

Evie Rhodes

Email: evierhodes@evierhodes.com

Web Site: www.evierhodes.com

Chapter 1

Aisha Jackson ran up to Jasmine. She tagged her. "You're it," she shouted.

Jasmine stomped her foot, starting to count. "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six. . ."

The kids squealed, laughing. They ran to find hiding places. At the corner of the block several young men were hanging out.

Standing on the corner of Muhammad Ali Blvd and 18th Ave. as though he owned it, and everything within its range was Temaine Perry who was seventeen years old.

He was a tall, rangy, wiry youth, with an edgy, moody personality. His dark edge was a source of attraction, but his restlessness was a magnet of trouble.

Never one to miss a shot he said, "Man, Ballistic is trying to roll down on niggas. It's time to drop that nigga.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-2

He can't get no action on this turf. That punk is from Irvington. How does he think he's gonna get a slice of Newark's pie. This is Port Newark baby. We is running things up in here.”

Rico DeLeon Hudson was nineteen years old. He was serious, methodical and as territorial as a panther, roaming the jungle. Although he was a good two inches shorter than Temaine's six feet one inches, there was no doubt he was the leader. Persona non grata, he was respected, awed and not to be played with.

Rico had been dodging bullets, running the streets and true to the game since he was twelve years old. He had also, always been the leader.

Everybody, who was anybody on the streets, knew Rico who sported a nappy Afro that was always groomed to perfection. His face was angular, sleek and his eyes emitted one truth, if one looked closely enough. That truth was death. It sprang from the depths of his eyes as lithe as a panther.

His deception was the seeming innocence that oozed from him. He was a mother's nightmare. A slick, sheen of charm covered the veneer of who he really was.

Underneath the veneer of innocence was a cold, cruel, calculating mind. He was of a generation that had to have it all now, by any means necessary. Coming in second was not an option.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-3

Rico stared at Temaine. They had been running the streets together since elementary school. They had taken a blood oath to always have each other's back. Rico who was always dressed in the latest sports gear, tugged at the collar of his \$900.00 leather jacket.

He straightened the hood on the jacket, and then stuffed his hands in his pocket. He stepped to the curb swearing under his breath.

High up on a roof Spence Parkinson was dressed in black, complete with a black cap pulled low covering his forehead. He aimed the rifle with the scope at Rico. Rico stepped into sharp focus. Spence nodded his head slightly.

Jasmine shouted even louder, “Five, four, three, two. . .” She ran toward the corner. Spence hoisted and balanced the rifle. He zoomed in. The scope teetered back and forth.

Rico stooped down on the side of Temaine. The scope followed him. The red dot centered on his heart. Jasmine careened into Rico shouting, “One!”

Rico jumped back.

The rifle kicked, the blast let loose ripping through the girl-child, Jasmine. Her arms spread like the wings of an angel, her body was airborne. The blast lifted her off her feet, knocking her to the ground.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-4

Rico's crew ducked and ran. Kids screamed. A high-pitched wail sliced through air. Rico did not know whose it was, but it shattered him in a deep secret place.

The entire incident had happened in a split second. For an instant every bit of noise on the street became a deafening silence. The kids running up and down froze as though someone had shouted, freeze frame.

Rico rolled her over, staring into the dull expression on the little girl's face. Though it was out of character for him, gently he cradled her in his arms, running a hand through her hair. Blood smeared all over his leather jacket, and the acrid smell of the blood and gunpowder drifted up into his nostrils.

Temaine was bugging. What the hell was he doing? He tugged on Rico's jacket. "Let her go man! Come on! We've got to raise up out of here!"

At the sound of Temaine's voice, Rico recovered, jumping to his feet. They cleared the area as though they had never been in existence.

A crowd gathered in the street. Jasmine lay face up on the concrete, where Rico had dropped her. Marcus Simms, who was ten years old and Jasmine's best friend, stared at her lying on the ground.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-5

He trembled as he saw her blood seep into the dirty gutter. He watched it trickle and spill down into the sewer, which had been erected at the edge of the curb.

Her eyes were sightless. Her face was expressionless. She resembled a porcelain doll that had been abandoned in someone's wake. Although the air had been still a moment ago, the trees now shook with an unknown spirit.

Marcus stared into the trees, watching what amounted to a mist until it disappeared. He heard an unearthly shrieking that pierced the core of his being.

Although he couldn't quite make out the words that were being shrieked it sounded like something scraping across glass. The sound was high-pitched and shattering.

