

THE LAST THIRTEEN

BOOK ONE



JAMES PHELAN

A Scholastic Australia Book

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BREAKING NEWS

In recent weeks, a group has emerged with what can perhaps be described as a special ‘gift’ or ‘ability’: their dreams come true.

Although unaware of it now, these individuals will not only save the world, but change it forever. They are our last hope in a battle of good versus evil.

This transformation from ordinary to extraordinary, this journey, will not occur overnight. Every story has a beginning.

04

Three helicopters buzzed directly over their classroom—massive grey-coloured things with machine guns pointing out the sides.

‘Cool!’ one of the students yelled out.

‘It’s an invasion!’ another cried.

‘No—they’re our military choppers!’

‘Awesome! Look at the guns!’

The tailing aircraft passed so close that some of the room’s windows cracked and shattered, causing students to scream and duck for cover—but a moment later they had their noses pressed up against the remaining windows, save for Sam and Mr Cole who were still standing at the board, watching.

No sooner had the helicopters touched down on the sports oval, than the cargo doors slid open and heavily armed soldiers in camouflage poured out. From the middle helicopter, a man in a suit emerged. It was a grey suit, white shirt, black tie. The man looked at a handheld electronic device—then looked up towards Sam’s classroom and pointed it directly at them. The suited man

and the soldiers set off in a flat-out run.

‘Sam,’ Mr Cole said out of the side of his mouth, ‘I think you should leave.’

Sam watched, stunned, as the man in the grey suit headed for their classroom. The soldiers who remained back at the helicopters, the rotors still spinning fast, had fanned out with their rifles trained all around as if expecting an attack, from any direction, at any moment.

‘Sam!’ Mr Cole said, taking Sam by both shoulders and shaking him, looking him directly in the eyes. ‘Whatever happens, don’t worry. It won’t be for long. We’ll find you. OK?’

Sam looked into Mr Cole’s concerned eyes. It was like he was seeing him for the first time.

‘Sorry, what?’ Sam asked, not comprehending anything his teacher had just said. *We’ll find you?*

The students at the window were shouting and pointing, Mr Cole’s calls for calm falling on deaf ears. The classroom door burst open and the headmaster rushed in.

‘Everybody out!’ he yelled.

Sam looked at Mr Cole.

‘Sam, there’s no time to explain,’ Mr Cole said, urgently and quietly. ‘Just don’t lose hope, we’ll come for you. I promise.’

The soldiers were at the windows and everyone watched in horror as sparks erupted around the window frames and more glass shattered to the ground. There was a crashing

sound from the surrounding wall and students spilled away from it, running for the door, shrieking. Debris from the cut-through masonry dusted their hair and clothes. And then there was an almighty *BANG!*

The force of the blast knocked Sam to the floor. He got to his hands and knees but the room filled with thick dust that made it impossible to see. The other students were screaming and coughing. Through the ringing in his ears, Sam heard Mr Cole calling his name but he still couldn't see more than a few centimetres in front of him or tell where the voice was coming from. It became hard to breathe and Sam kept low, crawling, choking from the smoke as he felt his way blindly along the edges of desks, tripping over school bags and fallen books, to where he imagined the door to the classroom should be.

'You can't take him!' Mr Cole yelled just as the smoke and dust began to clear. He was standing between Sam and the determined wall of thick-set soldiers, the wiry teacher right up in their impassive faces.

'This says otherwise!' the guy in the grey suit said. He passed the headmaster a note. 'National security, highest priority,' the suit announced and then turned to the soldiers. 'Take the boy, let's move.'

Four soldiers hustled towards Sam, who got to his feet and tried to look defiant although he felt nothing but fear.

Mr Cole rushed to intervene but the man in the suit stepped forward and jabbed a taser into his chest, the

electric shock sending the teacher crashing heavily to the ground. The headmaster tried to regain some composure and began to protest loudly. But a soldier levelled another taser directly at him, forcing him to surrender.

'He'll be fine,' the man in the suit said to the headmaster, stepping over the quivering form of Mr Cole whose sickly, pale face was turned towards Sam. Sam was picked up by two soldiers, but as much as he kicked and struggled and clawed at their arms, they remained completely unmoved.

'Let me go!' he shouted at the soldiers. But they persisted, undeterred, carrying him through the makeshift doorway they'd cut through the wall.

'Who are you?' Sam shouted at them. 'What have I done?'

The soldiers were silent as they marched Sam straight towards the whooping helicopters. Sam looked back and could see Mr Cole steadily watching him. The teacher's mysterious words echoed in Sam's ears—

We'll find you . . .

‘Strap him in tight!’ the man in the suit ordered the soldiers. Sam’s wrists were bound together in front of him with strong plastic ties and he was lifted into the helicopter, harnessed firmly into position on a bench seat running along one side of the narrow cargo space.

The soldiers sat facing the front, just behind the pilot and co-pilot, on dedicated stations where big machine guns poked out the sides of the fuselage. Sam couldn’t see whether their uniforms had any badges. As the three helicopters lifted off in unison, the world tilted and his stomach lurched.

