

EVIL EMPIRE - CHAPTER 1

YEAR 2030 - EUROPA - LONDON

Wake up, Jake. They're here.

Max's words rang like an alarm in Jake's head, waking him from slumber.

We need to move. Now.

The exhausted teenager prised open his caramel eyes momentarily to check he was not dreaming. Max his beautifully muscled, and compact American Staffordshire Terrier gazed back at him from the window, his fawn colourings illuminated by the searchlights and activity glimmering outside. This was no dream.

'What's going on?' Jake enquired wiping the crusty sleep from his eyes, pulling himself up from the makeshift bed in the corner of this building under refurbishment in which they had taken refuge.

I think they have found us. Drones are patrolling outside. Foot soldiers can't be far behind.

Jake and Max had been united when he was just a young boy, a gift from his father on his sixth birthday. That was twelve years ago and so much had happened since then. Max was meant to soften the devastating loss of his mother. It had worked to some extent, over time. Little had either of them known that Max would need to fill the void left by his father's mysterious passing a couple of years later. Their bond was unique, special. Somehow they had developed the ability to communicate telepathically over the years. Neither cared how this had come to be, but it had served them very well since the Empire had taken over.

For goodness sake boy! Get your butt in gear, we need to get out of here!

Max was not renowned for his diplomacy skills, but given the emergence of two armed drones at the window, Jake figured there would be a more pertinent time to address such trivial matters later.

Jake jumped to his feet, scrabbling to pull his well-worn shirt and hooded jumper over his athletic frame and brown locks.

The drones circled the windows of the derelict building whilst flashlights pierced through the old hypermarket near their position. Movements of the oncoming foot patrol began to echo down the road closing in on them. They had clearly been detected. Being captured was not a possibility that they could allow if they were to complete their mission.

'Looks like we better get running then boy' Jake said still trying to finish dressing and gather his scant belongings. 'I'll send a message to Frank and see if he can meet us at the rendezvous point'.

And then? Max interrupted having jumped down from the window and headed for the door.

Jake smiled. 'Then it really starts my friend. Everything we set out to do gets under way'.

The flashlights from the patrolling drones swept through the room that they had taken refuge in. The two of them escaping through the door moments before being caught in its glare into the body of the disused dry cleaners and into the night sky.

Jake peered around the corner of the exit before sweeping the area outside for activity. The drones could be heard circling overhead to the rear of the property and any signs of foot patrols were as yet not on scene.

Are we just going to stand here and wait for them to come and ask us out to play, or are we going to make a move? Max's voice snarled in Jake's head.

Jake pulled what appeared to be a mobile device from his pocket and began furiously pushing buttons. It was an antiquated device some twenty or so years out of date and no longer in general use.

'Just sending a message to Frank, we are likely to need his help to get out of here' he replied, putting the finishing touches on the message. 'You take a quick peek down the road to the left and then if it's clear we'll head that way'.

Max darted past him and bounded thirty yards down the dark road, the streets as was the norm were eerily quiet and empty. Since the Empire had taken over, streets in these heavily militarised cities and towns often operated a curfew. Citizens were protected from the ghettos outside but were often treated like prisoners within the confines of the Empire's authoritarian regime. Getting in was said to be impossible, even though Jake and Max had done so in many cities throughout Europa, a now unified state. Getting out was no less difficult and Jake knew that with their presence somehow having been detected they may need some help.

RUN!

Max's warning distracted Jake briefly from composing the message. As he lifted his head to identify the commotion, Max was sprinting past him with a clutch of foot soldiers gathered at the bottom of the road.

RUN YOU BLOODY FOOL!

Max hurtled past him heading in the opposite direction. Jake's reactions were a little slow at first, he put it down to not being fully awake, but the sight of the foot patrol charging towards him sparked his legs into action. The bolt of combined thunder and lightning that exploded against the bricks above his head from a recently discharged weapon of his pursuers was a secondary motivator.

Jake was soon sprinting at full speed behind his faithful companion who was just a few yards ahead of him. Jake snatched a quick glance over his shoulder every few steps. He made out that

there were approximately five foot soldiers behind them. The blasts from their powerful weapons cannoned off of the buildings right and left of him throwing debris in his path and forcing him to deviate from his chosen path. The whirring engines of the drones could now be heard suffocating the silence of the night sky, having pinpointed his location and sweeping their scorching, bright lights to identify him.

