DANGEROUS TRAITOR

DRAGONERA: THE DARK ONE CHRONICLES BOOK 4

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PROLOGUE

Richmond, the capital of Virginia, isn't exactly what Detective David Striker would call the most exciting place in America. It might have been a large city, but past efforts from the local police department had kept crime in check. Gangs hardly existed on the streets and all the local known drug dealers had either been arrested or fled the state. By all accounts Richmond was a safe place to live, work, and play.

Not exactly the most exciting time to be a police officer. Striker had joined the police force to protect innocents. But the young twenty eight year old, with blonde hair and brown eyes, had found out that life as a police officer wasn't the most exciting or rewarding. Months of physical training and studying felt like they had just gone down the drain as he sat in his office, going over the mounds of paperwork laid before him.

Striker rubbed his eyebrows with a hand shaky from endless hours of paperwork. He laughed, remembering the first words of his instructor at the police academy. 'Being a policeman means that we give our lives to protect the innocent. Always remember, we serve the greater good.'

"Serve the greater good huh?" Striker asked himself. "What greater good is there when everything that could have been exciting has dried up over the last few months?"

Striker sighed as he reached for his cup of coffee. The sweet aroma

of the drink reached his nostrils. The sweet heavenly sent power of the beverage filled his lungs with a strange kind of euphoria. It was the only thing he looked forward to at this job since all the problems of the city had supposedly been solved.

As he was about to enjoy his coffee in peace and quiet, it was shattered.

"Striker!" A gruff, tough voice called out behind him. Striker flinched a bit. His time working for the police department had left him familiar with the sound of a pissed off captain. "My office, pronto!"

With a heavy sigh Striker placed his coffee down on his table. Guess peace of mind would have to come later. Looked like was about to get his backside chewed for something. He knew that not all police captains were like those he saw in the action movies that he grew up watching. Lucky him, his captain was straight from central casting - gruff, shrill, balding, and impatient. Sometimes he could swear that steam would actually rise from his captain's ears during one of his rants.

"Not that he has anything to be ranting about to me." Striker thought to himself. "The damn city has been peaceful for the last three months, nothing for him to get on my ass about."

"Hurry up, Striker!" His captain shouted again. "My great grandmother could get her ass over here faster than you, and she's dead!"

"Coming, Captain!" Striker cried back before forcing himself up from his chair. The last thing he needed right now was a ranting boss pissed off about how "slow to respond" he allegedly was. As he walked towards the office, a few of his fellow officers chuckled.

"Try not to piss him off, Dave." One of them said. "The last time someone pissed the cap off, he could have popped a blood vessel. Though given how you don't listen to him at times it's not surprising."

The officer running his moth, Tony McGinnis was a PITA. He was a young brown haired and green-eyed smug looking idiot. Tony was a kiss ass. The captain played favorites, and Tony was definitely one of his pets. Striker didn't have time to get into a debate with him, but he did have enough time for a quick parting shot.

"Up yours, McGinnis." Striker responded as he passed by his fellow officer. "If I need your mouth running, If I need help from a kiss ass I'll let you know."

"Have fun." McGinnis responded in a mocking tone.

Striker rolled his eyes as he entered the captain's office. He closed the door tightly before glaring at McGinnis, who went back to his own paperwork.

"Asshole." He said with a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Stow it, Striker." The Captain said. "Take a seat, we got something to talk about."

Striker frowned as he took a seat in front of the Captain. Whenever he was called into the office his Captain would often have him stand the entire time while he chewed him out. He only had people sit down when it was a serious matter.

The Captain sighed as he adjusted his glasses before staring right into Striker's eyes. In his left hand he spun a pen around with seemingly no end in sight. Striker felt a bit of an unease rise up through his body as he cleared his throat.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" He asked.

"Yes. I did." The Captain said. "Son, I've gone over your records from when you were at the Academy. You're one of the best to ever graduate from that institution. You were good at the physical exams and the weapons practices, but the one area you excelled at was being able to find evidence faster than anyone else could."

