

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# The Dark River

John Twelve Hawks

## About the Book

Fear stalks our lives, in the press, on the television, over the airwaves, across the internet. Everywhere you go, someone somewhere is always watching. Waiting for the mistake that will reveal secrets, truths, lies, the real story or what they want to believe. No longer is anonymity a given right. And small freedoms are sacrificed daily, never to be returned.

There are some who will fight to the death to protect those freedoms. They live off the grid. Gabriel Corrigan is one such man. But the system says that you cannot opt out, that you have to participate. And it will do whatever it takes to return Gabriel to the fold - alive or dead. It will pursue him to the ends of the earth. From the underground tunnels of New York and London to ruins hidden beneath Rome and Berlin to a remote region in Africa that is rumoured to harbour one of history's greatest treasures, Gabriel will fight his running battle for freedom against forces that even he cannot see...

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About the Author

Also by John Twelve Hawks

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T H E

# Dark River

*Book Two of*

*The Fourth Realm Trilogy*



*for my children*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*THE DARK RIVER* is a work of fiction inspired by the real world.

An adventurous reader can touch the sundial hidden beneath the streets of Rome, travel to Ethiopia and stand outside the holy sanctuary in Axum, or walk through Grand Central Terminal in New York and look up at the mystery on the concourse ceiling.

The aspects of the Vast Machine described in the novel are also real or under development. In the near future, both private and governmental total information systems will monitor every aspect of our lives. A central computer will remember where we go and what we buy, the e-mail we write, and the books we read.

Each attack on privacy is justified by the pervasive culture of fear that seems to surround us and grow stronger every day. The ultimate consequences of that fear are expressed in my vision of the First Realm. Its darkness will exist forever and it will be opposed—forever—by compassion, bravery, and love.

—John Twelve Hawks

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

IN *THE TRAVELLER*, John Twelve Hawks introduced readers to an ancient conflict going on beneath the surface of our day-to-day world. This conflict involves three groups of people: the Brethren, the Travellers, and the Harlequins.

*Kennard Nash* is the leader of the Brethren, a group of powerful individuals who oppose any change in the established social structure. *Nathan Boone* is the secret organization's head of security. The Brethren are called the "Tabula" by their enemies because they see both humanity and human consciousness as a tabula rasa—a blank slate on which they can scrawl their own message of intolerance and fear. In the eighteenth century, the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham designed the Panopticon: a model prison where one observer could monitor hundreds of prisoners and remain unseen. Both Nash and Boone believe that the computerized surveillance system being created in the industrial world will allow them to establish a Virtual Panopticon.

For centuries, the Brethren have tried to exterminate the Travellers: men and women who have the power to send their energy into one of six realms. The realms are parallel realities that have been described by visionaries from every faith. Travellers return to this world with new insights and revelations that challenge the established order and the Brethren believe that they are the primary source of social instability. One of the last surviving Travellers was *Matthew Corrigan*, but he disappeared



when the Brethren's mercenaries attacked his home. His two surviving sons, *Michael and Gabriel Corrigan*, lived off the Grid until they discovered that they also had the power to become Travellers.

The Travellers could have been exterminated many years ago, but they've been protected by a small group of dedicated fighters called Harlequins. Matthew Corrigan was once protected by a German-born Harlequin named *Thorn* who was killed in Prague by Nathan Boone. Thorn's daughter, *Maya*, was sent to America to find the two Corrigan brothers. Maya is supported by a French Harlequin named *Linden*, and she often thinks about the legendary Harlequin *Mother Blessing*, who has disappeared. When Maya visited Los Angeles, she found two allies: a martial arts teacher named *Hollis Wilson* and a young woman named *Vicki Fraser*.

As the story continues, Michael Corrigan has gone over to the Brethren while his younger brother, Gabriel, is hiding with Maya, Hollis, and Vicki. At New Harmony, the Arizona community started by Matthew Corrigan, storm clouds cover the sky and snow begins to fall ...

## PRELUDE

SNOWFLAKES BEGAN DRIFTING down from the darkening sky as the members of New Harmony returned to their homes for dinner. The adults working on a retaining wall near the community center blew on their hands and talked about storm fronts, while the children cocked their heads backward, opened their mouths, and spun around trying to catch the ice crystals on their tongues.

