

# Epilogue

He sat there, reading. The sun was warm and the beach was beautiful. Through the waving of the palm trees he occasionally felt a burst of sunlight on his legs, his torso and head being completely in shade. This was just what he needed. He picked up the drink from his side and sipped it slowly. It wasn't alcoholic, just cool, refreshing his senses and filling him with a feeling of relaxation.

The man hadn't taken a holiday in years, previous events had meant he just couldn't afford it. Now, finally he was able to give his family something they had desperately needed; a nice

long vacation, somewhere hot, sunny, and relaxing.

Over in the water two teenagers were splashing each other. The young boy ran towards the the girl, hands cupped into the water, spraying her as he did so. She screamed in delight. 'They were having way too much fun,' he thought. His train of thought was broken by a voice to his left.

“So, did it turn out how you expected?” The author of the words was a woman in her early forties. In her youth she had been ferociously beautiful and now? 'Time hadn't stolen anything from her', thought Oken as he looked at his wife. Jay smiled.

“I guess so,” said Oken. “Truth is, this part was never in the plan.” He smiled back. “I'm just glad it turned out how it did, never mind what was intended to happen.” He had realised there had been no point in trying to shape the future to be a carbon copy of what he had been told, or even to try to carve specific aspects. Things would happen how they happened. Ruben of course would have argued differently, and often

did. 'God has a plan for all of us' was his favourite saying. It wasn't that Oken didn't agree, he just wasn't ready to give up full control of his life just yet.

The teenagers continued playing in the beautifully clear water in front of him. The girl had managed to get the boy into a head lock and was now busy dunking his face into the water, amidst much splashing and shouting from her victim. Oken laughed and pointed to the quarrelling pair. They seemed to get along so well.

"Way to go Kiele," he shouted, his hands amplifying his voice. Her likeness to the girl he had seen only briefly so many years ago was uncanny. One in a million chance. Perhaps not chance, Ruben wouldn't have called it chance. It was as if that face, that beautiful girl, was meant to be on this planet, no matter what the events the time-frame threw in her way. 'Maybe that's how it really worked,' thought Oken, 'some people are just destined to be here.'

Even more uncanny was the name of the young boy. He lifted his head from the water and started objecting. He yelled back across to Oken “Why do you always have to take her side Mr Brown?” The man smiled. Zane Krecer, who really was a carbon copy of the boy who had changed his future was standing, or rather half drowning in front of him. The two teenagers had met at school and had instantly fallen in inexplicable love. Oken shook his head. He still couldn't quite believe it, but it seemed God really wanted those two to be together. Had it really been God who had changed the past? Had his influence changed everything? In his mind, the face of Ruben nodded emphatically.

He picked up the book and read a few more lines of the story. He had never been one for fiction, a flight of fancy, he preferred to call it. He saw little point in indulging oneself into an alternative reality for such a short period of time. No, if Oken wanted to read, it had to be an entire series of books, something to really get his teeth in to.

The cover of the book was worn, where it had been read multiple times. Shortly after their marriage, Jay had given Oken a set of books as a gift. She had said that she hoped they would change his life forever. They had. He had become more assertive thought reading the tale, and they had become closer.

Oken had told her everything about the past, the future, the present. Everything. It had been difficult and to this day, he was still unsure whether she treated it as truth, or fiction. He knew the truth. It was his legacy. She had told him to write it all down, one day it would make a fascinating story for the kids. He had obliged, albeit reluctantly.

The two teenagers were now running up to him. The boy first, followed by the girl. She threw her body forward and rugby tackled him, landing inches from Oken's chair and spraying him and his drink with sand. He glared at the boy with eyes of fire.

“Why is it always my fault?” Zane screamed, smiling. It was a running joke between the pair.

Everything that happened was his fault, never the good, always the bad. He was happy though. He had found someone wonderful, someone that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. Oken could see that in his eyes. The pair were truly perfectly matched, much like he and Jay.

“Because you're always the one doing stupid things,” Oken said. It wasn't meant as a malicious comment, and the tone of his voice echoed the sentiment.

Kiele nodded, “He does have a point Zane.” The young boy screwed up his face in disgust and his girlfriend released him from her grip. He got up and dusted himself off, showering Oken and Jay with yet more sand.

“Are you trying to be annoying?” he asked the boy in jest.

“No dad, it just comes naturally to him.”

They all laughed and Oken realised how good it felt to be called Dad. Kiele had been a blessing, and not even in disguise. She had changed the once harsh figure of a man, into a loving father. His life with Jay had been perfect. He had

returned to university, but this time to teach, his course on temporal mechanics being one of the most popular in the construct.

In the absence of Oken's attack at the Zone, the government hadn't reacted in the same vain. The G-TEP still existed, and were more ruthless than ever, but overall life was beginning to get better for everyone.

"I'm just going to get a drink," said Jay, "anyone else want one?"

"I'll come with you," said Kiele, and the pair walked off towards the resorts bar. The beach was beautiful and the ability to just pop twenty metres away for a nice cool drink was a definite advantage.

"I'll have another," said Oken, lifting the sand filled glass, "As mine seems to have suffered some kind of accident." He looked at the boy who cowered away. He chuckled again. "Lighten up kid."

