

## **Learn effective ways to scale Agile software development in an enjoyable and memorable way**

The following concepts are covered in this dramatic story: scaling Scrum with LeSS, systems thinking, organizational Design, Systems Modeling, and how to develop a transformation plan that your organization can actually do.

### **Kartar Patel**

. . . a savvy Scrum Master charged with scaling Agile across a logistics company who's organizational structure is ill suited. Ill suited for Agile but right suited for Mr. Cherneski, a selfish genius who masterminded an organization of siloed pigeon holes which unknowingly support his darknet business. Kartar's transformation work is fought at every turn. Then he's left for dead in Indian Ocean and hunted by a foreign intelligence agency. Kartar washes ashore in Mumbai without his memory and while on the run, he learns tools to analyze and adjust organizational structures. By the time he recovers from amnesia, he has only twenty-four hours to stop his daughter from marrying Cherneski's son and get his Agile transformation back on track.

### **Lance(r) Kind**

. . . an Agile consultant and science fiction author who consults in the USA, China, and India, at many famous Fortune 100 companies. His works include: AGILE NOIR, SCRUM NOIR, MEMORY'S VICTIMS, CAVEMAN FUNK, BIT STORM, and HONOLULU HOTTIE. The last two awarded Honorable Mention by Writers of the Future.

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Agile Noir  
Memory's Victims  
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Bit Storm

SCRUM NOIR: A Silo To Hell! episodes 1–3  
SCRUM NOIR: Mad Dog Mary episodes 1–3  
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# Agile Grande

LANCER KIND

This is a work of fiction. If you see similarities between yourself and the hero, congratulations! If you identify most strongly to a villain, find a hero and work things out.

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## Chapter 1 Interconnectivity

*Although the Cold War is over, the spy game heats up in this world of increasing interconnectivity of trade, computers, and software. Note the manufactured objects sitting on the floor, hanging on the wall, or resting on the table. For all of these items, at least 90% of what you can see, touch, or eat contains components that were shipped via container ship from one part of the world to another. As this entwinement increases, also rises the level of smuggling and espionage.*

Agent Wallace stood at the top floor of a dusty memory of a waterfront cement plant. He worked inches from the edge where the wall had fallen away. A great view but he wasn't convinced the floor would hold. He wore gray Carhartt coveralls, new except for spots of thick gray dust that coated everything. With each exhale the dust respirator made a hum sound.

He crouched over a red metal toolbox and removed a spotting scope. Working with hands in latex gloves, he searched for a stable and debris free place to setup watch for the operation. It was unfair, he decided, that half a mile away people enjoyed the beautiful beach of Long Beach California and here he was with sweat, goggles, and feeling dressed for Siberia.

Crow was such a shit, the cute way she talked him into this. They had sat side-by-side at the back table of a



busy Starbucks filled with coffee slurping patrons surfing the internet. The nearby newspaper rack showed the President on the front page of the LA Times, breaking ground on phase one of his twenty-five billion dollar wall.

"I get it," she said. She had noticed him looking at the paper. "It's hard to do good work when your boss is an a-hole."

"Wouldn't high speed rail between LA and SF would be a better use of money? Wouldn't pretty much anything else be a better use?"

She shrugged. "That is not about what's good for America, that's about winning votes. So let's make up for shitty government by getting something useful done. I've got a pickup and transfer. Nothing to it."

She even winked when she added, "I've been using this asset for years. He's in a position of power and his work is reliable. Has to be reliable because he sells the service over the darknet and there, you don't last long if you can't deliver. It's a well oiled machine. But I need you to be the eyes. Observe the chain of custody—that we can't outsource. You need to, A—see the truck gets its container, and then B—ensure the package goes from truck to van. Once it's in the van you go home. Clear?"

Like she did every time they met, she wore a skirt and well pressed blouse, a perfect picture of the clean-cut and proper yuppie girl that he was so in to. A knockout Taylor Swift.