Trouble ahead. Max's voice echoed.

Up in front of him, Jake could see that a swarm of foot soldiers had emerged forming a road block. Max was in danger of being captured. From a side road, another drone emerged in the night sky and its searchlight now crept along the floor closer towards Jake who now had spotlights trying to lock on his front and back. He kept running and darting and dodging the shots being fired at him. The weapons of choice of the Empire were run on nuclear energy, vaporising victims on contact. This made them an effective and efficient weapon, but Jake was more wary of the drones above. If they locked on his position then it would be game over, given their artillery was even more impressive than the ones used by the foot soldiers.

'Freeze you are surrounded' echoed the omniscient voice from above, clearly amplifying the voice of some drone operative back in the command centre.

Jake ignored the command and was now feverishly trying to look for an alternative route given the one ahead was blocked and the soldiers were readying their weapons to fire. With his pursuers closing in behind and the drones overhead casting their searchlights ever closer to his person, he knew it was a matter of time before the game was up. As if matters were not already well out of control, the screeching sound of two militarised vehicles swinging around the corner near to Max's position elevated the situation to a whole new level. Both vehicles were occupied by the Empire's foot soldiers, four in each, with one man in each vehicle in control of a robust laser cannon.

Max was still ahead but had slowed his pace when the vehicles emerged. There was a tiny side street to the left and little other option available in terms of escape. The soldiers ahead had their guns locked upon him, one vehicle had stopped just in front of them with the cannon fixed upon him some fifty yards away. Another drone had now stopped above them in the night sky and locked the spotlight upon him. Max had come to a stop, light fixed upon him, weapons locked and loaded and pointing at him. He began to walk in circles looking for any escape. The road to the left was the only option. He could see Jake running towards him with the second vehicle accelerating close behind, soldiers were crowding beyond and a number of drones loomed ominously overhead.

We have got no option here kid. There is a road up here on the left and nothing else.

What's the plan then? Jake replied telepathically.

You take the left road and I'll cause a distraction. Asserted Max in reply.

The second vehicle had now screeched and skidded sideways to a halt the cannon now fixed upon Jake who continued to run headlong towards it.

'We now have you totally surrounded. Give yourselves up or be neutralised' came the drone operator's voice overhead.

Neither option was worthy of consideration. If they gave themselves up, they knew they would be subject to torture, imprisonment in the Outlands and rumour had it, live experimentation. To be vaporised and go down fighting was easily the better option.

A distraction sounds great my friend, but what about this mobile cannon ahead of me?

Enquired Jake, now just thirty yards or so away from the second vehicle.

'Don't move mutt, we only really need the boy' echoed the voice from the drone.

Max had now turned his back on the first vehicle, and the wall of soldiers ahead of him and had bowed into attack stance, teeth gritted and snarling like a rabid wolverine.

Just keep running for that road and stay left.

Jake began to bank towards the left, still running. The cannon followed his path. The soldier operating it asking for permission to fire.

Upon Max's sturdy shoulders and back sat a tightly fitted black backpack. The front of it now opened, revealing four rocket heads firmly fixed on the vehicle.

Just keep running and I'll meet you at the rendezvous point. He assured.

He let out an almighty roar into the cacophony of the scene, a sound of an enraged beast untranslatable to human ears, the smile on Jake's face suggested that it may have been for the best. Two of the rockets launched and within seconds exploded into the vehicle, eviscerating the inhabitants and sending a huge explosion into the night sky, temporarily knocking the drones behind Jake off course.

'Shots fired. Neutralise them' screeched the voice of the drone operator.

Max had already spun on his heels and unleashed the other two rockets at the second vehicle. The fearful look on the cannon operator's face was a picture before the explosions rose up into the night sky knocking the final drone into a tailspin. The on looking soldiers could have sworn that the canine winked at them at that point, some may have even reported the glint of a smile. Just before they began to unload their nuclear-powered weapons on his position whilst the targeted boy blazed a trail to the only area where the troops had failed to secure, something more unexpected occurred. The canine was now charging straight for them, teeth bared and muscles tightening with every stride.

