



To protect him from a murderous tyrant, fourteen-year-old Adams was hidden away. His existence is a secret. But when he witnesses a tragedy unfolding, he can't stand by. Now he's being hunted by a villain who'll stop at nothing to retain his iron grip on the world of the future.

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PART ONE:

*Beneath  
the  
Surface*



# A Dream in *the* Darkness

**T**he Marshal sat up in bed and took note of the time. For the sixth night in a row, he had been roused from his sleep at precisely 2:37 a.m. A vivid nightmare had broken his slumber each time, but with each successive dream, the details had grown clearer. The repetition of the events depicted and the timing of the dreams had led him to believe they were more than just random, subconscious fears being played out by his mind during the nightly rhythm of its REM cycles. These dreams were a message, and the Marshal always took such messages seriously.

There was sweat on his forehead and bags under his eyes. His mouth was dry with fear, but he managed a decisive phrase: “Night-time mode off.” Instantly, the room came to life, perfectly illuminated for the day ahead. “Andronica,” the Marshal said, louder this time.

“Yes, sir,” a female voice replied through the room’s embedded audio system.

“Council,” the Marshal said. “Now.”

“Now, sir?” asked Andronica. “It’s the middle of the night, my lord.”

“Now,” repeated the Marshal calmly. He pulled back the covers from his plush, oversized bed and stepped to the floor. “This ends now.”



The council chamber at the Marshal’s residence was located on the third subterranean level, far below Transom City. It was more of a bunker than a conference room, but Marshal Postulus Grouse liked the serious atmosphere the room evoked. He saw no reason to indulge a more cheerful meeting place, and there were few locations as private. Besides that, he liked for his staff to retain a wartime posture, and settings like the council chamber helped set the mood.

When the Marshal arrived, his cabinet was already assembled. Even though he had the shortest distance to travel—just a ride down the elevator—the men and women in his employ knew better than to keep him waiting.

The Marshal was tall—six foot four. He wasn’t terribly overweight, but he wasn’t fit either. He was lumpy, as if the extra pounds on his long frame could neither collect themselves in a single place nor spread themselves evenly across such a great distance. He wore black from the top of his collar to the soles of his shoes, which contrasted starkly with his reddish skin and the sparse silver hair atop his head. He walked to the front of the room with a slight limp and the aid of a cane. As he passed by the twelve members of his cabinet, he acknowledged each in turn with a nod. They answered by standing at attention.

At the front of the room and the head of the table, the Marshal turned and looked at the group. “Friends,” he said, engaging the

lilt of his slight Southern accent, “thank you for coming.” And with that, he took his seat.

A second later, so did everyone else.

“I’ll get right to it,” he began. “Insurrection has been birthed, and it must be crushed in its cradle.” Such a statement was nothing new to the ears of those in the Marshal’s inner circle. Though they knew no one would dare challenge their leader—at least not openly—they had grown used to the paranoid delusions about rebellions and uprisings that captured his focus from time to time. But they had never been summoned in the middle of the night before.

There was a moment of silence, and the minister of defense decided to fill it: “Sir, if I may ask, what is the nature of the threat?”

“I have reason to believe my life is in danger.”

The room gasped, as if each cabinet member were vying to be seen as the most shocked.

“But sir,” the minister of agriculture said, “it’s not possible. You are beloved. You are the People’s Protector.”

“You don’t believe me?” asked the Marshal, his mouth turned upward as if he had just heard something funny.

“No, sir, I didn’t mean—”

“But you just said it wasn’t possible.”

“I only meant that no one would dare think of attacking you.”

“I see. So then, I’m making it up? Is that right?” The Marshal chuckled, his eyes bright.

“No, of course not.”

“Then I’ve got my facts wrong. Is that it?”

The minister of agriculture hunched in on himself as if the room were closing in around him. “Certainly not, sir.”

“Am I mad, then?” The Marshal’s face was decidedly stern.

“My lord, no!”

“But you just said—”

“Forgive me!” pleaded the minister.

The Marshal took a deep breath and ran a finger through his silver hair. “Ours is an empire that encircles the planet. In a relatively short period of time, our superior values and virtues have spread across the globe. Freedom has been given to the people of every continent. It is my job, as the People’s Protector, to ensure that everyone has the same rights, the same freedoms, no matter their rung on the social ladder.” He smiled at the minister, who was now ghost white. “That includes you, dear friend. You are entitled to your opinion. You are free to speak your mind.”

