

# **REVISIONS**

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**The fact that you're reading this means you're a) literate,**

*What...*

**and b) dead. Congratulations. You've met both preconditions.**

*...is going on?*

**The pain from your final injuries will subside as soon as they finish healing.**

*That car...It came so fast.*

**And if you're starting to panic—wondering where, what, and who you are—don't: your mentor is on his or her way, answers in hand.**

*These words...and nothing beyond them.*

**But first things first: jump number one. Don't worry. It'll be quick, and more or less painless.**

*Why can't I see anything else? ...Ripping...I'm ripping...Twisting...Fading.*

**Enjoy.**

\* \* \*

Hundreds of people danced and cheered atop a massive staircase stretching at least a football field in length. Swarms of laughing, yelling, rejoicing, strangers...He squeezed his eyes shut against the visual overload and clapped his hands to his ears to muffle the deluge of noise.

It didn't help: no matter how fervently he prayed, his impossible new surroundings refused to vanish.

Reluctantly, he let the sights and sounds filter back in...His clothes were the same as those worn by the hordes around him. And their words were...still incomprehensible, but they sounded Eastern European. Russian, maybe, only—

A slap on his back preceded the appearance of a mustached, middle-aged man's face in front of his own. Furry lips emitted something rapid and enthusiastic.

He nodded numbly, looked at his feet...and noticed with a start that he was wearing boots. Clumsy, black, *enormous* boots. His feet felt bigger. He felt bigger. Kneeling, he began to free his right foot to disprove this madness. He was a size ten, should *still* be a size ten—

Shouts of a different tone tore through the air. Authoritative shouts. Commanding shouts. The masses turned as one, and a loud cracking noise rang out, ricocheting off the stepped acoustics. Smoke followed, begat more thunder, and the masses turned back and ran.

**1905 A.D.: Odessa, Ukraine.**

Pushing, stumbling, scrambling men and women of all shapes and sizes streamed down around him. He left his laces untied and stood, bewildered by the date and place still scrolling through his head. Someone knocked him to the next level. He landed head first, his scalp splitting on impact. Rough hands yanked him to his feet, and the mustached man bellowed something harsh in his ear.

“...you fool! The Potemkin...Czar...attacking Odessa! Run!”

“What...”

“Are you deaf, comrade? Run, dammit! Run!”

“...the Hell is happening?”

The mustached man swung away and took three stairs in a stride, then four. Then collapsed head first in an explosion of red mist.

**Czarist forces react to a series of strikes and demonstrations across Russia.**

Ignoring the new set of words hanging in front of his eyes, he swiveled towards the now rolling gunfire as the mustached man's feet slid from view. He started to scream his confusion at the callous soldiers above, voice his—

Hot, searing pain preempted him. He fell, his head landing only a few feet from where it had smashed seconds earlier.

**The massacre on the Odessa steps and subsequent looting in the city's streets cost over 6,000 lives.**

Darkness returned.

\* \* \*

**Log (of what you've done and why), first entry:**

*I'm...alive? Dead?...What you've done and why?...These clothes...The same as on the steps...And this stain...It's so red...Still hurts...*

*Those words, the ones that came in the middle of all that chaos. Did I just dream them, or was that really meant to be the Odessa Steps? But the massacre never actually happened; Eisenstein made it up to dramatize his movie...*

*Is this a dream? Why can't I see anything...except myself? My hand before my eyes...and nothing beyond it—*

*The stain is gone. So is the pain. A light? A figure...*

\* \* \*

A thin, reedy voice trills something unintelligible.

"What?" He squints at the coalescing form, one hand still gripping his chest.

"...your name, sonny...If you concentrate...understand any language." The figure flashes into focus, becoming an old man with a faint smile and a knowing twinkle. His snowy beard strikes a sharp contrast with the void around him, an incongruity outdone only by his neon-blue tuxedo.

"Blake."

"And I'm Galen. Well done, and have a seat. You'll need it."

Blake whirls around as he feels a hard edge pressing against the back of his thigh. He nearly trips over the wooden stool, recovers his balance, regards the seat for several moments, and sits cautiously. Twisting back, he finds the old man reclining in a leather easy chair and lifting a glass from a nearby end table.

"Bourbon? I find something stiff helps to sort out a bit of order from the chaos."

Blake drops his hand from his (now fully healed) chest and shakes his head uncertainly.

Shrugging, Galen downs the cup himself with a grimace. "Hmmm, but memory's never quite as good as the real thing...Humor me by answering a question, sonny, and then I'll start dealing with yours. I know it's not particularly fair, but I'm quite literally dying of curiosity."

His brow wrinkling, Blake's hands return to his head and chest to reaffirm their wholeness.

