

Anti-Supernatural
Assault Team
Book 2
The End of The World

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1 AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HEAP

1.

The History of the Seal

The Seal of Solomon was made by archangels after they had seen what demons do to humankind. It was made from a blend of iron and brass, placed on a ring and bore the symbol, later known as the star of David. Archangel Michael himself gave Solomon the ring and told him what the ring is capable of. With the ring, the owner can command or lock demons. King Solomon used the ring wisely. He was able to bring under his command seventy-two dangerous demons which he locked in the Seal. During the struggle with a powerful demon, Cizin, he lost the Seal. Cizin quickly became the king of Hell and no one could stop him anymore. Knowing that the Seal would be the only thing that can finish his reign, Cizin decided to destroy it, which he soon found to be impossible. His only option was to hide the Seal and to ensure no one will ever find it. He divided the Seal into six parts. Five parts were given to his children; Ayperos, Balan, Groth, Paymon and Shax. The last piece; the ring he kept to himself.

Ayperos entered Earth as the Roman Empire- Valens. He was tragically killed in the Battle of Adrianople in the fourth century and the Seal was lost in the ground. It was lying there untouched for over 800 years until it was found by one of the English knights during the crusades. It was taken to England where it was kept in the Tower of London till 1666 when the Great Fire of London occurred and many

items were taken out to a safe place. It was then stolen by a thief and sold to James Maryth, an affluent businessman living in the south part of London. The Seal was kept safe in a necklace and passed from generation to generation. In 1750 a vampire attacked and turned the last descendant of Maryth's Reiz. From that moment he kept the Seal on him.

Balan, many a time left Hell and did awful things to the humanity. His most famous character was Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century. He was tricked and killed during a game of chess by Bogdan Belsky on March 28, 1584. He took the Seal, knowing what it really was and had always had it on him, until it was stolen from him while he was in Kazan. The thief was a young woman called Laima who had learnt witchcraft. In the seventeenth century, she left for America and settled there forever. In 1705, Cizin visited her himself to take the Seal but she refused to do it and made a deal to keep it forever. She circled herself by an enormous labyrinth and made everyone stay out of her place. When people learnt where the Seal was, they tried to take it from her but none of them made it through the labyrinth.

Groth never used a host body. He came to Earth in the eleventh century as a pure demon and stayed in Norway all his life. During Napoleonic Wars, he left the country and moved North to the island of Svalbard. In 1910, Sweden settled a mine town there, Pyramiden, which was sold to Russian. Groth didn't want to leave the place so he stayed there and became a local legend. He was later killed by a Draugr called Heith and became the holder of the third part of the Seal.

Paymon entered Earth only twice; once as Oliver Combwell, who wanted to take Catholicism out of England. After his death, he returned to Earth for the last time and decided to keep the Seal away from the others. He was sent to Attica Correctional Facility in 1930s and stayed there changing hosts.

Shax spent her whole life in Hell. She mastered the art of sorcery and became the goddess of creatures known as orts. In 1980, she left Hell to become a queen of Demons that were still wandering on Earth. When she learned that humans are after the Seal, she made deal with vampires and some humans, and locked herself up in a tower in

Bangkok, turning the building into an impregnable fortress.

Cizin, however, lost the ring during the great battle in Hell. The ring was kept by one of the demons who entered Earth in 1756. He was killed by the government's special organization to deal with paranormal entities and the ring was taken from him only to be buried below the ground in Area 51 in 1941.

December 19, 2012

2 days remaining

2.

It was going to be a beautiful morning. Autumn had its last days but the air in San Francisco wasn't so cold. The sun was slowly rising higher and higher above the city skyline. The shadow of the tallest tower of Maldito Castle was gliding along the water towards the western side of the structure, slowly uncovering the courtyard. The buzz of a helicopter's propeller came from the mainland. It was getting louder and louder until a modern, black machine emerged above the hills. The helicopter was heading towards the Maldito island. When it was right above the castle it stopped and began the landing procedure.

3.

It was not common for the briefing room to be operating at dawn but this day was different. Tokutei, Lian, and Surya were sitting in the front row. O.D. and Eye were sitting one row behind them. They had arrived from Bangkok only an hour earlier. And tired as they were, they were all chatting nervously about something. Arthur walked inside. As soon as he entered the room, the voices stopped and only his steps filled the room. He looked stressed, tired and full of thoughts. His eyes were swollen from the sleepless night. He walked towards the desk, turned on the computer and cleared his throat.

"We have very little time, so I'll be quick."

Everyone listened with interest. Whatever Arthur prepared for the team, wasn't a part of his big plan. It was supposed to be over by then but it wasn't. The end of the world was supposed to be stopped. The

Seal was supposed to be found and Dan was supposed to be with everyone else safe and sound. Nothing went according to plan and it was obvious. Every single mission they had been on so far proved it. There had always been some complications. Something unexpected always happened that made the team act spontaneously. But everything always started with Arthur's plan. And this time, he had little time to prepare the last solution.

"What happened yesterday was totally unexpected. You may think that what will happen next is obvious; the world will end, and there is nothing we can do. Wrong. I have always been prepared for the alternative. Even though we have lost one of us, we are still in possession of the Seal. And I will not let the Seal be taken again. In a minute you will know everything. I cannot say that what we have to do is easy or even possible, but this is our last chance before Cizin attacks and destroys everyone and everything."

Having finished the sentence, he peeked at his watch and nodded his head.

"He seems to be waiting for something," Lian whispered slowly sipping her hot cup of coffee.

Arthur raised his tired eyes and directed them at the Asian woman.

"They'll be here any minute now."

"Who?" Jason asked turning around and glancing at the door.

"Just wait and see."

Tokutei heard steps coming from the corridor.

"Someone's approaching."

Everyone turned towards the door and waited with astonishment and curiosity. The steps were getting louder and louder.

"I can hear six people," Lian said quietly, looking forward to seeing the owners of the steps.

And there they appeared. Six people emerged from the corridor and entered the room. The first man looked slightly younger than Arthur. He was wearing dark combat trousers and a similar dark uniform. His face looked as tired as Arthur's. There was lots of white hair on his head and on his wide moustache as well. The second person was a woman with a light brown complexion, long, wavy, black hair and a long coat reaching

the ground. She looked no older than twenty five. Another woman followed her with similar complexion and similar face, but she looked much younger though. Two men were walking behind them. One of them was a huge, very well-built, strong person. He was wearing a black uniform with a light, leather jacket on it. His head was shaved bald and he had trimmed beard and moustache. The next man was shorter, he had a bit longer, gelled hair combed to the back. He was wearing a black uniform and he looked to be in his late forties. There was one more person at the back. He didn't look like the others. He was wearing a vast, round hat that looked like a combination of a cowboy's hat with an Australian adventurer's. He also had a long, dark coat. He was hiding his face in the shadow of the hat. And at the first sight he was beaming with mystery and darkness.

"Please come forward," the old man encouraged.

As soon as the six people reached the first row right in front of Arthur, they stopped one next to another. They didn't say anything. They were just staring at rest casting furtive glances at everyone, filled with curiosity and amazement.

"This is general Bishop, the commander in chief of the second ASAT unit."

And now everything became more vivid. Those were the second unit of ASAT. Arthur had mentioned them back in October before their very first mission. He said then, *We're not working alone*. That is what he meant. The second team. They look different so they must be special too.

"It's a pleasure to meet you all," the general uttered warmly and friendly. "Well not all of you. I have already met Arthur and Tokutei in person but I assure I know everything of the rest of the group."

Having heard that, the Asian man raised his head and opened his eyes wide. Now he remembered. Of course they had met before. It was in late September. It was on the very same night he met Arthur, the very same night he lost his friends. He remembered the general being the first he was introduced to, right before he met Arthur. And then it hit him. Bishop was there to recruit Sato. That's right. Sato was supposed to be in the second ASAT unit.

"I'll now introduce my team," the general's voice broke his thoughts. "This is Michael," he pointed at the huge man right next to him. "And next to him there are Amanda, Patricia, Jack and Seith." Arthur stepped forward and pointed at his team.

"And this is Lian Jason, Eye, Tokutei and Surya."

They all slowly nodded their heads as a sign of greeting. No words, no handshakes, nothing more. Then out of the sudden, Lian boomed,

"Why had we never been told about you!"

"Yeah, and where were you on all our missions," O.D. couldn't stand it either

The taller woman made a grimace and stepped forward.

"We haven't been on any of your missions, because we had a different tasks to do."

The general cleared his throat and joined the conversation.

"Arthur's team was far more qualified to take part in the Seal retrieving missions than ours. We would have probably failed. You see when ASAT was organized a few years ago, there were supposed to be three units. Each team was supposed to retrieve parts of the Seal but at that point we knew the location of two parts only; the witch's and the one you took yesterday. However, when we learnt what was in that building, we realized that we would have no chance without a special team. We decided to form two units then. One for searching for the Seal parts, one for retrieving them."

"What about the third one?" Surya asked?

"The Dragons," Bishop continued.

On hearing that, Tokutei focused his full attention on what the general was about to say next.

"They were originally planned to be the third team. A special team to deal with special tasks, not only the Seal problems but others as well."

"What went wrong?" Tokutei inquired curiously.

"Your master disagreed. He only let two members go, but only one survived the skeletons attack."

Tokutei got caught up with the memories from the horrible attack. He had lost there everyone who he could ever call friends, brothers or

family.

"Anyway," the general continued. "We have two teams now, and we are facing the highest of the crises. The president introduced defcon 3 at the moment, therefore we must act as one."

"Actually, as two," Arthur interrupted, stepping forward. "I will continue from this point. Please, everyone, take a sit," he beckoned at the second unit and pointed at the chairs.

Everyone knew this was it. They would finally get to know what to do next. Only few days left, so Arthur must have prepared a plan.

"I'm going to say it in as simple words as I can. Yesterday we managed to complete our goal. We retrieve the final piece of the Seal. Yet the Seal is useless without the ring itself. The ring had been kept in Area 51 for over seventy years. Shax's prince, however outsmarted us and stole the ring... not mentioning that we lost Dan."

On hearing this, Surya got caught up in her memories with Dan. She saw the moment they first met in an empty vampire nest, then the memory switched into their first kiss, then her run away from it, her disappearance. She also saw her first meeting with Arthur when he tried to convince her to join ASAT. He said then *If you join me, you'll find not only home, but also acceptance among other members. And also...* then he leaned towards her and whispered the very words she wanted to hear. The words that convinced her immediately. He whispered, *Dan will be there*. The next was their first meeting in Maldito, when he tried to attack her taking her for a vampire.

"How can we save him?" Lian asked snapping Surya out of her daydreaming.

The old man scratched his head.

"You said yesterday that we had to go to Hell," Jason added.

"Yes, that is true, and that is the only way, I'm afraid."

The well-built man from the second unit, Michael, cleared his throat and murmured,

"How can we get into Hell when it's locked for mortals?"

Arthur turned towards him and continued,

"Actually Michael, getting into Hell is not as difficult as you may think. Getting out of it is what you should be concerned with. And it's

locked for humans, not mortals. Remember that demons are mortals, too.”

Lian wide opened her eyes remembering something important.

“We can get out of there.”

Everyone else looked at her. Lian seemed so eager and so sure about what she was about to say.

“The key, the key is the answer.”

“What key?” Tokutei asked.

“They key Arthur hired me to retrieve in late September. It was the night I was recruited here. I got the key this key can...”

“Open Hell from inside,” the old man finished.

“And where is that key?” the younger sister from unit two asked.

“It’s safe here,” came the answer from Arthur. “And we can use it any time we want to.”

Jason wanted to ask so many questions. He, like everyone else, had just been bombarded with such a huge amount of information that he failed to process it all at once, and when he tried to think of one thing, Arthur said another new one.

“So who’s going to Hell?”

Arthur leaned against his wide desk, sighed and continued.

“I’m sorry. I have so much bad news for you. We will have no choice but to split into two teams. We have to mix our two units.” What was he talking about? What news what units? They worked fine as they were.

“I have thought about it, and I have come to conclusion. I choose you, Tokutei, for you’re the finest martial artist. I also choose Surya, for your fast, efficient and a damn good hunter. You will need some muscles with you, so I choose Michael. I also choose Amanda.”

Patricia looked at her sister trembling with shock. She hadn’t expected her to be chosen.

“She’s too young,” she said under her breath, but Arthur didn’t hear it.

“And also you will need someone who knows Hell best so I choose Seith.

Lian, Surya and Tokutei immediately turned toward Seith. He was

standing there, leaning against the wall, and his round hat was covering his face.

“How on Earth can he know Hell?” Surya exclaimed.

Seith raised his head revealing his unshaven face.

“Because I spent there over 300 years.”

On hearing this Surya jumped to conclusion.

“B-But if you were there for so long that means you’re either dead...”

“Or a demon,” Lian finished seeing his red eyes.

“Bingo,” Seith smiled, but despite this he looked mysterious and dark.

Jason caught an eye of the reddishness of his eyes.

“You have a demon in your unit? What the hell is wrong with you.”

“Calm down Jason,” Surya said with a sad voice. “You have me here.”

Jason realized what he had just said.

“I’m sorry. We all had a hard night, you see.”

Bishop stood up and started to speak.

“I understand there might be a few conflicts between you.

However, I hope you will all keep it professional and do the job right.

The world is not going to save itself.”

When Arthur looked at him, he remembered the very day that changed his life.

It was late February of 1999. Arthur had just had his castle rebuilt. He was in his office reading some books when the phone rang.

“West speaking.”

“Arthur, this is Gregory Bash.”

“Mr. President.”

“My informers have found another passionate person who is as devoted to the 2012 case as you are. I think you two should meet. I know you like working alone, but please, Arthur listen to what he has to say.”

“Sir, If he proves to be who you say he is, I’ll be more than welcome to work with him.”

“If I could add one thing more, he’s a general in the army, so just

imagine what benefits you both can have from this... hmm... fusion.”

“I’m already doing so, Sir,” he replied with a smile.

4.

Dan opened his eyes and looked around. He could see nothing but the darkness. He could hear nothing but some noise in the background. He could smell nothing but something burning near him. Then his receptors woke up and he felt a terrible pain tearing his stomach. He tried to touch the place, but something blocked his arms with a sound of metal clinching.

“Chains?” his mind raced.

Then it hit him. Everything that happened the night before popped up in his head. The fight with the princes, everything that Shax did, saving Surya and dying. The pain was filling his body spreading everywhere.

“Am I dead?” he asked himself.

But how could he be if he still could feel? Then the pain was too unbearable, and he couldn’t stand it anymore, but to scream at the top of his voice. His shouts echoed in some parts of the room, from which he learnt that some walls were empty. It didn’t take much time before the pain won and his body shut down.

5.

Tokutei was in his room preparing for the departure. He was packing his Bo staff that Dan had made for him, when he heard knocking to his door. The screen next to it showed Lian nervously fiddling with her fingers. Then he realized that they hadn’t had time to talk about what happened the day before. On their way home they both fell asleep or at least they thought they did. After he had put the Bo staff next to the bag, he headed towards the door.

“Lian, hi.”

“Hi, Tok. I know you’re busy, and you’re leaving soon. B-But I just wanted to... um...”

“Come on in.”

She followed him inside wiping palm sweat against her trousers. They went to the living room.

“Do ya’ want some tea, coffee, juice?” the man offered.

“No thanks, I must get prepared. You probably know why I am here.”

Tokutei sighed and sat opposite her.

“I know. We need to talk about yesterday.”

“You do understand it’s not an easy conversation, but there is no other way. You’re going... I can’t believe I’m saying that... You’re going to Hell, and I’m staying here. We both have important tasks to do, and there is a chance... I hope this chance is close to zero but still there’s a chance we may not see each other again, so I have to say what I must say.”

Tokutei was sitting there looking at her. He might seem look calm, but really he was nervous, maybe even more nervous than she was.

“I’m gonna start, Lian, if it is OK with you?”

She said nothing, only nodded her head still fiddling with her fingers under the table.

“Your first impression sucked.”

As soon as this message hit her ears, her eyes grew wide and she stood up. She thought it was over for her. Tokutei stood up, too.

“You do know what I mean. We didn’t get along. That constant rivalry, boasting, proving who’s better. I hated that. I didn’t like you. You were always trying to prove me wrong.”

These were strong words to hear and they did hit her emotions. Tokutei noticed that her lower lip started to tremble as if she was about to burst out with tears.

“Hey, hey, hey, I don’t want to hurt you, just stay with me. I did tell you that your first impression sucked but when I got to know you better, I changed my mind and I...”

The girl raised her eyes as all of her negative emotions vaporized.

“And?”

“Shax was right. She was right all along. Damn it, she could read people’s thoughts and feelings.”

He came closer to Lian and grabbed her hands. At first she wanted him to let go of her, because her hands were wet from sweat, but then she felt that he was also nervous, so she squeezed them tight.

"I love Qiaolian Shu. I really do."

Her pupils increased in size as she lowered her lower lip and noticed that her breath rate accelerated. Tokutei pulled her closer to him and looked her deep in the eyes, then glimpsed at her lips, leaned forward and kissed her. This is what she was waiting for, but what he had said earlier about her, messed in her mind. The kiss lasted for almost a minute, then she pulled back. She was in shock, and her body was trembling. She felt shivers and yet some sort of uncertainty.

"I-I'll go," she stuttered and turned on her heel and next headed for the exit.

Now Tokutei felt this awkwardness, but he knew it was not a good time to let his feelings interrupt with his thoughts of the upcoming mission. Lian stopped at the door and turned back at Tokutei.

"Don't get me wrong, Tok, I-I..."

"Lian, don't say anything else. We'll continue this conversation when I return, and I promise you I will try to get your brother back as well."

The girl opened the door and left. Tokutei stood there for a while moveless, then went back on getting ready. His difficult childhood along with his thorough training made him who he was now. He was able to put his feelings and worries away, so that he could focus entirely on what was more important. Hence he was always alone.

6.

Arthur was sitting in his office at his desk working on his computer. Bishop was sitting on the other side, looking for something in his tablet PC. Arthur pressed some buttons on his keyboard and a sound of dialing came from the speakers wisely installed in the desk.

"Whitehouse, how can I help you?" the voice on the other side asked.

"This is Arthur West. The president is expecting my call."

"Ah yes, Mr. West. Please hold on."

Bishop raised his eyes from his tablet and put the device aside listening to a nice and soft melody installed as hold music.

"Arthur, finally," they heard a strong masculine voice.

"Mr. President, Sir. I'm here with General Bishop. After thorough consideration I must say...um...We have no other choice but to begin the operation."

"Just tell me the current details and we will start the operation ASAP."

"I fear we need to evacuate the city."

"You mean San Francisco?"

"Not only San Francisco, but also the whole peninsula. So far we have obtained the information that they are going to hit us with everything they have, only to take the Seal."

"So why don't you move the Seal somewhere else?"

"You saw what happened to Area 51, which is said to be supermax. Maldito, on the other hand is impregnable to supernatural and paranormal entities. We're on the island, a few miles from the land. They are going to hit us with everything they have, and I believe this place is much more suitable for the Seal to stay in."

"Alright then, tell me what you need."

"6000 men armed with the weapons we talked about. About 700 snipers and medics. Men with experience, no privates or corporals, but at least majors."

"6000? Where would you put them?"

"On the island and in Alpha Point. As far as I remember you have trained more than 7000 men for this particular job. I also need four tanks and a few Hummers. And Sir, I want the city to have their choppers and jets ready, just in case."

"What about the city itself? Do we follow the original plan?"

"Yes, Sir. Everything just as we spoke of."

"What about evacuation?"

"I don't believe we should evacuate Oakland, just the peninsula."

"Of course Mr. West. Everything will be provided."

"Thank you, Mr. president"

"I'm not thanking you yet, Arthur."

"I'm sorry but we have a lot of things to do."

"I do understand that. You may expect everything you asked within one hour."

"Again, thank you."

"Goodbye and good luck."

Arthur turned towards Bishop.

"So what do you think?"

"Of what?"

"Of this whole operation."

Bishop took a deep breath and stood up.

"The castle will be heavily protected. However, you do understand that these 6000 men have no experience of fighting supernatural beings. They're only humans."

"Yes, I know that. Hence was the course. They have been trained and prepared. And they have a lot of experience in combat. Killing a zombie won't be a problem for them."

"What about stronger creatures like vampires, werewolves, orts, ghouls and so on?"

"About 1000 hunters are coming here as we speak."

"Hunters?" Bishop asked surprised.

"That is correct John. Hunters from all over the USA are coming here to help us. They all knew about the end of the world long before."

"Now you're talkin', West. Let us only hope we can withstand the attacks before they retrieve the ring from Hell."

"If they retrieve, John, if they retrieve."

Bishop looked at Arthur surprised.

"I've never heard or seen you doubting in your men, or in this very operation."

"I don't know. I don't know what will go out of Hell. No one has ever been there, and none of the demons gave any details. I fear that we may face something we may not be able to cope with."

"If it bleeds, it can be killed, our maxima, do you remember?"

"Ghosts don't bleed."

"But we have found a way to get rid of them."

"You're right."

"Let's gather everyone in the hangar and start this whole thing.

This place's gonna turn into hell of a fortress within next day."

Suddenly, the door opened and Patricia walked in. Both of the men took

a look at her. She was wearing the same coat as earlier, but her face seemed a little concerned.

“What is it, Pat?” Bishop asked.

“I’m here because of the mission. I don’t want my sister to go. She’s too young.”

“I understand that, but I need you here in the castle.”

She took a seat on the nearby armchair.

“John, I know, but you must understand. I’m the older one, I’ve always been protective about her. Let me go instead of her.”

Arthur was listening to every word they were saying.

“She’s right. We can have Amanda here.”

Bishop smacked his lips.

“Alright. So be it. I can’t believe I’m gonna say that, but go to Hell.”

“Go tell Amanda and get ready,” Arthur added. “We’re takin’ off in an hour.”

“Thank you, thank you so much.”

7.

It was fifteen minutes before the take off. Surya was in a lift that was taking her down to the hangar. It had taken her a few weeks before she learned the whole plan of the castle and how to get anywhere she wanted. Many a time she and the others instead of going to the gym, they ended up in a swimming-pool or a ballroom. The lift stopped with a screech and the door slid aside. Surya grabbed her backpack, as well as the weapons she had just taken from the weaponry, and made for the entrance to the hangar. She could hear some muted voices coming from the inside. The door immediately opened as she got closer and she stepped in. The hangar, which usually was rather empty, now was full. There were about twenty soldiers carrying big boxes of ammo from some window in the north side. She also saw a few dozens of cars parked in the east side. Every private car had been taken from the garages in the courtyard down here. Just a precaution. There was also a large, greenish plane and she could see the demon guy standing on the stairs leading to the inside. As she was walking down the stairs she heard familiar voice.

"Surya, hey, girl!"

She turned round with her head and saw Jason walking fast towards her.

"Don't you even think of leaving without saying goodbye."

"I wasn't going to," she replied.

O.D. could feel that she was worried about the journey. She was rather sad and didn't say a lot of words.

"I see you've got some second thoughts. I totally understand you."

"We're going to Hell. We're gonna fight on their territory. You, on the other hand, are in a better position. When they come out, they're gonna fight on our territory."

She adjusted her big backpack and went down the stairs towards the plane.

"Just wanted to wish you good luck, S."

She turned around and faked her smile.

"You too, Jason, you too."

Then stepped inside. As she was entering the cabin, she saw Tokutei standing silent at the window and Michael and Patricia sitting and chatting.

"Sink or swim," she whispered and went up to Tokutei

8.

A few moments later, the wide, military plane was speeding along the sky. Arthur gathered everyone to instruct them what to do. The uncomfortable section they were in was far from the standards they were used to thanks to Arthur's luxury. Surya, Tokutei and Arthur were sitting on one side while Michael, Patricia and Seith were sitting on the other one. Arthur sensed the difference and negative feelings between them, but he knew there was no other option.

"Listen now."

They focused on what he was going to say.

"The vehicle in the back was designed and constructed for mountain terrain. From what we know about Hell, it would be perfect for traveling down there. It has a hard titanium armor, strengthened even more in the front. Unpuncturable tires, four mounted 50k guns,

one for each side. What else... Ah yes, there is also weapon storage, food compartment and a self-cleaning bathroom compartment. The truck is actually divided into three sections. The cabin, the operating room, and the storage and the bathroom.

"Where's the food section?" Tokutei asked concerned after not hearing its location from Arthur.

"In the storage."

"So what's the plan?" Patricia asked.

Arthur took a glimpse at Seith and indicating at him with his head told them the next thing.

"Seith knows Hell, he will take you to Shax's palace. She definitely hasn't recovered yet, so she would be vulnerable. The guards, however, are what you should be concerned about. As soon as you get Dan, Lian's brother and the ring head back to San Francisco, once again, Seith will lead you to the portal, and get to Maldito castle ASAP."

"Unless we won't have anything to get back to," Michael said a little bit worried.

Arthur slowly shook his head.

"If you keep that sort of negative thinking, you won't succeed. Remember, success comes from determination and hard work."

Surya was fiddling with her fingers. She was finally getting to take the love of her life back.

"What about you, Arthur? How are you gonna keep the Seal safe?" Arthur dropped his eyes and sighed.

"Nearly 6500 of soldiers, hunters and private mercenaries are coming to the Castle as we speak."

"That's a good thing, right?" Michael said. "The more the better."

"It's not the number that counts," Tokutei replied. "It's their skill."

"Tokutei is right. However, we would face a few million of enemies willing to do just anything to fetch the Seal back to Cizin and we would do everything we can to hold them off until you come back. I haven't spent all these years vainly preparing for the end. We really are well prepared and I know we will not fail."

"So we cannot fail either," Tokutei said firmly.

"Wait, wait, wait," Michael spoke. "How are we gonna get to Hell exactly?"

"We found a portal to Hell in Africa in one of my mines. The portal lies twenty two miles below the ground."

Surya looked at him astonished.

"Does that mean that Hell is not simply underground?"

"No, Surya. Hell is another universe, another realm. There are many portals but most of them are deep underground... I don't know exactly why, but my speculations are that the temperature is similar."

9.

Jason and Bishop were preparing the headquarters in the Maldito castle. They and several other soldiers were in a room about thirty six feet long and forty eight feet wide. There were already several black desks and a few computers. Another two soldiers brought a thin, wide cardboard.

"Where should we put this LCD?" one of them asked.

Bishop turned towards them and walked closer.

"Arthur wants them to hang on this wall, so just put them over there, Roger and..."

"Miles, Sir," the soldiers pushing the desk said.

"Miles who? You know I don't like using surnames."

"Arthur Miles, Sir."

"Roger and Arthur will mount them."

Jason grabbed one of the twenty six-inch computer screens that had been brought a few minutes earlier and placed it onto one of the desks.

"When did he say he would be back?"

"In the evening. We need to have this room ready by then."

Bishop walked towards a window on the right and looked at the ocean. He could see a dozen of helicopters flying towards San Francisco. That view jogged his memory and reminded him of the first time he met Arthur West. His mind travelled back to March of 1999. He was traveling by a limousine along the main road in Daly City. He didn't look anything younger or different. He was talking on a large mobile phone with

someone more important than him.

“I’m almost there... I know, I’ll try to convince him to... No, absolutely not... Because he’s one of the richest individuals on our planet.”

He glanced outside the window and noticed that they were in some kind of a tunnel.

“Sir, did you know there was an underwater tunnel leading to the island?”

A few minutes later the limousine went out of the tunnel and headed for the towering castle at the end of the road. Bishop hang up the phone and gave in to the magnificent view of the forest.

“And it used to be a mountain one day,” he said under his breath. The long car passed the gate and stopped in the courtyard. There was already someone waiting for him.

“Mr. Bishop, I presume,” the young lad with medium, black hair said.

Bishop nodded and asked,

“Where’s Mr. West?”

“He’s in his office. Please follow me.”

A few minutes passed and Bishop was escorted to Arthur’s office.

“Sir, general Bishop is here to see you.”

Arthur was burrowing in a pile of paper stuck on his wide desk. He immediately took off his glasses and stood up.

“Ah yes, Mr. Bishop. Nice to meet you, Sir. I’m Arthur West,” he took out his hand and waited for the handshake.

“The pleasure is all mine. It’s nice to put a face to a name I heard so much of.”

Arthur peeped at the boy still waiting by the door.

“Bob, make sure no one interrupts us..

“Yes, Sir” came the answer followed by the door shut.

Bishop had finally a chance to look around the room. Apart from the numerous files and papers stuck on the old man’s desk the wall was covered in a few yard-long corkboard that was filled with photos of men and strange creatures. There was also a drawing presenting the Seal of Solomon.

"Please sit, Mr. Bishop."

"It's John."

"In that case, I'm Arthur," he said taking a comfortable seat on his armchair.

"The president told me what business you wanted to discuss with me, and I agree."

"You do?" Bishop replied surprised.

He didn't think it would be so easy to convince him.

"When I talked to the President a few years ago, he wanted the government to help me organize everything. I didn't agree then, which was a stupid mistake to make. Look at me, I got obsessed by those supernatural creatures, by the Seal and the whole end of the world in thirteen years. And what have I done so far? Apart from building the tunnel you had a pleasure to travel through, I haven't done a single physical thing. I have been only gathering the information and even though it's been a few years, I know nothing about the whereabouts of any of the pieces of The Seal."

Bishop waited till Arthur finished what he was to say.

"I know how much time is valuable, and how much it is spent on research. Hence, I am here to help. I have many a connection which will be useful. Also, I have much more experience in paranormalia than you may imagine and last but not the least I know the whereabouts of two pieces of the Seal."

Arthur couldn't believe what he had just heard. This was a perfect candidate to cooperate with. He accomplished much more than him and seemed to be more educated in the Seal matter.

"H-How have you obtained such information?"

"I'm in it for more than you can possibly imagine. I have my own sources. Together we may prevent the end of the world."

"I'm in," Arthur replied without hesitation. "I'm definitely in."

"Good, let us start by putting everything together, shall we?"

"If I may suggest anything," Arthur said putting his glasses on. "We have to think about the future. And by future I mean technology."

"I think I know what you're talking about."

Arthur smiled.

"I was planning to replace those pieces of papers and the corkboard with computers and screens. It will be easier to search and to store information."

Bishop nodded eagerly.

"What's more we need to find people two form a team."

"No, Arthur. Two or three teams. One team is not enough, believe me."

10.

Lian and Amanda were at the main gate. The courtyard was getting filled with military vehicles, and more and more of them were approaching along the main road. The sound of helicopters were heard getting louder and louder bringing in more equipment and soldiers. Another truck passed and behind them emerged a silver SUV with Colorado plates. As soon as Lian saw them, she beckoned to them to come closer. Then she walked towards the vehicle.

"Hunters?"

"Yeap," came the answer from a short woman with a curly hair inside.

"I need to check you on the list so please give me your names."

"Kelly Jackson, Peter Jackson, Tom Jackson and Susan Gorter."

Lian ticked their names on the tablet she was holding. The numbers were showing; Arrived- sixty nine, to check four hundred thirty one.

"A whole family, I see," the Asian woman smiled.

"Family business."

"Unfortunately, we do not have enough space for the cars, so if you could ma'am park your car in Daly City or in Pacifica. You'll be brought here by the soldiers again. The bus is waiting at each parking lot."

"What a shame. Alright," she turned around. "You're gonna take the stuff our and wait for me in the courtyard, OK?"

"Okey dokey," came the eager answers.

Lian went up to Amanda sitting at the gate on a deckchair.

"Hey, could you fill in for me for a sec, I need to go to the bathroom. Use your tablet if you can."

"No problem. Oh, and there're comin' another two cars," she said spotting something in the distance.

11.

Jack was on the highest tower situated in the western part of the castle. He was mounting huge sniper rifles every three feet. When he was checking whether one he had just mounted was movable he glanced at the beautiful view of the ocean and the land on the other side. The main road was full of traffic that from such distance looked like small dots. He had never seen anything like this. From one side a long queue of military trucks that were entering the underwater tunnel, on the other side thousands of cars were fleeing the peninsula.

"The evacuation process," he murmured to himself. He bended to take another sniper rifle when he heard three more choppers approaching the castle. He stopped again for a while and spotted New York symbols of one of the choppers.

The machine lowered its height above the courtyard and began the landing procedure. The metal bird slowly touched the ground, and the door opened. Seven people carrying backpacks jumped out and looked around.

"So this is the famous Maldito Castle," a woman in her late forties said tightening the grip on the handle to her suitcase. Lian was at that time coming back and she saw the not-military chopper cooling down in the courtyard. She accelerated towards the people that were getting their luggage out of the machine, and raised her voice.

"Excuse-me, are you those hunters from New York?"

"Actually vampire hunters," a tall boy with short, black hair replied. Lian caught up with them.

"I need to find your names on the list, one minute, OK?"

"No problem. I'll deal with it," the woman replied wiping sweat of her tired forehead. "I'm Leonora Night, you should have the seven of us by the name of NYVHA."

Lian looked at her with interest.

"NYVHA, New York? You must be from Dan's old team."

"I'm Danny's aunt," the woman replied. "I bet he would be happy

to see me.”

The boy with short, black hair heard this name and immediately ran closer to the women.

“To see us. I’m Mike. The man in white originally wanted to recruit me,” he boasted.

“Where is he?” the woman asked.

“Arthur? He’s gone to Africa, he should be in the evening.”

“Not him, Dan,”

Lian didn’t know how to say what happened to Dan. She couldn’t just say that he was killed by a demon and taken to Hell. She had to think of something.

“Dan’s not here,” she said ticking the seven names on the list.

“Where is he?” Mike asked with interest. “I haven’t spoken to him for two days.”

“You have to wait for Arthur, I’m afraid. Anyway. Take your bags inside, there should be another person waiting to take you to your rooms.”

The woman sighed and beckoned to the rest to follow her.

“I know you’re busy, keep doing your job.”

Lian smiled and went back to Amanda.

12.

It was getting late in the evening in a small, Polish city of Boleslawiec situated in the south-west of the country. A tall, blond man finished preparing his supper and walked to his room cluttered with clothes and useless things. He put the supper onto his desk and sat on his falling apart armchair making a loud sound of relief. Gobbling one of the sandwiches he typed the Facebook address in the browser and logged into his account. Four unread messages caught his eye at once. Ignoring what was already displayed on his wall, he checked the messages. One invitation to someone’s calendar; a completely pointless application. However, as he began reading the next three messages his jaw dropped in disbelief. *They’re evacuating San Francisco*, was what he read in three of them. He looked at the wall and yes, people were talking about it. Some were speculating about a bomb, others about a

possible disaster that might occur soon, yet some others were trying to connect it with the upcoming end of the Mayan long-term calendar. Instead of eating he opened one of the Polish main portals and read what media were saying about it.

13.

Two students were having lunch in a local café in Miami, when they heard bartender turning up the news.

"Something's goin' on, man," he said to his mate pointing at a small TV screen hanged in the corner.

The smartly dressed lady was reading the latest announcements.

"Over eight million people are forced to leave their homes and offices. The government has announced this morning to completely evacuate San Francisco, Daly City, Pacifica, San Bruno..."

"Oh my God!" some of the curious viewers commented.

"It is not yet sure whether they will be able to return home for Christmas," the voice on TV continued."

"Terrorists," some elder woman said with a squeaking voice.

"They must have planted some bomb."

"I hope it's not nuclear," some other man added.

Yet some other took out his cell phone and dialed a number.

"Honey? Did you hear the news? Yes someone's planted a nuclear bomb."

And that is how the rumor started to evolve and spread.

14.

In Dubai, an eight-year old boy ran to the living room where his parents were gaping at the old-fashioned TV.

"May I play outside, mom?" he asked bouncing his ball against the floor.

The parents didn't reply.

"Mommy, can I play outside?"

He came closer to the screen and saw the feed from San Francisco bay.

"Can I play, can I play, can I can I can I," he asked repetitively.

"Yes, go, go," came the final answer not being even sure whether

they were aware what they had just said.

All around the world people gradually learned about events in San Francisco. All major networks booked the latest flights to send their reporters there. Other journalists were speculating their own theories; sometimes agreeing what the government was saying, sometimes not. The Internet community was also an active place with over half a billion active users online flooding message boards, Facebook walls, or just chatting privately with their friends on various communicators. The world was interested in the San Francisco taking their mind off the upcoming end of the world.

It wasn't for long, however, when people started to connect the Mayan final date with what was going on in California. And people started to worry.

15.

In Kansas City one of the white-collar workers was in the middle of his work when he heard someone shouting from another cubicle,

"They're having some expert talking on TV."

"I need to see this."

He then glanced and saw that everybody didn't want to work, they wanted to learn more.

"Are ya' comin' Pete?" he heard his colleague's voice.

"Yeap," came the answer as he gave in and ran after the crowd to the lunch room where the big screen was.

"What are they sayin'?" he asked.

"Hush," he heard as everyone focused on the interview with some well-known doctor.

"... That's very interesting. Why do you think people connect this, so called, *San Francisco Exodus* with the end of the Mayan Calendar?" the woman asked.

"You see, ma'am. For the last two years or for some others much longer, everyone has been exposed to the fact that the world may end on December 21, 2012."

"Why this end of the world was so special for them?"

"I'm getting to that. The world didn't end in 2000, neither did it

later in 2011 when people tried to interpret bible, or any other time in the past. So why this one? Why is this very end so special and on everyone's mouth? It's not because people like to be scared in general, not so much this time. It's the end of the world that had been foretold over three thousand years before Christ. People started to believe that such a long prophecy may be real. Mayans had nothing to do with the bible. Anyway after being exposed to all the news concerning the day after tomorrow's date and when they saw that the whole peninsula in California is being evacuated, they somehow connected these two events.

"Do you, doctor, believe in this connection?"

"Of course I don't. No one and nothing says that when the Mayan calendar ends, the world will end. It only indicates that something huge may happen... some change, you know."

"What about the leap years? It wasn't introduced during Mayan times, shouldn't their calendar end some time ago?"

"No it shouldn't. The Mayan's didn't have months and dates as well. They only used some circles that can be transformed into our time reckoning. And yes, the leap years has been counted by our scientists and there is no doubt about when it ends. I just don't believe anything significant will happen then."

"Do you believe in what the government is telling us?"

"They are evacuating eight million people. But what is the true reason for it? I don't know. It's certainly not connected with the end of the Mayan calendar, for sure."

"You're so wrong," Jason said under his breath having lunch is his apartment.

He turned the TV off, grabbed his tray and walked towards the small gap in the wall. He placed the tray there and it immediately disappeared as a lift took it down to the kitchen.

16.

The heat wave struck the country of Botswana like every other day. Arthur's diamond mine was flickering in the distance through the hot air. It hadn't changed much since the 90's; a few new buildings had

been built, the staff had been enlarged and the working conditions had been improved to be much better than in any other competitive companies.

Many a time Arthur's face appeared in *The Times*. He wasn't only well known for being one of the richest men in the world and a big contributor to charities, but also for treating his workers with special care. African mines were infamous and often compared to slavery. Arthur's mine, named after his wife Alice, was nothing like that. Every worker had their office. The miners used hi-tech tools, not picks, to drill the diamonds off the walls, everything was safe, the tunnels were strengthened and there was an emergency exit every hundred feet. Of course the tunnels were air-conditioned and illuminated with natural-like light, so no one felt there like in a mine. Also the workers responsible for the polishing had sophisticated conditions. The mine also had a gym, swimming pool, vouchers for workers' families and within its fifteen years there was no accident.

The sun was dimmed for a second by the jet that slowly approached the mine. As soon as it landed, the back door opened and the vehicle rolled out. It looked like a truck; Ford F-650, but a bit longer and wider. It was painted black and looked more like a tank than a truck. After it, there went out Tokutei, Arthur, Patricia, Surya and Seith. Michael was driving the truck.

"Was it supposed to be so hot here?" Patricia asked squinting her eyes.

"Wait till you are in Hell," the demon replied.

A black man wearing a bright suit was already waiting there.

"Arthur, nice to see you again."

"Kubey," the old man replied seeing his old friend who he discovered the diamonds ore with.

"How long it's been? Two? Three years?"

"Five, old friend. It's been five years."

"Five already?"

"And I'm here for ten minutes only, I'm afraid."

"I understand. The crane is ready."

On hearing that Tokutei asked not being sure whether he understood

correctly,

“A crane?”

“That is correct. You’re going to be lowered twenty two miles down,” he turned around towards the group.

“Seith, go for Mike if you may, gather everyone here. Just a few words before we say farewell to each other.”

Seith nodded and zoomed towards the vehicle to fetch Michael. Arthur waited for both of them to return, took a deep breath, and spoke.

“I do understand that you have a very difficult mission to do. For others it may seem impossible, for you it’s not. Remember that you’re the best of the best. When you enter the vehicle you will be lowered twenty two miles down. Then it is all up to you. No surveillance, no assistance. Only you and Hell.”

He could see tiny tears appearing in Surya’s eyes. The words moved her.

“I’m not saying goodbye. I’m saying see you in two days.”

He then shook hands with Seith, Michael and Patricia, but with those who knew him for three months, he had a stronger relationship. Surya hugged him with tears in her eyes.

“Don’t break my bones, Surya,” he said feeling her dhampiric strength.

Tokutei wanted to bow, and so he did, but then he ignored his code and hugged Arthur as well.

“We will see you on Friday,” he murmured to the old man.

“We will,” came a hopeful answer as Arthur turned around and made for the jet.

He then turned around for the last time.

“Bring him home.”

Kubey walked towards the vehicle.

“Alright guys, if you please follow me, I’ll show you where to go for the drop.”

The team exchanged glances and walked to the truck.

“And remember,” Kubey continued. “Fasten your seatbelts, you don’t wanna fall onto the windshield.”

Everyone got in the truck and they headed to the point that Kubey showed them.

17.

It was about three o'clock in San Francisco. The city was almost empty. The army were checking the streets and houses to make sure that every citizen left or was evacuated. One truck was rolling along the district filled with houses similar to one another. It was a typical military truck used to transport group of soldiers or people from one place to another. Two soldiers were sitting in the cabin while two were walking on both sides of the street checking the houses.

"Did you get the orders for tomorrow?" the driver asked.

"Nope, and I have no idea what they'll tell me to do in an hour."

"I just hope it..."

"Wait, look there," he said pointing at one of the detached houses. There was a woman standing in the drive, nervously looking left and right.

"Fred, could you check it," he said through the walkie-talkie. Almost immediately the soldier walking on the right ran up to the woman.

"Ma'am, you cannot be here."

"I know, I know," the woman cried constantly brushing away her long, dark, curly hair. "I'm waiting for my son, Ben, he hasn't returned from school yet."

"Ma'am, as far as I know every schoolchild was taken to the secure zone two hours ago. If you want me we can check whether he's there."

"If you could be so kind."

The soldier grasped his radio.

"Gibbons, do you read?"

"Loud and clear."

"This is Porter from second division. Put me through to the Shelter."

"One moment."

The soldier turned towards the woman.

"What's his name?"

"Ben, Ben Stuart. He's eight."

"Shelter here," came a female voice through the speaker.

"Hi, this is Porter from San Francisco. We've found a concerned mother looking for her son; Ben Stuart. Is there anyone by this name?"

"Let me check."

The mother made one more step towards the soldier and listened carefully to the next message.

"Porter, are you still there?"

"Yes, did ya' find'm?"

"There are two Ben Stuarts. One is fourteen, the other one is eight."

"It's the second one. It's him," the mother cried.

"OK, it's him. Thanks."

"He's there safe, isn't he?" the woman tried to find out something more.

The soldier peeped at her house.

"Yes he is. You must go with me to the truck. You'll be escorted to the Shelter. Is there anyone here apart from you?"

"No, sir, only me. The others left hours ago."

"Good. Follow me, I'm gonna help you get to the truck."

"One moment please, I'll just get my luggage."

18.

After Jack had finished mounting the sniper rifles on the tower, he had lunch. Next he went to the headquarters to ask Bishop what to do next. As soon as he got there, he was stunned by the look of the room. When he had been there earlier with Jason, there was only one desk in a large room. Now it was almost ready. The soldiers were mounting the last screen on the wall. There were already nine of them; five in each row. Each wide using technology better than HD. Actually much better than HD because it could display picture in resolution up to 5000p. In front of the screens there was one long desk, at least thirty feet long, on which two soldiers were assembling computers. Behind this desk there were literally one hundred small, wooden desks in ten rows. About one third was equipped with computers and joysticks. Jack knew exactly what they were for. Actually it was him and Bishop who planned the design of the headquarters. Not waiting any longer, he walked fast to

the last row of the desk, opened a cardboard lying on a pile of similar boxes, and helped the others.

“Jack,” he heard Bishop voice. “Keep an eye on everything, I need to go to check the zones.

“Alright.”

Bishop wiped the sweat, took a sip of cold water from the bottle on the desk and went outside.

19.

Meanwhile, in the eastern part of the island about fifty soldiers were setting up a camp. Some of them were building wooden towers out of the poles and boards that were constantly being brought in by large trucks. Others were setting up huge tents. Yet some others were carrying boxes filled with ammo, spotlights, guns and other things. The rest were setting up a concrete wall or rather a fence. The same was happening in all parts of the island. It looked as if a new town was slowly rising in front of the woods

Deep in the forest, the camps looked a little bit different. Instead of building wooden towers, the army were setting up posts high on the trees that made them look like tree houses rather than military posts. The main tents, so called zone headquarters were set up on the borders between the zones. They were different from traditional tents for a few reasons. First of them was the materials they were made of, which couldn't be flammable. The second were the poles. They were used as walls and were equipped with long, white lamps to illuminate the interior and the nearby surroundings.

Cars and trucks wouldn't stop coming and going. Marines, snipers, hunters and mercenaries were flooding the island. There were already more than four thousand people, and almost two and a half thousand were still supposed to come. The transporters left the soldiers, materials or the equipment and went back for more.

20.

Unit one was sitting comfortably in the truck being lowered to the lowest point humans have ever dug. The lower they got, the darker it

was and the temperature actually instead of getting higher kept the same level as on the ground. The walls were covered in pointy, brownish rocks. They could also see diamonds sticking out between the piles of rocks and stones. Michael was sitting at the wheel, Patricia on the right, while Surya, Tokutei and Seith were sitting right behind them.

"Look!" Surya said astonished seeing a large, grey bone erecting from the wall.

"A dinosaur?"

"Yup," Michael confirmed tapping his fingers against the wheel.

"Half a mile to go," they heard Kubey's voice coming through the speaker in the truck. "As soon as we release you there will be no contact with us or any other person upstairs.

These words made them worry, but they understood the importance of their mission, and fear was not an option at that time. Neither was the fact that they would be the only humans down there.

Michael turned up the air-condition to keep the same temperature. He pushed his seat to the back and turned it round, then stood up and trying to keep his balance he headed to the next compartment.

"And what are ya' up to?" Patricia turned around confused.

"Too much stress, my ass's gonna explode."

Surya and Tokutei followed him with their eyes. On hearing this the girl gave Tokutei a strange look.

"He's not a gentleman for sure," she whispered.

Indeed, the situation was stressful and she couldn't blame him for such words in front of two women. Tokutei shrugged his shoulder and went on fiddling with his shurikens. It was the only way for him to deal with his emotions.

The vehicle stopped moving. They heard a metal sound of hacks being detached off the roof. Everyone looked through the windshield at what was behind them. Around was nothing special; rocks with diamonds. And that's it. No door, no tunnel nothing.

"And now what?" Patricia asked turning back to Seith sitting speechless next to Tokutei.

"Do not be so impatient."

Having said that the pebbly ground burst into flames covering the whole

vehicle. Patricia threw herself at the wheel trying to start the engine and just drive out of the fire, but Seith gripped her shoulder with his huge fingers and gently pulled her back.

“It will do no harm,” he spoke casually.

Tokutei and Surya were watching the whole situation not knowing what to do. They had to trust the demon sitting next to them.

21.

Lian and Amanda were still dealing with hunters arriving to the castle. It's been nearly six hours since they started, and there were still about over seventy hunters missing. In front of them marines were setting up camps. There were many towers in the woods and the walls were slowly raising turning the island into a fortress.

“How can we lose when we are so well prepared,” Amanda pointed at the men before her.

“We can't, at least I think so. But we cannot be so self-confident, either.”

“What do you mean, Lian?”

“We don't know what will come out from the pit. Let me ask you a question, do you know orcs?”

“Of course I do,” the girl nodded.

“Have you ever fought any of them?”

“Unfortunately, I haven't.”

“And I have. I fought them two days ago, and I must admit these are the most difficult creatures to defeat. If these soldiers aren't as skillful as we are, they will fail.”

“Don't say that,” Amanda raised her voice. “I was there when Bishop and Arthur were preparing this plan. These are not ordinary soldiers. They do have experience and they have been preparing for it for a few months.”

“At least Bishop told you more. Arthur always briefed us before the missions, and he said nothing about the doomsday.”

“From what Bishop told us, Arthur has been so quiet since he lost his wife.”

“He still keeps her photo on his desk.”

"Lian, another car is coming," Amanda directed her eyes at the road.

"OK, let's deal with them. Only few more hunters to go."

As they were walking closer to the gate, a female voice came from behind.

"Lian? Is that you?"

The Chinese girl turned around and saw no one else but Natalie who accompanied them in Pyramiden.

"Natalie, I didn't suppose you'd be here."

Amanda notice that Lian wanted to talk to that girl.

"I'll deal with the hunters, go L."

Lian nodded and walked closer to Natalie.

"How are things girl?" she asked scanning her black uniform. "I see you've changed your hairstyle."

"Yup, I've had it cut. And things... well... not so good. After Clark's death they haven't found me a new partner so I was stuck up with paper work. At least till last week when Arthur called and asked me to come here."

"You did well in Pyramiden. It'd be great to have you here."

"Where are the rest? I only met O.D. inside."

Lian dropped her eyes for a second.

"They're in Hell."

"Where?" she wide opened her eyes.

"We've found all pieces of the Seal, but we lost some ring without which the Seal simply doesn't work."

"That's terrible. I do hope everything will end up well."

"Without hope we have nothing to do here."

22.

Jason was in the hangar with hundreds of marines, snipers and hunters. Some of them were carrying boxes from a huge, military plane to two lifts on the left. The rest were carrying boxes piled up on the right to other lifts.

"How do these boxes differ from those?" O.D. heard a thick voice behind him.

He turned his head round, and smiled.

“You see what you brought are only silver and regular bullets. What we have here are clips with five types of bullets. You just press a button on your gun and select the type of ammo you need at the moment.”

“Five kinds you say? So what do ya’ have there except silver and regular?”

“Salt, poisoned and explosive. You’ll find the last one very useful if you’re assigned outside.”

“I’m assigned to Hotel zone, so I think they’ll come useful.”

One of the soldiers came up to them and asked,

“What are the poisoned bullet for?”

“Vampires,” a hunter replied casually.

Jason took hold of another box and headed towards the lifts

“They’re called poisoned because they were submerged in dead man’s blood for quite a long time.”

Their conversation was stopped by a tiny radio that someone had put on the table with bottles of water. When they got there they heard some interview with another specialist talking about the San Francisco Exodus. As soon as the soldiers heard it, they stopped next to the table and put down the boxes. One of them turned the volume up. Jason placed the box onto the floor and listened with the others.

“So you’re basically saying that this San Francisco Exodus is to cover something else than an upcoming earthquake?”

“That’s correct. Everyone now associate San Francisco Exodus with the Mayan last day of their calendar. I have been studying their history, their culture, and what has been happening in the world for about thirty years now and I don’t have good news, I’m afraid.”

“What do you mean, professor?”

“Whatever happens in two days will destroy our civilization completely. The species of homo sapiens will be no more.”

The soldiers were listening with interest and shock at the same time. Some of them began to develop doubts whether what they were doing was useful or pointless.

“And where did you get such speculations from, professor?” the

voice on the radio continued.

"If we were to survive, we would develop technologically to such a degree that we would travel to other planets. If we achieve this, then time travel would be just a matter of time. And since we do not see any people from the future among us, it means humans will not exist for so long."

"We're not gonna win this thing," one of the marines said.

"Hey! Don't even think that," Jason replied trying to comfort him.

"You heard what he said, man. We're not gonna survive this."

"He said some shit about the future. Firstly it doesn't mean people will face extinction soon, and it doesn't mean people from the future aren't here. They may be, but they simply do not show themselves. Anyway, soldier. You have been trained to fight, and you can't give up. I know humans will not die this time, Demons need us, Vampire need us, they cannot do without us."

"And where did ya' hear it from, huh? Mr. wise guy?"

"From demonic princess. I'm one of the ASATs and I'm proud of what I have done so far, and of what I'm gonna do and be doing for the next couple of days. And as far as I know I'm in charge here, so grab the box and keep on working. Time is running out."

23.

A ten-foot tall, empty tunnel curved in a rock began to shake as the ceiling opened and a black vehicle dropped onto the ground with a thud. Surya shook her head and looked out the window.

"Is this...?"

"Hell? Yes," Seith replied. "At least the underground parts."

Everyone took a good look at the world outside. It wasn't so different; the walls were covered in rocks, some of them were sticking out tipped with a sharp top, others were lying freely on the pebbly ground. And that was it, no lava, no fire, nothing else.

"What the fuck was that? Did that damn hook broke or what?" Michael yelled coming out of the bathroom compartment. "I almost landed in my own shit."

"Welcome to Hell, Mike," Patricia smiled forgetting about the

stress.

Tokutei leaned to the right and tapped Seith on his back.

“Where is Dan and Shax?”

Seith turned his head left touching his wide hat stuck between two seats and replied firmly.

“About one hundred miles from here.”

“And our way out?” Surya asked still looking outside with amazement.

“Every few miles there is a portal for demons to enter Earth in their incorporeal form. If they want to leave Hell as they are, they must use the main gate which will be opened by Cizin in two days. As you have been told, you cannot use any of the portals without the key for you do not belong here.”

Michael got to the steering wheel and snapped his fingers.

“Quit talkin’ your freakish stuff, Seith and tell us where I must drive and what we must do.”

“If you want me to guide you, I must sit in the front,” he beckoned at Patricia rocking on the front seat. “If everything goes smoothly we would be able to reach her palace unseen.”

“Let’s move, we need to be there in maximum three hours,” came a strong suggestion from Michael, as he pressed the accelerator, and the truck moved along the dark tunnel.

“Switch the light off,” Seith advised. “We need to stay unseen.” The lights went off as the truck reached the speed of eighty miles per hour. The tunnel itself didn’t seem to be ending, and there was no one in sight. Only the lonely truck speeding along the rocky road.

After a few minutes they saw a reddish light at the end of the tunnel.

“You shall see Hell in its true form now,” the demon spoke. “Have no fear.”

24.

The Whitehouse, one of the most important buildings in the USA, busy as always? No. Everyone was on their toes running in circles. New data arrived which created new orders, new problems and new possible

solutions. The president was sitting in a virtual conference room. There were several large screens on the wall, displaying faces of well-known leaders of other countries.

"Thank you all for finding time for what I am about to tell you," the president said without any hesitation in his voice.

"How is the evacuation going?" one of the people asked.

"Everything is going according to plan. The army is taking positions in San Francisco as we speak and 90% of the citizens have been evacuated.

"What about the Seal? Since you, sir, have decided to empty one of your cities, I guess it will stay with Arthur West."

"That is correct, Mr. Prime Minister. Arthur has convinced me to keep the Seal in his castle. He assured me it is better protected than any other venue in the world. However, this is not the true reason for my contacting you."

He stood there motionless for a second trying to gather his words as the leaders were gazing into the screens awaiting his continuation. The president took a deep breath and kept on going.

"I do not trust Arthur completely in this. I gave him all resources he needed, but I have doubts whether he will be able to stop this. Hence here is my appeal to you all. Take precautions. Have your men ready for anything. If anything goes wrong, we must be ready not only to save our species, but also to fight for it. At the moment my country is working according to def con 3 protocols. If anything gets worse, I will raise the condition to 2."

"What do you want us to do? Put men around every cemetery like you did, Sir?"

"With all due respect, Mr. president. I ask you to be ready for anything. I still do hope, it will start and end in San Francisco and our losses will be minimal."

"What about the media? How do your people want to handle them?" some other man asked.

"I do not want to lie to my people any more. When this thing is over. I will tell them the truth. This will not be covered up."

"Do you realize, Mr. president, what will be the result of such

consequences. People will panic.”

“Better they panic over something they know, rather than over something they saw on the Internet. I must be going now. The next report will be tomorrow at 8:00. And please, do not underestimate this situation.”

25.

A truck was slowly trundling through the Maldito tunnel. There were twelve soldiers on each side inside. Every single one of them was tightly holding their bags between their legs. They also had an assault rifle and a tablet PC.

“Remember, soldiers,” the sergeant said who was standing in the middle holding something hanging from the ceiling. “You have been chosen to this operation because you’ve proved yourselves to be tough, to be good, to be able to deal with it. As soon as we get to the island, you’re gonna join the others in Charlie zone, which is the north-eastern part of the island. At the moment, as far as I know, they’re building towers and walls. You’ll gonna help them finish it quicker. Every zone must be ready till the sun disappears.”

The truck left the tunnel and stopped on the beach. The back door opened and the soldiers ran outside. They put their backpacks on, grasped their assault rifles and ran after their sergeant along the beach to Charlie zone. The beach was about twenty feet long before the wooden and concrete walls began. The island started to look like a military camp. As they were running they heard a jet flying low across the ocean. It was heading towards the castle, but they couldn’t see exactly where it would land, as the walls and tall trees covered the view.

The artificial wall opened in the middle of the rocks on which the castle was standing. The jet slowed down and landed in the hanger. There were still soldiers taking boxes to lifts on each side. Jason was still among them. When he saw the jet landing, he selected other ASAT members on his tablet and sent them a message,

“Arthur’s back.”

He looked around as fast as he could and saw four soldiers drinking water at the table with food and beverages. Not waiting any longer he

walked towards them.

"Excuse-me guys, could anyone of you take this box to the lift."

"I'll do it," a shorter one replied emptying the bottle.

"Thanks, man," came the answer as Jason let go of the box and ran towards the plane.

The metal side door opened and Arthur walked out. Straight away, he spotted Jason standing by the stairs.

"How was it?" he asked the old man.

"No problems, I suppose. It's all up to them now."

"Everything goes according to plan down here."

"I'm glad Jason. Please meet in my office in fifteen minutes, tell the others will you?"

Jason activated the channel as he replied.

"OK. Everybody, Arthur wants to meet us in his office in fifteen minutes."

26.

The truck was tearing along the dark tunnel which was about to end. The reddish light was closer and closer and everyone was wondering what they would see when the tunnel ended. Michael slowly took his foot off the accelerator as he reduced the gear and let the car roll outside. Finally, they were out.

"This is Hell," Seith announced.

They saw huge mountains with tunnels, caves, caverns and lodges everywhere. The ceiling above spread about ten or twenty miles and was black as night sky, but it was obvious to be made of rocks. The mountains were steep with roads or paths winding along them. On the left, they saw a gorge and deep down, a yellowish river of burning lava. A few hundred feet higher there were empty paths leading somewhere along the gorge. On the right the view spread about thirty miles. A steep mountain wall in the distance went across the entire view. The whole ceiling was supported by thick poles of rocks and arched sides of the mountains and hills. About two miles from where they were, they saw a vast plain full of orts. However, they saw no more hellish creatures in sight. It all looked as if the whole place was empty.

"Where are demons?" Patricia asked.

"They are probably preparing themselves to enter the Earth. It never looked like this, I must say," came the answer from Seith. "We must proceed this way."

Patricia took a glance at the orts running freely across the plain below.

"I've never seen orts in my life. They look much bigger than I expected."

Michael pressed the accelerator again and the truck moved on.

A few hundred feet further Michael suddenly pressed the break as he saw something in the distance.

"Why did ya' stop?" Surya asked alarmed.

"Look there," he pointed before him.

They notice about seven creatures walking along their road. They couldn't see any details yet because they were too far, but they had no doubts what they were.

"Demons," Tokutei whispered slightly drawing his sword.

"This must be some kind of a patrol," Seith added. "We can't pass them unseen. We must take them out."

"Cold steel or silencer?" Surya asked rubbing her cuffs where her blades were hidden.

Patricia scratched her head and replied,

"If we use cold steel they'd have enough time to alarm the others and the whole Hell will know we're here. Use the pistols with silencers."

"They're too far to use the pistols," the dhampiric girl replied.

Michael rubbed his eyes and turned the wheel.

"I'll park behind this boulder, and you may go there on foot to take them out."

"By you, you mean?" Patricia enquired confused.

"All of you."

"I'm not so good with guns," the Asian said feeling a little bit embarrassed. "I'm gonna stay here."

"OK, I'm gonna take three pistols and we may go along this side," Surya sighed not being sure if it was such a great idea.

"Hey, do regular bullets even kill them?" Patricia asked.

Seith raised his eyes and fixed them on her.

“They are creatures made of flesh and blood, bullets will kill them.” Surya stood up and headed to the second compartment of the truck where computers were and weapons were stored. She grabbed three pistols, opened the back door and went out.

No sooner had she stepped on the Hellish ground, than she heard millions of shrieks and screams echoing in the distance. It made her shiver and she stepped back instantly. Seith and Patricia were right behind her.

“What are those sounds? Patricia asked before Surya managed to open her mouth and ask the same.

“Tormented souls,” Seith replied without any emotions. “You shall get used to it.”

Surya’s body shook as her mind filled with images of what that could look like.

“I don’t even wanna know what they do to them,” Patricia said reaching out for the pistols.

“It’s horrible,” the dhampiric girl added sadly and concerned. As soon as Surya handed out the weapons, she checked the type of ammo it was showing.

“Why are there no holy water bullets? They should do the job.”

“You are wrong,” Seith gazing into her white pupils. “They only work on possessed people. For those demons you need regular bullets or explosive ones.”

“Since we can’t use explosive here, we must use the iron ones, which are the regular type of ammo,” Patricia added proudly. Surya felt a little bit underestimated, so she tried to make amends for it.

“Alright, regular it is. Try to keep up,” she smirked making a dart along the road to the next rock, using her dhampiric speed. Within two seconds she was a hundred feet further behind a seventeen-foot tall boulder and waited for the others to catch up with her. When they finally joined her, Patricia leaned left to check how far the patrol was. The shrieks couldn’t make her focus, but she had no other choice.

“We can’t go this way. There’s nothing to hide behind. We must move up and take them by surprise.”

Seith looked up and saw a narrow footpath going along the wall.

"There is a footpath, if we manage to reach that lodge," he pointed at a small lodge about quarter a mile from them, "We may startle them."

"Actually not a bad plan," Surya replied. "I'll run there as soon as I can and wait for you on the lodge."

"Agreed," the demon replied.

Soon the three of them were lying on the lodge watching the patrol walk beneath. They were only few feet above them and they could see what they looked like. The first three demons were shorter than humans, they had bigger heads than their thin bodies covered with short, thick hair. Their heads were leaned to the front with long ears and horns that arched to the back and then down. They also had small goat beards and sharp, teeth. They were wearing old, torn clothes and they moved on their four limbs. Behind them there were two humanlike demons. They were the same size, but their skin was pale and they had larger, black eyes and wider black mouths with nothing apart from blackness inside. Their skull was covered in brownish veins. These creatures were thin and they were wearing only old-fashioned trousers. At the very back was one large demon. He was much taller than a human and was very well-built. His reddish skin glittered in the dark light of Hell. He had a bald head with two massive horns coming to the front on both sides. They were as thick as human arms and looked really frightening. He had yellowish eyes that seemed to be burning and its mouth was full of sharp teeth. He was carrying a large two-side axe that was as long as him.

"They look..." Surya tried to say.

"Hideous," Patricia finished.

Seith grasped the pistol and pointed it towards the biggest demon.

"I'll take the big one, you'll take the possessors."

"Which are...?" the dhampiric girl asked baffled.

"The ones with black eyes."

"What about the small ones in the front?" Patricia asked.

"They mean nothing. Ready?"

An uncertain nod came from both girls.

"On my mark. One, two, three. Shoot!"

Having said that, he squeezed the trigger and hit the large demon right in the head. Girls easily eliminated the two other ones and shot the small ones in the front. The demons fell numb onto the ground.

"We're done. Let's hide the bodies and get back to the vehicle," Seith announced slowly walking down.

The girls joined him and soon the three of them were walking slowly towards the rock where Tokutei and Michael were waiting in the vehicle. Surya put away her pistol and gave a comment,

"I thought all demons looked the same."

"Wrong, there are many types of demons," Seith replied. "We met three kinds of them; warthers, the smaller ones, possessors, the medium ones. Only they can possess a human body on Earth, and that big individual was a guardian."

"Wait, wait, wait," Surya slowed down. "That means that you're a possessor."

"Guilty as charged," came the answer.

They were getting closer to the truck. Michael could see them through the windshield.

"They're back," he said to Tokutei.

The Asian man raised his eyes. He was glad the rest were back, so they could continue the journey, but he could sense something looming.

"Oh no," he jumped from the seat and made a slash outside through the side door.

He had seen several small creatures climbing down the steep mountainside right at them. Two of the creatures threw themselves at Surya and Patricia knocking them down. Seith reacted quickly by drawing his large sword and cut through the one that was aiming at him. In the meantime, Tokutei rushed out drawing his bluish blade. He heard the souls' shrieks for the first time, but he neglected them quickly and made a slash towards the girls. Surya kicked off the creature; it was one of the warthers. Seith zoomed towards Patricia and chopped another one. Meanwhile, Tokutei sieved through the rest.

"Is it over?" Surya asked taking a good look at the ugly demons. Hardly had she finished the sentence, when a loud sound of a horn spread across the area echoing in the distance.

"They know we are here," Seith spoke casually spotting three guardians up a head.

Tokutei turned towards them and waited for them to come down.

"We must return to the truck," Seith said. "Make haste."

"I wana fight," Tokutei said through his gritted teeth.

"No time for it, come!" Surya exclaimed running towards the truck. They all hurried back to the truck, got quickly inside and spread. Michael and Patricia sat in the front, while the rest of them closed the back door.

"Mike, drive!" Patricia yelled grabbing two joysticks beneath the monitor in front of her.

Surya and Seith rushed to the second compartment where the computers were.

"Seith, take the left, I'll deal with the right."

Michael started the engine and they took off as fast as possible.

"Shoot only if they get too close," the demon announced.

The truck ran over the bodies they had just left and sped up. The weight of the vehicle was so large that they didn't even felt the crushing remains under the wheels. Tokutei saw a great number of various kinds of hellish creatures running down the hill on their right. They were mostly warthers, and since everybody was inside these monsters could do little harm. Because warthers were small and moved on four limbs they didn't have problems with gravity. They easily climbed walls or even could walk along ceilings.

"Goblins on the road!" Michael shouted pressing the breaks after he had noticed several warthers running along the road towards them.

The first shots came from Patricia. The joysticks were connected to the computer that was responsible for two mounted, fifty caliber guns on the roof. The deadly bullets ripped bodies apart and tore off limbs and heads.

"Don't you even slow down."

"Are you using regulars?" she heard Seith's low voice coming from the second compartment.

"You bet I am."

The truck headed forward along the road. More and more creatures were seen not only on their road but also on other roads on the mountainside and deep in a spacious gorge on their left. It seemed as if they all had gone out from caves as soon as the horn spread.

27.

Jason and Lian were walking up the stairs to Arthur's office.

"Wait for me," Amanda shouted from a few feet behind them.

They stopped saying no words and waited for her to catch up. Seconds later they entered the room also in silence. Jack and Bishop were already there. Arthur was talking on the phone. When he hanged up, he cleared his throat and beckoned at them to take a seat on the empty armchairs. When they all were finally sitting, he walked around his desk and leaned against its front edge.

"How many men are still missing?"

Lian grasped her tablet and answered his question,

"At the moment we have exactly five thousand marines, six hundred snipers and four hundred seventy three hunters."

"So twenty seven are still missing. What about the specialists?"

"Two hundred eighty nine."

"Only eleven are still on the road."

Jason rubbed his chin and said.

"Well, Arthur, you have your small army. The zones are getting ready. We need to distribute ammos and tell them what exactly they must do."

"At the sunset Bishop and I will talk to them. I want you to make sure each and every one of them has got a tablet and a life signs chips. Ammo and guns later."

"Anything else, Arthur?" Jason asked.

"Yes. Work as hard as you can today, get a plenty of rest tomorrow."

Having said that, he heard a knocking at the door.

"Come in," he raised his voice.

Everybody turned around to see who it was. They saw a woman with long, blond hair. Lian recognized her at once.

"Arthur," the woman said quietly.

"Leonora, good to see you here."

"I'm looking for Dan. I was told he was somewhere else and I had to wait for you."

Arthur sighed and thought for a while. He forgot that he had to deal with it eventually and tell her the truth.

"That's true, dear. There's no easy way to say it. Dan's been killed and taken to Hell."

"What!" she exclaimed almost losing her balance.

"Please calm down. They're rescuing him as we speak. Everything's gonna turn out well. I'm sure."

Leonora had little problem with processing that all information. She turned around and went outside saying no word.

"She's gonna be OK," Bishop assured.

"She will, as soon as she sees her nephew. Anyway. Lian and Amanda go back to the gate and identify all the remaining hunters. Jack and Bishop, please finish setting up the headquarters, and you Jason, I want you to stay with me, there're still a few things we need to finish."

28.

Michael was driving the truck as fast as he could. The number of enemies didn't decline and more and more creatures were trying to block the road, attack them from the mountainside or catch up with them.

"Tok, take the back gun," came a strong request or rather and order from Patricia.

The Asian man rushed to the computer compartment and sat next to Surya. The screen was already activated and the joystick was waiting for him.

"What the..." he said spotting several warthogs riding larger creatures right behind them.

They were slightly bigger than elephants, had strong legs tipped with three huge claws. Their large heads had long mouths with a feet-long, razor-sharp teeth. Their skin appeared to be rough. Their tail had an altered, hard stone attached to their end, so the creature could be used

as a weapon, too. Warthers were riding them in special baskets mounted on their backs.

Seith leaned over to Tokutei and shook his head disappointingly.

"Gondars; not good, not good. Shoot their head they should fall immediately.

Tokutei pressed the button on the joysticks with his thumb. The bullet flew from the barrel and headed for the monster, but it hit its cheek only, and did nothing but pissed the Gondar.

"Let's switch places. I'm not a good shooter."

"Move," Surya pulled Tokutei to her side and took his seat.

Having taken control over the back gun, she could easily take out the running gondars. Patricia was dealing with the front, Seith and Tokutei were in charge of the sides and Surya of the back. Five of such creatures ran down the hill to join the chase. Surya couldn't keep up, but she did her best. Suddenly, the car was pushed to the left as a thud spread across the roof.

"The roof," Michael yelled.

"Take them out before they break our guns," Surya added eliminating another one.

