

JIGSAW PRELUDE



DAVID ALYN GORDON


JIGSAW: PRELUDE

DAVID GORDON

Copyright © 2021 by David Gordon

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

 Created with Vellum

October 2, 1943

Kleine Schanze Park
Bern, Switzerland

Garth sat on a park bench, thinking it was too fucking cold and early for this shit. His appointment was late, so he fed the pigeons again. His partners Ruben and Luchese strolled the park, keeping an eye on things. Garth envied their heavy clothing and hot coffee.

Eventually, Fairchild entered the park and strode toward him. He wore a dark black business suit and had the aura of a snob. He nodded to Ruben as he passed. Ruben smiled, thinking, *What a schmuck.*

“I’m sorry,” Fairchild said. “I’m a few minutes late.”

“Why aren’t we meeting at the consulate?” Garth asked. “I’m freezing my balls off out here.”

“Because this meeting is not officially happening,” Fairchild said, and took a seat beside him.

“We’re spies,” Garth said. “None of our meetings are official.”

“We heard about what your team did in Italy last month,” Fairchild said. “Good job.”

“Thank you. Now tell me what you want.”

“We want you to go back to Voltri.”

“Why?” Garth asked.

“The special assistant to the ambassador had a visit from a reliable source. Who says Mussolini is attempting to assemble a science team in Italy that would develop some sort of secret weapon code-named Corvo.”

“Corvo means Crow or Raven,” Garth mused. “A secret weapon that has to do with aircraft?”

“Maybe,” Fairchild said. “Apparently, they’re setting up shop in Voltri, and the project is under the direct supervision of Mussolini. The source says there’s a good chance the Duce and maybe even Hitler will inspect the project when it’s done.”

“And you want us to deal with them,” Garth said.

“Precisely.”

“Is your source in the German Abwehr?”

“I don’t know,” Fairchild told him. “The special assistant didn’t give me all the details.”

“Let me fill in the blanks,” Garth said. “Sounds like the special assistant, who always liked Fascists, and his friends want to bring Germany into the western camp. Am I right?”

“I can’t say.”

“Right,” Garth said. “You want all those German soldiers and their military hardware fighting with the Allies against Communist Russia.”

“Well the Russians are starting to make some progress in the East,” Fairchild noted.

“The drawbacks of giving the Soviets all that Lend-Lease weaponry.”

“Quite,” Fairchild said. “We don’t want them moving too far west. This is an opportunity to get rid of Hitler and Stalin in the same year.”

“And the Duce?”

“Him too. Churchill feels we can have a Fascist-friendly government in Italy without him, before the left-wing partisans in the North grow too strong.”

“When do we leave?” Garth asked.

“As soon as possible. We’ll have no further contact with you from this point forward.”

“I understand.”

“We all wish you luck,” Fairchild said.

“Thank you.” He went back to feeding the pigeons as Fairchild walked off.

Ruben and Luchese went over to join Garth. “That Fairchild is such an ass,” he said.

“They all are,” Garth replied.

“I’ve lived over six thousand years,” Luchese said. “And I’ve always been struck that no matter what civilization I’ve lived in, there is always the annoying by the book bureaucrat.”

“Shit,” Garth said, “I’m 43 and not a Nephilim like you Luchese and I’m just as annoyed. I like how he couldn’t give me Dulles’ name. He kept calling him the special assistant. Even the fucking street cleaners here know Allen Dulles is the special assistant to the American ambassador.”

“How’d the meeting go?” Ruben asked.

“Like clockwork,” Garth replied. “They just gave us Operation Corvo.”

“So, Project Jigsaw begins?” Luchese asked.

“Yep,” Garth said. “Let’s get rolling and inform the others.”

Garth tossed the rest of his breadcrumbs to the pigeons and walked with Ruben to a secluded area of the park. “Do you see anyone?” Garth asked.

“No,” Ruben replied.

“Let’s do it,” Garth said.

Ruben took a device from his pocket and pressed a button—and the three men vanished.



