



THE
CENTURY
CUBE

BO BOSWELL

ONE

The Locked Door



Turner crouched beside a door and spun the sides of a Rubik's Cube. His brother, Weston, stood next to him, looking at a timer.

"You've got fifteen seconds left," Weston said.

"Hush! I know!" Turner said. He didn't need the extra pressure. If he couldn't solve the cube before time ran out, they would be trapped inside the building with a ticking bomb.

Turner had spent the past few weeks learning to speed-solve the cube. When he had first started, he'd worked slowly through each of the steps—right face clockwise, up face clockwise, right face counterclockwise. He'd watched tons of videos on YouTube and had learned how they referred to the sequences of moves, "right, up, right prime." He knew if someone said "prime," it meant to turn that side counterclockwise, otherwise all the moves were clockwise. He'd studied notations and knew that R U2 R' U' R meant right, up, up, right prime, up prime, right. He'd gotten faster, but he'd never expected to be in a situation where his life, and the life of his brother, would depend on how quickly he could work out the solution.

Weston tested the doorknob. "Ugh. Still locked."

"Hang on! I've almost got it," Turner said, trying to focus on the algorithms. He'd already solved the cross and the first two layers and had oriented the final one. He fell into rhythm as he started the steps to permute the final edges. He pictured the notation in his mind—R U R' U' R' F R F'—as his hands performed the moves.

"Done!" he said, and placed the solved cube in front of the door. The timer stopped with three seconds left.

Weston tried the doorknob again; this time it turned. He flung the door open and leaped out into a dark hallway. Turner remained where he was, barely able to see the dim outline of a door at the end of the hall.

Weston crept to the next door and jiggled the doorknob. "This one is locked, too."

"No, I can't do this. Not in the dark," Turner said, shaking his head.

"Come on, just try. We need to hurry—this timer is only thirty seconds!"

Turner heard the beep of the timer; it was now counting down. He darted down the hallway and patted his hands on the floor in front of the door until he found the next Rubik's Cube. He got down next to the bottom of the door where a narrow beam of light streamed through and slid the cube into the light so he could see the positions of the colored tiles. Once he had each side's pattern in his mind he sat up, and his hands went to work.

"Fifteen seconds left," Weston said.

Turner groaned, then took a deep breath to calm himself. He envisioned the algorithms in his mind as his fingers spun the faces, doing slice moves and dual layer turns, clockwise and counterclockwise, R F' R'.

"Five seconds."

Turner made a few more moves and blurted out, "I'm done!"

Weston flipped the light switch on the wall beside him. The lights came on, and they both looked at the cube in Turner's hands.

The timer's alarm went off and the continuous beeps echoed through the hallway.

"Well, that's it. We're dead," Weston said matter-of-factly. "The bomb blew up. You killed us." He dropped the timer to the hardwood floor, where it continued to sound its alarm.

Turner sat in his grandparents' hallway and slowly turned the cube in his hand, glaring at the unsolved sides. Where had he gone wrong? Had he mixed up the starting pattern in the dim light? Had he chosen the wrong algorithms? Performed the wrong moves? He seethed as he picked up the timer and turned off the alarm.

"This place is gonna blow!" Weston screamed. He fell to the floor and rolled around, making elaborate explosion sounds.

"Stop it. I don't want to play anymore."

"AARRRRGH!" Weston yelled, flinging out his hands from his chest as he mimicked his body bursting apart.

"I said stop it!" Turner shouted, and threw the Rubik's Cube hard against the wall; it shattered, and a corner piece flew off and struck Weston in the forehead.

"Oww!" Weston's hands reached up to his face. "Hey! That was my cube!"

"I don't care, I told you I didn't want to play anymore! Maybe you should've opened up your tiny earholes!" Turner said. He jumped to his feet and stormed through the door, which had, of course, been unlocked the whole time, but the rules of the game had mandated that he solve the cube correctly to unlock it, else they would both die in a catastrophic explosion.

Turner sulked through his grandparents' home, a ten-year-old who had just lost a game to his younger brother. He was two years older than Weston, but you wouldn't have known it by looking at them—they were nearly the same size and weight and could easily pass for twins. They both had dark brown hair; Turner's was thick and wavy, while Weston's was fine and straight.