Then they all heard a knocking on the glassy window in the ceiling. One of the warthers was trying to get in. Michael pressed some button making the roof open and immediately pressed again to make it close after he had made sure the warther got stuck in it. Patricia turned around and shoot it with the pistol Surya had given her.

"There's a tunnel," Michael announced.

"Just drive through it. We should be able to lose them there," Seith replied.

Another three gondars appeared, so there were now seven of them chasing ASATs. They were moving much faster than the truck, and the distance between the vehicle and the creatures was getting smaller. Surya took out two of them, but before she could deal with the others, they got closer to the truck and the warthers jumped onto the roof. The tunnel was getting closer.

"Faster!" Patricia yelled to the driver.

"Hang on!" he replied pressing the brake.

The car dramatically slowed down from eighty to thirty miles per hour. Two warthers fell onto the ground before them. Then Michael hit the accelerator again. Yet he failed to consider the chasing gondars and two of them hit the truck from behind making it skid. He quickly regained the control and sped up towards the tunnel. One of the creatures tried to break in from the rooftop, Tokutei was constantly peeking at it and was ready to take care of the demonic creature as soon as it breaks the glass.

“Just a sec...,” Michael murmured seeing the tunnel a hundred feet away. “Almost there... And we’re in.”

As soon as he said that, the truck disappeared in the tunnel. The warthers had no chance to hide because the ceiling was low enough to hit them off the truck. Surya killed another gondar when she saw three warthers’ bodies falling numbly onto the road and then being crushed by the gondars’ feet. These creatures were taller than the tunnel and as they were trying to stop they crashed into the rocky top. The tunnel was a perfect hideout and made her focus on the back and ignore the sides. It took her only a few seconds before all the gondars fell dead blocking the tunnel.

“Done,” she exclaimed joyfully feeling pride filling her body. Seith glanced at the screens.

“The road has been blocked. They shall not chase us anymore.”

“So we’re safe, for now,” Patricia added wiping her forehead. Tokutei let go of the joystick and stood up.

“Time for a snack,” he said under his breath heading towards the kitchen.

When he got there, he opened the fridge, took out a sandwich and put it into the microwave.

“Really, Tok?” Patricia said confused. “We have a dead goblin hanging from the ceiling and you’re cooking?”

“It’s his thing,” Surya answered. “Just ignore it.”

She rolled her eyes and turned her seat to face the windshield. Michael seemed to get lost in his thoughts. He turned his head around.

“What now?”

“We drive,” Seith replied.

When he heard the microwave door being opened, he asked eagerly,

“Are ya’ makin’ food, Tok? Make me somethin’, too.”

Patricia turned her seat around again and fixed her eyes at the dead warther whose blood was dripping onto the floor.

“Somebody clean this goblin before its stench sets in.”

“It’s called warther,” the demon replied.

“Whateve’ I can’t stand it anymore.”

“So clean it yourself,” she heard Tokutei’s voice coming from the kitchen compartment.

29.

There were already four large tents at the Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno. The tents were also made of illuminated poles with a black roof spread on top of them. Soldiers were taking ammo and weapons out of the trucks and carrying them to the storage area under one of the tents. Sergeant Major of the Army David Johnson; a tall, white man, with glasses on his nose and grey hair was overlooking the whole process. He was staring in a concerned manner at the left side of the cemetery when he heard a voice,

“What’s the matter?”

He recognized it, it was his friend sergeant Harris.

“Look, the entrance will be well protected, but I don’t like these graves here,” he pointed at a half a mile line of graves at the freeway.

“They’re too close to the street and to the camps.”

Golden Gate National Cemetery was designed in such a way that many graves were put a few yards from the road. There was only a small fence between the freeway and the cemetery.

Harris looked at the satellite map.

“There’re buildings on the other side of the freeway. Why don’t we place two snipers on each one.”

“Do you think it would be enough?”

“We may always place Hummers or tanks along the freeway. What do ya’ think?”

“Hmm, maybe you’re right. Let’s put two more Humvees here at the fence. Um... Tell you what. That’s good we have buildings on both

sides of the venue, then we can deploy snipers on every building.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea. We’d better protect the west side. We don’t want anything to pass to Maldito, do we?”

“If you’re so wise, maybe you wanna take my place here, sergeant?”

“No thank you,” Harris replied with a sarcasm, “I’m assigned to Alpha Point, and I’d rather stay there.”

30.

In the National Cemetery situated in north San Francisco, SMA William Smith was scanning the area and the map to plan the deployment of his men. Wilson, the first sergeant was with him.

“Look, Wilson, we can’t make a camp at the freeway because there’re too many graves close to the road. We can’t make it on the other side, either because there’re too many trees. The only place for the camp is this small area between Golden Gate Club and Doyle Drive. What do ya’ think?”

Wilson took a good look at the map. National Cemetery was constructed in such a way that was surrounded by woods from three sides and a freeway from its north side.

“Well, I think we have no choice but to do as you say. Then we would have a good view on the entrance to the cemetery as well as the majority of its territory. We also would take care of those graves close to the road. However, if we need to protect the southern parts we need to deploy snipers on every roof here in Nauman Road.”

“Eh,” Smith sighed. “Whatever will happen in two days, we’re gonna be in hell of a position up here.”

31.

In the meantime, unit one was driving along the hellish road. They had exit the long tunnel a few miles earlier and now they found themselves to be much higher than ever before. The ceiling covered with sharp stalactites was only a couple feet above them. There were no caves, no holes nothing, just the road winding along a steep mountainside that gradually disappeared in the abyss.

"We're half way there," Seith announced.

Tokutei changed his seats and was sitting now on the left side of the truck. He was gazing at the outstanding view below when something caught his eye.

"Guys, look down on your left."

Michael took a glimpse there, while Surya and Patricia leaned to the left window. An uncommon sight met their eyes. Down, down below they saw a thread consisting of millions of moving demons. The threat was at least sixty miles long, and about one hundred feet wide.

"They're preparing to enter Earth," Surya said under her breath.

"At least we have a safe passage to the castle... I hope," Michael commented.

"There're so many of them. If only there was a way to kill them all from here," Surya tried to daydream.

"That is, my fellow humans, good news," Seith spoke rubbing his bony chin.

Surya stopped gazing out the window and turned round.

"Why is that?"

"There shall not be many guards in Shax's palace. The other good news is that we are on the highest point in that part of Hell right now and it shall be much easier to get to the palace. I know a hidden passage."

"We should be there in less than an hour," Surya said. "Of course if we don't come across any difficulties."

32.

It was almost eight o'clock in the evening. Arthur was nervously walking from one side of his office to another constantly thinking about what he was going to tell everybody. He glanced at his watch, then at the camera feeds from the courtyard and the island displayed on the screens on the right side of the office. Almost every soldier was waiting for the speech. Arthur finally stopped at his desk, typed something and started speaking.

"Good evening everyone. This message is played automatically from your tablets directly to the earwigs you're carrying. My name is

Arthur West and within the next few minutes you are going to learn everything concerning the following days.”

He could see everyone listening with attention. After all these were some serious men and they were curious about the whole plan.

“Let me start from the beginning. You have been chosen from the best. We don’t have some damn armatures here. We don’t have any privates or corporals. Those soldiers are to deal with other things. You all have proved to be suitable for this extremely important operation. I do not know how much you have been told so far. Some of what I am to say is not new to you, but I’m still gonna say it anyway. You all must know that the world will end in twenty eight hours and it is now up to us to make sure it won’t end completely. You all probably wonder what the end would look like. No need to wonder anymore. I will tell you. There’re not going to be any natural disasters... I hope. The end will look much worse. We fear that each and every dead will come back to life here in San Francisco. We may also be attacked by other creatures like vampires and werewolves. But they’re not the worst I’m afraid. The worst thing is that Hell will open and the whole peninsula will be flooded by millions of demons of all kinds. We know that before they head east, they all will try to get to the castle to retrieve one very important object. The object that can stop all of this. We cannot use it now however, for it is incomplete. We have our best men dealing with this as we speak, and before they return we have to keep everything not human away from the castle for all cost. Currently, we’re the only people in the area of 40 miles. There are 5900 soldiers on the island including 600 snipers and 300 medics. There are also 500 hunters from all states and 300 specialists like mercenaries, soldiers of fortune and so on. However, the island is not the only place that must be protected. We have over 2000 soldiers in San Francisco, Daly City and San Bruno who will do more than their best to keep everything away for as long as they can. They’re currently building camps around major cemeteries like National, Woodlawn or Golden Gate. There are also roadblocks every mile north, north-east and south from Alpha Point. The south area will be protected by 100,000 soldiers with heavy machinery spread along the Millbrae Avenue in Millbrae and the mountains to the West from

this point. These are the only low rank marines in the region. The island is well protected, mainly because the only way to get it from land is by the tunnel. Thus, the first point to break through will be Alpha Point which is the entrance to the tunnel. The whole island is divided into 9 other zones, starting from Bravo and ending on Juliet which is the castle itself. Each of the first eight zones will have 500 soldiers, 50 snipers, 25 hunters, 20 medics and 20 individuals from other group. Each zone has a wooden-concrete, enhanced wall around. It also has a weapon and ammo storage, tents for medics, canteen as well as camp headquarters. One SMA will be in charge of one zone, and if you don't get orders from me or general Bishop, follow theirs. If any zone is lost, withdraw to the next one. The map is available to see on your tablets. The tablets will be also your main device used to everything; location, live feed from satellite, communication with single persons or with groups. Every important message will be read by the inbuilt synthesizer or played. You all have been given enhanced weapons. Each weapon has a new feature which is a small switch between various kinds of ammo. REG means regular bullets made entirely from iron. These bullets will be used to eliminate zombies and some demons. EXP stands for explosive bullets. After hitting the target it explodes like a grenade. Good for anything big as well as in great numbers. POI are poisoned bullets with dead man's blood. Used only against vampires. SLV are silver bullets used against vampires and werewolves. SHP are sharp bullets used against hellish creatures like orcs. The last one are SLT. These are advanced salt bullets used against ghosts only. As some of you have seen the island is surrounded by salt blocks. Do not remove them as thanks to them we can make sure the islands will not be trespassed by any spirits. We will also be assisted by jets and bombers. You have probably noticed spotlights in every zone. These are UV spotlights which are perfect against vampires. You also have access to UV grenades, also used against these creatures. Now the most difficult part. Nothing will stay dead starting from doomsday. It means that in the event of any of you getting killed, the others must make sure you will not return as zombies or if they do, they must make sure you're stay dead. If you see any of your teammates die, you must shoot them in the head. I think that's all I

wanted to say. You may all have your dinner now in the courtyard. I suggest you all have enough sleep and rest. And remember, the future of all human race lies now in your hands. If you do have any questions contact general Bishop.”

That was it. He was done. He said everything he wanted to say. Now everyone knew much more what to expect or what to do. Tired as he was, he made for his room. On his way his mind wondered around thoughts concerning Leanore and Dan. Straight away he moved back to 2007. Arthur’s office was much modern than eight years before. The corkboard was replaced by two large screens. The desk got modernized and was much bigger with a wide monitor on it. All papers were scanned and segregated into directories with easy access to them. Arthur was sitting or rather lying on his armchair having his feet stretched out on a small settee. One of the screens was showing Bishop sitting in some office. There was an American flag hanged behind him and he was wearing his military uniform.

“So what do you think of this ninja team, Arthur?”

“They’re good. They’re really good. I’ve seen them in action. However, I wanted to show you someone I’ve discovered recently.”

“Go on,” Bishop’s eager voice came back.

“He’s only seventeen, but he has accomplished a lot. One of my fellow hunters was bragging about a boy from New York who’s a vampire hunter.”

“Is he any good?”

“Good? He’s genius, he’s an inventor. He’s the one who came up with a UV grenade; a deadly weapon against vampires.”

“UV grenade, something rings my bell.”

“It’s his invention. I’m going to observe him. I think he makes a perfect candidate for the team.”

“I agree. Tomorrow I’m going to check out two girl hunters. They’re...”

Arthur found himself in his room. He hobbled towards his bed and fell onto it falling asleep immediately.

Every soldier heard the speech. Straight away hundreds of question aroused as they began discussing everything with their teammates and

friends. Most of them had been preparing for the final day for a long time, but there were still many of those who didn't know as much as the others.

33.

Jack and Bishop were in the headquarters. The room was filled with soldiers gathering at the desks. Everything looked perfect; the wide screens, the computers, the lightening, hidden wires, the canteen. Jack glanced over Bishop's shoulder holding his tablet.

"Any questions yet?"

"Yeah. Getting tones of them. You the speech. I need to provide them with answers," Bishop replied walking to the right corner.

"May I have your attention please," Jack raised his voice and after seeing everyone calming down, he continued. "Thank you. This room is the main headquarters. These screens will display life feed from Eagle Eye which will be shot tomorrow evening. The other screens will display life signs of each and every one on the island and on the land. Red dots will indicate someone's death, green, they still being alive. The wide desk opposite the screens is for operators. They monitor everything, including messages, threats, deaths, ammo status and so on. Now, the hundred desks among you make turret operational centre. Each of you will take one desk and two joysticks. It's similar to a computer game, you just have to point and press fire. The turrets are spread everywhere on the island, in the tunnel and around Alpha Point. You just select the turret from the menu. As simple as that. Any questions?"

A forest of hands shot up.

"And I hoped I explained everything," he said under his breath.

34.

"There's the Shax's palace," Seith pointed at the towering castle in the distance.

It was huge; at least half a mile tall and a mile wide. It was inbuilt in the mountainside in the back, so it could never be reached from the other side. The castle had twelve wide towers of different sizes, with the

highest reaching the rocky ceiling. A moat of boiling lava circled the tall, thick walls. Right in the middle, there was an enormous gate through which a bulk of demons were marching east where they joined the dense river of hellish creatures.

"We shall get in through a secret tunnel inside the mountain," he continued. "Unfortunately, this vehicle shall not fit the entrance and we would have to leave it there."

"Luckily," Patricia said, "There's gonna be fewer of those things inside."

Surya leaned towards Seith.

"Do you think Dan is in there?"

"It is possible."

Tokutei stood up and moved to the back.

"Guys, I don't wanna urge you, but if we get ready now, we'd be faster inside."

"He's right," Surya replied standing up and heading to the back. Tokutei moved to the weapon compartment and started to ramshackle his bag.

"Where's my..."

"Did you lose anything, Tok?" he heard Surya's voice.

"I can't find my Bo staff. I must've left it on my bed."

"You can totally do without it. Trust your sword."

"I know I can, I just wanted to have my staff, too."

The truck was tearing along the road encircling the marvelous structure. When the vehicle disappeared in a dark tunnel, it turned right inside a small cave and stopped behind a slanting wall.

"This is it," Seith spoke. "Take your best weapons and I shall meet you outside."

Surya went out first. She rubbed her ears as she heard the suffering screams coming from the distance.

"I thought we wouldn't hear these noises here."

"You shall get accustomed to them," the demon replied seeing the others stepping out.

He took out a large, two-handed sword and walked back to the road.

"What about the truck?" Michael asked circling the keys around his

index finger.

"It's safe here. There's no one in this part of Hell, as you can see," Patricia replied.

Seith walked towards the tall wall. He started to touch it gently feeling for something with his fingers.

"It is somewhere here. At least, it always has been... Here it is." He tightened his grip on some lever and pulled it down as hard as he could making the door disappear in the fake wall. Behind it, there was a long, dark corridor from which a stench of rotten bodies was coming out.

"Someone died there?" Surya asked covering her nose and waving her hand trying to make the air thinner.

"Yes, why do you ask?" Seith replied indifferently.

"Think, Seith."

"Many a demon tried to escape through this tunnel during the Great Rebel. Most of them were killed and left."

"I'm sorry," Patricia interrupted, "A great what?" Seith went inside beckoning to the others to follow him.

"The Great Rebel took place in Hell in the fourteenth century during Black Death on Earth. Millions of souls rebelled and tried to overtake Hell. We prevailed by putting the highest punishments on the attackers. Each and every soul had been suffering in special torture chambers till this day."

"By we you mean demons or humans?" Tokutei asked making a step over a weird skeleton.

"My sincere apologies. I meant the demons, of course. These souls shall never be released and they shall never become demons as well." On hearing that, Surya stopped.

"Become demons?"

Michael laughed under his breath poking Patricia on her arm.

"Ha, she doesn't know. I guess Arthur taught you nothing about demons."

"And they were the assault unit," Patricia added shaking her head. Surya stood for a while and stared baffled. Then she glimpsed at another weird skeleton lying there and asked in wonder,

“Demons have bones?”

“These are creatures, evil for sure, but creatures made of flesh and blood. Their bodies and skin may be different and made of different elements, but still, they are creatures.”

Surya couldn't help asking another question.

“Hey, if they're living creatures, made of flesh and blood, like you said, why so many of them have inhuman powers, huh?”

“You see, there are very powerful demons called sorcerers. They taught the others different hmm how to say it... tricks. That's why possessors can leave Hell or pure demons can summon others.”

“Paymon did it in Attica,” Tokutei recalled.

“For instance.”

The tunnel bent slightly to the right only to turn rapidly a few feet further.

“The castle is right behind this wall. Shoot any individual you encounter. We must reach Shax's chamber first before we start to look for Daniel.”

He pulled another lever as some loud rattle spread inside the wall. Everyone prepared to face whatever was waiting for them on the other side.

35.

San Francisco and all the cities and towns around became empty. None of the street lamps was on, the buildings were dark and there was no traffic apart from Army trucks and choppers. On the other side of the bay, in Oakland City, the coast was getting filled by reporters from almost every network that was in the world. Hundreds of trucks filled the parking lots and the streets. Reporters were constantly telling the viewers what was happening on the other side, at least what they thought was happening .

“Jack Johnson here for US news. As you can see the cities became dark now. We can't see anything there, but our sources told us that the only people who are in the area are soldiers. The evacuation ended a few hours ago. Everyone who does not have any family in Oakland and in neighbor cities has been evacuated to a camp built west from

Oakland City.”

“Good evening Boston, this is Samantha Jobs reporting live from Oakland City. What we know for sure is that army has taken over the city. Nobody here believes in the earthquake or flood theory anymore. If it was true, everyone would be evacuated even from these areas. Many people gathered on Oakland streets with various transparent. Most of them concern the end of the world.”

36.

Arthur was making himself a coffee when he heard knocking on the door. He glanced at the small screen on the left and saw Bishop’s face. Straight away he walked there to open the door. Before him stood his friend, tired as never.

“John, what happened?”

“I just had to answer over two hundred questions.”

“Come in. Fancy a cup of coffee?”

“Yeah, why not. I could use one. The President’s going to tell the truth tomorrow.”

“That’s good, isn’t it?”

“I know what you think, Arthur. People do deserve to know. However, do you imagine the panic that this may cause? The economy is already suffering.”

Arthur filled two cups with hot coffee, put them on a small, silver tray and carried to the table where Bishop was sitting.

“John, my friend. Imagine what would happen when people learn what is really going on here from other sources. Do you think they will trust the government again?. You worry about economy. Imagine what would happen to economy if we fail.”

“If we fail there will be no economy in any country. But didn’t we agree not to mention the failure, Arthur?”

“Indeed we did. Well, if I have you here now, I wanted to discuss one more issue with you.”

37.

The Echo Zone in the middle of the island was far from being quiet

even though there were only thirty people. Everybody was discussing what would happen the next day. Some of them wondered if this would be there last night, while others were talking about their families. Two soldiers were sitting at a table in the tent chatting. Four others were playing cards, while a few some others were trying to sleep.

"Paul, come with me to the castle. I don't wanna sleep here," the Mexican guy with a short moustache said poking his friend who was playing some game on his mobile.

"Paul..."

He paused the game and looked at his colleague.

"I told I don't wanna go there, Steve. I'm the First Sergeant, I simply cannot do this."

"Paul, com'on," Steve insisted.

"No. If you want to go there, then go. SMA Miller said there's plenty of room."

"I'm goin'," he replied standing up.

"So I see."

"At least I'll have a good night sleep."

He was about to leave the tent, when Paul looked at him with a smirk.

"Yeah, I bet you will. Especially when your mind fills with thoughts and worries."

"Shut up," Steve turned around and left.

38.

The rough, rocky wall disappeared and Seith made the first step. They found themselves in something similar to a very old library. There were shelves curved in stone on which old books were standing. Books so old that their pages seemed to fall into dust when touched. Next to each shelf there were two large, extinguished candles placed on two long, brass candlesticks. On the other side of the room erected four chairs, also curved in stone. The only light was the beam of lava coming from behind one, wide window on the other side of the room. There was no one inside, only the humans and one demon. The only sound they heard was the moaning of souls echoing somewhere in the distance.

"I hope the whole castle looks like this," Michael murmured lowering his gun.

"Follow me," Seith beckoned making a dart towards the left exit. Everyone ran after him trying to keep pace. Seith passed the exit which turned into a narrow corridor, then turned right into some other room with shields and swords everywhere. Next he made for another exit, down the steep steps into another corridor and right again. Still, they met no one.

After a while Seith stopped at some door and turned round to the group.

"We are at her chamber. She has been badly hurt, thus she is recovering from it. Vulnerable as she is, she can be killed easily, but do not kill her yet. We need to know if Daniel is here." He made sure if everybody was ready and quickly kicked open the door, rushed inside and made for the bed. The rest of the team followed him swiftly. The chamber was a huge almost empty, circular room situated in one of the towers. The walls had nothing on them except a few drawings of various kinds. There were at least six doors leading to other corridors and rooms and one door opposite the bed leading to a small balcony. A huge chandelier was hanging from the ceiling filled with twelve massive candles. Opposite the door, there was a large bed covered with animal skin and fur on which a figure was lying; Shax.

"You!" she said raising her heavy head.

Seith ran towards her holding his double-handed sword and pressed it to her throat. Shax said nothing. Her scared eyes had nothing to say. The others stopped in front of the bed and lowered their weapons.

"Where's Dan!" Surya exclaimed.

"And the ring," Tokutei added.

The female demon coughed and raised her shaky hand. She seemed to be very weak after the fight in Bangkok. She snapped her fingers and within a few seconds the room filled with tall, muscular guardian demons holding either swords or axes. Tokutei and Surya reacted immediately, The Asian warrior drew his bluish sword while Surya ejected her sharp blades from her cuffs. Tokutei managed to cut through one of the guardians when Shax held out her hand, opened her

palm and straight away a magical force pushed them all to the wall. They tried to move but the force was too strong for them. She wasn't so weak after all. To everyone's amazement the force hadn't touched Seith. Neither the guards did anything to circle him or to even stand near him. They thought that maybe her power didn't work on other demons, but then Seith slowly removed the sword from her neck and stepped aside.

"Thank you, Seith, for bringing them down to me. Did you also bring, what I asked you for?"

"Of course," the demon replied taking something from his coat. The others were gazing in shock not only because they had just learned Seith betrayed them but also because they saw what they had never expected. The demon gave the small object to Shax and stepped aside.

"You stupid fuck!" Patricia exclaimed. "Do you have any idea what you have just done?"

They both ignored them. Shax slowly raised the object up towards the candles light and said with satisfaction in her low voice,

"At last, the whole Seal is mine."

"How could you, Seith," Surya cried, "How could you stood us up!" Shax turned her head towards ASATs, smacked her lips and spoke,

"I'm glad that you're all here. I don't have to wait till my babies kill you, and now I can play with you just as I am going to play with your friend."

"Seith, do something you son of a bitch!" Michael exclaimed, but the demon said nothing.

He was only standing there ignoring his former friends.

"I have enough of you," Shax spoke as her low voice rebounded from the walls.

Having said that she moved her hand down and the magical force that was holding everyone at the wall pushed them to the ground so fast that they all lost consciousness.

"Take them to the dungeon. I shall deal with them when Arthur and the rest of these scumbags are sent here."

The tall guardians lowered their weapons and grabbed the unconscious humans. A moment later they went out through one of the doors and

disappeared as their heavy steps echoed in the stone corridor.

"And you Seith, you're banished no more. But that's of course too small price for such an achievement. You shall be given a country, any country you choose it will be yours forever and you can do whatever you like with it."

"Thank you, my Lady," he replied calmly while bowing low before the demon.

39.

The president of the United States was sitting at his desk in the Oval Room. There were three generals in the office sitting on the sofas in front of him. It looks like the discussion had been going on for quite a long time. One of the generals seemed to be a little bit frustrated.

"I don't think your plan is a good idea," he said almost crushing his hat.

"It's not what you think, Baker, it's what is right to do," the president replied.

"I still believe we should evacuate our boys and use a nuclear missile."

"And have an inhabitable area for a few decades?" some other general replied.

The first one looked at the president.

"Sir, I don't trust either West or Bishop. They don't know what they're doin'."

The president looked at him casually and replied calmly,

"Both West and Bishop accomplished within a few years of preparing and only three months of acting something what we couldn't for three decades, so don't judge them."

December 20, 2012

1 day remaining

40.

It was almost noon in empty peninsula where San Francisco, Daly City, San Bruno and Pacifica are situated. Arthur heard knocking at his

door, as his tablet was beeping and vibrating. He quickly sprang to his feet, made a dash for the tablet first and glanced it. The flickering name *BISHOP* caught his eye immediately, but what worried him was the time displayed in the top-right corner; 11:37. Not waiting any longer, he inserted a small earwig to his ear and answered the phone.

“What’s wrong, Bishop?” he asked stumbling towards the door to answer it afterwards.

“What’s wrong? It’s almost 1200 and you’re not answering either the door or the phone.”

“I’ve answered the phone now. Now waiting for the door.”

“It’s me on the other side, so hang up and answer that damn door.” Arthur opened the door and saw Bishop waiting there mad.

“I’m sorry, OK? I’ve must’ve had a good night sleep.”

Bishop rushed inside grabbing Arthur by his hand and pulled him with him.

“It’s not important now, we’ve got so many things to do. Put on some clothes and hit your office.”

He pushed him back to the room.

41.

Five minutes later they reached the office. Lian, Jason, Jack and Amanda were already there sitting nervously on the armchairs.

“Arthur, finally, we thought something was wrong with you,” the Asian woman said gladly.

“No need to panic, I just failed to sleep enough during the last few days and now the tiredness won and kept me in my bed almost till noon.”

Bishop ran to the computer, pressed a few buttons and the left screen displayed a green earpiece dialing number to the president.

“I told the president you would contact him as soon as you are reachable.”

Arthur smiled gently as the face of the president popped up on the screen.”

“West, at last. Better late than never. I talked to my generals yesterday, and we came to several conclusions. Firstly, we’re sending a

few Strykers and tanks to the peninsula. Secondly, we are going to use more bombers and fighters to assist you. Also, our men are preparing missiles in Los Angeles and our battleships are lining the coast approximately fifteen miles away.”

“Why so many precautions?” he asked.

“I do understand West that you managed to kill a couple of thousand vampires and ghosts or whatever you call them using only five of your men, but now we’re facing tens of millions of enemies. We must be prepared for it.”

“If I could only ask, sir, if you chose to assist us with more power, please do not lure these things outside the bay. If they do so, they may spread further, and then we’re doomed.”

“I do understand that. They are only to assist if any such help is necessary or to protect the borders if those things break out. I need to talk to the press now.”

“Are you going to tell them the truth, sir?”

“Not yet. I do not want people to panic. What if nothing happens? What if you... I mean we are wrong? We must wait for Hell to open, Arthur.”

“I’m not wrong. I can’t be.”

The president ended the call. Arthur looked at his men.

“Jason and Jack. I want you to go to Alpha Point and help them set up everything in the headquarters.”

“No problem, Arthur,” the black man replied.

“And girls, I want you to check whether everything is ready for tomorrow.”

42.

“Tokutei, Tokutei? Tok?” he heard a familiar voice, slowly opening his eyes.

The picture was blurry, but it became sharper with time. Not only this. He felt dreadful pain in his right leg. He tried to raise his head to see it, but Surya touched his arm and added,

“Don’t move. Your leg is broken.”

“Not only his,” he heard Michael’s voice.

"What happened?" he asked peeking at Surya and the room where they were.

Surya was crouching at him, while Michael was lying on the other side of a spacious room with Patricia at his side. The room itself looked like a cave with sharp rocks pointing from the ceiling. The entrance was blocked by thick, metal bars and the only light was coming from two torches spread on two sides of the cell.

"You don't remember?" the dhampiric girl replied sadly. Tokutei dropped his eyes for a while then raised them swiftly up and boomed,

"Seith, that son of..."

"Yes, he betrayed us," Michael added rubbing his shin. "If I only see him, I'll crush him like a bug."

Patricia slowly stood up and limbed towards Surya.

"I told you before, never trust a demon, but you Mike persisted that he was not like others."

"Not me, it was Bishop."

Surya couldn't stand it anymore.

"Guys, please stop quarrellin'. We gotta find a way to break out."

"My sword," Tokutei whispered trying to raise his body. "It can..."

"They took all our weapons," Michael interrupted.

"Even your daggers?" the Asian men asked.

Surya nodded unwillingly walking towards the entrance. She tightened the grip on the bars and tried to pull them with her dhampiric strength, but they didn't even move.

"They're too strong. This is it. We're in Hell and we're gonna spend our eternity here."

"Calm down, Surya!" Patricia walked up to her still limping. "Don't even think to give up. The whole planet is depending on us. They won't be able to win without the Seal, they simply won't."

"Hush!" Tokutei whispered hearing some noise coming from the outside. "Someone's coming."

"Don't hush me," Surya shouted. "We're doomed anyway. I don't have to be quiet anymore."

The steps were getting louder and louder. Then they stopped followed

by two sounds of sword coming through flesh and then two thuds. A moment of silence and the steps sounded again. Everyone was staring at the bars waiting impatiently to see who was coming.

43.

In every major city people were slowly gathering on streets where huge screens were placed. They were showing live reports from San Francisco bay talking about what was happening on the other side of the bay. Some of the people gathered before the screens were shouting different things about the end of the world. Others were praying. Yet some others came there only to watch. A reporter was talking about another issue.

“We have learned that many sects throughout the country are planning to commit mass suicide. The police are trying to identify these people and stop them.”

She touched her ear as if she received an important message from her producer.

“Our reporters situated north to the Golden Gate Bridge have spotted snipers gathering on the roofs of major structures in San Francisco. The president is scheduled to make another speech today at three p.m. local time. Let us hope he would tell us more.”

44.

The team was staring out the bars at the dark figure that rushed downstairs. It was no one else but Seith himself. He was standing there with his sword from which blood was dripping onto the steps. Hardly had Patricia recognized him, when she threw herself at the bars trying to grab his throat and squeeze it.

“You idiot, you have any idea what you’ve done?” she shouted waving her hand a few inches away from his throat.

“Hush. It was not what it seemed,” he whispered calmly.

“Not what it seemed?” Michael rolled on his side trying to get up. “Well, it seemed to me that you fuckin’ betrayed us.”

“How could you give her the Seal!” Patricia cried still trying to reach the demon’s throat with her hand.

Seith sighed as he made a step right gently tapping with the tip of his sword against the bars.

"I could easily cut these bars and let you out, but you would kill me before you give me any chance to explain myself."

"Go to Hell!" Surya shouted realizing what she had just said.

"Please, just let me explain, and you shall be free," he assured.

Patricia calmed down a little bit, while Surya sat next to Tokutei.

"If you have something to say for yourself then speak," Tokutei said. "Everyone deserves this right."

Michael lost his battle with himself, and realized he wouldn't be able to get up. He rolled to the left and waited for Seith to say what he wanted to say.

"At last, someone who follows his code," the demon said under his breath inhaling quite a large amount of air. "Now be silent and listen. I fooled almost everybody. It was the plan all along. Many years ago Bishop and I invented a marvelous plan. He sent me back to Hell to convince Shax that even though I was working with humans, I was still secretly devoted to Hell. As a proof I promised her the Seal, but do not worry. It was a fake Seal we created. She believed me and sent me back to Earth where I continued my work. Originally, Arthur wanted me to be in first Unit, but killing other demons in such great numbers would simply not be right for a double agent. I decided to stay with you," he pointed at Patricia and Michael, as they listened to every word in both disbelief and uncertainty.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Michael asked baffled.

"Under no circumstances could any individual know the truth. Only me and Bishop. Shax can read minds, which you already know. Had I told you, she would have killed us all, and I would learn neither the whereabouts of the ring nor Daniel Night."

Having heard that Surya's eyes grew wide as she stood up and went closer to the bars.

"What? You know where Dan is?"

"I do know. I couldn't come earlier as I was looking for both; the ring and Daniel."

"What about Lian's brother?" Tokutei asked. "Did you find him?"

"He's too far from here to be taken with us."

"So where is the ring and Dan?" Michael enquired being almost thoroughly convinced.

"Daniel is in this castle, not far from here. The ring, however is not kept by Shax anymore. It is in her chamber in a secret vault."

"I think he's lying," Michael said angrily.

"Why would I bother come here and tell you all of that. I want you to come with me and we have a mission to finish."

"What do ya' think, Tok?" Surya asked taking a glimpse at him.

"To me, If I must be honest, he is telling the truth. I should... we should go and finish the mission. By staying here we'll lose everything. By sticking with him, we might have a chance."

Seith raised his sword.

"You shall not kill me when I cut the bars?"

"I will think on that," Patricia greeted her teeth still being irritated.

"Step away," the demon spoke as he swung his sword diagonally right, then up again cutting through the massive bars.

He walked in watching everyone closely and then slowly, step by step walked to Tokutei and crouched at him. He touched his leg with his open palm and as he closed his eyes he gently exhaled some air through his nose. Next he stood up and walked towards Michael and did the same.

"I am deeply sorry, my friend, that you had to go through this. Your legs are broken no more."

Having finished it, he could feel their astonished eyes gazing at him, as he was walking towards Surya.

"I'm fine," she replied. "Patricia had something with her back," she pointed at her teammate.

"This is only a small percentage of what I shall do to make amends to all of you. But now it is not time for this for we must retrieve your weapons at once."

"What about Dan?" Surya asked.

"With no weapons, we cannot head there."

"Where are they anyway?" came another question.

Seith turned towards the cut off bars and made for the exit.

“Not far from here.”

The others joined him and ran after him upstairs. On their way they saw two bodies of guardians cut into half. A few yards further they saw another two bodies. When the stairs ended, they turned left into a dark hole illuminated by two rows of torches on each side. At the end of the hall, were large, iron door with two guardians standing on both sides.

“What are you doing here,” one of them asked raising his heavy hammer.

Seith grabbed his two-handed sword with the second hand and rushed forward. At the same time a dozen of warthers crawled out from the small holes in the walls.

“We’ll deal with them,” Surya shouted making a slash at the creatures.

Tokutei joined her immediately and the others followed them. Surya jumped into the air made a front flip and landed in such a way that she grabbed the neck of the warther with her thighs and crushed it. At the same time, she hit the other warther with her palm right into the eye. In the meantime, Tokutei made a spin and kicked off one creature, span back and kicked off another one. Meanwhile, Michael raised one of such creatures in the air and broke its spine against his knee. Patricia tried to do anything to help, but the others had taken care of them too soon.

“Come on!” Seith said entering the chamber.

They rushed towards the door along the floor covered with bodies of warthers and guardians, and as they entered, they saw two sets of tables with their backpacks and weapons on them.

“Quickly, take your stuff,” Michael exclaimed running to his backpack.

Patricia placed her watch on her wrist and stopped in shock.

“Is my watch wrong or is it almost one in the afternoon?”

Michael found his watch, looked at it and answered baffled,

“You’re right. We’ve been out for the whole night.”

“Once again, my apologies,” the demon added.

Tokutei looked around anxiously raising his backpack and looking underneath.

“Where’s the key?”

Seith dropped his eyes trying to recall.

“Shax must have put it along with the fake Seal and the ring.”

Surya glanced impatiently at her watch.

“So don’t waste time and go. The next stop is ...Dan,” she said leaving the room first.

Seith accelerated towards the corridor they came from.

“The number of guards is extremely low. Usually there’re ten thousand demons staying in the castle, today, there’re less than a hundred.”

Within a few seconds they were back in the corridor. Seith took the way up the stairs and then turned again, this time right, down the stairs, and left. The sound of moaning combined with suffering was coming from the corridor. When they entered there, they saw two rows of doors on each side going for a mile.

“How are we gonna find him?” Tokuei asked making the first step. Seith passed him and ran ahead.

“I know where he is, just follow me.”

And they did, but to everyone’s surprise they met no guards. The corridor was empty. Every door they passed they could hear either strange sentences spoken in foreign languages or sounds of moaning. After a few hundred yards Seith stopped.

“Behind this door.”

Surya was too thrilled. She couldn’t help herself anymore. She made a step forward. In her mind was only one thought; to meet him again.

“What are you doin’?” Michael asked.

“Openin’ the door,” she replied as two daggers ejected from her cuffs. She crossed her arms and drew a circle inside the door large enough for everyone to fit. Then she pushed the door and the metal shape dropped onto the ground. She didn’t turned off her blades, but entered first looking around. It was a torture chamber filled with various equipment. There was no one inside, apart from Dan who was lying on a wooden boards. His hands and legs were tied with chains against two wooden structures that were probably used to rip bodies apart. Having spotted him, she ran to him as fast she could, while the others followed her slowly.

"Oh my god, Dan," she said through the tears as she carefully examined his body.

His hands were bleeding, his chest was full of holes from the other day and his legs were covered in numerous wounds. The girl quickly cut the chains and slowly put his body on the boards below.

"He's barely alive."

"Let me handle this," the demon said walking towards them. He placed his palm on his forehead and muttered something. The wound disappeared immediately and the boy began to move gently. He slowly turned his head up as Surya stroke his blonde hair. His eyelids began to open and as he finally saw something, he whispered,

"Natalie..."

Michael and Patricia gave Surya a weird look full of confusion. They didn't know about her past. Neither did they know about their previous relationship.

"Yes... I mean Surya," the girl stuttered in astonishment.

"S-Surya?" he looked around with his eyes only. "Tok? Who are these people?"

"I'll explain everything later. How are you feelin'?"

Dan tapped his chest and legs several times looking for wounds.

"Actually, not bad," he replied sitting up.

"Now listen, there's been much goin' on for the last couple of days. So be all ears and listen up. It's 1:24 p.m. on Thursday, 20th December."

"Wait, wait, wait," the boy interrupted. "I've been gone for two days? I bet you've got somethin' to eat in that backpack."

45.

Lian and Amanda reached Alpha Point by Lian's white Porsche Panamera. There was no room in the parking lot outside the houses, so they decided to leave the car parallel to the street, which, moreover was not used by any cars. As soon as they got out, they saw a large number of soldiers and hunters wandering around setting up posts, tents, weaponry and so on. They went up to the highest in rank men there, which was Sergeant Major of the Army Charles Williams; a 41 year old black person with no hair on the head apart from small beard

and moustache. He was checking something on his tablet as the girls approached him.

"Charles Williams, I presume," Amanda asked.

"You must be those two ASAT girls. Bishop let me know that you were coming to help us finish the headquarters."

"That's right. Where is it?"

"First building on my right on the second floor. Our boys have done almost everything except the connections, of course."

When they heard the order, they walked swiftly to the building, passing several soldiers in the drive.

"I've never seen Alpha Point being so busy," the Asian girl commented.

Two minutes later they entered the room that served as headquarters. Lian knew that room pretty well, it used to serve as her resting room when she wanted to take a break from everything in October and November. Now everything was changed. The wall where paintings used to hang was covered with three large screens. Opposite them, there was a table with two computers and some device used to communicating. There was also a coffee maker at the computers. The western wall where two doors were; one from the stairs and one to the rooftop, had numerous weapons and clips attached. The main table was moved further to the northern window, and on the table there were eight laptops and three hunters around connecting them to the whole net. One of the hunters; a tall woman with long, black, straight hair and round glasses was plugging in some wire into the USB port at one of the laptops. When she noticed the girls, she stopped what she was doing and came up to them saying,

"Dorothy Lednicki from Ohio."

"Qiaolian Shu, and this is Amanda Brown. Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too. We're having some problems with the feed from the rifles on the roof. Could you help us?"

"Let me look at it," Amanda replied, while Lian moved towards the computer connected to the large screens.

There was a soldier sitting at the desk typing something on the computers, but the screens were showing nothing.

“Need help?”

“Actually not,” a short man with curly hair replied. “I’m trying to... and... great, done,” he clapped his hands as one of the screen displayed a picture showing green dots of everyone assigned to Alpha Point.

46.

Back in Hell, Dan had been listening to what Surya and the others had to say. They had introduced Michael and Patricia, they had told him what was going on in San Francisco, about Bishop, the soldiers, about Seith’s plan and how he had fooled everyone. But even though, Surya hadn’t dared to raise the topic of their common past nor their feelings. It took Dan several minutes to process all the information, but he quickly come round and behaved as a usual Dan; a positive, cocky dude.

“So, basically, we gotta take the ring, get back to your vehicle, travel fifteen miles to some portal and we’re back in San Francisco, right?”

“Right,” Patricia replied.

Tokutei drew his bluish sword and looked at the blade.

“There’s still one matter to be discussed.”

“I know, I know,” Michael replied. “Killing Shax.”

Dan was watching them speak so freely among themselves that he couldn’t believe that they had established such a strong bond within one day.

“And how are we gonna do this?” Surya asked. “She has still a lot of power within herself, so she can throw us against the wall or out of the window.”

Seith put on his hat that was lying on his laps.

“It doesn’t work on me. She cannot use her power on a demon within a human body.”

“What’s more,” Patricia added, “She has only two hands, and there’re six of us, so we can attack her from all sides.

“OK, sounds good to me. So can we go and leave this horrible place?” Dan asked grabbing a pistol from someone’s bag.

“Hey, hey, hey, man. That’s my gun,” Michael noticed it and got frustrated straight away.

"As you haven't noticed I have nothing with me. Only my torn uniform. By the way, you have still a few of those guns left in your backpack."

"J-Just don't scratch her," came the answer.

"Oh another gun lover. You should talk to Lian or Jason. They are like sleeping with guns."

"Follow me," Seith said taking the lead and leaving the chamber. The rest ran after him to the corridor.

On their way they met very few guards. Fighting them was now much easier when they had their weapons with them. The way to Shax's chamber was long. When they finally reached the familiar corridor, Seith stopped at the entrance and said,

"It is of the highest importance that we attack from all sides. There are six doors, as you remember, so it shall be right if each one of you enter through each door. Tokutei and Daniel, you go this way, and we shall go that."

"OK," Michael replied. "In exactly...um... sixty seconds we enter and bring Hell to them... or rather Earth to them."

And so they did. Everyone went along the circling corridor and stopped at each door. The time was ticking and they were waiting for the sixtieth second to pass. Everybody made sure their weapons were reloaded and the right ammo is active. When the time was up they all broke through the metal door inside the chamber they had known from the previous day. Shax was alone sleeping in her bed regenerating. The noise however, woke her up and as soon as she regained clear vision, she reacted as a reflex swinging her hand left and pushing Dan and Tokutei towards the door and the wall. With her right hand she pushed away Surya and Seith. Michael and Patricia stopped for a second having spotted that her force works on Seith as well.

"Seith, you traitor," the demon princess said through her teeth and threw him against the floor.

Next she noticed Michael pressing the trigger, so she released Tokutei and Dan and pushed him and Patricia away causing them to let go of their weapons.

"Guards!" she shouted with her low voice so loud that the walls

shook and several fractures appeared on the ceiling and the floor. Dan raised his pistol and began squeezing the trigger, but the demon was quicker and released Surya only to push Dan hard against the wall hoping he would lose consciousness.

“Guards! Guards!” she shouted again making a few parts of the ceiling fall.

One of the rocks hit a torch putting out the fire which immediately dimmed the room. Surya wanted to use her dhampiric speed and throw herself at the demon, but she heard heavy steps coming from the corridor outside. Within a second she had to make a decision, either to take a chance at the foe or save Seith who was still lying on the floor. She chose the second option and made a dart at the door at two guardians that had just entered. Tokutei got up and jumped into the air, made a frontflip pointing his mighty blade towards the enemy’s head. Shax was able to stand up on her feet and dodge the stab. She let go of Michael and Patricia and threw Tokutei towards the open balcony. At the same time, four guardians entered through the door where Michael and Patricia were lying. The girl quickly straightened her hand to take a grip of her assault rifle. Hardly had she felt the cold barrel, when she realized that the large guardian had raised his heavy hammer and was aiming down at her. She swiftly rolled away as the iron hammer made a vast hole in the floor. Patricia aimed her gun, but Michael was faster and had killed the guardian. Not waiting any longer, she directed her weapon at the other two demons and took a series of shots. In the meantime, Surya cut through demons with her sharp daggers and helped Seith get up. Tokutei however, tried to stop himself from falling out through the balcony, but the force he had been pushed by was too strong. He flew over the edge and was sure he would fall down into the boiling hot lava, but he straightened his hand with the sword, stabbed it into the very edge of the balcony with the sharp edge facing up and hanged. If he had turned his blade other side, the sharp edge would have gone through the wall and he would have fallen. Dan crawled to his pistol and was determined to take Shax first. Yet, he felt a strong kick on his stomach from some other guardian who had just rushed inside. The force from the heavy leg made him fall across the room towards

Seith and Surya. Shax was constantly pushing away those who tried to do something to her. Every push made her weaker and she couldn't stay focused enough to trust her eyes or senses. She even failed to omit her guard, so they sometimes were pushed, too. Tokutei crawled barely up the edge of the balcony. Shax was too busy with the others to notice him, and in her mind she was sure, he had fallen out. He raised his sword and made a slash at her. As he was only few feet away, he jumped and aimed at her head. In the meantime, Shax pushed away Surya and Dan and as she was turning to deal with Michael and Patricia, in the tail of her eye she noticed a bluish blade approaching right at her. There was no time to use her force, so the only option for her was to dodge out of the way. Tokutei cut down, but the demon moved away with her body. Too slow. The edge of the blade went through her arm where elbow was and cut it off. The others took a glimpse and reacted quickly.

"She can't use both hands anymore!" Michael shouted pressing the trigger.

A series of bullets went at her as Tokutei moved away. The demon swung her other hand to knock everyone to the walls and screamed out of pain. Surya found herself the closest and took advantage of the situation. She zoomed towards the demon and kicked her as hard as she could. Shax flew towards the balcony and landed on the very edge. Next Surya quickly rushed forward to finish her off. She could hear others following her. She raised her leg to throw an axe kick from above straight down. The demon grabbed her leg by the calf and threw the dhampiric girl out of the balcony. At the same time Patricia and Tokutei caught up with them. Tokutei quickly grabbed Surya by her hand before she fell down and pushed her in, while Patricia hit the demon on the hand to let go of the grip. She did.

"You fools, I have the Seal, you're worthless without it."

Patricia made a spin to kick the demon out of the balcony, but the opponent managed to take hold of her leg, and as a result they both fell out and started to gain speed directly towards the lava. The others couldn't do anything, but to watch them fall down.

"You'll die with me." Shax whispered.

Patricia stumped on the demons fingers to make her let go of her leg. She felt the grip being slowly loosen, so she looked deeply in her eyes.

"I won't. Oh and the Seal Seith gave you... was fake," she finished with a strong kick and released herself from the clutch.

Shax froze in shock trying to process everything that had just happened. The distance between them began to increase as Patricia activated the side wings in her suit and glided away from lava. The body of demon hit the moat with a splash and sank burning completely.

"She's alive!" Michael exclaimed with joy seeing his teammate land freely and safely outside the moat.

Tokutei glanced at the colossal army marching a few miles away.

"Quickly, find the ring and let us head back."

"We'll meet at the truck!" Surya said to Patricia through the earwig, then turned round and followed the rest inside the chamber. Seith went first and stopped at the bed only to pull it aside.

"The ring should be here," he pushed away a few rocks revealing a hole inside the wall where two brownish objects were lying. There was also one more object. Seith grabbed them and placed them onto his hand while everyone stood around him in circle.

"The key," Tokutei murmured. "I knew that bitch stole it from us." He took the key and handed it over to Dan. Then everybody focused on what Seith had on his palm.

"So this is the fake Seal," Surya said raising the object up.

"It is out of importance," the demon replied. "The ring is of great matter and I suggest you," he beckoned at Tokutei, "to hide it in your sword's handle.

"It's called tsuka."

"Just place it inside and guard it with your life."

"What 'bout the fake Seal?" Michael asked, while Tokutei placed the ring inside the tsuka of his sword. Seith took a glance at the object.

"We shall bring it either. We do not know when it may become useful."

"All in all," Dan put away the pistol inside his backpack. "Shax's dead, the ring is ours. Can we now go to the truck and back on Earth?"

"Aye," Seith nodded turning around and walking towards one of the doors. "But remember, there're still demons in this castle so be on your toes."

47.

It was almost eight o'clock in the evening. Every soldier, hunter, sniper, mercenary and so on was on their positions waiting for the final hour. People were beginning to gather on various squares in every large city and towns. Those who couldn't leave their homes watched the news reports on TV. Many restaurants, pubs and schools were also displaying the news reports from San Francisco Bay. Arthur was in his office overlooking the last details. Bishop was with him.

"Launch Eagle Eye," he said to Jack, who was in the headquarters.

"Launching Eagle Eye."

The roof of the north-western part of the castle opened only to eject a small racket. It caught eye of everyone on the island and as one they were gazing at the rocket raising into the air.

"Eagle Eye," Leonora whispered from her room in the northern part of the castle.

"Four hours to go," Bishop muttered, then rested on the armchair.

"Four hours, John, for hours, and everything will change."

Bishop closed his eyes for a while and moved back with his memories a few days earlier. It was December 14 and he and the second unit had just landed on Attica baseball pitch. The chopper turned off the engines, and everybody got off. They were wearing ASAT uniforms and were heavily armed. There were lots of police and army people outside the prison making sure no one would disturb the operation.

"Follow me," Bishop said running towards the door.

The yard was full of dead bodies in orange suits. Michael outran Bishop, opened the door and rushed inside. The others were just behind him.

"What a cemetery," Amanda commented seeing lots of blood stains spread around.

"They sure spared no one," her sister added.

As they were moving along the corridor leading to the main hall, they

heard some growling noises.

“Hush,” Jack raised his fist as he turned his head left trying to overhear something.

They slowed down and watched the corridor. The moaning got louder as two figures limped out of the cell on the right.

“Target sighted,” Michael said as he raised his gun and pulled the trigger quickly ripping their heads apart.

“So we are the clean-up team, now?” Patricia commented moving further.

“At least they saved us some fun,” Jack added.
Bishop cleared his throat and slowly shook his head.

“You’re not the main assault team yet. It’s gonna change when the Seal is completed. Now shut up and let’s make this place clean.”

48.

In Oakland, a large number of reporters from almost every country were showing the world what would happen at midnight. A short woman with long, curly hair was standing on some street, from which the panorama of San Francisco spread. Thousands of people gathered around to watch.

“I’m standing here in Oakland waiting like everyone around for midnight. Within four hours we will know the answer to the question of the era; will the world end on December 21st? Government hasn’t changed their statement about the upcoming earthquake, but if it were true, the whole bay would have been evacuated by now which has not been done yet. Stay with me America for more news.”

49.

Everyone from unit one managed to reach the vehicle. Patricia was already waiting for them.

“Any problems on the way?” she asked.

“No, none, you?” Surya enquired.

“A few goblins. No big deal.”

Dan walked out of the tunnel and saw the truck for the first time. He immediately ran to it and examined it carefully.

"Wow, this thing is huge. Arthur thought well."

Michael opened the driver's door and got in. Dan went inside through the back door and immediately headed for the weapon storage.

"You do have a spare uniform, don't you?"

"There's one below the assault rifles," Patricia replied stepping after him followed by Surya and Tokutei.

"So, Seith, tell me where now?"

Seith sat comfortably in the back seat.

"The portal for us is near their portals. However, theirs cannot be opened by no-one but Cizin himself. As far as my mind goes, Cizin casted a spell on the portal to open exactly on 21st December, 2012. Ours, on the other hand can be opened by the key anytime someone wants to cross to the other side."

"No time to lose, let's go."

50.

After about half an hour of driving along the hellish roads, they got closer to the massive army marching towards the portal.

"We have no choice, but to take the parallel road and hope they won't see us," Michael said nervously slowing down. "To remain unseen we should take the one over there," he pointed at a road going much higher, right above the marching army.

The truck reached the higher road and slowed down not to be heard by the demons below. A steep mountainside was on their right towering up to the rocky ceiling, the army was marching about two hundred feet below on the left along a deep and wide gorge with river of hot, boiling lava at its bottom.

"Just a few more miles," Seith said with his casual, emotionless voice.

But something gave his impatience and nervousness away. He couldn't help rubbing his palms against his coat. Demon or no demon he was sweating; natural reaction to stress. Not only him, everyone was waiting impatiently for the road to end, so that they could leave Hell forever. Surya and Dan were watching the army on the left.

"So many demons are about to walk on Earth," the girl said

impatiently.

No sooner had she said that, than something jumped onto the roof of the truck.

“Goblins!” Patricia said seeing one climbing down the window. Surya reacted quickly by drawing her blades, running to the second compartment and cutting the creature into two. At the same time, a couple of orts shot out from a cage on the right side hitting the vehicle with their massive heads. The back wheel lost the ground and the vehicle turned with its back towards the precipice.

“Hold on!” Michael shouted pressing the accelerator hard to bring the truck back on the road, but another ort ran down and pushed the vehicle so hard that it fell out and rolled down towards the road with the army.

It was rolling like a snowball, gaining a higher speed. Almost all of the windows broke and the momentum threw some of the glass out.

The demons noticed it and spread making a way for the vehicle.

Everyone inside was trying to remain on their seats, apart from Surya who was in the second compartment rebounding from the walls, the floor and the ceiling. While rolling, the vehicle reached such a high speed that it crashed into the demons below and knocked them like a bowling ball. There was nothing to stop the truck. No rocks, no stones, nothing. Because of the momentum, the back door didn't withstand it and smashed open. The machine acted like an avalanche and took several demons with it falling right into the deep gorge with a river of lava.

2 TO HELL AND BACK

December 20, 2012

1 minute remaining

1.

Everyone was waiting for the clock to strike midnight. ASATs, soldiers and hunters on the island, marines in San Francisco, the government. The hand on the old clock was slowly moving up getting closer to the cipher twelve. It went passed a big eight and headed towards nine. In Arthur's office the electronic clock displayed on his digital wall was showing 11:59:47. Arthur blinked and the numbers changed into 11:59:48. Only a few seconds were left before the most important event of the entire humanity would occur. People in other cities gathered in the streets and watched transmission from Oakland on huge screens. Some others stayed at home and watched it on the Internet. It didn't mattered what time it was in their countries, they were simply curious to see what would happen in San Francisco, the only city that had been completely evacuated. They were referring only to San Francisco as it was the main city on the peninsula. Rarely were the reporters talking about Daly City, Pacifica or San Bruno.

That night the whole world was awake. One of the marines was constantly glimpsing at his watch and the National Cemetery before him. 11:59:55. He tightened the grip on his rifle and waited for the unknown. He had been told what would happen and he had to be on his toes. One more glance from Arthur and Bishop at the watch; 11:59:56. In town squares of every city and town in the country people curiously counted down loudly.

“Three.”

Some boy and his whole family were sitting in a traditional Hindu house somewhere in India. They were all gaping at the screen and counted down along with the world.

“Two.”

Jason was standing in the same room as Arthur. His eyes were directed at the digital watch on the wall.

“One.”

“Zero,” said the marine at the cemetery having his finger on the trigger.

2.

The ASAT truck was lying upside down on a small rocky ledge sticking out from the steep mountainside somewhere in the middle between the main road and the lava river. The front of the vehicle was completely smashed and there were numerous dents in the body itself. Tokutei opened his eyes. Everything was blurred and he could feel a terrible headache. He blinked several times to make his eyes see sharper. He turned his head left and saw Patricia lying on Dan. Michael was lying a few feet from them. Tokutei looked right and saw Seith lying on his back. Everything was in mess. One of the seats was torn off, the screens inside were smashed, weapons and backpacks were lying all over the place.

“Are you OK?” he heard Michaels’s weak voice from the left.

"I think so," came the answer as he turned his head left again. Michael turned over and crawled towards Dan and Patricia.

"Hey, guys, wake up."

There was no response.

"Wake up," he slightly pushed Patricia's arm.

The girl opened her eyes and moaned,

"What-What happened?"

"Orts pushed us to some gorge," Tokutei replied trying to stand up.

Patricia realized she was lying on Dan and rolled over towards a piece of rock that had punctured the roof. Dan moved his arm whining and trying to come out of shock examined the situation.

"Are we alive?"

"Even if we weren't we'd probably end up in Hell," came the answer from Michael.

"So, are we alive?" Dan asked confused.

"I think we are."

Tokutei crouched towards Seith. He looked at his stone face and reached out his hand to pat him. As he was moving his hand towards him, Seith opened his eyes rapidly and looked at Tokutei.

"Don't touch me."

The Asian man quickly withdrew his hand and turned towards the others.

"I think everyone is OK."

Michael crawled towards Seith.

"Hey, I've broken my leg again, could you fix it?"

Dan took a good look around.

"Hey guys, where's Surya?" Dan boomed.

December 21, 2012

0 days remaining

3.

The countdown was over. The whole world was staring at the screens showing live view from Oakland's cameras pointed at San Francisco to see what would happen. Some of them had imagined that the city would be consumed by an earthquake, landslide, tornado or any other disaster. Some others had expected four riders of apocalypse to emerge and spread destruction. Yet some others had other beliefs. But nothing happened. No fire, no flood, no disaster, not even a tiniest quake.

"I don't understand," Lian said walking towards the huge window in Arthur's office. The screens were showing live feed from Eagle Eye, but there was nothing unusual about the view. Was she disappointed? Not at all. Baffled as she was she tried to spot something in the distance, just anything out of order. But apart from the city being abandoned, there was nothing.

"None of us do," came an uncertain answer from Arthur. It was a few minutes after midnight when the phones burst out ringing. Arthur took a deep breath and answered one of the lines, totally forgetting to put it on the screen.

"Arthur West... I know, Mr. President... No, sir. I have no idea either... No, sir. With all due respect, we have to, we must wait... Alright, sir."

He hanged up, put away his phone and turned towards Bishop, Jason, Amanda and Jack.

"Don't even tell me, Arthur, that he wanted to move away the troops," Bishop asked.

"No, he asked me what to do."

"And what are we gonna do?" Lian asked turning round.

"We wait."

Lian walked slowly back to the group with her eyes fixed on the floor.

"What if they did more than we expected?"

"They?" Jack asked.

"Unit one. What if they somehow locked Hell?"

Bishop shook his head.

"It's not possible. The only way for Hell not to open is if they imprisoned Cizin, and without the Seal it's simply impossible."

"So, do ya' have any better explanation?" Jason asked.

"No."

Having said that, he heard a voice coming from the main speaker.

"General, sir. This is SMA Miller from Echo Zone."

"Report, captain."

"There's nothing to report, sir. The soldiers are getting curious. What are the orders?"

Bishop glanced at Arthur, then at the digital watch showing 00:04.

"We wait."

"Aye, Aye, sir."

Bishop took a glimpse at the window, while Lian took a seat on a nearby armchair.

"Something must be responsible for this delay."

"We haven't received any calls regarding other parts of the world. It means that nothing happened there, either," said Arthur.

"We can't just wait, Arthur," Jason said. "We must do something. We have over 6000 people on this island waiting for what? For nothing? You must tell them something."

"You're right, Jason," the old man replied pressing some button on his keyboard.

Next he pressed something on his tablet PC and spoke.

"Attention all units. This is Arthur West. I do understand that all of you were waiting for this moment, and I'm afraid I don't have any news. The countdown was over a few minutes ago, and as far as I know, nothing happened...anywhere. There's no need for any of you to be operating at the moment. If anyone feels a need for sleeping or eating, you may do so. If anything happens,

you'll be notified by the watchers. Please do not contact us with any questions regarding this situation, as we do not have any answers. Thank you."

Jack smacked his lips and raised his eyebrows.

"Why didn't you tell them to standby?"

"Because if anything happens, I want to have them be well-rested and not hungry."

"I think it was a wise move, Arthur," Jason commented. "If they have some rest now, they will be more efficient later."

Arthur raised his eyes and smiled unwillingly.

"I want you to have some rest, too. There's no need for you to be here."

"I don't think I would fall asleep," Jason replied.

"I will," Jack said turning round, then left the room.

Lian dropped her eyes, then peeked at the screen showing grey dots representing unit one.

"I just hope our guys are OK down there."

4.

Everyone managed to get out of the vehicle. While they were brushing the dust and dirt off their uniforms they looked around the ledge. They saw a gorge on one side with boiling hot lava hundreds of feet below, and a steep mountain on the other side. The small area where their vehicle had landed was covered with sharp, pointy rocks and bodies of a few demons. Some of them were even crushed by the vehicle itself.

"We were lucky to survive this," Patricia said checking her wound beneath her torn trouser-leg wondering whether Seith could fix it or was it too small to bother.

Dan ran nervously around shouting desperately,

"Surya! Surya!"

Yet, he heard no answer.

"Surya! Surya!" he continued looking behind the pointy rocks.

"Stop screaming Dan," Tokutei suggested. "You don't wanna give out our position."

"She's not here," Patricia added.

Michael took a seat on a piece of the rock right next to a side mirror that had fallen off the car on the impact.

"What if she walked somewhere?"

"No, she wouldn't have done that," the boy assured. "She would've first checked up on us."

"Dan, what if..." Tokutei tried to give the worst explanation that had come to his mind. "What if she fell into the lava."

"Don't even say that!"

"She was in the second compartment when we got hit," the Asian added.

Dan nervously looked around trying to spot anything among the bodies. Then he heard Patricia's voice.

"Come here, quickly."

He sped as fast as he could towards the abyss, just two feet from the truck. Patricia was standing on the edge of the precipice staring down.

"Look there," she pointed down at a small ledge.

Dan leaned forward and looked down at the ledge. It was a few feet wide with pointy rocks all over. Then he saw something he didn't want see; Surya lying on her stomach with a tip of a rock coming out from her back. There was a pound of blood around and another two bodies of demons. He felt shivers all over his body, and then a gentle touch.

"I'm sorry, Dan."

The rest of the group were standing staring at them, but they didn't come forward. Dan turned around with tears in his eyes. It occurred to everyone what he had seen there.

"No, no, no. It's not over yet. She came here for me, and at

what cost?"

Tokutei felt the need to go to him and try to comfort him. After all, he was here his closest friend, but before he made a step, Michael was already there.

"Hey, buddy. I'm so sorry about her."

Then suddenly, they heard a loud call in the distance, coming from somewhere in the gorge.

"Scouts!" Seith exclaimed. "Quickly! Hide!"

He made a slash behind the truck. Tokutei took a glance at the darkness on the other side, slightly lit by the lava, and spotted two flying demons. He rushed after Seith and hid behind the vehicle, while Michael, Patricia and Dan took cover behind the rocks.

"Hush," Seith whispered with his finger on his full lips.

Two flying demons were looking for the wreckage. One of them saw the smashed vehicle on the mountain ledge and beckoned to the second one to fly there. They examined the area, but as soon as they spotted Surya's body pierced on the rock, they neglected the upper ledge.

"ASATs are dead," one of them spoke with satisfaction.

"Good, nothing to see here. Let's get back to the line," the second one added, and soon they were gone.

Seith made sure they disappeared behind the corner, and went out from behind the vehicle.

"It's safe... for now."

Dan ran up to him still delusive.

"We can't leave her like that. You healed me, you can heal her, too."

"I cannot," came a firm answer. "I can heal people, but I cannot bring them back to life."

"There must be a way," he cried.

Tokutei walked towards him.

"I'm sorry Dan, I don't think we can do anything."

"Let's take her body with us. That's at least what we can do. Don't let her stay in Hell."

"I think that's the only thing we can do now," Patricia replied heading back to the edge.

Seith followed her along with Tokutei.

"So how are we gonna do this?" Michael asked looking at the ledge a dozen feet below.

Tokutei scratched his head and quickly turned around heading back to the vehicle.

"Where're ya' goin'?" Dan asked through tears watching the whole situation from the rocks.

"We have a rope in the truck. It should be enough."

He tried to open the boot, but it got stuck because of the numerous dents. Not waiting any longer, he kicked it several times as hard as he could. The lock broke and he was able to raise the hatch. Everything inside was upside down. He started to rummage through the items until he finally found the rope. Next he grasped it and zoomed back to the others.

"Hold it tight," he gave it to Seith. "I'm going down."

"No way," the demon replied strongly. "You're too weak to get her back up. I'm much stronger. I will go down."

"So be it," Michael replied and tightly grabbed the rope.

Seith didn't wait, but jumped onto the ledge below. He used the rope to tight it around Surya's body after he had gently removed it from a sharp rock, and signaled the others to pull them up. Dan finally walked to the edge and took Surya into his arms, then walked towards the vehicle to put her on a brown, pebbly ground.

"Just remember, Daniel, if she gets back on Earth, she will raise as a walking dead."

"I know," came a sad answer. "I'll deal with her then."

Seith turned around and sat on one of the rocks.

It was autumn of 2004. Arthur was waiting in the

courtyard. He was constantly looking at the main gate and glancing at his watch. He seemed very impatient as if he was waiting for something important.

"There they are," he muttered seeing a limousine passing through the gate. It stopped next to the black chopper and the engine silenced. He made a few steps towards the car as the left door opened and Bishop stepped out.

"Arthur," he said warmly..

"John."

After him stepped out another man. He had three-day facial hair, hair pinned into a pony tail and a suit.

"This is Seith I told you so much about," Bishop said.

Arthur shook his hand saying his name.

A few minutes later they were in his office. Arthur took his usual seat, while Bishop and Seith sat on the armchairs on the other side of the desk. Arthur took a good look at the man. He could easily see that he didn't feel comfortable in such clothes. Every few seconds he pulled his collar as if to let some air underneath his chest.

"Arthur, there something I need to tell you about Seith."

"What is it"

Bishop took a deep breath and gathered his thoughts.

"It's not easy for me... You see there is a reason I kept him away from you. Well...err...um..."

"I'm a demon," Seith spoke seriously interrupting Bishop.

"A demon?" Arthur's jaw dropped.

Bishop sighed as he scratched his head

"I wanted to tell you earlier but I knew how much you hate them.

"A demon in ASAT, that contradicts our idea.

"It does, but he's different. Just give us a chance and you'll not regret it. After all, it was him who helped me locate one of the

pieces of the Seal.”

5.

It was almost four in the morning in San Francisco and almost everyone was fast asleep. The soldiers, the marines, and the others who decided to stay were resting anywhere they could. Arthur was still in his office along with Bishop and Lian. They were all wondering what was wrong. A few days earlier they had learned what the end of the world would look like, and it was nothing like that. In fact, it wasn't happening at all.

“Maybe they did stop Cizin?” Arthur wondered.

Bishop shook his head.

“No, it's not possible. And even if it were, they would be trapped in Hell forever.”

“They have the key, they can get out.”

“So why aren't they, Arthur? Why? It's been two days. Why aren't they here yet?”

Arthur glanced at one of the screen displaying GPS position of ASATs. The green lights were only at Jason, Lian, Amanda, Jack and Bishop. The second unit was still inactive.

“We do know for sure they're still in Hell.”

6.

Two of the marines were walking around the Woodlawn cemetery. There were only three other soldiers watching the venue.

“A night like a normal one, right Bobby?” one of them asked.

“I wonder how long are they gonna keep us here. Nothing's happened so far, so I doubt whether anything would happen today.”

“Orders are orders.”

“Anyway, what are you buyin' your kids for Christmas?”

“They wanted this games console, ya’ know, the one where you play games with your body.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know which one. I bought it for George on his birthday. At least I know he’s doing some exercises, heh.”

7.

Surya was lying numb on the ground. Dan was crouching next to her remembering their all best moments from both times when he knew her as Natalie and as Surya. In his mind, he saw their first meeting in vampires’ nest, when she was dressed in a white, stained with blood dress. He also remembered their fake date in one of the New York clubs. Then he saw her visiting his home and mending things together. Another image that popped into his head was when she accompanied him when he was buying his dream, Porsche, car. Next he remembered when he met her as Surya for the first time, totally unaware of her past. And then came all the unpleasant moments when he was rude to her almost on every mission, and every time in the castle, even though she was nice and warm-hearted to everybody. But the most unbelievable thing she did, was when she came down to Hell for him. And now she was dead, and there was nothing he could do.

“Dan!” he heard a voice behind him which tore him out from his memories.

“Dan, quickly,” he heard it again and turned round. He saw Michael making a dash towards the upturned vehicle. Tokutei and Patricia were right next to him. Seith was on the other side, holding his bow he had taken out from the truck. Dan looked where he was aiming and saw an army of demons flying right at them. It was too late to hide. Fight was their only option now.

“Dan, catch!” he heard Tokutei’s voice.

He looked at him and saw two metal pistols approaching that Tokutei had thrown to him. He swiftly snapped out of the daydreaming, grabbed them, changed the ammo into explosive ones and aimed at the horde. He took two shots, not to waste the ammo. Then seconds later, two explosions came. The blast was very strong. The wave ripped apart six demons in the range, and pushed away the others. Some of them fell into the gorge dropping into the boiling lava, while the rest hit the rocks. Those who were not killed regained their balance and continued advancing. Tokutei waited for any of them to fall or to land on the lodge, while Patricia held her shotgun tight and waited patiently for them to approach closer. Michael took out his M4 rifle and started to take down one after one, while Seith shot with his deadly arrows hitting their heads every time. Some of the demons landed on the lodge and attacked the ASATs. Tokutei and Patricia rushed to eliminate them. The Asian warrior cut through the first one, made a spin then cut the wing off of the next one, then ducked as a blade swished over his head, made another spin and stabbed the demon into his heart. No sooner had he stopped spinning, than he heard a shot behind him, and as he turned around he saw another demon ripped apart by a blast from Patricia's shotgun.

"Thanks," he said earning enough time to wipe sweat off his forehead.

"Behind, you!" the girl replied, as Tokutei turned around and managed to slice another one.

Then some other demon quickly knocked him onto the ground. He rolled right only to avoid a massive hit from a halberd that made a deep hole in the lodge. Straight away several cracks appeared around it. The creature raised the halberd again, and as he was to strike the final blow, he split into half. It was Seith's sword that went through the monster, saving Tokutei.

