



4400: Promises Broken

By David Mack

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4400 taken, 4400 returned. All were given startling new abilities. Now, if you are willing to risk it all, you too can be extraordinary. Is this what the future intended to ensure the survival of the human race?

Promicin -- which kills half of those who dare to inject it and grants paranormal abilities to those who survive -- is spreading across the globe and threatening to plunge the entire world into chaos.

One year has passed since Jordan Collier and his followers seized control of Seattle and renamed it Promise City. U.S. armed forces have surrounded Seattle, and each day brings Collier and his Promicin-Positive Movement closer to all-out war with the world's greatest military superpower.

However, the real threats are the Marked -- agents from the future whose identities are encoded into body-hijacking nanites. They were sent back to thwart the efforts of the 4400. The last three surviving Marked lurk in the shadows, working in secret as they prepare to deliver a deathblow to the planet.

Caught in the crossfire are NTAC agents Tom Baldwin and Diana Skouris. His son, Kyle, and her thirteen-year-old adopted daughter, Maia, are both more loyal to Jordan's movement than to them. And when the standoff between Collier and the U.S. military explodes into open conflict, Tom, Diana, and fellow agents wind up outnumbered and outgunned.

In the end, the fate of all mankind will rest in the hands of one man: Tom Baldwin.

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4400: Promises Broken By David Mack Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #932453 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Pocket Books
- Published on: 2009-10-27
- Released on: 2009-10-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .90" h x 4.10" w x 6.70" l, .35 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 336 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

David Mack is the national bestselling author of more than a dozen books, including *Wildfire*, *Harbinger*, *Reap the Whirlwind*, *Road of Bones*, and the Star Trek Destiny trilogy—*Gods of Night*, *Mere Mortals*, and *Lost Souls*. His first original novel, the supernatural thriller *The Calling*, debuted in July 2009 to critical acclaim. In addition to novels, Mack's diverse writing credits span several media, including television, film, short fiction, magazines, newspapers, comic books, computer games, radio, and the Internet. He currently resides in New York City.

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ONE

April 3, 2008

Naked and shivering, Roger Keegan awoke bound to a chair. He sat in the center of a pool of harsh incandescent light, but the room around him was pitch-dark. His feet were flat on the cold concrete floor. Metal handcuffs bit into his wrists, which were secured behind his back. All he could smell was ammonia.

Looks like a cellar, he thought. *Am I still at the casino?* He had come to Las Vegas for a few days of well-earned vacation: some cards, some strippers, maybe some surf-and-turf. Somewhere between his six Cuervos and Cokes at the Mirage and his visit to a nearby gentlemen's club, something had gone very, very wrong.

A door creaked open in the darkness, but there was no light to draw Roger's eye. Footsteps were answered by crisp echoes as they drew closer.

Roger swallowed in a futile effort to expel the sour taste of metabolized booze from his tongue, which was coated in a vile paste. Squinting, the forty-two-year-old middle manager saw three dark figures step into the ring of shadow just outside his circle of light. Two looked like men; the other had the appealing curves of a woman.

The man on the left lit a cigarette, illuminating his brown face with a flicker of orange flame. Then he flipped his lighter shut, and all that remained was the red pinpoint at the end of his cigarette. Roger winced at the pungent aroma of tobacco. Whatever the man was smoking, it was harsh and bitter.

"So," said the man in the center. "This is him?"

"Yes," the woman replied. "He's been prepared."

Throwing fearful looks at each member of the trio, Roger said, "Wait a second, there's gotta be a mistake! I'm just a sales rep! My name's Roger Keegan, I don't --" The clack of a round being chambered into a semiautomatic pistol cut him off.

"We should get started," said the man in the middle. He and his two compatriots stepped into the light.

They were attired in casual business clothing -- suits without ties for the men, a simple gray skirt-and-jacket ensemble for the woman. She was pale and blond, and held an odd-looking device with a syringe and a

needle. Roger didn't recognize her or the black man with the cigarette. Standing between them, however, was a man with a graying beard who looked familiar.

It took Roger a moment to dredge the man's name from his memory. Then it came to him. "Holy shit!" he exclaimed, eyes wide with disbelief. "You're George Sterling! Is this a movie?"

The famous Hollywood producer-director ignored Roger and extended a hand to his male colleague. "Let's get on with it."

The black man handed Sterling the pistol. He and the woman stepped back as Sterling released the weapon's safety and looked at Roger.

"You're a lucky man," Sterling said. Then the movie mogul lifted the gun, pressed the muzzle to his own grayed temple, and pulled the trigger.

The shot resounded off the floor and walls as the left side of Sterling's head vanished in a pulpy red spray.

His body went limp, fell face-first at Roger's feet, and landed with a meaty slap. The pistol tumbled from his hand and clattered across the floor.

Blood spread in a swift tide around Roger's bare feet. Trembling now with fear and adrenaline, he shouted at the blond woman and the black man, "What the hell's going on?"

