

A BOY WHO CAN SEE THE FUTURE. A GIRL WHO CAN PART  
THE WAVES. A CONFLICT THAT WILL DESTROY THE PLANET.

# THE PROPHET WARS

VOLUME 1: PROJECT 9:6

THOMAS EMSON

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# T H E D R E A M

A MUEZZIN calls the faithful to dawn prayer. On the horizon the new day bleeds into the old. The reek of camel dung and campfires hang.

The boy leans out of a window and listens to the chant, and sees the dawn, and smells the manure and the burning wood.

Time folds. The window is gone. Sand burns the soles of his feet. His skin itches. His throat needs water.

The desert under him trembles. Out of it a pyramid rises. It drowns him in its shade. In the far left corner a strip of light shimmers.

Time folds again and he is standing at the entrance to a narrow passage. Beyond it a room with a flickering candle. He slides sideways into the gap. It is barely wide enough and he feels the granite scrape his skin. Claustrophobia grips his heart and he feels

panic brewing. He edges along. His chest tightens. Sweat drenches him, head to toe.

He makes it to the end of the passage and looks into a scriptorium. The tiny, low-ceilinged room is lit by a single candle. Its flame sputters and makes shadows dance on the walls. The odours of incense and ink mingle, tickling his nose. His eyes adjust to the gloom. He swears he didn't see this when he first looked into the room, but now a scribe is sitting behind a desk. The writer hunches over a piece of parchment, scratching out words with a quill.

He watches the scribe at work. He looks at the words forming on the paper. They are not words or letters he recognizes but somehow he knows what they say.

He steps from the passage into the scriptorium. A chilly breeze brushes his nape. He looks over his shoulder. The passageway has gone. He is gazing instead at the star-studded heavens. Billions of lights wink at him. But one body burns brighter than the others. He stares at it as it grows and grows and a voice, hissing out words – A VOICE, HISSING OUT WORDS.

He jumps out of his skin. He whirls round to face the writing room. His belly knots. A figure lurks behind the scribe. A cowl hides the stranger's face in

shadow. The spectre is whispering in the scribe's ears... a voice, hissing out words... words the scribe transfers on to the parchment.

The hooded shape raises its head. The flesh on its chin is pale. The nose comes into view, hooked like a beak. The cheeks, deathly white.

The stranger is about to look directly at the boy, a trespasser in this secret place, and the dread of being caught freezes his blood and fills him with horror.

It will be enough to tear him from the dream...

O N E



SEVEN armed men smashed their way into Billy Kingdom's home at 11.57pm on 16 February 2026 and kidnapped him.

Dressed in black, they carried submachine guns, and each one had a knife, a torch, a CS gas canister and an extendable baton clipped to their belt. They wore Kevlar vests and faceguards. Three of them had German shepherd dogs that barked and growled.

The men meant business and although Billy fought like a cat, at 15 years old he stood no chance.

He'd known it was 11.57pm because he'd woken up from another nightmare and checked the time on his phone.

Most of his dreams were about natural disasters. Earthquakes, tsunamis, storms, floods, volcanic eruptions. Some were about human conflicts. Wars, assassinations, political scandals. Two or three days after the dream, it would happen for real.

The night before he had dreamed about an

earthquake. In his sleep the ground caved in under a city of skyscrapers. The buildings sank into the earth. Enormous clouds of dust swirled and formed a canopy over the city. It was dark and noisy. A monstrous roar filled the air as the buildings collapsed, one by one.

As they fell, they crushed everything and everyone.

In his nightmare Billy ran alongside the terrified population. Thousands of men, women and children tried to flee the catastrophe. Their screams rang in Billy's ears. He shared their terror. Adrenaline pounded his heart. He was sweating as he ran with the stampeding crowds. He panted for breath as the dust filled his lungs. His eyes watered as debris from the destruction clogged the air.

Fires broke out and Billy smelled petrol and gas and flesh burning.

He ran and the people ran. Some were crushed underfoot. Others were flattened by falling masonry.

Someone grabbed him. He wheeled round. It was a Chinese woman. He realized in his dream that everyone was Chinese. He didn't know how he knew, but he knew.

The woman was screeching at him in a language he didn't know, although he could understand.

He knew what she was saying.

She was holding out her baby. A new-born thing in rags. She was begging him to take the child and to keep it safe.

He reached for the infant.

The woman smiled through her tears.

The earth under her feet fell away. The ground gulped mother and baby. Billy was left grasping at space and staring into the great, fire-filled pit into which thousands of people were plunging.

For three months that's what it had been like in his head while he slept.

Awake now, he was lathered in sweat. He ran a hand through his hair. It was soaking wet. He had grabbed his phone and checked the time.

He took his notebook from the bedside table so he could scribble down his dream. He'd done that since the visions began in November. Since he had that weird dream about the pyramid and the stars, and the strange figure in the hood whispering words in a scribe's ear while he wrote. Billy's nightmares filled his notebook; pages and pages of scribbles; drawings of the devastation he dreamed – the devastation that came true a few days later. His night-time horrors identically replayed in the world.

And now another one was about to begin. Only he

wouldn't be sleeping through this one.

He was about to write what he'd dreamed when they broke down the flat's front door and came in with their guns, their flashlights and their dogs.

MUM, thought Billy. Mum and Daisy.

He tossed the notebook aside. He leapt off the bed. He raced for the bedroom door. He was only wearing his boxer shorts, but he didn't care.