"Mmmm, my apologies for the poor choice of words. Rather inconsiderate." Galen makes a clucking noise as he pours himself another glass. "But you can put your hands down. You're as good as new. Mint condition, maybe better."

Blake's gaze wanders around the blackness as his hands fall slowly back to his sides.

"Where...What is this place?"

Rolling his eyes, Galen snaps his fingers and the empty glass and bottle wink out of sight. “All in good time, Blake. All in good time. Speaking of which, we really don’t have much left. Things happen fast at the beginning. Which means you really need to get a hold of yourself and start the ball rolling.”

Blake’s hands raise out of his lap again, this time to explore the stool beneath him and test its substance.

“Blake!” Galen’s voice is hard enough to make Blake’s roving hands flinch and recoil. “Where—were—you?”

The image of a mustached man shouting Russian flits across Blake’s thoughts. “Odessa... 1905. But like the movie... There was a massacre on the steps.” His eyes clear somewhat.

“Good, good, sonny. And interesting... Someone after you must have modified things to fit Sergei’s vision. A cinema buff, no doubt...” Galen sits up in the easy chair, hunching over his beard. “The precursor to the Russian Revolution on jump one, though. Hmmm... But you certainly seem to know your history. That bodes well.”

His eyes narrowing sharply, Blake leans forward to match the old man’s pose, bringing their noses within inches. “What the fuck is going on?”

Galen snorts and leans back into a reclining position. “You really should have had some of the bourbon. A must for our next session. Now give me a moment, if you would, while I try and remember how my mentor handled this. They don’t give you much warning for this, you know. Just a sudden alert and an order to be at such and such time with such and such—

Blake leaps off the stool, sending it careening into the darkness as he spreads his arms wide. “Dammit, old man, stop dancing around the question and tell me what the fuck is happening to me!”

“Seems to me, sonny, that if fair’s fair, you have to ask me at least one more time before I respond. And... Well, now you’re starting to skip out on me.” Galen puts his hands behind his head in resignation. “Never good to make a jump riled up. Bad for the digestion, or at least it would be. Try and calm yourself before you go. Can you still hear me? Remember your history, Blake!”

The void seems to collapse in upon Blake, becoming a deeper nothing. He feels himself distorting, sputtering, imploding. A light flickers and fades.

“Remember—your—history!”

Emptiness.

\* \* \*

**Confusion is normal. You don’t need to embrace it at this point (though you will later), but at least try and accept it for now.**

*Why can’t I feel anything?*

**At this juncture you should be second-jump-in-transit. This one will be a little more substantial. Observe what you can, see what you can do.**

*Only these damn words...nothing else.*

**But remember, you’re still acting on a trial basis: try not to make too much of a mess.**

*Not again...Shit that hurts.*

**Have fun.**

\* \* \*

“...the Senate...in the forum...another list posted...How much longer will this madness be allowed to continue?”

“Sounds like you think someone could actually change things if they had the mind to. But it won’t end until the old man gives out on his own; there’s no one left who has the nerve...Need another Marius.”

Blake shook his head gingerly, trying to make sense of this latest set of sounds and smells. When he finally opened his eyes, he found himself staring at cobblestones so worn they were effectively a single sheet of brick.

“Another Gaius Marius? Are you serious? Have you forgotten the bloodbath after he got his cursed seventh consulship? That was worse than this lunacy, and that’s saying something!”

“Marius of twenty years ago, then. The memory the people so love: our beloved general who crushed the Germans.”

Tunic hems swished by Blake on all sides as sandaled feet picked their way indifferently around his hunched form.

“See now, I always temper that with the memory of friends’ heads spiked on the Rostra by the Marius of five years ago.”

“Have you tallied the skulls lately? Sulla’s already outstripped Marius by half, and he’s nowhere near through. The old man will kill off the entire knight class before he’s done, laughing on his night walks all the while.”

“I never disputed that Sulla’s proscriptions may be the death of the republic.”

“On that, at least, we’re in agreement.”

Uncurling tentatively, Blake waited for a brief lull in the swishing tunics before trying to rise.

**81 B.C.: Rome, Italy.**

With a soft groan, he slumped back to the pavement.

“Mark that poor fellow over there, Curio.”

“I see him. Ho there, citizen! Can you hear me?”

Two sets of sandals stopped in front of him. A hand shook his shoulder gently, and Blake did his best to bite back the whimper that mewed out nonetheless.

“Looks in bad shape. Let’s get him out of the traffic.”

Three more hands encircled his limbs, and he shuddered despite the smooth lift.

“He’s a slight fellow, isn’t he? Could do with some of Clodia’s cooking.”

“Tunic looks well-to-do, though...I wonder if he hasn’t had a run-in with Sulla’s damned bounty hunters.”