'The boy is getting away' one of them screamed amidst the firing.

Max leapt high into the air over the flaming vehicle. Drawing their fire to the right. They pursued him briefly until he leapt towards the wall of an empty building and catapulted himself from

it into three of them. He recovered quickly and began bounding towards a clutch of others, darting away from their fire and sweeping ever closer like a tiger stalking a herd of discombobulated bison. The soldiers kept on firing, each shot missing by the tiniest amount, hitting the road, the buildings and on the odd occasion a fellow soldier.

The carnage in the once sleepy city was building with fires breaking out all around the scene and fallen foot soldiers frazzling and electrified, melting away revealing the circuits and metal of their robotic forms. The Empire's main soldiers had always been manufactured and imported in, the leadership not trusting humans to protect its interests. Humans had consciousness, robots, on the other hand, did as their masters told and programmed them to.

Jake had now passed the road block where Max had created the diversion. He trusted his old friend to manage that little situation, as he had proven himself capable in many other skirmishes they had encountered on their travels in the past. He continued down the tight and tiny road to the left, but he was not totally in the clear, the foot soldiers who had been chasing him all this time continued in pursuit and all five seemed to still be intact and full of running. The two drones that had been hit following the explosion of the first vehicle had now split up one had followed behind the troops into the alley, but Jake had not seen where the other had gone.

He continued to run down the dark street, which was now becoming darker and narrower as he headed towards the glint of light right at the base of what was becoming an increasingly evident blind alley. He cursed Max, under his breath, a knot now forming in his stomach and his instinct telling him that the end of the alley did not augur well.

Back in the main street, Max had managed to overpower and maim many of the soldiers with his quick movements which had resulted in them firing at each other. He had seen Jake disappear down the left alley as he had advised. He was going to abandon his plan to meet at the

secret point and to follow him down there, given the pursuing forces, but his attention was now drawn to his own predicament.

Three soldiers had now picked themselves up, having only been knocked down by debris in the ensuing skirmish and began to fire at him again. It would have been child's play for him to finish them off as he had their fellow squadron members, but as he was about to leap into action a train of motorised armoured vehicles and a new squadron of foot soldiers were emerging from the right-hand street. Max looked left to where Jake had gone and then ahead along the long street he had been able to clear of the soldier blockade.

You really are on your own this time, kid. He warned Jake.

Reluctantly, he headed straight down the road past the strewn and fallen robot soldiers to draw attention away from his master and friend. Despite Jake being the apparent target, the newly emerged forces followed him.

No sooner had Jake received Max's message than he found himself nearing the end of the blind alley. The drone's searchlight lit up the path he had just passed. The alley was no wider than the distance between a couple holding hands and the high rise buildings all along made it nearly impossible to see a thing. There were no back doors or windows down the back of this alley, just a long high rising wall of solid brick. The only way out was ahead given that the bright lights from the drone above highlighted the chasing troop behind rendering the thought of turning back a suicide mission.

Jake continued ahead towards the tiny glimmer at the exit of the alley hopeful for a friendly beacon to be waiting for him. No such luck. As the exit was upon him and the wide road emerged with normal street level light both left and right, Jake realised that he had stumbled into a trap.

The second drone had now drifted down into his path hovering just a few feet above him. Rockets locked upon him. He had now emerged from the mouth of the alley onto a street very

familiar to him with apparent escape left or right. The time of planning his great escape and next move disappeared within an instant. A squadron of soldiers, around twenty or so parted and surrounded him from both sides, guns raised and pointing at him less than a step or two away. There was nowhere to go. A fleeting thought passed quickly through his mind to turn and run back down the alley, but the chasing soldiers had now emerged, guns raised and directed at him, the pursuing drone coming overhead. He was going nowhere.

'Hello Jake' came a familiar voice from the drone in front of him. 'It seems you have been looking for me. I have been looking for you too'.

The voice sent a chill down his spine. This was not how this was supposed to go down. The soldiers in the alley now shoved Jake out into the middle of the road, the soldiers keeping a safe distance away from him guns locked and loaded. The two drones facing each other, either side of him, lights blaring brightly almost blinding him.