It was Saturday morning, and usually the boys would be with their dad and their friends, Yui and Hector, at the weekly Cars & Coffee event in Nashville. There, they would see classic and modern versions of cars like Corvettes, Mustangs, and Camaros, and sometimes, during the bigger shows, there would be exotic Lamborghinis, McLarens, and Aston Martins. On this Saturday, however, they were staying with their grandparents in Winchester while their mom and dad were out of town for a "much needed break," in their mom's words.

Turner felt Weston's shoes nipping at his heels.

"Will you put my cube back together?" Weston asked.

"No."

"Then I'm telling," Weston mumbled, still holding a hand to his face where the Rubik's Cube piece had struck him.

They found their grandfather, who they called Papaw, in the living room, snoozing in his favorite leather recliner, his feet propped up, his hands tucked inside the bib of his overalls, and his fingers joined together over his considerable belly that heaved as he snored. His rectangle glasses sat crooked across his face as the morning news droned quietly on from the television.

Turner stomped up to the recliner, causing the dishes in his grandmother's dining cabinet to clink together, and gave the footrest a firm nudge. The recliner creaked as it shook, and

Papaw squinted his eyes open to see both boys standing at his feet and looking upset. Before he had a chance to ask what was wrong, each boy blurted out their argument.

“Weston cheated and turned the lights off while I was solving his Rubik’s Cube!” Turner said, at the same time Weston blurted, “Turner broke my Rubik’s Cube, and a piece flew off and hit me in the head!”

Papaw, still trying to work himself out of his daze, looked at the boys through his crooked glasses. His eyes slowly shifted toward the television, and before he could return his attention to the boys, his eyelids grew heavy and closed shut again.

“Papaw!” the boys shouted together.

Papaw jerked and sat up in his recliner, leather squeaking as he shifted around. The recliner was quite old; strips of duct tape had been applied to several tears in the leather, and they stretched and bulged as Papaw situated himself. Papaw’s wife, who the boys called Mamaw, had encouraged him to get a new recliner, but he had insisted that his current one suited him just fine, thank you very much. The frame of the recliner wobbled, and the boys took a step back in case the whole thing collapsed.

“My buddies, my buddies, my buddies!” he said in a thick and cheerful southern accent. “You boys doin’ all right?”

“No!” Turner said.

Weston shook his head, his bottom lip puffed out.

“Oh. Well, where’s Mamaw and Aunt Boogie?”

“They went to the grocery,” Turner said.

Papaw straightened his glasses and massaged his forehead with calloused fingers. “Okay. Well, it’s a nice day out, why don’t y’all go outside and play until Mamaw and Boogie get back home, and then we’ll work this out over lunch?”

The boys lingered for a few minutes, shooting dirty glances at each other and grumbling.

“Can we go play in the barn?” Turner asked, knowing what the answer would be.

“That’s probably not the best idea without me or Mamaw there to watch you,” Papaw said.

“Fine,” Turner grunted. He turned sharply toward the door, making sure to ram his shoulder into Weston. As expected, Weston overreacted with a fake whine.

“Oww! Stop it!” Weston said, and hit Turner in the back.

Turner spun and shoved Weston, slamming him against the footrest of Papaw’s recliner. There was a sharp crack, and the recliner flipped backward. On his way down, Papaw shot his arms out and struck the corner of Mamaw’s dining cabinet. The recliner slammed against the floor, and the cabinet teetered like a domino on the brink of falling over. Papaw, still seated in the overturned recliner, reached up his thick arm and steadied the cabinet. The glassware inside rattled.

The boys had a moment of relief when it seemed that the cabinet wouldn’t fall over. Papaw had saved it. Then the cabinet doors burst open and a river of plates, dishes, and cups gushed out and shattered, sending hundreds of jagged glass shards scattering across the floor.

The room was quiet for a few tense seconds. Turner, Weston, and Papaw all looked at each other, eyes wide. The silence was broken by the voice of Alexa from the Amazon Echo in the kitchen. “Sorry, I didn’t understand the question I heard.”

“Look what you did, Weston!” Turner said, pointing at the broken glass covering the floor.

“It wasn’t my fault! You pushed me!”

“Unnngh,” Papaw grunted as he eased the empty dining cabinet to an upright and steady position. There was broken glass on the floor beside him, which he carefully swept away before slowly rolling out of the overturned recliner. His breath was strained as he got to his knees and reached his hand around, holding his back.

“Are you okay, Papaw?” Weston asked, taking a step forward. His shoe crunched glass against the hardwood.

“Don’t come any closer,” Papaw groaned. “You boys need to get out of here. Y’all go play outside, I’ll clean this up.”