Did she know he was freaking in love with her? Of course she knew. They'd probably assigned him to her knowing he'd go the extra mile. However, if he'd known he'd have to crawl through a building loaded with carcinogenic shit to do the surveillance, he'd have told her to go pound sand.

"Why not satellite? Or the day before I could setup a remote?"

"Step B under a roof, in a nearby warehouse. As for remotes, I need boots on the ground just in case."

He'd watched her face for tell tale's but as usual there was nothing. Why was she taking so much care?

"Well," he said. "It's a cinch you've got something to hide from satellites."

"Wallace, you need to be onsite. If I could do it with autopilot I wouldn't even be talking to you."

And then her knee brushed his. It could have been accidental but then sweet Jesus maybe not.

It felt as though the building was an oven. His goggles were fogged while he combed through the inch thick dust with his fingers for a spot on the floor that was free of sharp objects. It took only a moment to set the scope and tripod. He was sweating like a pig when ready to watch for the package.

He looked over at the Long Beach seaport as the first of the quay cranes leaned its neck over the ship. He panned the scope across the line of waiting trucks looking for his. Easy to find since it was one of the few in the lineup that wasn't driverless, a blue semi with a red door.

Things were moving slow so he had nothing to do but wonder what Crow was up to. This job stank of a counter intelligence op. Mossad, Russians, several European agencies, hell even the Chinese have a host of spy satellites. What agency was the CIA mad at now? The smart money was on Russia's FSB or China's MSS.

And yes, he decided, she had intentionally brushed his knee.

"As for backup," she had said, leaning closer to tell her secret. "If anything should go wrong at the port, I've got another asset in the wings. Walter is CBP and will be very helpful if it goes sideways." She wrote the number on a brown Starbucks napkin. Their hands brushed when he grasped it but instead of pleasure he felt jealousy. Silly because she wouldn't give a Customs and Border Patrol officer any more private attention than he got which was none.

He paused, not pulling the napkin from her hand.

"I'll do it if you go to dinner." At every meeting, he always found a way to work the offer in.

Her eyebrow arched. "And this is where I tell you, as always, about regulations." She said it coldly while at the same time her gaze was warm. How did she do that?

"Wallace, if you're going to go places, you need to start paying attention to the system around us. You'll never make case officer if you can only see what's bumping into your nose. There are relationships with various actors such as you and me, our country, our opponents, and our work."

He wobbled his head in mockery. "So this is about another agency."

She let go of the napkin and raised her hand as if to slap him.

"Wallace! Think of the years of service you'll have and how this would be a favor. To me." She relaxed, smiled, and sat back. "You'll earn a favor so I'll owe you in that time when you need help climbing the ladder."

"Fine. Whatever," he had said. And now here he was, roasting his ass off after climbing seven floors wearing a dust respirator, Carhartts, goggles, and latex gloves. And he'd be damn but a sneeze tickled at his nose.

He sat and tried to find a position that was relaxing, but there was no hiding from the sunny weather heating the roof above head. Finally, containers started moving from the ship and the first truck was loaded, and then

another, and another. Then it was time for his semi to have a container set on its bed and—.

"What the?! Well oiled my ass!"

He pulled the respirator off and called Walter and told him to pick him up at the abandoned cement plant.

Wallace stuffed his equipment into the red toolbox, then ran for the stairwell.

#

The ship that docked was a triple-E stacked with steel box containers, each sized for dropping onto a rail car or semi-truck. This huge vessel was not only longer than an aircraft carrier but was stacked with enough containers to reach 20 stories high. Carrying 18,000 containers at a time was not unusual.

Like a curious brontosaurus, the long neck of a quay crane leaned above the ship. Along the underside of the neck, a cab rolled on a track and within sat an operator. Behind the quay crane was a steel girder gantry beneath which a state-of-the-art autonomous crane shimmied along, lifting containers from where the quay crane deposited them and whisking the container to its computer planned position in a stacking yard.