'You are entirely surrounded, young man' chimed the hauntingly familiar voice from the drone. 'Now I suggest that you come quietly, we wouldn't want you falling to the same fate as your father now would we?'

Maniacal laughter trailed off into the background. Jake's hands tightened into fists, his brown eyes sharpening and darkening with rage, and his jaw clenched with the realisation that he could sense that Max was not close by. This time he was really on his own.

EVIL EMPIRE - CHAPTER 2

YEAR 2030 - EUROPA - LONDON COMPOUND

The lights from the drones above were burning through Jake's eyes making it barely possible for him to see the cluster of green and black suited foot soldiers who had him entirely surrounded. It was well known that the Empire's forces largely comprised of these robotic man-sized drones. They were easy to control and entirely dispensable and somewhat ironically were made in China. Perfectly formed and proportioned, such an army would have made Hitler proud. To look at them it was very difficult to believe that they were not human, but sadly for Jake, this reality was going to make escaping this situation somewhat impossible.

'Secure the prisoner' declared the voice of the drone operative who had resumed control of his station from the omniscient voice of Jake's past.

'Wait!' Jake shouted desperately clawing for time. 'Look, guys, I'll give you a chance to walk away unscathed if you just let me go'.

The irony that Jake was currently trying to negotiate his way out of this mess with in excess of twenty robot foot soldiers was not lost on him at this point, but his command had slowed them briefly.

'Secure the prisoner, now' commanded the voice from the drone above.

Drones had been used to great effect by the Empire to control these enclosed compounds. Such implements of war and control had been used to great effect by the United States Administration a couple of decades earlier in eliminating regimes who stood between them and their interests overseas. These modern day drones, however, were far more sophisticated, smaller and agiler. They had the ability to patrol the skies obtaining surveillance intelligence without the

limitation of being fixed to specific sites and being easy targets for vandalism should anyone fall out of line. The fact that they were heavily armed also meant that the Empire could eliminate threats within or outside the compounds with relative ease. The only limitation it seemed they had was that they required human operatives to function. That was the weakness that Jake knew he could exploit.

Five foot soldiers in front of Jake now stepped forward guns aimed at his chest.

'On your knees' the one in the centre said, waving his gun towards the ground to reinforce to Jake what was expected of him.

'Gladly' Jake said with a wry smile, following the orders of the gunmen.

As he slowly lowered himself to the cold, dark ground, Jake closed his eyes and took in a deep breath.

The lights from the drone behind him rocked awkwardly from his position and jerked up and into the air and the drone began to spin wildly out of control preventing any further action from the foot soldiers.

'SECURE HIM NOW' screeched the second operative's voice from the drone opposite before it too began to judder and lose control.

Now both drones were spinning wildly in the night sky, clearly beyond the control of the operatives back at base. Jake maintained his crouched posture and took in another deep breath.

It was clear that the situation was getting out of control and now without any further instructions, all of the foot soldiers made a move on Jake. The drone behind him now corrected its path and locked its bright beams on the advancing foot soldiers. They raised their guns to neutralise the threat, but within an instant, an intense laser beam cut through the darkness cutting through six of them, the second wiping out the remaining seven or so before the drone hurtled headfirst into the ground and erupted into flames.

Jake now rose to his feet and turned on the twelve remaining soldiers who now began to fire at him. His instincts were to run, but for some reason, his feet were rooted to the ground facing down his attackers. The soldiers advanced on his position firing at will, but he stayed still. The ground beneath them began to shake violently as if a herd of wild buffalo was charging towards them. Jake's eyes now opened a bright blue glow now replacing his hazel eyes, emanating a light more bright than the searchlights of the second drone which had now corrected itself and swooped down behind him, armed and pointing at the soldiers.

The shots fired were making no impact, an ultra blue force shield had engulfed Jake's body deflecting them back towards the shooters. The drone now unleashed its arsenal upon the remaining foot soldiers tearing through them like a scorching knife through butter. Jake remained in a trance, a wild wind of energy channelling through him to maintain the spherical makeshift protective field all around him, his eyes and hands illuminated with a power never seen. His lank locks fluttered and stood on end as if hit by a bolt of lightning.

