

Mind Splinters:The Fallen

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## CHAPTER 1

ADIM watched as the two boys slunk back into the forest to hide within its shadowy confines. They knew they were being hunted, but not by whom, or rather, by what. ADIM waited until they were out of visual range before he extended his head and arms from within the egg-like shell of his body and took off in the direction of the forest. At the edge of the tree line he stopped and scanned the nearby area for other people. When he was satisfied that he would not be interrupted in his chase he retracted the scanner disc on top of his metallic head and proceeded into the forest.

As he slowly stalked his prey he computed the reasons for the sudden acceleration in the number of jobs he had been sent on the past few months. The escalation must mean something but he could only reason so much before he ran into a wall in his programming. The reasoning module was a marvel of modern engineering as it learned and adapted with every new event that ADIM encountered, giving him more data to compute with, but it was still nonetheless a program, and all programs have their limitations.

As he advanced further into the shelter of the trees his audio receptors picked up the banal sounds of the

forest around him; the songs of the katydids, the chirping of the baby birds signaling that they were hungry, the babbling of a nearby brook and underneath it all, filtered out by an audio program, the soft footsteps of the two boys. Even though it was just past noon the canopy of leaves above created an almost dusk-like atmosphere that would normally make it more difficult for the boys to be tracked, but ADIM had special visual receptors that allowed him to filter out specific shades of color.

He made his way through the trees in as straight a line as they would permit while monitoring the direction the sound of the boys' feet were coming from. If he had an olfactory receptor installed he would be able to smell the soft dirt he was walking on, the strong scent of the pine trees surrounding him and the occasional waft of freshly cut grass nearby. But neither the original DIM models nor ADIM have the ability to smell. ADIM wondered why not. He reasoned that it would make him a better tracker and therefore better at what he does. He made a note of the issue to discuss with his maker at a later date.

He continued his slow methodical advance in the direction of the boys but must wait until the right moment to strike because he had been instructed time and again by his maker never to be seen by anyone who is not part of the

program. He has had many conversations with his maker and each and every one of them is stored inside his memory banks, able to be recalled at a moment's notice.

ADIM approached a brook, its dark blue water slowly trickled its way down through the forest on its way to the nearest pond. The reflection of the sun through the trees looked like tiny stars dancing on the surface of the water. ADIM watched as the water wound its way around and in between the many rocks and boulders lying in the ground and would smile if he weren't a robot. He recalls the note he made earlier about installing an olfactory receptor and realizes that if he were a tracker similar to a dog, who could only track by scent, he would likely have lost his prey by now. But he could still hear their slightly wet footsteps a few meters ahead. He splashed through the brook and headed up the side of the hill.

*Maker: "-truly a marvel ADIM. You are my finest creation. You will be able to do what no one else can. You will be able to make all of my dreams come true. You will allow my work to continue unabated."*

As the recording played ADIM once again tried to discern the meaning behind the words. His maker often spoke to him of his goals, his dreams, his desires but he was just a robot and most of what the maker said was very

hard to understand. As time went on and he got more experienced he was able to decipher more and more of the conversations, but his greatest puzzle still remains conversation RC-110607.

ADIM then stopped dead in his tracks. He had lost the sound of the footsteps. He applied more audio filters in an attempt to locate the boys, but to no avail. He questioned if the boys just stopped to get their bearings, or maybe they have found a good hiding place, or maybe they are setting up an ambush. In any case he must find them, so the scanner popped out of the top of his head again and began to swivel around in a circle.

As sudden as a strike from a cobra he snaps his head back into his metallic shell. A split second later a medium sized boulder flew through the space where his head was and smashed into the ground with a heavy thud. ADIM extended his head and looked at the boulder as it slowed to a stop in the soft earth. The boys had found him. He switched from tracker mode to contain mode.

As soon as contain mode was activated a small antenna rose from the back of his head and emitted a dampening field that disabled all ESP within a specific range. ADIM calculated that the boys must be within 30 feet, so he set the dampening field to a 45 foot radius. He didn't want it

to stretch too far for fear of unwanted attention from other Mind Splinters that might be in the area.

He picked up the boys' footsteps as they took off to the East of him. They had realized they could no longer use their ESP. He reacted instantly and took off in their direction. Luckily for him the boys were sticking together rather than splitting up, which would have made it much harder for him to contain them both.

