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# CONNIE'S DANCER

ALIENATION SERIES VOL. 4

WARNING  
Contents recommended for Mature Audience:  
Violence & Sensitive Topics

## **Connie's Dancer**

By Ryan Gray

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## CONNIE'S DANCER

A gloved fist smashed into my face, over and over again.

“Get out of there” a faintly familiar voice fought its way into my ringing ears. “Johnson, get off the ropes!”

I grabbed at anything I could wrap my arms around and pulled towards me, as I shifted and pivoted my feet. The two of us, locked in a struggle of wills, fought over control. Our arms and hands were tangled and not doing much. However, below the surface, the real fight took place for a position.

Our feet battled, feeling for the smallest opening to take the edge away from the other. I felt her hips move and make a big weight shift. My opponent swayed looking for a hip throw “Oops, Cheri, you should have faked first,” I thought to myself. As Cheri swayed with her left hip, I took advantage by shooting to the outside with a left foot while my other leg wrapped around the inside of her left leg as I tipped her over with my body weight. I had caught her perfectly with a Judo takedown.

“There you go, Johnson, stay on the attack. Get past her guard and look for a knee to belly!” My coach screamed as he applauded my takedown.

My opposition fell hard, but the fight was far from over. As we both smashed against the mat, Cheri wisely went on the defense and wrapped both legs around my waist and arms around my head. This will make my job of forcing her to tap out harder. At this point, most fighters would begin working their way past the legs of their opponent, referred to as their guard. Alternatively, they could stand up and lean all their weight onto their opponent's shoulders, forcing them to choose between giving up their defensive position or being folded in half, referred to as 'stacking.' However, I decided I did not want to wait to pass her guard or take the time to stack up her body. Instead, I quickly snatched up her right wrist with both hands and stood. As expected, she locked her legs even tighter around my waist and held on for dear life.

“Johnson, don't you dare!” My coach screamed from outside the ring.

I ignored him and stood up with all the strength my legs could muster. When Cheri was a good three to four feet off the mat, I slammed her back down, with a massive thud. My sparring partner let go and went limp for a second from the shock; that's all I needed. I passed her guard and pounced on her chest like a cat,

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reining hammer-fist strikes down on her face until two big arms pulled me off her. I didn't stop swinging: I hadn't heard a bell and she never tapped out.

My coach sat me on the mat and shook me by the shoulders, "What the hell, Johnson, didn't you hear me?"

I snapped back into reality, "Sorry, what's that coach?" I pulled my mouthpiece out and leaned my head back, trying to suck in more air. "What? Is Cheri not ok?"

"Nah, I'm fine, you psycho." Cheri snapped back. "Learn what sparring is, moron."

"I'm here to fight, so go home and cry to mommy, if you don't wanna roll with the big boys."

"The two of you knock it off!" Coach cut us both off but stuffed a finger in my face.

"We are all doing you a favor, Johnson, being here on Christmas morning. We are only here cause we wanna help in your upcoming fight. But no one here is getting paid enough to get hurt. You pull any crap like you just did, or by not listening to me, and I'm done with you."

My coach sighed and took a breath, but continued, "Johnson, you have some of the most pound for pound strength and raw talent I've ever seen in any fighter. You could dominate the woman's division unlike anyone ever before, but not if you aren't willing to learn and get better. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, yeah." I rolled my eyes as I stood to leave.

"Hey," he snatched up my arm, "This is my house - my rules." He leaned into my face, "Do you understand?"

Now, most people would think that a kid, who grew up bouncing from foster home to foster home and had been in more fistfights than she could count would snap and pop their coach for stepping up like that. But, those of us born and tested by the streets weren't stupid, well, at least those of us who had survived. My coach was the most skilled fighter in the city, the only man to ever hold a boxing and MMA title at the same time. Besides that, he was the best coach around and a pretty good guy. If I couldn't get along with him...then I really was done.