The foot soldiers had all been completely destroyed, the first drone lay in a heap completely beyond repair and ablaze and now Jake turned to the second drone, the ground beneath him shaking with aftershocks of the devastating disaster that had just occurred.

'Tell Numen, I'm coming for him' Jake said with a deep and echoing tone directly to the drone above.

He then took a deep breath and as he exhaled the bright blue and white energy that had flowed in and around him surged with the speed of an advancing cheetah into the sky. The strips of energy fused and moulded together like old friends reuniting as they hurtled collectively towards the drone gaining pace. A loud explosion like a clap of thunder erupted as the energy ball collided violently with the drone. A bright white light soared across the skies of the city compound providing

a glimmer of daylight for a second or two until the energy ball and the destroyed drone were swallowed by the darkness.

Jake was now left alone in the side street with a path of destroyed machines all around him. He had a meeting to make with Frank and Max and would need to find a hideout until then. His plan to come to London under the radar had gone probably as terribly as he could have imagined and no doubt Frank would not be happy with him, but he had sent a message to Numen and the Empire, revenge was coming and the miscarriages of justice of the past would be rectified. Jake's father would be honoured and avenged, of that, he was certain.

As he moved, he felt a wet sensation dripping onto his hooded top. He wiped his hand across his nose to see a steady stream of red was now flowing freely from his nostrils. His head was pounding like a drum and his energy was fading fast, he needed to find a safe, secure location quickly before he passed out. Jake had experienced this before. Whenever he used his powers previously he had experienced a nose bleed and felt nauseous and weak.

Sirens began to ring out in the aftermath of what had just taken place. Jake now headed into the darkness looking for somewhere to stay the rest of the night and preferably, find a change of clothes.

Hey kid, this way. Max's voice echoed faintly in Jake's aching head.

'Max? That you?' Jake murmured weakly now beginning to become disorientated and dizzy.

The American Staffordshire Terrier emerged from out of the darkness of a poorly lit alley having clearly evaded his pursuers. The relief etched upon Jake's face to see his faithful companion was palpable. His chubby face and panting tongue reminded Jake of happier times when they were young and Max was just a puppy. Max had since become his most trusted and loyal friend, someone upon whom he could depend upon unequivocally and he was very glad to see him now. Max would know how to take care of him.

'You didn't trust me to get out alive then?' joked Jake, far from the godlike image he had cut not long ago.

Well to look at you, I'm not convinced you succeeded! Max mocked.

Max pulled up alongside him and licked the blood from his nose, much like the way a mother would pull out an old handkerchief to wipe the dirt from her child's face.

'I need a change of clothes before morning' muttered Jake entirely fatigued and exhausted.

Way ahead of you, my friend, now let's get you some rest before tomorrow.

Max then led him down the alley to the back of a closed food market that he had found for them to stay the night.

LONDON COMPOUND - UNITED CRIME CONTROL AUTHORITY HQ

This was no ordinary day at the office for Frank McQuaid. The director of Security and Intelligence for the United Crime Control Authority (UCCA) had been accustomed to his morning bagel and coffee at one of his favourite outlets, a quick review with his night team of what tended to be better described as an NTR (nothing to report) briefing and then setting a plan for security patrols of food and resource shipments for the day to minimise losses to rebels within the ghettos. Today, however, he had been called in on alert following an unprecedented event the previous evening.

Frank was a mild-mannered, middle-aged man who had dedicated his life to the much-changed security services over the years. He had served as a Metropolitan police officer back in the days when London had its own force. He had also served many years in senior positions in both Mi5 and Mi6. To say he had seen pretty much everything in terms of security and terrorism was an understatement. He was a well-regarded and straight talking professional who took his work very seriously. He had risen through the ranks to his current position because of his excellence and whilst

he suspected that the current ruling elite was far from clean cut, he knew that the stark reality was that they were not that much different to previous politicians and men of power.

The UCCA's role was to monitor and maintain surveillance throughout the compounds across the globe. All security and intelligence ran through the headquarters here in London and was one of the main employers in Europa. Not only was it their job to maintain order, to contain the rebellion and to ensure complete control was maintained, a key function was ensuring that the key messages of the Empire were broadcast through the state media to ensure that workers knew who was in control. Frank once joked that his team were like drug pushers such was the lorry load of nonsense that they kept their ill-informed citizens dosed up on. The number one priority was to ensure control and order and to keep people to their tasks.