While the inbound end of the stacking yard was lined with containers fresh from the ship, the other end, outbound, was being loaded onto semi trucks by another autonomous crane. Everything from where each container is on the ship to which truck the container was set upon was scheduled and organized by the computer systems of Logisto. The only necessary human operator was in the quay crane. With less human intervention, the port's ability to move cargo had improved dramatically.

A container with a SpaceX logo was lifted by an autonomous crane and carried beneath the overheard gantry to a waiting autonomous electric semi. The crane lowered its grapples until the container clicked into place on the flatbed. Once the grapples were out of the way, a black woman in a green reflective jacket waved at the semi and the truck moved forward and left the port, its position taken by an older semi with a driver. The woman insisted the driver back up a bit and then forward until it was in the correct position, and then the crane brought a yellow unmarked container over the semi, lowered the grapples, and the container locked onto the trailer.

The woman was looking down the line of semis for the next truck. Loading and unloading operations needed to move smoothly because even a ten second delay per container multiplied eighteen-thousand times meant that

they'd get the cargo ship unloaded two days later than planned, causing incoming cargo ships to wait in the harbor, and making the entire shipping chain suffer delays so little Jimmy didn't get his box from Amazon in time for his birthday or industrialists like Alphabet received their batteries from Korea behind schedule, delaying the rollout of their new smartphone. So while the gantry crane whirled to raise the grapppler from the container attached to the truck, this woman looked sternly at the next waiting semi because she'd be damned that she was going to let that happen due to some twelve-dollar an hour driver using her queue to sleep on the job. There were on-time bonuses to think about!

"Hey!" she shouted and flashed her mag light at the next truck. "Look sharp!"

Her grimace turned to panic when in her peripherality, she noticed something that shouldn't be—the backend of the semi was now above her shoulder and getting higher . . . above her head.

She dove away from the truck and at the same time, the driver's door opened and the man scrambled out as the back tire of his truck rose with the trailer. The container and trailer continued rising, the truck's nose pitched forward, all of its back wheels off the ground, the trailer coupler allowing the cab to nose downward like a Big Mack Concorde.

The grapppler released the container. It all dropped.

The tires and suspension compressed then rebounded so the trailer jumped sideways toward the woman who instinctively threw her hands before her head. The container doors broke open. The woman scrambled to her feet as boxes fell out, a few broke open, spilling DVDs in thin plastic sleeves and electric vibrators across her feet.

Slowly she lowered her arms, her heart pounding and voices shouting over her radio. A few of the items strewn among the DVDs started to vibrate. Something brushed her leg. She looked down and found a phallic item had slipped into the cuff of her boot, wagging like some member that had been freshly removed.

While she freed herself from the mess, a white suburban with government plates roared onto the scene, the badge of US Customs and Border Patrol on the door. A uniformed CBP officer got out and ordered her away while a man with goggles on his forehead and coveralls, the upper part tied around his waist, exited from the back seat and stirred through the mess.

"You!" he shouted at the truck driver. "Make yourself useful and pack these up. Quick!"

While the driver did all the work, the dusty looking man climbed into the back of the trailer and began to

examine boxes.

#

Off to the side of the seaport was a cluster of three story office buildings. Each building had the words "Logisto" across the top, and below the words was the logo of a forklift in whose driver seat was a bottled brain.

The late afternoon sun dipped toward the Pacific, reflecting blue ocean and sky against the buildings' mirrored glass walls. From the lobby exited Scrum Master Kartar Patel, talking to someone via his bluetooth earwig. His hair, a pompadour of black cresting in a curled wave above his forehead.

Walking unnoticed by Kartar though nearly alongside was Mr. Cherneski, a heavysset man wearing a pinched leather cap. Each right step was short and stumbling, each left was a surge that evened his progress; the gait of someone who suffered a foot or knee injury during their youth. Well over six-feet tall and burly, he was large in all proportions. Gray hair stuck out from beneath the edges his pinched cap. He held an old Blackberry to his ear and was trying to wrap up his last meeting for the day. As a VP he had the position to dodge meetings this late in the day if he felt like it, but today the CEO was on the call and wanted to hear how operations were doing.