October 3, 1943

Italian Social Republic Headquarters
Salo, Italy (near Lake Garda)

Lorenzo could hardly believe that he was standing in the office of “the Duce” himself: Benito Mussolini. He’d been summoned here to meet with Mussolini and felt nervous as he waited. He couldn’t help but wonder whether he and the Duce’s other supporters were just Nazi stooges now. Perhaps it would have been better to throw in their lot with Badoglio and the King’s supporters. At least they weren’t aligned with the Nazis.

He reminded himself that he was a committed Fascist. The Allies had deceived the Italians after the Great War, and it was Mussolini who sought to restore Italy to her former greatness. Lorenzo’s father had often complained about Italy’s sacrifices during the conflict, and her scant rewards in the aftermath. He was a devout follower of Mussolini and instilled that devotion in his son. Lorenzo remained loyal to the Duce, though the occasional doubt crept in.

The alliance with Germany, for example, had drawn Italy and the Duce into trouble. Mussolini was so impressed by the German Blitzkrieg across Western Europe that he felt an alliance was the only way to realize his dream of a New Rome, with Italy at its center. But things hadn’t worked out well for Italy; three years later, the war raged on, and the country was divided among German and Allied powers.

Lorenzo felt that Italy should have stayed neutral, like Franco. That way, the government could have waited until the military was ready. The Duce hoped his latest idea would make Italy a major player in the war, putting her on an even basis with Germany, and convincing Franco’s Spain

to join the Axis. But what if it didn't? What if that was a delusion? Personally, Lorenzo thought the "New Rome" dream was finished. Probably.

Those who found themselves in the new Italian Social Republic had to think of saving Italy and her people from the Germans. Because if they couldn't do that, there could be no hope of preserving an independent Italy.

The door opened and Mussolini strode in, flanked by two men wearing Italian Black Brigade uniforms. "Welcome, Professor Lorenzo," Mussolini said. He smiled and shook Lorenzo's hand.

"It is good to see you again, Duce," Lorenzo replied.

He was taken aback by Mussolini's appearance. The Duce's vitality was gone. The strength and force of will that had catapulted him to power twenty years ago now seemed a shadow of its former self. The man was almost a caricature of what he had once been. This operation he wanted to resurrect was one of the few things that kept Mussolini enthusiastic about a possible shift in the war and the hopes that he could still save his dreams of a New Rome.

"Allow me to present two of my aides Professor," the Duce continued. "Major Angelo and Colonel Merretti. You'll be seeing a lot of them over the next few months."

Lorenzo focused his attention on the Black Brigade officers. They looked like true believers. Angelo was the more imposing of the two, even with a patch covering one eye.

"Would you like a drink, Professor?" Mussolini asked.

"No thank you, Duce."

"Well come with us into the garden then," Mussolini said. "It will be more pleasant breathing the fresh autumn air."

"Yes sir."

The four men walked out into the garden. The Duce led the conversation. "The events of the last several months were a test of our countrymen's commitment to Fascism, and our endurance in this war. Thanks to this test, we were able to separate the cowards and vacillators from the true men of strength. These cowards, including people close to me, will be dealt with. Make no mistake. Fascism is destined to win this battle, and our country has a great and decisive role to play. That's why I brought you here. I want you and your old science and engineering team to resume the development of Operation Corvo."

“Duce,” Lorenzo said. “I very much want to resume Operation Corvo but we need the expertise of the Zionists who were part of the team. I need Saberstein and Klein.”

“We anticipated your need,” Mussolini said, and looked to Angelo.

“Professor,” Angelo said, “you can start constructing your facilities with whatever Italian team members you feel appropriate. I will find your Jewish scientists.”

“Think of it, Lorenzo,” Mussolini said. “With Operation Corvo, Italy can once again set itself among the great powers of the world. We can create our own sphere, surrounding our Mediterranean Lake—the dream we started in 1922.”

“That would be wonderful, Duce,” Lorenzo replied. “Assuming Major Angelo locates Saberstein and Klein, how do we convince them to cooperate?”

“This is a chance to chart new beginnings,” Mussolini said. “There’s still a place for a Fascist Jewish State in my empire, like the one we planned with Jabotinsky in the 1930s. The Germans can be persuaded, if this project is successful. Remember, before the war, elements of the SS supported Zionism to promote Jewish emigration from Europe and the Soviet Union. Offer them that.”

