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A.S.A.T.



ANTI-SUPERNATURAL ASSAULT TEAM

BOOK 0

A.S.A.T

Anti-Supernatural Assault Team

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<http://asatthebook.com>

Book 0- Fresh Blood

SUMMARY

A.S.A.T. (Anti-Supernatural Assault Team) is a special group created by a billionaire Arthur West. They consist of 6 best people Arthur could find. Their main aim is to find 5 pieces of the Seal of Solomon so they can stop the demon that is responsible for the end of the world in 2012.

Book 0 tells the history of each member and how they become members of A.S.A.T.

THIRD EDITION

Book 0- Part 1- Arthur West

It all started with him.

December 14, 1995

1.

It was a cold evening, the sky was full of thick, black clouds and it looked like it would rain. Arthur West was working on his computer in the office which was situated in the south part of the city. He was of medium height, slim and in his early forties. His brown hair had only just started to turn grey.

Arthur looked at the clock sitting next to the computer screen. It was 9:58pm.

“Just two more minutes and you’re free,” he murmured to himself staring at the tiny clock in the bottom-right corner of his screen.

The day wasn’t an easy one, as always. Being over forty and still having to work for 10 hours on a computer, made his job mundane and tiresome. Yet, the money was good and it was the only thing that kept him coming there over and over again. The time changed to 9:59pm.

“I’m done.” he mumbled enthusiastically, shutting down the program he was working on and then standing up.

There was only one woman inside the building working a few boxes further away. She looked at him and asked,

“Why so early Arthur?”

He looked at her with indifference.

“I’m done for the day thank god” came the bored answer.

“I have to stay until eleven. I have way too much work to do!” complained the woman as she got back to her work.

Arthur walked up to a hanger beside the door, grabbed his jacket, put it on and turned his head towards his colleague, saying,

“Bye Jane, see you later.”

“See you tomorrow Arthur,” the woman called as Arthur was reaching to turn the door knob.

He simply opened the door and left. However, at that time they both didn't know that Arthur was here for the last time.

2.

The office was situated inside a tall skyscraper with a gigantic underground parking area. Arthur was walking along a lane in the parking lot heading towards his car; an old white mustang - his dream car. He put his hand in his pocket to take out his keys. They weren't there. He nervously tapped himself in all the places and pockets where the keys might be, yet he found nothing.

“Not again,” he said with disappointment.

Arthur had no choice but to return to his office.

Of course they were there. Where else could they be? It happened a few times that month but he still didn't learn his lesson. Not thinking much, he immediately turned around and rushed back to the lift. When he got back to the office, Jane was still working on her computer.

“Did you forget your keys again?” she asked raising her head from the keyboard.

“Yeah, as always.”

Arthur went up to his desk and his eyes scanned it carefully. The keys were next to an old printer. He picked them up and put them away into the inside pocket of his jacket.

“Bye again,” he said to Jane.

“Bye,” the woman answered with a silent laugh.

3.

Three minutes later Arthur got downstairs to his car. He opened it briskly and threw his suitcase onto the back seat. Then he got in shutting the door behind him. Although it was London, the white mustang had the steering wheel on the left side. He had bought it while he was in the USA in late 70's to do some menial jobs. It was a clean renovated car with no scratches on it. The owner must have taken good care of it and he did too. Twice or three times a week, Arthur would polish and wax it. He loved this machine.

Arthur fastened the seatbelts and turned the key causing the engine to start with a loud, typical roar. Afterwards, he pulled back, switched the radio on, and headed for the exit.

“And here is the weather forecast for the British Isles,” a nice soft woman's voice on the radio announced. “The wind is getting heavier that may result in a heavy storm with thunders,” the gentle voice continued.

“Storms in December, that's weird,” Arthur said under his breath as his car emerged from the underground parking lot. “Forget this, I'm gonna listen to some music,” he yawned as he pressed a small button on his car radio to change the station.

Some sad song was being played.

“No, not this one,” he grumbled while pressing the button again.

A new station was playing some old rock song.

“Yeah, that's more like it, oh yeah,” he said joyfully.

Arthur drove through the city then headed west outside London to get quickly to his village.

It was an addictive trend for the new rich to move outside London to the villages nearby. They needed to run away from all the city noise to the peaceful and quiet cottages. Although they lived in their desired silence, they still spent way too much time on getting to their jobs. Arthur was one of them.

As he was turning into the motorway, he spotted some dark clouds coming from the west. The tree branches started to wave faster and faster rustling with the remains of the leaves that hadn't been taken by Autumn. A few minutes later, he was driving along a narrow

country lane listening to some old rock hits. The darkness of the upcoming clouds covered the light of the rising moon. Suddenly, it started to pour. Big, heavy, thick raindrops attacked the windscreen.

“Fuck!” He screamed angrily frowning his high forehead.

Heavy drops of rain were banging against the car body and the strong wind was rocking the speeding Mustang. The bright flashes of lightning struck the trees of the forest around. The man focused his eyes upon the road ahead and slowed down. He could barely see anything through the wet windshield of his car. The windscreen wipers were flickering from right to left making the road visible only for a while, before the raindrops dripped it over. Suddenly, a massive tall tree that had been struck by lightning fell to the ground. Arthur pulled the wheel to the left as hard as he could trying to avoid the limb. Two tyres felt the rough gravel and the car skidded past the tree, skimming its branch and eventually got back on the road.

“Holy shit! That was a close one!” he sighed wiping the sweat from his forehead as his heart thumped. Having finished the sentence, he saw a shining sphere falling from the sky on the empty road ahead.

“What...the...fuck?” he wondered to himself pressing the brakes hard causing a loud screeching sound of the tyres that started to get out from under the chassis.

The back of the car started to turn but Arthur was still in control of the vehicle. The unknown, mysterious thing looked like a ball made of light, shooting white bolts in all directions. The sphere was no bigger than a basketball and it moved quickly towards the car.

“You won’t make it,” his mind raced, as he was trying to stop his speeding Mustang. Moreover, he was moving too fast and as a result, the car and the ball bumped into each other with huge speed. The windscreen broke immediately and the ball darted inside making a horrible sound of electrical discharge. The tiny flashes of lightning spattered around penetrating Arthur’s body. He didn’t even have time to scream or to do anything as he had lost consciousness out of fear and shock. At the same, the vehicle made two spins filling the air with loud screeching and stopped on the gravel next to the road. The bolts were visible for a few seconds before the ball diminished and vanished leaving no trace after itself, only the half-destroyed car.

4.

A few hours passed. Arthur slowly opened his eyes and everything was blurry.

“What the hell happened?” he quizzed himself looking around his burnt car.

The seats were soaked. The windscreen was gone and everything was covered with burnt stains. First, Arthur gently checked himself looking for any wounds. His hands touched every part of his body, though to his surprise, there were hardly any bruises. No burns, no wounds, nothing serious.

“What the heck happened to me?” he tried to remember.

Then it hit him. He remembered the storm, the tree, the lighting and the mysterious sphere. But he also saw some sandy dunes and desert in his head. He slowly opened the door of his car and stepped out.

“Not my Mustang!” he whined grumpily contemplating his seriously burnt car.

The left headlight was smashed and the front was covered with leaves and smoke stains.

His precious car, his dream, was destroyed. He had been saving for this particular vehicle since it came out. And now? He would have to spend even more money on it than he spent in 77.

“My wife’s gonna fucking kill me,” he despaired resting his arms over the roof. But then he wiped his eyes and got back into the car. He took a glance at his watch and couldn’t believe it was past midnight.

“No way, I must get back home.” He gently placed his palm onto the key and slowly turned it. The engine started with a roar.

“Phew, she still works,” he sighed with relief, pressing the gas.

Arthur left the gravel and headed back to the road. It was covered with leaves and broken branches but the sky was clear and no cloud was in sight. He still had a few miles to his home but now, he drove slower having his head filled with questions

“What was that thing, and why and how, for God’s sake, I’m not hurt?”

5.

The car arrived in the village about ten miles from London. There were only a few houses, and the light was off in almost every one of them.

“Everyone is sleeping, or the storm damaged the power cable,” he thought.

The car stopped in front of an old wooden cottage, surrounded by trees. The neighbours’ houses were far from this one. Arthur got out of the car and glanced over the vehicle shaking his head with sadness. Suddenly, he saw a light turning on inside and remembered that his wife was definitely worried sick about him. He locked the car door and rushed inside the cottage. As he was entering and taking off his coat, he saw a woman standing in the middle of the hall.

“Where the heck have you been? I was so worried!”

Alice, his wife, was a medium-height woman. She was a few years younger than him, but her face had begun to cover with wrinkles in the eye area. Her hair was nicely dyed blond, pinned for a night and her slim body was hidden underneath a green nightgown. Arthur was still in shock and didn’t know what to begin with.

“I-I-I was...” he tried to say something while hanging his wet jacket, covering the burnt hole.

“Are you OK? Did anything happen?”

“Honey...”

“You always call me when you’re late...” the woman interrupted “... always! I called your work, but Jane said you’ve already left. Then the downpour came and you didn’t come home. I thought the worse...”

Arthur spotted a few tears pouring out of her blue eyes. His shock faded. He knew he must tell her something, but what to begin with.

Alice, calm down. I thought I would be here by eleven, but the storm... the rain was so heavy... there was something on the road, some kind of a ball of light, or something, it hit me and I lost control of the car and... and... No, this version was too hard for her to bare. He couldn’t say it.

“The downpour... that’s why I’m late, Alice.” Arthur said calmly. “I couldn’t see anything through this thick, heavy rain, so I simply waited at the parking lot until it was gone.”

“Thank goodness you didn’t drive in such awful weather,” Alice smiled wiping the tears off her cheeks and turned around. “Come to the kitchen, I’ll make you something to eat.”

“Good, I’m starving,” he replied with relief.

He was surprised that Alice believed in his lie. She must have been in a small shock too because she couldn’t notice his torn jacket or maybe because it was soaked. Arthur took the shoes off, and then followed her, turning the light off in the corridor.

6.

One hour later, Arthur was finishing brushing his teeth in the bathroom. He couldn’t stop thinking about his lovely car and the mysterious sphere.

“What if she sees the car? She would definitely know I lied to her. Hmm... I know...I’ll just go to bed and try to fall asleep. No thinking. No talking. I’ll explain everything tomorrow.”

Suddenly, he heard the clock strike. It was coming from the living room that was situated downstairs. A few seconds later the second strike came filling his ears.

“Just great, 2 o’clock and only four hours of sleep to go.”

He quickly left the bathroom and headed for his bedroom where his wife was already lying waiting for him. The bedroom wasn’t too big. There was enough space for a double bed, a wardrobe and a table. The bed was placed against the wall, between the door and the wooden window with old-fashioned curtains.

“Please turn off the light,” his wife asked yawning.

Arthur reached to the switcher and pressed the button. The room became dark. He felt for the bed and laid down.

“I’m really tired after today darling,” he said covering himself with the quilt, “So let’s sleep and we’ll talk tomorrow babe.”

“I’m tired too. Good night then babe.”

“Good night.”

Arthur turned over to the other side and closed his eyes. The thoughts from that night hit him again.

What was this sphere? Some kind of UFO? Some governmental experiment? Why the hell am I seeing some sands?

“You know what Arthur?” Alice whispered.

“Why do you always wanna talk when I want to sleep?” he replied angrily to avoid the lie to come out.

“I just wanted to tell you something what happened to me today,” she said calmly.

“Can’t it wait till tomorrow? I told you I was tired.”

“I know, but this was really strange. Just listen, will you?”