**After setting the dangerous precedent of using Rome’s own legions against her, Lucius Cornelius Sulla forces the Senate to extend his dictatorship indefinitely.**

Dimly, he registered that he was being carried toward a door. It creaked open; he went through it. It creaked shut; he was safe inside a rustic-looking house.

“He’s lucky to have anything above his shoulders, then. Either way, he’ll have shelter here. Standing up to that monster has to start somewhere.”

“Ahh, but do you have more than words in you?”

“Just lay him on the table there.”

The mild impact was still more than enough to make Blake scream, flail...and then sink.

“We’re losing him! Go, Bulla! Quickly now! Fetch Clodia. Citizen? Citizen!...”

\* \* \*

**His onetime mentor and longtime rival Gaius Marius finally dead, Sulla sets about reordering the republic in his own vision.**

Shaking his head to rid it of the unwelcome text, Blake woke to a homely, middle-aged woman's face wearing a smile so warm he couldn't help but respond with a dazed grin of his own.

"Awake now, I see. Good: you're sturdier than you look. But you could still do with some bread, child. Baked it myself not two hours ago."

Sitting up cautiously, he let out a small sigh of relief on finding the pain gone. He still felt disoriented, but the closeness of the room was more cozy than claustrophobic, and the woman's kitchen scent was revitalizing. "Thank you."

**In addition to radically altering the constitution, the aging general begins eradicating his political enemies by proscribing them—publicly declaring their lives and property forfeit as penalty for treason.**

Blake's first bite of bread was more vigorous than he meant it to be, and ultimately ineffective: the words remained. But the bread was gone within seconds.

Chuckling in a lighter, higher-pitched tone than that of her speaking voice, the woman motioned for him to hand the plate back. "I'll bring you some more, then."

She bustled out of the room before he could respond, leaving him to reconcile the little he'd seen and heard with the pedantic blurbs still invading his head.

**When bounties are offered for whereabouts of the damned, the ensuing backstabbing and headhunting plunges the city into chaos.**

The smell of fresh bread reentered the room several seconds before the woman. "Here, child."

"Thank you again...But—"

"Eat. I'll brook no argument."

Blake tried to push the plate back towards her as respectfully as possible. "It's wonderful—"

"Chew."

**A young Julius Caesar, one of the many proscribed, manages to be one of the few to escape.**

After contemplating the woman's baleful expression, Blake reached for the top slice.

She nodded her approval but made no move to go, apparently intending to watch every mouthful.

So he ate. And ate. And ate, until the woman finally grunted and eased the plate away. "You'll feel better now." Her smile was back, and so was the high-pitched chuckle. "Mercy, but you needed that. Now, I'm Clodia. What will you be answering to?"

**Sulla's absolute power—authority so total the old tyrant can walk the streets of Rome at night without fear—is not an example Caesar forgets.**

Blake hesitated for a moment, waiting until his thoughts were free of intrusions. "Brutus. And, I'm sorry—knock on the head—but is this Rome? Are we really in Rome?"

Clodia looked at him skeptically. "The Subura is as much a part of Rome as any other, 'Brutus,' even if it is doesn't smell as good as Palatine Hill and all its fancy manors. It's not what Master Curio's accustomed to, but it will serve until he can pay back his creditors." She lifted the plate off the bed and turned to go. "I'll leave you to your rest."

"Clodia, I—"

“Sleep, child.” The old woman swept out of the room and slammed the door shut behind her, leaving Blake alone with his confusion.

\* \* \*

He woke to what seemed like blinding light...until his eyes adjusted and he realized it was only the dim glow of partially obscured stars. Listening quietly before making any movement, he noted that the house as well as the world outside seemed remarkably, unnaturally still...More so than he would have expected of any city—at any time of day or night—much less a teeming metropolis like Rome in the first century B.C.

It still seemed insane, but he'd known where he was for sure once the images started pouring into his head...Legions marching against Germans, Italians, and then themselves...Togaed noblemen shouting hoarsely before being knifed from behind...He was caught up in the fall of the republic. At a pivotal point, after the first civil wars but before everything really started unraveling.

His stomach growled. He must have been out for a while. Clodia had apparently been in at some point during his nap; four more slices of bread and an earthenware mug of water sat atop the end table. He ate and drank as noiselessly as his greed would allow. Once he was full, he moved to set the mug and plate back on the table, stopped, stared, and blinked in disbelief.

A trick of the light, no more. His addled mind playing tricks on him...He needed a better look.

The window revealed itself to be no more than a hole in the wall veiled by dingy cloth. After a moment of brief clambering, Blake was on the street, silhouetting his arm against the moon as he rotated his hand back and forth at the wrist.

Smooth as a baby boy's, as if it had never known a day's work. And stained a darker brown, giving his skin an almost wooden hue. The day the car...hit him...he'd been pale and freckled. With fairer hair. Finer hair. Not these coarse black tendrils littering his forearm. Hadn't he been taller, too? Heavier?