ADIM's metal legs were also an upgrade from the original DIM units and they allowed him to cover a lot of ground in a very short period of time. Each step left a deep impression in the earth as his legs propelled him forward with great force. In mere seconds his visual receptors picked up the two boys running in the distance. He saw them look back and make eye contact with him. One of the boys stumbled as the other one attempted to keep him upright and running. But the chase was almost over as ADIM closed in on his objective.

When he was within range of the boys his arms burst forward from his shell like metallic heat seeking snakes. Each hand grabbed the back of the neck of one of the boys and then lifted them up off the ground, their legs still running but with nothing beneath them but air. ADIM came to a stop with the boys raised in the air. From within his

core a pulse of energy glided along his arms and was released into the boys with the force of a stun gun. The boys went stiff as a board for a second and then completely limp a second later, lifeless in ADIM's hands. ADIM slowly reeled them back to his body as the scanner once again checked the surrounding area for people. Once satisfied that no one was around to interfere he dropped the dampening field, curled his arms up on each side of his body, a boy in each arm, and headed back to the extraction point.

## CHAPTER 2

Max knew time had run out. He sprinted down corridors in search of a hiding place, somewhere he wouldn't be found, somewhere safe. It's hot, stifling; the August heat felt much hotter where he was because there were no open windows in the vicinity, only closed doors. Goose bumps broke out on his olive-skinned arms as he raced to find a good spot to hide. A sense of urgency forced him to stop at the nearest door. He attempted to enter the room but the doorknob wouldn't turn. It's locked.

*Why would this door be locked?* Max thought. *It doesn't make any sense. Nothing should be locked here.* He didn't have the luxury of time to solve the mystery of the locked door so he dashed down to the next door, only to find it was locked as well. He started to panic as he felt time slip away like sand in an hourglass. He ran across the hallway and hoped the next room was unlocked because he could sense his pursuer hot on his trail. To his surprise the doorknob twisted in his hand.

Inside, dust motes swirled lazily in the shaft of sunlight coming through the window on the opposite side of the room. The room was empty except for an old wooden desk that stood against the right side wall. The bottom drawer



was missing from the desk and two lamps sat on top of it; one had a black base with the chord wrapped around it and the other one was more elaborate with gaudy colored pebbles placed all over the base and a lampshade with beads dangling along the bottom.

Max quickly closed the door behind him and instinctively headed towards the only cover in the room. He crammed himself under the desk and lifted his knees to his chest in order to fit. He peered around the edge of the desk at the closed door expecting his pursuer to be there. He watched the doorknob with bated breath, unsure of what he would do if it started to turn.

After a moment of catching his breath he examined his current surroundings and realized his so-called hiding spot wouldn't hide him from anyone but a blind person, so he scurried from underneath the desk and walked over to the closet door. He opened the door and was pleasantly surprised to find it was completely bare. He entered and quietly shut the door behind him. The only light in the room was the shaft of light that emanated from between the floor and the bottom of the door. He sat down and took note of his surroundings. The closet had a top shelf for storage and a wooden bar above his head where a few metal hangers dangled without a purpose.

As the minutes passed by Max finally started to relax. He decided to get into a more comfortable position and skooched to the back of the closet, as far away from the door as possible, and rested his back against the wall. As he leaned back against the wall he felt something give behind him. Frightened he may have damaged something he sat up to investigate. With his limited visibility he reached out to the wall to determine what had happened. He slid his right hand along the wall feeling for anything out of the ordinary.

The wall was made of wooden slats about a foot wide. He skimmed his way along them from one side to the other until he came across an opening he could barely see at the bottom of the wall where the floor met the slat. One of the wooden slats had a small corner piece missing from the bottom left corner of it. The missing area was just large enough for him to fit his index finger in, so he gently pulled at the wooden slat. He felt it separate from the wall as he pulled back with his finger. When he sensed there was enough room he reached out with his entire hand to pull the rest of the square section away from the wall. He placed the removed section of the wall, which was about as big as a large pizza box, up against the side and moved

his body in an attempt to allow as much of the sunlight to penetrate the opening.