“OK...” his attitude changed immediately on hearing *strange*. Maybe it had some connection with what happened to him.

“Something weird happened to me today.”

Even though Arthur had a difficult and a weird night as well, he wanted to hear what his wife had to say. After a moment of listening to Alice’s breath, waiting patiently for the next sentence, he boomed, “Well, what happened to you?”

Alice took a deep breath and said,

“I killed a cat.”

“If you killed it with a spade or something then it would be strange” Arthur laughed silently.

“No!” Alice denied, “I accidentally ran over it when I was coming back home.”

Arthur overturned so he was facing his wife. He knew he had to end the conversation somehow.

“Everyone kills animals in their lifetime. There is nothing weird in it,” he explained casually.

“B-But, when I stopped the car and came up to the cat... to check if it’s alive, I saw that its eyes were different.”

“What do you mean?” Arthur wondered, as his interest rose.

“T-They were not like any normal cat’s eyes. I mean, they were not grey or brown, but red as b-blood.”

Arthur’s breath stopped for a while.

“Red?” he asked in disbelief. “Maybe they were soaked with blood?”

“But the worst thing was... I was getting back to my car and I remembered these two superstitions my grandma used to say.”

Not again, her grandmother's superstitions. In the beginning of their marriage she was addicted to the superstitions. Don't go under the ladder. If you break a mirror, you will have seven years of misery, or don't open your umbrella indoors. But after her grandmother's death, Alice learnt her way to live without them... well with the help of a psychiatrist.

“She used to say that if you kill a black cat, Devil will come for you, or you will see Devil before you see another black cat”

Arthur could sense fear in her voice but he was sick and tired of her grandmother's superstitions.

“You know what I think of it right?” he said calmly. “Superstitions do not apply to your life.”

“Hmm, B-But...”

“No buts, Alice! I don't want to go through it again!”

“Me neither, b-but those eyes... I don't know.”

“Alice, please. Can we go to sleep now?” Arthur asked.

“OK!” the woman said irritated turning over to the other side.

“Good night and sleep tight.”

“Good night, you too.”

7.

The clock downstairs struck four times. Alice and Arthur were fast asleep. The light from Venus was falling into the room through the window, creating a hardly visible tree shadow on the floor which was gently moving as the wind blew. Suddenly, a sound of footsteps spread around. Alice woke up, turned over and looked at Arthur with her half-closed eyes. He was sleeping like a baby snoring from time to time. Her eyes closed again and she fell back onto a pillow landing back in her dream. Then she heard the silent footsteps again. She opened her eyes rapidly and turned over to the right side of the bed, towards the sound of the footsteps. What she saw worked on her as if she had drunk at least two coffees. Her eyes wide opened. Her heart started to beat twice as fast. There wasn't any light at the bed yet she could see a clear blueprint of some humanlike shape. It was sitting on her side of the bed and was slowly scanning the room. When it turned its head at Alice, the top part of it met the weak light revealing a pale face with large, black holes instead of eyes. Alice immediately started screaming, as her eyes grew wide with terror. The ugly creature stood up and stepped to the shadows near the door. The scream woke up Arthur.

“What the heck happened?” he asked, then noticed the dark blueprint of the monster in the shadows. Arthur tried to get up and do something about it but he couldn't move.

“I can't move!”

Alice didn't stop screaming. She caught her breath every few seconds and kept on shrieking.

“Oh come on!” the very low voice spoke. “Maybe the more familiar nature of mine will not scare you,” he added emerging from the shadows.

To everyone's surprise the shape that came out from the shadow straight away changed into a human one. There were no black holes anymore and it looked like a fifty-year old man.

Arthur couldn't believe his eyes, neither could Alice. She stopped screaming but she still couldn't say anything.

“Who-Who are you?” Arthur asked in a trembling voice. “Do you want money? It's downstairs!”

The man sat back on the bed looking at the bed-ridden couple. He had short dark hair, a long face and reddish eyes. He was wearing a black suit with a black shirt underneath.

“Money? Ha, ha. I don’t want your money.”

“A-Are y-you d-death?” Alice whispered in a quivering voice.

“Death?” the creature laughed. “I’m far worse than him.”

Arthur tried to release himself from the mysterious magical boundary that paralysed his every muscle apart from his face. Alice was sitting right next to him, not even being able to turn her head. She was soaked with fear, and deep down she knew what was going on.

“I was sent today on Earth to deliver something important.”

The dimmed light covered his eyes with shadow so neither Alice nor Arthur knew who he was talking to.

“... and you with your fancy car just ran over this body.”

“T-The ball of light?” Arthur stuttered still trying to free his body from the invisible force.

“The ball of light? What? No!” came a surprise answer.

“I didn’t come here for you,” the creature told Arthur, “I came here for her,” he added pointing at Alice.

“You know, Alice,” he moved closer to the scared woman. “Your grandmother was right”.

Her jaw dropped but nothing more could she do.

“Surprised Alice? Huh?”

The girl only nodded and her breath sped up.

“Don’t you know Alice,” the old man asked, “That devil will come for you if you kill a cat?”

Alice was trebling with shock. Arthur couldn’t believe his eyes and ears. “Isn’t that what she used to say?”

“A-Are y-you D-Devil?” Alice asked with a stuttering voice.

“Not THE devil, but A devil yes. Well, actually a demon but many a person calls me devil so I got used to it” he answered casually. “But you know, Alice, the cat you killed was one of my special ones.”

“What are you saying?” Arthur hissed.

“Let me explain this simply: There’re many kinds of demons,” he started to talk fast as if he was saying it for the hundredth time, “Some of them are stronger than the others, blah, blah, blah. But those who’re weak can’t possess a human so they have to use animals, in that case a cat, blah blah blah. Anyway, when you hit me, you made me leave the cat’s body and I had to start over again. And you don’t even realize how long one has to wait in a queue to be sent here again. Luckily, I know a few powerful demons.”

“I-I’m sorry,” Alice wept.

“Leave her alone!” Arthur yelled with anger.

“Who asked you for your opinion?” the creature said irritably.

He pointed his dirty finger at Arthur while his red eyes became even redder for a split second, then they became large and black which caused Arthur to be pushed away with a magical force. Arthur landed on the floor between the window and the bed knocking over the table. He could feel that the magical force got stronger and paralysed his every muscle fixing his eyes on his wife and the demon. He tried to focus his thoughts but the same images popped into his head; the sphere, the unknown desert and his Mustang. Alice started to scream again.

“No way!” the creature complained rolling his reddish eyes. “You want to be silenced too?”

Alice shook her head and stopped screaming as her tears were running down her smooth, shaky cheeks.

“So please shut up already!”

Arthur wanted to do something but his whole body was paralysed. He couldn't move and his eyes were frozen on Alice and the creature.

"P-Please l-leave us a-alone" Alice stuttered.

"Hmm I don't think I can" the man replied indifferently. "You see, I was waiting for ten months to be sent on Earth. A cat was the best I got then. But on the other hand, if it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have got this body. Anyway, I don't like you. Alice, I think you deserve some punishment."

Alice was shaking her head crying silently "No, n-no." Arthur could do nothing, not even move a muscle.

"I-I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

The man rolled his eyes again, "Typical behaviour." He sounded as if he was having fun doing what he was doing.

Alice was staring in disbelief and stuttered her last sentence,

"B-But it was an-an accident."

"B-B-B-But" the demon mocked her, pointing his finger towards Alice, then moved it quickly towards the wall.

The mysterious force raised and pushed the woman's body and smashed it against the wall with the power so huge that it could be compared with the rushing train. The whole body spluttered and blood trickled everywhere covering the whole room in stains.

"Oh, that was also an accident," the monster said amusingly.

Arthur was forced to watch it without a blink. The mysterious creature looked at him and said.

"If anyone asked, I wasn't here."

Then he pulled back into shadows, turned around and left. Simultaneously, the mysterious force that was restraining Arthur from making any move vanished. He burst out with tears. He cried and howled releasing the sorrow accompanied by grief dwelling inside of him. He immediately stood up from the bed and rushed outside. The man was nowhere to be seen. As soon as he ran through the front door, he fell down on his knees leaning his hands against the ground. The tears were running down his cheeks like a stream.

"Alice!" the man's scream combined with weep and howl spread around filling the area.

Yet, there was no one who could hear him. His voice echoed among the nearby trees. He couldn't do anything at that point. Witnessing his wife brutal death was unbearable experience. But not only this, he was also a witness to supernatural activities and he learnt that demons were real.

8.

Another few hours passed and the sun began to rise. Arthur was lying cringed in front of his house. It was very cold but he didn't feel it. His eyes were closed and he was asleep, unaware of the cold that was making him pale. He slowly opened his eyes and looked around. Suddenly, the memories of the previous night tragedy stroke his mind. He sprang up, went to his house, grabbed some money from jar in the living room, took out the car keys from his jacket and put another jacket on. Then he rushed outside and looked back at the window of his bedroom only to see that it was covered with blood stains. For a moment he closed his eyes to see the images again: Alice greeting him the previous night, making him supper, then being brutally turned into leaking pieces of meat and blood. He also saw the sandy desert again. Arthur opened his eyes and got into his car, started the engine and took off forgetting to shut the house front door. In fact, he didn't even call the police or anyone else for that matter. He just simply left.

February 3, 1996

9.

Arthur found himself in Botswana, Africa. The sun was in the zenith and the heat was unbearable. He was driving an old jeep across Kalahari Desert. There was an old lane or rather a path that connected the two towns. Next to him, there was sitting a black man; a typical one for the region.

“Why exactly are we here?” the black man shouted in order to break his voice through the noisy sound of an old engine.

Arthur took a glance at a small picture attached next to the wheel. There was a young blonde woman in it, Alice. He glanced back at the man.

“Something tells me that here I would find what I am looking for,” he replied.

“Which is what?” The man asked again doubtfully.

Arthur looked ahead.

“I don’t know yet, Kubey. But I do know it’s near.”

Suddenly, Arthur spotted something in a distance.

“Look! Can you see it Kubey?”

The tall black man with short curly hair and a wide mouth screwed up his eyes trying to see what his colleague was seeing.

“You mean the trees?”

Arthur pressed the gas harder and the white jeep accelerated. They both felt a stronger wind on their sweaty faces.

“No, below the trees, those huge rocks,” he said eagerly.

“What rocks? I see only sand, no rocks,”

They were getting closer to the trees where a sandy desert transformed into a semi-desert.

“You must be having a mirage,” Kubey shouted.

“No, I’m not,” he said casually, “I know what I see.”

They stopped the car near the trees. Arthur jumped out of it.

“Give me the shovel,” he shouted.

“What?”

Kubey didn’t believe what Arthur was saying.

“The shovel, fast!”

Kubey got out and went to the boot. He opened it and took out a spade.

“Don’t tell me that you’re gonna dig here.”

“Of course I am and you’ll help me,” Arthur replied with a smile.

He grabbed the spade and started to dig in the sand. Kubey grabbed the second one and unwillingly started to do the same.

10.

A few hours later when the sun was approaching the in the west horizon, the men were still digging. They had their shirts taken off and there was a half-empty bottle in the shadow of the jeep. They had made quite a huge hole in the sand.

“Are you ready to stop and go back to the village?” Kubey asked wiping out the sweat off his forehead.

“No, it’s here,” came the answer. “It must be here!”

“But can’t you see, Arthur, that it’s no use. There is nothing there.”

“Stop grumbling, we’re almost there,” Arthur said patiently. “I’ve been seeing this exact spot for three months now and I need to know what is there.”

