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Opening extract from

Sabotage

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CHAPTER ONE – EXILE

When you know the British Secret Service wants you dead, it's hard to relax. But Jimmy Coates was forcing himself to try. Every second that passed, every mile he was driven away from New York, it became a tiny bit easier. No hand burst through the window of the car to grab him. No sirens pierced the quiet drone of the road. He had really done it. He had fooled NJ7, the top secret British Intelligence agency. They thought he was dead.

According to NJ7 files, Jimmy Coates – the boy their scientists had genetically designed to grow into a killer – had been terminated by machine-gun fire and his body lost in New York's East River. They could call off the search. Jimmy didn't want to let himself smile. Not yet. He wasn't far enough away.

"Welcome to Blackfoot Airbase," announced Agent Froy, the CIA man who had grasped Jimmy by the shoulder to lift him out of the East River a few hours before.

The black sedan slowed down and Froy pulled into a driveway. The iron gate in front of them rolled back automatically. Jimmy sat up in his seat to look for whatever device must have identified the car. His eyes scanned the foliage that lined the road. The hedge wasn't a hedge; he noticed that immediately. It was an iron wall, six metres high and at least a metre thick, constructed to resemble a line of Leyland cypress trees and painted dark green.

In a second, Jimmy picked out four security cameras and a laser scanner all concealed in the fake hedge. A cockroach couldn't get into this place without being microwaved by the lasers first.

He twisted in his seat as they drove through and watched the gate slide back into place. The last sliver of the rest of the world disappeared. He was cut off from everything, sealed inside Blackfoot, the classified military airbase on the outskirts of Piscataway, New Jersey.

Jimmy's family was a lifetime away. He had left his sister Georgie and his best friend Felix Muzbeke with Felix's parents back in New York. They were also in the care of the CIA. Jimmy could see them now, in the safehouse apartment above a Korean restaurant in Chinatown. He didn't know when the CIA would relocate them, but he hoped it would be soon.

Meanwhile, his mother had been on her way to find Christopher Viggo, the former NJ7 agent who had helped Jimmy escape Britain. Viggo had run off back to Britain, full of anger. Jimmy pictured him trying to overthrow the Government single-handed.

He had to hold on to the hope that he would see them all again. Even if it wasn't for several years, whatever happened or however he changed, Jimmy knew he must always remember his family.

But Jimmy had no idea how he would change. Inside him was a powerful organic programming. It enabled him to do amazing things, but day by day the assassin instincts in his DNA took over more of his mind, subduing his human voice. Would that voice become just an echo in his memory? And what if his memory itself was pushed aside to make room for the assassin's skill?

For a horrible minute, Jimmy imagined himself in a few year's time, about to turn eighteen. His programming would be fully developed – what would he feel when he looked at a picture of his mum? Or Georgie? Would they be like forgotten files, lost in the back of a computer's hard-drive, never accessed? Jimmy tried to imagine looking without any hint of emotion, thinking of them as just two more faces. It made him feel sick, so he closed his eyes and dropped his head back on to the leather.

A few seconds later the car stopped abruptly. Jimmy sat up. The long driveway had opened out to reveal an expanse of concrete stretching for at least two miles ahead of them. Right in the middle was a one-storey breeze-block bunker, covered in a jumble of satellite dishes.

The wind whipped across the tarmac, buffeting the side of the car. There was none of the noise or bustle found at a commercial airport. The place was deserted.

"Where are the planes?" Jimmy asked.

Froy was busy punching numbers into his mobile phone. "That's what I'm going to find out," he grumbled. Then he barked into his phone, "Where's our plane?!"

Jimmy leaned forwards, but he couldn't make out what the person on the end of the line was saying.

"Get one down here now! Anyone!" Froy went on. "I don't care about the weather conditions. Colonel Keays is overseeing this operation himself. There are only two people more powerful than Colonel Keays: the president and God Almighty.

Have either of them called you? No. So get the closest military air vehicle out of the sky and on to that runway."

Froy snapped his phone shut and stuffed it back into his pocket. "Sorry, Jimmy. An operation like this is usually planned weeks in advance. This obviously had to be a bit last-minute."

Jimmy felt the panic swirling in his chest. He had to get as far away from NJ7 as possible, as quickly as possible. Every second he spent sitting in the back of that car was a second too long.

"Don't worry," Froy reassured him. "Your plane was diverted to McGuire because of high winds, but I'm not going to let a little breeze get in our way. I've told them to ignore the weather. They'll find us something."

How long will that take? Jimmy wondered – though he didn't dare say it aloud. He scanned the sky. With nothing to distract him, he couldn't help returning to one thought he wanted more than anything to forget about for now – his father. It still seemed amazing to Jimmy, but Ian Coates had just taken over as Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Already the man had shown that he planned to continue the policy of not letting the public vote. He called it 'Neo-democracy' and the more Jimmy found out about it, the worse it sounded. The Government held on to absolute control, with no opposition, and everything was run by the Secret Service.

Even worse than that, Ian Coates had threatened to go to war with France over a tiny misunderstanding. The only thing that had stopped him so far was the fact that the American President wasn't going to support him unless Britain spent billions of dollars on American weapons.

In spite of all this, the one thing that stuck out for Jimmy was the moment when Ian Coates had revealed that he wasn't Jimmy's biological father. Jimmy took a deep breath. *It doesn't matter,* he insisted inside his head. *He's nothing to do with me now. Forget his lies.* Jimmy longed to believe the words he was repeating to himself. But underneath it, he could feel a mist of confusion. Britain could never be his home as long as the Neo-democratic Government was in power – his fake father included.

Suddenly, Jimmy felt his muscles tense up. He could hear something. A drone.

"Here it is," announced Froy.

The noise was huge now, and getting louder all the time. The shadow of the plane loomed over them. Then Jimmy saw it – like a sharpened bullet, the EA-22G

Growler scythed through the wind. The slim grey fuselage was almost camouflaged against the sky, but the fins were tipped with red and they flashed like flames. Then, with the thunder of the plane touching ground, a glimmer of sunlight caught the emblem on the side of the cockpit – a white star on a navy disc.

Jimmy gasped. For the first time, he was awed by the power of the organisation that was taking care of him now. Colonel Keays hadn't just used his CIA resources – now he'd mobilised the US airforce. Jimmy felt a smile creep over his face, confident that they would be able to escort him anywhere in the world in safety.

But where? Jimmy laughed at his own stupidity. In all the fuss of escaping NJ7 and the trauma of leaving his family behind, he hadn't thought to ask where in the world he was going to be taken.

"Where will it…?" he started, almost overcome by excitement. "I mean, where am I…?"

Froy broke into a huge smile.

"I hope you like Mexican food."