He burst out of his room. Light blinded him – someone shining a flashlight straight in his face. He squinted and threw an arm across his eyes.

Dogs barked. Footsteps pounded through the flat. Billy was terrified. He had to protect his mother and his sister.

Lots of voices shouted the same words over and over.

“Armed officers! Armed officers!”

Someone grabbed him.

A man said, “This is him, the kid.”

Billy threw his fists recklessly. He made contact with something hard. The man grunted and let go of him. Billy stumbled away from his attacker.

His eyes adjusted. He made out shapes. Big men.

Big men wearing black, armed with submachine guns. His guts writhed.

“Mum! Daisy!”

Another figure loomed over him. He kicked and cracked the man in the knee. But it had no effect.

The soldier charged forward and rammed Billy into a corner.

Billy clawed at the guy’s face. His nails raked the plastic of a protective mask.

The man felt heavy and strong. Billy brought his knee up into somewhere that wasn’t strong – the thug’s groin. The tough guy doubled up, groaning.

Billy made a run for it. Now he heard his mum and Daisy screaming. They were calling his name. Mum was shrieking at the men to get out of her flat or she’d kill them. “I know people,” she shouted.

Billy knew she didn’t. Only a couple of fat bouncers from the club where she worked two evenings a week. Maybe they knew someone, though. Billy prayed they did because these thugs were serious.

Figures surrounded him. He kicked and punched. He snarled and bit hands that came anywhere near his face.

He was scooped up. They gripped his arms and legs tightly and carried him face down along the

corridor. Dread filled him. He was convinced they were going to kill him. Tears welled. But he fought against them. No way was he going to cry. No way was he going to be a baby right now. He was going to be a man.

They tossed him down on the sofa and someone switched on the light, and again Billy was blinded for a moment.

“Sit down and be quiet,” said a man with a Scottish accent.

Billy did exactly that – for two seconds.

He roared and charged at the man. He just had to protect his mum and Daisy – especially Daisy.

She’d upset mum earlier that evening with her news. She’d made Billy angry. She was two years older than him. Although he was the baby of the family, he was also the man of the house. He was meant to protect the women, wasn’t he? But he’d failed.

The Scottish man whacked him across the head. Billy saw stars. He hit the floor. A dog barked in his ear. A foot pressed on the back of his neck, forcing his face into the carpet, which smelled of fags.

“Move again and I’ll have you sedated,” said the Scotsman.

“Leave him alone, you bastards,” said Mum.

Billy tried to get up. But the boot was heavy on his neck.

“Sit down, darling,” the Scot told Mum.

“I ain’t your darling, don’t you never call me darling,” Mum said.

“Whatever you are, sit down and shut up,” the soldier said.

“Has he been in trouble again?” said Daisy.

“Who are you?” said Mum. “We haven’t done anything wrong.”

“No one says you did,” said the Scot.

From the corner of his eye, Billy counted seven pairs of boots. He saw the dogs. They grunted. They were skittery and pulled on their leashes. They scared him more than the men.

A rottweiler bit him when he was nine. Two girls aged about 14 were trying to take the rottie for a walk. They couldn’t control it and the dog broke free and came straight for Billy, who was waiting for his mates.

He screamed as the dog pounced, slobbering jaws, teeth bared. The animal took Billy’s arm and bit, breaking the skin. The dog growled and shook its head from side to side, tearing Billy’s arm.

He screamed and kicked and punched the dog with his free arm, but the animal was in kill mode.

And it would have probably killed Billy. But two



blokes pulled it away. Billy stared in horror as it was dragged off, its jaws full of blood and spit.

Now, six years later, his face pressed into the carpet, the bite throbbed as if reminding Billy of the pain a dog could cause.

“Get him up.”

The Scotsman again.

They dragged him to his feet and plonked him on the sofa.

Mum was kicking and screaming. A soldier gripped her tight, his black-clad arm wrapped around her shoulders from behind. Daisy sat on the sofa. She was crying. Another of the invaders pressed his hand on her shoulder in case she decided to get up.

Billy was ready to fling himself at both men.

“Hey, sonny.”

Billy looked towards the voice.

The Scot had taken his headgear off. He was in his late forties. He was huge, his neck like a tree trunk. His head was shaved. He had freckles and scars on his face. A ginger, Gaucho-style moustache made an archway for his mouth. The man took a tattered and scratched tablet from a backpack and studied it, typing something.

Another of the men had taken his headgear off too. He was Asian. He had a beard and a bald head.

He took what looked like a short version of a lightsabre from those old Star Wars movies that played on loop on TV these days.

The rod shimmered and hummed. The soldier passed it in front of Billy's face.

The Scot scanned the tablet computer.

After a few seconds he said, "Yes, that's him."

"What d'you mean 'That's him'? 'That's him' what?" asked Billy.

"That's him Billy Kingdom," said the Scot.

"I could have told you that."

The Scot smiled. "Just checking, sonny."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Major Duncan."

"Major Duncan from what, the army or something?"

"Yeah, 'something', that's right."

The men laughed.

"What's my Billy done?" said Mum.

"I ain't done nothing," Billy said.

"He hasn't, that's true," said Duncan. "But he's coming with us, now."

Mum yelled. Daisy swore.

Duncan said, "Shut up."

Billy said, "I ain't going with you?"

"Yes you are, sonny."

“Why?”

“Because you’re going to help us save the world.”

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