Weston started for the door, then cautiously turned back. “Did you say we could play in the barn?”

Turner nudged him in the back and whispered for him to leave.

“Huh? Oh, good heavens, whatever. Just go on and get out of here,” Papaw mumbled, his belly jutting forward as he arched to stretch his back.

Weston opened his mouth to reply, but Turner grabbed him by the arm and yanked him out of the room. They’d never gotten to play in the barn without an adult supervising them and telling them what they could and couldn’t do. Turner couldn’t wait to take advantage of the rare opportunity.

TWO

The Loft



Before scampering out of the house, the boys decided to grab a few necessities to play with in the barn. Turner got his Rubik's Cube and his iPhone, which he slid into the pocket of his jeans. Weston considered grabbing the pieces of his broken Rubik's Cube, but he knew that Turner wouldn't help him put it back together. Instead, he snatched his trading card binder, and just before heading out the door, he snuck a couple of quarters out of the coin dish on the kitchen counter and stuck them in his pocket.

The boys crossed the barnyard of their grandparents' farm in the small country community of Broadview on the outskirts of Winchester. The morning sun peeked over the horizon, etching silhouettes of evergreen trees onto the weathered wooden planks of the old red barn. Tall rows of round hay bales were stacked on the barn's main floor with overhead lofts on each side where smaller square bales were stored. At the entrance of the barn was a rusty metal gate with an old lock and chain that clanked against the rungs as the boys climbed over and dropped to the hay-covered dirt.

Weston plopped down in the hay with his binder and flipped through the pages, wondering if he should reorganize them for the third time in a month. His Pokémon cards were up front; the most powerful GX cards took up the entire first page, with Snorlax GX claiming the coveted first spot. His basketball and football cards came next, organized by team. He was thinking of moving the football cards to the front, since football season was coming up and he'd need quicker access for more efficient trading.

Turner rolled his eyes at his brother's fixation on trading card organization and looked down at his Rubik's Cube. He closed his eyes and thought of the notation for his favorite pattern, Six T's, and his fingers blindly went to work—F2 R2 U2 F' B D2 L2 F B. He opened his eyes and turned the cube in his hands to confirm each side had a T shape, then tossed the cube into a soft pile of hay in the corner of the barn.

He gazed up at the rope swing that hung from the rafters; it swayed gently in the morning breeze. A piece of twine dangled from one of the swing's handles, making it easier to retrieve.

"Watch this," Turner said. He grabbed the twine, climbed up a few rows of hay, and stood near the edge of one of the bales. He wiped his sweaty palms on his jeans and adjusted his grip on the swing handle as he gazed down at Weston, who seemed very far below.

Weston watched with excitement, especially since he knew they weren't supposed to use the rope swing without an adult around. Turner took a deep breath and kicked off. He soared through the air, hollering and kicking his legs wildly. Weston laughed and cheered from below.

Turner swung back and slammed against the wall of hay. He let go of the swing and slid down the stacked bales until he landed hard on the bottom row, groaning and laughing.

“My turn!” Weston said. He closed his binder and clambered up the hay. He climbed to the top row, higher than either of them had been before—so high that it took Turner a few tries to fling the rope up to him. He finally grabbed it and kicked off without hesitation. He pulled his knees up and barely cleared the edge of the hay bale that Turner had jumped off. He howled with delight as he swung out farther than Turner had, his feet nearly hitting the opposite wall of the barn. He smacked hard against the hay on the return and fell to the bottom row, coughing and giggling as Turner scrambled for his next ride.

The boys took turns on the swing, the stalks of hay scraping them as they slid down the stacks, leaving faint scratch marks across their skin and snags in their t-shirts and jeans. On one trip down, Turner’s iPhone slipped out of his pocket and tumbled across the matted hay. The phone was his dad’s old 5S. It didn’t have an active cellular connection, and he mainly used it to listen to music, play games, and take pictures, but his dad had told him to take good care of it if he ever wished to have his own working phone someday. He rushed to the phone and found that, other than being covered by a thin layer of hay dust, it worked fine.

“Let’s go up to the loft,” Turner said. He put his iPhone on top of Weston’s binder so it wouldn’t fall out of his pocket and climbed up a rickety wooden ladder to the loft.

The back half of the loft had square bales stacked nearly to the ceiling. The boys preferred playing on the front half, where the stacks were shorter and easier to climb on. The floor of the loft creaked as they walked across it and lay down on a row of hay. They gazed up at the thin shafts of sunlight that streamed through the cracks in the walls, highlighting the clouds of dust they had stirred up while playing.