Zane's face changed. He looked down at Oken and made a face as if he was eating a toffee, a particularly sticky toffee at that. He was

looking for words, but found none. Eventually he settled for the simplest option.

“Mr. Brown can we talk?” Suddenly Oken's face changed too, to one of concern, one of a serious nature.

“Sure kid.”

“Mind if we walk and talk?” Oken smiled and got up out of his chair. He placed his hands in his pockets and began to walk off in the direction that Zane was already taking.

The two of them walked in silence for at least ten metres before Zane stopped. The sun was past its highest point now and had begun its lonely descent across the sky. The shadows were taugt and the hue a subtle red. Zane looked at the man who he already felt was like a father to him. His real parents were still alive, and though they loved him greatly, they had been far too preoccupied with his little brother lately. Zane understood. He was only twelve, and needed far much more looking after than he ever did.

“Mr. Brown,” he started. Oken held up his hand.

He spoke in a slow but caring way, "Please, Oken. Call me Oken."

"Oken," the boy started again, "You know I love your daughter very much." The man nodded. "And, well, I kinda feel like I want to spend the rest of my life with her. You know what I mean?"

Oken's expression changed once more. A Frisbee flew between the pair, narrowly missing Oken's face. He looked across to see if his daughter had been the culprit. He looked at her sarcastically, before returning to the boy.

"Only kinda feel?" he asked.

"OK," said Zane, "I totally feel it." He paused, looking down at his shoes. "Man this is so much harder than it ought to be."

The wise man spoke once more, "Just go for it kid." He already had an inkling of what the boy was going to ask. Zane and Kiele had been dating for years, and the time seemed to be approaching for them to want to branch off on their own.

"I was hoping that you may possibly consider consenting at the request of mine to perhaps take

your daughter's hand in marriage.” The sentence was long and the boy had paused several times throughout. Oken looked thoughtful. He turned back at the boy. He knew how much he loved Kiele, and he also knew how much his alter ego had been through. It wasn't even an alter ego, more of a shadow of the boy standing before him.

“Zane,” said Oken frankly, “You'd do anything for her wouldn't you?”

The boy nodded. “I'd die protecting her, you know I would.” The man nodded slowly, breathing in deeply as he did so.

“I know you would son,” he said. He put his arm round the boy and looked out over the ocean, the sun was bright and it almost burnt his eyes. He squinted. “I know what you're capable of and, I have to say, I can think of no one better to protect my daughter than you.”

Zane looked at Oken talking as he finished his sentence. Sometimes the boy found it impossible to comprehend how genuine this man really was. He couldn't quite believe his response. Though he had been hoping, and praying, that Mr. Brown

would say yes, he still didn't quite believe it. It was going to take a final confirmation.

“Is that a yes?” he asked slowly and cautiously.

“No,” said Oken, “It's not just a yes, it's an irrevocable yes. I wish you two all the happiness in the world.” The boy, tears in his eyes hugged the big man. “Knock it off,” he said, “Go do it already.”

Zane looked up at him, slightly confused.

“If this isn't the perfect place and time to ask a woman to marry you, then I don't know what is.” The boy smiled and felt around inside his pocket for something. He suddenly became frantic and Oken lifted a small object from his pocket and placed it in Zane's free hand. “I guess you're looking for this,” he said.

The ring box had fallen out when he had been tackled earlier, and Oken had been quick to disguise it. He had known Zane was planning to give her a ring, marriage was predictable. The kid smiled. “Thanks,” he said.

Oken turned and walked away, with Zane staying behind. When he reached Kiele, she asked him, "And what were you two talking about?" Oken sat in his chair and sipped his new drink.

"I think that's something you'd better ask your boyfriend about." he said dryly. Kiele poked out her tongue at her father and walked off in the direction of Zane. Jay, now lying down again on the reclined chair looked across at her husband, shielding her eyes from the light.

"So what were you talking about?" she asked.

Oken looked at the boy who was now knelt down on one knee. He tapped his wife on the shoulder and pointed at the pair. "Say hello to our new son-in-law to be," he said.

Jay cooed happily at the proposal taking place. Kiele suddenly flipped out and flung her arms around Zane's neck before kissing him, almost knocking him over.

"Remember when we were like that?" she asked.

A voice came from behind them. "Whatd'ya mean when," it said gruffly. It was Ruben. He threw a book down onto Oken's stomach. "I read it," he said.

"And?" asked Oken.

"Yah, it was OK," he said, "thought of a name yet?"

"I was thinking Emblem Divide," said Oken.

Ruben nodded slowly before crouching down between the couple. "It's OK I guess," he said. The young pair at the waters edge were still locked in embrace. "Forgive me for being a little bit of a killjoy, but aren't those two acting even worse than usual?"

"That's because they're now engaged."

Ruben slapped Oken on the arm. "Congrats my man."

Oken nodded.

"Oh by the way Okie," he said, "You gotta change the end line. It really stank."

"Whatd'ya mean?" said Oken. "I thought it was really good."

“Yeh right,” said his friend, “And then he woke up and realised it had all been a dream.”

Published by Peter Savage

4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3

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First published in Great Britain in 2009 by  
Peter Savage

Proofread by Lisa Savage & Damien Chavarria  
Logo Design by Damien Chavarria  
Front Cover by Peter Savage & Lisa Savage

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