"There a reason why you're reminding me of this, sir?" Striker asked. "I don't think I need to be reminded of my grades at the Academy."

"Watch your mouth, boy." The Captain said. "I'm getting to my point and I don't need you running your mouth."

The Captain reached into his desk grabbing a document. Striker blinked as this commanding officer placed the file down in front of him. He noticed that the tab of the file had the title 'The Occult' Striker quirked an eyebrow up as he turned his attention back to the captain.

"Something happening that we don't know about, sir?" He asked.

"You're damn right something is going on." The Captain replied as he took out a cigarette. "A few days ago, we got some reports of some kids dressed up in these long dark purple robes walking the streets at night." He opened the file up, revealing a shoddy picture of the robe-wearing individuals fleeing the scene. Striker's eyes glanced over the photo carefully as he analyzed it precisely.

"We don't know what it is that these kids are up to, but Intel seems to think that they're some kind of new gang trying to take over the streets."

"What kind of gang goes around wearing robes like this?" Striker asked. "Last I checked gang members don't wear something so out of place."

"Good question, Striker." His captain said. "The thing is, we're not even sure what this is ourselves. If they were gang members they would have been more of them. But eyewitness reports state that these kids travel in groups of two, and the odd thing about this whole thing is that whenever they're spotted, they supposedly vanish before anyone can ask them any questions."

The Captain frowned as he pointed to the picture before them.

"We got damn lucky with this one. The policeman that took this photo gave chase trying to apprehend these kids, but the moment they turned a corner, they just apparently, vanished."

"Vanished?" Striker asked. "Sir, with all due respect, people just don't up and disappear into thin air like that."

"You think I don't know that, Striker?" The Captain retorted. "I've been on the force longer than you've been alive. There's no way that this is ordinary."

"What do you want me to do?" Striker asked.

"I want you to open an investigation into this mess." The Captain said. "Everyone in this precinct knows that you're the best at finding evidence. And I sure as hell don't want any of the newbies walking around trying to solve this."

"Sir, with respect, that's what you are asking me to do." Striker responded. "If I'm gonna be investigating this mess, I'll need more information."

"Don't be a smart ass Striker." The Captain's eyes narrowed in anger. "We both know that your eyes have already found something about that photo to start investigating."

Striker couldn't deny that. His eyes had spotted something else on the photo. While it wasn't the largest image on the photo, one of the robbed beings had exposed their wrist, revealing a tattoo.

The tattoo was of a large eyeball, with the iris of the eye a pale

yellow color, where the whites that an eye would normally have been were replaced by a dark grey color.

It was a start. Striker sighed as he leaned back in his chair for a moment.

"Do you have any idea where I should begin, sir?"

"Check downtown." The Captain said. "The last time we heard of any activity was down there. Apparently the locals are worried that these kids are doing something that they sure as hell shouldn't be."

Striker nodded as he stood up and began to move towards the door.

"And Striker?" The Captain said moments just before he left. "For the love of God, don't go shooting any kids. The country's already upset enough about the recent police shootings going on all over the place."

"Duly noted, sir." Striker said. "I can't promise that it won't come down to that, but I'll try my damn hardest to avoid it."

At that moment, as left his captain's office, Striker had no idea that he was getting himself into something that was way more excitement than he could have ever asked for.

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Downtown Richmond. A place where the people who lived there either had it good or had it rough. Most of the crime in the city lately had been the result of a turf war between gang members and drug lords trying to establish a source of easy income.

Just because the police department had driven those problems out of the city didn't mean that downtown was transformed. There was still poverty crippling some housing, and thanks to the gangs and drug lords several of the houses had been ruined by their war.

Striker felt bad for the people who still lived in the poor part of downtown. He truly did, their living situation was deplorable. The governor swore they would be getting relief funds soon and that they would be take care of, but so far those were empty promises. Striker would believe it when he saw it. Politics were always a waste of time and politicians never got anything done other making sure they were reelected.

