitor, wanting to ask *me*,

about *you*. An honest, stupid, and very amateur, visitor.

“Oh, this is going to be so much *fun*.”

Jacob woke up with a headache and his body felt cramped and sore. He didn't remember falling asleep on the sofa. He didn't remember much at all.

He opened his eyes and, for a moment, had that vague, perplexing sense of unfamiliarity. It quickly turned to a solid awareness of unfamiliarity. He wasn't home. This wasn't his sofa. He sat up.

“Welcome Mr Heath, it is good to see you are awake.”

The voice came from behind. It sounded vaguely familiar, but he couldn't pick it.

“Allow me to introduce myself, I am The Sleepwalker.”

Jacob stopped. He felt the hairs on his arms start to rise and his hands suddenly felt very cold. He realised he wasn't breathing.

“Do make yourself comfortable Mr Heath. Although, since you are one of the very few people who visited me at Rampworth, that makes you a friend. So, Joseph, your head will be rather sore, so you will find some water and some pain killers on the coffee table beside you.”

Jacob glanced at table and saw a pitcher of water and a little box of Tylenol beside it. He didn't move.

“Stephen forgot to get soda water while he was out fetching you, so the water is—I regret to say—only tap water.”

Stephen? Keeping his head still, Jacob's eyes darted about the room. Two men, both looking like they were linebackers for a professional football team, stood on either side of the door. One of them glanced at the water bottle. Stephen.

“It seems you don't trust me. The medication box is sealed, and you can examine the blister packs – if I was going to kill

you I'd pick a method that was much more fun than poison.

"Allow me to demonstrate.

"Stephen! Please pour four glasses of water."

The man who had glanced at the water bottle jumped a little then, after a momentary pause, swaggered forward and poured the water. He picked up the box of pills between his thumb and forefinger, displaying it to Jacob while he used a key to snap the plastic seal. He returned the box to the table and stood up.

"Jacob, you will choose a glass of water for yourself, and one for Stephen. You will open the pillbox and remove 4 pills, two for you and two for Stephen. Stephen will consume the water and the pills that you give him. You may wait as long as needed to see that he has not been harmed. We need to talk, and I need you to have a clear head. I don't want to ask Stephen and Derrick to help you, but will if I need to."

Jacob looked up Stephen and imagined him forcing a pill down his throat. If he was going to die, then he was going to die, so he may as well do it on his terms. He reached out, broke two pills out of their blister pack and downed them with a whole glass of water. He had to admit, he did feel better having the water.

"You're not going to share? Well, it seems that Stephen is not needed then."

There was a thud and Stephen fell backwards to the floor. A crossbow bolt stuck out from his chest. He didn't even twitch.

Jacob fought a sudden surge of nausea.

"See? Now *that's* how you have fun."

Sleepwalker stepped into view, an empty crossbow slung nonchalantly across his shoulder. He dropped in to the chair on the other side of the coffee table and grinned.

“Oh this is so much more fun than I thought.”

He reached down beside the chair and pulled up a new bolt, then held it up over his other shoulder as he called it out to Derrick.

“Arm this for me will you? There’s a dear.”

As Derrick took the crossbow and bolt, Sleepwalker looked at Jacob.

“Now my friend, we need to talk. It seems a rather amusing coincidence that the Fisherman would appear so soon after you visited me—or rather, visited my friends—at Rampworth. And how strange that you should want to know so much about Terrordon, and then that Terrordon himself would reappear. It almost makes one believe that these events are all connected in some way.

Jacob could hear his heart. It seemed so loud he wondered why Sleepmaker wasn’t raising his voice.

“Perhaps the Fisherman is just bait to catch a dinosaur from another age? And the Terrordon is most certainly a dinosaur worth catching don’t you think?”

Jacob could barely feel his hands or feet, and had to consciously remind himself to breath.

“Now Jacob, we’re friends. You can tell me. How do you intend to use your Fisherman to reveal the Terrordon’s true identity?”

Jacob shook his head, swallowed, and tried to speak, “...”.

“Do you want some more water my dear? Please, do tell.”

Jacob tried again, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh Jacob, I am so disappointed in you. I thought we were friends.”

Sleepwalker raised his hand and Derrick placed the loaded crossbow into it.

Jacob stared at it.

“Now, I’m sure your dear sister Emmy would agree this was just a misunderstanding. Do you know that I bought that pitcher from the Teal and Taupe? It’s a lovely little store and Emmy’s doing such a good job there. You really should go there and see what she’s done.”

Jacob blanched.

“And little Pacey is adorable. Walking around the yard, talking into his toy mobile phone, he looked just like his Daddy. I’m sure he’ll make a fine accountant one day. And don’t his grandparents love him? They don’t seem to mind all the time they spend looking after him while Emmy’s at work. They do seem to wish they could see you more often.”

With a barely perceptible flick, Sleepmaker fired the crossbow again. The pitcher of water exploded.

“Oh dear, an *accident*. I’ll have to go back to the store and buy another one from Emmy. I’d hate for there to be other accidents...”

It was too much for Jacob, “You’re right. It’s me. The Fisherman is the bait. I want to find out who the Terrordon is. I’m trying to write his biography, but I don’t know who he is.”

“See? I knew we were friends. So how will you find out his identity?”

Jacob took a breath, “I don’t know. I didn’t get that far. I just thought that, if he came out of retirement, I’d work it out then. But I haven’t. I don’t know how I’ll do it.

Sleepmaker burst into laughter.

“Oh my friend, that is delightful.” He kept chuckling, “This is even *more* fun than I’d imagined. Tell you what, for a bit of a lark, I’ll help you. What the Fisherman can’t do on his own, he’ll manage with the help of The Sleepmaker. What do you say?”

Jacob, relieved to still be alive, and hoping to keep his

family safe, just nodded.

“Excellent! I haven’t felt so alive for 10 years!! Derrick, take Jacob downtown and dump him somewhere public. But be nice, he’s my friend now.

Oh this is grand!”

chapter sixteen

Alex Schuler

“LOOK, IT’S QUITE SIMPLE really.” The Sleepwalker stood in front of his henchmen in his favorite purple three piece suit. “All those toys the wretched pterodactyl loves so much must cost a pretty penny. So get me a list of people with money, people with power! We’ll start there. Anyone who can give me a good fight must be Terrordon.”

The henchmen scurried away like rats, all save one small, mousy fellow who was doing his best to bore a hole in the ground with his eyes. “Erm, sir?” he squeaked.

Mousy made the mistake of lifting his eyes and The Sleepwalker greeted them with a piercing stare. He followed Mousy’s eyes around, refusing to release them, chuckling internally at the way his henchman squirmed. When he grew bored of this game he deigned to answer, “Yes?”

“Well, erm.” Mousy shuffled his feet.

“Spit it out, then.”

“It’s just . . . “ he took a deep breath to calm his nerves, then one more to gather air. “How do we know Terrordon doesn’t have some sort of benefactor like a girlfriend or a

boyfriend or a close friend or something,” he said all in that one breath.

“We . . . Of course he doesn’t!” The Sleepwalker glared at his henchman to cover his own panic. This would work, right? Of course it would. Right. Terrordon was a loner, and prideful. He’d never accept help from others. Sure again of his plan, The Sleepwalker addressed Mousy, “Well, what are you still standing there for? Don’t you have better things to do than bother me with stupid questions?”

“But what about—”

“Enough!”

Mousy wandered off, mumbling something about soldiers and martial artists under his breath.