“Now what do we do?” Weston asked.

Turner shrugged. “I wish Yui and Hector were here,” he said, referring to their two best friends from back home in Nashville. “Then we could play football.”

“I’d be Tom Brady,” Weston said, swinging his arm as if he were throwing a long touchdown pass.

“Let’s just play hide and seek,” Turner said, springing to his feet. “You’re it. Count to twenty.” He waited until Weston covered his eyes before he ran to hide.

Weston began to count. “One... two... three...”

Turner quietly climbed up the high stacks of square bales and crawled toward the back corner of the loft. He had never been allowed to venture this far back. In truth, he had always been too scared—it was really dark and dusty—but he knew from experience there weren’t many other good hiding spots in the barn.

“Nine... ten... eleven...”

Turner spotted a rectangular gap in the hay near the wall. It was the same size as the other bales and appeared to be just as deep, as if a stack of hay had been intentionally removed or left empty. It reminded him of Minecraft, where he would dig in the ground and create perfectly square holes.

He sat on the edge of the hay and dangled his legs into the hole. He couldn’t tell how far down it went, but if he could squeeze in then Weston would never be able to find him.

“Fifteen... sixteen... seventeen...”

Turner gripped the brittle twine binding of a hay bale and eased himself down into the hole. His sore, sweaty hands began to lose their grip. He tried to pull himself back up, but just as he got his head up to the edge the twine snapped, and he slipped down into the dark hole.

“Eighteen...” Weston stopped counting and opened his eyes after hearing a sharp cracking sound. “Turner? Are you okay?”

“Weston! I need help!” Turner said. His voice was muffled.

Weston followed Turner's voice, scurrying across the hay toward the hole. "Ohh, this would've been a really good hiding place," he said as he peered down at Turner.

"I know, but I accidentally fell in here," Turner said. "Now my feet are stuck in something."

"Can you reach my hand?" Weston asked.

Turner grabbed his brother's hand and tried to hoist himself up, but his legs wouldn't budge. "Hang on." He reached down and felt around his foot; there was a layer of rotten wood, which was probably why no hay had been stacked there. His feet had plunged through the top layer of flooring and were wedged between it and a bottom layer. He twisted his leg at an awkward angle and pulled it free, then did the same with the other leg. His foot kicked against something that tumbled around between the layers of flooring.

"What was that?" Weston asked.

"I don't know," Turner said, timidly. He eased his shaking hand inside the hole and felt around for whatever he'd kicked. "Ahh!" he screamed, and jerked his arm out of the hole.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Turner said, and let out a deep breath. "I think it was just a spider web." After working up his courage, he reached his hand into the hole again and felt along the other side. His fingertips grazed something solid, and he fought the urge to jerk his hand out again. He forced himself to grab the object and yank it out of the hole; it was square and it glittered in the low light. "Okay, I've got it. Help me out."

Weston grunted as he hauled Turner out of the hole. They sat on the edge and looked at what Turner had found.

"Whoa! Is that a Rubik's Cube?" Weston asked.

"I don't know." Turner rotated the cube in his hands. It was a puzzle cube that looked a lot like a Rubik's Cube, but it wasn't made of plastic; it was heavier, had a frame of tarnished silver, and instead of stickers for the colored sides it had sparkling gemstones inset in each of the silver pieces.

"Is it made out of glass?" Weston asked.

"I think those are gemstones," Turner said, brushing off the dust and cobwebs.

Light glinted off the gems. The boys had visited a mineral exhibit at a local science museum and knew that the red stones had to be rubies, the whites were diamonds, and the greens were probably emeralds, but they couldn't remember the names of the other colored gems.

"It looks expensive," Weston said.

Turner nodded. The cube's gems were scrambled, and he began working out the solution in his head. He tried to turn the sides, and found them all stiff from who knows how many years of sitting unused in a dusty hole.

"How did it even get here?" Weston looked around the loft as if he expected to see someone searching for a gemstone puzzle cube they'd accidentally left behind.

"I don't know, but it looks like it's been here for a long time," Turner said. He banged the cube against the palm of his hand to try and loosen up the pieces. Dust fell out from the cube's thin cracks, and the sides finally turned, tight at first, then they smoothed out. He began making the moves to solve the cube with the blue gemstones—were they sapphires?—as his top color.

