

This is your *Conundrum* excerpt, currently the Prologue, although this novel is in editing and subject to change or reorganization.

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Alluded to in each *Rabbit* installment, *Conundrum* deals directly with **Rakum Sexuality**.

### The “Fix-It Man”

Each Rakum youth discovers his key strength(s) by age eight. From there, it is up to the group lair proctors to develop and hone these natural propensities until age thirteen when he is assigned an Elder, who will initiate First Ritual training. In any generation, less than one in a thousand are discovered to be *ish-mikhan*.

*Ish-Mikhan* ~ also called, “fix-it man”; a Rakum born with the propensity and skill to service Elders sexually.

**Ages 13+, Language, Sexual Situations, Vampire Violence**

*Caution is extended to sensitive and/or young readers.*

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## PROLOGUE

2015 / Buffalo, New York<sup>i</sup>

THE AROMA OF HUMAN BLOOD HIT THE AIR AND JERSEY pressed against the brick wall, dissolving into the shadows between the garage and the house. He had tracked his Rakum brother this far, but since Last Assembly<sup>ii</sup> when their High Father abandoned them, his telepathy was often useless. Up close, he could read a brother’s surface thoughts, but their threads were faint and the separation this caused was difficult to stomach.

Because of this limitation, there would be no getting a jump on the brother's headspace; they weren't all jolly individuals the past few years. To compound the issue, Jersey's keen nose didn't recognize this brother's scent. Awaiting the best time to move, he listened hearing two distinct heartbeats—the Rakum and the victim, a male of about forty. The homeowner hadn't cried out, which meant his brother had stealth.

*Home-invasion and murder; whoever this is, he has huge balls...*

For the most part, Jersey could forget their new leader was insane. He had head-quartered Down South and Jersey stayed as far north as possible to avoid him. When Elder Rufus assumed the throne abandoned by their Fathers at Last Assembly, Jersey fled to Buffalo, New York, and hunkered down. Rufus fanned his soldiers across the land to take a census of the remaining faithful and Jersey had signed up. So far, as long as he periodically checked in, the crew in Mississippi left him alone. Still, it was difficult to get the blood he so desperately craved and finding his brethren did not come easy. All of them hid—from Rufus, from the Rabbit's posse, from the mortal authority, and even from each other.

Tonight, and by chance, Jersey spotted the Rakum strolling out of a convenience store. A careful tail led him to the affluent neighborhood where the brother disappeared into a home after forcing entry.

*He's tapping that guy...* Jersey yearned to join in. Finding volunteer blood had become impossible and stealing it drew too much attention. As a result, he didn't imbibe often, and the result left him cranky and weak. *Come on, brother...* Jersey crept toward the front windows, hiding from neighbors or passersby, but not his brother, who would have heard his heart sounds no matter how silent his approach.

*"Gyere beh, tstevee-al,"* a deep voice whispered from within and Jersey quickened his pace.

*"Yifz Jersey..."* he returned in the same language and pushed open the front door. A ceiling fixture illuminated the foyer but the living room and beyond remained unlit. Jersey peered into the shadows and at the end of the long hallway the unfamiliar brother stood holding the victim to his chest facing outward.

*"Help..."* The pitiful sound bubbled past the man's lips, his eyes half-open, expiring from blood loss.

"Hurry," the brother said offering Jersey the dregs.

Without hesitation, Jersey jogged up and assumed possession. He brought the victim's throat to his mouth and pulled the blood, his brother politely remaining still. When the flow thinned, Jersey ceased with an

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<sup>1</sup> "Come inside, brother." (Rakum Hungarian, a language unknowable to mortals.)

exhale, anticipating the buzz that would soon travel across his frame. Standing close with only the dying man between them, the brother finally spoke.

“Name’s Winston,” he whispered in a Texan drawl, pulling off a decent working-cowboy illusion—dusty boots, faded Levi’s, partnered with a rugged flannel shirt. Such a costume was the man’s personal choice for animal husbandry had never been a Rakum’s interest. “Tasty fella, eh?”

Jersey still hadn’t met the guy’s eye, but murmured an agreeable sound, allowing the now-corpse to slip onto their toes. Then the buzz arrived, deliciously rolling across his every nerve ending. Jersey did not suppress a moan of ecstasy as he squeezed his eyes closed. Winston’s back was against the wall, so Jersey lifted one hand to brace behind him.