“That could work,” Lorenzo said. “But what if they don’t believe your offer is sincere?”

“There are other tools of persuasion,” Angelo noted.

“Quite right, Major,” Mussolini agreed. He glanced around, then said, “Show him what you mean.”

Angelo drew a silenced pistol and shot Merretti between the eyes. Lorenzo watched the body fall the ground.

The Duce smiled. “Do you think that would persuade your scientists to cooperate, Professor?”

“Probably,” Lorenzo gasped. “Was he a Partisan informant?”

“No,” Angelo replied. “He worked for the Germans.”

“Can’t have our benefactors knowing more than we want them to,” Mussolini added. “We’ll say the Partisans did it. Isn’t that right, Colonel Angelo.”

“Yes and thank you for the promotion sir.”

Mussolini turned to Lorenzo. “You and your team will have whatever resources you require, Professor. If this works, all our dreams will be

fulfilled.”

“Of course,” Lorenzo said. “Where do we set up the new facilities?”

“Voltri,” Angelo replied. “It’s isolated enough and should satisfy your needs.”

“I know the town,” Lorenzo said. “Not far from Genoa. When do we go?”

“Three days,” Angelo replied. “That should give you time to gather your team: Spada, Sforza, and the D’Ambrosios. They’re not hiding like the Jewish ones.”

“Good,” Mussolini said. “Professor, I have a driver waiting for you.”

“Thank you, Duce,” Lorenzo replied.

After Lorenzo left, the Duce and Colonel Angelo walked on. “See to that traitors’ body,” said the Duce. “And give the Germans some scapegoats to execute.”

“Yes, Duce.”

“Do you have what you need to find the Jews?”

“I believe so. I’ll send a request should I need more resources.”

“Good. I want daily progress reports on all fronts. Do whatever is necessary.”

“Understood. To be clear—that includes threatening to send them to concentration camps.”

“They’re no good to us if we send them to the camps,” Mussolini replied. “Start by threatening their children. That almost always works. But if it doesn’t, kill their family members one at a time, until they are properly motivated.”

“Very well.”

“This must succeed, Colonel. I don’t want to be a German lackey the rest of my life.”

“I understand. We’ll get it done.”

“Then I’ll let you get started. If you’re pardon me, I have to arrest and execute my son-in-law.”



October 7, 1943

The Ville Brignole Sale

Voltri, Italy

Trucks and equipment from Ansaldo Engineering drove to and from the Ville Brignole Sale for twelve hours straight. The grounds had been cordoned off to keep the locals away, and Black Brigade guards patrolled the grounds.

Lavonia and Elisabetta watched from a nearby hill, using binoculars. Both wore carnival masks, and clothes whose color blended with the forest. They could hear the rumble of heavy machinery but could not see past the barriers. “What are they building down there?” Lavonia asked.

“I can’t tell,” Elisabetta replied. “Maybe we can get some cell members to infiltrate the Ansaldo work crews.”

“I doubt it,” Lavonia said. “They’re not going to put new people on a new project.”

“You’re probably right,” Elisabetta said. “But Giotto won’t let us just blow it up.”

“I share your enthusiasm for blowing up Fascists,” Lavonia said. “But the Allies want us to find out as much as possible before deciding on the next step.”

“We’ve seen all we’re going to see from here,” Elisabetta said. “Let’s get back.”

The women backed away from the hilltop and started for resistance cell headquarters. Moments later, two Black Brigade soldiers—a corporal and a private—stepped out from cover.

“What were you two doing?” the Corporal demanded.

“We were just walking around,” Elisabetta told him.

“We saw you spying on the Villa,” the private said.

“We were curious,” Lavonia said. “We wanted to see what all those strong men were doing.”

“Wearing masks?” the corporal asked.

“It’s cold out here,” Elisabetta replied.

The soldiers exchanged glances and laughed. “This one’s funny,” said the corporal. Then he looked to the women. “Put your hands behind your backs. You’re under arrest and coming with us.”

“Please don’t, Corporal,” Elisabetta said, stepping closer. “I’m sure we can come to some other arrangement.”