A soft laugh echoed down the line of darkened buildings.

Blake scrambled to the closest doorway, struggling to control his sudden panting. Unwilling to risk creaky hinges, he flattened himself against the door as a bent figure tottered into view.

The robed form gradually sharpened into a bald old man whose shadowed features became increasingly gruesome as he drew closer. Blake's labored breathing stopped altogether as the hideous details came into final focus: what may once have been a beautiful face was now a pockmarked horror, ravaged by some terrible disease. But the mouth still looked...wise. Even kind, set as it was in a pensive expression.

The old man stopped suddenly as he drew even with Blake. After a terrifying pause, the same quiet laugh came rumbling up, eerily strong for such a crooked form.

And Blake felt something snap inside him.

His emotions flashed from fear to anger to rage. Questions demanded answers where there were none; confusion sought release. With a growl that rapidly swelled to a yell, he sprang from his corner and rushed forward.

A twang vibrated through the air. Blake froze in mid-lunge, staggered back, and fell to his knees and then onto his face as pain exploded through his ribs. The arrow snapped beneath him as he slumped against the cobblestones, its feathers whispering as they slithered across the smooth brick.

“Hold, soldier. Sheath your sword; the bolt served him well enough.”

A rough hand tightened around Blake’s neck. “You don’t want me to finish him, dictator?”

“I would look on him first, Milo.”

“As you wish.” The hand squeezed harder, rolled Blake over, and let go.

He shuddered, his mouth filling with a sweet acid.

“Smallish man, but brave it seems.”

Blake’s vision began to glaze over, blurring the old man’s ravaged face into two overlapping visages, one of health and one of sickness.

“And not of this era, it would seem.”

Wait, was that English? Blake tried to reply, but managed only a broken gurgle.

“Better luck next jump, shifter.” The voice switched back to Latin. “I’ve seen all I care to, Milo.”

Blake’s sight failed.

“Yes, dictator.”

Another blade pierced his ribs.

\* \* \*

**Log, second entry:**

*The pain’s fading...Quicker this time. How do I turn off this “log?” ...Tunic’s gone. And my hands are pale again...That old man spoke in English. Called me “shifter.” In English...*

*Are you there, Galen? Was that you in “Rome?” Did you enjoy killing me? How many times is that, now? What did I do to—*

*A flickering again...Galen?*

\* \* \*

“Galen?”

“None other.” The old man’s snowy beard flounces in rhythm with the pogo-stick beneath him. Galen maneuvers expertly toward Blake, tank top and biker’s shorts hanging loosely from his bony frame. “First things first: you are the metaphysical law of all you see here, sonny.” He gestures at the emptiness before bringing both arms to rest atop the stick’s handles as he begins balancing instead of bouncing.

Letting his hand fall from his re-healed chest, Blake stares hard at Galen, eyes blazing.

“Stop pouting. I’m just enjoying my last days before retirement. Don’t worry: you’ll be at least as eccentric when your time is over. But where were we? Ah, yes—my favorite part. Wish for a monkey.”

Blake’s brows lower even further. “Wish for a monkey?”

“Well done, Blake, that is what I said. Now: let’s see it.” The old man nods expectantly.

Blake breathes in, breathes out...and charges, bending low like a football player preparing for a tackle.

Galen snaps his fingers and a ten-by-ten square of gorillas appears to his left, dancing the Charleston. Taking both hands off the pogo stick, he directs the troupe of simians with one index finger while closing Blake’s gaping jaw—which had stopped short inches away from his own—with the other. “I suppose gorillas are technically apes, or at least so the anthropologists would classify them. Odd lot they are...But that’s beside the point, which is that this is your own

personal playground. You're the genie here. Now live up to it: concentrate and make those prancing primates stop for the good of us all."

Blake slouches back. Does nothing, says nothing.

"Your age, Blake, not your shoe size." Galen suddenly starts spinning, gaining speed with each rotation on the pogo stick. His beard flies up level with Blake's nose, whirling just an inch beneath it before the old man grabs the tip and pulls it to his chin. "Focus, sonny. Close your eyes if it helps. Seems like that's how I started."

Blake shakes his head, watching incredulously as the gorillas start twirling in time with the old man, a hundred and one furry blurs amidst the black.

"Just try, sonny. Quickly now, before they all have heart attacks. Easier on the point of a pogo-stick, you know."

Biting his lip, Blake stares for several moments before slowly closing his eyes. His brow furrows again; his hands clench, unclench, and clench again; his breaths come in ragged bursts. When a bead of sweat drips from his nose onto his chin, he shakes himself and looks again.

