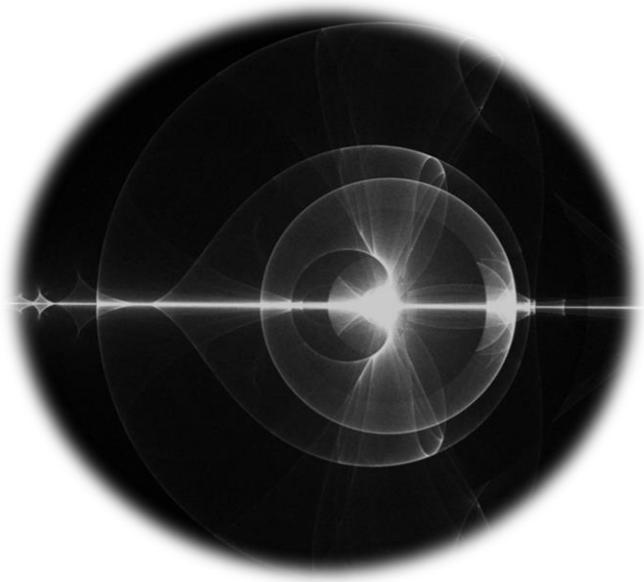


# Wake of Deception



By Sasha DeVore

Wake of Deception

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**Summary:** The Ancient Ones have plans to save humanity from itself. Except the Dissenters are trying to unravel them. But when fourteen year-old Hanu learns that neither are who they appear to be, he develops his own plans - stay alive long enough to save his friends and family from a nefarious plot. In the first installment of The Wake Trilogy, a young hero struggles to find his place in an uncertain world.

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*To my husband and son,  
who've supported me every step of the way.*

*And to Lisa,  
my first silent reading partner.*



# They Came

It wasn't as if General Tsung needed to refer to his radar in order to figure out that he was flying over the right city. It was just a formality. He knew this route from the many missions he'd flown into the heart of America during these last nine years of war. It was beyond the risen Pacific Ocean, past the angry, earthquake-aggravated coastline of what used to be California and Nevada, and over desolate Utah – Colorado Springs. He could see the city just ahead now, still dazzling in places that hadn't been touched by the fires, bombings, protests or riots. It was here that he would drop the nuclear missile that would end the war.

And he wanted to look as charming and important as he could while he did it because this event – just like the rest of the bloody war – was being streamed live to the entire world. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren would bask in the glory of this moment in history, so he made sure to tell the terrified cameraman to only take photos of his good side.

So he adjusted the radar screen dramatically as he read the coordinates to his co-pilot.

“Confirming, thirty-eight point seventy-three degrees north, one-hundred four point eighty-eight degrees west,” he said. “We’ve approached our target. Prepare to release the missile.”

The co-pilot, who had been sitting in silence for the latter half of the trip, quickly released the safety on the missile port and placed his hand over the lever that would drop the bomb. He looked to his General, waiting for him to give the nod.

Tsung’s eyes studied the mountains. The President, along with most of his line of command, took refuge in the base here. He would wait until the right moment, until they were just close enough, to ensure that the mushroom cloud rose directly from the center of the mountain. At this point, aesthetics were really the only thing to consider.

When they were right on top of it, the General slowly dipped his chin.

“Releasing missile.” And with a triumphant smile, the co-pilot pushed the lever forward.

For such a massive object, the bomb seemed to float effortlessly, peacefully, on the breeze. It would’ve seemed like such an innocent thing, but the whole world was well aware of the bomb’s raw, destructive power by now. The pilots watched it tumble toward its destination with a foreboding whine.

Several of the aircraft behind Tsung’s captured the descent, sending footage to the few million people around the world who had survived thus far. They watched anxiously as the bomb approached detonation. Some people counted, just to see how long it would take before it went off. *One, two, three...* it cleared the stratosphere, *four, five...* heading straight for the mountain peak now, *six, seven...* and it vanished.

Then there was *'The Gasp Heard 'Round the World'*, as it went down in the textbooks. The ones who weren't sitting directly in front of a television set missed it. But the lucky ones were able to see that a sparkling silver orb appeared out of nowhere and beamed the missile right out of the air. It happened in an instant. The orb, which looked like nothing more than a giant mass of liquid metal, pulsed toward the bomb and caught it with a red laser, then the missile disappeared.

