

UNDER THE CLOUD by B.R. Erlank

EXCERPT

Danny Gunderson woke to the muffled sound of gunfire and helicopters. He squinted at his watch and saw that it was only 6 a.m. Then he remembered that it was Saturday, rolled over, and tried to go back to sleep. Finally, after ten minutes of tossing and turning, Danny got up and went to the bathroom. Afterward, he leaned against the doorpost to look at his roommate, Timothy, who sat at a small desk playing Rainbow Six Siege on his laptop. The sound of violence continued to seep out from the roommate's headphones.

Timothy was the same age as Danny – seventeen – and the same height at 5' 8". But that was where all similarities between the two ended. Danny had the physique and looks of a stereotypical California surfer – blonde hair down to his shoulders, blue eyes, a smile to melt a glacier, and an aquiline nose in a perfectly symmetrical face. Timothy was hunched over in his striped pajamas, and with his glasses and unruly black hair, he looked like an awkward teen version of Harry Potter. Danny moved toward the desk and slowly leaned his head into Timothy's field of vision. He gave a small wave and smiled.

Timothy removed the headphones and glanced at Danny, then fixed his gaze onto the computer screen.

Danny said, "Morning, Tim. Since what time have you been up?"

"I got up at four to help my friend Mykyta."

"Mykyta – the Russian hacker?"

"He is not Russian," Timothy said in a monotone, "he's Romanian. And he is not a hacker anymore. He now works for a cybersecurity company."

"Ah-ha, a hacker turned cybersecurity specialist in Romania. That sounds fishy."

"No, it doesn't. Mykyta told me he doesn't work on phishing attacks anymore."

"How did you get out of the controlled network and onto the internet this time? You know you're not supposed..."

"It was easy," Timothy interrupted. "I used coach Jamey's account. He's very predictable. I cracked his password in eight minutes and twenty seconds."