“I tell you, you will find nothing here apart from the sand. Let’s go back,” Kubey insisted.

“No, I have to stay and keep digging,” Arthur shouted.

Suddenly the spade hit something hard. Both men looked at it in wonder. Arthur kneeled and started digging with his hands, getting rid of the sand from the hard object.

“Strange” Kubey said looking at his colleague as he was maniacally brushing off the dirt.

Finally, the sand was removed revealing a shiny object.

“It can’t be,” Kubey said looking in disbelief at the crystal piece of rock.

“I told you I saw something,” Arthur replied happily.

“I have never seen such a huge diamond,” Kubey shouted as he kneeled and started to help Arthur to unearth the diamond with his strong hands.

Finally, they managed to take out the object.

“Oh my God! It must weigh at least fifteen pounds,” Kubey said happily.

Arthur looked at him and smiled. “There is more,” he said casually.

“More? How do you know this?” Kubey said with a huge grin.

“I can see it, /” came the answer.

“You must be a god or something. And from now on you’re certainly my god.”

Arthur pushed the diamond farther towards the car.

“Kubey, go for the satellite phone and call the others. I think we’ll set up a mine here.”

Kubey ran as fast as he could to the jeep and grabbed the satellite phone. Arthur grabbed the spade again and started to make another hole.

July 21, 1998

11.

Two years have passed. In the very place where Arthur had dug out the diamond now there was an enormous mine, fully operating on the desert of Botswana. Many a building has been built around it, as well as the facilities for workers. Dozens of trucks took the mined diamonds to the nearby airport and then were sold worldwide. The biggest diamonds were given to museums or sold to the private collectors. The success of founding up a mine made Arthur one of the richest men in the world.

It was boiling hot, but the workers were used to working in extreme conditions. A helicopter appeared in the sky and slowly landed on a special H-shaped, concrete place. The door opened and Arthur stepped out of the machine. He was wearing a white suit and glasses. His hair was completely grey. A few people wearing suits were already waiting for him. Kubey was among them.

“Arthur, nice to see you here,” Kubey shouted, as the propeller was slowing down deadening regular speech.

“Kubey, so how is the work going?” Arthur asked.

They entered the two-storey building.

“The deposit is fifteen miles deep,” one of the men said while they were going along the corridor.

On both sides there were workers grinding the mined diamonds. The condition they were all working in were absolutely fantastic; air-conditioned interior, everyone had their own table with superb tools, coffee machines were in many places and everything was illuminated by natural, white light.

“So how many years will the mine operate?” Arthur inquired.

“About twenty” came the answer from the second man. “The ore is bigger than we expected.”

“I told you. Any more news?”

“No, sir. Everything is going according to plan.”

Arthur stopped.

“Well then, if anyone is looking for me, I’ll be in my office,” he announced and turned right into a short corridor leading to the leather door.

“OK, and we are going for the meeting with some diamond collectors,” Kubey said. *Phew, finally left alone. I hate these business meetings. No wonder why I have people to do this.*

Arthur entered his office. It was a spacious room with a window as big as the wall. The spotlights in the ceiling were illuminating the whole interior. The sun never disturbed Arthur, as the window was facing north. There was a desk in the corner with a few monitors and numerous buttons. In one sentence, it was a very modern office as for the year 1998. Arthur went towards the desk and sat on a large leather seat. There was a framed article on the wall behind him. The headline said: *Man struck by a lightning finds a diamond ore in the dessert.* There were also colourful pictures of the biggest diamonds that had been dug here. He took out a satellite phone from his white tuxedo and dialled a number.

“Hello, this is Arthur West. I’m calling you to finalise the deal on Maldito Castle...

Yes... When can I move in?... OK, so I’ll be there next week.”

Then he put back his phone into the pocket and turned on his computer. The screen showed an article with a headline *Ghosts and spirits*. The man looked at it closely and started to read the article with interest. Suddenly, his phone rang. He took it out and answered.

“This is Arthur West.”

Then after hearing something on the phone his eyes grew wide and his jaw dropped

“Really? Mr. president wants to meet me?... I will be in San Francisco next week... All right then... No, the honour is mine.”

He put the phone back, rubbed his eyes and went on working on the computer.

It must be really huge that the president himself wants to meet me. Does he know about my discovery?

July 30, 1998

12.

Next week, Arthur went to San Francisco to his new castle situated on an island approximately three miles from the shore of Pacifica. It was an enormous Spanish building. It was a tall tower was visible even from Golden Gate Bridge. The whole building was magnificent and spectacular. There were two black helicopters in the middle of the courtyard, and a few people wearing black suits around it. Every one of them was looking around and scanning the area. Two men were sitting at the table on the balcony above the courtyard. One of them was Arthur, the second one was a middle-height man, with black hair. From his face, one could deduce that he was in his late forties. There were also several people wearing black suits and black sunglasses behind a thick glass door of the balcony. On the table, there were two glasses of coffee, freshly made, and a few cookies.

“Mr. West, I wanted to talk to you about this matter for a long time,” the man said. His serious face didn’t show any emotions.

“But Mr. President,” Arthur tried to explain himself, “I do not have any idea what you are referring to.”

The man looked around the beautiful view of the sea.

“I think you do. I am talking about the project you have been working on.”

Arthur squinted his eyes pretending to be thinking about something.

“Do you happen to mean the second mine, sir?” he said hoping it would be the answer. “Mr. West. Of course not,” the president smiled. “Do not play games with me, please. I am talking about the project connected with paranormal entities you have been working on for the

last two years. And I mean not only the supernatural beings, but something much more fearsome that you must have found out by now.”

“21st December 2012,” Arthur whispered.

“That is correct.”

“H-How do you know that, sir?” Arthur said with a little shock although he knew the answer deep inside.

“We have got Echelon,” the man said proudly. “Thus, we have caught one of your calls with some hunter,” he added.

“All right, sir, I admit I have been gathering numerous information regarding paranormal and supernatural beings as well as 21st December 2012. Do you want me to stop working on this, sir?” Arthur asked with uncertainty.

The president looked around if neither of his Secret Service Agents were listening.

“No Mr. West, I want you to continue working on this and make sure the project will be completed as soon as possible.”

Arthur felt both satisfaction and relief. His secret project, the one that had started with the death of his wife, is now officially approved by the president of the United States.

“Mr. West, have you found the solutions to stop the end of the world?”

“I came about some information about the Seal of Solomon but I don’t know anything more about it.”

“We have had people working on that for several years now. The Seal is real. It has been broken into five pieces and spread around the world. However, we do not obtain the whereabouts of either of the pieces.”

“I can help.”

The president frowned. “Hence, I am here, Mr. West. I want you to form a team and find those pieces. The end of the world must be stopped. I’m choosing you because you have managed to accomplish more in two years than we have in a decade”

“B-But sir, even if I form the team now, it may take years to find the pieces.”

“I know. You will be given full support from the government. We can also provide you with our best people.”

Arthur raised his hand a little bit, as if to show his disagreement.

“Please sir, leave selecting people to me.”

“All right then.” the president said standing up, “All the necessary information, as well as the access to the latest technology, will be provided. So do not worry,” he added. “However, I will not be the president in 2012. I will make sure all my successors will put their heart into it.”

Arthur stood up and smiled.

“Thank you for your support Mr. President.”

The man looked at Arthur for a split of second and nodded smiling, then headed for the thick glass door. One of his Secret Service agents came closer and opened it. Arthur followed them to the courtyard. They stepped out from the main door and walked towards the helicopter.

“Good bye Mr. West, we will be in touch,” the president said as he was approaching the machine.

“Once again, thank you for your approval and good bye, sir.”

The men boarded one of the helicopters and took off. Arthur went inside the castle.

13.

Arthur was walking along an obscure corridor. *So much work to do.* The corridor inside was in bad condition. The walls needed to be restored, the floor was covered with some old rug, and the ceiling was cracked. He went up the stairs that led to the tallest tower. His office was on the last floor, where an old observatory used to be. The large room was full of

boxes and suitcases. In the middle there was a vast desk with several computer monitors on it, as well as a few schemes of various things. The wall on the left had a wide corkboard; at least twenty feet long that was covered with posters. One of them showed some kind of a ring. The other one showed some mysterious creatures. Arthur sat down, looked at his wife's photo on the desk and said to himself.

“So let's get started.”

Book 0- Part 2- Tokutei

Second to nothing

September 25, 2012

87 days remaining

1.

The sun was slowly disappearing between huge skyscrapers in Tokyo. The sky was clear and soon the brightest stars started to emerge. You couldn't see them in the city, as the lights of everything dimmed even Sirius, which is the brightest star in the night sky. A couple of miles from the last house of Tokyo, the sky was more beautiful than ever. No additional light could dim it, nor any passing car. The Milky Way was cutting the night above a widespread bamboo forest. Among the thick trees a dark shape passed really fast, then another, and another. Twelve of such black figures quickened inaudibly through the forest. They seemed to be rushing somewhere, yet, they did not move in a straight line. Three of them occasionally jumped on bamboos then leaped back to the ground performing a front flip or other twisting moves. Others pushed their knees hard to the mossy soil, and ejected high in the sky over the uprooted plants. Suddenly, the one who was leading them stopped, pulled his hand strongly to the back like a karate chop, and opened it in a flat palm manner.

“Cease.”

Everyone stopped running, and crouched scanning the area.

“We've attained our destination,” he added, pulling his arm back.

Now it was clearly visible that these figures were people dressed in black ninja-like attires. They had curved swords on their backs, and several small shiny metal things attached to their belts. In front of them was a huge old Japanese castle, or rather some ruins of it. It seemed to have been built in the forest, hidden from everyone. Further from the truth.

In the seventeenth century the area was a small village with a beautiful castle where ronins had their dwelling. These people were samurais who had themselves for their masters. They didn't want to serve for the country, and certainly they didn't want to obey the ruler's orders. Hundreds of them hid in the castle, and fought the emperor's soldiers. In late spring of 1608, the emperor Tokugawa Ieyasu sent ten thousand soldiers to dispose of ronins once and for all. The soldiers were lead by general Hakizama who was in possession of a legendary katana sword; the sword made of a meteorite. The legend had it that this sword could cut through anything, as it had been made from the element not known on Earth. This element was harder than carbon fibre, lighter than lithium, and because of its unnatural blue color, it was named bluenium. On 5th June 1608, the soldiers attacked the castle. Their orders were to kill everyone. The inferior ronins had no chance of winning, but they never gave up. Having fought for over 8 hours, the last ronin was killed. After the battle, the castle was left with blood-covered walls and floors, and also with thousand dead bodies, both of ronins' and soldiers', including general Hakizama. The villagers buried only ronins, and abandoned their home forever. Since then, no one lived there, and the nature covered the village with a bamboo forest. The almighty meteoritic katana has never been seen again.

The ninjas were slowly approaching the remains of the castle. The building had three floors. The walls were creaked, and the roof was covered with trees that had made their way through the structure.

“There was supposed to be a village around the castle. I can’t see anything,” one of the men said.

“The forest buried everything.”

They walked towards two statues covered with green grass and leaves. The statues showed two samurais standing at attention. The first one was cut in the middle, with the second part lying behind it while the second samurai had only small holes and creaks made by time.

“The myth says that Hakizama was killed on the second floor, near the north terrace,” said one of the men.

“The villagers left his body as well as the weapon among other soldiers of Emperor Tokugawa Ieyasu,” The other one added.

The leader pointed to several men.

“Idaki, Sato, Tanaka, fetch it.”

