

LEOPOLDO GOUT

GENIUS  
the  
revolution



FEIWEL AND FRIENDS  
NEW YORK

A FEIWEL AND FRIENDS BOOK

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To all the DREAMERS:  
*Stay Strong—light will always splinter the darkness.*



# ONDSCAN

**To all black box lab staffers:**

We find ourselves at a turning point.

I have always been honest with you about my goals and my intentions with our work. You were handpicked from, literally, thousands of candidates to join me in changing civilization for the better. We all know how afflicted the world is with suffering, poverty, violence, environmental destruction, and persecution. And we all want to change it—to stop the ills of the world and usher in a new age that we can own.

I promised you that when you joined the brain trust I would do everything in my power to ensure that we were successful. I gave you every tool you could ever need and all the space and encouragement. I provided food, shelter, and every amenity to guarantee your comfort. All I asked in return was for you to abandon all doubt and commit your considerable talents to helping me design a world in which the stagnant, old ways would no longer hold sway over the brilliance of youth.

And you have done magnificent things.

I have been to all of the black box labs and seen your work firsthand. I have witnessed your breakthroughs and championed your failures (because, as we all know, failure is the ultimate teaching tool). Every single day spent in your company has been surprising and revelatory. I believe in you and our mission now more than I ever have before.

That is why I am writing you this message.

As long as there have been dreamers and innovators, there have been those afraid of change and desperate to keep the status quo. For every bright-eyed visionary looking to galvanize new technologies, there are one hundred doomsayers eager to squash her reveries. I am afraid that there are desperate young prodigies who want to stop us from achieving our goals.

Hard to believe, I know. But it's true.

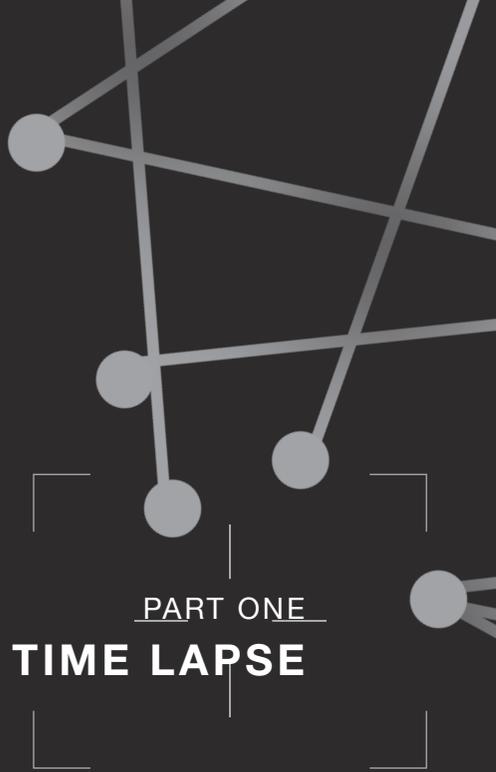
They are the LODGE, and they are out there right now, making contact with our enemies—like Terminal—to find ways to stop us. They will be reaching out to you. Trying to break down our walls. I am asking you to be strong, to stay the course, and to resist their messaging. At the end of the day, I know this is merely a passing storm, one of many we've already weathered.

So hunker down. Lock the doors. Arm the security systems.

Trust no one outside of the lab. Ignore all external e-mails and messages. Do not listen to the media. We need to isolate ourselves and focus our minds. I am available whenever you need me. We are so close.

In six days, Shiva will be ready to launch. The clock starts now.

Yours in solidarity and vision,  
Kiran



PART ONE

**TIME LAPSE**



6 DAYS UNTIL SHIVA

Three hours after we landed in Beijing, I located my father.

He was at the Municipal Number 23 detention center. Thankfully, he hadn't been transferred to a prison yet. No doubt Interpol's involvement in his case kept him from being sent directly to one of the overcrowded jails. Given the seriousness of the charges against him, though, that was likely to change. After the interrogation was finished, the odds were high that he would be sent straight to a maximum-security prison. If that happened, we'd likely never get him out.

Now that we had found him, it was time to do my thing.

**The Painted Wolf thing.**

Even if my father wasn't in prison, getting him out of a detention center wasn't going to be an easy feat. I'd have to rely on a lot of the same skills I'd used when we busted Rex out in New York but without the advanced gear. I'd have to use the art of talk and bluster.

Pretending to be a lawyer in the States was relatively easy; I used my accent for one. Getting away with something like that in my home country, however, was going to be trickier. I'd played the underground journalist, the stone-faced security agent, and the concerned business partner, but now I needed

to create someone new. Someone more believable than all the others combined. This was going to require more research and more time—the one thing we didn't have.

We all rode in a cab together on the way to the detention facility.

I sat up front with the driver, an older man from Nankin, while Rex, Tunde, and Teo squeezed into the backseat. They had their bags piled on their laps and were going through whatever tech they had readily available—cell phones, my pin cameras, scattered surveillance tech like earbud mics and wires.

The second I realized where my father was being held, I bought some new clothes—slacks, a blouse, and sleek shoes. I aged myself up with some subtle makeup effects; I wanted to appear as **professional and intimidating** as possible.

As the cab slowly made its way through the late-afternoon traffic, I went online to figure out my angle. Though the detention center didn't have an active website, several of its employees did. Using their social media accounts—reading up on their colleagues, their families, and their friends—I was able to get a good sense of the corporate structure of the center. I knew the various departments, who was in charge, and was even able to piece together several current schedules. These tiny nuggets of innocuous information were like treasure chests.

Fifteen minutes from our arrival time, I made the first call. Rex had taken a few minutes to spoof my cell number to make it look like I was calling from the discipline commission, several layers of bureaucracy above the jails and prisons. One of the security guards I'd found online answered the call. She was very businesslike.

"This is Liu Xiansheng."

"Good afternoon! I'm Mrs. Huang, the coordinator for the department of facilities management, badge number six-five-two-zero. I'm on my way now and should be there in twenty minutes to do my inspection of the facility."

I could hear Liu Xiansheng swallow hard over the phone.

"I—I don't have this appointment on my calendar—"

"What do you mean?" I asked assertively. "It has been scheduled for weeks. I was told I'd have access to the entire facility. I have a list of prisoners that I'll be meeting with as well as center staff. Are you telling me **you don't know** about this?"

Liu Xiansheng scrambled. "No," she said, "I just—"

"Maybe I should contact your superior to clarify the situation here—"

"Oh look, here it is. Yes. I do have you scheduled," Liu lied. "We will have everything ready for you when you arrive. I will have a list of staff and prisoners available, and you can choose whom you would like to meet with. We look forward to seeing you soon."

"Excellent," I said, then hung up.

I spent most of the rest of the drive online creating a fake ID. A lot of IDs were digital now, and with the right tweaking I knew I could pull off something fairly convincing. In our final few minutes on the road, I refreshed my makeup and pulled back my hair in a tight, professional bun.

Two blocks from the municipal detention center, I had the cab pull over so the boys could get out. I did not get out with them. Teo had already used mapping software to scout out a rooftop on a nearby building where he could provide

surveillance, while Rex and Tunde hacked into the detention center's closed-circuit-TV camera system. They had just upgraded to a new wireless system, which meant we could have eyes inside the building as well as outside.

"You guys know the plan?" I asked the boys.

"We're on it," Rex said.

## 1.1

The cab dropped me off alone, and Liu Xiansheng met me in the lobby.

She was young and full of smiles.

"Your ID, please," she said, her lips barely moving. "And your cell."

I pulled out my cell and showed her the ID. She looked it over, glancing from the screen to my face and back again several times. I was wearing a pair of reading glasses but she didn't bat an eye, which was good, because these reading glasses were outfitted with multiple 360-degree surveillance cameras and spot microphones. (The boys had done some quick tweaks to the frames we'd picked up when I went clothes shopping.) Finally, Liu nodded her approval.

"I'm afraid I will need to keep your cellular phone here," Liu said.

"Of course."

I handed it to her.

It worked. I was in. As Liu went to a desk to grab some paperwork and drop off my cell phone, I whispered to the tiny earpiece I was wearing, hoping Rex would hear me clearly.

"I'm in," I said.

"Looking good," Rex replied. "On your right."

I glanced up at the corner to my right and saw a camera mounted there. I gave a flash of a smile to Rex before Liu returned with a file folder.

Before she could even open her mouth to say a word, I said: "First, I'm going to need to interview several of the prisoners, then the staff, and finally I'll need a tour of the premises so I can confirm my findings for myself."

Nodding, Liu handed me a list of men at the detention center.

I scanned it and pointed to three names. My father's was first.

Liu looked at the sheet and nodded in agreement.

"Right this way, please," she said.

I walked down the corridor, flanked by Liu and two armed guards. None of them seemed particularly suspicious. If anything, they acted as though this was just another visit, just another part of a long day. That gave me some confidence, but I also knew things could change in a matter of microseconds. One false word, one misstep, and they wouldn't hesitate to toss me into a cell alongside my father.

I needed to be **focused**.

"I'm almost in the room," I whispered.

Rex said, through the earpiece: "I can see your dad on the CCTV cameras. He's sitting at the back of the room. There is one guard in the room with him."

I let the conference room door close behind me as I stepped inside. The room was large—there were four tables, empty save for one. My father sat there, arms on the tabletop in front of him. A guard stood on the opposite side of the room, eyeing me coldly. I crossed the room slowly, confidently.