Galen reclines before him in the easy chair from their last meeting, dressed in the same neon-blue suit, with the same glass raised to his lips. "Not bad, sonny, not bad. Although I already miss those fellows...But keep it in mind, Blake. You control the all and the everything in here; it's yours to mold. Now conjure something comfortable to sit on and we'll chat in whatever time you have left."

Blake stares for several moments at the point where the gorillas just were, and then shakes himself and closes his eyes again. Upon reopening them, he finds himself stretched full length in a silk hammock, the ends floating on either side. He sways gently to no breeze.

Galen throws back his head and roars. "So you do have a sense of humor, sonny. Not bad, not bad at all. Oh my, I haven't laughed like that in ages. Ahem...Now, questions?"

Blake's momentary wonder at manipulating his surroundings begins to wear off. Anger and bewilderment return. "I'm dead, then."

"Most definitely."

"And did you just kill me?"

Galen leans back slightly and takes a sip from his bourbon. "Now that I wasn't expecting. Care to explain?"

"I was hoping you would."

"Humor an old man, sonny, or we won't get anywhere."

It takes several deep breaths before Blake can respond in an even tone. "The dictator Sulla, just before ordering my death, called me a shifter. In English."

Galen spews bourbon into the void, the droplets diminishing rapidly as they fall from sight. His laughter jiggles the folds of snowy beard into furry waves. "You tried to kill an epicenter, didn't you? On your second jump?... Wait, sonny... Whew, but that's rich on so many levels... Blake, stop wasting time."

Blake keeps walking into the dark, eyes locked straight ahead.

"Have it your way, then...But a real mover and shaker on the second jump? Almost unheard of. I didn't try to kill Mussolini until my seventh." Galen appears on Blake's left, keeping pace in his now levitating easy chair as he refills his cup.

Immediately turning the opposite direction, Blake finds the old man sipping away directly in front of him.

"Coincidentally, though, that was Philip, my old mentor. Retired as a Roman power-monger...A much more stressful ending than I'm planning. That's how he recognized you,

though: shifters can see each other for what they are. Sometimes it takes a few minutes, but eventually their true face shines through.” Galen laughs again. “Oh my, sonny. So rich...But you can’t kill, Blake. First rule. Shoot, stab, burn, hang as hard as you like; it’s the only thing beyond you. Not your purpose.”

Whirling, Blake finds Galen has imposed himself on the entire visible spectrum. He shuts his eyes, his fists pulsing at his sides. “Then what is my fucking purpose, old man!?!”

“You’re not a fighter, sonny. You’re an observ—blast it, man! Focus! Oh, for crying out loud... We’ll talk when you get back.”

Blake feels himself dissolving from the inside. “Galen!”

“If you were sick last time, you’ll be fine this trip. Alternates for some reason...But it’ll fade eventually, once you get more control.”

Everything tornadoes into nothing.

\* \* \*

**By now your mentor should have briefed you on the basics. To reiterate, here are the first two rules:**

*How can I be reading this when I can’t see anything else?*

**1) You can’t kill.**

**2) You’ll get killed.**

*Is this just in my head?*

**The third run is the final trial. It should be fairly intense. Be ready to improvise; you won’t have much other choice.**

*I’m ripping again...But...there’s no pain?*

**Bon voyage.**

\* \* \*

Recycled waves lapped against a waking beach. The sun inched out over the water, still only a dull glow but growing steadily with each crash of the surf.

Blake rose to his feet, relieved to be feeling none of the previous jump’s pain. Sweeping the sand off his khakis, he paused as he recognized them for vintage military apparel. He doffed his white cap for confirmation: authentic U.S. Navy. He should know—his granddad had done thirty years of active duty.

Unreal. He was in the service, then. And a good four or five inches taller...Blake shook his head and turned to take in the rest of his surroundings.

A flash of crimson spurted across his vision, vanished behind the now gleaming sun, and reappeared on a palm tree to his left.

Palm tree? And that bird...

He’d been here before. It was one of his few clear memories from age six, the last period he remembered his parents coexisting. The air had tasted a little different, the trees hadn’t looked quite as fresh, and the sand had felt dirtier...but he’d been here before.

Christ. Shit. A U.S. Navy uniform? On this beach? What the hell was the date? He had the where, but what the fuck was the when?

As Blake spun around to reorient himself, he churned up a plume of glistening sand that sent the red bird streaking skywards again. If memory served, the main port was to the East, maybe ten miles along the coast. Quite a hike, but there really weren't any other options.

Slipping off his boots with two smooth kicks, Blake stuffed his socks in the heels, tied the laces together in a bowknot, and took off at a brisk jog with the bundle over his shoulder.

**1941 A.D.: Hawaii, United States.**

Jesus.

