

FIRST CHAPTER

It's a chilly fall late afternoon in Manhattan, New York City. You can see your breath as you hurry down the street, dodging puddles from this morning's rain. You navigate through sullen passersby and note the concern on their faces as they eye your uniform. They need answers. It's been a strange week, most concerning this city's ever seen. Three days ago, the city bundled up together in the cold dead of night in fields, shielding themselves from the brightness of the skyscrapers, hoping to catch a glimpse what was touted to be the largest meteor shower in history. Things went south quickly. An explicable explosion, a fire and no trace of the cause. The oddities didn't stop there. The next day a city wide power outage, wiping out even the most robust of generators. 24 hours of darkness, pets missing, strange sounds in the shadows and dozens of mysterious "sightings reported to the station". These went largely ignored by the squad but you didn't have a good feeling about this. The most uncomfortable of them all were the ones about the subway system. When the lights stabilized, the platforms were littered with dead rats - hundreds of them, all across Manhattan, Brooklyn, hell, even Queens. You didn't see it with your own eyes, but 300 reports can't be entirely wrong, can they? Something was going on and, even without the help of the team, you were going to get to the bottom of it.

You quicken your pace. You can see it up ahead - the partitions circling the area where the fire happened. It was being tested for radial electric patterns and they hadn't let an officer in since the night of the incident. You figure it's time to work a little leverage and see if there's anything you can find in the ruins.

You get to the plastic enclosure, slit it open with your pocket knife and slip inside. It reeks of smoke and burnt plastic. Also faintly of burning flesh, although there's no evidence to believe that took place. There isn't actually much in here. You kick at the piles of soot and uncover the edge of a piece of plastic. You bend down to pick it up. It's an ID! You wipe away the soot. It belongs to Special Investigator, Inspector Julie Hudson. Strange... Hudson was on the case but you haven't seen her in days. Good detective - she has a history of cool confidence, sharp wit and stern composure - that is, as long as she's not around dogs. She's a cooing mess around dogs, quite easily distracted by them. Has been ever since her beloved pooch Donut kicked the bucket in 2017. Such a shame - you'd heard that her partner Inspector Jerry Stills had gone missing not too long after the fire. Sometimes it's best to lay low after something like that but you better make sure she's alright.

Looking down at the ID, you step through the slit in the tarp. Someone slams into you, shouldering your chest, nearly knocking the wind out of you. You stumble backwards, dropping the card, hands splayed, bracing yourself on the outer wall of the partition. "Watch it!", you shout after the stranger. They don't look back and are walking so quickly that you barely have time to say another word. You compose yourself muttering something about people these days. You bend down to pick up the ID that is now laying next to a USB drive. Odd, did the stranger drop it in the collision? You crouch down, take your laptop out of your bag and pop in the USB drive.

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Looks like this USB actually belonged to Inspector Hudson! That rude stranger couldn't have been her, could it? Why would she be in disguise? She would have at least recognized you, right?

You try to open the USB but curse when you see that it's encrypted. There could be valuable evidence here. Try to unlock the USB.

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Panicked, you try to call the inspector but she doesn't answer. You access the database on your phone to see if a missing person's report has been filed. Nothing. In fact, nothing has been reported by the inspector or about them in days. You decide to head to the Hudson's house. You need to know what's happening and you're worried that she's not safe. Is she alive? Was that her who bumped into you? You take off, jogging down the street. Luckily it's not too far away. You all live in this district of your precinct.

Arriving at the house, you ring the buzzer. No one comes to the door. You try calling Hudson's phone. She doesn't answer. You better head to the station to inform the team. You turn and walk a couple houses down the street. Behind you, you hear a muffled sound. Turning around, you see that someone else is at Hudson's front door! You duck behind a car to watch the interaction, ready to jump in if something isn't right. The character doesn't seem familiar, although it's hard to tell - they're fully cloaked from head to toe. They sure are ringing the bell a lot, though they don't look like they are in a hurry. Wait... there's something oddly nostalgic about that sound... suddenly it dawns on you. IT'S MORSE CODE. You studied it in training during your junior year in the force. Whipping out a pen you pull up your sleeve and scribble down as much as you can onto your forearm. Looks like a set of numbers. 20...18...63...3. Why would they be ringing these numbers into Hudson's buzzer?