My heart was racing so fast I worried it would bruise my ribs.

Reaching the back of the room, I sat down across from my father. He looked exhausted. Not just from sleep deprivation but from emotional fatigue as well. The crimes my father was charged with carried **serious weight**, and there were so many people—Chinese authorities, Interpol, FBI, and Mossad—who wanted answers. Answers that my father didn't have.

Just like in Nigeria, my father recognized me right away. I didn't have to say a word, didn't even remove my glasses. He leaned forward and rested his elbows on the table. I could hear his shackles clank under the table and my heart sank. The thought of my father in chains, it was nearly too much to bear.

"Hello," I said as Liu and the guards walked away. "My name is Mrs. Huang. I'm with the department of facilities management. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your time here at the detention center."

The door closed behind me. Liu and the guards were gone, and as soon as they were out of earshot, my father leaned in, his eyes wide.

"Cai," my father whispered, "what are you doing?"

"I'm here to get you out."

"There are cameras on every wall," my father said.

"We're in control of the cameras. The plan is simple. I'm going to interview you and you're going to complain and then I'll act very upset. I'll tell the woman from the office here that I need to speak to management, that you've been mistreated and need to be moved to a hospital. We'll have an ambulance come, and security at the hospital will be much lighter. That's the first part. Second—"

My father shook his head. "I'm sorry, Cai. It will not work."

"Why? It seems like it will work just fine. I've done this before."

My father raised an eyebrow at that.

"Well," I said, "I mean I've done . . . Look, it doesn't matter. We have to get you out of here and this is our only chance, okay?"

My father spoke urgently. "They are expecting you."

I stopped breathing for a second.

In my earpiece, Rex said, "Hang on, what did he just say?"

"They've been asking me about a team of young people," my father continued. "A Mexican or American boy, a Nigerian boy, and a Chinese girl. After meeting your American and Nigerian friends last week, I knew the Chinese girl was you."



*Interview with Cai's father*

In my earpiece, Rex said, "Cai, you need to get out now. . . ."

"Who were these people?" I asked my father.

He shook his head. "I don't know, but I do know that they'll be watching me here. If you try to remove me, they'll hear about it and things will only get worse. They're using me as a pawn. I can't leave here unless the charges are dropped."

I drew in a deep breath, mind racing, searching for any way to make our original plan work. But my father was right. Without knowing who was watching us, any action could just make things worse. Reluctantly, I nodded to him.

"I will get you out of here, Father. Count on it."

Then, into my earpiece, I said, "Rex, go ahead and restart the cameras and **make the call** in about thirty seconds."

I stood and thanked my father as professionally as I could. Even with my stomach doing somersaults and my eyes threatening to tear up, I kept my composure. The guards stepped into the room the moment I stood; one held the door open for me as I crossed the vast expanse of dull gray carpet as slowly as I could. I needed to give Rex time to make his call.

Sure enough, it worked.

Liu appeared in the doorway, looking quite concerned.

"I just received an important call," she said. "You are to call Deputy Minister Yang immediately. Here is your phone back."

Liu handed me my cell. I dialed up Rex and tried to act as serious and concerned as possible as he said, "We're packing up. See you down on the street in a few minutes." I hung up my cell and pocketed it.

"Unfortunately, there has been an emergency," I told Liu. "I'll have to reschedule the rest of the inspection. I'm not

convinced that this facility is meeting every standard. I will be coming back. Soon."

As I walked out of the building, Rex whispered into my earpiece.

"Damn, that was cold," he said.

"I need them to take care of my father," I replied as I walked through the front gates of the detention center to the street. "And **I'm not going to give up.**"

## 1.2

Tunde, Teo, and Rex had a cab pick me up in front of the detention center.

It took me a few blocks away where they were waiting.

Each of them had a duffel bag tossed over their shoulders, loaded high with gear, and we walked as quickly as possible through the crowds that frequented the markets at the end of Tiantan East Road. As we walked, Tunde seemed distracted, staring off into the crowds as though he was looking for something or someone in particular. He paused several times.

"What's up?" I asked him as we rounded a corner.

"It just looked like there were some people following us."

"Who?" I glanced into the throng behind us.

"A group of young people. Maybe I am mistaken," Tunde said.

I took Tunde's hunch seriously and stealthily glanced around. The streets were incredibly crowded. A storm was about to break overhead, and all of the pedestrians were trying to get their shopping done before the downpour. I didn't see anyone unusual in the crowd; most of the people milling about appeared to be tourists.

"I don't see anyone," I told Tunde.

"Perhaps I was mistaken," he replied.

"So," Rex asked me, getting back to plans, "what're you thinking?"

"There's a microblogger I've worked with in the past. She's got some insane deep-web connections and owes me a few favors. I don't want to pull her into anything too dangerous, but she might be able to find a way to get my father's record **wiped clean**. What do you guys think?"

We pushed through the shoppers, past men hawking umbrellas and women pushing carts filled with fruits and vegetables. I noticed a stand of spices like fennel and star anise and thought about my mother. I wanted desperately to call her and check in but knew I couldn't.



Beijing

Teo was first to answer. "Sounds risky. How can we trust her?"

"She's a friend."

Teo shrugged. "I have a lot of friends. I don't trust any of them."

Rex said, "Well, maybe that's 'cause of your bad attitude."

"I trust her," I said. "That should be enough."

"And I trust whoever Cai trusts," Tunde added.

"That's good and all," Teo said. "But every time we reach out, every time we make a connection, that links us to other people—people who we might endanger or who could endanger us. I didn't spend the last few years living under a rock just to have everything **blow up** in my face now."

"Cai knows what she's doing," Rex said. "Cai is the smartest, most selfless person I've ever met," he continued, pulling Teo to the side. "We wouldn't be here if it weren't for her. Truth is, Cai's the only one who can stop Kiran. You've been trying for years. . . . It's time to let someone else take charge. Cai can do it."

I wanted to hug him then and there, but it started to pour.

I motioned for everyone to follow me down a narrow alleyway between two gaudily lit cell phone stores. In Beijing, cell phone stores are nearly as common as noodle houses. We stopped beneath an awning to get out of the rain.

"I'll be back in two minutes," I told the guys.

Darting into one of the cell phone stores, I asked the young woman with spiky hair working the counter for a cheap, prepaid cell. Nothing smart. Nothing touch-screen. She handed me a Nokia knockoff the size of a small notebook. It came with an access code she scribbled out on a piece of

paper and enough minutes to make a quick call. I paid and made my way back to the boys.

"My friend is called Rodger Dodger. She's somewhat of an activist, somewhat of a journalist. What she does is very dangerous. I can't guarantee she'll be willing to help us out, but she's helped me before."

Teo narrowed his eyes, suspicious.

"I need you to trust me on this," I told him.

Rex elbowed his brother.

"Fine," Teo said. "Make the call."

Getting to Rodger Dodger meant calling through a series of numbers. She'd cloaked her location through a Beijing bank that instantly forwarded the call to a bakery in Nanjing that pushed the call through a call center in Suzhou before a young man's voice answered the phone in English. "Hello?"

"Painted Wolf calling for Rodger Dodger," I said.

"One second."

There was a series of clicks before the line picked up again. I realized at that moment that I'd never actually talked to Rodger Dodger. All of our communication had been by text or encrypted e-mail. I knew a few vague details about her— young, female, educated—but could not put a face or a voice to the name. And it was an odd name. Where on Earth would she have come up with Rodger Dodger?

"Painted Wolf," she said. "You're back in China."

"Yes," I said, "and **I need some help.**"

"I noticed a lot of chatter on the feeds. Someone picked up a still of you on the street in Beijing earlier today; lot of rumors going around. Hope you're keeping your head low like usual."

"I'm trying," I said, "but it's not easy."

"Tell me about it. So what do you need?"

"Can't say over the phone. Any chance we can meet?"

"Sure," Rodger Dodger said. "There's a dumpling place a few blocks east of where you're standing right now. I'll meet you there in an hour."

I couldn't help but look out, past Rex, Teo, and Tunde, into the crowds passing by. Even though I knew Rodger Dodger had likely just pinpointed my location using pings from a cell tower or some sort of **tracking program** via the line, there was something spooky about the fact that she knew exactly where I was.

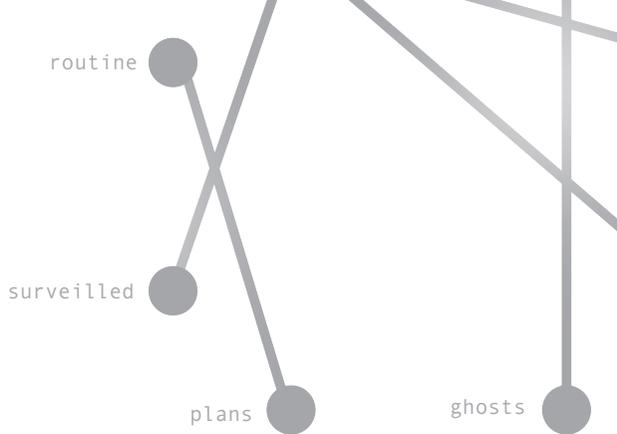
"Okay," I said. "See you then."

I hung up and pulled the cell's SIM card.

Then I crushed it under my shoe before tossing the cell into a storm drain.

"So," I asked the boys, "who's up for dumplings?"