\* \* \*

*Honolulu Star: December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941.*

The text and images that had stabbed through his thoughts for much of the trek here should have kept this latest confirmation from having much of an impact. But he still felt sick.

It was already early afternoon, and he had no idea what order he should or even could go about doing this...How to overcome countless combinations of chance and incompetence, military rigidity, miscommunications...And Gramps. His true father, his inspiration for picking up that first historical novel, would lose both legs in roughly eighteen hours. But warning one low ranking relative—if he were even believed—wouldn't help the other two thousand casualties-in-waiting...This was too much. Too ironic, too contrived. "Damn you, Galen!"

The short Hawaiian woman who'd sold Blake the paper recoiled slightly, but she kept her open hand extended. Mumbling an apology, he fumbled through unfamiliar pockets until his fingers located a quarter. He turned his back on the surprised stream of thanks—apparently he'd overpaid—walked to a nearby bench, and sat heavily. He was still sweating profusely from the run here, and he could already feel his back sticking—

"Kyle Wilson?"

He started noticeably.

"I was told you might be a little surprised." A bronzed teenager, sixteen at the most, flashed a bemused smile. "For you, Mr. Wilson. Courtesy of Mr. Jackson."

Blake nodded dumbly, instinctively closing his fingers around the proffered envelope.

The boy laughed again. "No worries, sir. Mr. Jackson already took care of the tip." Clearly enjoying Blake's mystified expression, the boy chuckled and walked off, whistling as he went.

Blake's fingers spasmed with the sudden urge to tear the letter to pieces. Who knew he was here? And—even more galling—had the knowledge to call him by his granddad's name? "Galen, so help me, if this is another one of your god-damned games..."

The sun began to reflect off the shell-flecked pavement, the light's movement a reminder of how little time he had. Slowly—painfully—his breathing normalized, his reason resurfaced, and he smoothed out the crumpled envelope and ran his finger under the flap.

\* \* \*

"Please, sir, just raise the alert status...If I'm wrong, and nothing happens, what harm will you have done?"

The balding commander continued to stare out the window, watching the dock that was still extremely busy even in the failing light. "State your name and rank again, sailor."

Blake hesitated, painfully aware of the one—very personal—task he'd yet to complete. "Henry Smith, sir. Private on the Arizona. Please, Admiral Kimmel, sir—"

Without turning around, the older man held out his hand a few commanding inches from his side. After receiving the expected silence, he lowered his hand. “Several hours ago, Privates Lockhard and Elliot of the signal battalion were telegraphed anonymously that *when* they spot an unusual cluster of planes on the Oahu radar tomorrow around 0700 hours, they are to report it ‘immediately and unfailingly.’ Shortly thereafter, various captains reported being similarly advised, including a Captain Outerbridge, who was instructed by an unsigned note to raise a full alarm, bypassing the proper channels of authority, *when* he encounters enemy midget subs tomorrow morning. Not twenty minutes ago, our liaison with the *Star* contacted my secretary about the unsolicited tip they were just given concerning hostile ships sighted within a hundred miles of the island. And now a phantom private of the U.S.S. Arizona, a Henry Smith who doesn’t *exist*, who’s been breaking down my door since 1700 hours, is warning me the Japanese will bomb Pearl Harbor into rubble if I don’t raise the alarm here and now.”

Kimmel finally turned and looked at Blake directly. “What would you make of all this in my position, Mr. ‘Smith,’ keeping in mind that I’ve had nothing more from Washington than a caution to be on alert against *sabotage and espionage!*?! Sailor?”

Blake stood rigidly at attention, schooling his impatient fingers not to fidget with his denim trousers’ ties as he recalled Mr. Jackson’s advice from the letter: **Play on Kimmel’s insecurities; it’s your only chance of establishing credibility.** “The last time you asked your superiors whether you were being fully informed, sir, did they tell you that Army and Navy cryptographers have cracked the Kaigun Ango?”

The admiral’s face screwed up incredulously.

“Over a year ago, sir. The diplomatic cipher, too. We’ve been intercepting the Japs’ communications to their embassy for months now.”

“And what proof do you have, ‘Smith?’” The admiral tried his best to sound amused.

**The details I leave up to you: you know them better than I. Just be aware that I can’t foresee the actions of those who come after me.** “One of the intercepting stations is actually on the island, sir, less than a hundred yards from where we’re standing now. I can show you if you’d like, but we have to hurry: Admiral Yamamoto is laying his final preparations as we speak.”

The admiral said nothing for several moments before switching on his intercom. “Charles, I’ll need a security escort as soon as possible.” Releasing the button, the old man looked back up at Blake. “What else do you think you know, sailor?”

