

I N V A S I O N



# I N V A S I O N

A C.H.A.O.S. Novel

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JON S. LEWIS

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THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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**For Nana, who taught me that  
giants could be slain.**



## :: CHAPTER 1 ::

It's a military academy."

Colt McAlister looked at his dad sideways. They were in Washington, D.C., on what was supposed to be a summer vacation, but this didn't look like the kind of place tourists would visit—especially a sixteen-year-old tourist like Colt. "I thought you said this was a camp."

"It's more like a prep school."

"Are you thinking about sending me away?"

"Don't worry," Dad said, and reached over to tousle Colt's hair. "You're just taking a tour, that's all. Besides, they won't admit you until you're eighteen."

"So why am I here?"

"Because you were invited."

"By who?"

"The same people who invited your brothers. This is an elite school. You can't even apply—it's strictly invitation-only."

"What if I don't want to go into the military?"

"That's up to you." As Colt's dad rolled his window down, a panel opened up on one of the brick columns. A mechanical

arm unfolded with a sphere like an eyeball attached to the end. Then a green light flared to life before it scanned Colt and his father. Moments later a buzzer sounded, and the gate opened up.

“Is this place owned by Trident Industries or something?” Colt asked as the red beam shone in his eyes. He was referring to the multinational conglomerate that had its hand in everything from weapons manufacturing and robotics to capital investment and biotechnology.

“I doubt it. Why?”

“You know what they say, Trident is watching,” Colt said with a shrug. “I mean, if scanners like this exist, I wonder what kind of spy equipment is out there.”

“You’ve been listening to too many conspiracy theories.”

“Maybe, but I want one of those for my room,” Colt said as they drove through the opening and down the winding drive.

“It might be a little out of your price range.”

“I was thinking you could buy it for me.”

“I’ll have to talk to your mother.” Dad didn’t hide the sarcasm in his tone.

It wasn’t long before they pulled up to the front steps, but when his dad didn’t get out of the car, Colt frowned.

“Sorry, but this tour is for potential cadets only,” Dad said. “Trust me, it’s more fun that way.”

“Is there something you’re not telling me?”

“I’ll be back to pick you up this afternoon.”

Colt hesitated before he opened the car door. He stepped onto the sidewalk, shut the door, and then stood there until his dad rolled down the window. “Why aren’t there any signs?”

“It’s a top-secret facility.”

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“What kind of school is top secret?”

“You’ll be fine, son, I promise.”

Colt looked over his shoulder at the massive building and felt his chest tighten.

“Look, if this is anything like the tour your brothers took, you’re going to spend most of the day playing video games,” Dad said. “I hear you even get to watch a movie.”

“Seriously?”

“Have I ever lied to you?”

“When I was six you told me it wouldn’t hurt when you pulled my tooth out.”

“That was different.”

“How?”

“Pain is relative.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’re just stalling.”

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“You’re coming back, right?” Colt knew that didn’t sound very macho, but something felt off.

“Of course. And make sure you say hello to Lieutenant Lohr for me.” Dad rolled up the window and pulled away.

After the car disappeared behind a bank of trees, Colt took a deep breath and walked up the front steps. Another buzzer sounded, followed by a click that released the lock. Colt pulled on the handle and walked inside.

The foyer was stark, reminding him of an office building or maybe a bank. There was no art on the walls, the floor was covered in large marble tiles, and a man in a military uniform stood behind the reception area.

“Name?” he asked, his voice monotone as though the answer didn’t matter.

“Colt McAlister.”

The man pushed a button, activating a metal sphere that rose from the countertop. It flew over Colt’s head, where it hovered. There were no strings holding it in the air, and once again, he was distracted by thoughts of Trident Industries spying on the entire world with their top secret network. The Internet was filled with rumors about how they were using it to gather intelligence so they could become the most powerful entity in the world. Sure, Colt thought it was ridiculous. Still, if technology like this hovering scanner existed, then anything was possible.

“What is that?”

“Stand still, please,” the man said as he looked at a monitor.

“It’s flying.”