The Sleepwalker retreated to his office and poured himself a glass of grape juice. Just a matter of waiting for his henchmen to do the boring work, now. He sat down to read, but instead found himself staring at the same spot of the same page and tapping his fingers rapidly against the cover.

Finally he gave up and tossed the book on the desk. It landed with a thud, upsetting the grape juice, which splashed out of the mostly full glass and onto his sleeve. The Sleepwalker sighed. He’d deal with it later, though he knew from experience the stain would put up a fight.

If reading was a no go he could always find some entertainment in his pet rabbit. He smiled at Thumper XIV, who cowered in a corner and stamped her feet. The Sleepwalker feigned offense; he hadn’t even done anything to her yet! The rabbits always seemed to know. However warm he made his smile, however kind his eyes and gentle his voice, they knew that he wasn’t to be trusted.

The rabbit screamed when he picked her up and a smile crept across his face, this one without pretence of kindness.

Thumper XIV was a gorgeous specimen with velvety jet black fur and deep, soulful eyes. All the more pleasure in breaking her spirit, then. He'd have to make this one last.

The Sleepwalker walked over to where he kept his tools and picked out a needle five inches long and a quarter inch in diameter. With one firm push he pierced the belly, pushing deeper to the song of Thumper's screams. Another needle, then another. "This is just the beginning, my dear," he murmured, "There's lots of fun yet to come."

A knock at the door. He removed the needles and placed Thumper back in her cage where she curled up and whimpered, as if that would somehow solve her problems.

One of his henchmen stood in the doorway shaking, unhappy to be the messenger. "Your list, sir."

The Sleepwalker snatched the list and scanned the information, crossing out anyone who was too tall or too short or the wrong weight or the wrong sex, glancing up occasionally to glare at the henchman, who remained hovering by the door. Did nobody else around here who ever use their brain? When he'd narrowed the list down he created a single page list of only the names of the most likely suspects and taped it to his dart board, just over the Terrordon logo that usually resided there.

Thunk. Roger Reeds, playboy. What a stupid alliterative name. He sure hoped Roger was Terrordon!

The Sleepwalker whacked Roger from behind with a plank. Never saw it coming.

Thunk. Peter Warwick, minor politician. He didn't seem anything too special, but his high level of athleticism had earned him a place on the short list.

He managed to corner Peter in a dark alleyway. The man put up a minor resistance, resulting in a black eye and various

bruises for The Sleepwalker. Still, it seemed mostly luck, and The Sleepwalker gave it back tenfold. Probably not Terrordon, but maybe he should have heard Mousy out about martial artists. No, it was a rare person who could even fight back, let alone stand up to him. This would work. It had to.

Thunk. Steven Lestrage, corporate mogul. His collection of superhero paraphernalia was legendary, and he had the kind of smug face The Sleepwalker would just love to elicit screams from.

Today wouldn't be the day for it, though. He didn't struggle a bit, and finding Terrordon was top priority. He made a mental note to torture Steven later.

Thunk. Jason Richards, former playboy turned senator. Jason was highly athletic and loved to flaunt his wealth. At the least he had his love of expensive toys in common with Terrordon.

He followed Jason from a nightclub and into an empty park. When he confronted him, the man immediately took a defensive stance. The Sleepwalker grinned; this looked promising.

He attacked, but Jason evaded and pinned him against a tree. A kick to the solar plexus freed him, and he immediately followed through with a punch to the head. Jason replied by attempting to sweep his feet out from under him, but he countered and knocked Jason off balance.

Jason resisted for near ten minutes, but he won out in the end. So this was the great Terrordon. Not too tough without his toys! The Sleepwalker threw the unconscious man over his shoulder and prepared to execute the next step of his plan.

chapter seventeen

Waleed Ovase

WHEN RUNNING FOR THE State Senate, his friends had joked that he was lowering his chances of being kidnapped. That, being a playboy was a more attractive ransom opportunity, rather than a low level public servant. It had been a sense of comfort, in a way, that he was turning towards a safer life. And hopefully a more contented one.

But the Sleepwalker's piercing green eyes had changed all that, and now he was laying on his side in a trunk, listening to the car's back tires rumble over the uneven road. He made mental notes to himself, trying to remember where all the potholes and especially rough patches might be, so that he could find someone to yell at to fix them. The City's infrastructure might be his next pet project. If he lived through all this.

He moved his head side to side against the trunk's rough inner lining, trying to scratch his forehead. There was something strange about the Terrordon and Sleepwalker showing up after all this time. Sure, he'd heard the rumors, that only someone of his wealth could afford to be the Terrordon,

and while he hadn't necessarily denied the rumors, he didn't think anyone really thought they were true. It had been an easy way to get laid on more than one occasion. But all those lies and endless parties had just caught up with him. The car slowed down, but not before hitting one last deep pothole, forcing his head to crash against the trunk's floor. If he lived through this, he decided he needed a spa day.

The trunk swung open, revealing the crisp cool San Francisco air. He could tell by the angle of the road, the few letters he could make out on the street sign, and the silly German car that his neighbor always parked on the street, that the Sleepwalker had taken him home.

"You awake in there?" the Sleepwalker asked, his brilliant green eyes more visible in the dark than the rest of him. He stood above Jason, his hands buried in the deep pockets of his coat. His henchmen milled around behind him, unsure of what to do with themselves. The Sleepwalker never gave them more information than they could handle.

"You won't find anything here," asked Jason, trying to shift to a more comfortable position.

"That's what someone who had something to hide would say," laughed the Sleepwalker. "But there's only one way to find out, you know? There's only one thing we can do."

"What's that?"

"Try our best with the options at hand!"

The Sleepwalker grabbed Jason, and in one swift movement, pulled him from the car and onto his feet. "I see you've had some practice with this," mumbled Jason, trying to get his left leg to wake up.

"There was a time, before I was put away, that I was quite good at what I did," the Sleepwalker replied, guiding them towards the house. He reached into Jason's pockets and found

his keys.

"If you were so good, why'd they put you away?"

"Well, I guess you were better, Terrordon." The Sleepwalker put the key in the door, and let it swing open, hoping to himself that it could be just that easy to find out that Jason was the Terrordon. Perhaps his mask was just sitting on the kitchen table. Perhaps his old uniform was draped over a living room chair. Perhaps his entire house was his Terrordon Cave.

Jason stepped ahead into the foyer of the house. He had designed the foyer to be especially grand: a testament and taste to what the rest of the house would hold. A regal chandelier hung from a molded ceiling, while the walls were simpler and more modern with mostly glass and clean lines. The house had been expensive, but a beautiful reminder that the old world and the new could live in harmony. "So this is my foyer, and as you can see, there's nothing here but things that belong in a foyer," said Jason.

The Sleepwalker paced around the room, not letting himself go into the rest of the house yet. There had to be something here too, something small, that could play well into Heath's book. He imagined a clue lying on a random table, that would lead him to the stash: The Terrordon Cave.

But there was nothing. He opened every drawer, and threw them aside. "How big is this place?" he asked.

"About 15,000 square feet," laughed Jason.

"A grand birdcage," mumbled the Sleepwalker.

"You really think I'm the Terrordon, don't you? It's not apart of some larger plan of yours?"

"Your identity is close to being revealed Terrordon. I've cleared one room, and now we move onto the next one."

Jason sighed, his hands still tied behind his back. "Alright,

let me at least show you around. I have to be a good host in my house." He put his shoulder into a side door and it slowly creaked open. Heavy doors, he reminded himself, were apart of his design too. They always felt more substantial.

