

THE CORT CHRONICLES BOOK 2

Spirral

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Spiral
The CORT Chronicles Book 2
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Dedication

I want to dedicate this book to all the families who have lost loved ones to the COVID-19 epidemic. Keep their memories alive.

Table of Contents

1. The Rescue	1
2. Spirral	17
3. New Magic	20
4. Going East	30
5. Eastview	44
6. The Sages	53
7. Old York	58
8. Grand Central	63
9. Awakening Hope	75
10. Train Trip.....	79
11. Wonder Woods	84
12. Icy City	92
13. The Public Test	97
14. Looking Deep	104
15. Book of Know	111
16. Dark World	118
17. Wonder Stone	127
18. Dark Swamp	134
19. CORT Central	140
20. Field Temple	149
21. Iron Lady	154
22. Spirral AI	161
23. Going Home	165
Acknowledgments.....	169

Chapter 1

The Rescue

One Week Later

Andy woke up from his dreams of hope. The cell room was bare; the flashing red light had settled. His body felt normal again. In front of him hung a nineteen-inch plasma TV. Where did it come from? Was he transferred to a different cell room? Everything seemed the same. The last thing he remembered was being punished with water and light. He could not recall how he got here or when. The TV was turned on from a distance.

“Good morning, Andy 8, did you sleep well?” He was looking at the face of a woman. Andy started to remember. It was the Ms. Weed 2 person. It was she who humiliated him; it was she who tortured him. Finally, things were beginning to make sense. Did he have that brief amnesia period? Maybe it was because of the torture he experienced. Andy wanted to smash his fist right through the TV, but he knew he had to control his temper and act like a perfect boy.

With a fake smile, Andy said, “I slept very well, Ms. Weed.”

“Have you learned your lesson, young man?”

“Sure have,” Andy said calmly. “Thanks for the cool shower. I really needed it.”

“You certainly did, young man,” Ms. Weed answered. “That is a good lad. Now it is time to go to your new room and meet your roommate.”

After those words were uttered, the cell door swung open, and two robots grabbed Andy. They were solid steel and they moved around the room swiftly on gray and black wheels. Andy could not believe how strong they were. His body was lifted easily. Their grips were rock solid. Andy figured there was no point in fighting, especially for an eleven-year-old boy.

He was carried through endless hallways, several turns, and passed by empty rooms. He could not believe how massive this prison was. After several minutes, they approached an open room. It was the size of a medium closet, had two full beds, a square thing that looked like a sink, and a large hole in the floor. Andy guessed it must have been the bathroom. He was surprised that these machines knew so much about human needs and wants. He was taught back in school that machines were controlled by men, but here machines controlled and owned men. His body was thrown inside, the door was locked, and the robots rolled away.

Andy was able to get a closer look at this room. The floor had black and white tiles that felt like ice under Andy’s bare feet. He assumed they were watching him 24/7. Ms. Weed 2 did tell him to forget about all privacy. He noticed the TV hanging above his head. He wondered if he could catch some earth shows here. Most likely not. It probably was another

of those brain-washing machines like he saw back in CORT City. This time he had no protection with him. He got up, still feeling the pain from his forced landing. Thankfully, it was just a large bruise on his butt. Andy started pacing back and forth.

After about twenty minutes or so, the door was thrown open and another boy, probably about Zack's age, was dropped off, and the door locked. Andy looked up at the newcomer; he had blond hair tied in a ponytail, hazel eyes, and large glasses. He was wearing the same see-through uniform that Andy had on. It was wet and very see-through.

"Hello," Andy said.

"Hey. Looks like we are roomies," the boy declared.

"What is your name?" Andy asked.

"I am John, and who are you?"

"I am Andy."

"I heard about you from my resistance captain. Such a pleasure to meet you," John said, holding out his hand.

Andy grabbed it and gave it a nice strong shake. "A pleasure to meet you."

"You said you were with the resistance. How did you get captured?"

"I was on a secret mission for my captain and messed up badly. Before I knew it, I found myself being humiliated, abused, and tortured."

"Looks like we are in the same boat."

"Yep, I guess."

"What kind of things did they do to you?"

“Since I am part of the resistance, they tried everything from whipping to using drugs and beyond, the whole time. They tried to make me speak and give up all of our hideaways.”

“These creatures have no mercy.”

“The things I saw here break all the rules.”

“I do not think rules exist here,” Andy said.

“Not in the outside, but in Icy City, there are many rules,” John continued.

