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THE BLACKGAARD CHRONICLES™



BOOK SEVEN

SCOTCH GAME



PHIL LOLLAR

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Tyndale House Publishers
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The Blackgaard Chronicles: *Scotch Game*

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CHAPTER ONE



“N icholas?”

“In here!” Nicky Adamsworth paused the video game he was playing with a pang of regret. He was just about to finish off the two barons and teleport off Phobos. But he knew that when the owner of that rich, deep voice called for him, he needed to stop what he was doing and give the man his full attention.

Nicky rose from his comfortable, overstuffed chair as Dr. Regis Blackgaard entered the game room. The man’s tall, lithe body was clothed in his customary

impeccably tailored black suit, his angular face all smiles. “Having fun?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.” Blackgaard’s brow furrowed, his smile faded to a grimace, and Nicky added hastily, “Er, *father*.”

Blackgaard’s countenance resumed its previous cheer, and he glanced at the paused screen. “Ah yes, eliminating the two barons! You know, there is a newer version of this game coming out soon. I’ll make sure you get a copy upon my return.”

“Thank you,” Nicky replied without much enthusiasm. He already had more games than he could ever play, and every game system on the market as well, and that was just the beginning. The tastefully furnished game room in the Blackgaard mansion contained every “toy” a teenage computer whiz could want—and more. *Blackgaard is generous in that regard*, Nicky thought. He wanted for nothing.

And yet, despite his wonderful surroundings and ample provisions, Nicky still felt alone. For all his niceness and consideration, Blackgaard was not affectionate. He brooked no mistakes from his subordinates, keeping them in line through fear and intimidation rather

than loyalty and devotion. And though Blackgaard had never turned his wrath upon him—nary a harsh word even when Nicky messed up—he, too, feared his adoptive father.

Nicky had genuine affection for Blackgaard and tried to love him. But he had glimpsed Blackgaard's dark side—cold, severe, ruthless, and devoid of love, incapable of giving or receiving it. Niceness was the best the man could do, the most Nicky could ever hope for from him.

Suddenly he realized what his father had said. “Uh, ‘return’? Where are you going?”

“Upstate New York to pick up an old friend. I won't be gone long.”

“Does it have anything to do with that journal?” Nicky gulped. He knew it was a long shot that Blackgaard would answer him honestly, but he hadn't been able to get the journal out of his mind ever since he'd pilfered it from the safe at Whit's End. He also knew that he was risking getting a taste of the doctor's temper.

But to his surprise, Blackgaard smiled and replied, “Smart boy. As a matter of fact, it does.”

Nicky decided to press his luck. “It’s just that . . . I noticed there were three different kinds of notes in the journal. The handwriting was different on some of the loose pages, and the subject matter seemed to be different as well.”

He was certain he had crossed a line and braced himself for a scolding. But again to his surprise, Blackgaard beamed with pride at him and nodded. “Very observant! Good lad! Yes, that’s one of the things I need my friend’s assistance with.”

“Maybe I could help?”

“Not with that, I’m afraid.”

Nicky’s shoulders slumped.

Blackgaard rested a hand on his son’s head. “Now, now, no need for despair. There are things you can help me with that I need you to do while I’m gone.”

Nicky’s eyes brightened. “Really?”

“That’s why I wanted to see you before I left. Have a seat.” Nicky sank into his gaming chair, and Blackgaard sat on its twin close by. His countenance became ultra-serious, and his tone matched it. “The Odyssey operation is getting ready to begin,” he said in a low voice.

“Bringing in my friend is the last piece. He’ll need certain official documents while he’s here.”

“I take it that’s where I come in?” Nicky asked. “Or more specifically, my hacking skills?”

Blackgaard chuckled. “Yes. But that’s not all. I also need you to find some documents for me from two organizations: the RBG Foundation and Edgebiter Supplies.”

“Edgebiter? The chemical company?”

“That’s the one.”

Nicky nodded. “And when I find these documents, what do you want me to do with them?”

“They’ll need certain . . . *alterations*.”