People in their living rooms, and at crisis centers and pubs and shelters stared at each other in shock for a few brief moments. The excitement and fear were tangible. Within minutes of the miraculous appearance of the orb, something else began to broadcast over the TVs: a message. There was no image – only a wispy, but compassionate voice over grey static. “Dear Young Ones,” it said. “You have hated, bickered and warred for a very long time now. Can you not see more peaceful ways to disagree? Can you not imagine more industrious solutions to your problems? We have watched you interact with the world given to you, and you have brought us great joy... but you have also brought us great sorrow. You see, the current course of action will inescapably lead to your own annihilation.”

The world had never been so quiet – at least not since the war. Children whose video games were interrupted by the message didn't moan, and civilians at the crosswalks didn't complain when all of the screens were replaced with the grey fuzz. Stray dogs in the alleys didn't even bark.

“Soon, the entire planet will be uninhabitable,” said the somber messenger. “We have intervened on this occasion out of love and necessity, but the course of the future is up to you. We dare

not intervene again without your permission, but if you would like, Young Ones, we extend a helping hand. So we are calling out to the people of Earth – we are asking you, do you wish for us to help you change your course of action? Do you wish for us to guide you toward a peaceful path of life in abundance? Think about this question. Search your heart deeply, and send up your answers. We will hear them.”

Then there was a buzzing that grew louder in the streets. The visitors inspired a hope that Earth hadn't felt in many years. People gathered in their schools, government buildings, neighborhoods and in their places of worship. They debated the authenticity of the offer, and what it meant for them. Then, three days later, everyone had cast their votes, and the Ancient Ones landed.

They would hold a summit.

# Wake of Deception

# An Odd Morning

No one at the Flush wakes up in a good mood. As a matter of fact, the patients typically wake up in more of a non-mood.

It's true – there wasn't a single child at the American Continental Mental Rehabilitation Center that should have been experiencing any wide range of emotions at all. It gets too dangerous, given their unstable conditions and all.

That's actually how the hospital got its nickname – The Flush. The doctors, therapists and staff on this little patch of habitable land flush all of those erratic and dangerous emotions right out of you. That's the only way to completely ensure rehabilitation, according to the Ancient Ones. It was kind of an 'out with the old, in with the new' kind of thing.

So it was really quite unusual when Hanu awoke this particular Wednesday morning in what we would call a *very* good mood. He lay quietly in his metal cot, wide eyed and suspicious of the peculiar feeling. His heart was pounding. But not in the way that happens when you're running up the stairs and miss a step. This was something different, something more inviting.

His heart was going to float up and out of his chest if he didn't breathe deeply enough. He fought back the urge to open his mouth and bellow at the top of his lungs.

He knew that he absolutely couldn't do that. He knew that if he did, Ms. Jones would call the nurse and he would be getting booty juice within the minute. That's what they called the injection you got when you started acting out of line. It was terrible stuff – it burned going in, and then you were knocked out for about twelve hours. And it wasn't as though you would be doing anything particularly interesting in those twelve hours, but once you woke up, you definitely got a nagging feeling that something precious had been stolen from you.

Mrs. Rand, the daytime nurse, always encouraged the patients to report these symptoms – elevated heart rate and swelling sensation in the chest; feelings of over-excitability – so that they could receive the proper treatment for it. Once a month the psychiatrist would come and give his presentation with those little puppets about how dangerous it is to let these things get out of hand.

This feeling was pleasant, though. It made him feel nostalgic, as though he would soon remember some barely-out-of-reach memory that wanted to resurface. No, Hanu decided he would keep quiet about all of these feelings. He got out of bed and found his shoes in the dark. He moved about slowly so as not to trigger the motion-activated camera that perched in the corner of the room.

Hanu wasn't terribly concerned about being monitored. Surveillance towers were everywhere at home in Capital City, and the Flush wasn't any different. But at least the Council had the decency to give them a little privacy at The Flush as they slept or maybe sat in the corner and had a good cry.

Finding a comfortable place on the floor, he sat with his legs crossed. He would wait until daybreak when Ms. Jones would finally come around and turn on his light to wake him. He breathed deeply and tried to calm his thoughts, hoping that the memory would return.

And finally, it came. Or maybe he went.

He was suddenly standing before a tall desk. Hanu had to take a few steps back in order to see behind it. There were seven creatures there – strange, with brown, wrinkled little faces and wispy whiskers protruding from underneath long beards. The room offered very little light, but he could see that they all wore maroon robes.

