



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:

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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

T Granger

AUGUST 2017

The phone on the other end of the line rang out once more as the car pulled up to the kerb. It was the third time that morning that Pete had tried to call Jacob, with no success. While this wasn't unusual during downtime or even when he was writing, it wasn't like Jacob to be so unavailable during book tours.

Turning off the ignition, Pete grabbed his phone and got out of the car.

They had arrived back at San Francisco early yesterday evening and both men had gone their separate ways. Pete to his partner, Jon and Jacob to his home before visiting his sister and her family. That had been the last he had heard from Jacob.

Pete entered the building and headed towards the lift that would take him up to Jacobs apartment.

He had called the man an hour ago to confirm that he would be at the bookstore for their fourth reading of the tour,

at 11:45 as planned. When Jacob hadn't answered, he had left it half an hour and tried again. When that call went unanswered and his voicemail message to call him back immediately went ignored, Pete decided to go to Jacobs apartment to see if everything was alright.

The ride up seemed to take forever, Pete's foot impatiently tapping on the floor as he travelled up. A small grunt of relief sounded in the back of his throat when the lift came to a halt and the doors finally slid open. He walked the short distance down the hallway and stopped at Jacobs door, rapping on the wood, loud enough to be heard if Jacob was at the back of the flat.

To Pete's surprise, the door opened almost instantly, as if Jacob had been expecting him.

"Come in," the man said flatly, stepping aside to allow Pete entrance.

Pete walked into the flat, eyeing Jacob as he did so, and waited for Jacob to shut the door before he spoke.

"I've been trying to call you" he stated, simply.

Jacob just shrugged in response, and Pete really had a good look at him.

Jacob looked like hell.

Pete knew he got like this, restless, in between books. When writing a book, he threw himself into the project, giving it everything he had. He immersed himself in the work, delving into the life of the person he was writing about.

This time had been no different. Jacob had looked into the personal life and professional life of Lance Armstrong.

He had spent time in Plano, Texas drinking numerous cups of coffee at Juan Pelota Cafe. He had taken up swimming, running and cycling, entering into two different marathons.

He had trained hard and taken time out to complete the

Bourg-en-Bresse to Saint-Étienne stage of the Tour de France. He had visited many different support groups for testicular cancer and discovered everything he could about performance-enhancing drugs, specifically Erythropoietin.

This project had been gruelling but he had come out on top and the book truly was a masterpiece. All of that hard work had paid off.

Personally, Pete worried about Jacob during these times. He seemed to get obsessed, sometimes to the point where he pushed his body too far. Twice, in the past few years, Jacob had found himself hospitalised because he had immersed himself so far into the character he hadn't realised that he was overexerting himself.

But if Pete thought Jacob was bad when writing, then between projects was worse. Directly after a book was finished was the worst time, as far as Pete was concerned. At this period, Jacob seemed to become restless, almost lost in life and his usual healthy lifestyle (the previous trips to the hospital notwithstanding) seemed to get pushed aside. Jacob exercised less, drank more and wasn't overly concerned about what he put in his mouth to sate his hunger. His normally cheery nature turned snappish for a week or two and he seemed unmotivated to do much. But then the negotiations for the book tours would start and he would snap back to his usual self and all would be fine.

Today though was something different. Today, Jacob looked like he hadn't slept in a week.

"Are you unwell?" he asked instantly, mentally running through appointments he would have to reschedule while Jacob recuperated.

"I'm fine" Jacob replied, his voice mumbled and still flat. He pushed past Pete and walked over to the armchair,

dropping into it gracelessly.

Pete took another look at him. He had changed clothes from yesterday, but his hair, usually styled neatly, was an oily mess and he clearly hadn't shaved since yesterday morning.

"You need to go shower and shave. We have to leave in forty-five minutes."

Again, Pete was met with a shrug and Jacob let his head fall back so he was looking up at the ceiling.

"Is this all that there is to do?" he asked, the first full sentence he had uttered since Pete arrived. "Haven't we talked about the book enough as it is?"

Instantly, Pete was worried. Jacob liked talking about the books. He worked hard on them and was proud of the final result. He was always eager to push them. Especially this early in the piece. They had only done three stops; not even a quarter of the way through the tour.

"No, no we haven't. We have hardly even started talking about the book. Are you sure you're alright?"

Pete was answered with a frustrated sigh. "This will be the fourth day now, saying the same things, answering the same questions, signing the same damn signatures. It's over, it's done. There is nothing else to say. Quite frankly, I'm completely over it."

Pete tried, he really did, to try and see where Jacob was coming from, but he was coming up blank. This had never been a reaction to a book tour before. And where was it coming from, even? Jacob had been heavily involved in the negotiations of the tour. He had had a strong say in how many readings and Q&A sessions he did, and where. He had dictated how many days he would work straight and how many days he would take off in between. He knew exactly what he was getting involved in and he had clearly been

enthusiastic all the way and happily signed the contract to do said shows.

"We have an obligation to fill..."

"Fuck the obligation" Jacob yelled, suddenly standing up from his chair. His posture was no longer disinterested. It was straight and tense. His facial expression clearly showed that he was angry.

"Do you want to tell me what is going on?" Pete asked, trying to sound calm and unthreatening. Evidently, something was wrong, despite Jacobs earlier claims, and Pete needed to find out what it was. He wasn't going to accomplish that by reacting aggressively.

"What is going on, Pete is that I don't want to do this anymore. I am bored, am over it. It has run its course. The first stop was recorded. Upload it to YouTube, or you go and answer the questions, you should know all the answers by now. You have heard them all plenty enough times."

It was at that point that Pete began to feel his composure start to crack. Whatever problem was affecting Jacob needed to be resolved, and quickly, but that wasn't going to happen if Jacob wasn't going to be straight-out honest with him.

"We are not uploading the readings, nor is anyone else answering your questions for you. Unless there is an actual, legitimate reason that you can not do the session, you need to go shower, make yourself presentable and be at the bookstore at 11:45 as planned, by you." During his speech, Pete had straightened his own posture and taken a step towards Jacob. There was a time to be Jacobs friend and there was a time to be his agent. Now was the time for the latter.

Jacob glared down at Pete. "You cannot order me aro..."

"I don't have to order you" Pete practically yelled, his composure completely cracking and frustration and anger

seeping out. "You signed a contract, one that you helped compose, which you have to fulfil."

A tense silence filled the flat, both men glaring at each other, for several long seconds. Finally, Jacob stepped back and looked away from Pete.

"You know what? I've had enough of this. I'm going out." And with that, Jacob stalked towards the door, grabbing his wallet and Jacket and left the apartment leaving Pete still standing in the middle of the room, alone.

At first, he was speechless. He still couldn't believe what had just happened. What had just happened? There had been no signs that this was heading in the direction that it had. Pete had noticed that Jacob had been feeling a bit out of sorts, but he had put it down to the pressure of the book and coming down from the all the training he had put himself through in order to write the book. Surely this was some sort of joke, a test?

He stood there for another minute or so before his vocal cords finally started to work again.

"Fffuck" he groaned when he realised that Jacob was for real. He really was going to throw the whole thing in.

With a mixture of frustration and exhaustion, Pete ran his hands over his face and then to the back of his thinning hair. He had a feeling it was going to be more than a bit grey before this was all over. He took a deep breath and then decided that this was not the time to ruminate about his hair. He had phone calls to make.

chapter three

Elizabeth Mead

THE FUNNY THING ABOUT San Francisco weather in August is that you never knew what to expect. It could be frigid and windy one day and two days later, you'd be basking in the park in lovely 75 degree sunny weather at noon. And late that afternoon, you'd be back to sweaters because of frigid bone chilling wind and fog spilling in through the channel that separated the Marin headlands from the City shores. And that fog could drill right into your very being. Mark Twain was right when he quipped, "The coldest winter I ever spent was summer in San Francisco." You just never knew what you were going to get. So, when you woke up and saw the sun streaming solid and bright into your window on a summer morning, you jumped out of bed, got dressed, and did your best to take advantage of a good day of sunshine.

That Tuesday broke sunny with blue skies and a forecast of 78 degrees. This was a perfect opportunity for a brisk walk to clear his mind and figure out his next steps, so Jacob set out for one of his favorite restaurants. Golden Era, was an easy fifteen minute Uber ride from his North Beach flat, but the

forty-five minute power walk. The amped up adrenaline and endorphin rush, combined with a clear sky and almost balmy weather was almost too much to bear.

The Golden Era was crowded, as usual, with a waiting line spilling over to the sidewalk. But luckily, the bar counter usually had a free space and Jacob was able to find a spot at the far corner inside.

While Jacob waited for his order of Curry Okra to arrive, he glanced around the packed restaurant and then out through the large picture window to the people milling around outside of the restaurant.

A woman in a deep plum jacket and impossibly high stiletto heels was deep in conversation on her cell phone. Her purse dangled off of her opposite shoulder via a narrow strap. Before Jacob could even formulate the observation to his brain – Gee, you are just asking for someone to swipe that purse off of your shoulder – two hooded figures swept by on a small motorbike. The one riding in the back reached out with two arms towards the woman, snatching the purse with one arm and shoving the woman's shoulder with the other, sending her sideways careening into a large metal trash receptacle.

The motorbike picked up speed but just before it turned left at the opposite corner, a young, athletic looking guy cocked his hand back and snapped what looked like a football in a perfectly executed spiral that drilled right into the motorbike's front wheel. The driver lost control and both men toppled over.

“Whoa. Sweet pass. Stanford could have used him last week against Arizona State.” Two younger, techy looking fellows at the table behind where Jacob sat continued their meal and matter of factly discussed what was happening outside their window. “Look at those two scramble away and,

heh heh, they even forgot to take the gal's purse. What a fail day they are having."

"Wow. Look at those two Japanese chicks taking selfies of themselves in front of the gal that just got creamed." "Yup. They're going to be able to tell their friends back home about the big heist they witnessed on their vacation."

"Look! The boy of the hour just picked up his ball and the purse and is going over to the gal. He pulled a great Terrordon today. Let's get back to work."

Terrordon. Jacob remembered a few stories that had surfaced well over fifteen years ago. The Terrordon – some guy who wore a caped crusader outfit that appeared off and on for a hand full of years back around 2000. What had happened to him? Did anybody ever find out who he was?

Jacob did a quick Google search on his phone and saw a few hits for Terrordon, but they were mostly hits for some hip hop dude or a Pokemon type of character. But then, several links down he saw an item dated in 2005 that described a mysterious costumed man who had helped rescue a litter of puppies from a basement fire. And then another link a year before that about someone who had beat up a guy who was pushing drugs near a high school in the Richmond.

Was it just those two incidents? There had to be more, but Jacob's memory was a little foggy. Jacob pulled up the San Francisco Chronicle's website and tried a few searches there but came up blank. Who would remember? Who would know?

All of the folks he'd worked with at the San Francisco Chronicle had retired, moved away or died, so that was a dead end. But he was having dinner Saturday night with his good friends, the Hunters. They were both in the news business and had been around for a while. Maybe he could get some good intel from them.

Taking San Francisco's BART train over to Oakland, Jacob landed at the Rockridge station and walked the three short blocks to the Hunter's home. For all the bad stories about Oakland being a continual crime scene, the Rockridge area felt like a comfortable and calm slice of suburbia. Neat lawns fronted somewhat charming homes with deep lots and an array of late model cars, either SUV's or small Prius sedans, parked on the curbs or in driveways suggested families and people who worked.

"Hey! It's the Jimmy-man! Still drinking the same blue bullet Coors? Think I will have one too. How's the world of television news? And where's Joyce? It's been a while since I've seen either of you."

"Well, you know the news business. It keeps happening. I'm on call right now, so I hope nothing big happens or I am going to have to make this a short party night." Just then Joyce, tall and lanky, came out from the kitchen with a drink in one hand and a plate of bruschetta in the other. "Jacob! It's been ages! It's going to be so much fun catching up! Here, have one of these. It's my new recipe."

As they settled in to talk, Jacob wasted no time in bringing up his subject. "Do either of you remember any news stories from about 2000 to 2005 about a guy who called himself the Terrordon? He went around doing good deeds and stopping bad guys. Or at least, that's what he said he did."

"Oh my God! That's so funny that you brought him up! I was just about to put together a special about vigilantes. You know, there's a guy who rides BART all over the city and he seems to be waiting for something to happen so he can be a hero. But this guy doesn't wear a costume. Jimmy, what was that guy's name? Do you remember?"

“Yeah. I remember vaguely something about that. I think he was into Parkour. You know, that crazy French sport that Raymond Belle and his son, David did. The Yamakasi was David’s group. They’d plot out courses in the City and then race through and go up and over whatever was in your path. You just conquered everything in your way. Intense sport. That was real big in the late ‘90s as an extreme sport.”

“Didn’t this guy have a costume that made him look like a Pokemon character? And *nun chucks*, didn’t he carry those?”

“Nah,” Jimmy interjected, “he used those ninja stars and throwing knives, Joyce. Except I don’t think he ever used them – he just showed a few people that he had them. What he used a lot was his grappling gun. Guess he got a little tire of the Parkour rules.”

Something nudged Jacob’s memory. “And he had an armored car of sorts. And a utility belt.”

“What a Batman rip off! I don’t even know if he actually did any real saving. Think he just beat up a few bad guys and claimed he was cleaning up the City,” Jimmy offered.

“But what happened to him? I mean he would pop up every so often but then went completely dark after about 2005. Did anybody ever find out who he was?”

Joyce placed a large platter of roasted chicken and root vegetables, a spinach and feta salad, and a bowl of curried rice on the nearby dinner table and she and Jacob settled into their seats as Jim opened a bottle of Tribunal red. “The problem is that 2000 was an election year. And remember how crazy that was, especially at the end. We were all concentrating on learning about hanging chads and butterfly ballots from Florida. Nobody was really paying attention to local stuff. And then, just when things were settling down, we get September 11th and then all the news went national news again, nothing

local unless it was related to terrorism.

“We are bringing in some shrinks for our special on vigilantism to discuss the psychological profile of vigilantes. And what drives them,” Joyce said. “Did you know that the largest vigilance committee was here in San Francisco during the Gold Rush times? The city was overrun by bad guys and it really was the wild west here. Almost eight thousand members worked together to get rid of people they thought were terrorizing the townspeople. They hung four people, but they drove out scores of gamblers and people who they suspected were thieves. Gosh, I wonder where those people are now. We could sure use them in Oakland!”

“Joyce, only you would pull this type of information out of your ass,” Jim added.

Joyce continued, “But, since I am doing this special, I think we should include this Terrordon guy. I mean, yes, vigilantism is supposed to be a mob action, but isn’t that what these hero types do? They take the law into their own hands because they think the police aren’t doing the job right.”

“But, Jacob wondered out loud, “what happened to this Terrordon? He never got caught. We never knew his name. I want to know more. Did he take on the wrong dude and end up as a dead John Doe in the morgue? Is he still around somewhere in the City – heck, he’d be about 60 now, practically a geezer getting ready to retire. I want to find him.”