Suppressing a smile, Blake stared at the ceiling until the other key points from his dissertation fell into place. “Any minute now, the Japanese government will begin relaying a declaration of war to its embassy in Washington, to be used at 0700 hours Hawaii time. We’ll intercept it at the same time their ambassadors receive it, the Secretary of State will enter negotiations pretending—as usual—he doesn’t know what’s about to be said, and while the diplomats dither, the information will never reach where it’s most needed. Pearl Harbor will be left unprepared, and there will be a slaughter. Here, tomorrow, sir, unless we act quickly.”

Noting the admiral’s reddening face, it was Blake’s turn to forestall an outburst with a gesture. “I can’t say why you’ve been kept out of the loop, sir, but it’s one of history’s graver oversights—”

The door burst open, rebounding off the white wall and crashing back against the outstretched arm of a panting officer. Kimmel started to open his mouth for what looked like a reprimand before deciding against it. Blake followed his lead and stayed silent. After several moments of heavy, raspy breathing, the newcomer found his voice.

"I'm sorry, admiral...Didn't realize how out of shape this desk job is making me...One moment...All right...Sir, I have evidence that this 'Henry Smith' here is in fact an anarchist attempting to provoke an international incident with the Japanese."

"That's a lie!"

"Hold your tongue, 'Smith.'" Kimmel raised his hand again with a renewed sense of majesty.

"All the recent rumors can be traced to this man, admiral. Lieutenant Jacobs is on his way with evidence, but I sprinted ahead to prevent this man's harming of your person."

"Very good, Adams. 'Smith,' do you have anything with which to deny these charges?"

Blake's mouth opened and shut once before his voice resumed functioning. "If you would just accompany me to the intercept station, sir, we can prove—"

"I think I know my island, 'Smith.' Lieutenant Adams, if you would."

The newcomer nodded and moved forward, arms tensed.

Blake looked rapidly between the two men and began edging to his left...until a fourth man in naval attire entered the office. "You're bringing everything that happens tomorrow down on your own head, admiral."

"Everything that happens here already is on my head, 'Smith.' Adams, Cell Block Five until further notice."

"Yes, admiral."

Adams and the summoned security moved to secure Blake's arms, but he shook them off. "I'll go."

As he left, sandwiched between his two escorts, Blake took one last look back at the admiral, searching for any flickers of doubt.

\* \* \*

He'd tried, using everything he remembered in combination with the more useful elements of the mysterious Mr. Jackson's advice. The letter would have been sci-fi whimsy a few days (weeks, months, years?) ago, but that morning it had made all too much sense.

"Left here."

Blake turned as he'd been bidden, numbly letting Adams direct him from behind. In all probability, he'd failed. Pearl Harbor was still going to happen...But maybe he still had time to carry out the task that mattered most to him.

"Right."

The odds of being allowed to make a phone call were slim. But he was alone with Adams now, the other guard having been dismissed due to Blake's seeming placidity.

"Through that door, straight ahead."

And not that it was any real justification, but decking this idiot would feel pretty good. Should he try to find Gramp's number, though, or just show up at the house?

"Sleep tight, Blake."

What? "The fuck—"

Fire flashed through his head. Unconsciousness followed.

\* \* \*

"...your eyes, boy. I left you alive for this: wake up and see how little effect a rookie like you really has."

Blake's lids fluttered open to take in a night sky and a sneering face as pain raged at the base of his neck. "Ad...ams?"

The face chuckled grimly, moving in blurring, jarring jumps. "Sure. Look to the East." Something streaked behind the face, momentarily blotting out the stars. "Too little, too late." "...attacking? But...still...night..."

"1:30 AM. Things just got moved a little ahead of schedule; Kimmel's a fool, but he tried. Just not hard or soon enough. Kind of like you."

His vision seemed to stabilize somewhat...And then the sneering face doubled, becoming two—equally hostile—visages, the first superimposed over the second just as Sulla's had overlaid Philip's. "Jackson?"

The faces snorted. "Cyrus. Jackson's a moron; it's mostly his mistakes that are being erased here. Days of Infamy have to happen. Fools like you two don't deserve to be shifters if you can't see that." Three more dark blurs shot by in the background, seeming to speed in one set of Cyrus's ears and out the other. "There's no stopping it now." The faces withdrew as another plane whipped overhead, leaving a dot behind in its wake, a pinpoint that began to expand as it hurtled groundwards. "Did they tell you the rules yet?" Cyrus's voice seemed further away. "You can break number one if you're indirect. But number two... Well, that one's a bitch."

Blake struggled to stand up, then to crawl, then to roll over, and finally just to shut his eyes. Failing even at that, he watched helplessly as the dot became an oblong monstrosity which rapidly eclipsed everything but itself.

An explosion rocked the world, and he was gone.