Three men ran towards the building. The first one amazingly jumped onto the first floor, then onto the second one. The others *flew* inside through the window. The walls inside were badly destroyed, but to their surprise the pale stains of blood were still visible. The floor was covered with hundreds of human bones, rusty samurai swords, as well as remaining of the clothes and uniforms. They all met upstairs. The room, as everything else looked like an open cemetery, with all the bones covering the whole floor. There was a large collection of weapons hanging on the left wall. Opposite to it, were two low tables and dozens of broken plates and pottery.

“How will we recognise the katana among all these swords?” one of them asked picking an old blade.

“Bluenium does not fade, nor does it decay or rust,” said the second man looking around the corridor. “Yet, at night, its colour is very weak, and one can only see it by pointing it towards some source of light.”

“Like the stars.”

“We have to separate, and find it,” ordered the first ninja.

The men spread into different directions around the room and corridor. Each of them grabbed a sword from the dusty ground, looked at it carefully, and threw it back among the skeletons. Most of the weapons were rusty, broken, or completely destroyed.

A few minutes past, and the sword was nowhere to be found.

“It must be somewhere here,” one of them shouted angrily, throwing another regular katana onto the floor.

“Look!” the other one exclaimed pointing at the glowing object in the corner of the corridor. “This must be it.”

They slowly walked towards it. As they were approaching, they saw a headless skeleton lying on the floor. It had still an upper armor on it, and a large helmet lying nearby. The shiny, light-blue object was half-covered by some piece of metal. The ninja crouched, pushed away the metal piece, and picked up the glowing item. It was a three-foot long, curved sword with a navy handle and a silver-blue blade. He could easily see his masked face reflecting in the steel. The other men were gazing at it with amazement.

“It’s beautiful.”

“I could easily change my Katana for it.”

“No time for reflections. Let’s go back,” the ninja holding the sword ordered.

The warriors rushed quickly to the terrace, and leaped out of it landing silently on the ground.

Eight other ninjas were squatting near the two statues. No one said anything. They were only waiting for the others to come back.

“They’re returning,” one of them said.

The person carrying the sword ran up to the leader.

“Here it is, master,” he announced handing out the weapon.

The black ninja took the sword, and scanned it carefully, while the others gathered around, and stared at it with astonishment.

“At last, after 400 years, the almighty katana has been found.”

Suddenly, the ground started to shake, and a horrible high-pitched howl came from the forest. Everyone looked around with concern. The shake lasted for a split of second, which could be felt like a thud rather than like a shake.

“Look!” the ninja who brought the sword whispered pointing at the castle.

The building began to wobble, and seconds later it collapsed with a huge boom. When the debris hit the ground, a great cloud of ash rose into the air covering everything. The ninjas were observing it, but they did not feel any fear, only wonderment. What is more, none of them ran away or even moved.

“What’s going on?” one of them asked.

“Aught,” the leader said in a manner as he knew exactly what had happened. He shook his head, placed the sword on his back, and ordered, “Withdraw. Now!”

“We’d better return to the base before someone comes here,” one of them suggested.

Not waiting any longer, the crouching warriors stood up, and started running into the forest. No sooner had they passed the first bamboo trees, than the ground shook again. However, now, the quake didn’t seem to be similar to the previous one, and certainly it didn’t last as short as that one. The soil moved in dozens of various places in the area. Everyone stopped, and took a look at it. The ground in those places fractured. The slits were around thirty inches long, and they were getting bigger and bigger. One man drew out his sword, and stood in the readiness.

“What is it?” One of the warriors asked scanning the fractures, which now, were almost everywhere.

“I don’t know. Something evil is looming,” came the answer.

The ninjas were looking around stopping their eyes on every fracture.

“Master, you seem to be hiding something from us,” someone asked.

The leader didn’t know whether to tell them the truth or try to escape as quickly as possible. He made a decision.

“You must prepare to fight,” he whispered.

“Fight? What?” came another answer.

“The dead, the evil that dwells here.”

“What evil?”

“What are you talking about, Master?”

The leader made a small step to the left, as a fracture appeared right between his feet.

“The legend is true. This ground is cursed. I did not believe it, until now.”

“There was nothing about the curse in the legend.”

“I have failed to inform you about the last piece of the Blue Sword story.”

The cracks stopped spreading, and the soil around them began to move.

“I did not believe it was relevant,” the leader continued louder as the others were preparing for the unknown. “The legend also says, that whoever steps on this cursed ground, will bring all the dead back to life. This land should not be entered. He was right, and I did not listen. What a disgrace to me.”

All of the sudden, something emerged from the ground, it looked like a grey tip of a stick, but another appeared next to it and another. Three of these grey-looking sticks were

emerging from the ground. Just when they were two inches long, the ninjas saw that they are connected to some root-like thing of the same colour. The men quickly realised it was a palm without any skin or muscles, only bones. Then another came from the ground. The osseous hands were getting higher and higher. One of them grabbed a nearby root of a plant, and pulled itself up revealing bones of arms and the skull. The moving skeleton was rising from the ground. It happened in every place where the fractured had occurred. Nevertheless, the ninjas weren't scared by this fact, even though they were surrendered by hundreds of skeletons raising from the ground.

"I knew we wouldn't escape from here so easily," one of the guys said.

"We wouldn't have been hired if it weren't for an extra dangerous mission, would we?," the second one added gazing at the nearest skeleton that was slowly walking towards him.

"They seem to be either soldiers or ronins who fought here," another ninja deduced.

"Or both," yet another added.

All the undead creatures snaffled old metal things, which were inside their graves, and ran towards the ninjas. The leader replaced his sword on the back with the recovered one, and took a defence position.

"Remember, Dragons," he shouted to everyone addressing them by the names of the legendary creatures, "Never surrender."

"We'd better make our way through them," one of the ninjas exclaimed drawing his samurai sword, and preparing for the inevitable encounter.

Hundreds of angry skeletons were rushing towards twelve ninjas. The warriors were standing next to one another, tightly holding their swords.

3.

These ninjas belonged to a Japanese special group called *Dragons*. It consists of twelve, well-trained, finest and masterful men of the Japanese islands. They all had been taught secrets of martial arts since they were little. Most of them came from poor families that couldn't afford raising a baby. The rest were orphans after their parents had died, or had been killed. Each and every one of them had to master fifteen martial arts style, including secret pressure point techniques, and also weapon techniques. They all have been raised in strict conditions. Their daily routine consisted of training, food and sleep. There was no time for any pleasure, play or love. The group had been formed in order to perform the hardest tasks and missions. For instance, eliminating bosses of yakuza, hostage rescue, or retrieving legendary objects that were stolen from museums or disappeared long time ago. In this case, the meteoritic sword. The twelve members of the group fear nothing, and always prevail. Their unique techniques, as well as extraordinariness, make them very useful in impossible tasks. In 2002, the American government wanted to use the Dragons in Afghanistan to seize Osama Bin Laden. The Japanese government refused, for they didn't want to get involved in that case. They have taken part in many impossible missions so far, but they have never faced any supernatural activates.

4.

Rotten skeletons were running towards the ninjas. In the darkness of the forest, one could see only the blueprints of the warriors holding glossy blades. One of the angry-looking skeletons, holding a katana sword only in one hand, as the second limb was missing, was in the front. He was aiming for the ninja standing the farthest on the left. The warrior took a defending position, raising his sword over his head. The skeleton erected his katana, and cut aiming at the head of the ninja, who placed his blade diagonally down to the right. The blades met. The skeleton's 400-year old sword didn't withstand the power of the fast cut of his

opponent's, and broke into half. The brave warrior turned over his sword just above the ground, so now the sharp edge was facing up, and cut diagonally up to the left, snipping the opponent's spine and two ribs. The bones fell limply on the dry soil, and stopped moving. However, the warrior didn't stop his moves on just two cuts. He quickly rotated the weapon through his fingers, so now his thumb was facing not up but down along tsuka; the Japanese name for a handle. He rapidly stabbed it to the back, placing the handle of the Katana under his right shoulder. The shrill tip of the blade penetrated through the skull of another approaching skeleton. The ninja knew that stab wouldn't stop the undead creature, thus he pulled his sword back, quickly changed the grip, and threw a horizontal cut to the left. He made a spin at the same time, so when he turned around with a huge speed, the blade went through the skeleton's neck beheading the enemy. Hardly had the ninja finished his spin, when he jumped into the air performing another spin. He had eyed one more opponent, flying right at him. Cut. Another one was down. Still being in the air, starting the second spin, the ninja noticed yet another skeleton that was advancing towards the black teammate from his right. The upcoming enemy, was holding his sword tightly on his right side as if to perform a diagonal cut down to the left. He intended to cut through the guts of the ninja. Being in one-third in his second spin, the warrior had no intentions of using his sword in this strike. His left leg chambered at the belt level. At the same time his right one straightened. He performed, so called, tornado kick. As he was facing the enemy, his right foot hit the skeleton's ribs, and went through it with an ease. The chest split into half. The warrior landed on the ground, and prepared himself for another strike. The whole manoeuvre lasted only four seconds. Long enough to take down four opponents.

Meanwhile, other Dragon members were also dealing with hundreds of approaching undead soldiers. The warrior standing near the leader had already got rid of three opponents, and there were still six skeletons just about to cut him from six different angles. He didn't have much choice of defending himself using only just one sword. All his other colleagues were already fighting, and he couldn't count on any assistance from them. He had a few sharp shurikens at his belt, but using ninja stars at this situation was useless. His mind raced, and finally, he made a decision. The warrior jumped into the air, but not too high, as two sharp edges were coming at his head at a high speed. While he was in the air, he raised his weapon in order to block those blows, yet there were still four to be blocked. He kicked the two enemies coming from the front, while blocking the Katana swords coming from above. Then he quickly twisted his body, so now he and his Katana were facing down. His right foot kicked the fifth opponent. However, the falling blade of the previous one harmed his shin. The pain went through his body stopping the twist. He realised that one of the blades was on the point of penetrating his kidneys. The sixth skeleton was cutting horizontally. The ninja was falling towards the ground, but he made every effort to twist his body a little bit more. If he had fallen in that position, the next blow would have been deadly for him. The ninja felt only a gentle wind just over his chest. As soon as he, as well as the defeated opponents hit the ground. He blinked, and as he was opening his eyes, he saw a sharp blade, speeding vertically right into his throat. The ninja raised his sword, tightened the grip, and the sharp edges of their weapons met for a moment. Neither of the weapons broke. The skeleton screamed out of fury, which was really unbelievable, as there was nothing in his throat that could produce the sound. He leapt off the ground, and changed the grip, so now he was holding the katana with his thumb up along the tsuka. The sword was facing down. The ninja could see the tip of the blade, and the undead dropping from the sky. There was no possible way of blocking it, hence, he rolled to the right scarcely avoiding the thrust. The Dragon had just enough time to rebound from the ground, and stand on his two feet. The wound on his leg got a little bit bigger, and a few drops of blood were running down along his calf. As soon as he stood up,

he grabbed the sword facing his thumb up, and vertically cut up through the skeleton. The bones broke, and fell onto the soil.

The leader of the Dragons was in a greater danger, for he was the target of much more soldiers than the others. To make matters worse, having another sword on the back, made it more difficult to perform manoeuvres as accurately as the rest of the team. Having wiped out a dozen of skeletons, he had enough time to look around, estimate the number of approaching enemies, and to see whether his teammates were doing well. It wasn't easy to withstand attacks of so many enemies.