“Well, you know, Jacob, Facebook and Twitter didn’t go really main stream until ten years ago. Before that it was MySpace and just the kids were into it. But now, practically everyone understands social media and you have so much more access to information. I think, Jacob, that you ought to dig around and find out who this guy was and where he is now. Wouldn’t that be a fantastic hook for my special, Jimmy?”

“Joyce, what, are you signaling to me that this is now a closed subject for me because you’ve scooped me again? It’s a good thing that you do news specials and I do actual news. But I think I liked it better when we both worked at the same station.”

By the time he was on BART and headed back into the City to his flat, Jacob was furiously taking down notes and making a rough outline. He was feeling that familiar and distinct BUZZ that he got when he was about to dive into an interesting project. Another book. About the Terrordon. He could do it. He WOULD do it. He NEEDED to do it. And this wouldn’t just be a biography like his last two books. This would be a mystery case too. That he would solve.

And maybe the Jimmy man was right on target - that this Terrordon was into Parkour. He’d track those local players down and they might be able to provide a lead. That was it! That’s where he’d find him.

While Jacob was coming up the escalator from his BART stop, he pulled out his cell phone and hit his agent’s speed dial number, but it went straight to voicemail. “Pete. I know you had to clean up a lot of mess for me. But you already know all of my reasons. Now listen to this. I have a new biography that I am going to begin. You’re going to love this... Do you remember anything about The Terrordon?”

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

Kimberlee Gerstmann

JACOB SHIFTED IN HIS sleep, trying to avoid the sliver of light that fell across his face. Unable to move in just the right direction, he slowly opened one eye, in hopes of determining the source. *Of course*, he thought. The blackout curtains on the southern-facing window had gapped, allowing the sunshine to blaze through. He grabbed his phone and looked at the time... 8:02. *Great*. The universe was telling him to get moving.

He swung his legs over the side of the bed, simultaneously scrolling through news and social media notifications to see if he had missed anything the few hours he'd been asleep. Not finding anything of interest, he tossed the phone aside. He felt drained. The lack of sleep was really starting to get to him. He rubbed his hand across his jaw noting the tension residing there. He felt certain he'd been grinding his teeth during his brief night of sleep. Jacob made his way to the bathroom and plucked the bottle of tension-headache relief Tylenol out of the medicine cabinet. He popped three tablets into his hand and tossed them into his mouth. Running the tap, he drank cool water from his cupped palm. He slid out of his boxers

and turned on the shower, planning to rid himself of the mental haze.

“Alexa, shuffle dance music,” he commanded as he slipped into the pulsing water.

Thirty minutes later, Jacob felt as good as new. Dressed and ready for the day, he twirled his favorite pen between his fingers as he mapped out the plan from his shower-thinking and revelations. A J-Lo song, Villain, triggered the idea. He realized if he couldn’t get a normal source, he’d go toward the abnormal and interview villains who’d been taken down by Terrordon. A bit of internet research took place as he ate a couple of pieces of buttered toast and a Granny Smith apple. Then he started making calls.

By late afternoon, Jacob had half a pad of notes scribbled and several calls crossed off his original list that had been modified multiple times. He was so deep in thought that, when his phone rang it startled him, and he dropped it into his lap. Seeing Em’s face on the screen, he snatched it up and answered the call.

“How’s my favorite brother?” Emily asked.

“Uh... I’m your *only* brother,” he stood up to stretch his legs.

“Details, schmetails. Your pickiness ruins the compliment.”

“Whatever. How are you doing? How’s Pacey?”

“He’s great. I’m fine. And Tom is as well... not that you asked about him,” she answered; a small hint of sarcasm at the end.

“Don’t start on me, Em. I’m not in the mood for it today,” Jacob sighed.

Emmy, hearing her brother’s tone, let it go and shifted gears. Concerned, she asked, “What’s going on?”

“I told you that I was working on the story about

Terrordon. It felt like I'd reached a sticking point, and that things had stalled."

"You always feel that way," she started.

"BUT," he interrupted, "I had a breakthrough this morning and ran down some new leads."

"That's great," she finished, ignoring his brusqueness.

"Yes, and no," he stated. "It is great because I think I have a fabulous source that I'm meeting with tomorrow. But on the other hand, he's a mental case... AND talking with him means that I have to go inside Rampworth State Hospital."

"Oh god," Emmy's words rushed out in a gasp.

"Yeah."

Silence hung between them for a few moments.

"How are you going to...?" she started.

"I don't know."

More silence.

"Well, if anyone can overcome this, you can," she offered.

"Overcome my greatest fear... virtually overnight?" he challenged.

"Yes." She sounded more certain now. "When you put your mind to it, you can do anything. Just look at what you did with the Milk bio. You went so far into that world that you had a relationship you would have never considered in a million years before that."

Jacob considered it for a second. Memories of Travis flooded him at once. He hated to admit that he missed him. Shaking those thoughts from his mind, he refocused. "Yes, but this is completely different. I've been afraid of mental hospitals and the mentally ill for as long as I can remember. You know how bad it is."

"I know. I remember. But that is the past, and you have to let it go. This won't be the same. It is a new scenario, and one

where you will be safe the entire time.”

Of course he knew that, but the feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach did not dissolve.

“Thanks, sis.”

“You can do this. I have faith in you,” she replied. “Call me when you’re done.”

“Will do.”

“Love you,” she said.

“Love you, too.”

He set the phone down on the desk and re-read his notes. Rampworth State Hospital for the criminally mentally ill. Dr. Lisa Warne. He circled the name on the paper in front of him. The Sleepwalker. Dissociative Identity Disorder. He shuddered.

Jacob’s stomach felt like it was filled with lumps of lead even though he hadn’t eaten since the day before. The drive to Rampworth had been unpleasant, and he’d been forced to make two bathroom stops to relieve his nervous bowels. During the trip, his mind had summoned up all kinds of nasty tricks and replayed nightmare images from childhood featuring his much-older cousin Stan... who was both physically and mentally impaired and liked to torture Jacob when the adults weren’t in the room.

Outside the gates of Rampworth, Jacob sat for a few minutes, collecting himself and trying to control his breathing before he went to meet with Dr. Lisa Warne.

“I’m Dr. Warne. It’s nice to meet you.” Lisa Warne extended her hand out and shook Jacob’s noting that it was moist to the touch.”

“I’m Jacob Heath. Thank you for agreeing to this on such

short notice,” he replied.

She took in his appearance and realized that even though she’d never seen him before, he was definitely pale and sweating. “Are you... alright?” she asked.

“Just nerves,” he replied, his mouth too dry to smile convincingly.

“Let me get you a can of Sprite,” she offered. “It helps.”

She ushered him back toward her office and reached into a mini fridge for a little can of soda. “We can sit for a minute while you have a drink and try to relax.”

“I apologize,” he started, “I can’t believe I’m so shaky.”

“No apologies needed. This isn’t a happy place, and most people are uncomfortable here, to say the least. We don’t receive many visitors.”

He tried to smile politely before sipping from the soda can.

“Were you able to read the information I suggested about Dissociative Identity Disorder?”

“Yes. There wasn’t a whole lot that made sense to me, but I read as much as I could,” he responded.

“It is so controversial, there isn’t a lot of material out there that does make sense to laypeople. Even psychiatrists have a hard time with it because there is no real diagnostic criteria. It is a rare disorder to begin with, and there isn’t much consensus surrounding any of it. All that you need to know is that the Sleepwalker has about seven “core” personalities aside from the main ‘Sleepwalker’ persona, and there may be even more. You never know who you’ll be talking to at any given time. So with the Sleepwalker, the personalities you may encounter can include: Doug, who is a tough New Jersey builder with a quick temper. Rog is a quiet Californian who wants to be left alone to read. Then there’s Tim who is, oddly enough, Australian, with an outgoing personality. James is another Californian, gay,

18 years old. Billy is a farmer from Alabama who likes photography. Joe, is a British ‘gent’ who often appears after conflict, and is the most remorseful personality. And finally, Charlotte, the only known female personality, who is six years old.”

Some of the color had returned to Jacob’s face as he listened to Dr. Warne’s description of the Sleepwalker’s personalities. If he could ever get over his fear of the mentally ill, it would be a mesmerizing subject to write about.

“Did you have any questions before we make our way to the visitation room?”

“Not at the moment,” Jacob replied, struggling to refocus.

“Ready?” Dr. Warne asked.

“I guess.”

They left the office and walked down several corridors, finally reaching the large security doors with a guarded entrance. Dr. Warne handed Jacob a clip-on visitor badge and instructed him to attach it to his pant pocket. He took a deep breath as the guard cleared them for entry and the first door swung open. They took a step inside and the door closed behind them with a loud clang. The door in front of them was steel bars, but Jacob felt claustrophobic waiting for it to swing open. When it closed behind them, he felt his breath catch in his throat, knowing that he was now locked inside of a mental ward with severely demented criminals. Dr. Warne squeezed his forearm, leading him forward to a small visitation room. As they approached, Jacob could see a man of average build sitting in the room. He was in his late 30s or early 40s and had short dark. The man’s hands were chained to the table in front of him. When the man looked up, he recognized Dr. Warne and gave a big smile.

“G’dday, Doc,” the Sleepwalker stated boisterously. His

loud voice echoed off of the concrete walls.

“Hello, Tim,” Dr. Warne replied.

“And who is this fine-looking bloke with you today, Doc? He looks a bit bleak, doesn’t he?”

“Now, now, Tim. Don’t pick on visitors. This is my friend, Jacob. He wanted to meet you and see if you could answer some questions for him,” Lisa said. She chose the chair closest to the Sleepwalker, leaving the seat across from him for Jacob.

Jacob stepped inside the room and pulled the chair back from the table. He hesitantly sat down, not scooting forward. He took out his pen and notepad and balanced it on his knee rather than using the table to write on.

“I’ve got a lot of answers for you,” Tim/the Sleepwalker started. “Do you want to know about my days filming in Sydney, or when I was doing small-town theater in Caloundra, Queensland? I also did a little bit of zookeeping there and had a stretch tending the birds in the flamingo yard. Quite a lot of good times.”

Jacob stared at the Sleepwalker. His fear had turned to morbid fascination. It took him a few seconds to remember what he really wanted to know because now he had an entirely different batch of questions he wanted to ask.

Dr. Warne piped in. “Tim, while I’m sure he’d love to hear about all of that, Jacob would really like to know about your experiences in San Francisco.”

Jacob jumped in and continued Dr. Warne’s thought. “I’m writing a biography of the Terrodon, so I’d really love to have your point of view.”

Tim/the Sleepwalker cocked his head to the side and looked at Jacob like a dog who hears something he doesn’t understand.

“The what?” Tim asked.

“He wants to find out specifically about your experiences with the Terrordon,” Dr. Warne offered as if hearing it from her would make a difference.

Tim/the Sleepwalker blanched noticeably.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” he stated. “I’ve never been to San Francisco. I’m an Aussie through and through.”

Jacob watched the conversation.

“Tim, you are **in** San Francisco now,” Dr. Warne urged. “You were apprehended by the vigilante known as Terrordon. That is how you ended up here.”

“Doc, as sweet as you are, I think you are confused. I’m an actor. What you are saying makes no sense. I think you are trying to make a fool of me.”

“Tim, we’ve been over this before. You are not in Australia. You are in San Francisco and I’m here to help you to get better,” Lisa said calmly.

“I’m not a sookie. I want to go back to my room. This isn’t the conversation I wanted to have this arvo.

Jacob didn’t know what to think of the exchange.

Tim/the Sleepwalker’s fists clenched in the cuffs and he dug his nails into his palms.

Jacob looked at Dr. Warne. She stared ahead at the Sleepwalker, her eyes locked with his. A fraction of a second later, Tim/the Sleepwalker slammed his head down onto his fists and he started to pull at his short hair. Jacob scooted back in surprise, but Lisa maintained her calm demeanor.

“Tim?” Lisa questioned.

“Tim? Are you ready to talk again? Let’s just have a quiet little talk and she’ll be right.”

The Sleepwalker seemed to relax and stopped pulling at his hair. After a couple of minutes of silence, he lifted his head

and fixed his green eyes on Jacob.

“Hello!”

Jacob was startled by the voice of a young girl coming from the Sleepwalker.

“Hi,” Jacob replied.

“Who are you?” the Sleepwalker asked in the curious manner of a child.

Jacob looked to Lisa for guidance, and she nodded at him, letting him take the lead.

“I’m Jacob. I came for a little visit.” He shifted to the small talk he normally reserved for his nephew Pacey.

“I’m Charlotte. I like visitors. Did you bring any candy?”

Once again Jacob looked at Dr. Warne.

“No, Charlotte. He didn’t bring candy. You haven’t had lunch yet, so no candy,” Lisa said.

Charlotte/the Sleepwalker returned her attention to Jacob. “Maybe you can come back and bring me some candy later. I like peanut butter cups the best. Not the little ones... the big huge ones.”

Jacob smiled at that.

“I like those too,” he admitted, feeling comfortable with this Sleepwalker personality.

“Charlotte, my friend Jacob has some questions about the Terrordon. Do you think you can help?” Lisa asked.

“Terrordon... Oooh. I know all about him.”

“You do?” Jacob questioned with a tinge of doubt in his voice.

“Yes, sillyhead. The Terrordon is tall AND strong.”

Jacob’s breath caught in his throat.

“So, you’ve seen Terrordon?” he asked. He started to feel hopeful. Maybe the innocence of Charlotte was the key to getting answers after all.

“Of course.”

He watched as Charlotte/the Sleepwalker’s green eyes grew animated. Jacob scooted forward and got his pen ready.

Charlotte continued. “I watched Dinosaur Train all of the time when I was little.” “The Terrordon is a flying dinosaur with really big wings that are super strong. I can draw one for you. Tiny, Shiny or Don. Maybe even the conductor, but he’s not a Terrordon. Or I can draw Buddy. He’s the T-Rex that was adopted by the Terrordon family. Can I use your pen?”

“No.” Lisa interjected. “No pens. No sharp pencils.”

Charlotte’s face crumpled into a pout.

“I can bring crayons and paper by later,” Lisa offered as a consolation.

Charlotte gave a little smile.

Jacob let his breath out in a whoosh. He didn’t even realize that he’d been holding it in anticipation. He felt completely frustrated.

Charlotte looked at Jacob, and her smiled faltered. “Did I do good?” Charlotte asked.

“Sure, kid,” Jacob responded. “That was great.”

“No. I can tell you are mad at me,” Charlotte whined.

“No. You were fine,” Lisa answered.

“No. Not fine. I know. Everyone is mad at me,” Charlotte continued.

Jacob sat back in his chair, once again noticing that the Sleepwalker’s hands were clenched into tight pinching fists of rage. Inching his chair back, Jacob readied himself for what he assumed was the inevitable pounding of the head and hair-pulling.

“I’m sorry you came all this way and went through so much stress with no real results.” Lisa said as she walked Jacob back

to the front of the building.