## 2. Rex



6 DAYS UNTIL SHIVA

If Kolkata seemed crazy crowded, Beijing had it beat.

I was thankful I wasn't attempting to navigate the city alone, but, regardless, the experience was a blur of neon lights, rain, steam, and glass and steel.

*I won't lie: I loved every minute of it.*

That sounds strange, considering the pressure we were under. But at that point I'd gotten used to it. Being on the run, chased across continents, stressed that every hour might be your last moment before a life behind bars, had become familiar. Routine even.

That's crazy to say.

But it's true.

I will say that it wasn't the adrenaline surge of constantly being on the verge of being arrested that I loved but the fact that I was with family. Having my best friends at my side made me feel secure, and having Teo right there next to me made me confident. Even with the crowds and the rain beating down on my head, I felt stronger than I had in weeks.

Call it the big brother phenomenon.

Ever since I was little, I'd looked up to Teo. I'd turned to



him for the answers that Papa or Ma couldn't give me. Usually, he had them. When some kid at school gave me a hard time, Teo always offered to "talk" to the bully. He could see I was upset even before I'd registered the emotion. He was there when I felt lonely.

That's probably why his disappearance hurt so much.

That's certainly why having him back felt so good.

Still, I knew getting into the groove again wasn't going to be easy.

Teo hadn't exactly offered up every detail on what he'd done while he was gone, but whatever it was had made his rough edges that much sharper. Perhaps it was just stress, but he definitely had a shorter fuse.

And I wasn't going to tolerate him taking it out on Cai.

The fact that he doubted her was one thing. Considering what Teo had been involved in over the last couple years, I didn't expect him to go along with all of our plans right away. It was the way he did it that got to me.

As we followed Cai to the dumpling place, navigating a warren of wet side streets, my brother walked slower than the rest of us.

I dropped back beside him.

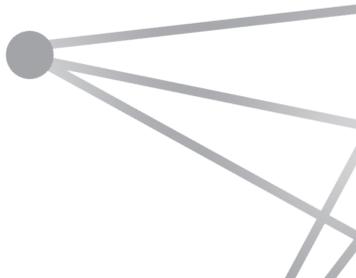
Something had his hackles up.

"Why're you acting like this?" I asked him.

"We're in China, Rex. This is the most surveilled state in the world. Everything we do here is recorded. Maybe there isn't someone watching the footage as we speak, but our being ghosts isn't going to last very long."

"Cai is the real deal. She lives here. This is her playground."

"And her little friend? I still don't trust her."



*Well, Teo, if you don't like our methods, you can do your own thing.*

But there was something else bothering him.

"Tell me the truth," I asked Teo in Spanish. "What's up?"

"We're wasting crucial time trying to get Cai's dad out."

"What? No. We need to make things right. Tunde's entire village was under the gun. Cai's father is in detention and might never step foot out of prison again. And Ma and Papa aren't getting home without our help. We're the only ones who can fix it. There's nothing more important right now."

Teo stopped walking. "What about Kiran? Seems pretty important to me."

"We're going to stop him."

"If we don't . . . ?"

The others continued ahead before Tunde noticed we weren't following. "Everything's okay," I told Tunde. "Just give me and Teo another minute."

Tunde nodded. "Okay, *omo*. But just a minute."

I turned back to Teo.

"We're going to stop him. We will. We have to."

Teo and I locked eyes for a moment. I wanted him to know how serious I was. How he needed to let go of his stranglehold on the decision making.

"Fine," Teo said. "For now."

## 2.1

An hour later, we were all squished into a booth at the dumpling place.

It was a small shop with flashing neon lights in the window and greasy tabletops. But the smell! It was an aromatic heaven



inside that restaurant. We'd been in China for several hours, but I hadn't gotten the sense that I was truly in another country until we'd stepped into the dumpling place.

Every scent rang out clear as a bell, and I could not stop my mouth from watering. As we were all starving, we decided it would not hurt to indulge in several rounds of *xiao long bao*, the steamed soup dumplings. They were insanely delicious.

As the waitstaff cleared our plates, a girl, no older than twelve, dragged a plastic chair over to our booth and sat across from us. She was Chinese, short even for her age, and wore an expression of confusion.

"I thought you had blue hair," she said to Cai.

"Rodger Dodger?" Cai asked in response.

"At your service," the girl replied, her English pronunciation flawless.

Teo groaned audibly.

"She's a little girl," he said, motioning to Rodger Dodger.

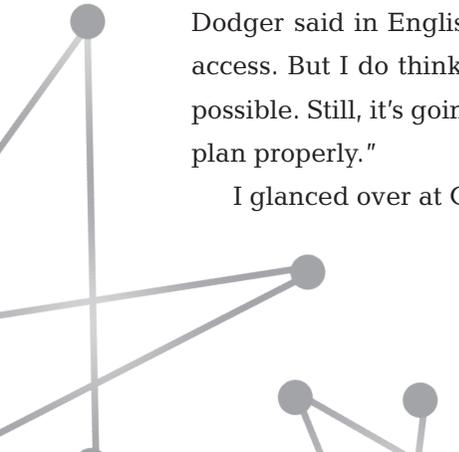
I shushed him.

"I'm going to tell her what we're up against," Cai told me.

Then, in Mandarin, she gave Rodger Dodger a rundown of our situation. I didn't know much about Rodger, but I assumed Cai trusted her. Only thing she'd mentioned was that they shared a common goal—exposing corruption and malfeasance, soldiers in the same war.

"Well, I don't think I can clear this person's record," Rodger Dodger said in English to all of us. "I don't have that sort of access. But I do think your plan of getting him transferred is possible. Still, it's going to take a significant amount of time to plan properly."

I glanced over at Cai. She looked downcast.



Stressed about her dad.

That's when I got an idea, something a bit out of the box.

"I think I got it," I said. "We go after Terminal first. Naya stole all that data; if we can find her trail, it'll lead us straight to Terminal. If we find them, we can clear Wolf's associate's name. Everything we'll need is with Naya. I say we get the data and then use it to bring Terminal to its knees while we clear Wolf's associate."

Rodger Dodger thought over the suggestion and then looked to me.

She said, "I think it's our only option."

"Sounds complicated," Tunde said. "I want to get Naya just as much as you all do. But there are just as many moving parts in this plan. We do not know where Naya is, to begin. And there are a lot of worries dealing with Terminal—"

"And a lot of risks," Teo said from the other side of the table.

Cai and Rodger Dodger turned to him.

"Don't forget, we already saw Wolf's, uh, *associate* this morning. You were in the detention center, close enough to touch him. It didn't work. And the only reason we're not in a jail cell right now is because our digital prints are still blacked out. We're still, for all intents and purposes, ghosts. We need to stay that way. The second we're recognized on a video feed or a log-in, then Kiran will vanish. Right now, we have the upper hand—he's scrambling. I think it's not in our best interest to get this person out now. We have to take down Kiran first."

No one said anything.

Teo took the opportunity to continue. "We have everything we need," he said. "We can use my bio-computer drives. It

won't take long to access them. Then we'll be able to interrupt Kiran's final moves before—"

"I disagree," Cai interrupted. "I think Rex is right. We need to go for Naya and Terminal. It seems the easiest, most logical route."

Tunde cleared his throat.

"I am sorry, *omo*. But Teo has a point. We should hit at Kiran while his defenses are down, and then we can circle back around for Naya, Terminal, and the associate in the detention center. I worry that if we do not take this opportunity to strike at Kiran, the door will close."

"I disagree," Cai said. We were at an impasse.

"So," Teo said, hands on his hips, "what do we do now?"

We all sat in silence for a moment.

Then Tunde spoke up.

"I think I have a very good idea."

## 2.2

Tunde's idea was simple.

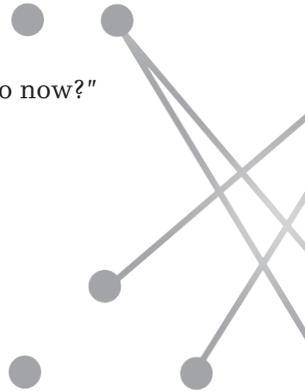
"We split up," he said. "Rex, you and Wolf and Rodger Dodger can track down Naya, and I will go with Teo to the apartment he has in this city. The two of us can begin our work on finding and stopping Kiran."

"I like this plan," Teo said. "My place isn't far."

Cai nodded, and I shook hands with Tunde and Teo.

"Be in touch," I said. "We'll let you know as soon as we find Naya. We can meet back up after and figure out how we'll make it all work."

I watched my best friend walk out into the rain with my brother.





*See you guys soon.*

And then I turned back to the table where Cai and Rodger Dodger were accessing their network of spies and contacts to attempt to trace Naya's movement after she'd fled Nigeria. Rodger had a small tablet computer ready for the job.

It wasn't easy.

They motioned for me to join them as they navigated terabytes of footage just to find her arrival from Africa. Luckily, Rodger Dodger had some serious skills—while she wasn't a computer expert, she had Cai's quick deductive reasoning.

After Rodger Dodger got us onto Naya's digital scent, Cai jumped in to predict Naya's next moves.

"Naya's communicative," Cai said. "She'll be looking to meet up with Terminal."

"She needs to bring in the data," I said.

"And quick," Cai replied.

We all hunched over Rodger's tablet, watching as Cai sorted through various social media accounts associated with Terminal. She told us she was looking for clues, little giveaways, maybe coded language, that would reveal Naya's plan.