R U R' U R U'.

As he neared the solution, the sides of the cube became harder to turn, but not because of dirt—it was rather like tightening a bottle cap onto a bottle, as if the core of the cube was pulling the gemstone pieces inward like a strong magnet.

R' U' R' F R.

"You've almost got it!"

Turner felt a strange tingle in his hands, and the hairs on his forearms rose up like soldiers standing at attention, like the time his dad had demonstrated static electricity by scrubbing a balloon on his hoodie and then holding it over his head, making his hair stand straight up.

“I can’t turn this last side,” Turner said, shaking his hand from where the cube’s edges had pressed into his skin. “I need your help. Here, hold the other side of it.”

Weston gripped the cube in his hands as firmly as he could while Turner rotated the final side. The gemstones aligned in a perfect pattern with a satisfying click. The boys felt a shock run up their fingers and arms. There was a bright flash of light and a thunderous clap as Turner and Weston vanished from the loft.

THREE

The Clock Tower



Turner blinked his eyes, but he couldn't see anything. Darkness was all around him. He thought maybe he'd fallen back into the hole in the hay, but instead he seemed to be suspended in space. He tried to call out to Weston, but he couldn't make a sound; a heavy force was pressing against his chest.

His body started to spin clockwise, as if he was sitting at the center of a massive merry-go-round. He realized the cube was no longer in his hand. Panicking, he blindly reached for the cube or Weston, but his arm was yanked up as he slid down a steep incline of small rocks and toppled out of a hole near the base of a concrete wall. Weston followed close behind, his foot striking Turner in the back of his head.

The boys skidded to a halt in the middle of a dark room; bits of charred cinder block and rocky debris littered the floor. Sections of the walls and ceiling had crumbled away, exposing the night sky. Moonlight leaked in through the cracks.

Weston bent over and spat out rocks and dust he'd gotten in his mouth during the fall. He attempted to wipe his tongue with the back of his dirty hand, but that made his situation worse.

"What just happened?" Turner asked, rubbing the back of his head.

"I don't know." Weston's tongue was dry, and the words came out garbled. He spat again and tried to work up saliva to rinse out his mouth. "Did we fall in that hole in the hay?"

"I was thinking the same thing, but now I don't know." Turner peered up at the pile of rocks they'd fallen down, trying to figure out where they were and how they'd gotten there. Near the top of the rock pile was an opening that could've once been a window or doorway, but was now just another gaping hole in the deteriorating wall.

The boys got to their feet and looked around in confusion. Turner approached a series of metal gears mounted to a wall. The structure looked like the inner workings of a big clock.

"Turner, you gotta see this," Weston said, peeking out through a large crack in the wall. "I don't think we're in Papaw's barn anymore."

Turner rushed over and looked through the crack. From their vantage point, it appeared they were on top of a building overlooking a small town. There were no lights on the horizon, and he could barely make out the roofs of buildings in the moonlight.

"What in the world is going on?" Turner stepped away from the wall in a daze. "We need to go back." He ran to the rock pile and tried to climb up, but wasn't able to get any traction; the bits of concrete crumbled underneath his grip, and he slid back down. "We can't get up this way." Panic crept into his voice.

“How *do* we get back?”

“I don’t know!” Turner said curtly. “I don’t even know how we got here in the first place!”

Weston scrunched his forehead in thought. “I remember holding that weird-looking Rubik’s Cube while you were solving it—”

“The cube! That’s it!” Turner said. “Could it have brought us here somehow?”

Weston shrugged. “I don’t know.” He looked around, but didn’t see the cube. “Where is it, anyways?”

“I was holding it, but I lost my grip. It’s gotta be around here somewhere.”

“It’s too dark to see.” Weston crouched in the dim room and ran his hand along the floor. The chipped edges of rock bit at his fingers, and he drew back his hand to check for cuts.

“I wish we had a flashlight,” Turner said, and kicked his foot through the mound of rocks at the base of the wall. Out of the corner of his eye he saw something gleam in the moonlight. “Oh, here it is!” He plunged his hand into the rubble and grabbed the twinkling object.

“Did you find it?”

“Uh oh.” Turner held up a single red ruby. “It’s just one piece. The cube must have broken apart.”

Weston came over for a closer look. “Maybe the other pieces are here, too.”

The boys scavenged the area for the remaining pieces, lining them up on the floor by color. The last thing they found was the cube’s metal core. A thin crack ran between two of the axes. Turner put pressure on them, and the crack opened wider as the core flexed. He guessed that was why the gemstone pieces had fallen off. When he tried to reattach the pieces, they wouldn’t snap into place.

