

WHEN HE SLEEPS, THE IMPOSSIBLE WAKES.

DORMANT

BOOK ONE

THE AWAKENING

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BRINGINTOLIFE

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Book One: The Awakening

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This is a work of fiction. Its characters, organisations, research programmes and events are invented. Real places appear within an imagined 2033 setting.

Dormant DNA, the hidden field, powers, portals, Custodians and Celestial Courts are fictional story devices, not scientific or medical claims.

FREE PREVIEW · CHAPTER ONE

Chapter 1

The Last Ordinary Night

At half past six, Imran Shah put a bank statement on Ron's desk and turned it so the red figure faced the right man.

They worked above a former upholstery shop in Ancoats. Downstairs, six apprentices were dismantling donated computers at benches Ron had bought from a school that was closing. Upstairs, the heating made a noise like somebody trying to escape a wardrobe. Imran kept his coat on while he worked. He had stopped describing this as temporary in February.

"That is Friday's payroll," he said. "Not an ambition. Not a possibility. Friday. Eight people."

Ron knew the figure. He had checked it in the supermarket, in a queue outside a meeting and once while pretending to listen to his mother. He moved a drawing of a music studio off the desk.

"Mercer can wait another week for the lease deposit."

"Mercer doesn't own the building yet. The man selling it does. And that man has a solicitor whose hobby is explaining that a deadline means the end of a line."

A drill started downstairs. Someone cheered when an old monitor lit up. Ron listened to the cheer, and Imran saw the decision forming on his face.

"No," Imran said. "Those lads doing well is not an argument for making promises we can't pay for."

"I was going to say the deposit can come out of my money."

"You haven't got any."

Ron sat back. He had a small talent for making people feel that a locked door was only a door someone had not yet tried

properly. It worked less well on a man who had been opening his invoices for four years.

Imran lowered himself into the chair opposite. "I believe in the place. That's why I'm here, freezing with you. But paying somebody late while telling them you're changing their life isn't kindness. It's just a better speech."

The words hurt because Ron had used versions of them himself. He took the bank statement and wrote PAYROLL FIRST across the top. Then he called the seller and asked for another week. The answer was no. He stayed on the phone long enough to hear it twice.

Downstairs, Josh waited by the door in the orange work jacket they had given him on his first morning. Nineteen, very thin, always seeming to stand slightly inside his clothes. He had repaired eleven computers that week and broken one mug, for which he had offered to pay in three instalments.

"Can we have a word?" Josh asked.

Ron glanced at the clock. The investor call was in twelve minutes. His mother's messages were waiting. He still had not eaten.

"Course. Walk with me."

Josh did not move. "A proper word."

Ron stopped. There it was: the small choice on which he would spend months trying not to look back. He could have sat down. He could have asked Imran to take the call. Instead he put a hand on Josh's shoulder and said they would talk first thing tomorrow, when neither of them was rushing. Josh nodded too quickly. "Yeah. Tomorrow."

By seven, the apprentices had gone and rain was blurring the workshop windows. Ron found a box of unused access cards beside Josh's bench. Under it lay a collection slip from Northern Arc Renewal, the consortium buying properties

along the street. Equipment recovery, it said. No employee signature. No inventory.

He photographed it without knowing why. Then he called Josh. No answer. On his way out, Imran handed him the notebook he had left by the kettle.

"Payroll first," Imran reminded him.

Ron held up the bank statement. "Written down."

"And you come back tomorrow. Not another version of you with six more schemes."

"Cruel way to describe innovation."

Imran laughed and locked the office. Ron went down to his car with the collection slip folded inside the notebook. When Josh finally rang, the boy was crying.

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Rain polished Manchester until the city looked newly forged.

Ron Smith drove through it with one hand on the wheel and the other drumming against his thigh. The windscreen painted the city in moving bands of amber, red and electric blue. Trams slid past old mills converted into apartments. Drone lights blinked above delivery lanes. A street preacher shouted beneath a digital billboard promising a better life on subscription.

Manchester had changed, but Ron still saw the old city inside the new one.

He saw the shuttered units behind the luxury hoardings. He knew which tower had been built over a youth club, which restaurant employed half a family, which cash-only garage would fix a stranger's car at midnight because somebody's uncle had vouched for him. To Ron, the city was never buildings. It was people connected by invisible favours, grudges, chances and debts.

His hands-free connection clicked. A young man named Josh was breathing too fast at the other end.

"Listen to me," Ron said. "You messed up. That is not the same thing as being finished."

"I've ruined everything."

"No. You've ruined some things. Different sentence."

Josh gave a broken laugh that sounded close to tears.

"Where are you?"

"Near the old tram depot."

"Stay there. I'm coming. And do not disappear on me."

"Why do you even care?"

Ron changed lanes. "Because somebody should." He ended the call.

His notebook lay open on the passenger seat. Across the cover he had written IDEAS THAT CAN HELP PEOPLE in black marker. Inside were business models, community projects, technology sketches, mad inventions, rough film scenes, music ideas, property plans, funding numbers and notes written at four in the morning that made perfect sense to him and nobody else.

His business partner called before Ron had passed the next junction.

"Investor wants the revised projections before eight."

"Of course he does."

"You said that yesterday."

"Yesterday he wanted them before nine. We're improving."

"Ron, do you ever stop helping everybody long enough to help yourself?"

Ron looked through the rain at the skyline.

"What's the point building something if it doesn't make life better for somebody?"

"Money."

"That's why you handle the spreadsheets."

They laughed, and for a moment life was exactly what it had always been: too many plans, not enough sleep, people relying on him, Manchester shining through rain. Then the traffic light turned green. Ron accelerated. A pair of headlights appeared from the right where no vehicle should have been. The other car came through the red at impossible speed.

There was no time for panic. There was only recognition. The instant before impact stretched. Ron saw the junction differently.

Every raindrop became a point of light. Every wheel, pedestrian, traffic signal and pane of glass connected through fine golden lines. He saw the other driver's hands tighten. He saw the angle of the collision before it happened. He saw a cyclist forty metres away who would survive because Ron's car would spin left instead of right.

He saw choices. Thousands of them. Then metal folded. Glass became a galaxy. The car turned sideways. The world struck him from every direction. His shoulder snapped against the restraint. Blood filled his mouth. And still the golden lines remained. They passed through steel. Through rain. Through him. For half a second Ron understood that nothing in the junction was separate from anything else.

Then darkness took him. Somewhere far below the city, Dr Elian Voss watched a biometric trace leap beyond every projected limit. A technician whispered, "Activation." Voss did not answer. On the screen, one line of text appeared without being typed.

R-17 IS NOT YOURS.

Voss leaned closer. The message vanished.

"Begin recovery," he said.

The technician stared at him. "You saw that."

"I saw interference."

"It used words."

Voss's face hardened.

"Begin recovery."

Above them, sirens converged on the wreck. A paramedic named Lena Morris climbed through the passenger side and found Ron unconscious beneath falling rain. Loose glass around his chest trembled in time with his heartbeat. Once. Twice. Then every fragment settled. Lena reached for his neck. A pulse. Weak, but there.

"Stay with me, mate."

Ron's eyes opened. They did not focus on her. They focused through her.

"What can you see?" she asked.

His lips moved.

"Everything is connected."

Then he was gone again.