"There," Cai said, pointing to the monitor. "Bread crumbs."

"What is it?" I asked, leaning in to look.

It was a forum for Terminal supporters. They were talking about a "big data haul" and a "triumphant meet-up." But it was all so vague. At least to me.

"She is in Beijing," Rodger Dodger said, looking over the information.



"How do you know?" I asked.

Rodger Dodger pointed to a reference to the 798 Art District.

Cai said, "There's also Terminal chatter, little hints and clues, about what's happening in China right now. Naya's bringing in the data."

"To who?" I asked.

"That is the question," Cai said.

"We need to know where Naya is right now," I said, growing frustrated. "We need to get to her before she hands anything over to . . . whoever."

"We'll get it," Rodger Dodger said. "Just give us a little more time."

I was beginning to feel some of the same frustration that Teo had. Instead of getting antsy, I decided it couldn't hurt to order another round of dumplings. The menus on the wall were, of course, in Chinese. When our waiter came over, I pointed to a picture of some dumplings that looked interesting; he nodded and left.

"Those are delicious," Rodger Dodger said without looking up.

"What's in them?" I asked.

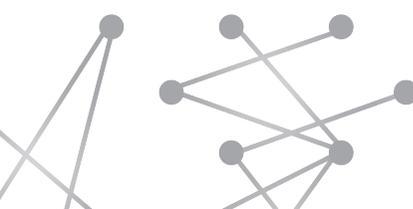
"Mutton," she said.

"Awesome."

Cai elbowed me and whispered, "You're cute."

Then she leaned forward, face inches from the tablet screen, and ran her index finger across a posting on one of the Terminal forums. Rodger Dodger read it and nodded. They high-fived before Cai turned to me.

"Naya's got a customer," Cai said.

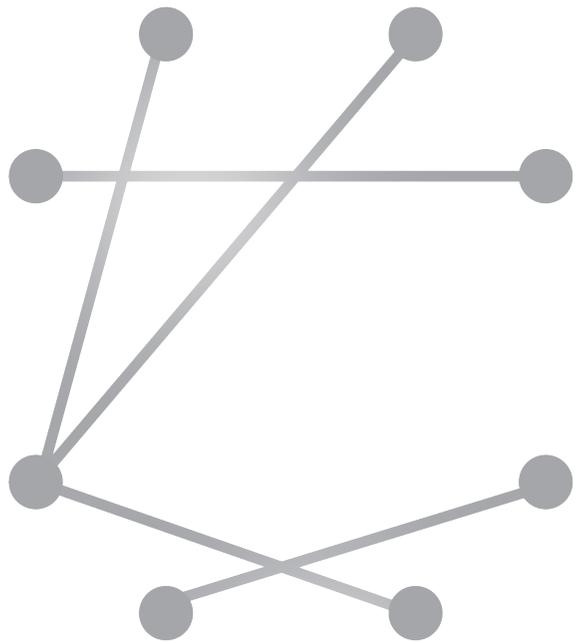
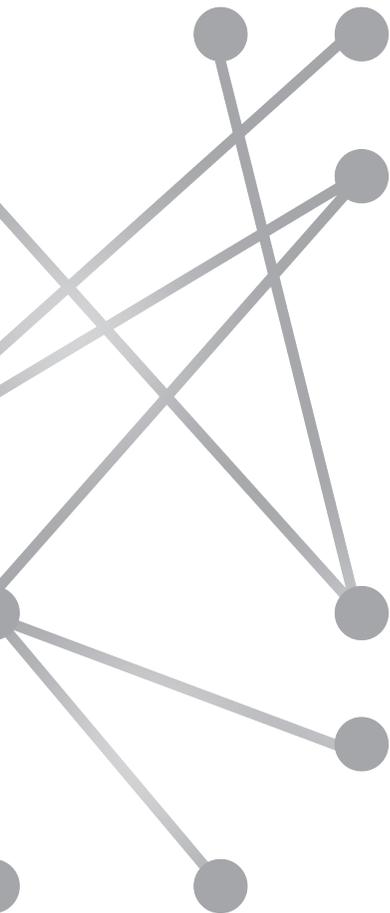


"We know who it is?"

Rodger Dodger said, "Looks like Terminal leadership."

"No way," I said, glancing at the screen as if I could read it.

"We do this right," Cai said, "we'll find the head of Terminal."



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### 3. TUNDE



6 DAYS UNTIL SHIVA

Teo and I began the trek to his apartment on foot.

I was happy to be out in the fresh air, despite the rain.

I will tell you that I had an inner peace—a certain stability, a weight from my shoulders—that I had not felt in many, many weeks. With my family and my people safe back in Nigeria, I was now more concerned than ever about ensuring that we accomplished our mission for the sake of my friends. Though I am surely not the bravest of our bunch (that would most definitely be Cai), I did feel the overwhelming urge to ensure we were protected.

Still, I could not shake the unnerving image of the young people that I had seen in the crowds as we made our way to the dumpling shop. They were not tourists. Of that I was certain. And yet they did not appear to belong, either.

I wondered: *Wetin be they palava?*

The streets outside were just as raucous as they had been before. It seemed to me at the time that this was truly a city that never slept.

It did not even take a nap!

As we crossed a busy intersection jam-packed with hundreds of idling vehicles, I felt a bit silly about my worries.

Why was I so nervous? Why was I on edge? No one was looking at me. No one was hiding around a corner. I began to think that my suspicions had been entirely unfounded. Perhaps, I told myself, it was just being in a new city that had me concerned. Though we had traveled so much over the past few weeks, it was likely the strain of our stressful situation had finally gotten the better of me.

*Dis stress si mi trouble!*

With this thought in mind, I followed Teo across a large plaza that was dotted with trees. People with umbrellas darted to and fro, and I tried to keep up with Teo as he wove expertly through the crowds. That was when I saw them, my friend!

I was not going crazy! I was not overly tired!

There were three young people. They looked very much like contestants at the Game, but these faces were not familiar to me. Two girls and a boy, not much older than the members of the LODGE, stood watching me from across the plaza. They were carefully positioned, the two girls looking at cell phones, while the boy, tall and pale, appeared to be watching the crowds. But I could tell he was actually eyeing me surreptitiously. I knew right away these were the same people who had been following us when we first arrived.

What did they want? Who were they with?

My mind was spinning with questions.

"Tunde?" Teo asked. "What's up?"

He had noticed I had stopped walking and was staring. I turned to tell him what I had seen, but I knew I would have to point out the young people to prove my suspicions. However, when I looked back to where the threesome had been standing, they were gone. Vanished like ghosts back into the rainy night!

"Seriously," Teo said, "are you okay?"

"We are being followed," I told him. "Come."

I started walking with Teo as quickly as I could into the thick of the crowd.

"I thought I was imagining them," I said. "Just being paranoid or something. But it is true, there are three young people following us tonight."

"You recognize them?"

"No. They are new to me."

Teo looked around, eyes tracking every young face in the crowd. "What do these people look like?"

"Young. Not Chinese. Two girls and a boy."

"Think they're with Kiran?" Teo asked.

"I have no idea, but we have to lose them."

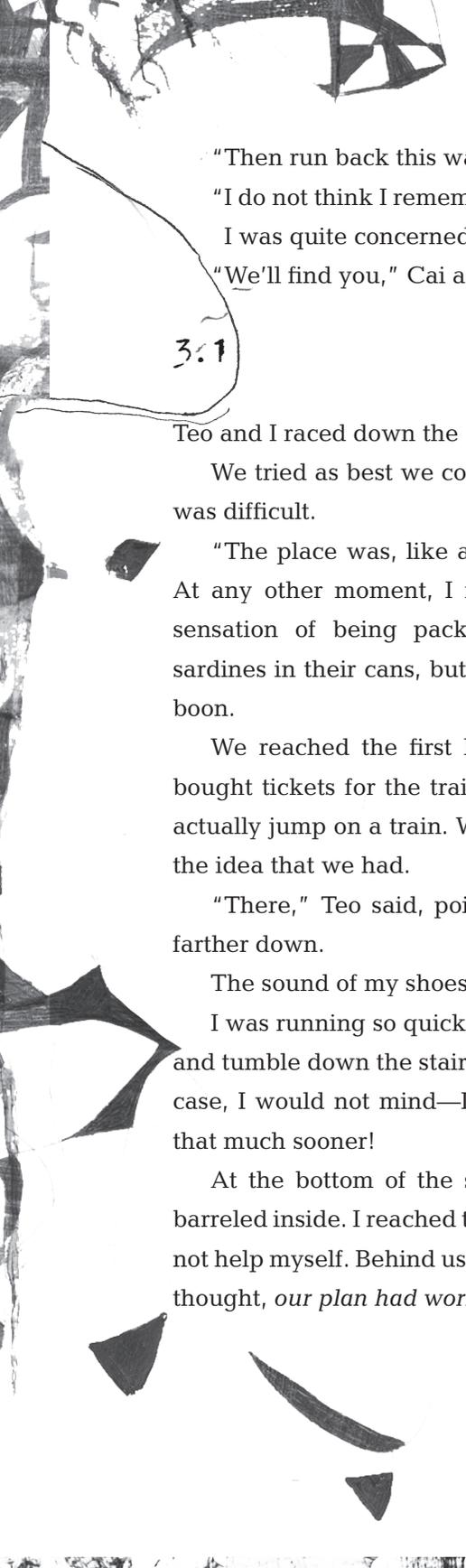
Teo and I dodged passersby, darting through the crowd to the edge of the plaza. I noticed an entrance to the subway half a block distant and pointed it out to Teo. "I bet we can lose them in there," I said.