The Sleepwalker motioned to his men to stay behind him and keep a lookout for anything, anything at all that they could bring back to Heath. They followed Jason through the myriad of living rooms and side rooms, the main kitchen and the smaller offshoot ones, and finally to what Jason had always described as the Grand View: the largest living room in the house, with a full glass wall overlooking Golden Gate Park.

"My my what money can buy," said the Sleepwalker. He stared at the view for a moment, and then turned around. "Alright boys, split up into teams and let's see what we can find."

They rushed off in different directions, deciding quickly which part of the large house they would be searching. The Sleepwalker turned back to Jason. "Why'd you quit?"

"Partying? I wanted to grow up," replied Jason, still staring at the view. The Golden Gate Bridge was always beautiful. "Everyone has to realize that there's something more that can be done with their lives."

"Throwing me off with your little nonsense about being a young playboy would have worked if I didn't already know who you were," replied the Sleepwalker. "I know it's you. Everyone does. They've all known for years."

"Then why can't you find anything?"

"Because you've spent your money well."

"Or maybe I'm not the Terrordon."

The Sleepwalker sighed. "You have been my nemesis for longer than I can be comfortable with, and to see you here now, like this, it would so easy to kill you. It would be so easy

to just," he trailed off, his fingers motioning towards Jason's neck.

"Perhaps it would be too easy," whispered Jason.

"What?"

"The Terrordon would have put up more of a fight."

"No," said the Sleepwalker. "No no, your games won't work this time. You said you've matured. So have I. Everyone kept telling me I'm crazy, especially in Rampworth. But in there, I met the actual crazy ones. And I matured too. I know what I know."

"Then why have your henchmen come back with nothing?" said Jason, leaning against the glass wall.

The Sleepwalker turned around and looked over his men. They had brought nothing back with them. "Boys, what did you find?"

They all shook their heads. "It's a very large house, and we couldn't find anything that might lead us to the Terrordon Cave," said one.

The Sleepwalker glanced at Jason. "Ya know what they say, if you want the work done right, you have to do it yourself."

"Or you're wrong," mumbled Jason. He didn't understand why he felt so courageous in this moment, but he was getting annoyed that the Sleepwalker had a personal grudge against him, when he wasn't even the Terrordon! He was all for helping people, but this blame was too great.

The Sleepwalker's green eyes had darkened as his brows furrowed. "I will not play your games anymore Terrordon. I won't do it." He shoved his men aside and he went to search the house.

Each room held more knick knacks and random furniture than the previous. It was a well designed house, with more than a couple pianos strewn about, but there was nothing

interesting laying around, no clues that he could find.

And then it occurred to him there might be a switch, or a button, something that might lead to an underground room, or a hidden part of the house. "Boys, start moving things, start figuring out if there might be something else. A hidden room, a button, a mechanism, something. Anything. We won't let this masked vigilante win this round."

But as they moved through the house, knocking books off shelves, pressing piano keys, moving every painting and every object in every curio cabinet, he realized how futile and desperate the situation was becoming. He had been certain that Jason Richards was the Terrordon. The logic and clues had added up, and yet this man was going to beat him again, if he couldn't find any proof.

And that was something he could not abide by. There was an anger, brutal and raw, that he knew Doug felt. It was guttural. He threw a bookcase to the ground, checking the wall for any signs of a door, anything to make the hunt easier. Doug prided himself on building things, and he would have loved to know the plans to this house. But when Doug became angry, he could morph into something far more dangerous.

"Burn it down," whispered the Sleepwalker. "Burn it down and then we'll see what's inside. And we'll take the Terrordon's crown jewel from him. He can't win. He won't win." His boys looked at each other and nodded. If there was anything that they loved doing, it was burning things.

The Sleepwalker returned to the main living room. The Sun was slowly rising, and the Golden Gate Bridge had begun to take that little light and use it to transform itself into a man made beauty. "If you won't assist me, I will take it from you."

"Aren't you trying to do that?"

"If you don't assist me, I will burn everything."

"There's nothing to assist! All there is what you see. I am not the Terrordon. Never was."

The Sleepwalker nodded as his boys returned with jerry cans of gasoline. They began spraying it around the room and down the hallways, the air quickly filling with its pungent smell. "You won't help me reveal to the world that you're nothing but a rich boy who wanted to get in the way. Now I'm going to burn it all." He took out a match and struck it against his boot. It burned bright, even as the morning sun came up.

"But why?" asked Jason. "I'm not the Terrordon."

"You are, and you will not win this round." He stared at the match for a moment, before letting it drop to the floor. The gasoline ignited immediately and rushed off in every direction. He motioned to his boys. They grabbed Jason, and forcibly tied him to a chair. "And now we will leave you here, so you can watch your beautiful sunrise, as your house burns around you."

"I don't think you understand," said Jason, staring at the flames that engulfed his house. "I don't think you get that I'm not the Terrordon."

The Sleepwalker shrugged. "All will be known."

The flames crawled towards the ceiling, and as the Sleepwalker was turning to leave, the glass wall splintered as a fast moving form crashed through it and landed on the living room floor. "I think you've taken this charade far enough," said the Terrordon, picking himself up and brushing off the larger pieces of glass. He wore a hard rubberized suit and his iconic mask. The only skin Jason could see was the Terrordon's lips and muscular chin.

The Sleepwalker looked at the masked man and then back to Jason. "Did you pay someone to dress up as you?"

"I'm not the Terrordon!" yelled Jason. "Use your damn eyes!"

The Terrordon moved towards the Sleepwalker. "It's just like the old days. I come after you, and you burn things down."

The Sleepwalker looked at the masked and suited man, slowly realizing that he was the real Terrordon. There was something about his arrogant swagger, the way his lips moved in a condescending way, that only he could be the true Terrordon. He glanced at Jason, realizing that he had missed all the little clues. Jason didn't have what it took to be the masked vigilante. "The old days were better. Simpler times," he replied.

"I think it's time to get back to Rampworth, don't you?"

The Sleepwalker looked at the flames that had finally reached the ceiling. He heard cabinets and chairs fall over as they crumbled, and something felt right about it all. "No, I'm not going back there," he replied, retreating slowly into the house. "I'm not going back there, but we will meet again." He grabbed one of his henchmen and threw him towards the Terrordon, as he turned and fled into the house. The henchman looked at the Terrordon, and instead of taking a swing, ran past him into the depths of the flames.

The Terrordon looked towards Jason and then back towards the disappearing form of the Sleepwalker. He knew he would meet his old friend again. He moved quickly and untied the State Senator, the house quickly getting worse. He grabbed his arm, but when he realized that Jason had breathed in too much smoke, he easily threw him over his shoulder and made his way through the burning debris.

From a vantage point across the bay, the Terrordon looked at the burning wreck of a house, and through his binoculars he

could even make out Jason Richards being treated by a paramedic before being loaded into the ambulance for treatment at the hospital.

Retiring in 2005 had been a personal choice, but now the Sleepwalker was back on the streets of San Francisco and had implicated a prominent State Senator. They would all come for him, because they would all want their own kind of revenge.

Was this the right time to show his face?

No, he thought, shaking his head and turning to return to the Terrordon Cave. This time he would need to take down the Sleepwalker. Before he killed someone.

chapter eighteen

Dañiel Garcia

BACK AT RAMPWORTH JACOB knocked at the door after having been let through by the receptionist, and a familiar British accent distractedly invited him in. The accent belonged to Dr Warne, who was busily arranging some papers while speaking on an antiquated phone, and skilfully avoided getting her arms caught in the cord. Jacob was surprised that there were even phones like that left over, not to mention in working order.

"Uh-hm." voiced Jacob by clearing his throat.