The corporal hesitated, and looked to the private, who nodded. "Take off your masks," the corporal ordered. "I'd like to see who I'm making arrangements with."

"Of course," Elisabetta said, and they removed their masks. "Do we have an arrangement?"

The corporal stroked Elisabetta's hair, then pulled her close and kissed her. Then he saw the hate in her eyes. "I don't think so," he said.

"That's too bad," Elisabetta told him, and kicked him in the groin. The Private raised his rifle and fired, but Elisabetta pulled the corporal in front of her. She went out of the line of fire and the Corporal took the bullet. Before the private could recover from the shock of what he had done, Lavonia broke his neck with a head-twist, killing him instantly.

"Quick," Elisabetta said. "Take their weapons and radio and let's get the hell out of here." She and Lavonia collected the weapons and radio and fled into the woods.

"What about the bodies?" Lavonia asked as they ran.

"There's no time for that," Elisabetta said. "We'll ask Giotto if it's safe to come back and dispose of them."



July 3, 2017 8:30 p.m.
Renaissance Academy
Tempe, Arizona

A month after high-school graduation, teachers, parents, students, the principal and school staff wrapped up a *bon voyage* briefing-slash-party. Two days later, on July fifth, selected graduates would begin a two-week trip to Italy.

"Heh," Connor said. "This is great. Graduation, Italy, then college. Italy's going to be awesome."

"You bet your ass it is," Josh replied. "We should finalize what we're gonna do on the trip. Noah, can you stay over at my place tonight?"

Noah didn't answer. He looked a bit sick.

"Hey bud," Josh said. "Are you okay?"

Noah tried to answer but started to gag.

“Oh shit,” Connor said. “He looks like John Hurt from Alien.”

Noah hurried toward the boys’ restroom. Connor and Josh followed. On the way, Noah almost ran into Mariah Fischer, one of the girls going on the trip. Noah tried to smile, then vomited all over Mariah. Instantly nauseous herself, Mariah heaved all over him.

“Fuck,” said Lilian, a friend of Mariah’s.

Another girl, Tori, came over. “They’re meant for each other,” she said. “Let’s get them to the bathrooms and clean them up.”

“Joy,” Josh said.

“Tell me about it,” Lillian said.

Moments later, parents started arriving to pick up the students. Mariah’s and Noah’s mothers were directed to the restrooms.

“What happened?” Noah’s mother asked.

“He just threw up, Mrs. Patterson,” Josh said. “We don’t know why.”

“Are they all right?” Mariah’s mother asked.

“Don’t worry Mrs. Fischer,” Lilian said. “They’ll be okay.”

“What the hell did they eat?” Mrs. Patterson asked.

“We all ate the same food, Mrs. Patterson,” Tori said.

School principal Anthony Alizio came over with Bram Cohen, the teacher who’d be leading the Italian trip. Both carried bottled water.

“What happened, ‘Cuz?” Alizio asked Noah’s mother.

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Patterson told him. “They got sick.”

“That’s the last time we cater from Garcia’s for these parties,” Alizio said firmly. “We get Los Dos next year. I’ll pay the difference.”

Mrs. Patterson worried about Noah as she waited for him to come out of the bathroom.

“Don’t worry, ‘Cuz,” Alizio said, putting his arm around his cousin. “Everything will work out on the trip.”

“I’ll look after him,” Cohen added.

“I know you will,” Mrs. Patterson said, tears falling from her eyes. “I’ll just miss my baby.”

A moment later, Mariah and Noah emerged from the restrooms with their friends.

“How are you feeling?” Alizio asked.

“Kind of queasy,” Mariah said.

“Me too,” Noah said.

“Here,” Cohen said. “Drink some water. It might help.”

Mariah and Noah took the proffered water bottles and drank.

Outside the school, two darkly dressed, men, wearing ski masks, peered inside through a window. “I can’t believe the fate of reality rests on these kids,” D’Auria said.

“It won’t if we do our job,” Jeffords replied.

“Poisoning them didn’t seem to work.”

“Hence Plan B,” Jeffords said. “Is the last one ready?”

