

Rise of Hawk

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Sample Chapter (1st Ed)

Part One, Scene Three

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Taelin was sleeping, curled up in a ball in one corner of an empty, dusty apartment. His face twitched, and fists clenched and unclenched under the stress of reliving the horrific memories of his past.

Sixteen years old, he sat under the kitchen table where his father had left him. The lacy decorative cloth covered the view of his surroundings completely. There was a terrible noise around him but Taelin couldn't think, he couldn't feel and couldn't move.

Gunshots. Screaming. Crying.

Then it all went silent for a very long time.

No thinking. No feeling. Just stillness and silence.

Sometime much later, a hand moved aside his mother's embroidered table cloth. Yellow-brown eyes came into view and someone spoke his name. The person touched his face with chilled fingers. Fear and grief flowed through their skin and into him. It hurt: the touch hurt. Someone spoke but his mind could not understand the words.

There was a mental pop and he blinked.

"Taelin! Are you OK? Taelin?" Krena Ree was there, her square face covered in tears and her wide eyes were fearful.

Fighting against the silence in his mind, he lifted his arm from the floor and took her hand from his face.

"Please..." it was nearly impossible to speak, but he pushed through it. "Please, don't touch. It hurts."

Krena nodded and shuffled back so he could get out from under the table. There were puddles of blood on the kitchen floor, and people-shaped figures lay underneath the sitting-room throw rugs. He couldn't see his parents or his little sister.

He struggled again to speak. "Whe... where are they?"

“I’m sorry, Taelin. They took Asha. Your parents are dead.” Tears lifted into her eyes.

He wondered why he couldn’t feel anything. “What... what’s wrong... with me?”

Krena sighed and shook her head. “I don’t know, I think your dad did something to keep you safe--”

A noise sounded outside and they both looked towards the front hall. “We’ve got to go. I’m so sorry, young Taelin.”

“Police! Open this door!”

Taelin jumped up, flinching violently out of his dream. He came to full consciousness as he landed on all fours, with his back to a corner and staring at the only door in the empty room. It took him several moments to remember where he was; it was a condemned apartment building. Many street kids lived in its unlocked rooms, and he had been lucky to get his own room away from the cluttered psychic noise of sharing personal space with others.

Outside his space, someone yelled fearfully and he craned his neck to listen. Numerous firecrackers popped downstairs and he tensed. It wasn’t close enough to Winter Solstice for crackers. That had to be gunfire, which meant there were intruders in the building.

Could be Spades’ slavers looking for street kids and Illegals. But if it isn’t the Spades--

Mid-thought he stopped and listened again.

Someone was outside his room and, based on the deep sense of ill-ease that had suddenly dropped into his belly, he figured they were not friendly. He had to get out.

Being as quiet as he could on the bare wood floor, he crept towards the nearest window. There was a fire escape; if he could unlock the window he’d be able to get away.

Carefully, he fiddled with the old-fashioned turning clip-lock. Heavy footsteps came closer down the hall towards his door, and more gunfire sounded below him.

The lock slid out of place and he put his fingers under the window edge. But after a gentle pull, it didn’t budge.

From across the room, he heard someone turning the door handle. There was no lock on his door, but there was a chain across it. The door opened, stopping at the length of the chain, but thankfully they couldn’t see him because of the angle of it. Through the gap in the door, he heard the sound of radio static and knew at that moment it wasn’t Spades Slavers.

“This is the Agency! If you co-operate you will not be harmed!”

Taelin swallowed down his fear. He couldn't be captured and taken by the Agency, not like his little sister Asha. He'd rather die fighting like his parents, instead of being forced to become an Agent simply because he had Psi genes, and useless locked Psi genes at that.

Getting a better grip on the edge of the window, he pulled up with a quick and hopefully efficient yank. The window flew open. He rolled out onto the metal fire escape, slipping and half-falling onto the ladder. He released the rusty catch, and gripping the metal bar tightly, he and the ladder dropped down to a jolting stop.

He climbed to the bottom rung, let go and landed on the concrete below. Above him, there was a loud bang, and he realized that the Agent must have broken through the door chain.

He looked around him at the narrow lane. Going down to the street would likely lead to their vehicles and armed Agents ready to corral him into custody. Up the lane looked like a dead-end, but there was a hidden path between buildings that led out to the next block over. If he could get there, it would be an easy unexpected escape route.

Turning, he started to sprint.

Gunfire sounded from above and bullets hit the concrete behind him. He flinched but kept running. At the end of the drive was a waist-high concrete fence, which he vaulted. Another volley of gunshots fired and as he passed into cover, he felt the impact of a bullet in his right shoulder.

Swearing, he stumbled but did not fall. The agonizing pain radiated through his back and right shoulder-blade into his lungs. The world spun nauseatingly, but he kept running. He had to get as far away as he could before he would rest. Agents were persistent chasers and if he didn't fully get away they would find him again, just as they had others he'd known and lost on the streets.

Taelin flew out through the narrow gap and crossed the street to the next alley.

Which direction should he go in now? He doubted that he could get the bullet out on his own. Even if he had the right equipment, agony wasn't conducive to sewing stitches in one's own skin. But, he didn't know any safe street doctors, and official medical facilities were a one-way ticket to the Agency.

Turning in a southerly direction, he knew there was only one option; he had to try and get to the Rebels and to Ren, their healer.

Running up the next street around pedestrians, he searched for another alley or side access-way. He had to get under cover and stay under cover, as much as he could. There were government cameras everywhere, as well as cops.

The pain in his back was sharp and permeated him with every beat of his heart, but he stubbornly focused on his goal. This wouldn't be the end. It couldn't. Another alley presented itself to him and he shot straight for it.

He ran for three blocks, zigzagging through narrow alleys and lanes before his feet started going numb.

Stumbling, but still upright, he passed into another lane and slowed his pace. He couldn't hear any Agency sirens nearby, so he figured it might be safe to slow down a little. Pushing off one wall with his hand, he kept moving towards the other end of the alley. It looked impossibly long and bent slightly sideways.

The world flipped around him like some demented roller coaster, and he stopped to lean on the wall. It was too close to the Agents. He couldn't faint now, he had to keep going. He took a wobbly step, legs weakening under his weight, and he dropped slowly to the dirty concrete. Still fighting but losing, he kept his eyes open for as long as he could, even beyond his capacity to see any more. Finally, the pain and blood loss dragged him away from consciousness.