"Ok, ok, coach, sorry. You're right. Just, don't like this whole Christmas thing." I hung my head to complete selling the lie. I loved Christmas, it was one of the best times to have fun and get cool stuff during my times in the foster homes. But after more than a decade with therapists, counselors, pastors, and a couple of psychologists, I knew what adults expected from foster kids. Most importantly, I

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knew when to play on those expectations for sympathy.

Coach sighed and calmed down, "I'm sorry, kid, I should have thought of that. Do you want to come over and spend the day with me and the family?"

"I don't know, I'll think about it." I lied again.

"Ok, well, hit the showers and we'll see you back here tomorrow. Oh, and lock up. Make sure you hit the lights when you leave." He gave me a big bear hug, which I always braced for in an attempt to seem apathetic. To be honest, any human contact always warmed up my insides just a little bit, but I'd never admit that to anyone.

Fifteen minutes later, I ran my hand across my shaved head, as I began closing up the gym. Just before I hit the light switch labeled "main" everything went dead. "Huh? Power out?" I mused allowed. I flipped the switch up and down, but nothing happened. So, I left the little white levers in the off position and locked up.

As I stepped outside, I checked the ride-sharing app on my phone to see how much longer my ride would be, "Ugh, 22 minutes," I moaned, then plopped down on the front stoop of the gym building as I checked my surroundings. Kensington was an old neighborhood in Philly, with a deep history of race riots, famous mobsters, and even some Hollywood fame, back in the day, from Philly's own: Rocky Balboa.

Of course, the creator of the iconic boxer, Sly, was actually from NYC, but few cities in the world obsess over boxing more than Philly, so Rocky was still our guy. At least I think he is. I may be biased, of course, my life is fighting. Ever since the first time I walked onto the boy's wrestling team at school and made the captain look like a fool, the team's coach took me under his wing. After a couple of years, he introduced me to Mix Martial Arts (MMA) and eventually my current gym, with pro-level coaching.

Most would have shied away from four hours of daily training, and decided it wasn't worth it, but I ate it up. My mind was set on one goal: *beating whoever was in front of me and dominating until I couldn't dominate anymore, even if I had to eat the ....*

My thoughts were interrupted by the dandy little prancer who stepped out of the dance studio next door; the only reason I hated coming to this gym. He was covered up with a thick coat and a beany atop what I guessed was still ugly bleached white hair. Ever since the first time I noticed him three months ago entering the ballet and jazz studio, I had successfully avoided the freak by

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scheduling my workouts to end half an hour after their class finished. However, this was an anomaly, a Christmas day workout. I was caught, right out in the open and with nowhere to hide, the little dandy could see me.

I attempted to melt into the stoop and hid my face as best I could, but it wasn't enough. Just as the dandy was lighting up a cigarette, he glanced over in my direction, stopped, and exclaimed in a voice that was still far too loud and irritating for my liking, "Yo, Connie!"

I winced, I hated that name so much! It felt so..bubbly! "Nobody calls me that anymore, Stew."

Stew ran around the railing and back up my steps wrapping uninvited, long arms around my shoulders. "So, good to see you sister-girl."

I looked away and moaned, "I'm not your sister, Stew. We were just a couple of unwanted brats, stuffed into the same group home for a few years."

He laughed and sat down next to me and completed lighting up his cancer stick. "I can see you're still a wonderful delight."

"I can see you're still an annoying, little, gender-confused fairy."

Stew chuckled at the reference, "Oh, that's so outta pocket! I'm the one who's gender confused? You're little, Miss Balboa over there, you and your shaved head."

"Yeah, well, at least I know I'm a woman, I just also happen to kick some butt, too! OK, Stew, so shut it."

"Oh, so, cause I'm gay then I'm not drawlin? What, you won't like me, or maybe you'll narc on me again to our old foster mom. She might make me clean out her garage...for, like, the seventh time?"

