

ENERGY WAR

Chapter 2

"You're joking, right?"

Cato's best friend Greta looked at him, as if she hadn't properly understood what he'd just told her.

They were sitting in a café well away from the North's city centre. There were less Security Providers round here.

"If I don't do it, they'll start messing with June and me," whispered Cato. "Crash and burn. You've seen what they do to people who disobey them."

"But if the South Side people catch you, they're not exactly going to greet you with open arms."

"I have no choice."

Greta sighed and eventually nodded. "I guess you're right, but what happens if you can't do what this Stone woman has asked you to do?"

"I've got just under three hours over there. That should be enough time."

Greta bit a nail but didn't reply.

Cato was twitchy all afternoon and early evening. And even though he spent most of this time in his bedroom, his edginess made Aunt June even twitchier.

"What's the matter?" she asked, poking her head round his door.

"I've just got a lot of studying to do," he replied, pretending to look at a maths graph on his Elbow Vid Screen.

June went to bed at 9.30 p.m. "Make sure you're in bed in the next hour," she called from her room. "A boy needs his sleep."

"No problem," called back Cato.

He waited until 10.30 p.m., by which time June was fast asleep, and then, making sure the USB4 Stick was in his pocket, silently let himself out of the apartment.

Apart from the Security Providers, the streets were almost deserted. The North Side government liked it that way.

He caught a hover bus through the centre of the city and towards the border.

"What are you up to heading to the border at this time of night?" asked the driver in his dark blue uniform and side arm.

"Just want to get some fresh air," replied Cato.

The driver frowned. "Funny place to get fresh air, the border, don't you think, kid? You know, so near to those filthy Southies. They're always fighting and killing each other. They give me the creeps."

"This is my stop," said Cato, jumping off before the driver could say anything else. He waited until the red tail lights of the bus had disappeared and then crossed the

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road. Walking through several narrow, twisting alleyways, he finally stepped out onto Border Road.

On the left side of the road was some dry, patchy grass. On the right was the huge border wall. Large posters stuck to the wall declared: DANGER! THIS IS THE NORTH/SOUTH DIVIDE! TURN BACK AT ONCE!

There were Security Providers spaced out along the wall, their eyes facing upwards for any intruders. They had obviously been told about Cato's visit because none of them gave him a second glance.

Up ahead was the Archer Gate; it looked just like the rest of the wall except for the picture of an archer carved into its surface. Arietta Stone was waiting right next to it.

"Well done for being punctual," she said, handing Cato a tiny, silver disc when he reached her. "Follow the arrows on this Directional and it will lead you to the South's Energy Centre. The Directional has the key code for Entrance 13 in the Loading Bay. That will get you inside the building."

Cato studied the disc as if it carried all the secrets of the universe.

"At this hour there'll be hardly anyone there, but this security pass will keep you out of trouble. We know they have plenty of young people working there. You won't look out of place."

She handed him a laminated white card with his photo and a security bar code, plus a clip. He affixed the card to his jacket.

"You need to get to Terminal B43 – that belongs to their Chief Tech Officer. Hack the system, find the energy programmes and download them onto the stick. Don't look at anything else on their system and don't go anywhere but the Energy Centre. Be back on the other side of this gate before 3 a.m."

Cato nodded as if she'd just asked him to do something as easy as buying a packet of Synthetic Fruit at the corner shop.

They waited in silence for a few minutes, Cato's body popping with nervous energy and... fear.

On the stroke of midnight, there was a loud clanking sound and the gate suddenly started sliding open.

"Remember," said Stone. "You have to be back here at 3 a.m. or you'll be stuck over there and it's unlikely we'll be able to get you out. Don't engage in conversation with anyone. They'll just kill you. Remember, all they want to do is destroy our way of life. So do the job and get out."

Cato nodded.

"Now go," said Stone.

Cato took one last look at her and hurried past the gate. As he headed off into the night he heard another clanking sound and the gate started to close.

The Directional was the best one he'd ever seen. He passed several people but no one gave him a second look and there were certainly no signs of any rioting or looting. That must all be happening in the centre of town. Stone had been true to

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her word; she'd planned his route to avoid any trouble.

Through a maze of streets the Directional led him, and eventually he reached the end of a wide alleyway and came upon the South's Energy Centre. It was a large, metallic structure, way smaller than the North's. How they were producing energy at a quicker rate than the North was a complete mystery.

He walked round the back of the building and found the loading bay. It housed some forklift trucks that were silhouetted against the night sky. They looked like ancient beasts waiting for the dawn to wake them.

Jumping up onto a platform, Cato studied a series of metal door numbers and walked until he reached the thirteenth one. He saw a white panel on the wall next to it and held the Directional up against it. There was a click and the door swung open.

Cato stepped through and the door closed behind him.

It had worked.

He was in!