

Thermonte stood in one of the upper rooms of his father's business, looking down into the street from a large window, looking below, watching the action taking place. It was on the other side of the street; two men dressed in black overcoats, confronting the store owner from across the street. One man stood behind the store owner, the other spoke to him in front of him.

The front man hit the shop owner in the stomach with his fist, and with his other hand, patting him on his shoulder. To Thermonte, it reminded him of when his own father yelled at him when he had done something wrong. The finger pointing and shaking, and the business owner down on his knees in front now. The streets were empty this morning, probably because most everyone here in the District of Caste was getting ready to go to temple in a few hours.

"Thermonte, go get yourself dressed young man," yelled his mother reminded him, as she passed his room.

He ignored her, still watching the men outside. Thermonte was a quiet boy. He had just turned eight years old, just two months ago. He had few friends, just those he knew from school, and he spent most of his time looking out of his window in his room. His mother was a strict woman and didn't want him playing out in the streets with the other kids, and she usually dragged him to the Caste Temple of Light every week, where he usually took brief naps during service.

In the days ahead, Thermonte would always see what happened next in slow motion. One man standing in the back of the business owner outside, pulled out a *mark x1*, slender barreled blast pistol pointing the barrel at the back of the owner's head, and shot a hole in the back of it.

Thermonte didn't even blink. It was just another killing in the streets. The Locals would arrive and do an investigation, and he and his mother would walk to the temple as they always had, and nothing would ever be done. It never was.

"Thermonte," he heard his mother calling to him from her own bedroom. "It's time to get ready!"

They lived in the three-bedroom apartment just above the Deli his father owned. His father owned the building, as far as he was concerned. Thermonte turned his head with that last call, and he finally moved to get dressed to go out.

A few moments later, his mother stuck her head in his door. "Hurry yourself up," she said.

"Mom," he said to her. "Is dad not going?"

"He has business this morning," she replied. "Now hurry. We got to get going."

About thirty minutes later, Thermonte walked down the stairs into the Deli where he saw his father sitting at one of the tables. He waved to him, and his father waved back. Holding his mother's hand, he followed her out of the door of the Deli, and began the walk to the temple.

As he walked, Thermonte turned his head around to see a long black air-car pulled up next to his father's Deli, and saw who was getting out. It was the head of the Corlesh Clan, the biggest mob family on the planet of Chotis. Jerking his hand, his mother warned him not to watch, and they turned the corner and the