A large bald man got out of a black Audi and held the door open for Mr. Cherneski. Kartar stopped at the side of his red Cadillac, Cherneski stopped short of entering the Audi's back seat. As though part of an imperceptible ballet, both men turned to the chainlink fence that surrounded the port and scrutinized the far off activity of trucks, cranes, and containers. Neither missed a beat of their phone calls.

"Was anyone hurt?" Kartar spoke into the earwig. "But she's OK? Good. Any idea why it jammed? Check with Rockstar and see our release could have mucked something up. What will the port do for now? OK. If it happens again, they'll want to roll everything back."

"What," said the Cherneski into his phone, "caused the holdup?" His accent was eastern European. He pulled the cap visor lower to shade his eyes. "Yes. Go find out whose software did this—No! First, check the status of container," he pulled a sticky note from his jacket pocket and rattled off a number. "Did the consignee accept shipment? That is most important. Good. No. No! Listen to me very carefully. Schedule a meeting about this screwup because someone isn't doing their job, and I'll get to get to the bottom."

First Kartar pivoted back to his car and then Mr Cherneski, both men satisfied that things were being handled

as they should be. Both got into their vehicles. Kartar left the parking lot, opened his sun roof, and took a right; Mr. Cherneski followed, raised his window blind, and his driver merged with traffic not far behind.

Kartar settled into the rich leather as the car quickly cooled, air conditioning blowing from the seat and through the stitching of the steering wheel. After a few blocks, he took a right on East Ocean Boulevard and opened the windows. The Pacific Ocean on his right and single family homes on his left, he relaxed to the sound of waves, seagulls, and the thump and shouts of beach volleyball. He followed the long beach allowing sunshine and sand to sooth away the workday then he had to turn left, inland, to go home.

The black Audi didn't follow the scenic beach drive but instead went straight where the traffic flowed faster. Not only did Mr. Cherneski wish to get the drive over quickly but he found the glare of sun reflecting off sand tiresome.

"Is everything good?" the driver asked as he frequently did.

"Probably," responded Mr. Cherneski. "But have the gardener check the yard tonight. There was a hitch with our lemon tree, but I believe it got what it wanted."

The Audi pulled into the short driveway of a two story stucco home, surrounded by a brown lawn and a small backyard with a struggling lemon tree. The driver exited the car and opened the back door. Cherneski heaved himself out, leaning hard on the door until he got his balance. Without word or glance at the driver, he walked to the front of his house. The driver opened the garage door by hand and parked the car, carefully, beside a Suzuki sport bike.

The garage door didn't close easy. The driver had to swear at it in Ukrainian and jerk at it with all of his weight before it rolled down. After he beat the door with his fists, he left the home and crossed the street, jaywalking in front of Kartar and his red Cadillac. He didn't bother to pay the car any attention but kept walking until he arrived at a bus stop.

Cherneski knocked on his door and waited, his black and white peppered eyebrows lowered while seconds slip away. He looked at his watch. The door opened; a young man in his mid-twenties with round shaped glasses said warmly, "Dad," then retreated to allow the large man in.

"Well, at least that worked like it's supposed to."

The young man shook his head, not getting the point. "What would you do if I wasn't home?"

"Your badge is still on," said Cherneski. "Yet, you're not at work because you didn't answer when I called."

Where were you?" Cherneski's gaze brushed over the man's face before settling on staring at his shoulder.

"I've been home since noon. I worked a deployment last night. A big one. Quarterly release. A bunch of changes went into prod."

"I see! Well, someone didn't do their job. A grappler malfunctioned today. You know what change did that?"

"Dad, how could I? There were hundreds of them. Cranes have nothing to do with order management. That's all in Williams's division."