Teo agreed.

As we picked up our pace, racing across another street choked with cars, I pulled out my cell phone and called Cai. She picked up on the first ring. Before Cai could speak, I blurted out my concerns. "Cai," I said, "we are being followed."

"Followed?"

"Yes," I said. "The young people I noticed before we met with Rodger Dodger. I believed then that I was likely mistaken, just being paranoid, but I saw them again just now. We have to meet up. Teo and I will try to lose them here and then—"



"Then run back this way," Cai said.

"I do not think I remember where we were exactly," I said.

I was quite concerned we would easily get lost.

"We'll find you," Cai assured me. "Just move."

3.1

Teo and I raced down the stairs into the subway station.

We tried as best we could to not bump into anyone, but it was difficult.

"The place was, like all of Beijing, ridiculously crowded. At any other moment, I might have complained about the sensation of being packed into this concrete space like sardines in their cans, but at that moment the crowds were a boon.

We reached the first level of the station, where people bought tickets for the train, but realized we did not want to actually jump on a train. We just wanted to give our pursuers the idea that we had.

"There," Teo said, pointing to another staircase that led farther down.

The sound of my shoes on the steps clanged like thunder.

I was running so quickly that I was concerned I would trip and tumble down the stairs. But I realized that if this were the case, I would not mind—I would certainly get to the bottom that much sooner!

At the bottom of the stairs, Teo threw open a door and barreled inside. I reached the door and stopped to look. I could not help myself. Behind us, the staircase was empty. *Perhaps*, I thought, *our plan had worked.*



We found ourselves in a long corridor.

A few people were walking down it toward us, and I realized this was a passageway that ran under the street, likely connecting this station to another a block or so away. It was the perfect deception. We would be like those burrowing rodents I had seen videos of online. When a predator appeared near their homes, they would dart underground and pop up in another location. How clever!

As we sped down the corridor, Teo asked, "Where else did you see these people? You told Cai you'd seen them before."

"Before meeting Rodger Dodger," I said.

"So maybe there's a connection there," he replied.

"No. I doubt that very much," I said. "I know that you are highly suspicious of Rodger, but these people are not associated with her. I do not know how I can confirm that for you, Teo, but I know it is true. Painted Wolf is the most thorough person I know; she would not be fooled by subterfuge."

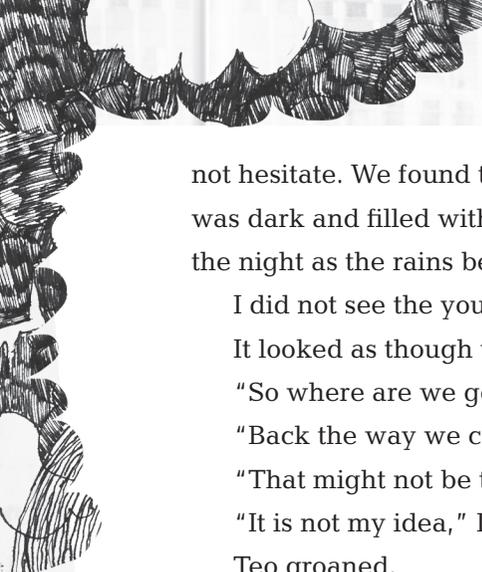
Though I tried not to act too obviously concerned, I kept turning to look over my shoulder. There were a few people following behind us, but they were not the young people I had noticed in the square. They were just regular folks heading home from work or crossing town for a bite to eat.

"I think we are good," I told Teo.

Teo said, "Just keep moving."

On the other side of the passageway, we found another staircase.

Rather than exiting through the regular entrance to that subway station, we decided to find a side exit. Thankfully, there was a door just to the right of us that was ajar. I pulled Teo by the sleeve and directed him toward the door. He did



not hesitate. We found the door opened onto an alleyway that was dark and filled with reeking dumpsters. We both ran into the night as the rains began again, harder now.

I did not see the young people who had been tailing us.

It looked as though we were free and clear.

"So where are we going?" Teo asked me.

"Back the way we came," I said.

"That might not be the best idea," Teo replied.

"It is not my idea," I said. "Wolf suggested it."

Teo groaned.

"Sorry, *omo*," I said, "but the Wolf only comes up with good ideas."

### 3.2

Of course, Cai was true to her word.

Teo and I headed in the general direction we assumed we had run, keeping to the back streets, the darker corners, to avoid CCTV cameras that appeared to be mounted on every light and telephone pole. There were undoubtedly cameras on the rooftops as well. Teo had told us that China was the most surveilled country on the globe, and seeing all those cameras—even though I likely only saw a small percentage of the electronic eyes zooming in on us—certainly made that statement seem all the more certain.

When we stopped at an intersection, my cell buzzed in my pocket.

It was Cai. I answered her call and she said, "To your left."

I looked to my left to see her and Rex standing across the street from us. As soon as the light changed color and the walk

sign flashed, Teo and I made our way over to them. I hugged Cai and shook hands with Rex. I could not help it.

Rodger Dodger, however, was not there.

"Where is Rodger?" I asked.

"Lying low," Cai said. "The fact that we're being followed means that someone—Kiran, maybe someone else—is onto us. She can't take any more risks tonight, but she'll be helping online."

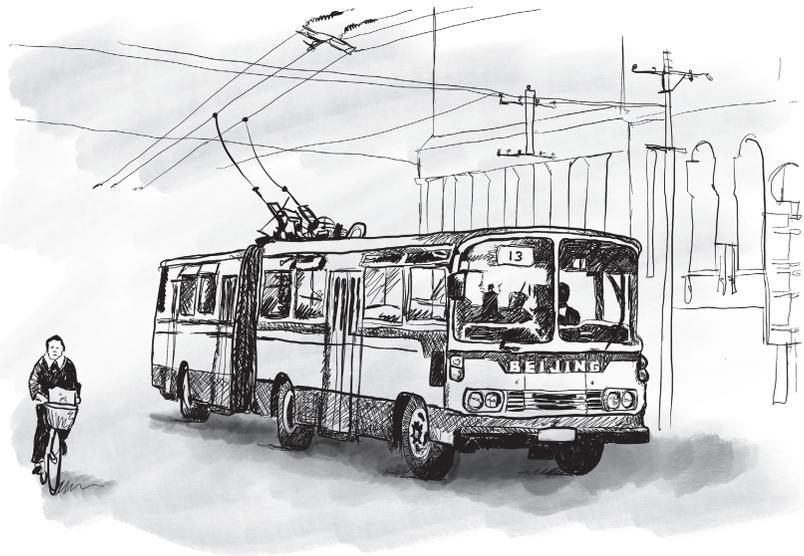
Cai motioned for us to follow her.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

My clothes were soaked. There was water in my shoes.

"There," she said.

Cai pointed across the street at a trolley bus that had stopped momentarily to pick up several passengers who were huddled together against the rain.



*Beijing trolley bus*



"Yes," I said, a bit irritated that I was not getting an actual answer on our destination, "but where does this trolley lead to?"

Cai put a hand on my shoulder. "To Terminal, hopefully."

We ran across the street and made it on board the trolley bus seconds before it pulled out into the street. Cai had a card to pay for our ride (I did notice that the name on the card was not her own), and then we settled into seats in the back. As I sat down, water pooled in the chair and ran down to the floor of the bus. I felt as though I had just swum across the Pacific Ocean.

"We need to get to my place here in Beijing," Teo said. "Now that we have the stuff we'll need to read the data files on a bio-computer, we can—"

"It won't work, Teo," Cai said. She motioned for us all to gather in closely. The bus was not crowded and it did not seem that many of the passengers were paying more than cursory attention to us, but she was wary.

"I thought we already discussed this," Teo said, angry at being interrupted.

"We did, but things have changed. We're being followed now."

"Think they're with Kiran or Terminal?" Rex asked.

"I don't know," Cai said. "Neither would be good."

"Going after Terminal isn't going to help us get Kiran," Teo said as he leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms.

He appeared very unwilling to discuss this situation further.  
*Dis man wan raina me!*

"That's exactly wrong," Cai said. "Terminal will lead us to Kiran. And bringing them down will also clear my father's name. We all thought we'd have time to perfect our plans, but

our time has been erased. We cannot plan further; we have to think on our feet. We find Terminal, then we find Kiran."

"What makes you so certain?" Teo asked.