Alice Chen was a small, serious girl in jeans, work boots, and a blue nylon parka. She had just turned eleven, but her best friends, Helen and Melissa, were both twelve going on thirteen. Lately, the two older girls had been having long conversations about childish behavior and which boys at New Harmony were stupid and immature.

Although Alice wanted to taste the snowflakes, she decided that it wasn't very mature of her to twirl around with her tongue out like the Lower School babies. Pulling on her knit cap, she followed her friends down one of the paths that crisscrossed through the canyon. It was difficult to be grown-up. She was relieved when Melissa tagged Helen, shouted, "You're it!" and darted away.

The three friends dashed down the canyon, laughing and chasing one another. The night air was cold and smelled of pine and wet soil and the faint odor of a wood fire down by the greenhouse. As they passed through a clearing, the snowflakes stopped falling for a moment and swirled around in a circle—as if a family of ghosts had lingered to play among the trees.

There was a distant mechanical sound, growing louder, and the girls stopped running. Seconds later, a helicopter with Arizona Forest Service markings roared above them and continued up the canyon. They had seen helicopters like that, but always in the summer. It was strange to see one in February.

"They're probably searching for someone," Melissa said. "Bet a tourist went looking for the Indian ruins and got lost."

"And now it's getting dark," Alice said. It would be terrible to be alone like that, she thought—getting tired and scared as you trudged through the snow.

Helen leaned forward and slapped Alice on the shoulder. "Now you're it!" she said. And they started running.

\* \* \*

A NIGHT-VISION device and a thermal imaging sensor were mounted on the underside of the helicopter. The NVD collected visible light as well as the lower portion of the infrared spectrum, while the thermal sensor detected the heat emitted from different objects. The two devices sent their data to a computer that combined everything into a single video image.

Eighteen miles from New Harmony, Nathan Boone sat in the back of a bread delivery truck that had been converted to a surveillance vehicle. He sipped some coffee—no sugar, no cream—and watched as a black-and-white vision of New Harmony appeared on a monitor.

The head of security for the Brethren was a neatly dressed man with short gray hair and steel-rimmed glasses. There was something severe, almost judgmental in his manner. Policemen and border guards said, "Yes, sir," when they first met him, and civilians usually lowered their eyes when he asked them a question.

Boone had used night-vision devices when he was in the military, but the new dual camera was a significant advance. Now he could see targets both inside and outside at the same time: one person strolling beneath the trees and another washing the dishes in the kitchen. Even more helpful was that the computer was capable of evaluating each source of light and making an informed guess whether the object was a human being or a hot frying pan. Boone saw the new camera as evidence that science and technology—indeed, the future itself—were on his side.

George Cossette, the other person sitting in the truck, was a surveillance expert who had been flown in from Geneva. He was a pale young man with a great many food allergies. During the eight days of surveillance, he had occasionally used the computer's Internet uplink to bid on plastic figurines of comic book heroes.

"Give me a count," Boone said, watching the live feed from the helicopter.

Concentrating on the monitor, Cossette began to type commands. "All sources of heat or just the humans?"

"Just the humans. Thank you."

*Click. Click.* Fingers moving on a keyboard. A few seconds later, the sixty-eight people living at New Harmony were outlined on the screen.

"How accurate is that?"

"Ninety-eight to ninety-nine percent. We might have missed one or two people who were on the edge of the scan zone."

Boone took off his glasses, polished them with a small flannel cloth, and watched the video a second time. Over the years, Travellers and their Pathfinder teachers had preached about the so-called Light that existed inside every person. But real light—not the spiritual kind—had become a new method of detection. It was impossible to hide, even in the darkness.

\* \* \*

SNOWFLAKES CLUNG TO Alice's hair as she entered the kitchen, but they melted before she pulled off her jacket. Her family's house was built in the Southwest style, with a flat roof, small windows, and little exterior decoration. Like all the other buildings in the canyon, the house was made of straw—bales had been stacked into walls, skewered with steel rods, and then covered with waterproof plaster. The ground floor was dominated by one large area with a kitchen, living room, and open staircase that led to a sleeping loft. A doorway led to Alice's bedroom, a home office, and a bathroom. Because of the thick walls, there was an alcove around each window frame; the one in the kitchen was filled with a basket of ripening avocados and some old bones found out in the desert.