"Are you certain about that? OM talks with port systems. We can talk about it tomorrow with the other managers. I called for a meeting at eight."

"AM?" His head dropped forward.

Cherneski just nodded and gestured again at his son's badge. Beneath the badge's picture was the name 'Studebaker Cherneski.' Studebaker put the badge in his pocket, and Cherneski turned away, signaling the conversation was over.

Cherneski rotated himself in the center of the living room as if conducting an inspection: tufted emerald chesterfield sofa, old fashioned rear projection tv, and two book cases with sagging shelves, packed with movies on VHS.

"Stu, when did you buy that?" he said, flicking his finger at the coffee table where an iPad lay askew between orderly stacks of Forbes and The Weekly Standard.

Stu shrugged. "Last week sometime. Picked it up used at GameStop. Hardly cost a cent." Stu squeezed his hands together.

"As long it's within your discretionary budget, I guess that's OK. You're going to be so much more wealthier than my family growing up. My dad hadn't lived long enough to managed my finances."

Stu relaxed. Cherneski put his jacket and cap in the closet. "But we had no money in the Ukraine. There was nothing to manage. But you, son, you're not only going to have a great retirement, you'll inherit a system of wealth, built on my blood, my sweat, and my tears. With it you'll use your position to profit the most important person—you."

Stu looked up from his phone. "Dad, when I was at GameStop, I got a tip on a cool scifi anime. We can watch on my iPad. Interested?"

Dad mumbled an excuse and decided to organize the closet. Stu fondled velour drapes hung on each side of

the closet doors. They were emerald, matching the chesterfield. He inhaled and closed his eyes, savoring some memory.

"What is this here?" said Cherneski. He held up a blue inflatable guitar, shaking his head as he examined it.

The drape fell from Stu's hand as he watched Dad deflate the guitar.

Cherneski tossed it in the direction of corner garbage bin. "Your mother. She could have had the consideration to take her crap with her when she left."

Stu's hands bunched into fists. "That's mine. Mom helped me win it at a carnival."

"I don't remember—"

"You hate carnivals and didn't come. It was just down the beach. You could hear it from the front door. "

"I want to get rid of it." Cherneski returned to rummaging through the closet shelf. "It takes up a lot of space. Don't get married Stu, at least not before I vet her, otherwise half your wealth could disappear." Cherneski froze and seemed to be considering something, one hand gripping the drapery rode above the closet.

Stu's phone vibrated. Careful to keep the screen away from his father he glanced at a picture of a woman with long black hair and teal fingernails. She was leaning on the hood of a car; the BMW logo visible at her elbow. Her smile, genuine and flirtatious. Above her shoulder fluttered animated hearts winging across the screen like butterflies.

Before Dad turned from with the closet, Stu snapped a photo of himself, blurry because of the rush, and tapped back the question: your car? you a fast and furious babe?

Above his blurred photo came a thought balloon with his words, like a comic book.

"Stu," said Dad. His eyes slid across his son's face to settle on Stu's shoulder. "This Anime, we have to turn in early. We've got that eight o'clock meeting."

The unhappy expression was strong enough that even Cherneski noticed. "Now now. It's been a while since we've talked. Let's have a look at your journal. I always learn something about how you see the world."

Stu sighed then reached past and pulled a black Moleskin notebook from the closet corner and handed it over. Cherneski flipped through the book. The pages of the first half were dog-eared—junior high poetry, first love, pics from high school prom, drawings of his mom. College was perfunctory, mostly a record of achievements in video games and a mish mash of comments about friends and enemies which ceased by the middle of his first year. The last entry was simply: No Dad, you must go find her and make her stay.



When Cherneski looked up from the book, Stu had left the room.

Cherneski flipped the book shut and dropped it in the garbage bin where the inflatable guitar had been.