The minister of agriculture sighed with relief. “Thank you, sir,” he said, wiping a drop of sweat from his brow.

The finance minister two seats down seemed to sense what was coming and shook her head, ever so slightly, in pity.

“Far be it from me to stifle a dissenting opinion,” continued the Marshal, still grinning. “In fact, I’d like to help extend the reach of your voice. Amplify it, as it were.”

“Amplify my voice, sir?”

“Yes, I’d like to make it so everyone can hear what you have to say.”

“Sir, I really don’t think that’s necess—”

“But I insist.” The Marshal pressed a small button on the table, and two drone guards entered. Addressing them, he said, “Mr. Eliot here would like his voice to be heard around the world.” At that, the two guards lifted the minister of agriculture high out of his seat so that his feet dangled above the dark, concrete floor. “See to it that the, uh, *former* minister of agriculture is heard.” The Marshal paused for dramatic effect, and then in a tone that was as steady as the one he used each morning to order breakfast, he told the guards, “Remove his vocal cords and have them installed in the new talk-show drone being deployed next week.”



As Mr. Eliot was being escorted out of the room, he pleaded with the guard on his right, but unfortunately for him, a drone has no heart to be softened. Then he turned to the one on his left. “No! Wait! This isn’t what I—”

The drone squeezed Eliot’s arm tightly—a bit too tightly—and Eliot passed out from the pain. It was too late, but the minister finally shut his mouth.

“It’s going to be a very popular show, Mr. Eliot. Everyone in the world will soon know your voice,” assured the Marshal. With that, he waved his hand.

The guards quickly disappeared with their prisoner, and the door clicked shut behind them.

“I’m terribly sorry about that,” said the Marshal to the now wide-eyed room. “Where were we? Ah, yes. There is a coup d’état brewing, and we must end it before it begins.”

Once again, he pushed a button on the table, but this time, instead of guards entering the room, a small blue light appeared above the dead center of the antique tabletop.

“For the past several evenings, I have been receiving messages,” the Marshal began. He looked down at the table and paused for a moment. “Forgive me, friends. Allow me to start again.”

The Marshal cleared his throat and took a sip of water from a ready glass. “Most of you are ignorant of the world in which we live. You dismiss fate as mere coincidence. You see cause and effect but never miracles. And you believe we are all alone in the universe. I don’t blame you. Really, I don’t. Ignorance can be much more enjoyable than understanding. But ignorance can only take you so far.”

He took another sip from his water glass, seizing the opportunity to read the faces in the room. “Friends, for the past six nights, I have experienced vivid dreams. In many ways, these experiences have been more vibrant than my waking life. But these were not just

dreams. Nighttime visions are usually more than they appear to be. These, I believe, were meant as a warning. A great catastrophe is coming, but the Ones Out There want us to survive.”

The Marshal smiled, seeing the confusion on the other faces in the room. “You do know about the Ones Out There, don’t you?” He looked around the table as if he were about to ask for a show of hands. No one dared move, lest he make an object of them. “Far be it from me to invoke religion, but do you suppose we are so much more enlightened than those who lived long ago?” He stood and placed his arms behind his back. “They were called gods, spirits, muses, angels, demons.”

The Marshal began to pace. “The labels don’t really matter. What’s important is that everyone from the Egyptians to the Aztecs to the Babylonians to the Greeks and the Romans believed. From East to West and from North to South, every thriving civilization was spurred on by help from Out There. Could it really be that all of these mighty empires, in many cases separated from one another by great distances of time and space, just happened to hold the same basic belief? Let me ask you: Who is more likely to be wrong—billions of people around the world, across thousands of years, all testifying to the same basic truth that we are not alone, or we who, only recently in the cosmic scheme of things, have chosen to dissent from the tide of history in order to stick our fingers in our ears and ignore the helpful voices calling to us from Out There?”

Everyone in the room tried not to blink. The minister of agriculture’s open chair spoke loudly that they should not engage the Marshal, not even to agree with him.

“Until tonight, the dreams have not been clear enough to take any action, but now I believe we have something.” He pressed another button, and the small blue light came to life, projecting a complete 3-D holographic image above the table. “A few nights

ago, I began using a thalamus scanner to record my dreams.” The Marshal took his chair once again.