Dan slowly moved back towards the vehicle switching the ammo into iron one. He successfully took out three creatures, but he failed to notice one that had just landed on the top of the vehicle. He grasped Dan by his shoulders and raised him up, then threw him onto the ground. Dan fell hard near the pointy rocks releasing his guns. He managed to turn over and took a good look at the upcoming demon. He noticed that this one was really old and was in many a battle. There were lots of holes in its wings and several scars on its hard, brown skin. Its two blades were blunted in some parts and Dan was sure they killed thousands of humans or whatever they fought against. The demon roared, as he stumped his big foot, tipped with claws onto Dan's stomach and prepared himself for a blow. The boy accepted the idea of dying there even though his body was filled with adrenaline. Surya was gone, and he didn't see any hope to keep on living. Not even saving the world mattered to him at that very moment. What is more, there was no way he could do anything from that position. The demon made the swing. The sharp blade was zooming right into Dan's neck. The boy held his breath, which he thought would be his very last one, and closed his eyes for a split a second. When he opened them, the blade was only a few inches from him. And then, suddenly, another blade appeared from the left. It came out of nowhere. Dan thought it was some other demon that wanted to be faster than the one who was on the verge of killing him. He was wrong. The blade blocked the other one, and cut through it upwards. Then a second blade glittered and sieved through the demon. Several strikes hit it and its massive body fell onto the pointy rock letting be penetrated by its sharp tip.

"Give me your hand," he heard a voice from the left and saw a smooth palm waiting for a grip above him. Dan was in shock, he could just easily lose his life, but he didn't. Trembling with fear, he turned right and his jaw dropped. Never

ever could he expect what he saw now. Before him, stood no one else but Surya herself. She had a hole in her uniform right on her stomach, yet there was no wound, not even a sign. He reached his hand to her and let himself be dragged on his feet.

"I-I, I-I," he tried to say something.

"Surya?" Tokutei's voice came from behind.

Seith, Michael and Patricia killed the last demons and slowly walked towards the girl.

"It's not her," Michael said. "She was probably raised by some demon here. She's nothing more but a zombie."

"He is right," Seith joined the conversation preparing his long sword. "We need to kill her."

"Hey, hey, hey, guys," Surya said slightly irritated. "I had enough discrimination in my life for being a dhampir. Now a zombie? Are you mad? I'm not a freakin' zombie."

Dan wanted to say something, but it was not possible for him.

"She can heal," Tokutei said grabbing Seith's arm, simultaneously preventing him from making a mistake.

"No one can heal from being dead," Seith said. "Unless, you have been raised."

"I wasn't dead you fools. I was unconscious. As soon as you removed my body from the rock, it started to heal, as always." Patricia slowly shook her head.

"I don't believe in it."

"But it's true," the Asian man insisted. "One of her dhampiric abilities is healing."

Seith lowered his sword and stepped back. He seemed still not to be truly convinced.

"Eh, just look," Surya said cutting her arm with one of her daggers.

A deep wound focused everyone's attention. Then it slowly started to disappear leaving no scar behind.

"Alright, I believe her," Michael said. "If she were a zombie, her blood would be of different color. And if she were raised, she wouldn't heal."

"You don't say?" she said with a sigh.

Dan was still stunned. His emotions were slowly cooling down. He turned towards the truck and headed there as if nothing happened.

"We gotta be goin' before more of them find us. Move your ass."

Patricia leaned over to Michael raising her eyebrows.

"What's his problem? One minute he was like cryin' all over the place makin' a scene, and now he's like she's alive, so what?" Michael said nothing; he only shrugged his shoulders and headed back to the truck. Tokutei and the rest followed them.

"What exactly did I miss?" the dhampiric girl asked scanning the area full of bodies and the upturned vehicle.

"Actually," Tokutei said. "Nothing, apart from Dan being hysteric over you. Maybe he doesn't show it now, but he does care about you, a lot."

"He has these emotion issues. I got used to them."

Patricia crawled inside the truck and turned around only to ask,

"So what's now?"

Dan walked around the vehicle, carefully examining the scale of the damage. He, then opened the hood and looked at the engine.

"Unfortunately, we can't use it anymore."

Seith put aside his weapon, looked up at a ninety foot-tall cliff, and said,

"We have about five miles to the portal. We cannot take the main road without the car so we must go higher and try to be as much undetectable as we can."

"So how are we gonna get high?" Dan asked.

"By smokin' weed," Michael replied with a silent laugh. "But

seriously. I suggest we should take what we can and head up for the cave up there.”

Seith walked to the first demon body and dragged out his arrow from its chest.

“I do not know how many creatures we shall meet, so do not waste your ammo and use cold steel as much as possible.”

Tokutei crawled into the car and started to look for something.

“And we have to take all the food we have left.”

“Patricia,” Michael spoke. “Take the rope from the edge. It can come useful.”

They all began to take things out of the truck and putting them into their backpacks. Those which were no longer necessary were left behind.

8.

It was almost seven. The bright light started to appear in the distance making everything more visible again. Arthur was still in his office talking to the president of the United States.

“Yes, sir. I do understand that... I just ask you, sir, to wait till noon... We’re still waiting here.”

He hanged up the phone and looked at the satellite view of the city displayed on one of his huge screens on the walls. Lian walked in.

“Any news, Arthur?”

The old man gave her a sad look with his tired eyes.

“They want to bring people back.”

“What did you say?”

“I told them, it wasn’t a good idea yet. We have to wait till noon.”

Lian took a glimpse at the other screen showing status of ASAT units. Unit one was still inactive. She sighed with disappointment and headed back to her chamber.

9.

Jack and Amanda were walking along the beach situated in the north of Maldito island. The horizon on their right was getting more and more yellowish. A gentle wind was blowing from the north. They could hear birds singing in the trees, and muted voices coming from a camp in the forest. They could see several soldiers strolling along the beach about a quarter mile ahead.

"I'm worried about my sister, you know. It was always her who took care of me and protected me. Now she's in Hell, and I have no freakin' idea whether she's alive or not."

Jack stroke his gelled hair and tried to say something to comfort her.

"Hey, Amanda, I'm sure there must be some reason they're in the pit for so long. Whatever they did or are doin' is why we're gonna see another sunrise."

They got closer to the soldiers.

"Hey, you're those ASATs guys, aren't ya'?" the tall one with a short beard asked.

"Mhm," Amanda murmured.

"Maybe you can tell us what's goin' on here."

"If we only knew," Jack replied stroking his hair again.

The shorter soldier looked at the distance to the north.

"You must know something more. You're the freakish saviors here."

"Or at least what they're saying 'bout ya' in the camp."

"Saviors?"

"You have that ring thing that can stop the end of the world, don't ya'?" the taller one asked.

"Arthur West has it. And, I don't wanna spoil the fun, but the end of the world cannot be stopped. We may only make sure it doesn't spread outside the city. But you must know that from the

briefing.”

“Well, we were told during the briefing that the world would end at midnight, and what do ya’ know, we’re still here safe and sound.”

“And I hope with my whole heart it would stay like that,” Amanda said trying to spot the sun emerging in the east.

10.

It was seven twenty. Marines were having their breakfast at the San Francisco National Cemetery. Four Hummers were guarding the main entrance to the twenty-eight acre area full of white graves. Two marines were patrolling the neighborhood, circling the fence. One of them was looking rather sad.

“And then she told me to get fuck out of her place and never come back.”

“Whata’ bitch. You’ll never understand them.”

“At least I don’t have to listen to her complaints anymore, huh.”

“Any new orders?” he said through the walkie-talkie

“Yeap guys, you’re not gonna miss dinner today.”

“Finally. This whole plan was a stupid idea.

“Hush! Did you hear that?” the second one said after he had stopped suddenly.

He looked at the graves through the bars of the cemetery.

“What is it?”

“I heard something.”

“Probably some animal. No one is allowed to enter the cemetery.”

Having said that, he felt a tiny quake coming from somewhere nearby. Then he heard some low-pitched noise as if someone was knocking at a door.

“Gotter, can you check out that sound?” he heard a voice

from his superior coming from the walkie-talkie.

“On my way, sir” came the response, as they both came closer to the fence and watched the graves.

They felt another quake, much stronger than the previous one. It lasted for about a second, but it was strong enough to overturn plastic cups that were standing at the breakfast table in the nearby camp. The soldiers sitting there stood up and nervously looked around. SMA Smith went up to them.

“Well, what do you know, there’s an earthquake after all,” he grabbed a cup of coffee and started to drink it.

“Gotter, do you see anything?” the soldier asked looking at the cemetery.

The two marines were gazing at the graves that were slowly falling apart. They saw a rotten, skinny hand breaking through the soil, trying to pull the rest of the body up.

“Sir! It’s happening!” he sounded scared taking a few steps back and preparing his weapon.

“Can you confirm that?”

“Affirmative...There’re fucking zombies coming back to life right in front of my fucking eyes.”

The captain standing on the other side of the audio channel froze in shock as his jaw dropped. He turned towards Smith and stuttered.

“Sir, i-it’s sta-started, sir.”

Smith was sipping coffee at that time. He didn’t put it aside, but threw the cup onto the ground and ran towards the other marines at the table. One of them saw the strange behavior and leaned left to his colleague.

“Look, something’s goin’ on.”

Smith grabbed his tablet, selected everyone and shouted.

“All units, all units. It’s started. Begin the operation. I repeat begin the...” but before he had chance to finish his sentence, he

heard a voice played automatically not only on his tablet, but also on everyone's around him.

"We've got a bunch of zombies at Woodlawn. What's the status at other cemeteries?"

"Fuck! Fuck!" the SMA cursed taking a good look at National Cemetery as the first shots started.

Almost every marine picked up their weapons and rushed to their previous positions. SMA selected all the cemeteries on the list and sent them a message,

"This is National, we're in a bit of crisis here. Already sent my men to their posts."

A soldier ran up to him and trying to catch his breath, he said.

"Sir, we must contact Maldito and let them know."

"I think they already know."

11.

In Golden Gate Cemetery the graves began to open in dozens. Soldiers received their orders and started to act according to plan. Those who were patrolling the area engaged into fight at once. Soon four units were sent to help them. All the snipers ran back to the posts and began their work. Bullets were swooshing above the graves eliminating the walking dead one by one. SMA Johnson grabbed his wireless headset and sent a message to everyone.

"This is SMA Johnson from Golden Gate Cemetery. We have a bunch of zombies to deal with. Be on your toes and shoot on sight."

12.

Arthur was sitting at his desk, slowly sipping a hot cup of coffee. Bishop was sitting on the other side nervously fiddling with his fingers.

"It's the sunrise," he said. "At noon they're gonna abort the

operation.”

Hardly had he finished his sentence, when a phone call appeared on one of the screens.

“Another complains,” Arthur murmured pressing the accept button, automatically ignoring the caller’s name. “This is Arthur West.”

As soon as he heard the first words his eyes grew wide and he immediately turned back towards the screen showing the satellite view over the city.

“Alert the others,” he replied hanging out.

Bishop was overhearing the conversation, but from Arthur’s reaction he imagined what the news was.

“Bishop, it’s started. The dead are coming back to life.”

“Why now? Why in the morning?”

Arthur didn’t reply. Instead he grabbed the keyboard, opened all channels and stood up, walk nervously towards the screen only to zoom the satellite feed on National Cemetery.

“Attention all units, this is Arthur West. We’ve received information that the first phase started a few minutes ago on every cemetery on the peninsula. Everyone knows their orders. Just stick to the plan and good luck.”

“Arthur? Why has it started now?” Bishop asked again.

The old man glanced at his watch. It was 7:25. Then he glanced at the view outside one more time and saw the first rays of the morning sun.

“How could we be so stupid, Bishop.”

The general looked at him strangely. He had no idea what his friend had on mind.

“I spent over fifteen years preparing for this day. I’ve read hundreds of books, texts, talked to thousands of people and I missed this one thing.”

“What thing?”

"The new day does not begin at midnight, according to ancient texts."

As he was saying that the door burst opened and Jason rushed in.

"Is it true?"

"Unfortunately it is, Jason."

"Finish your thought, West," Bishop said impatiently totally neglecting Jason's presence.

"Ah, yes, excuse me, Jason. I was saying that in Bible and other ancient texts the reckoning of a new day was with the sunrise, hence it started now."

Lian ran inside the office trying to catch her breath.

"I want to help now."

"If you want to help, go to Alpha Point and help them there. Do everything not to let anything get to the tunnel."

Arthur walked back to his armchair and sat down. He pressed some other buttons on his keyboard and every screen changed the display feed. The first one was still showing the current position of the ASAT members. The second one showed the feed from Eagle Eye of the whole island and the last one showed the view from the government satellite directed towards San Francisco and nearby cities.

"Bishop, please stay with me to coordinate the whole operation. Lian and Jason, go to Alpha Point."

"They're already gone," Bishop replied turning his armchair left, to be able to see the maps clearly.

"I must contact Jack and Amanda," the old man said selecting their names from the list. "Jack, I see you are on the island already. Lian and Jason will be going to Alpha Point. I want Amanda to go with them, and you, Jack meet us in the headquarters."

"Roger that."

"When will they be goin'?" the girl asked confused.

“In about five minutes. Try to get to the tunnel ASAP.”

He hanged up and almost immediately a green earpiece appeared on the forth screen. Arthur pressed something and the call has been picked up. The screen displayed an image of the President.

“Arthur, we have just learned that cemeteries in San Francisco, Daly City and other cities around have... how to put this...”

“Bodies have begun to break out. I know that Sir. We are dealing with it as we speak.”

“If anything goes wrong, we have other armies ready around our main cities.”

“I hope it wouldn’t be necessary.”

“I try to hope that, too. Keep me up to date, West, and good luck.”

Arthur hanged up the phone and rested his head on his hands and elbows on his laps.

“Let’s get started. I need coffee here first,” he pressed something on his tablet PC and the forth screen displayed the feed from the headquarters in the castle. What he saw looked like a grand opening of a new store. Everyone was running in as fast as they could and taking places in front of their posts. One person sat in front of the screens; captain Henry Morris, a Hindi person, above six feet tall, with short, curly black hair and black glasses on his nose.

“I’m ready, sir.”

“Captain, make sure everyone is operating their turrets. Soldiers, shoot on sight, I don’t have to remind you that heads are the targets.”

“Aye, Aye.”

Arthur stood up and went again towards the window.

“Put Alpha Point on Eagle Eye. Zoom the satellite on Woodlawn Cemetery. Put me SMA Miles on the fourth screen.

And give me some Red Bull, too.”

Arthur seemed very engaged into what was going on. He had to have control over everything. After all, he was in charge of nearly seven thousand men that were willing to fight for the Earth’s sake.

13.

The army was preparing for the first fight around the Woodlawn Cemetery complex in Daly City. Several graves were broken, and dead bodies started to wander freely around. Soldiers were gathered outside the fence watching the zombies closely and carefully. The main base or rather a camp was set up just outside the gates to Woodlawn Memorial Park. The entrance looked like an old church or a castle with two tunnels beneath and one cone tower between them. Two Hummers were guiding the gates in the parking lot and three large, greenish tents were set up on the grass between the main street and the gates. Nine snipers were lying on the other side of the gate on a flat roof. SMA Miles was watching the feed from the video cameras spread around the cemetery when his earpiece started to beep. He pressed the accept button and said.

“Miles.”

“This is Arthur West. What’s the status at Woodlawn?”

“About forty zombies. The numbers are dramatically rising.”

“How many have you eliminated?”

“None, Sir. We’re waiting for the orders.”

“What! You must be kiddin’. Their rise was the order. Soldiers in National are doing their job perfectly. Shoot them before it gets out of control.”

“Yes sir, My apologies, sir, he grabbed a walkie-talkie from the table nearby totally forgetting about tablet communication.

“To all units at Woodland, engage. Shoot on sight.”

Having finished it, he heard sounds of shots coming from inside the cemetery.

“Miles,”

“Yes, Sir?”

“Let everyone know if anything goes wrong.”

“Acknowledged, Sir.”

As he hanged up he felt vibration under his feet. He stepped away and saw the ground fracturing in several places.

“What the heck?” he murmured to himself, as other soldiers gathered around him.

They pointed their weapons at the rising mole hill and waited. A few seconds later they saw something breaking out.

“What is that? A viper?”

“No, some kind of a mole.”

“It’s a fucking zombie,” the third said pressing the trigger shooting its hand.

Nothing happened. The body was still trying to dig itself up.

“The head, idiot,” Miles shouted taking the pistol and waiting for the head to emerge.

And when it did, he took two precise shots right into the forehead.

“I thought you were all trained for this. And when the whole cemetery is full of walking dead, you assume this was a viper?”

“We were, but we didn’t have any field experience with zombies, sir,” a masculine soldier said lowering his gun.

“Neither did I. Anyway, these things can come out anywhere so I need to let the others know.”

As he took out his tablet and selected all zones at the dial menu, he heard voice in his walkie-talkie.

“Sir, there’re too many of them, we can’t make it.”

“Don’t worry soldiers. I’m sending some men to help you right away.”

As soon as he said that, he looked at the men in the nearest tent and shouted.

"It's you lucky day, girls. Take your weapons and help the snipers out there."

Almost immediately about twenty men left the tent and headed for two tunnels.

Miles dialed the number and when he saw that the channel was activated, he sent the message.

"To all units, this is SMA Miles from Woodlawn. Those shits don't break out from graves only. They break everywhere. Whenever a freakin' body was buried it now comes back to live. Stay alert."

He understood that even though he said it in an open channel, the message would reach everybody taking part in the operation. If someone didn't have their tablets switched on, they would notice the message as soon as they turn it on. But at that time all tablets were operating, and the message was simply played instantly in all earpieces. That is how it worked.

14.

In the meantime, unit one was walking along a dark cave not far from where they had left their truck. They had taken everything they could; weapons, first aid kits, food and water. The frightful shrieks were still coming from where they entered, but after spending two days in Hell everyone got accustomed to them. Drops of lava were trickling down along the rocks deepening the channels. Seith was going first.

"I still can't believe what we've accomplished within these two days," Surya said.

"I still can't believe you were dead," Patricia added.

"I still can't believe I'm alive," Dan joined the *can't believe* conversation.

Seith suddenly stopped at the turn and tried to hear what was coming from behind.

“Hush, someone’s there.”

They looked at the pebbly ground as five shadows lengthened. Tokutei drew his sword and leaned against the wall. Seith took out his sword and did the same. The rest stepped back and waited for their reaction. The shadows were getting larger and larger as hissing sounds echoed in the cave. Next five warthens emerged from the corner, and as they did, Tokutei and Seith attacked. Tokutei made a swing down dealing with two at a time, while Seith slashed through the second one, rolled further and cut through the rest.

“Goblins,” Surya whispered.

“I guess not everyone has a ticket to get upstairs,” Michael chortled.

Seith sighed as always when he heard someone invent stupid nicknames for other creatures.

“When are you going to learn that these are not goblins but warthens.”

“Potato, potato,” Surya replied.

They turned the corner and headed further. The cave started to go up and the lane became steeper now.

“What’s that smell?” Dan asked following his nose.

“I feel that, too.”

“To me it smells like shit,” Michael commented covering his nose. “Some demon probably took a dump.”

“You’re not far from the truth,” the demon replied. “We’re near one of the torture lands.

“So now they submerge souls into shit soups? What happened to the pit?” Michael continued.

“You don’t want to know, Michael.”

They moved further. Seith was going as the second one now. He

was looking at the ground thinking of the conspiracy. He and Bishop were in some laboratory filled with fancy equipment and scientific devices. White light was illuminating the room in four places coming from the ceiling and one dimmed light was coming from the only door in the laboratory. Seith was lying on a hospital bed covered with smooth green leather. His coat and hat were hanging on a nearby hanger. Bishop fastened his wrists and ankles with belts to immobilize him.

“Ready?” he asked checking the tightness of the belts. Seith nodded slightly blowing his strand of hair off his forehead. Bishop took a deep breath as he grabbed a very old book from the tablet and started reading. The words that were coming from his mouth were in some ancient language and as soon as began, Seith started to tremble trying to break the belts with his body. The speech lasted for about half a minute and when Bishop finished, Seith stopped moving and his body turned off while a thick black smoke escaped through his eyes and disappeared in the floor. Bishop took a glance at the screen showing the demon’s biosigns and rested on a nearby chair.

A few minutes passed and Seith found himself in Hell. He wasn’t the same man anymore, he looked now like a typical possessor with large black holes where eyes and mouth should be. Hell looked like always, hot, steamy, spacious with reddish, yellowish and brownish colors everywhere. Shrieks and screams of suffering were coming from the distance. Shax’s castle could be seen a few miles ahead. He turned right and before he started running, his way was blocked by two halberds that were being held by two guardians.

“Seith,” one of them spoke with a low voice. “You are banished forever. Under no circumstances are you to be here.”

“I do know that, Rask. Take me to her. I have something she may desire to hear.”

It took them more than two hours to get to the castle. The guardian brought the small demon into a large dining room. Shax was sitting at the first table with two sorcerers on each side. There were many warthens in the southern part of the room tearing a couple of human bodies.

“Seith,” she spoke making the walls tremble. „

“Just here me out before you decide what to do with me,” he replied firmly walking towards them.

“Why should I? After all it was you who rebelled, you killed your own kind, so why should I listen to you?”

“Because I can give you the stolen parts of the Seal.

“The Seal?” Shax spoke.

“And how are you going to do that.”

“By bringing it to you personally.”

Shax dropped her eyes for a moment.

“My brother and I are the two remaining Seal holders. It’s all because of that ASATs. None of the previous attempts succeeded so far. No, but this one is different this one is special. They manage to gather three pieces so far. But I have something special on my own preparing for them.”

“That is what I am talking about. I have been recruited to ASAT and I can bring them all to you.”

“Hmm, interesting, continue.”

“They know about your fortress in Bangkok and they shall attack soon.”

“So what? Let them attack. The fortress is impregnable.”

“This time, they are more powerful than any previous teams.”

“Seith, They shall not win. I want to take something from them.”

“Then if you say so. I shall bring them down to you afterwards.”

“If they ever escape my fortress. But if you are to fulfill your

words, than a reward shall be waiting for you.”

A few hours passed and Seith returned to his host body. Bishop was fast asleep at the moment but on hearing the movement, he woke up and looked at the demon.

“Did she buy it?”

15.

It was almost eight in the morning. Every soldier, sniper, hunter and others were on their positions. Snipers took towers that were made especially for them. Three snipers on each side of each tower. The others were lying along the walls or on the towers built around the highest trees. Hunters and marines were in tents waiting for further orders. Some of them were checking the mission status on their tablets others were getting mentally prepared for the fight. In Charlie zone, three hunters were working on their tablets. One of them was checking the satellite feed. Others were watching Alpha Point from Eagle Eye. Suddenly, all tablets started to beep as the message from Miles played.

“Too all units, this is Miles from Woodlawn. Those shits don’t break out from graves only. They break everywhere...”

“Ha! I told you,” a teenage girl with short red hair said.

“It’s not funny Dorothy!” her mother replied listening to the rest of the message.

“...Stay alert.”

“Imagine this; every single person that drowned, or was buried somewhere before people even established cities here will now be brought to life only to come here.”

“Oh stop it mum, Let them come. I can’t wait fighting.”

“If only you were so good as you’re eager,” some other hunter spoke listening to the conversation.

The tablets beeped again. And Arthur’s voice spread.

“You all have probably heard Miles message. Alpha Point is

no longer the only gate. We're expecting the undead to come from the sea as well. Stay alert as Miles said."

Jason and Lian were in a jeep that was carrying them along the road towards the tunnel. Amanda was already waiting for them at the very entrance. She waved to the truck as it approached, waited until it stopped and jumped in to the back.

"So I guess we're goin' there together."

"I guess we are," Lian replied nervously fiddling with her fingers.

Her hand started to shake as she imagined what would await them in Alpha Point.

"Maybe it's a bad idea to go there. If everything that has ever died here is now going to come from everywhere..."

"Stop that, Lian," Jason interrupted slightly irritated pressing the accelerator as hard as he could. "Alpha Point may not be the only way to the island, but it's still the main gate. If we want to help, we should join the rest there."

"Hmm... you're right. Zombies are not the only creatures we will face."

Having said that, she saw the sunlight again as the jeep drove from the tunnel to Alpha Point area. The road was blocked from two sides by tanks and Hummers. Snipers were already on their positions mostly on the roofs of the Alpha Point houses. Many a soldier was inside watching the area through digital scopes or binoculars. Other men were laying on the hill on the east side where they had a good view over the beach, roads and the trees. From that point they could see two other roadblocks. One on the boarder of Pacifica and Daly City and the other one in the south part of Pacifica. Jason parked the jeep in front of the houses and as soon as they got off they headed towards SMA Williams.

"Arthur sent us here to help," Lian announced.

"The more the merrier," Williams replied. "I want you to go

to the second floor and wait for any activity.”

16.

In the meantime, in Juliet Zone, one of the snipers was lying on the roof of the castle, slowly scanning the rocks below. The castle was about one hundred yards above the sea level, so he had to use his weapon's sight to see anything. He was moving his scope from left to right. Nothing strange was in sight. All he could see were the crashing waves and birds floating on the surface of the ocean. Then he heard his teammate's voice.

“Zombie on the rocks.”

He pulled back to watch the area with his bare eye and spotted something moving in a minute bay below. He immediately pointed his rifle there, but before he pressed the trigger, his teammate eliminated the threat.

“Dark clouds are comin’,” he heard someone's voice in the earwig. “It's gonna be way tougher now.”

He looked towards the land and it was true. Clouds were coming from the land, slowly covering the rising sun. Another shot came from somewhere in the island, and another. Then one from the other side of the castle, and yet some other from the island.

“They're coming from everywhere,” he whispered to his fellow snipers lying next to him.

“There're a few hundred of us. They won't get past.”

17.

National Cemetery turned into a slaughter house. There was no fence and both snipers and marines had to engage. SMA Smith was sitting by the radio listening to what was going on inside.

“Two on left!”

Two loud shots with a series of other shots in the background.

“Taken down.”

“Dorney, behind you!”

“They got me... shoot’em!”

Another series of shots.

“I’m alright.”

“Fifteen on your two.”

Smith had to give some orders. It was too dangerous to risk his men’s lives up there. He grasped the earpiece and said.

“All marines, move back to the buildings. Snipers, cover them.”

“Acknowledged,” “Roger that,” came the answers intervened by echoing shots.

He stood up and walked out of the tent when another message came through the walkie-talkie. “Sir, we need to use the mounted guns, they’re heading for the streets.”

“Do not let them break to the street. Take them down. Take them down now!”

“There’re way too many of them,” he heard back.

Smith made a grunting noise, as he saw earth breaking in several places outside the memorial park. He knew he had no choice but to use full power now. He took out his tablet, selected his whole battalion and sent a video message.

“This is Smith, all units engage now. I repeat I all units engage now.”

Another ten soldiers ran inside, while the rest stayed in the camp and focused on the runners. He walked towards weaponry and grabbed one of the FN SCAR assault rifles that proved to be the best in such combat.

“They’re breaking through the Fisher Loop,” he heard some voice in the earpiece.

It was not far from here. He took two soldiers with him and ran towards the Gold Gate Club near the Fisher Loop.

“Snipers! Do what you do!” he shouted through the earpiece.

Fisher Loop was in the southern part of the cemetery. There were several buildings around, and on each and every one of them, there were two snipers. One of them was carefully scanning the area eliminating every threat that came into his sight. He saw the SMA and two other soldiers running from the main camp.

"On your three, sir," he spoke through the channel.

They reacted quickly and took three precise shots to take the enemies out.

"Man down!" they heard from someone in the battle field.

"Damn it! I said clearly to move back! Don't go inside, stay outside," Smith said through his teeth.

Having said that, he stopped as he saw several undead walking away about a quarter mile from their position.

"They broke through, God Damn it!"

He quickly took out his tablet and selected five closest roadblocks.

"They're goin' your way," he sent the message as he heard a growling noise behind him, followed by a shot.

Straight away he turned around and saw a zombie falling down on its back as blood trickled from its grayish forehead.

"That was a close one," he murmured.

Unfortunately there was no time to rest.

"Sir, they going out through the woods at Park Boulevard and Nauman Road."

"Humvees, engage!"

"Already engaging, sir."

The black clouds covered the sky above the cemetery blocking the sunlight. These were not usual clothes, they seemed to be much thicker and denser and the day became as dark as during a storm. The visibility got limited and most of the marines got soaked with fear.

"Night visions if you can't see!"

18.

“Sir, we’re losing the visual,” one of the soldiers sitting in headquarters in Maldito Castle announced.

“The clouds are getting, too thick,” Morris added zooming the satellite.

They directed the satellite at Golden Gate cemetery. The clouds didn’t block the view there yet, but they were getting denser. Just before they covered everything, everyone could see several dozens of zombies leaving the cemetery and getting towards the city.

“They’re out! They’re out.”

“And we lost the visual.”

On hearing this, Arthur dropped his head and leaned it against his palm. Bishop smacked his lips and boomed,

“Fire the other Eagle Eyes immediately.”

“Yes, that’s a clever idea,” Arthur responded feeling Red Bull working in his body, but his attitude quickly changed when he caught a glimpse of Golden Gate zone on one of the screens. He saw SMA Johnson responding through his tablet PC. The background however, was filled with walking corpses and the audio was intervened by gunshots of various weapons. The old man thought for a while.

“We need to warn the roadblocks.”

“Already done, sir,” Johnson replied.

“Are there any victims, Morris?”

Morris was in the headquarters sitting at a main computer in the middle. He typed something, took a glimpse at the screen and replied.

“So far, we’ve lost two at National, and one at Woodland.”

It occurred to Arthur that what he saw a moment ago was happening in Golden Gate, and as Johnson said there were no fatalities. That view terrified him, so he could only imagine what

was going on in the other cemeteries.

“What about our zones?”

“Everything’s going according to plan. Nothing reached the beach... so far.”

19.

Lian and Jason were in the northern house of Alpha Point, which was the first one and was facing the main road. Lian was on the second floor, sitting on a chair near the northern window, while Jason and Amanda were on the first floor talking to other soldiers. On the roof of the first building were lying five snipers. Eye was among them listening to the shots coming from the cities and the island. There were also two other sniper rifles with no one operating them.

“What’s up with those two?” he asked a fellow on his right.

“They’re operated by a computer. Ya’ know, like in a video game.”

“Good for game players.”

“True, true. I bet some teenage hunters are operating them as we speak.”

He wasn’t wrong. The rifles were connected to two laptops placed on a table one floor lower. The table itself was stacked with twelve other laptops, every single one of them was connected to a sniper rifle somewhere on the roof. People who operated them were hunters only, and none of them was older than thirty. These were the people who had spent their life on playing various shooters and practicing their accuracy. Having these skills they were soon spotted by hunters and were recruited, trained and given opportunities to use their skills for a greater good. The rifles were easily operated by computer mouses and were as accurate as the ones operated by real snipers. There was still one more advantage over the regular weapons, namely the digital sight.

Every *player* could easily scroll down or up to zoom in or out.

One of the hunters, a teenage boy with spiky, red hair and stylish sunglasses was checking the area along the rocky beach when a voice of their SMA came through the earwig.

“We’ve got some movement in the north east hills.”

He glanced at the huge screen showing the feed from Eagle Eye and yes, there was something moving. He directed his rifle there and zoomed in two hundred times.

“Guys, we’ve got some zombies.”

There were eight walking corpse at the top of the hill. They looked very old; their heads were grayish skulls with no skin at all and their torn, ragged clothes covered only some parts.

Both hunters and snipers directed their barrels there.

“Distance two thousand feet.”

“Look at their clothes,” some other hunter said in astonishment.

“They’re not from the last two centuries for sure,” came the answer from the red-hair boy.

“I think they were buried somewhere there long before civilization reached the west,” Eye said.

“Guys, no time for chitchat. Let’s deal with them.”

Gunshots spread and ten projectiles sped towards the undead. The powerful, 50 caliber bullets made their heads vaporized. Two of the bodies rolled down the hill.

“Tango down,” they heard in the earwigs.

“More tangos coming from the south,” SMA announced.

Eye rolled to the left to take a sip of some fizzy water. As he was sipping he looked up at the dark clouds that crossed the island border. They were as dark as the storm ones, and it didn’t seem to clear up soon.

“Gush, I just hope it won’t start raining,” he murmured.

The sniper on his left looked at him and replied with a silent

laugh,

“Then you’d wish you were one of the hunters downstairs, heh.”

“Distance?” he heard in the earwig a female voice.

“One mile.”

“Take the shots.”

20.

The situation in Golden Gate National Cemetery was getting worse. The corpses had broken the west fence and crossed the freeway. The soldiers tried to eliminate as many as they could at the gate to the venue. Those who crossed the freeway were finished off by snipers waiting for them on the rooftops of houses along the Creastwood Drive. Those who went passed them were later killed by roadblocks.

Sergeant Davies was running along the northern fence towards the Junipero Serra Freeway situated in the south. He took two shots, right after he had spotted two zombies limping towards the broken fence. He took a glance left at the cemetery, and he stopped for a second. There were more than ten thousand zombies heading for the south.

“There’s a horde of those mother fuckers walking towards you.”

“They won’t pass the freeway. The snipers can manage,” he heard back.

“Not ten thousand.”

Having said that, he felt a dreadful pain in his back as if something had hit him. He felt the wind blow in his face and another pain in his torso and face. Being in shock, he opened his eyes and saw that he was several feet further from where he had been standing. His head was spinning but he was able to see a dark figure near him.

“Davies, do you copy? What happened?” he heard in the tiny speaker.

He realized he had been pushed by this mysterious figure. It was definitely too strong for a zombie and certainly not a human. He blinked several times to make the picture sharper and when he opened his eyes the mysterious figure was right at his face. He could easily see now what it was; a vampire.

“Come in Davies,” he heard again.

He tried to say something but the vampire grabbed his throat so hard that he was unable to speak. Yet, he remembered he had a silver knife attached to his ankle. Still fighting for his life, he tried to reach for it. He couldn’t even raise his leg high enough. Then suddenly, he took a deep breath as the tight grip let go of him. He fell onto the ground and quickly reached for the knife at same time noticing that one of the undead attacked the vampire. The creature grabbed the zombie by its arm.

“You’re were not suppose to attack me, you idiot,” and as he was saying that he threw it somewhere towards the horde. Before he turned around he stopped and froze as the silver knife cut his stomach. He swung his arm as hard as he could hitting Davies, who flew towards the window in the nearby building and landed inside. The vampire fell on his knees and tried to remove the knife. Then two other zombies knocked him onto the ground. Feeling helpless he greeted his teeth and tried to push them off but, the silver had caused enough damage to weaken him. The corpses crouched at him and began to rip its body apart, getting to the brain as quickly as they could.

A few hundred feet from them, in the camp, SMA Johnson was helping the others guard the entrance. There were twenty soldiers protecting each side of the ripped gate. One of the marines was slowly retreating when he stumbled and tripped. The others noticed it and ran to him to help him on his feet. Then a

few undead made a slash at them. One of them bit the soldier that was trying to help his friend. The others quickly shot it, but it was too late. He fell onto the ground as his neck trickled with blood. His body started to tremble.

"Come quickly!" the other soldier shouted getting back on his feet.

Johnson noticed the whole situation and walked quickly towards them.

"You can't leave him there. You know what you have to do."

"With all due respect, sir. We cannot. He's our friend."

"What you're gonna see in a minute ain't gonna be your friend. Eh... I'll do it myself," he sighed and shot the soldier right into the head without any hesitation.

An awkward silence spread for a moment only to be broken by a message on their tablets.

It was an audio message and was automatically played. Every single soldier heard it.

"This is Woodlawn. We've been attacked by vampires. I repeat. There're vampires on the streets."

The awkward silence turned into a hopeless one.

"What are the orders, sir?"

Johnson stood there speechless trying to gather his thoughts.

"Sir, the orders."

Then he heard another message.

"Eagle Eye shows hundreds of unidentified objects coming towards us from Sneath Lane.

"This is sniper team from Sneath Lane. We can see the objects."

"Are they vampires? Confirm?" someone else spoke on the channel.

"They're movin' too fast."

"Are they vampires? Confirm!"

“Affirmative.”

Johnson raised his head and snapped out of the moment of weakness.

“We can’t protect this cemetery from all sides. All units from Sneath Lane, El Camino Real and Rockwood retreat to the camp. Regroup into groups of four. One pair will deal with the fucking corpses, one with the bloodsuckers.”

“What about the corpses that already got onto the streets?”

“We can’t deal with them. They’re now roadblockers’ problem.”

21.

Jack reached the headquarters and sat at the first, wide desk on the right. His eyes rested on the enormous live map of Maldito island. Each zone was displayed on separate screen. He could see the snipers easily eliminating the undead that were trying to get from the ocean. Then he heard a message from Woodlawn. No sooner had he finished listening to it, than Arthur’s and Bishop’s faces showed up on the tenth screen.

“It can’t be true, Arthur. Vampires don’t go out during the day.”

“They don’t come out when the sun shines. These thick clouds must be some kind of spell.”

“We have already walking dead walking everywhere, and now vampires coming from the south and east in such great numbers? I don’t understand.”

“Jack, you didn’t hear Paymon’s talking to some important vampire a few weeks ago,” the old man said taking another sip of a hot cup of coffee, “But I did, and I heard their conspiracy. They had a deal that when this whole thing would be over, vampires would get the whole state for themselves and no one else. That’s why there’re so many of them. Make sure, Alpha Point is ready for

them.”

“I’m sending them a message as we speak.”

22.

SMA Williams was in the Alpha Zone headquarters situated on the second floor. The hunters on the table nearby where slowly taking down zombies emerging on the hills. Among them there was Dorothy Lednický, Martin Harris; a twenty-four year old well-built man with short beard and no hair on his head, and also First Sergeant Mark Jackson; a thirty-six year old black man with short hair, a beard and glasses. The others were mostly soldiers and hunters.

“Coffee, sir?” one of the soldiers asked carrying a tray filled with hot cups.

“Yes, thanks.”

Having said that, all tablets beeped as the message was read in their earwigs by the inbuilt voice synthesizer.

“A great number of vampires has been spotted coming from the south and south-east. Prepare yourselves.”

He wasn’t surprised at all. As soon as he took another sip, he stood up, then walked towards the window overlooking the east regions. He made sure he’s selected everyone in the zone on his tablet and made an announcement.

“Everybody, listen up. The vampires have appeared way sooner than we expected. I want every marine to prepare all the necessary equipment and every second sniper to change their ammo.”

“Just a short reminder for those who haven’t faced bloodsuckers before,” Martin who was sitting at the table said switching the ammo button on the laptop. “These creatures are damn fast, so don’t waste your ammo if there’re further than two hundred feet.”

"Thanks, Martin," some other hunter replied. "Like we didn't know that. Anyway, it's gonna get way tougher now, so good luck, guys."

Eye was lying on the roof. He was responsible for the vampires, so he changed the ammo, and went on scanning the northern-east parts.

"Any experience?" he heard from the sniper next to him, Kenneth Thompson; a thirty-nine year old, white male, bald with trimmed beard and moustache.

"With vampires? One day shooting. You?"

"None."

"Don't worry. It's gonna be alright."

23.

In the meantime, Woodlawn Memorial Park had worse and worse situation. Dozens of zombies got to the south part of the cemetery, then through the nearby mall and into the park. The snipers couldn't manage to keep with their great numbers but they did their best. One of the snipers was scanning the parking lot from the mall roof, successfully eliminating the undead. Then he heard his SMA's voice in the earpieces.

"A few vampires spotted running across the cemetery. Light'em up."

He turned around towards the second group of snipers directed to the north at the cemetery itself. There were also several marines on the rooftop that were responsible for the huge spotlights.

"You heard what SMA said, lets burn those bitches," a Mexican soldier said checking the settings on the laptop connected two the spotlights.

"There they are," his teammate pointed with his barrel at more than a few speeding dark figures across the cemetery.

“Here we go.”

Having said that, he grabbed the two joysticks at the laptop and turned on the spotlights. Almost immediately two lamps shone and two thick, white glares shot out towards the cemetery. He was a good shooter and without any problems he followed the dark figures with the rails. Loud, horrible shrieks and squeaks came from that direction, leaving nothing else, but clothes and black flakes.

“It wasn’t so hard, was it?” he asked his teammate, yet he heard no response. “David?”

He glanced left at his teammate and froze in shock. The soldier was lying dead on the roof with his head twisted and above him was standing a frightening female vampire with a long Katana sword. The snipers didn’t see it, for they were too occupied with the zombies in the parking lot.

“Vampires on the roof!” he managed to shout as the creature raised his sword and prepared himself to strike a blow.

The vampire swung her Katana with its tip pointed down aiming at the soldier’s chest, but the victim to be rolled away. Straight away he turned around to see where the next blow will be, but to his surprise, the vampire was lying numb on the roof.

“We need some backup on the mall roof,” he heard one of the snipers.

As he looked at him, he realized it was him who had just slain the creature.

“Rodriguez! Aim at one of those freakish things on the roof,” he shouted.

And he did so, but soon he was thrown onto the ground one more time.

“Another one?” he murmured hitting the enemy with his elbow, but what he heard back was a moan. “Fuck!” it came to him what he had done wrong.

He forgot to shoot the dead soldier on the head and now a zombie was attacking him. Swiftly he grabbed the pistol from his belt and made the final shot. It wasn't easy for him, but he understood it was the right thing to do.

Another spotlights launched from the Hummers at the main gate. That meant more and more vampires must've appeared somewhere there.

It was true. The soldiers were protecting the gate doing more than their best. They were now in teams of two. One had sharp ammo, one had silver or poisoned bullets. Rodriguez burnt another few vampires and followed a larger group that was tearing towards the mall.

"Damn," he cursed under his breath when he saw them disappearing behind the wall.

"They're on the other side!" he heard someone yelling.

"They're totally ignoring us."

The vampires emerged again in the parking lot and headed towards the main street.

"We're not their aim. Maldito is," SMA's voice sounded. "Kill as many as you can. If the roadblocks don't finish'em off, Alpha will."

A group of zombies were hobbling dangerously close to the gate near the camp. The soldier quickly aimed at them and fired. Two shots, two kills, two bodies fell on the ground among the rest. Before he took another shot something threw the zombies towards them.

"Duck!" he was able to shout as a corpse flew over him. However, the second one knocked his colleague onto the ground.

"Jackson, come on!" he yelled finishing the zombie off. Next he saw three vampires a few feet from him. They had thrown the zombies. Jackson sprang to his feet and took a series of shots in the dark, hoping he would hit some of them. He saw

two of those creatures collapsing but the third one passed among them and made for the camp.

"We've been breached," a voice came from the camp, followed by a burst of shots.

"Tango down," someone else shouted.

He reloaded his gun and as he looked back up, he saw many of these creatures running right at them. His finger squeezed the trigger like an instinct. It was not enough even though there were a couple more marines using silver and poisoned bullets around the tunnel. The vampires were getting closer and closer. He understood they won't stop them, so not releasing the finger from the trigger he closed his eyes, turned his head left and prepared himself for the inevitable. A few seconds passed and a sound of screams met his ears. As he opened his eyes again, he found himself still standing on the ground dazzled by the spotlights rails.

"It's not a playground, marine, move your ass and fight!"

24.

Snipers in Echo Zone had a few minutes of rest, as the hunters took care of the intruders with their rifles connected to computers. About fifteen bodies had been thrown onto the beach. Shots were coming from other zones every few seconds and in comparison with zones on the land it was rather calm, for now. A couple of snipers were having second breakfast in one of the tents. It was too dark outside not to have the lights switched on.

"How many have you taken, H.Q.?"

"So far, two," he replied chewing his sandwich. "You?"

"One, but she was quite a catch. I'd fuck'er if she wasn't dead."

On hearing this, a tall, Afro-American man sitting at the edge

stood up and spoke a little bit frustrated and irritated.

“I think you both forgot why we all are here.”

“No, Sergeant Major,” one of them replied straightening up his back and raising his head.

SMA Miller came up to them and stopped, putting his arms behind the back.

“It’s not a competition. We’re shooting human corpses here, for God’s sake. They used to be someone’s families, friends, wives, husbands or children. It’s not funny at all. We’re fighting here for the future of our world. If we fail, the world will cease to exist. Right now I’m having doubts whether I made a good decision choosing some of you for this war.”

“No, sir. It was just a stupid joke, sir. To break the tension, sir.”

“Jokes about what we are doing here are not funny! Do you think our brothers at Golden Gate or in Woodlawn are joking right now?”

“No, sir.”

“They’re too busy sacrificing their lives to make sure we’d have a bigger chance to survive all of this, and...”

His thought was interrupted by a beeping sound of all tablets. It was a message from National Cemetery.

SMA Miller, greeted his teeth as he wanted to continue what he was talking about, but before he opened his mouth someone ran to the tent yelling,

“Watch the feed from National’s Eagle Eye. You must see this.”

Every free person in each zone opened the feed link on their tablets.

Arthur and Bishop were gazing at the view of National Cemetery from Eagle Eye hanging about two miles over the venue.

“It’s started,” Bishop’s jaw dropped.

"It looks worse than I imagined. It's going to get pretty tough from now," Arthur replied.

In the headquarters below the feed was displayed on one of the huge screens. Everyone was gazing at what was going there. Right in the middle of the cemetery a red circle appeared, about twenty hundred yards in diameter. The edge of the circle started to flicker and glow as the middle turned black.

"Put Smith on the speaker," Arthur ordered.

The blackness inside the circles turned into grey, red and brown as thousands of little dots started to fill its surface.

"Smith here."

"Take your men and get out of there ASAP."

"We can't sir. We promised to do our best to hold them off as long as we could."

Everyone could hear low sounds coming from the background. Then the sounds turned into horrible shouts and cries. The dots in the circle spread in all directions as if someone poured out reddish-brown paint.

"Oh my God," someone said from the headquarters gaping at it in disbelief.

"God damn it Smith. You're not gonna survive this. Run quickly till you can."

The thousands dots flooded the cemetery running in all direction. No word came back. They could only hear shouts and cries accompanied by thousands of thuds and steps that were interfered by sounds of swooshing bullets. Everyone in other zones, both on the island as well as on the land was listening to the audio feed from National. Those who were not occupied watched the video feed, too, those who couldn't, only listened. But they all heard the same; shouts, shots, moans, guffaws, cries, explosions, thuds and inhuman noises.

Jack was glancing from the video feed to the screen showing their

life signs. The green dots representing each soldier became all red as the reddish and green stains covered the whole cemetery and the roads around. It all lasted for a couple of seconds and then became silent. Bishop raised his head and looked at Arthur. He was concerned and disappointed.

“We lost them. We lost the National,” he kept repeating. A green earpiece appeared on the fort screen. Bishop peeped at it and said quietly.

“Arthur, it’s the president.”

The old man rubbed his face with his open palms.

“Put me through.”

“Arthur, what the heck just happened there.”

“Sir, Hell opened, the demons are out.”

“We’ve all seen it here. I’m sending eighty more fighters from LA.”

“No fighters. B2s. Do it, sir.”

“Then I’ll send both.”

Bishop cleared his throat, as he wiped a tear from his left eye.

“I’ll order all roadblocks in the north to retreat to Alpha Point.”

Arthur hanged up and nodded unwillingly. Deep in his heart he understood it was for the best now. Bishop selected all roadblocks in the area and sent the message.

25.

One of such roadblocks was situated on the junction of Sloat Boulevard and 35. Four Hummers were standing parallel to the road. On each Hummer there was one marine holding the fifty-caliber mounted gun, gaping at the distance awaiting the supernaturals to come out. At the back of each vehicles there was a three-foot spotlight mounted and operated by one person in a tent a few feet behind the Hummers. Between the Hummers and

the tent there were twenty soldiers with regular assault rifles scanning the area and eliminating any threats. The group was under the command of First Sergeant Bruce Lenox, who was in the tent with two medics and four soldiers operating the spotlights. This was not all. Ten snipers were lying on the roofs of the houses built along the Lakeshore Drive. They were the first to see and take out any threats that went out from National. The road around was covered with dead bodies of zombies with holes in their heads or sometimes no heads. Mary Wilson, a twenty-five year old female sniper was lying on the first roof. She had long, blonde hair pinned into a pony tail, under a bdu cap. She was responsible for the whole east side of Sloat Boulevard. As she was reloading, she could hear some hum combined with racket coming from the north.

"Try to ignore those noises," she heard her superior's voice.

She was scanning the area about three hundred feet away when she saw something moving in the trees growing at the road. Two shapes passed the street in the twinkling of an eye.

"Vampires," she murmured to herself.

Making sure, she had the right ammo, she pointed her CheyTac M310-R at the direction where the figures ran.

"Stop, stop, stop for God's sake."

Mary waited for a clean shot while following after the figures with her scope.

"Yes, that's it," she whispered seeing them stop right at three other creatures that emerged from the sewage.

Not waiting any longer, she squeezed the trigger and took the shot. The bullet flew right into the neck of the first vampire. The others immediately spread, disappearing from her sight. Then she spotted two corpses, walking from the same direction. She aimed at the first one and as she was about to press the trigger, a

message played instantly in her earwig.

"This is General Bishop. Every roadblock in the northern-east part is to retreat to Alpha Point immediately."

"Just let me finish them off."

She wanted to press the trigger, but another voice spread through the earwig disturbing her.

"You heard the message, if you don't wanna end up like the National, we need to move to the south. I see each and every one of you at the tent in ninety seconds."

Two minutes later they were all down. Two Hummers took the lead, the transporter truck was in the middle and the other two Hummers took the back.

"We have ten miles to Alpha Point," Lenox said sitting in the first Hummer. "It should take us about fifteen minutes. Keep your eyes wide open. We ain't gonna meet any other roadblocks on our way."

"Zombies on twelve!" someone shouted.

They saw seven undead walking along the 35 road. There were five females and two males among them and their bodies seemed to be no older than two months.

"There're two more... three more ahead."

"They're all seem to be going to the south."

"Arthur was right."

"No time for chitchat, take them out."

26.

In the meantime, in Alpha Point the situation was getting more intense. Williams was walking around the table with laptops, thinking about the National. So many people died so quickly, so painfully. He saw one of the marines crying at the northern window.

"What is it marine?" he asked walking towards him.

"My-My brother's just been killed in National," he replied clutching his beret.

Williams understood it was difficult at the moment, but he had to do something. He'd just lost a few friends there, too. And that thought couldn't leave his head. He crouched at the soldier and pat him on his arm.

"I know it's tough, but you have to understand that people are gonna die today. You brother died fighting for the future of the Earth. This is what we're all doing here. We're fighting for the future. Just don't give up, soldier. Just don't give up."

Then they heard a message from Eye on the roof.

"First road block is coming."

"Good, let them in," Williams replied standing up he headed towards the huge screen showing the feed from Eagle Eye.

"Put National on the screen," he ordered to the men responsible for what the screen was displaying. Almost immediately the picture changed into National Cemetery. The reddish and brown dots covered the whole cemetery and were heading towards the street Veterans Boulevard. The northern part of the cemetery was in flames. Everything was destroyed.

"Sir, there're twenty four people alive," one of the soldiers said looking at the life signs.

"What?"

"Those are mostly snipers spread around the cemetery."

"Tell Bishop to contact them. They must join the others."

"On my way, sir."

Williams was staring at screen for a while looking at the demons organizing their route.

"They're gonna march to us. If... um...they have approximately seventeen miles to walk... It should take them five and a half hour to reach us."

“What about the jets?” Lian asked sanding by the east window.

“The jets should hit them in a few minutes. But don’t count on air support to wipe them out. They’ll only slow them down. Anyway, by six hundred we’re gonna have the fight of our lives here.”

Eye stood for a while to stretch his legs. He could see the first convoy entering Alpha Point. When he lied back, he checked the ammo status on his Barrett. So far, one empty clip and six bullets left in the current one. He was about to point his rifle at Maldito island to check how the others were doing.

“What are you doing?” Thompson, the sniper next to him asked.

Before he said anything another message came through the earwig.

“This is General Craig from the south division. After losing National, we have decided to move our western flank to the hills in the southern part of Pacifica. You should be able to see our troops soon. Do not shoot south further than two hundred yards. I repeat, do not shoot south further than two hundred yards. Our buys will be dealing with that region from now on.”

Eye and Thompson looked south at the hills. They both grabbed their rifles and pointed them there. In the sight they saw a wall of men appearing on the green hills that made the border between Pacifica and the south part of the peninsula.

“I feel safer already,” Thompson smiled.

“Safer?” Eye said surprised. “If they move to the hills they won’t be able to help us here. None of their bullets will be able to reach us.”

“But they’re gonna take care of the southern region.”

“So what if everything comes from the north.”

Having heard the message, SMA Williams grabbed his tablet,

selected the group in the south part of Alpha Point and sent them a message.

"I want you to join the others in the north and east. The south is being taken care of."

27.

Arthur was sitting in his office, alone. After losing the National he became doubtless and hopeless. He'd switched off all the screens and was sitting on his armchair staring at the window. He began to wonder with his mind around the worst possible ending to all of this until he was snapped out of these thoughts when he heard Bishop enter his office.

"God Damn it, Arthur. Don't even think of losing it. We've been preparing for this for a few years for what? For you just sitting here? I told you back then that people would die. Damn it, you told them the same two days ago. If you're crying over National, I've got good news for you."

The old man slowly raised his head and directed his eyes with little hope left inside at Bishop.

"Over twenty people are still alive. Orders have been sent for them to join other roadblocks in the east."

"What about the ring? We would never be able to close Hell with no ring."

"The worst possible scenario is to kill everything that goes through that whole."

"Everything? There're over thirty million demons entering our world every hour. How do you imagine killing all of them?"

"The B2s are on their way. In the meantime, I suggest you should come with me to the headquarters and stay there."

Arthur nodded unwillingly and stood up. Straight away he felt this hope again and energy to fight.

"We need to prepare Alpha Point for the impact. Tell the

soldiers to activate the turrets.”

“And that’s what I’m talking about,” Bishop smiled.

28.

Bright, yellowish light became visible in the distance as unit one was advancing through the cave. They had met numerous creatures on their way, mostly warthens and a few possessors. The light was getting closer and closer.

“Finally, I can see something brighter than the torch light,” Dan exclaimed joyfully running towards the exit.

“Dan, stop!” Seith raised his voice, but the boy didn’t listen. He was a few feet from the exit when his eyes got used to the light and saw what was on the other side. To his surprise and shock, there was a precipice over the road they had fallen onto with the truck and millions of demons down below walking toward a bright portal a few miles further. On seeing this he started to swing his arms as if he tried to stop. His momentum was so high that when he stopped moving his legs, he skidded towards the gap. He lost the ground with his left leg and leaning to the back, he lost his balance.

“Shit,” he said to himself realizing he would fall. As he began to drop, he felt a grip on his collar and a strong pull to the back.

“Why the hell are you so reckless?” he heard Surya who had just saved him. “I’ve already lost you twice, I’m not gonna lose you again. I won’t let it.”

Dan felt shivers as he sprang to his feet.

“I-I just thought.”

“Eh, Dan,” Tokutei and the others caught up with them. Tokutei looked down. The demons were marching approximately hundred feet below them. He scanned the area and saw a small path going slightly up to the right. The problem was that the path

was a few inches wide.

"I guess we need to get to the top over there," he assumed peeping at the demon.

"There is no other way."

Patricia leaned out through the gap. She could see the lava river far below the road.

"What if they see us?"

"Then we will fail," the demon replied taking off his hat and letting it hang on his neck.

"Are you comin'?" they heard from Tokutei who was already outside, moving step by step to the right leaning against the wall with his back. He could feel the vibration made by millions of feet spreading across the whole mountain.

"He really wants to get there quick," Michael added joining in.

As they were slowly moving along the wall, Surya couldn't take her eyes off the portal.

"Look, they go in thousands through the portal," she whispered.

Michael took a peek at the wide, bright tunnel of light as the army disappeared inside.

"I just hope our guys can manage them upstairs."

One of the possessors was impatiently marching after a huge guardian.

"I can't wait to be there, just a few seconds, only a few seconds."

"Don't be so impatient," his fellow demon said. We're all gonna be there."

"I wanna be there now," he replied speeding up walking into the guardian in front of him.

He heard back a grunting noise as the guardian turned back and gave the creature an angry look with his frightening, yellow eyes.

“Sorry, big fellow, I’m just so excited.”

“Like you never were outside.”

The guardian turned back. The tunnel of light was enormous. It was at least two hundred feet tall and about half a mile wide. They entered the light and everything became pure white. They felt no weight, nothing for a few seconds and then the light disappeared revealing a lawn full of broken graves, green trees and tall buildings in the distance. The sky was dark, almost black.

“Keep marching south!” someone shouted.

The possessor took a good look around admiring the view.

“When it’s over I’m gonna...”

His sentence was cut by a huge explosion in the cemetery causing massive destruction in the area. Thousands of demons vaporized or were torn into millions of pieces. The explosion created a cloud of dust slowly filling the cemetery and blocking the view. The rumble of jet engines was coming from above.

29.

“The bombing started,” Eye announced seeing several planes flying towards the northern parts.

Other snipers turned around facing north and watched what was happening behind the hills. A huge mushroom made of smoke and fire rose above the hills. Then another appeared, and another. Lian and Jason were in the zone headquarters watching the feed from Eagle Eye. The cemetery was completely covered by a cloud of dust. Other explosions appeared on the road where the demons were marching.

“Another convoy arrived, sir,” a voice came through the headset.

“Good,” Williams replied. “Bring your best snipers to the headquarters.”

“Yes, sir.”

Having heard that, everyone heard low, muffled sound similar to a thunder.

"The sound of explosions," Lian said under her breath.

"Look," Jason pointed at the screens as the cloud of ash and dust started to thin out.

Suddenly, hundreds of reddish objects emerged from the clouds rising up as if some kind of a swarm.

"What are those?" one of the baffled soldiers asked.

The objects were getting higher and higher. It took only seconds for everyone to realize what they were.

"Flying demons," Williams murmured.

Flying demons were a nightmare in Hell and were far worse on Earth. Dark as it was, it was a perfect place for them to operate, and having quite complicated structures in the city, they made an ideal cover and a hideout.

"Sir, look!" Martin, the hunter said turning his laptop around. Almost immediately everyone gathered around the computer only to watch what was displayed on a nineteen-inch screen. The picture showed a live view from one of the rifles on the roof. It was connected to a digital scope making everything look more visible. The rifle itself was pointed at the swarm of demons seventeen miles from Alpha Point. They saw a cloud of reddish monsters attacking the jets.

"Master Sergeant Mary Wilson reporting for duty, sir," a female voice came from the direction of the stairs.

"One minute," Williams replied staring at the screen and completely ignoring the woman.

Mary came closer the group, released her blonde, straight hair from the bun and tied them back. She stopped behind the marines and tried to see anything on the screen, but short as she was, she couldn't see anything.

"Put their channel on the speakers," Williams ordered.

A moment later they could hear what the pilots were saying.

“They’re on your tail, Asura!... Eject! Eject!... Man down Man...Hendrix, God damn it... It’s on my wing, I’ve lost the wing, ejecting now...look at its teeth... Dodge this mother fucker... I got’em... Airsquad One, abort the mission, abort abort... aborting...shit..gotta land somewhere... man down... we lost Cruise... Return to the base for God’s sake... Airsquad One, do you copy? Airsquad one? Do you copy? Fuck.”

They saw a few explosions in the air, three machines falling down; one crashing somewhere in the hills and two in the water.

“Oh no,” Lian shook her head seeing what these demons were capable of,
But what she saw next made her take her weapon as chill ran down her spine.

“They’re not returning to the others,” Jason murmured.

“They’re heading this way,” Dorothy Lednický, a female hunter added.

SMA quickly moved towards the second table, where he left his tablet. He poked it several times with his finger and started to speak.

“Several thousand demons are flying this way. All snipers to the roof and northern windows.”

Having heard that, Mary turned around and headed for the stairs leading to the roof. She rushed there with several other snipers following her. Among them, she could see a few men from her roadblock and a several from her previous missions. As soon as she got to the roof she spotted a gap between Eye and Thompson. She ran there, took her Cheytac M310-R off her back and asked,

“May I lay down here?”

“Of course, suit yourself,” Eye replied.

The other snipers took their positions.

"They're turning towards the ocean," Mary said seeing the cloud of demons swinging left.

"They're heading to the island," Eye added quietly.

"What are the orders, sir?" Thompson asked.

"All snipers shoot to kill, as many as you can."

Mary looked into her scope and checked how far they were.

"Distance three thousand feet. We should be able to take some of them before they are out of range."

The shooting began. Hunters were using their computers, snipers their rifles, and that's all. No one else had a weapon of such a range. Seconds later the bullets reached the horde depriving a few of their lives. Some of the snipers used explosive bullets those went off somewhere in the swarm. The bodies were dropping to the ocean like raindrops from a dark cloud.

"Stop," Eye released the trigger. "They're out of range now."

"We must warn Maldito," Amanda's voice sounded in the speaker.

"They already know," Jason replied.

30.

Arthur and Bishop were watching the crowd on one of the screens in the headquarters. The soldiers were sitting at their desk operating the turrets scattered all over the island. A hail of bullets met the cloud.

"Distance five hundred feet," Jack announced watching the screens.

The cloud was getting thinner and thinner as the bodies were falling into the ocean. It lasted only for about fifteen seconds before the cloud completely disappeared.

"We made it!" someone exclaimed from the desks. Joyful shouts spread across the island as everybody was thrilled and excited. After all, it was their first huge victory.

“Ha, and you were so worried, old man,” Bishop patted Arthur on his back.

He smiled back shaking his hand.

“I told you the castle was impregnable, I told you,” Arthur kept repeating feeling this excitement and fulfillment ripping his apart from the inside.

Then an announcement came,

“This is general Craig from south division. We’re sending a few Strykers to assist you in Alpha Point. You need something more powerful to take those things out.”

31.

Millions of people were watching the news all over the world. Not every information was said and not everything was told that met the truth. A few people were sitting in their living room watching the special report. A pretty, long-haired blonde was speaking.

“It’s eleven in the morning in California and here is the special report coming from San Francisco. No one is let in or out. The army is still guarding all bridges and freeways.” She touched her ear as if she heard something.

“I’ve just received news from our reporters in Oakland. Over to Jack Roberts.”

The picture changed now showing a man standing on some roof. In the background spread a beautiful panorama of San Francisco.

“Thank you, Sam. A few minutes ago San Francisco was bombarded by US Army planes. There were a few explosions in the northern parts of the city. A moment later we saw some unidentified flying objects flying above the skyscrapers. We don’t know what exactly happened. At the moment the city became quiet. We can hear only a few shots somewhere in San Bruno. Over to you, Sam.”

"What's goin' on there?" a black teenager asked watching TV. His father looked at him and replied,

"I wish I knew, Martin. I wish I knew. Please, God, save them all."

"Them? Us!"

32.

It was a few minutes after 11, when Golden Gate Cemetery sent a signal for help. At that moment all of the graves had opened, and they'd lost over fifteen soldiers, so far. To make matters worse more than a hundred zombies broke to the south and were heading towards the nearest roadblock. SMA Johnson was in the tent monitoring the action. His tablet began to beep. He took a glimpse at it and saw Bishop on the line. Not hesitating he picked up the call.

"General."

"We received your signal for help. You do know there is nothing we can do. We have a few-million army marching towards us as we speak. What's the vampire status at Golden Gate?"

"We only had a few. The last was seen about an hour ago. Since then, nothing. They must have slipped some other way, sir."

"I see. You won't be facing any other then."

"Sir. What will the orders be when we the cemetery becomes empty?"

"Join the others on Maldito Island, Johnson, unless, of course, you bump into ASATs then escort them."

"Understood... oh shit!"

The conversation was cut when Johnson saw a bunch of zombies passing the tent. He and the other soldiers in the tent took a grip of their weapons and rushed outside as quickly as possible.

"No one at the east side," came the announcement from sniper team.

"You don't say?" Johnson replied sarcastically, seeing a great number of walking corpses.

"Sir, we can use grenade launchers," someone put forward.

"Do it," came the order.

Almost immediately a dozen of muffled grenade shots flew right into the horde causing several severe explosions. Guts and pieces of human flesh spread around the streets and the cemetery itself.

"God damn it soldiers! Shoot those who are further from us."

33.

Lian was sipping some hot tea in the Alpha Point headquarters when all tablets started to beep.

"A large group of vampires just passed us. They seem to be ignoring us."

"Us?" she swallowed and took a peek at the tablet to see where the message was coming from.

Huge letters were showing *FROM: Woodlawn.*

"Guys, listen up," First Sergeant; Mark Jackson walked into the headquarters. "All convoys from total six road blocks have already joined us. From now on, everything you see will be treated as enemy."

"A great number of bloodsuckers coming your way from the south-east," another message played.

"This is it soldiers. We're gonna be hit by those creatures. Lednicky, tell our fellows in Maldito to take control of the turrets. Let's kick some cold asses."

Mary was lying next to Eye scanning the northern-east hills. She pressed the trigger to take out another zombie emerging on the hills, then another and another. While she was doing so, she heard Eye's laughing voice,

"You're running out of ammo."

"You don't say," she replied shooting the last bullet.

Having reloaded, she looked through the sight again at the hills.

"Oh fuck, fuck, fuck," she kept repeating as she pressed some button on her tablet lying next to her.

Eye was looking at her confused not knowing what she had just seen there. He pointed his Barrett there and saw an enormous group of vampires zooming towards them.

"Vampires on two and three!"

As soon as she sent this announcement all the remaining snipers on the roof, responsible for that region aimed their rifles and the shooting began.

"Shit, there're at least a couple hundred of those bitches," one of them said firing another poisoned bullet."

Two rows of Hummers were blocking the road from each side. Several soldiers were on the hill to the east and many others were in the parking lot waiting for anything to appear. The shots were coming in two directions.

"They're gonna reach us in two-three minutes," they heard someone's voice.

34.

In the meantime, in the Maldito castle headquarters, the soldiers activated the turrets around Alpha Point.

"Davis, take the turret four," Jack ordered to a soldier on the other side of the desk.

A shorter soldier selected number four from the desktop and almost momentarily the screen showed a view from some hill. He could see Alpha Point about half a mile in the distance. After tightening the grip on the joystick he moved the barrel left only to see the horde of vampires running a few hundred yards from the turret. Few of them were falling down every few seconds. He placed his index finger on the trigger, glimpsed at the type of

ammo displayed at the top and pressed the trigger. Instantly, powerful, fifty-caliber projectiles shot from the barrel one after another and hurtled towards the vampires.

"That's what I'm talkin' 'bout," he said with great satisfaction seeing how much damage the bullets did.

Seconds later, the other turrets joined and momentarily decimated the advancing enemies.

"They're retreating," Jack announced with pleasure seeing the remaining vampires turn around and disappearing somewhere in the hills.

Arthur and Bishop were sitting next to Jack at the front desk watching the feed from Eagle Eye.

"We're too powerful for them," Bishop said proudly.

"We can deal with zombies, vampires and flying demons. Yet, we still have to face the colossal army marching towards us."

"Speaking of which," Bishop replied, "We need to do something to delay them as much as possible."

"Jack, put the National on the screen."

The screen displayed the feed from Eagle Eye over National. The hole in the cemetery was still trickling with thousands of demons per second. The string of an army was at least four miles long.

"There're so many of them that they take side streets to keep marching towards us."

Having said that, he saw an instant message played on the other screen.

"General Lohan here. We've decided to launch ten TBMs from LA. Golden Gate Park is the target. They should reach the targets shortly."

"TBMs?" Arthur asked surprised.

"Theatre Ballistic Missiles," Bishop explained. "Basically surface-to-surface missiles that can reach a few thousand miles. They chose a good target, look. When they pass Golden Gate Park

they would spread into streets and it won't be so easy to eliminate them by missiles."

Jack checked out the park in which the demons were cumulating and replied with a grin.

"Boys, we've just earned a little more time."

The feed from National began to flicker for a few seconds.

"Something's wrong with the picture, sir," Jack announced.

"Nothing's wrong with it. Could you zoom in, Jack?"

The feed was zoomed a couple times till the different types of demons were vivid enough to be distinguished among one another.

"Sorcerers," Bishop exclaimed recognizing a few among the crowd.

Arthur scratched his head and dropped his eyes for a while.

"Well, if there're sorcerers than we can be sure to face some spiritual activity soon. OK zoom out."

The lenses moved returning to it regular position.

"Look!" Bishop exclaimed again.

Another cloud of flying demons was rising into the air.

"Why are they doin' this? They know they'd fail."

Arthur stood up quickly and looked at the soldiers at the desks behind him.

"Give me the view from turret one."

The screen changed into a live feed from turret one that was situated on a hill left to Cabrillo Highway north from Pacifica.

"Point at them, marine," he pointed at a huge cloud of flying demons rising above the ground.

"It's four times as big as the previous one," Jack commented wiping his eyes in disbelief.

"They had enough time to organize. Prepare for the attack. All turrets operators switch into turrets on the island, let's show them who's planet this is."

The congested cloud that looked like a gigantic swarm covered the view and stopped. It was so big that it was at least one mile high and at least two miles wide. The picture didn't show how thick it was, but judging by the congestion it must have been at least quarter a mile. Then suddenly, a couple of smaller groups, about ten demons each, detached from the swarm and flew higher.

"This one is bigger, guys, so don't release your triggers till they're gone."

Arthur glanced at his watch impatiently.

"The rockets should be any second now."

"They're comin', sir." One of the soldiers announced.

Ten missiles, one after another were zooming across the sky aiming at Golden Gate Park situated only four miles from the vast hole in the National cemetery. The park ended with dozens of smaller streets into which the demons were spreading. The first missile hit one of the detached groups and exploded.

"Shit, they're using these demons as a shield," Bishop punched his fist against the desk seeing all the other missiles explode.

The cloud then congested again and got lower disappearing somewhere in the streets.

"They're not attacking us?" Someone asked astonished.

Arthur wide opened his eyes and quickly closed them tightly in order to gather his thoughts.

"They're preparing for a massive, simultaneous attack. "

"However they are planning to do so, Alpha Point ain't gonna have an easy task to do."

Bishop slowly shook his head thinking about something. Then he took out his tablet and as he was clicking the icons with his index finger, he announced what his intentions were.

"They must be organizing somewhere in the city. I'll send the

message to all roadblocks and cemeteries.”

35.

What happened in the other cemeteries in the last few hours? Soldiers were eagerly fighting at the Holy Cross cemetery. They had almost as many enemies to face as the brave marines at Golden Gate. However, they were in both; better and worse position in comparison with Golden Gate. The advantage was that they didn't have to worry about undead that passed them, as cemetery was connected with other neighbor venues like Home of Peace or Cypress Lawn. Therefore when a group of zombies broke out, they were still two or three cemeteries to pass. The disadvantage was that if something passed to the other cemeteries, they were still someone else's problem. The whole complex of cemeteries in Daly City had over one million graves. After five hours of dead walking around there were still seven hundred thousand left. There was no way that so few soldiers could suppress the invasion. Snipers took out as many as they could, but hundreds of Zombies had passed them and disappeared among the congested houses. When the cemetery became empty and everything pushed forwards south-west to Pacifica, the order came from SMA to follow the corpses, and almost everyone did so. When all snipers lost visual of the targets, they got off the roofs and joined the marines walking along the streets. Seven Hummers were used to outrun them and enlarge the roadblock at Junipero Serra Freeway over the Kings Drive. Only three vehicles were left along with a group of thirty men including SMA Miles.