#

The lovely sun, surf, and the Cadillac's smooth ride relaxed Kartar. A breeze fingered at his pompadour and the lines crossing his forehead eased as the trouble at the port was overtaken by an aromatic cocktail of dry sand, the sea, and Recaro leather seats. With the exception of today's incident, things had been going nicely at work. The boss was happy with the progress in the business unit. Seaport Automation has its first three teams putting code into production multiple times per quarter. They weren't perfect but they've got enough test automation to do a somewhat continuous delivery. It was still taking three days of manual effort each release but now they could deliver a little more frequently than monthly. Today Mr. Williams complimented him on creating the first teams to do this. Still, it was challenging in that the everyone at Logisto was doing a lot of different projects for different parts of the organization, and everyone wanted their project done first.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers had been playing on the radio. He was turning them up when the Cadillac's sensors buzzed a warning—a jaywalker was in his path. Kartar braked hard, hand resting on the horn. The guy was huge and looked like he could do as much damage to Kartar's car as the car would do to him. The bald man glanced back and there was no surprise at almost being ran into on his face, only toughness. Kartar moved his hand far from the horn and the big man simply continued on his way across the street.

Kartar calmed himself as the Chili Peppers ended and Echo and the Bunnymen's The Killing Moon began. With the mood lost, he continued down the street. Through his rear-view mirror, he noticed the man waited at a bus stop.

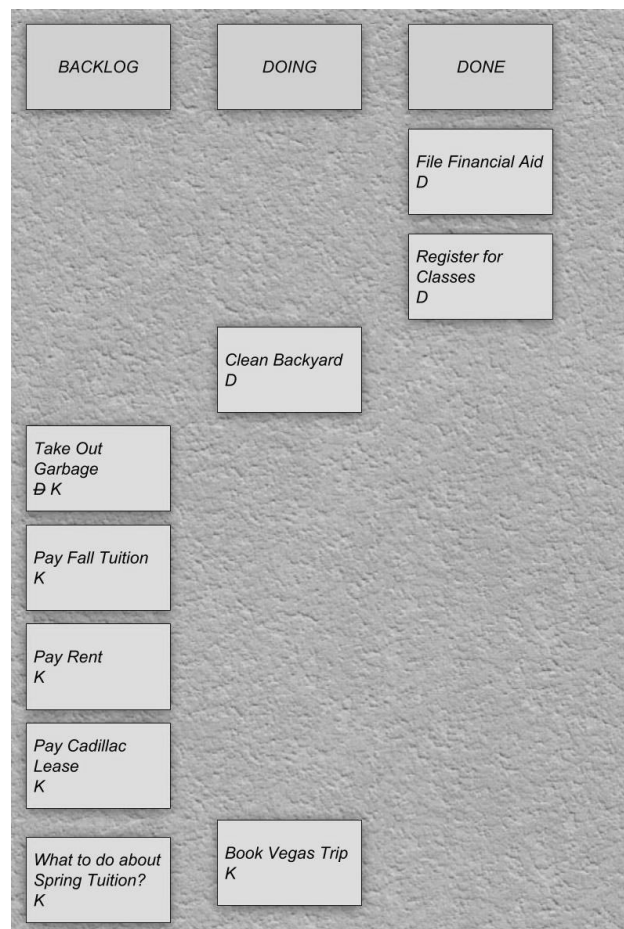
"Neighbors," Kartar muttered to himself, and after a few blocks he turned into his driveway, the garage opening automatically. He parked then walked to his front door. When it didn't open at his touch, he fumbled with his phone until it did.

"Dharma?" he called as he entered. There was no answer. Must be studying after work, he decided. She sometimes did that at the nearby library. Such a good kid! She was hitting the books hard to test out of some of

her Freshman classes.

His phone chimed that he had an eight AM meeting tomorrow. Ah piss, he thought. I bet I know what that's about.

The living room was a mismatch of furniture discoveries from the local second hand: a burgundy booth seat from a restaurant, a surfboard turned coffee table, and a pair of barrel style chairs covered with black shag—second hand shops in Los Angeles could be quite eye opening. Kartar sat on the booth seat, set his phone on the surfboard, and looked at the colorful sticky notes arrayed to the right of the flat screen TV.