An aperture opened beneath the belly of the sphere, bathing Colt in a green spotlight as the sphere spun slowly in place. A dimensional replica of Colt flickered to life next to him. It reminded Colt of an X-ray. He could see his skeleton, as well as the change in his front pocket.

“How is it doing that?”

The man ignored Colt’s question. “Do you have a phone, camera, or any other type of recording device?” he asked.

Colt shook his head.

The man pushed the button once more, and the holographic image of Colt disappeared. The aperture closed and the sphere returned to the desk as the man picked up a duffel bag from the floor and handed it to Colt. “You can change in the locker room at the end of the hall.”

“Thanks.” Colt paused, looking at the sphere, then at the man,

who didn't return his gaze. He had all the warmth of a robot, and there was clearly no point in asking more questions.

Colt walked down a long corridor before reaching the boys' locker room. He was expecting more science-fiction gadgetry, but there was nothing extraordinary—at least nothing that stood out. There were walls of stacked lockers, hooks filled with towels next to open shower stalls, and long benches. A dozen boys about his age were in various states of undress as they changed into black T-shirts with matching cargo pants and combat boots.

Colt was strong, but most of them looked like professional athletes. They were tall, their shoulders were broad, their chests thick, and their stomachs taut. Without a word, Colt walked over to a quiet corner and unzipped his bag to find the same uniform.

He dressed quickly, embarrassed to find the bag even had new underwear. Since there was no belt, Colt had to use his own to keep his pants from falling down.

“Where are you from?”

Colt turned around to find a tall boy with dark skin and black hair smiling at him.

“San Diego.”

“So that explains it.”

“Explains what?”

“Your hair.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“You're a surfer dude, right? You have the tan, the blue eyes, and the shaggy blond hair. All you need is a set of puka shells and you could be the poster boy for southern California.”

“I guess,” Colt said before stuffing his old clothes into his duffel bag. He wanted the kid to go away but he decided to be polite. “Where are you from?”

“I was born in Virginia, but I’ve lived in Germany, Japan, Washington, Texas, and a few other places. Right now I live in Arizona.”

“My grandpa lives there.”

“Yeah, I get that a lot. By the way, I’m Romero,” the boy said, offering Colt his enormous hand.

“I’m Colt.”

“So you’re a gunslinger or something?”

“Not exactly.”

As the boys shook hands, another man in uniform walked into the locker room. “Put your personal items in one of the lockers and follow me.”

“I didn’t bring a padlock,” Colt said.

“You don’t need one,” Romero said. “Just put your thumb on that sensor.”

Colt raised his thumb to a small black pad next to one of the lockers, but he paused when he saw a Trident Security logo.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Colt said, thinking his dad was right. Maybe reading all those conspiracy blogs was getting to him. He pressed against the sensor and a green light glowed as the door clicked open. Romero took Colt’s duffel bag, stuffed it inside, and shut the door. Then Colt placed his thumb back on the sensor, but this time a red light flashed three times. The door didn’t open.

“Now you try it,” Romero said.

Colt put his thumb on the sensor, and just like before, the door clicked open. “How does it work?”

“It’s a biometric scanner,” Romero said. “They reset them every night, but for today that’s your locker. The only way someone could break in is if they cut your thumb off.”

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Colt shut the door before trying to open it again.

“We’d better get going,” Romero said. “Lohr is going to make us run laps until we throw up if we’re late for orientation.”

“How do you know so much about this place?”

“My dad is kind of in charge.”

“He’s the principal?”

“Not exactly. He’s the director of the entire agency.”

“What agency?”

“CHAOS.”

“Wait,” Colt said. “As in the CHAOS Agency that protects the world from alien invasions?”

“Yep.”

Colt hesitated. “I don’t get it. I mean, isn’t that just in comic books and movies?”

“You’ll see.”

Romero led Colt through a series of corridors before they came to a set of double doors that slid open like an elevator, revealing a room that looked like an amphitheater. Six rows of desks were filled with quiet boys all dressed in the same gear. Nobody was talking, and Colt could see why.

In the front of the room, standing on a small stage, was a monster at least seven feet tall.