“This is disappointing,” Turner said. “The pieces just keep falling off.”

“What do we do now?”

“If the cube really did bring us here, then we need to figure out how to fix it so we can get back home.” He gathered up the gemstones and began to cram them into his pockets.

“Hey! I want to hold some of the pieces!” Weston said in a huff.

“Okay, fine. Here, you take the core. I’ll carry the gemstones.”

Weston stuck the core into his pocket and followed Turner back to the wall.

“I think we can crawl through here,” Turner said. He ducked his head and slowly inched his way through the narrow opening and emerged onto the building’s rooftop. The night air was warm and muggy. He looked up and saw a giant clock on the face of the wall he’d just crawled through. “I think this is a clock tower. Come on, I’ll help you through.”

Weston grabbed Turner’s hand and squeezed through the crack. The boys walked toward the edge of the rooftop and looked out over a small town square. In the moonlight, it seemed like the town had experienced some sort of disaster. The shops that bordered the square had damaged storefronts, with shattered windows and gaping holes in the walls.

Turner saw something he recognized: a large sign with OLDHAM in tall red letters. He knew it as the movie theater marquee in his grandpa’s hometown of Winchester. He’d only ever seen it when its neon lights were shining brightly above the twinkling bulbs that surrounded the title of the feature film. But now the sign was dark and hung askew on the wall; broken glass from the lightbulbs of the marquee were scattered at the theater’s entrance.

“We’re in Winchester!” Turner said, and then realized they were standing on the roof of the courthouse building in the middle of the town square. “It looks like something bad happened here, though.”

Weston nodded and peeked over the edge of the building. “Whoa! We’re really high up!”

“It’s not that high,” Turner said, trying not to sound nervous. “Come on, let’s see if we can find a way down.”

They walked along the rooftop toward the other side of the building. Weston continued to peek over the edge while Turner studied the square-stepped clock tower that rose up from the

center of the roof. It had been ravaged, as if something large had plowed into it. There were clock faces on the remaining sides, but none of the hands were moving. He wished he'd brought his iPhone so he could at least know the time.

As they rounded the corner, Turner spotted a door on the side of the tower. He stepped toward it, and two small lights flickered on in the shadows; they looked eerily like glowing eyes. He froze in place.

"Wait, there are lights over there," Turner said, but as soon as Weston looked where Turner was pointing the lights went off.

For the first time, they wondered if they might be somewhere they shouldn't be.

"Are we going to get in trouble if someone finds us up here?" Weston asked.

"No... at least, I don't think so," Turner said. "It's not like we came up here on purpose." He took a step forward, and the lights flickered on again. This reminded him of the motion detector in his parents' house. He would often creep as slow as he could to try and sneak past it before the sensor detected his movement and the indicator light turned on. Weston was never good at sneaking; moving slowly made him impatient.

"Weston, stop! I think something's watching us!" Turner said.

Weston tried to tiptoe, but his movements became even more elaborate than when he walked normally. The lights turned red and flashed rapidly. A high-pitched alarm filled the night air. Turner's hands flew to his ears to muffle the sound. He looked over at Weston, who had his arms crossed over his head to cover his ears and was spinning in frantic circles.

The lights moved forward and emerged from the shadows of the wall. Turner saw that the lights were indeed eyes—eyes that belonged to a tall robot. Turner stepped backward. What was a robot doing on top of the courthouse? Was it making the alarm sound? He tried calling out to Weston, but he could barely hear his own voice over the alarm.

The robot walked on two legs, moving as fluidly as a human. A green light blinked on the side of its dome-shaped head. It held out its hand, and thin sections of metal extended out of its forearm and fanned around its wrist, joining together and forming a shield that looked similar to Captain America's, but without the patriotic paint job. A sword flipped out of the robot's other forearm and latched to its hand.

Weston collapsed to the ground and tucked his forehead between his knees. Turner saw a red spot on Weston's head that looked like a beam from a laser, then saw one on his own chest. The robot had targeted them and was approaching.

Turner shrank down next to his brother, his whole body trembling. He wondered if the robot was responsible for all the damage and destruction they'd seen. If so, what would it do to them? Should they run? Where would they go? Could they even outrun it?

This wasn't the Winchester he knew. Something had gone wrong. He had never been so confused or felt so far from home.

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