"Don't be wack!" I snapped, "I don't care that you're gay. It's just...what I can't handle...your frilly, weak...whatever." I didn't know what to say. I knew I didn't like his "thing", but couldn't quite place my finger on whatever it was..

"Ballet?" Exclaimed Stew. "You don't like me anymore and won't talk to me because my profession is dancing? WOW! For being a straight girl in an obvious lesbian disguise, you sure are judgmental."

"It's pronounced 'judgemental'. It's just a word and not very hard to say. Why do you always do that?"

Stew, always the optimist, cocked his head back and laughed at me, "Do what? What did I do this time?"

"You always have to shorten words for no reason. Just..." I stuttered a bit until I managed to growl out, "Just be normal."

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“Fine,” His voice deepened and Stew stuck his chest out adding mannerisms that were something akin to a lazy drunk, “How’s this? Football, girls...beer! Right on...by the way, I hope you punch the other girl’s lights out before she hurts you!” He grinned at me. “Not bad, right? I had to play a jock in an off-broadway production a few years ago.”

“Wait, hold on, what’s that crack about my fights?”

“What, that I don’t want you to get hurt, umm, I don’t know? Maybe, you’re one of the only people in this world I shared my childhood with and I don’t want to see you end up a punch drunk senile forty-five-year-old woman, with no one to leave behind except the thirteen cats who will eventually eat your corpse, when you die alone. And, BTW, if we are bringing up pronouncing words, the name is Stewart, I haven’t been ‘Stew’ since the tenth grade.” He stood and tossed his cigarette.

“Whatever,” I growled, “Do what you want.”

“You know,” Stewart turned back to me, and placed a hand on my shoulder, “You don’t have to attack and control everything around you to keep yourself safe.”

I glared daggers back at my foster brother, “What would you know about safety?”

He shrugged, “You’re not the only one who’s been hurt, sister girl,” He turned to walk away, but stopped.

*Ugh, just go, before I kick you down these steps.* I screamed in my head.

“Yo, Merry Christmas, Connie, it’s good to see you again.”

I snatched up my gym bag and stormed past him down the steps, and mumbled something to the effect of “Who cares,” but there was probably a four-letter descriptor stuffed into my response for good measure.

I scurried down the sidewalk towards a busy T-junction which led downtown. I swore under my breath, “What a weak, moron. The little fairy is lucky to even be alive.” But, my angry mutterings were interrupted, by an unexpected shoulder check. Someone ran past me, we collided shoulders and I almost hit the pavement. “Watch it, you jerk!” I screamed at him and even thought about chasing him down and letting him know he’d just messed with the wrong chick, but I took a second to look around. Everybody was running!

The main street looked to be flushing all humans down into the T-junction from the direction of downtown. It looked like one of those online videos of a covert in a flash flood, and that covert was about to smash all that force into my

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body! I turned and ran back up the street as cars and people hair-pinned around the corner towards me. The first two vehicles made it, the third was bumped by the car behind it. It turned and spun out, which started a pile-up that put that street out of commission within a matter of seconds.

I peered over my shoulder, as I saw pedestrians pour into the intersection, turn the corner and run towards me, escaping an unseen danger. I had no idea what I was running from, but when hundreds charge towards you, getting out of the way is not a matter of choice.

When the stoop was in view I spotted Stew sitting back on his side of the steps with a cigarette in hand.

“Move!” I screamed. “Go, go, go!”

He stood with a confused look on his face until the mob behind me came into view. I must have looked like a movie character being chased by angry villagers.

I tossed my bag over Stew's head, ran up the steps, grabbed him by the collar. He was still standing and staring, cigarette in hand, not sure what to do. So, I drug him back down the steps. We turned the corner and hid next to the stoop, waiting for the herd of humans to rush pass.

As the crowd thinned, I pressed my arm against Stew to keep him back and safe. It was a force of habit from being the big sister for those three years we lived in the same home.

I peered over the steps down the street only to be met by a violent shock wave that knocked me onto my butt.