“And I suppose these alterations aren’t exactly on the up-and-up?”

“Is that a problem?”

“Not for me,” Nicky said. “Just let me know everything you need, and I’ll take care of it.”

“Excellent! Philip will provide you with the details.”

Nicky scowled. “Glossman? I don’t like that guy.”

Blackgaard nodded. “I know the feeling, but he is necessary for now.”

“Is that it?”

“One more thing. There’s a local gang in Odyssey, the Bones of something or other?”

Nicky smiled. “Rath. The Bones of Rath. It’s a play on Rodney’s name.”

“Rodney?”

“The leader. His name is Rodney Rathbone. Get it? ‘Rathbone’? ‘Bones of Rath’?”

“Ah yes,” Blackgaard said dryly. “How droll. His father, Bart, runs the Electric Palace for me. He’s a dolt, but he gets the job done. So you’re familiar with the gang?”

“With one of them anyway. Rusty Gordon. He was involved in the incident that got me sent back to juvie. Why?”

“I want to use them to initiate our little campaign in Odyssey.”

“Use them how?”

“Disruption. Destruction. General mayhem.”

“Oh, they’re good for that.”

“Excellent. Then when the time comes, I want you to set things in motion.”

“Me?” Nicky replied, surprised. “They won’t pay any attention to me!”

“You’re my son. They need to know you have my authority.” He handed Nicky a pager. “When you hear from me, contact Bart and tell him to give the Bones the green light to proceed.”

Nicky nodded. “Okay . . . but . . .” He sighed.

“What’s wrong?”

“It . . . it just seems like I’m missing out on all the fun! Disruption, destruction, mayhem!”

Blackgaard patted his shoulder sympathetically. “That’s for pawns, Nicky—bit players. You’re made for better things. I’m raising you to be a *king*.”



UPSTATE NEW YORK ON THE US-CANADA BORDER: TEN HOURS LATER

Blackgaard sat behind the wheel of a luxury car, concealed by snow-covered trees, and stared intently out the passenger window at the frigid landscape. An expanse of old-growth forest and wilderness was bisected by an impressive river and its barren banks, which extended

several dozen yards back to the trees on both sides. The waterway was frozen solid, the one time of year when it could be traversed safely on foot, though that was never recommended.

There was a much narrower crossing a few miles upriver, but that made it more attractive for crossers—and the border authorities trying to catch them. It was too heavily trafficked for his needs. This crossing was far less used and far less watched. It was all but deserted on this late afternoon.

It seemed like hours since his courier had crossed over, though a quick glance at his watch told him it had been only forty minutes. Time seemed to stand still when one was engaged in nefarious activities. At least that had been his experience. It had taught him patience under pressure, but he couldn't afford to wait here much longer. It was only a matter of time before border patrol checked the area, and besides, his feet were cold.

And then he saw them emerge from the trees on the far bank—the tall, well-built First Nations courier accompanied by a squat, heavysset companion clad in

fur and struggling to keep up. The companion slipped and fell on the bank three times, and five times before the midpoint of the iced-over river. But oddly, once he passed the midpoint, crossing from Canada into the United States, he didn't slip once.

They made their way to land and clawed up the slope to the barren bank, and the courier pointed to Blackgaard's car. The companion nodded, shook the courier's hand, and ran toward the vehicle. The courier waved to Blackgaard and then turned and retraced his steps back to Canada. The companion opened the passenger door of the car and clambered inside, slamming it behind him.

Panting, he pulled down his fur hood, revealing a balding head; a chubby face; a red, frostnipped nose; and thick, steamed-up glasses. "Regis Blackgaard," he said with a curt nod between panting breaths.

Blackgaard smirked. "Thaddeus Bovril. Welcome to America." He started the car and headed for the highway.

"It's not exactly the way I envisioned coming back," Bovril responded, "but I'll take it. I won't ask how you managed to get me out of jail."

“There’s not much that money won’t buy,” Blackgaard replied. “Or the *promise* of money. You actually came rather cheap.”