His little girl was growing so fast. Although it was two years ago, it seemed like yesterday when he was stuck on the Winner project in Vegas and caught in some kind of strange karmic life loop that had him reliving the same software project over and over.

On cue, the memories caused his knee and chest to throb with ghost pains from when he was shot. He would

still be stuck there to this very day, forever reliving disaster if he hadn't transformed the project into an Agile one. Without Agile, there was no way to get the business sated to realistic goals, IT delivering incremental value, and to stop the project sponsors from literally sending contract killers after him. The Caddy having all those horses under the hood ensured a fast getaway when he could see them coming, otherwise there was a trunk filled with fully loaded goodies when he couldn't. That car had given him a life expectancy.

Which brought him back to the task board: pay tuition, pay rent, and pay the Cadillac's lease. But the problem was that not everything was going according to plan.

From his wallet he removed a dollar bill and set it on the coffee table. He uncapped a Sharpie marker, its chemical odor whisked him from memories of his past back to his present awkward situation: Dharma's first year at Stanford was a disaster, her grades had dropped, and she lost her scholarship. So this summer she took a job at GameStop and had enrolled in the much less expensive U.C. Long Beach. Even with this, he was behind, struggling to make 'rent' and save for tuition at the same time. School was starting next month and he had only part of the tuition. And six months later he'd need more for Spring. It was all coming fast.

Kartar put marker to dollar bill, scribbled something, and set another dollar on the table. The task board seemed to be watching and judging, like it silently waited for him to arrive to an answer.

Something had to change he decided, or he'd fall behind. Of all the items up there, one had the biggest value for long term—getting Dharma through college. Paying rent had short term value and was mostly unavoidable.

He put marker to dollar bill, wrote on its face again, then took out another. The task board was indomitable, a silent friend who reflected back what was happening and who only listened, never speaking. It wanted what it wanted—all the tasks moved to done or to be clearly told something was to be removed from the board.

He scrawled and set another dollar bill on the table next to the neat stack of two.

Garbage and backyard, no matter. Dharma had crossed out her initial on Garbage and wrote in his. He'd get her back for that. Regardless, those items had no bearing on getting her through college. What was left, what the damn board wanted him to pay attention to, was the last two: Cadillac and Vegas trip.

For Vegas, the plan was to go see old colleagues at his last job and celebrate the 2nd anniversary of the Winner launch. It wasn't much money to fly up to Vegas for a weekend, especially since his old boss was comping the hotel and food. He bought the ticket online then moved the Vegas Trip sticky to the Done column.

So that left the Cadillac.

The last bill in his wallet was a twenty. He continued the ritual of marking the bill and thought about something he didn't want to acknowledge—short term demands versus long term. Continuing the Cadillac lease was long term. If he dropped it, there would be penalties. But it'd free up nine-hundred dollars a month.

Kartar stared at what he had done to the bill in his hand while he counted the number of times that car had saved his life in Vegas. And the hitwomen were still at large, wanted by the FBI.

He flopped back on the seat, trying to be honest with himself and the wall with its sticky-notes. But that was Vegas. In Long Beach he's had nothing but peace. And hit . . . people didn't work for free. Their sponsors were prison. He could get by with an economy car. Goodbye Ricaro leather, sun roof, and air conditioned steering wheel. Who'd have thought that a steering wheel could cool the whole body so quickly?

While he sat on the seat, considering what he was giving up, the front door popped open and slammed against the wall. Kartar dove forward onto the surfboard coffee table and rolled for the farthest point from the entrance. He bumped into the TV and was stopped by the wall. No one had yet entered. Need cover, he decided and scrambled to his feet, grabbed the surfboard and shielded his body, sure that the hitwomen and arrived for a revenge killing. He readied, deciding he'd run for the hallway if pistol, dive for the booth seat if shotgun.