"Oh, it's you Mr Heath." remarked Dr Warne as she hung up. "I hadn't expected you to come by again so soon."

"Well, after I heard about the Sleepwalker breaking out, I thought I'd talk to you again to get some insight as to how or why it happened."

Dr Warne looked at Jacob for several moments and let her brow wrinkle several times before replying.

"Frankly I'm surprised that the 'Sleepwalker' personality had re-emerged." she stated with a hint of genuine regret. "I thought that we had achieved some significant progress. Otherwise I wouldn't have agreed to you interviewing him."

"Do you maybe know where he could have gone to?" asked Jacob, he tried to remember any hint he might have gotten from his previous interview, but came up blank.

Dr Warne looked at him in confusion.

"Why would you want to know that?"

"Oh, it's for the biography I'm writing." answered Jacob, barely avoiding to make it seem too obvious that he was more than interested. "I thought that maybe it could be a place that I've already written about during my research on the Terrordon. Just to add a bit more excitement to that chapter."

At first Dr Warne replied she did not know, but when Jacob asked about what the Sleepwalker might do, her face lightened up as she remembered something.

"There might be something." said Dr Warne determinedly. She beckoned Jacob to follow her into the next room. It was the archive for the patients she had treated, containing all written and recorded material. As she looked for a particular box she explained: "Although the Sleepwalker is the more prominent personality, he isn't perpetual, meaning he isn't always at the forefront. He would frequently switch with the other personalities, sometimes involuntarily."

Having found the right box she brought it back to her office, Jacob followed close behind. His curiosity was peaked at the mention of the Sleepwalker's other personalities. Correction, the other personalities inhabiting the same body with him, he thought.

"I'd like to show you a video from one of our earlier sessions." stated Dr Warne. "There was a peculiar incident that might be insightful. Perhaps it can help you in your research."

In contrast to the old fashioned phone Dr Warne had on her desk, Jacob was quite surprised to see her take out an isolinear optical disc and insert it into the player in her office.

One of the mediums that one of his friends kept mentioning was supposed to replace ultra blu-rays or such.

"This isn't the stone age, Mr Heath." said Dr Warne after having correctly read his expression. "We do like to keep accurate records with good video quality. We don't use video cassettes like you see in the movies. Although the sound is a little off due to the microphone."

"As you surely know, there are several personalities besides the Sleepwalker." explained Dr Warne. "Even more than the frequent or 'core' personalities we've identified over the years. This is from one of our earliest sessions during the treatment."

As the video started Jacob could clearly see that it was an older recording, because the figure he recognised as the Sleepwalker had longer hair compared to the time when Jacob had interviewed him previously.

The video shows a small room with simple furnishing, the camera looks down at a table at which is seated Dr Warne, her brunette hair braided instead of open. At the other end of the table sits a figure with shoulder length dark hair, bent over a large piece of paper. Several crayons and pencils are scattered in front of it.

"This is 'Charlotte', she is the young child personality." explained Dr Warne. "By her speech patterns and behaviour, I estimate that she is around six years old. She's usually busy drawing."

From the angle of the video Jacob could clearly see that 'Charlotte' was drawing a picture of a cruise ship. A surprisingly detailed one, he thought.

"What are you drawing, Charlotte?" ask Dr Warne's slightly distorted

voice.

"Just a ship." replies a remarkably feminine voice with perfect child-like pitch. Charlotte's face remains focused on the drawing and her hair sways slightly when she cocks her head to examine a detail.

"What kind of ship is it?" asks Dr Warne. "It looks very big."

"Aye," grumbles the long haired figure in front of Dr Warne in a deep masculine bass, "t'is a poiret ship. We bein' poirets o'th sea 'n all."

The man with long dark hair looks up, the video clearly shows that he wears an expression as if being in a permanent dark mood, sternly judging any and all that he looks at. The jaw is held out front, presenting a nonexistent beard.

Although the image of Dr Warne does not betray any sudden movements she is, momentarily, visibly startled.

The video pauses.

"At first I thought it was Charlotte's impression of a pirate, but..." she paused, similar to her image on the screen, at that moment the encounter had refreshed itself in her memory. "...as you could hear, it did not sound like a child impersonating an adult."

"You mean it's one of the Sleepwalker's other personalities?" enquired Jacob. He was quite curious now. The new voice did not sound like any of the other personalities he had talked to.

"There is more." said Dr Warne calmly.

The video continues.

The man stands up from the table and looks round.

"An' w'ere th' bloody 'ell is t'is?" he half growls.

"This ain't no pirate ship, Cap'n." says another voice, it sounds halfway between rude and arrogant, on the way to condescending. The Sleepwalker's figure turns round to tap the drawing with his index finger.

His expression is changed again, it looks as if it is on the verge of a perpetual sneer.

"This here's a cruise ship." he says.

"Th' bloody 'ell we be doin' on a cru'z sh'p, Jimmy B." replies the gruff voice. "W'ere's Jibbles? Jibbles!"

The Sleepwalker's figure shouts and looks round. "An' 't be Captain, nae 'Cap'n'!"

After moving along the end of the table the Sleepwalker visibly shrinks down, appearing timid.

"Y...yes, Captain Bane, Sir?" replies a timid squeaky, almost child-like, voice. Under the Sleepwalker's long dark hair his eyes dart around nervously with a worried look. His lips shiver slightly, but never tremble.

"W'ere ar' we. T'is isn' our sh'p." rumbles Bane. "An' don' say, 'Sir'. all 'th toim."

"I don't know Captain, Sir." replies Jibbles politely as he slowly looks round the room. "It looks like we're not on a ship, but in a house."

As Jacob watched the video, and although he knew that physically it was the same person, he couldn't help but be amazed at how expressive the Sleepwalker's face was. Subtle shifts in muscle, gestures, and posture gave each personality its distinction. If one were to see them all lined up at the same time, one would surely mistake them for individual people at first, thought Jacob.

"These three personalities were new." explained Dr Warne. "I hadn't encountered them before, but it was as if all three shared the same mental space."

"Yes." agreed Jacob. "They clearly interact with each other, but it seems they aren't aware of Charlotte."

"Watch what happens next." said Dr Warne ominously.

The video continues.

The personalities identified as Captain Bane and the first mate Jimmy B. have gotten into an argument. The Sleepwalker's features tirelessly switch between them. They steadfastly ignore Dr Warne, who remains seated and lets the scene play out.

Suddenly Jibbles' voice calls out.

"Ca...Captain, Sir. I think there is someone else here with us."

"You think or you know?" scolds Jimmy B. "I've already seen the dame. She ain't no looker she is."

"No, not her." replies Jibbles nervously. "I...I'm not sure. I can hear someone else."

Bane looks in the direction where Jibbles would be standing, suddenly his neck jerks back.

"Unagh." His hands reach for his neck.

"You're too loud!" calls out a fourth voice from the pained features of Bane.

Jacob recognised the voice. It was unmistakable. A glance at Dr Warne's nodding head confirmed his suspicion, and sent shivers down his spine.

It was the Sleepwalker's voice. The actual Sleepwalker personality. Jacob recalled hearing the same voice during his research of the trial recordings.

The Sleepwalker has turned round, his posture indicates that he is strangling the supposedly larger form of Bane. Looking up he reveals the shocked face of Jimmy B.

"What's goin' on? Jibbles, what happened to the Cap'n?" shouts Jimmy B.'s voice. "I don't see no..."

Gurgling sounds again as the Sleepwalker strangles his next victim, Jimmy B.