“Can't you go any faster?” Sergeant yelled at the driver who was speeding as fast as the Hummer full of people and ammo could.

“I'm doing all I can. There's the roadblock.”

“Uff, they’re not shooting yet. It means we’re before the undead.”

Sergeant Major pressed something on his tablet and spoke,

“Listen everyone. We’ll stop at the roadblock and try to hold them off for as long as we can. When they pass us, we’ll move to the next roadblock.”

A few hundred yards from the freeway the marines were slowly clearing the Serra Highlands district. Three of them were walking alert along Lacrosse Avenue. Suddenly, they heard something moving in the yard between two bungalows. Right away they directed their barrels there to find the targets.

“Hold your fire,” the first one ordered. “It’s just a dog.” Seeing the dog walking towards them, the second marine crouched and stroke the animal several times.

“What a nice doggy you are. Yes you are. Are you hungry?” The dog barked joyfully seeing the soldier taking out a piece of his sandwich.

“OK, you fed it, now go,” the first one said feeling a little bit angry and annoyed by his teammate behavior. Having said, he saw two corpses walking out of street on the right side. They raised their weapons, aimed and shot.

“Two tangos down. Proceed.” They moved further towards the street where the zombies came from.

“Hush! Can you hear that?” he whispered listening to some sounds coming from that street.

As they reached the junction they saw hundreds of zombies moving south-west.

“Where are the others?” But the only shots they could hear were only coming from the other side.

“Oh no. Look!” one of them pointed at the crowd as his eyes

grew wide with terror.

They spotted two zombies of the marines walking among the crowd.

"They got them."

"Use the grenade launchers," came the order.

36.

Meanwhile, the bridge over King's Road was ready for the zombies. Snipers had already engaged and killed the single ones that had been spotted in the streets. The rest were waiting for the crowd to turn up. It didn't take long, just a few minutes till the streets became full with walking dead. The shots spread from mounted guns and the crowd slowly became thinner and thinner. When they got close enough, the rest of the soldiers with assault rifles engaged.

"I think we can stop them," one of them said hopefully.

"Even if we did, there're still thousands of them walking over there," he pointed at the area of houses on their left.

"Where is the nearest roadblock?"

"Hickey Boulevard, but we received a message from them that demons passed them."

"Balls."

A few explosions came from the district.

"They're using grenade launchers."

"Guys, focus on the horde ahead," Sergeant ordered. "I'm gonna contact the Golden Gate."

As he was selecting SMA Johnson on his tablet, he moved to the other side of the bridge.

"SMA David Johnson?"

"Yup?"

"This is Sergeant Perks from Woodlawn. We've notice that the zombies tend to use this passage to move further. If you run

out of targets, I suggest you join us here.”

“At Woodlawn?”

“No, the bridge over King’s road.”

37.

Unit one successfully reached the path over the marching demons. They were tired from over one hour of walking with their backs against the wall moving one foot per second. Now they were taking some rest at the rocks.

“How much water is there left?” Dan asked.

“Don’t panic Dan, we’ve got plenty of bottles. Arthur gave us provisions for at least a week,” Michael answered opening his backpack and taking two bottles of still water.

“Do ya’ want some?”

“Yup, thanks, man,” he grasped the bottle and gulped down the liquid from it.

Patricia stretched out her feet and looked at the photo of her sister that she was having in her necklace.

“We’ve never been apart for so long.”

“You mean you and Amanda?” Surya asked.

“There’s never been a day that we spent apart. We did everything together, you know.”

“Me and my brother used to be the same,” Surya sighed. “But I haven’t seen him for half a year.”

Dan swallowed the water and gave Surya a surprised look.

“You have a brother? You’ve never said anything ‘bout him.”

The girl realized that it could be difficult for Dan to learn that his best friend from New York is her brother, a dhampir and the worst, a traitor.”

“I do, but I don’t wanna talk about it. Sorry, Dan.”

“Alright, I see.”

Seith was sitting a bit further from them gawking at the cave

landscape of Hell. A very old memory popped up to his mind. Seith was walking along an earthy road somewhere in Hell. He was in his demonic body of a possessor. There were many demons around, not only possessors but also guardians and warthens. He went into a cave and said with a raised voice,

“Dunar, are you here?”

“Come,” he heard back a low voice.

He made a few steps inside the dark cave and saw a sorcerer standing by the iron table. He was wearing a dark coat, red from the inside and was holding a staff in his right hand. His large head was sticking out from a pointy collar and his huge, yellow eyes caught sight of Seith.

“Speak, demon,” he said with a low voice.

“Paymon refused to send me on Earth, thus I come to you, oh mighty Dunar.”

“I shall send you there provided you do something for me.”

“Whatever you desire, oh great one,” he hissed bowing.

“You shall send me fifty souls; each and every one shall be no older than ten.”

“Of course. Your wish is my command.”

The sorcerer raised his staff and said something in an old language. Seith closed his eyes as he felt something pushing him to the back. When he opened them again, he found himself riding a carriage along a city road. He quickly took a look at his new body; a muscular man, long hair. He let the horse lead wherever it was going to. As he was riding he looked around. It was his first time on Earth. He saw wooden houses on both sides of the pebbly road and people dressed in coats, round hats and leather boots. Men were running in one direction, while women either stood and stared or along with children ran in the other one. The carriage took a turning left and before him spread a panorama of the city covered in flames.

A few minutes later he reached the first burning structure. Many men were taking buckets full of water from the river and handing them to others to put down the fire. Seith stopped the carriage, jumped off and took a good look at the landscape. Most of the buildings were made of wood. People were trying to prevent the fire from spreading. Then someone shouted with an English accent,

“Don’t stand like this, grab the bucket and help out.”

A few days passed and Seith returned home, at least what he thought was home, he just let the horses take him wherever they liked. A lonely farmhouse surrounded by a wooden fence was on his right. There were many horses and cows at the back of the field. A young, beautiful woman was standing in front of the house. She had long, dark brown hair and green eyes. She was wearing a brownish dress.

“Charles, thank God you’re back. I began to think that the fire took you.”

Seith realized it must have been the man’s wife. It was the first time he saw a female human from such a close distance. To him she was of an extraordinary beauty and he decided to play along.

“We put it down. We finally put it down. It took us a week, but London is safe.”

“You must be hungry, come. Jacob was asking about you.” When they entered, he saw a boy running to him. He was no older than six, had dark hair, and was wearing an old, dirty shirt. The boy hugged his father, but said no word. Seith didn’t even react. He neither crouched, nor bent over.

In one minute he thought of the boy as a perfect soul for Dunar. He could see a long, wooden table in one room, a door to a kitchen where something was simmering in an iron pot. He immediately went there and looked for something sharp.

“What are you doing?”

Seith said no word. He found a knife, grabbed it and turned around. Jacob and his mother were standing there confused.

“Charles?”

“Seith, how far?” Dan asked.

Seith quickly came round instantly forgetting about the past.

“A few hours.”

“Demons! Hide!” Patricia shouted seeing a few flying in the distance.

Everybody made a dash towards the rocks. Tokutei and Surya hid behind the ones they were sitting on, while the rest rushed behind a large boulder. They could hear the scratchy noises the demons made that were getting closer and closer until they became quiet as the creatures passed them and flew further.

“Clear,” Dan heard Tokutei’s voice.

Patricia went first checking the rocky ceiling and the mountainsides spreading across the landscape.

“Let’s go. We’ve been here for almost an hour. That’s enough rest, isn’t it?”

38.

Maldito headquarters was really busy. It was a few minutes after four o’clock and lunches had already been distributed in every zone. The northern part of the courtyard had been transformed into a kitchen. Arthur had moved his cars to the hangar underground and had hired over sixty cooks to provide meals for a few thousand people on the island. Those who were in the castle went to the distribution point and picked up their meals. When they finished they helped the twenty people from catering take the food to the headquarters and other zones. Only Alpha Point had its own kitchen placed in the middle building.

Arthur finished having his lunch and threw the plastic plate into the dustbin on the left. The dustbin had also been cleverly

designed. In 2006, Arthur had ordered to install a special machine that could recycle everything that was thrown away. It wasn't a simple machine that segregated rubbish into glass, plastic and so on, but a highly technological device that through different reactions and procedures could separate atoms or compounds and use them as other materials. Of course not every element could be retrieved, but the machine was able to separate most of them. Similar machines were used in gold mines to separate gold from dirt.

When he returned to his seat and stretched out, the screen started to beep as a green earpiece appeared with the writing *President*. Arthur answered the call.

"I'm sorry I couldn't contact you within the last few hours, as I had to speak to the public."

"How did they react?" Bishop asked walking closer to the screen.

"It was better than I expected, but at least they know the truth. Homeland Security has been sent to the streets in every city and I announced def con 2. Anyway, Arthur, could you possible give me the report from the last two hours? Our feed is unstable."

"There's nothing wrong with the feed, sir. It's that there's some spiritual activity which is dimming all electronic devices."

"I see. So what's with the report?"

Arthur took a deep breath, while Bishop checked the demons position and displayed the date on the screen.

"The island itself is under constant attacks by the undead coming from the ocean. Their number is low. You probably know, sir, about the demons destroying missiles."

"I do."

"Since then, there have not been any attacks from the demons themselves. Nor have there been any from the vampires or any other creatures. We do know that the undead have

breached through all major cemeteries and those who will not be stopped will reach Alpha Point at about 1800. We have reasons to believe that it's going to be a simultaneous attack from both demons and vampires."

"What about their heading south?" the president asked eagerly.

"I have obtained the information that everything is heading towards Alpha Point."

"If we lose Alpha Point, I will send ten thousand more marines."

"That's ten thousand more zombies," a voice came from the behind the president.

Arthur frowned as he recognized the voice. He rolled his eyes and asked with confusion.

"Is this..."

"You're God damn right it's me," a man with grayish hair reveled himself.

He was a plump elder man with medals pinned all over his uniform. He was wearing a visor cap.

"Baker," Bishop interrupted. "Do you have any better solutions?"

"Of course I do. People are already panicking. Many of them booked the nearest flights and are fleeing the country."

"You didn't answer my question, Baker," Bishop insisted.

"I think you should evacuate the peninsula and the whole bay, and use nuclear bombs."

"Are you insane?" Arthur exclaimed. "No one will ever live here anymore. We can't do it."

"Don't worry, Arthur," the president replied. "I won't go as far as nuclear weapons. Everything is in your hands. Keep me up to date."

"I will, sir."

He disconnected and still with a frown looked at Bishop.

“Baker, that cheap bastard.”

“You’re not the only one who hates him. Since he joined the Cabinet he thinks he is a know-it-all.”

39.

Many reporters and TV trucks had also gathered around the northern part of Golden Gate Bridge. Even though, the air was getting thicker and less vivid, they hoped to see anything that was happening on the other side of the bridge. One young reporter was about to be live when he saw his colleague turn around and rush towards his truck.

“Hey! Carl! Where’re ya’ goin’?” he ran after him.

“Didn’t you hear?”

“Hear what?” he looked around as every third person ran to their trucks and escaped in a hurry.

“The president made a speech, Harry,” Carl replied opening the door to the truck.

Harry stopped right at the door and grabbed Carl by his arm.

“He told the truth, he told the God damn truth about what’s goin’ on there. Get in, there’s no time.”

“No! I want to report.”

“Dude, it’s freakin’ end of the world, there’re demons and other stuff. You don’t fuckin’ wanna be here.”

Harry turned at the landscape of the city then back at Carl.

“I’m stayin’. Go with the others. People need to see this.”

“Suit yourself,” Carl left the truck and ran to the competitive network’s vehicle nearby.

Harry opened the back door, grabbed a camera and a tripod, placed somewhere overseeing the city and stood in front of it. He then realized he had forgotten to take the earwig and connect to the main office. As he was running back to the truck he could see

almost every single person leaving the place. He returned swiftly and dialed the number to the network.

“This is Harry, I’m stayin’ here... Understood... wait, what did the president say? ... Oh my God, it’s gonna be huge.”

He quickly patted his cheeks with opened palms, did a funny movement with his hands and stood erected.

“This is Harry Finney reporting live from Golden Gate Bridge. After the president’s speech, the world learned what is the true reason for having evacuated the San Francisco peninsula. Some of you were right, this is the end of the world, but instead of cataclysms and aliens we have something different, something much worse. From the speech of our president, we have learned that every dead individual rose back to live this morning.

Moreover, Hell opened a few hours later and now an army of demons is marching south. The president assured us that everything is under control and we are able to stop them. That explains numerous explosions and shooting within the city. Since we learned the truth, almost every competitive network packed their bags and left. Yet, you may be sure that Harry Finney will stay with you till the end.”

The transmission stopped.

“Chris, darling, since I’m here alone I’m gonna take the transmission backpack and try to get to the peninsula.”

“Hell no, Harry,” he heard back a woman’s voice.

“Look, At the moment, there are two competitive networks still transmitting. I’ll do my best to show them the demons.”

“There are still some reporters left in Oakland.”

“Ha, but will anybody dare to get to the peninsula? I don’t think so. See you on the other side.”

40.

SMA Williams glanced again at the fancy watch on his wrist. It

was 5:35. He then glanced at the screen displaying live feed from Eagle Eye. The massive army of demons was passing Sharp Park Golf Course which was just over a mile to the north from Alpha Point. Arthur was on the other screen.

“You’ll be able to see them in a few minutes. They’ll probably strike with everything they have at once, so I suggest you place some men facing Calbirro Highway at the west and north.”

“We’re not gonna give up so easily, sir. I just hope that our men will use the turrets efficiently.”

“They will, Charles. Good luck.”

“There’re so many of them,” Jason said gazing at the screen. Williams selected everyone in and around Alpha Point. It was high time for his speech.

“This is it, soldiers. We’re not gonna fail so easily. I want each sniper to shoot on sight. Not any particular objects, just anything you see. Soldiers blocking the Calbirro Highway, I need you to do the same. We’ve got four tanks at our disposal so make good use of them. The Strykers and Bradleys will provide additional support. If we do encounter flying demons, the M270A1 are there to meet them. And the most important; do not let anything get past Alpha Point.”

At that moment Amanda was outside somewhere at the front line. When the speech was over, she peeked at a man with a sword on her right and gave a comment,

“I thought he would say something to encourage us.”

“It’s Williams,” a marine on front of her replied. “His speeches sound like orders, but he has good intentions.” Amanda wanted to say something more, but before she did so, Eye’s voice spread through the earwigs of everyone in the area.

“Demons spotted in the north.”

The shooting started. Apart from snipers, turret one engaged into the operation. The bullets were shooting right at the warthens

leading the armies. It didn't take much time for the demons to notice the turrets and within a few seconds a couple of rocks, cars, lamps flew right into the cannon destroying it.

"Turret one is down."

Fortunately, there were still many turrets operating waiting patiently for the army to come. The Strykers became ready as their operators were scanning the Calbirro Highway for the first demons to emerge. Snipers were already shooting at the dense, congested horde that was slowly marching towards Pacifica. The hunters were using digital enhanced rifles trying to inflict as much damage as possible. It was after all, the most important battle of human race since ever. Turret two and three were situated at the junction of Calbirro Highway and Reina Del Mar Avenue less than a mile from Alpha Point. Two operators of these turrets could see the massive army come into sight from behind the corner. They could also see some of the leading creatures fall dead. There were many warthens in the front followed by possessors and guardians. A few flying demons could also be seen marching among them. They were all carrying cold steel weapons of various kinds; swords, sabers, daggers, shields, spades halberds, bows or crossbows.

"And they come from Hell," the soldier operating turret two commented pressing the trigger. He was easily taking out warthens and possessors. With guardians he had a bigger problem.

"Those big fellows are strong," he said under his breath. One of the guardians grabbed a car and threw it at the turret smashing it completely.

"Turret two is down," he said angrily as his colleague added,

"Turret three is down, too."

Eye threw away another empty clip. Mary and Thompson were on both sides doing everything they could to slow them down. Lian

ran out of the building through the west door and lied down with other soldiers on the hill. The tanks and Strykers were just one hundred feet from them. Around thirty soldiers were waiting for the army to get closer. Some of them were lying, others were kneeling on one knee holding their assault rifles tightly. Lian looked through the sight at the highway up ahead. Nothing was seen yet.

“They’re gonna show up any minute now,” someone from the crowd said.

“Strykers engage,” they heard William’s voice.

As soon as the order came the vehicles began shooting. The primary weapon of these eight-wheel machine was Royal Ordnance L7 that shot 1,200 kilogram projectiles from a 115 mm barrel. The massive projectiles flew out from the barrel towards the approaching army. Every hit ended up with a huge explosions destroying between twenty and thirty five demons. The snipers directed their fire further leaving those who had managed to pass for the Strykers. Everything was going smoothly. No other turrets were destroyed as well as the army itself was being successfully stopped by the Strykers. Jason was in the headquarters carefully observing the Eagle Eye feed. There was a soldier; George Harris right next to him using Jason’s enhanced M4 to observe the territory.

“What’s that Sergeant Major?” he asked pointing at something appearing around the hills in the east and north-east.

“Zombies,” SMA replied casually.

“Not that, behind them.”

Williams walked closer to the screens showing many black dots moving fast from the forest.

“Vampires? No, not so many.”

It looked like the whole eastern part was covered with thousands of congested dots moving fast to the south.

"Can you see any?" he turned towards the table with hunters.

"No, Sir," George Martin; one of the hunters replied.

Jason walked towards the feed and zoomed out a little bit.

"They're not as stupid as we thought. They're moving along the hills beyond our range. "

SMA Williams selected the general's Craig name on his tablet.

"Are they trying to break through the southern line?"

Lednicky asked.

Having heard general's voice he started to speak with a little uncertainty in his voice,

"General, a couple of thousand vampires are moving your way. I think they're trying to break out of the peninsula."

"We're ready for them. There's no way they can break through our line. The snipers are locking them on target as we speak."

"Turret four, five and six dealing with the zombies," they heard someone from the main headquarters.

"They're not going there," Jason said examining the feed carefully.

Williams quickly lowered his tablet and took a good look at the screen. Thousand of dots that were zooming south now turned west.

"They're encircling us."

"General, order your men to take as many as they can."

"Those mother fuckers are too smart. They're beyond our range as well."

"OK, everyone, listen up."

As he was about to say something, a soldier at the screens interrupted.

"Sir, the army is splitting into two in Fassler Avenue."

"Fuck," Williams banged his fist against the table. "I want everyone to deal with the parts you were originally assigned to."

Every marine who joined us from the roadblocks..." his sentence was interrupted again, this time by some sniper from the roof."

"Sir, great numbers of walking dead coming from the east." He stopped in shock as he was gazing at the screen showing three armies slowly closing on them.

"Sir, what are the orders for the roadblockers?"

"Just fucking kill them," he replied slightly losing his temper. "Hunters, leave the demons, deal with the vampires. It's your job."

"Goin' to the western terrace," Jason said grabbing his M4 and headed to the stairs.

In the meantime, Lian was watching the Strykers and couldn't believe how well they were doing their jobs. When she heard that the army split she sprang to her feet. At the same time she heard Jason from terrace above.

"Lian, where're ya' goin'?"

"Roberts Road. Strykers can manage them here."

Seconds later she reached the northern entrance to Alpha Point. The road was stuck with two Hummers parked across and four parked with their front facing north. There were two marines on each vehicle; one responsible for the mounted gun and one with an assault rifle covering the gunner. Behind the Hummers there were about fifty men. But apart from soldiers she could see hunters, mercenaries, hitmen, martial artists with swords and many others. Two twins caught her eye particularly. They were two black people with enormous muscular bodies holding enhanced machine guns. She recognized these weapons from weaponry in Maldito castle, but she had never seen anyone use them. She stopped at the men and thought for a while. The road was protected really well, but she wanted to add something from herself. The sounds of shots; both from sniper and assault rifles were coming from the roof and hills in the east. Then she spotted

a perfect location on the hill on the right and ran about hundred and fifty feet and lied down next to a bush that was partly covering her. On her left she could see several zombies. But what worried her where the sounds of hissing and fizzing coming from the distance. Luckily, there were four turrets about fifty feet from her to the right and for a few minutes she could trust them completely. Having noticed one arm of the demon army turning from behind the corner of Fassive Avenue, she peeped at the Hummers. There were still a few more seconds before they could engage, so she decided not to wait any longer. Her index finger gently found the ammo switch button, and pressed it several times, until she saw capital letter EXP in her sight. Next she squeezed the trigger several times as four explosive bullets sped towards the army. It didn't take long for the explosions to come smashing a dozen of demons ahead. A moment later the Hummers and the rest of the soldiers engaged into the fight.

41.

Meanwhile in Hell, the team was advancing forward. They had a difficult last hour, for they had to sneak between a pack of orts resting on the rocks. When they finally hit the road again, they were walking along a narrow path a few hundred feet above the army marching towards the portal. Surya took a glimpse at the demons below, then raised her eyes and quickly looked back.

"They're bringing orts now."

"Not only orts, Surya," Patricia added turning round. "Trolls as well."

On hearing this, everybody turned round and froze in shock as they saw large creatures being pulled by gondars.

"These are not trolls," Seith said. "Trolls do not exist. They are..."

"But we fought such creature back in the labyrinth," Dan

interrupted rudely.

“As I said, trolls do not exist. They are called Mertons. And they are natural inhabitants of Hell, like orts and...”

He didn't finished his sentence, as the ground shook terribly accompanied by a thud from the distance. Then another came and another, and a few more.

“And those giants,” he finished.

“Giants?” Michael asked with trembling voice. “Do tell me the thing that is making this thud is not real.”

The thuds along with the ground shaking so hard that everyone lost their balance were getting louder and louder until they saw an enormous monster emerging between the rocks many miles from them.

“It's much bigger than draugr,” Tokutei said trying to take a grip of something.

“Do not worry,” Seith assured. “Giant shall not simply walk on Earth. Demons will transport him.”

“How can we not worry!” Micheal exclaimed holding a tip of the rock tightly.

“Because the thumping will stop then.”

“I don't wanna see this thing on Earth,” Surya cried.

They all were holding to anything they found attached to the solid ground, but every thump made the ground shake so much that they were thrown into the air only to fall down again.

“How long do we have to wait for it to stop?” Michael asked slowly losing his grip.

Before he got the answer the thuds and quakes stopped. They slowly stood up on their feet and looked at the monster sitting down and then lying down on the road.

“Look, what are those things around them?” Patricia indicated at several demons surrounding the monster.

“Sorcerers,” Seith replied. “They're casting a spell on it.”

Tokutei grabbed his backpack and hit the road again.

“Giant or no giant, we must go. There’s still chance we can close Hell before this thing reaches the portal.”

42.

Arthur, Bishop and Jack were constantly watching the feed from both Eagle Eyes over Alpha Point and National Cemetery.

“The spiritual activity is rising in National,” Jack announced glancing at the flickering screen.

The vast hole was at the same size as before and the number of demons that crawled through it was rising every second. As soon as they went out, they joined the army heading south. It seemed that their main objective was getting to Maldito, but it didn’t stop them from having a little fun from time to time. And by fun, they meant smashing cars, breaking windows or take the wondering zombies with them. The feed flickered several times until the screen became completely black.

“We lost the visual, sir,” Jack announced.

Arthur slowly shook his head as he took another sip of his coffee.

“And it’s just a matter of time till we lose feed from Alpha.”

“And then any means of communication,” Bishop added looking worryingly at the soldiers stats.

43.

Lian was lying on the hill next to the bush shooting at the upcoming army. Everyone on her left was already engaged. They were working fast enough to keep the army far away. However, vampires and zombies were getting closer from east and south. She noticed that the clip was getting empty, so not thinking much, her hand wandered to the backpack for another one. Having reloaded something fell on her back. She screamed of out fear as she rolled to the right and saw a human corpse lying with a

quarter of its head dandling by nerves and skin at its shoulder.

"Hey, turret guys, would you be so kind and let me damn know when those freakin' things pass you!"

"Sorry ma'am," she heard back.

In the meantime, Eye was lying next to Marry. They were both responsible for the north.

"I think, we can manage," the girl commented.

Having said that, she saw a black cloud rising behind the hills in the north.

"You had to say that, didn't you?" Eye commented taking another shot.

Williams was watching the screens in disbelief.

"When did they manage to gather such an army."

"It's not only flying demons, Sir," Martin said showing the zoomed picture on his laptop.

"What?"

"Just look," he turned the laptop towards SMA.

The others in the room were only glancing at the screen still being busy with their own tasks. The cloud was at least two miles wide and one mile tall, but what worried everyone was not the size of the cloud but something much worse."

"A-Are they carrying other demons?" Williams stuttered rubbing his eyes.

"I think they are," Martin replied.

"Use explosive bullets and focus on them," came the order to everyone.

"Sir, the vampires are about to attack from the south-east," someone announced.

"You know what to do."

From the island the flying horde of demons looked much more terrifying. It looked like a gigantic swarm so dense, congested and thick that nothing could be seen through it.

"Arthur, look at this," Jack said pointing something on the feed from Eagle Eye.

Arthur and Bishop focused their attention on the screen.

"Just as I thought," the old man muttered. "They're not interested in Alpha Point, they're heading straight at us, again."

"Not at this. Look at the size of that army."

"I know, more than ten million. It's not a problem, I think."

He turned around, made sure every single soldier on the island would get this message.

"Listen up, there is a huge flock of demons approaching. Way bigger than the previous one. I want you to use explosive ammo, and explosive ammo only, unless of course, they get somehow to the ground."

The order reached every tablet on the island. About thirty turrets were operating within Alpha Point, so nearly seventy were left on the island. Snipers who were resting in the towers ran out, took hold of their rifles, changed the ammo and within the next few seconds, first bullets found their way to the cloud. From the towers the view was much more incredible and breathtaking. The vast horde was coming from the north-east, completely neglecting Alpha Point. Almost immediately thousand of lights flashed across the sky from the island. It didn't take much time for the first explosions to come and diminished the army. There was so many of them that the sky became bright again. It looked as if it was raining with demon bodies, as they fall dramatically into the ocean. This didn't stop them. In fact, the attack continued.

"Just keep on shooting," Bishop ordered observing the view from one of the cameras on the castle.

The explosions scattered the army into several minor groups that started to circle the island.

"Finish the groups with sharp ammo," another order came. Hunters situated in Bravo zone were sitting at a rectangular table

in one of the tents. There were twenty five laptops on each side and at each one was sitting a hunter operating a mounted, advanced sniper rifle situated either at the towers or on the walls.

“Changin’ into regular bullets,” one of the hunters said aloud. His screen was showing zoom on the left flank of the flying army. Every time he pressed the trigger he moved to another target, then to another as the demons were falling one by one into the ocean.

“They’re gonna reach us,” someone warned. The marines were ready standing along the walls surrounding each zone. The sound of flapping of wings along with heavy breathing was getting louder. Suddenly, a body fell behind the wall. Its wing was broken and there were three holes in its chest coming out through the back. The creature made a few steps growling loudly then fell down near the main road. It caught attention of everyone straight away. They had never seen a demon, especially a flying one from such a close distance.

“Incoming!” one of the snipers shouted seeing one group lowering their height and dropping the carrying demons into the ocean near the island.

It was not long for the group to reach the wall and knock several marines down. The demons landed inside the zone and advanced quickly at those who they had knocked. Shots came quickly from the marines inside, killing the opponents instantly.

“We need medics here.”

One of the marines stood up rubbing his shoulder. He noticed that his friend wasn’t moving. Not thinking much, he crouched and checked his pulse, then started to push his chest trying to make his heart beat again. It lasted for a few seconds, though. Reluctantly he moved away after he had spotted a vast wound or rather lack of the right side of his stomach and hip. It made him livid. He aimed at the soldier’s head, took one shot, then turned

around and rushed up to the wall. Vengeance was the only thing that was driving him at that moment. As he reached the top of the wall, a voice came through his earwig,

“The army has been eliminated.”

“Assholes,” he whispered checking the beach covered with bodies.

“Two fatalities,” a voice came.

Arthur turned towards Bishop.

“Two fatalities for ten million of them, not bad, Bishop, not bad.”

44.

Unit one was getting closer to the portal. They were still walking along the road with the demon army marching to the enormous gate of light. A couple of warthers along with two possessors ran out of a cave on their right.

“No time to hide!” Seith shouted. “Fight them!”

Surya rushed first at the possessors knowing that the warthers were less dangerous and the others could easily deal with it. She cut through the first one at the same time hearing two swooshes of swords behind her. One of the creatures made a slash at Dan, and knocked him down. Dan quickly used his legs to throw the demon into the precipice.

“Dan, no!” Patricia shouted running towards him to prevent the demon from falling.

Both her and Dan held out their arms to grab its limbs. Dan crawled to the front towards the edge and was able to take a hold of its foot, but the body itself was too heavy for one of his hand and it slipped out falling directly at the marching army below.

“Ups,” he whispered seeing thousands of eyes rising up. The boy swiftly pulled back not to be seen, but a loud roar came from the precipice as if a commander was calling for the others to

advance up. Only seconds later a horn spread and it was now obvious that their position was revealed.

“We’ve been compromised,” Michael said imagining what would happen next.

Seith took a glance to the front. There was a small glowing rock about half a mile ahead.

“There’s the portal, Hurry!”

And soon everyone took off rushing to the glowing rock. No one dared to turn around but, strange noises were coming from behind and they didn’t seem to be getting any quieter.

“Don’t turn around!” Patricia yelled.

Surya, who was the fastest of all turned round slowing down, and quickly accelerated.

“They’re catching up with us!”

On hearing that Patricia gave up and turned round to see the number of enemies. She could see a dozen of warthens running on their four limbs, there was also a couple of possessors and behind them flying demons were carrying guardians. She realized that even if they sprinted, they wouldn’t have enough time to reach the portal. Having thought that she stumbled on a rock and fell down.

“Patricia!” Michael shouted turning round and running towards her.

At the same time everyone else stopped.

“Draw your weapons,” Tokutei said. “We have no choice now, but to fight.”

45.

Eye took another shot at the army ahead. The Strykers seemed to be doing quite a good job. The western flank was at the same distance as it was half an hour before, however the eastern flank coming from the Rogers Road was getting closer and

closer. It was only a few hundred yards from the Hummers blocking the road.

"Vampires from south-east!" someone announced from the roof.

"Use the spotlights," came the order from Williams.

On the southern house there were two sets of spotlights situated on the roof. Each set was a rectangle with two rows of four spotlights; each three feet in diameter. They covered much more territory than single spotlights and could be used more effectively. The vampires were seen emerging about one hundred yards in the distance. The lights turned on and thick, white rails illuminated the south and the east regions.

"It's working," some sniper said seeing the vampires turning into dust as a horrible loud shriek came from those directions. The vampires pulled back immediately and hid behind anything they could; bushes, cars, rocks, buildings.

"It's no use goin' that way till these light are on," one of these creatures bellowed loudly to the others.

"The demons should have done something by now," the other one replied.

Eye and Marry were shooting constantly at the right flank. Eye didn't dare to use regular ammo. Marry on the other hand, was using only regular bullets to finish off those who separated from the main army. Thompson was lying next to Eye.

"Ya' know what, Marry. I'll switch into explosives. There's no point shootin' with sharp ammo when you take out all the runners."

"Do it," Marry replied seriously not feeling like smiling or laughing at all.

Thompson pressed the switch button, pulled himself closer to the sight, aimed at the farthest point of the army he could see and shot twice. Two explosions came afterwards ripping a few

demons apart. Having seen that, everyone heard a sound of a horn coming from a few miles, as if someone was giving an order.

“What da,,,?” he said under his breath.

“Great, you pissed them off,” Mary commented.

Suddenly, the dark air covered with thousands of red and orange points that zoomed up.

“Won’t ever learn. Using flying demons is no use,” Eye said.

“These are no flying demons,” Mary replied in shock. “These are burning arrows. Take cover everyone!”

They quickly sprang to their feet and moved back as fast as they could shouting,

“Run, run, run!”

“Take cover! Arrows!”

Everyone made a dart towards the stairs leading down but there were too many people on the roof and the arrows were beginning to swoop down. Those who made for the stairs jumped down and were safe, others had no choice but to hide behind chimneys and air-condition boxes. Yet some others were desperate enough to jump off the roof at the cars below. All the time the warnings were coming through the earwigs. Soldiers at the parking lot and those who were guarding the road hid behind Hummers or ran inside the buildings. Lian heard the announcement, then noticed the arrows as they were high in the air. There were so many of them that they covered the sky like a massive flock of birds. She looked around in a slight panic. Nothing to hide behind. The Hummers were too far. There was either a turret or the bush. She chose the bush hoping it would be thick enough not to let any arrows through. Straight away she rolled behind it. The arrows were getting lower and lower. Eye wanted to use the stairs but the queue was too long, he let Marry go first while he leaned with his back against the narrow chimney. The arrows came onto the area like a pouring rain of fire penetrating the ground, weaker

constructions and windows. Few people failed to run away on time and the arrows wounded many and even killed some of them. None of the arrows damaged any vehicles, but the fire started to spread.

“UV spotlights are down,” someone shouted.

Williams looked at the feed from Eagle Eye. The roofs and the road were empty as far as humans were concerned.

“They’re not so stupid after all. They wanted to get rid of us so now they can attack much easier.”

“Not only them, the vampires are advancing, sir,” someone said.

Williams looked at the table with laptops and hunters around. Some of them seemed disappointed.

“We lost a few rifles, sir,” Dorothy said sadly.

Marines who were at the window quickly put out the fire from the arrows that had flown in through the gap. Jason who had hidden inside stepped out to the balcony again. He saw hundreds or even thousands of burning arrows spread across the area. The Strykers were still operating, so that was a good thing. He raised his gun in order to check how far the enemies were. Nothing changed with the left flank, but the right one looked much more dangerous. The army was crossing through a meadow into Roberts Road.

“Fuck!” he shouted seeing the sky being covered with burning arrows again.

He took a few shots at the right flank constantly watching the distance between the arrows and Alpha Point.

“More arrows,” a voice sounded in the speakers.

Eye realized the roof was no longer an option for anybody, so he and the remaining snipers quickly jumped inside the hole. Lian could hear hissings coming from the south and east that were extremely close. After receiving the message about the second attack, she sprang to her feet and hurtled towards Roberts Road

as fast as she could. Yet, she wasn't fast enough and when she was running down the hill, the arrows began to fall like a hail. Several landed around her, one even an inch from her foot, but she kept running until she reached the first Hummer to hide behind.

"It's the last attack," she said to the soldier next to her.

"How do you know that?"

"The vampires will strike now. They are almost here."

Williams was walking impatiently in circles thinking what to do next.

"If what you're saying is true, then we have to prepare ourselves for the vampires now," he replied through the audio channel.

Every sniper from the roof took new positions by the windows and balconies in the mansion.

Hunters whose weapons have been destroyed left the table and ran outside to the parking lot to face the vampires. The rest focused on the approaching army. While Martin and a few of his fellows were running down the stairs, they heard the first shots directed to the east and south. And these were not the shots from turrets but regular shots from shotguns, pistols and assault rifles.

"They're already here," the boy said running out of the building just after Martin.

He saw a massive horde of vampires running down the hill towards them. Unfortunately, the fifty-caliber guns on Hummers were not equipped with ammo switch and they were useless at that moment. The vampiric creatures were armed with various kinds of weapons; ranging from cold steel to pistols and Uzis. Arthur had predicted fight hand to hand, so it was wise of him to invite various martial artists to help. This was a perfect opportunity for them to engage into the battle. Those vampires who managed to reach Roberts Road had now them to pass.

"We've gotta use the spotlights," Jackson said.

"We can't, they all've been destroyed," Amanda replied running at the vampires.

"Balls."

"But we can still use UV grenades," Jason suggested through the audio channel.

Everybody was engaged into the fight; from one side with vampires, from the other with demons.

Every Stryker had four people inside. The computerized interior technologically exceeded many other military vehicles. The screens were showing what was before them in greenish light. Suddenly, they saw a few creatures separating from the army and running left and right. They were much bigger than the other demons. They were even bigger than elephants.

"What are those things?" the driver asked.

"I have no idea. We'd better report it to the headquarters." Having said, he selected the whole Alpha Point on his table.

"We've got some strange creatures separating from the army."

"We see them, too," someone from the zone headquarters replied. "Try to... them... focus..."

"We have some problems on the line, could you repeat that?" But they heard nothing back apart from a noise.

"Do you read? Base? Fuck. We lost the connection."

The large creatures; gondars were running fast at the Strykers. The ground shook with every step they made and the road cracked under their weight.

"Shoot those things."

He pointed the barrel and fired. The projectile successfully hit the monster making it fall on its head and rolled. However, the explosion raised dust into the air and covered the view.

"What now?"

“Shoot in the dark.”

Before they managed to shoot another projectile, the huge creatures emerged from the cloud of dust and ran straight into the Strykers. On the impact, the vehicles rolled along the road landing twenty yards further on their side or on their roofs.

46.

In the main headquarters, in the castle one of the soldiers had problems with operating a turret.

“Sir. I lost connection with the turret.”

Bishop turned around surprised.

“Me too.”

“And me.”

He turned back at the screen showing feed from Eagle Eye. There were upturned Strykers in the west, vampires attacking from the south and east and the colossal army in the north.

“Williams, we have some problems with the turrets.”

He heard nothing back but some noise.

“Williams?” he asked looking at his tablet.

Swiftly, he selected the whole Alpha Point and asked again.

“Do you copy? Anyone?”

The feed started to flicker only to disappear completely within a few seconds.

“I think we lost them,” he said disappointed, then turned round to the soldier operating the screens.

“Give me Alpha Point on screen nine. I mean the view from any sniper rifle.”

47.

Meanwhile, unit one was in a similar situation. They were fighting a large number of demons that were attacking them on the path to the portal. Tokutei and Surya were at the front dealing

with the bigger ones, at the same time leaving warthers for Dan and the rest.

“Don’t advance!” Michael shouted. “We gotta pull back.” Surya turned round. She could see an old door on a ledge over the portal. They were made of iron and were arched at the top. There was something curved on them, but they were too far to see what it was. The distance was about one hundred yards. However, the path was blocked by second flank of demons that had climbed from the other side. Seith was using his broad sword helping Tokutei and Surya from the right side, while Michael and Patricia were using both regular and explosive ammo to make a way through. Dan shot another warther when he saw something lightening up the ceiling. He looked up and saw a large ball of fire flying directly at them.

“Look out!” he screamed at the top of his voice making a dart to the left at the mountain side.

The rest of the team rushed there instantly after they had spotted the sphere.

“They must be using some kind of a catapult,” the boy murmured seeing the ball hit the road more or less fifty feet from them and bursting around the area with deadly flames and sparkles.

It was at least twenty feet in diameter and caused massive destruction in the area. A few demons burnt alive on the impact while many others got injured by the pieces of fire.

“Quickly run!” Seith ordered taking off towards the portal. The others followed him immediately.

“They don’t care for their own kind,” Surya muttered. The demons quickly caught up with them and the fight continued.

“Only few more yards, just a few more yards,” Dan kept repeating shooting at the warthers who were climbing from the precipice on the left.

Seith spotted two large guardians blocking the path. Each of them was holding a large halberd and was confidently marching to the front. As one of them raised his weapon up in the attempt to cut down through Seith, the demon ducked and made a spin holding his sword with his both hand. The sharp blade cut through the first guardian. Seith turned back to exclaim,

“Tokutei, the key!”

But when he turned back it was too late for him to dodge the attack of the second guardian. He had only enough time to raise his sword and try to block the strike. The heavy impact made him lose balance and fall down on his back hitting his head against the ground. He lost consciousness for a while moving with his memories far in the past. It was now 1668. Two years passed since the Great Fire of London. Seith was going to bed, wearing nothing but an old, long shirt used for sleeping. As soon as he lied down, a woman came in and lied down next to him. It was his wife; Elizabeth.

“Charles, I want to tell you something,” she said extinguishing two candles at the bed with her fingers.

“What is it, Elizabeth?”

“I think I’m with a child.”

A gentle smile appeared on his face, but his eyes were full of joy. He right away hugged the woman and blissfully replied,

“I am glad our Jacob shall have a brother or a sister.”

“He shall feel alone no more,” the woman replied.

Two days later, they were walking back home from a festival in London. It was late at night, and the moon was the only source of light in the narrow streets where the stench of urine was the only smell in the air. Suddenly, five men stepped out from behind a corner and blocked their way. At first, Seith thought they were robbers or thieves.

“Well, well, what do we have here,” the fat one said looking

at them both.

Seith took a good look at them and immediately recognized who they were,

“You,” he said stepping to the front.

“Charles, what’s goin’ on?” Elizabeth asked feeling shivers all over her body.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“You don’t remember, Seith?”

Elizabeth was baffled. She had no idea what they were talking about and what they wanted from her husband. A shorter, ugly man with a huge mole on his nose leaned against a brick wall on the left and spoke,

“Dunar sent us. He is very angry with you for not receiving any souls from you.”

“What is he talking about?” Elizabeth asked now getting scared. “Who’s Dunar?”

Seith ignored her. He walked closer to the men.

“I sent him no souls, for I saw that what we were doing here was wrong. These are good people, they do no harm to our realm, and we shall do no harm to theirs. I have a life here, a wife, a son and I shall have another child.”

“Ha! Just hear yourself, Seith,” the fat one laughed.

“Dunar wants you back and we came here for you,” the third one added.

“Tell Dunar I shall go nowhere.”

“He gave us a specific order in case you said that,” the fat one said coming towards Elizabeth.

“No!” leave her alone.”

Seith threw himself at the fat man and punched him in the face so hard that he fell onto the rocky road. The others reacted quickly and grabbed Seith by his arms and held him tightly.

“Well, well, well. It was a big mistake for you to do this,” the

fat one said standing up.

He went up to the woman, took out a blade and cut her stomach open with one swing. A terrible shriek echoed in the streets as Elizabeth fell on her knees. She was still trying to understand what was going on.

“No!” Seith cried trying to break from the grip.

“Please... I’m with a child.”

The fat man crouched at the woman and put his hand into her stomach.

“What do you know. You were right. There is a child.”

Next he raised the blade and as he was about to strike the final blow, Seith kicked the man on his right, broke the arm of the second one and rushed towards his wife. As he was right at her trying to stop the blade, another demon pushed him to the back. The fat man stabbed the woman right into her heart and she screamed again for a second, only to lie down and bleed to death in agony.

“This is a punishment for your not following orders. Oh, and if you want to come back home to Jacob. Well, he’s dead, too.”

Seith couldn’t stand it anymore. What he heard and saw released his full potential. The anger he felt inside pushed him to act. He zoomed to the fat man, took the blade from him, then cut his head off. He then turned around and looked at the four men. His eyes were different now. Instead of two brown balls, they were now yellow as if something was burning inside. His mouth became black and bigger. Momentarily, he made a slash at the rest, killing them one by one by either slashing through them with the iron knife or ripping their bodies apart without any difficulty. When it was over he kneeled at Elizabeth’s body as tears ran his cheeks and he cried so loud punching his fist against the road.

The furious demon made a step forward and stamped his foot with rage on Seith’s chest. Tokutei saw it and swiftly zoomed

there, but Seith grabbed the huge guardian by the foot and with one swing he ripped his leg and threw the body into the abyss.

"The key, you fool, quickly!" Seith yelled ignoring the Asian attempt to help him back on his feet.

Tokutei took out the key from the bottom of his sword and hurtle towards the door. Dan and Patricia were right after him. It was now clear what was curved on the doors. The right side had an image of an angel holding a long sword pointed up, while the second one showed a demon holding a similar sword but pointed down. When Seith stood up he realized they won't be able to escape in time for there were still many demons all around them.

"Just put the key into the lock and turn twice. When you see the red light, step in. I shall hold them off for as long as I can."

"I'll help you," Patricia replied shooting everything she saw. Then the ceiling lit up again as another ball appeared in the sky. Dan looked at it and quickly did the math.

"We won't be able to escape this one," he said with disappointment.

The ball of fire with the same size as the previous one was tearing right at them. Luckily, down below was only one catapult and the attacks couldn't occur so often. It would crash exactly where the door was, killing instantly everyone within a dozen feet. While Tokutei was struggling to open the lock, the rest were nervously trying to hold the demons off, at the same time glancing at Tokutei and the upcoming sphere.

"Hurry up!" Patricia shouted nervously.

The ball was getting lower and lower and there was little time left. Seith had realized that there was no point in running away as neither of them would make it. Tokutei turned the key and the door instantly opened revealing a reddish light.

"I shall hold them off. You go!" Seith said running forward at the demons even though it was no use killing them.

There was no time to think his words through, Patricia looked one last time at Seith as he was fighting the possessors, and ran after Michael and the rest. The burning sphere fell onto the area smashing everything including the portal. There was an explosion and everything covered in flames. Small pieces of burning flesh fell down onto the road with the marching army. The bombardment stopped. There was nothing left at the portal above.

48.

“EMF readings exceeded 600!” Donald White in the Alpha Point headquarters said.

“That’s why we lost the communication,” Williams replied.

“Sir, we’re losing power.”

Everyone in the headquarters looked at the flickering screens only to see them disappear a moment later.

“It’s done, we’re out of power.”

“I don’t need to explain what that means, but I can say only this; beware and keep salt bullets ready,” Williams said loudly. Outside the building, Roberts Road was full of vampires. One of them attacked a marine from above quickly breaking his neck. Lian noticed it and straight away sent a series of precise shots at the creature. As she was reloading, she felt a huge pain on her shoulder and within a second she found herself lying on the lawn. She looked around baffled and saw another vampire being beheaded by some martial artist. She wanted to get back on her feet as quickly as she could, but something grabbed her hand and pulled out to the parking lot. It was the dead soldier everyone had forgotten to shoot. Now being a zombie he was a threat to all of them. With her other hand, she pointed her barrel at the undead’s forehead and pulled the trigger. The grip released instantly and she was free to engage into the fight again. As she

was running to the marines barely holding off the army of demons that was only a few yards away, the blocking vehicles mysteriously pushed to the side turning over.

“Salt bullets!” someone shouted as a dozen of transparent figures appeared in the middle of the road.

Most of them looked human, but there were some much older that managed to turned into scary apparitions of frightening shapes and godlike abilities. Those who were further kept shooting at the demonic creatures, while a few in the parking lot switched the ammo into salt bullets and got rid of the spirits. At that time three things happened; a gigantic group of zombies came down from the hill, another group of spirits appeared in several places inside Alpha Point, and the left flank of demons reached the destroyed Strykers on the other side of the zone. Amanda was fighting near Lian. She had two pistols in her hands; one with poisoned bullets, one with regular ones.

“Cover me!” she shouted to one of the marines as she made a slash towards the upturned Hummers.

Jason rushed into the headquarters. He was already tired from endless fighting.

“Sir, I think we should evacuate Alpha Point. We won’t be able to stop them here.”

Williams looked out the window at the army entering the zone.

“What about this huge monsters?” the soldier from the window asked.

“We’ve already killed them, but we lost the Strykers.”

Williams was standing there in silence with his eyes dropped.

“Sir, we won’t prevail if we stay here.”

“Sir, they’re closing in on us from all sides,” First Sergeant Jackson rushed in trying to catch his breath.

The sounds of shots, groans, moans, screams were coming from the outside. Williams raised his head and sped to the weaponry

for his gun.

“We’re going to the tunnel. It’s only a couple of feet wide so we’re gonna have advantage over them. Jason, Jackson, pass the order to the others.”

Jason took a few clips from the weaponry, while Williams looked around the headquarters. The screens were not working, the table where hunters used to sit was now empty. They lost. It was time to retreat. Jason put the clips into his side pockets.

“We don’t need to cross the road to get to the tunnel. There’s an underground passage from the basement.”

“Good. Jason, tell the others about the evacuation, we’ll meet in the tunnel.”

Williams and two other soldiers were heading for the stairs, when two white figures appeared in front of them. None of them had salt bullets activated. Jason pressed the switch button and shot the spirits.

“To unlock the passage you need to open the washing machine and pull a lever inside,” O.D. reminded.

“Understood, good luck to you.”

Jason rushed to the window. There were three soldiers with him.

“You heard the boss, tell everyone we’re going to the tunnel.” Having said that, he jumped through the window onto a tent below. The area looked terrifying; bodies of soldiers, vampires and a few demons were lying everywhere. The parking lot, the walls and the trees were covered in blood stains and salt piles. On the right a horde of vampires was pushing through and on the left the colossal army of demons. He saw another UV grenade exploding with light.

“Pull back! Pull back!” he shouted loudly. “Withdraw to the tunnel!”

Those who heard him, followed him to the entrance to the tunnel situated about fifty feet from Roberts Road.

"Soldiers!" he tapped of them on his back. "I need you to go inside these buildings," he pointed at the last two structures of Alpha Point, "And tell everyone you need to get to the tunnels. Tell them to use an underground passage in the basement."

"Roger that."

"To open it, you must open the washing machine and pull the lever inside."

"Acknowledged," the soldiers replied and rushed into the buildings.

Jason took a few shots at the ghosts appearing ahead and tried to spot Lian in the crowd. He noticed Amanda fighting at the Hummers. A few explosions came from the army. Someone did a wise thing, but at the same time one of the Hummers exploded filling the air with thick, black smoke.

"To the tunnel!" someone exclaimed from the smoke.

Jason couldn't see Lian anywhere. He had no choice but to follow the soldiers to the tunnel. It was no use waiting there any longer.

"UV grenades!" a suggestion popped up.

He could see several fast-moving figures in the smoke, zombies roaming around and the vampires running everywhere. A few people threw the grenades around to make their way to the tunnels. The rest threw regular grenades at the army, far enough not to hurt anyone. As he was running across a short lawn into Roberts Road, the UV grenades exploded with light. Yet, the light was too weak to make its way through the smoke and burnt only those who were outside the black cloud. Those who weren't affected by the deadly UV light, got killed by the marines. Jason heard roars and grunting noises coming from the smoke. He turned back and saw dozens of warthens, possessors, guardians, flying demons, and the most dangerous- orts. They threw themselves at the running soldiers overthrowing many of them.

"Shit," he slowed down to help them.

The others did the same. Some of them were shooting the creatures off their comrades, while the others tried to help them to get back on their feet.

“We need medics here!”

“We can’t keep them here, take them to the tunnel at once.”

“Use the grenade launchers at the demons!”

Hardly had he heard that, than he heard the left flank of demons running from the southern side of Alpha Point. He couldn’t see them because of the smoke, but the noises made blood run cold.

“Two flanks merged! Run, run, run!”

Amanda shot out of the smoke, covered in black stains.

“Where’s Lian?” Jason asked impatiently.

“Haven’t seen her.”

“Help me with this soldier.”

Jason threw an arm of a wounded soldier round his neck, while Amanda threw the second one and they both helped him get to the tunnel. The medics were already waiting for them. Jason waited at the door for the rest to get in. A little bit deeper in the tunnel, a piece of the wall moved to the side as Williams and a dozen of other soldiers went through.

“It’s everybody, throw a few grenades and lock the door!” came the order.

Jason impatiently looked at the burning Alpha Point trying to spot Lian among the smoke. He could see nothing human. Several soldiers threw grenades while some others used grenade launchers and after that the door to the tunnel were locked.

Lian got caught up in a fight among demons and ghosts. The thick smoke prevented her from seeing anything further than five feet. She shot another ghost simultaneously kicking off two possessors when she heard two grenades roll along the road.

“Crap,” she whispered making a slash at the hill on the eastern side.

She was tearing as fast as she could, getting as far as possible when the explosions came. The blast blew her off making her fly numbly a couple of feet to the east.

3 BATTLE OF WILLS

December 22, 2012

1.

The warehouse somewhere in the city was really quiet. No noises, no one walking around, nothing. There was also nothing on the flat and empty floor apart from some dust and dirt. Somewhere on the floor the small pieces of dirt started to move, then jump, then vaporised as a few-yard wide, yellow ring appeared. The light burnt a circle around, leaving a few-inch deep gaps. Then from the light around emerged wide door made entirely of fire which opened seconds later. Through the door came out Tokutei, Dan, Surya, Michael and Patricia.

“It wasn’t so painful, was it?” Patricia said looking around.

“I hope we’re in San Francisco,” Dan added trying to spot any window or door through which he could see anything what was outside.

“Seith, you fool,” Michael said under his breath seeing only his hat dropping onto the floor from the fire door. Tokutei and Surya made a few steps further, as the mysterious circle gradually disappeared leaving only the burnt shape in the floor. Michael

glanced at his watch and pressed some buttons on it.

"We need to contact Arthur ASAP," he said, then tapped the watch several times.

"What's wrong?" Dan asked walking to him in order to provide a helping hand.

"It doesn't work."

"Maybe the battery is out," the boy tried to find a solution. Surya took out a tablet from her rucksack and turned it on. Yet, the screen showed nothing.

"Shit, I know what's wrong."

The others looked at her waiting to get the answer.

"You remember Pyramiden? We had the same problem."

Dan wide opened his eyes, as he leaned against the wall.

Pyramiden was a horror to him. As much as he hates ghosts, this mission gave him a few weeks of nightmares.

"Don't tell us it's caused by..."

"Unfortunately, it is," she nodded unwillingly.

"Caused by what?" Michael inquired raising his eyebrows.

Surya put her tablet back into the rucksack and took a deep breath.

"Supernatural energy. Arthur said that when there's too much spiritual activity, you know ghosts, spirits and so on, it can dim all electrical devices."

"Too much?" Patricia boomed. "We faced EMF readings up to 80 and there was nothing wrong with the devices."

"80 is nothing. We had over 450 back in Pyramiden."

"Before the EMF went dead," Tokutei reminded.

"H-How much?" the girl asked in disbelief.

Dan stopped thinking about the dimming supernatural force.

"Hey, Pat, I thought you knew about it. You said you monitored our missions."

Tokutei started to walk towards the door separating from the

group. No one noticed him.

“We did, but not in such details.”

Finally Michael saw Tokutei.

“Where are ya’ goin’, man? he asked raising his voice.

“Well,” the warrior turned around. “If we cannot contact Arthur, we have to get there somehow.”

“Like we know where we are,” Michael replied shaking his head.

“Either you go with me or I’m going there by myself.”

Dan and Patricia followed Tokutei towards the exit.

“Wait for us,” Patricia exclaimed running after them.

2.

Soon they were out of the warehouse, standing in the empty parking lot. It was late at night and what they saw devastated their hopes. There was no one in sight. All they could see were several, white, abandoned trucks left in the area of the warehouse. There was a fence with a barbed wire surrounding the venue, and outside it, there were a few empty cars. It seemed that people left in a hurry because some of them had doors open, lights switched on or engines still running. The sky was covered with thick clouds and they could hear helicopters flying somewhere in the distance. They could also hear sounds of shots echoing from the buildings more than five miles from where they were.

“Are we in San Francisco?” Dan asked.

“We should be. “

“It doesn’t look like somewhere familiar,” Patricia added trying to spot any landmarks.

There were lots of other warehouses lying on both sides of the street. Dan walked to the nearby truck and focused on its lower part.

"Guys, we're definitely in San Francisco, look at the plates." The others quickly directed their eyes at the plates of one of the truck.

"At least one mystery is solved," Tokutei sighed walking towards the street.

"And where are ya' goin' again?" Michael shouted.

"To check where we are."

Dan and Surya ran after him and momentarily they were in the middle of the street.

"Davidson Avenue," Dan read from the opposite building that was some kind of a shop with audio systems.

"Look there," the Asian man pointed towards the city centre. Dan and Surya turned around and saw a gleam of fire a few miles in the distance. The shots were of various kinds; assault rifles, pistols and rockets.

"There's some kind of a battle," Patricia said walking out the warehouse territory.

"And where is a battle there are soldiers," Tokutei added.

"We have to reach them and find out what's goin' on over there."

"I hope you guys don't think of goin' there on foot, right?" Michael said walking towards one of the SUVs left a few feet from him.

Patricia ran up to him.

"Hey, Mike! Don't take the SUV, take the pick-up instead," she pointed at a blue, Ford pick-up. "Come on guys, put your stuff there and off we go."

As soon as she said that, a car alarm sounded from a car parked at the end of the street startling everyone.

"Someone's there!" Tokutei whispered drawing his Katana sword, but then he felt Surya's touch on his arm.

"We don't have time for it, we must get to the others ASAP."

“B-But.”

“No buts, Tok,” Dan said firmly running towards the pick-up. “The girl is right, we have to reach Maldito castle.”

The Asian man put away his sword and unwillingly walked to the car, carefully observing the beeping car. Dan threw his weapon to the cabin and as he was about to get in onto the driver seat he heard Michael’s voice.

“Oh no you won’t. I’m drivin’.”

Surya quickly jumped onto the back of the truck throwing her rucksack in the corner.

“I’m riding here in case we meet something.”

“Tok and Pat, join her,” Dan tried to be in charge by saying this which wasn’t supposed to turn out as some kind of an order. Michael climbed inside, threw his assault rifle to the backseat and started to look around.

“Great, the keys are still here, and the fuel level is acceptable.”

He turned the key and the engine started with a loud roar.

“At least the car works,” Surya said unsuccessfully trying to switch her tablet again.

“Fasten your seatbelts, we’ve got a long ride ahead of us,” he said adjusting the mirror. “And keep your eyes open. We don’t know what we’re gonna meet there.”

He turned around the truck and drove towards the end of the street. As he was passing the sounding car, Tokutei tried to spot anything that could trigger the alarm. There was nothing unusual.

“Cable-car tracks,” Dan said pointing at the street. “Follow them, they’re gonna take us to some highway.”

“As you wish, boss,” came the answer followed by a sigh. Patricia was nervously looking around at the empty street with abandoned cars. There was nothing unusual about it, except for that mysterious, supernatural force that was dimming their

electronic devices. She heard some shriek coming from behind a tall fence on the other side of the street, and immediately looked there pointing her gun at the direction of where the shriek came from.

"I can't see anything," Tokutei whispered.

"I don't know why," Surya sounded a little bit worried, "But I have a bad feeling about this."

"What do ya' mean," Patricia asked forgetting about the shriek.

"I fear we'll fall into a much deeper shit than down there."

"Surya, please keep your worries away, and think positively. We can still win this thing."

"We're not alone here, Surya," Tokutei added. "This is not Hell."

Oh if only he knew how wrong he was saying this last sentence.

"There's a highway," Dan exclaimed seeing a wide road cutting the horizon about half a mile ahead.

"Then let's go there."

And they went. When they passed another junction they had a better view on the city. The hills were visible in the distance and they could see that the gleam of fire didn't come from just one place. About a dozen of buildings were burning somewhere deep in the city. The jets and choppers were flying in the distance surrounded by hundreds of red dots. Michael and Dan were gazing at the sky. Then something caught their eyes. They saw a massive explosions inside one of the choppers and saw it falling down. Having seen this, Michael pressed the accelerator as hard as he could.

"The sooner we get there, the fewer people will die."

3.

Alpha Point became empty of humans as four armies merged

and entered the underground tunnel. All the zombies seemed to be put under a spell not to attack anything but humans. Some of the demons and vampires frisked the house to make sure no one stayed there alive. They found two soldiers hiding near the exit to the roof and quickly disposed of them.

On the other side of the tunnel everyone who survived the attack on Alpha Point finally ran out. The sandy beach was covered with dozen of bodies. Some of them were lying right at the very edge of the beach, while the others were floating on the waves. However, zombies were not the only bodies that covered the area. There were much more flying demons penetrated with bullets spread across the coast and the ocean. The water lost its beauty and began to look more like a graveyard than the ocean. SMA Williams was among the survivors. Tired as he was after running four miles of the tunnel, he found hope again. When he was at the very end of the tunnel he could hear voices in his earwig again, as the communication was restored. The salt blocks that were circling the island did keep the ghosts away.

“Juliet, do you copy?”

“Williams, thank goodness, where are you?” Jack replied turning towards Bishop. “It’s Williams, they made through.”

“Leaving the tunnel. They destroyed Alpha Point completely. Communication is back, that’s a one good thing for sure.”

“Spirits cannot enter the island,” he heard Bishop’s voice. “Has everyone got back from the tunnel?” Williams turned back at the exit.

“Twenty soldiers are still there, as we planned.”

“Twenty?” Bishop replied worryingly. “It means that we lost more than fifty people there.”

Arthur checked the life signs screen and spoke in a worried voice,

“Where is Lian?”

“I lost her,” Jason replied.

"Is she dead?"

"Arthur, it's our Lian, she's too good to be dead."

Williams looked back at his men.

"We're joining Bravo as we speak and waiting for those bastards."

"Our boys are connecting to the tunnel turrets now. We'll hold them off for some time. Take all the wounded to the medic tent."

Having heard that, everyone heard shots coming from the inside of the tunnel.

"We'd better hurry. It's started."

Jason accelerated towards the gate where Bravo zone began. The gate had opened a few seconds earlier so that everyone could enter. At the gate there was already waiting for them sergeant Edward Martinez; a tall, white man without any hair apart from a small beard trimmed to one inch.

"How many snipers among you?"

"Twenty with me, the rest are in the tunnel," Williams announced.

"If anyone needs medical attention direct them to that tent," he indicated at a wide tent among the trees about hundred yards from the road. "Those who are able to fight, take position along the fence and on all the towers on the trees."

Everyone got inside the zone, but the gate didn't close. They were still waiting for everyone from the tunnel to return. The zone itself looked like a war camp with soldiers, Hummers and ammo packs spread everywhere. About fifty yards further the forest began with all the towers built on the top of the trees. Many of the marines were waiting alert on the wooden wall, while some others created several lines of defence every fifty yards. Over six hundred people were in that zone, and about the same number was in the mirror zone in the north-eastern part of the island.

“Where is SMA Jones?” Williams asked.

“In the tent at the very end of the zone. Just go that way.”

4.

Lian was lying near the thick bush not far from Alpha Point. She quickly opened her eyes as a loud growl hit her ears. She shook her head and rubbed her face trying to remember what had happened. Another groan coming from a few feet away brought everything back to her; from the moment she woke up that morning till the explosion of the grenade. There were several zombies walking around her including three of the marines she recognised from Alpha Point. She looked back and saw how many demons and vampires there were in fact. If she wanted to stay alive she had no choice but to crawl a few yards to the front behind the bushes and get rid of the zombies before they would notice her.

“No way goin’ that way,” she said under her breath thinking what do to.

She rolled on her stomach and felt for her Masada around her, but there was nothing. She had only a knife in her boot and a pistol at her belt, which was useless at that moment as it was lacking a silencer. There was nothing she could do but to crawl further until she would disappear somewhere on the path behind the hill. When she reached it, two zombies noticed her and began limping towards her. She took out a knife, got back on her feet and penetrated their skulls with the sharp blade. Their bodies fell numb onto the sandy ground. The spiritual activity was still blocking all the devices. She knew she had to get further in order to contact Maldito castle. But to get there fast, she had to find a car. Luckily, she recalled a few houses on Roberts Road not far to the south from Alpha Point. Yet, to get there she had to remain stealthy and alive.

5.

In the meantime, Arthur and Bishop were analysing the fatality rate. Jack was reading the statistics aloud,

“Forty marines down, ten snipers, one medic and one mercenary. It’s in Alpha itself. Here on the island we’ve lost so far: four marines and one sniper.”

“What are the estimated number of kills?” Bishop asked. Jack looked at the stats displayed on one of his screens.

“I can’t say exactly, but more than thirty million.”

“It’s the amount of them crossing within a single hour,” Arthur slowly shook his head glancing at the screen still showing unit one’s life signs inactive. “Show me the view from the tunnel, and change Eagle Eye feed to the island.” Almost immediately, nine screens displayed the view from Eagle Eye; each screen a different zone, the last screen changed into the view from one of the cameras in the tunnel. It could be seen as army of demons was walking along the dark corridor. The shots spread from the distance killing the very first ones.

“Engage all the turrets,” Bishop ordered. As he said that the screen started to flicker only to disappear completely.

“EMF is showing 500,” Jack announced. Bishop selected soldiers who were in the tunnel on his tablet and sent a message to them.

“Marines, use salt bullets, if they get too close leave the tunnel immediately.”

“Understood.”

A few shots came and the screen showed the picture again. It didn’t take long for it to disappear as the EMF readings crossed 500.

Bishop rested his legs for a while still monitoring the situation in

the tunnel.

“I think, the turrets are doing pretty good.”

6.

Unit one was going fast along the Southern Freeway. There was nothing special on their way. The freeway was clear apart from empty cars left at the side. They could still see thousand of reddish dots flying in the distance, but they couldn't see any tall buildings. They also failed to see any living humans on their way. The city was dark and empty. Suddenly, Michael pressed the brake hard as he heard Patricia screaming,

“Zombies!”

The tyres screeched as the car slightly turned to the right side. There were four undead walking on the same lane towards south-west. They didn't react however, to the sound of the screech. The background was filled by sounds of marching and sometimes a shot spread in the distance reminding everyone else that there were still humans fighting.

“Where're they goin'?” Surya asked preparing her pistol.

“Probably to the island,” Dan replied casually as if it wasn't a big deal to see walking corpses.

“What are we doin'? kill or leave?” Michael asked from the cabin.

Patricia checked the amount of ammo there was left and shook her head with a slight disappointment, but before she managed to say anything, something had swished right from the roof top at the opponents in the front.

“What the...?” she muttered as she saw the zombies falling onto the streets numb with two shurikens in the back of their heads.

“Sorry,” she heard Tokutei's voice. “I just thought it would be the best solution.”

Next he jumped off the truck and ran towards the corpses.

"And where the hell are ya' goin'?" Michael inquired confused.

"For my ammo," came a joyful answer.

"He's like that, you'll get used to it," Dan commented.

"Yeah, I heard that before," Michael replied.

Patricia jumped off the roof and knocked at the side window.

"Hey, pretty boy, I'm taking the cabin now, hop on the back."

Dan without a word opened the door and unwillingly switched seats with the girl. Surya gave him a confused look as if she was saying, *why did you do that?* Dan turned quickly around as a loud roar came from somewhere in the city.

"Hush... Did you hear that?" Surya asked trying to spot something in the distance.

"I don't see nothin'" Michael replied. "Tok, hurry up."

Tokutei returned and the truck hit the road again. They passed the bodies and gained speed. On the left they saw cable-car tracks that were going along the freeway and on the other side of the tracks a few houses were barely seen because nothing illuminated them.

"If I remember correctly from Bishop's plan," Patricia spoke, "There should be some roadblock on this freeway. If they're still alive we can get some info."

"Or try to contact Arthur," Michael added.

Hardly had he said that, when something appeared on the bridge above the freeway. It was moving fast across to the other side.

"Demons and orts!" Surya shouted from the back.

Two orts noticed the approaching truck and quickly jumped off the bridge onto the road and ran towards the vehicle. The other demons; a few warthers, and guardians saw it too and followed the orts.

"Hold on tight!" Michael yelled pressing the brakes and

quickly turned left to avoid the collision.

The back of the car skidded to the front as Tokutei almost fell out. Dan and Surya held onto the roof. They drove off the way through a few trees on the left. One of such tree hit Dan on the head. The boy rolled to the back of the truck, which passed through a fence and now was speeding towards a soccer pitch right behind it. Michael lost control of the car as he hit the wall above the tribunes and broke through the stairs. The hit made Dan fall out onto the concrete area where the tribunes began. The boy raised his head and watched the truck bumping down the stairs only to stop in the middle of the dark pitch. There were a few dead bodies wandering around the pitch. Patricia quickly opened the window, stuck out her head and threw up onto the grass and a side of the door.

“Are you OK?” Surya asked hearing the moaning of the dead.

“Yeah,” Michael replied kicking the door out. “Grab your weapons, ladies, we’ve got a small battle to win.”

“Dan!” Surya shouted realising he had fallen out.

She looked at the direction of tribunes and saw him tearing towards the truck along the pitch with three orts on his back and a few warthers.

“Sh-Shoot’em!” he screamed at the top of his voice.

Tokutei had no range weapon on him. He knew he couldn’t ran at the orts by himself so he turned round and rushed at the zombies. Patricia took a few shots at the chasing orts, but the bullets did no harm.

“Any sharp ammo left?”

“We lost everything,” Michael replied.

Dan was running so fast that everyone thought he would trip and then would be crushed by the monsters. Finally, he caught up with the group, but he didn’t stop. Instead he kept on running. Surya looked at him for a while only to realise that the orts would

smash the truck any second now.

“Take cover!” she shouted making a dodge to the right. The heavy steps of the orts were getting louder till they ram the truck rolling it over. The others had been able to duck out of the way just in time.

“Only me and Tok can get read of them,” she shouted to the others ejecting her two daggers.

“Too dangerous,” Patricia replied getting back on her feet. Michael changed the ammo on his gun and aimed at one of the orts.

“Only Surya and Tok my ass,” he said sarcastically mocking them as he fired a bullet right into the mouth of one creature. The sound of warthers was coming from the tribunes, which caught everyone’s eye, but something else distract them. The ort exploded splashing across the pitch.

“Ha, it worked,” Michael commented with a grin, aiming at another creature.

Dan finally stopped running and bent down resting his hands on his knees trying to catch his breath. He could see Tokutei dealing with the zombies and the others trying to fight the orts. Another monster exploded. Surya decided to leave those creatures to Patricia and Michael and she ran to the tribunes to deal with the warthers. When she was a few feet from them she jumped into the air, threw a round kick knocking two of the warthers down, then made a spin again with her blades held out and cut through the rest of them. Next she saw two guardians marching through the broken fence of the pitch towards her. She turned round to the group. Tokutei had finished dealing with the zombies, three orts were lying all over the place and Dan came back to the group. She also noticed Michael preparing his gun to deal with the guardians, so she knew she had to return, too. When she finally came back to the overthrown truck it was after the shots, and the

guardians were threat no more. Yet she could still hear some shots not far from the place where they were.

“These shots,” Patricia said. “They’re coming from somewhere behind the fence.”

“These may be our guys,” Tokutei added. “Some roadblock or something. Let’s go and check it.”

And they went across the dark soccer pitch, through the trees and they found themselves on an empty parking lot with abandoned cars on each side. They went north towards the Southern Freeway. With every step they made the sporadic shots seemed closer and closer. When they reached the freeway, they saw a road leading up at the bridge above from where the demons had attacked them by surprise. They also saw several military Hummers standing there and a few figures moving.

“I told you there was a roadblock,” Michael said joyfully taking the lead as the others followed him. “Hold your fire, soldiers!” he exclaimed to make sure no-one will shoot them.

“Hold you fire,” someone shouted from the bridge.
“Friendlies on three.”

There were four Hummers blocking the road with soldiers at the mounted machine guns. One tent was towering on the left side of the vehicles, from which several curious soldiers walked out. When they came close enough to see the soldiers vividly, they noticed a large building; like a garage with dozens of cable-cars parked outside. The bridge was covered with bodies of zombies, demons and small piles of salt that looked rather like patchy snow. A man with short, white hair stepped out and walked towards them.

