



BOOK EXTRACT

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Chapter 3

Mark sighed as he and his wife entered B&Q. It's huge, doll," he said. "You could get lost in here, never to be seen again."

"Yes, darling," replied Sandar. "You say that every time we've visited here. I know that you don't want to stay here for a long time, so I'll go and get the lampshades. I know what I want. You go and find the fuses, or whatever you need."

"Where shall we meet up? In the cafe?"

"No, I'll find you. You'll take longer than I will."

"Really? And how do you know that then?"

"I'm a woman and you're a man. You'll start looking around and forget what you came in here for."

Mark grinned. "Fuses? I doubt you'll win. Tell you what, I'll race you."

"If you must," Sandar responded, with a patronising tone. "See you soon."

"Okay, doll," replied Mark. He looked up to scan the large signs that directed customers to their desired aisle. "Electricals," whispered Mark. "That will do."

Mark fought his way through the crowded floor space until he arrived at the electricals section. At last, he thought, now let me have a look. Mark was walking down the aisle, concentrating on perusing the shelves, when about halfway along he bumped into a man. "Excuse me," uttered Mark, "I wasn't looking where I was going. Trying to find ..."

"It's you!" declared the man.

"Me?"

"Of course it is. You're the writer of ... Oh, what was it now ...? Um ..."

"*Military Rule*," replied Mark. "Actually, I'm surprised you recognised me. But it's good of you to ..."

"That's it. *Military Rule*. I remember the local newspaper articles."

"Have you read it?"

"Ah! Not exactly," responded the man cautiously. "However, I obviously know about it."

"Well," said Mark disappointedly, "I suppose that's something."

The man sensed Mark's mood. "Sorry," he said. "I know - an autograph. Would you mind?"

Mark suddenly felt better. "No, not at all," he answered. "It's not every day ..."

"Here," interrupted the man, and he gave Mark a piece of paper and a pen.

Mark noticed something was already written on the crumpled piece of paper. Great! he thought. Not my book and not even a posh autograph book. "Are you sure you meant to give me this?" he asked.

"I'm sure," confirmed the man. "There is space on there, somewhere. Anyway, what's written on the paper isn't private. It doesn't matter if you happen to digest some of it while you're looking for a space."

Mark started looking for an appropriate space, with the distinct impression that the man wanted him to read what was written on the paper. Besides, compelled by his curiosity, he couldn't really help it. And what he read was something of a surprise: "I don't actually want your autograph. Sorry to disappoint you. Anyway, allow me to explain and then you will understand. I am the commander of a splinter cell from the Network. Continue reading, and don't look up. I am known as a red-eyed of the Network

and the splinter cell was formed by Zealot to combat any potential evil within the Network. I and my faction are the alternative to the story that you have been summoned to write. Excuse the crude introduction, but I had to act immediately before you were totally reeled in by Mandeville. Now it's time for you to look up at me and we'll talk." Mark lifted his head slowly and glanced at the man's face. The glance became a gaze as he felt mesmerised by the man's stare. His red eyes penetrated Mark, drawing him into a hypnotic-like imprisonment. Mark diverted his gaze to the whole body of the red-eyed.

"As I would have imagined," Mark commented. "A citizen of Iraq but taller than I would have thought."

The red-eyed smirked. "Shallow," he observed. "I am a descendant of Iraq but was born in England."

"Ah!" replied Mark. "Home grown. I think that is the description our government use for British ethnic minorities."

"True," the red-eyed conceded. "Home grown was originally the term used for an alliance with the government aimed at alienating the militants within minorities. Alas, as with most of the government's policies, it didn't work. Anyway, now that you have a mental image of me, let's get back to the business at hand - why I'm here at this time."

"Hang on!" declared Mark. "Why are none of these passers-by staring at you? I mean, it's not a common eye colour."

"They don't detect it," he answered. "Only those who are involved with the Network can recognise a fellow member."