“Connie! You a'ight?”

I shook my head, “Yeah, Stew, I'm good. But, what the hell was that?”

This time, we both peeked over the step and noticed a black and white van labeled “Police” flipped onto its back. It was on fire and had a gaping hole through what used to be its engine block.

“Naw, ways!!!” Stew and I both exclaimed with a thick Philly drawl.

Sirens stole our attention from down the street. Two squad cars came to a screeching halt, blocking the road. Four officers sprang from their black and whites, weapons in hand. Two were armed with black tactical rifles and the others with shotguns. One noticed Stew and I and screamed, “Yo, yous, need to get outa here, now!”

We nodded vigorously and turned to make our escape when all hell broke loose. Explosions, gunfire, and screams erupted with such savagery, that it felt as



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though the oxygen had been snatched from my lungs. I felt someone dragging me and pulling me back behind the stoop. Stew shook me violently. “Breathe! Connie, you have to breathe!”

I nodded with limited understanding and let out a little air, but then sucked in too hard and too fast.

“Slower, sister, slower.”

Finally, as if a switch flipped in my brain, my training turned on. I focused on my breath, thinking about every inhale and exhale and calming my heart rate. After ten breaths, I sat up and checked to see what was happening with the cops. One squad car was on fire, and the other was littered with holes and almost every window was blown out. One of the cops was sprawled out on the ground not moving, another clutching a sizable leg wound, while the other two continued to fight, giving pedestrians time to evacuate. Strange green streaking lights zipped past the cop cars. “Maybe a new type of bullet terrorists are using?” I muttered to Stew.

No matter what, I was beginning to get pissed off! I’d never been really good friends with cops. My experience was being detained a few times and once arrested for fighting, however, this was still my city, my Philadelphia! “No one messes with Philly!” I growled and glared at Stewart.

He nodded his head and grinned, “Hell ya, sista-girl! Let’s do it.”

I grabbed my backpack, searching for my phone, and told Stew to do the same. After we located them, we switched the smartphones to video mode and pressed against the steps, but held the phones up just high enough to record down the street in two different angles. After twenty seconds we brought the smartphones down and reviewed the “intel.”

“What am I looking at?” Stew asked. He had paused his video and zoomed into the picture, studying the same dark figure I was.

“Looks like a huge monster of a man, with a giant gun.”

“No ways! Ain’t nobody that big!”

I stared harder at the image. He was right, there wasn’t anybody that big. “So, this must not be a body!” I yelled over the sounds of the explosions.

“What?” Stew yelled back.

“This isn’t human, maybe a robot, like a super-soldier, but definitely not human.”

“Terminator!” Stew shot back with a terrified expression.

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I shrugged my shoulders, "All I can say, is they really wanna kill everyone. And they're tearing up our neighborhood."

"What do we do?"

"Well, I think we have to get down to the cops and..."

Stewart's hand clapped itself over my mouth. I almost smacked him, until I noticed his bulging, terrified eyes.

He slowly pointed to our right, no more than twenty feet away. One of the giant robot things stood, creeping up on the remaining two police officers. It had to be at least 8 or 9 feet tall and was green...with scales? "Impossible" I muttered aloud. I also noticed that its face was covered by something that looked like a high tech motorcycle helmet.

"What the hell, bro?" Stew muttered.

The monster, robot...thingy, did not seem to notice us as it was locked onto its prey. As it crept forward, it also closed the distance between us and him...or her, maybe? This giant green monster I wanted to kill was definitely badass enough to be a female. However, this wasn't the first female monster I had taken on.

Very little time had elapsed since the attack first hit, but every second felt like an hour. I knew very well why. My adrenaline was pumping through my body at an unprecedented rate. This made my thought processes and reaction time faster, giving me the illusion that time had slowed. That was a problem. Adrenaline was finite. I had only another minute or two tops before my energy levels would crash and if I didn't calm down, I could go into shock. I also knew to win this fight, the two remaining cops needed to stay alive. All this information processed in my mind within the time it took for me to glance at Stew and state, "Stay here and make sure nothing sneaks up behind me!"