The detective walked down the sidewalk of one of the local shopping districts. Mom and pop stores owned by the local residents had fallen on hard times. Most were either closed completely or rarely open. Those that were open did have their fair share of regular costumers. Striker's heart swelled to see these people, who have been through some incredibly hard times, face each new day with a strong will to continue onwards.

He kept his hands in his jean pockets as he walked down the sidewalk. His ever-observant eyes glanced around the area for any clues, or even a group of teenagers that he could question. Summer was ending, and the streets were full of kids spending what few hours of summer vacation they had left before being sent back to the grind that was school.

Striker's eyes moved in all directions looking for a group of teenagers that would give him useful information. Based on what the captain had told him about the case, he had ruled out the possibility of large groups of people being associated with this, for lack of a better word, cult. It would be too easy to spot members of the cult if they stayed together in giant groups. Striker stroked his chin as his searched for any teens that were traveling in groups of two.

"Shouldn't be too hard." Striker told himself.

Time crawled. It came with the territory of his job. Patience was something that he had to sharpen over time, proving to be one of the toughest hurdles he had to overcome. When he started Striker wanted to chase after criminals, bringing them down, arresting them on the spot. To hell with the rules and regulations, back then he wanted to take action the moment an opportunity presented itself.

The memory of when he was impatient made him laugh at himself.

"Damn, I was such a foolish kid back then." He thought to himself.

Striker blinked for a brief moment, spotting what he assumed to be his targets. Two young teenage boys, walking very close together, made their way across the sidewalk as fast as they could.

Striker took note of their body language. His objective now was to pinpoint if these boys were a part of the cult in the picture. Both of them kept their heads down, barely looking where they were going. Their hands stayed in their pockets, only their thumbs peaking out. Another key fact that Striker noticed was they both were wearing dark

purple hoodies over. Which was peculiar since it was the end of summer, and it had not gotten cold yet.

"Well then." He said with a slight smile. "Looks like I just hit jackpot."

The detective followed the two boys. The last thing he wanted now was to lose this lead.

Unfortunately for Striker, teenagers are a lot smarter than people give them credit for. While everyone knows that hormones often control teenaged minds, they did have moments when they could outsmart adults. Striker learned that the hard way. Never underestimate them.

Striker tried to look inconspicuous. If he were spotted now, his chances of finding where this cult was meeting would be lost. He felt his hands slowly start to sweat as the kids kept checking to see if they were being followed.

"At least those years of training didn't go to waste." He thought to himself as he hugged the wall for the fifth time.

After tailing after the duo of teenagers for at least an hour, maybe more, Striker took notice of the setting sun. Just as he had thought. No cult would dare to meet during broad daylight. Well, at least not the ones with something to hide from the world. He kept his eyes on the two teenagers.

One of them finally spoke the moment they reached a dark alleyway.

"Are you certain this is the place?" The shorter of the two teens asked. "It's just a dark alleyway back there, why would we meet there?"

"You know that we never meet in the same spot." The taller teen responded. "We have to keep the rest of the world from knowing exactly where we meet."

"But some of us already got caught." The smaller teen argued back. "They could reveal our locations!"

"Not a chance in Hell. When they joined, they swore an oath to keep every secret hidden from the society that has rejected them."

"And just how do you know that they won't though?"

"You know why." The taller teen's voice turned a bit harsher at this point. "Those who break our covenant rules will be located, and exterminated."

Striker felt his heart grow cold at that statement. This cult was willing to kill any of their members that dared speak out. While he was use to hearing adults say such a thing in similar situations, he never once thought he would ever hear those words uttered by a young teenager. The smaller teen must have had the same reaction as he did, as he began to back away slowly.

"You know I hate it when you say that." He said as dread filled his voice. "No one wants to talk about the punishments one would have to endure for daring to go against our vows."