“You’ve gone a while without, haven’t ya?” Inches away, Winston spoke softly in Jersey’s ear. The brother sniffed against Jersey’s throat. “You sure smell good. Did you bathe in that cologne?”

The Rakum had spoken with humor and as soon as Jersey’s tingling filtered away, he pushed off the wall with a quiet thank you.

“Hell, thank *you*,” he replied, waiting for Jersey to meet his eye. “We haven’t seen another brother in months.”

Jersey finally looked up. Winston was a bit taller with dark blond hair shaved close, a square jaw, and a furrowed brow. His eyes were deep brown and as their gazes locked, a slow grin hit Winston’s mouth, the man recognizing Jersey’s distinction as *ish-mikhan*.<sup>2</sup>

“No way,” he said, awe in his tone. “And you’re gorgeous as shit!”

Jersey ignored the remark and peeked into the adjoining rooms from where they stood. Pre-Last Assembly, he’d been a different man. Now? Whatever this Rakum discerned, Jersey wasn’t into performing freebies. He was, however, accustomed to his effect on others so Jersey changed the topic without moving out of Winston’s space, using his magnetism toward his own end. *Keep ‘em flustered*—his favorite *ish-mikhan* tenet.

“Why’d you pick *this* guy? Is he special?” As far as Jersey could tell, Winston’s victim had no discernible quality that would cause him to stand out or draw a Rakum’s attention.

“Oh, him?” Winston put an open palm to Jersey’s chest. “No big mystery there. He looked easy.” Winston watched his own fingers slide slowly across Jersey’s T-shirt. “He looked rich and he was completely distracted by his phone.” Winston licked his lips and his right hand ran up to Jersey’s shoulder.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ish-mikhan*, fix-it man, used euphemistically; a Rakum whose main talent was relieving the Elders’ sexual tension.

“So that’s all it takes to launch a Rakum captain into reckless behavior?”

The Rakum grinned to the side, amused that his military past remained evident in his countenance. “Let’s just say, I don’t take rejection well.” Winston set his left hand now to Jersey’s shirt.

“Your Elder would be disappointed,” Jersey said with derision.

“I’ll tell you what, fix-it man, the Elders are gone.” Winston’s fingers spread out to encompass more of Jersey’s pectoral muscle. “But, hey, I’m still here.” Jersey did not react, and Winston added, “Wait till you see my bang-on impression of Master Fawn.”

“F\*ck Fawn,” Jersey said stepping casually out of the contact, realizing the man couldn’t know he’d mentioned Jersey’s least favorite master. Another heartbeat approached from the backyard; Jersey knew this one and had enjoyed his company. Ignoring Winston’s attempt to resume the unwanted caress, Jersey turned toward their visitor. “*Avi? Koos-tev, re.*”<sup>3</sup>

“Jersey? Judas Priest!” his brother remarked and came into view, his shirtfront stained with blood. He glanced to Winston over Jersey’s shoulder. “Win, do you know Jersey?”

“I want to know him, but he’s awful shy,” the man replied fluffing Jersey’s hair before putting both hands to Jersey’s shoulders from behind. He pressed his face into the back of Jersey’s head to inhale deeply.

“Ignore him, Jerz, he’s harmless.” Avi inched in to bump Jersey’s forehead with his own and Winston dropped his hands. “Come with us next door. I’ll share my lady-friend.”

Avi turned for the backdoor and Jersey followed. Winston brought up the rear and stopped trying to manipulate Jersey into some sort of quickie.

“I knew you’d save me some,” Winston whispered to Avi, speaking over Jersey’s head as they crept across the dark lawn to the neighboring iron fence. All three scaled it and were against the cool wall under the shade of the eaves in moments. “Just the one female in this huge house?”

“There had been a youth. He wasn’t too keen on finding me in the house. He was delicious.” Avi slid open the glass porch door and all three whispered across the tile. “As for the female?” he chuckled. “She didn’t consent.”

Jersey pondered their carelessness to attack two separate households at once. All three of them ascended the staircase and Jersey picked up the muffled cries of a gagged woman. The air smelled of fear and sex, and as they reached the woman’s room, she thrashed in her bonds. Beneath a sheen of sweat and blood, her naked body held no appeal.