\* \* \*

**Log, third entry:**

*My body's...gone...Disintegrated...Reforming...Motes of flesh—my flesh—swirling back together...That was Cyrus? Then who was Jackson?...And—*

*Gramps.*

*Shut this shit off. Stop recording. Now.*

\* \* \*

"Leave me alone, Galen."

"I would if we had time, sonny, but now I'm the one who's short on it." The old man's form finishes coalescing, his black robe barely distinguishable from the void around him. "Now stop acting like—"

"No." Blake finally looks up, raising his head from his lap, dried tears streaking both cheeks. "I'm through."

Pulling up short, Galen studies him for a moment before continuing in a softer tone. "I know it can be hard sometimes, Blake. Incredibly hard...But—"

"I gave up history four years ago, Galen." Blake lowers his head again. "Did these damn logs tell you that?"

"I don't know anything about you, sonny. Barred from any point after my first death, just as you are."

"It took over my life..." Rocking back on the conjured stool, Blake pauses over the irony of that last statement.

Galen's left hand wanders to the tip of his beard, tugging it lightly as he seems to wage an internal debate before sighing softly.

"Possessed my thoughts, consumed my days, destroyed my marriage..." Blake looks Galen in the eye. "The day I quit grad school, I didn't want to go any further back than yesterday's news. That's faded some, but...I've died four times in the span of a few days. I'm done. If you want to do any more mentoring, just tell me how I can end it."

"In a few minutes now I'll show you." Galen's lips betray a slight, sad smile as Blake's expression morphs from bitter to confused. "But until then I need you to listen. This'll be a bit of a lecture. No help for it, though."

Blake's eyes turn wary again, but his mouth stays shut.

"How to keep this short?...Dive in, I suppose: you're my successor, Blake. I was Philip's. He was Thomas's. And so on. Down the whole course of human history, there's always been one of us. Which means, in a sense, there's always been all of us: only ever a single shifter in the void, you see, but the whole lot of us are forever muddling through time." Galen begins pacing rapidly, gesticulating with each stride. "What's more, you have access to the files of every shifter that came before you. Their logs, their briefs, their Shift dates: everything. Study them so you can use them, because rest assured others will read yours. It's best to be prepared: the nature of our job makes interaction inevitable. And messy—it's rare that two of us agree exactly on how matters of import should be allowed to unfold."

His eyes bulging suddenly, Galen freezes for a moment before shuddering and taking a seat on a newly appeared folding chair. "It's coming fast, sonny..." Shaking his head once, he squares up with Blake's eyes and begins rapidly ticking off points on his fingers. "The rules you don't know: Number three, your lower limit for jumps is man's first consciousness. Four, your upper limit is your first death. Five, you can't overlap with any point of your prior jumps."

Blake's eyes betray a hint of panic at this last rule.

"But if you have mistakes to fix..." Galen starts to tremble. "Blast...Never knew it would hurt...If you have mistakes to fix, contact another shifter. Use the files...Strike a deal...I'm sorry, Blake, but I'm being called."

Galen's robe merges with the void, and his exposed skin begins to erode, smudging away to nothing.

Blake leaps up and sprints after Galen's receding form. "Galen? Wait, dammit! When does it end? What am I supposed to do? What *can* I do?...You can't leave yet, old man!"

A sketch of a hand waves a farewell. "Haven't you figured it out yet, sonny?"

"Figured WHAT out?"

Galen's disembodied voice sounds from the emptiness, fading further with each word. "You, me, us: we're the powers that shape history, channel it as it should have flowed. We, collectively, are God. Or what remains of him...Goodbye."

"Galen!" Blake stumbles to a stop, not expecting an answer but still distraught when he doesn't receive one.

Turning slowly, he stands still for several minutes before sitting cross-legged on the dark. After a long while, he shakes his head, sighs, and opens himself to the files. From the beginning.

Another length of time passes, and then he looks up and embraces a growing swirl. The void blurs; his mind divides.

Nothing.

\* \* \*

**Fourth jump, and you're on your own now. Be objective, be vigilant, be as wise as you're able.**

*I didn't ask for this...*

**Be careful with my legacy. Our legacy.**

*...and I'm not ready.*

**Good luck.**

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Thanks for reading “Revisions.” If you liked it, would you mind leaving a [review](#)? Even just a few words would be awesome—it really helps.

Looking for something else to read? Check out *[The Red Wraith](#)*, my historical fantasy set in Early America. The protagonist is a Native American who becomes the focus for magic’s reentry into the world.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Wisseman lives in Bear Lake, Michigan with his wife, daughter, forty cats, and thirty horses. (Okay, so there are actually ten times less pets, but most days it feels like more.) He’s not quite sure why he loves writing twisted fiction, but there’s no stopping the weirdness once he’s in front of a computer. You can find the complete list of his oddities on his website: [www.nickwisseman.com](http://www.nickwisseman.com)