“My ears didn’t play trick on me. I knew I heard some shots from the pitch.”

“Yeah, we had a little incident with a few demons,” Patricia replied.

The man held out his hand and smiled,

“Master Sergeant Evans, Charlie Evans. I’m in charge of this very roadblock.”

“Michael Devis, and these are my colleagues, Tokutei, Surya, Dan and Patricia.”

They all shook their hands.

“Oh my God,” Evans said stepping back as his face became red and his hands shook.

No one knew what was going on. Was there something wrong they did or didn’t do. Surya though first that it was her appearance, but the soldier wasn’t looking at her. His eyes were directed at Tokutei’s uniform, at his ASAT logo on the arm, to be precise.

“Is there somethin’ wrong?” Tokutei asked glancing at his left arm.

“You-You’re ASATs.”

“Yes,” came a baffled answer.

“Then it means it’s over.”

“What’s over?” Surya stepped forward.

“This whole battle is over. If you’re here it means they destroyed the castle.”

Surya thought for a while only to boom a few seconds later,

“No, no, no, you’re wrong. We’re the other unit. The one everyone’s waitin’ for.”

“We’ve just came from Hell with the ring,” Dan added hoping it would cheer Evens up.

The soldier sighed with relief as another shot echoed in the background.

“Then, there’s still hope. I’m sorry, I took you for the other team. I’m glad it’s you.”

“We need to get to Maldito ASAP,” Michael said.

Evans turned around and walked toward the tent.

“Follow me. You must be hungry and thirsty. As far as Maldito is concerned, I’m afraid it won’t be so easy.”

“What do you mean?” Dan asked following the man inside the tent.

They entered the tent where a few soldiers were having rest, lunch or medical attention.

“Hell opened a few hours ago and the whole western part of the peninsula is covered by literally millions of demons.”

“Yeah we saw them in Hell marching to the portal,” Dan commented making for a coffee machine.

“It’s not the worst thing I’m afraid. Let me start from beginning.”

7.

Meanwhile, in Maldito headquarters Arthur was watching the reports from the tunnel carefully. The only view he could still get was from the camera situated at the very end of the tunnel. He could see the soldiers several hundred yards ahead and a vast army of zombies and demons getting closer with every second. Everything that was happening in the tunnel was heard in the headquarters.

“We ain’t gonna hold’em off. Move to the next point... Josh move, move , move... Just a moment. Wilson, come on.”

“At least we have the communication running,” he said to himself.

Bishop returned from somewhere and glimpsed at the screen.

“Maybe you should consider blowing up the tunnel?”

“I was thinking about it, but then they will either swim or be carried by others here. When they march out from the tunnel, we would have an advantage over them to focus our fire in a much narrower place.”

“Maybe you’re right.”

"Sir," Jack stood up from the desk. "I think I will do better in the field. Therefore, I am asking you for your permission to join our men in Bravo."

Bishop peeked at Arthur for approval. The old man slowly nodded.

"I believe, Jack, this is no longer a place for you. You're a good soldier and a better ASAT. Go to Bravo zone and help the others."

"Thank you, sir."

Jack headed for the exit and as soon as he disappeared President's call popped up on the screen.

"Bishop, find someone for Jack's place. I have to take this." He answered the phone.

"West, good to see you still in one piece."

"Thank you, sir," the old man replied not knowing how to react to this sentence.

"I've heard you lost Alpha Point."

"Unfortunately, that is correct, sir. We're less vulnerable on the island. We've successfully repelled two attacks of flying demons including one consisting of over ten million enemies. What is more, their arrows won't reach us from the ground."

"But they can reach you from air."

"We have many a sniper watching the sky, sir."

"Arthur, I'm not so concerned about Alpha Point. They lasted more than I expected. You proved to be a good leader. However, I'm worrying about what may happen next, hence I'm sending you ten thousand marines. I'm also sending unmanned aircrafts to diminish the army."

"Sir, you saw what happened to the jets."

"I did. And I regret to inform you that we lost every chopper in the city. I made a decision to sent unmanned aircrafts. They will be assisting you within the territory of the island only. The aircraft carriers are lining the shore as we speak."

“So be it.”

“And one more thing. Have you heard anything from unit one?”

“No, sir. Nothing. I don’t think I will till we figure some way to get rid of the spiritual activity.”

“I’m off to make another speech to the press. I’ll contact you soon. Good luck, Arthur.”

He hanged up and Arthur looked at the feed again.

“How many turrets have we got left on the land?” he asked.

“Seven or eight,” someone replied.

“Get access to the turrets around Bravo and Charlie. Make sure the tunnel will be stuck with their own bodies.”

8.

Jack went outside to the courtyard and headed towards the main gate. As he was walking, he moved back with his memories to an unpleasant situation from his past. It was November 1998, Poland. Jack was sitting at a dinner table with his wife, Dorota; a short woman, with shoulder-length, blonde hair and brown eyes, dressed in casual clothes.

“How was work, Jacek?” she asked using his Polish name, trying to start a conversation.

Jack swallowed a piece of chicken and replied firmly,

“You know I cannot talk about it.”

“Ah, as always, GROM stuff.”

“Hush! Did you hear that?” he asked as some noise came from the outside.

“What is that?”

Jack rushed to the kitchen for a gun, but before he found one, something hit him on the head and he lost consciousness.

He opened his eyes and realized he was being dragged by his legs along a forest floor. He was still weak and didn’t know what

was going on. Looking around he saw two large figures pulling him and two more pulling his wife. He couldn't see them clearly because of the darkness, but he could smell the stench coming from them as if they had never been in water.

"He's awake!" one of the figures said with its deep, scratchy voice.

Next it came to Jack and hit him on the head to make him lose his consciousness again.

He half-opened his eyes again after a few minutes. He was still being dragged. Now he was more careful. He understood he had to find his way out, and most of all, he had to save his wife. Serving many years in GROM he had these particular skills.

"We're almost there," one of the creatures moaned.

Jack then quickly twisted his body breaking the grips on his ankle.

"Idiots," the first creature bellowed letting go of Dorothy. Jack managed to sprang to his feet and broke the neck of the first one, then rushed to next one and hit him hard in the chest, then jumped clutching the opponents head between his thighs and broke another one's neck. Now he had time to see what these creatures looked like. They were certainly no humans, at least not any more. Their faces were deformed, with thin noses slightly higher, longer ears and their skin was grayish and dark. Their eyes were yellow and they seemed to have bigger muscles than humans. Next he rushed to Dorothy, who was still unconscious, then raised her light body and placed it around his neck and made a slash towards the dim light many miles away.

"After him!" the creature groaned throwing himself after them.

Jack was running as fast as he could. He could hear several steps behind him and his wife starting to wake up.

"What is it?" she said weakly.

"Everything will be OK. Just a few more minutes. Are you

hurt?"

But there was no answer.

"Honey?"

The steps behind him silenced, as he slowed down, put her wife on the moss and stared in shock. There was an arrow coming through her forehead. She was dead.

9.

Everyone in Bravo was ready. They were gazing into the tunnel waiting for the remaining soldiers to run out. Soon, the last group emerged from the dark entrance. Among them was Eye and Mary. They made for the gate and as they entered, the gate closed.

"I'm taking the tower," Mary said heading instantly at a tall tower building at the fence.

"So I'm going somewhere at the back," Eye replied.

Their SMA's voice came through the earwigs.

"They're gonna be here any minute now. I think it's high time we used our minigun defence system."

"Activate the MDS!" one of the marines shouted to the others at the gate.

Almost momentarily two platform raised on both sides of the gate. The platforms were a few feet wide and had four large miniguns attached to a holder. Two were at the height of five feet and the other two at the height of one foot. Behind the holder there was a metal armchair with a transparent screen at the eye level. Each platform was operated by one man who could turn the weapon side to side as well as up and down with one joystick located in front of the chair. The transparent screen displayed a crosshair to find the target easier. Each soldier directed both weapons at the tunnel and waited. Roars and moans were coming from the dark inside and they seemed to be almost at the very

end. Jason was standing on the gate with his M4 pointed at the tunnel.

"Hi O.D.," he heard from a woman climbing next to her.

When he turned around he saw Natalie.

"Natalie? I didn't know you were here."

She put a beret on her head and replied,

"I heard this before. It's gonna be like in Pyramiden, right?"

"Worse."

Jack entered through the second gate from Delta Zone and headed straight away to the weaponry tent not far from the zone headquarters.

"Give me some SAR 21 and a few clips," he told the man responsible for weapon distribution.

"SAR 21, SAR 21," the man looked around the weaponry. "Ah, here it is. Here you're."

Having been given the rifle, Jack heard dozens of shots coming from the walls in the north of both zones. The army must have indubitably crossed to the island. He loaded five clips into the weapon and ran towards the gate. He could see soldiers running out of the tents and grouping among the trees and bushes. The miniguns were doing much better job than expected. The large boxes with long belts of ammo were capacious enough for the miniguns to fire non-stop for ten minutes. There was of course much more ammo prepared at the platforms for six-hour, non-stop fire from both weapons. Demons were falling down dozen after dozen slowly blocking the entrance with their own bodies. Zombies were still invading the beach but in very low numbers. The sorcerers had cast the spell on the others to enter the tunnel and slowly stumble towards the island.

10.

Unit one was still in the tent inside the roadblock. They were

listening to Evans about everything that had happened after the dead had risen. He had told them about the Fall of the National Cemetery, about the jets, missiles, gigantic army and about what they had faced there.

“When the Hell opened,” one of the soldiers in the tent said. “It was awful. A complete nightmare. Within a few seconds the army sucked them in and they were gone.”

“Did you see it?” Dan asked.

“I was there, on one of the roofs. My friends and I jumped into the car and drove to this very roadblock.”

Evans looked at him sadly, then continued his speech.

“And at about four, which was five hours ago we lost radio and video contact with the rest, so we don’t have any information whether there is anybody alive or not. We fear that since we encounter small groups of demons so far from the road, they began to spread.”

“It’s terrible what is happening here,” Surya said with a sorrow in her voice. “What about the world? Do they know?”

“The president decided to tell them, and as far as I know people started fleeing the country. In many cities Martial law was imposed. Also many sects committed suicide in hundreds.”

Before Michael managed to ask his question a female voice came from outside the tent,

“We have a human coming!”

“What?” Evans asked leaving the tent immediately.

Dan and Tokutei went with him towards the Hummers.

“Don’t shoot!” the man walking across the bridge shouted.

“Hold you fire, soldiers,” Evans ordered seeing a man in his late thirties, carrying a big video camera with him.

“Who the hell are you?”

“I’m Harry Finney. I’m a reporter.”

Evans looked at him puzzled and scratched his white hair.

"The whole city has been evacuated. None of the reports was allowed in."

"I was reporting from Gold Gate Bridge and when the message came that the President had told everybody the truth, most of the people left the area, but not me. I took a boat and went here by myself to show the world what was going on here. And I must admit, I saw pretty bad things here, and I was doing quite a good job, you know, till my camera and phone stopped working."

"Spiritual activity," Tokutei murmured.

"What activity?" Harry replied in disbelief.

"Never mind," Evans added. "The less you know the better." Dan tapped the man on his shoulder.

"And don't bother 'bout the camera. It won't work until you're outside the peninsula."

"If you're hungry, need medical attention come with us to the tent," Evans suggested.

"I need only something to drink. Those things I saw, it's all real, isn't it?"

"They're real," Dan said, "And we gotta stop them, unless...of course, you wanna take them as pets."

"You're kiddin' right?"

"I can't tell you more, I'm afraid," Dan said going inside the tent.

When they all entered the tent, Michael recognised the man immediately.

"Hey, ya're that guy from TV."

"Yup."

"I thought you're not allowed to be here."

"We're not."

"He sneaked in," Dan finished.

Patricia stood up when she saw Evans coming in as the last.

"I think we should decide how to get to the island and take off from here."

Evans looked at Finney and pointed with his head at the coffee machine as well as the food facilities.

"Suit yourself to whatever you like. We have something to discuss here. And you, gentlemen and ladies of course, follow me to the map."

They went outside the tent again to one of the Hummers where Evans took out a paper map of San Francisco and opened it on the hood.

"We're here," he pointed at the Ocean Avenue bridge over Southern Freeway. "The demons are going that way. You may continue going along the Southern Freeway as far as Daly City or... or even Woodlawn Cemetery. Then you're gonna turn into Junipero Serra Freeway. There should be another roadblock on the exit so you may rest there. Next you can take the Westborough west and turn into 35. When you pass this building... what is it... never mind, when you see only green bushes and trees on your right that would be a sign to turn south again and walk up the hills. You should be apposite Alpha Point then."

"Sounds clear to me," Michael commented.

"That Woodlawn cemetery creeps me out," Patricia added. Evans looked at her seriously.

"No need to worry. The zombies have been gone for a few hours now. Everything headed to Maldito island, and we will make sure nothing will chase you."

"What do you mean, you'll make sure?" Dan asked astonished. "I thought, you're gonna join us."

"We had orders to stay and guard the roads."

"But we've got the ring, and the whole war is on Maldito, we need men like you."

Evans dropped his eyes and folded his arms tapping his forearm with one finger.

"I can add three men two your unit and give you one car. There's all I can do, I'm afraid."

"It's still better than nothing," Tokutei smiled accepting the offer.

Evans looked at the soldiers spread around the area.

"Alright, you'll get two gunners and one sniper. Roberts, Mitchell, Collins! New orders."

A few seconds later three men came; the first one, a bald, tall man with an M4 assault rifle hanging on his shoulder, not older than nineteen. The second one, a shorter black man with short, curly hair and a sniper rifle in his hand and the last one a bald, Asian man with a small scar on his left cheek, holding a shotgun in his both hands

"What are the orders, sir?"

"You're gonna escort ASATs to Maldito castle. They're carrying something special that needs to get there ASAP."

"Roger that!"

11.

One of the demons in chief was standing at the edge of the Pacific Coast Highway right below the remains of Alpha Point. Next to him was standing a tall man with medium hair and a dark coat leaning against an upturned Stryker. They were looking at the Maldito island from where hundreds of shots were echoing.

"I don't think this tunnel is the best option," the vampire hissed. "If they keep firing like that, we'll fail."

The tall, brown demon wearing strong armor on his whole body growled through his nostrils.

"We shall not fail. We outnumber them."

"So how are you gonna get to the island. Tunnel is not the

best option.”

“Flying demons shall carry us to the other side. When we destroy their defense, we shall be able to crush them.”

“But don’t you think, big fellow, we should use something stronger than cold steel?”

“Orts and gondars shall do the work for us. They’re swimming to the other side as we speak. We are awaiting Cizin to come and form a bridge.”

“A bridge? Anyway, I’m not sending my men until the passage is clear.”

“You’d better tell your men to get ready. It shall be clean soon.”

It could be seen that hundreds of orts and gondars had entered the ocean from the coast and now were directing towards the island from all sides. Dark as it was made them invisible to the naked eye, but both infrared vision and radars detected the enemies.

“Sir, we’ve got hundreds of large object approaching from north and east,” captain Morris in the headquarters announced.

“Show me them,” Bishop replied focusing his attention on the screen.

He could see a great number of large, dark figures swimming fast towards the island.

“The smaller ones are orts, for sure. I don’t know what the bigger ones are. Use explosives.”

Snipers who had been lying on the northern roof since the morning could see the monsters through their sights. They changed the ammo and tried to eliminate the closest ones first. The other snipers situated along the walls of the zones did the same. Soon the sound of explosions was mixed with regular shooting.

On the shore, the demon in chief and the vampire were

watching the whole situation.

"It looks as if your plan was not so good after all," the vampire shushed.

"Just watch," the large demon replied confidently.

The incoming creatures exploded every few seconds far from the island. Everything seemed to be going smoothly until suddenly, a large number of orts emerged from the water.

"Orts on twelve," one of the snipers announced.

"What? It's impossible," some other replied.

"They must've been swimming under water," yet some other suggested.

A large group of orts got onto the shore and advanced towards the wall of Bravo and Charlie.

"Use MDS on them," SMA Jones ordered.

And they did. One of the MDS turned left and focused its shots at the upcoming orts. There was no point in using exploding ammo anymore, as the orts got too close to the gate. The gondars were right behind them.

"Aim at the big ones!" came the order.

Both MDS were now focused on the gondars, at the same time leaving the tunnel for only a small group of soldiers and turrets. When the number of shots at the tunnel diminished dramatically nothing happened. The tunnel was blocked with hundreds of demon bodies.

"The tunnel is blocked, focus on the big monsters!" another order came.

Marry was on one of the towers set up on a tree. She was using exploding ammos, as it was the only reasonable type of ammo to be used against such creatures. Her every shot brought an explosion that ripped the body of a gondar apart.

On the other side of the shore the two creatures were still observing the events on the island.

“Actually,” the vampire said. “It wasn’t such a bad plan after all.”

No sooner had he said that, than a horde of demon broke through the bodies that were blocking the tunnel and rushed across the beach towards the gate. Marines who were close reacted straight away.

SMA Williams was in the main tent with SMA Jones and a few hunters. They were all observing everything on the screens displaying view from two sniper rifles, feed from Eagle Eye and life signs of the soldiers.

“It doesn’t look good, Jones.”

“I know. They’re gonna break through soon and then it won’t be a matter of hours but minute before the zone is destroyed.” Williams looked at him in a disappointed manner.

“You’re wrong. First of all, they can’t use archers here, so we have way more time for us. Secondly, they’re gonna attack from one side only; the front, and thirdly, which is the most important aspect, I presume, we have five as many men here than we did in Alpha, and I’m talking about one zone only.”

Jones said nothing. He seemed to be thinking about what Williams said.

“I used to have such attitude like you when I was in command, but it changed, and I believe, yours gonna change, too.”

“I hope you’re right, Williams, I hope you’re right.”

Williams stood up, grabbed his gun and headed towards the exit. Jones looked at him astonished.

“Where’re you goin’?”

“You’re in charge here, not me. I’m only another soldier and my... our men need me.”

December 23, 2012

12.

Lian managed to reach the nearest buildings a few hundred yards from Alpha Point. Luckily, nothing noticed her. She had used the back sandy road, then used various plants as a cover. On her way she met a few zombies that she dealt with without any difficulties. She glanced at the EMF reader; still no signal. Tired as she was she had to rest. Not waiting any longer she went up to the first door. Surprisingly, it was open, so she walked inside and made for the kitchen. It was only a few days after the evacuation so there must have been some food left. She ransacked the cupboards and the fridge and found some tin of fruit, some sausage, milk and a bottle of still water.

When she finished eating, she went inside the garage. Yet the room was empty. She walked to the next garage and found there a Jeep. She didn't bother to look for the keys, but started the engine by connecting special wires with each other.

"Piece of cake."

After that, Lian went out to open the garage door and went back inside. When she sat comfortably on a leather seat, she pressed the accelerator and the car took off to the Roberts Road. The only reasonable thing to do was to head to south Pacifica and contact Arthur.

13.

In the meantime, unit one and three marines were driving along the Southern Freeway in a military Hummer. Michael was driving, Patricia was sitting next to him. On the back seat there were Tokutei, Dan, Surya and one soldier. The second and the third one were at the mounted gun on the roof.

"I'm glad we took the Humvee," Surya commented. "If we were to travel by that pick-up I wouldn't feel as safe as now."

As they were getting closer to Junipero Serra Boulevard, something stopped the vehicle out of the sudden. Two soldiers flew immediately to the front and hit the street with their backs.

"What the hell was that?" the third soldier exclaimed in disbelief.

"Ghosts! Move!" Dan replied getting out of the car, while Tokutei and Patricia followed him.

Tokutei ran to the marines to check on them. He heard Michael screaming in a commanding voice,

"Reveal yourselves!" then adding under his breath, "You stupid freaks."

"No, don't call them," Dan said a little bit terrified. Straight away, one bright figure appeared in the middle of the road. It looked like a teenager with a reddish, horizontal cut on his neck. His eyes were pure white and his head was directed down.

"What do we have here," Michael said examining the ghost and preparing the ammo.

Tokutei and the soldiers were walking towards the Hummer, constantly staring at the ghost.

"Some teenage murder victim, huh?"

Dan seemed to be getting more concerned.

"Mike, he's a fucking victim, leave him alone."

Surya walked over to Dan to try to calm him down.

"But, he's under the command of demons, so he's just the same threat as those spirits in Pyramiden or Attica."

"You think you're funny?" Michel continued as the others took glimpses at him and the ghost. "You think that's funny to stop our car in that way, huh? Answer me," he started to walk towards the spirit who didn't even raise his head, but was standing there moveless. "So you wanna play that game?" he raised the shotgun and aimed at his head.

The ghosts looked at Michael and his face immediately changed.

Now it became grayish, with black holes instead of eyes. It rushed at Michael, but he managed to press the trigger and shot the spirit. At the same time the whole street filled with dozens of spirits of different kinds.

"You had to pull the trigger, didn't ya'?" Dan said shaking his head feeling for the shotgun under his feet.

Everyone took a grip of their weapons and rushed to get rid of the spirits. The battle took a few minutes and none of the humans was heard. Michael threw the shotgun into the truck and got in still being mad.

"That's a few less to jam our equipment."

They got inside and the car took off.

As they were getting closer to Junipera Serra Freeway, the sound of marching was getting louder and louder.

"Stop the car," Tokutei said seriously.

Michael reacted quickly and pressed the brakes, but not too hard in order not to lose the control of the car.

"Why did we stop?" Dan asked turning round at the driver.

"You don't see it?" the Asian man replied surprised.

Patricia looked at where Tokutei was looking, but she couldn't see anything extraordinary.

"See what?"

"On that freeway over there, thousands of demons marching."

The bald soldier took his gun with a sight and pointed it at that direction.

"He's right. The demons have taken Junipera Serra."

"Do you see what I see?" Surya said in astonishment.

She saw the very monster they all had seen in Hell. Now standing still somewhere among the buildings ahead.

"It's that colossal monster," Patricia muttered.

"We can't get to Daly City that way," Michael replied turning

the car around. "Now hold tight."

"Why?"

"Cause I'm making my own exit," he answered turning right where there were only few trees and bushes.

14.

Lian was speeding south as fast as she could, constantly glancing at the EMF readings. It was not until she reached the end of Roberts Road, about half a mile to the south from Alpha Point, when the car radio switched on, and the EMF meter showed 40 only to drop to 0.

"Finally."

She stopped the car took out her tablet and as she was selecting Maldito headquarters Arthur's face showed up.

"Lian, thank God you're alive. Where are you?"

"I'm about half a mile south from Alpha Point."

"Are you OK?"

"I'm fine. I had to escape from that spiritual activity. How is Bravo and Charlie?"

"They're holding them off, for now."

"I want to get back to the island. Tunnel is no longer an option. Any ideas."

"Let me think," the old man replied looking at Bishop and the map.

Lian looked in the rear-view mirror to check if nothing followed her.

"Lian, I don't think your staying there is a good idea. If you want to get to the island, you may find a boat."

"She can't, West," Bishop interrupted. "Orts and those big monsters are in the water, not mentioning zombies."

"I don't know, Lian. The best way would be to get by air. But using any machine would only lure those flying demons."

"Never mind, Arthur. I'll think of something."

"Let us know when you figure it out."

"I will."

She dropped her eyes for a second and began to think, process and analyze every way. After a while she suddenly pressed the accelerator and rushed towards Pacific Coast Highway and sped south.

15.

Many a soldier was gathering in front of the main gate in Bravo zone. It was indubitable that the creatures would break through, but it wasn't known yet when. Quite a lot of marines had left the medical point and were now able to fight again. Demons walking out of the tunnel were already heard outside. SMA Williams walked towards the marines with a shotgun. Some of the soldiers looked at him in surprise.

"What are you doing here, sir?"

"Aren't you gonna supervise the mission?"

"There's nothing to supervise for me. My zone was Alpha Point, and since it's gone I am just like any other soldier here."

"B-But.."

"No buts. Check your ammo and be ready when they break through."

Mary was lying on the tower along with other snipers. Their task was to use explosive ammunition and deal with the gondars and orts that were still in the water. If a body of a gondar exploded close to the shore, a small tsunami was created which was powerful enough to knock warthens and smaller possessors down and pull them back to the ocean. She looked into the sight at Alpha Point. Being several miles from the shore, it still looked horrible.

"It feels as if we lost over there and are fighting for our lives

here.”

“What are you talking about?” a young, black sniper next to her murmured taking another shot.

“The coast, look, There’re at least a hundred million of them there. We lost contact with every human on the peninsula. I feels as if we lost the battle and .. and we are the only stand here.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic. I still hope ASATs will return, and it will be over soon.”

“I don’t know.”

“Hey, stop thinkin’ and help me get rid of those big ones.” Jason, Natalie and Jack were lower on the wall close to the gate. They and about hundred other soldiers were defending the gate from the demons that were getting closer and closer. Flying demons were carrying other creatures near the island, threw them into water and return to the land for more. As they were defending the wall, one of the orts managed to dodge the bullets and hit the gate. The wooden construction shook and several marines lost their balance falling either to back to the zone or outside among the demons.

“We have men outside the wall!” Jack shouted loudly creating covering fire for those who had fallen. A few fellow soldiers helped him as Jason and two others jumped over the wall and helped them to the gate.

“Open the gate!” came the order.

Jason looked around at the beach full of bodies on one side and the army of demons and vampires on the other. He made sure every soldier got back to the zone and went in as the last one. The gate closed and Jason climbed back up.

“We need to look for the orts, they’re way too strong.”

Eighty percent of the soldiers in other zones were resting. A few snipers were engaged in eliminating zombies that surfaced from the ocean from time to time. Some hunters in the tents

were using their enhanced sniper rifles to help Bravo and Charlie, but since the zones were a little bit further, and everything was covered by trees, there wasn't much to do.

16.

The Humvee was trundling along San Diego Avenue which was a parallel road to Junipero Serra that ran about half a mile away. They couldn't go faster due to the spiritual activity. It wouldn't end up well if they come to a sudden halt again. The neighborhood looked rather calm. The net of narrow streets was filled with semi-detached houses. But the darkness and emptiness of the area made the street scary and frightful, particularly with the demonic sounds coming from the freeway. Also, rustling coming from the yards or from under the abandoned cars made chill run down everyone's spine. One of the soldiers; Collins, looked constantly left and right. Every noise kept him anxious.

"I fear they're gonna see us from the freeway."

"Don't be stupid, we're half a mile away from them," Mitchell replied.

As they passed a junction, they heard a loud horn blow coming from the freeway. It riveted everybody's attention as they saw a great number of flying demons raising up.

"Are they going to attack the castle from above?" Dan asked examining the situation.

But when he saw a couple of orts jumping off the freeway and heading towards them, he understood that they were the target. About thirty orts and many flying demons were heading their way.

"They saw us," Collins spoke with fear in his voice.

"Hold tight!" Michael shouted pressing the accelerator hard. Mitchell turned the mounted gun around and started shooting.

"Aim at the orts!" Surya said. "We'll deal with the winged ones."

Both she and Patricia stuck out their guns through the window and waited for the creatures to get closer.

“How did they see us?” Tokutei asked astonished holding onto the seat as Michael turned rapidly left into Vista Grande Avenue.

The momentum of the turn was so strong that Dan fell onto Surya who fell onto Tokutei.

“Seeing the only vehicle in the area made them tick,” Michael replied noticing the creatures in the rear-view mirror getting dangerously close to them. Mitchell was shooting as precise as he could. He succeeded in taking out two orts, but there were still pretty many approaching both from the street and the sky. Surya killed another creature that swooped down, crashed against the road and rolled hitting one of the abandoned cars. Some other ort got so close to the vehicle that it grabbed the rear element of the car body and wanted to climb onto it. Mitchell was unable to kill the monster for the mounted weapon was limited in its movement. Michael felt the additional weight and briskly turned left, right and left again trying to shake the ort off. Patricia shot it several times, but the creature wouldn’t let go.

“What a stubborn dick,” she said through her teeth, while the Hummer turned right into a wider Mission Street.

The rotational speed made the ort let go and fly right into the building. Mitchell was now able to send a few rounds at it and took care of the others. Michael noticed that this road was so long that he couldn’t see the end, so not thinking much, he put the pedal to the metal. A few flying demons appeared in the mirror catching up with them.

“Use explosive ammo on them,” he cried speeding south. There were several walking dead on their way, but they ignored them.

“Keep going this way,” Dan suggested when he saw Michael

wanting to turn into another street.

Then one of the creatures dropped onto the hood and snorted revealing its long tongue and yellowish eyes full of evil.

Michael hit the brakes and when the creature rolled onto the street, he sped up again. Then another ort appeared on the left and two more on the right. The one on the left hit the vehicle with its side so strong that it almost made Michael lose control and crash against a truck left on the side of the road.

“Take them out!”

“I’m trying,” came the answer from the roof.

Michael noticed a palm tree growing between two lanes. He knocked the ort back trying to make it crash against the tree. The monster slowed down, only to catch up with the vehicle again. It was running without even realizing what was ahead, as its large, scary eyes were directed at Michael.

“Hey, ugly! Say hello to Shax from me. Ah yes you can’t because she’s dead!”

Having said that, he heard a loud roar coming from the creature. Then he turned slightly right passing the tree and saw the creature crash into it, or so he thought. Instead, the speed and the weight made the ort run through the palm only slightly slowing down and seconds later it was on the left side again.

“I didn’t expect that,” came a surprise comment.

Then he saw a few cars ahead blocking the road. He pressed the brakes knowing he would not be able to pass them. The Hummer slowed down to forty miles per hour. At the same time, the ort outran them and stopped ahead. It was a perfect situation for Mitchell to take him out, and he did so. But then other orts hit the Hummer so hard that it leapt into the air for a split a second.

“A roadblock up ahead!” Tokutei announced recognizing military vehicles in the distance.

Four Hummers were standing right in front of them, each

equipped with a 50-caliber machinegun. Around them there were approximately twenty marines and the same number of snipers spread on the roofs. The vehicle stooped about fifty feet from them, and both orts and flying demons surrounded it. It didn't take long for the soldiers from the roadblock to engage. With such artillery the street soon became a graveyard of orts and demons.

"Is it over?" Surya asked looking around, while Michael turned the vehicle back to the road and drove towards the roadblock.

The Hummers moved away so that they could pass them. The roadblock was situated right next to a large parking lot belonging to a shopping center; Lucky. The roadblock itself wasn't much different from the one they had met earlier. A tent with a medical point, Hummers, marines and snipers. The only thing that differed was a large pile of zombie bodies in the parking lot.

"We haven't met any people for several hours, now," a man with round green hat said examining the vehicle. "Which roadblock are you from?"

"We're from ASAT," Surya replied through a broken window. "We're trying to get to Maldito island with the ring." Tokutei, Dan and two other soldiers pushed outside to stretch their legs.

"ASAT?" the soldier asked in shock. "You must be the ones who were sent far away."

"You can't even imagine how far," Dan murmured. No sooner had Dan said that, than an apparition appeared next to them and screamed loudly trying to attack the marines.

"Another ghost," someone from the roadblock shouted. Tokutei reacted quickly by drawing his sword and cutting through its spiritual body.

"They appear every few minutes. We've lost four men because of them."

Michael glanced at the watch; it was almost 1 a.m.

"Listen, the demons are on their way behind us. They're gonna be here soon. We need to keep going south."

"Don't worry 'bout the demons. We'll deal with them. Take this road and you'll find yourself in Woodlawn. I hope there are still some of our men to assist you."

"Hope?" Surya asked baffled.

"From what we heard, there was a real zombie apocalypse." Tokutei could hear a dozen of hoofs accompanied by shrieks and grunting noises coming from the north.

"They're comin'" Dan said jumping back to the car.

"No time to waste, go, go, go," the soldier exclaimed while the first shots came from snipers around.

"Good luck," Michael said making sure everyone was on board and took off.

"Good luck to you," the soldier replied.

17.

The situation in Bravo and Charlie was getting worse. There were more and more demons getting to the island from the ocean. To make matters even worse, a greater number of flying demons tried to get inside the zone. Soldiers were getting slowly tired, but everybody knew this was no time to give up. It had been a long time since the last gondar appeared. Also, the number of forts had diminished significantly. Inside the zone, there were already about a hundred of people waiting behind a line made of bags of sand. Another group of snipers was on the towers on the trees spread in the whole zone.

"Big monsters approach!" a voice came from one of the trees. SMA Williams checked the feed from Eagle Eye on his tablet. There was a large group of gondars swimming towards the shore. He understood that this may be the last time he saw the gate

close.

“Get ready men,” came the order.

Gondars reached the shore. Each of them had two-four possessors on the top. Those who could, directed their barrels at the monsters. Yet, by doing so, they let other creatures come closer to the gate. Jason was doing everything he could to eliminate the gondars. It was getting more difficult for him because the number of explosive ammo was getting lower till it hit zero. He saw that three gondars gained speed and were aiming at the wall and the gate. Someone managed to take down the first monster. Its huge body hit the sand and it glided along for a few yards until it crashed against the wall. Several creaks appeared along the wooden poles and two marines fell behind. The second gondar got hit in its leg. Regular bullets felt like mosquito bites and the creature didn't react. Jason was aiming at its head trying to damage its brain. He noticed a possessor out of the tail of his eye aiming with a crossbow right at him. He pressed the trigger and moved back, but the bullet missed the target. At the same time the bolt headed right at him. Even though he twisted his body the sharp bolt head cut his uniform in the forearm and left a small wound. Next the gondar went through the wall breaking it into hundreds of wooden pieces. Simultaneously, the last monster smashed the part of the wall next to the gate. Jason, Natalie and two more people fell onto the gondar's back and got quickly thrown away to the right into the bushes.

SMA Jones was watching everything on the screens. He saw the two monsters running along the road towards the human roadblock. As soon as they broke a hail of bullets went towards them. Some of them were explosives, and it didn't take much time before the air filled with fire and huge pieces of meat. The explosions shook with the nearby tree with a tower build at the top. The shake was strong enough to make one of five snipers trip

and fall down.

“Phase two! Phase two!” Jones shouted.

Jason opened his eyes. Everything was blurry. He felt himself being pulled somewhere. He tried to wrench himself free, but then he heard a human voice.

“Calm down, we’re takin’ you to a safe place.”

His vision got clear, as he caught a glance of two people; a marine and Natalie who were pulling him out. He could hear shots in the background mixed with shrieks, groans, thumps and hissings. Momentarily, he heard another explosions coming from the back and sounds of the wood cracking.

“Phase two,” he thought.

18.

Meanwhile, Lian reached the southern hills. Vast lines of soldiers, Strykers, tanks and other military weapons spread along the whole peninsula. She had announced herself to be arriving, hence there was a group waiting for her at the road. She slowed at the man who seemed to be leading that particular squad. He beckoned to her to turn right and park her car among other jeeps, and she did so. When she got of the car, she heard a low voice of a black man.

“Ms. Shu, isn’t it?”

“Everyone calls me Lian,” she replied seeing a black man with a round hat and small, black moustache coming towards her.

“Carl, Carl Phillips. I’ll take you to our general.”

“There’s no need. I just want to return to the island.”

“Still you have to go to the general.”

“Gush, if you say so.”

They went behind the line of soldiers towards a wide tent. The man went first. The tent looked like every other one that was in zones or within the roadblocks. A table with computers, coffee

machine, some kitchen compartment and a few people inside.

“Sir, Ms. Shu has arrived.”

Lian went in and saw the general. She thought he would be older, but she saw a man in his early fifties with hair that only started to turn grey. He had scars all over his face as if a bomb had exploded near him. He scanned Lian from top to bottom and asked.

“General Craig. Please take a seat,” he pointed at an empty chair. “Care for a coffee?”

“No, thanks.”

When Lian sat comfortably, the general asked her a question.

“So how was it?”

“How was what?” she asked confused.

“Alpha Point, of course. You’re the only person who returned from there alive and I have a pleasure to talk to.”

“If you mean our tactics and fighting, it went quite well. We defeated more enemies than we’d estimated.”

“It’s not what I mean. I was asking about fighting other creatures, nonhuman, you know.”

“It wasn’t new for me. I’m from ASAT and I have faced pretty much everything evil.”

“How is it different from fighting humans?”

The general seemed to be very curious about the hellish world and having someone who had some experience with it right before him, made him want to listen about them.

“They’re stronger, faster and not so stupid as we thought. You can expect everything from vampires, but demons, on the other hand, tend to be better at battles, but primitive about technology.”

“Fascinating.”

Lian leaned with her elbows on the table.

“Now I have a few questions.”

“Go ahead,” the general smiled.

“Why did you move the line to the back. Some of the missiles and projectiles could reach them in Alpha.”

“It’s not me who makes such decisions. It was a direct order from the president. You see, Ms. Shu, West wanted only ten thousand soldiers, more than half around the castle and the rest he used for cemeteries and roadblocks. And these are not ordinary people. I mean, they are not privates or corporals. They are at least sergeants who had a lot of experience. This line is made of a hundred thousand soldiers and 95% of them are simple privates who had never been to war before. We are to make sure nothing would cross to the land.”

“I know Arthur’s plan, but with such a great number of enemies, we would’ve needed help.”

“Arthur didn’t ask for it, but the president decided to send ten thousand marines to Alpha Point.”

“That’s twice as many as on the island.”

“I know. If I were the president I would engage at least a million of men and made sure none of these creatures left the portal in the first place, but he tends to listen to the old man.”

“Anyway, general. I’m here not to chat, but to find a way to get back to the island. I’m needed there.”

“Get back hmm,” he scratched his head and thought for a while.

“I don’t think it’s possible.”

“Why?” Lian asked a little bit irritated.

“Look, the water is full of monsters, they destroy everything that swims, and the tunnel is out of question.”

“There must be a way.”

“I don’t know any, unless you go with the marines and somehow cross through the tunnel”

The Hummer was going along the Mission Street south which changed into El Camino Real. They could hear muted sounds of shooting coming from behind. And only shooting, no screams no explosions, nothing more.

“What if demons break through and get us?” Dan asked slightly worried. “We’ll never be able to fight so many of them.”

“Neither we could in Hell,” Tokutei added. “And look, we’re still alive.”

As they passed another bridge over the road, they saw an church-like, pointy tower emerge near the road on the right. They could also hear single shots echoing somewhere in the distance ahead. As they got closer they also saw several military cars parked on the road and on the left side to it. Behind them stood a green tent, caved in on its right side. The black clouds above made the place look even scarier.

“Woodlawn.” The bald soldier murmured.

Michael turned right and stopped the car next to the other Hummers. Blood was everywhere, but there were no bodies around. The lawn was covered in holes and large molehills and there were a few smokes coming from behind the gate. The other side wasn’t much different. The hill with another cemetery looked almost the same. They got off the car and looked around.

“Is anyone here?” Patricia asked loudly.

“Like zombies will answer you,” Dan commented maliciously. But then a male’s voice came from behind the gate.

“We’re here.”

Dan looked at Patricia raising his one eyebrow.

“Mr. Zombie?” he asked loudly.

“It’s not funny,” Michael punched Dan on his arm gently. They saw a black soldier walking up towards them. He had his assault rifle hanging on his arm and his face was covered with smoke and blood.

"Which roadblock are you from?" he asked when he got closer.

"We're from ASAT. We need to get to Maldito ASAP," Surya spoke.

The soldier scanned them. His eyes got fixed on Surya's unusual look.

"You look strange."

"You're not the first person that tells me that."

Tokutei looked around to see whether there were no ghosts or zombies in the area.

"How many are there left?"

"None."

"You're the only one?"

"Ah, I thought you meant zombies. There are about fifty of us. Marines, snipers. Everyone else went south-west after the undead."

Michael looked around the place; the lawn with molehills, the bloodstains.

"So what are you doing here?"

"We're burning the bodies."

Dan tapped Surya on her shoulder.

"I think we'll take a break here, and then take them with us."

"I don't think we can go with you," the soldier replied.

"The orders were to stay here."

On hearing the same reply over again, Patricia couldn't stand it anymore.

"We're carrying something that may end this whole damn thing and we need to get to Maldito. You may either gather your men and help us or let us die on our way and have hundreds of millions of lives on your consciousness."

These words really got to everyone there as they were standing speechless feeling the awkwardness of the moment.

“We’ll go with you.”

Suddenly, a sound of muted moan came from the direction they came from. It sounded as if it was about a mile from where they currently were.

“Ah, and I almost forgot, we’re probably being chased by a horde of demons and ghosts.”

“The demons are marching on the other side of Woodlawn,” the soldier replied. “They don’t seem to be interested in us. Tokutei slowly shook his head as if he realized something terrible.

“If they hear the horn they would come in great numbers, and if they do, we will not have any chances with them.”

“We’d better hurry,” he replied. “I’ll gather my men.”

20.

It didn’t take much time till walls of Charlie zone broke, too, letting thousands of vampires and demons in. In the meantime, more than a hundred soldiers were protecting the road in Bravo not more than three hundred feet from the remains of the wall. Another two hundred were running from the west to help the others. Mary was on one of the towers with four other snipers. She could see everything around and down below. Another empty clip she threw onto the ground and reached for one more. Shot after shot she took out possessors and guardians. She left the small one to the others. Some of the vampires were using their speed to jump onto the trees, and climb up to the towers to eliminate the snipers.

“Watch your six, snipers,” Jones’s voice sounded in the earwig. “Bloodsuckers are going for you.”

“So take them out,” Marry replied.

“It’s not so easy.”

Mary took away her sniper rifle and grabbed her short HK MP-5K.

“What are you doing?” a sniper next to her asked surprised.

“Someone must deal with them when they reach the top.” Having replied, she looked down the ladder. There were seven creatures climbing up fast. One of them fell as it got hit by someone, but the others were stubborn and didn’t give up. She aimed her weapon at them and took several quick shots. Some of them were hit. However, nothing happened, as their wounds quickly healed.

“What the...?”

She checked her type of ammo. It was just as she thought; wrong ammo, so she swiftly changed it into poisoned bullets and leaned forward again. To her surprise, she saw two hands gripping her shoulder and she felt herself being pushed to the hole where the ladder was. She managed to take a grip of the edge with her one hand while not releasing the weapon with the other one, she started to shoot at the opponent. The bony hands let go of her, but as she was hanging trying to pull herself up, she felt her fingers slipping off the edge until she could feel nothing with the tips. As she began to fall, she felt again something with her fingers. It was the other sniper’s hand who had caught her. He was a strong man, so within two seconds she was up again.

“Thanks,” she replied feeling her body tremble.

She quickly aimed at the rest of the creatures and got rid of them.

Meanwhile, Jason was in the medical point, which was a tent set up further in the forest. He was lying on a green camp-bed and two medics were doing something with his left arm.

“I’m OK, I told you already. I’m needed out there,” he pointed with his head at the exit where sounds of various kinds were heard.

“Just a moment, Sir,” the medic replied. “I’ll just... and you’re free to go.”

“Finally,” he replied standing up.

At the tail of his eye he saw three other doctors trying to save a

marine on the other side of the tent. They were using a defibrillator to bring his heart back to work.

“Clear!” a doctor’s voice came as the chest of the patient rose again. “Clear.”

Jason walked slowly towards them reaching for the pistol at his side.

“Time of death?”

“1:27.”

“We need to shoot him,” Jason said pointing his pistol at the dead’s head.

After that, he pressed the trigger making sure he won’t return as a zombie.

“Jason, are ya’ coming?” he heard Natalie’s voice.

The medics were looking at him as he turned round and left the tent. Outside, he saw flashes and flames among the trees in the distance. He couldn’t see the road itself, but he knew the forest like the bottom of his pocket. Many a time he had been walking there to gather his thoughts.

“Hurry up!” he heard some soldier shouting to another.

He loosened the grip on his M4 and sped up towards direction where everyone was running. Natalie followed him. They could hear snipers shooting above them and from the back wall. They could also hear active turrets almost everywhere. When they got back on the road, what he saw made them anxious. Before their eyes was a real war. Wounded soldiers were constantly escorted to the other medical point. Those who could fight were hiding behind trees only to take a series of shots and hide back again. Those who were further hid behind two Hummer vehicles and one Stryker that was already inactive. The area where meadow used to be was all burning and the demons got as far as the first trees. Even though they were falling in great numbers, they didn’t stop pushing forward.

"Any ideas, how to hold them off?" Jason asked SMA Williams.

"I'm not in charge here, son. But I do know that if we stop shooting this zone is dead."

"We've gotta use something heavier than that," Natalie suggested

"Heavier than 50K? Girl we don't have anything."

As he said that someone shouted,

"Look out!"

They both looked right as a huge, burning piece of a car flew right at the group of soldiers. They all managed to spread when the wreckage hit the ground shooting balls of fire in all directions. Because of that fact the numbers of shots significantly diminished, the enemies pushed further.

"Don't let them get so close!" someone shouted.

Soldiers got back in line and kept on firing. Using explosive bullets was no longer optional but a must.

"Stubborn assholes," Williams said through his teeth. "Why don't ya' let go."

Jason ran to the right side of the road and hid behind the lying tree, he took a quick around, but he couldn't find Natalie anymore. Within a few seconds two of the marines joined him.

"Where are those flying motherfuckers?" one of them asked.

"Dunno, haven't seen them for a while," Jason replied.

All the turrets were pointed at the horde. The dust and ash made the whole eastern part of the island invisible. The cloud of black smoke reached even some snipers' posts.

Jack was on the right side of the zone. He took a perfect hiding position in the bushes and was dealing with guardians and vampires that were coming along the zone border. The horrible, loud roars and grunting noises were heard in thousands, but nobody gave up. Shot after shot he killed demons one by one.

Then something fell next to him, he looked right and saw a sniper trying to get up.

“Vam-Vampires,” he said heavily rubbing his broken leg. Jack looked up and saw there a couple of those creatures jumping off the tower right at him. He made a step to the back, so that nobody would knock him over. When vampires fell he immediately took a few, precise shots. He wasn’t the only one there. A few marines and hunters were in the area and instantly provided help. But then something terrible happened. From the cloud of ash emerged orcs, possessors and guardians in greater numbers than before. He could see them advancing forward and even though much effort was made to stop them, nothing seemed to work.

“Retreat!” came the order from Jones. “Retreat as far as the back wall.”

He meant of course the wall that ended Bravo zone and started Delta one. Those who were far, slowly moved back still shooting, while those who were too close had no choice but to fight. Then the southern wall, the one at the tunnel collapsed and let another group of enemies inside.

“They’re surrounding us!”

All snipers that were not on the towers moved to Delta and assisted from there. Snipers from the castle could only help little because the trees covered almost the whole zone.

Jack changed ammo into explosive bullets, fired a few several yards from one another and shot out after the running marines. As he was catching up with them, something went off right next to him and he found himself on the ground. His head started to spin as he heard,

“Man down,” and that was the last thing he remembered. He got caught up with the memories of 2011. He was sitting in a bar sipping whisky. There were a few people around him who had

come to have lunch or a coffee.

"Bartender, one more."

"It's not even noon."

"In my time zone it's nine p.m."

The bartender slowly shook his head and poured another glass.

"Make it double," Jack bellowed.

He received the glass and right away drank half of it. Suddenly, two men; Arthur and Bishop walked into the bar and sat to the left. Jack glanced at them and took another sip.

"Jack Nowicki, I presume," Arthur spoke warmly.

"And you are?"

"Mr W."

"W? I thought we weren't supposed to meet in person."

"I know, but this time you would like to hear me."

"It's not the best time, as you can see."

"Your drinking problem is not our issue. We know you drink only not to think about your wife."

"Just say what you've gotta say."

He finished the glass and turned to him. Bishop at that time got water and sat between them."

"This is general Bishop, my associate. You did more than well locating Paralth. And we have a better job for you that could use your particular skill."

"What continent?"

"Mostly ours, but let me finish. We want you to join our special team dealing with something more severe than humans."

"You mean bears?"

"No," Bishop interrupted. "Ghosts, vampires, demons." Jack didn't seem to be taken aback by that.

"We want you to be a part of our team. We're looking for people with particular skill to join us."

"Whatever it is, I'm in. I'm fed up with being a lonely wolf.

When do I start?"

Arthur scratched his head.

"Next week. You would help us locate a few other future members."

21.

"Activate the hidden turrets," Arthur ordered in the headquarters.

Every soldiers whose turrets had been destroyed selected a hidden turrets from the turret menu and waited for the connection. About forty new devices emerged from the ground in Bravo zone.

"Use grenade launchers," Bishop ordered.

The soldier operating one of the automatic grenade launching turrets established connection with the device. The screen displayed a gigantic number of demons pushing forward. He didn't wait any longer and pressed the mouse button that immediately caused the thick barrels shoot the grenades at the opponents. The grenades began to swoosh as fast as two per second, and opposite to the explosive bullets, these exploded on impact.

"At least we give our men enough time to retreat," Bishop said under his breath.

"How many have we lost, so far?" Arthur inquired.

Morris checked the stats and replied sadly,

"Seventy three."

"It's quite a lot."

Bishop looked at the feed from Eagle Eye.

"Arthur we need to evacuate both zones. If Bravo fails, Charlie will be attacked from three sides. I think it would be wise to retreat now and later defend in larger numbers."

"We can reach Delta and Echo from the castle," SMA

Anderson added who was with Bishop and Arthur in charge of the castle itself.

Arthur took a few glimpses at the screen before him.

“So be it. Evacuate the zones, but hold the turrets for as long as you can.”

22.

Lian was still sitting inside the tent. She was watching the Eagle Eye feed on her tablet. She switched into the turrets view or snipers' view from time to time. General Craig was sitting next to her watching the view from the sniper weapon displayed on a large screen hanging in the tent.

“I need to get there,” she muttered.

Having said that, she sprang to her feet and while she was heading out of the tent, she asked,

“Where's your weaponry?”

“In the third tent, why do you ask?”

“I just thought of something.”

She left the tent in a hurry and went towards the weaponry. On her way she saw several thousands of troops getting ready to set off to Pacifica. She got into the tent. Inside, she saw two rows of weapons of various kinds and lots of boxes with ammo. She slowed down and started to look for something.

“C'mon, where are you...”

23.

Dan was sitting on the passenger seat of a Hummer, glancing constantly at Mission Street on his left. Roberts, the bald soldier was staring through the sight of his weapon into the darkness of the street. Patricia was walking in circles on the other side, while Tokutei was resting his feet on a curb playing with a shuriken with his fingers. Surya was sitting on the curb casting glances at Dan.

She couldn't stand it anymore. They had to talk about each other, and now they had a moment. She stood up and walked towards the Hummer.

"Dan, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure," he replied getting out of the vehicle.

They went towards the tent. Surya seemed to be very stressed and nervous. The stress even made her fangs slide out, but she ignored it and felt that need to have the conversation over with.

"Listen, Dan. I think we should talk about us. It's been a few days and we haven't even touched the topic."

"I know what you mean. So many things happened that ...um... Tell ya' what. I also wanted to talk about this ever since you came for me in Hell. But first there's this one question that is in my mind. Why didn't you tell me the truth, why did you run a few years ago when we kissed, why..."

He heard something coming from the gate to the cemetery and looked towards that direction. There was Michael, and about twenty soldiers walking towards them. A tall man with a short moustache was walking faster than the others.

"We'll finish this talk later, OK?" Surya said going back to the group.

"OK," the boy whispered following her.

And again, the conversation didn't happen. Dan felt bad because he wanted to talk to her as much as she did, and as he was going back towards the vehicle, he couldn't help thinking about wasting such a perfect moment.

"So you are the guys everyone's been waiting for. I'm SMA Daniel Miles and I am in charge here."

"SMA?" the sniper pulled his eye away from the sight. "From what I know there were only fifteen SMAs taking part in this mission."

"Actually thirteen. Each for every Cemetery complex and for

every zone on the island.”

Patricia walked up to him and looked Miles deep into the eyes,

“I hope you’re not like the other soldiers we met, and will help us get to the island.”

“They didn’t have clearance level ten like us. Our orders were to take you to the island as quick as possible. I must admit I lost hope a few hours ago when the communication broke down. But after hearing about you, my hope is back, Anyway, jump in the cars and....”

He heard a sound of muted snarl coming from Mission Street. His eyes grew wider, as he checked the ammo status on his weapon.

“We’re gonna hit Junipero Sierra Boulevard and then 35.”

He turned round and headed towards one of the other Hummers.

“No,” Surya said. “We can’t take Junipero, we saw a flank of the demons army there.”

“They’re at Junipero Sierra Freeway. I’m talking about Boulevard. Anyway, they turned into Cabrillo Highway at the end of Woodlawn, so we’re gonna pass them.”

He closed the door at the back and tapped his hand against the metal side of the car body signaling the driver to take off.

Everyone got in the trucks and they hit the road straight away.

There were four Hummers in this convoy. Michael was driving the second one. Only ASATs were inside. Patricia, as always was sitting next to him, while Tokutei, Dan and Surya at the back.

Mitchell, Collins and Roberts took the last vehicle. Patricia took a few glimpses; at the car in front and at the two others reflected in the side mirror. A gentle smile appeared on her face.

“Why are you smiling?” Michael asked taking a peek at her.

“Hah, I’m having this good feelin’ that everything will turn out just fine.”

Hardly had she finished the sentence, than a sound of a horn came from the west.

“Oops,” Surya said in surprise.

“Oops?” Dan asked raising his eyebrows.

“That was the horn, the one of a demon captain. We heard it in Hell.”

Dan knew exactly what it meant. He stuck his head out the broken window and shouted.

“Faster before they find us.”

Miles was in the first car, he turned right, but he couldn’t see anything unusual.

“I don’t understand. Why they want to attack us now? Why not earlier when they had a lot of opportunities,” one of his soldiers said.

“Because,” Miles replied, “Those behind us have something that can stop all this crap, and the demons would do everything to have it back.”

The cars accelerated and were going along El Camino Real also known as 82, and the Woodlawn cemetery was disappearing in the rear view mirrors. Dan and Tokutei were constantly looking around trying to spot anything. At that moment none of the enemies was seen. When they were passing several buildings, Tokutei saw something in the distance in the gap between them.

“Flying demons,” he said.

“Somebody take the “fifty-K”” Mike suggested.

Surya took out the M4, turned round and stuck it out through back window.

“Take care of the left side, Dan.”

The car turned left into Serramonte Boulevard and now had Woodlawn complex on their right. They could see not only flying demons there, but also many warthogs running along the cemetery lawn.

“There’re way too many of them,” one of the soldiers commented in the first car seeing the demons flying towards

them.

"Well, boys," Miles said with a serious voice. "It's the first time we gonna fight demons, so get your weapons ready and don't hesitate to shoot'em."

When they were passing the car showroom, the first warthers shot out from the trees and soon were chasing them along the street.

"They're the weakest one, two bullets usually do the job," Patricia said turning round and firing a few rounds.

"But those, are not so easy to kill," Michael added seeing the flying monsters getting closer.

Tokutei had no choice. He climbed onto the roof of the vehicle and grabbed the mounted gun. It was actually his first time using such a weapon, and with his low accuracy he had some problems with dealing with the creatures.

"Here, let me handle it," Dan said pushing Tokutei down and taking his place.

"Faster!" Patricia told Michael seeing that the car in front of them gained more speed.

"I'm tryin', for God's sake."

Several flying demons attacked the first vehicle. Soldier at the mounted gun killed them at once and their bodies fell onto the street blocking the way. Michael turned to the pavement passing them on their left and seconds later he was back on the street. A couple of warthers ran out from the left.

"Run them over," Miles said to the driver, who did as he was told.

The massive Hummer hit the creatures and crushed them with the wheels. Then three flying demons landed on the road. The soldier sitting on the passenger seat leaned out and killed them. The driver pulled rapidly to the left not to hit the bodies. The pull was so strong that the soldier on the left would have fallen out if it

hadn't been for his mate. The road bent left and some other major road appeared ahead cutting this one horizontally.

"Turn left," Miles said. "It's Junipero Serra Boulevard." As they were turning, a group of orts hurtled from the right. Michael couldn't keep up with them, so he crossed through some parking lot on the right and saved a few yards. The third car did the same. The scenery changed and now instead of buildings they had green trees on both sides of the road.

"It's easier," Tokutei said shooting with a pistol he had found in the car. "They're all behind us now."

They saw several zombies crossing the road up ahead. The first Hummer tried to pass them without collision, but their number was too big and they knocked a few of them. All three mounted guns were directed at the demons behind, while the passengers were dealing with the orts.

24.

SMA Jones left the tent and headed towards the gate with a few hunters as his entourage. They were running towards the main road, across the densely planted trees when several hissings and squinting noises surrounded them.

"Vampires," one of the hunters said, rapidly looking around with his weapon ready to shoot.

Breathing heavily, they realized they were the only humans left in the zone, and they had no one to count on except each other.

"Move!" came the order from Jones.

They sped up passing another trees. The empty road could be visible in the distance. Then they heard one of the hunter's scream. When they turned around, they saw a vampiric creature who had knocked the hunter onto the ground, and was now trying to break his head. Two shots came, and the creature fell numb onto the grass.

"That was a close one," the hunter said standing up.

"We don't have much time," Jones said.

They finally reached the road. Sounds of firing and explosions were heard behind them, and in front of them they saw the rest of the marines retreating to the other zone. Another hissing spread right behind them. Jones turned round. There was a small group of female vampires. He noticed that one of them had blood on her face and hands. She must have already killed someone. The hunters turned around, too, and fired a few rounds. Then the vampiric girl zoomed towards Jones and before he or anyone else had a chance to do something she was standing there holding his head in her hand.

"Jones!" one of the hunter exclaimed pressing the trigger out of anger puncturing the girl with poisoned bullets.

"There's nothing we can do now," the other hunter said.

"We're close. Go, go, go."

Williams with his small group was waiting at the gate. He saw the whole incident, and realized that even though they had the highest rank, it meant nothing for the enemy. They could easily kill you no matter whether you were a Sergeant Major of the Army or a Private.

25.

Bravo Zone became almost empty as everyone headed to the next one. An order had been given to evacuate Charlie, as well. The vast army of demons and vampires were marching along both zones, destroying the remains of the tents, weapons and other things.

"What are the stats?" Arthur's voice came through SMA Christopher Davis's earwig.

The, masculine, Asian man, with rectangular glasses was watching the screens in the zone's main tent.

“1160 men within the zone. We lost 141 men.”

“What about Charlie?”

“Let me check... 91 deaths, sir.”

“OK, thank you.”

The man took a glance at the screen showing Eagle Eye feed. The reddish and brownish stains of dots were covering the whole eastern regions of the island and were moving towards the next zones.

“All snipers engage. Use the explosive bullets,” he ordered. Having said that, he saw a group of marines running into the tent. He recognized SMA Williams among them.

“Williams. Where’s Jones?”

“He’s dead. The demons got to him on the way.”

“Balls. We have over one thousand men in the zone. It’s twice as much as we used to have.”

“Tell everyone to stand in five lines as far as two hundred feet from the wall. We made a huge mistake to be closer.”

“Roger that.”

Jack opened his eyes and found himself in a medical tent. Everything got to him as soon as he raised his body and stood up. The medics were busy with seriously wounded soldiers and failed to see him running out of the tent.

Jason was waiting at the gate for everyone to get in. The gate was very similar to the previous one; made of wooden poles enhanced by a concrete wall and had two MDF on both sides with soldiers ready to fire. Many marines were placed on the walls and many snipers had been on their position much earlier. Hunters had their own tent with twenty computers connected to enhanced sniper rifles that were mounted on towers, trees and other places within the zone. Jack noticed Jason at the gate and ran up to him.

“I hope I didn’t miss anything.”

"No, where have ya' been?"

"Something knocked me out."

Jason looked at the sky.

"Still dark as hell."

Jack looked at the remains of Bravo. No one in sight. Only muted shots were coming from turrets that were slowly decreasing whenever a turret was destroyed.

"It's now a matter of minutes before they regroup and attack again," Jack replied.

Making for the ladder, Jason asked,

"Jack, help me hold them off up there," he pointed at the wall.

"Right, I wonder how is Amanda doing."

When Jason reached the top, he looked at the tablet. Amanda's dot was flickering in Echo zone.

"She's in Echo. I hope she's doing fine."

Jack joined him and squinted his eyes trying to catch a glimpse of anything in the other zone. The trees were blocking the view.

Meanwhile, in Echo zone, a medic was treating Amanda's wound on her arm.

"Girl, what creature has so long fingernails," the female medic asked seeing five bloody lines on her arm.

"Some kind of a demon, and had," she corrected smiling gently.

The medic finished treating the wound.

"OK, you're gonna live. Now get back there and kick some hellish ass."

"Ha, thanks, girl," she replied grabbing her bow and leaving the medical tent.

She was out again. Dark sky, cool air, shots everywhere. People dying every few seconds and no signs from unit one. She missed her sister a lot. But she understood it was no time for thinking and

regretting. She had to get to the wall and help the others. The demons were about to attack again.

“Take cover, arrows,” she heard in the earwig.

“Arrows, duck, duck,” someone’s voice came from the left. Arrows were useless in such thick woods, but still, they were dangerous for the snipers up there. The storm of arrows came from above piercing the area. The trees were a perfect cover. They let nothing through.

“Another attack,” a voice came in the earwig. And yet more arrows swooped down in gigantic numbers. Then the bombardment stopped. Amanda reached the wall. There were already many snipers and other marines waiting for the next attack, while the rest were creating five lines in the back, just as Williams suggested.

26.

Lian was constructing something in the weaponry. She herself had no idea what the result will be, but she was trying her best. Many backpacks were lying opened next to her and she seemed to be gluing something. She then went outside and looked around the vehicles. She cast an eye on a small one and walked towards it. As she was looking under the hood, she spotted something in the tail of her eye and raised her head. It was a flat machine about two yards long, maybe less.

“Well, what do ya’ know,” she said under her breath. Then she returned to the weaponry and grabbed the first backpack that wasn’t open. She turned around and headed back to the main tent.

“Who’s operating the unmanned aircrafts?”

“What?” Craig asked.

“I want to know who is operating the unmanned planes that are outside.”

"They're operated from another tent, why do ya' ask?"

Lian turned around,

"Because I've just found my way home," she smirked.

"I told you that it would be impossible," he raised his scratchy voice, but Lian was long gone. "Damn it, woman."

27.

Four Hummers were speeding along the Junipero Serra Boulevard breaking almost every law in the driver's book. The number of demons behind got lower, but even though they were doing eighty miles per hour, the orts were right behind them. One of the flying demons managed to get to the ASAT Humvee even though Dan shot it several times. It landed on the back seat through the roof. Surya quickly stabbed it with her blade.

"Push it out!" she said to Tokutei.

"Ha, ha, ha," the creature laughed as blood was running down its neck. "Cizin is already in the city."

Tokutei hesitated for a second, then pushed the demon out onto the street.

"Look right!" someone from the first vehicle said pointing at the freeway.

They heard several shots coming from the that direction.

"Just as I thought," Miles said joyfully. "These are the guys from Golden Gate Cemetery. We're gonna join them."

They moved further, about half a mile till Westborough Boulevard and turn a sharp corner; almost one hundred eighty degrees and were on their way to Junipero Serra Freeway.

"It's the freeway, why are they turning?" Surya asked.

"Just follow them," Patricia said.

When they turned, they were practically moving backwards which was to their disadvantage, as many flying demons simply flew over the trees and were right in front of them. The orts made

their way through the bushes and were also dangerously close to them. One of them hit the last car so hard that it hit the concrete side of the road. Straight away hundreds of shiny sparkles came from the collision. Some soldier from that vehicle killed the ort, and they quickly sped up. When they finally reached the freeway, they saw six military vehicles and about hundred men blocking the road.

“Ha, I told you we’re gonna find them,” Miles said cheerily.

“Look, more soldiers over there,” Michael said slowing down. The soldiers had noticed them long before when they saw a couple of flying demons chasing something. They had got ready and shots spread. As the four vehicles were slowing down, something happened to the group waiting for them. They all rose up in the air, as if an invisible bomb exploded right in the middle of the camp.

“What was that?” Surya asked with terror in her eyes. Seconds later the same thing happened with the first vehicle. Then with theirs, and in the end with the two behind them. They felt it as if something hit them and threw them up in the air. Being fifteen yards above the ground, Tokutei pushed himself off the seat and jumped through the hole in the roof. He saw the first cars crashing against the road and men falling around. The momentum he gained made him flip in the air twice. During this time he reached for his sword and drew it. As he was doing the second flip, he saw two small armies; one consisting of ghosts coming from the north and the second one consisting of the remaining demons from the south. His mind filled with many thoughts; *How many will survive? Will more demons come? How to land not to be crushed by a Hummer?* While falling, he swiftly looked around and estimated the situation. There was no time to check the others. With the sword specifically altered by Dan to be able to eliminate ghosts permanently, Tokutei knew he had to

deal with them first. When he landed onto the road, he rolled to move the energy from his knees to the road and not to damage his joints. At the same time The first and the second Hummer landed around him. As he was zooming to the front, while soldiers were falling from the sky like raindrops, he noticed that the first ones were getting up. When he passed them he heard the crash of the last vehicle followed by voices of pain. He raised his sword and cut through the first three spirits. He heard ammo being switched by the others while he swung his sword down and up again. The first salt bullets came from behind accompanied by some shouts which he ignored and moved to the next group of spirits. In the meantime, Dan, Surya, Michael and Patricia crawled out of the car, and along with soldiers from the last vehicle dealt with the remaining demons.

The fighting lasted for about seven minutes and after that none of the ghosts showed up. Miles looked around the road. Several marines were lying dead around.

“Make sure the dead stay dead,” he ordered.

The rest of the men instantly went to the lying ones, checked their vitals, and if there were none signs of life, they took one shot in their heads. Surya took a glimpse at them and felt negative emotions rising in her body.

“What is it, S?” Michael asked.

“They were alive a few minutes ago, and now look. It’s so inhuman.”

“You do know it’s necessary evil, right?”

“I do, but still... It makes me sad.”

“Get over it, girl. It’s the right thing to do.”

Tokutei returned to them. He looked tired, but having such a perfect condition, he quickly regained his strength.

“So we have no cars now.”

“Hey, ASATs!” Miles shouted from the bridge. “Come over

here.”

They walked up towards him and some other man. He was tall, had a long face with glasses on his nose and short, grey hair.

“This is SMA David Johnson. He was responsible for Golden Gate Cemetery.”

“ASATs,” he said.

“Sir,” they replied simultaneously.

“As I was saying,” Johnson spoke. “We’ve been here for several hours and apart from zombies we had no other encounters. No demons, no ghosts, nothing.”

“Don’t play stupid, Johnson,” Miles said. “You have the highest clearance, you know why they attacked now.” Johnsons looked at the ASATs and slowly nodded his head. Dan looked at the time.

“Guys, I don’t wanna hurry you but we need to get to the island.”

Miles took a quick look around at the Hummers lying upside down or turned over with smoke coming out from their engines.

“I don’t think we can use these any more. There’re plenty of abandoned cars we can use.”

“I agree. There’re a lot of them over there,” he pointed down the bridge. “But there’s yet one more thing to be discussed.”

“Which is?” Miles asked trying to find a way down from the bridge.

“How are we gonna get there? We can’t use Cabrillo Highway.”

“That’s why we’re gonna get there from those hills in the west, the ones close to Pacifica. The same way zombies used. ”

“And then what?”

“And then we think, but first we’ve gotta get to the 35.” Miles turned around. “Alright, boys. We’re gonna find some rides and get the hell out of here.”

A few minutes later they were walking west along King Drive. A few marines had already found some cars. Others were still looking. Dan spotted a Toyota SUV left on the drive. He ran up there and pressed the knob. To his surprise it was open.

"Hey the keys are inside!"

He turned the keys and the engine started along with the radio. Nothing was on, apart from the noise.

"Oh my God," Patricia said running up to him.

"What?" the boy asked looking at her confused.

"The radio. The spiritual activity has lowered."

Surya took out her tablet.

"I have a signal here." She said.

Miles reacted quickly and took out his tablet.

"The EMF is still very high, but not high enough to block the signal. I'm gonna try to contact Maldito. As he was selecting Maldito island from the menu, a call appeared and he answered it immediately.

"General Baker."

"Miles. You're alive."

"Not only me, sir."

"We've lost contact with everyone there."

"It's because of the spiritual activity."

"Miles, get your ... peninsula. I don't think ... hope there left. We're not gonna win this thing. We have decided to use ... at twenty two hundred ..."

"Sir, could you repeat, we have disturbance on the line."

"Sir, EMF is raising," Michael announced.

"Get your ass out of there. We're gonna drop a nuclear bomb ... hundred. Do you copy?"

"Sir, I've got ASATs with me, they have the ring to stop it. We just need to get to the Maldito and that's all."

The signal got weak and all he heard back was his surname,

“Miles? Miles?”

And there was nothing. The tablet switched off as the EMF raised above the scale. Everyone who was around stood and stare without saying a word. Then Surya broke the silence.

“A nuclear bomb? Are they insane?”

“There’s no other choice for us,” Tokutei said. “We need to get to the island and stop it, so that they can stop this attack. I just hope we can manage before Cizin”

Johnson looked at the other soldiers.

“There’re about forty of us. We need to get to the hills fast.”

28.

Arthur was walking nervously around the headquarters thinking about their next move. Bishop was watching the feed from Eagle Eye, while the marines were using the turrets.

“Any response from the government?”

“None,” the soldier at the desk replied covering his yawn with his palm.

“What about the demons? Why are they standing there? What are they waiting for?”

Bishop scratched his head as he looked out the window. He caught an eye of something strange there.

“Probably for this,” he walked towards the window.

Arthur and the others looked at that direction. They saw millions of dots in the distance of approximately fifteen miles.

“Flying demons?”

“Get me a zoom on that,” Bishop ordered.

One of the screens showed the view from a sniper rifle. It got directed right at the colossal number of those creatures.

“It’s their third strike. This time they had prepared a way bigger army than before.”

“That would explain why we haven’t seen flying demons for a

long time.”

Arthur walked towards the desks.

“We have to notify the zones. This one’s gonna hurt.”

29.

Lian was outside the tents with a group of soldiers. The unmanned aircraft was lying next to them. In the distance a large number of marines were slowly getting ready to set off to Maldito.

“So what exactly do you want us to do?” one of them asked not being sure what the Asian girl was planning.

“I want you to take off the plane. It will pull me up and when I’m high enough, I’m gonna let go and fall with my parachute onto the Maldito Castle.”

“This is crazy, you’re crazy, you do know that, don’t you?” the other one commented.

“Like I said earlier. I will do anything to return to the island.”

“Eh, so be it,” the soldier sighed. “If you wanna die, then die as you like.”

“Can you take the plane to the road?”

“Sure.”

As they were walking towards the plane, general Craig walked out of the tent and headed towards them.

“Stop that nonsense.”

“You have no right to keep me here,” Lian replied getting irritated

“This is not why I’m here.”

