

THE GOLDEN ORB: PRELUDE – VOL. 1

CHAPTER EIGHT

Written by Jenner Arriaga

At the end of the school day, the bell rang and all the kids at Cooper Academy exited in one massive crowd. Kepler walked out the building through double exit doors. There is no one wearing a backpack in sight within this student crowd. Policy was passed by the state's new governing administration headed by the suggestions of the new governor. She had signed the bill into law. One that was, according to her, aimed at increasing the new technology literacy among Arizona students. Of course, only schools that received state funding were directly affected by the law that required all homework and textbooks to be administered online at school-provided-and-remaining laptops. The need for pens, papers, physical books, and, therefore, backpacks were completely removed. The effects of the combination of this law and rise of AI on the intelligence of the American students – the future leaders of the country – were yet to be seen. The dwindling literacy, math, and other education skills amongst these students even while paper and handwritten problem solving and skill development had been used did not initiate confidence in this new development. Kepler got his phone out of his pocket and called his sisters. Only one of them answered.

“What’s up, Kepler?” Ilsa greeted on the phone.

“Are you guys staying for practice?” Kepler asked.

“Yeah.”

“Alright. I’ll see you at home.”

“You’re not going to join fútbol again?”

“I’ve been thinking about it.”

“You still have time.”

The phone was still pressed to his ear -

Thirty minutes later, from across the street, Kepler got off the public city bus and looked both ways before he jaywalked into the neighborhood on the other side. He looked up at the sky where he only found the sun that burned the retina of his eyes. He continued on the neighborhood sidewalk when a gray car suddenly sped by and cut in front of him. Two henchmen quickly exited the vehicle while Kepler simultaneously began to run away. One of the henchmen grabbed Kepler and pulled him by his shoulders. The other, Marc, opened the trunk of the sedan while he helped push Kepler into the it. Kepler frantically attempted to get away.

“No, wait! I didn’t do anything!” Kepler exclaimed. *“I didn’t do anything!”*

The taller of the two henchmen continued to push the teenager into the trunk. The attacked teenager held on to the outside corner of the open trunk successfully stopping his entry for a moment. Kepler managed to get a good look at the tallest man's face here.

"Mr. Isaac?!" Kepler said in disbelief.

"Kepler?" Mr. Isaac said. The teacher turned to Marc. "See, there is a reason why I can't do work here!"

Kepler had a hilarious look of incredulousness on his face. "I didn't mean any of things I said at P.E. You were just doing your job!"

"This has nothing to do with that, kid," Marc chimed in.

"Kid?! Who are you calling a kid?" Kepler snapped. He began to rethink and question everything. "You're a kid?"

Marc became hilariously disgruntled. "Just put him in the car!"

Marc and Mr. Isaac both finished pushing Kepler into the trunk together.

"No wait! I'm innocent!" the teenager had let out. Before Mr. Isaac shut the trunk, the last thing heard was Kepler yell in a high-pitched manner.

Marc and Mr. Isaac entered the front seats of the sedan.

"I'm glad you guys were able to handle that," someone said with brazen sarcasm from the sedan's back seats. It was Jonathan.

Marc started driving.

"Jonathan, the short bald kid is one of my students," Mr. Isaac said. "My cover is blown."

"Your cover?" Jonathan said. "We'll just relocate you."

"What about my job?"

"This is your job."

"This is just a hobby."

Kepler knocked hard on the wall bridging the back seat section and the trunk. All the sound it made were a few dull clangs. Jonathan and the English teacher looked back toward the source of the noise.

“Mr. Isaac, I know you’re in there!” Kepler said, his voice muffled from being within the trunk.

Moments later, the gray sedan parked on the Alfonso suburban home driveway. Mr. Isaac opened the trunk of the car. Kepler was sprawled and banged up from all the movement of the car. The sunlight pierced through to him. “Who was driving?!” he asked with half-closed eyes.

Mr. Isaac shrugged his shoulders.

“Listen,” Kepler continued, “we can do this calmly or I scream.”

Marc punched Kepler hard, directly on his jaw. Kepler’s head turned to the right, back toward the inside of the trunk, and rebounded against the floor of it.

“Ow, you hit my jaw,” Kepler lisped with disbelief. He quickly shifted his eyes to Mr. Isaac. “Don’t you dare hit me; I’m a mandatory reporter by the way.”

Marc punched Kepler again. The kidnapped stopped talking.

“I understand now,” Kepler said innocently. He took a moment to nod while the criminals paused to make time for Kepler to take it all in. Kepler suddenly yelled: “If anybody’s home, RUN-!”

Marc punched him hard in the face again. Mr. Isaac and Marc pulled a weak Kepler out of the car trunk. They kept their surveilling eyes open to see if any neighbors were watching them. The two henchmen dragged Kepler to the front door of his home. The shins of his legs scraped the ground. Now inches away from the door, they stopped.

“Hold him up,” Jonathan said.

His two paid men followed the orders, and Jonathan got the house keys out of Kepler’s right pocket. He unlocked the door with them. The group made their way through the home, their shoed footsteps echoing on the tile floor. Nobody seemed to be in the house. Jonathan opened the sliding glass backyard doors. The criminal gang moved swiftly, efficiently, and silently. The heir to the kingdom moved toward the center of the outside area, stopping in front of the swimming pool.

His two henchmen dragged a chair over and zip-tied Kepler to it. They placed Kepler on the edge of the floor leading to the pool.