The Dragons had had many dangerous missions in the past. The largest number of enemies they had fought simultaneously was around thirty. In most of their missions, they had to take out enemies one by one, without even letting them know what had just killed them. In some cases, there were no enemies at all. They simply had to get inside some building, and take some important object. In other cases, the Dragons had to eliminate some bosses, drug lords and warlords that were too dangerous for Japan to allow having them on their soil. This case however, was the most difficult of all.

The leader counted his men. One was missing. He quickly blocked another attack, kicked the enemy to the back, and counted his men one more time. Still, one was missing.

"Idaki!" he shouted, but there was no response.

Then he noticed one of the Dragons lying dead on the ground. The number of the skeletons didn't seem to be decreasing. He saw another ninja, who had just pushed away three undead creature, coming to Idaki. He crouched, checked his vital sites, and shouted with anger.

"Idaki!"

Then he threw himself at the upcoming dozen. All the others realised what had just happened. The leader knew that even though he had trained all of them in fifteen martial art styles, their skills were not sufficient enough to withstand such a horde of enemies. Nevertheless, neither him, nor his teammates gave up, and fought at their best.

Other ninja jumped onto a bamboo tree. The skeletons chased him along the ground. Then he jumped on the second tree, and then on the third one. The skeletons were a little bit confused, because they didn't know where to run to catch him. Their enemy jumped on the tip of the next bamboo tree, so hard that it bent, and the tree hang a few inches above the eyeless skulls. Then he quickly swung his blade. Whoosh. All three heads fell down, as the ninja jumped up a little bit, so the tree got back to its natural position. The warrior made a flip, and landed on one knee. He was holding his weapon with one hand, pointing its tip at the dark sky, while his other hand banged with the fist against the ground, causing it to crack.

"No time to rest," he murmured to himself, and rushed towards one of his friend.

Some other Dragon was dealing with eleven enemies at one time. His fast spins, and rapid cuts, followed by blocks, efficiently eliminated the opponents one by one. He had to select the most effective, as well as the fastest moves, and had to choose wisely and fast. If he decided to block the wrong blow first, some other strike would kill him. While he was in the air, performing another hook kick, he noticed much more enemies coming particularly at his direction. It was obvious to him that at this point he had to use the ultimate technique, which was the most suitable to decimate the skeletons. Some of the advancing opponents had already leapt into the air to perform either a cut or a stab, while others threw themselves down aiming at their legs. They were approaching from all directions. As he was landing, his grip tightened, and the ultimate technique began.

5.

The Dragons had learnt this technique at the age of fifteen when they were being taught proficient manoeuvres to take out a large number of opponents. The technique was used to choose the moves wisely, but fast. Every block was another strike. Every dodge was

another kick or stab and every twist had to disorient the opponent. The Dragons had to practice it on numerous convicts; usually members of yakuza, who thought they would have eluded death penalty by fighting against fifteen-year old boys. It was undoubtedly a bad choice for the criminals. Since that time, the whole team mastered the ultimate technique, and could use it only in situations like this.

6.

The numerous enemies were coming in all directions. The determined ninja uttered a loud *kia* shout, bent his knees, and lift off the ground up in the air holding his katana sword above his head. The *kia*-shout is used by many martial artists to gather strength before a difficult manoeuvre is performed. Being in the air, five feet above the ground, the warrior kicked into split, tearing off the skulls of two enemies on both sides. As he was dropping onto the ground, he cut diagonally to the left eliminating three more creatures. As soon as he felt the soil, his knees bent, and the Dragon jumped again turning his head and shoulders to do a spin. His sword was in his right arm, ready to do a horizontal cut, which he did as soon as he rotated 180 degrees. The sharp blade went through the rotten jaws of three opponents, detaching them from the joints. The black man landed crouching, and began another spin, which was now low. He straightened his right leg, which easily hooked the jawless enemies. When he finished the full spin, his katana cut horizontally through advancing skeletons from the opposite side. Afterwards, he made another spin, still crouching, which was a continuation of the previous spin and the sword cut. The wheezy katana penetrated the groin of the falling skeletons, which was the end for their undead lives. One of the enemies, who had come from the right, was speeding towards the ninja with his sword aiming at the warrior's heart. Another two had jumped from the front willing to stab the squatting Dragon. The ninja pointed his sword with the blade up, and quickly jumped into the air. The sword of his staved into the pelvis, and went up through it. If it had been a human, the sword would have penetrated through the guts, but as it was only a skeleton, the next thing the tip met, were the vertebrae of the neck, then the skull. He chambered his legs, so that the second skeleton skidded below him. The man changed the grip, and pointed his polished weapon directly down, and while falling, he punctured the neck of the third skeleton detaching his greyish skull from the rest. As soon as his feet touched the ground covered with a bulk of bones, he turned his sword, to have its blade pointing up, still holding it with thumb down. Then he made a spin and got rid of the enemy who had just flown under him. As he was cutting through this opponent, he noticed another one coming towards him. When the spin finished, the warrior performed a backflip, or rather flash kick, which was a flip to the back with a lethal kick from the above. The kick was effective, and another enemy was taken down. Some other creature was advancing from the left, and had already been in the air, but without any sword. The opponent threw himself at the legs of the Dragon, to knock him over, but, after doing the backflip, the ninja, turned around, bent, and pushed himself hard off the ground, doing an aerial; a handless cartwheel. When he was upside down he stabbed the flying skeleton causing his spine to break and deactivate the creature. However, the man didn't finish the move. There were still two opponents flying at him. He had no choice, and no possibility of protecting himself from this one. Fortunately, the skeletons had no weapons. The three characters met in the air. The impact of the bags of bones was so hard that made the ninja fall, and release his Katana. He fell on his back onto the ground, and had to face two blades, coming at his stomach, from opposite direction. The blades were approaching really fast, and there was nothing he could do to avoid it. Rolling was not an option in this case. The only alternative he could do, was preparing himself for the lethal blow. When the steel weapons were a few inches above his body, another blade appeared from the left. It was turned with its sharp edge up. The rectangular metal sword stopped moving to the right when

its tip was just above the lying, helpless ninja. Next it began moving up, and pushed to the back the upcoming blades. Then it killed their owners. The ninja looked left, and saw one of his teammates reaching out his hand in order to help the warrior to get up, and return to the fight.

“Thanks, that was a close one,” the ninja sighed picking up his sword.

“I couldn’t allow losing another one of us,” came the answer.

The ninja took a glimpse over his shoulder, then looked around, and realised, that there were only eight members of Dragons still fighting. He looked at the ninja one more time as if he wanted to express his sorrow about losing his friends, but he didn’t say anything. Suddenly, his colleague opened his mouth, and his eyes grew open, as a shiny steel sword came out of his chest.

“No!” he screamed desperately watching the bleeding man falling onto the ground. The wounded teammate tried to say something while dropping, but the blade damaged his lungs.

“*How could I have been so careless?*” his mind raced seeing a skeleton emerging behind the body.

“*He did save me,*” the useless thoughts hit his mind. “*Yet, he couldn’t save himself. Or what should be more important, I wasn’t able to protect my friend.*”

As on the spur of the moment, he lost orientation, and didn’t see that the very skeleton had just pulled back his sword, and was ready to attack him too. Not thinking any more, the ninja made one step to the back, held his sword on his right side, turned around to the left, then raised his chambered left leg into the air, and next jumped from the right one as if to perform a tornado kick. Yet, he didn’t straighten his leg, but raised the katana above his head, then cut diagonally down to the left, splitting the skeleton into half, the cut didn’t stop there. The warrior moved his sword behind the head, still being in the air, and cut for the second time, cutting the eyehole off the enemy’s skull. Then he landed on one knee. He could feel the bones of the defeated opponent falling around him. The smell of rotten bones filled his nostrils.

“Tokutei!” a familiar voice came from the right. He jumped back on his feet, and rushed rapidly at the rest of the enemies, killing them in anger one by one. The Dragons had been taught never to be overtaken by anger. However, in this case, losing five of his teammates was an agony to him. They were not only his teammates, but also friends and family. He had spent basically his whole life with them. They had trained together, had meals together, and gone on every mission together. The pain filled his heart, but he knew he couldn’t give up. There was still a chance to end this right.

Meanwhile, a few yards from him, two other ninjas were using each other’s help to cope with undead enemies. One of them had already lost his mask. It was a black-hair Asian man with a scar on his forehead. His mate was still wearing a dark mask with a wide space for eyes. They occasionally used each other’s backs to roll over to the other side, dodge the incoming unblockable blows. While one was rolling over, the other one was estimating what moves he should use next in order not to be slashed. Cut, block, kick, chop. Over and over again.

After a series of fancy, effective moves, when the whole ground was covered with broken bones and metal weapons, the remaining seven ninjas were slowly getting tired. To perform such skilful manoeuvres, one has to use a lot of strength, and, of course, must be fit and strong. One of them was still using trees to annihilate the opponents. While he was jumping from one tree to another, a few skeletons threw themselves into the air to slice the man. They could easily jump as high as him.

The key to perform a high jump doesn’t lie within the leg muscles. The bigger the muscles are, the harder it is to jump higher. The key lies within the bones themselves. Scientists have proved that if we didn’t have any muscles in the legs, our body could jump as

high as seven metres from the ground. So how do ninja jump so high? They use the ground to rebound. The stronger they jumped onto the ground, bent, and use all the cumulated energy to leap, the higher they will fly.

Seeing the skeletons leap as high as him, the ninja froze for a moment in disbelief. To defend himself, he performed a horizontal rotation, holding his Katana in one hand. As he was rolling, his sword was doing a vertical circle, which was so fast, that observing from the ground it looked like a full car wheel of silver colour. The speeding blade went through the upcoming bones, splitting them into separate pieces. Then he pushed his legs forward to land onto the tree, and leap out of it. To his surprise, as soon as he touched the bamboo bark, he wasn't able to rebound off it. The tree pushed to the back, leaving the ninja helpless in the air. The warrior looked down, and saw several enemies, who had chopped the tree. The man had really little time to think what to do next, and what was more important how to survive the fall among the mad soldiers. While he was falling down, he felt a dreadful pain which sieved through his body. He realised that there was still one enemy in the air, who he had failed to kill because of the tree incident. The creature had stabbed the falling defenceless ninja in the back; the blade went through the lungs and the heart, coming out through the shoulder. The skeleton released his weapon and kicked the man. As a result, the dying body gained more speed. The warrior's body zoomed down right into the blades waiting for him. Slash, strike, thrust, cut. His blood trickled onto the trees, the ground, and the enemies. The other Dragons didn't notice it because they had too much fighting to do, and now when there was yet another one of them missing, their chances were dropping.

7.

Another few minutes passed. One of the living Dragons was spinning around using the ultimate stunt; a spin followed by a cut, then by a kick, then by a twist with a cut, a block, a kick, a strike and a punch. The number of the opponents was far too great and many an experienced warrior would actually be unable to restrain such an enormous invasion. Moreover, there were far too many bones on the soil that made it harder to leap up into the air, or to keep balance. Nothing good could come out of that. Twenty rushing blades from all directions at once, were impossible, both to be blocked, and to be ducked out of. The failure was inevitable. The Dragon managed to block four. Actually it was three as his katana broke one of the approaching steel tips. He also succeeded in avoiding four other blows by twisting his body. Yet, there were eleven others that he couldn't stop. As a result, his body came to bits, and litres of blood pour onto the bones. Not waiting long the skeletons rushed towards the remaining five. Their target was now those two warriors, who were using each other's backs to fight better. Once again, the greater number of enemies made it inconceivable to withstand the horde. Another two Dragons fell victim to the undead. The Dragon leader noticed it, but he didn't stop fighting, nor did he let any thought hit his mind. He had to stay focused. It was when the first Dragon failed to the skeletons, when he realised that their mission was no longer a priority. Their only priority was to survive; the basic human instinct.

