

DAVID ALYN GORDON



# JIGSAW: PRELUDE



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READER MAGNET

JIGSAW:  
PRELUDE

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For My Love and Constant Source of Support  
Dr. Gwyneth Williams Gordon



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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.

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

My family and friends for their encouragement.

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

Mibllart for the cover art.

Ms Tonia Designs for the formatting.

John Robert Marlow for his editing of the first edition.

Natalie Bavar for providing valuable feedback by both betareading and line editing.





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 black business suit and had the aura of a snob. He nodded to Ruben, as he passed.

Ruben smiled to himself. *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, taking 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 that says Mussolini is assembling an elite team of scientists to develop a 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 and his Fascist-loving 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 alongside 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 thinks that if we take out the Duce before left-wing partisans in the north grow too strong, we can have a Fascist-friendly government in Italy.”

“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 joined Garth.

“That Fairchild is such an ass,” Ruben said.

“They all are,” Garth replied.

“I’ve lived over six thousand years,” Luchese said, “and I’ve always been struck by the fact that no matter what civilization I’m in, there’s *always* an annoying, by-the-book bureaucrat.”

“Shit,” Garth said, glancing at Luchese. “I’m only 43—not a Nephilim like you, Luchese—and I’m just as annoyed with that bastard. I like how he couldn’t give me Dulles’s 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. He took a device from his pocket and pressed a button—and the three men vanished.



October 3, 1943  
Italian Social Republic Headquarters  
Salò, Italy

Lorenzo could hardly believe that he was standing in the office of the Duce himself. He had been summoned here to meet with Mussolini and felt nervous, as he waited. He could not help but wonder whether he and the Duce's other supporters were just Nazi stooges now. Perhaps it would have been better for his science team 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 still 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 had not 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's Spain. 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. If they couldn't do that, there was no hope of preserving an independent Italy.

The door opened, and Mussolini strode in flanked by two men wearing 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, the Duce's appearance. *Il Duce's* vitality was gone, and he seemed like a shadow of his former self. The strength and force of will that had catapulted him to power twenty years ago had virtually disappeared. This operation was one of the few things bolstering Mussolini's enthusiasm—without it, there seemed to be no hope for a possible shift in the war and the realization of his dreams of a New Rome.

"Allow me to present two of my aides, Professor," *Il 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, with the eye patch, appeared as the more imposing of the two.

“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. *Il 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, glancing at 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 establish 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 will 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 Professor Lorenzo what you mean.”

Angelo drew a silenced pistol and shot Merretti between the eyes.

Lorenzo watched the body fall to the ground.

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

“Probably,” Lorenzo said, then 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. 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. Unlike your Jewish friends, they're not hiding."

"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 traitor's body, and give the Germans a few 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 for 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

**T**rucks 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 camo clothes that blended in 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. He looked Lavonia and Elisabetta up and down. “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 at the private, who nodded. “Take off your masks,” the corporal ordered. “I’d like to see who I’m making arrangements with.”

Elisabetta and Lavonia removed their masks.

“Do we have an agreement?” Lavonia asked.

The corporal stroked Elisabetta’s hair. He pulled her close and kissed her, but when he saw the hatred in her eyes, he pulled back. “I don’t think so,” he said.

“That’s too bad,” Elisabetta told him kicking him in the groin. The private raised his rifle and fired, but Elisabetta pulled the corporal in front of her. She ducked 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, killing him instantly.

“Quick,” Elisabetta said, crouching by the corporal. “Take their weapons and radio, and let’s get the hell out of here.”

Lavonia searched the private, then she and Elisabetta darted 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* party for the graduates selected to embark on a two-week trip to Italy.

“Heh,” Connor said, grinning. “This is great. Graduation, Italy, then college. This trip’s going to be awesome.”

“You bet your ass it is,” Josh replied. “We should finalize what we’re going to 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 worse than John Hurt from *Alien*.”

Noah hurried toward the boys’ restroom. Connor and Josh

followed. On the way, Noah almost ran directly 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 Lillian, a friend of Mariah’s.

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

“What a joy,” Josh said, rolling his eyes.

“Tell me about it,” Lillian said.

Mariah’s and Noah’s mothers were directed to the restrooms.

“What happened?” Noah’s mother asked.

“They just threw up, Mrs. Patterson,” Josh said. “We don’t know why. Connor and Lillian went in to check on them.”

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

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

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

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

School principal Anthony Alizio came over with Bram Cohen, the teacher who would 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. “The kids tell me Noah 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 Mrs. Patterson. “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 Lillian and Connor.

“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 men dressed in dark clothes and 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 TMDs.”

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 exited the building and walked to the parking lot.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” 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 patted her son on the back.

“Noah,” she said. “Are you sure you don’t want to take a few more minutes in the bathroom to make sure you’re okay?”

“I’ll be okay, Mom,” Noah said.

Suddenly, a masked figure appeared between Noah and the others.

“Who the hell are you?” Noah asked. “And where did you even come from?”

The masked figure drew a gun. “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, then 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 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 the Earth and Space Exploration Science Building)

**W***hat the hell is happening?* Ferrara thought. The temporal alerts were going off, which meant an attempt was 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, rushing over.

“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 oblivion.

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?”

“Inject that solution into both of them,” Ramirez said, pointing to two syringes of oddly-colored liquid. “It might be a bit risky, but it should stabilize them enough that we can operate properly.”

Ruben had just managed to administer the injection to Noah and Mrs. Patterson when his arm disappeared. But their vital signs stabilized, and the facility gradually stopped fading in and out of existence. After a while, 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 completely, 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, shivering.

“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 to monitor their progress.”

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

“Yes, Director,” Ramirez said.



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

**T**ori, 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 jogged toward the school.

By the time Noah came to, Mrs. Patterson was already awake and starting the car.

“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, turning to look at Noah, “we’re all going to miss you.”

“Thanks, Mom. I’ll miss you, too.”

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

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

“Good.”

Mrs. Patterson backed out of the parking spot 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. He sighed and turned away. “Let’s clean up the blood and go home.”



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