"Now for you." says the Sleepwalker, his voice is filled with palpable menace. He seems to look into the distance at Jibbles.

"Wh...where are you?" cries out Jibbles voice. "I can't see you, but I can hear..."

The Sleepwalker with Jibbles' features lies on the floor, as if struck from behind. He slowly crawls towards a far corner of the room. As he gets up on his legs, he is the real Sleepwalker again. He raises his arms and strikes downwards.

Again.

And again.

Jacob flinched, looking half away. It was as if he could hear whimpering with each blow he saw the Sleepwalker act out.

After several more seconds the Sleepwalker stops, looks down at himself and says: "Ugh, this isn't purple."

The figure of the Sleepwalker slumps down on the floor, back against the wall, pulls his knees to his chest.

Video pauses

"And those three personalities haven't appeared since." said Dr Warne as she let several moments pass to recover. "The Sleepwalker personality actually hurt them."

"I thought they were not aware of each other." replied Jacob confused.

"True, the 'core' seven do not recall any actions of the others. The Sleepwalker is the only one who knows what all the others have done."

"Which suggests that he *is* the true personality?" asked Jacob.

"I do not think so." replied Dr Warne. "I think that these three personalities were an emergent new personality, that may have been independent, and could have provided new insights and answers to the Sleepwalker's psyche. But it seems that the

Sleepwalker punished them for their independence."

"Or in this case outright killed them." added Jacob.

Silence as Dr Warne and Jacob looked at each other, letting the finality of what he had said sink in. No wonder the Sleepwalker is Terrordon's arch-enemy, he is ruthless even in his madness, thought Jacob.

"But, do you know why exactly he did that?" pressed Jacob.

Dr Warne hesitated a moment before answering.

"I believe that if any of the other personalities gets out of line or appears to be a threat to him, I mean, if he thinks that his dominant control is threatened, he kills them before they can establish themselves."

"But why not the 'core' group?" wondered Jacob. The other personalities that he knew of, such as the child Charlotte, Tim the actor or Doug the builder were more expressive. And theoretically more independent, thought Jacob, since they didn't share anything between each other.

"I believe the Sleepwalker either does not see them as a threat," continued Dr Warne Jacob's thought, "or he thinks they have some use for him."

"Such us getting him out of trial," suggested Jacob, "or perhaps they have some control over him?"

"I doubt it..." said Dr Warne hesitantly.

"Maybe not exactly control," revised Jacob, "but some sort of leverage of which they are not aware of."

Dr Warne thought for moment, then said: "That might explain this."

Video continues.

A child's whimpering fills the room. The image of Dr Warne hesitantly moves towards the slumped figure. When she is sure who it is, she steps forward.

"Calm down Charlotte." says Dr Warne with forced warmth. "What happened, why are you crying?"

"It went dark." cries Charlotte. "I lost my crayons."

The soft sobs continues as Dr Warne's image moves to a small cupboard and takes out a plastic cup. Crouching back to the sobbing form of Charlotte, Dr Warne proffers the cup and asks: "Would you like some tea?"

"Why yes, madam, if you let me." says a gentle male voice. "I'm awfully sorry for any trouble I've caused. I would love a cup of tea. You wouldn't by chance have Earl Grey?"

The two stand up and go to the table. The video shows Dr Warne calling to one of the nurses to bring a freshly brewed cup of tea.

"This is 'Joe'." explained Dr Warne casually. "He is the more remorseful of the 'core' personalities. He usually emerges after strong periods of disruption or stress."

"I see." said Jacob. He noted that Joe was a strong contrast to the other personalities.

"I feel I've done something quite terrible." says Joe as the nurse enters and brings a cup of tea for Dr Warne and him. "Do you know the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning with a terrible headache from the night before?"

Dr Warne nods affirmatively.

"And then all the old chaps tell you what a brilliant night it was, and how you made a complete and utter fool of yourself?"

Another nod from Dr Warne.

"And then the shame hits you. Like a ton of gold bricks wrapped in lemon."

Joe looks down at the cup of tea in front him. His eyes are blank and on the verge of tears.

"Do you recall any recent events?" asks Dr Warne. "From inside

this room?"

"No, madam." replies Joe after a moments thought. "Nothing in particular."

He picks up the cup of tea by the handle, and carefully blows at it to cool down the first sip.

"I just feel that there is something I should deeply apologise for." he adds, then takes his first sip of tea.

Joe makes a sour expression.

"Speaking of lemons." he says and sets the cup of tea back down. "This isn't quite what I had in mind. You know, the best tea I've had, had always been at the Westin."

Dr Warne nods automatically and reflexively asks: "Where is that?"

"Union Square, the Westin at Union Square." replies Joe. "The best I've ever had, just the bloody best."

After the tea is finished Joe is escorted out of the room by two male nurses.

Dr Warne leaves afterwards.

Video ends.

"I'm sorry." said Dr Warne regretfully after the video finished. "That's all I have from that session, and that's usually all that Joe ever mentions. There haven't been similar incidents since then, and it's why I had thought that we had managed to treat the Sleepwalker."

"No, no. It was very insightful." reassured Jacob. "It's just the type of information I can use...for the biography. Thank you for your time, and for showing me the recording."

chapter nineteen

Jason Newton

JACOB PUT DOWN THE pen, looked across to where the sun was leaving meaningless, flat squares of light across the carpet and closed his eyes.

In his mind, he again saw Lisa, the doctor at Rampworth leafing through the case file. And once again she said the same the thing.

He is more than one person.

Jacob heard movement out in the hallway and wondered if there were other guests booked onto this very same floor of the hotel. He had managed to find the room fairly easily, and had paid in cash. This place wasn't too far from the Westin Hotel which made things easier. He had more time to formulate his plan.

He turned the thing over in his mind looking for flaws - potential gaps in the planning might lead to disaster. Lisa had told him about the personalities that seemed to make up the psychology of the Sleepwalker. The dominant one was Joe. It was Joe who made all the rational decisions - where to go and what to do.

Jacob returned to the paper in front of him. Had it been a mistake to get involved in this case? He didn't think so. Immersing oneself in the life of someone else was the only true way to tell the story.

But there were dangers here too. It was possible that in shadowing the Sleepwalker, one might become tainted with the same evil that drove the killer forward.

Jacob shivered in the gloom of the hotel, in the places where the sunlight hadn't yet reached. It was all a long way from his time writing about Harvey Milk.

He reached over to his tape recorder and spooled back the tape, pressed play and listened to Lisa once again. There was a nervous quality to her voice that Jacob didn't care for. He listened carefully and she spoke again of how the Sleepwalker had escaped, his method of concealment, the errors in security that had let the Terrordon lose once again. Fear stalked the corridors of the hospital and now blind terror pervaded the streets too.

Jacob stood, went to the window of the hotel and touched the glass there. It was about twenty minutes by bus to Union Square. His informant had told him that the Westin Hotel had someone booked in under the name of Joe.

Jacob wondered dimly if the information was reliable. Sometimes you paid a lot but you never really knew if it was good until it was too late.

He thought about ringing Emmy. She had left three messages on his phone but every time he began to dial, some thought, some feeling would pull him back before he could finish dialling. Maybe it was wrong to involve them in what he was up to. They had their own lives and so did he. That he had chosen to spend it in journalism was his decision.

Back at the small, makeshift desk, he took up his pen again

and continued to sketch outlines. His plan was to check out of the hotel in a few hours and book himself into the Westin. There he would wait, biding his time until Joe made an appearance.

And then what? Asked a voice inside. *Are you going to try to apprehend him?*

Jacob had not thought that far ahead. It made no sense to rush plans.