"And that is why they will never betray us." The larger teen said as he grabbed the smaller one's shoulder. "Now come on. We got to move."

The conversation was not brought up again as the two of them made their way down the alley. Striker glanced out from where he was hiding, looking down the alleyway. His palms clenched into fists as he realized that the situation at hand was now far worse than he first thought.

But what he'd heard wouldn't be enough. He had to find out more before bringing his findings to the captain. He needed to confirm who these occult members were and record anything they might be doing. Lives were on the line - God he loved his job!

Decision made, Striker took a deep breath, steeling himself. No one else was going to tail these teens, and he was too close to let his only lead go now. He summoned his courage and began to move after the two teens. Making certain to walk as quietly as possible.

Striker hid beside a large garbage can as he watched the two teens when they stopped waling once again. The larger one grabbed something out of his pocket before opening his palm. Striker couldn't tell what it was from his location, but he could make out that the item was some kind of parchment paper, much like a scroll, with a seal wrapped around it.

"With the removing of this seal..." The tall teen said slowly as he pulled the seal off. "We attend."

What happened next could only be what Strike later described as a dream. The moment the seal was taken off the parchment a flash of purple light erupted. Striker was forced to cover his eyes for a second

as the light surrounded the teens, not realizing the light had expanded to where he was hiding as well.

When the brightness died down Striker's eyes readjusted so he could see properly. Now flat on his back, his body feeling like it was filled with lead, he groaned in pain before realizing where he was. What he saw bewildered him, he was no longer in the alley. Instead, all around him, were a multitude of trees. Above him a starry sky of night with the ever present glow of the moonshining down.

Several thoughts raced through Striker's head as he tried to reason what was going on. That parchment the teen opened had done something. Maybe they had spotted him and they had used a flashlight to blind him before they injected him with some kind of drug. There were reports he'd read up on about these kinds of twists happening to other cops. Not once did he think that he would have fallen for the same trap that other officers of the law fell for.

"How the hell did you let yourself fall for something like that, Striker?" He asked himself as he did his best to push himself up.

The feeling of his limbs being weighted didn't exactly help. Each step he took felt like his body was about to shatter from the pressure he was applying. It took every bit of his willpower to not shout out in pain.

Overtime he felt his body began to recover from the numbing feeling that had overtaken his muscles. While he still felt groggy he could at least take steps without his leg muscles screaming in protest.

"Calm down." He told himself. "You have to take this slow. Let your body recover from whatever the hell happened to you."

Easier said than done of course. Striker had a job to do and he couldn't afford to let the two teenagers he was tailing get away now.

It then occurred to Striker that he didn't even know where in the world he was. He grabbed his smart phone from his pocket and began to open its map app. As the app opened a small ray of hope came to his lips and then swiftly turned into a shocked expression what he saw where his phone had taken him.

Dragon Run State Forest. Located right in King and Queen County. Which was hundreds of miles from the city of Richmond.

"How the hell did I end up here?" He asked himself. He took notice of the time and date. Eight o Clock PM, August 22nd. "The date's still

the same as it was before. But it takes hours to get here from Richmond…"

Confusion was plastered all over his face. If his phone was correct the teenagers had somehow knocked him out and made it to Dragon Run all in a mere couple of hours.

The answer to his questions would elude him for awhile longer as a noise caught his attention. Striker turned to the source of the noise, which came from his left, noticing a bright light.

He knew that Dragon Run State Forest was a recreation park, and no one was allowed to create a fire in it. Must be the teenagers from before. Something about them felt really off when that bright flash of light covered them and him. He couldn't be a hundred percent sure, but his gut feeling told him to head towards the the fire.

Perhaps he could find his answers there as well.

Striker took a deep breath before he trudged towards the fire. In the back of his mind he could only picture what his Captain would be saying to him for being too slow on the initiative. He gave a short dry laugh at the image of how red his boss' face would be right now. It wouldn't be the first time that would happen either.

