Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Lockdown

Written by

Peter Jay Black

Published by

Bloomsbury Publishing PLC

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Bloomsbury Publishing, London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi and Sydney

First published in Great Britain in September 2015 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square London WC1B 3DP

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trademark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © Peter Jay Black 2015

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

All rights reserved
No part of this publication may be reproduced or
transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying
or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4088 5147 0



Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

CHAPTER ONE

JACK FENTON WATCHED OVER CHARLIE'S shoulder as she used her set of customised tools to pick the lock on the metal door. The train rocked from side to side and he hoped she'd factored the motion into her timings.

After a few more anxious seconds, Jack peered through the other door behind them to the passenger carriage beyond.

All was quiet in there – people were reading newspapers, listening to iPods, oblivious to what was going on.

Hopefully it would stay that way.

His eyes drifted to the far end of the carriage, where Wren was sitting in an aisle seat. Her long, blonde hair was tied up with a pink bow and she looked like an innocent ten-year-old.

A deception.

Jack caught her eye and whispered into his headset, 'You doing OK?'

Wren smiled and gave a slight nod.

Jack stayed as still as possible, letting Charlie get on with her work.

He turned to the compartment's side window, watched the trees and houses speed past and quickly ran through the rest of the mission – checking for any last-minute problems.

The security door Charlie was working on had a special lock. Beyond that door was an armoured train carriage. And in that carriage was a silver briefcase.

Jack had no idea what was inside the briefcase, and right at that moment he didn't care. All he knew was a man called 'the Shepherd' wanted it. In exchange for the briefcase, this Shepherd guy would help the Outlaws get from London to New York.

Jack balled his fists as he thought of Hector.

Hector was their new enemy. He'd managed to copy the world's most advanced virus and he was now taking the virus apart to understand how it worked. He intended to use it to become the greatest hacker ever known.

Hector would then be free to do whatever he wanted. Just like his father – he'd steal secrets and sell them to the highest bidder. He'd cause chaos and misery wherever he went. And – Jack's stomach twisted – with that sort of power, given time, Hector could even track down the location of the Urban Outlaws' bunker.

Using a program Jack had written, the Outlaws had tracked Hector to America. That was why they needed to get to New York, and *fast*.

Jack's gaze moved back to the security door.

First things first, he told himself. They needed that briefcase.

'Sixteen minutes before you reach the train station,' a voice said in their ears. Obi was back at the bunker, watching the CCTV footage and keeping an eye out for any police or bad guys.

Charlie was still working on the lock. Beads of sweat trickled off her forehead and down her cheeks. She didn't seem to notice – the concentration on her face was intense.

Jack didn't want to interrupt her, but sixteen minutes meant they were running out of time. She should've been done with the lock by now. He leant in. 'How you doin'?'

'Not good,' Charlie hissed back. 'It's tougher than I thought.'

She'd practised on a similar lock back at the bunker until she could do it blindfolded, but this one seemed to be a newer version.

Upgrades, Jack thought. *That's all we need*.

He braced himself. 'So, how long?'

Charlie puffed a strand of hair from her eyes. 'I'm going as quick as I can.' Her voice sounded strained, but, as always, she seemed in control.

Jack straightened up and cupped a hand over his microphone. 'Slink?' A blast of dubstep almost tore Jack's eardrums from his skull. He winced. 'Slink. *Seriously?*'

After a few seconds the music died down.

'What?'

'Do you have to do that, like, *every* time?'

'Yeah, mostly,' Slink said. 'And?'

Obi chuckled.

'Come on, guys, I'm trying to work here.' Charlie shook her head and returned her attention to the lock.

Jack stepped away from her and whispered into his mic, 'Slink, just tell us where you are.'

'All right, chill your beans. That guy's finally gone, and I'm getting into position. I'll have it all set up for

you in the next couple of minutes.' He'd been delayed too.

Wren cleared her throat.

Now what?

Jack spun to the passenger carriage door.

Through the window he could see a conductor walking down the aisle towards them, asking for tickets as he went.

'Charlie?' Jack didn't take his eyes off the man. 'I don't mean to rush you, but we kinda need an ETA here.'

'At least a few minutes more.'

Minutes?

Jack gauged they had less than sixty seconds before the conductor reached them. 'We don't have that much time.'

Charlie glanced up at him. 'If I stop now, I'll have to start all over again. And that would mean another fifteen minutes at least.'

'Not a chance, you guys,' Obi said through the headset. 'The station is now fourteen minutes away.'

As soon as the train pulled into the station, the armoured carriage would be unloaded and they'd have no way to get that silver briefcase.

Brilliant.

Jack ground his teeth.

The conductor only had six more tickets to check before he came through the compartment door and found them.