A pot boiling on the electric stove gave off steam and fogged up the window glass. On a cold night like this, Alice felt as if she were living in a space capsule dropped to the bottom of a tropical lagoon. If she wiped the moisture away from the window, she would probably see a pilot fish gliding past white coral.

As usual, her mother had left a mess in the kitchen—dirty bowls and spoons, stems from cut basil, and an open flour container just waiting for the mice. Alice's black braid swung back and forth as she moved about the kitchen, putting away food and wiping up crumbs. She washed the mixing bowls and spoons, and then placed them on a clean towel as if they were scalpels on a surgical table. When she was putting away the flour, her mother came downstairs from the sleeping loft carrying a stack of medical magazines.

Dr. Joan Chen was a petite woman with short black hair. She was a physician who had moved to New Harmony with her daughter after her husband died in a car accident.

Every evening before dinner, Joan changed from jeans and a flannel shirt to a long skirt and a silk blouse.

"Thanks, honey. But you didn't have to clean up. I would have done all that ..." Joan sat in a carved chair near the fireplace and placed the magazines on her lap.

"Who's coming for dinner?" Alice asked. The people at New Harmony were always sharing meals with each other.

"Martin and Antonio. The budget committee has to make a decision about something."

"Did you get bread at the bakery?"

"Well, of course I did," Joan said. Then she fluttered her right hand as if she were searching for a memory. "That is, maybe I did. I think so."

Alice searched the kitchen and found a loaf of bread that appeared to be about three days old. Turning on the oven, she split the loaf in half, rubbed both sides with fresh garlic, and drizzled on some olive oil. As the bread roasted on a steel tray, she set the table and got out the serving platter for pasta. When she was finally done, she intended to walk silently past her mother to protest all the work she had to do. But when she approached the chair, Joan reached out and touched her daughter's hand.

"Thank you, dear. I'm lucky to have such a wonderful daughter."

\* \* \*

SCOUTS WERE IN position at the perimeter of New Harmony, and the rest of the mercenaries had just left a motel in San Lucas. Boone e-mailed a message to Kennard Nash, the current head of the Brethren. A few minutes later, he received a response: *The previously discussed action is now confirmed.*

Boone called the driver of the SUV carrying the first team. "Proceed to Point Delta. Employees should now take their PTS medication."

Each mercenary was carrying a plastic packet containing two pretraumatic stress pills. Boone's employees had nicknamed them "pits pills," and swallowing them before an action was called "taking your pits." The medication temporarily immunized anyone entering a violent situation against strong feelings of guilt or regret.

The original research concerning PTS was done at Harvard University when neurologists found out that accident victims taking a cardiac drug called propranolol had decreased amounts of physiological trauma. Scientists working for the Brethren's research group, the Evergreen Foundation, realized the implications of this discovery. They obtained a grant from the U.S. Defense Department to study the drug when used by soldiers in combat. The PTS medication inhibited the brain's hormonal reactions to shock, disgust, and fear. This lessened the formation of traumatic memories.

Nathan Boone had never taken a PTS pill or any other kind of trauma medication. If you believed in what you were doing, if you knew you were right, then there was no such thing as guilt.

\* \* \*

ALICE STAYED IN her bedroom until the rest of the budget committee showed up for dinner. Martin Greenwald arrived first, knocking softly on the kitchen door and waiting for Joan to greet him. Martin was an older man with stubby legs and thick eyeglasses. He had been a successful businessman in Houston until his car broke down on the freeway one afternoon and a man named Matthew Corrigan stopped to help him. Matthew turned out to be a Traveller, a spiritual teacher with the power to leave his body and travel to other realities. He had spent several weeks talking to the Greenwald family and their friends, then had embraced them all at one final meeting and walked away.