D’Auria took a small bomb from his backpack and set the timer for three minutes. “It is now.”

“Great, set it here,” Jeffords said. “The three of them should bring the whole school down.”

With the bomb in place, they turned to go—and were shocked to find three people aiming pistols at them. “Good evening,” Garth said. “Ruben, go get what they dropped on the ground there. Tori, get their TMD’s.”

Ruben went over, picked up the bomb, and deactivated it. Tori confiscated the would-be assassins’ teleportation devices.

“You Novus Ordo people never learn,” Garth said. “We retrieved the other two bombs as well, in case you were wondering.”

“Garth,” Tori said. “Let’s get out of here before people start leaving the building.”

Ruben took out his TMD and prepared to teleport everyone. But before he could press the button, Noah and his mother stepped from the building and walked to the parking lot.

“Are you sure you’re all right?” Mrs. Patterson asked, unlocking the family Prius.

“Yes Mom,” Noah said. “I’ll be okay in a.... Oh God, not again.” He rushed to a small bush beside the building and threw up again.

Mrs. Patterson pat her son on the back.

“Noah,” she said. “You want to go back to the bathroom and make sure you’re okay.”

“I’ll be okay Mom,” Noah said.

Suddenly, a masked figure in black appeared between Noah and his mom, and the others.

“Who the hell is that?” Noah asked. “Where did he come from?”

The masked figure drew a gun and said, “Quiet.”

“You’re the Suzerain,” Garth said.

The Suzerain nodded, indicating the gun. “Sometimes the simplest solution is best.”

“Who are all these people?” Noah asked.

“Your doom,” the Suzerain replied—then shot Noah and his mother.

“*NO!*” Tori yelled as they fell to the ground.

The Suzerain took out a TMD, staggered for a moment, and pressed the button. “Good luck in oblivion.” An instant later, the Suzerain, D’Auria and Jeffords disappeared.

“Holy shit,” Tori said. She ran to Noah and his mother. Both were clutching their wounds and gasping for breath. “They’re both bleeding out,” Tori said as the others came up behind her. “Oh... I feel weird.”

“Me too,” Garth told her.

“It’s starting,” Ruben said. He stared at his hand, which seemed to vanish and then reappear.

“Quick,” Garth said, taking out his TMD. “Let’s get them to the Foundation medical unit.” He tried to press the button on his TMD, but his finger passed right through it. “Shit.” He tried again. This time it worked, and the group vanished into thin air.



October 27, 2031

The Falcone Foundation Lab at Arizona State University
(Beneath Earth and Space Exploration Science Building)

What the hell is happening? Ferrara thought. The Temporal Alerts were going off. An attempt has been made to change history. The whole Foundation seemed to be fading in and out of existence. Even the equipment was disappearing and coming back. Then Garth, Ruben, and Tori teleported in, carrying Noah and his Mother. “What the fuck happened?” Ferrara asked.

“The Suzerain shot them,” Tori said.

That explained it; without them, much of the future—the Foundation’s present—would cease to exist. As they hovered between life and death, the future dwelled between existence and nonexistence.

Everyone rushed to the medical center. Noah and his mother were placed on operating tables.

Surgeons—also fading in and out—prepared to operate.

Ferrara, Tori, Garth, and Ruben put on masks and gloves.

“Start with Noah,” Ferrara said. “We’re all dead if you can’t save him.”

The surgeons found it hard to operate on Noah. His and their existence faded and returned with no discernible pattern. Sometimes instruments passed through hands and clattered to the floor; sometimes they did not.

“Shit,” said the lead surgeon, Dr. Ramirez. “This isn’t going to work.”

“We should try going back and preventing the shooting,” Ruben suggested.

“That’ll create another paradox,” Garth said. “We didn’t do it before, so we can’t do it now.”

“We’re running out of options,” Ruben noted.

“We can’t do it,” Garth said.

“We should at least get the mother’s heart going again, sir,” one of the doctors said. “We don’t have much time left.”

“What do you think, Ferrara?” Ruben asked. Getting no answer, he turned to Ferrara. But she wasn’t there. Neither was Tori. “Where did they go?”

“They’re gone,” Garth said. “And we’re not far behind. Ramirez, how can we help?”