Lian immediately changed her attitude.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m going to risk three lives of my men for you. There’s a chopper. You’re gonna get inside. It will go as high as two miles and you have to jump from there with your parachute.”

“Thanks a million. That should do the work. Two miles should be enough to get to the castle.”

“Follow me if you please.”

They all headed towards the tents at the road. The chopper with no side doors was waiting for them a few hundred yards ahead.

30.

Unit one along with the rest of the soldiers was driving along 35 road south. They had found more than ten vehicles and now were getting closer to Pacifica. Dan, Michael, Surya, Tokutei and Patricia were in a red Nissan.

“Look, they’re turning here,” Surya said seeing the first cars taking the first right into College Drive.”

A few seconds later they passed a large stadium. Then the cars left the road and turned into a sandy path or a trail.

“I think this is the last road,” Michael commented.

Soon the landscape changed from urban into woods, and the trail took them up the hills. On their way they met several bodies of zombies lying on or at the road.

“Just a few more minutes, guys, a few more,” Dan kept repeating.

31.

Arthur was looking at the horde of flying demons getting closer. Now it was much visible than before.

“Bishop, take a look at this,” the old man said.

Bishop went closer to the screens.

“What are they doing?”

The large horde started to get denser in the middle creating some kind of a shape.

32.

Lian walked into the chopper. There was also a pilot and two soldiers with her. Craig was standing outside overseeing the operation. The girl put the backpack with the parachute on and checked the status of the ammo.

“Good luck, girl.”

The propeller started to move faster and louder. Craig touched his ear as if he got a call. He covered this second ear with his hand and shouted,

“What?”

His eyes grew with terror and when he raised them he shouted to Lian,

“At twenty two hundred they gonna...”

She couldn’t hear what he was saying.

“I can’t hear you, what?”

The chopper was raising. Craig repeated his sentence, but she failed to understand any of the words. She held onto the metal pipe at the ceiling and watched the view. She could easily see the hills getting smaller as the machine gained height. She also saw the Maldito Island with many black smokes in the western region, the vast and long army spreading from Alpha Point and disappearing somewhere in the darkness of San Francisco. But what made her worried was what she saw a few miles from the island.

“What is that thing?” The soldier asked.

“Demons, I presume.”

They saw something like a gigantic flock that was getting closer to the middle creating a shape of a tornado whirl.

“Just get one mile higher and I’ll jump.”

“You wanna jump when that thing is there?”

The tornado was getting closer to the island. The demons inside where moving so fast that the sucking power created a hole in the water raising it up.

"I've gotta get to the island. This is my only chance."

She waited until the chopper was high enough.

"No need for you to be here any longer, I can manage," she shouted, then jumped off the chopper and opened her parachute as soon as she was out.

Now it would take her some time to get there. As she was slowly decreasing the distance between her and the castle, she couldn't help watching the petrifying tornado made of demons.

33.

Jack was waiting on the wall along with Jason and many other soldiers and hunters. After the arrow attack nothing was happening. As he was standing there, gazing in the distance he found himself in the memories of 2006. He was sitting at some window with a sniper rifle pointed at a structure that seemed to be a school. It had large, square windows and an American flag on the roof. He was in some room in an abandoned building. There was nothing inside apart from a small table with a radio on it, tuned to police frequency. He was chewing some gum, listening to the voices on the radio.

"There're three hostiles, I repeat there're three hostiles. Hostiles are all armed."

He split the gum onto the floor behind him and looked into the scope. He could see a bulk of children sitting close together in one of the classrooms and three people walking around them. They were wearing red bandanas on their faces and sunglasses to cover their eyes. The children looked very frightened.

"They're gonna kill the first hostage in two minutes if that guy is not released from the custody," the voice on the radio said. Jack placed his finger on the trigger and aimed at one of the terrorists. He waited a few more seconds until one of them stopped and as he was on the point of pressing the trigger three

shots came from the neighbor building eliminating every terrorist. Jack moved his barrel to the left to look who did this.

"There's been three shots of unknown origin," the voice on the radio yelled.

He saw a woman with long black hair, dressed in black, that was packing her sniper rifle. She grabbed the backpack and ran towards the exit.

"What a bitch," he murmured.

Next he disassemble his gear and left the place.

34.

"How high is Eagle Eye," Arthur asked watching the disaster coming.

The soldier checked the numbers on the computer and replied,

"Two miles."

"So it's safe then."

They were gazing at the screen showing the feed from Eagle Eye. From that view the tornado looked like an empty hole with millions of demons flying around it.

"Start the shooting. Use explosive bullets, grenades and other powerful stuff."

The snipers were watching the tornado approaching. It was as wide as the island itself.

"Fire!" came the order from zones headquarters.

And they did. First hail of bullets flew towards the whirl, but no damage was seen.

"The trees gonna stop it," Eye kept saying shooting with everything he had.

Soon the turrets joined and now the effect was visible. The demons reached the island and it looked like some of them tore off the formation and fell into the ocean or onto the island.

Amanda was staring at the tall tornado with fear in her eyes. She

wasn't the only one.

"Hide among the trees," came another order.

The tornado reached the island and momentarily all leaves and small twigs raised into the air. The miniguns were ready to shoot. Both of the weapons directed their barrels towards the formation that was covering the whole sky and the soldiers operating them pressed the triggers. Dead bodies of demons were now falling off the whirl in thousands.

Lian was less than a mile above the ground and was slowly falling down. From her point of view it looked much worse. The vast tornado was consuming the island moving towards the castle. The number of explosions within the whirl looked like sparkles in an electrical wire that had been torn off or like a night sky on the fourth of July. The formation quickly absorbed the majority of the island before it broke into something that looked like a gargantuan swarm.

"Shit." She murmured seeing that the demons spotted her and some of them were now whooshing up. She let go of the parachute strings, took hold of her two assault rifles and started firing into the demons.

The soldiers on the castle were using miniguns to finish off the remaining demons. Snipers were using explosive bullets, while the soldiers in the headquarters all the turrets.

"What is that?" Arthur asked pointing at something he saw on the first screen.

Bishop took a good look at this.

"Well it's not an enemy, for sure. It's killing the demons."

"Zoom me on that."

When the zoom came from one of the turrets, Arthur's jaw dropped.

"Lian," he whispered in disbelief.

The demons were attacking her from all sides. She took out as

many as she could, but some of them had made several holes in the parachute. When another one scratched the material, she started to spin. One of the demons got caught up with her and she couldn't push it off. The air no longer slowed them down and they began to gain speed heading directly at the courtyard.

35.

The cars were going along the trail called Baquiano Trail. The road went up and it seemed that the top would be any minute now. The ocean began to emerge in the distance and the tall tower of Maldito castle erected seconds later.

"We're here," Miles said stopping the car.

Before them spread the panorama of Pacifica with the ocean and the island in the background. There was no sign of the tornado anymore.

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4 SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

1.

"I hope we're not too late," Patricia asked staring at Alpha Point and the castle in the distance.

The colossal army was marching along the Robert's Road towards the tunnel in Alpha Point. However, the tunnel was too narrow for every demon to fit in, so many of the flying demons were carrying others to the island. It was not clear what was happening on the island; mainly because it was still dark and the island itself was a few miles from the coast. Only muted shots were coming from that direction.

"They're still fighting," Dan said observing the view.

"Look there!" Surya raised her voice spotting something on the island.

It was a beam of light or rather a rail that went from the castle across the island. It shone for a few seconds then went out.

"UV spotlights," Dan replied. "I didn't think the vampires were supposed to be there."

Miles sat on an old trunk and sighed,

"Boy, we received information about vampires a few hours after the dead rose."

"Great, so we have an army of demons on one side, vampires on the other one, zombies wandering around and a bulk of pissed ghosts appearing almost everywhere."

Surya started to walk in circles with her head down as if she was trying to think.

"What are you doing?" Michael asked.

"It's her way of thinking," Tokutei replied.

One of the soldiers suddenly remembered something.

"I need binoculars."

"What happened?" Patricia asked handing over him her sniper rifle.

"You see those hills in the south."

"Yup."

"The plan was to put a hundred thousand soldiers across the peninsula to kill anything that tries to leave," he lied down looking deeply into the sight. "There was an order for them to move up to the hills for a better view."

"So, do you see any?" Patricia asked glancing at Surya still walking in circles.

"Nope, nothing. They're all gone."

"Maybe they retreated," someone suggested.

"I know!" the dhampiric girl boomed as the others looked at her strangely. "It's obvious we cannot go this way, neither can we use the tunnel. But, if we take the sewage we can reach the shore find a boat and get to the other side. What do ya' say, huh? Am I a genius?"

"Actually it's not a bad idea, after all," Johnson commented. "We'd better find the entrance to the sewage system and have it over with."

2.

Many a person ran towards Lian lying unconscious in the

courtyard. Among them, there were marines, medics and hunters. They quickly got rid of the remaining demons. The medics crouched at her and examined her instantly.

“Ma’am, can you hear me? Ma’am?” he slightly tapped her face, but there was no reaction.

“Three severe wounds,” the other one announced. “Leg, stomach, arm.”

“We need to bring her inside.”

As they were carrying her on a stretcher towards the main entrance to the castle, Arthur ran out to the courtyard and headed towards the medics.

“How is she?”

“Three wounds, unconscious. She needs to be taken to the medical facility immediately.”

“Bring her to the one at the headquarters. Let me know the moment she wakes up.”

“If she wakes up. She fell from a pretty high distance.”

3.

Bishop was still in the headquarters examining the reports that were flooding the screens. He was staring at the information such as: death toll, number of injured, number of ammo used, approximate number of enemies killed.

“Put me the president on the line,” he told the soldier on his left.

Seconds later the president’s face appeared on the screen.

“Where’s West?”

“He’s downstairs dealing with one of the ASATs. I’m here to give the report.”

“I’m all ears.”

“So far we’ve lost 232 men excluding the main land, of course. It’s still way fewer than I expected. Five zones have been

destroyed.”

“So we’re in the half way through with our defenses.”

“Not exactly. Soldiers from previous zones enhanced the others when they retreat, so the defense lasts much longer.”

“I see.”

“Sir, we haven’t received the reinforcements yet,” Bishop said disappointingly.

“Ten thousands soldiers have been sent to you. They’re on the way to Alpha Point.”

“Like you said, sir. We cannot lose hope yet.”

“There is one more important thing I need to tell you, and I want ... tell it... West.”

The screen started to flicker.

“We’re losing the signal,” Bishop said loudly.

The EMF readings were raising dramatically exceeding 250.

“We have decided to ... weapon if ... or the demons ... the peninsula.”

“Sir, I can’t hear you.”

The screen flickered for a moment until it disappeared completely.

“EMF readings are over 400, sir,” Morris said rubbing his forehead.

Bishop looked around nervously.

“They cannot enter the castle. They must be blocking the signal from the outside.”

Arthur walked inside and looked at the black screens.

“Where is the picture?”

“EMF readings are over 400, Arthur. The spirits are jamming the signal.”

Arthur scratched his head as he sat on his armchair.

“It means we can only communicate within the walls of the castle. No one can hear us outside.”

"I'm afraid so."

"That means, zones Foxtrot and Golf will fail much quicker."

"These soldiers know how to fight. They won't give up so easily."

4.

Over 150 snipers were helping from Maldito castle and many more were spread across the zones. Hundreds of marines had just entered the zones as Delta and Echo were destroyed by the demon tornado. Some of them needed medical attention, while the rest were able to fight. SMA Tylor and Moor, people responsible for Foxtrot and Golf were in the main tent deep in the forest. The tent itself was longer than the ones in previous zones and was connected with the second one in the Golf zone.

"We've lost every contact because of this spiritual activity," Moor said taking off his glasses to wipe them.

"We cannot use anything electronic," Tylor added. Moor rubbed his eyes and put back the glasses.

"Well, if we want to have the power back, we have to deal with those ghosts first."

"We're far enough from the eastern coast to use explosives. I'll order snipers to use them."

"Go ahead, shout."

"You bet I will," he replied leaving the tent.

Jack and Amanda were in Golf. They had climbed onto the wall to have a better view at the situation. About one-fourth of the trees in previous zones had been destroyed. She could see large heads of gondars that were walking far ahead among the trees in the remains of Bravo and Charlie. The noise of moans, growling noises, hissings, cries, howls and stamping feet were coming from the east. Several flying demons tried to attack the remaining zones from air, but they were quickly eliminated by

snipers. Most of these creatures were used as air-taxis to carry possessors, sorcerers and guardians to the island. Amanda was using a typical M4 rifle. She was scanning the area among the trees to spot anything moving. She could see burning tents and knocked walls, abandoned sniper posts and dozens of bodies. When she saw any movement she reacted quickly by successfully eliminating the treat. Jack was doing the same.

Jason decided to stay in Foxtrot. He and Eye climbed onto a sniper tower and lied down next to each other. They had a perfect view at the whole east side of the island.

"They let us use explosives," Eye said with a smile.

"Now we can kick some ass in ASAT style."

5.

Unit one was walking along a narrow, stinky, dimly-lit sewage. Nothing was heard apart from dripping water or some rats running to and fro. The sewage itself looked like a typical one; a circular tunnel with a stream of smelly water running in the middle. Surya was leading the way.

"Are you sure we're going the right way, girl?" the Roberts asked walking right behind her.

"You hear the stamping of the demons feet over the ground?"

"Yup."

"So we're going the right way."

Michael was going as the last person making sure nothing follows them.

"I just hope none of those creatures is even thinkin' of comin' down here."

Tokutei was last but one. He turned round to Michael and replied with a silent laugh,

"Don't worry, they're too occupied with the island."

“Hush!” Surya stopped immediately after she had heard something coming from round the corner.

“What is it?” Patricia whispered sensing the other soldiers gaining curiosity and fear.

Everyone became silent as they all came to a halt. The heavy breathing noises seemed to be coming from more than one creature. The dhampiric girl ejected her daggers and slowly moved forward. When she was at the corner she quickly stuck out her head and moved back immediately.

“Only a couple of zombies,” she said now loudly.

Hardly had she said that, when she turned left and vanished for a moment. The others heard sounds of slashing coming from that direction and momentarily the girl returned with her blades covered with dark-red blood.

“We may proceed.”

“Wait!” Michael exclaimed turning round and listening out for something.

The others were only looking at him trying to deduce what he tried to hear.

“Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Patricia asked.

“Something is out there in the sewage.”

“Probably some other zombies. Can we go now, please?”

“OK, let’s go,” he replied with uncertainty still turning round at the mysterious sound of unknown origin.

6.

Arthur sat for a while on his armchair in the headquarters and dropped his head. He seemed weary and depressed. Bishop noticed that quickly and straight away walked to him.

“Don’t even think of getting depressed today... again.”

“No, no, I’m far from being depressed. I’m just thinking how

to decrease this spiritual activity. Without it we have no communication outside the castle.”

“You’re right, it can be annoying, but we can manage without communication. You’d better think how to withstand longer. They’re preparing to attack right now.”

Arthur sprang to his feet after he had noticed several turret operator doing nothing.

“You, turret guys. If you cannot connect to turrets on the island, use the ones spread outside the castle. Shoot anything you see.”

He turned to Bishop,

“Put a live feed from any of our outside cameras. Pick a good one. And you,” he glanced at the soldier at the desk. “Make me a coffee and something to eat. The sun is about to rise.”

“I don’t think the clouds would go away, Arthur,” Bishop yawned.

“I know they won’t. But I do know that the minute the sun is somewhere out there, it’s gonna be twenty four hours of our fighting.”

7.

Jason had climbed down from the sniper tower. Now he was standing on the wall in Foxtrot scanning the area with the zoom inbuilt in his microcomputer. None of the demons showed up at the wall till that time.

“I don’t understand,” a marine next to him murmured. “It’s been quite a lot of time since they destroyed Delta and Echo, and they’re not attacking?”

Jason looked at him calmly and replied casually,

“They’re waiting. They’re clever enough to keep themselves hidden among the trees, but they’re not gonna hide forever. They wanna attack big. I think they’re gonna repeat Alpha.”

Actually O.D. didn't know what to say. He just said what he thought they were doing, judging by their previous behavior.

"Which was what? I wasn't there."

"Get rid of our defenses and attack with everything they have."

Having said someone shouted,

"Archers!"

Jason quickly looked into his sight and saw a couple of demons among the trees far away, but close enough for him to take a few effective shoots. As he pressed the trigger for the third time, the sky lit up with hundreds of burning arrows.

"Take cover!" the marine next to Jason screamed to the rest as he lied down flat and waited for the arrows to pass.

They had advantage over Alpha Point. First of all the number of arrows wasn't as big as in Alpha. Secondly, the island was covered with trees that served as a perfect cover from the arrows. Within a few seconds the arrows caused a slight panic in both of the zones as everyone made sure nothing would fall on them from the sky. Most of the arrows got lost among the trees hitting the leaves and the barks. Some of them ended up in the walls. Only a few landed in the ground within the zone, but they had to be extinguished right away.

"They wanna make sure we're occupied with hiding!"

Williams yelled, "So that they can come up to the walls."

"Use the gaps in the walls to drive them off!" SMA Tylor ordered.

Many marines stuck their barrels into the walls and waited for the demons to approach. Among them there was Dorothy Lednický from Alpha Point and Mark Jackson, also from that zone. Some of the brownish and reddish figures flashed among the trees..

"Up ahead, on the road!" Dorothy said noticing a few zombies walking along the road towards them.

"Are these...?" a hunter asked with sadness in his voice seeing limping undead bodies of marines.

"Unfortunately they are," Jackson replied. "Listen, we have no choice, we must defend the castle of all costs. I'll shoot them if you can't."

He aimed at their heads and as he was about to press the trigger, he felt a strong pull on his shoulder.

"Wait! They're alive," his colleague said hopefully.

Jackson looked one more time. He was about to make a horrible mistake. In front of him were walking three wounded soldiers helping one another get to Foxtrot. Lednicky turned around.

"Open the gate, we have three our guys outside."

"Open the gate!" a voice came from above.

The wooden gate began to go up. Lednicky and four other soldiers quickly ran outside to their teammates. Two helped them get to the gate, while the rest made sure no one was following them. As they were getting closer to the wall, seven vampires sprang out from the trees and attacked them. None of the marines had prepared silver bullets, so before they changed the ammo, three vampires knocked over the wounded marines. One of them grabbed the first marine by his leg and threw it hard against the tree breaking his spine on the impact. As he was on the point of grabbing the second one, the two soldiers shot him from the back. Then a few others shots came directly from the zone.

"Go, go, go!" Jason shouted from the walls.

It was he who had killed the rest of the vampires and simultaneously saved their colleagues' lives. The soldiers helped the others get back and disappeared inside the zone.

"Close the gate!"

They helped them get to the medical point, when some else shouted,

"Arrows!"

Jackson knew that being at the wall was a good place to hide, and the arrows wouldn't hit him, so he got back to scanning the road. He spotted another group of marines approaching the gate. This time he looked closely at them to make sure he wouldn't make a mistake.

"Alive my ass. Guts dangling from your belly," he said under his breath.

Next he pressed the trigger several times taking three precise shots at their heads.

SMA Tylor was still in the tent thinking what to do next. They can't be hiding forever, and using explosive bullets is not good enough. Suddenly, he had an idea. He stood up and ran outside. He ignored the burning arrows sticking out from the ground.

"Use grenade launchers! Aim them at Bravo and Charlie!"

"Not a bad idea," Jason commented.

Tylor disappeared in the tent as more and more soldiers climbed up the wall. It was not long till they answered to the enemies' arrows with grenade launchers simultaneously stopping the arrow bombardment.

8.

Unit one and the marines were still in the sewer system walking along cold stream of water. Those who had any light illuminated the round corridor. Tokutei and Surya didn't need any, so they were leading the way. Another howl echoed in the sewage behind them, then another and another.

"I don't know about you, but these are not God damn zombies," Michael said alarmed feeling more and more irritated by those noises.

SMA Johnson turned round and stopped for a while to listen.

"He's right. These ain't no sounds of walking dead."

The noises seemed to be heading towards them briskly. Everyone

started to get concerned about them. Some of the soldiers changed the ammo to poisoned bullets, hoping the noises belonged to vampires, while others chose regular ones in case the noises belonged to demons.

"I think we've gotta stop," SMA Miles said. "We won't be able to hide anywhere if we keep on going. We need to take advantage of this long corridor."

Everyone spread. Those who were in the back got on one knee creating the first line, those who were in the middle stood up behind them making the second one. There was no room for the rest so they waited and watched. The grunting noises sounded as if they were right behind the corner ready to reveal the creatures that were making them. Next a couple of black shadows emerged from the left, covering the right wall of the sewage tunnel. The splashing of water echoed in the background.

"Oh no," Dan said as his jaw dropped.

They saw thin, humanlike creatures walking on their legs and hands. Their heads were bald and their eyes were much bigger than the humans'. Their grey skin made them look like shaven dogs without ears.

"What are they?" Mitchell asked.

"Ghouls," Surya replied switching ammo into explosive one. The first and the second line of soldiers had started shooting before Dan said a word. Yet the regular shots did no harm to the monsters.

"Explosives! Use Explosives!" Dan shouted getting ready.

"And move back!" Tokutei added.

He knew it was a stupid idea for him to get engaged into the fight. Even though the corridor was long, there was no point in running further and swinging his sword around when explosive bullets were in action. He waited patiently and observed the situation from the back.

The marines swiftly stood up and began to walk to the back shooting at the same time. Explosive bullets had a few seconds delay, so the creatures made a few more steps before they were torn apart. The first explosion came unexpectedly faster. Its force could not spread evenly within the tunnel so a wind of fire took both directions knocking over several marines. The second explosion came right afterwards only making the first one stronger. When the third ghoul exploded, the tunnel couldn't withstand it anymore and the ceiling collapsed cutting off the eastern part of the sewer system. Large blocks of concrete fell not only onto the ghouls but also onto some marines. The tunnels filled with a large cloud of ash. The explosions were heard above making the ground shake in the area which immediately caught an eye of everything above.

"What's happening down there?" one of the demons in chief asked himself.

"Werewolves and ghouls are always making a mess," a sorcerer standing next to him replied with a hiss.

"Insidious creatures," the commander replied.

9.

Everyone in the headquarters was much busier since they lost communication with the zones. The only turrets that could be used were the ones mounted within the walls of the castle itself. Arthur was staring at the feed from one of the enhanced sniper rifles. After the bombardment with the grenades the explosions caused large cloud of ash to rise into the air and spread within remains of zones Bravo and Charlie. Arthur was blowing his nose when a face appeared on the other screen. It was a plump man with short, curly, dark hair wearing a white uniform.

"Arthur, sir, you wanted us to let you know when the girl wakes up. Well... She's just woken up."

On hearing this, Arthur leapt up and headed towards the door. A minute later he rushed inside the medical point. It was a white hall with four rows of beds. At each bed there was a cupboard with necessary medicaments and tools, a monitor, and bags of blood. There were six people lying on some beds, with several doctors performing some procedures on them. Lian was lying on the last bed sipping some hot beverage. She was wearing hospital clothes and it seemed that all of her wounds had been taken care of. Arthur walked towards her slightly uncertain.

"Arthur, don't even tell me I look well, cause I know I don't."

Noticing her sense of humor, he joked,

"It was the last thing on my mind. How are you?"

"Apart from being irritated by this piece of rag, I'm fine. The morphine works quite well on me."

The old man sat next to her and rubbed his hands.

"Lian, you were the last who came alive from the land. What can you tell me about it?"

The Asian girl scratched her head putting the cup away.

"I don't have good news, I'm afraid. The soldiers moved the line half a mile to the south. We cannot count on them anymore."

"Have you met the marines they've sent?"

"They sent them when I was leaving. I don't know when they're gonna reach us."

Arthur stood up and thought for a while.

"I think you should rest for a while."

"If by *a while* you mean an hour, then I can do with that."

A small smile appeared on Arthur's face as he was turning around.

"Arthur, wait. Any signs from them?"

"None," he replied as the smile disappeared immediately.

"What about the island?"

"We lost four zones on the island. The demons must have destroyed the salt blocks because the spiritual activity rose

dramatically jamming our aerals and communication. We have no contact with the zones.

“Then, I’m going to help them straight away.”

“No. It’s out of question,” Arthur replied seriously. You must rest... at least for a while.

10.

“Cease fire!” SMA Tylor ordered.

“Why did you order this?” one of the hunters in the tent asked.

“It’s been fifteen minutes since we saw the last arrows. I think they’re done.”

SMA Moore from Golf was a few feet away listening to the conversation.

“And our snipers complain about the cloud of ash and smoke we caused.”

Moore walked towards them with a serious face.

“You do understand that we cannot ignore the EMF readings, don’t you?”

“Yes, I have my men ready to react if any spiritual activity occurs in the place.”

“Don’t forget to burn zombies, too. Most of these spirits can be killed by burning their original bodies.”

“We prefer salt bullets, it does the work.”

George Martin, a hunter from Alpha Point and Amanda were walking along the northern wall in Golf zone. He knew that he and the others would face ghosts any minute now. Yet they weren’t alone. No one could be alone that day, for death would claim them. They and two other hunters were watching the east. It was the only place where salt stones had been destroyed so there was no other option that spiritual entities could appear from any other side. As they were getting closer to the sniper tower, they heard

strange noises coming from above.

“Are OK up there?” Amanda asked with a loud voice.

There was no answer. She looked at Martin and then up again. A scream came from above as a body of a sniper fell down crushing against a tree trunk. They were able to jump off in time. Next they heard another scream and two shots coming from the same sniper post.

“They’re here,” she whispered rapidly looking around.

“Beware.”

One of transparent spirits revealed itself at the wall, then another and another and one more. Martin was carrying a shotgun for such situations. He didn’t want to wait, so he fired a few shots there. He hit two of them, but the rest disappeared only to appear right before Amanda’s eyes. She could easily see that it was an elderly woman who had probably died of age. She held out her hands as if she was about to strangle Amanda or break her neck. The girl swiftly jumped to the back, still switching the ammo into salt bullets, but then something unexpected happened. The spiritual body stopped and caught fire out of nowhere. The elder woman wobbled and shook from left to right as her pieces vaporized starting from the bottom and ending on her head.

“Someone destroyed her body,” Martin said. “At least we know that soldiers still fight on the land.”

“Or it may’ve been somewhere on the island.”

Amanda noticed a few more up ahead. She and the others ran there quickly.

On the other side of the island in Foxtrot, Eye was scanning the woods for any movement. He could see no one. Thompson was on the same tower lying facing south. He pulled back and asked Eye something that was bothering him,

“Do you think it was a good idea to use the grenade launchers?”

“For marines down there, yeah, it was. Look, their numbers clearly diminished. But for us, well we can now only operate within a quarter mile radius.”

“That is what I was talking about. We can’t see further because of that stupid cloud of ash.”

11.

After visiting Lian, instead of getting back to the headquarters, Arthur headed to his office. It was almost twenty-four hours since his last visit there. The screens were working, but were showing nothing apart from green dots of every human alive within the walls of the castle. The old man walked up to his desk and rested on the armchair. He looked at the clock. It was A few minutes after eleven. As he was sitting with his eyes fixed on his wife; Alice, terrifying images popped up in his head. He began to imagine what it would be like the next day. He saw his men dying. He saw the demon spreading, he saw death everywhere.

“What would happen if Cizin gets the Seal back? Would it be as Shax said? Would he really divide it into hundreds of pieces to make sure no one will bind him again? If Hell wins, it will be the end of humanity, a real end of the world. And then what would the future look like? How would they deal with natural disasters? And what if there are some extra-terrestrial life and they would come on earth and meets only evil. They would destroy the whole planet. And it all goes to one tiny seal and the ring to end this. Without the ring there is nothing they could do. They cannot protect themselves forever. Over thirty million demons come through the portal each hour. There are ten million vampires all over the world. And how many will they be if they transform our pearls of mankind? A hundred million? A billion? Maybe that wouldn’t be so bad if they do scientists, brilliant minds. No, they wouldn’t do that. They are evil sons of the bitches who would

grow humans in laboratory to satisfy their bloodthirst. And what about others species like werewolves, ghouls, shapeshifters, mutants and so on? They cannot think like humans, they know no mercy, no rational thinking, no goodness. They cannot make any peace, they can only kill. With their evil nature they would kill one another leaving only one species to survive. But why am I thinking about that? I should focus on what is going out there, but on the other hand, Unit one. Where are they? It's been two days since they got there. What if they didn't make it even to Shax's palace? Hell is full of various creatures, something might have killed them. Maybe I should have sent Jason, he feels no fear. Without the ring there is nothing to protect. I could just easily walk out now and give the Seal to the demons and have it over it. Maybe I should do this? Maybe they will spare the island? Demons and sparing? No way. Or why not escape to some island, nothing will find me there. What are you thinking, Arthur! Accept it, it's over for us now. There is no hope, there is no hope, no hope. Maybe suicide? It's gonna be less painful than what demons gonna do with me."

As he was wandering with his thoughts one of the black screens displayed image of Bishop.

"Arthur, I knew I would find you here. You won't gonna believe what just happened."

Arthur slowly raised his sad eyes and looked at his friend. He was obviously thrilled with something.

"What is it?"

"There's been some decline within the EMF and we received a message from Golden Gate Cemetery. I... I'm just gonna play it to you."

"Whatever," he replied miserably.

The screen displayed an image of one of the snipers who were in Golden Gate. He had black stains of smoke on his cheeks and blood was trickling down his forehead. Cemetery in the

background looked empty with a few soldiers wandering around.

"This is Major Barnes from Golden Gate Cemetery. An hour ago the spiritual activity decreased significantly and we received an important message from our roadblocks on Mission Street. The ... Fuck the spiritual ... is raising again. ... be quick, they saw ... We can be sure ... because ... a man with a blue samurai sword. ... hours ago, ... ready. They ... coming."

Words *blue sword* absorbed Arthur's attention and made him rise from his armchair with his jaw dropped in disbelief. In his moment of sadness and misery he actually heard something that immediately cheered him up and gave him hope again. A minute ago he was depressed, hopeless and miserable, now he felt warmth inside.

"Th-They are back," he stuttered as tears ran down his wrinkled cheeks.

These were not tears of sadness. These were the tears of joy. There was still hope. Arthur felt as his heart became warm with relief. Finally after two days of no contact he heard that unit one is back again, at least somewhere on the main land.

"They are back!" he exclaimed joyfully. "They beat Hell!" He couldn't believe what he had just heard. Unit one was somewhere there on its way home.

"I'm going to you," the old man said making a dart towards the door.

Two minutes later, he rushed into the headquarters and stopped at the desk, trying to catch his breath.

"Put me the map of peninsula onto the screen. In the meantime select everyone on the peninsula and send this message to them."

"Just a moment, sir," the man at the desk replied selecting everyone in the area. "But I don't think the message will reach them."

"If this message reached us, we may only hope this will reach

the others.”

“OK, sir. The tablet is ready to record.”

SMA Anderson gave him a surprised look.

“What is he tryin’ to do,” he whispered.

“This is Arthur West. I know there are problems with communication, but if you get this, follow the instruction. If you’ve had contact with any of our ASAT members within the last twenty-four hours, leave the roadblock and try to join them. Those who are in San Francisco, go south to join the others.”

“The message has been sent, sir.”

“Good,” Arthur replied directing his eyes at the map of San Francisco.

Bishop came closer and observed what Arthur was doing.

“So... The Mission Street ends... um... here in Daly City. They are not going to take the western freeways, so they have to cross through Woodlawn and other graveyards until they are somewhere about here,” he pointed at the hill west to Alpha Point. “They cannot take the tunnel, so they will either fly to us or swim. They have no other choice but to get from the east or south. Bishop!” he turned putting his hand on John’s shoulder. “They might be on their way here. We need to send a party for them. Our best people, not only soldiers, but also hunters and martial artists.”

“I think you’re right, Arthur. I’ll send the message over to everybody in the castle and organize a search party.”

“Good. They’re coming home. We can still win this.”

12.

The ash and dust disappeared in the sewer system revealing large pieces of stones and concrete dividing the tunnel into two. Michael woke up but feeling helpless he lost consciousness again. He was back in 2003. He and four other soldiers were sitting

inside a special military vehicle used for carrying important people between camps. In this particular one, there was a man in a black suit, black shirt and a tie, sitting between two soldiers on the back seat. He was looking out the window at the sandy road and dunes spreading across the landscape. There were also two other military vehicles in the front and at the back.

“We’ll be there shortly, sir,” one of the soldiers said.

“I’ve got lots of time,” the man smiled taking off his sunglasses.

He looked at the vehicle in the front. There was a whoosh and suddenly the car exploded raising a cloud of fire into the air.

“Oh my God,” the person in the suit murmured taking a sudden cover.

The same happened with the vehicles in the back.

“Stay in the vehicle, sir,” one of the soldiers said opening the door and ran outside.

The door also opened on the other side of the car and two others quickly found themselves out of the car. Four soldiers were now outside having their weapons aimed ahead looking for any opponents. The explosions filled the air with black smoke that covered everything.

“Damn it, I can’t see anything through that sand,” one of the soldiers yelled covering his mouth with his elbow.

“Davis! Protect the senator!” came the order.

Michael tried to find the best solution. Staying inside was dangerous because someone could blow the car up. Getting out was neither an option, especially when the shots began to whistle on both sides. He had to make a decision and he had to make it now.

“Sir, I need you to get out of the vehicle,” Michael said leaving first.

In the cloud of sand and dust he saw his teammate lying dead on

the sand. Some shots were coming from the side, but he couldn't see anything. When the senator got out, Michael saw an opponent advancing from the cloud. It was an Iraqi person with his face covered in a turban. Not waiting any longer, Michael fired eliminating the target and moved on.

"Come with me," he said covering his face from the sand. A few feet further he met another soldier crawling along the sand. He had a red stain on his chest. He looked at Michael and whispered,

"It was a trap..."

Then lost his consciousness. The senator moved crouching towards Michael. After that, he spotted some object at his feet. Someone had thrown a grenade towards them. Michael quickly picked it up and threw it away. Split a second later, after the release the grenade exploded with a flash making Michael lose his balance and hit his head against a stone lying on the sand.

"Target is secure," he heard someone speaking with an Iraqi accent.

This was the last thing he remembered.

On the other side of the tunnel Surya got up and looked around brushing the dust off her, already dirty clothes. Tokutei and Mitchell were lying near. They seemed to be OK, at least they looked so. There were also several soldiers. Some of them wounded trying to get up and several lying unconscious.

"Dan? Mike? Pat?" she asked loudly seeing two pairs of legs sticking out from the debris. One was definitely human, while the other one was grey and shoeless with hard skin and long toenails.

"Mike? Pat?" she asked again louder. "Dan?"

"Don't shout or you will reveal our position," Tokutei said standing up.

"Don't you think the explosions did it?"

Tokutei helped the others get on their feet and checked whether

they were hurt. Surya asked one more time.

“Can anyone hear me?”

“We’re here,” some male voice answered coughing.

“How many are there?”

“Sixteen, seventeen,” came an uncertain answer.

“And Dan, Mike and Patricia?”

“We’re here,” came a familiar voice.

Surya grabbed the stones and started throwing them away.

“Come on, help me.”

Tokutei thought for a while, then boomed,

“Surya stop, it’s no use. You won’t get to them this way.”

The girl left the rock and shouted,

“Try to get round the tunnel!”

“OK, if we don’t meet you in the sewage, we’ll meet you outside,” female voice echoed.

Mitchell cleaned his pistols and as he was going towards Tokutei, he said to the others,

“We must be going.”

“Wait, what were those creatures called?” Johnson asked.

“These were ghouls,” Tokutei replied with a serious voice.

“They usually live within graveyards and they feed on dead. They cannot be killed by regular bullets, neither by silver or poisoned ones. As you have all seen, they can be eliminated by fire or cold steel.”

“We can’t use so many explosive bullets here,” someone else said.

Surya ejected her daggers.

“That’s why we have these.”

On the other side of the tunnel, the rest were moving to the back. Two of the soldiers were limping, Collins had his arm hurt, but all in all they were alright. The sounds of growling and moaning spread again in the distance.

"Not again," Miles complained feeling for the trigger with his index finger.

Patricia became quiet and listened to the noises for a while.

"They're far away. If we speed up we may have a chance not to meet them again."

As they were moving forward, they heard sudden sounds of shouts coming from above.

"What is that?" One of the soldiers asked looking up.

"Johnson and the others?" someone else asked.

"No, too many of them," Michael replied.

It sounded like thousands of shots shot at a time from different weapons. Muted screams and squeals were coming through the ceiling.

"Who are they?" Roberts, the bald soldier inquired curiously.
"Our rescue team?"

13.

In Miami, Florida, in one of the local hotels, guests were leaving in tens. Many of them skipped the long queue to the check out. They simply left the key somewhere and left the hotel in a hurry. Two flat screens were hanging on the pillars with the news channel. Some of the people stopped to listen to it for a while, but most were in such a hurry that they ignored it.

"It's been several hours since we lost any contact with the west coast. From what we know, none of the electronic devices works there due to some electromagnetic impulse that turned off everything in the area. We have lost contact with all of our reporters who decided to stay there. We have professor Daniel Barnes, a leading specialist in paranormal activities in our studio. Could you tell us anything about what is going on there?"

"Well, I cannot. I'm not there. But I can only speculate. You see, there is something called electromagnetic field, EMF that

ghosts and spirit create around themselves. It's usually low. However, if the EMF is high, and I'm talking about fifty spirits high, then it can jam all the electronic devices; our cell phones, our computers, radios, screens and so on."

"Are you saying that we are dealing with not only demons but also ghosts there?"

"I don't know, but there is no creature in the world that can do something like that."

"So how can we stop this?"

"By eliminating the spirits of course. And to do that, we can either use temporary tools like salt or iron, or permanent tools like burning their remains."

The woman touched her ear as if she was listening to a message in the earpiece she had there.

"We have just received a message that all the international flights and cruises are fully booked for the next couple of days. What happens in other states? We've received information of demon sightings in other states. It hasn't been confirmed yet however. People are leaving to Mexico and Canada not in hundreds but thousands. Los Angeles has lost half of its residents. The massive traffic jams on the highways made many people choose other, less popular roads. Homeland Security keeps order in towns and cities. In many cities Martial law has been introduced due to many burglaries, robberies and riots. What was that?" she squinted her eyes listening to what she was hearing. "Are you sure, west? Not east?" She raised her head. "It's incredible but thousands of people, usually teenagers and young adults, are heading west, yes west not east, to California to fight for our country."

14.

Meanwhile in the castle, Arthur and Bishop were in the

briefing room. More than a hundred of people were inside. Most of them were soldiers, but not all of them were wearing military uniforms. Dan's aunt Leonora and Mike were also there. Arthur was walking impatiently from left to right of his wide desk. He waited until everyone got inside and started.

"I have asked for your presence here due to a certain thing. We've learned that the other ASAT unit is on their way to the island. We need to send a group of ten to fifteen people to the east to enable them a secure passage to the castle. We do not need only soldiers. We need people of all kinds who feel they are best in what their do and are willing to go as far as Delta and Bravo zones."

They saw many a hand rising up.

"You have your army," Bishop muttered then he and Arthur received a message.

"Something is going on in Pacifica, you need to see it." Bishop smacked his lips and sighed with irritation.

"You handle the team, I'm going back to the headquarters."

15.

A few minutes later he entered the room. The screen was already showing the view from one of the sniper rifles at the shore. Because of the darkness spreading around the view was shown in infrared that added to it this greenish color. They saw many explosions taking places to the south from Alpha Point. Also they saw white lines of thousands of shots firing to the north.

"Unit one?" Morris asked rubbing his chin.

"No, too many. These are probably the marines sent to help us."

But then they saw something odd. It was as if some smoke was coming from the northern east.

"What's that?" SMA Anderson asked.

"Some fog, I guess," Bishop answered with worries. "If it reaches us, our snipers will become useless."

16.

The fight with the spirits was still going on in Foxtrot and Golf. So far, twelve people have been killed and about twenty have been wounded. Yet, nothing apart from the spirits entered the zone; no zombies, no vampires, and particularly no demons. SMA Tylor, two medics and a few hunters were still in the tent. Suddenly, one of the laptop fell off the table and dropped on the ground.

"They're here," one of the hunters exclaimed.

SMA grabbed his shotgun and shouted.

"Reveal yourself you mother fucker."

Before him a white, glowing blueprint of a child appeared. He was at least seven years old and he had wounds all over his body. Tylor wanted to press the trigger, but when he saw the child he made step to the back. At the same time his jaw dropped.

"What is daddy?" the child said casually.

"T-Tommy," he stuttered as his eyes filled with tears.

The others stood and stare. They all understood the situation and couldn't do anything about this one ghost. Then a few more spirits appeared behind them, and they had to deal with them.

"Oh my God, Tommy," he lowered his weapon.

"I miss you, daddy."

Out of the sudden, all his emotions and memories from two years before got back to him.

"I miss you too."

"Why did you drive drunk? Why?"

"I-I'm sorry," he cried.

"I don't want to this, but he tells me to," the child whispered as he disappeared and appeared again right in front of Tylor.

This time his face changed and blackened as his eyes turned into two empty holes.

"He wants everyone here dead," the child continued with a scary voice. "Even you, dad. I'm sorry, but I."

Tylor felt a dreadful pain in his stomach. He dropped his head only to see the child's arm inside of him. He felt a hurtful but a warm feeling spreading from the inside. Then the child flickered and disappeared. Tylor turned his head and saw one of the hunters with an assault rifle.

"Don't ever let them get to you, no matter who they are," he said when SMA fell onto his side showing off the wound.

Having seen this, he ran up to him shouting,

"Medic, medic!"

"It's too late, I failed," he whispered glancing at his hand covered in blood.

"Shoot me in the head before I turn into a zombie."

"I cannot, Sir."

"It's an order."

"We need a medic here!" the hunter shouted again.

Tylor spilt blood onto the ground.

"No, I won't make it."

The medic rushed inside and crouched at him.

"Sir," he held his arm. "Sir."

There was no answer. He looked at the vast wound in his stomach.

"We couldn't have saved him anyway. You know what to do, kid," he stood up and ran to someone else.

The hunter raised his HK G36C and pressed the trigger. Then stood up and ran towards the hunters that were fighting apparitions.

Outside the tent soldiers were fighting everything that popped up.

“Watch your six!”

“On your left.”

“Two more,” these were the voices that were heard in the zone.

The action lasted for about fifteen minutes. Then the screens in the tent displayed feed from Eagle Eye for a moment, and every ghost disappeared.

“We’re back online,” Williams said taking his tablet out. Almost instantly Arthur’s message played everywhere. Jason listened to it and immediately contacted Eye.

“They’re coming, Eye. Point your barrel east and tell me if you see them.”

Eye did what he was asked to.

“I can’t see the coast. ... fog is ... from that side.”

“Fuck the spiritual activity raises again,” Jason replied angrily. And it was gone. The screens turned off and the communication was down again.

“I think we killed enough ghosts to lower the EMF enough for our devices to work,” Thompson said who was standing next to Jason at the gate.

“Back to fighting in the dark,” other soldier said wiping off blood that was trickling down his forehead.

“Open the gate,” an order came from Williams.

“What why?” Jason asked confused.

Having turned around, he saw a group of about fifteen men walking along the road. These were not only soldiers. He could see among them also mercenaries, big fighters and Asians that seemed to be martial artists. As the last, there was walking a boy or rather a young adult. He was thin, with black hair and he was gazing at Jason indifferently. He could sense this strange aura around this lad.

“Where are you goin’, guys?”

"ASATs are coming back, we're gonna get them safe here," a huge, bald man replied with a low voice.

Jason watched them cross the gate and immediately turning into the woods.

"Good luck," he whispered.

"So it's true, then," his teammate said watching the empty road through the holes in the wall. "They are coming back and this whole thing will be over soon."

"We must hold on a just few more hours."

17.

Tokutei was running along a long, stinky sewage corridor below the ground. Surya and the others were right behind him.

"We're almost there," she whispered hearing the crashing waves somewhere in the distance above the ground.

The ghouls hadn't attacked for a long time, but the rest of the team hadn't showed up, either.

"You hear that?" Roberts said.

"Hear what?" Mitchell stopped and raised his eyes.

"Exactly, apart from the ocean I hear nothing. What happened to the shots up there?"

Everyone stopped for a while. They could hear no sounds coming from above. An hour ago there were thousands of shots as if some fight was taking place, now nothing.

"The good thing is," Surya tried to comfort, "The stumping hooves and feet are also gone."

"We're gonna check it when we're outside, right?" Tokutei said seriously, springing forward.

The rest of the team was about half a mile from them. The monotonous tunnels filled with horrible smell didn't seem to be ending anywhere soon.

"Just assume it, Michael," Dan said. "We're lost."

"We're not lost," he replied angrily. "Look, the compass points north there," he pointed to the right. "And we're going west, which is there."

Dan thought for a while. He tried to remember how many turns they had had and where they were at that moment.

"I think we should go up at the nearest exit. We've been in the sewage for two hours and since we can't hear any shots, we are way past Alpha Point."

"No, we must pursue," Michael insisted.

"Don't you realize for God's sake that we are safer above the ground than below it?"

Michael rubbed his face trying to figure out what to do next. If they keep on going through the tunnels, they would eventually reach the end, but the disadvantage was, of course ghouls. But if they go to the surface, they would have the rest of the creatures to face. However, no one knew how far from Alpha Point there were.

"We're going up," he decided.

"What changed your mind?" Patricia inquired.

"I thought it through. It's better to be up."

So they headed further and looked for a metal ladder that would take them back to the surface.

"There's an exit," Collins said noticing something before them.

Michael went first. He let go of his weapon to have both of his hands free and started to climb up a round, narrow tube. When he reached the metal lid, he placed his hands on it with his palms flat and pushed up lifting the lid. Then he put it near silently and pushed himself up. To his amazement they weren't anywhere near Alpha Point. They found themselves in an urban area with buildings, cars and pavements around.

"What do you see?" Patricia whispered.

She saw several buildings around, but nothing more. The fog was thick and the visibility was no more than twenty yards.

“We’re probably in the southern part of Pacifica.”

No sooner had he replied, than several muted grunting noises came down from the tunnel. The last in the queue was one of the Woodlawn’s snipers. He immediately turned around and scanned the empty corridor. There was nothing. The second soldier from the back felt shivers remembering what had happened the last time they heard these noises.

“Hurry up, they’re coming!”

SMA Miles went as the next one.

“Come on, come on!” his voice came from the surface.

The grunting spread again, much closer than a few seconds before. The sniper took several glimpses at the marines and the corridor.

“We ain’t gonna make it,” he said under his breath getting his sniper rifle ready.

He laid down at the stinky stream and pointed his weapon at the end of the corridor. He saw two other marines doing the same.

“You’re not gonna do it by yourself,” one of them said as another growling came yet even closer.

The rest of the soldiers were climbing up as fast as they could. One by one they got onto the surface counting for others to make it in time. There were seven soldiers left, and the creepy sound was right behind the corner.

“Explosives, you said, huh?” the sniper muttered.

“EXP it is,” the other one replied making sure what type of ammo he had just selected.

Then they saw three shadows coming closer appearing on the wall on the left. Waiting impatiently for the ghouls to emerge, they placed their fingers on the triggers and faintly pressed them. Three figures emerged slowly from behind the corner. They were

moving neither fast nor on their four limbs.

"These are just zombies," the marine said with relief switching his ammo into regular bullets.

But then four ghouls shot out from the dark and passed the undead. The sniper and the other marine took several shots.

"Go you two!" the sniper pushed his teammate on the right. "I'll finish them."

One of the marines stood up and made a dash towards the ladder.

"I'm staying, too," he heard from the other one. "We'll join you in a sec," he added to the rest waiting upstairs.

The ghouls got hit by one or two explosive bullets. The impact only slowed them down. Next The sniper hit the ghouls with his Barrett and the massive bullet pulled the monster several feet to the back. He shot the other one, too, which only tore off its arm. While the marine was climbing up he glanced down at his teammates. To his surprise there was no one climbing below him.

"Guys, hurry up!"

Then he felt himself being pulled up by Miles and within a second he was on the street. At the same time a few things happened; the first explosions came filling the tunnel with a cloud of fire, the road shook and cracked in several places, and a few of the marines were knocked down by the impact.

"No!" the soldier shouted desperately as two others held him tight and pulled him to the back.

Then the rest of the bullets exploded shaking the ground again.

"They sacrificed themselves to help us," Miles tried to explain.

Michael checked his ammo status looking around.

"You had your moment, Doug. We need to find the others ASAP."

Meanwhile, the rest of team we turning a sharp corner. They were going south, when the explosions came and echoed from

the walls. Small pieces of sand and dust fell down from the ceiling in several places.

"They must have met ghouls," Johnson said looking ahead to see or to hear any noises.

Roberts gathered his thoughts making a few calculations in his head.

"The explosions came from the south about half a mile from here."

"We should go there," Mitchell pointed with the barrel of his weapon.

Surya shook her head in disagreement.

"No, we should go to the surface and wait for the others."

"We should go and join with others," Mitchell insisted.

"No," the girl replied stumping her feet.

Tokutei was crouching leaning against his sword and was listening patiently to the quarrel. Suddenly, he heard many noises coming from the northern tunnel.

"Whatever you decide," he said firmly. "Do it quickly. They're coming."

Surya briskly made a step towards Tokutei and turned her head slightly in order to hear the noises.

"And they're many of them."

Her worrying voice made Mitchell act quickly.

"Let the highest rank decide," he turned towards SMA Johnson.

"You wanna know what I think. OK, you got it. We shouldn't stay in the sewage anymore. The explosion will kill us all. We need to get up at the nearest exit."

"So be it," Dan replied.

The SMA went first towards Tokutei and Surya.

"Since those flesh-eaters are coming from that direction, I need both of you to take care of them."

“Sir, why them?” Roberts asked. “We too wanna help.”

“We cannot use the explosives here, and they have cold steel weapons.”

Tokutei drew his sword and the blade’s blue glow illuminated his face.

“We’ll stop them. Go.”

“See you on the other side,” SMA replied then looked at the rest. “Follow me.”

Surya ejected her two blades and watched the group run forward. While they were running, Mitchell turned back and looked at Surya. She didn’t find it difficult to read his look. It wasn’t saying *farewell*. It was rather a warm look saying *kick some ass, girl*. Tokutei was standing next to her.

“Shall we?” he pointed with the tip of his sword at the northern tunnel.

Surya nodded willingly and walked forward at his side. Many noises were getting closer and closer until a dozen of ghouls emerged.

“It will be just like in witch’s graveyard, yup?” the girl smiled.

“Just like that.”

They waited for the monsters to reach them. Tokutei took a defensive stance while Surya moved to the front making sure her teammate wouldn’t cut her. The first ghoul threw itself at her. She made two quick spins, cutting off both of its arms with one spin, and splitting the body into two. There was enough time for her to cut another one, but she couldn’t reach the one more that passed her and made at Tokutei. The warrior cut diagonally up disposing of the creature. It didn’t take them much time till every ghoul was lying dead.

“All of them?” the Asian man asked.

“It looks so.”

“Let’s join the others.”

And they ran along the corridor. They heard the others' voices not far from them.

"They're comin' back," one of the marines said.

Mitchell was climbing up the ladder as the first one. He tried to push the metal lid up, but he couldn't.

"I think it's locked."

"Let me," Surya elbowed up.

Having passed Mitchell and reached the top, she pushed the lid with her one hand. She didn't meet any resistance or problem. The others were looking at it and laughed or gave stupid comments,

"You've got beaten by a girl."

"Shut up."

Surya got to the surface and looked around. She didn't see almost anything because the thick, grey fog was everywhere.

"The morning fog, huh?" Johnson said quietly.

"Morning? It's after noon," Roberts replied surprised.

"How do we know where we are?" the girl answered looking around.

The exit didn't take them to any of the road or a concrete place. Instead, they found themselves somewhere outside the road. Among withered bushes.

"By sounds?" Tokutei answered coming up next. "There's the ocean," he pointed west, "And there's the army," he pointed to the north. "That means we're to the south to Alpha Point."

When everybody got to the surface, Johnson bent down and pushed the lid back to its place. Mitchell looked at him and asked,

"What are ya' doin'?"

"We don't wanna see those grey monsters up here, do we, Major?"

Tokutei looked around and tried to hear other sounds apart from demons and nature.

“What is it Tok...?” Roberts asked.

“Hush!”

Everyone became silent and watched Tokutei use his senses. As a part of his training back in Japan, he and other ninjas were left blindfolded deep in woods and had to find their way out using only touch and hearing. Having had such training twice a month, his hearing became so sharp that he began to hear sounds that others didn't.

“A small group of people, two hundred yards that way,” he pointed to the south.

“It must be our guys,” Mitchell added.

Johnson and Tokutei rushed to the front.

“So let's go then.”

Everyone took off. Only Surya stood for a while looking concerned.

“These are not our guys,” she murmured to herself catching up with the others.

Tokutei was leading the way. He was going along a dry meadow covered with dust and pebbles. Johnson was right behind him looking at the ground not to trip. While he was circling a bush, he heard some voice coming from the front.

“I can hear them.”

He passed Tokutei and ran towards them. Soon several blueprints were visible in the fog which slowly became vivid enough to confirm they were humans.

“Someone's comin'” he heard a male voice.

And then he stopped confused. The others drew near.

“These are not our guys,” he muttered.

They saw about twelve marines, much younger than the others. It seemed that none of them was older than twenty. Some of them were wounded and lying on the ground, while the others were just sitting with their weapons ready to shoot on sight.

"These are not zombies," someone from their group announced.

Tokutei and the others went closer to them. Johnson accelerated, passed Tokutei and went up to the group looking at the signs on their shoulders.

"Privates? It's impossible. Who are you?"

The marine at the front lowered his weapon and stepped forward.

"We're marines from the southern line, sir."

The medic went to the wounded, while Johnson made a few steps to the front.

"The southern line? Has it been broken already?"

"No, sir."

"We don't know it, sir," some other one added.

"So what are you doing here? Or is it us who went too far?"

SMA wondered.

"We have been sent to Maldito island to assist."

"Only twelve?" Tokutei asked sitting on a rock and resting his feet.

The private dropped his eyes for a second and shaking his head he answered,

"No, sir. Ten thousand. Everyone failed. We're what's left.

There are no more."

"How can ten thousand soldiers fail so easily?" SMA asked as his eyes grew wide with terror and shock.

"Arrows, catapults and heavy resistance," came the answer.

On hearing that, Surya ejected her daggers.

"What is it, girl?" one of the snipers asked.

"We must leave this place. If there were ten thousand of them, that means there're ten thousand zombies wandering around."

"We shot a few," the private replied pointing at some bodies a few feet from them. "At first we thought you were them, but it

turned out otherwise.”

SMA turned around at his men and thought for a while.

“Damn it, they were just kids.”

“Sir, we need to get to the south and find the others,” Surya insisted.

“She’s right,” Tokutei stood up. “I can hear many a step coming from the north and east.”

“On your feet privates,” came the order. “It looks like you’ll reach the island after all.”

Now there were around twenty five of them. Everyone took an attack stance that from above looked like a triangle and headed south until they disappeared in the fog.

18.

Mary was watching the area carefully for any signs of the enemy. The woods seemed quiet and she couldn’t see anyone in the distance. The search party had long disappeared among the trees, and since no screams or shouts came from that direction, they were probably still alive. She was concerned with something more serious however. The thick fog reached the island from the east slowly absorbing everything it met.

“I don’t know about you,” she said to the sniper next to her, “But it doesn’t look like a natural fog to me.”

“I sense some dark magic there. It’s like with those freakish clouds, you know. It should’ve been bright like six hours ago.”

“We’re useless up here, let’s go down.”

She headed for the ladder while the second sniper followed her. They reached the bottom before the fog set in.

“Why are you coming down?” one of the hunters asked.

“We’re useless in the fog. Time to change profession.”

Mary headed deep in the woods to the main tent. On her way she passed many other snipers that had climbed down.

"The fog, huh?" some sniper asked her.

"That's right."

The tent was just ahead. She went inside and scanned everyone there.

"Where's SMA Tylor?"

One of the soldiers inside stood up and replied with a serious voice,

"You haven't heard. He was killed some time ago."

"Killed? Those bastards got in so far?"

"Evidently."

She killed that thought instantly and asked again,

"Has anyone seen Eye or Thompson?"

Everyone shook their heads. She looked back and saw a white cloud covering everything.

"Damn it."

SMA Williams rushed to the tent and trying to catch his breath he leaned his one hand against the metal pipe.

"Fucking fog, we need everyone out there, now."

"Sir," One of the first sergeants said walking up to him. "SMA Tylor is dead. We need you to take over command."

"Dead? But I just saw him in the fog a minute ago."

Having heard that everyone looked in shock. The hunter who had seen all of this stood up.

"He was attacked by a ghost of his son, I guess. I was there when he was dying. He asked me to end his suffering. I remember shooting him in the head. You couldn't have seen a zombie, though."

"Are you sure it was him?"

"I'm sure. We've worked together in Afghanistan. I would recognize this face anywhere."

"That means we're dealing with ghosts again," some other hunter said.

“B-But he was so vivid, and not dead to me,” Williams tried to explain.

Marry sat on the nearest chair and sighed. At the same time Natalie walked into the tent from Golf zone. She was covered in numerous wounds and her uniform was torn. She took a seat near Mary and right away some medic came up to her and started to treat her wounds.

“So we now deal with ghosts of our own people.”

Jack walked into the tent. His ASAT uniform was torn on the forearm, and he had a scratch on his left cheek.

“I heard the last sentence,” he spoke with a serious voice. “And if that’s true, we have to find a way to a; distinguish living from dead and b; make sure no more ghosts of our guys will haunt us.”

“But we can only do the second thing by burning the remains of the soldiers,” the hunter said.

“I don’t agree,” one of the marines stood up. “If we burn them, their families won’t have a chance to bury them.”

“There won’t be any families if we don’t burn them,” Marry added.

“So what are you waiting for?” Williams ordered. “If I am to be in charge from now on, do as I say.”

“And what about the other problem?” the hunter asked.

“How would we recognize the ghosts?”

“EMF,” some other hunter suggested.

“Wrong,” Jack replied. “We can’t use EMF readers when the spiritual activity is so high that it blocks the signal.”

“The ghosts usually flicker and pop up out of nowhere,” the hunter added.

“And we can use iron and salt,” Natalie added.

Jack shook his head.

“Do you wanna hit everyone with an iron pipe or throw salt at

them?"

"I know what we can do," Williams said raising his weapon. "Look, our weapons are made of iron. That means that ghosts cannot take hold of them."

"Brilliant," Mary commented.

"So we must tell everyone not to let go of their weapons or to have their weapons on them. If they don't, that will mean they are ghosts."

"It's one option," Jack commented. "But what about wounded and those who won't get the message, huh?"

"I know," the hunter exclaimed joyfully. "One cannot touch a ghosts. And if you can't touch them, your hand will just go through them. So if you see anyone without their gun, do this to make sure."

"That's another option," Williams said. "Now, burn those bodies."

19.

Arthur was walking impatiently in circles in the headquarters. Bishop was sitting on the armchair next to him. Behind them every single soldier was connected to a turret.

"Try again," Arthur said to the guy at the desk.

The soldier typed something on the keyboard, but four screens in front of them stayed dark.

"Nothing, sir."

"Damn it. We need to contact the Whitehouse at once. How do we do that..."

"Maybe we'll send a chopper to the area outside the reach of spiritual activity," Bishop suggested.

"You saw what happened to Lian and those jets. They won't let anything fly in or out."

"What if we send a message in a container and shoot it

from the tower, huh?"

"Shoot it where?" the old man wondered.

"To the southern line."

Arthur thought for a while about the equipment they had on the island that could be able to do anything to contact the main land.

"The line is four- five miles from here. We don't have anything so powerful on the island. We cannot use a missile."

"So I have no other options," Bishop replied.

20.

The group sent for unit one was waiting among the bushes on the border of Bravo and Delta in the southern part of the island. They were looking out to the fog, waiting patiently for any signs of ASATs.

"It's been quite a while and we saw nothing," the Asian martial artist complained.

One of the big soldiers gave him a gentle tap on his shoulder.

"Arthur said they're coming, so we must wait."

"I'm not talking about ASATs. I'm talking about enemy. We are somewhere in the middle of former Delta zone and we saw nothing here."

"Actually Bravo is right over there," one of the marines said.

"At least we know they're not gone," some other added indicating at the muted sounds coming from the north.

"What the hell are they doin'?" a female hunter asked.

"I think they are preparing something big. Something way bigger than we've seen so far."

Mike was sitting quietly on the left, nervously glancing at his watch and looking around. His hearing was better than any other person in that group, and he had no difficulties in deducing what was going on in the woods.

"Guys, do ya' think it will be over tonight?" another soldier

asked.

"I heard those guys we're waitin' fo' got something that can stop this. Nobody told me what it is. Any guesses?"

"You didn't listen to the briefing the other day, it's some kind of a ring.. Changing the subject," the female hunter said. "Any ideas what's goin' on in other states? From what we know they know."

"Whatever is goin' on," the Asian replied. "Nothing shall be the same anymore."

"What do ya' mean?"

"I mean that now people are aware of all the monsters living among us. This will change everything for sure."

"Hush, something's approaching," the huge soldier pointed at the fog covering the water in front of them.

They all became quiet and were staring at the ocean. The sound they heard was a typical sound of splashing, as if from an oar. Something started to emerge in the water ahead, but it was no boat or a vessel. The picture became more vivid and they realize what it was; a small warther trying to get to the island by itself. The Asian waited for the creature to decide what to do next. The small demon looked left then right and raised its head slightly up as if it was trying to sniff something. After that its brown eyes stopped, and were now gazing at the bushes in front of them.

"It can sense us," the female whispered looking at the others for a while.

Then when she looked back, the warther was no longer standing on the beach but tearing along the meadow towards them. The Asian martial artist had enough of this. He sprang to his feet and met the creature with his Bo staff. Hit after hit he beat it to death and returned to the others.

"One less."

21.

Michael, Patricia and the rest of the soldiers were sitting on the curbs discussing how to find the rest of the team. The fog was covering everything and the only two sounds they could hear was the ocean somewhere in the west and muted shots coming from the island. Michael was sitting on a curb with his head in his hands. Tired as he was he locked all the sounds and voices out of his head and returned to his memories from Iraq.

He opened his eyes and everything was blurry and unclear. He looked around only with his eyes. He was in some cave. Then everything came back to him; the explosions, the failed attempt to protect the senator, and the flash grenade. He heard foreign language spoken on the other side of the cave, but he couldn't understand a word. He looked left. There was one more soldier tied sitting leaning with his back against a large rock. He then realized he was in the same position. His vision came back. He spotted the senator sitting on the other side of the cage. His mouth wasn't covered and he was in front of a video camera making some speech. Three other masked terrorists were standing at him with AK-47 pointed at his head. It was all a set up. Everything had been planned to kidnap the senator. What were they trying to accomplish? Their demands hardly were fulfilled? He understood only one phrase,

“One hour.”

Michael turned to his colleague.

“Pss, Dean. Wake up, buddy.”

Dean slightly raised his head and looked around baffled.

“Dean, we need to save the senator before...”

He felt pain on his temple as a terrorist hit him with the butt of his assault rifle.

“No talking!”

Then the Iraqi grabbed him by the armpits and dragged him

towards the senator. A moment later he was thrown onto the chair next to him. He could feel what would happen next. The senator looked at Michael with a scared face, as the terrorist stood in front of camera.

“And to prove that this is not a joke, we will now kill your American soldier.”

The second terrorist took out a long knife or rather a machete and placed it right at Michael’s throat. The man looked rather like a thread right next to Michael, who was huge and well-built with his broad shoulders and muscular chest. As he was about to cut his throat, they heard a whoosh and another and yet another, followed by a sound of broken glass as all the lights went off and everything became dark. The terrorists yelled something in their own language while Michael rose from the chair, grabbed the man with the knife and broke his neck. All this time he had been scratching the ropes with a tiny piece of metal. He heard several shots lighting the cave for split a second, but he couldn’t see anything else, especially what was going on. Not thinking much, he threw himself at the senator and covered his body. All he could hear were shouts filled with screams of pain and mysterious swooshes. The shots ceased. He remembered seeing a group of lamps turned off at the camera. He felt for the switch and turned them on illuminating the chairs. Next he moved the lights around to see what happened in the cave. All the terrorist were lying dead.

“What the...” he murmured seeing one of the dead Iraqi with a silver ninja-star pierced into his chest.

Michael stopped daydreaming and returned to reality.

“We cannot go into the tunnels,” Miles said walking in circles. “We’re safer here, especially when we are far from Alpha Point.”

“I bet they heard the explosions and hit the surface as well,” Patricia added staring into the fog.

"I know what we can do," one of the soldiers stood up.

"We're not shouting their names, Gary," Mitchell replied amusingly.

"Not shouting. We can fire a flare. It will get their attention."

"Yeah, if they're anywhere near. They won't see the flare through the fog."

"I think we should do that," Michael said raising his head. "It's the best option, I think. Ghouls are underground, demons are focused on getting to the island. We should do this."

Miles took off his backpack and looked inside. He started to rummaging in the ammo clips, grenades, bottles of water. After a while, he took out a small pistol and examined it from all sides.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Michael said standing up from the curb.

Miles pointed the flare up and pressed the trigger. A shiny, red light shot out into the air with a hiss and went through the fog as high as ninety feet. The light spread across the fog making it glow red for a couple of seconds and then disappeared.

"So what's now?" one of the snipers asked.

"Now we wait for them," Michael replied taking a sit.

Mitchell stopped looking at the fog and turned towards the group.

"There's still one problem to be discussed."

Patricia rolled her eyes and sat down again.

"Let me guess, our way to the island"

"Bingo."

"Well, we cannot swim there, for sure."

Dan looked around the area. The fog was covering everything and he couldn't see anything apart from the street and a piece of a building. Then he came up with something.

"Look, Pacifica is on the coast. I don't even know if we can call it Pacifica or Pedro Point or whatever its name is. What I'm driving at is that... um... I bet someone here has a boat, a yacht or

something like this.”

“Or we can look for a port,” Patricia suggested.

Having said that, she heard several noises coming from the north. They riveted everyone’s attention as they directed their eyes there. Soon they saw a few dark figures emerging from the fog, moving towards them.

“Finally,” Dan sighed walking towards them. “Where the fuck have you been, guys?”

One of the marines followed him and went closer to them. He could see their uniforms getting clearer in the fog.

“We’ve gotta find a boat. C’mon guys.”

When they were a few yards from them, he noticed something strange about them. Although they were wearing uniforms and some of them had their guns with them, their faces looked different. They were pale and emotionless. But not only this was bizarre about them. Some of them had arrows sticking out from their legs, stomachs, back or even heads. And there was no one from ASAT among them.

“Zombies,” the soldier said as his jaw slightly dropped.

“Move aside!” someone from the group on the curb shouted preparing his gun.

Dan ducked out as the others got on their feet and took several precise shots in their heads.

When everyone was dead, Michael went up to their bodies and examined them carefully. Then he turned around to the others and said with relief.

“I don’t recognize any of them to be with us earlier. These are some other soldiers.”

“If they’re not our guys, so where did they come from?” Mitchell asked.

“I bet it has to do with that shooting we heard in the sewage.”

"Never mind, what now?" Dan said disappointed.

"We..." Patricia tried to reply but some voice came from the fog.

"Don't shoot, it's us."

They looked there straight away and saw a larger group of soldiers. Tokutei's blade was glowing in the fog.

"Finally," Dan sighed with relief. "Heh, it sounded like a déjà vu."

Then he saw unknown faces among them.

"Who are they?"

Surya saw that one of the marines that were waiting for them was holding a bottle of water in his hand. She pulled it out from his hand, had a sip and answered,

"They were sent here to help on Maldito. Only they survived."

Michael looked at Mitchell and slowly nodded his head,

"So now your puzzle's been solved."

Patricia put her backpack on and headed down the street.

"We don't have time for discussion now. If we're back together again we need to find some boats to get to the island."

"I wonder if they even expect us," Roberts asked.

SMA Johnson patted him on the shoulder.

"I'm sure they do. They would never give up."

"I just fear that if the demons could kill ten thousand of us here, what would they do there?"

"So don't fear," Patricia said seriously. "If you're to talk like this all the freakish way, you may run to those buildings and help us find a boat."

"Or two..." Roberts finished.

22.

Mike and the others from the search party were still waiting

in the bushes. The fog was still around and the scary noises were coming from the darkness in the island. Mike was sitting quietly, looking around the area. Then he opened his eyes wide hearing something in the trees behind and turned around. A smile appeared on his young face as he stood up and placed his fingers on his HK assault rifle.

“Did you hear that?” the Asian scowled.

“Hear what?” the huge soldier asked.

Hardly had he said that than about five dozens of vampires shot out from the bushes and rushed at the group.

“Vampires!” someone from the group shouted.

Two vampires attacked the Asian from the front. He tightened the grip on his staff and swing after swing he beat them. Others didn’t seem to have many problems with them until they met the ones carrying guns. The shooting began on both sides. With every shot the number of enemies and the party members diminished. Mike raised his weapon and shot the huge soldier. The Asian martial artists noticed it and looked at him in shock, as if he wanted to say, *what the hell man?* Mike pressed the trigger again and again until every human from the party was dead. When there was no one left the vampires circled Mike. He lowered his gun and spoke,

“You know, I could hear you way before you stuck out your noses.”

The vampires laughed until one of them replied,

“Go back. We’ll deal with them.”

“If they ever arrive,” some other vampire hissed.

“Even if they do, you won’t have a chance with them. They’re ASATs,” Mike said casually.

“ASATs? You were sent for ASATs?” the vampire asked as his jaw dropped. “I thought you were sent to secure some reinforcement.”

“What’s wrong with ASATs?” some other younger, female

vampire asked confused.

"Haven't you heard what happened in October?"

"Nope."

"Six of them wiped out over five thousand of us in LA."

"Yup, and they killed Reiz," Mike added sadly. "Anyway, if you make sure none of these demon things will disturb me, I will take them out with a sniper gun."

"They're about to attack soon. But they were told who you are."

"Let's go, boys. Back to the fog," the vampire said.

Then they disappeared in the fog. Mike looked around the bodies, then walked among them until he found a sniper rifle.

"Now, just wait."

23.

In the Foxtrot headquarters, two soldiers returned to the tent. SMA Williams was sitting there looking at the empty screens.

"Sir, all the bodies have been burnt."

"Good."

Then out of the tail of his eye, he saw one of the hunters running inside through the other side of the tent that belonged to Golf zone.

"Sir, demons are approaching."

"Mobilize everyone, and we have no choice but to face them in such conditions."

Williams stood up right away and while he was walking out of the tent he said to the soldiers,

"Do the same. This battle won't be so easy."