“Is that so?” Bovril said, cleaning his glasses. “Well, it obviously took some effort, and for that, I’m grateful.” He put his glasses back on. “Now, what in blazes is this all about?”

Blackgaard gestured to the glove box. “Open it.”

Bovril gave him a wary glance and pulled the latch on the compartment. It popped open, revealing a leather-bound journal stuffed with loose, note-filled papers. Bovril retrieved it, closed the glove box, and thumbed through the pages. As he did, his eyes grew wide with wonder. “Are these . . . Professor M’s notes?”

“They are indeed.”

Bovril bounced giddily in his seat. “This is incredible! I heard that the COSU had sold them to someone named Tessler!”

Blackgaard nodded. “That’s his journal.”

Bovril gaped at him in amazement. “You really are remarkable, Regis! How on earth did you get all this?”

Blackgaard waved him off. “It’s a long, involved

story. The point is, we have it, and it's time to put it to use."

"You were always his favorite student, you know—Professor M's."

"But you were his *best* one, which is why I've brought you here. I need a good chemist."

"I gave you *my* best student," Bovril replied. "What happened to Hakim?"

"Part of that long story," Blackgaard said with a tinge of sadness. "He was a casualty of the conflict." A thought hit him. "Oh! Speaking of conflicts . . ." He fished around in his coat pocket, retrieved a pager, held it up, and pushed a preset button on it. The word *GO* appeared on the tiny green screen. He pushed the Send button. The pager buzzed, and he repocketed it.

Bovril continued to sift through the material, and each new page brought a sigh of delight. "Oh, Regis," he whispered, "if this works . . . if this works . . ."

"If it works," Blackgaard finished for him, "it will change everything." *For me, that is*, he added in his thoughts, and then he chuckled softly.

The car sped on in the gathering darkness.



Riiiiing!

It was late afternoon in Odyssey. At the Electric Palace, Bart Rathbone stared at a ringing phone he had just removed from a cabinet in his office. He was momentarily stunned. That phone had never rung before, not because it didn't work, but because it was a special phone, installed at the behest of the business owner. Bart had received instructions upon its installation: It was never to be used for outgoing calls and was to be kept under lock and key. Bart alone was to answer it, and it was made crystal clear that he was to follow the instructions of whoever called him on it *to the letter*. No questions asked.

Riiiiing!

He took a deep breath, picked up the receiver, and put it to his ear. "Uh . . . yeah?"

He was so surprised by the voice on the other end that he almost didn't hear what was said. It sounded like a kid—thirteen, tops! The voice gave Bart specific orders, and for once, Bart didn't say anything but "Got

it” despite his burning curiosity to ask just who this boy was.

The line clicked dead before he could ask anyway, and Bart hung up the receiver and replaced the phone in its locked cabinet. He took another deep breath, opened the office door, and yelled, “Rodney!”

“What?” came the response from across the sales floor.

“C’mere!”

A pimply faced, redheaded teenager in torn blue jeans, a dirty sweatshirt, scruffy tennis shoes, and a perpetual sneer on his kisser loped up to Bart. “Okay, I’m here.”

Bart pulled him into the office and shut the door behind him. “Youse remember that thing we talked about?” he said in a lowered voice.

“You gotta do better than that, Pop,” Rodney replied. “We talk about a lotta things.”

Bart sighed. “That *thing* I told youse to *prepare* for!”

Rodney looked momentarily stumped, and then a light bulb went on. “Oh! The *thing*! Yeah, I remember! What about it?”

Bart swallowed, looked around, and lowered his voice even further. “I just got word. It’s time.”

“Time for what?”

“To do *the thing*, ya numbskull!”

Rodney’s sneer turned into a wicked smile. “For reals?”

“You think I’d kid around about somethin’ like this? Make it happen, Rodney.”

“On it like stink on a monkey, Pop! I’ll round up the Bones! We’ll do ya proud!” He let out a whoop and bolted out of the office toward the front entrance.

“Good,” Bart called after him. “And don’t call me Pop!”