I used to carry a knife, but since my MMA career had taken off, I didn't want to risk being caught up in a fight with a weapon, besides that, I hadn't been in a street fight in almost two years, since I'd focused on keeping my fights in the ring. But, man I really missed that blade. I looked down. In my hand was my smartphone, *better than nothing*. I thought to myself.

Then I moved. I sprang from our little hiding spot, leaped upon a hand railing to the right of our position with one foot, pushed off the metal railing with all my might, and vaulted atop the giant back of the monster. With something this size, it would be tempting to play it safe and attack the legs, but I knew how strong even a little woman's legs could be. An eight and a half foot 500lb monster like this would

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only squash me like a bug. So, I needed to find a soft spot. So, why not start with the neck?

I stuck a perfect landing on the intruder, surprising the monster so much that its weapon bounced off the cement sidewalk after the monster dropped it, as I wrapped my arms around its neck. I immediately spotted a thin spot on its neck. I slammed the corner of my phone into the crevice of its neck with all my might. The animal screamed in pain and clawed at its back to tear me off. I dodged blows as I jabbed at the soft spot over and over. The creature then got smart. It identified a brick wall behind us and backed its one quarter ton body into the wall. I knew it was coming, but my style was to never back down, never go on defense, attack, attack, attack! Well, usually it worked...just, not this time.

I had just managed to break through the scaly skin of the green monster when everything went black. Moments later, I regained consciousness on the ground. And looked up to see a hazy figure staring down at me. It had a giant head and massive feet. "Oh, that's right, I'm trying to kill you!" I muttered aloud to myself, as I tried to crawl back to my feet. The world around me spun out of control as I tumbled back to the ground.

I could see enough to make out a giant foot raise itself over my head. I really wanted to move out of the way, but my body would not respond to my brain's commands. This was it. I was done. Whatever. I'd thought about dying longer than most folks think about living. I wasn't scared. Actually, I was kind of relieved. My secret fear had always been cowardice. That's why I loved fighting so much, it wasn't about winning. It was a constant proving ground against fear. Proof that I wasn't afraid, that I would never back down. Going out now meant just that. I was dying cause I refused to back down. There was only one thing I could think to say, "Stew, I'm sorry...run!" I didn't know where he was, but I hoped he was smart enough to get out.

He wasn't!

"Hey, Jackass! Get your foot off my sister." The monster turned on Stew and marched up to the dancer. Stew stood in complete defiance, feet set wide, white-bleached hair flowing in the cold winter air, hands behind his back, with a cocky look that would make any acting coach proud.

They stared one another down from only six feet away. "Don't know which hole you crawled out of, son, but that's my sista you're messing with. Big mistake!" His thick Philly accent really showed through when Stew was pissed off.

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The monster reached under its chin and pressed a button, something hissed from inside the helmet as he pulled it off. "There's no way, I must be dreaming!" I exclaimed to myself. There in front of me, stood a giant man with the head of a crocodile, snake, reptile ...thingy and it spoke...English!

Its speech could be understood, but it's vocal cords released words from a hiss, much different from any language I'd ever heard. As if its size and appearance were not enough to intimidate, the creature's voice was downright creepy. When it spoke every word felt as though it were dipped in tar and chased with a contagious gloom, darkening the soul. "What a pretty little prancer, maybe I'll keep you as a pet?" The monster hissed down at Stew.

The dancer took a step forward and looked up, "And if you don't leave right now, maybe I'll turn you into some boots with a matching man-purse."

The giant hissed what I could only guess was its version of laughter, "You and what army, dancing boy?"