8.

It was over an hour since the battle started. Three ninjas were left; the leader, Tokutei, and the one who had brought the sword from the castle; Sato. Tokutei pushed away two enemies, and noticed Sato being attacked from all directions. He rushed up to him, and leapt off the ground straightening his right leg. The powerful kick pushed one enemy to the back. Split a second later, after the kick, he swung his leg, and kicked away another opponent. As soon as he landed he slashed two more.

"Take the right!" Sato shouted trying to catch his breath.

Tokutei took a short glance at him, and noticed his tired face. Then he jumped high, made a spin, cut off the approaching enemy's hand. Second spin, the backbone broke. Third spin, kicked away two opponents. Duck, a sweep kick within a spin. Stand, a side kick, then without putting his leg, a round kick. A dozen of moves like this, and he stopped. Not because of the fact that he was exhausted, but because a horrible shriek came right from behind him. He turned his head, and saw Sato falling on his knees. There was a skeleton right in front of him with his sword raised and blood dripping off it. Almost immediately Tokutei bent a little bit to gather as much energy as he could, and jumped into the air to throw a split kick getting rid of two enemies. He took a glimpse at the leader noticing too many opponents speeding towards him. He quickly lifted off the ground, jumped onto the tree, and from there he whizzed towards his master. The leader had a nasty gash on his arm that restricted him from moving the sword as rapid as he would do. Yet, his powerful legs went through the ribs, temples, and other bones of the enemies with ease. He was surrounded by more than fifty skeletons, and it was much tougher to spring into the air. He made a rapid spin to the right, then jumped kicking two opponents with his left leg, which was followed by the right one, also eliminating a couple of skeletons. He heard his mate coming from the left, which made him glad. Tokutei was the best Dragon. He had mastered all the techniques three times faster than his teammates. The leader, yet, wasn't fast enough and was exposed to three cuts from the other side.

"Master!" Tokutei shouted angrily seeing him falling on one knee, and then tumbling down.

As soon as the ninja reached his master, he slashed through three closest skeletons, then quickly grabbed his master's Katana sword and started to spin. He was holding two lethal swords horizontally, making a three-yard, shining, three-dimensional figure eight. All of the remaining skeletons made a dash at him. The level of adrenaline in his blood, as well as hatred, made the ninja move so fast that the blades of the swords crossed the same point five times in a single second. All the creatures were treated like a paper in a shredder. The fountain of bones trickled from the lustrous noose, spreading within thirty yards from it. When there were no more skeletons left, the spinning stopped. The Dragon dropped the Katana swords, filling his lungs with air, and crouched at his master. The leader slowly raised his head, and tried to sit up. Tokutei took off his mask. He had a typical Japanese complexion, slanting eyes, short black hair, and sweat all over his 28-year old face.

"Master! It's over. It's over now."

"Tokutei," said the leader weakly trying to push himself higher off the skull under him.

"I must take you to the hospital, Master," the young man cried.

"No, Tokutei, this is it, my life is bound to terminate this very night."

"No master," Tokutei shouted desperately tearing his mask, and trying to cover the wound. "I lost ten brothers tonight. No more deaths, no more suffering."

The leader raised his hand, and reached out for the katana on his back, and said,

"The Dragons will exist no more. This is the end of us."

He took out the weapon, and put it onto some rotten ribs lying on the soil.

"Yet, not for you," he sighed weakly with a shivering voice.

Tokutei looked at him closely trying to understand his words. At the same time he tightened the knot of his mask on the wound.

"What are you saying, master?"

"I have failed you all. I could not protect you. I... brought only shame to the team. Such dishonour. "

"It's not dishonour, master. The skeletons... there were too many of them."

"I had sent for help... too late," he shook his head, and dropped his eyes. "But you... you out of all of them were able to end this. I always believed in you, Tokutei."

“You’re wounded. You’re talking nonsense, master” Tokutei replied dealing with another wound.

“Tokutei... stop. Let me... do what I should do,” the leader said with a cough. Then he grabbed the little dagger; tanto, at his belt, and took it out.

“No, no, no, Master! You can’t do this. You’re the only one I have got now...” Suddenly, a loud noise came from the forest as the ground shook.

“It’s ...not over... yet.”

The leader grabbed the blue katana, and handed it to the warrior

“Take the Katana, and ...go. Go... before they come here.”

While he was saying this, his eyes closed, and he couldn’t bear sitting any more, he slowly slid down onto the ground among the smelly bones and a vast puddle of his own blood.

“I won’t leave you here, master.”

“Tokutei... go... I must ... finish it.”

Having said that, he tightened the grip on his tanto, and placed it with the blade facing his stomach.

“Go!”

Tokutei grabbed the blue Katana, and stood up. He heard dozens of shrieks coming from the left. It was his way out. Not thinking much, he took a glimpse at his master one more time, then started to rush towards the shrieks. As he was running, a silent moan hit his ears. It came from the back. The ninja knew what it was. His master had exhaled his very last breath as he had committed seppuku.

Seppuku, also known as hara-kiri is the Japanese ritual suicide. A warrior commits it either because he doesn’t want to be killed by enemies, or he brought shame and dishonour. The ritual is performed by thrusting a short sword; tanto, into the stomach and moving it to the right.

Tokutei was zooming towards the horde of skeletons. He could see them emerging from the darkness just half a mile ahead. He placed his regular sword on his back, and drew the blue one. The enemies noticed the bluish glow, and prepared themselves to attack, and destroy the last human, who had entered the cursed land. Tokutei focused his mind, raised his sword, and accelerated. Suddenly, some strange sound came from the distance. It sounded as if it was far behind the horde, and it was getting louder and louder. It was coming from the dark sky. The ninja looked around, and tried to catch a glance of the objects that were making it. The horde stopped, as several bright lights cut through the forest. The huge rails were coming from above at a small angle. The rattle got loud enough to be recognised as a group of helicopters. Shortly afterwards, the man’s eyes spotted the machines in the sky. The huge birds hang a few hundred feet behind the undead. The ninja made a few steps back, still looking at the whole situation. He was baffled.

“What’s going on?” he thought, as he noticed a dozen of men sliding down the ropes that were hanging from the helicopters.

The enemies were determined to kill anyone. Seconds later they dashed at the unknown men. Almost immediately the shots spread. Tokutei reacted quickly, and jumped onto the bamboo tree to hide there. He was observing what was going on, trying to figure it all out. The bullets went through the bones, perforating and breaking them. It all lasted for only half a minute. Then a voice sounded with an American accent.

“Clear!”

“Clear!” some other voice reacted.

Tokutei was staring at them, still trying to work it out.

“Who are these guys?” he thought.

Then another voice came.

“Search for the Japanese.”

He saw several men spreading in all directions. Three of them were slowly walking towards him.

“What were those pieces of crap, huh?” one of them asked kicking some broken skull.

“I don’t know. They only told us what we may expect, but nothing more.”

Tokutei tried to see what these men were wearing, but the bright light behind made it impossible to see anything but the blueprints. He waited until the men came closer, so he could easily attack them. As they were right beneath him, he pushed himself off the tree, and landed silently behind them. He quickly rose his sword, and prepared for a cut, but then one of the men turned around, and raised his hands apart.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, easy there,” he said with a little bit fear.

The two other men turned around.

“It’s OK, we’re friendly,” the other one added.

Tokutei, still confused, lowered his sword. He noticed that these men were wearing American Army uniforms.

“We’ve got one,” the soldier shouted. “Where are the rest?”

“All dead.”

“Each and every one?” the soldier asked in disbelief.

“Yes,” came a serious answer, as he put away his sword.

The second soldier grabbed a walky-talky and said.

“We came too late, general. They’re all dead.”

“Damn it!” came a scratchy voice. “Bring this one here.”

“Yes sir!”

Tokutei was full of questions, but he asked none. Instead, he prepared himself to be escorted towards the helicopters.

“Come with us.”

As they were walking, one of the soldiers scanned the area, and couldn’t help asking.

“What were those things?”

“Skeletons of soldiers from the seventeenth century.”

“So, the old man was right, they do exist.”

9.

The four men came towards the helicopters. The propellers were spinning slower and slower until they completely stopped. Tokutei saw about twenty men, all wearing army clothes, waiting near the machines. He also saw one man talking to them. The colours of his uniform, as well as the numerous stars sewed onto it, revealed his military status; a general; A man with slightly grey hair, a grey moustache and coarse eyebrows.

“Sir, this is him.”

“I see, you’re dismissed.”

The general came closer to him, scratched his head and said.

“We came as soon as we received the signal from your leader.”

Tokutei half-closed his eyes, and looked left. Then he remembered one of his master’s last words. *I had sent for help...* He had thought then that master was being delirious because of the numerous wounds, but now it all made sense.

“The bodies...” he murmured pointing towards the direction he had come from. “They are all over there, about a mile from here. They all need proper burial.”

“Of course,” the general replied, and looked at his men. “Everyone, go over there and bring the bodies.”

The ninja’s pupils grew.

“The skeletons... they have risen twice, so far. What if they will...”

“They won’t,” some voice interrupted.

Both Tokutei and the general looked towards the helicopter, where the voice came from. They saw an old man coming out from the machine. He was tall, in his early 60's. He had short grey hair, a short moustache and a beard. Tokutei knew him. He had come to their base a few hours before the mission. But he couldn't remember why.

It was almost six in the evening. Tokutei and his teammates were in a typical Japanese room. It had paper walls, and many traditional Japanese symbols around. There were eleven men inside. Some of them were putting black ninja clothes on. The others were polishing their weapons.

"Do you think we will be back before midnight?" one of them asked sticking some shurikens behind his belt.

"I hope so, Idaki. Tokutei is cooking tonight."

"Yeah," Tokutei answered with a silent laugh. "Don't count on traditional food tonight. I'm gonna prepare..."

He didn't finish, as his attention focused on the main door. He saw two men walking in. One of them was wearing white suit, and looked like an American. The other one was their leader.

"One hour to go," the master said, then the two men disappeared in the second room.

Tokutei raised his eyes snapping from the memory. The man in white came up to them.

"It's definitely over now. The skeletons won't rise again. Thank you Bishop. I'll take it from here," the mysterious man said.

The general nodded, and walked away. The man came up to Tokutei, cleared his throat, and looked at the warrior.

"Hello Tokutei. My name is Arthur," he reached out his palm in order to get a handshake, but Tokutei was not familiar with this gesture.

In Japan people bow to one another, although the handshake is getting more and more popular among the Japanese teenagers.

"First I would like to say how deeply sorry I am because of what happened. I tried to explain to your master what might happen, but he wouldn't listen."

"Did you know about the skeletons?"

"That is correct. And this is one of the reasons I came today."

"There are more? What reasons?"

Arthur looked around to check whether nobody followed them, or nobody was in a distance to hear them, and then sighed.

"Yes. You see, we came here to help you with this very mission. I talked to your master how dangerous it may be, but he was stubborn, and believed you would manage without our help."

"This is not the answer to my question," Tokutei replied without any emotions.

"You're clever. You have always been, thus I chose you."

"You chose me? I don't understand."

"Well," the old man said feeling perplexed. "I know you're confused right now, but I will explain everything to you one at a time," he added.

They reached the point where the last helicopter was standing. Arthur stopped, took a deep breath, and started to talk.

"Fifteen years ago I visited you."