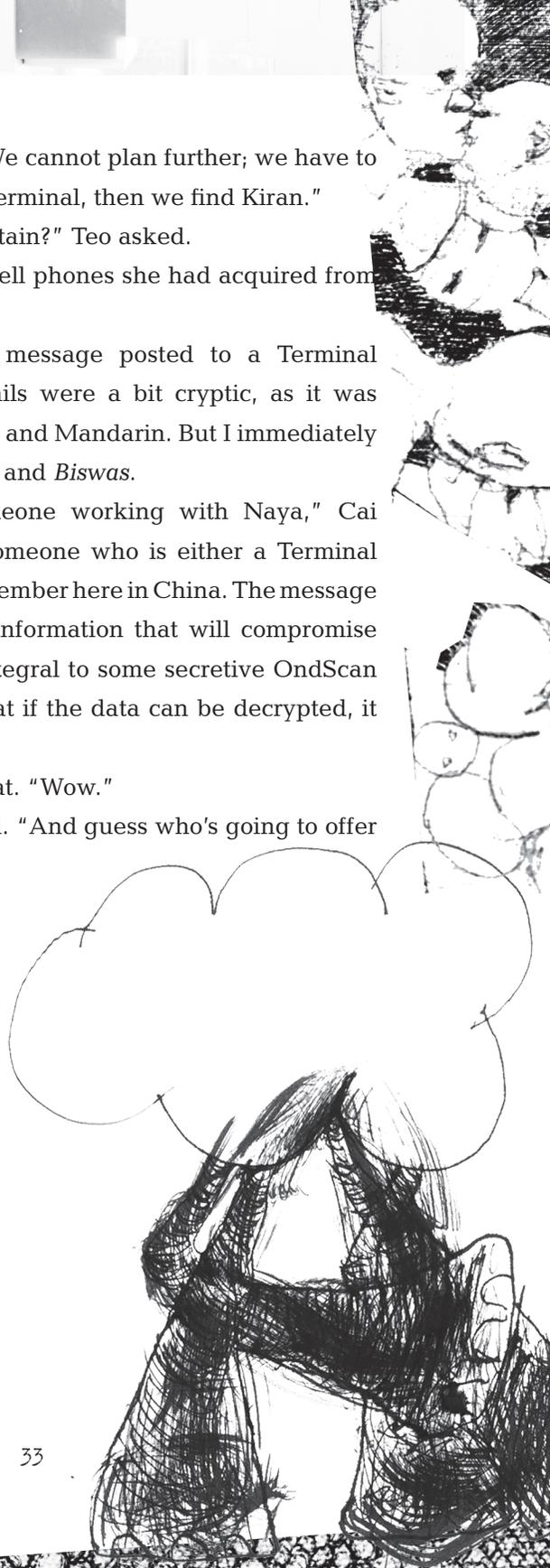
Cai held up one of the cell phones she had acquired from Rodger Dodger.

On the screen was a message posted to a Terminal discussion board. The details were a bit cryptic, as it was written in a coded language and Mandarin. But I immediately noticed the words *OndScan* and *Biswas*.

"It is a post from someone working with Naya," Cai said, translating. "Likely someone who is either a Terminal sympathizer or a Terminal member here in China. The message says they have encrypted information that will compromise Kiran—stolen data that's integral to some secretive OndScan tech. This person claims that if the data can be decrypted, it could take Kiran down."

Rex whistled hearing that. "Wow."

"Wow, indeed," Cai said. "And guess who's going to offer to help?"





6 DAYS UNTIL SHIVA

I knew we were taking a huge risk.

But with Rodger Dodger on the run (and hopefully not caught) and someone on our tail, we simply didn't have any options. I knew Teo was angry. It wasn't an ideal situation to me, either. He wanted to focus on Kiran. But in my mind, this was a way to make everyone happy and, as we say in China, "shoot two birds with a single arrow."

As the bus bumped past Zhongshan Park, I explained the plan.

"We are going to post in this forum answering this person's request. We're also going to ask for an address to meet. I'll do it mimicking the kind of coded language that the poster used. At the same time, I'm going to tip our hand."

"How do you mean?" Tunde asked, suddenly very concerned.

"I'm going to give them hints as to who we are. I think Naya will be even more intrigued if she thinks that we're here after the data she stole. If we offer our assistance, she might see an opportunity."

"An opportunity to screw us over again," Rex said.

"Exactly," I replied.

Tunde looked at me quizzically.

"We want Naya and Terminal to think they can get one over on us. That they have something we desperately need. Something we're willing to make an agreement over. The truth is, of course, that they'll need us more than we'll need them. It'll give us an in, and once we have the data, we can clear my father's name and uncover the rest of Kiran's plans."

Rex looked to his brother. Teo said nothing but shrugged.

"Tunde?" Rex asked.

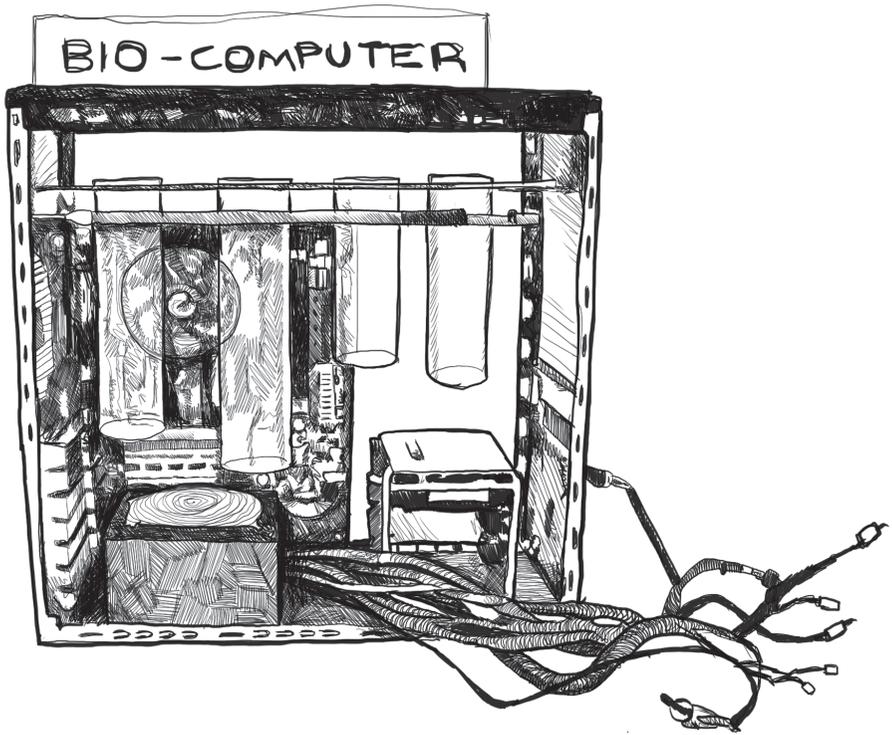
"I have always said that I trust Cai and her wisdom in these sorts of matters. While I have agreed with Teo that we cannot take risks that might tip Kiran off or lead to our covers being blown, I think we have already crossed that bridge. The people following us are aware we are here. Let us **toss the bait** to Terminal."

It took me two minutes to compose the message. I was very careful in my wording. The key to making the post convincing was using the right language. I wanted to appear in the know but not **desperate**. I also wanted to make sure that if Naya read the post, she would see the LODGE's fingerprints right away. Tunde was right to call it bait, and once Naya had taken it, the hook would find its mark.

As we waited for the response, I tried to catch my breath. My homecoming had been a nonstop roller coaster ride, and I was eager to take a few moments to orient myself. Looking out the bus windows, I watched the lights of my city drift past. The raindrops on the glass turned each light into a flower of luminance.

While Tunde and Teo talked about the bio-computer, sharing insights on how to wire the machinery, Rex reached

over and took my hand. His grip was so warm. I hadn't realized how cold my hands were.



*Bio-computer*

"How are you holding up?" Rex asked.

"I'm okay," I said.

That was only partially true. I was feeling confident that we could navigate our way through this—we could find Naya, Terminal, and maybe even get my father out—but I had my doubts about Kiran. There were just so many factors in play. While being digital ghosts allowed us to move unseen (at least until a few minutes earlier), it also kept us in the

dark in regards to Kiran's latest moves. Knowing that there were people after us made me even more concerned about my father. If the authorities could connect us with him (still doubtful but possible), then the likelihood of clearing his name grew ever dimmer.

Seeing my father in shackles was heartbreaking. I couldn't imagine visiting him in an actual prison and seeing him behind bars. It would shatter my mother. And the thought of that almost had me crying. **I had to be strong.** I couldn't give up hope or give in to dark thoughts.

We were still in motion; we just had to stick to the plan.

I asked Rex how he was doing. "Must feel good to have Teo back."

"Yes," he said, glancing over at his brother. "I'd forgotten how cantankerous he can be, but, yeah, it feels . . . I don't know, it feels like we're **even more unstoppable** now. That sounds silly, considering our present situation."

"No, I get it. I like to see that optimism in you. Nice change of pace."

A block from the trolley bus's last stop, we got a response to the posted message. I read it over quickly.

"Did it work?" Tunde was understandably impatient to know.

"Yes," I said. "We have a meeting."

"Excellent," Rex said as he and Tunde high-fived.

"And Naya suspects it is us?" Tunde asked.

"I think so," I said. "But she's playing her cards close to the vest."

"So where are we going?" Teo asked.

"To the opera," I said with a smile.

## 4.1

Chinese opera isn't like Western opera.

Sure, there are some similarities. Opera is about song and entertainment. But Western opera focuses largely on the voice, whereas Peking opera expands to include dance, mime, and acrobatics. Not to mention the use of string instruments, face painting, and costumes. There is a circus-like element, but it does not have the same sort of childish connotations that circuses have.

For the Chinese, the opera is a matter of cultural pride.

It took two hours and two different buses before we arrived at the opera house Naya had specified in her response to my message. It was at a theater I had been to several times with my parents. There was no show playing at the moment, and the woman at the front desk seemed a bit perturbed to find us knocking on the front door. Finally, after a bit of grumbling, she got up from behind her desk and opened the door a crack.