"I can just hear his voice now." Striker grumbled as he placed a hand over his head. "It's giving me a headache already."

A new sound came from where the light shone. Strike reached for his gun as he crept close to the ground. He couldn't exactly make out what it was, but it sounded a lot like chanting. If he was right, then there were people here.

Striker moved as quietly as he could towards his target. His brow covered in sweat as he approached. If he truly was alone in this wilderness, then he should have nothing to fear. Right? It's not like there was anything out here that could be too dangerous.

Oh how he wished that he was wrong.

Before him was a large gathering of teenagers and young adults. Each of them varying in shape, size, gender, and color. All of them looked anxious, on edge. Every single person wore a dark purple robe with a demonic looking eye on the back of the robe. Strike gritted his teeth.

"Dammit. Too many here for this to be a 'small' cult." He muttered to himself. "It's like a small army!"

As the insistent chatter in the group continued to go on, a loud 'clang' was heard from the makeshift stage they all stood before. The sound deafened any sort of chatter as Striker swallowed a lump in his throat. If he had to guess, the head honchos of this cult would be gathering together there.

Sure enough, there they were. A middle aged man with a goatee, a teenaged boy with black hair hanging over one of his eyes, and a young girl with black hair just like the boy before her, but with some of the saddest eyes Striker had ever seen. The last one caught Striker completely off guard as she crawled onto the stage.

Words escaped him, there was no way to accurately describe the large monster on the stage besides the three humans. She had pale green skin, sickly yellow eyes, and the palest blue short cut hair. While she had the body of a young woman, the rest of her body was anything but human. Somehow, this creature had a massive dark grey spider body for legs and her abdomen was covered in what looked to be bits and pieces of bones from life forms that Striker couldn't identify.

The middle aged man grinned as the crowd gathered before him. As silence took ahold of them, he held his hands above his head.

"Welcome, to you all. On this glorious night." He spoke out. Striker could practically taste the venom dripping from every word the man spoke. "Many of you are new to our family. To you, I say, welcome. Welcome to a place where you will finally be accepted, where you can finally open your eyes to the truth of this world: it's corruption, it's wickedness, it's perversion."

The man began to stroll back and forth across stage. Some of the gathered youth nodded their heads in agreement."

"You are here, because society has rejected you." He continued. "They have rejected each and every one of you...for a multitude of reasons. Reasons we shall not discuss here; reasons that are no longer relevant. But, it is the truth, that this world has led you into isolation. They have forced you into hiding, fearing their retribution, their bile, their hatred..."

The crowd became more rowdy at this as they all shouted out in agreement about how they were treated. Striker clenched his fists. The bastard was using mind games on them, and it was working. The man spoke again.

"They have rejected each and every one of you...for a multitude of reasons. Reasons we shall not discuss here; reasons that are no longer relevant. But, it is the truth, that this world has led you into isolation. They have forced you into hiding, fearing their retribution, their bile, their hatred..."

The crowd screamed about how poorly they were treated. A sly grin slipped over the leader's lips as he watched them pledge to do as he asked.

"On this night, you join our family." A glint grew in his eyes. "Nay, our ARMY. Which grows each day! On this night, we rise! On this night, we will begin destroying the fools for our master, who will make all things equal under his rule! No more will you be judged, no more will you be mocked, tonight, you are now blessed with the powers you need to take your revenge! So say I, Grandmaster Dimitri! Do you swear loyalty to the Dark Eye?!"

"We swear!" Was the unanimous chant of the crowd.

A chill ran down Striker's back as he watched the crowd chant Dimitri's name over and over again. The spider lady on the stage looked barely impressed while the two teenagers gave different reactions. The girl hid her eyes and face. The boy though? He grinned as he began to laugh loudly.

Things were much graver than Striker, or any of the police force, could ever imagine. Without wasting a second, and using the loud shouting of the crowd to his advantage, Striker ran as fast as he could from the cult. God help him, no one saw him.

God help them all, they were going to need it!