“It is frustrating. That is for sure. But it was also fascinating. I didn’t realize that I’d get to talk to so many personalities,” he agreed. “I do find it hard to believe that none of the personalities knew who the Terrordon was though.”

“What will you do now?” she asked.

“I’m going to have to think about that,” he replied honestly. “I’d love to come back at some point though.”

“We’ll see if we can make that work out,” Lisa answered. “It would be nice to have someone give a non-biased viewpoint about the mental illnesses we deal with here and take away some of the stigma.”

“I’d like that,” Jacob said.

They shook hands and he stepped through the doors into the August sunshine, happy to be outside and free from Rampworth.

chapter six

Eric Christiansen

“BITCH!”

“Faggot, don’t you dare call me that!”

Jacob’s head pivoted to hopefully triangulate on the *Sound of Trouble*. He’d built up himself enough to consider the words worthy of capitalization. The book may even take it as a title - lord knows that everything else about writing a novel was hard, the title coming so quickly must be a sign he was finally in the groove.

The Castro district may have mellowed in recent years, but violence against the gays, well, anyone not straight, was rising. America was not given permission to be made great again, it’s people had been simply given approval to act out the festering hate of anything not “normal”. The Others were the bad guys. And that was unfortunate, since most of the people here simply wanted to find love just like any other straight citizen.

His dalliance with Travis allowed him to realize firstly that he was only interested in women, and more importantly, that this area was a prime spot to try to understand what made The ’Don start helping those under attack.

The Sound of garbage cans being upended as weapons and defensive objects led him to an alley next to Aunt Charlie's bar. He'd only been here once before, but the memory of the dark grungy interior and the older grizzled clients made a lasting impression. Slow death lurking in their cups and veins. These people remembered the mid-80s intimately.

Muffled words and meaty thuds welcomed Jacob into the alley where it looked to be a couple of larger men terrorizing a very thin asian.

"Nigger!" a white man in lumberjack flannel - in this heat? - spit the word towards the thin man.

"That's bullshit!" yelled back the asian. "We're above that kind of talk!"

"Johnny, man, he's right?" The second attacker chimed in.

Jacob slowed his approach, this didn't seem like normal shit-talking.

Lumberjack Johnny turned towards his partner in crime, "Are you fucking him too, Bruce?"

"Fuck you fag, Cory has a point! I don't fuck where have the neighborhood has been - no offense man, Cory's beautiful, of course, but it's not right what you said. You know I was a civil rights lawyer."

Johnny whipped around and threw the trashcan at the asian that Jacob took to be named Cory. The man easily dodged it.

Jacob took the distraction to run up to Cory, he'd waited long enough, it was time to help save the day...or at least diffuse the situation enough for no one to get hurt.

"You need some help, man?"

Cory reacted in disgust, "The fuck you calling me a man? Bitch, who are you?"

He turned to Johnny, "This asshole called me a man!"

Johnny turned towards Jacob, lumbering forward, “You go balls deep in him, too?”

Jacob became confused - Cory rushed to hide behind Johnny.

“Wha-?” Jacob started before a trashcan lid hit him mid-pelvis.

“How many you doing at once, Cory?” Johnny cried in anguish, but his face was in a rage as his fist swung out to Jacob, missing him completely which made the bigger man stumble.

Cory caught his partner, and Bruce picked up another lid, winding up to throw it with as much force as his inebriated mind could muster.

“I may be a twink, but I sure as shit can play some disc golf!” the lid flew from his hands and grazed Jacob’s shoulder.

“You needed help!” Jacob yelled.

“I didn’t need anything from you! Johnny, take his head off!” Cory gave his possibly not-ex-boyfriend a little push towards Jacob.

Bruce rushed up and kicked at Jacob’s crotch. The hit wasn’t powerful, but they never need to be in that area. Jacob crumpled, and he heard Cory laugh.

“Fight!” The little man yelled, rushing into the bar, “It’s a fight!”

Men and women started streaming out as Jacob took a heavy foot to his ribs.

The hits weren’t doing much damage, bodily that is, but his ego was simply hanging by a thread. To add to the psyche of insults, the smell of rotting fruit and stale beer was making him gag.

“Who the fuck dumped my trash?” A dark man in a smock yelled in outrage.

“That ass right there, Dean.” Cory pointed to Jacob.

Jacob swung his head side to side, mouthing the word “no”, but bile was in his throat.

Johnny foot connected with Jacob’s sternum and acidic food remnants spewed out, splashing the shoes of a half-dozen on-lookers.

A chorus of swearing aimed at Jacob rose and swelled as others started gagging themselves. These weak stomached patrons rushed back into the bar, while those with more fortitude started gathering around Jacob’s retching form.

The *Sound of Trouble* rose again, and Jacob’s fear rose with it. He’d be lucky to get away with only the minor bruises he’d already taken.

“No one dumps my shit in my alley!” Dean the bartender said as he loosened his tight shirt, “Or fucks up my shoes!”

He pulled back with a fist that had dished out it’s allotment of punishment in its day.

But the strike never struck.

“Dean, stop.” Jacob’s teary eyes saw a form slip between him and the bartender. Between himself and the mob of drunks. “Stop, he’ll pick this shit up, let it be.”

“No, I-“

“The fucking cops are on their way. Hear them?”

The siren was faint, but the sound was growing.

“I’ll make sure he takes care of it. Go back in, serve some drinks, make some cash. You know your yoga teacher would be disappointed if you hit him.”

The bartender deflated, and took a deep breath.

“Yeah. Yeah, I know. Okay.” Dean, turned around and silently strode back to the bar.

Jacob hoped that he’d call the crowd with him, but it seemed that his generosity ended with him not taking Jacob’s

head off.

“All you, too! Unless you want trash duty.”

“Only trash I see is puke-boy there, Travis.” One of them men said with a disgusted look.

“Get the fuck back inside.”

“Travis?” Jacob whispered.

He was able to stand and wiped the tears and puke from his face.

“Hey Jacob, how you doing?” Travis turned, “You asshole, what is this all about? Decide you were going to play gay again? I should beat you myself for this stunt!”

“What’re you doing here?”

“I this is my neighborhood, dummy!”

“But - “

The siren turned out to be an ambulance passing by. Travis used that to drive home his point.

“And it seems I’m saving you from a horrible ass-beating. These guys don’t fuck around.”

“But - “

“You need to stay to yourself, keep out of other people’s business, dumb-ass.”

“They were going to kill that guy.”

“Who? John and Bruce? Those two couldn’t lay a hand on Cory if he fucked their mother!”

“But - “

“It’s a domestic dispute, Jacob. A little case of Cory being a bit too loose with his affections, and Johnny getting more upset than normal. Bruce would have talked him down.”

“They were getting ready to beat him down with the trash cans, Travis!”

“This happens almost every couple of weeks. If you went inside - which you won’t! - you’ll see them at a table, probably

on the same chair, as Cory cuddles into Johnny.”

“That’s not a healthy relationship.” Jacob replied, helping Travis pick up the trash.

“Said the guy that faked gay for a month.”

“It was an experiment.”

“You were method acting, and it’s stupid. What’re you doing down here? Need a reminder - “

“I’m sorry!” Jacob interrupted, and sighed. “I’m sorry. I know I probably insulted you, your way of life. I didn’t mean to do that. And...I, I don’t know why I’m here.” He wasn’t about to bring up the fact that he was trying to understand why someone would be come a vigilante. It would bring up his “homo-month” as Travis had originally put it, and Jacob really wanted to deflect away from that part of his methods.

“Get that can over here.” Travis said, “We’re almost done. I don’t believe I’m actually picking up trash for you. Me and my big mouth!”

Travis looked critically at Jacob, “Are you hurt?”

“My balls ache, and my ego is crushed, but other than that I’m okay. Maybe some bruising tomorrow.”

“And count yourself lucky at that! They’d have broken some bones, the way Cory was getting them whipped up. The puke didn’t really help, either.”

“I know. I know.” Jacob met Travis’s gaze, “Thank you. I definitely needed you tonight.”

“Don’t you forget it.” Travis smiled. “I’d let you buy me a drink, but you should probably head out. These guys don’t give up a grudge easy, and you did puke on their shoes.”

Jacob reached his hand over.

Travis shook it.

Jacob knew he was going to have the shakes when he got home. Hopefully a shower and a whiskey would put him

right, but at the moment, the adrenaline rush was ebbing and the fright was growing. He'd narrowly missed being seriously hurt, and that experience wouldn't soon leave his memories.

How had The Terrordon dealt with this fear? Did he grow accustomed to it? Did it eat him up, and that was why he disappeared?

The fear added aspects to this that Jacob wasn't quite prepared for yet.

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

Isidora Regenbogen

THE DRIVER HIT THE brakes just in time, making a gesture at Jacob, as he was crossing the street, deeply immersed in his thoughts. The sudden rain was slowing down the traffic and people were hurrying to find repair in stores and cafes. Jacob entered the shop and took off his baseball cap. “Hey Emmy, wonderful weather!” he grinned.

Emmy was stacking new souvenirs and gadgets while at the same time greeting the people looking for a shelter from the rain. “Good morning Jacob, perfect timing!” she said, smiling, “Do you mind answering the phone while I help the customers?” As a part of his morning routine Jacob used to stop by the gift shop at least twice a week, have a coffee with her sister and get the latest news on Pacey and Tom. “Teal and Taupe may I help you? Oh hey Tom, yes Emmy’s busy at the moment but I confirm you it’s on for tonight, meet you at Osvaldo’s at seven.”

Jacob had organised a dinner for Pete’s birthday at his favourite Italian restaurant for that night and was looking for something funny to give to Pete as a present. A sudden blast

and the loud sound of sirens interrupted the conversation. “What the... talk to you later, Tom”, Jacob hung up the phone immediately.

“What’s going on?” a man looked outside the window. “There must have been an accident, I just received several notifications on my twitter feed”, the girl replied without looking away from her smartphone.

The sirens’ sounds were loud and coming from all directions, Jacob grabbed his phone and immediately opened his twitter account for the SF hashtag: ‘terror attack in San Francisco, police is cordoning off the area.’ “Emmy text me later, tell mum and dad we’re ok and all, I must dash!”, Emmy couldn’t even reply to Jacob as he was already out of the shop, running as fast as he could in the rain, just like he used to do during his swimming team workout. The streets were jammed, police cars and firefighters were all over the place, people were trying to make sense, talking to each others for more insight, checking their phones.

Why the sense of community only arises when a tragedy brings us forcefully together? Jacob was thinking about this and about the murder of Harvey Milk and George Moscone in the late seventies, how it brought a sense of unity that the city struggled to keep up with in recent years. While all these thoughts were jamming his mind, one was prevalent: The Terrordon. Could this awful attack be a magnet for his comeback?

Good thing I keep up with the workouts, he thought, or I would have ran out of breath and stuck in the traffic by now. Jacob was approaching his flat when the phone rang.

“Pete, you ok? I guess we have to put your grand soirée on

hold. No, I'm not running around screaming his name...I'm actually entering home right now, I'll probably display the light signal in the sky and call him out." Jacob was famous for using irony and sarcasm in delicate situations. He saw them as weapons and as a cheap instrument to stay away from psychologists.

Jacob was assorted in his plotting and by the time he entered the flat he was soaking wet. *Damn it!* he thought, I might as well take a hot shower and think the plan through. He always found shelter in water. When he was a child he loved spending time in the swimming pool, his parents allowed him to take group lessons and soon became clear he was in his natural element. During the university years, at Seton Hall, he was the star of the Pirate Blue swimming team.

As the shower drops flowed down his head and body, Jacob felt the anger caused by the attack, the fear for his loved ones and the scar it would once again inflict on the city he loved. *There must be a way to contact The Terrordon, he must feel angry too,* he thought. As soon as he was out of the shower he followed his train of thoughts to a rather extravagant conclusion: he was going to create an antagonist so hostile that Terrordon will feel compelled to face him. *After all I am a writer, a biographer,* Jacob said to himself, *I have scratched more than the surface of Harvey Milk's life, this time I will enter the mind of a criminal.*

Jacob made a cup of coffee and sat at his desk, computer switched on and started to type away an identikit of his super villain. The research he made at the San Francisco Public Library database on most wanted criminals in history, gave him enough material to create a compelling villain, but he needed a name. Jacob went back to his water connection once again and feeling like a fish who doesn't want to be caught, just

like The Terrordon, he came up with the nickname The Fisherman.

The Fisherman, in his mind, was going to be the ultimate villain, who viciously attacked San Francisco and won't get caught unless The Terrordon will rise again to defend his city. Jacob was quite satisfied with his creation, however he had to come up with a plan to send a claim of responsibility to the press. Being a biographer he was used to get inside the people minds' he was writing about, so after profiling The Fisherman psychological mindset, he came up with a plan. He had little time and a lot of work to do.

“Hey Billy, guess what? It's time you return me the favour. Meet me at the spot, tonight, same time.”

Jacob felt a lot like a spy, one of the things he liked the most when writing for the San Francisco Chronicle was the relationship he had to establish with outcasts, pimps and generally dubious people that kept him in the loop in turn of small favours, like avoid pressing chargers for minor violations. One of them was Billy, a smart kid who was too good with computers for his own good. A hacker.

At the planned time, Jacob was nervously walking up and down, waiting for Billy to show up. Billy was already fifteen minutes late. *Where are you, don't bail on me, not tonight*, Jacob gave voice to his internal fears.

“Hey man” a figure emerged from the shadows.

“Billy! Damn it, I was already cursing in three languages! “

“I'm sorry I got caught up in stuff and with police patrolling every inch of the city, I had a hard time being on time.”

“I don't even want to know, I'm already in deep with my shit. Now hear me out and tell me if it can be done.”

The air was still smelling of rain. Jacob was tense, his athletic shape towering Billy's slender figure. At the end of the thirty-minute talk, Jacob let out a smile and gave Billy a pat on the shoulder.

"Thanks Billy, I won't forget this one, it's a huge one. As usual, hit and forget. Deal?"

"Sure. Now we're even, man. I hope your plan works out. Check the news tomorrow."

Jacob watched the young man rushing away, as silently as he got there. He really knows how to be a ninja, he thought, smiling to himself, happy to have planned it all out. As soon as he got back to his flat, Jacob looked at himself in the mirror: *I better get some sleep, I will read the police statement tomorrow morning, when Billy will have hacked into the systems forging an email crediting The Fisherman as the attacker. No one will trace it back to me.* He kept talking to himself to calm his nerves, adrenaline still running high. He was tired but checked once again the news. No terror organisations took the credit yet but reading about the fatalities increased his anger and frustration. *Terrordom, get back to work,* he thought, clamping his fists.

'Happy birthday, Pete. What a shitty day, we will reschedule. Hope Jon is back home sound and safe', he texted Pete, switched the phone to buzz mode and lay down on the sofa. It was 8:13 in the morning when he suddenly woke up at the sound of yet another siren. Jacob instantly checked his phone, to find a text from Billy: 'Pirate Blue rule ok!' It was their code to confirm the correct output of a task, or secret mission, as Jacob used to joke. The hack was a success! Jacob left the sofa with a sudden move and rushed to the computer to check the news.