It was still too dark to make out what lay inside but he could see that there was definitely an object of some kind lying within. He carefully reached out with his right hand, placed it down on the object and gently rubbed along its surface. The object had a coarse feel to it; images of tree bark and sand and brittle fall leaves sprang to mind. His fingers searched along the objects length until they found the edge of it. It seemed as if the object was small enough for him to pick up with one hand so picked up the mysterious item and gingerly slid it out of its hiding place, careful not to scrape it against the wall. He grabbed it with his left hand to keep it steady and removed it entirely from the space within the wall. Once the object was safely clear of the wall he held it in his hands and strained his eyes to see what he had found.

The object was rectangular and heavy. It had a distinct odor that he couldn't quite place but it reminded him of the old archive section in the Ridgeland Public Library. As his eyes adjusted to the dark he could see that the object appeared to be a book of some kind.

He placed the book down near the shaft of sunlight that was beaming through the opening below the door. He

rotated it in every direction in an attempt to see if there was any writing on the cover, but there was nothing of note on it. He then slowly opened the book, conscious of the fact that it was obviously very old. The cover cracked and popped as it was opened, the distinct smell of aged paper burst forth as he turned the first page over.

He scanned the pages but couldn't make out any of the words. The writing was not in English and he was quite certain it was not in Spanish either. What he found more interesting was that on the sides of the pages were what appeared to be hand written notes. These notes were written in a different language than the original text and some of them were in English.

His heart leapt in his throat as he forgot all about his pursuer. He was completely absorbed in the mystery of the book and what secrets it may contain. He laid down and moved the book so the sunlight could reach the area with the English notes.

"Today my teacher taught me how to lift multiple things at the same time. He told me that my telekinesis is progressing nicely and I -"

Max's eyes bulged out of his head as he read the word telekinesis. *What is this? Who wrote this book? Was I supposed to find this? Is this some kind of test? How*

*long ago was this written?* There were no answers to these questions but that didn't stop Max from asking them.

However, before he could attempt to find the answers to those questions a voice boomed inside his head.

*Max, Freyja - meet me in the training room in five minutes for class.*

Max was startled at the sound of Gray Towers' voice speaking inside his head. He was so engrossed in the book he had forgotten where he was. He took a deep breath and sighed. He carefully closed the book and gently placed it back inside its hiding place. He grabbed the wooden panel and replaced it in the wall but made sure that he could still fit his finger in the opening so he could return to read the book at a later date.

He stood up and left the closet with a huge smile on his face. Not only had he found a secret journal of some sort but he had also beaten his sister at Hide and Seek.

### CHAPTER 3

"Let's continue with the mind shield."

Towers, Max and Freyja were clustered in the workout room. The lack of air conditioning caused sweat to drip off their bodies. The circular fans on the floor alleviated some of the stifling heat but Freyja wished they could have their lessons in a cooler room of the house.

"Freyja, like I explained earlier, I want you to feel your way telepathically around my mind shield and search for the glow of my mindsig."

"OK," Freyja said, her face a mask of concentration. She waited for Towers to nod and then she sent out a mental probe at him. Instantly she felt the mind shield that surrounded his thoughts. The mind shield reminded her of a rubber ball that was jammed inside his head.

Over and over the mind shield she searched for the orange glow of Towers' mindsig, but it never appeared. She even tried to leave markers in the places she had already searched, but she never ran into them again, which made the search that much more frustrating. She had no idea if the markers were still there, or if she just never searched the same place twice. Either way, it made her upset.

"That's enough for now," Towers announced and Freyja stopped her telepathic hunt. "Do you feel like you're getting the hang of it?"

Freyja shook her head in frustration, her flaxen pigtailed swaying back and forth. "No, I don't."

"OK, well why don't you take a quick break and have something to drink while I work with your brother."

Freyja rolled her eyes and stood up to retrieve the glass of lemony liquid from the desk. She took a long drink and again shook her head in aggravation.

"Alright Max, are you ready?" Towers challenged.

"Yup."

Freyja was jealous at the ease in which Max could break through a mind shield and yet she still couldn't do it. She watched as her brother and Towers calmly stared at each other. She knew Max was using his telepathy because his hazel pupils had expanded to twice their normal size. She found it odd that his eyes reacted so differently than every other Mind Splinter she knew.

At that moment Towers winced, signaling the end of the exercise. "Well done," Towers admitted. "You have really gotten quite good at breaking through my mind shield."

Max beamed at the praise offered up by Towers. Freyja scowled and slumped back down in her chair.

"Are you ready to try again?" Towers asked as he turned back to face her.