Everyone watched as the grainy, blue-tinted image grew clearer. What they saw taking shape was a room full of clocks. There were grandfather clocks, sundials, pocket watches, alarm clocks, analog faces in every shape and size, and digital displays too numerous to count. From one angle, Mickey Mouse could be seen smiling at the room from the face of an antique watch. And in the center was a strange looking ceramic piece, obviously ancient. If it was a clock, it was unlike the rest—a box that was decorated on one side, though it was too small in the projection for anyone to make out anything more than that.

Suddenly, the room of clocks spun around, and when it came to a stop, there was the Marshal in his full-dress uniform, the ceremonial black and green he reserved for special occasions, his privilege as leader of the free world. He was winding a small black clock from the mid-twentieth century. He was careful and focused, as if applying too much pressure would cause the clock to crumble in his hands. When he was finished, the timepiece he held chimed twelve o’clock, and then, one by one, all the other clocks began to gong, beep, and ring—a cacophony of sounds growing louder with each tone. The projected Marshal dropped the clock he was holding to cover his ears, and the timepiece crashed to the ground, shattering like glass. From among the pieces, a small snake that had apparently been hiding in the clock slithered out. The Marshal did not react, either because he didn’t see it or because he wasn’t surprised by the creature’s presence.

As the twelfth chime rang out and the sound of the clocks reached a crescendo, a male figure appeared in the foreground of the holographic frame, obscured by shadow. Reaching toward an especially old and ornate grandfather clock as tall as himself, he

turned the minute hand counterclockwise. As he did, the chimes of every timepiece in the room began again, but this time, they counted backward from twelve and grew quieter with each tone. When the reverse dings, chimes, and bells were complete, the clock that had been shattered suddenly took its shape once more. The bits reassembled themselves in perfect order, undoing the damage the piece had suffered. The Marshal picked the clock up off the carpet and examined it. There appeared to be no sign of fracturing. He held it to his ear to find it ticking in steady rhythm.

Then the shadowed figure lunged with all his might into the side of the grandfather clock he had adjusted. It wobbled for a few seconds and then toppled over, taking down the clocks to its immediate right and causing a chain reaction. One by one, every clock fell over, either toppling onto its side or falling from its shelf. In that moment, it seemed as though the center of gravity had been refocused on the place where the Marshal was standing, for every remaining clock now fell in his direction. Within seconds, he was being buried alive in an avalanche of broken timepieces.

The Marshal paused the playback. "This was, more or less, all I could see until tonight. I would wake up at this point. They say you aren't supposed to see yourself die in a dream. But a short while ago, I dreamed this." The film of his subconscious mind resumed.

Just as the dream version of the Marshal was about to be crushed to death, he let loose the clock he had been holding, throwing it across the room. It struck the mysterious figure in the head, causing a spray of virtual blood to project across the boardroom table. As if knowing he'd have an audience, the shadowed assailant exited the frame, but not before shouting, "*Ante tenebras lux! Post tenebras lux!*"

The holographic image shrank down to a small blue light above the table's center and then disappeared entirely. "It's Latin. It

means ‘Before darkness, light. After darkness, light,’” confirmed the Marshal.

“But why, sir?” the particularly brave foreign relations minister asked.

“It doesn’t matter. What matters is that I’ve been warned about a threat against my life.”

As if he had been out of the room when the Marshal ordered his agricultural counterpart’s vocal cords untethered from his body, the minister of transportation services spoke up. “Sir, if I may, the elements of this dream are clearly symbolic. Should we not take time to analyze it further before acting too quickly?”

The Marshal glared at him and then exhaled in frustration. “I don’t expect to be crushed to death by an avalanche of clocks, I grant you that—but when my life is in danger, is there such a thing as ‘too quickly’?” he asked.

“Of course not, sir. I didn’t—”

“No amount of dream interpretation will change the fact that the Ones Out There have given me a great gift: a warning about the future. And now, thanks to this recording, we have what we need to stop it.”

“We do, sir? But the figure in the hologram is never shown clearly.”

“No, but his blood is.” The Marshal pressed another button on the desk, and a freeze frame image of the dark figure’s crimson blood splatter appeared. Turning to the minister of science on his right, the Marshal said, “I want to know whose blood this is. Magnify it. Analyze it. Use every piece of technology at your disposal—and invent some new ones if you have to. Just get me a name.”

“My lord?”

“Get me a name.”

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