Well, you'd better start thinking about that outcome, the voice suggested.

When he awoke, he saw that the squares of light were now tracing their path up one of the walls. He checked his watch. It was now three-thirty. He would have to leave by five. He could hear people arguing in the room next door, the sound of roadworks down in the street below and the voice of a girl out in the corridor, probably the same maid who had helped him up with his suitcase.

He found the remote for the small, battered portable TV and thumbed through the channels. On NBC, he soon discovered that the Sleepwalker had been busy yet again.

Jacob listened and watched as the news reporter, standing in front of a shabby apartment block told everyone listening what had just happened.

"Police arrived here just after midday responding to a call from the building supervisor. Mark Harrison, made the discovery some time before eleven this morning in the pool that residents here use as part of their housing agreement."

Jacob watched as the camera panned left across grubby looking deck chairs to the pool and the tarpaulin that police were now using for the crime scene.

"The battered body of Alice Hall, a twenty-eight year old

student has been removed and taken for forensic examination."

Now the camera pulled away and back to the reporter.

"Right now there is no solid information on the killer but people in the Bay Area will no doubt be forming their own opinions on who was responsible. I have with me Chief Harrison from the police."

The camera widened to show both there reporter and a uniformed individual who had clearly never been in front of the cameras before.

"Let me put it to you, Chief Harrison. Given the recent events at Rampworth, many people out there are going to conclude that this is the work of the Sleepwalker and with -"

"That's just rumour right now. And it's one that media outlets like the one you work for are very unhelpfully fuelling. Therefore we -"

"And with that in forefront of the minds of all the taxpayers here in San Francisco, they'd like to know just exactly where all those tax dollars go. With cuts to the police department in recent years and the Goldstein scandal last summer, many will conclude that your department just isn't up to the job of finding this man."

Jacob listened to the arguments back and forth while he packed his things. He left, leaving the television playing to an empty room. Down in the foyer, he had the receptionist ring for a taxi to take him to the Westin hotel.

"Hell of a thing," said the driver, weaving through the traffic.

"What is ?" asked Jacob. He found he didn't want to talk but sometimes it took away the anxiety, if only for a little while.

"The Sleepwalker. Getting out."

"That name," suggested Jacob, "it was something the media came up with. It makes for better headlines."

"Well, the guy sure is making them now - what with that girl they found in the pool over on west boulevard. Do you think he picks them?"

"I've no idea."

The driver nodded at this, as if the mindless violence of the Sleepwalker somehow made sense, as if it contained some kind of queer logic peculiar only to itself. In the days since the Sleepwalker had escaped, Jacob had begun to construct an internal landscape in his mind, one populated only by the Sleepwalker and those he had encountered. It was a dark place and one that kept reaching out into the real world, threatening to engulf it.

"The Westin. Pretty busy this time of year," said the driver. "And some conference starts tomorrow. Been ferrying in all these tech types all morning. Probably deciding how they are gonna automate even more things. Probably got another five years driving this cab before it can drive itself."

Up ahead, the towers of the Westin loomed against a sky that looked bruised and black. Heavy rain was forecast for the Bay Area.

As the taxi pulled into the drop-zone, Jacob could see umbrellas opening as the first heavy spots began to darken the road. He gave the driver a twenty dollar bill, thanked him and grabbed his one and only piece of luggage. Not looking back, he made for the hotel doors.

After his second drink, he used the lobby bathroom and then returned to where he could see anyone coming into the hotel. He reflected on the photograph Lisa had shown him back at the hospital. In all likelihood, the Terrordon would find a way

to blend into the crowd of faces spilling into the reception area.

He would need to look for Joe. That was the only option right now.

Beyond the doors, a scuffle broke out. The sound of two well-dressed young men fighting. From their slurred speech and aimless attempts at throwing punches, it seemed they had been drinking.

Jacob looked away from the spectacle that hotel staff were attempting to solve and found himself staring at the solitary figure seated alone at a table by one of the large bay windows.

The figure that walked through the haunted landscape of the Sleepwalker was here.

Jacob carefully crossed the room and sat down opposite him.

The man looked up from his drink. "Do I know you friend?" His smile somehow sick and weak.

"It's Joe isn't it." Jacob replied, not offering his hand. Something about the man, his skin, sent a wave of repulsion through him. "Actually, you're not Joe are you? A recent unauthorised departure from Rampworth? That's about it, I guess."

Now the man spoke again but his voice had taken on an uncomfortable, bird-like quality. "Now, friend. You've gone and upset Joe. You see he's just the guy who lives inside. Helps me keep everything straight and proper. Kind of like my older brother. Handing on his timely advice for when things attempt to fall apart."

Like some magician performing a trick, some sleight of hand performance, Jacob watched as the Sleepwalker rose, producing a pair of surgical shears. A light glinting on metal and turning precious. In one moment, the Sleepwalker

removed the head of the woman sat at the next table in a way that reminded Jacob of how his mother had once clipped roses in their garden.

A wave of blood, hot and thick washed out, drowning the white table cloth in a sea of red and carrying away the wine glasses to wear they smashed on the floor.

And as Jacob began to feel the world around him start to swim out of focus, the cutting and tearing began.

"And you, my friend," said the Sleepwalker, in that same bird-like tone, "Well, I'll save you for last."

chapter twenty

Greg Ray

HE KNEW THERE WAS a lot of blood, but he didn't feel anything. Crimson red. His ears were ringing. His head was pounding fit to burst.

A man's face looked down at Jacob. The man had a friendly accent. He was saying something to someone. But his words came through all muffled by the ringing in Jacob's ears.

"Oh, that's awful," the man was saying. "That looks bad. You shouldn't have done that, mate. You didn't have to shoot him, for God's sake. Ugh, he's really bleeding out."

Jacob closed his eyes.

"Finally, some privacy!"

Jacob glanced round at the hostages all around the Clock Bar, not to mention Sleepwalker's henchmen.

Sleepwalker eyed him coyly. "Oh, ig-nore them, honey. Tonight is all about me and you," and he punctuated each syllable with a tap on Jacob's chest with his finger.

Sleepwalker tilted his head with a snap toward Jacob. He lowered his head and looked up under his brows at him. There was a mischievous glint in his green eyes. "How about a

highball?" "Bartender," he called out, "one Sex on the Beach. What'll you have, Jay?" Sleepwalker nudged his shoulder.

Jacob didn't answer.

"Never mind. Make that two for Sex on Beach. And I like a real Beach, so it better be red. Really red." And he tapped Jacob's chest again. "Red red red red red! Because baby's in a mood." He spun around on his heels and stopped suddenly. Then he threw head back and laughed.

Sleepwalker swung his arms wide and surveyed the bar patrons. "Well, here we are! And I'm sure everybody here knows my boy, Jacob Heath."

Sleepwalker pounced over to one of the hostages. "What did I just say?"

The man was shaken by this assault. "I— I don't know."

Sleepwalker flipped up the man's tie. "Disappointing. Isn't it disappointing? Nobody listens to anybody anymore. What about you?" He pegged another hostage who tried to shrink away.

"Forget it." He turned back to Jacob. "Well, what do you have to say for yourself Jacob Heath? This is all your fault, isn't it? Everybody is waiting on your every word. Maybe you'd like to tell them what a vigilante lover you are."

Sleepwalker stopped in front of another patron. "What did I just say?"

"Vigilante lover."

"Who is?"

"Him. Mr. Heath."

"Excellent. Thank you, Miss Whateveryournameis. You are free to go. Because I think this party has gotten boring, don't you?"

