

Chapter 2: The geometry of fear

Julmargo: The Truth of the Three

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Most people think darkness is empty—a simple lack of information. To me, darkness is... loud. When the lights went out in our tenement building, I didn't see blackness. I saw structure.

My vision doesn't work like everyone else's. I don't see colors when I focus on the "code." Instead, I see force vectors, tension lines, and thermal signatures. I saw the walls of our apartment, which had always seemed so solid, suddenly dissolve into a map of weak points and stress fractures. I saw heat escaping through the leaky window frames and—most importantly—I saw them.

"Don't move," I whispered, though my own voice sounded like cracking glass in my ears.

Five red pulses throbbed in the hallway. They weren't eyes; they were the thermal signatures of their bodies. I could see their hearts beating in a steady, almost mechanical rhythm. Seventeen-

year-old Julka stood right behind me; I could smell her jasmine perfume mixed with the sharp scent of fear, which radiated off her like an infrasonic wave. Gogo, our twelve-year-old "little tank," stood in front of us. In my eyes, Ignacy wasn't just a boy anymore. He was a cluster of incredibly dense matter. His body glowed white in my vision, a brilliance of kinetic energy so intense I had to squint.

"Gogo, left flank, thirty degrees!" I shouted, seeing one of the attackers raise a device that pulsed a sickly purple in my structural view.

The roar of Gogo's strike was thunderous. I saw the shockwave ripple out from his fist, forming perfect concentric circles in the compressed air. This wasn't magic. It was physics—just a version they don't teach at the school on Sienkiewicza Street. The attacker was literally knocked out of his boots, his tactical armor shattering at the exact "critical point" my sight had identified.

"Marcel, where are Mom and Dad?!" Julix's voice trembled, but it carried that natural authority she always had.

I shifted my gaze toward the bedroom. I saw our parents. Dad was holding a small, metallic object—a black rectangular prism that had no structure in my vision. It was a black hole in a world of code. Something my sight couldn't "hack."

"They're in the bedroom, but..." I trailed off. "Julka, you have to stun them. The stairs are full. I can see the vibrations in the stairwell. More are coming. Twenty of them. They have heavy gear."

"I can't control it, Marmar!" Julix hissed. "I'm already terrified of what I did to those mirrors!"

"Focus on your throat," I said quickly, instantly analyzing the acoustics of our hallway. I saw how the sound waves would bounce off the curve of the ceiling. "If you emit a sound at the right frequency, their targeting systems will go haywire. Just... imagine you're slicing the air with a razor."

Then it happened. Julka didn't scream. She released a sound that was almost inaudible—a high, piercing screech that made the fillings in my teeth vibrate. In my eyes, the world exploded into a thousand white lines. The attackers' electronics began to sizzle. I saw their night-vision goggles burst in small showers of sparks.

"Now!" Julix cried, grabbing my arm.

We scrambled into the bedroom. Our parents stood by the open window leading to the balcony. Rain began to lash inside, soaking the rug. Dad handed me the black cube.

"Marcel, only you can read this. Not now, not here," Dad said, his gaze unnervingly calm—which terrified me more than the Eterna Corp agents. "This is the key to who you are. To the Triad."

"Dad, come with us!" Gogo grabbed Dad's hand... too hard. Ignacy couldn't control his strength in the heat of the moment.

"We'll hold them back," Mom said, kissing Julka on the forehead. "Go across the roofs. Marcel, do you see the technical bridge over the seventh courtyard? The one connecting our building to the office block?"

I looked through the wall. I saw it. Rusty steel, hidden under a layer of old roofing felt. Invisible to a normal person in the dead of night, but to me, it glowed as a safe path.

"I see it," I whispered.

"Lead them," Dad pushed us toward the balcony. "Find the Safe House. Marmar, the key in the cube will show you the way once you're safe. We love you."

"No!" Julka wanted to stay, but at that moment, the bedroom door flew off its hinges.

Gogo reacted first. He grabbed Julka and me as if we were sacks of

flour. I felt the air around us thicken, forming something like a pressurized bubble. He jumped.

It wasn't a fall. It was a controlled flight. Gogo slammed into the balcony railing of the neighboring building, bending the metal like a paperclip, and then he kept running—horizontally, along the side of the stone wall, using the incredible friction his feet generated.

"Put me down, kid, I can run on my own!" Julka yelled as Gogo set us down on the slick, wet roof.

I looked back. Our apartment was burning with a strange, blue fire. But it wasn't a normal blaze. I saw the structure of my old room—my books, my model kits—disintegrating into elementary particles.

"Mom and Dad..." Gogo began, his hardened skin suddenly starting to tremble. He was just a twelve-year-old boy again, on the verge of tears.

"There's no time," I said, clenching my fingers around the black cube. I felt the device pulsing in time with my own heart. "I see their drones. They're flying in from the Oder River. If we stay here one more minute, they'll lock onto our heat signatures."

Julka straightened up. She wiped her rain-soaked eyes and looked

at us. In that moment, she stopped being our sister who argues about borrowed shoes. She became something else. A leader.

"Marcel, lead the way," she commanded. "Gogo, if anything gets within a meter of us, hit it so hard it lands in Warsaw. Let's go."

We sprinted across the rooftops of Wrocław. I saw the path, Gogo cleared the way by forcing open locked hatches, and Julka... Julka hummed a strange, low melody that made us almost invisible to the city cameras. The sound she emitted drowned out our footsteps and blurred our silhouettes in the lenses of the surveillance network.

We didn't know then that this night was only the beginning.

Somewhere behind us, in the darkness, I heard a mechanical voice amplified by speakers:

"Subjects 1, 2, and 3 located. Initiate recovery protocol!"