“What is Icy City? I haven’t heard of it before.”

“All I can tell you is that it’s the last human city left in my world. I cannot go into details because, you know.” John pointed his finger at all the mirrors.

“I understand,” Andy said. There was a strange moment of silence between the boys. They stood face-to-face, looking at each other’s see-through uniforms.

Underground War Room

Wendy gathered all her resistance leaders to come up with a plan to take down CORT Academy and to save Andy from its grips. Zack was part of the group.

The room looked like an abandoned station. A plaque still hung here with Williamsburg Station engraved on it. A large oak table stood in the center. A few old paintings and photos covered the walls. Those pictures represented the world long gone. Images of people walking on the large streets with baby strollers, pictures of vendors selling hot dogs and peanuts, and beautiful buildings long gone.

“We must come up with a plan,” Wendy started.

“Do you have the manpower to take the school down?” Zack questioned.

“I might have a few seeker weapons that Melvin gave us.”

“How do we know where Andy was taken?”

“I chipped your brother right before he disappeared.”

“Is everyone chipped?” Zack wondered.

“Yes, and from what my tech crew says, he is with another of the resistance members.”

“Wow, that sounds good.”

“Perhaps by now, both were humiliated, tortured, abused, and who knows what else. Yet it is still good news that the chips have not been found. This gives us about three days to take them both back,” Wendy said.

“Why so little?” Zack asked.

“It takes ten days for the old chip to be deactivated and another five days to put in the new robot chip.”

“What is that?” Zack asked again.

“It is the chip that is inserted in the children they capture.”

“Once that happens, then what?” Zack asked.

“It basically means that CORT has won the battle,” Wendy said.

“We must hurry,” Zack said.

“Here’s the plan,” Wendy said. She took a pencil and turned the map over. She started drawing. “We need a small group to go in. The only way we can succeed is to blow up the school’s central computer. It controls everything.”

“We need two individual groups to go in. One must keep the guards engaged and the other must use the tunnels. Our target is Remake school two.” Wendy drew a large red X on the map. “That is where the latest signals from the chips have come from. The tunnel goes right under it.”

Zack could not believe how smart the girl was; he could see why she was the leader. He started to fade into a daydream of Wendy and him going on a date. He finally woke up when he heard: “We need volunteers. Each group will have six people in it. I will lead one and Jackson will lead number two.”

Zack watched as resistance members started to step forward. When Zack tried to move forward, Wendy pushed him away.

“We cannot lose you, Zack.”

Zack tried to reason, but he knew deep inside that Wendy was right. He had to trust the resistance. He did not forget how they saved him.

“Okay, I will stay here,” Zack agreed at last.

“Sounds like a good plan,” Wendy said with a smile. “We start our mission at daybreak.” With those words, the war room cleared.

The Next Day

By the time Zack woke up, the place felt like a ghost town. Did the groups leave? Why was nobody here? Did Wendy know what he was planning?

Zack got up, put on his one-piece armor suit, and

grabbed his weapon. He walked out the door and started heading down the tunnel. He was surprised at the complete silence that surrounded him. How would he find them? He did not know this place. All he could do is wait to hear voices; maybe they would guide him to the proper location. The moment he turned his back, he felt a hand grab him on his shoulder. He was about to strike his weapon but heard a familiar voice.

“Dude, do you really think I was going to leave you behind?”

Zack turned around and saw Wendy standing behind him. With her were five young people.

“Don’t do that again.”

“The number one rule is never turning your back.”

“Was it a training exercise?” Zack asked.

“You can say that” Wendy said. “Now, let’s go and save your brother.”

Zack joined the group, and they continued the journey.

“What is our job?” Zack asked.

“Our job is to save your brother while the other group will cause the shutdown of central computer,” Wendy said.

“How will we know when the right time comes?” Zack asked.

“This is what you will use.” Wendy reached into her pocket and handed Zack a strange device that looked like a mixture of cell phone and a walkie-talkie. It was the size of Zack’s hand, and had a green stripe with the words “Resistance East” on it.

Zack took the device and looked at it closely. “How does it work?”

“You press this button and speak. It has a two-hundred-foot range.”

Zack pressed the button and called out, “Testing one, two, three!” He could not believe how loud this little device was. Everyone in the group was carrying one.

“Let’s go,” Wendy said.

“Where to?” Zack asked.

Wendy gave Zack a glance and it said everything. The group settled in and headed down the tunnel. They soon arrived at a large stone door.