One of Sleepwalker's men stepped forward and escorted the woman to the door and out.

Sleepwalker turned his head with a snap to one of the cocktail waitress. As if someone had just told him she was there.

He walked up to her and planted his feet apart.

"Hey, there darlin', ya'll got any real food around here." He leaned in closer and she leaned back. "Hostage takin' can really work up an appetite, you know. How about some of that bourbon steak?"

The cocktail waitress didn't know what she was supposed to do. The husky voice, the sudden Southern drawl made it sound like this was some kind of bad joke.

"Well, go on! That's right. Fetch me somethin'. Because I hate waiting."

The woman fairly ran for the door.

"And don't you forget my bourbon!" he shouted after she was already gone. He chuckled to himself. "She ain't comin' back, you know."

Things got quiet. Of course, the cocktail waitress really did not come back. Sleepwalker spent some time pacing around the room, occasionally hassling people that caught his attention for some reason. Clearly, the men you had taken over here were waiting for something.

Finally, one of the men posted at the door came over and said something to Sleepwalker. Sleepwalker moved swiftly over to Jacob.

"Why the long face? I know, I know, this is tedious. Fresh air? Yes, let's get some fresh air."

— "Oh, this looks bad. Ugh, he's really bleeding out. You've bollocksed the whole thing up now, right enough. Why'd you have to shot him?"

— Jacob's ears still rang from the gun's loud report. Shots fired. A body crumpled to the floor right there in front of him, bleeding out. A

spray of red on the curtain behind.

—Jacob didn't know what was happening. Had they been shot? Had he been shot? He looked down to see if he was bleeding.

When Jacob and Sleepwalker exited the bar, he was stunned. The old lobby was busy with hotel patrons going to and fro, consulting their schedules, talking in small groups. *Didn't these people know there was a hostage situation right there in the bar?*

The minute they stepped into the lobby area, a booming voice came from above.

"Sleepwalker! I've been waiting for you." A darkly caped figure stepped forward on the balcony above the lobby. It was Terrordon, of course.

"And I've been waiting for you", replied Sleepwalker. "Now really, isn't this congenial? But we should sync calendars or something. Soo much less waiting!"

"Let the hostages go. There's no way out for you, Sleepwalker."

Jacob noticed that none of the patrons in the lobby had beat a retreat when this weirdness started. Everyone was just where they were and all eyes were on Terrordon. That couldn't be good, he realized.

Terrordon seemed to realize it too. Two black sticks came up into his hands from somewhere and he held them up with his arms crossed before him. They sparked to life.

All the "patrons" in the lobby moved as one, dropping papers and schedules, pulling open their coats, revealing every one of them a gun. One man reached into the bouquet at the center of the room and slide out a snub rifle with a bump stock.

Terrordon threw the two black sticks spinning down into the room. They erupted like roman candles spraying hot

sparks in every direction on the way down. A few in the lobby got off some rounds, but nobody could take aim as they were forced by the spray of burning sparks from the room. A few fell to the ground, downed by razored stars thrown from the balcony. One unlucky henchman who tried to come out from under the balcony got jackbooted in the face as Terrordon spread his cape and swooped down from the balcony.

The black sticks were spinning harmlessly at floor level now, no threat to the boots of the Terrordon. The fallen henchman was not so fortunate — he got one of the spinner's fire full in the face once he hit the ground. His screams were enough to keep anyone from trying to reenter the room immediately.

Sleepwalker, after the introductions were over, had walked Jacob right back into the bar. He relieved one of this men of his pistol.

The bar was a small area but with some conveniently placed pillars. He took up position by the far end of the bar and with a gesture the hostages were arranged so as to flank he and Jacob on both sides.

Everything was in position when the bar door blew off its hinges and fell. The Terrordon stepped out of the curling smoke, one caped arm before him. There was no telling what weapon he might have been holding in his other hand.

"Sleepwalker!"

Sleepwalker's men were ringed around among the hostages but nobody attempted to do anything.

"Dinosaur man!" shouted Sleepwalker as if he had just spotted an old friend.

Terrordon who was already frowning, frowned harder.

"Just two words with you, Dino Boy, that's all I ask. Are you ready?" He paused for effect and bugged out his green eyes. "Side door."

Someone grabbed Jacob from the side and he and Sleepwalker were whisked off behind the hostages and out the side door of the bar.

There was really only one direction to go from there and that was up. So, Jacob was hustled in Sleepwalker's wake up the stairs that came down right there. Behind them was the sound of gunfire and now also sirens somewhere.

They ran at a jog and entered on what looked like an endless hall of mirrors. Sleepwalker made them all stop here, he said, "to admire the view." And then they ran on — deeper and also farther up into the extensive grounds of the old St. Francis hotel.

Jacob knew he should be feeling something — pain from his own wounds, horror at the bloody scene before him — but he didn't feel anything. No, that wasn't true. He felt numb. He looked down. He had sunk to the floor on this knees, but he was not bleeding. In his hand was a gun. Why did he have a gun?

They were holed up in a snug suite of meeting rooms up on the twelfth floor. Sleepwalker, who was calling himself "Doug" at that particular moment, was rigging something with a gas canister in the so-called Study Room.

"Superheroes? Those aren't heroes. Vigilantes. Criminals is what they are. Everyone of them." He twisted hard on something attached to the canister. "Because there is such a thing as law and order, you know. It's downright unAmerican that's what it is."

He had finished attaching whatever it was to the valve mechanism on the top of the canister. "You know, if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself."

"I'll tell you what I think." He smacked the top of the canister with the flat of his hand. "These creeps are destroying our way of life. Just look at 'em. Dressing up in all colors and prancing around with sticks and whips and guns and such. Sweet Jesus! People that want to draw attention to themselves like that, they already got something screwy in the head. You let a few of them run around like that, call them heroes, get a thank you from the mayor — and pretty soon everybody's out there and it's like some kind of goddamn Halloween. And there ain't no normal anymore."

Jacob didn't know this persona of Sleepwalker, but he felt uncomfortably like he knew this sort of man — the kind that could be saying those things while setting a death trap.

One of his henchmen came over to report. Sleepwalker snapped to attention and Jacob was made to join him in the hallway. Jacob had to stand in one particular spot and face just such a way, while Sleepwalker did likewise. Sleepwalker had his gun was out. The few henchment that had accompanied them up here were nowhere in sight.

The double doors to the suite burst open and Terrordon appeared in action-ready stance, one caped arm in front of him.

"Oh no! It's Terrordon!" cried Sleepwalker in unconvincing surprise. "Quickly, this way!"

He ran with Jacob in tow back into the Study room, Terrordon in close pursuit. But when Terrordon entered, the door closed behind him with a clank.

Sleepwalker stood in the only other doorway which let

onto the Library Room. Jacob had been shoved on into that room and into the hands of a waiting henchman.

Sleepwalker held up one hand like a showman and clicked the remote switch he held. The gas canister valve blew clean off and gas started venting wildly into the room.

Terrordon was choked by the gas immediately. He staggered.

"Not sleeping gas this time, Terrordon. This time we play for keeps. No third act for you!" Sleepwalker coughed on his last words and took a step back from the room.

Terrordon stood his ground in spite of the gas. He held up one gloved hand like a showman and spread two fingers to reveal a mesh webbing.

"Hand mask," he said with what must have been his last clear breath. Then clapped his hand over his mouth, drew a filtered breath and came at them.

Several razor disks flew threw the opening before Sleepwalker's waiting henchmen could yank him back and secure the door — with Terrordon still on the other side.

