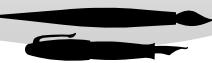


# GORDON KORMAN

## THE DRAGONFLY EFFECT

**BOOK THREE OF THE HYPNOTISTS**



SCHOLASTIC PRESS / NEW YORK



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Library of Congress Control Number: 2014957877

ISBN 978-0-545-50336-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1    15 16 17 18 19

Printed in the U.S.A.   23  
First edition, August 2015

Book design by Nina Goffi

# 1

The M1 tank rumbled across the Oklahoma countryside, its long gun sweeping back and forth on the rotating turret. The commander's eyes never left the screen. He had it on the highest authority — post rumor — that a lot of top officers would be watching this training exercise. The three members of the tank crew knew they had to be ready for anything.

The commander scanned the image of flat land and scrub brush, expecting the unexpected. When it happened, though, he was still caught completely off guard.

The tank's driver spotted it, too.

"Is that a *kid*?" he asked in disbelief.

The commander stared. The figure that had stepped out from behind a tree and was walking toward them at a leisurely pace looked like he had just gotten off a school bus. He was probably around twelve or thirteen, tall for his age and slender, with light brown hair. He was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt.

The commander was astounded. Was this some kind of trick? Were the generals throwing him a curveball to see how he'd react to a middle-school kid strolling out in front of a speeding tank?

“Stop!” the commander barked to the driver. “You’re going to run him down. Stop!”

The corporal was already braking. The M1 rolled to a halt, and the kid stood before it in the shadow of the long gun.

The commander scrambled up the ladder to the hatch. “Be ready to get us out of here on my word!” he tossed down to his crew.

He popped the top and emerged, staring at the slight figure dwarfed by tons of military armor.

The kid took something out from behind his back. A weapon? No, it was a small electric megaphone. He brought it to his lips and spoke four words:

*“Look into my eyes . . .”*

The commander did. And what amazing eyes they were — large and luminous, a pale green that changed to blue, then darkened through indigo to a deep violet.

*“You are very calm now . . . very relaxed . . .”*

The commander was amazed to find that he *was* calm. In fact, he couldn’t recall having ever felt quite so tranquil. He was still aware that he was in the middle of a major exercise, but that didn’t seem so important anymore.

The boy spoke through the megaphone again. “Now you will order your crew to unload all your ammunition. Toss it on the grass beside the tank.”

By the time the Humvee roared up, heavy tank shells were scattered like ten pins on the grass all around the M1.

An irate military officer jumped out of the Humvee. His name was Colonel Roderick Brassmeyer, and he was

the director of the army's Hypnotic Warfare Research Department, also known as HoWaRD.

Brassmeyer was crimson with rage. "What's going on here?"

Twelve-year-old Jackson Opus faced down the colonel's anger, but kept his eyes averted. "I disarmed the tank."

"You weren't supposed to disarm the tank!" Brassmeyer roared. "Your orders were to instruct the commander to fire on Building F!"

"I decided this was safer," Jax explained.

"You don't decide! *I* decide! You follow orders!"

"Yeah, but what if there's somebody in there?" asked Jax.

"There's nobody in there! It's a target! You've ruined the whole maneuver!" He looked up at the tank commander, who had resumed his place atop the turret. "Lieutenant, restore this ordnance!"

The tank commander wouldn't even glance in Brassmeyer's direction. His eyes remained on Jax.

"Oh, sorry, I haven't broken the mesmeric link yet." Jax turned to the commander. "When I snap my fingers, you'll awake feeling refreshed and happy —"

"Not too happy," the colonel interjected in an irritated tone.

"— and you'll do everything Colonel Brassmeyer tells you to do."

"You don't need that last part," Brassmeyer growled. "He's a soldier. *He* knows how to follow orders."

Jax snapped. The commander seemed startled for an instant, then saluted his superior officer.

“Sir!” he called out. Spying the scattered ammunition, he added, “Uh — what just happened, sir?”

The colonel swallowed an angry retort and softened. “Don’t worry about it. You were just following orders — which is more than I can say for this young civilian here.”

Brassmeyer had been in the US Army for thirty-five years. He’d seen action on three different continents, and had trained with every conceivable piece of equipment. But *this* weapons system — the one he was now in charge of developing — had to be the most bizarre.

Hypnotism.