“Our ride is just beyond there,” Wendy said.

Wendy reached into her pocket and pulled out a large keychain with four ancient keys on it. She placed her finger on the wall, and instantly a keyhole appeared. Next, she inserted the smallest key and turned right. The door swung open.

“What is that Wendy?” Zack asked.

“It’s our ride to Remake Academy 2,” Wendy said. The small group entered what looked like an elevator shaft. Several chairs with seat belts were inside. Colorful ads were posted on the wall: “Smoke Carmel Cigarettes and Live,” “Drink Milk and Grow Strong,” and “Just Do It.” Zack looked around the little room and smiled. For the first time, this place reminded him of home.

“Okay, guys, grab a seat,” Wendy said. She sat in the first row and buckled in. The rest of the group

followed her lead. Zack sat in the third chair. Next to him was a boy who looked no older than ten; his left hand was holding a teddy bear and in his right hand he held a large, curved knife. It was like a scene from a horror film. A girl with an exceedingly long ponytail that reached her ankle sat on his other side. She must have been thirteen. Her whole-body suit was covered with knives and sharp stars. Zack decided not to say a word to them. The children literally scared him. He could only imagine how much bloodshed they had seen in their short lives. Zack was the beginner here. The other two kids in this group looked normal to him and, of course, there was Miss Wendy, who Zack thought was hot. He did not say a word but drifted into thinking about her. One thought about her made his face turn red like a tomato. He tried to hide his face with one hand. Suddenly, Zack felt a kiss on his cheek. It came from the girl with the long ponytail. He heard a distant giggle coming from somewhere.

“I wanted to do that so badly,” a sweet voice said. At that moment, a realization hit Zack: this would be his team, and only teamwork would make good things happen.

“That will be enough, Heather,” Wendy said.

“I was just having my fun, girl,” Heather responded.

Zack watched as Wendy opened a panel next to her chair, took the second largest key, and turned it. Suddenly, the room started humming, and puffs of air came out from the walls. After some smoke, the room took off. Zack could not tell in what direction they

were heading. It reminded Zack of the Disney ride called "Space Mountain." He understood the reasons for the seat belts. They must have been flying at 200 miles per hour. After a couple minutes, Zack heard a squeak, and the transportation device came to a very sharp stop. Zack felt his stomach drop. He threw up his whole meal. He heard kids laughing all around him.

"What was that?" Zack asked, turning red again.

"You just learned an important lesson: do not eat too much before a trip," Wendy said.

Water came out from all sides and washed away the food junk.

"We are here, guys," Wendy said. The sound of seat belt buckles opening filled the small space. After everyone got up, the door in front of them swung open.

"Thank you all for riding the Pink Flood Express and watch the gap," Wendy said as everyone stepped down.

Still recovering from the wild trip, Zack stumbled from side to side. It was the first time he felt his leg limping. He did not feel the ground under him. It was an amazing rush that ran through Zack's body.

Slowly, Zack adjusted. They heard the first explosion from the distance.

"Okay, guys, that is the signal. Weapons out and move forward," Wendy commanded.

As soon as Wendy's words were heard, the group sprung forward. Zack could not believe how fast they moved. He tried his best to stay close.

“Stay together!” Wendy yelled.

Five minutes later, the second explosion rang out. The tunnel echoed loud, and all Zack heard was Wendy’s distant voice calling, “Go!”

Zack and the group made it to a staircase. They climbed the ladder as one, but it took them five minutes to get inside a rather large building. At the end of the journey, Zack saw lots of gray ash everywhere. Flashing red lights and large warning signs were floating above them.

“We will self-destruct in ten minutes,” a metallic voice announced.

“Hurry, hurry!” Wendy called.

The team worked fast as lasers, metal stars, and knives flew. Swords banged, and chaos was everywhere. The battle of man versus machine had started. Tin cans, iron parts, black wheels, and iron dust scattered everywhere. Zack watched in amazement at the coordination and speed with which those children worked.

“Go find your brother. We got this,” Wendy commanded.

“Yes, boss!” Zack called. He took off, destroying some roller robots in his way.

“Eight minutes and counting. Clear out, everyone,” the robotic voice said.

Each door Zack passed was wide open, so he continued to run forward. He hoped he would survive and not get lost. As Zack moved, he heard voices coming in front of him. He was surprised because

Andy and a few more children in wet and clear-white uniforms emerged and bumped into him.

“Andy!” Zack screamed.