From the corner of his eye he saw a huge pair of black wings flapping, or he thought he did. He blinked. It was gone.

He turned back to the shell that was Jasmine Davenport. Frozen in place he did not move. Unconsciously he whispered, "Someone call 911."

Knowing in his neighborhood, that's all it was, was a call, a disembodied voice on a wire. There was no real Savior for them on the other end of the line.

The thought sent a tear chasing a spot of dirt down Marcus's cheek.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-6

They were standing on shaky ground. That ground was Newark, New Jersey. The Central Ward. Newark's Central Ward was legendary even amongst the dark and dangerous.

The most curious thing about The Central Ward was the level of co-habitation.

It was home to some of the most notorious, ruthless thugs breathing, as well as to those whom were regular citizens struggling for upward mobility.

And of course there was always the low income, those who were simply trapped. Not having any paper to spread around meant they were not captains of their own existence.

They were the forgotten victims sitting on a patch of dirt that society at large had basically given up on, but that those who knew how to drain money out of misery had targeted at the top of their list and they were raking in the cream, at the expense of the downtrodden and defenseless.

There were housing apartment complexes that you couldn't go in. Period. There were pockets of The Central Ward that you could meet your maker in. Serious business.

Projects where a person could disappear never to be heard from again. The projects had their own roaming security, packs of young boys ages ranging from eight to fourteen, had it locked down. Corporate American had never employed security that was as tight as this.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-7

Coexisting right along side the older apartment complexes were new developments with landscaped lawns, barbecue grills and bright shiny new Cadillac Denali's, if you can believe that in the driveways.

There was a very conflicting contrast between someone trying to make a change, as the new developments were testament to. To those who were forgotten as the older dilapidated buildings with people leaning out of the windows on hot days with gunshots ringing out from the hallways, or blood flung against the walls testified to.

And you know what?

Even the least of the animals in a jungle knew, that it was the fittest of the fit that survived. But these were not animals these were people, living, breathing souls all trying to survive. In some cases they were trying to survive in surroundings not fit for human habitation.

Except The Central Ward was not about surviving. On the surface it appeared to be but it wasn't. You weren't surviving if you were scared to death, trapped and couldn't get out. You were just one of the living dead.

The mechanism for survival had died long ago; this was defeat, existing but never living.

The Central Ward was actually about law and lawlessness, and the rulers thereof decided.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-8

On the corners of these streets the churches, the bodegas and liquor stores competed for passing bodies. Needless to say the churches weren't winning out. And no one could really figure out why.

The churches were dying on the same corners as the people, since there was a lack of youth to fill the inside pews. There were barely any children to add their voices to the choir.

Although the body drops were occurring at an alarming rate there were no bodies to fill up the pews in search of salvation, freedom or hope. An entire two generations was missing from the churches.

Perry and Whigham Funeral Homes, which were located around the corner from each other, were at an all time high. They were raking in the remains of what the churches did not. Death had become a profitable business in the black community.

And death was just about death because what it really boiled down to was that death was the only real means of escape. It was for some the only way to get out. Word.

And then there was the darkness, it sprouted from the souls of men, it danced in their blood spilled in the streets, and it permeated the very air they breathed.

They lived with darkness on a daily basis. Even when the sun was shining. Yet they didn't see it, no they didn't really see it. Couldn't really comprehend it.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-9

They didn't know what it truly was. And they didn't know its name. Not really, because they didn't believe.

They thought that was just the way it was. Deceit. Deceit at its highest level. The players being played because they didn't believe they had the power to change it. And if you didn't believe it you couldn't receive it.

Such was The Central Ward.

The tragedy of it was no they didn't see it. Couldn't see it. God why couldn't they see it? Death was an alternate escape route.

Little Jasmine Davenport had escaped and Marcus Simms who sat watching her life's blood disappear into the sewer had seen but as of yet he didn't know what he'd seen.

“Someone please call 911,” he whispered for the second time that day into an empty pit where no one seemed to answer. His voice was a small echo in a really big abyss.

After all this was The Central Ward. There really wasn't any hurry. Was there?

Jasmine Davenport was only one of the children who were lost. And she could count herself lucky because she had escaped with her soul.

There were many others who would not.

Welcome to The Central Ward.

Rhodes – Out “A” Order-10

And be forewarned you will need to see with your spirit not just with your eyes.

Upon this reading you have deemed to enter a different world. It is a world that co-exists by its own laws.

And that world is in and of itself OUT “A” ORDER! Believe that.