'*Charlie?*' Jack said out of the corner of his mouth.

'Wait.'

Four tickets.

Jack glanced at Wren – she was wringing her hands and staring intently at him.

Two tickets.

'Time's up,' Jack whispered into his microphone. 'Wren, execute *Operation Decoy*.'

As the conductor reached for the button on the door, Wren leapt to her feet and *screamed*.

The conductor wheeled round, his mouth hanging open in shock.

Several passengers turned in their seats to gawk at her too.

Wren's eyes were wide and panicked.

The conductor came to his senses and started walking towards her, his hands outstretched, while saying something Jack couldn't make out.

That should buy them the few extra minutes they needed.

'Well done, Wren.' Jack turned to Charlie as, to his utter surprise, she straightened up and stepped back from the security door. 'You've done it?' he said.

'Yes, but –' Charlie let out a puff of frustration and glanced away.

Jack had that sudden sinking feeling.

He looked between Charlie and the security door. 'But . . . what?'

'I'm sorry, Jack. I had no way of knowing.'

'Knowing what?' He frowned. 'What are you talking about?'

Charlie looked at him. 'I've unlocked the door, but it won't open. There must be a bolt on the inside or something.'

Jack's blood ran cold as realisation hit him. 'Wait – does that mean someone's in there?'

Charlie shook her head. 'I don't think so. If there was, they'd have heard me picking the lock and come to investigate already.'

That was a good point. 'Then how do they get in –' Jack winced. 'Oh, no.'

Now he understood – on the side of the armoured carriage was another door that the workers used to load and unload the contents on to the station

platform. With this inner door to the compartment bolted, the side door was the only way in or out of there.

'Twelve minutes, guys,' Obi said over their headsets.

'I'm really sorry,' Charlie said.

'It's not your fault.'

Charlie sighed. 'What do you want to do?' she said in a small voice. 'Should we get off the train at the station?'

'There has to be another way.' Jack's mind raced for a solution.

He looked into the passenger compartment.

Wren was now on the floor, rolling around as if she was possessed, while the conductor was standing over her looking unnerved.

'Wait a minute.' Jack glanced at Charlie and pointed to the compartment's external side door. 'You can open this without the driver or conductor knowing, right?'

They'd planned to use the external door when they made their escape. Normally it was impossible to open those doors until the train had stopped, but Charlie had a way around it.

She frowned. 'Yeah.'

'And you have the signal jammer?'

'Yep. Why?'

Jack slipped off his hard-shell backpack and pulled out two oversized suction cups with handles. They each had a small motor, and pipes ran to the cups.

They'd planned to use the grippers at the end of the mission, just before they reached the station, but Jack couldn't think of any other way to do this in the time they had left. He held them up. 'Will they hold?'

Charlie's eyes widened as she understood what he was getting at. 'I designed them for use at thirty or forty miles an hour.' She glanced out of the window as the train continued to speed along the track. 'We must be going well over a hundred.'

'Eleven minutes,' Obi said.

Jack slipped his hands through the loops on the handles. 'No choice.'

Charlie pulled the signal jammer – a black rectangle, ten centimetres long by four wide – from her hip bag. It had a stubby antenna at one end and a small display.

She switched it on, stuck it to the wall, then spoke into her headset. 'Obi?'

'Here.'

Good. She could still communicate with them. Charlie had set the device to block all mobile phone and radio signals. All but the one they were using.

She looked at Jack. 'Are you sure about this?'

Jack nodded. 'Do it.'

Charlie went across to the side door.

Next to it was a panel. She opened it and removed an internal cover, revealing a circuit board with a modification she'd made earlier.

She pressed a button and a light came on inside. 'OK. Ready.'

Jack hesitated and glanced back towards the passenger compartment. 'Can you keep this door closed?'

It hadn't been an issue before – if the conductor had spotted them leaving the train, it would've been too late for him to do anything about it. Especially with the phone signals blocked.

'I can cut the power to all the doors,' Charlie said. 'But the conductor has a key to open them manually.'

'What about the emergency brakes?'

'It's risky, but I can disconnect the power to them too. The driver shouldn't have any idea what's going

on, and the passengers will be trapped in the compartment with no way to call the police.'

Jack peered into the carriage again. 'Right.'

Wren was still on the floor. Her eyes had rolled back and she was convulsing.

Jack couldn't help but smile – she was a good actress.

A few passengers were holding phones up, trying desperately to get a signal.

'Wren, listen,' Jack said. 'The conductor has a key in his pocket and we need it.'

Wren's eyes suddenly flew open and she leapt to her feet.

The conductor scrambled back in surprise as Wren ran forward. He grabbed her and for a few moments they wrestled, but Wren managed to duck under his arms and slip past.