New Harmony was a reflection of the Traveller's ideas—an attempt to create a new way of living that was apart from the Vast Machine.

Alice had learned about Travellers from other kids, but was uncertain how it all worked. She knew that there were six different worlds, called realms. This world—with its fresh bread and dirty dishes—was the Fourth Realm. The Third Realm was a forest with friendly animals, and that sounded great. But there was also a Realm of hungry ghosts, and another place where people were always fighting.

Matthew's son, Gabriel, was a young man in his twenties who was also a Traveller. In October, he had spent a night at New Harmony with a Harlequin bodyguard named Maya. Now it was early February, and the adults were still talking about Gabriel while the kids argued about the Harlequin. Ricky Cutler said Maya had probably killed dozens of people and that she knew something called the Tiger Claw Variation: one punch to the heart, and the other guy was dead. Alice decided that the Tiger Claw Variation was a big fake invented on the Internet. Maya was very much a real person, a young woman with thick black hair and ghostly blue eyes who carried her sword in a tube hanging from her shoulder.

A few minutes after Martin arrived, Antonio Cardenas thumped on the door and walked in without asking. Antonio was a swaggering, athletic man who had once been a contractor in Houston. When the first group moved into the canyon, he had built the three windmills up on the mesa that provided the community's electric power. Everyone at New Harmony liked Antonio; some of the younger boys even wore their tool belts in the same low-slung way he did.

The two men smiled at Alice and asked her about her cello lessons. Everyone sat down at the oak wood table—like most of the furniture in the house, it had been built in



Mexico. The pasta was served and the adults began to discuss the issue before the budget committee. New Harmony had now saved enough money to buy a sophisticated battery system to store electric power. The current system allowed every family to have a stove, a refrigerator, and two space heaters. More batteries would mean more appliances, but perhaps that wasn't a good idea.

"I think it's more efficient to keep the washing machines up at the community center," Martin said. "And I don't think we need espresso machines and microwave ovens."

"I disagree," Joan said. "Microwaves actually use less power."

Antonio nodded. "And I'd like some cappuccino in the morning."

\* \* \*

AS ALICE CLEARED the table of dirty dishes, she glanced at the wall clock over the sink. It was late Wednesday night in Arizona, which meant Thursday afternoon in Australia. She had about ten minutes to get ready for her music lesson. The adults ignored her while she quickly pulled on her long winter coat, got her cello case, and went outside.

It was still snowing. The rubber soles of her work boots made a crunching sound as she walked from the front door to the gate. A six-foot-high adobe wall surrounded the house and vegetable garden; it kept out the deer in the summertime. Last year, Antonio had installed a large gate with carvings of scenes from the Garden of Eden. If you stood close enough to the dark oak wood you could see Adam and Eve, a flowering tree, and a serpent.

Alice pushed the gate open and passed beneath the archway. The path up the canyon to the community center was covered with snow, but that didn't bother her. The kerosene lantern she carried swung back and forth as the

snowflakes kept falling. Snow covered the pine trees and mountain mahogany; it transformed a pile of firewood into a mound that looked like a sleeping bear.

The community center was made up of four large buildings around a courtyard. One of the buildings was the Upper School for older students, eight rooms that were designed for online learning. A router in the storage room was connected to a cable that led to a satellite dish on the mesa above them. There were no telephone lines at New Harmony, and cell phones didn't work in the canyon. People either used the Internet or the satellite phone kept at the community center.

Alice turned on the computer, removed her cello from its carrying case, and positioned a straight-backed chair in front of the Web cam. She connected with the Internet and a moment later her cello teacher appeared on the large monitor screen. Miss Harwick was an older woman who had once played for the Sydney Opera.

"Have you practiced, Alice?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Let's start with 'Greensleeves' today."

Alice drew the bow back and her body absorbed the deep vibration from the first note. Playing the cello made her feel bigger, more substantial, and she could hold on to that power for a few hours after she stopped playing.

"Very good," said Miss Harwick. "Now let me hear section B again. This time focus on your pitch in the third measure and—"

The monitor screen went black. At first, Alice thought that something was wrong with the generator. But the electric lights were working and she could hear the faint hum of the computer fan.