“You’ve been quite content to allow this to go on,” one of the creatures said, leaning in to get a better look at Hanu.

He wrung his shirt with both hands before finally speaking. “There’s no way I can do this,” he answered. “And besides...I don’t want to become a martyr.”

“You’ve allowed fear to cloud your judgement,” the old creature said with a comforting smile. “You will find your strength again.” And then just as quickly as it had come, the memory began to fade.

Or rather, the *dream* began to fade. Hanu realized that he had had a dream – the first one in years. He took a quick glance over each shoulder; afraid someone might’ve shown up to discover his secret. Then, not surprisingly alone, he took a moment to try and burn the details into his memory – the creatures’ faces, the dark room, the words...

Mr. Carlisle, Hanu’s therapist, once told him that dreams were windows to the subconscious. He said that since humanity’s subconscious had been so badly distorted by a long history of wars, famine and hate, it was best to abandon

dreaming altogether. That's why, since the Ancient Ones arrived, everyone was encouraged to take the little pink pill right before bed if they suffered from having dreams. It was "best practice," as Mr. Carlisle would say. And Hanu thought maybe he was right, because the creatures he had dreamt up were quite ridiculous looking. And on top of that, he didn't know what a martyr was.

He did find a strange sense of comfort in the dream, though. A sense of familiarity lingered as he stared into the plain room. It was nice, he thought, to have something all to himself, without it having to be recommended, issued or inspected by his treatment team.

The first light of the sun crept through the window. It was close enough to daybreak now, and Hanu just couldn't wait any longer. Hanu crept over to the doorway and knocked gently on the frame.

"Permission to do my morning hygiene?" he said quietly into the hall.

Ms. Jones, the night staff, was sitting at the only table in the long hallway, finishing up the night's paperwork. She dimmed the screen on her computer and looked at Hanu for a few seconds, as if debating the question.

"Very well," she said curtly. "I shall provide you a towel."

Hanu grabbed his hygiene box from underneath his desk and bounced down the hallway on the balls of his feet. Then he stopped at the door of the communal bathroom, waiting for Ms. Jones to unlock it. Everything in this facility was locked – bathrooms, bookshelves, towel closets, and water fountains – so you spent a good portion of your day waiting for one thing or another to be opened for you.

Ms. Jones moved about, productively, preparing soap and towels for Hanu. All of the staff had that same air of productiveness. They hardly ever showed traces of distinct personality. Hanu and the other patients decided that maybe it was part of their training.

When she appeared at the bathroom door, she looked Hanu once over. He was only fourteen, but he was just as tall as she was. Her soft features didn't quite fit the baggy black staff jumper she was wearing, he thought. A princess' gown seemed more appropriate for her delicate frame.

"You awoke fourteen minutes early today," she said as she approached the bathroom. "Yesterday it was seven minutes. Have you been feeling disturbed?"

Hanu hesitated. He would have liked to tell her that it was *happiness* he was feeling, but every time he mentioned such things to Mr. Carlisle, he'd get a lecture about safe and unsafe emotions.

"I'm feeling... well... *not* disturbed," he said.

"I shall document that you completed your morning hygiene early again," Ms. Jones said matter-of-factly. Then she straightened herself up as much as she could and looked him over once more before unlocking the door.

Hanu entered the bathroom. He didn't give Ms. Jones another thought before dumping the contents of his hygiene box onto the marbled sink. Then he looked at himself in the wide mirror – first from a side view, then straight on. His hair fell around his face in tawny curls. Hanu's skin was usually much paler, but today it was warm and radiant, sparkling with sweat.

Even though he knew he was alone, he glanced over both shoulders again, out of habit, then he looked back at himself and let his lips curve into a smile. He sometimes practiced smiling

to see what it looked like on him. In all of his seven years at the hospital, Hanu's smile never conjured any particular feelings, and it definitely never looked quite like it was supposed to. He was certain of it. His vacant eyes always cancelled out the upturned corners of his mouth in a very creepy way.

But when he got a chance to be alone in the bathroom, he always tried it, because of Titanya. She'd been living at the hospital for almost six weeks now, and she never stopped smiling. It was rather strange, actually, and also rather intriguing. It made him remember a time before the hospital, when he lived at home and his mother would put her index fingers to the corners of his mouth and say, "Smile always." She said that a lot, especially when Hanu wasn't particularly happy. It always made the tight corners of his mouth spread into a toothy grin, even when he was sure he wanted to be angry.