Jack hit the button on the door. It slid open and Wren ran through. As it closed again, Charlie cut the power.

The guard pressed the button too, but it didn't open again. He looked confused and rummaged in his pockets.

Wren held up the key and grinned at Jack.

'Good work.'

'Ten minutes,' Obi said.

Jack turned away. They were almost out of time. 'Open it,' he said to Charlie.

She handed him a set of lock picks. 'You're really sure about this?'

'No,' Jack said, slipping them into his pocket, 'but if we don't complete this mission . . .' He groaned, thinking of the consequences if they didn't stop Hector. 'I'm all out of ideas,' he said in a resigned tone. 'This is our only chance.'

Charlie, seemingly aware that she didn't have a better plan either, said, 'Good luck,' and pressed a switch on the circuit board.

The side door opened and wind whipped through the compartment, almost knocking them off their feet.

The conductor banged on the glass. 'What the 'ell are you doing?' his muffled voice shouted.

Jack ignored him and gripped the yellow pole by the door to steady himself.

He took three quick breaths, pulled his bandana and hood up, then leant out.

The wind instantly tried to pluck him from the compartment, but Jack managed to press the first gripper to the smooth painted surface of the outside of the train.

He hit a button under his thumb. The gripper's motor engaged and Jack felt the suction cup depress under his hand.

He gave the gripper a tug, making sure it was secure and, after a couple more deep breaths, hauled himself out the door and into the open.

For a moment Jack hung there, and it took all his strength not to be torn from the train.

Trying not to think too much, he shifted his weight, reached up as high as he could with the second gripper, and, arms burning, dragged himself up the outside of the carriage.

Now his head was just below the curve of the roof. He could make out Obi's faint voice in his ear, but because of the wind, and the heavy pounding in his chest, it was hard to hear what he was saying.

It sounded like, 'Eight minutes.'

Jack considered giving up and lowering himself back down through the door, but then he reminded himself of what rested on the outcome of this mission.

No silver briefcase, no tickets to America, no stopping Hector.

A tree shot past him and its branches brushed his jacket.

'All right, all right, I'm going,' he muttered to himself as he released the lower gripper and reached up beyond the top curve of the train carriage.

He found the flat part of the roof, pressed the gripper's button and felt it tighten. Only then did he release the second gripper and haul himself up and on to the roof of the train carriage, keeping his head low and his face pressed to the cold metal.

Wind ripped at Jack's clothes. It felt as though a thousand hands were slapping him, trying to prise him off.

With every bit of determination he had, Jack lifted his head and squinted into the wind. He would have to crawl halfway along the carriage, and it seemed like a million miles.

With his eyes watering, Jack reached forward and secured the other gripper, then bent his knees and forced himself along the roof.

Suddenly the train punched into a tunnel and his ears popped.

Disorientated and in the darkness, with wind clawing at every inch of his body, Jack remembered the safety and the warmth of the bunker and wished he was back there.

He continued forward in the dark – one gripper in front of the other – until the tunnel finally released the train into the light and he looked up. Tears streamed down his face and he could just make out the top of the armoured side door a metre ahead.

Jack quickly pulled himself towards it and peered over the edge.

The door below was divided into two halves, secured with a hefty-looking padlock.

Jack reached down, attached one gripper to the side of the door and let go of the other.

Hanging on with only one hand, he felt in his pocket for the lock picks and slid two out of their wallet.

It was then that it hit him – he would need both hands to pick a lock - one to use the rake, the other to apply pressure on the wrench.

He swore.

'Five minutes,' Obi's voice said faintly, as if he were just back in that tunnel.

Jack swore again and glanced up at the gripper he'd left on the edge of the roof. He had an idea.

A bad idea, but he was desperate.

Jack rotated his body, reached up with one foot and slipped it through the loop on the gripper above him.

He yanked a few times, making sure it was secure, then let go with both hands and hung upside down.

This had to be the stupidest thing he'd ever done.

Jack started to work on the lock.

It was slow going – normally Charlie would be doing this, or even Slink. Jack hadn't picked a lock since his time at the children's home.

Mind you, he'd like to see either of them trying to do it in these conditions – like a bat in a wind tunnel.

The train rocked as it passed over a set of points.

Pain shot through Jack's leg and he winced, but he managed to keep going – raking the lock and putting pressure on the wrench.

Finally, as if by some miracle, the padlock sprang open.

He removed it and slid one of the doors open, holding on to the edge of it.

Freeing his foot, Jack dropped as far as he could, then swung into the train and collapsed on to the floor.

The relief was instantaneous.

He lay there for a few seconds, breathing hard, happy to be alive.