Jason was outside the tent. He heard shots coming from the east, then he saw the soldiers running out of the tent shouting,

"Demons, Demons are comin'!"

Jason knew what it meant. It was supposed to be the most

difficult battle so far. First the fog limiting the view, then the lack of snipers, and last but not the least, the army of demon was much greater now, for they hadn't attacked since the last zones failed. He made sure he had enough ammo and sped towards the gate. On his way he saw blueprints of soldiers passing in the fog at the same directions. The number of shots increased with every second. Running as fast as he could, he saw something in the fog. It didn't take much time to realize what it was; five lines of soldiers spreading across the whole zone.

"Let me through," he said to the soldiers.

"Forget it, man. The wall's gone."

"So quick?" he asked in slight disbelief joining the line.

There was no choice. He had to face the enemy now. They all could hear stamping feet of the army of ten thousand marching towards them. Then a horn spread and another from the other side of the island. Gaping into the fog, they all heard sounds of thousands of demons shouting, roaring and making other scary sounds as the thumping frequency increased and soon they saw many a figure emerge from the fog.

"Fire!" came the order.

A hail of bullets met the demons, but their greater numbers made them crash into the lines of soldiers and break it.

"Move back, move back," another order came.

The reinforcements were still coming from the back. Mainly hunters and martial artists.

On the other side of the island, in Golf zone, the lines hadn't been broken yet. Amanda was standing among the soldiers. She had taken a professional bow from the weaponry tent. She also had many arrows sticking out from her backpack. Some of them were tipped with iron, others with explosives, yet some others with salt and iron mixtyure. She made a few steps to the back and arrow after arrow she shoot the demons. As she was reaching for

another one, something pulled her hand and she fell onto the ground. She looked there and saw a spirit of an elder man.

“Ghosts, she yelled looking for something that could kill it.” She felt herself being pulled up and thrown onto the ground once more among other bodies. She spotted an assault rifle lying at a dead body of some marine. She tried to reach it and when she felt the cold handle of the weapon, the ghost raised her again and threw onto the ground. His mistake, she was now close enough to take the weapon. Being pulled up again, she selected salt bullets and fired. The ghost immediately vaporized and she fell onto the ground. The bow was no longer a good option for her. The assault rifle was quicker and had far more ammo. She moved to the back as three hunters passed her. Looking around, she saw another group of ghosts emerging at them. She wanted to shout to warn them, but they had spotted the threat earlier and eliminated them. One of the snipers was in the first line. He saw demons coming from three directions; front, and two sides.

“The line’s been broken,” he exclaimed. “Retreat!”

The remaining people did their best to hold the demons off. The sniper shot one of them, then another and yet some other, and one more. Next he felt a dreadful pain on his stomach and found himself lying on the ground. He took six more, precise shots. Having fired the sixth one to the left, he saw two human legs, a pelvis and some leaky intestines hanging out of it. As he tried to get up something terrible occurred to him. It was his legs. Being in shock, the amount of adrenaline produced in his body deadened the pain and kept his vital functions for a while. Seeing this horrible view, he quickly understood that he was the only one there left and the demons were now passing him and moving on. He turned over to the right. No, he wasn’t the only one. There was his colleague lying and his arm was missing. He saw that he was still alive and was pulling something from his belt. It was a

grenade. He bit the safety pin off and let the grenade roll down off his palm, then he looked at the upper part of the soldier who quickly read the look.

“For Earth.”

“For Earth,” the soldier replied closing his eyes.

24.

“Have you seen anything?” Dan shouted to Surya who was in the garage of some detached house.

“Nope,” came the answer.

Dan looked at Patricia, who was the only one standing at the road with him. Everyone had spread some time earlier. Behind them stood a trail with a white boat without any engine.

“So, so far we’ve found one small yacht. We need to have at least three of them if we want to get to the other side.” Having said that, he heard a roar of a car engine coming from the street. Soon a silver SUV with a boat on its trail showed up, driven by one of the soldiers.

“Look what I’ve found.”

Both Dan and Patricia walked the trail around.

“Well, well,” the boy complimented.

“At least this one has an engine,” Patricia laughed.

The boat on a trail could contain about nine people. There was a red sign, *cookies*, on its side. It seemed to be used quite often by the owners, but it also looked to be well taken care of.

In the meantime, Tokutei broke into another house. He didn’t bother to look for the keys to the garage, but drew his sword and cut the lock of the side door. He rushed inside and looked around. Apart from shelves with tools and old garbage spread around, he saw a sport car, and a canoe.”

“It won’t do,” he said under his breath.

Leaving out, he met Miles on his way walking out the neighbor

house.

“Did you find anything?” he asked.

“A canoe,” the Asian man replied.

“You can row it if you like,” Miles laughed.

When they reached the street, they saw two cars with trails and one trail standing alone, as well as about thirty soldiers waiting.

“We’ve got what we need,” one of them said.

“Great,” Miles replied. “Check the fuel level, and off we go.”

Tokutei went up to the other ASAT members. Surya, Dan, Michael and Patricia were helping with connecting the first trail to the second one.

“So, this is really it, isn’t it?” he said to the others.

“We’re goin’ home,” Dan replied climbing up the boat.

They waited for the rest to come back, got in the cars and on the boats, and a small convoy took off. Michael was driving the first car; a black Mercedes SUV. He looked at the name of the street.

“It’s De Solo Drive.”

Patricia was sitting on the passenger seat next to him.

“I can hear the ocean there, so turn right at the junction.”

“Now it’s Linda Mar Boulevard.”

The buildings immediately changed. Now they weren’t among detached houses or bungalows. It seemed to be some kind of a main street. They saw a long building on the right side and McDonald’s restaurant on the other. Then the surroundings on both sides changed into vast parking lots. They reached another junction, much bigger than the previous one.

“Can you read the name of this street?” Michael asked.

“It’s Cabrillo Highway, the last road in the west.”

“Yeah, we went this way today,” one of the privates sitting in the back of the Mercedes said.

In the last vehicle, on the boat, Tokutei, Dan, Surya and a couple of marines were looking out for any kind of threat. So far they had

found none.

"Look, Surya," Dan pointed at the sign with the name of the road. "It goes right at Alpha Point."

"The ocean should be up ahead."

A group of zombies could be seen in the fog on their right.

"Walkers..." Collins murmured.

"Just ignore them," Johnson replied knowing there was no time for dealing with zombies.

The two cars crossed the road and went further into San Pedro Avenue.

"Mike, turn here," Patricia pointed to a sandy road on the right side.

"Okey dokey."

And they found themselves on the beach. Miles, who was sitting in the SUV saw Michael turning round the car and patted Mitchell on his shoulder.

"Turn over next to him."

Michael turned the car around, so that the trail got completely submerged in the water, turned off the engine and got out of the car.

"We need to release this baby."

Mitchell had much more difficult task to do. Having two trails at the back, made the maneuver harder, but after about two minutes both trails were in the water.

25.

The fights in Foxtrot and Golf were still taking place. Both sides had no mercies for each other and did everything to win. Jack found an abandoned Hummer in the fog. He swiftly climbed up to the mounted gun and fired 50-k bullets at anything that came out from the white cloud. Soon several marines and hunters found shelter behind the Hummer and helped Jack as they could.

“Orts?” he murmured seeing a couple of them in the front. Luckily, this caliber had no problems with their thick skin, and they easily fell dead until one of them jumped into the air and tried to attack Jack from above. One of the soldiers bellow had managed to select sharp ammo and took a few shots, killing the monster in time.

“Thanks,” he heard from Jack.

“Find there some room for me,” Jason said approaching from the left.

Then they saw something strange in the fog. There was a figure completely different from the rest. Instead of running everywhere, it was standing erected. It wasn’t yet seen what it was; just a blueprint. On seeing this, Jack boomed,

“What the fuck is that thing?”

“A vampire?” some soldier suggested.

“No, too big for one of them,” Jason replied.

They couldn’t see it exactly, as the monster was still deep in the fog, but they noticed a large dark cape fluttering around and big, red eyes glaring at them.

“I ain’t waitin’ to check,” Jack said directing the barrel at the mysterious creature.

The figure turned towards them and swung its hand. Straight away, a magical force turned over the Hummer, knocking Jack onto the ground.

“It’s a mother fuckin’ wizard,” some soldier said shooting a series of bullets at it.

The mysterious creature raised its both arms. There was a flash and when it was gone all the bullets hit something that looked like a sphere about a yard before the creature. Jack stood up.

“Deal with the others. Jason and I gonna take care of it.”

The soldiers fired at the other demons around while Jason and Jack crouched behind the Hummer.

"Any ideas?" Jack asked checking the amount of ammo there was left.

"Shax had similar powers, but it took seven of us to take her out."

"Yeah, but Shax was a daughter of Cizin."

"Are you suggesting, this is Cizin?"

They stood up to take a quick peek at it. It was right behind the Hummer. Now they could see it's true ugliness. Starting from a tall head that looked like a longer skull with large, sharp teeth sticking out from the jaw. It had seven horns growing out of the top of its head; all pointy and sharp. Then a thin neck and nothing more. His whole body was hidden under a cape, but it could be seen that the creature had a wide chest and massive legs. It was holding a staff tipped with a small skull with two horns.

"Nope."

Jack jumped to the back and pressed the trigger, but the bullets were stopped once more. A female voice came from their left,

"Take cover, guys!"

No thinking much, they followed the instruction and ran to the right throwing themselves onto the ground. Seconds later the strange creature exploded into several pieces. The explosion also turned over the Hummer back on its wheels. Jason got up on his feet and took a few shots to the right side where a few warthens came out from the fog. He turned around and saw a human figure running up to them. It was Mary.

"What was that thing?" Jack asked.

"Dunno, some demon or something."

Jason walked towards her and the rest of the soldiers.

"At least we know it's not explosion-proof."

Another group of demons approached from the east.

"No time to rest, boys," Mary reloaded her gun. "We have a fight to win."

And the fight continued. However, something was different. It was the fog. It wasn't so thick and dense anymore.

On the other side, Eye crossed to Golf zone. His weapon of choice were two Uzis; one with explosive bullets, the second one with regular ones. He wasn't alone. There were two soldiers with him and two hunters; Martin Harris and fourteen-year old Kevin Lewis from Alpha Point. There was also Natalie among them. They took care of the ghosts and vampires if they popped up. They got as deep in the island as the remains of the northern wall.

"Zombies on three!" the hunter shouted.

Eye turned there and fired directly at their foreheads. After that, he saw a group of demons walking out from the ocean. He used his other Uzi and shot a few explosive bullets.

"To the right!" he ordered running away from the forthcoming explosions.

When the explosions came, raising dust and ash from the ground into the air, blocking the view completely, something fell from the front. These were a few bodies of soldiers and they came as if they had been hit by something big. Eye knew he had to go there and get rid of whatever there was.

"C'mon, we've gotta kill it."

They moved deeper in the fog. Walking swiftly, they saw a large group of orcs ripping everything they met apart.

"Use the sharp ones!" one of the marines shouted.

Kevin and the soldiers switched their ammo.

"One of you, stay on salt."

There were several orcs at the wall, and when they noticed the group, they rushed towards them. Martin pressed the trigger several times still moving to the back until he tripped over a body of some possessor. Two monsters fell dead on the ground. But the third one, even though it was hit, managed to take Kevin with its huge claw and throw him somewhere towards the castle. He

zoomed through the fog until he hit the branches. It all happened very fast, but he let go of the weapon and grabbed the branch, which instead of slowing him down, broke and he crashed into the bark and fell down. Someone pulled him back onto his feet.

“What is a kid doing here?”

“I’m a hunter.”

“You’d better get to the medical point, boy. You don’t look so good.”

“I’m OK,” Kevin replied trying to make a step and as a result he fell.

“Wait, let me help you.”

The soldier raised the child and carried him towards the medical point.

26.

In the meantime, in the headquarters, the situation was getting more and more intense. Most of the soldiers left their computers due to the fog. Bishop and Arthur had only insight into what was going on in the castle itself.

“Any news?” Bishop asked getting more and more nervous.

Arthur gave him a cold look and took another sip of his cold coffee.

“Nothing. We know nothing. Nothing about the zones, nothing about the search party, nothing about unit one and nothing about the continent.”

“Remember, Arthur, as long as we are here, we will not give up. The minute we lose, the whole world loses.”

“I think, Bishop, It’s time to talk seriously.”

“More seriously than now?” he asked ironically.

“What do we do if we fail to get the Seal?”

Bishop sat down on the armchair and rested his feet.

"We discussed it, remember?"

"I do, but now some things have changed."

"But the plan hasn't."

Bishop dropped his eyes for a while trying to gather his thoughts. His mind raced. Should the plan be changed? Why? They have discusses almost every opportunity. The Seal is in the castle, and the very ring is somewhere near. It's not over yet. It cannot be. He raised his head and gave his definite answer.

"In my opinion, we should stick to the plan."

"And stick we will."

27.

The three boats were in the water now and people began getting on board. Miles went to the first one. He threw his backpack onto the floor and as he was turning round to help the others get on board, a voice came from the last boat,

"Zombies, zombies on ten and twelve!"

He caught an eye of several figures emerging from the fog, that wasn't so thick any more.

"Move, move, move," he ordered.

Surya ejected her blades and looked around to estimate who to attack first.

"Tok, help me!" she shouted, then ran into the fog.

Slash, cut, spin, and a few were threat no more. She saw a blue glow not far from her, moving quickly.

Dan and Patricia got onto the board, then the soldiers followed them. They were constantly looking how far the zombies were. Miles started the engine and soon he heard the engine of the third boat. Several shots spread.

"Move, people!" Johnson yelled taking three precise shots at three zombies he randomly picked from the horde.

As soon as Michael got on board, he felt the boat moving off the

shore.

“Surya, Tok! Come on!”

The first boat was three dozen yards from the land and was getting further pulling the second one off the shore. Surya slashed through another one and she saw in the tail of her eye the boats getting further.

“Surya, let’s go,” she heard Tokutei’s voice and saw a blue blade moving towards the ocean.

The zombies didn’t seem to stop. Some of them went into the water and disappeared below its surface, others floated towards the island. Not waiting any longer, Surya used her dhampiric speed and seconds later she was way ahead of her teammate. She leapt high into the air and landed on the boat. Tokutei joined her seconds later.

“What are you?” one of the soldiers asked seeing her incredible jump.

“You don’t wanna know,” she replied with a smile.

Michael and Miles were looking at the land with zombies, slowly being consumed by the fog. All three boats were gradually heading towards the island. In the first boat, there were both SMAs; Miles and Johnson along with the whole unit one and all the remaining soldiers from the Woodlawn. The second boat had no engine and was tied to the first one. There were remaining soldiers from Golden Gate. The last boat had the marines who had been sent to help. The only sounds they heard were clatter of the engines, crushing of the waves, moaning of the zombies and muted shots coming from somewhere in the ocean.

“How will we know where to go?” One soldier asked.

“The shots,” Johnson replied. “We’re goin’ that way.”

28.

The situation in both zones was getting worse with every

minute. Jason, Jack and Mary were working together in Foxtrot. The ground was full of bodies; both of soldiers, demons and vampires.

"Where the fuck are we?" Jack said through his teeth losing his orientation.

The fog was everywhere, but they all changed their direction so many times that they no longer knew where the castle was nor the gate.

"They're comin' from that way, so there should be west," Jason replied.

Suddenly, a green light exploded near their position, making the fog glow for a few seconds.

"What the fuck was that?" Mary inquired running towards that direction.

The rest followed her. She reached the source of the light and stopped.

"It's the same creature that we saw earlier."

On the ground was lying a tall figure with dark red face with large horns sticking out from its head.

"What is that freakin' thing?" Jason asked kicking the body.

"Whatever it is, it has some influence on the fog," Mary said pointing at a blueprint of a wooden wall coming into sight in the distance.

"So the more we kill such monsters, the thinner the fog will be," Jason concluded.

They looked around. Now more objects were visible; trees, other soldiers, even the main tent. There was a huge army of demons marching on their right and not so many soldiers trying to fight them.

"Come, let's help them first," Mary said running towards that direction.

They took several shots while running, effectively disposing of a

few demons. Jason changed the type of ammo into explosives and fired wherever he saw a larger group of enemies. Eye saw a couple of soldiers lying on the ground. He crouched at them, and checked the vitals of the first one. He was still alive, conscious, but not able to fight.

"Hey, you two," he said to the soldiers fighting a few feet from here.

When he had their attention, he pointed at the tent.

"Take him to the medical point."

He then checked the pulse of the second one. Dead, and already taken care of. He stood up on his feet and helped Jason and Mary deal with the rest of the demons.

In the main tent, SMA Moor was talking to Williams. There were several medics inside, and many marines were running past the tent to and fro.

"We're losing too many men," Moore said. "I think it's now a matter of time before we evacuate the zones."

"Something's happening to the fog. Look, we can see further now."

"I'm not talking about the fog, Williams. I'm trying to make a decision here."

Williams took a glimpse at both ends of the tent.

"If we evacuate the zones now, there will be nothing left but the castle to protect."

"We need to make a decision now. The demons are getting closer to the tents."

Williams dropped his head and rubbed his face nervously.

"Listen, let's do like this. Let's fight for another ten minutes. If we continue to lose, we retreat."

"Ten minutes, not a second more."

Three boats were moving forward in the fog covering the ocean. None of the electronic devices was working and the visibility was unacceptable, so the only thing they could rely on was the constant shots coming from somewhere in the distance. Tokutei was standing with Dan at the front staring at the nothingness ahead. The boy was tapping his fingers against the metal barrier of the boat.

“We’re almost home,” he said.

“Don’t forget that the worst is still ahead of us. We don’t know how far the demons are.”

“We may always get off at the very castle.”

“True, but first we must know where exactly the castle is.”

Michael was sitting on a leather-covered seat on the left side thinking of his past. It was early June of 2012. Michael was walking along a concrete floor towards something that seemed to be a cage for fighting. There were many spectators on both sides; mainly businessmen, mobs or rich people seeking new kind of entertainment. The speaker’s voice was coming through the speakers above the cage.

“And now, the fighter you were all waiting for. The fighter who in thousand fights lost none and now is going for his thousand one... Michael... UntenableDavis.

Michael got into the cage raising his arms up in a glorious manner. He was wearing only black shorts. His chest was wide and his neck was almost covered by the vivid muscles. The crowd was cheering loudly, like on every his fight.

“And his opponent for tonight is a twenty-eight year old, Brazilian capoeira master- Nicco.

A black man entered the cage on the other side. He had long, dirty dreadlocks pinned behind his head, and was wearing nothing but colorful shorts.

“Let’s get ready for the rumble,” the speaker said then a bell

sounded and the fighters threw themselves at each other. In the first row, there was sitting Arthur and Bishop. They were watching the fight carefully. Then something happened, something that everyone knew would happen anyway. Some men burst inside shouting,

“Police!”

The fight was over.

A few months later, Michael was being escorted by two prison guards along the prison hallway. He passed another inmate; a thin man in his sixties with a notebook under his armpit. They both were wearing an orange uniform, and his hands were cuffed. He passed an elder men with a notebook. Next he went through some door and found himself in a room with one glass window with crates over it. There was also a microphone and a speaker. On the other side of the cage was Bishop and Arthur. Michael sat down on the chair and looked at them.

“The famous Michael Untanable,” Arthur said.

“I remember you two. I saw you many times on my fights. What do you want?”

“Yes, we’ve been observing you for a long time, and we must admit you’re a pretty tough guy.”

“So what? Did you come here to congratulate me?”

“No,” Bishop cut in. “We’re here to give you your freedom back.”

“And something more, actually.”

Michael looked at them surprised.

“More? What do ya’ mean?”

“By more we mean a seven-figure job.”

“Who do I have to kill?”

“No one.”

“Or not who but what,” Bishop interrupted.

“OK you’ve got my attention, now. Who are you, anyway?”

"My name is Arthur West."

"The Arthur West? The one from the diamond mines?"

"The very one. We want you to join a special force, slightly..."

Bishop cleared his throat, "...Much different than the others."

"How is it different, huh?"

"Instead of humans, we deal with supernatural creatures."

"With what?"

"We cannot say here more. Just tell us whether you agree or not. And within one day you'll leave Attica."

Michael snapped out from the memories when he heard Johnson's voice coming from the other side of the boat,

"Another ship on three."

Both men, along with everyone on the boat looked at the left side. About hundred yards from them, where the visibility was at its end, there was a blueprint of a vessel. It wasn't clear however, what kind of ship it was.

"I thought none of the vessels was allowed to enter these waters," Tokutei said with some uncertainty.

"They weren't," came the answer from Miles.

The ship was getting closer to them. It was now seen that it had two large poles with shiny, wide sails.

"What the..." one of the soldiers said seeing that the ship was made of wood.

But not only that worried him. The vessel had many holes in the front and in the side. The sails weren't perfect, either.

"Don't even tell me it's a ghost ship," Dan spoke aloud rolling his eyes.

"I'm afraid it is," Surya replied. "Look it's a typical Spanish boat. It must have sank here many years ago."

"Eh, a ghost ship with ghosts. Keeping my finger crossed for it to pass us."

Johnson squinted his eyes as he spotted something.

"I have bad news for you, I'm afraid. Look," he pointed at several small boats that had just appeared out of nowhere around the ship.

Miles shook his head as he grabbed the belt of his weapon that was dangling between his arm and a hip, and pulled down making the rifle slide from the back to the front.

"Alright, we have no choice now. We won't be able to reach the shore in time. Switch into salt bullets and shoot them up." The boats looked really real, but the figures on them not so much. They weren't transparent or see-through or anything like this. These specters looked as old as the ghost ship behind them. They were wearing old-fashioned hats and clothes typical for seventeenth century. And the older the spirit is, the more powerful it becomes. It means that they can present themselves as normal people without any flickering or transparency. Their powers were also stronger.

"Listen guys," Michael said. "These are old spirits. That means they can do tricks you cannot even think of."

"What kinda' tricks, man?" one of the soldier asked.

"Like on Junipero when all our Hummers were thrown into air."

Patricia crouched at the barrier and leaned her assault rifle against it. She pressed the trigger twice and two of the ghosts in the first boat disappeared.

"Piece of cake."

Hardly had she said that, when the very same spirits appeared on their boat. One of them swung his hand and two soldiers were thrown overboard. Surya ejected her daggers and using her inhuman speed she slashed through them.

"Piece of cake, huh?" she said looking with her eyebrows raised.

Miles turned to the back at the second boat dragged behind.

“Pull those two up,” he yelled.

Tokutei drew his sword. He felt he would be needed here. Another three spirits appeared near him. He cut diagonally down, then up then horizontally and the figures vaporized permanently. Another series of shots flew towards the remaining boats. Some of the bullets hit the targets, some of them forced the spirits to vanish only to appear somewhere among the people. Suddenly, they saw a vague explosion coming from the right.

“The island,” Patricia said in relief.

“Finish them off and we’re out of here,” Miles ordered.

30.

Mike was lying among the bushes with the sniper rifle he had snatched from some member of the search party. He was listening out for all the noises coming from the ocean. He sometimes found it hard especially when all the creatures squeaked and groaned behind. Then he heard some human voice coming from the front. He turned his head right and listened. Yes, these were definitely some human noises. He quickly grabbed the rifle and looked through the scope. Something definitely was there in the fog. A few seconds later he saw one shape of a boat appearing in the distance. Then another smaller and one more. He pointed the sight at the first boat.

“Some high ranked soldier,” he whispered. “Another high ranked soldier, some other soldier. A ninja? Some huge guy. These are ASATs for sure. Oh, and Dan is coming back. Yeah, I’ve never liked you. Pressing this trigger would be a pleasure for all these years you made me kill my own kind.”

He moved the scope to the left to see the others.

“And this is who? Some girl, another soldier and this one is...” He pulled to the back rubbed his eyes as if he saw a ghost and looked again breathing heavily.

“Sis?” he muttered in disbelief seeing Surya. “What the...” It’s been more than six months since he saw her for the last time; their argument, it all came back to him. His memories moved to childhood they spent together. Their escape from vampire cell, they mutual work in N.Y.V.H.A. and many other cherished memories. He blinked several times as tears ran down his cheeks. It was too much for him, way too much. He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t kill his own sister. He dropped the gun, turned round and rushed towards Foxtrot using his dhampiric speed.

The boats reached the shore without any casualties during the journey. The engines turned off and everybody slowly, one by one, jumped into the water and headed straight to the beach.

“We’re here. We’re finally here!” Dan shouted joyfully grabbing two handfuls of sand.

“Err, Dan?” Michael said pointing with his head at several dead bodies lying next to Dan.

The boy slowly looked with his eyes only, then turned his head and immediately sprang to his feet releasing the sand.

“Yuk.”

Tokutei walked around the beach to check the damages done so far. The broken wall of Delta zone was in front of him, but something else he found curious. He spied something in the bushes ahead and briskly rushed there.

“Guys!” he raised his voice.

“You do wanna see this,” he beckoned.

Surya, Miles and a few other marines jogged there straight away. Tokutei was standing over few bodies of soldiers and other people.

“Do you know anyone?” Surya asked,

“No, but they are way before the wall. Why would they leave the zone?”

“This was not what I wanted to show you, guys,” Tokutei said

standing over some electronic device.

They came up to him and examined the burnt thing.

“Eagle Eye...” Dan muttered.

Surya looked north. The sounds of demons marching and vampires hissing were heard everywhere. The sounds of shots were only coming from the west and north-west.

“I don’t know. We’d better gather everyone and make our way to the castle.”

31.

Meanwhile, Mike was tearing along the main road on the island towards the Foxtrot zone. He ran past the gate, leapt over many demon and human bodies and headed west towards the next zone. He had tears still in his eyes and he couldn’t believe that his sister was in ASAT. Running in shock, he saw many soldiers tearing at the same direction.

“Evacuate the zone,” he heard.

He accelerated and ran past them. The castle was just ahead. He zoomed through the gate, then up the hill and through the main castle gate. As he was running through the courtyard full of flying demon bodies, he tried to focus his thoughts, but no, the shock was too big to take. Mike then entered the castle and ran up the stairs.

Arthur was watching the fog disappear little by little behind the window. Bishop was monitoring the evacuation through some CCTV camera and the soldiers behind were using the turrets whenever they saw something.

“What time is it?”

“It’s almost five,” came the answer from the soldier at the desk.

Mike then shot out through the door and trying to catch his breath spoke,

"It's over."

"What's over? Who are you?"

"I was sent with the search party."

On hearing this Arthur did remember a boy similar to him going with them out there.

"Report."

"We were attacked by vampires," he gasped. "All dead. No signs of ASATs."

So he made up his mind. He couldn't kill his own sister, so he lied, and let ASATs alone in the zone.

Having heard that, Arthur almost broke. His cheeks started to tremble as he stuttered,

"I-I must go to my office."

And he left the room.

32.

Everyone was getting ready on the beach. Miles and Johnson were standing in front of them. Miles knew it was the best time to make a speech.

"From what we know, we're somewhere in the middle of Delta zone, so we have less than a mile to the castle. We don't know whether the next zones, Foxtrot and Hotel are still operating, but judging by the shots, the war is still going on. We have two hours to get to the castle and find a way to cancel this fucking nuclear attack. However, getting through the island full of demons, vampires, zombies and ghosts won't be an easy task to do. You all have been through a lot, both today and yesterday. But to make sure our race will survive we must do yet a little more. We must now show them who's in charge of this planet. We must wipe them out!"

They replied with a loud cry raising their guns up in the air. Yet they didn't realize at that time that getting to the castle would be

much harder than they thought, as both zones; Foxtrot and Golf became completely abandoned and demons were now marching at the last two zones.

5 TO THE LAST

1.

Arthur fell onto his armchair and rubbed his forehead with an open palm covered in sweat. Seven zones were down. The last one to go and no signs of any kind from the unit one. He peeked at one of the flickering screens. The ghost activity was still too high to see anything except blackish stripes. No communication. Nothing.

"Get up, Arthur!" he heard Bishop's voice. "There's still hope. Don't forget what we're fighting for."

"Hope? What hope? We've lost National, Alpha, almost every single zone on the island. We're the last one standing."

"Don't you remember when we were planning all of this, when you insisted on protecting the castle only? No zones, nothing?"

"We lost most of the soldiers."

"No, Arthur, we have half the men we had when we started. We may win this. This is the impregnable castle, remember?"

"We have no communication with them, with no one."

"And do you think they had any modern communication with the soldiers back in ancient times? They didn't and they could still lead an army of several thousand men. And what about protecting castles in medieval times, huh? Did they use technology? No, they shouted to one another, and this is what

we're gonna do now. So get you lazy ass up, West and join me in the headquarters.

Arthur unwillingly stood up, left his office and headed downstairs. On his way down, his mind filled with miserable thoughts of their next hours and how it might end. As he was walking along the corridor leading to the headquarters, he caught a glimpse of Lian speeding down and Bishop running out of the headquarters shortly after her.

"Bishop, Bishop!"

He stopped, looked back at Arthur with a face as if he saw a ghost.

"They're here!"

"What?" the old man asked confused.

Who did he mean by them? The search party, the demons or maybe ASATs?

"ASATs, they're here in Foxtrot."

Arthur stopped frozen in shock.

"ASATs?"

But a few minutes ago Mike told them no one came. It was a moment before an adrenaline boost hit his muscles and he sprinted to the headquarters.

"Get me the view from the gate between Foxtrot and Hotel," he said stopping at the screen.

The left screen displayed the view from one of the CCTV cameras placed over the main gate to Hotel zone. The picture was flickering and it was barely able to see anything.

"It's impossible..." he whispered feeling the emotional storm within himself.

He and the three soldiers responsible for the computers in the first desk were staring at the feed. The slightly misty field of Foxtrot was filled with bodies of humans, demons and vampires. The road was full of marching demons, slowly being killed by turrets and soldiers waiting on the wall. The road was going right through the middle of the zone. There were several tree stems knocked down blocking the road. In the distance they saw a group of about thirty figures moving forward in a circle formation. In the front, they could see Surya and Tokutei leading the group behind

them. They were cutting through the enemies making their way to the next zone. Slash after slash, cut after cut, dodge after dodge. Dan, Michael and Patricia were also among them. The demons stopped the march and focused on the group trying to close in on them, but they shot them like ducks. As they got closer to the gate, two spotlights illuminated the way, simultaneously clearing the road off the vampires.

"It's really them, it's really them," Arthur said exuberantly. "They made it!"

Technically they didn't. They had an army to shove through.

"Focus the fire from the turrets at the creatures around them. All snipers cover them! Use the hidden turrets!"

The number of demons significantly exceeded them, but they didn't give up. Not at that moment, not at the very gates to the castle. Another marine fell victim to a demonic attack and left the circle.

"We're close!" Miles shouted. "Advance!"

Another marine fell dead. As they were moving further, a large group of demons tried to cut off their way by blocking the gate.

"We won't make it," Johnson said slowly losing his hope. Suddenly, thousands of shots came at all the demons around making the way clear enough to cross to the other zone.

Lian sped along the courtyard towards the main gate, then through Hotel to the gate there. Bishop followed her, but his condition was poorer and he was moving twice as slow as her. Running as fast as she could, she started to have doubts whether what she had seen on the screens was really what her mind told her. She did see a group of soldiers making their way through Foxtrot, but she didn't recognize any of the ASATs. What if her mind played a trick on her? What if those are the soldiers sent as the reinforcement?

Tokutei cut through another vampire, turned left, slashed a demon, jumped up high and pierced the neck of a guardian. Surya eliminated five on her left.

"Clear," Miles yelled.

Dan took a quick look around. It was done. Every single one was

eliminated and it was all thanks to the soldiers on the wall as well as the turrets.

"Quickly before they send reinforcements," some sniper shouted from the gate.

They finally went through. They could see the eyes on every single soldier, hunter, medic directed at them as if they were some celebrities. Lian was tearing across the zone. Slowly losing her breath, she spotted what she was longing for; a bluish glow of Tokutei's blade.

"Tokutei! Tokutei!" she shouted as the gate was closing behind them.

He noticed her and straight away ran towards her putting away his sword. They hurled themselves into each other's arms.

"Lian," he whispered holding her tight.

It occurred to him, that the second most important reason that kept him fighting all this way since Hell till now was that very woman. Finally, she was in his arms. Yet he understood it was not time for hugs. There were still two more important things to be stopped.

"That's enough, love birds," he heard Jason's voice.

"O.D.," he shook his friend hand laughing joyfully.

"What about me, guys?" Dan asked stepping out from the crowd.

Jason let go of Tokutei's hand and ran towards Dan raising him up.

"You're alive! You lucky mother fucker."

At the same time Bishop and Amanda appeared.

"Pat!" she exclaimed throwing her arms around her sister.

"If everyone said hello to one another," Bishop spoke. "We have to prepare for another attack. By the way, do you have..."

"Affirmative," Michael replied.

"Where is Seith?" he asked examining the group.

"He didn't make it," Patricia answered.

Miles pushed himself through the crowd.

"General, sir. There's yet another great threat above us. We need to contact the Whitehouse immediately."

"What threat?" Lian asked.

"We are unable to contact anyone outside the island."

"The spiritual activity..." Dan murmured.

"We need to contact Arthur immediately," Johnson said.

"What threat, God damn it?" Lian said irritated.

"Nuke," Michael replied.

Bishop looked at everyone worryingly. He could only assume what they had in mind.

"Follow me to the castle."

Miles looked at the soldiers around.

"What about us?" he heard from the them.

"I'm not in charge here. Find the main tent and ask new SMA for orders."

2.

Arthur had seen everything on the screen. He waited until they all entered the courtyard, and then he rushed outside the headquarters, and headed downstairs to the main hall to meet them. There was still hope. The end could be stopped. The Seal was almost in one piece.

A few minutes later he was by the main door. He didn't know what to do. How to behave? To meet them inside or to wait for them outside. He chose the inside. The door opened and everyone went in. There were ASATs; both two teams, SMA Miles and Johnson and Bishop.

"Arthur!" Surya ran to him to give the old man a hug. He raised her and put her ninety degrees to the left, then walked towards Dan.

"You brought him back."

"It takes much more than a demon to kill me, old man."

They hugged like father and son laughing cheerily. Then Arthur greeted everyone else cordially. Johnson went closer to Arthur. His face wasn't happy, neither was it tired. It was concerned.

"Mr. West. We need to talk honestly."

"I assumed that. Follow me to my office, all of you. This not over yet."

3.

Five minutes later they were all in the office. Arthur walked towards the screens, while the some others sat comfortably everywhere they could. The rest simply stood or leaned against the wall. When Williams shot inside, Arthur was at the left side of the screen.

“Safe, activate,” he spoke with a commanding voice and the screen pushed to the front while a smaller one pulled out.

“Mr. West,” Johnson spoke. “I don’t know if you know, but we’re all in great danger here.”

“Whatever it is, it must wait,” came the answer, as Arthur opened a small box and took out the very Seal of Solomon. Tokutei deduced what the old man was doing, so he stood up, took out his sword and opened the bottom part of it. Next he took out a small, round ring, and walked towards Arthur.

“Here’s the ring,” the Asian said holding out his palm. Arthur looked at it and picked it up with his two fingers. Then he put the Seal onto the ring. The two elements magically combined.

“This is the Seal of Solomon, the only thing that can stop the end of the world.”

“How can it stop it if the end is already in progress?” Michael asked confused.

“It can end it. It can close Hell. It can imprison any demon.” Dan remembered something and spoilt the special moment.

“There are scarcely any people left on the peninsula in case you want to know.”

“They’re gonna use a nuclear bomb,” Johnson said not being able to hold that information.

Arthur kept calm even though earlier he had a few break downs. Now his main purpose was fulfilled. The Seal was completed and ASATs were back. He placed the Seal on his index finger and slowly sat down on his armchair.

“One thing at a time, please. Johnson, you first.” Johnson wriggled on the leather armchair blinking several times.

“When we were on our way here, there was a short moment of lower spiritual activity. General Baker was able to contact us

and he told us that if this whole thing wouldn't be prevented, they would use a nuclear bomb at twenty two hundred."

Arthur peeked at his watch. It was almost seven p.m.

"We have three hours to make contact. But with such high EMF we cannot do anything.

"After we eliminated a large number of ghosts," Patricia said. "The EMF readings lowered significantly."

"And we have noticed a certain connection," Jason spoke. "The connection between undead and ghosts. When some of the zombies burnt or exploded their ghosts vaporized automatically, too."

Surya looked at him, and spoke,

"There's a certain type of demon, magician or something like that."

"Sorcerer," Bishop corrected.

"Whatever. From what we learnt from Seith, they are responsible for the zombie and the spirit apocalypse on the peninsula."

"I think I saw them here in Foxtrot," Jason said. "They were using some kind of magic to protect themselves."

"They were also responsible for the fog we had for several hours," Williams added. "Whenever we killed one of them, the fog got thinner."

Arthur was listening to them constantly fingering the Seal.

"From what you're saying, in order to make contact with the Whitehouse we need to get rid of the ghosts and zombies from the island."

"I can't see any other way," Jason replied.

Arthur typed something on his keyboard and almost immediately a link with everyone within the castle was established.

"Listen everyone, this is very important. We need to decrease EMF levels and to do so all the snipers must focus their shots on apparitions and the undead. Make sure you use explosive bullets for the second one."

He turned towards the group.

"Well, one thing is in progress. Now if we have some time,

please tell me about your journey. Did everything go according to plan?"

Michael smacked his lips and cleared his throat.

"Not everything. At first Seith betrayed us."

"It was all part of the plan," Bishop interrupted.

Arthur gave them a confused look. Calm as he was he found this information surprising.

"What plan? I didn't know anything about it."

"Sorry, Arthur, but you couldn't know. It was only between me and Seith. Since Shax can read others minds, she would've got this information from you back in Thailand. I couldn't have let that happen."

"So what did he do?" the old man asked flabbergasted.

"He gave Shax the Seal," Michael continued.

"The fake Seal," Patricia corrected.

"But he fooled us," Michael said louder. "Anyway, we were put to prison and we lost hope. Seith came back for us, he explained everything and we freed Dan."

"He fixed him," Surya interrupted.

"Apparently," Michael went on speaking, "He had some power to heal others. Later we had a fight with Shax. Wasn't easy, but working together we defeated her."

"What happened to her?" Arthur asked curiously.

"She fell into a lava moat. We found the ring and we had to return to the vehicle and get back to the surface."

"What 'bout my brother?" Lian asked suddenly remembering it.

"Seith said he was in some other part of Hell, we couldn't, sorry, Lian," Tokutei said sadly.

Was she disappointed? Not all. Deep in her heart, she knew she would never see her brother again. Arthur glanced at her and when he noticed her emotionless face, this topic was over.

"Any difficulties on the way back?"

Michael scratched his cheek.

"Since it took us one whole damn day to return, we had some."

"We had an accident and we fell into a gorge. Nobody was hurt," Patricia finished.

Dan cleared his throat looking at Surya.

"Apart from Surya, but she healed. The vehicle was no longer usable, so we had to go on foot. We finally got to the portal and barely got to the surface. Seith sacrificed himself saving us... for the second time."

"What happened in San Francisco? It took you another day to get back to the castle."

"At first it was easy, there was no one...I mean nothing around, but the portal brought us seventeen miles from Alpha Point and we had to find our way back."

Dan decided to add something.

"We tried to contact you, but EMF was too high. It was impossible."

"But we did run into a few roadblocks. They thought the castle failed and that we were the ASATs from Maldito. They gave us a vehicle, three soldiers and we set off."

Patricia rubbed her tired eyes and joined the conversation.

"The army of demons was enormous. They were everywhere to the west from Junipero."

Then Tokutei remembered the giant monster he saw somewhere in the city.

"There was an enormous creature we saw in hell which then we saw in the city. Did it get here?"

Everyone from unit two exchanged baffled glances.

"No, we didn't see such thing," Jack replied.

"So it's not yet here," the Asian man replied.

Jason wanted to say something, but Michael was faster.

"I almost forgot, Cizin is on the peninsula."

Arthur and Bishop immediately raised their eyes.

"What? You saw him?"

"No, we didn't" the Asian man replied.

"And what about that huge monster, huh?" Miles asked hearing this information for the first time. "Do you think that is Cizin?"

"It wasn't Cizin," Surya replied. "It was that...um... I don't remember the name, but the sorcerers compelled it back in Hell." Jason slowly shook his head and couldn't stand it anymore,

"Wait, wait, wait. Do ya' mean there is a huge monster on the loose somewhere in San Francisco?"

"Unfortunately, there is and we saw him," came the answer from Michael.

"How tall is it?" Amanda asked.

"Hundred feet, at least..." Tokutei said.

Arthur rubbed his chin and dropped his eyes for a second, then boomed,

"Like I said, there was no such thing here yet, so it probably means we are still to face it."

Michael took a deep breath and continued,

"We then managed to reach Woodlawn and meet SMA Miles there. He decided...He wanted to join us and escort us home. Later we met SMA Johnson. There we heard about the nuclear attack. We finally reached Pacifica, but Alpha Point was way gone. Demons were everywhere. We decided to take the sewer system and get to the coast."

"We met ghouls there," Patricia said.

"Ghouls? And where did they come from?" Arthur asked in shock.

"If there are ghouls there must be a witch somewhere," Bishop said.

"Or witches," Arthur finished.

Michael dropped his eyes for a moment to process this information, then he went on.

"After some time we were in southern Pacifica or whatever it is called. We met there twelve soldiers who were apparently sent to help you."

"Twelve?" the old man asked. "We received information that they had sent ten thousand."

"And only twelve survived," Tokutei finished.

"What about the rest?" Bishop asked.

"Zombies. Demons outsmarted them and bombarded with

arrows and fireballs.”

“How did you get to the island?” the old man asked another question.

“By boats we’ve found in Pacifica. The rest you know.”

“Oh, and we found Eagle Eye lying on the beach,” Dan added. Arthur thought for a while. He tried to process all this information he had been bombarded with.

“So what now, Arthur?” Dan asked. “What now when we’re back? How do we stop it?”

The old man stood up and walked towards the window.

“We have to wait for Cizin to come here. In the meantime, we must protect the castle and the Seal.”

Amanda gently touched her bruise on her arm.

“We can’t separate now. We will be too vulnerable, we’re ASATs and we must fight together.”

“Yeah, like we always did,” Lian added sarcastically.

“I like your talking. Go to Hotel and make sure nothing will reach the gate.”

Dan rapidly stood up.

“I don’t know about you, but I need to pee, and get my Desert Eagles.”

“I need to get my lightsaber,” Tokutei added.

“OK, do what you have to do and meet me in five... no ten at the main gate,” Jason said.

As they were heading to the door, Arthur turned off the screen and followed them.

“We’re gonna get back to the headquarters and decide what to do next.”

4.

A few minutes later Arthur and Bishop returned to the headquarters. The old man seemed cheerful and nothing seemed to bother him, not even the nuclear attack or the fact that Cizin was in town.

“What’re the readings?” Bishop asked walking into the room.

“Still too high, nothing works outside the castle,” Morris

replied.

“What about the attacks?”

“None since ASATs returned. But you wanna see that, sir.”
Something displayed on the screens. It was a live feed from one of the turrets pointed at north. There was something walking in the ocean towards the island, something huge.

“This is that monster they were talking about,” Arthur said.
“Try to take it down with some missiles.”

“Yes, sir,” came the answer from Morris while he was connecting to the missile system. “Do you want me to fire now?”

“Of course, we don’t want this thing to come here.”

“Missile one has been launched.”

“Let’s just hope it won’t hit any flying demon,” Arthur said keeping his fingers crossed.

About a four-yard missile ejected from the southern part of the castle directly up. When it reached the height of 4500 feet, it changed its direction and headed straight at the monster in the distance. Everyone in the headquarters was staring at the feed from the missile.

“Come on, come on,” Arthur muttered.

The missile hit the target as the feed disappeared and everyone looked at the other screen with the feed from the turret. There was an enormous explosion that covered the view.

“That should do the work,” Bishop said satisfied.

To his surprise, the gigantic creature emerged from the fire and kept on going as if nothing had happened.

“Missiles are too weak,” Arthur said. “We’ve got to use something else.”

Bishop turned around.

“No, send five at the same time. Let’s see what will happen.”

A few seconds later five missiles launched into the air and flew at the monster exploding on impact. When the cloud of ash vanished, they saw the monster lying in the ocean as huge waves spread everywhere. Bishop smiled with satisfaction.

“That’s right, son of a bitch.”

SMA Anderson did a quick calculation on the computer and almost momentarily announced,

“Sir, the waves gonna cover one-third of the island.”

“Good. They’re gonna wipe them out.”

5.

Dan got out of the lift and walked towards the main entrance to the courtyard. He was wearing brand new uniform, two Desert Eagles at his belt, and a M4 assault rifle on his back. He also had a micro computer-lens in his eye connected directly to the main server. As he was at the gate he heard a familiar, female voice,

“Danny? Oh my God, it’s really you.”

He turned around straight away and saw his very own aunt.

“Auntie?” he started to run towards her. “What are you doing here?”

“Arthur invited us to help. I’m so glad you’re OK.”

As they were hugging another familiar voice came from the stairs.

“Ms. Night?”

They looked at the direction of the voice and saw Surya walking down the stairs. Leonora gave the girl a baffled look. She didn’t know who she was, at least she didn’t recognize her.

“I’m sorry, you don’t know me from that side. I’m Surya, but you may know me as Natalie. I used to...”

“Natalie? I knew I heard this voice before,” the woman said.

“But Natalie was killed a long time ago.”

Dan cleared his throat realizing this was the time the truth would come out. At the same time Tokutei appeared in the corridor.

“We’ll be there in a minute, Tok,” the boy said, then turned towards his aunt. “Listen, it’s complicated, but I know the truth now. Natalie, I mean Surya is a dhampir...”

“I’ll tell the story. You’re gonna mistell the whole thing anyway. So, I’m a dhampir and I worked against all vampires, at least I tried, and the only way was to pretend to be human, and so I did, but then I couldn’t take it anymore... the lies... I had to tell...um... and my love for Dan. I decided to kill off Natalie and work on my own. I helped you many a time.”

Leonora was staring at her trying to process her words and gather her own thoughts. Now everything made sense. The very girl that had been found in a vampire nest was her. She wasn't furious or angry at the girl. If it hadn't been for her, a lot of mission would have failed.

"So it was you all along. Arthur made a good decision to take you on."

"Dan, we need to go," Surya said.

"We're goin' to Hotel to help. It's all gonna be over soon. Then we'll talk."

They went outside to the courtyard. Everyone was already there waiting for them.

"Finally," Patricia said raising her eyes.

As they came nearer, they saw many a soldier on the walls gaping east.

"What's goin' on there?" Dan asked.

Michael quickly displayed feed from one of the turrets only to see the crashing tsunami wave against the eastern part of the island. The waves were as high as twelve feet, but the densely planted, and simultaneously old trees stopped them in the middle of Delta and Echo zones. The destructive waves took everything they met on their way wiping out the demon army, vampires and zombies. The island became empty for a while, but not for long because flying demons were still in the area. Water got into the tunnel. However, nobody knew how far.

"Guys, EMF readings," Lian said seeing the numbers drop to twenty.

"The communication has been restored," an announcement came from someone in India zone.

Surya looked at them with her eyes wide opened.

"The nuclear attack. We can cancel it," she selected Arthur's channel and sent the message. "Arthur, the EMF is low, we can cancel the attack."

"I'm already doin' that," she heard back.

And it was true. Arthur was in the headquarters with Bishop. The screen was showing a video call with the Whitehouse. The

president answered the phone. He was sitting in the oval room with several military officials. Baker was among them.

"West? You're alive?"

"Yes, Mr. president. We have finally restored the communication, but the EMF reading will rise any second now. You need to cancel the nuclear attack."

"I'm afraid I cannot do that. You have still some time. Leave the place immediately."

"You don't understand, sir. ASATs have returned. The Seal is completed now. We will stop it now. Hell will close." The president seemed to be touched and shocked by this message. He gathered his thoughts and boomed,

"West, even if you do close Hell, there will be still more than one billion of those things to kill. That's way too many for us to deal. I won't cancel the attack."

"Let me guess..." Bishop interrupted. "It was all Baker's idea."

General Baker was sitting there silent. Then a gentle smirk appeared on his face.

"This is the sacrifice I need to take," the president continued. If you manage to close Hell before nine-thirty then OK, but take all your men and leave the peninsula after that. The attack will happen. I can't talk right now we have our own crisis here."

Everyone in the headquarters couldn't believe it. A nuclear attack on American soil, an inevitable attack to take place in less than three hours.

"What now?" Morris asked checking the time for the fourth time.

Bishop scanned Arthur from top to bottom and gave him a look saying *What now?* Arthur cleared his throat and finally spoke,

"We do what we must do, we stay. If Cizin is somewhere near, he would finally get to the island to take the Seal. We're gonna lock him in the Seal, which will simultaneously close hellish realm and we will leave the peninsula as said."

"How? How are we gonna leave with two thousand men? Our

planes won't take so many."

"Many will die," someone said from the turret section.

"Even if there may be as many as five hundred men, your jet will take thirty at most, the helicopters... maybe fifty, what about the rest, huh?" Bishop continued.

"I didn't think it through. We won't fly away. We will go deep inside of the mountain to the shelter."

"What shelter?" Bishop asked confused.

"Do you think I altered the castle on the basis of your ideas only? There is a shelter below the hanger, way below the hanger, lower than the ocean. Its walls are made of lead which will not let any radiation through."

"It sounds like a good idea," Anderson commented.

"But of course this is only if the president doesn't change his mind."

6.

ASATs were still waiting outside for Arthur to let them know about the cancellation. Patricia was wandering around thinking of her childhood. Her memories brought her back to 90's. She was just a little girl. She was seven years old at that time and she was running after her sister along the dark corridor of a typical house.

"Amanda, wait!" she said with her child voice.

Amanda was running right before her. She had her hair pinned into a pony tail and her white, ducky pajama was the only thing that Patricia could see in the corridor.

"Mommy! Mommy!" the girl called through the tears.

She opened the door to her parents' bedroom and headed towards the bed. Her face looked petrified. Patricia ran after her. She had a red, plain pajama and her hair was loose about her shoulders.

"What is it, darling?" her mother asked waking up.

She was a young, beautiful girl in her late twenties. She had very smooth face, black hair and brown complexion. Next to her, was sitting her husband; a plump man with dark hair and a long face.

"There is a monster under my bed."

"It's your turn now," the man said.

The woman glanced at the digital clock on the bedside cabinet. The red ciphers were showing 3:17. She sighed and stood up.

"Why did you come here, Pat? Did you too see the monster?"

"No," the girl replied holding a fluffy teddy. "Amanda scared the crap out of me with her screaming."

"I told you to watch your words, young lady," her mother raised her voice, then grabbed her younger daughter's hand and they walked out of the bedroom totally forgetting what Patricia had just said.

They went into the daughters' room and the woman switched on the light. The room became bright. It was a typical children room with two beds on one side, pink walls with posters of Barbie dolls and ponies. The wide window was on the left side of the beds and a wardrobe on the right side. Opposite the beds, there were lots of toys spread around the room on a green carpet.

"So where's the monster this time?"

The girl walked step in step behind her mother.

"Under the bed?"

Amanda nodded unwillingly. The woman walked towards the first bed and bent over looking at what was under it. She saw only a face of a dog toy that somehow got there. She raised her body and turned back at the girls.

"The monster is gone, sweetie."

Both girls were gaping out the window slowly withdrawing from the room.

"What?" their mother asked confused as she turned around at the window.

Freezing in shock she saw a light figure hovering behind the glass window. It was taller than a human, had a greenish glow, seemed to have some kind of a hood on the head and its face was longer and more frightening than anything else they had ever seen. The apparition flickered and appeared right in front of the woman. Straight away, both girls ran away to the parents bedroom. There was a loud shriek, then it silenced.

"Miles is comin'" Dan said.

They saw Miles running out of the building and heading towards the gate. As he was passing Patricia, she poked him,

"Hey, where're you goin'?"

"To India for s sec," he stopped.

"Have you seen what happened?" Michael asked.

"You mean the monster?"

On hearing this, Dan asked astonished,

"What monster?"

Miles turned towards him. He knew he had little time to finish his business, but even though he decided to explain the situation.

"The big one you saw in the city. They took it down with a couple of missiles."

"Ah, that thing," the boy answered. "Still, this wasn't what we meant. There was a tsunami wave that wiped them all out."

"Well, what d'ya' know. We earned some time. But still, I need to get to India. See you guys later."

And he disappeared somewhere among the crowd. At the same time Arthur's voice came through the earwigs.

"I've got some bad news guys."

Having heard that, everyone looked at each other and looked forward to Arthur's next words.

"I talked to the president. He won't cancel the attack."

"B-But there're thousands of people here, is he insane?" Jack exclaimed.

"He's partly right. Till now over one billion demons entered our world, not mentioning vampires, zombies and other creatures, and we have killed... um... I don't know, fifty million? One hundred million? Even if we manage to close Hell in time, we won't be able to kill them all. We can take them out with one attack, all of them, vampires, zombies, demons."

"But no one will be able to live here for another decade."

"Or more," Tokutei added.

"We have time to twenty-nine forty-five to close Hell. After that we're going to the shelter in the castle," he paused for a second as if something disturbed him. "We have some zombie

movements in the tunnel. They're coming back. Go to Hotel zone and help the others wipe them out."

"Alright," Jason replied to confirm. "You heard the man. We're going to have some fun with them."

"Aren't you at least concerned with the nuclear attack?" Lian asked.

"I am... a little bit. Yet, we don't have time for this now." They headed for the main gate and left the castle.

7.

India and Hotel zone were situated right at the castle. They were the smallest ones, and at the same time the most crowded. Soldiers were either standing or crouching along the wall waiting for the zombie wave. Snipers who had visual on them had already engaged. One shot, one kill; that was the motto. Nobody left the zone to Foxtrot or Golf, they all stayed inside the last three zones and patiently waited for the attack. Over one hundred fifty snipers, armed and ready to shoot on sight.

ASATs got to the main tent situated on the left side of the road connected, like in previous zones, with the tent from the other zone. Inside, there was SMA Wilson watching the area through new Eagle Eye. Apart from him there were also four soldiers and Natalie. Dan recognized two of them from the beach in Pacifica and two from the sewage system.

"Oh my God," Natalie beamed. "Dan? Tok? Surya?"

"Natalie?" Surya replied baffled and astonished.

"ASATs, finally," Wilson said pulling himself off the screen.

"What are your orders?"

Tokutei peeked at the screens showing the picture over the island with a large number of dots getting out of the tunnel.

"To help everyone."

"Zombies will be easy targets," Wilson said. "Our snipers will easily deal with them. It's gonna be much harder with other monsters."

Michael and Jack noticed that many undead were walking out of the water all around the island.

“Those scumbags must’ve walked under the ocean. Let’s get to the main wall and shoot them out.”

SMA grabbed the tablet, made sure he had everyone on the line and sent a voice message,

“Zombies are coming from everywhere. Engage at once.”

All the ASATs, as well as the four other soldiers and Natalie left the tent and headed to the main wall.

The first shots came. Eye and Mary were on the first tower and had a great view over the island. Eye looked into the scope and pointed his gun at the eastern part.

“The water is almost gone,” he muttered.

Through the nightvision, he could see a horde of zombies appearing among the trees about as far as the remains of Bravo and Charlie zones were. Most of these were the bodies of soldiers who had been killed while trying to get to Alpha. He placed his finger onto the trigger and fired, then aimed at another one and fired again. Dozens of shots were echoing in the air and their number rose dramatically. After a minute the number of shots was counted in hundreds per second. It wasn’t easy to kill all of them, for many trees blocked the view. It didn’t take much time till the first walking corpses appeared in Foxtrot and became an easy target for the marines on the walls. Mary and Eye were on the same tower on a tree at the very wall. Something caught Mary’s attention in the distance. She stopped shooting and looked there.

“Why did ya’ stop?” Eye asked.

“Something is not right. Something is there.”

Eye took a glimpse where she was looking and directed his sniper rifle there. He was staring in the distance, examining the view, approximately four miles from the island where the shore spread. It was then when he realized what Mary had on her mind. Straight away he pulled back, took out his tablet, selected main headquarter and spoke,

“This is Eye from Hotel zone. Mary and I spotted a large number of flying demons in the north-east.”

“This is Steven. We see them, too. They’re carrying other

demons to the island.”

“The tunnel is too narrow for them,” Bishop’s voice sounded.

“What are the orders?”

“Deal with the walkers. They’re not yet a threat.”

Eye looked at Mary.

“You heard them. We have to shoot the zombies first.”

8.

Almost every member of ASAT got to the main gate. They climbed a ladder and joined other soldiers who were already engaging into to a fight. While Tokutei was climbing, he felt a gentle pull on his back. He turned around and saw Dan.

“Tok, let’s not break into smaller groups now, OK?”

“I don’t even want to.”

“Now we have no choice but to operate as one team,”

Amanda added placing her assault rifle on the wooden wall as she pulled herself up.

First zombies emerged from behind the trees limping towards the castle. Surya was crouching on the wall observing them.

“Look at them, wandering here stubbornly. Are they even aware of what they are compelled to do?”

“From what I know,” Jack said. “Cizin is the one who raised them and his aim is clear. But I doubt whether using zombies as weapon is a good choice. There is no way they can break through.”

“Cizin or those wizards demons,” Michael added.

Patricia leaned on her elbows against the upper part of the wall.

“They may not break in the castle, but they are responsible for dozens of deaths on the main land.”

“Shooting them is a piece of cake,” Jason added. “Why do we even bother? Why do we even waste ammo on them?”

“To finish the job earlier,” Patricia said. “Snipers do all the work, though.”

9.

In the meantime, Mike had separated from the hunters

group, and now was running down the stairs somewhere in the castle. He was constantly peeking at the watch as if he wanted to get somewhere in time. The stairs were winding down in a narrow dungeon. The walls were made of grey bricks and there was no windows. The only light was coming from lamps placed every few yards. The stairs ended and there was a long corridor with prison cells on both sides. Mike glanced at his watch and accelerated. He was taking constant glimpses at the cells, as if he was counting them, then he stopped at one, entered and looked around. The cell itself was no different from all the others; old, grey walls and rotten holders for torches. Luckily, he had turned on the nightvision in his microcomputer. He walked to the back door, leaned over and knocked the bricks with his knuckles. Something knocked back, then the bricks pushed out creating a few feet hole.

“Mikie, Mikie,” a scratchy voice spoke as a dark shadow squeezed through the hole.

It was a medium-height man with short, dark hair and a sun tattoo on his cheek. Next another came in and another.

“How many of you are there?” the boy asked seeing more and more vampiric creatures entering the cell.

“About two hundred.”

“I need to get back to the others. You know what to do.”

Having said that, Mike turned on his heel and disappeared somewhere in the corridor.

10.

“They are so stubborn,” Amanda said taking another shot at an upcoming zombie.

Jason was next to her, he waited till his clip became empty and spoke,

“They are not stubborn. They’re driven by a spell.”

Natalie was standing next, she reloaded another clip and added her comment,

“Spell or no spell, they are too mundane to kill.”

Jack half closed his eyes for a moment only to boom seconds later,

"Hey guys, listen, if we could get rid of the fog by eliminating those magicians, maybe we could somehow get rid of zombies by eliminating whatever is responsible for them."

"I think it's Cizin himself," Lian replied.

"It can't be," Arthur's voice sounded. "Look, guys, Hell opened a few hours after the zombie apocalypse. That's one thing. If it was Cizin, graves would open as soon as he entered Earth. I personally believe those zombies have been woken up by a witch or witches. From what we know it's only happening on the peninsula itself."

"If that's true, those witches must be hiding somewhere," Tokutei said.

The number of zombies didn't seem to be getting lower. It seemed as if all the remaining undead had walked along the seabed and got to the island. Among them there were many walking corpses of soldiers, but not only them. Some of the undead were older than hundred or even two hundred years. The oldest ones looked nothing more than a skeleton in shuttered clothes and to kill such creatures, shot in the head was too much, as there was nothing inside the skull to be deactivated.

As Tokutei was leaning against the wall waiting patiently for any of the walking dead reach the zone, he heard a message in the earwig.

"The castle's been breached. We've got vampires everywhere."

As he was listening he caught eye of the others hearing the same message. Then another came,

"Vampires are coming from the dungeons, they're in the castle, I repeat they're in the castle."

He looked at Dan jumping down from the wall and he knew that keeping the team as one at that moment was impossible.

"Go with him!" Surya exclaimed.

The Asian warrior turned around and within a few seconds outran Dan.

11.

A group of hunters was rushing along the corridor in order to join others in the northern part of the castle. Soldiers and other hunters joined them shooting out from the doors on the left and right. The shots and screams were coming from the stairs gently lighting up the corridor. The hunters had their weapons ready and were sieved with determination to wipe the creatures out. The first soldiers reached the stairs. They saw three marines withdrawing up as a large group of vampires was zooming along the stairs and walls, killing the rest of the opponents on their way. The hunters began to fire poisoned bullets at the vampires. The second squad threw two UV grenades down the stairs which quickly finished off a couple of the enemies. Both soldiers and hunters made a dart downstairs to the others. There were no more vampires on the stairs, but they could hear shots coming from the corridor leading to the main hall. Some of the soldiers stopped to help the wounded lying around, others were just tearing to help the others.

Arthur and Bishop were carefully watching the screens showing the feeds from cameras spread around the castle. The vampires were hurtling, spreading along the main hall and getting to the first level.

"How did they get here?" Bishop asked scratching his head. Arthur leaned over the keyboard and rewound the video.

"From the basement. Unfortunately, we don't have any cameras there, but I may assume how."

"Well?" Bishop asked waiting for the answer.

"Back in the days when the castle was on a mountain, the count would keep prisoners here. I read a story about a few that escaped through a hole in the wall in one of the cells. The vampires must have learned about it."

"And what? They swam under water to get here?"

"Probably."

"We need to get rid of them, Arthur."

As he said that, Arthur turned to the soldiers and said aloud,

"Those who are free, connect to the inside turrets and help our boys kill those things."

One of such soldiers was sitting at the back. The turret he had been operating from had just been destroyed by a flying demon. He selected the turret menu and chose the one situated at the main entrance to the castle. When he got the feed, he saw about two dozens of people fighting a very large group of vampires that were coming and coming. He pointed the cannon at the horde at the end of the corridor, where none of the men were, made sure he had poisoned bullets selected and pressed the trigger. A hail of bullets swiftly cut off the way of the other vampiric creatures.

"Take the wounded!" one of the hunters shouted slashing through a vampire that had thrown herself at his colleague. As two marines helped one wounded man get up and escorted him to the medical point in the castle, Tokutei rushed inside and within five seconds he was at the end of corridor that lead to the stairs to the basement. Dan was right behind him. He caught an eye of two fast moving figures up the spiral stairs and quickly made a slash there. Tokutei cut down, up, stabbed and soon he reached the stairs to the basement.

"Tokutei," he heard Bishop's voice, "Take a few men and go block the entrance in the dungeons."

"Acknowledged."

"I'm goin' with you, man," Dan shouted from up the stairs. Smoke was hovering over the barrels of his two Desert Eagles. He must have just killed the monsters he was chasing.

"Boys help us out down there," Dan said to the soldiers and hunters in the main hall.

Soon there were seven people along with Dan and Tokutei running down the spiral stairs. Tokutei was leading the way and behind them there were three hunters, Dan and two soldiers. On their way they met about six vampiric creatures, which they easily eliminated. Finally, they reached the dungeons.

"The cell is at the end of this corridor," Arthur's voice spread through the earwig.

There was no one apart them. They became silent and slowly moved along the dimly-lit corridor alert and ready for any surprise.

"Can you hear anything, Tok?" Dan asked looking around.

"The problem is I can't."

No hissing sounds, no squeaking, nothing apart from the crushing waves coming from the outside. They moved to the last cell and saw a hole in the wall.

"So this is how they got in," one of the soldiers said lowering his gun.

"We must do something about this," the second one added.

"Any ideas, Arthur?" Tokutei asked checking out the objects in the dungeon.

Arthur was sitting on the armchair, thinking about the solution. There was a hole and a tunnel leading to the outside. If vampires knew about it, it could be an easy access for zombies and demons.

"The only thing that pops up to my head is blowing up the tunnel."

"A grenade should do," one of the soldiers said examining the tunnel as he stepped inside.

"Then use one, this way should be erased."

Tokutei bent and walked into the tunnel. It wasn't much different than the caves in Hell except one thing; it was much narrower. Once he was in, he turned round to Dan,

"Return to the gate, I'll keep an eye on them."

The boy nodded, turned on his heel and seconds later he was gone. Tokutei stabbed his sword into the ceiling creating a small hole where the grenade could be stored. As the soldier was placing the grenade there, they all heard moans coming from the outside of the tunnel. They all directed their eyes there and they caught sight of a zombie climbing up the wall.

"And how did you get here," the hunter muttered walking towards him.

When he was close enough he placed his foot on the undead's head and pushed the body back to the ocean. He could feel the wind blowing from the land and he could also see the flying demons approaching the island, but what made him worried the most was when he looked down. He immediately stepped back and ran to the others.

"Use that damn grenade and we're out of here."

"What, did you see down there?"

"Zombies, vampires, I don't know, but there're like hundreds of them climbing up. Just blow the freakin' ceiling."

The other soldier pulled the safety pin and placed the grenade in the hole. After that they all squeezed through the hole back into the cell and hid from the explosions. The blast did the work and the tunnel no longer existed.

"I leave you guys here," the Asian said and made swiftly for the stairs.

12.

Dan was running along the courtyard back to the rest of his team when he heard Arthur's voice,

"Dan, how powerful is that laser of yours?"

"Which one?"

"The one you used to sharpen the weapons."

"Powerful enough to make a hole in the moon, why do ya' ask?"

Arthur was standing at the window staring in the distance. Bishop was right next to him rubbing his eyes.

"Because the missiles didn't kill the monster."

The gigantic creature that had caused the tsunami some time earlier was now standing up and it didn't seem to be happy about what had happened. All the flying demons looked like flies around it.

"Why don't you use the missiles like you did before?"

"It's too close to the island; the tsunami will destroy the remaining zones."

"OK, it will take some time before I dismantle the laser, Arthur."

"Take someone to help you, do it quick before this creature crushes us."

Tokutei shot out from the main door. He saw Dan running back to the castle, but because he wanted to reach the team as fast as possible he used the channel to communicate.

“Where’re you going?”

“To my lab for the laser. It seems that we failed to kill that Godzilla and I can’t see any other weapon than the laser itself.”

“I see.”

The warrior passed the gate and headed along the road towards the main gate. Thousand of shots were coming from everywhere and some of them looked like fire-flies along the dark sky. He finally reached the wall.

“Still playing with the zombies?”

When Surya saw him return alone, she yelled,

“Where’s Dan?”

“Easy, girl. He went to his lab for some laser. Apparently the...”

He didn’t finish as a message was played instantly on everyone’s tablets.

“An eight-hundred foot monster is approaching the island. Before we can use the laser, you can help by using explosive ammo only.”

This message made everyone concerned, especially those who saw this thing in Hell. Then another message was played.

“This is SMA Williams, it seems that all the flying demons are transporting others to the island by air and they are regrouping in the eastern part. At the moment we cannot do anything but focus on the monster.”

On hearing that, Eye pushed himself off the sight and looked in the distance. It was the first time he saw the hellish monster. It was slowly walking along the ocean. The water only was as high as the knee levels and the ocean was really deep at that point. Every step the monster made, created waves comparable to the ones during a storm.

“This thing is damn huge.”

Mary changed the type of ammo into explosives and pointed her gun at the creature.

“Still too far to take a shot.”

Then she scanned the island. The remains of Foxtrot were covered with dead bodies and several walking dead limping pointlessly

towards the castle. The further zones, Delta and Echo were barely visible. There were lots of smoke clouds coming from that area, and the first two zones; Bravo and Charlie were out of sight.

13.

Dan reached his lab. It was exactly as he had left it before leaving for Bangkok a few days earlier. He even found his unfinished coffee lying on the table at the main computer. He sped towards the laser mounted on an arm similar to the ones that are in car factories. The soldiers that came with him were astonished by the place. There were many inventions they would probably not see for a couple of years. Some of them were still in test phases, other unfinished.

"We need to detach this arm and take it somewhere outside."

"How are you gonna power it?"

"By those batteries," he pointed at a table with large car-like batteries stacked in a shape of a pyramid.

14.

"Oh my God," Miles said seeing something strange on the screen that was showing feed from the turret directed at the coast.

Bishop turned to him and before he asked the question he knew why his reaction was so concerning. They saw something incredible and impossible at the same time. The screen showed a long and extremely wide bridge made of fire that came out of nowhere and connected the eastern and northern part of the island with the coast. The structure was one mile wide at the island but it was at the shape of a triangle and at its end it covered the whole coast; from Alpha point to the point where the portal was in north San Francisco.

"How is this possible?" Williams asked gaping in disbelief. Arthur left the upcoming monster for a while and took a glimpse at the screen.

"What the hell is that supposed to be?"

Bishop took a deep breath and replied,

"It's a hellish bridge. None of the sorcerers is powerful enough to create something like this."

"Cizin," Arthur murmured. "He's coming."

"But first we have his armies to face," Miles said zooming in the coast where all the creatures; demons, vampires, ghouls and zombies were marching towards the island.

And this time breaking through the zones was not an obstacle as the bridge ended by the castle itself.

"Don't forget about Godzilla," Williams reminded indicating at the screen showing feed from the north.

"Dan, how is that laser goin'?" the old man asked.

"We're dismounting it," he heard the answer back.

Williams leaned over to Miles and whispered something to his ear. He reacted with a worrying face, but he quickly nodded and turned towards Arthur and Bishop.

"Arthur, general, we both think there is no need to keep our guys in the zones outside. When those monsters reach the island it will be a quick slaughter... and I'm talking about our men."

"Are you suggesting bringing them to Juliet?" Bishop asked.

"That is correct, sir," Miles replied.

"And there're a few good reasons besides their quick death," Williams continued. "We believe that whatever is coming now will dim our electronic devices again. We need to fight within the castle. It's the only right way."

Arthur grabbed and squeezed his nose with his index finger and thumb as if he was thinking this option through.

"I'm not sure," Bishop said, but as he said that the EMF meters jumped like crazy to seventy.

"Now you should be," Arthur said selecting everybody on the tablet. "This is Arthur West speaking. The island has been connected by a supernatural bridge with the coast which enabled all our enemies to get to the island in larger numbers. I'm not going to lie to you, but soon we're going to be hit by the largest army so far, from the north, north east and east. All the snipers from the southern roof must move at once to the northern one."

Lian was listening to orders taking several glimpses at her teammates. First the monster, then the largest army ever; what's next? The EMF readings jumped to 150. Arthur's message started to be disturbed.

"...India and Hotel must ... at once. ... should stay in ...zones." Arthur saw the EMF readings exceeding two hundred.