"He doesn't get out of that room alive!" cried Sleepwalker, hustling Jacob to the hallway. Two henchmen fell in to follow them, but Sleepwalker said no. "You are here until he is dead. You kill him. Now."

As he was saying this, a curve of blade punched out through the Study door. I was very obviously the saw-toothed black and white cranial crest from Terrordon's outfit.

Jacob looked down and saw that he was holding a gun. He knew what that meant. Why did he have a gun? I shot him. It was me. Why did I shoot him?

High over Union Square, Jacob looked out over the city. No

fog tonight. It seemed that Sleepwalker was just running now without a plan. He had brought him here at gun point and they had come all the way up to the Imperial floor, but when they got to this room — opulent chamber projecting out over the square from the thirty-second floor, they just stopped here. Sleepwalker seemed at first captivated by the view — through floor to ceiling windows on three sides and seemed to forget everything else — just as he had for one moment in the hallway of mirrors. But here, at a certain point, he had just sat down on the floor. He looked up at Jacob with bright green eyes and a smile and offered to draw him a picture. That's what he was doing now, lying on his stomach, drawing intently on a hotel notepad. At the same time, Sleepwalker had also lost all interest in his gun or its whereabouts — and that gun was safely tucked in Jacob's pocket.

But now Jacob wasn't quite sure what he was supposed to do. He had fallen into a reverie of his own looking out over the city. Why was Sleepwalker so obsessed with Terrordon? Probably everything he had done was meant to lure Terrordon here, to confront him — not even just to kill him — to confront him and then kill him. But why? Maybe their paths need never have crossed, if Sleepwalker had not always been gunning for him. Let the vigilante be vigilant and stay out of his way. We all do wrong in some way or other, but everyone wants someone to stand up for what's right — well, as long as it doesn't interfere with our own wrongdoing. That was as true for Terrordon as it was for Harvey. Jacob realized he understood even less about why people get in the way of such people as he understood what made those people who they are. This whole city. He didn't understand any of it.

An elevator dinged somewhere on the floor.

Jacob turned from the window and was drawn up short.

Sleepwalker was standing right there. He smiled, squinting up his green eyes. "I drew you a picture."

Jacob took the paper. "We have to go right away now. But have to stick together." He didn't know where he was going with this, but it seemed like the right thing to do — to get somewhere out of the way.

But something on the notepad he was holding drew Jacob's eye. He had been expecting some stick figures such as a 6 year old might draw. But on the note pad was a dark mass, prone and twisted. And it was scratched over with many red lines. "What. What is this?"

Sleepwalker smiled again and then unsmiled. His stone green eyes met Jacob's. "Your death."

"Sleepwalker!" Terrordon stood at the far end of the room.

Sleepwalker sprang to his feet, green eyes wide. This was no staged moment. No henchmen, no gas, no escape route. Sleepwalker didn't even have his own gun.

Terrordon held a weighted cord in one hand, coiled length of it in the other. As he strode forward, he began swinging it around over his head. There was no place to get away here — on all three sides of them was nothing but floor-to-ceiling windows, thirty-two stories up.

Terrordon dropped suddenly to one knee and swung low. Sleepwalker jittered a moment but the sweeping cord caught him in the shin. Jacob jumped wide as the weighted end swerved round — and then round and round, quickly binding Sleepwalker's legs together. The weight spun faster and closer until it slammed Sleepwalkers shins with a loud crack. Sleepwalker collapsed to the floor.

Terrordon approached, stood over him — a prehistoric reptile over its fallen prey. There was no mercy in this

physiognomy of a creature so ancient mercy had not yet been born into the world.

Sleepwalker winced and clutched with one arm round his side. "Oh, what's this?" Sleepwalker said, drawing his arm back out. He grimaced. "A taser!"

The electrodes shot out and pinned Terrordon right in the chest.

Sleepwalker laughed excitedly. "Oo ouch, right in the pteradactyl."

But Terrordon swatted the taser cables away, uneffected.

Sleepwalker tossed the taser and tried to scramble upright, but Terrordon was on him and punched him back down. He put his boot down on Sleepwalker's throat.

No one had been paying any attention to Jacob, but he had not run. How could he? This was Terrordon bringing his arch-enemy down. Jacob was rooted to the spot. But now he was faced with a question he had not considered. Was Terrordon just going to kill Sleepwalker like that? And was Jacob going to watch him do it?

Sleepwalker sputtered under the weight of Terrordon's foot.

Jacob didn't want to see it, but he couldn't just walk away either.

"You're not going to just kill him, are you? He's sick. He needs help."

Terrordon didn't take his eyes off Sleepwalker. "You should go. Alert the policet to come up here."

"But you're not going to kill him, right?"

"This nasty piece of work? Of course not. Why ever would I do that?" Terrordon ground his boot harder into Sleepwalker's neck, making him writhe in agony and grope

silently for air.

Sleepwalker sputtered and beat Terrordon's boot with his fists. Terrordon relented.

Sleepwalker gasped for air. "Don't do it, Jacob. He'll kill me. Don't leave."

Jacob took a step back toward the door.

"You know he'll kill me. And he'll be gone. You won't find him. And who is he? You're never gonna know. Never."

Jacob took another step back, put his hands in his pockets. The gun was there.

Terrordon was unwrapping another length of cord from his belt. The absurdity of his outfit was made more absurd in this gilded room. *How do you become someone like that — who stands out and stands up against all odds?*

Sleepwalker was staring intently at him. "I know you can do it, Jacob. You have to."

Terrordon stopped what he was doing, dropped the cord. His caped shoulders rose as he turned toward to Jacob with new intensity.

But it was too late. Jacob's unsteady hands held the gun trained on him.

"Shoot him!" Sleepwalker shouted, "Just shoot him!"

"Jacob." Terrordon's voice was calm, steady.

Jacob was immobilized. Sleepwalker thrashed at his captor's feet, just babbling now "Red red red—"

"Jacob!"

"Red red red red red red."

Terrordon's hand seemed to move at his utility belt.

The shot rang out. Terrordon reeled back and crumpled to the floor.

Jacob sank to his knees. There was a lot of blood where

Terrordon had fallen. Red. Blood red. His ears were ringing from the gun's loud report. He should feel something but he didn't.

Sleepwalker was up, towering over him. Jacob looked up. He could hardly hear what Sleepwalker was saying to him.

"Oh, that's bloody awful. That looks awful. You shouldn't have done that, mate. Really shoot him, I mean. God, he's bleeding out."

Jacob looked down. The pistol was in his hand. Why did he shoot him? The gun felt warm. He didn't expect that.

Sleepwalker was still talking. "Listen, I'll find some towels or something. Because that's terrible. I feel bad about this. And what is the matter with you? Bollocksed it up now, right enough."

Jacob closed his eyes. Soon after that, he let the gun slip to the floor.

"Hands in the air! Hands in the air! Do it now!"

A swarm of armed policemen in tactical gear advanced on Jacob, shouting orders. He was quickly hoisted up and pulled to one side, cuffed. Someone was reading him his rights.

"Sleepwalker is the one you want," he said. But no one was listening, no one was asking any questions. They had their man. Time to clear the area, bustle him off and book him.

Jacob was dazed, crestfallen.

"Wait. Terrordon." He strove to catch a glimpse. Would he see his face? "Who."

But Terrordon wasn't there where he had fallen. He was gone. Just gone.

As Jacob stood with his escort waiting for an elevator, the chill draft crossed the back of his neck. Somewhere a window stood open thirty-two floors up and a dark prehistoric shadow

soared against the San Francisco night.