While she was checking the cables, a door squeaked open and Brian Bates walked into the room. Brian was a fifteen-year-old boy with dark brown eyes and blond hair down to his shoulders. Helen and Melissa thought he was

cute, but Alice didn't like to talk about things like that. She and Brian were music friends; he played the trumpet and worked with teachers in London and New Orleans.

"Hey, Celloissima. Didn't know you were practicing tonight."

"I'm supposed to be having a lesson, but the computer just went off."

"Did you change anything?"

"Of course not. I went online and contacted Miss Harwick. Everything was okay until a few seconds ago."

"Don't worry. I'll fix it. I've got a lesson in forty minutes with a new teacher in London. He plays for the Jazz Tribe."

Brian put down his trumpet case and pulled off his parka. "How are the lessons going, Celloissima? I heard you practicing on Thursday. It sounded pretty good."

"I've got to come up with a nickname for you," Alice said. "What about Brianissima?"

Brian smiled as he sat down at the computer. "Issima is a feminine ending. It's got to be something different."

Pulling on her coat, Alice decided to leave her cello at the community center and go back to the house. A door from the performance room led to a storage closet. She stepped around a potter's wheel and left the cello leaning against the wall in a corner, protected by two plastic bags of ceramic clay. That was when she heard a man's voice coming from the performance room.

Alice returned to the partially opened door, peered through the gap, and stopped breathing. A big man with a beard was pointing a rifle at Brian. The stranger wore brown-and-green camouflage clothing like the deer hunters Alice had seen on the road to San Lucas. Dark green camouflage grease was smeared on his cheeks, and he had special goggles with a rubber strap. The goggles were pushed upward on his forehead, the two eyepieces combining into a single lens that reminded her of a monster's horn.

“What’s your name?” the man asked Brian. His voice was flat and neutral.

Brian didn’t answer. He pushed back the chair and got up slowly.

“I asked you a question, pal.”

“I’m Brian Bates.”

“Anybody else here in this building?”

“No. Just me.”

“So what are you doing?”

“Trying to go online.”

The bearded man laughed softly. “You’re wasting your time. We just cut the cable to the mesa.”

“And who are you?”

“I wouldn’t worry about that, pal. If you want to grow up and get laid, own a car, stuff like that—then you better answer my questions. Where’s the Traveller?”

“What traveller? Nobody has visited this place since the first snowfall.”

The man motioned with his rifle. “Don’t be cute. You know what I’m talking about. A Traveller stayed here with a Harlequin named Maya. Where’d they go?”

Brian shifted his weight slightly, as if he were going to sprint for the door.

“I’m waiting for an answer, pal.”

“Go to hell ...”

Brian jumped forward and the bearded man fired his rifle. The gunshots were so loud that Alice jerked away from the door. She stood in the shadows for a full minute, the sound still vibrating through her body, and then returned to the light. The man with the rifle was gone, but Brian lay on his side, as if he had fallen asleep on the floor, curled around a bright pool of blood.

Her body was the same, but her Alice-self—the girl who had laughed with her friends and played the cello—had suddenly become much smaller. It felt as if she were living inside a hollow statue, looking out at the world.

Voices. Alice stepped back into the shadows as Brian's killer returned with six other men. They all wore camouflage clothing and radio headsets with little microphones that curved around to their mouths. Each man carried a different kind of rifle, but all the weapons had a laser-sighting device attached to the barrel. The leader—an older man with short hair and wire-rimmed glasses—was talking softly into his headset. He nodded and switched off the transmitter clipped to his belt.

"Okay, Summerfield and Gleason are in position with the thermal sensors. They'll stop anyone trying to escape, but I don't want that to happen."

A few of the men nodded. One of them was testing his laser sight, and a little red dot danced across the white wall.

"Remember—the weapons you've been given have been registered under the names of people who live here. If for some reason you have to use an unregistered weapon, please keep track of location, target, and number of shots fired." The leader waited until his men nodded. "Okay. You know what to do. Let's go."