Tokutei squinted his eyes, trying to move back with his memories, and then it hit him.

"This is where I know you from!" Tokutei exclaimed.

"That's correct. I spoke to your master then. We agreed to recruit two of the Dragons to the USA. Yet, the problem was which two. I really admired your training then. The ultimate technique, perfection and accuracy."

Tokutei was listening to every word with a lot of attention. It was his team the old man was talking about. He tried not to let any thoughts into his mind, but the words he heard woke old memories.

“We made a decision, that as soon as I find what I am looking for, I will come for two of you. Two excellent ninjas pointed by your master were, Sato and you. I personally chose you, not only because of your masterful techniques, but also because of the symbolic meaning of your name.”

“My name?” the warrior asked curiously.

“Oh, it’s so obvious, isn’t it?” the old man said.

“*Toku* means an answer, and *tei* means an older brother.”

“Have you ever considered it not as two separated words, but as a whole name?”

The ninja thought about it, and realized what it meant. His eyes grew wide open.

“That’s right,” Arthur said, “You are special, particular.”

“But still, why did you need us?”

“Let me ask you something first. How did you feel when your team got attacked by the skeletons?”

Tokutei looked up and replied,

“I wanted to stop it. I wanted to kill as many as I could, so my team could return safely home.”

“This is what I do. I stop such supernatural creatures from interfering with human world. Did you know that every year more people die because of a vampire bite than because of a terrorist attack?”

“Wait, are you saying that you and your men kill monsters?”

“Well, actually, they are the U.S. Army, so only me. And not only monsters, but also demons, ghosts, and so on.”

“And you want me to join you? Give me one good reason.”

“I already did,” Arthur smiled. “I understand that it is difficult for you to cope with it right now, but believe me, I know what you are feeling.”

“Do you? I just lost my whole team there!” the warrior replied with an angry voice.

“And they were everything I had! So how can you say that you understand, huh?”

“Tokutei, I really do. I lost my wife seventeen years ago.”

On hearing this, Tokutei calmed down and continued to listen.

“She was my only family, too. And to make things worse, she didn’t die of a disease, or a in an accident, but from a demon, so yes, I do understand what you’re going through right now. I have been looking for five individuals for fifteen years now. I have checked over 500 people, and you, Tokutei, proved to be the best fighter. I really want you to join my team.”

Tokutei dropped his eyes, and tried to think what to say next. All the thoughts from the night tried to mess with his head. *No, not yet.*

“You saw what these creatures had done with your group,” the old man continued.

“And there are, believe me worse, far worse creatures in the world.”

The ninja still didn’t know what to say, too many things happened in such a short time.

“Look, you have nowhere to go, no one to live with. Join me, and start your new life.

Don’t you want to avenge your team? Your family?” Arthur tried to manipulate him.

The Asian man raised up his head.

“I wanted to say no, but since I have no choice now I will go and join you.”

“Follow me,” Arthur said with satisfaction.

The old man started walking back to the helicopter. Tokutei made a step and stopped.

“What about this sword?”

The old man turned around.

“This sword is currently the most powerful cold steel weapon in the world. Hold on to it,” he said with a smile, and continued walking to his machine. Tokutei didn’t move yet. He saw the soldiers coming back with the bodies. He couldn’t repress the memories any more. Silence set in, as his mind raced. He was very confused, and couldn’t think rationally what to do next. Having been left alone, as all his friends were gone. Friends he had spent all his life with. Friends he could easily call family. Friends, who were the only people he truly knew. And now, this man in white wants him in his team. This new life, new home, new purpose to help people. And there was still this legendary weapon he was carrying on his back.

“Please follow me,” Arthur’s voice stopped the silence, and the thoughts left his head.

“We’ll fly to your home to bury the bodies. Then you will be given money, tickets, and everything you need. In one week you will fly to San Francisco. There we will meet again.” Tokutei was listening with patience, but said nothing.

“I know you need some time to recover from the shock. But believe me; a better life is awaiting you.”

They both entered and sat inside the helicopter. The pilot turned the engine, and a moment later, the machine slowly took off. Tokutei was sitting comfortably, gazing through the window at the forest and soldiers putting bodies into the other helicopters. He couldn’t stand it anymore. He turned his head away from the window, covered his eyes, and let his tears flow. Arthur was sitting next to him.

“*I wish he’d listened to me,*” he thought. “*One mistake, one late signal, and almost all of the Dragons are dead.*”

The machines headed towards the Tokyo city, leaving the bamboo forest filled with bones.

Book 0- Part 3- Daniel Night

Fall into a trap

September 29, 2012

1.

The rain has already set in in the city of New York on this warm, autumn, Monday afternoon. The wind was strongly blowing, banging against everything it met. The streets were being covered with water, and pavements were slowly getting empty. A young man, in his early twenties, was sitting in front of his computer in the house situated in Queens Village. The grey walls of his room were covered with posters from *Blade* movie, and one map of New York. The computer was situated near the window, and above it, there was a shelf with photos. In the room, there was also a modern, wooden bed, a dark blue bag lying on the floor, and a vast, metal wardrobe near the door. The tall boy with rather short, dark blond hair was browsing some pages on the Internet, sipping hot coffee from time to time. Some electro music was being played from the four speakers spread in the room. As he was taking another sip, he heard a ring coming from his right side. He moved his head towards the direction of the sound, but his eyes were still fixed on the screen. The man finished reading the sentence on the webpage, then looked indifferently at the mobile, grabbed it, and checked whose name was displayed on the screen. He saw a picture of a man his age with short, black hair. The lad pressed the green button and brought the cell phone closer to his ear.

“What’s up Mike?” he asked turning down the music.

“Danny Listen up,” said the voice in the phone.

“Yeah?”

“One of our sources contacted us. They said that a transport is coming.”

“From where?”

“From Europe.”

Dan looked at the wet window and bit his lower lip.

“Where is it coming?” he asked inquisitively.

“To the New Jersey Port.”

“When?”

“Tonight,” the voice replied.

Dan leapt up from the armchair, and headed towards the wardrobe. Mike continued.

“Hunters from all the boroughs are coming. We wanna trap the package. It’s gonna be the biggest operation ever. “

Dan opened the wardrobe and pressed some button at the door. The bottom disappeared into the floor, and a metal container emerged. It was big enough to fit into the inside of the wardrobe. It looked like a modern safe with a palm recognition system at the front. Dan pressed his hand onto the screen. Beep, the door opened. There were lots of weapons, bullets, and flashlights of different sizes.

“You do realise it’s gonna be a slaughter out there,” he randomly took out the items from the metal safe.

“I do.... You won’t find anything on the web. The boss wants to avoid any leak.”

“I see.”

“Oh, and Danny,” the voice hesitated, “Come for me at six, I’ll tell you everything then.”

The boy looked at the clock on the shelf showing four o’clock, and replied, “Okay.”

“And one more thing Dan,”

“Yeap?”

“Take the grenades.”

“Already done. C. U. at six.”

“Right, C.U.,” Mike said and hanged up.

Dan put the phone back on his desk, looked out the window to check whether it was still raining, then he packed the selected items to a huge, dark blue bag lying on the floor, and finally he went back to his computer. He took another sip of the coffee. Having swallowed it, he sighed, hitting himself onto the forehead with an open palm. He forgot to close the safe. Not thinking much, Dan turned around, walked back to the wardrobe, and closed the safe door. Next he pressed the button on the wardrobe door making the regular bottom lift up again, and returned to his computer. When he finally sat down, he typed some address in the web browser. A weird site appeared. It showed a bunch of children drawn picture of flowers, houses, New York buildings, and people. Dan scrolled down until a picture presenting the Statue of Liberty came up, and clicked its torch. Then a small white window popped up with a note: *Login and password is required to proceed*. He typed something very fast, and pressed the enter key. The page changed. Dan looked at it. Now the screen was red and black. Big letters *N.Y.V.H.A.* were standing out at the top. He took another sip, and clicked the large banner; *Current mission*. Now the screen said; *Number of hunters signed for the current mission- 58*. The boy moved the cursor down to the *sign in* button, and clicked it. As soon as he did that, the door of his room opened and a woman entered. She was in her late forties, with long blond hair pinned back in a ponytail, a square face, and an athletic figure. She was wearing a checked pinafore and typical female jeans. Having heard the door creak, Dan quickly hit a hidden button under his desk. The website changed automatically into the Wikipedia site.

“Danny, sweetie, are you hungry?” The woman asked heartily.

He hated being called *sweetie*. He was twenty two for God's sake. Old enough to be treated like an adult. But he greeted his teeth, took a deep breath, turned his head to the left side and replied with indifference.

"Actually, I am."

"So, I will prepare something hot for you... A-Are you going somewhere?" the lady asked noticing his bag being full.

"Yeah, I am gonna stay at Mike's for a night. We have some project to do."

"OK, but why do you need such a huge bag?" The woman was getting even more curious

"I've got there some stuff for the project. You won't understand," the boy answered convincingly.

"What kind of pro... never mind. Anyway, I'll be waiting in the kitchen, so when you're done, come downstairs."

"OK aunty. I'll be there in a minute"

The women left and closed the door. Dan turned back to the shining screen, and turned it off. Next he turned the speakers off, and the room filled with the sound of rain drops knocking at the window. Afterwards, he stood up and went downstairs.

2.

The kitchen was connected with the dining room. There was a four-person table covered with nothing but an empty vase. The two seats were situated in such a manner that everyone who was eating could watch TV at the same time. The two windows had no curtains. There were only thick blinds installed outside. The fridge, the oven and other kitchen equipment were set in a perfect harmony.

Dan ran downstairs, dropped his bag in the hall, and sat at the table. His aunt was just taking a hot dog out of the microwave oven. She put it on a plate and served it. Dan licked his lips, grabbed the food, and started eating it. The woman leaned against the dishwasher and fixed her eyes on the floor. She seemed to be worried with something. A few seconds passed, and she boomed.

"I want to talk to you Dan."

The boy raised his eyes and looked at her in confusion. He couldn't say anything, as his mouth was full of food. She inserted her hands underneath her blouse from the top, and took out a necklace. It was a big, round charm attached to a gold chain. Then she placed her fingers on both sides of the round thing, used some force, and opened it. Inside, there was a tiny piece of paper. Dan was gazing at her in wonderment.

"Your parents wanted me to give you this," she said calmly.

The boy put away the hot-dog, and asked,

"What is it?"

"I don't really know what it is. It's some piece of paper with numbers," she handed it to the boy. "I've never figured it out."

On this little sheet there was a square made of numbers. Dan scanned it carefully, but the picture didn't appear to have any meaning.

"I have no idea how to read it," he said with a grimace.

"Your parents told me that when you are ready you will know," she added.

Dan pressed something on his hand-watch. A little pocket ejected, like a cd-rom. He folded the riddle and put it onto the pocket. It quickly disappeared in the side of the watch. He looked at the aunt and asked inquisitively,

"Why today?"

The women sighed and replied;

“I know about your inventions. I know that you are a hunter and I know about today’s mission.”

Dan shook his head, and his eyes grew wide. He was in shock. At first, he tried to say something, but his mind raced. All the memories of his sneaking out for the missions filled his head. He did it perfectly. Nobody apart from the hunters knew. Maybe she saw him once? Maybe she found his secret safe?

“B-But ... how?” he stuttered.

The lady rolled the right cuff of her shirt up, revealing a tiny blue tattoo. It was a minute triangle that looked like a labyrinth. He exactly knew what it was. He saw it every day or rather every night. Every hunter had something like that. It was their symbol.

“You are a hunter, too!” the man shouted.