"Just me, cupcake." After a sarcastic wink, Stew's right hand slid around from behind his back, revealing a Glock 9mm semi-auto handgun. With expert precision, he locked the weapon against his hip and began firing as he closed the distance between him and the monster. The giant reptilian screamed in pain as two bullets struck true, one in his hip and the other just below the navel. Stew was about to press his advantage as the giant reptile took a swipe at him. The dancer saw it coming. The giant claw missed Stew by a foot as he spun to the right and dropped to a kneeling position. He paused for only a second and fired twice into each knee cap. The animal collapsed to its knees, bringing its head down to Stew's level.

The gunslinging dancer stood and stepped right up into the face of the agonizing reptile and stuffed the Glock 9mm under his chin. "You pissed off the wrong family, homie." Then fired the gun twice.

The giant dropped to the ground as a crimson mist of blood spatter settled upon Stew's white hair and face. He coughed "ugh, I think I got some in my mouth! Son of a..." Stew stopped short of swearing as he attempted to escape the blood transfer and check on me. "You okay, sis?"

As he helped me sit up, I stared at him in shock. "You're a badass? I had no idea? Where'd you learn to shoot like that?"

He shrugged, "Tactical training at the gun club." Stew gave me a sly smirk, "I may be a gay, ballet dancer, but I'm still an American! All my friends outside of work are ex-military or law enforcement, and I'm a proud card-carrying member of

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the NRA!” He ran his hand around my back checking for broken bones and blood, something that was second nature to us both.

“Wait, why didn’t you just shoot him, to begin with...ouch!”, Stew found something tender. Stew rolled his eyes at me, “Cause like always, you know best and take charge without asking anyone else’s opinion. Besides, I figured this 9mm would be like a pop gun against these things. I needed to be close. We got lucky, real lucky. Now, if we can get some real firepower, maybe...” My bro stopped as he noticed tears streaming down my cheeks. He wrapped a gentle arm around my shoulder and pulled my head into his. “Shhh....it’s ok, we’re gonna make it through this.”

I sat up and looked into his soft green eyes, “Nah, I don’t care about all that, I’m just so sorry...I haven’t been there.”

“Ah, it’s ok, sis, I know...”

“No, you don’t know! Just let me finish.”

Stew nodded as I continued.

“Ever since that last beating you took in high school when you were in the hospital on life support, I just....”, words were suddenly stuck in my throat. My brain was okay, it wanted to communicate, but now, every word felt like bowling balls being forced through my neck.

Stew smiled, “It’s okay, take your time.”

I nodded and waited for my throat to relax. I was vaguely aware of the continuing firefight on the street, the sound of gunfire, explosions, and zapping energy weapons. All I really cared about at the moment was the chance to finally come clean.

“I couldn’t watch you die again, so I decided you were already dead to me. I used your lifestyle as an excuse. You wouldn’t change to protect yourself, so it’s your own freaking fault!” I wailed as I hid my face in my hands, “I’m so sorry Stew...I’m so sorry. I wasted so much time being afraid of losing you, losing more family...I’m so sorry.”

I half expected him to push me away or pull away from me, but I should have known better. Stew always had twice the heart and maturity than I did. He wrapped his other arm around me and his grip around my shoulders tightened as I felt his lips press against my shaved head. I gripped him with both arms tightly as we held each other for what could have been ten seconds or possibly an hour. But, for those moments, we were reunited and our family was reborn. A family not through blood nor marriage, but a family nonetheless. A family birthed out of hardships, violence,

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and neglect, but purified by loyalty, conquering fear and anger, and discovering love in the least likely of circumstances.

When we finally let go, it was Stew who took charge, "Can you move, Johnson?"

I looked up at him and smiled, "Call me Connie."

He shot me that boyish grin of his, "I like that...and that strange curving shape your mouth is making, is very foreign, but it reminds me of how pretty my big sister is."

I rolled my eyes as I fought to stand up, "Shut up...you had to ruin the moment. Trying to be nice, and you gotta get all frilly on me."