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<sup>3</sup> “Avi, I’m back here.” *Rakum Hungarian.*

“*Gyakra jatszola?*”<sup>4</sup> he asked both men as Winston urgently approached the female and jerked her body from the floor to toss atop the mussed bedding. Avi shrugged his reply and met Jersey’s gaze, his eyes seeking his meaning. Jersey tried an explanation. “*Aloua veszely-a.*”<sup>5</sup>

“Pretty-boy, use English,” Winston barked at a normal volume, gamely working the woman over. “And speak up. I’m not leaving her alive.”

The woman screamed past her gag and Jersey considered her face. Her eyes sought his, as if he might help, but he didn’t care. Before Last Assembly, the brethren had Cows, volunteers who adored and worshipped them. These round and frightened eyes only served to remind Jersey of how their world had gone to hell. He took Avi’s elbow and led him into the hall.

“Come home with me. I have a nice house and the basement is light-tight,” he said as Avi peeked in to watch Winston ravage their victim.

“Where?” he mumbled without averting his attention. Jersey’s back was to the violence and he did not turn.

“On the north side. It’s very nice. Even better than this,” he added taking in the opulence of the victim’s home. Then he added, “I miss my brethren...”

Avi raised his gaze, eyebrows up. “We miss you, too,” he said with a small grin, referring to the very small number of *ish-mikhan* at the time of Last Assembly.

Jersey knew the whereabouts of three, but the others? Gone or lost. *Or they might have fallen for God and turned mortal*, his inner mind whispered, and Jersey shut it out. All of them were forced to hear the Rabbit’s Gospel when she stood before the Hundred-Thousand at Last Assembly; Jersey had wanted no part of it, then or now.

“Yeah, let’s stick together.” He briefly touched Jersey’s cheek and offered a new nod. “Win and I will take care of you; we’ll make it like the Old Days.”

Jersey shook his head. “I’ll take care of me. We’re forging a New Way, brother.” He hooked a thumb into the room without looking in. “Ending these people like this, you have to stop.”

A loud grunt caused them both to look backward and Winston was dressing, holding the woman down with a knee in her lower back.

“Preciate the invite, Jerz,” he said and once his belt had been secured, he pointed to his captive. “You want any of this?” he asked Jersey.

“Not even a little,” Jersey said and as he returned to Avi, Winston snapped the homeowner’s neck. Jersey only bedded those that consented and forcing sex—man, woman, or Rakum—held zero appeal.

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<sup>4</sup> “Do you do this all the time?”

<sup>5</sup> “It’s very risky.”

Beaming with satisfaction, Winston reached their position in the hallway. “As for tonight, *Dolly*, calm yourself,” he said to Jersey. He didn’t touch him this time, but his eyes said he wanted to. “We don’t do this often.” Winston sent Avi a wink and added, “We’re gonna have a lot more fun now that there are three of us.”

“And one of us is *ish-mikhan*,” Avi added and punched Jersey’s shoulder from the side.

“Hell, yeah,” Winston agreed with a chortle and passed them both to head downstairs. He called behind him, “See you at the truck.”

Jersey and Avi descended the stairs together and watched as their brother skirted the light and left the backyard out of sight. In the shadows themselves, Avi first broke the thoughtful silence.

“Winston has been my favorite companion for fifty-five years. All you have to do is get used to his hands.”

Jersey grinned. “I have hands, too, and they make nice fists.”

“Fists,” Avi hummed. “I don’t think he’s into that.”

Jersey shoved Avi hard and the brother hit the ground, bracing to land on both palms. He hopped up and Jersey bolted off, laughing quietly as his brother gave chase. They cleared two decorative iron gates before a motion-activated light triggered and bathed the area in white light. Chortling in low hisses, they slipped from view and reached Winston’s SUV. Jersey piled in the back and Avi up front. When Winston steered them away from the crime scene, all three laughed aloud.

“I’ll figure you out, Jerz, just wait.” Winston glanced backward to Jersey in the rear. “We’ll trade secrets. I have special skills, too. You’d do well to make nice with me. Ask Avi.”

Jersey tossed the guy a half-grin and looked out the window. No mere grunt could measure up to the *ish-mikhan* in what they did best, but it was good to have friends who tried.

End of Excerpt



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Book Five, CONUNDRUM, is slated for a Fall 2019 Release. Feel free to email the author or publisher to be placed on our waiting list and be alerted when the book is ready.

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<sup>i</sup> Event takes place in *Rabbit Legacy*, Book 2.

<sup>ii</sup> Event takes place in *Rabbit: Chasing Beth Rider*, Book 1.