The six men went away, fitting the goggles over their eyes, but the leader remained in the room. Pacing back and forth, he spoke occasionally on the headset. *Yes. Confirmed. Next objective.* The leader ignored Brian's dead body—almost as if he hadn't noticed it—but when a thin line of blood trickled across the floor, he gracefully stepped over it and kept moving.

Alice sat down in a corner of the storage room, drew her knees up to her chest, and closed her eyes. She had to do something—find her mother, warn the others—but her body wouldn't move. Alice's brain kept producing thoughts, and she watched them passively as if they were fuzzy images on a television screen. Someone was crying, talking loudly—and then she recognized a familiar voice.

"Where are my children? I want to see my children ..."

Returning quietly to the door, Alice saw that the leader had brought Janet Wilkins into the room. The Wilkins family came from England; they had just joined New Harmony a few months ago. Mrs. Wilkins was a plump, fussy woman who seemed to be afraid of everything—rattlesnakes, rockslides, and lightning.

The leader held Mrs. Wilkins's arm tightly. He guided her across the room and made her sit down on the straight-backed chair. "There you go, Janet. Make yourself comfortable. Can I get you a glass of water?"

"No. That's not necessary." Mrs. Wilkins saw the dead body, and then she turned her head away. "I-I want to see my children."

"Don't worry, Janet. They're safe. I'll take you to them in a few minutes, but there's one thing I need you to do first." The leader reached into his pocket, pulled out a piece of paper, and handed it to Mrs. Wilkins. "Here. Read this."

A video camera on a tripod had been placed in the room. The leader set the camera five feet away from Mrs. Wilkins and made sure that she was in the viewfinder. "Okay," he told her, "go ahead."

Mrs. Wilkins's hands were shaking as she began to read: " 'In the last few weeks, members of New Harmony have received messages from God. We cannot doubt these messages. We know they are true ...' "

She stopped reading and shook her head. *No. Can't do this.* Standing behind the video camera, the leader drew a handgun from his shoulder holster.

" 'But there are disbelievers among us,' " Mrs. Wilkins continued. " 'People who have followed the teachings of the Evil One. It's important that we perform a cleansing act so that all of us can enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' "

The leader lowered his gun and switched off the camera. "Thank you, Janet. That was a good first step, but it's still not enough. You know why we're here and what we're looking for. I want information about the Traveller."

Mrs. Wilkins started crying, her face contorted into a mask of sadness and fear. "I don't know anything. I swear ..."

"Everybody knows something."

"The young man isn't here anymore. He's gone. But my husband said Martin Greenwald got a letter from a Traveller a few weeks ago."

"And where is this letter?"

"It's probably in Martin's house. He has a little office there."

The leader spoke into his headset. "Go to the Greenwald house in sector five. Search the office for a letter from the Traveller. This is level-one priority." Switching off his radio, he took a step toward Mrs. Wilkins. "Anything else you can tell me?"

"I don't support the Travellers or the Harlequins. I'm not on anybody's side. I just want my children."

"Of course. I understand." Once again, the leader's voice was soft and comforting. "Why don't you join them?"

He raised the handgun and shot her. Mrs. Wilkins's body fell backward with a thump. The leader looked down at the dead woman as if she were a piece of trash left on the floor, then slid his gun back in its holster and left the room.

Alice felt like time had stopped and restarted in a herky-jerky manner. It seemed to take a very long time to push the closet door open and walk through the rehearsal room. When she reached the hallway, time went so fast that she was conscious of only a few things: the concrete walls, the beckoning doorway, the man with the steel glasses at the other end of the corridor who raised his gun and shouted at her.

Alice went the other way, pushing the door open and running out into the night. It was still snowing and very cold, but the darkness surrounded her like a magic cloak. Her face and bare hands felt like they were burning when she emerged from the grove of juniper trees and

approached the house. The lights were still on inside; that had to be a good sign. When she passed beneath the archway she reached out and touched the flowering tree that Antonio had carved into the gate.

The front door was unlocked. Alice entered the house and saw that the dinner dishes were still on the table. "Hello," she said softly. No one answered. Moving as quietly as possible, she inspected the kitchen and then entered the living room. Where was she supposed to go? Where were the adults hiding?