“Right. Inject that solution into both of them.”

“What is it?” Garth asked.

“Something I hope will stabilize them so we can operate properly.”

Just after Ruben injected Noah’s mother, his arm disappeared. But the patients’ vital signs stabilized—and the fading slowed throughout the room. Ruben’s arm came back.

“Good,” Ramirez said. “Let’s monitor their neural activities on the EEG while we sort out these wounds.”

A half hour later, the fading effect ceased, and Ferrara and Tori reappeared.

“Thank God,” Garth said.

“What?” Ferrara asked.

“You were both gone for about half an hour,” Ruben replied.

“We were,” Tori said.

“How do you both feel?” Garth replied.

“I didn’t feel a thing,” Ferrara said. “I didn’t know I was gone.”

“I didn’t even know I was gone either,” Tori said.

“So that’s what nonexistence is like,” Ruben said.

An hour later, the operation was over. “They’ll live,” Ramirez said. “But we’ll need to keep them here for a couple of days and monitor their progress.”

“Understood,” Ferrara said. “Keep them in induced comas until we can take back. Can’t have them seeing this place.”

“Yes Director,” Ramirez said.



July 3, 2017 8:30 p.m.

Renaissance Academy

Tempe, Arizona

Tori, Ruben and Garth teleported to the parking lot with Noah and his mother, both unconscious. They arrived a second before their earlier selves left—and saw them leaving.

“There we go,” Tori said. “That’s three days I don’t want to go through again.”

“No argument there,” Garth said. “Let’s get them in the car.” He and Ruben placed Noah and his mother in the Prius, while Tori kept an eye on the school and the parking lot. “They should wake any minute,” Garth said. “Let’s get out of sight.” They walked toward the school.

Noah woke up in the car. His mother was already awake. “Mom. How did we get in here?”

“Where else would we be?” Mrs. Patterson asked.

“I thought we were over there by that bush I puked in and there were other people outside. I remember someone with a mask.”

“You must have nodded off and had a quick dream,” Mrs. Patterson said. “You know you weren’t feeling well. Just relax. We’ll be home soon, and you can get a good night’s sleep.”

“Okay.”

“You know,” Mrs. Patterson said. “We’re all going to miss you.”

“Thanks Mom.”

Mrs. Patterson kissed her son. “Just promise me you’ll be careful.”

“No problem. I won’t do anything stupid.”

“Good.”

Mrs. Patterson turned on the ignition and drove off.

Garth, Ruben and Tori watched. “Thank God that worked,” Ruben said.

Tori looked back through the open school door, where her younger self was having a good time with her friends and looking forward to seeing Italy for the first time. “Look at them,” she said. “So young, so innocent. Before the beginning of Project Jigsaw.”

“We all started that way,” Garth noted. “Let’s clean up the blood and go home.”

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES IN JIGSAW: BEGINNINGS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for making this work and series a reality:

My wife Dr. Gwyneth Gordon for her endless support through the years.

My family for their encouragement.

My students, teachers, and staff at Grand Canyon College Preparatory Academy.

Alexander Miley for the cover art.

John Robert Marlow and Ross Browne of the Editorial Department in Tucson, Arizona for editing.

Beta Readers Elizabeth Allen and Jamie Barry

David Henry Sterry from The Book Doctors for advise after the first draft of *Jigsaw: Beginnings* was completed.

Katy Grant and the students in the Creative Writing Program at Mesa Community College.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Gordon has been a social studies teacher, principal, and the founding owner of the Grand Canyon College Preparatory Academy in Tempe, Arizona. He grew up reading and watching science and historical fiction. He is also a big baseball fan. He combined his various passions in the Jigsaw series, which focuses on time traveling teens thrust into major historical events—many of which never made the standard history books.

David was born in New York and now lives in Arizona with the love of my life Gwyn. They are both dog people, and enjoy travel and food—Italian, Asian, Middle Eastern and Indian cuisines in particular.

Please click on DavidAlynGordon.com and join [our mailing list](#).

Please [click here if you would like to preorder the first novella in the Jigsaw Universe: Jigsaw Beginnings](#).