"We're closed," she said, looking us over.

"I'm sorry," I said. "We were given this address for a meeting."

"Are you performers?" the woman asked.

I nodded, unsure if we'd be convincing.

The woman screwed up her face and pointed to the right. "You need to go into the employee entrance," she said. "Around the corner. Someone should have told you that."

"**I agree,**" I said. "I'm sorry to disturb you."

There was a second entrance, marked EMPLOYEE, on the north side of the building near the delivery ramp. The door was open, and we walked inside to find ourselves backstage and surrounded by amazing costumes. A feathery, gilded dragon, easily twenty

feet long with teeth the size of humans, hung above us on a series of ropes and pulleys, and a painted backdrop of a gorgeous sunset loomed overhead. It was like walking into another world.



*Opera backstage*

"This place is magnificent," Tunde said, looking around. "Next time we have a meeting, we should definitely have it in a place like this."

"You've made it."

The voice came from behind a curtain. We all turned to see a young man with dyed blue hair step into the half-light. He was Chinese and had his hands clasped behind his back. "My name is Cosmo. Follow me."

Cosmo turned and ushered us down a hallway behind the stage.

I'd heard of him before. He was part of the microbloggers' community but didn't post regularly. Most of his stuff had a political edge to it, but I would never have imagined he'd be a Terminal supporter. As we followed Cosmo up a series of stairs, I wondered if he was the person who had been looking for assistance in **decrypting the data** Naya had brought back.

Cosmo led us to a room at the end of a hallway lined by doors that read PERFORMERS ONLY. Two men were standing outside the door. They were Chinese and older than Cosmo. Neither looked like the Terminal type; both more closely resembled hired thugs. The kind of men who wouldn't have a problem kicking you to the floor if someone asked them to.

Cosmo knocked on the door three times.

Then he opened it. The guards stood to the side as we passed through the door into a dressing room lined with mirrors and makeup lights. The door closed behind us. The room was empty outside of a few tables and some hastily arranged chairs positioned in the middle of the room.

"Good to see you, LODGE," Naya said.

She was seated across from us among a collection of familiar faces. Two of them were people I recognized from the Game but whose names I didn't know: prodigies, competitors, but likely people who didn't make it past the first or second round. Sitting right next to Naya was a teenaged girl with long, braided hair. She had dark skin and deep black eyes and wore a kimono. The girl motioned for us to take a seat, and we did. Rex kept his eyes on Naya.

Teo stood at the back of the room near the door.

"My name is Dural Kalali," the teenaged girl with braids said. She spoke with a singsongy Australian accent, and I

assumed she was Aboriginal. "Hello, Tunde. Excellent to see you."

Tunde leaned forward in his seat, stunned.

"Dural," he said, flabbergasted. "What are you doing here?"

"This is **my show**," Dural replied. "I am the head of Terminal."

Tunde turned to me and Rex. "She is one of the brightest roboticists in the world. She was not at the Game, but she is known to everyone. Well, at least in the engineering and robotics community. This is quite a shock."

Dural smiled.

"You all are in some big trouble," she said. "And I'm the only one who can help you get out of it."

## 4.2

"This won't be a bargaining session," Dural continued.

She turned to Naya and nodded.

Naya got up and grabbed a briefcase from a chair in the corner of the room. She brought it over to me and then went and sat back down. I was feeling uneasy already. Dural's confidence was intimidating; I tried to refocus, realizing that our plans were changing by the second, but I needed to get a better read on Dural.

The briefcase was locked.

"The data that Naya brought back from Nigeria—"

"Stole," Tunde interrupted.

"Well," Dural continued, "the data that we now have is not what we anticipated it would be. Sure, it provides insights into Kiran's operations. It has account numbers, passwords, a

whole smorgasbord of delicious information. But it also has a puzzling aspect. A key to a lock that we can't open."

"Okay," I said. "What lock?"

"As you're probably aware, Kiran wants to release a program that would cause worldwide devastation. Sink monetary accounts, impact businesses, interrupt governments. Essentially throw the world into chaos."

"Shiva," Rex said.

"Yes," Dural continued, "that is what he calls it. He aims to do this and then release Rama, his fix of sorts—a fix that he can control. While Kiran sees it as a way to rebalance power in the world, to give more to the dispossessed, we see it as a direct threat to our goal of destabilization."

"That's not much of a goal," Rex snickered.

"Well, that can be argued. In our minds, as Terminal, we believe that no one person should have power. So while we can understand Kiran's larger mission, we cannot abide by his methods or support the end result. We have to stop him."

I nodded. "We're agreed on one thing, then."

We'd come here looking to undermine Terminal, but instead it looked like we were going to have to strike a bargain. That was infuriating. Especially since my father's freedom was hanging in the balance.

"To prevent Shiva's release," Dural said, "we need to access a data storage site here in Beijing. It is an OndScan black box lab. Much like the one you visited in India, Rex. While we have what is contained in the briefcase I handed you, Painted Wolf, we don't have a way to successfully breach the systems at the lab."

"So you need help?" Tunde asked.

"Embarrassingly, yes," Dural said.

"You want us to hack into this black box lab?" Rex asked.

Dural shook her head and leaned forward. "No, we could do that. You might assume you're the best coder in this room, but I assure you that you're not. Terminal is, if anything, expert at getting into machines and manipulating software. No, for this mission we need to outsource. We need Tunde and Painted Wolf."

Tunde seemed taken aback. "And why is this?"

"The Beijing black box lab is completely analog. There are no digital systems in the place. No computers, no connections, not even a phone line. All of the data stored inside is bound in books or held on recording tape. Inside the briefcase is a key to get into the building. It is, literally, a key, 3-D printed from **a code hidden inside** the data that Naya smuggled out of Nigeria. We need you to get inside the Beijing black box lab, discover the files that Kiran is hiding there about Shiva, and then bring them back to us in a format we can use."

The room fell silent for a moment as we considered what she was saying.

Terminal was trying to flip the tables on us. Dural was good. Laser focused. That was likely how she'd been able to make Terminal the bane of authorities the world over; she ran a very tight operation. It was going to be difficult to shake her confidence. I realized then and there that I'd have to switch up strategies; we'd need to make her think she was getting exactly what we wanted. Dural was likely used to being challenged, just like she was used to making the decisions. We needed to play on that, to show her we'd be willing to bargain and leave her in charge. I knew she'd never really let her guard down, but if we kept her feeling confident, we might be able to make a move she wasn't expecting.

"And if we do this?" Tunde finally asked.

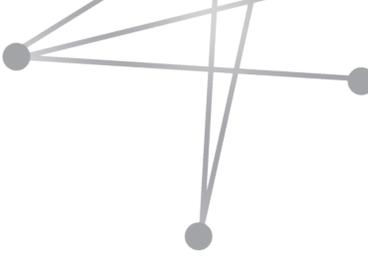
Dural sat back and folded her hands and said, "Then we will ensure that the individual you were attempting to get out of the Municipal Number 23 detention center is released and all of the charges against him are dropped. That and the fact that you'll be working toward your own goal of stopping Kiran's larger plans."

"And if we decline?" Teo asked from behind me.

Dural shrugged. "Then you'll be **handed over** to the authorities."

"We'll need a while to think it over," I said.

"Fine," Dural said. "There's a room upstairs. You can have the rest of the night. I'll have Cosmo bring you some food and tea."



## 5. Rex

6 DAYS UNTIL SHIVA

Cosmo took us up to a small room cluttered with junk.

Well, really it was props and costumes, but piled up in the corners of an ill-lit room it pretty much looked like a bunch of junk. There was a folding table that had been set up. On the table were a couple of plates of noodles and a teapot and cups. The noodles smelled good, and I realized it'd been way too long since I'd eaten.

As soon as the door closed behind Cosmo, we started talking.

Tunde spoke first. "This is a joke. We cannot take them up on it."

Cai sat at the table and poured herself a cup of tea.

I sat across from her.

Despite lack of sleep and chaos, she still looked amazing.

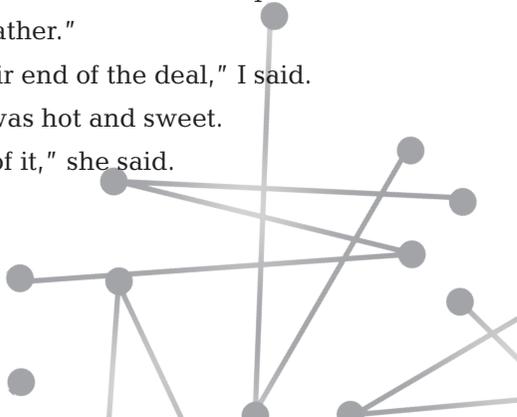
*Always with the racing heart, huh, Rex?*

As she poured she said, "I think it sounds like a reasonable plan. If we can get to the Shiva information, it helps us significantly. And we can free my father."

"That's *if* Terminal holds up their end of the deal," I said.

Cai handed me a cup of tea. It was hot and sweet.

"Let's have a vote. I'm in favor of it," she said.



Tunde stood by the door, and I could almost see the wheels turning in his head.

"I do not like it," he said. "This is a very slippery slope we are going down. If we help Terminal, we know that they will try to trick us. Also, it is a matter of morals. We can get this information without their assistance. Better to do it alone, without their help. We have run from the police many times. I am certain that we can run from them successfully again."

Teo, pacing the room, said, "I don't like this. I'm not going to vote."