"Yes," she confirmed. She quickly sat up straight and on the edge of her chair.

"Begin."

Freyja sent out her telepathic mind probe and again was unable to break through Towers' mind shield.

"This is stupid," she announced out of sheer frustration. "I hate this. What does a mind shield have to do with reading peoples' minds anyway?"

"I understand your frustration, but breaking through a mind shield isn't something that happens overnight," Towers pointed out.

"I did it," Max said with a grin aimed at his little sister.

"Shut up Max," Freyja shouted.

"No you didn't," Towers countered in a milder voice.

"Yeah I did," Max protested.

Freyja clenched her teeth in anger. She was so angry she could scream. Max thought he was so special and always made sure she knew it.

"Freyja, ignore your brother," Towers advised. "He's just trying to get a rise out of you."



Freyja turned her head in order to regain some self control. If she looked at Max's smug face a second longer she was going to punch him.

"Tell you what, why don't you take a quick break, maybe walk around the room a little bit, stretch your legs, calm down and I'll do some more work with Max."

Freyja didn't need to be asked twice. She quickly got to her feet and made her way over to the window where she looked outside at the lovely garden in the back yard where several people were tending to the weeds and clipping away dead leaves from the flowers. The serene scene helped to calm her down immensely.

"So would you like to try to break through my mind shield again?" Towers asked Max. "Or do you have any questions about mind shields that I may be able to answer?"

"I do have one question." Max took a moment before continuing. "When will you let me help you search for Jakob?"

Freyja heard the question and sighed. *This again, she thought. How many times is he going to ask?*

"We've been over this before," Towers warned.

"I know, but I still don't understand why I can't help."

Freyja turned around and saw the exasperated look on her teachers face.

"Max, I'm not going to deliberately put you in harm's way," Towers said.

"Then why do you let Troy help you?"

"I only brought Troy out with me a couple of times and that was only when Kara couldn't go and I knew it would be safe to bring him along."

"You said you don't want to put me in harm's way, right? But if it's safe, why can't I go with you?"

*He has a point, Freyja thought as she sat down. Not that I want him going out looking for the man that kidnapped him.*

"It's different," Towers muttered.

"How?" Max countered.

Freyja was tired of this conversation. She had heard it many times before and it always ended the same way.

"Troy is older than you and he -"

"He's only two years older."

"You'd be surprised what you can learn in two years."

"That's not the point. I can -"

"Stop it!" Max and Towers turned to face Freyja. She had had enough of the conversation.

"Max, he said no, OK? So stop asking."

"This has nothing to do with you Frey so stay out of it," Max ordered.

"No. I only get a few hours of time a week with Mr. Towers while you get to stay here all day every day. It's my turn to learn about telepathy. If you want to keep asking Mr. Towers about Jakob do it when I'm not here." Her face was beet red when she finished her outburst.

"Your sister's right," Towers confessed. "We can continue this conversation at a later date. Right now I'd like to continue to work with your sister."

Freyja stuck out her tongue at Max. He made a face and crossed his arms across his chest in defeat.

"OK, let's try it again," Towers told Freyja.

She once again sent out the mind probe towards Towers' mind shield. She set her markers down as she traversed to black, blank landscape of his shield. Minutes passed with no mindsig in sight when suddenly she sensed something different, something off in the distance. She smiled as she sent her probe towards the pulsing, glowing light.

"Towers!"

Freyja wasn't sure if the male voice she heard was in her head, her teachers head or coming from inside the house.

"TOWERS," the voice yelled louder this time.

"Freyja, stop for a second," Towers said with his hand held up to signal for quiet. She reluctantly released her telepathy.

"Get out here," the voice demanded.

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For more information about the Mind Splinters series please visit the website at [www.mindsplinters.com](http://www.mindsplinters.com). For more information about the author please visit his blog at [www.ajdonnelly.com](http://www.ajdonnelly.com)

#### **About the author**

A.J. Donnelly was born and raised in Connecticut. He attended college in Boston and eventually found his way out to Southern California to pursue a career in the entertainment industry.

As luck would have it that career did not last long and he soon found himself working as a web programmer. The seed for the Mind Splinters series was planted when he was designing and programming web games for kids. His love of video games, comic books and fantasy novels all culminated in a story about a young boy named Max Daely.

When he is not busy with his day job he spends his time with his family and the remaining tiny bit of time reading books, playing video games and watching movies.