There's movement at the door. It opens slightly. Hudson looks shocked to see the figure. There's signs of a struggle as the inspector tries to stop the cloaked figure from coming inside. The character grabs Hudson by the scruff of the neck and tosses them onto the porch. The figure runs inside as the Inspector clutches at her throat. The figure emerges with a briefcase in their hand. They try to step over the inspector who grabs their pant leg near that waist, stopping them in their tracks and hoisting herself up onto their feet. Hudson hits the figure in the stomach. The figure bends forward, wind knocked out of them. The inspector takes this opportunity to spray a fine mist into their eyes.

Assuming it's pepper spray the inspector won't have much time before another blow is made. You get up and start to run towards the scene, coming to her aid. What happens next is so blood curdling that it stops you in your tracks. A ear wrenching screech is emitted from deep within the hood of the figure. So sharp that you grasp at your ears, forcing your fingers deep within your canal. It makes no difference and you drop to your knees in pain, wishing, begging for the sound to stop. You pry your eyes open, What could possibly be making this horrific sound? The figure contorts in a manner so unnatural that your eyes widen in terror. A neon red fluid shoots out from the hood and the figure drops the briefcase, running down the street, stopping only twice to violently convulse on the sidewalk, all the while making that hellish sound. You feel yourself growing faint from the pain of the sound. You look over to see the inspector on his knees, white knuckled at each ear as he crawls into the house on his stomach, dragging the briefcase behind her with his foot.

The figure disappears down an alley and the screeching stops. You remove your fingers from your ears, muscles sore from the tension and take off after the figure. You get to the alley and there is nothing there but more bubbling neon red liquid oozing off the walls and street. It seems to go nowhere. You rummage through the scrap left and find nothing. You turn to go and, out of the corner of your eye, catch what looks like a piece of torn black fabric stuck to the corner of the dumpster.

You cautiously approach the dumpster. You pick up a piece of metal and hold it in your dominant hand. Slowly and in one swift motion you fling open the dumpster and look inside. There's no one and nothing in there but the cloak, covered in the bubbling red liquid. The liquid seems to be eating away at the fibers. You use the metal stick to fish it out and grab a splintered piece in the other hand. You drop the cloak on the ground and use the prongs to look through the pockets for any evidence of the identity of the mysterious creature - this surely wasn't human. A wad of paper falls out of the pocket. The acidic liquid has eaten a hole straight through it but several numbers are vaguely visible - "290". You stuff the paper into your ziplock bag, forcing it deep into your pocket and run back out onto the sidewalk, heading back to the inspectors apartment.

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You ring the buzzer. You try calling her. Nothing. Then you remember the morse code message you wrote down on your forearm. You buzz in the numbers. The door slowly opens just a crack. "Inspector, it's me!", you say. The inspector flings the door open. She looks entirely bewildered. "What happened? What was that?!" She gasps and says that she can't talk about it. "They're watching me. My family is in danger. You have to leave. You tell her about chasing the figure into the alley. Hudson's eyes widen at the tale. "You don't have much time" she says, "it's up to you. You're the only one left who can do this and save us." She forces the shiny metal briefcase into your hands. "What is this?", you ask. "I can't tell you much, it belonged to my partner. It has valuable information in it. I can't open it. They're watching me. Open it, and use the information to take you to the subway station. The payphone... the dispatcher will send a train. We're all working in hiding. We don't have much time." Hudson was absolutely frantic and began to close the front door. "What do you mean? Which platform what dispatcher? What are you talking about?!" you ask, desperately. "Jerry! He's waiting for me to call her from the payphone on a subway platform! I can't leave the house. I'm being watched. Take this and get out of here before you're discovered." With that she pushes you backwards and slams the door shut, you fall backwards onto the pavement, stunned from the info you've just heard. You scramble to get to your feet and run down the street, briefcase clutched to your chest, hoping desperately that you haven't yet been discovered.

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When you feel like you've run far enough, you look up and see that you've run right into the lot of an old subway car train depot. Dozens of abandoned train cars litter the lot. You crouch between two cars and put down the briefcase. You try to pry it open. It's locked. You look near the handle and find a set of sliding dials with a digital screen that displays their value. Jerry always was too tech savvy for his own good. You scroll through the numbers hoping to find some clairvoyant answer. Based on what you know, enter in your best guess and press the unlock button

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You get out of the cab at the station and run down the stairs. You get the platform and look frantically for the payphone, chest heaving. Finally, you see one way at the end. You run over and pick up the receiver. There's no dial tone. Payphones usually have dial tones, right? You can't remember. You've been using a cell phone for decades. Perhaps this is the line to the dispatcher... Using the information you have, enter in the six digit dispatch code.