Stew wrapped my arm around his shoulder and helped me stand. "Oh, so we're not past the ballet hate and making fun of my fabulous fashion sense?"

"I glared, but then winked, never."

"Good, cause until you prove otherwise, you're still She-Hulk."

"Whatever,...so now what?"

Stew stepped over the giant dead body, bent down, and hefted the monster's laser cannon up and looked back at me over his shoulder and grinned, "Let's go, carve us some boots and bags."

I grinned, "Hell ya!"

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DANCER

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# THE ALIENATION SERIES BY RYAN GRAY

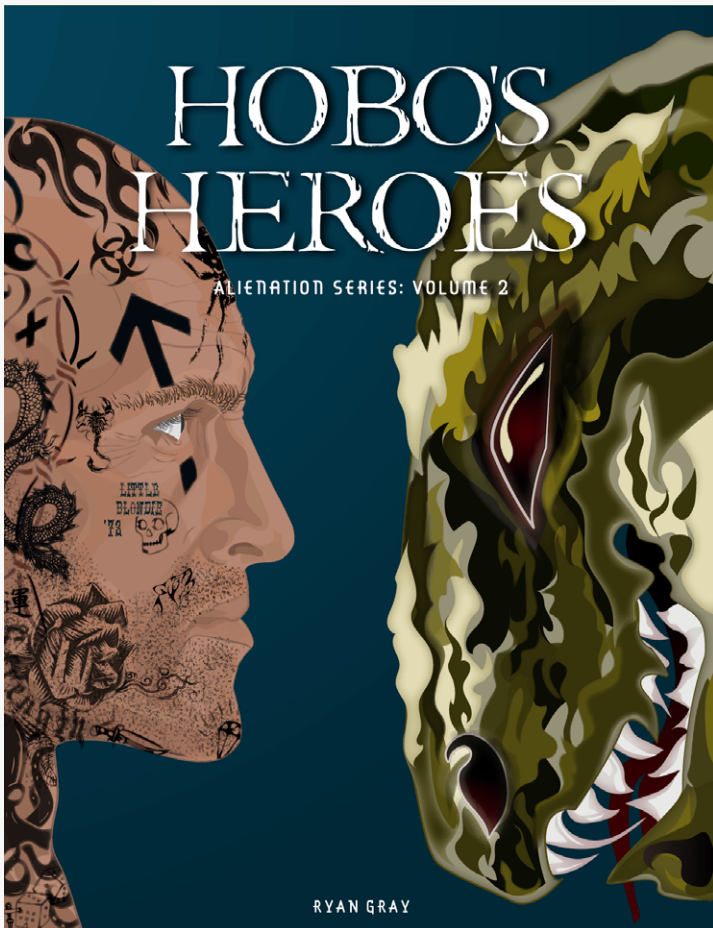
## JASON'S ALIENATED FAMILY: VOLUME ONE



How can I describe a day like today?

The food was almost gone, clean water scarce, neighbors killing neighbors, and the military fighting an unknown enemy for the very survival over our planet! Yet, I feel more complete and joyful than I have in a very long time, calm even. How do I describe such redemption in my heart amongst so much destruction? Honestly, I don't know if I can. But if I don't try, I might just explode...

## HOBO'S HEROES: VOLUME TWO



I turned to my audience.  
“Now, since you’re gonna bleed to death, cause I shot you, like 7 times. I think it’s only fair, that I tell you why. Let me start from the beginning. Around here, I’m known as a bum...”

## HOBO'S HEROES: VOLUME THREE



Christmas morning and Air-force Captain JT Cameron is stuck at work, monitoring a mission that most consider a waste of time. Suddenly, the captain is thrust into a world-altering moment he had hoped for but dreaded since his first encounter, nine years earlier. Unidentified objects are detected near the dark side of the moon, and they are drawing closer to earth. Within minutes, he finds himself coordinating an impossible mission answering only to the POTUS, the President of the United States.