"What?" Jacob startled aloud while frantically looking for

other news and police reports.

There was no mention of The Fisherman whatsoever, none in the news or in the SFPD report.

He checked every news report in the San Francisco Bay area, even very social network with the SF hashtag and the local tv news, but they were all reporting other organisations claiming responsibility for the terror attack of the day before.

What happened? Jacob was anxious and sweaty, did the police receive the claim but decided to keep a low profile? That could have happened. Releasing the news of a maniac who attacked the city under the name of The Fisherman could have caused a potential mass panicking. Will the news make it to The Terrordon?

Jacob sat at the desk, head in his hands, unsure of what to do next.

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 smoak 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

Wendy Christopher

JACOB KEPT HIS HEAD down as he turned off Colma Boulevard and into the Home Depot parking lot. He knew it couldn't be true, but, for some reason, it felt like everyone was watching him.

No-one could have guessed from looking at him that, underneath his crusher hat and trench coat, he was clad head-to-toe in turquoise spandex. His initial preference had been for some sort of suit – more like *The Penguin* or *the Joker* – but since he'd already chosen *The Fisherman* as his moniker that left him with few sartorial options; waders and a sou'wester didn't really fit the villainous vibe he wanted to project. So, in the end he'd had to go abstract, attaching some fishing nets along the arms of his tight bodysuit like droopy bat wings and gluing foil wrapper fish scales in strategic places. It wasn't the most intimidating outfit he could have knocked up, but at least he had the physique to carry it off.

Instinctively he glanced across at the passenger seat, where the scruffy black gym bag containing his home-made explosive devices lay like a weight on his conscience. The whole point of

choosing this venue in the first place was that it was public enough to guarantee a dramatic reaction when the bombs went off, but large enough that he could place them in areas where there were no actual people. The last thing he wanted was to play the role of villain for real.

As he pulled into a parking space outside the front entrance he couldn't help noticing how many other cars were already there. It wasn't even eleven o'clock yet and the place was busy, even for a Tuesday.

His hands felt clammy on the steering wheel. This could all go horribly wrong. What if someone else caught him planting the bombs before the Terrordon even showed up? Jacob had been careful to delete his browser history before printing off the instructions, but only now did he wonder if that was enough to cover his tracks. Swallowing down a wave of nausea, he grabbed the gym bag and crawled out of his car like a tortoise emerging from its shell. If he could just get around to the back of the building without being seen, the rest would be easy. Well, not *easy*, exactly. There were still timing issues to consider...

He turned away from the main entrance and headed down the side of the building toward the loading bays. The warehouse crew were too busy transferring goods from the back of two huge trucks to notice him slipping past, and the rows of crates and containers stacked outside the main warehouse provided good cover. He soon found a perfect spot to plant the first device.

It looked almost comical as he slid it out of the gym bag – like something from a Wile E. Coyote cartoon. But if the YouTube tutorial video was anything to go by, it would make a hell of a mess in an area like this. For a moment he froze, staring down at the tangle of cobbled-together components.

Even if he made sure no-one was nearby when he set this thing off, this was still, by definition, a terrorist act. He might only be playing a role, but the destruction would be real. Maybe it *was* a step too far...

“Bang bang into the rooooooom--”

Jesus Christ... Jacob fumbled in his coat pocket for his cellphone, fingers scrabbling to shut off the far-too-loud ringtone. A real villain would have remembered to set it to vibrate, he thought to himself. Glancing at his screen, he recognised the number instantly.

Peter.

How did he always manage to pick the worst times to call? Jacob’s thumb hovered over the ‘cancel’ button. If he didn’t answer it, Peter would surely leave a message, wouldn’t he? But it might be important. Some interest in the book maybe, from a potential publisher...

Jacob looked at his watch. Ten fifty-five. That still left an hour and five minutes to plant the second device and retreat to a safe distance if he stuck to the plan. Crouching over his home-made bomb as if to shield it from potential prying eyes, he dropped his voice to a whisper. “Hey, Peter, what’s up?”

“Jacob?” Peter’s melodic vowels rose in a surprised pitch. “Why are you whispering? Is this a bad time?”

“No... well, yeah, so can you make it quick? I’m – kind of in the middle of something here –”

“Okay, fine, I won’t keep you. You know a few weeks ago I pitched your idea about the Terrordon bio to Random House, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, I just got a call back from them. They’re super-interested, and they want to see more – synopsis, sample chapters, whatever you got!”

Jacob's legs gave way beneath him, and his ass bumped down onto the concrete. "Seriously? How soon do they want it?"

"As soon as you can get it to them. Strike while they're hot, you might not get another chance like this! What have you got so far, did you track the guy down yet?"

"Ah —" Jacob's mind whirled. *I just need to stall them for a while.* "I'm — right in the middle of negotiating that now, as it happens."

"Oh! Sorry. Well, don't mind me then, I'll let you get back to it. But I just thought you'd want to know. *Random House, Jacob!*"

Jacob hung up and wiped a hand slowly down his face. Now there really was no going back. All his reasonable, law-abiding attempts at tracking down the Terrordon had ended in failure — a sad little catalogue of dead-ends and red herrings. If he wanted to secure this publishing deal with Random House, he was going to *have* to get his hands dirty. Smoke the guy out.

Literally.

Jacob glanced at his watch. Three minutes to twelve.

From his vantage point behind the bushes, he could see the warehouse staff heading inside for their lunch break. They would be shielded from any flying debris once the first device went off, but it would still be loud enough for them to hear. Then, once they had alerted the managers, the store would be evacuated via the main entrance at the front — far enough away from the second device to avoid hurting anyone, but still near enough for everyone to see it go off. Guilt pricked at him as he realised the shivers rippling through his body were as much from excitement as fear. *Get a grip, Jacob, you're not supposed to be*

getting a kick out of this. Slowly and carefully, he pulled the remote-control device from his pocket and set it down on the grass beside him, before unbuttoning the trench coat and letting it drop to the floor, then taking off his hat to remove the turquoise ski mask scrunched up inside it.

The foil wrappers glued around the eyeholes caught on his lashes as he pulled it on, but after a few tweaks and lot of swearing he was suitably incognito, if slightly visually-impaired. No matter. At this stage in the game, it was more important the Terrordon believed he was dealing with his new arch-nemesis The Fisherman, and not the desperate biographer Jacob Heath.

He looked at his watch. Noon, on the dot. And the loading bay was deserted. Time to make his move.

Three... two... one...

It was more like a dull thud than the loud bang he'd been expecting, and the spray of splintered wood and molten plastic that followed seemed to arc outwards in slow motion. Windows shattered, debris clattered against concrete and metal, and thick, black smoke with the acrid tang of burning plastic billowed up from the devastation. Jacob darted away through the bushes as a fire alarm began to wail.

He sprinted to his next vantage point at the front of the store and waited. Now he had to make sure everyone was being evacuated via the main entrance before setting off the second device. Sure enough, within minutes people began pouring out through the automatic doors and swarming into the parking lot like confused sheep.

Most were just staring in goggle-eyed silence, some were shouting and crying, and a few others were holding up cellphones to take pictures of the chaos unfolding around them. No-one seemed to know where to go or what to do.

And they certainly weren't paying any attention to the dumpsters in an isolated corner on the opposite side of the parking lot, crammed with cardboard packing material – until Jacob hit his remote-control button for the second time...

The dumpster exploded, scattering flaming cardboard and plastic in every direction. Car alarms shrieked in response, and the crowds outside the store scattered like ants from a broken nest. As Jacob watched them, it struck him that he felt none of their fear. Everything around him looked fake, like it was all part of a movie set; colours were brighter, sounds were sharper. Adrenaline rushed through him.

This must be how it felt to be a *real* superhero, where your actions had real effects that rippled out from their point of origin and made an impact on the world. Where you changed something forever, and people noticed you were the one who had changed it. He had to admit, it felt *good*.

But wait – he was supposed to be playing the villain, wasn't he? *Oh crap, the Plan...*

He strode out from his hiding place, chin thrust back and fists resting on his hips in the classic super-villain pose. After a moment or two a few of the crowd noticed and nudged those next to them or pointed shaking fingers in his direction. As the attention on him increased, Jacob grew bolder. Strutting closer, he swept a foil-shaded gaze across the bewildered masses.

“Yes, this was *my* doing,” he said. “The Fisherman has struck again! And I will continue to spread my reign of terror across this city, because it seems there are no heroes around who dare to oppose me!”

A small part of him twitched – it hadn't sounded that clichéd when he'd been practising it at home. But the message had been delivered – and, from the look of it, understood. As

Jacob threw down a smoke bomb he'd bought from a joke shop to hide his retreat, the faint hiss of a single phrase rushed through the crowd in small, frightened whispers – “The Fisherman! It's the Fisherman...”

The smoke bomb caused enough confusion to enable him to duck behind a wall and make his escape, and when he reached the trees he was relieved to find his hat and trench coat were still where he'd left them. If he could get them back on and his mask off without being discovered, he could sneak back out to his car and drive home before anyone realised. He grabbed the top of the mask, but before he could pull it off a sound like lashing rope cut through the air behind him. He whirled round in time to see a dark shape swing down from the roof of Home Depot and land on the grass about twenty feet away.

Jacob's heart somersaulted in his chest as the lycra-suited figure peered through the trees. It was him. It really was the Terrordon! And he looked as lean and mean as ever; whatever he'd been doing for his twelve years of self-imposed exile, it certainly wasn't avoiding the gym. But none of that mattered now, because he was *back!* The public had their superhero again, and Jacob had his Protagonist. And all it took was setting off a couple of home-made bombs in a public place and pretending to be a terrorist...

Oh.

Crap.

The Terrordon finally located him through the trees – and as their eyes met, Jacob felt the blood chill in his veins. This was where The Plan had fallen apart. He snatched up his coat and hat and ran toward the bushes, crashing through the foliage in a desperate attempt to vanish.

There was a shallow bank on the other side, and he slipped

and skidded all the way down, not daring to look behind him as he bumped his way across tree roots and through branches. It was only when he reached the bottom that he realised he could no longer hear footsteps pounding after him, and when he turned back there was no sign of the Terrordon or anyone else. His hands shook as he finally tore the mask off his face.

That was a close call.

He sank to his knees, suddenly lightheaded from the car-crash of emotions inside him. Luring the Terrordon back out into the open again had been the biggest buzz of his life – but getting caught himself would have been a disaster. He put his coat back on and stuffed the mask into his pocket, staring back up the bank where the roof of Home Depot peeked over the top of the tree line. He should probably stay here for a while before heading back up to collect his car.

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

Nils Cordes

DOUG WAS IRRITATED. HE just couldn't make up his mind. Walking down California Street from the Presidio and heading downtown, he kept looking over his shoulder, anxious. It was like something in the back of his mind kept urging him on, but he couldn't put a finger on what it was. Like when you forgot a book on the train, one you'd already read, one that didn't hold much value to you anyway, but it just bothered you that you forgot it. It keeps nagging you and you don't really understand why. Screw the book! You keep telling yourself that it's okay. It's just a goddamn book. But the thought wouldn't go away.

Just like that, thoughts kept returning to his mind. He wanted to scratch them away, slap himself, hit himself so hard his mind would focus again.

He stopped in front of an ATM. Bank of America. Something inside him wanted to scream.

He kept walking, annoyed. He began to sweat.

He stopped in front of the First Republic Bank, the golden eagle teasing him from its dark mint-green sign. He forced

himself to move on. A step at a time. Another headache began to form on his clammy forehead.

An old woman with what must have been her granddaughter walked past him. The little girl, sporting braces and a red ponytail, locked eyes with him for just a moment, then pulled herself away to her grandma. Did he scare her? Did his appearance scare her? What did he do?

Pain. Incredible pain just above the eyebrows. He knelt on the sidewalk, winced and rubbed his temples. Finally he slapped himself.

"Everything alright, young man?" the grandmother asked. "Should I call an ambulance?"

The little girl pulled at her grandma's hand. "Gramma, let's go."

Doug looked up, tears in his eyes. "Leave me alone, you old crone!"

The woman and the girl were suddenly gone. He was standing in front of yet another bank, Union Bank. The pain had subsided, but only for a little bit.

"What do you want from me?" he yelled at no one.

He leaned on the beige walls next to an ATM, rested his forehead to the cold plaster. He was able to get it together. For now.

He had had days like these before, the headache, the insecurity, the irritation, but never quite so intense. He took a deep breath, that always worked.

He straightened up, still holding onto the walls of the bank.

He looked through the windows, at the line in front of the teller's desk. A flickering light above asking the employees to be replaced. He wondered whether he should go inside and talk to them.

His feet decided against it as they walked on until they finally reached Wells Fargo. He should have known. The large golden slab serif letters invited him in exactly the way that the flickering lights of the Union did not. The headache was now gone.

Doug smiled for the first time that day. Only, he did not know why.

Then the pain slapped him against an invisible wall and he found himself walking onward again. He screamed in frustration. Passers-by stopped their shopping spree and looked over to him. He wept, asking for help and asking them to mind their business.

He walked further down the street, his head throbbing. The stores and banks were replaced by trees and a long red brick wall, surrounding a large University park—or something. He didn't care.

He wished the nagging in his mind would return. He wished he just had lost a book somewhere, something that made sense to him, that made him feel like he *knew* what was going on.

And then the red wall stopped, and so did the pain. As the wall was replaced by a tall cream-coloured building, and as the long street was replaced by a gigantic-looking intersection, Doug suddenly felt at ease again. No more headache, no more irritation. The soaked collar of his purple shirt felt cold and nice against his neck. He pulled his purple jacket tighter to warm himself and finally he stopped in front of the huge semicircular glass front of the building. It throned over the intersection. It took the whole place and made it its own. The building reflected everything back at the world.

It reflected Doug back at himself. He was wearing almost entirely purple. A purple suit, consisting of a shirt, tie, jacket

and pants, and black socks in purple shoes. For the first time he became aware that he was wearing purple gloves, made of suede.

"Thank you, Doug," he then said in a new voice. "I really appreciate you giving me this little tour through the neighborhood, but I'll take it from here."

The San Francisco Fire Credit Union on California Street was perfect for his needs. It was a gigantic bank, it was very stylish, but most importantly, it conveyed the message that you must be crazy to attempt to rob it. He *was* crazy so that seemed like a very kind invitation to do just that.

As always, he had multiple plans with multiple avenues of approach ready at his disposal. Still, he needed another half hour or so to decide which one to tackle and how best to go about it.

The Sleepwalker sat in a chair by the window inside of Ella's restaurant, just across from the bank. He had put his jacket across the back rest of the wooden chair next to him, and was sipping a coffee. Elegantly and completely at ease.

"Can I bring you anything else, hon?" the young waitress asked. She was no more than 21, short red hair and wearing a very fashionable nose ring in a piercing on the left wing of her nose.

"Oh, you're a darling. Thank you, but I'm fine."

"Holler if you need more."

I most definitely will, he thought to himself.