What came into view first was an empty hand, teal colored nails, and a matching teal banded Apple watch. Dharma entered the living room with her backpack slung over one shoulder.

"Dad? Dad! What are you doing to my coffee table?"

Kartar blinked a few times, then realized he should put the table down. "Well, it was actually me that paid—Why the hell did you throw open the door like a vengeful god?"

"Sorry. It was a little stuck so I kicked it."

"Oh."

She set her shoes by the door, stepped onto the wool rug with elephant patterns at the corners. She hugged him and looked at the tasks on the wall.

"Dad, you should take out the garbage because—" She noticed the bills on the coffee table.

"Dad!" She snatched up the money and held it before his nose. "I told you it's illegal to deface government currency!" She crossed her arms, looking at him angrily. He glanced at the floor sheepishly.

"How come? It's my money," he said.

"No it's not! It's the government's." Dharma again held the bill to eye level and pointed one teal nail at the

banner above the founding father's portrait. Kartar had replaced the word 'God' with 'Agile' so it read 'In Agile We Trust.'

"This!" Dharma crossed her arms again. "This is disrespectful! Even blasphemous." She rocked back her head waiting for his apology.

Kartar rolled his eyes. "Don't you think it's a little immature of us to think that an omnipotent being that transcends time and space would be so easily offended?"

"Still!" She stabbed a manicured nail in his direction.

Kartar held up his hands. "OK. Fine. I'd expect nothing different from my daughter who is interested in becoming a lawyer. Who, I might add, never refuses to spend such tainted money."

He composed himself and went to the task board, replaced his initial on the Garbage sticky with hers then moved the Pay Fall Tuition sticky into Doing.

Dharma said, "I hate it that you've product backlogged my life. It's really too much."

Kartar raised his hand for silence then pointed at Fall Tuition. "When does this need to be in your account?"

Dharma blushed. "Yes," she absently twisted her watch crown. "They need to be in place before classes start." She sounded a little strained.

"Is something wrong?"

Dharma shook her head, friskily and strands of hair dropped over her face.

Kartar grabbed the sticky note regarding his lease. "I'm going to downgrade. Maybe an electric Fiat or something."

"Bu—why? You love that car?"

"I can't afford both a daughter in pre-law and a . . . prestige car. I need something more practical."

"We'll just ask Mom—"

"No! Don't trouble her. In fact, if they are helping you out, better that I don't know. Keep the money for living expenses."

"But your car! You . . . you've been shot at in that car. And survived. The two of you have memories. How can you give it up so easily?"

"Dharma, it's never really been mine. It's a lease. Even so, it's not my daughter. And I know you've been saving every cent for school. We've both been making sacrifices. So . . ."

Something was in her face he couldn't quite read. Maybe it was stress. She had work and then she'd been spending a lot of late nights at the library studying.

He continued. "Hey, it's all good! Have you seen the ads in the paper? The little Fiats are pretty cool looking. Like something out of Speed Racer. And they have leather and sun roofs, so—"

Dharma look downward and covered her eyes, like she couldn't accept what was happening.

"What is bothering you?"

Finally she looked at him. "Dad, you really don't have enough money?"

"It's what life is telling me to do," Kartar said, pointing at the dollars in her hand. "No matter how much wishful thinking we want to have, those stickies on the wall have an impact. That clarity forces us to be conscious of what's happening around us. It's clear as the nose on my face that I need to change this . . . to this." He wrote, 'downgrade,' at the bottom of the sticky and moved it to the Doing column.

She dropped the money on the coffee table. "I—I need to rest." And down the hallway she went, feet beating on the wood floor. She entered her room and closed the door with a slam.

This, he realized, was the first time she had ever left money behind.

Later that night, when he was preparing for bed, an alert popped up on his phone: The national threat level was raised. The section of the wall in San Diego, the presidential commemoration site, had been destroyed in a blast.