Alice stood still and listened for voices, anything that would tell her what to do. The wind blew snowflakes against the windows while the space heater hummed softly. She took a step forward and heard a faint dripping sound, as if water were leaking out of a kitchen pipe. The sound came again—a little louder—then she circled around the couch and saw a pool of blood. A drop of blood trickled down from the loft and splattered on the floor.

Her body began moving again and she slowly climbed the staircase to the loft. There were only fourteen steps, but it felt like the longest journey of her life. Step. Another step. She wanted to stop, but her legs kept moving. "Please, Mommy," she whispered as if she were begging for a special favor. "Please ..." And then she was up in the loft and standing next to her mother's body.

The front door slammed open. Alice crouched down in the shadows, a few inches away from the bed. A man had entered the house. He was talking loudly into his headset microphone.

"Yes, sir. I'm back at sector nine ..."

There was a splashing sound and Alice peered over the edge of the loft. A man wearing camouflage clothing was pouring a clear liquid over the furniture. The sharp smell of gasoline filled the air.

"No kids here—only the targets in my sector. Raymond caught two people running for the trees, but they were



both adults. Affirmative. We took the bodies inside.”

The man tossed the empty fuel can onto the floor, returned to the entryway, and lit a wooden match. He held it in front of his face for an instant and Alice saw, not cruelty or hatred, but simple obedience. The man tossed the match on the floor and the gasoline immediately caught fire. Satisfied, the man walked out the door, closing it behind him.

Black smoke filled the room as Alice stumbled down the staircase. There was a single window on the north side of the house, about six feet above the floor. She pushed her mother’s desk against the wall, clicked the latch open, and crawled outside, falling onto the snow.

All she wanted to do was hide like a small animal curled up in a burrow. Coughing and crying from the smoke, she passed through the carved gate one last time. A chemical odor filled the air; it smelled like a garbage fire at the dump. Alice followed the adobe wall to a patch of bear grass and began scrambling up the rocky slope that led to the ridge above the canyon. As she climbed higher, she saw that all the houses were burning now, the flames flowing like a luminous river. The canyon got steeper and she had to grab at branches and clumps of grass, pulling herself upward.

Near the top of the ridge, she heard a cracking sound and a bullet hit the snow-covered dirt in front of her. She threw herself sideways and rolled back down the hill, covering her face with her hands. Her body went about twenty feet, then hit a thornbush and stopped. As she began to get up, she remembered what the leader had said at the community center. *Summerfield and Gleason are in position. Thermal sensors.* And what did the word *thermal* mean? Heat. The gunman could see her because her body was warm.

Lying on her back, Alice began to scoop up snow with her bare hands. She covered her legs with snow, then lay

flat and pushed snow over her stomach and chest. Finally, she buried her left arm and used the right arm to cover her neck and face, leaving a little opening around her mouth. Her bare skin began to tingle and burn, but she stayed beside the thornbush and tried not to move. As the cold penetrated her body, the last particle of her Alice-self flickered and faded and died.

# 1

MICHAEL CORRIGAN SAT IN a windowless room at the Evergreen Foundation's Research Center, north of New York City. He was watching a young Frenchwoman as she wandered through the Printemps Department Store in Paris. The surveillance cameras in the store reduced everything to black and white and shades of gray, but he could see that she was a brunette, fairly tall, and quite attractive. He liked her short skirt, black leather jacket, and her shoes—high heels with thin straps tied around her ankles.

The scanner room resembled a private facility for showing movies. It had a large flat-panel video screen and speakers built into the walls. But there was only one place to sit—a butternut-brown leather lounge chair with a computer monitor and keyboard on a pivoting steel arm. Whoever was using the room could type directions into the system or slip on a phone headset and talk to the staff at the new computer center in Berlin. The first time Michael sat in the chair, he had to be guided through the use of scanning programs and backdoor access channels to surveillance systems. Now he could do simple tracking operations on his own.

The young brunette was walking through the beauty-care section. Michael had checked out the store a few days earlier and was hoping that his target would take the escalator upstairs to the Printemps de la Mode section. Although surveillance cameras weren't allowed in the

individual changing rooms, there was a hidden camera in the public area at the end of the hallway. Occasionally the Frenchwomen would come out wearing lingerie so they could study themselves in a full-length mirror.