For a moment, he contemplated the waitress and wondered which part she could play in what was about to develop over the next forty-or-so minutes. But in the end, pragmatism won out. She was a sweet girl, and managing to involve her into the plan would only complicate things for him. He watched the

other customers.

The coffee was surprisingly good. I make sure that the Others will remember this place, he thought. The Sleepwalker took another sip and sighed a satisfied sigh.

At the far end of the restaurant was a father with two young girls, probably four and six. They were certainly spoiled, fighting happily through a big stack of pancakes while making a mess only kids could make. The father was typing on his smart phone. What a jerk.

At the bar sat a large man with some alcoholic beverage, deep in thought.

A family of two adult children, two parents, two grandparents and some man in an expensive-looking suit were digging through the menu, quiet, unsure what they wanted to order. He wondered how the man in the suit fit into this. He looked not related to any of the others. Could it be a lawyer?

Two police officers, a man and a woman, were talking with another waiter, occasionally laughing. The Sleepwalker had to resist the urge to laugh too. Instead, he drank more coffee and merely smiled.

There were at least ten more people randomly distributed in the restaurant, but brief glances told him that none of them would help his plan in any way, so he faded them out from his mind.

One of the pancake girls was getting syrup all over her. It was the older one of the two. The dad didn't notice, still busy with the phone. What a jerk. Very well, the Sleepwalker decided, I just suppose *that* is the way it's going to be.

He looked over to the police officers. They were still laughing. Oh well.

The Sleepwalker slid out of his chair, leaving a five dollar bill and taking in a last sip of coffee as he got up, then

disappeared to the restrooms. On his way, he nodded to the officers, smiling politely and interrupting their laughter for a fraction of a second.

He loved it when the air became tense with anticipation. Soaking in the atmosphere, he opened the door to the ladies' restrooms, entered one of the remarkably clean stalls, closed the door without locking and pulled out a knife.

Not entirely unexpected, the six-year-old girl showed up a few minutes later. By herself. As she stood in front of the mirror, contemplating how to clean up the mess she made with the maple syrup all over her shirt, the Sleepwalker stepped behind her. Their mirror images looked at one another for a moment, and as she was about to scream, a soft suede hand slid over her mouth. He smiled and nodded at her: It's alright. Not to worry, not to worry.

An infuriating eight minutes later, her father appeared at the door. He didn't look inside at first, only called out to her. "Sarah? Are you still in there?" No response. Then the father opened the door some more and glanced inside. "Sarah?" He left again and went over to the men's restroom where he was immediately greeted by Sarah sitting on the floor next to the urinals, and by a knife to his throat.

Ten minutes later the purple man left the restroom. Without looking at anyone he exited onto the intersection. His hands were hidden deep in the jacket's pockets. Sweat had begun to discolor the already sweat-stained collar again. He crossed the street and approached the reflection of the purple man on the glass facade of the SF Fire Credit Union. He immediately walked past the windows to the right of the bank and towards an intimidating cave of an entrance. He pressed the button for wheelchair access and the doors opened

automatically. Then he disappeared inside.

On the other side of the street, Sarah and Hannah sat on her seats inside the restaurant. Both had a large bowl of ice cream in front of them, but only Hannah was eating. Sarah held the long spoon with both of her hands. She stared out the window.

"Now, now, Sarah. Don't you worry yourself sick," the man next to her was saying, taking a scoop from the nougat ice-cream in Sarah's bowl. "Worrying never got anyone anywhere. Also, it spoils the dessert."

He looked over to the bar where the police officers had stood not long ago. They were gone, and so was the waiter they had talked to, probably now attending to some of the other customers. The large family were just being served their drinks.

Service is a bit on the slow side, the man thought, as he patted Sarah on her head.

"Here, try the nougat. It's marvelous," he said with a grin.

Inside the bank, the purple man was trembling. He rubbed his right shoulder, feeling the sticky blood seeping through the purple jacket from where the knife had attempted to explain to him the gravity of the situation. Drops of sweat fell onto the marble floors. There were surprisingly few people around, yet all the employees were busily fussing over something or someone.

He walked slowly to the tellers, and got in line behind two other customers. Nobody seemed to take much notice of him. A young man filled out a form with the help of the bank clerk. Time was moving slower than usual.

The purple man wondered whether he would pass out before it was his turn. It felt like a very high probability. His sides ached and he noticed he was having trouble breathing.

He pulled his hand out of the right pocket to wipe the sweat from his brows. Then he closed his eyes.

"How may I help you, Sir?"

The girl at the desk looked enquiringly at him.

The purple man moved towards her and pulled out a light yellow piece of thick paper from his left pocket and handed it to her. The sweaty hands left moist fingerprints on the paper.

The girl read the note carefully, eyes widening as she read. She looked back at him, then turned around, trying to find her super. She was scared and insecure.

"Please," the purple man pleaded.

Then he unbuttoned his shirt and revealed a device that somewhat looked like a remote control without buttons, strapped to his chest. A single purple light blinked once, twice, counting down the seconds.

The girl stood up, walked to the back of the room and talked to a tall man. Together they returned to the desk and without speaking surveyed the situation.

Underneath the purple man a small puddle was accruing from the sweat. It was coming down hard past the nose, down the chin.

Drip.

Wait.

"Please."

Everyone turned out to be quite professional and fast. The purple man carried a nondescript black bag and was walked through the lobby by the tall man. The desk girl had disappeared.

When they reached the exit, the purple man pulled out a second note, this time from his right pocket. He handed it to the tall man.

Silently, the man read the note.

"Are you aware of what it says here?"

The purple man nodded.

"And are you sure this is what you want me to do?"

The purple man nodded again. "Please, or he will kill my daughter."

His daughter, meanwhile, had finished half of her ice cream, every spoonful a torture that was likely to spoil her appetite for ice cream for a very long time. Her face was covered in dried tears. The man next to her patted her shoulders. Silently the three of them looked out the windows and watched the bank, the traffic, a UPS van stopping in front of the Jewish Community Center on the other side of the street. A bus drove past and people got out at the stop, business was going on as always.

Then two things happened in short order: A purple man appeared in front of the large semicircular building across from them, his hands once again in his pockets. He walked towards the middle of the intersection and stopped. Cars honked, people yelled. But he just stood. And then, in the distance, police sirens began to be heard.

"Sarah, I must ask you to please stay here with your sister until your father comes back."

The man stood up, pulled a twenty-dollar bill out from his faded jeans and placed it on the table, wiped his ice-cream fingers on his plaid shirt and smiled one more time at the girls.

"That is, *if* he comes back."

Barely two minutes later, seven police cars had stopped in front of the bank. Officers jumped out, guns drawn and pointing them at the purple man in the street. Loud sirens filled the streets, flickering lights told every one to go away, go home. Threat was once again in the air.

In a small restaurant, two girls were crying as a young

waitress came to ask what was wrong.

The Sleepwalker was unsure whether he would have liked to hear shots fired. But as such things go, not everything can be under one's control, so it might as well end happily for the little family. More importantly, he hoped that the restaurant would keep its business. The coffee really was outstanding there.

He pulled a large black bag out from behind the red brick wall next to the bank. Moving swiftly, he walked back towards Spruce St. Station further down on California. He walked past Wells Fargo, where some of the employees had come outside to see what the commotion was about. Every now and then he caught snippets of people talking, worried, scared.

"... robbed a bank ..."

"... police everywhere."

"A man in purple ..."

"... do you think it's him?"

"They said he was back."

"The Sleepwalker?"

He walked past the other banks and stores, the bag resting heavily on his shoulders. Of course it needed to be heavy. It contained close to \$ 40,000.

Minus the money for a new purple suit.

chapter fourteen

Lin Yanxiang

THE CURTAIN FLUTTERED, LETTING in a sharp sliver of light that danced across the Jacob's sleeping face. Jacob stirred, stretching an arm in reflex. The mug crashed to the floor, splashing the remnants of his late night coffee on the worn carpet and the side panel of his oak desk, rousing Jacob fully.

"Damn it!" Jacob sat up. He glanced at the clock on the wall. Another night wasted falling asleep at the desk. He looked over at his computer screen and shuffled his mouse impatiently. The cursor remained blinking after the sentence "The Terrordon had finally faced his match in the Fisherman", where it had been for the past three nights.

Frustrated, Jacob ruffled his hair and stood up. Tightening the belt of his robe, he padded to the front door to pick up the morning paper. He tossed the rolled up paper onto the coffee table, intending to read it after his morning run but then stopped and did a double-take as he saw the headlines.

"Goddamit, this is exactly what I need!"

"Do you know what this is about?" Amy asked as she sips on

a latte. Pete sat on the couch opposite her, in Cats and Fiddles, the café where Jacob had asked to meet them.

Pete shrugged.

“It’s getting hard to tell these days. He’s been... intense. I don’t think his latest novel is going well.”

“That’s the one about the Terrordon?” Amy asked. She didn’t know Pete well, but remembered their last meeting a month ago at the book launch of her friend where she found herself chatting with Jacob, an old acquaintance from the Chronicle and Pete, his agent about some of her old articles on the Terrordon. Then, she frowned as it dawned on her. “God Pete, you don’t think...?”

Jacob came in just then, looking freshly combed and showered. Amy could smell the faint scent of his shampoo as he sat down beside her with two large paper bags.

“Sorry I’m late,” Jacob looked excited, confident, unlike the last time Pete saw him. “I was getting us these!” He pulled out a pile of clothes from one paper bag.

“Uh... Jacob, what are these?” Pete frowned as he looked at what looked like a pile of spandex.

“Our costumes!”

“Our what...?” Pete spluttered. “Jacob, it’s July, it’s nowhere near Halloween!”

“Oh God... Is this what I think it is? This is about the Terrordon and the Sleepwalker isn’t it?” Amy asked as she shook her head. “This is serious Jacob, you can’t pull your Harvey Milk thing here. The Sleepwalker is a dangerous criminal!”

“This is true writing Amy! I couldn’t have had that Milk piece published if I didn’t go out onto the streets. Pete,” Jacob turned to his agent. “Look Pete, I need to really get into the head of the Terrordon if I’m to make any headway on the

novel. It's going to be a really good one, but I need your support."

"So you're proposing what exactly?" Pete asked, leaning back slightly on the couch.

"Look at this," Jacob took out the papers from his other bag. "I was getting nowhere with the Fisherman as the villain, but look here. The Sleepwalker has escaped, the one true nemesis of the Terrordon!"

"What? What Fisherman? What Sleepwalker?" Pete looked confused.

"They were both criminals that the Terrordon was chasing back in 2005. The Fisherman was small-time—famous for stealing purses from ladies using fishing lines from overhead bridges. He taunted the Terrordon but for a bit but he was never caught. I wrote a few articles based on some anonymous reports I got, Jacob here passed me one of them, but that was it. He disappeared round the time the Terrordon did. But the Sleepwalker was different. Wait Pete, you know nothing about this?" Amy looked at Pete in surprise.

"Well, Jacob said he was going to do a book about the Batman of San Francisco. Sounded good enough for me. Wasn't around back then." Pete shrugged. "So what about this Sleepwalker?"

"He's a real super villain." Jacob cut in at this point. Then he brandished the article again. "Look at this – after he was caught, he was diagnosed with Dissociative Identify Disorder before being put away at the Rampworth State Hospital."

"What exactly did he do?" Pete asked.

"He killed ten people, drove many more insane." Amy whispered.

"What? How?"

"He specialised in making people suffer. It wasn't about

straightforward murders with him. In the years he was active, he would identify what he termed ‘good people’—fine upstanding citizens, normal people on the street. He wanted to make the point that everyone had a seed of evil. He made all sorts of elaborate plans so that he could force these victims to choose.”

“Choose what?”

“He made them choose between saving a loved one and committing a heinous crime.” Jacob explained. “In fact, the San Francisco police didn’t make the connections at first, because all the crimes were different. It was the Terrordon who saw the strange pattern of otherwise normal people with no criminal records suddenly committing these terrible crimes. Then he dug into it and found that in some cases there were reports of their loved ones—children, spouses, families, close friends going missing for a while. The victims, well, the criminals, never said a word about the Sleepwalker but the Terrordon began identifying possible future victims himself and managed to catch the Sleepwalker in the act.”

“That last case, it was the worst.” Amy shook her head, a look of fear and disgust on her face at the memory. “The Sleepwalker kidnapped the five year old son of Rachel James, a sweet and lovely daycare teacher by all accounts, and another child from her class. Then he made her choose—she had to cut off the fingers of the other child one by one, or have it done to her son. When the Terrordon finally got to stopping it, she was half insane and just about to use the pliers on the boy. Even though she never committed the crime, she was never the same after that. The last I heard, she lost her job. She was already a widow before the incident and her son was placed in foster care after that. And that is just the last case. You can’t imagine how many lives the Sleepwalker destroyed.”

“Oh,” Pete swallowed. “Well, it’ll make a good book this one.”

“Exactly! But I need to get into the head of the Terrordon,” Jacob said as he patted the pile of clothes again. “He hasn’t been seen since 2005, I’ve got to be him and chase the Sleepwalker down.”

“I knew it,” Amy smacked her forehead. “You can’t be serious about this. You can’t go around chasing an insane criminal. You remember what happened to the Terrordon don’t you? He barely got away—that last showdown with the Sleepwalker was why he retired himself.”

“A superhero would never give up just because his life was endangered. He retired because he’d completed his task, he’d cleaned up the streets of San Francisco,” Jacob said coolly.

“I can’t say I advise this as your agent,” Pete added. “I agree with Amy, you can’t do this.”

“Not me, us!” Jacob thumped on the table for emphasis. “We can form a league of heroes! Me, the Terrordon, you, the Bulk,” Jacob pointed at Pete. “And Amy, you can be Superfemme!”

“You’re insane!” Amy exclaimed, throwing up her hands. “I’m not going to be part of this. Pete?”

Pete shook his head slowly.

“Wouldn’t look good in a costume, no.”

“Come on, I think I know where the Sleepwalker is headed. And I’ve got all the gadgets prepared. Look outside,” Jacob pointed at a dark armoured vehicle. “That’s our Heromobile. And look, I’ve studied the reports on how and where the Sleepwalker escaped. He should be headed to...”

“Jacob,” Amy had been doubtful of the venture but now there was an added chill in her voice. “How did you put everything together so quickly? The article was only published

this morning. And what reports? There were no details on the escape.”

“Amy, let me explain,” Jacob started but Amy stood up.

“Pete, we best call the police.”

“The police? No Amy, they’ll just mess everything up the way they always do. Trust me Amy, I have my sources. This could be a big break for you too. First dibs and exclusive coverage on...”

“Pete,” Amy said again, ignoring Jacob.

“Hey hey, let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Pete said in a calm voice. “I don’t think we need to call the police. This is a hare-brained scheme, but Jacob is not dangerous. I know him.” Pete stood up beside Amy and patted her shoulders.

Amy took a deep breath and shook her head.

“No police then, but I want no part of this,” Amy said before picking up her purse and leaving.

Jacob looked disappointed but turned to Pete.

“Hey, so you believe me right? Two of us, it could still work.”