They didn't answer him. The blonde stepped forward, kneeled beside the dead Hollywood titan, and jabbed the needle of her gadget into the base of his skull, into his spinal cord. She tapped a touchpad on the side of the device. A moment later, a shimmering silver fluid began filling the syringe behind the needle, drawn up and out of Sterling's neck.

Roger yelled, "Who are you people? What is that?"

"You'll find out soon enough," the black man said, stepping behind Roger's chair.

The blonde removed the needle from Sterling's neck, stood, and walked toward Roger. "Hold him," she said.

Her cohort wrapped one muscular arm around Roger's throat and jaw. With precision and force, he twisted Roger's chin and immobilized his head.

"Stop!" Roger begged. "Please, don't do this!"

The woman met his plea with a cold smirk and icy blue eyes. "What is it you think we're about to do?"

"I...I don't know," Roger said, too scared even to guess.

Stroking his cheek, she asked, "Then why be afraid?"

While he was still concocting an answer, she jabbed the needle into the nape of his neck. Piercing agony traveled down his spine like an electric jolt. Then a searing heat flowed into him, purpling his vision and filling his head with vertigo.

He felt himself scream, but he heard only silence.

Jakes hadn't felt any fear as he'd pulled the trigger. This death would be merely an interlude, and a brief one

at that.

Putting a bullet through his brain had still hurt, though.

He inhaled sharply as he felt his consciousness take root in a new form. This body's senses were sharp. He caught the competing fragrances of cheap cologne and expensive perfume.

His eyes opened, and he saw his fellow agents of the Marked. "I'm all right, Wells," he said to his male colleague.

They were each two or three bodies removed from who they had been in the future, before their identities had been encoded into nanites for their perilous undercover mission into the past. When they had first hijacked new personas, they had agreed to call one another by their new names, to maintain their covers and avoid confusion. With so few of them left, however, there was no reason not to revert to their true names.

Pleased by his new voice, he asked, "How long did it take?"

"Less than two minutes," Wells said. He glanced at Kuroda, who put away the nanite-transfer device. "The upgrades to the bonding process worked better than we'd hoped."

Jakes nodded. "Good. Then you won't mind untying me."

"If we must," Wells joked. He stepped behind the chair and removed the handcuffs from Jakes's wrists.

While his comrade untied the rest of his restraints, Jakes massaged his new wrists, scowled at the glare of the light above his head, and wrinkled his nose at the lingering bite of sulfur in the air. He looked at George Sterling's bloody corpse. It galled him to give up an identity that had blessed him with such vast wealth and influence, but it was for the best.

The Marked had recently suffered brutal setbacks in their covert war against the 4400 -- people abducted from far-flung parts of the world over the course of nearly six decades of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, taken by agents of the future determined to alter the shape of things to come. Injected with the neurotransmitter promicin, which gifted them with extraordinary paranormal abilities, the 4400 had been returned en masse on August 14, 2004, in order to avert a catastrophe that would end the world as they knew it.

In other words, the returnees had been changed and sent back to erase the past and topple the future's last bastion of stable civilization, which the Marked were sworn to defend.

Unfortunately, the war had turned against the Marked. An assassination squad -- sent by Jordan Collier, the charismatic leader of the rapidly spreading promicin movement, and led by the ex-military telekinetic returnee Richard Tyler -- had killed seven of Jakes's fellow agents.

It was likely a matter of simple luck that Jakes had escaped Tyler's attack on Wyngate Castle, the opulent redoubt that George Sterling had built with his movie-industry millions. If not for a secret passage Jakes had added to the estate, he, Wells, and Kuroda would likely be dead.

They were now the last three agents of the Marked. They alone remained to save their future from Collier and his quasi-religious promicin movement.

As his bonds fell away, Jakes stood. "That's better," he said. Kuroda handed him his clothes. He dressed quickly, then walked toward the exit. Wells and Kuroda followed him. "I wired what's left of Sterling's

fortune to the Caymans with the rest of our assets," Jakes said. "We can use that as startup capital."

Kuroda picked up her briefcase, in which she carried the new nanite-transfer device. "I still don't see how we're supposed to do anything posing as these *nobodies*," she said.

"Impersonating people in high places worked for as long as it could," Jakes said. "Now we have to lie low."

Wells was dismayed. "How does that help us? We've already missed our window of opportunity against Collier."

"Maybe," Jakes said. "Maybe not." He opened the door to the dimly lit stairwell, where the air was hot and stuffy compared to the cool confines of the subbasement. "That's why we have to make a new friend -- one who wants to stop him as much as we do."

Over their trudging footfalls, Kuroda said, "You've already made contact with this 'new friend,' haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," Jakes said. Even though his new body was relatively young and physically fit, the heat in the stairwell had rivulets of sweat running down his back as he climbed one switchback flight after another, back to the main floor.

Laboring up the steps behind him, Wells protested, "It's still too late. The date for the calamity came and went."

"I know," Jakes said. Pushing open the door to the ground level of the hotel under construction, he squinted against the glare of the late-afternoon sun. Wind like a gust from a furnace whipped his brown hair from his face. "But all that means is that Collier prevented the disaster he knew about." He permitted himself a malevolent smirk. "It's time to give him one he won't see coming."

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