The UCCA had enough dirt on absolutely everyone that even those who worked within the surveillance services were fearful of past concepts of whistleblowing and leaking information to the press. The truth was the Empire owned all media across the world and no one had access to alternative media within the confines of these fortified compounds. It made censorship of the past seem trivial by comparison.

The rules were simple: do your job, live in relative luxury within the compound. The alternative of stepping out of line was met with 'mysterious disappearances' like something out of the Politburo playbook back in Stalin's day; being sent to the Outlands and subject to torture and reprehensible treatment that in a more liberal past would have been seen as war crimes; alternatively, publicly broadcast executions of state terrorists had been known to occur even when no evidence existed. Owning and controlling everything, the Empire create evidence to justify its activities and actions with relative ease and everyone knew it best to just go along with it like Lemmings.

The challenge facing Frank today was that the NTR briefing would instead be replaced by a detailed investigation into what had occurred the previous evening on the UCCA's doorstep. In excess of thirty foot soldiers, four drones and a couple of armoured vehicles had come to be destroyed by a teenage boy and his dog. The same boy whom he had received an encrypted message from that night on an old and disused channel. In fact, he was due to meet him within the next couple of hours at his favoured coffee shop. The agreement with Jake had been 'quiet and orderly', he remembered that because that is what he had told his old friend Jack's son just a day or so ago when he agreed to meet with him. The kid had royally fucked up his day and to say he was more than a little pissed was a massive understatement. All of this was going to be difficult to clean up, especially given the meeting tomorrow between Europa President Van Duyn and the other leaders of the Four Territories of the world. Not a good start to the day.

There was a knock at the door.

'Come in' Frank barked, flipping through the images captured the previous night on his touch screen monitor.

He had expected one of his incompetent operatives to be standing before him, tail between his legs apologising profusely for their monumental screw up the previous evening. Instead, he was met by a towering dark figure, dressed from head to foot in black leather attire, ebony skin pulled tightly across chiselled, sharp features. The man's glowing white grin was not welcoming or one that filled you with a feeling of warmth, quite the contrary. His bald head was dressed with silver braids that clung all around the base of his skull like reef knots on the side of a fishing boat.

As soon as Frank realised to whom his less than welcoming invitation was addressed he rose to his feet and cast a more apologetic figure. 'I'm sorry General Numen, I had expected someone else' he said somewhat embarrassed.

'Clearly' replied Numen, removing his sunglasses to reveal his impressive and piercing blue eyes. 'It seems we encountered a bit of a problem last night Director'.

'Yes sir, I've been reviewing some of the footage and images before you arrived' Frank said trying to avoid eye contact. He and Numen had never really gotten along, both suspicious of the other's motives. 'I intend to conduct a full investigation as soon as this brief conversation ends' asserted Frank returning to his seat and flicking through the images again.

Numen stroked his bright silver goatee beard sans stache. 'Well don't worry yourself too much about it. I was here last night and have taken care of the damage limitation activities'.

Frank's brown eyes sharpened into an angry stare and interrogated Numen's face. 'That really is not your concern General' he growled. 'In fact, we had not anticipated your intrusion until later on this evening. Your meeting, after all, is not until tomorrow'.

Numen chuckled, clearly enjoying the power play that he had initiated. 'Well, needless to say, this monumental fuck up happened on my watch Director' he said, his face cooling into a stonier facade. 'I'll ensure that President Van Duyn is fully aware that this was my mistake, Frank, I'm very used to cleaning up my own messes'.

'See to it that you just focus on your job, whatever that is' sniped Frank in response, 'and I'll stick to doing mine'.

Numen sneaked a smile before replacing his glasses. 'Strangest thing, though' he said as he turned to leave. 'Not one image of the alleged perpetrator in the system'.

Frank looked quizzical. 'What do you mean?'

'It was as if a ghost broke into the compound, overpowered a number of our units and then disappeared again without a trace. Curious' replied Numen.

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