“Jacob, listen. I got you out of something there, but this is insane. I won’t put on garish costumes and go chasing criminals I have no business chasing. Neither should you. You write books, I sell them. That’s what we do. Do whatever research you need to. But not this,” Pete paused then looked at his watch. “Look I need to go, I’ll call in on you later. But I repeat, don’t do this Jacob.”

Then Pete left.

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

Pete Becker

AT FIRST GLANCE, THE Sleepwalker's secret headquarters looked like a poor person's idea of how rich people lived: intricately patterned wall hangings, overstuffed uncomfortable chairs, gilt fixtures everywhere. But on closer examination, the years of disuse while The Sleepwalker was in Rampworth had taken a toll: the wall hangings were torn and faded; the chairs had become homes for moths and other, less respectable, insects; the gold-colored paint was cracked and chipped, exposing the brown and white beneath it, turning what had been smooth and bright into something mottled and flaking.

The Sleepwalker sat at the faux Louis XIV desk, eyes closed, elbows on the desk, fingers caressing his temples. The joints of the desk were dried out and loose; whenever he moved they squeaked, shooting a searing spasm of pain through his head. He tried not to move.

Kelly, a bald man with just a fringe of grey hair below his tonsure, stood beside a chair near the desk, waiting for his boss to settle down. Despite his demonstrated courage when he had been in the military, he did not dare sit in the chair: too

many unknown creatures could be lurking beneath the layer of dust.

The Sleepwalker took a deep breath, opened his eyes, and lifted his head to look at Kelly. “Maybe we should just kill him. We could do it so that it would be fun, and the obituaries would give us a clue to his secret identity.”

“Yes, sir, that will probably work. We’ll find him and lure him out and kill him. But that could take a long time. And the obituaries might not give us enough information to figure it out.”

“It’s a great idea! One of the greatest ideas ever! Don’t forget, I’m smart. Smarter than you, smarter than all the rest of them. That’s what we should do. Kill him!”

“Okay, sir, we’ll do that. But while we’re trying to find and kill The Terrordon, should we try some other things, too? There’s always a chance that we might get the information without having to kill him.”

“I want to kill him. I spent all those years in Rampworth because of him. Besides, what else can we do?”

“Sir, you’ve always said that he must be very rich. How else could he afford all those expensive gadgets?”

“I’ve always said that.”

“So here’s what you were probably thinking: we make a list of all the richest people in the city and start kidnapping them. When we grab him, he’ll fight back, and we’ll know we’ve got our man. And the rest we’ll hold for ransom.”

“That’s what I’ve thought all along. We should kidnap them and hold them for ransom. More money!”

“More money, sir, and maybe we can figure out his secret identity.”

“That’s my plan. It’s the best idea I’ve ever had. Stop arguing with me. Just do it.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Sleepwalker closed his eyes and lowered his head, his expression taut with pain. Then he relaxed, pulled open the top drawer of his desk (which protested with an ear-splitting screech), and took out a book: “The Art of the Deal”. Pushing back his chair, he put his feet up on the desk, opened the book to the bookmarked page, and started to read.

“Look, Mister Kelly, I drew a picture for you. It’s that pretty place with all the white walls and all the nice people where we used to stay. I want to go back there. I don’t like it here. When can we go back?”

“Thank you, Charlotte, that’s a beautiful picture. We’ll talk about when we can go back. But later. Right now, I need to talk to The Sleepwalker.”

“Oh, him. You *always* make me go away so you can talk to him. I hate that. I hate him!”

“I’m sorry, Charlotte, but it’s really important. Please?”

Charlotte heaved a big sigh. Then she started to cry. Through her tears she choked out, “Do I *have* to?”

“Yes, honey. Please?”

Charlotte closed her eyes, put her elbows on the desk, and started to massage her temples.

The Sleepwalker brushed away his tears, lifted his head and looked at Kelly. “What’s happening?”

“Well, sir, it’s mixed. Jerry and Ivan got Chuck and that Nancy-boy. They’re in the cells in the basement. But The Mooch wasn’t so lucky. I’m afraid McCain’s security guards got him.”

“So The Mooch is no longer with us? I told you this was a bad idea. But you wanted to do this yourself. See what you got us into?”

“Well, sir, I’m really sorry. But The Mooch was a troublemaker, so it’s no big loss. It’s not like he’d been with us for a long time. Just ten days, isn’t it?”

“Sure. But I liked his style. Reminds me of myself. Doesn’t take any shit.”

“No, sir. He didn’t. But that’s water under the bridge. The question now is, where do we go from here?”

“Who’s next on the list?”

“Jason Richards.”

“That asshole? Okay. But no more fucking around. I’m going to do this myself. Get the boys together. We’re leaving in ten minutes.”

“Yes, sir. Where are we going to go?”

“Well, to his house. That’s where he is, isn’t he?”

“No, sir, I don’t think so. There was an article in the paper about the opening of the new photography exhibit at the Fraenkel Gallery. He’s supposed to be attending.”

“Photography? I like photography. I take great pictures. The best, in fact.”

“Yes, sir, the best. But we only have about half an hour until it closes, so we’d better get a move on.

“Okay. Fire up my helicopter. I’ve got just enough time to change into my fighting clothes.”

Whirrr. People looking up; helicopters weren’t unusual here, but they usually stayed higher up. WHIRRR! Getting closer. Nearly on the ground! WHIIPPP. Three ropes trailing down from the chopper. ZIP! Three men sliding down the ropes.

EEEKKK! People running. HHEEELLLL! Cries from the crowd. Open space below the chopper. Three men in that space, facing toward the entrance and the few people clustered there. One man stands out from the cluster as the others

cower in fear. Jason Richards, sharply dressed in his thousand-dollar suit, knows that this is the moment his martial-arts training has prepared him for. EEEYAAH! He strikes a pose, knees slightly bent, elbows at his sides, forearms horizontal, fists clenched. “Come and get me, you cowards!”

And they do.

THWAACK! His foot hits the chest of one of the attackers. OOOOF. The man collapses in pain. WHOOSH. Jason’s roundhouse kick misses the next man. He quickly recovers and takes a step back from the two men still standing. They split up, to come at him from opposite sides. He smiles. “Now we’ll see who’s the better man.”

The two men move in simultaneously. THUNK. His kick bounces off the forearm of one of the men. WHIZZ. The other man’s nunchucks spin through the air. CRACK. On his head. CRUMPLE! Jason hits the ground, bleeding.

One of the attackers puts his knee on Jason’s neck. The other roughly pulls Jason’s arms behind his back and whisks out a pair of handcuffs. Properly subdued, Jason glances toward the helicopter, which has landed about ten yards away from him.

The Sleepwalker is in the copilot’s seat. He’s not looking at the result of the brief combat. Instead, he’s making WHIRR, WHIRR, WHIRR noises while shoving the helicopter’s control stick back and forth with one hand and jerking the collective up and down. Fortunately, the pilot has shut the helicopter’s engine down. He’s flown for The Sleepwalker before.

It doesn’t take long for The Sleepwalker to get bored with flying. He lets go of the controls and turns toward Jason. “So, Terrordon, I have you at last.”

Jason looks up at The Sleepwalker, resplendent in his

purple outfit. “Nice suit.”

The pressure on his neck increases. “Treat the boss with respect.” Jason is silent. The man removes his knee from Jason’s neck, and the two thugs lift him painfully by the arms so that he is more or less standing. They drag him to the helicopter, and throw him into the back. They climb in as the pilot restarts the engine. The helicopter lifts off. Jason is a prisoner.

The Sleepwalker slumps in his seat and scowls. “Why am I wearing this hideous color? I would surely love a spot of tea.”

chapter seventeen

Ron Ward

THE SLEEPWALKER PRESSED HIS foot against the accelerator just to feel the g-force of an exceptional drive train. The resulting pressure exhilarated him. In the rearview mirror, he could see his men falling back unable to keep up with the rich man's car. "You have a state senator in the boot," Rog whispered. He clicked the cruise control then allowed the vehicle to slow back to the posted speed limit. "I am slowing down for them Rog, not for you." He said.

"What boss," a voice asked from the rear seat.

"Your fellow men at arms are falling back, I must slow down for them, Rog. Your job is to make sure that the costumed menace stays in the boot. Not to question my driving, Rog."

"My name is not Rog." The voice from the rear seat said.

"Who is the boss here Gregory, you or me?"

"You sir, no question about that."

"Good answer Rog, Gregory has too many letters in it. A name that long can cause confusion in the weak minded. From now on you are Rog, got it?"

“My brother’s name is Rodger.” Gregory/Rog said.

”I think I will call all of you Rog from now on, that way I will not be confused as to which one of you I am speaking to.” The Sleepwalker said. This was a pick-up crew, hired for special occasions. Gregory the muscle, Toby the driver slash knife man, and Vincent the Silent, slim, lithe, and deadly.

By stealing peeks in the rearview mirror The Sleepwalker enjoyed the small torture his new minion went through trying to figure out how calling everyone Rog would bring an end to confusion. Twice the foolish lump opened its mouth to mount a rebuttal but each time the mouth closed without making a sound. Deeper furrows in his forehead the only result of all that thinking.

The sign announcing the Jason’s exit lit up in the headlights. A second later the GPS announced it was time to make an exit from the freeway. The Sleepwalker flipped on his turn signal so that his follow car would have plenty of warning that they were making a turn.

Toby saw the signal just in time. He cut across two lanes of traffic and came boiling down the off ramp. A screeching stop sent the panhandler near the stop sign scurrying for safety. No one from law enforcement was near enough to notice the faux pas. The boys always enjoyed a night out. “Let them have a little fun,” The Sleepwalker said through clenched teeth.

Ten miles further inland, a sleepy little burg well on its way to a cozy night came into view. Signs demanded that everyone slow down to protect the children. Boom, boom, Gregory bounced forward into the seat in front of him. “If he gets out of the boot Rog, you will die too.”

A state police car idled at the gas station, the policeman’s profile illuminated by a bank of florescent bulbs. The

Sleepwalker was not afraid of one policeman but he was on a bit of a schedule. Boom, Jason again tried to kick his way out of the boot.

“You tied him up good, I watched you. If that cop makes a move, I’ll plug’em.” Doug said.

“I don’t need your help right now Doug,” The Sleepwalker said.

“I thought I was Rog.” Gregory said.

“Gregory! Sit the fuck back in your seat like a normal human, and shut the hell up, forever.” The goon settled back in his seat, relieved that the boss was yelling again, doing puzzles made him angsty.

Seven times Jason kicked at the seat but the policeman did not investigate. Gregory dealt with the jostling, poorly. Every few seconds the big man lurched forward. The seat did not give. Jason remained in the back. The policeman either did not notice or did not care.

A quarter mile out of town the speed restriction lifted and so did The Sleepwalker’s spirits. The last miles before Jason’s property he spent testing the cornering ability of the car. The vehicle passed all exams with flying colors.

One hobby farm after another passed in peaceful quite. The last farm came complete with three Alpacas and an Emu. Finally, the GPS nagged The Sleepwalker to take the next turn. An estate rose out of the dark as the road curled down around an inconvenient hill. The place reeked of ‘old money’.

“Looks like we made it to your house Jason. Now we will get some answers.” The sleepwalker said.

In the back-seat Gregory squirmed, unsure if the prohibition against him talking, ever, had expired. Instead of saying anything he slammed his elbow into the seat, then smiled wanly, seeking assurance. “Get him out of the boot and

into the house. I have some questions to ask our new friend State Senator Jason Richards. Or should I say, The Terrordon! No need to be kind Gregory.”

Gregory walked to the back of the car. He was standing staring at the bumper as the follow car drove up. The Sleepwalker looked back to make sure it was his men pulling into the drive. Sheepishly he clicked the button the released the latch.

“How long was I away Gregory.” The Sleepwalker asked.

“Not long like a couple seconds.” Gregory answered.

“Liar, How Long?”

“I wasn’t counting, I just waited like you told us. I know you got important plans to make and stuff. I just waited like you said to.” Gregory trailed off then busied himself with extricating the senator from his vehicle.

“No use making a big deal out of it. We are all alone out in the country after all. It was the well, that caught my attention. It is kind of picturesque.” With effort, he pulled his thoughts away from the well and its innate charm. There before him stood his longtime foe. The Terrordon shorn of his toys and magical flying suit. A lowly senator surrounded by thugs. Perfect hair jostled, hands bound behind him, a bruise welling up under his eye. Now that was a charming sight.

“Where is it Terrordon, where is the door to your secret lair.”

“You have made a terrible mistake. I am not a vigilante, I make laws, I do not break them. Not for any reason.”

“Save the stump speech, no one here is ever going to vote for you. Tell me where the door to your lair is businessman!” The Sleepwalker really spit that last word out, with luck some of it got on the senator. Now he was having fun. Bringing down the hoity toity, high and mighty, that is what life is all

about. Reducing movers and shakers into frightened children shaking in their boots.

“Is it the well, is that why I am so drawn to it?” How does it open, is there a secret door at the bottom of a ladder down in moleville?” The Sleepwalker asked.

“Two years ago a neighbor boy fell down that well during one of my fundraisers. He dressed as the Lucky Leprechaun, guarding his treasure in the well. Exchanging lucky tokens folks could throw into the well for campaign checks. He was horsing around dancing on the rim and, and the poor child fell in. The boy died.” Jason said.

“I bet you got your checks off the body, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” Jason bowed his head in shame, “I did. However as a token to the parents I filled the well with cement.” Jason said

“Do you mind if I do not believe your sentimental little story. Vincent go check the well for a knob or latch, some way to open a secret door.” From where he was standing Vincent could see a crescent of cement lit by a lamp held by a carriage boy on a pole.

“Maybe not the well, still, we have all night to find your nest even if I have to take that house apart stick by stick. Drag his sorry ass over here Gregory, we will have a look inside.” The Sleepwalker walked to the carved front door.

“Open the door Toby, Gregory has his hands full.”

“I don’t have a key.”

“Who says it is locked”

Toby tried the door, “locked”

“Check his pockets do I have to think of everything?”

Vincent walked up and buried his hatchet into the polished wood. Three more chops left the deadbolt hanging from the door frame. “Now there is a man of action, note to self, see if the crew will dump Gregory, join up full time. Toby is a good

driver and drivers are as hard to find as reliable drummers.”

The Sleepwalker shook himself then kicked the broken door open. The group all moved into the foyer. To the right a fire burned in a fireplace. The fire light revealed a man's place, dark wood and warm leather chairs. To the immediate left a coat closet with its door ajar. Past the closet a hall led into a dining room.

“Is there anyone here senator? I notice there is a heartwarming fire burning. Who lit it?” The Sleepwalker asked.

“It is automatic, a computer starts the fire, I do not burn wood any more only gas.” Jason replied.

“Toby, Gregory up the stairs, Toby left, Gregory right, search every room for Terrordon gear, he has to have a room full of it so don't waste time looking under beds just yet.