Tunde just shook his head, disappointed, before turning to me.

"What do you think, Rex? I am against it. Cai is for it."

I took another sip of tea and locked eyes with Cai.

She wasn't the risk taker I was. All of the moves she made, even if they came out of left field, were carefully thought through. If I didn't see the logic behind her decisions, then it was because I wasn't looking closely enough.

If the smartest person in the room agreed to this, I figured I should as well.

"I think we should take the deal," I said. "Sorry, Tunde. I don't think we have any options at this point. And, besides, if we do it right we'll get what we want, too."

"And if it goes wrong?" Tunde asked.

"We won't let it," Cai said. "Now come sit down and eat."

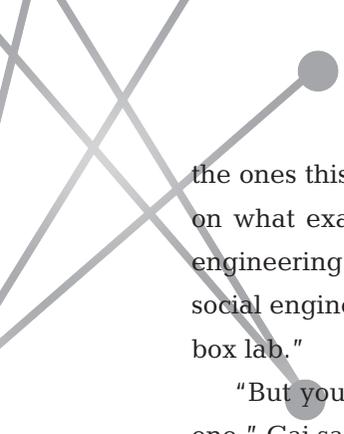
With that settled, Tunde and Teo took seats at the small folding table and helped themselves to paper plates of the noodles and several cups of tea. We ate in silence for a few minutes and then, once full, got down to business.

"So we know off the bat that this thing isn't going to involve much of my skill set," I said. "Tunde and Cai, you're

morals

logic

encrypted



the ones this thing was designed for. My guess is, depending on what exactly this key does, we'll need some mechanical engineering to get through whatever locks there are and social engineering to get past whoever might be in this black box lab."

"But you're the only one of us who's actually been inside one," Cai said.

"I guess that's true," I said. "But I can't imagine this one, being all analog, is anything like the one in Kolkata. However, it probably has some similar people."

"Brain trust people?" Tunde asked.

"Yeah," I said. "You know what they're like."

"We'll still need your skills," Cai said. "Just 'cause it won't be on a computer screen doesn't mean it won't be coding. My guess is that whatever data they've stored there, it's still going to be encrypted. We'll need your math skills."

"Okay," Tunde said. "So we get this information, then what?"

"Then we need to trick Terminal," Cai said. "We can't have them accessing whatever data we pull out of this lab. Even if they want to see Shiva shut down as much as we do, they'll only end up using it for their own goals."

"Maybe those goals aren't as bad as you assume?" Teo said.

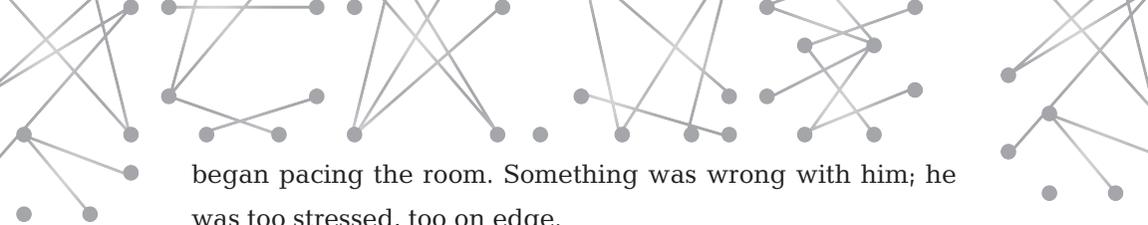
I looked over at my brother and noticed he looked quite downcast.

"What does that mean?" Cai asked.

"I'm just saying that maybe Terminal knows something we don't."

"Like what?" Tunde asked.

Teo pushed away his plate of noodles and stood up. He



began pacing the room. Something was wrong with him; he was too stressed, too on edge.

"What's bothering you, brother?" I asked.

Teo stopped pacing and cracked his neck.

He said, "I think it's a bit foolish to waste time on Terminal. This is just the same as wasting time trying to get Wolf's dad out of that detention center. Kiran is the focus here. Kiran is the larger issue! If we don't stop him, no one will. I think you're all being too simplistic and emotional. No one's thinking logically!"

Cai turned to me, concerned.

I stood up and walked over to Teo.

"What're you trying to tell us?"

Teo's face was a snarl of stress. His eyes burned with an anger and confusion I hadn't seen in forever. It was like he was hiding a terrible secret. Something he needed to get out; otherwise he'd burst into flames.

"Please, Teo," I said in Spanish. "It's okay."

Teo sighed long and hard.

*Brace yourself, Rex.*

"I'm with Terminal," he said.

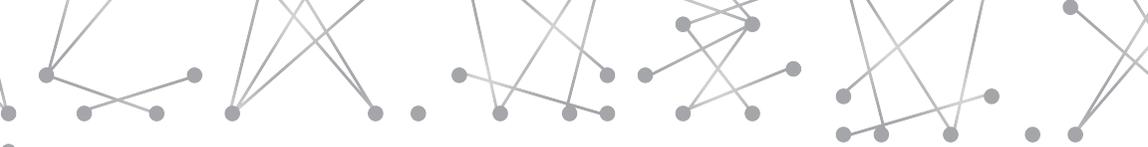
## 5.1

I'm not going to lie; I almost punched my brother again.

I balled my fists and started to slug him but held off. It wasn't that the anger subsided—if anything, it just kept growing—but the look in his eyes gave me pause. He looked guilty. He looked disappointed in himself.

"Why?" I asked him, trembling with rage.

"They're doing what most of us don't have the guts to do."



"Destroy everything?"

"Sometimes it's better to wipe the slate clean and start over. Things are terrible out there, Rex. You've been to Africa, to India. You've seen the imbalance. How many people are suffering every second? We live in these perfect illusions, safe behind the mask of thinking we're virtuous people. But right under our noses, poor people are getting poorer. Sick people are getting sicker. The environment is being trashed, the air poisoned. The system is so broken there's no way to fix it now. If we don't do something, something radical, it will only get worse."

"But Terminal isn't about morality, Teo," I said.

He agreed. "I know. But sometimes the end justifies the means."

"People in my country have talked that way," Cai said. "People that I expose for corruption. You might think that fighting fire with fire is the best way to solve this. But that only ends up with everyone getting burned."

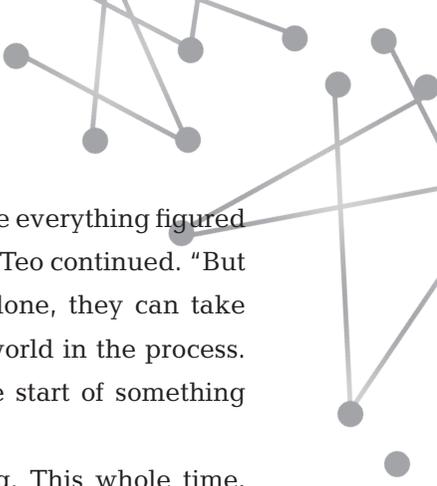
Teo turned to me. "Papa always says there's no right way to crack an egg."

"We're talking about civilization, Teo. Not omelets."

"I just think it's silly to automatically assume Terminal's plan wouldn't have worked, that it would have ended poorly—"

"And I think you're wrong to assume otherwise," I said.

Teo replied, "It felt good to belong to something bigger than me. I was helpless at school, learning about history that just repeated itself over and over, the same types of people making the same types of mistakes. Terminal offered to do something about it. That's all I really wanted. The world's going one way; Kiran's going another. Terminal offered the only alternative, and now . . ."



He slouched against the wall.

"I'm not going to pretend that they have everything figured out. Or that they haven't made mistakes," Teo continued. "But I do think that they can get this thing done, they can take down Kiran and send a message to the world in the process. I don't think this will be the end but the start of something bigger."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This whole time, ever since that night in the garden in Kolkata, I'd sincerely believed that my brother hadn't abandoned my family—our family—to join a hacktivist cell bent on mayhem.

Even when the clues were there, I denied them.

Even when my friends had suggested it might be true, I ignored them.

And yet Teo, my own flesh and blood, had deceived me.

I couldn't put into words how crushed I was.

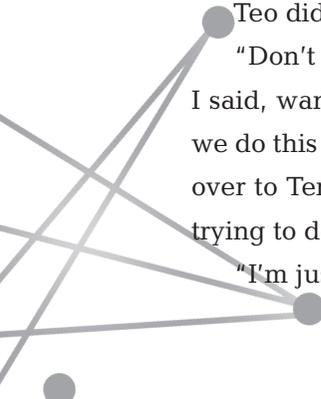
*But hit by a speeding bus might be close.*

"Does Dural know who you are?" Cai asked.

"No," he said. "They don't know my name or my face. They only know my handle online. I've been helping them for the past fourteen months, but it's been at a distance. Dural has never interacted with me."

"But you would protect them?" Tunde wanted to clarify.

Teo didn't answer.



"Don't put me in a position of not trusting you, brother," I said, wanting to punch Teo again. "Answer the question. If we do this job, get that information on Shiva, and then hand it over to Terminal, are you going to warn them that we will be trying to double-cross them?"

"I'm just letting you know what I think. I don't agree with



everything Terminal does. Heaven knows I've had my battles with them—"

- Teo shook his head.  
Tunde stood up.

"This is silly," he said. "I am not going to work with Terminal, and I am certainly not going to trust your brother. I am sorry, Rex. This pains me very deeply, but I must not be a part of this."