Hanu was grateful for the warm reminders of home that he rarely received while at The Flush. That's why he made it a personal goal to return the gesture to Titanya one day. And today might be the day, he thought. Today's smile perfectly complimented the auspicious sensation he was feeling in his body.

Hanu brushed his teeth and then treated himself to a long shower.



By the time the other patients had started entering the bathroom, Hanu was just finishing. He put his towel in the community bin and started back toward his room.

Jeremiah and Ester were sitting in front of the towel closet waiting for soap – no surprise seeing those two together. Jeremiah was the only one who could get Ester to talk, even if

it was just with him and only in whispers, and Ester had a disturbing way of staring that only Jeremiah could tolerate. She lurked from behind a curtain of dark bangs, watching quietly. Hanu sometimes wondered if she felt invisible behind those bangs, as if she were on a spy mission of some sort and her hair served as her camouflage.

As he passed Ester, she acknowledged him with her usual penetrating stare. He took the opportunity to give her his much-practiced smile, and to his surprise, she answered with a knowing nod.

He was taken aback, almost confused. He stood in the hall for a moment, watching Ester, expecting her to do something more, maybe even *say* something. She didn't. She had already moved on to staring at Les, who was coming to get soap, too.

Back in his room he folded his used, rust-red jumpsuit and put it in his laundry basket, right on top of the rest of the week's accumulated items. Then, as he crossed his tiny room to replace his hygiene box on his desk, Hanu noticed something unusual going on outside of his window.

He forgot about his hygiene box, allowing it to ease unceremoniously from his grip, as he tried to make his brain recognize what he was seeing. Hanu must've sat at this window for hours a day, watching the comings and goings in the concrete courtyard below, but today something was happening that he had never seen before.

For one thing, he could barely see the rising sun. It was being blocked out by white fog. Not the usual fog that the drones sprayed – and besides, the drones wouldn't be out this early anyway; they sprayed in the evening. This was a totally different fog. It was much thicker and filled almost the whole sky.

Water was falling, too. Hanu could see it hitting the sidewalks and windows with a loud slapping sound. Where was it coming from?

Then all of a sudden, he realized he was forgetting something very important. “Meds!” he yelled to nobody. He dropped his hygiene box and ran out of the room.

Through the window at the end of the hall he could see that the sun, which was also swathed in fog, was rising over the buildings now. He was going to be late for the morning medicine line.

Hanu smoothed his jumper as he slowed to a brisk walk in the social room corridor. To his relief Mrs. Rand was still passing out meds. Hanu looked at the clock on the wall above the nurse’s station window. It read six thirty-two. The line was still quite long for it to be so late. He didn’t complain, though. He simply situated himself at the back of the line, content with not having drawn any attention to himself.

In all these years, Hanu only missed the med line a couple of times before he figured out just how much he never wanted to do it again. He refused to take his meds for the first time when he was nine. It was an all-out temper tantrum.

But it wasn’t entirely his fault; he wasn’t intentionally acting like a brat. It was just the medicine made his stomach hurt and he was already angry with Mr. Carlisle for telling him that his mother would stop visiting, so he spit all over the floor and yelled at the top of his lungs at anyone who walked by. That was the very first time he went to containment for behavioral reprogramming, too, by the way. The second time was when he was twelve. Enough time had passed for him to forget just how bad containment was, but they quickly jogged his memory.

One patient, a long time ago, had been sent to containment so many times that they just went ahead and shipped him off to Capital City for override. Hanu didn't know how many times you had to mess up before that, and he didn't plan on finding out. That was a fate that he just didn't see in his own future, which is why he had been so careful to show up on time for meds and make sure that nobody – not even the other patients – saw when he slipped his pills between his gums and lip.

From the back of the line, Hanu could see that the staff seemed a little restless. At six in the morning they were usually bustling around – productively, of course – but today they were clustered in groups, whispering amongst themselves or rushing in and out of the nurse's station. Mr. Drews and Mrs. Pack, the weekend nurses, were also present.

The TV in the social room was displaying the morning news, as usual. The familiar holographic news anchors were projected into the room by a round lens in the ceiling. The man and woman always wore cordial expressions, and their wit livened up the place in the morning time. Hanu could barely hear what they were saying, but he didn't have to hear in order to know that today they were delivering bad news. At the bottom of the projection, revolving around the desk of the anchors was a bold red headline reading: *Sabotage attempts continue. Dissenters miss target.*