Vincent, you go to the dining room after you make super double sure there is no secret door in the coat closet. Look in the kitchen too, look for a dumb waiter. The senator and I are going to retire to the drawing room. I thought you might have a bigger place, this is nicely appointed and all but hardly a mansion.”

“My grandfather built it. With his own hands.” Jason said

“Sure, sure, save it for the reelection posters.” The Sleepwalker replied.

“This way senator I bet you have an amazing scotch collection. I am craving something peppery with a hint of tobacco on the finish. Why don't you take this chair?” The Sleepwalker shoved Jason sideways toward a mahogany and leather chair. The senator twisted and hopped trying to keep his balance. Instead he gracelessly fell to the floor.

The Sleepwalker stood over the fallen man triumphant. “You are the Terrordon. I am in your house. Tell me where

your burrow is then I will bring Jacob out to get your side of the story. You will get to tell everyone why you did it before you go to jail for all the laws you broke chasing me over the years.”

“I have no secret lair. There is a passage from my bedroom down to the maid’s quarters. Dad told me he would tell me about it when I was older. I would have liked to hear his stories.”

“I... Have you...

Dead...

To rights senator.

Tell me the truth and no more sappy stories.” The Sleepwalker kicked the prone man, boot toe right up the ass.

Vincent walked into the room, I couldn’t find any secret door. I did find a dumbwaiter but it only went up to the master bedroom. I sent an apple up to Toby, it didn’t come down. Toby walked in cutting an apple with a shiny chrome knife. “Want a slice boss, it is a damn fine apple.”

“No, I want some Terrordon toys, the real kind. I need evidence before I call that reporter.” The Sleepwalker forced his voice into a calmer range.

The Sleepwalker left Jason on his floor and walked around the corner to the bottom of the stair. “Come here boys.” As each man came close they got a slap to the back of the head. Whispering he said, “listen, I am going to have you put the senator in that nice chair of his and I will watch his eyes. He will look at the entrance to his lair because his only hope is to get in there and get some Terrordon weapons. You watch too maybe one of us will catch him looking right at the access portal.”

Gregory came sauntering down the stairs looking dejected. “I looked under all the beds just like you said but not even one

little weapon.”

Toby began flipping his knife folding up his butterfly. Once finished he stood there grinning like a kid at a school play holding his folded knife.

“So, what, I could do that, wanna see?” Gregory said.

“We can all do that, big whoop, I bet even the senator could do that, can’t you senator?” The Sleepwalker said.

“Yes, I,” another swift kick to the coccyx silenced Jason.

The flashing knife made The Sleepwalker think of Billy the drummer in his band back during his senior year. Plasmatronica, they could have been something special. I wonder what Sweetlips and Flash are doing. Man, Flash could play bass like nobody’s business, I hope he is still playing bass. Billy could twirl his sticks but he kept rushing, then that one day Billy hit on Prudence, he had invited Pru why would she giggle for the stinking drummer?

“What is wrong with him?” The senator asked.

“Nothing he visits other worlds in his mind, like a genius. That is where all the great plans come from. Go on ask him.” Gregory said.

“Correct in the main Gregory.” The Sleepwalker said shaking off his short trip into the past. “Now senator we are going to all have a nice glass of scotch. You can tell us some stories about your grandad.

“That was a petite mal seizure, you’re autistic” Jason blurted it out before he thought it through.

“The psycho crying tits, called me all sorts of things.” The Sleepwalker said.

“The Psycho what, called you what?” Jason asked.

“The psycho crying tits, The psycho crying tits, sound it out for Christ’s sake.”

“I must be dense.” Jason said in a moment of defiance.

“Physiatrists, the schools made my mam take me to the Physiatrists.” The Sleepwalker punched the nearest wall hard enough to leave a dent. “Those pricks talked a lot but never said anything useful. Over and over they said that I was smart I could be what I want to be. And looky here,” the sleepwalker flashed his best jazz hands imitation. ”I am what I want to be. Set him in that chair boys.” The Sleepwalker said.

All four of them watched in silence. “Nothing, he didn’t look at nothing but you boss.” Gregory said.

“Where is your gear, your car, Toby look in the garage. Why did I not think of the garage? What is that you are looking at Jason. A funny small piano?”

“It is a harpsichord, I play it sometimes to help with stress, the sound soothes me.” Jason said at once regretting his praise of the instrument.

“What you have to play the proper series of notes on the mini piano? Is that the trick, then the automatic fireplace slides out of the way?” The Sleepwalker asked.

“You’re nuts, I am not The Terrordon, I am a law maker.” Jason shouted.

The Sleepwalker blinked, he did not like shouting unless he did the shouting. “I just thought of a new game. Vincent will play your Harpsichord with his hatchet until it is a pile of wood. Then we will set you and your nice chair on the pile and light the pretty little piano on fire.

Until you die you will be able to tell me the location of your lair and I will save you from the flames. I do not want you dead! The flames I want licking you are the flames of shame and derision. I could be satisfied with you being Dead however, if you insist. Vincent play my favorite song won’t you, Appetite for Destruction.”

The Sleepwalker laughed deep in his chest. He did love

seeing beauty reduced to ash. Gregory find us some nice high proof booze to lite this sucker up with. Twenty minutes later Gregory was getting drunk, Toby was back from the garage with no good news. Vincent was sweating, drinking an ice tea purloined from the fridge behind the bar. The Sleepwalker played with a zippo lighter found next to a large ashtray holding the remains of fat cigars.

“One last chance Jason. Toby has the rope tied to your chair so we can pull you out as soon as you tell us where to find the door. Ready, hands on the rope Toby. Get set.”

Gregory howled in pain. A Terrordon shaped ninja star protruded from his hand. The bottle of brandy shattered by the force of the weapon spilled down onto the intarsia floor. The Sleepwalker dropped the flaming cigarette lighter on the broken body of the harpsichord.

“Let the senator go. It is me you want.” The Terrordon said.

The flames rushed into life around the senator. Fire crawled up Gregory’s pants consuming the fine spilt brandy on their way to his pierced hand. The big man ran out of the room, you could hear his feet pounding up the staircase.

Toby pulled on the rope tied around the chair. “No leave it, get The Terrordon, fuck the senator.” The senator and his chair tipped backward but not out of the fire.

A bouncing glass bauble sucked up everyone’s attention. The glass did not break as it bounded toward the fireplace. Tink, bounce, Tink, bounce, directly into the coals of the fireplace. The glass did nothing, sitting like a jewel in the coals. The liquid inside started to boil. An explosion of light blinded everyone. The Sleepwalker ran. A bolo cord wrapped around his ankles. He hit the ground hard. “Show yourself asshole,” shouted the villain.

“Here I am you vile scoundrel.” The Terrordon said. The cozy flames of the fireplace outlining his all too familiar form.

Vincent rushed the Terrordon screaming, hatchet raised. The Terrordon reached into a pocket on his belt and blew the retrieved powder into the rushing thug’s face. Vincent ran on past the vigilante slamming into the wall. The hero held the hatchet now. The Terrordon used the blade to open Vincent’s skull from the back.

Gregory fell down the stairs. Leaving burning clothes and flesh on every step he landed on. Toby turned to run but felt the blade of Vincent’s axe tear into his spine. Toby strutted in halting steps the hatchet protruding from his shoulder blade like an aborted chicken wing. The Terrordon appraised the scene calculating his next move. Flames bit at curtains, ate at the still moving Gregory, and chewed into wood everywhere.

The Sleepwalker hacked at the cords holding his feet. The bolo gave way. The Sleepwalker got to his feet. “Who are you,” he screamed as he ran out the door.

The senator was unconscious on his back still tied to the chair. The Terrordon calculated that he could not cut the man free and catch The Sleepwalker both. With Toby's butterfly, he cut Senator Jason Richards free of his bonds. It took some effort to load the big man on his shoulder. Outside in the cool night air The Terrordon watched the senator’s house burn. A siren in the sleepy town over the hill screamed, begging for help against the newly reported blaze. Volunteer firemen would be here soon.

chapter eighteen

Jaysen O'Dell

“DAMN IT PETE! YOU know how this works.”

“Just because I know doesn’t mean I like it. This isn’t Milk you’re talking about.”

Pete Schlamme was talking about Jacob Heath’s biography of Harvey Milk. Jacob went to the extreme of dating other men to understand what Milk and others endured as homosexuals living openly in America.

“Knock that shit off. You know I never f...ed any of those men.”

“Exactly!” Pete saw a chance to make his point. “You were safe. You could say ‘no’ and retreat. This bastard ’s a psychopath.”

“Terrordon is the good guy...” Jacob sounded confused.

“Yeah, but Sleepwalker is the one you will be dating.” Pete really hoped Jacob understood the real likelihood of physical harm. “You know how Jon and I love you, not for the Milk thing, but because you’re like a brother to us.”

“And a paycheck.” Jacob chuckled as he said it.

“There is that.” Pete realized he’d lost the argument.

“Listen, I’m gong to the nut house... Rampworth... again to chat with that Dr and figure out where this guy could be hiding. I’ll check in once I’m done there.”

“If she’s good looking, maybe you should chase her and not the loon...” Pete tried to make a joke.

“I’ve seen you and Jon dressed for a Friday night out, the ladies will have to work hard to beat that.” Jacob hoped the compliment would score him some points with Pete. “I’ve got the best looking gay men working on my team. Right?”

“Shut it and save the compliments for the Dr. Maybe she can talk some sense into you.”

Jacob put his phone in his pants pocket. He grabbed his “working bag” and gave it a shake to make sure his keys were in it. Looking up at his cork-board he reviewed a few notes.

- *Dissociative Identity Disorder: in extreme cases it presents as multiple separate ‘people’ ‘sharing’ the same body, with those personalities exhibiting substantially different behavior, emotional reactions, and a lack of shared memories*
- *Dr Lisa Appleton Warne: Clinical psychiatrist; Rampworth State Hospital; maximum-security; mentally ill convicts committed to psychiatric facilities by California’s courts*
- *Sleepwalker: sadist; diagnosed with DID; under care of DrLAW; nemesis of Terrordon; ESCAPED*

Jacob realized he didn’t really know anything about Sleepwalker for the umpteenth time that morning. He needed to think like Terrordon if he was going to provide his readers the ‘inside thoughts’ of his current subject. To think like Terrordon he would need to know as much as he could about his quarry. He’d read the books, but now he needed to know the details. The details that only the Dr would have. Dr. Lisa.

She was a distraction. A “too easy on the eyes” kind of distraction. Those men had nothing on her. Except for jasmine. Pete and Jon must use the same soap as Dr. Lisa Appleton Warne.

“F... this is going to be a long day.”

“Dr Lisa War...”

“We know who you are here to see. You know your crazy, right?” The orderly stared at Jacob like a teacher looking at the class idiot. “That man was in here for a reason. Leave this alone and let the po-po handle it.”

From over his right shoulder he heard the heels on the floor. Click-tap, click-tap, click-top. The slight rustling of the white coat over her hips as she walked, barely audible over the sound of the facilities noisy air handler. When smell of jasmine reached him he knew she was close.

“Hello Dr. Warne. Thank you for seeing me.”

Her laugh seemed less like bells this time and more like ice tinkling into a heavy high ball glass. “You always seem to know I’m here.”

“And you’re not happy to see me.”

“You are still trying to ‘be’ Terrrordon, aren’t you?”

“If I say yes, will you talk with me? Try to cure me of my ‘affliction’ and remind me who I really am?”

Her sigh reminded him of the sound his mother made when Jacob was in high school and brought home low grades. “First, you know I can’t tell you too many details about ‘Sleepwalker’, he’s my patient which makes nearly all the information privileged. Second, you aren’t sick, just ... annoying. Third, I’d rather convince you how dangerous this man is so you STAY HOME and let law enforcement deal with the subject.”

“That’s just what I was saying Dr L. Just like you requested.” Jacob couldn’t tell if the orderly was trying to excuse his comments to Jacob or get the approval of Lisa.

“Thank you B. I’ll take Mr. Heath into the offices. If you’ve completed the log...”

“Yes ma’am, he’s all set. Here’s the visitor badge.”

“Thanks.” Jacob smiled. Figuring that having B on his side would be good in the long run Jacob extended his hand. The orderly looked at him oddly and shook it.

Lisa started to walk down the hall. As Jacob caught up with her she asked, “was that to ensure access to information on Sleepwalker or me?”

Jacob was startled. “Ummm ... I uh...”

“I’m not sure exactly how you know when I’m coning up behind you, but you’ve clearly observed something about me that tips you off.”

“You wear heals, in a prison. Look at all the other feet here... soft flats.”

“That ruins it for me.”

“How so?”

“What woman wouldn’t be flattered to hear ‘I remember the scent of your soap?’”

Jacob was suddenly angry with himself.

“Is that a blush I see?” Lisa laughed.

“Jasmine.”

“What?!”

“Jasmine. You use a jasmine scented soap or shampoo. The other female doctors use... gasoline.”

“I... I’m... I didn’t mean to... I’m truly flattered.”

The silence that accompanied them to her office could have been named Sleepwalker. She left the door open as they entered her office. As she turned the corner of her desk Jacob

sat in the chair immediately opposite her leather wingback. The cold directness of her question was startling compared to her warm flirting in the hallway.

“Why are you really here?”

“I’m writing a book ...”

“Stop. We have a problem,” she said. “Either we are on the same page about ... my soap... or we aren’t. I don’t want to hear about complications or books or gay men or serial killers. Let’s get it over with. You’re either gay or you aren’t. If you aren’t then you have a girl or you don’t. If you have a girl, why do you know I use jasmine soap and blush when I mention it?”

“I’m not gay. There’s no girl. Complications... just one book with a serial killer in it sits between me and you making it hard to answer about the ... blush.”

“I can live with that. And I could get used to seeing you more often. Let’s make this book go away. Shall we?”

“What about your statement about ‘privilege?’”

“You ask your questions. I’ll tell you when we’ve crossed the line.”

“Where is the Sleepwalker?”

“If I knew that, it would be privileged information. But since I don’t know ...” She smiled.

“When he was here, did he tell you about how he was caught?”

“That’s public record so I can say that he did.”

“Did he tell you of more hideouts, or bases, or anything like that?”

“Privileged.”

“Ok... Did he tell you his favorite places to eat?”

“Privileged.”

Jacob was surprised by that. “Hmmm... Did he tell you

...”

“Privileged” she cut him off.

“I didn’t finish!”

“You need to think of what I can and can’t tell you. If the Sleepwalker ‘tells me’ then it is privileged. I’ll help you a little bit, but I want to you look behind you...”

Jacob turned and looked through the open door.

“Nothing we say in this room is privileged. You are not my patient. I’ll not lose my job for you. Yet.” The flirtatiousness was back in her voice for the last word.

“So I need to not ask you about what he said?”

“I would not be able to answer if you did.”

“Can I ask your opinion about what he said?”

Lisa stopped for a moment. “My opinion is not privileged unless it requires me to disclose privileged information.”

“Does law enforcement have this same ... I don’t want to call it difficulty...”

“They have warrants. But yes. There are things I can not tell them. But you have it much worse.”

Jacob stopped to think for a moment.