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MICHAEL'S PRESENCE IN the scanner room was just another indication of his growing influence among the Brethren. He was a Traveller like his father, Matthew, and younger brother, Gabriel. In the past, Travellers had been seen as prophets or mystics, madmen or liberators. They had the power to break free of their bodies and send their conscious energy—their “Light”—to other realities. When they returned, they had visions and insights that transformed the world.

Travellers had always encountered resistance from the authorities, but in the modern era a group of men called the Brethren began to identify Travellers and kill them before they could challenge the established order. Inspired by the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, an eighteenth-century British philosopher, the Brethren wanted to establish a Virtual Panopticon, an invisible prison that would contain everyone in the industrial world. The Brethren believed that once the population assumed they were being watched at all times, they would automatically follow the rules.

The true symbol of the age was a closed-circuit surveillance camera. Computerized information systems had formed a Vast Machine that could link images and information to monitor large populations. For thousands of years, those in power had tried to ensure the permanency of their particular system. Finally, this dream of social control had become a real possibility.

The Brethren had entered Michael's and Gabriel's lives when they were growing up on a farm in South Dakota. A team of mercenaries looking for their father had attacked

their home and set fire to the buildings. The two Corrigan brothers had survived, but their father had disappeared. Years later, after being raised by their mother off the Grid, the Corrigans ended up in Los Angeles. Nathan Boone and his men first captured Michael, and then Gabriel. They transported both brothers to the Evergreen Foundation's Research Center.

The Brethren's scientists had built a powerful quantum computer, and the subatomic particles at the heart of the machine had enabled communication with the other realms that only Travellers had been able to explore. The new quantum computer was supposed to track a Traveller's passage across the four barriers to other worlds, but a young Harlequin named Maya had destroyed it when she rescued Gabriel.

Whenever Michael evaluated his new change in status, he had to admit that Maya's attack on the Research Center was the crucial step in his personal transformation. He had shown his loyalty—not to his brother—but to the Brethren. Once the wreckage was cleaned up and a new security perimeter was established, Michael had returned to the center. He was still a prisoner, but eventually everyone in the world was going to be part of an enormous prison. The only real distinction was your level of awareness. There was going to be a new alignment of power in the world, and he planned to be on the winning side.

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IT HAD TAKEN only a few sessions in the room for Michael to be seduced by the power of the Vast Machine. There was something about sitting in the chair that made you feel like God looking down from heaven. Right now, the young woman wearing the leather jacket had just stopped at a makeup counter and was chatting with the salesclerk. Michael slipped on the headset and pressed a switch.

Immediately, he was talking to the Brethren's new computer center in Berlin.

"This is Michael. I want to speak to Lars."

"Just a minute, please," said a woman with a German accent. A few seconds later, Lars came on the line. He was always helpful, and never asked impertinent questions.

"Okay. I'm at Printemps in Paris," Michael said. "The target is at the makeup counter. So how do I get her personal information?"

"Let me take a look," Lars said.

A small red light appeared on the lower right corner of the screen. That meant Lars had access to the same image. Often several technicians were watching the same surveillance system or you attached yourself to the activities of a bored security guard sitting in a monitoring room somewhere. The guards—who were supposedly the first line of defense against terrorists and criminals—spent a great deal of their time stalking women through malls and then out into the parking lot. If you switched on the audio, you could hear them chatting to one another and laughing when a woman wearing a tight skirt was about to get into a sports car.

"We can reduce her face to an algorithm and compare it to the photographs in the French passport database," Lars explained. "But it's much easier if we just pick up her credit card number. Look at your personal monitor and click the dedicated telecommunications option. Type in as much information as possible: location of the phone, date, time—which is right now, of course. The Carnivore program will skim her number the moment it's transmitted."

The store clerk slid the young woman's card through a scanner and numbers flashed onto the screen. "And there it is," Lars said as if he were a magician who had taught his apprentice a new trick. "Now double-click ..."

"I know what to do." Michael moved the cursor to the cross-reference button and, almost instantly, additional