The man in the suit was talking into a radio headset, ‘We’ve picked up the third one. Returning to Seattle.’

Sam didn’t even have time to wonder what *the third one* meant before there was a tap on his knee. A teenage guy was seated next to him at the rear of the helicopter and he seemed pleased to have gotten Sam’s attention. His wrists were also tied, and he too was strapped in tight.

‘Name’s Alex,’ he said, smiling, and offering a cuffed hand in greeting. He seemed a little older than Sam, shorter

but bigger across the shoulders, with messed-up brown hair and flushed cheeks. Although restrained, Alex almost seemed to be enjoying himself. Sam awkwardly offered a bound hand in return, lost in the strange moment, queasiness forgotten.

‘And her over there,’ Alex said loudly into Sam’s ear so as to be heard over the noise of the helicopter, ‘won’t give me a name, but I call her Dream Girl.’

Sam looked across the helicopter’s cabin. A girl about his age sat wide-eyed, unnerved at his arrival. She was tall and pretty, with plenty of black eye make-up and overall a bit Goth-looking. Eventually she nodded at them, a small gesture of acknowledgment.

‘I’m Sam!’ he shouted.

The girl’s eyes went even wider as if she recognised his name. Alex laughed.

Sam’s mind worked overtime to take everything in. He knew he had to start thinking about how to get out of there. His mind scrambled to imagine scenarios of what might happen when they touched down at ‘base’ and how he could get to safety. He knew he couldn’t live with himself if his two fellow prisoners didn’t factor into his plan.

‘Well, Sam,’ Alex said. ‘It seems that we’re all here then.’

Sam looked from Alex to Dream Girl, completely confused. ‘What do you mean we’re all here?’

‘Ask her,’ Alex said, then leaned as far forward as he

could towards the girl. ‘You’re the dreamer, so tell me, I’m dying to know—what happens next?’

Dream Girl looked amazed and didn’t answer. She just continued to stare at Sam.

‘Well, while she’s playing mute, I’m going to try to get untied,’ Alex said into Sam’s ear. ‘Why don’t you ask her to tell you what she told me?’

Alex rubbed his plastic wrist-ties against the metal leg of the bench seat. The burly soldiers were preoccupied with staring out their respective windows.

‘What’s he talking about?’ Sam asked her.

The girl shook her head and replied, ‘You’ll freak out.’

‘Try me,’ Sam said.

Again, she shook her head.

‘Well, just so you know, I’m already freaked out,’ Sam said. ‘In fact, I’m about five stages beyond it.’

‘What’s stage six?’ Alex said. ‘You poop your pants?’

‘That, and more,’ Sam said, almost smiling. Something about Alex’s cavalier personality reminded Sam of Bill and he shook his head to dislodge the thought. He looked over to the guy in the suit, who was still talking on the radio. The soldiers continued to watch out the windows. Sam leaned forwards into the aisle towards the girl, his weight pushing against the shoulder harnesses that pinned him against the wall. ‘Please, tell me—do you know what’s going on here?’

She looked from Sam to Alex.

‘Maybe, a little,’ she said.

‘Told you,’ Alex said, ‘she’s a freak.’

‘You’re a freak!’ she replied.

‘Yeah?’ Alex said. ‘Well, I’m not the one who predicted all of this, am I?’

Sam looked warily between them.

‘Predicted?’ he said. ‘How?’

‘She was already in here when they loaded me on board,’ Alex explained, nodding over to the armed soldiers. ‘Soon as I got on, I went to talk to her and she already knew my name! Said she knew where we were going, and how they’d soon bring on a guy named Sam from your school.’

‘Then—then you’re with them,’ Sam said to her, ‘these soldiers?’

‘No,’ she replied. ‘It’s nothing like that. My name’s Eva Kennedy and I was pulled out of high school, just like you guys.’

‘Then how did you know our names?’ Sam asked. She looked down at the steel floor at her feet. ‘How does that work?’

Sam could see her wrists were tied just as theirs were, so it made no sense that she’d be with those guys. But he didn’t know if he could trust her. *Maybe she’s faking.* He noticed a tear fall from her eye to her lap, and she looked up at Sam with wet eyelashes.

‘Because, Sam, I *dreamed* this,’ Eva said. ‘Last night. All of it. Beat for beat. Him. You. Them. The helicopters. All of it.’

Sam felt like he was going to be sick. The fear on her face was genuine. *She dreamed all this last night—and it's coming true? But, does that mean my dream from last night could . . . ?*

'I dreamed this would happen,' Eva said. 'That the three of us would sit here, that we would talk like this, until—'

She checked her watch.

'—about now.'

Sam looked at Alex, who shrugged his shoulders and kept working away on wearing through his wrist-ties.

'That's all she told me too,' he said.

'What else did you dream?' Sam asked. 'Where do they take us?'

Eva bit at her bottom lip.

'What is it?'

'They don't take us anywhere,' she said, as the helicopter banked hard.