“Dr. Warne, in your opinion, is it likely that the Sleepwalker has more than one hideout or base?”

“In my opinion, it is very possible. I would suggest that it is likely based on the number of personalities involved. And may I suggest that you phrased that well Mr. Heath.”

“Why thank you Dr. Warne.”

They both smiled at the sudden formality. Her smile. Suddenly his day was going too quickly.

“I have to rethink my questions.”

“I can wait. Can you?”

“It’s close to lunch. Do you want me to come back after I’ve reworked these?” He was stalling.

“No. You can take me to lunch and work on it there. There’s a nice bistro around the corner. Ask me questions there. I’ll drive.”

Jacob was surprised. “Wait, if you’re driving, how am I taking you to lunch?”

“Because you’ll be paying.”

Lisa’s BMW M5 was a bit of a surprise.

“Listen, I know what you’re trying to do. You realize this guy is messed up? It’s likely to end poorly for you. I don’t think I’ve been too subtle regarding my personal interest in ... well ... you. Why should I help you knowing that I’m endangering something I’m interested in?”

“For a psychiatrist you sure don’t hide your emotions well.”

“Why should I?” Lisa was clearly irritated by his response.

“I guess I just figured ...”

“As a psychiatrist I know what a healthy display of emotion is. I also know when I need to make a move because someone else is to unsure of themselves.”

“Touché”

“Hold on. I like this little stretch of road.”

“When you said ‘around the corner’ I was expecting a few blocks, not 30minutes of high speed curves.”

“Why? You’re entering a world, this world of the Sleepwalker, where every statement means something different than the surface of the statement suggests. Right about now you should be wondering ‘is she serious about me?’ And I’d answer ‘yes I am.’ And then it will hit you ‘it doesn’t matter what Lisa answers because I can never know what is true and what is false.’ And then you begin to understand how much danger you are walking into.”

Jacob realized that there was more to what Lisa was saying than he really understood.

“Please. Please stop this. He is dangerous beyond anything a sane person should approach outside a prison. Do not do this.”

“How did Terrordon find him? How did he catch him? Where do I look? What will I find?”

Lisa looked up from her meal. “Terrordon used a profiler, someone that looked at the crimes and drew some circles on a map, provided some clues where to look and even suggested how to bait an irresistible trap. Terrordon used that information in 2005. I think I might have been the profiler.”

“Wait. What?” Jacob was struggling to comprehend exactly who this woman sitting across from him was. “You know who Terrordon is?”

“No. I was contacted in 2004 and met with 5 different men. Each said that he was not Terrordon. I was paid well and told that I would get the opportunity to understand the Sleepwalker once he was caught. That’s how I made my way to the US and to Rampworth.”

Jacob suddenly felt small. Whoever Terrordon was, he had a large reach and the ability to direct the “machinery of the state” to get one very pretty woman a job and then to get a specific convict into that woman’s care.

“Do you understand just how dangerous this man is?”

“Which man?”

“Exactly.”

“Tell me what I need to know to find the Sleepwalker.”

“Men. You never learn.”

There are at least 8 personalities inhabiting one body. We don't know who that body was before these other personalities emerged.

Normally, in a case of D. I. D. there are clues; a common last name, one that has a cohesive past life that can be confirmed, something. With this case, nothing. We have no place of origin. No family. No age. No missing person report. Nothing. Of the identified personalities the following information has been compiled:

- *Doug : New Jersey native. Contractor or other role in construction of homes and offices. Excellent mechanical dexterity. When added to experience in industry, results in finely crafted and detailed objects. Extreme and rapid hostility as a result of perceived or actual slights.*
- *Rog : California native. Solitary and introspective by nature. Primary interests are philosophy, theology, and psychology. Will read voraciously with extreme recall.*
- *Tim : Australian extrovert. Seeks attention via planned performances or reactions to events. Claims to have performed professionally on stage and television.*
- *Charlotte : 6 year old female for entirety of observation. The only known female personality. Loves to draw and is very good at it. Manual dexterity shows similarity to Doug. Does not know/ recall origin or home.*
- *James : California native. 18 year old homosexual male for entirety of observation. Transition into this personality is clear from the exaggerated stereotype behavior. Behavior is NOT affect but genuine (homosexual intercourse is welcomed by “James” and has been confirmed as consensual).*
- *Billy : Alabama native and commercial farmer. Extensive knowledge of Alabama, the area of the claimed farm, farm equipment, techniques, and agricultural methods. Prefers photography as a hobby with several critics praising “his eye for accentuating detail via textural contrasts”.*
- *Joe : British national. Claims elevated status. Frequently*

appears after conflict showing remorse without full knowledge of the actions preceding the feelings of remorse. Prefers tea over other beverages. Often compares teas to previous samplings from various hotels.

It is important to note that NONE of the above personalities share memories of events.

The other clearly identified personality is unique for the following reasons:

- *The Sleepwalker does not have a proper name. It refers to itself as the Sleepwalker.*
- *There is no origin for the Sleepwalker. Unlike the other mature and time aware personalities, the Sleepwalker has no backstory, time of origin, or other historical context for analysis. It claims to have “always existed”.*
- *The Sleepwalker is fully aware of the actions and memories of ALL other personalities. No other personality has any awareness of other personalities.*

As Jacob finished reading his notes out loud, Lisa sat silently.

Jacob looked over all he had written and realized there was nothing there to point him in the right direction. Before he could say anything Lisa reached across the table and placed her hand over his.

“Do you understand? Please tell me you understand and have come to your senses. Drop this. Let it go.”

“How an I? How else can I write this book?”

“Like every other author. Sit at home. Make phone calls. Look up things on the internet. Interview officers and other people. Figure out what they do and do that instead. Just run from this Sleepwalker chase.”

“If I don’t? Will you stop me?”

“No. But I wish I could.” She withdrew her hand from his.

As she stood up from the table she mumbled the waiter, “put it on my tab with 25 for you”, then motioned for Jacob to follow. Sitting in her car, she looked at Jacob and said, “There is some ... help ... I can give you. This is off the record.”

She started the car, rolled up the windows and turned on the radio.

“Paranoid much?” Jacob smirked.

“You still don’t get it do you.”

“I guess not.”

Pulling out of the parking lot, Lisa accelerated quickly. She took a straighter road than previously to she could focus on communicating.

“Sleepwalker is NOT in control. I don’t know who or what is. Unmedicated the transitions from personality to personality are fast and frequent. While Sleepwalker seems to be coordinating I don’t believe he really CONTROLS the other personalities. That’s where Joe may help you. He fancies himself a connoisseur of teas. He has a particular favorite though. He was always talking about the ‘perfect cup’ at Westin on Union Square. Whenever he would get agitated he would become desperate for a cup or tea always requesting one from Westin. Because I ... know things ... I can tell you that a person really determined to find the Sleepwalker would start looking in that area for Joe. Joe is the safe one. Find Joe and you find the rest of them. Kind of obvious since all 8 of them share one body.”

“I’ll be careful” Jacob said.

“No you won’t. Careful would be walking away from this and coming home with me. But you won’t, will you?”

“Not today.”

Lisa parked the BMW in her designated spot. “Dr Lisa Appleton Warne, D. Clin. Psy” the placard read. He was just

invited home with a Dr. His mother would be proud. Why wasn't he going with her.

Jacob climbed out of the passenger side of the BMW, walked over to Lisa and kissed her gently. Without a word he entered his miserable Honda and started to pull away. He opened his phone and hit the speed dial.

Had he looked in the mirror he would have seen Lisa saying, "Good bye Terrordon".

The phone was ringing.

Pete answered.

"Pete, you won't believe this..."

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

Heather Lovelace-Gilpin

BLOOD SPILLING FROM THE throat of one of the patrons didn't do much to the dark brown colour of the carpet. It pooled in the lines and grooves at his feet, startled eyes wide as his hand went to his throat, dropping the cigar he lit seconds before. Jacob glanced at the Sleepwalker, stumbling back when the image caught up to him. He slit his throat. Slit his throat from ear to ear and for what?

The Sleepwalker crushed the smoldering cigar with his foot, taking a step back when the patron fell to his knees.

“No smoking in a public establishment.”

Patrons uttered sounds of disbelief, a few women cried out, patrons headed towards the door only for the henchmen to shove them back towards their tables. Jacob can hear the gurgling sounds of the man, his eyes dropping to him to see his mouth moving. Blood continued to spurt outward, but Jacob knows it's only a matter of time before he succumbs to death. Minutes to be exact. Especially if he continues to pull his hand away from the gash in his neck.

A couple brave souls moved in to assist, grabbing cocktail

napkins, and held them to the man's throat. A lost cause if you ask him, but silence is in his best interest since the Sleepwalker hasn't acknowledged his existence since their arrival. Jacob's death is imminent and the writer in him is now conjuring up images on how his death is going to play out. A blade across the throat like he did with this poor gentleman right here. Maybe he will stab him in the heart. Quick and somewhat painless. But not really his style. No. Whatever the Sleepwalker has in mind, it will be long, drawn out, and torturous.

Silence except for the occasional snuffles, hushed spoken words of comfort, ice clinking in a glass. Jacob caught sight of a man sitting at the far end of the bar. He's not phased by the events, tossing back one drink after another. Jacob's eyes returned to the Sleepwalker, he's still waiting for the man to die, a sly smile spreading across his lips. It's not the first time Jacob considered lunging at him. He can take him. There's no doubt in his mind. But there's the henchman. Six, maybe seven scouring the bar, gathering what few patrons are here to enjoy a cocktail, and moving them to the center tables. And let's not forget the Sleepwalker. Locked away in the depths of Rampworth State Hospital these last twelve years. Declared insane. He has nothing to lose. Jacob, on the other hand, could lose his life.

No sooner than the thought completed itself, the doors to the small quaint bar flew open, causing everyone's attention to jerk towards it. Filling the doorway, dressed in dark clothing, his face obscured by a mask, the Terrordon stood. Henchmen moved towards him quickly while Jacob remained immobilized. His mind is telling him to move, get somewhere safe, this is your one and only chance, but he can't seem to make his feet work. Something sharp skimmed past his cheek and that set him in motion. He ran for the bar, dove over the

top, crashing to the floor with a grunt. There's something wet on his cheek and he wiped it away, bringing his hand down to see blood on his fingers.

He gripped the edge, pulling himself up to peer over the bar. The Terrordon and the Sleepwalker are tangled up, fists thrown, the henchman he brought with him lying in a pool of their own blood. Patrons are sneaking out the front door, men helping women, others shoving past with no class at all. Jacob moved along the counter, staying on his hands and knees, hearing the grunts from villain and superhero as they continued their assault on each other. He passed one of the henchman, yanking one of the ninja stars from the forehead of one of the men. He groaned softly, shifting his head slowly, and while Jacob waited to see if he attacked, his entire body relaxed.

His eyes drifted towards the fight. He could make a run for it. He should. They aren't anywhere near the door, tossing chairs at each other, blood dripping from one nose, a knot above the right eye on the other. But this is the closest he's been to the Terrordon and Jacob can't deny the excitement. If the Sleepwalker can knock his mask off, reveal the Terrordon's true identity, he can finish the book, and finally get the kind of recognition he deserves.

Jacob only took his eyes off of them for a few seconds to move around the bodies when he heard an angry grunt. The Terrordon shoved his knee into the back of the Sleepwalker's neck. Curse words flew from his mouth, writhing around on the floor in hopes to break his hold.

"You should have stayed at Rampworth." The Terrordon muttered, grabbing his arms and yanked his hands back behind him. "It's where you belong."

The Sleepwalker laughed. A sound that caused a shiver to

creep down Jacob's spine. Kiddish and almost carefree. Something Jacob didn't expect.

"And you should have stayed in hiding." The Sleepwalker repeated, his cheek pressed to the dark carpet. "It's where you belong."

"And let you terrorize this city." The Terrordon tightened his hold. "I don't fucking think so."

Jacob moved closer towards him, acting on pure adrenaline now. The Terrordon's head snapped towards him. He can only see his eyes, he can't make out the colour from here.

"I'm writing a book." Jacob started, flashing him an uneasy smile. "I'm writing about you. Any chance you and I can sit down and..."

"I have nothing to say." He interrupted, slamming the Sleepwalker's head back to the carpet with a thud. "Get out of here. And if you run into a police officer, send them my way."

"No one has seen you since 2005." Jacob said, ignoring his command. "Where did you go?"

The Terrordon stood to his feet, yanking his prisoner with him.

"Get out."

"Did you come back because of him?" Jacob went on. "Because he escaped?"

Jacob pushed himself to his feet.

"The public has a right to know the man who protects the city. They have a right to know who you are."

The Terrordon narrowed his eyes.

"I said to get the fuck out."

"Don't let him push you around." The Sleepwalker said, his eyes resting on the six point ninja star Jacob still held in his hand.

"Shut up." The Terrordon hissed, jerking him towards the

door.

“Throw it.” The Sleepwalker mouthed. “It’s the only way you’re going to know. The only way you’re going to unmask him.”

The Terrordon moved quickly, his cape flowing outward from the sudden movement, slamming the Sleepwalker face first into the wall. Jacob did move towards the door.

“Don’t do it.” The Terrordon said, his head shifting with him.

“Do what?” Jacob asked innocently, feeling his palm sweat as he ran his fingers over it. He didn’t have to look down to see the cold steel is branded with the Pteranodon. He can feel it. The same design the Terrordon wears across his chest.

The Sleepwalker smiled at Jacob before he mouthed “throw it.” The temptation is there. There’s no denying it. This is what he’s been after, what he’s been working towards. The unveiling of a superhero.

“Come on. Throw it.” The Sleepwalker chanted softly, his eyes flashing wildly. “What are you waiting for? Do it. Throw it.”

“Shut your fucking mouth...” The Terrordon’s eyes rested on him. “He gets away, he will kill you.”

Jacob’s grip tightened on the star and without any warning at all, he threw it. He didn’t really think he would hit him. What are the chances. It’s a ninja star and it’s not like Jacob has any kind of experience throwing something like it. Luck is on his side and while the Terrordon made a futile attempt to avoid it, it sank into his chest, blood darkening the color of his suit. Jacob’s breath caught in his throat as he collapsed to his knees, his grip on the Sleepwalker slackened. The Sleepwalker grinned, threw Jacob a wink, and bolted towards the bar. Jacob uttered a soft protest, but it’s too late. The Sleepwalker ducked

out the side door. Jacob took three tentative steps towards the Terrordon, his heart racing in his chest.

“You have any idea what you’ve done.”

Jacob didn’t get a chance to answer. The main door to the bar broke open, several police officers stormed in, guns drawn.

“Hands in the air!” One of the officers hollered and he’s aiming the gun at Jacob.

“Wait. You have the wrong man...”

Two officers grabbed him, shoving him against the wall. They yanked his arms back, the sound of steel cuffs clinking together. If he doesn’t make his move, if he doesn’t unmask the Terrordon, he did this for nothing. He slipped from the officer’s grasp, dropped to his knees where he last saw the Terrordon, only to find him gone.