“Bro, hey!” At that moment, the two brothers embraced each other with tears pouring down.

“Five minutes before self-destruction,” a voice called.

“Come, follow me,” Zack said.

The group of children and Andy smiled, and Zack led the way he came. He saw lots of ash everywhere. It was hard to tell who was human and who was a robot. He hoped the group that came with him was all right. Zack noticed Heather and Wendy nearby.

“I have found him,” Zack said.

“Hi, Andy,” Wendy said with a smile.

“Hi, Wendy,” Andy answered.

“This way, guys and gals!” Wendy announced.

Just next to her, a door was opened.

“Hurry,” she said.

“Four minutes to the end,” the voice called.

The children leapt into the open door and ran as far away as they could. A countdown started: “Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.”

When that ended, they heard a massive explosion that rocked the tunnel.

Finally, everything collapsed, and entrances vanished under piles of rock.

“How many survived?” Wendy asked as the group gathered next to another solid wall.

The count began, and the total survivors from the

group was only seven out of eleven. Zack was happy to see that none in his party had died. In addition, twenty children from the school stood around them.

“It looks like seventy prisoners had been transferred to another school,” a young boy said.

“Fifty robots have been destroyed,” said Heather.

“We did okay tonight. We will honor our fallen back at headquarters,” Wendy said.

With tears in her eyes, she pressed the wall and another keyhole appeared. Taking out her large keychain, she chose a middle-sized key and opened it.

“This is Green Flood: it is larger and can hold thirty.” When the door opened, Zack noticed thirty chairs with seat belts.

“Buckle up, everyone,” Wendy said.

Soon, twenty-seven children were sitting. Heather decided to sit next to Zack. Most of her metal stars and knives were gone. The simple armor looked so weird after the attack.

Zack looked at all the faces around him. All twenty children—twelve boys and eight girls—wore see-through uniforms. Zack had never seen so many almost naked bodies in his life. He could only imagine what these poor kids went through. He had so many questions to ask his brother but decided to wait until later. He would have more time together with him. Like before, Wendy pressed a button and, once again, the transport took off.

It took them just an extra five minutes. When the

machine stopped, this time there was no laughter, but pure silence. Everyone left the transport in a single line. The age range of the children was five to eighteen. Zack could see the exhaustion in everyone's faces.

Wendy broke the silence. "Everyone who was rescued, go to our infirmary. Please take the injured people." The kids looked over at Wendy. "Zack, you will help them. It is time you learn how deadly this civil war is."

Zack had no words. Heather joined him.

"I will show you where," she said. She grabbed Zack's hand and pulled him behind her, and the twenty children plus four fighters followed closely behind them.

Soon, Zack came to a familiar place. It was here where he woke up over a week ago.

Joy was overjoyed to see him.

"I was told that you will be assisting us," she said with a smile.

"I guess so," Zack said.

"You must put these on." She handed him a white coat, paper mask, and plastic gloves. The staff in the hospital were fourteen people of all ages, and thirty beds were scattered. Five were used for injuries and twenty were available for those rescued.

"Go on and help these poor children out," Joy said.

"What do I do?" he asked.

"Observe for a minute and get to work," Joy replied.

He watched as people helped the released prisoners undress and put on something that looked like hospital

robes. He noticed some weird machine being used on the bodies.

“What do I do with this?” Zack wondered.

“You must see if any of the children have chips implanted in their skulls or other body parts,” Joy said. “We only have fifteen minutes before they are reactivated from CORT Headquarters. If that happens, we will be found and destroyed.”

Zack worked fast. Children were placed face down on the bed, and he had to literally strip each of them. It did not matter if they were male or female. Some of them had chips in their skulls, others in their back, and others had them in other areas on the body. The machine worked easily. In those fifteen minutes, Zack pulled out five chips from three boys and two girls. The machine was cool: all he had to do was press a button and the machine grabbed the chip from the body and crushed it to dust.

Joy had to help Zack with the stitches. Together, they saved five children. The three boys were nine, eleven, and sixteen. The girls were seven and ten. The next step was to give them physicals and help them out. A few of the kids shook wildly. They received iodine shots, which eventually relaxed them. While he was working, Zack discovered that when he touched an injured area on the body, his hands felt a tingle in them and, in many cases, small cuts and slashes just vanished.

“Zack, you are special. It has been at least four years since we had a healer, here,” Joy said.

Zack could not believe his ears. Did something here give him healing power? How had he not noticed this before? It was the first time Zack felt special.