"I repeat; Everybody from India and Hotel must move to the castle at once. No one should stay in those zones," but this message failed to reach anybody outside the castle.

Lian tapped her tablet gently trying to bring the communication back. She slowly shook her head,

"Damn it."

"So we have to stay here," Jack said taking his last shot at some zombie outside.

Tokutei jumped off the wall and looked at several confused soldiers.

"The communication is down again."

He could see that they were not happy about it. He however, was used to be given orders without any fancy technology. Whenever he and the other Dragons were on a mission, their master would whisper or say the orders and that was enough.

Michael climbed down and headed for the tent with the ammo, situated at the road.

"From what we heard, the army is approaching from the north, northern east and east. That means that we are in a perfect position to hold them off."

"Don't be so sure," Patricia replied with a frown. "Don't forget about that huge monster wandering around."

Surya looked in the distance trying to spot or even hear the monster, but the constant shots dimmed every its step.

"I just hope, Dan's gonna help in time."

14.

Snipers at the top tower were watching the monster carefully, waiting for it to get close enough to shoot. However, the monster was not the worst thing they feared despite its gigantic

size. To his left side they could see literally millions of demons, vampires and God knew what else, tearing straight at the castle.

"Why is nobody shooting the monster?" they heard Mile's voice in the headset.

"It's still out of range, sir," someone replied from the tower. The sniper was gazing at the approaching horde of enemies on the magical, burning bridge and couldn't stand it anymore.

"The question is why is nobody shooting the demons?" But they heard no answer as the spiritual activity killed the audio outside the castle walls. Then they heard someone shouting from the courtyard,

"Use the grenade launchers!"

Having heard that, they saw hundreds of yellow lines cutting the dark sky followed by a large number of whistles. All the lines seemed to be starting within the castle walls; either on the roofs or the towers. It didn't take much time before they reached the bridge blowing up the incoming enemies. The sniper took a good look at that direction and saw that even though the bombardment was ongoing it was not sufficient enough to stop them. Then finally, he heard what he wanted to hear for so long. The shots from sniper rifles and the turrets.

The monster was circling the castle trying to get there from the north-east. Those who were assigned to the windows and balconies in those regions could see the true horror behind the massive steps. The waves were higher than in any storm, reaching as high as the walls of the castle. Now it was close enough to fire. A wide and heavy series of shots flew towards the monster. Regular, explosive as well as sharp ammo hit its body, but they seemed to do no harm. The loud and terrible roar came from the monster's mouth, which trembled the whole castle and the island like a strong earthquake.

"We only make it angrier," Bishop said watching the view.

"Cease fire, focus on the bridge," Arthur ordered firmly, pressing something on his tablet. "Dan, where the heck are you?"

"On my way, just a few more minutes."

Arthur shook his head sighing with dissatisfaction.

"In a few minutes there may be no castle," Miles added. Williams looked at the three of them. Something seemed to concern him. Something other than the current affairs.

"Why is nobody returning from India and Hotel?"

15.

"Hurry up, they're almost here," Amanda said loudly to the others as they were all running among the trees to India zone in order to help the others.

Surya was many yards ahead using her dhampiric speed. She could already hear the explosions and grunting noises coming from right outside the wall at the northern rocks not far from the castle walls. Other soldiers around were shouting something, running in other direction, but not she, she was determined and stubborn enough to reach the wall, to see what was behind it. She passed the main tent, jumped onto the structure and stopped in horror. It was the first time she saw the army so huge. All other armies weren't so terrifying either in Hell or in the city. Now, when all the enemies were marching on a few-mile wide bridge, they looked much more fearsome. However, she only caught a glimpse of that army because hardly had she jumped onto the wall, when an arrow went through her chest and she fell down onto the ground. Split a second later thousands of such arrows fell like a storm from the sky. The girl closed her white pupils for a moment realizing that what others were shouting was a warning from the arrows and they were simply trying to hide somewhere. A few seconds later, she heard a familiar voice,

"Damn it, girl, stop screwing around."

It was Jason, who stopped at her with Michael and they both took out the arrow from her body. The wound quickly healed as she sprang to her feet and took cover at the ladder leading to the top of the wall. She saw that Lian, Patricia and Jack were already shooting through the holes between the boards. It was the only way as the arrows didn't seem to stop. The shrieks out of pain were coming from everywhere. Not everyone managed to hide in time.

"What now?" she asked hiding under the wooden ceiling glancing at the others and the arrows pouring from the sky.

Tokutei glimpsed at the team and then at her,

"We fight till the end."

"He means till we die," Lian added turning around to reload.

"Nobody's dying here," the dhampiric girl replied firmly.

"You meant, you're not dying here, miss immortal?" Michael said with a little anger.

"I meant, we're too good to die. We..." she stopped as she saw others gaping at the castle tower.

She slowly turned her head and saw the very monster being less than a quarter a mile from the north-east side. It was so enormous that the castle only covered it till its chest. Many flying demons were accompanying it.

"...are already dead," she finished losing every hope as her hands dropped.

16.

Dan was pushing a trolley with the laser on it along with three other soldiers. They were almost at the lift door when Dan stopped.

"We cannot take the lift. The trolley won't fit."

"Is there any access to the outside from this floor?" the first soldier asked.

Dan scratched his head thinking about the balconies. Then it occurred to him,

"We have no choice but to use the windows. Help me push that thing to my apartment."

They turned the trolley around and headed for the main door on that floor. Dan took off his card, opened the door and soon they were all inside.

"Don't mind the mess, guys," he said directing the trolley to his northern balcony.

17.

The monster made one more step and it was right at the

castle wall. The northern roof reached to its chest, while the tallest tower reached to its jaw. Everyone was standing and staring at its size. Some of the people dared to shoot, but the bullets only made it angrier. Several snipers were constantly firing at it from the northern roof. No result, neither the fifty-caliber weapons, nor the automatic cannons and turrets. The monster raised its arm high and swooped it down hitting the northern roof in the middle. Its hard fist went through two storeys until it stopped. Almost immediately a dozen of green dots on the main screen changed into red ones signaling a massive death in that area. Everyone was standing with their jaws dropped not knowing what to do.

“Dan, for God’s sake!” Arthur’s voice spread in the earwig, but Dan was already on the balcony and the spiritual activity blocked the incoming messages.

“Dan? Do you copy? Daniel?”

The old man quickly switched the view on one of the monitors to find Dan.

“There he is,” Bishop whispered taking only a glance at that screen.

He was more concerned with what the creature will do next. Not only he; everyone in the headquarters, within the castle walls and outside were more than concerned. And those who were outside had a hail of burning arrows falling from the sky. Soon the balls of fire from the catapults joined the bombardment.

The monster raised its arm again and as it was about to make another hole, a violet laser shot off from the southern part of the castle, right above the courtyard and into the arm, cutting it from elbow to armpit. The colossal, numb arm hanged on a few muscles and one skin connection until it tore off the body and fell onto the roof near the hole smashing the last floor completely. When it landed, its fist opened and one of the fingers moved for a few seconds until the whole arm became dead. Dark blood, almost black, poured out of the burnt wound as the monster squealed making a few steps to the north-western part of the castle.

"It worked," Arthur murmured observing what will be next. When the laser shot off, hundreds of flying demons attacked the castle, focusing their main strike on the balcony where Dan was standing. He was too busy at that moment to notice it, as he was occupied with adjusting the laser to use it again. The other soldiers spotted the enemies and began firing at once.

"Hurry up, hurry up," one of them kept repeating taking out the opponents one by one.

"I'm tryin'."

Everyone within the castle walls engaged into the fight. The turrets joined the fight seconds later.

"They're leaving the bridge unprotected," Tokutei said watching what was going on.

There was nothing more they could do at that moment. The flying demons knocked off the grenade launchers and made sure everyone engaged into the fight. The island at that time was protected only by a few turrets and less than a dozen soldiers shooting from the holes in the wooden walls.

"It's now only a matter of minutes before they reach us," Patricia replied.

At the same time the enormous monster swung its other arm to the right, wiping everyone off the northern roof.

"Fire that damn thing," the soldier yelled to Dan's ear.

"Just a second..." he answered doing something. "Done."

He pointed the laser once again at the monster and as he was about to press the trigger, two flying demons landed on the balcony and grabbed two soldiers into their claws only to drop them onto the courtyard. Dan felt for his Desert Eagle attached to his belt and when he finally grabbed it, he took two precise shots at the creatures, then activated the laser again. The thin rail went through every other demon on its way past the north-western tower and hit the monster into the chest. Dan moved the machine slightly to the left in order to cut the monster with the laser. And so he did. The violet light went from the chest to the left making a long wound. The monster roared out of pain, quickly turned around swinging with its arm so hard that it hit the tower nearby,

completely destroying the ten-storey structure. Dan wanted to shoot one more time, but a piece of flying demon hit the balcony so hard that it broke a part of it. Almost immediately the bottom with the laser fell down and Dan jumped off towards the entrance to his chamber to hold on to something, just anything not to fall with the machine. He felt a grip on his hand; it was the third soldier who pulled him back up.

"Luckily you stayed inside," the boy said. "But those fucking bats ruined my laser and the balcony."

"... explosive... wound," they heard Bishop's voice and instantly the large creature was bombarded with explosive bullets that knocked it off balance. It leaned to the back and finally fell dead into the ocean with a splash so high that water was thrown high into the air and landed in the courtyard and in India zone putting out the burning arrows and fire balls.

18.

The arrows and fire balls stopped falling from the sky simultaneously with the fall of the monster. Those who were hidden came out from the hideouts and headed for the walls to strike back. As they were coming several hunters ran out of the castle and into the India zone shouting,

"Why haven't you retreated yet?"

Everyone responded with a confused and strange look.

"We were told to stay here," someone with a higher rank said firmly.

"No, didn't you here West's message? It was said to retreat to the castle before they reach the island."

Several soldiers were climbing up the ladder leading to the wooden wall of India zone. Tokutei took a hold of one's leg and said seriously,

"No, you can't."

"Why is that?" he heard back.

"They ceased fire not because they ran out of the arrows, but because..."

"They're here already!" the soldier who had just reached the

top exclaimed.

SMA Lopez stepped out of the tent. He saw many of his men fleeing to the castle courtyard.

“What’s goin’ on there?”

“We misheard the orders. We must pull back immediately.”

He frowned for a while hearing as others shouted,

“Pull back,” “To the castle.”

And then he heard a racket coming from the north-eastern part of the zone. When he took a glimpse there, he saw a group of orts breaking through the wall and attacking the escaping men. The ASATs were a few yards from that wall. Confused as they were, there was no choice for them. They couldn’t stay there alone, especially when the orders were not to stay there but to move to the last zone.

When the walls were shuttered, a few soldiers fell off the top and landed on the arrow-covered grass. Two hunters quickly ran up to them and helped them stand up. The cover fire came quickly from those who were many yards further, almost by the castle war.

“Help me,” Tokutei said to Surya, putting away his sword and taking out the Bo staff.

“We’ll help, too,” Michael said running towards them with Amanda and Jack.

Lian crouched at the other lying soldier and along with some mercenary she brought him back on his feet. Then she tightened the grip on her Masada and pointed it towards the upcoming orts. She couldn’t take any of the shots, nor could the others from the distance; Tokutei and Surya were too close. She saw them finishing off the last two orts as more creatures appeared through the ten-yard hole in the wall. There were lots of possessors, warthers, guardians and vampires. The warthers made a dash at the trees and climbed up only to jump off the bark and attack from above.

“Get the hell out of the sight,” she shouted.

Tokutei realized that though he wanted to help, he only prevented others from shooting. What’s more, staying there with

such a great numbers of enemies would result in his quick death.

"Pull back," he said to Surya and they quickly moved past the trees towards the others.

The shots spread again. Lian switched her ammo into explosive bullets and eliminated as many as she could until Tokutei and Surya joined her. Michael and Amanda were a few yards from them doing the same. Then suddenly, flutter of thousand wings filled the air above the trees and many flying demons swooped down. Some of them grabbed a few running people with their sharp claws and pulled them up. Others attacked the weaker ones with their cold steel weapons. It was only about a minute after the monster was killed before the snipers could help the others get inside. The turrets joined the fight soon afterwards along with MDSes placed along the structure above the main gate.

Everyone in the headquarters was busy with what was going on in India zone. Arthur turned around to the turret operators.

"Activated the hidden turrets in Golf and Foxtrot."

He wanted to repeat the same action that helped everyone abandon Bravo and Charlie zones. And it was a wise move. Within a few second more than a fifty turrets erected from the ground and prevented most of the enemies from reaching the hole in the wall. Michael and Amanda were running as the last making sure everyone would leave the area. They saw Patricia and Jason ahead stopping for a few seconds to take a few shots at the flying demons that had landed among them. One of those creatures appeared before Michael with a long, two-handed sword. He quickly pressed the trigger and took a few shots into the opponent's head. As he was aiming at the second one, he felt two sharp claws clutching on his shoulders and within a second he was a few feet above the ground. He could feel the claws piercing through the uniform and nesting into his shoulder muscles. The pain made him release the weapon and a few seconds later he felt the ground with his feet. Someone must have fired at the demon and they both fell down.

"Come'on get up, get up," he heard Patricia's voice.

Then he felt a gentle breeze as something went past him leaving a

significant stench. He followed the shadow with his eyes and realized what that creature was; a vampire. It zoomed towards the open gate, slashing two people on its way only to be stopped by Surya as he passed the main tent. Soon dozens of those creatures appeared among the trees.

“Vampires!” someone shouted.

All the towers in both zones became empty. Most of the people crossed the gate. The only help they could get was from those in the castle and the turrets hidden in the zones, not mentioning people who were running as fast they could to get inside. The number of the vampires increased, as they sped towards the gate. One of them poked Jason so hard that he tripped and fell over landing with his face on some body of a flying demon. He quickly felt four hands helping him stand up, and then something unexpected happened. Everything covered in a white, bright light blinding everyone. Jason quickly covered his eyes with one hand as he and two people next to him fell again. The light went through everything covering every blueprint. *It must be the nuclear attack*, his first thought was, as he could feel literally the light burning his skin and many, many loud squeals filled with pain surrounded him. But then it occurred to him, it couldn't have been the attack. He could still hear shots coming from the front and echoing in the background. He opened his eyes trying to get used to the light. On his right he found his close friend, Eye. It was him who had just helped him. He quickly threw his arm around him and they both stood up.

“Hold on for a few seconds,” he said to him.

Eye was in shock. Everything was blurry to him as he made the first step and touched a dark coat with his shoe. Black flakes were falling from the sky everywhere.

“Spotlights,” he said under his breath as he and Eye made another step forward.

Eye tried to say something. He quickly let go of Jason's hand and coming out of the shock, he turned round and went back.

“We must go,” O.D. said.

“Mary,” he heard back as he saw his friend helping a woman

stand up.

Yes, of course. There was one pair of hands more before the lights shot off. It must have been hers. How could he have forgotten about it. Unbelievable.

Tokutei returned to Michael, Amanda and Patricia. His shiny, Bo staff was almost invisible in the spotlight light, as it was using the same UV light.

“Come on guys, we must go!”

They took off first towards the light, following the voices of others. Tokutei was right behind them. He turned round for a split of second to see how many and how far the enemies were and he saw something luring in the shadows of the trees. At the same time, Natalie went past him. He turned back again and rubbed his eyes. There was a large beast breathing heavily not making even a step into the light. He knew exactly what it was. Flabbergasted as he was, he still decided not to return there, but joined the others.

20.

Arthur was carefully observing what was going on before the main gate. The lights definitely got rid of the vampires, and they also slowed down the demons that squeezed through the hole.

“Thirty turrets remaining,” someone from the office said.

“They’ll manage,” he answered holding his hands behind his back still observing the screens.

One of the monitors was showing the number of red and green dots. He took off his glasses, and began wiping them against his shirt.

“Could you read the stats to me, Bishop?”

His friend went closer to the screen and peeked at the one showing the view on the main gate. With every person crossing into the courtyard, the number of green dots increased because spiritual activity was very low inside the castle. When he saw the gate being closed, he took a look at the other screen again and read the numbers out loud,

“It’s not so bad I may say. I thought it would be much worse,”

"Just read them, please," the old man replied huffing into the glass.

"The total number of living people is 3524 including 2250 marines, 311 snipers, 339 hunters, 245 medics and 179 other soldiers, but excluding our nine ASATs."

"Tell all the remaining SMAs to join us in the headquarters. We're starting our final battle."

"Apart from Miles, Johnson and Williams, we've got Brown from Charlie, Tylor from Foxtrot, Moore from Golf, Wilson from Hotel and... that's impossible.. According to the computer, SMA Lopez has just been slain during the evacuation."

Arthur put on his glasses and gave his comment,

"That means that we have still eight left ready to command. That's a good thing, Bishop. Originally, there was one to be in charge of five hundred people and now... there are eight plus two of us to command 3500 people," he did the math. "That's actually... um... no... with two of us it's ... yeah I was right, I haven't counted Anderson here. So you, SMAs, deal with the soldiers and marines and I'm gonna deal with ASATs only."

"Sir, eighteen turrets remaining," came the announcement. Arthur looked at the three SMAs on his right.

"You know what to do. I'll deal with my people."

"What about that devil?" Miles asked.

Bishop took a glimpse at Arthur and said in a worrying voice.

"We do know he's responsible for that bridge. It's more than sure that he's somewhere there on his way here."

"This is not what I meant. How to fight him?"

"Leave that to us," Bishop replied.

21.

Amanda crossed the gate running behind her sister who was constantly checking up on her. Suddenly, she saw a spirit appearing among the runners. Someone immediately took it out before it harmed anyone. As she was running, several memories appeared in her head. She tried to block them, but one kept coming back.

It was late 2001. The girls were now living in an orphanage in a small town in France. Amanda was seven and Patricia was eleven. The orphanage, like everyone else had financial problems, and the conditions everyone was living in were poor. The furniture was a few decades old, the walls hadn't been painted since World War II. To make matters worse, the number of sponsors diminished significantly since the 80's. And the local church was the main food supplier. It was evening time. Amanda and Patricia were lying in their beds along with other six girls aged 10-16.

"You're worried about today, aren't you, Amanda?"

Patricia asked sadly seeing her sister staring out the window with fear in her eyes. "It's the fifth anniversary since it killed our parents. You're worried it will come back, don't you?"

"I saw it last year," Amanda replied. "And two years ago, and three years ago. It will come tonight. I fear it will take you from me, I fear it so much."

"You can sleep with me if you like."

Amanda stood up and walked towards her sister's bed. As she was walking, she saw something behind the window and screamed at the top of her voice waking everyone up.

"It's here, it's here," she started to run towards the door as all the other girls began shrieking.

Suddenly, the door opened and a nun rushed in. She was in her late twenties and had a really smooth face. She saw the specter hovering over Patricia's bed, and quickly ran towards it grabbing an iron candlestick from the shelf. She hit the spirit with it and it vanished.

"Girls, swiftly, come with me," she spoke in a voice lacking any worries or fear.

All eight girls stood up and ran with the nun to the corridor, then to the kitchen. She grabbed a bag of salt, spilled it on the wooden floor drawing a circle.

"Step inside and don't go out unless it's over," she said.

Every girl went inside the circle and watched the nun. The woman zoomed to the corridor and disappeared somewhere. At the same

time the specter appeared again. It flew towards the girl but the salt barrier made it stop. The girls screamed again. One of them stepped onto the salt breaking the circle and the specter threw itself at her. Then the nun returned. She was holding some old book and started to read from it in a foreign language using a commanding voice. The spirit was holding a little girl at the ceiling, totally neglecting the nun's presence. The words created some wind inside the room as the walls trembled making everything fall from the shelves. The specter left the girl and rose into the air spreading its bony arms hidden in wide cuffs. Next it started to spin and scream with a high-pitched voice. As the nun finished reading, the specter flickered for a while and vaporized leaving a blast of light that went across the room.

"It's over girls, it's over."

Patricia was gazing at the nun in shock and disbelief.

"Teach me, teach me this, I beg you, teach me that magic."

Amanda ran up to the nun and hugged her tightly as if she was thanking her for saving them that night.

As soon as the main gate closed Tokutei took out his tablet PC and contacted Arthur at once. While he was waiting for his boss to pick up the call, he checked with his eyes whether all the ASATs were inside.

"What is it, Tokutei?" Arthur answered the call.

"Arthur, I saw werewolves in India zone."

"Are you sure?"

"Unless demons look like wolves."

"You met ghouls in the sewage, now werewolves. We're gonna have a very hard fight."

"What are the orders?" Lian asked seeing that soldiers that had just ran inside started to regroup.

Some of them headed towards the castle, others ran left, yet some others were just standing in the middle of the courtyard.

"We need to keep them away for as long as we can. I want you to go above the gate and help the marines there."

"What about me?" Tokutei asked.

"Go with the others and deal with the flying demons."

“Copy that.”

Jason reloaded his weapon and went towards the stairs on the left side of the gate.

“You heard da man, we have the most difficult battle to win now.”

They followed him up the stairs. On their way up they heard lots of concerned voices, and the higher they got, the more shots they heard. The castle was their last stand. All nine zones had been destroyed or abandoned, and this was the only place for them to fight. There was no escape now.

Finally, the stairs ended and they found themselves on the roof twenty yards above the main gate. It was an area of a rectangular shape; about fifty yards long and ten yards wide. The walls were about four feet tall with small platforms for archers, which at that moment were occupied by snipers. There were already more than hundred people engaging into fight and many more were coming on both sides. There were also many bodies of flying demons lying around. Marines who hadn't engaged into fight yet, pushed them down the roof onto upcoming army. Jason could see Eye and Mary already taking their new positions on the left side. When they all got to the roof, they saw two dramatic views.

“Oh my God,” Surya said as her jaw dropped.

She stopped in shock gazing at the northern side of the castle with a large hole going through the roof and ending two storeys lower. She also saw many bricks and debris where the north-eastern tower used to be. Having been in India zone she was unaware of the damage the monster had done. The second view was much worse. Now being so high, much higher than the trees in other zones, she could see the whole island and the bridge. The burning trees below as well as the dark evening sky and the millions of light dots marching towards them reminded her of Hell. She quickly put her worries aside.

“Hey, Lian, you wanted to know what Hell looks like. Not much different from this.”

The Asian woman scanned the area as her eyes filled with tears.

She quickly wiped them out as soon as she saw the wooden walls from both zones being destroyed by demons, and much more running up the hill towards the main gate where the UV spotlights were still active. Now she could see their different distribution. Instead of using single or double UV lights, she saw four, large, rectangular panels filled with round spotlights, approximately three in a row and twelve in a column. At least the castle was vampireproof.

“Hell or no hell. Shoot to kill.”

As soon as a whole battalion of flying demons was destroyed, another one rose from the bridge and was quickly over the castle replacing those who had failed. The smoke from the burning trees covered the sky and limited the visibility. One of the soldiers finished up the clip with regular ammo, he ducked and took cover behind the wall to reload and when he stuck his barrel back, he saw thousands of shiny dots breaking through the smoke.

“Arrows,” he managed to shout and took cover again.

Surya looked up at the falling arrows and commented,

“They’re killing their own kind.”

The others raised their heads and saw that many of the arrows penetrated the flying demons.

“Thousands years of fighting experience, huh?” Michael commented with a gentle smile.

Arrows were not the only weapon they used. After them, the demons used catapults and bombarded the castle with burning balls. But then the bombardment stopped as they heard a sound breaking glass right below them. Amanda’s eyes grew wide as she realized what had just happened.

“The spotlights,” she whispered with terror.

They all got back to their positions. To their horror, none of the spotlights was operating and the remains of the island became dark again, scarcely illuminated by the fire.

“They’re climbin’ up the walls!” someone shouted.

Jack and Jason looked down and they saw not only vampires, but also warthogs walking up the walls as if the gravity never existed.

22.

Dan returned to his laboratory. He wasn't in shock or anything like that. Within a couple of last days he was in Bangkok and Hell and he saw creatures and monsters he had never been aware of their existence. A part of his apartment had just been destroyed a few minutes back and if it hadn't been for the marine, he would have fallen down and probably lost his life. As he was looking for something in his laboratory, he was constantly listening to what was going on outside.

"They're coming from the north!"

"Take them down."

"Harris, God damn it!"

"Behind you."

Yes, these were the sounds of the war between two realms; Earth and Hell. After a few days, Hell managed to take over the island and left now less than 3500 men locked in the castle. They were there outnumbered, tired, wounded, and trying to finish what they had started before the nuclear attack happened. They were the Earth's last chance to save the world of course excluding the nuclear attack.

The boy found what he was looking for. It was something like a missile, very similar to these which are used to launch Eagle Eyes.

"This should work?" the soldier asked.

Dan nodded and pushed the trolley with the missile outside the laboratory.

"I'll handle it. Go fight."

"Good luck."

The marine turned around and headed for the stairs down. Dan pushed the trolley towards the main building. As he turned into the corridor leading to the main stairs, he heard Surya's voice in the headset.

"Where the heck are you, Dan?"

She sounded pretty much concerned. After all, it had been more than half an hour since she last saw him.

"I'll join you in a few minutes. Need to do something first."

"All the spotlights are down, and vampires are breaking into the castle."

"Just a few more minutes, girl. Be patient."

He hanged up and selected Arthur.

"Arthur, listen up. I know the spotlights are down, but it's high time we used the device."

"Do you think it's ready?"

"I'd finished it before we left for Bangkok. It should do the job. I'm heading to the launching area with the missile."

"OK, Dan. Hurry up. The vampires are breaking from all sides."

23.

Another couple of warthens climbed up to the roof in the main structure. Tokutei made a dash towards them at once, and with a few swings of his Bo staff, he burnt through their bodies. As soon as he turned around, he saw a few more from the other side. He rushed there and did the same. Then several vampiric creatures found their way up and he had to deal with them.

"Shoot down, for God's sake," he said trying to catch his breath.

"What do you think we're doin'," Lian replied constantly firing at the climbing creatures.

Having finished the sentence she reloaded her clip with poisoned bullets and as she pointed her barrel down, a vampire leapt from behind the wall, grabbed her weapon and knocked her down. She could feel its dirty, wrinkled hands with long, rough fingernails winding around her neck. She quickly twisted her body to release herself from the grip, placed her legs on the creature's neck, crossing her feet, and loosening her leg and stomach muscles she raised her body from the ground, circled the vampire, breaking its neck and as she was releasing the grip she took her weapon and fired. Another three jumped onto the roof, followed with a few flying demons from above. One of them easily killed a marine and headed for a hunter a few feet further, but the hunter was smarter, ducked, moved to the right and stabbed the creature

with a silver knife.

“We’re not gonna hold for long,” someone shouted as another dozen of vampires climbed up.

Ten seconds later, there were more vampires on the roof than humans, and everybody had to deal with them instead of shooting at the upcoming ones. Surya let go of her weapon and ejected her daggers. She used her dhampiric speed to zoom across the roof, slashing through the creatures, but she was quickly knocked to the ground. She saw something shiny in the tail of her eye, shooting from the main, western tower. She thought at first it was Eagle Eye, but she was wrong.

“Just hold there a few more seconds,” she heard Dan’s voice. The castle was covered with vampires taking over each roof. Hunters used UV grenades to get rid of them. Two of such weapons were even used on the roof where ASATs were. But the light was quickly coved by wings of flying demons, which let the other vampires get to the roof. Some of them headed down the stairs, others spread, yet some others decided to deal with the people. When almost everyone was in a tight situation, the sky flashed with white, bright light. The light covered much more area than a UV spotlight or a UV panel. The missile had risen as high as the cloud levels and acted like a chandelier or a main lamp that illuminated not only the island itself, but also the bridge and some part of the land. Every vampire in a ten-mile radius burnt alive leaving nothing but its clothes and black flakes. The light lasted for about twenty seconds, until the battery drained. Surya threw away the clothes that were lying on her after the vampires, quickly grabbed her gun and the shooting continued. Dan felt proud for a while because his parents’ weapon worked. If it hadn’t been for the hidden coordinates in the necklace, he wouldn’t have found the schemes and constructed the device.

“They’re all dead!” Dan’s voice spread through every channel. “The weapon worked, they’re all dead. No more vampires for a long, long time.”

As the other soldiers and hunters went back to shooting, Tokutei looked around the castle at the empty clothes and the black snow

that was gradually covering the roofs and the courtyard.

“Try to make something for demons, too.”

“Could you please stop playing around, Dan,” Lian joined the conversation, “And move your ass to the roof and help us?”

“Already running, girl.”

Arthur also decided to say a few words.

“Good job, Dan. With this weapon, we would be able to eliminate their kind forever.”

But then he said something quieter, “What is that? What?”

They heard a loud growling noise spreading somewhere over the island. It was too low and too loud to be a flying demon.

“Guys, we spotted some kind of a flying monster heading towards the castle. The turrets and the snipers are already on it.” Patricia hid behind the wall to reload and with her eyes she tried to spot the monster Arthur was talking about. She heard another noise and there it was; a twenty-foot long bird-like monster which looked like a combination of a dragon with an ort and a dinosaur. It was flying right at the gate. Most of the shots focused on it.

“What the hell is that thing?” Jack commented taking a few shots.

“Whatever it is, its skin is as thick as the orts’,” Eye added trying to do something with the fifty caliber sniper rifle, but the monster was much quicker and dodged the bullets. It flew right at the front structure. The Minigun Defense System that was placed in the middle, over the main gate, focused their fire on the bird, but all the bullets rebounded from its skin. The monster grabbed the miniguns with its claws and ripped them off the walls. Then it flew straight up, caught on the part of the wall at the very top and broke it into small pieces. The wind created by its speed knocked everyone on their backs.

“Use fifty K on it,” Eye ordered.

“Or sharp ammo,” Surya added. “If you have any... she tapped her pockets realizing there was none left.”

Dan ran onto the southern roof and rushed towards that structure. He could see the monster rising up in the air. When it was about two hundred yards, it let go of the miniguns that were

clutched in its claws, and the machines began to fall.

"Look out!" one of the hunters shouted realizing that one of the machines will crush against the roof.

"Over my dead body," Lian said raising her Masada rifle and taking a few precise shots.

The Asian girl had switched the ammo into explosive bullets and as soon as one of them hit the falling object, she counted that the blast will move the device slightly off the roof. She was right. At the same time, many snipers and turrets focused their attacks on the monster. Some of the bullets were flying past the bird, others were piercing its wings, yet some others nested in its large body until it finally gave up. It was on the height of three hundred yards where the creature made a grunting noise for the last time and started to fall. Dan was still looking at the monster trying to predict where it will fall.

"Shoot it away, Lian! Shoot it away!" Tokutei kept repeating knowing that they were standing where the body was supposed to fall.

"I'm tryin'" the girl replied shooting another series.

It was useless and too dangerous. The bullets rebounded from its skin and exploded when they were falling. If they kept on shooting it with this type of ammo, the bullets will finally explode right under their noses.

"Run!" someone shouted.

"Get outa' there!" they heard Miles voice in the headset.

"Take cover, fast!" Dan yelled watching the beast gradually gaining speed.

There was no other choice. The roof must have been evacuated and there was very little time. Those who were by the stairs, threw themselves down. Others jumped onto the lower roof right behind this one. Yet some others ran towards the debris of the tower. All in all, everyone tried to leave the roof at once.

"Hurry up!" Dan shouted again when the body of the bird was about hundred yards above them and was still gaining speed. Surya used her speed and grabbed Patricia and Amanda on her way, only to rush to the next roof. Tokutei was right behind her

while the rest of the team decided to run to the roof on their right.

The body finally crushed against the roof with such a speed and force that it destroyed one-quarter of it on the impact. The bricks trickled around and fell like rain onto the courtyard and the roofs nearby raising a cloud of ash and debris into the air.

"Guys, are you OK?" Dan asked reached the end of the southern roof.

He tried to spot them among the soldiers running out of the cloud, but he couldn't.

"Guys! Come in!"

He heard back coughing.

"We're OK. A little bit dusty but OK."

He finally saw Surya with the girls emerging from the disappearing cloud. When it was gone completely, he also saw everyone else standing still and watching the remains of the tower. The body of the bird was covering almost half of it with its one wing hanging loose.

"Now they're gonna break in," someone commented.

Having heard that, Dan spotted dozens of warthens and flying demons getting to the roofs from all sides. It wasn't long till the inevitable order came,

"To the castle, everyone!"

24.

Arthur shook his head and headed towards the exit. On seeing this, Bishop asked,

"Where are you going?"

"To the tower. It's only a matter of minutes before they will be in the courtyard."

"I'm going with you."

And they both left the head office. The remaining SMAs didn't even notice that. Williams turned round to the turret operators.

"How many turrets do we have available?"

"Within the castle... more than a hundred outside and twice as many inside the castle."

“Good,” he turned around to the other SMAs. “So what are we doin’ now without snipers on the roof?”

Johnson scratched his head while Moore dropped his eyes and thought for a while.

“We still have many snipers inside using the windows... and we’ve got the turrets.”

“If I were you,” Miles said. “I would worry about the corridors.

Brown cleared his throat.

“He’s right. We don’t have one entrance to protect, but a dozen. As soon as they reached any of the entrance on the left or right, they will spread everywhere and it will be pointless to continue fighting outside the castle.”

“No, Brown,” Arthur’s voice came through the earwig. “I told you Maldito is impregnable. When everyone is inside, activate the lockdown mode and you’ll see.”

25.

All the ASATs ran inside the castle and headed towards Arthur’s office situated in the main tower. On their way they passed many soldiers and hunters running to and fro. Most of them tried to secure all the entrances, while others ran to the windows to continue firing from there. Now it all seemed to be more and more out of control. People were getting scared even though they spent so much time fighting those creatures. Surya was leading the way up the stairs. She looked back from time to time to make sure whether the others were following her. They passed the last stairs and there was the corridor leading to Arthur’s office. She opened the door. Arthur and Bishop were already there. The old man was checking the screens, he only took a quick glance at ASATs. He was focused on something more important.

“Sir, everyone is inside.

“Good. Activate the lockdown mode.”

“Activating.”

When Dan heard that command, he sighed with relief.

“We just gained half an hour.”

The lockdown mode was activated. Every single entrance to the castle was shut by a thick, iron and salt barrier, which was invulnerable to fire. The barrier was also connected to electricity and if someone decided to touch it, they were quickly given a shock by a high voltage.

“We cannot go into lockdown. There’s a huge hole in the northern roof,” Michael said.

Bishop looked at him and smiled.

“That area has already been cut off. We are in a complete lockdown mode.”

“What about the walls? If they destroyed the lower bailey, they can easily destroy them as well.”

Arthur rested his feet on his comfortable armchair and took a sip of a hot coffee that he had poured during the mode activation.

“They won’t. I had the castle slightly rebuilt to make it monsterproof. And by monsterproof I mean that the bricks are not the castle’s main structure. There’s a titanium installation that goes through the keep. And behind this titanium construction there’s a second layer of the densest element on earth; Iridium. Hence none of the ghosts can cross it. The third layer is made of iron, and the last one is made of bricks again.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Amanda said baffled. “Are saying that the castle is actually a metal construction?”

“Well, inside it is. But only the keep. The southern, northern and eastern parts are made of regular materials and hadn’t been enhanced. Anyway, we are not here to talk about the castle. We have more than an hour till the nuclear attack, and we know for sure that Cizin is either on the bridge or already on the island.”

Everyone tried to focus what Arthur was going to say. None of other thoughts were supposed to pop up in their heads. No feelings, just pure focus on Arthur’s words.”

“If not the demons, then he will be the one who will come and try to take the Seal. It is a hard decision for me, but I have no choice. I cannot hold the Seal, therefore I want you, Tokutei. To hide the Seal in your Katana sword.”

Having heard that, the Asian's eyes grew wide open and he felt warmth filing his body.

"Me? How am I supposed to fight having the Seal in my weapon?"

"Hey, you didn't have problems with it when Seith hid it there back in Hell," Patricia said.

Arthur stood up and held out his hand open. On the inside of his palm, there was a small ring with the symbol of the Seal on it.

"Please, take it and hide in the butt of your sword."

"It's called tsuka."

"Just hide it there, and under no circumstances can you use the ring on any of the demons, especially Cizin."

"Why is that?" Dan asked astonishingly. "You always said he's the best of us."

"I did, thus he's given the Seal to protect, but if he tries to use it on Cizin, he can be killed in no time before he even takes out the ring."

Michael looked around the room processing the information.

"So what are the plans now?"

Having said that, he heard a message in the earwig,

"The gate's been broken, they're in the courtyard."

"We fight," Arthur replied. "Bishop and I are gonna stay here, while you may spread into teams or fight as one. Whatever you decide do not overestimate yourself. If you see you have to pull back, you pull back. If demons break to the keep or if you see Cizin, I want you all to return here and protect this very corridor. This will be our last stand. Any questions?"

Surya raised her hand as she scratched her hair with the second one.

"I have one. Why can't we kill Cizin like we killed all other demons?"

"Surya, You had quite a good luck killing Paymon the other day. But it was only good luck. Remember what it took to kill Shax? We shot her, cut her, stabbed her and she lived. Cizin is her father. He's the most dangerous demon of all. He's the devil himself, the king of Hell. If he outsmarted Solomon he can easily

outsmart us. Therefore the plan is to take him by surprise. When he finally gets here, Tokutei will give me the Seal and I will imprison him. Everything should end then.”

“General, sir,” Williams voice sounded. “You wanted to be informed when they fill the courtyard.”

Bishop grabbed the tablet and sent a reply,

“Good. Activate ADS.”

“Yes, sir.”

Amanda looked at him surprised,

“ADS?”

Everyone seemed to be confused by this name.

“I told you, there is more to this castle than meets the eye. ADS stands for Automatic Defense System. Arthur and I decided to install it a few years back. To cut long story short, this baby will earn some time to regrow.”

“Speakin’ of which,” Jack turned around. “We shall be goin’.” Michael and Patricia immediately followed him.

“Hey, hey, hey, wait,” Jason said remembering something. When he had their attention, he spoke,

“We haven’t decided on our teams yet. Going there as one will make too many openings.”

Tokutei looked at the bottom of his sword and put it away to its saya.

“I don’t think we should argue about teams now. We have our usual teams, and you probably too. There’s no need to mix them.”

“Good choice, Tokutei,” the old man said. “You know your partners, you should work with them.”

And they left the office and headed along the corridor towards the stairs.

“Has it ever occurred to you,” Amanda said. “That if the Seal is real, the figure of king Solomon is real, so that angels exist?”

“Angels?” Michael asked surprised. “Where did ya’ get it form?”

“Silly, you don’t remember the legend? Solomon received

the ring from archangel Michael.”

“Ah yes, there was something.”

They reached the lower floor.

“It’s time we spread,” Jason said. “I’m not saying goodbye. I’m saying good luck.”

“Good luck,” Patricia replied.

Then Tokutei went with Lian, Dan with Surya, Amanda with Patricia, and Jack with Michael.

“I’m going with you,” Jason said to Jack and Michael, realizing that his usual partner was Arthur, who couldn’t leave the office.

26.

Automatic Defense System was activated. In many places of the outside walls of the castle emerged thick, massive barrels consisting of eight smaller ones. The barrels looked like miniguns, but much bigger. Each sub-barrel could fire fifty caliber bullets at any moving target with the speed of three per second, which gave twenty four shots per second from one device. About twenty such devices were hidden within the castle walls, and as soon as they appeared their motion censor recognized the first targets. The system quickly diminished the number of enemies and worked better than expected. However, the number of ammo was getting slowly to 0 because no one expected such a great number of enemies to reach the castle.

27.

Dan and Surya were on the stairs. Surya was constantly glancing at him knowing it would be the time they should have the talk.

“Hey Dan, I think we need to talk. If we don’t do it now, we may not get a chance later.”

The boy stopped and closed his eyes for a few seconds.

“Because we have a lot of work to do, I’ll do it quickly.”

Surya felt nervous. She didn’t know what to do with her hands, she folded them, then tried to put them into her pockets, finally she placed them behind.

"I fell in love with you when I knew you as Natalie and it broke my heart when I learnt that Natalie was dead. When I met you here as Surya, I hated you because of your nature. But you proved to be different, to have still the features of the girl I loved, which I wasn't aware of... I mean the features. I fell in love with you again when I got to know you."

The girl was baffled. She was standing there not knowing what to do.

"You don't have to say anything. Just forget about it for a few hours and come with me kick some hellish ass."

He shot out and now was running down the stairs towards the northern part of the keep. Surya was a few steps behind trying to deaden the words she had just heard. As he turned into the corridor and left the staircase, he heard a familiar voice coming from there.

"Boss, pss. Do you copy?"

He stopped and moved back to see whether his ears played a trick on him. They didn't. Before him stood no one else but his friend Mike trying to communicate with someone through the cell phone.

"Mike?"

The boy raised his eyes putting away the mobile phone and replied,

"Hi Dan."

He wasn't at all surprised on seeing Dan.

"W-What are ya' doin' here?"

But before he had any chance to answer, Surya emerged from behind the corner. On seeing her, Mike turned on his heel and made a dart down the stairs. Dan did nothing for a second trying to understand the situation, but then he saw Surya running past him,

"After him."

"What? W-Why?"

"Tell ya' later," he heard back when Surya disappeared behind another corner.

Not waiting any longer, he rushed downstairs and followed them.

He left the staircase and turned into the corridor leading to the northern part of the castle. The corridor ended with a metal barrier that separated the parts. He saw Surya lying on Mike, holding his both hands behind his back. There were already dozen of men; marines, hunters, martial artists. Dan walked up to them.

"What are ya' doin', girl. He's a hunter like me. Don't you remember him from our group?"

"He's a traitor, not a hunter."

"What? I don't believe you. Mike, tell her she's wrong."

But Mike was lying with his cheek pressed against the floor and said nothing.

"Mike?"

Surya slowly stood up, still holding Mike in such a way to prevent him from running away. The others were only looking at them speechless.

"Your friend, Mike here, has been working with vampires for a long time. He was responsible for many failures. It was him, who gave you wrong information about the vampire shipment, it was him thanks to whom you fell into their trap, it was him, who betrayed the organization."

Dan was looking into Mike's eyes that were filled with anger, directed somewhere at the floor. That specific look told Dan everything. He made a step forward and said with a trembling voice.

"How could you? You? My best friend? How could you betray us like that? How could you lie to us?"

Mike raised his head and looked deep into Dan's eyes.

"Lie? You're blaming me for lying to you? The person who was lying to you for all this years is holding me right now. Tell him, sis."

"I know about Natalie... wait... did you call her sis?"

He made a few steps to the back. Surya dropped her eyes.

"A-Are you siblings?"

"Surprised?" Mike said. "And yes, that means I'm a dhampir, too. I wasn't *evil* all the time. You and me were best friends since childhood. We spent so many missions together. Surya wanted to

join the organization, too, but she couldn't as she looked more vampiric than me. It was then when we created Natalie."

Surya felt awkward for a moment.

"He helped me get closer to humans and help them deal with vampires. But when I decided to kill Natalie, Mike got corrupted and was bought by vampires. Since then he worked against us." Dan was listening with patience and he couldn't believe any word he was hearing.

"Vampires are better creatures, they are stronger, faster, immortal. Dhampirs are closer to vampires than to humans. Sis could never understand this. She hated them. You may both be angry with me. I can't blame you, but I did what I thought was right for my kind. It was me who shot off your search party, it was me who let those vampires inside the castle. I don't even regret that. And you know what Dan, I had you today at my gunpoint. I was about to press the trigger, and I would've done this. I would..."

His sentence was interrupted by a large explosion coming from the end of the corridor. The explosion so powerful that it wiped the metal door off the wall. Mike used this situation to his advantage. He twisted his body to let go from the grip, took out a small dagger from his pocket in his trousers and stabbed Surya with it, then made a slash along the corridor to the south. Dan reacted quickly; he raised his Desert Eagle and squeezed the trigger. One shot, missed, second missed, third missed, then the fourth one hit Mike in the back and he fell down on the floor. After that, Dan slowly removed the dagger from Surya's hip.

"He can heal, too," the girl whispered rubbing her wound with her fingers.

"He won't. I used poisoned bullets," he replied.

Surya was looking at Dan for a while not being able to believe what he had just done. Mike was his close friend after all, and he pressed the trigger as if he ceased to exist to him.

"Don't look at me like this, That fuckin' bastard wanted to kill me."

Meanwhile, many soldiers and hunters engaged into the fight.

They saw warthens and guardians coming in great numbers.

"Dan," Surya tried to say something. "I didn't know you kept contact with him. If I'd known I'd have told you."

"This is not the time for such talk. We have work to do."

28.

Amanda and Patricia were at the main entrance to the castle. There was also Martin Harris. They and a bunch of soldiers and hunters were waiting patiently in the hall and on the winding stairs when a message came,

"We've been breached from the north!"

Amanda looked at her older sister and said seriously,

"It's started. Good luck, sis."

Then a thud came from behind the metal barrier, then another and another and one more. Nothing happened, not even a dent appeared on the smooth surface of the door, but the thuds themselves made everyone get ready for the attack. The barrier was so thick that it didn't let any other sounds through, especially the moans and painful shrieks when the enemies touched the barrier. Silence filled the hall as everyone was staring at the door. For a few seconds no one dared even to breathe, but then the door burst opened, as the metal barrier flew inside and a couple of orts appeared right behind it. The shots spread from the turrets first, then everyone joined in. Another message came,

"Orts breached from the south!"

Before Patricia managed to send the message about the main door breaching, someone from the group did it for her. She put away her tablet and helped the others shoot the intruders. Orts were dying like ants from the turrets. A few warthens tried to squeeze between their bodies, but were quickly eliminated. One of the beasts broke through the fire from the turrets and headed straight for the stairs. It didn't seem to be vulnerable to the bullets they were shooting. Amanda took a closer look at it and shouted loudly,

"Werewolf, silver bullets!"

One of the hunters changed his ammo and aimed at the beast.

The werewolf jumped onto the stairs, ripping two people on its way. As it was aiming for another group, the silver bullets reached it.

"It's now a matter of time before we see more of them," Martin commented in a concerned voice seeing dozen of warthens crawling along the walls and the ceiling.

29.

The fight in the south was getting worse. Michael, Jason and Jack were doing their best to help the others keep everything non human away. Jason changed his ammo into silver one,

"They spotted werewolves at the main entrance. I'll take care of them."

Another creature emerged from the hail of bullets and slowly headed forward. When a bullet hit it, it was pulled to the back, but after a few hits, it made a strange sound and rushed to the front on its four limbs.

"Ghoul!" Jason yelled instantly switching into explosives. Next he fired one precise shot into the monster's body and shouted again,

"Take cover!"

The corridor, wide as it was could not be destroyed by such an explosion, but because of the fact that the ghoul was rushing to the front, everyone had to withdraw. The explosion blew four people away and ripped the monster apart. Jack switched into explosive bullets and shot in the dark at the smoke in front of him hoping one of them would prevent any other ghoul from getting so close. As he was pressing the trigger every few seconds, something knocked him to the ground. He could only see brown-green clothes on it and before he realized it was a zombie of one of the soldiers killed by the blast, Jason had saved him with one of his silver bullets.

"We won't last here for long..." Michael said spotting another ghoul.

"Withdraw! Withdraw!" came the order from the headquarters.

About two hundred people had to move to the next corridor.

30.

In the meantime, Tokutei and Lian were running from the second level of the northern part. There were about fifty soldiers and a few hunters among them. They were being chased by a group of werewolves and demons that had broken their division and made them withdraw.

"Up the stairs, we take them out there!" Lian exclaimed. They turned to the staircase and rushed up the stairs. The shots and explosions were coming from the third floor. Tokutei reached the floor first and stopped at the turn. He let the others pass him. Some of them stopped and pointed their guns at the stairs and when the monsters emerged they shot.

"There's Dan and S," Lian said spotting their teammates in the group fighting there.

"We must return to protect the office," Tokutei said. "If they broke through us, they may have already broken through the others."

"Dan, Surya!" Lian shouted. "We're returning to Arthur." They turned around and quickly ran up to Lian.

"I guess we have no other choice," the boy said wiping sweat off his forehead.

The four of them headed up the stairs leaving everyone behind. Surya looked at them sadly.

"You realize it's probably the last time we see them, don't you?"

"We do," Tokutei replied.

They passed the fourth floor and headed to the tower.

"All ASATs return to the office," Lian gave an order. When they finally reached the corridor leading to Arthur's office they stopped and reloaded their guns.

"What time is it?" Dan asked.

"9:30," Lian replied.

"We have only thirty minutes left."

31.

Arthur and Bishop were watching the monitors. The number of the enemies outside had never been so great, and the magic bridge didn't seem to get emptier. The catapults began to line up outside the castle ready to start the bombardment.

"Thirty minutes, Bishop. Where the hell is Cizin."

On saying this, the barrier separating the balcony from Arthur office burst open to the outside with a tremendous thud.

"Did you hear that?" Dan asked.

Surya was already zooming towards the door and Tokutei was a few feet behind. She rushed inside and was already pushed to the wall. On her right side she saw Arthur and Bishop at the wall a few feet above the ground. The room became darker as the screens were lying broken on the floor and the chandelier above produced slightly reddish light which went off and on every few seconds. In the middle of the room stood a large figure. It was a ten foot-tall, well built humanlike demon. Its head was a skull, covered with nothing but thin skin, no muscles, no horns. Two yellow eyes were nesting in the black eye sockets. It was wearing an armor covering most of its body. The armor at least three foot wide with no scratches on it. A wide, black cape was covering the back of the creature. Its hands were thin and bony, just like its head, and there was no weapon. Surya felt like in Bangkok being stuck at the wall with no ability to move. Arthur managed to shout at the top of his voice,

"He's here!"

When Tokutei heard it he slowed down and ducked extending his right foot forward letting his body slide along the floor. Dan and Lian ran past him and were immediately pushed to the wall. While sliding, Tokutei let go of his Bo staff and drew his sword. Then when the demon used his power to throw Lian at the wall, he gathered all his strength he had left and leapt from the floor right before the desk and aimed his sword at the demon's head. It was the first time he saw Cizin. He didn't think it would be so huge, scary and powerful, but it was his only chance to make it let go of the ASATs. Cizin turned his head at Tokutei and looked at him with

its big, yellow eyes. Tokutei could see many deaths inside of them. When he was close enough to strike a blow, the demon swung his arm with such an anger and high-pitched hiss, that Tokutei was thrown at the wall where the balcony used to be. The power of that swing was far much greater than the previous ones. The force first hit the wall, ripping it off the castle tower. When the wall divided into three, large, irregular pieces Tokutei hit it with his back. He felt such an enormous pain, filling his body that he let go of his sword. Everyone inside were watching him falling down to the ocean along with large pieces of concrete, titanium and iridium. So this is how he would die. This is how he would disappoint the others. Instead of recognizing him as a great warrior, he would be known as the one responsible for the end of the world. He closed his eyes as the piece of wall turned, pushing Tokutei to be under the concrete. He opened his eyes only to see the rocks and the ocean zooming towards him. He closed his eyes again. Two seconds later one piece smashed against the rocks and the two others fell into the ocean.

32.

Cizin swung his hand again pushing away the table and the armchair, then made three fast steps towards Arthur.

"The Seal, now!" he hissed with a petrifying voice.

Arthur replied with a laughter. Lian, Dan and Surya looked at him strangely. How could he laugh at that time when the king of Hell, the devil himself was standing right before his eyes?

"They're breaching the headquarters," a message came through the earwigs and the speakers lying on the floor.

Then Jack, Jason and Michael rushed to the office and ended on the wall as soon as Cizin saw them. Amanda and Patricia were right behind them.

"Stop," Patricia grabbed her sister by her arm and pushed to the back. "We cannot go there," she whispered.

"What is so funny, West?" Cizin squeaked.

Arthur raised his eyes and gave him the answer,

"You just threw Tokutei outside, and the Seal was hidden in

his sword.”

“You’re lying!”

“Read my mind to find out.”

Cizin stepped closer and leaned towards Arthur. His head was as big as Arthur’s chest. The old man saw the scary, yellow eyes staring deep into his. He also saw there death and doom.

“No!” the demon turned around smashing another wall; the one where the screens used to be.

Almost immediately large pieces of the tower fell down covering the office in several places. The chandelier started to flicker more intensively making the room dark every three-five seconds. A few flying demons flew in and landed on the screens. Cizin looked at them.

“Japanese sword in the ocean. Now!”

And the demons flew away.

“Arthur West,” Cizin spoke. “You killed so many of my kind. You killed my son Paymon, my Daughter Shax.”

“I killed Paymon,” Surya said.

Within a second Cizin appeared before her face and looked deep into her eyes.

“You killed my son?”

She didn’t replied but spit onto his face. Cizin grabbed her with one hand, crushed her and threw against the wall. Surya fell onto the floor with broken ribs and back arched to the other side so hard that her stomach opened. Dan’s eyes immediately filled with tears as he felt his body tremble with fear and shock.

“No one ever found all pieces of the Seal. No one. Never has anyone resist me for so long. I admire you for that. Maybe not everyone from your team will end up in Hell. Some of them will make good vampires, others... eminent demons.”

“Tell me, Cizin,” the old man said. “What do you need Earth for? From what I know Hell is much bigger than our planet, and you prefer darkness and warmth.”

“You stupid human, you don’t understand that Earth is only the first step to our goal. We aim at a different realm, and to get there we need to go pass this world.”

"They gonna stop you," Jack said. "They're gonna close your helldoor."

Another message came through,

"They're everywhere... blood... dead."

Cizin smiled and snapped his fingers six times.

"Since I entered the Earth I opened ten more holes on this continent, and with that snapping I added six more. It's over for you anyway."

They couldn't believe his words. Sixteen more portals all over the continent. It's going to be a start of a nuclear war between humans and Hell fought on our soil. The messages were ringing in everyone's ears. One particular focused Michael's and Patricia's attention."

"Johnson is dead... check his vital signs...Johnson is down! Explosive bullets!"

Arthur peeked at his watch. It was 21:35. There was still time. A nuclear attack should wipe them out. As Cizin was walking back towards Arthur, he stopped at Bishop. Something got his attention and he looked into his eyes.

Outside the office, Patricia and Amanda were trying to think of a plan.

"Maybe holy water or exorcising bullets?" the younger sister suggested.

"They work only on possessors in human bodies. Listen sis. We have to rush there and just start shooting. Use explosive bullets and I will use the regular ones. Something must work on it. Amanda nodded and they both walked closer to the door. At the same time Cizin was staring into Bishop's eyes.

"You survived..." he hissed while one of the flying demons flew inside through the hole. Patricia heard the fluttering of its wings as they both stopped at the door. It was holding a bluish katana sword in its hand. Cizin looked at the weapon and made a step towards it.

"Tokutei..." Lian whispered so sadly as tears went down her cheeks.

Now she was sure he was dead. She dropped her head and gave

up. It wasn't supposed to end like this. Now Cizin had the Seal within the reach. He took hold of the sword and turned it upside down to open the bottom. He wasn't gentle or careful at all. He removed the tip by ripping it. Inside, there was a small storage.

"It's over now, we failed," Dan said under his breath.

Cizin looked inside and his big yellow eyes grew even wider as he found nothing there.

"It's empty! Where is the Seal!"

"Here!" a voice said as a dark figure stepped out from behind the flying demon having the Seal on his finger. He pointed it at Cizin and closed his eyes.

"Tokutei!" Arthur shouted with hope in his eyes.

Tokutei was standing there as the flying demon fell dead down onto the floor. He opened his eyes still having his hand in front of him with the Seal on his finger. But nothing happened. No flash, no magic wind, nothing. He only heard Cizin laughing.

"You fool. One does simply not point the Seal."

As he was saying these words, Patricia kicked open the door and straight away ducked behind the table to avoid the blow of the hellish force while Amanda stepped in and headed left. They both started shooting. Cizin hissed as one of the bullets went through his armor and wounded him. At the same time the magical force broke, and everyone fell onto the floor. Cizin hissed again, but this time with anger. He held out his hand and the Seal went through Tokutei's finger cutting it off and flew towards the demon. Arthur sprang to his feet and rushed towards him to take the Seal.

"No!" Bishop shouted as he threw something at Cizin.

At that time three things happened; The Seal landed in Cizin's hand and fell apart when the demon crushed it, another two bullets hit his body, Bishop ran after Arthur realizing the bullets were explosive ones.

Everyone was staring at the whole situation not knowing what to do. Then the object, Bishop had thrown hit Cizin. Suddenly, a bright, white light appeared around him, as he shrieked out of pain. Arthur stopped baffled as Bishop pointed his palm toward the rest of the group and said two words.

“Murum Lucis.”

Then touched Arthur on his forehead and said something else in a foreign language.

The explosive bullets went off causing a sphere of fire spread across the office wiping everything on its way. Jason, Michael and Amanda covered themselves from the fire, but they felt nothing. They saw the fire stop in front of them as if there was a magical barrier protecting them. No one knew what was going on. When the fire diminished, they saw Bishop lying between Arthur and Tokutei. There was no sign of Cizin. The pieces of wood were burning around slowly filling the office with a dark smoke. Amanda, Michael and Jason quickly ran up to them. Their clothes were torn, burnt and they had numerous wounds. Bishop opened his eyes and quickly stood up. He seemed fine. No wounds, not even a scratch

“It’s over now,” He said grabbing a small object from the ground.

“What the hell had just happened?” Jack asked in disbelief seeing Bishop holding the Seal of Solomon.

“I’ll tell you later. We must take Arthur and Tokutei to the bunker. The demons will not bother us anymore.”

“What are you saying?” Lian said kneeling at Tokutei and trying to pick him up, while Dan ran up to Surya.

“Cizin is locked in the Seal. Hell is closed. We have twenty minutes to evacuate everyone to the bunker.”

Amanda rushed to Dan to help him put Surya up.

“Gently,” he said grabbing Surya by her arms and raising her body.

The bones started to heal as the wound on her stomach vanished.

“W-What happened?” she asked in a weak voice.

“We want to know the same,” Amanda replied as Dan hugged Surya tightly.

Bishop put the Seal on his finger and looked at Jason.

“Help me pick Arthur up, while Lian and...”

“Me...” Surya finished.

“Take Tokutei.”

As they were taking them, a message came from the headquarters,

“What the hell happened? The bridge disappeared, the demons are retreating.”

“Williams? Is that You?” Michael asked.

“Yes.”

“Order everyone to head to the hangar. The bunker is right underneath.”

“One more time, what happened?” Jack asked again trying to process the last five minutes.

Bishop looked at him seriously,

“There is no time for it now. I’ll tell you when we’re safe.”

As they were leaving the burning office, Lian turned back,

“Dan, take his sword, please.”

“Of course.”

As they were running, Patricia looked at Bishop. What the heck happened? Why wasn’t he hurt by the blast, who is he? And then she remembered their first meeting.

It was a calm autumn of 2010. She and her sister were walking deep in the woods. They both had backpacks filled with various kinds of equipment. Amanda was holding a mobile phone with a GPS tracker.

“Less than a mile.”

“Good. The sooner we get it over with, the better.”

They were walking straight along a floor covered with yellow and brown leaves that had fallen a few days earlier. Nothing was visible in the distance apart from the trees, and sometimes the night sky.

A few minutes later, they saw a wooden hut in the middle of the forest. It was an old building, at least two-three hundred years old. There was no glass in the windows and the rotten boards looked as if the whole structure would collapse any minute now. A dim light was coming out of a window upstairs as two shadows covered the light for a split a second.

“Something is not right,” Patricia said in a concerned voice and ran towards the door.

Amanda followed her taking a shotgun out of the backpack. When Patricia was at the door she took hold of her pistol and glanced back at her sister placing her index finger at her mouth to remind her to be silent. They entered the hut. There were thumps and steps heard upstairs as if someone was fighting. Patricia sped there right away and stopped at the door leading to the room where the noises were coming from, and waited for Amanda. She then pushed the door and they both rushed inside. They saw a middle-aged woman struggling with a man at the same age. She was wearing old, ragged clothes, had dirty, straight hair and a huge mole on her cheek. The men however, well it was Bishop. The woman knocked him down and threw her hands at his neck trying to suffocate him. Bishop touched her hands and she immediately let go as if she was pushed away. Patricia took a few shots at the woman. She stopped and looked at her chest as the bullets dropped out.

“Another immortal one,” Amanda said feeling for her machete at the other side of the backpack.

At the same time Bishop managed to stand up. He seemed to be hurt because blood was trickling down his forehead. Amanda made a step forward and slashed the head off the woman.

“Burn the body and the head!” Bishop said pointing at the fireplace on the other side of the room.

Patricia grabbed the head and threw it into the fire, while Amanda and Bishop dragged the headless body. They stood in front of the fireplace and watched the body burn.

“Who are you?” Patricia asked.

“My name is John Bishop, I’m a hunter, too... in some way. And you’re the famous Brown sisters; Patricia and Amanda. I heard much about you.”

"You did?" Amanda asked peeking at the fire.

"Actually, I've been watching your work for a long time, and I must admit, WOW, I'm impressed. In fact, since we already met in person, I would like to offer you a job."

"A job?" Patricia asked. "We worked on our own."

"Just listen to me. My friend and I are creating a special group to deal with such things, like this witch. We look for the best of the best and you suit the profile."

"A group you say?" the older sister murmured scratching her head.

"Yes. We provide luxurious accommodation, company of other people doing what you do, unforgettable missions, and of course, six-figure salary."

"Per year?" Amanda inquired.

"Per month."

Patricia put her hand on her sister's shoulder.

"I don't know. It may be some kind of a trick. What if he turns out to be a pervert."

"Ha ha," Bishop laughed. "I'm not a pervert."

"Perverts always say that."

"In fact I can tell you that my dear friend is Mr. Arthur West, and yes, the very Arthur West that popped into your minds."

"Hmm," Amanda rubbed her eyes.

It was too much information for both of them.

"Tell you what. Here is my business card," he handed them two small pieces of paper. "If you do make any decision, give me a call."

33.

Every single demon, ghoul, zombie or werewolf that was on the bridge fell into water. Those who were in the castle, turned around and left the building in a hurry heading for the tunnel.

Soldiers who could still fight shot those who were running away. Turret operators did the same, then everyone rushed to the hangar. The corridors were covered in bodies of soldiers and monsters. There were also many zombies wondering around that needed to be shot. Some floors were destroyed to such a degree that the titanium layer was exposed; others were covered in black stains. Most of the paintings were either completely destroyed or still burning. The stench of death and rotten meat was hovering in the air. The whole structure looked like one, big graveyard.

34.

What happened in Arthur's office? How did Tokutei appear out of nowhere? How did Cizin get locked in the Seal? Why didn't the fire reach the ASATs? So many questions were constantly wandering in everyone's head.

It all started about a few hours earlier when Arthur and Bishop were going back to the headquarters after having a small talk with the ASATs. They were going along the corridor when Arthur took out the Seal and gave it to Bishop.

"We have to be smarter than Cizin. He cannot fool us."

"I have a good plan already. I believe it will work."

Bishop knew that when Cizin would come, he would be able to read Arthur's mind, but not his, so he had to fool everyone in order not to let Cizin know the truth about the Seal. He told him to give Tokutei the Seal, so he could hide it in his sword. Bishop knew that Tokutei would try to use the Seal on Cizin even though he was told not to, but he didn't expect Tokutei to be so good and actually get as close to the demon as he did. Bishop had switched the Seals and gave Tokutei the fake one, while he kept the real one on himself. He wanted Tokutei to act as a distraction. He hadn't predicted yet that Cizin would use such a power on Tokutei that would actually throw him out. At that time, he had to find a way to stop the magical force that was holding everyone at the door. Patricia and Amanda were his only chance.

While Tokutei was falling with the piece of the wall over him and his sword was gaining bigger speed because of the slower air

resistance, he pressed his feet against the wall, bent his knees and pushed himself off the piece accelerating to such a point that he hit water quicker than the wall did. As he was below the surface, he swam away not to be crushed by the drowning piece, took hold of his sword and headed towards the rocks. He wanted to get back to the tower, so he started climbing. He took out the Seal and placed it on his finger to use it in the office. When a few flying demons appeared. He killed two of them and used one as a vehicle, hiding on his wide back and holding the sword in such a way that if anything went wrong he would cut the demon. When the creature landed back in the office, Tokutei stuck a little needle into his spine to paralyze its body, then made sure, Cizin won't see him. When Bishop saw Tokutei emerging from behind the flying demon, he knew that he would try to use the fake Seal and everything could go according to his plan. Cizin laughed at him for pointing it when, the correct way was throwing it at the demon. When Cizin ripped the Seal with Tokutei's finger, and the girls stepped in, this was a perfect distraction. However, Bishop hadn't assumed they would use explosive bullets. He also hadn't thought Arthur would act desperately and threw himself to save the Seal. When the magical force let go, Bishop acted fast and threw the real Seal at Cizin. He quickly rushed to the front to save Arthur from the explosion. With a spell he created a wall of light to protect the rest from the blast, but he couldn't do it for Arthur and Tokutei. So he had to make a quick decision and save either Arthur or Tokutei.

35.

Jack was waiting at the massive door looking at everyone who was coming in. He could see the time in his microcomputer. It was 21:58. Two minutes to the nuclear attack.

"Keep the door open," he heard Bishop's voice and seconds later he saw him and Jason carrying unconscious Arthur. "There are still people out there."

"We need to close the door in one minute."

"One minute is enough," Bishop said heading towards Lian,

Amanda, Patricia and Surya.

Tokutei was lying unconscious on a piece of clothing while Lian was treating his wounds. The rest of the ASAT girls were helping medics with other casualties. Jack checked the time again. The minute changed to 21:59. Seven soldiers ran inside.

"Close the door," one of them said loudly. "There's no one else... at least no one alive."

He did as they said and ran towards the others. There were more than two hundred people in the bunker, not only soldiers, but also many hunters, mercenaries and civilians from the castle. Among them there were SMAs Williams, Miles, Brown, Wilson and Moore, snipers Mary Wilson, Thompson and Eye, hunters Lednicky, Martin and Jennifer Young.

Jason stood up and said as loud as he could. Most of the people gathered there were wounded, tired and sieved with not relief, but fear of the nuclear blast.

"It's gonna get pretty loud out there, so everybody lie on the ground and cover your ears. Everything's gonna be alright," he turned around and walked fast towards his friends. "I hope."

"This is it," Dan said quietly, putting his tablet onto the ground so that everybody around him could see the view from the turret directed at the shore.

The EMF readings were showing twelve. The time changed to 22:00 and everyone covered their ears gazing at the feed. Nobody dared to move or to say anything. They were all waiting for the inevitable. Dan felt Surya's warm palm on his as their fingers bent together. Patricia and Amanda did the same. They saw nothing, apart from the dark clouds spreading away.

Bishop frowned as he saw nothing on the screen. He checked the time; it was now one minute after ten.

"They're never late," he said under his breath. "Never."

"What?" Jack asked taking his hands away from ears.

"Something's wrong."

Everyone exchanged strange, confused looks as Jason stood up and switched the feed on his tablet.

"So what now?"

Bishop grabbed the tablet and selected Whitehouse from the list.

“We shall find out.”

He could hear the dialing signal in the earpiece and waited patiently for the president to pick up.

“Why isn’t he pickin’ up?” Lian asked.

“I don’t know.”

Then suddenly, Tokutei started to tremble. Lian and Jack made a slash there instantly.

“He’s ceasing,” the girl shouted.

“We don’t have the right meds here,” John said sadly.

“Don’t tell me what we have and don’t have, but fetch some medic here quickly!” Lian yelled.

Tokutei shook as if his body was about to give up. His eyes blinked rapidly and then he fell numb onto the piece of cloth. Lian placed her two fingers at side of his neck.

“No pulse!”

She placed two hands on his chest and began pushing trying to bring his body to life.

“One, two, three four...” she counted than checked the pulse. Then again pushed her palms onto his chest and checked the pulse again.

“Someone bring a defibrillator!” she exclaimed and continued.

Everyone stood around and watched the situation. Amanda felt for her pistol at her side and slowly took it out. She knew someone had to pull the trigger before they would have a zombie in the bunker.

36.

One minute Arthur saw Cizin in bright light, the other he saw darkness. A few minutes later everything became pure white. He could hear some voice; a very familiar one, a voice he hadn’t heard for a long, long time. He couldn’t understand anything yet, but his hearing was coming round. He knew he had his eyes opened, but still, everything was bright and he couldn’t see anything.

"His waking up!" a muted voice came from somewhere.

"Arthur, honey," he heard a female voice.

The picture changed from bright into a blurry, but he couldn't recognize anything yet.

"He's waking up! He's waking up!" the same voice exclaimed. He could hear a few people running into the room. Then he felt a touch on his arm. Next a cold thing touching his chest.

"Everything seems normal," some other female said. Now his vision got back and the blurry objects became vivid enough to see the details. His eyes filled with tears when he recognized the person before him.

"Arthur, thank goodness."

"A-Alice?"

"I thought I lost you."

The woman in front of him looked like his former wife, a little bit older, but still pretty. She held his palm tightly and tears appeared in her eyes. Then everything came back to him; the fight, the nuclear weapon, Cizin. He sat up feeling pain in his back.

"The Seal," he said.

"Easy," the doctor standing on his left said. "You've been out for seventeen years."

"What! What are you talking about?" his jaw dropped and his eyes grew wide filling with terror and shock.

Alice came up to him and put her arms around her.

"It's too much for him. Arthur. It's gonna be hard, but you need to know the truth."

Arthur was sitting there speechless not knowing what was going on.

He was in a hospital room, God knew where, with people he didn't know but his wife.

"Arthur it's 2012, December 23rd, to be precise."

"I know what day it is."

Both doctors and her looked at him astonished. How could he know what date it was?

"Arthur, listen to me for a second. In December 1995 you had a car accident. You were found unconscious in your burnt car.

Doctors were trying to wake you up, but there was nothing they could do. You were in a coma for seventeen years. Till today, you... you finally woke up.”

Arthur couldn't believe what was going on. This was not what he remembered. What happened to ASATs? To Cizin? But on the other hand, demons? Getting rich by finding a diamond ore? End of the world? The Seal? ASATs? Could that all have been in his head? After all he was sleeping for seventeen years and minds can play lots of tricks on us while we sleep. So what now?

Book 3

Visit <http://asatthebook.com> to find out.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Keyth was born In Poland In 1984. He was raised only by his mother and having only one parent made his childhood different from a typical one. After graduating high school, he studied English language in Polish city of Legnica and made a Master's degree in English language . Since 2006 he has been working as an English teacher in the very high school he graduated from. He has never stayed in a native English country for longer than two days, but even though he decided to write in English. Being Polish and not being influenced by books but movies and TV series makes his work different from American and British literature. His series of novels- A.S.A.T. , Anti-Supernatural Assault Team- is an action, horror, adventure project directed mainly to young adults, but it has also become popular among older and younger generation.