"Of course, I forgot," uttered Mark. "So, you're here from the future to put a different perspective on my story?"

"Mandeville's," replied the red-eyed. "Don't be fooled by him: he is only using you. I'm here to protect you from making a mistake, protect you from the Lord's mist of deceit. The splinter cell can't allow you to be taken in by Mandeville and let him control your imagination."

Mark stretched out his arm to offer a handshake to the red-eyed while he questioned himself: is he real or the next plot?

The red-eyed reciprocated. "I don't understand," he said.

"Neither do I," declared Mark. "It's as if my imagination is, in fact, becoming reality. I was expecting some sort of hologram through which my hand would pass ... yet I felt your hand clasp mine - strongly, I might add."

The red-eyed laughed. "Really!" he said, after his laughter faded. "Do people return from the future, Mark? Can they be in both places at once in order to correct any mistakes taken in one's history, or in the future? Now that would be a perfect world. But, alas, it's not in either time space. This explains your sequel going back to the past to explain the future. So, you see, you can be in two places at once. Your problem is accepting this, and the question of whether or not you should write."

"Um ..." contemplated Mark. "Do I have to accept that you can be in two places at once? How can that be?"

"You have accepted Mandeville's return," replied the red-eyed, "and have accepted everything that comes with his reincarnation - even losing your job ..."

"But ..."

"No buts." The red-eyed stared at Mark, looking into his inner thoughts. "I see," he continued. "You choose not to believe the extras, the accessories, which add an additional dimension. This is what Mandeville wants: to hinder your own imagination and thus conceal the splinter cell. However, Seeker One controls the Network ..."

"Mandeville?" interrupted Mark.

The red-eyed laughed again. "Mandeville is just an acceptable image used by the Lord to portray Seeker One as the Second Coming. Mandeville and the Lord are only prisoners of Seeker One's power. No one has controlled Seeker One since its creation. Anyway, we are drifting from your question. You wish to know how it can be?"

"Yes," said Mark, "but I don't know if I am ready for your answer, ready for the choice of believing you or not. I think it will go over my head, never to be understood."

"I'm aware of what you have just pointed out, Mark," confirmed the red-eyed, "but you do need to understand. And you will choose to do so."

"Okay," said Mark, with wavering confidence, "go for it." Mark thought: keep a straight face if the answer is out of this world.

"Good," replied the red-eyed. "I'll be direct. The quantum mechanics system, which is provided by Seeker One, allows us to move throughout time, but not beyond the future that we are in. It's designed to understand the past in order to understand the future, and then make necessary changes if the need arises."

"Well, that's abundantly clear," stated Mark. "That explains it then. Silly me for not knowing. Still, it sounds familiar. Something I vaguely remember from the telly."

"Quite," mumbled the red-eyed.

"Sorry, I didn't quite hear ..."

"Oh, just thinking out loud," interjected the red-eyed. "I'm encouraged by your comprehension, albeit in simple terms of similarities. Your prompt acceptance means that we can move on."

Mark sighed. "One thinks you are taking the ..."

"No, no. Not at all," reassured the red-eyed. "Simple similarity is a good assessment for understanding. However, there is a slight difference to your reference."

"What difference?" enquired Mark.

"We can multiply more than once," answered the red-eyed. "We can be here, there and everywhere."

Mark laughed. "Now you see me, now you don't ..."

"You attempt to mock me," retorted the red-eyed. "Now who is taking the ..."

"Sorry! Just musing over the madness of this plot that is speeding around my brain. I wish it had gone over my head instead of steamrolling into my imagination. So, Mandeville, can he multiply?"

"Fortunately, no," replied the red-eyed. "As I mentioned before, he is a prisoner. He can only use his brain in conjunction with Seeker One and has no physical ability. This is to our advantage, as he relies on others for physical presence ..."

"You?"

"No. He has an army of presence - the white-eyed of the Network. The red-eyed are the opposition."