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You punch in the numbers. You hear breathing on the other end. "If that's who I think it is, don't speak. I'm sending a train to the platform on your left. Get on it. I'm destroying this line." You get on the train. It pulls out. Your head starts to spin and you black out. When you wake up, you're on the cold ground. Someone's hand is covering your mouth. Your eyes widen in panic and you begin to struggle in the dark. The grip on your face tightens and a voice whispers in your ear. "It's me. It's Jerry. I was expecting the inspector but he must have sent you in his place. You nod, hand still restricting your mouth "Is she alive?" You nod again. "Okay then there is much work to do. You need to be completely silent when you see what I'm about to show you. I need you. We must do this together. There isn't time". You take a deep breathe through your nose. The air smells like flint and rotting flesh. Where are they? You nod and Jerry slowly releases his grip . Jerry, crouching, crawls over towards the light cast from the other side of a large object. What was this? As you crawl closer you realized that this is a toppled subway train. Are you still in the tunnel? Jerry gestures for you to follow him as he grasped the edge of the car, hoisting himself up just enough to look over the edge, into the light. You follow his lead, heart racing, beating in your ears as you anticipate the scene. You look over, squinting into the brightness. The lights of a car cast a strong light onto the tracks in the middle of a dark subway tunnel. Your jaw drops in horror as your eyes adjust to the light, bringing the movement on the tracks into focus. Dozens of neon red creatures feast in the centre of the tracks, ripping open the chest of subway construction workers, pulling out the organs within with excited abandon. Blood oozes from the bodies, pooling along the tracks, saturating the fur of piles dead rats that lay around them. Gelatinous pods hang above them, dripping liquid that hits the ground sizzling and smoking. Within, small creature wriggle and squirm. Your eyes well from the stench. One, swollen at the neck, stopped eating and let out an ear piercing screech. Spot on their skin coursed electrically. The headlight of the subway waning. From deep within her thoart emerged an slimy egg, ripping past the creature's long teeth, falling onto the hard ground. A long appendage of the pedulas sacks dripped down, encasing it and slurping it up into their sack. When you can manage to pull your eyes away, you look over to Jerry.

They landed three days ago. There were only a few of them, one or two. They tapped into the electrical system and developed this skin tone. They ambushed a train car that I was on, attacking the conductor and leaving three others wounded to die. Two days ago they emerged and killed the rats, ate them and spawned to be ten to twelves creatures. Today they captured an unsuspecting crew of subway workers. They've developed a taste for human flesh. There isn't much time. We need a plan.

CHAPTER 8 - INCORRECT

You punch in the code and hear nothing. A dial tone emerges. You say “hello, Jerry is that you, into the phone”. A train pulls up, honking its horn as it pulls into the station. Is this it?? You drop the receiver and board the train nervously. There are many others on the train. You’re the only one drenched in a cold sweat. You try to steady your breathing and take a seat. You don’t want to panic anyone. You need to look normal. The woman next to you shifts over. You realize that the stench of the acidic fluid from the alley has clung to your clothes.

You ride the train, stop after stop, each one, waiting for something to happen. At each stop, the doors open, people get off, a few get on and the doors close, just like any normal day. You ride the train all the way to the end of the line. The train pulls up at Church Avenue and everyone gets off. The train conductor comes over the microphone to say that this is the last and final stop. You wait. He repeats this information. You get off with some trepidation, standing on the station, looking left and right. Nothing happens.

You cross over to the other side of the platform and ride the train again. Maybe you’re doing this wrong? You ride the entire line, ending up in Queens. You get off the station. A notification comes up on your phone. The inspector was found dead in his house about an hour ago. Unknown causes. Well, your source is gone. Tired and disappointed in yourself, you decided that you may as well visit your parents, who live out this way. If humanity is doomed, you may as well live out the last days with the ones you love. Your stomach tightens and tears well as you rationalize with the idea of death, walking slowly to your parent’s place. You decide you won’t tell them. No sense worrying them about the inevitable.