Sam could see the other choppers—one out in front, the other to the side, their rotors beating fast against the air. He looked at the pilots, then imagined the three of them breaking free of their bonds and trying to overpower one or two of the soldiers, getting their weapons, forcing them to land and making a run for it . . .

'Wait,' Sam said to her. 'What do you mean they don't take us anywhere?'

'Yeah,' Alex said. 'That doesn't make any sense. We've got to be going someplace.'

Eva checked her watch again.

Sam felt a heavy weight of dread in his stomach, the nausea back in full force.

'Eva, what happens?' he asked.

Eva looked at him and with a steady voice she said, 'You should hang onto something.'

The way she said it, the way she herself now held on to the bench seat and braced, made Sam grab hold of the bench and lean back, his legs pressing hard against the floor.

'Got it!' Alex said, revealing that he'd managed to wear through his plastic wrist-ties. He looked up to find Sam and Eva staring back at him. 'What?'

'You need to hang on to something,' Sam said.

'What for?'

'That,' Eva said, motioning out the side window behind them. Alex and Sam craned around to see.

'Incoming, port side!' the co-pilot screamed into the cabin. 'Brace, brace, brace!'

Behind them, a ball of fire streaming a plume of white smoke was streaking towards the helicopter—in a second they could make out a slender grey object, a missile, a supersonic bringer of death looming in on them, *fast*. They had just seconds until impact. The pilot dipped sharply towards the earth. It was an emergency dive that twisted into a sideways tilt, hurtling towards a suburban street full of life. Sam's harness gave out and he found himself

crushed next to Eva, the helicopter almost completely on its side as it banked hard and fast towards the ground in the evasive manoeuvre.

Sam could see that Eva, while looking ill from the aircraft plummeting, didn't seem scared.

'How are you so calm right now?' Sam asked, straining to see if the missile was still closing in. *Oh boy—it's there, coming in too fast to outrun.*

'Don't worry, Sam,' Eva said, her voice almost serene. 'We don't die.'

'How can you be so sure?' Sam asked, struggling to speak as the helicopter banked and turned haphazardly.

'Because,' Eva grimaced, 'I've seen what happens next.'

06

The sound of the explosion rang in Sam's ears. The blast sucked the air from the cabin and the helicopter's tail sheared completely off, leaving a gaping hole at the rear of the aircraft. *That can't be good.* The helicopter fell fast in a flat spin towards the ground. An incessant alarm wailed. Sam was being pressed against the cabin wall, the g-forces gluing him against it like a local show ride he'd once been on, where it had spun around so fast there was nothing he could do to get himself off the wall.

'Hang onto something!' Eva screamed.

The helicopter's nose dipped forwards and that motion changed the forces inside the cabin. Alex's shoulder straps snapped free from the wall and he fell towards Sam and Eva. Sam grabbed hold of him and held tight to them both as best he could with his bound hands. He stuck his leg through some webbing straps at the back of Eva's bench seat to stop himself from being flung around.

Up front, the suited guy and a door gunner were slumped in their seats, unconscious—maybe from the blast or flying shrapnel. The frantic pilots seemed useless

against the bleeping and screeching as the aircraft spun its way to earth.

Alex was screaming in Sam's ear and there was a ripping noise as the other side of the helicopter began to tear away. As the wall tore through, Alex was pulled from Sam's grasp. The only thing keeping him in the aircraft were his ankles, still strapped to the bench seat.

'Argh!' Alex screamed as his ankle straps snapped free.

Sam let go of Eva and flung his arms out to grab Alex's wrists, but straightaway he could feel his grip loosening as the centrifugal force threatened to throw them both out of the hole.

'Hold on!' Sam shouted over the roar of the rushing air.

'I'm trying!' Alex looked pleadingly at him, his eyes begging Sam not to let go.

'I've got you, Sam,' Eva yelled, as she strained forward and began to draw them both in, bit by bit, Sam's grasp keeping Alex from sliding out into the void. The wind buffeted them around and Sam started to feel faint from the effort and motion.

Finally Alex reached the webbing and he got a purchase, his legs still dangling out where the wall used to be. Eva clung tightly to them both. Sam could see that up close, her black-lined eyes shone bright blue, her expression as determined as anyone's he'd seen.

'Yeah!' Alex yelled through gritted teeth. 'Nothing to worry about at all!'

His face was all exhaustion and confusion.

'I said,' Eva replied, 'that we don't die!'

Sam looked out the window on their side—they all did. The helicopter continued to fall, belly first, spinning around and around. The horizon was packed with houses and trees in a vision that was spinning around them in a blur. Sam was sure that in seconds they would become some quiet suburban street's new traffic hazard.

'How?' Alex asked. 'What can we do?'

They looked at each other in silence and Sam knew there was nothing they could do. There was no way they could jump for it, if that was supposed to be their way out. Sam looked into Eva's shining, frightened eyes. *I wonder if those eyes will be the last things I'll ever see.*

He took a deep breath and held on tight to them both. The world went silent.

Three . . . two . . . one.

They hit hard.