“That’s correct, and so were you parents.”

Too much confusion. He didn’t know what to say. So many questions arose in his head. Now he learnt his aunt was a hunter. But how did she manage to keep it away from him? He visited the headquarters every day. He knew 90% of the hunters. Yet, he never saw her there, nor on any of the missions.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he exclaimed.

“I wish I could, but this was your parents’ decision,” the woman explained.

“I don’t even know what to say. So many questions,” Dan said bemused.

“Say nothing, accept their choice,” she tried to console him. “It wasn’t that I didn’t want you to become a hunter. You were, I mean, you are perfect for this job. Your inventions, intelligence, fast learning. Just look at all these things. There is no way you could not become a hunter. But because of your parents’ choice, I decided not to engage in your career. Well, not exactly engage.

“How...how on earth I didn’t see you either in the base, or on any of the missions, huh?”

“That’s a good question, and you will definitely figure it out.”

“What?” he looked up trying to put all the information in one piece. “There are over 100 hunters in New York. I know most of them. I have seen all of them, but not you...” He scratched his head, clenching his eyes, and continued, “There are two possible explanations; you’re either new...”

His aunt slowly shook his head

“Or... or, you’re the boss.”

“Bingo!” she smiled. “I told you that you would figure it out.”

Dan was gazing at her, wiping his eyes.

“You could not possibly see me because I didn’t let you. I sent you to all these missions, where I wouldn’t take part.”

“B-But... S-So your disappearing for whole nights wasn’t because you had to stay longer at work?”

“Well, I was at work, hunting them, you know,” she replied.

“S-So, all this time...”

“Yup, all ten years now.”

“OK, let’s say I understand this all, but there is still one thing that I can’t understand.”

“Which is...?”

“Why today? Huh? Why did you decide to tell me all of this today?”

“It’s not that I didn’t want to tell you for all these years. I simply couldn’t. I didn’t know how. It was hard for me to go to bed with the same thought. How to tell you this? Or when to tell you this? But tonight,” she pulled her chair to the back and stood up. “Tonight, it’s the most dangerous mission of all time. We have this one opportunity to take down this

huge vampire transport. 85% of the hunters are engaged. I had to tell you, because I don't know what will happen tonight. If something goes wrong, I fear..."

"Nothing will go wrong," Dan interrupted.

"As always, your optimistic. Natalie was a pessimist and you always cheered her up," the woman referred to Dan's former partner.

After that she went towards the kitchen window.

"It's stopped raining. You'd better hurry."

"What about you? Are you going too?"

"Yes, but on my own," the lady smiled.

"All right then," he tried to snap out of the confusion. "I'll go for Mike now."

His aunt only nodded, and turned around.

The man went up to his room, and walked up to his computer. He looked at the shelf above it, and grabbed a photograph of three people. There was a woman with long curly blonde hair. Next to her, there was standing a bald man wearing a suit. They were both hugging a seven-year-old boy, who looked just like Dan. The man took out the piece of paper he received from his aunt and scanned it carefully.

"What did you want to tell me, dad?" he tried to figure it out.

Then he put away the frame remembering he had a mission to go to. He quickly ran downstairs, took a glance at his aunt one more time, grabbed his bag and shouted,

"I'm goin'."

"Good luck, Dan," the soft voice replied, "Good luck."

The door shut.

3.

Dan and his aunt lived in a white detached house with a garage attached to the right side. The streets were covered with puddles, and the sun was slowly getting closer to the horizon. The large, brown, rectangular, door of the garage pulled up and disappeared in the ceiling, revealing a blueprint of a sport car. Seconds later a loud sound of a car engine spread around. It was a silver Porsche Carrera 911; his dream. Dan has always liked sport cars. He had managed to earn enough money to buy this particular one. If it hadn't been for his brilliant, innovative inventions, he wouldn't have been able to afford such an expensive vehicle. Yet, what he earned was not enough to fulfil his biggest dream; Aston martin DB9. The man slowly pressed the accelerator, and the vehicle drove out. He turned into the street, then sped away.

4.

Half an hour later, he turned into a street surrounded by tall blocks of flats. This district was situated near the centre, and many rich people lived there. The streets were half-empty, as many people had already got to their homes. Dan knew exactly where he was driving. It wasn't the first time he had to pick up Mike. Having passed the next traffic lights, he slowed down. There was a man standing near the corner of some building, leaning against the wall. It was a tall boy at the age of nineteen, wearing black leather jacket and denim trousers. There was also a backpack near his legs. As soon as Mike saw the car, he pushed himself off the wall and went near the corner. The car stopped, and its boot opened automatically in the front. The tall boy came to it and threw his backpack inside. There was already Dan's bag. Next he closed the boot, opened the door of the car, and went inside.

"Hi, Mike," Dan said reaching out his hand to shake.

"Dan, did you take the grenades," the boy replied while shaking the hand of his mate.

"Of course."

"Why a sad face?" Mike asked looking at Dan's grimace.

“Too much to talk,” he answered as he pushed the handbrake down.

“Oh come on. I’m your best friend, for God’s sake.”

“It’s not a good time. Everyone says it’s the most difficult and the most dangerous mission of all time, so I’d rather not talk about my personal problems right now.”

The car took off, and joined the traffic. It’s not usual to drive a car in New York. Most of the New Yorkers use public transport to get to their work, friends, or supermarkets. If anyone living in the centre of the city uses their personal car, it means that they either show off, they really love driving, or they work with their cars.

“So tell me Mike, what are the details of the mission?”

“The ship is coming at 11:10 to the New Jersey Port. There should be around thirty containers on the ship. And inside of only one there’s gonna be about sixty vampires. Pretty tight, right?”

Dan listened carefully to every word Mike said, and pictured everything in his head.

“There are already some of us preparing the trap,” Mike continued.

“Wait, wait, wait. How will we recognise which container is the right one?”

“Somebody would probably be there to pick up the frights.”

“I was on the webpage, 58 hunters signed in.”

“Actually, I was there before I left, and there were 73 hunters. Anyway, as soon as we get there, we’re gonna take the toys and go to the roof. Well, If our source was right, the package should be delivered right in front of the building, so we’re gonna have quite a pretty access to it.

“What about the attack itself?” Dan popped curiously.

Mike looked at him with a sneer.

“Don’t worry Dan. We’re gonna use the UV spot lights.”

“A slaughter,” Dan smirked realising the importance of the mission.

5.

The boys arrived at the port. It was almost 8 p.m. The sky was dark, and a few clouds were coming from the east. There were lots of cars parked in the parking lot. As soon as the beautiful Porsche stopped next to some other car, both of the doors opened and two men got out of the car. They opened the front boot, took their belongings, and headed for a large, ramshackle building near the docks. It used to serve as a warehouse back in the 80s, but now the building was waiting for demolition. Dan took a good look at the whole place. The vast area was filled with red and white containers piled up. They looked like a huge labyrinth. He could also see a few cranes at the side that were used to unload the ships, and a long cargo ship moored nearby. The lights of Manhattan were glowing in the distance. Dan could see a few people around the building fiddling with some cables.

“I hope, we’ll have more fun, than menace.” The man said putting his bag strap on left shoulder.

“Yeah, seeing all these leeches burning up simultaneously gonna be an unforgettable view.”

“We’ll meet upstairs, OK?” Mike suggested spotting a black BMW pulling up at the lot. “I’ll say hi to the guys.”

“Okey dokey.”

Dan was walking slowly towards the building. He was alone again with the memories from the afternoon. Yet, he quickly snapped out of it hearing a familiar voice.

“Dan! Dan!”

He looked up suppressing all the memories, and saw a short, plump men waving at him from the entrance to the building. It was Jake, his fellow hunter.

“Jake, bro, what’s up,” Dan exclaimed greeting his man by hitting each other’s knuckles.

“Tough mission, huh? Did you take the grenades?”

“Yup. About a dozen.”

“Great. They’re expecting you on the roof.”

“I’m on my way.”

Having said, Dan opened the wooden door, and went inside. At the same time Jake ran towards Mike and three other guys who had just got out of the black BMW.

6.

N.Y.V.H.A. stands for New York Vampire Hunters Association. It is an official governmental organ dealing with vampiric entities in the whole state of New York. Every capital city in the USA has its own association, which operates on their territory. In New York, the group employs over one hundred people. It was founded in the nineteenth century by two brothers, right after they had lost their third brother to a vampire. Before World War I, the association gathered over twenty members. They led a constant war with the underworld world of the vampires. Right after the World War II, the government legalise the organisation, and became its official organ. However, since its beginning, the organisation was kept in secret, and only few could join it. Nowadays, New York Vampire Hunter Association is the second largest in the USA, after Los Angeles Vampire Hunter Association. 15% of their members are underage hunters.

7.

The door on the roof opened, and Dan entered carrying his large bag. He saw many people around doing different things. Two people were installing another spotlight on the edge of the building. Some others were sitting next to them preparing weird looking pistols. There were also a few men on the other side of the roof. One of them was holding a tablet showing them a digital map of the docks. At the door, there was a long table with three monitors showing the view of the docks, and around the table there were five people. One of them was holding a walkie-talkie. Another one was looking at the screen. He turned around, noticed Dan, and said,

“Dan, nice to see you tonight.”

“Hi T,” came the answer.

At the same time, Mike rushed through the door. He dropped his bag at the table, nodded once to the man at the spotlight, and took a glance at the monitors.

“What do we have here?”

Dan put down his bag next to Mike’s, and came closer to T. T had black skin. He was medium-height, slim without any hair. He was wearing glasses, and looked like a nerd.

“As you can see, boys, we’re fully prepared for the mission,” He said proudly raising his chin.

“Yeah, and seeing so many familiar faces on this mission, brings old good times back.”

“Anyway,” T cut in, “Have you brought the grenades?”

“Everyone keeps asking me that,” Dan replied opening his bag.

“I have... let me see... 24 grenades. Will it do?”

“I hope we won’t have to use them, but 24 are enough. Go to Molly and the guys over there,” he pointed to the other side of the roof. “And give them a few.”

Dan nodded, grabbed four grenades and ran up to the other side of the roof.

8.

It was almost eleven. There were about thirty people on the roof. Everyone was wearing black clothes, and everyone was busy with something. Dan and Mike were at the screens with eight other people. There was Dan's aunt among them, and Dan couldn't help glancing at her from time to time. The camera was showing three men doing something at the main entrance to the port. Two people came in through the door carrying wide, cardboard boxes.

"Hey! Listen up! We have the remaining grenades."

Almost momentarily, a group of hunters gathered around them and grabbed the weapons. Mike banged a portable radio that was standing at the monitor with his fist.

"Is this thing on?"

T frowned, and grabbed the cable coming out from the back of the radio.

"Now it should be working."

"Every single signed hunter arrived," the voice on the radio said.

One of the men hanging around came up to the boys.

"Does either of ya' want the grenades?"

"Nope Kyle, we're good." Dan answered directing his eyes at his aunt.

Some other hunter, who was standing near Mike, joined the conversation.

"I believe the spotlights should do the whole work. But... the grenades are just for the precaution."

Suddenly, the noise of the ship siren spread around the port. Everyone looked at the sea.

"They're coming!" the bold guy with glasses, sitting at the monitors shouted.

"Everyone, take your positions, and follow the plan," another one shouted.

"Team 6 is moving towards the ship," the female voice came from the walky-talky.

"Do not engage yet," T said through the microphone.

"Which team are we?" Dan inquired, with a silent whisper while grabbing the two pistols from his bag.

"Wake up Dan," Mike said with a little anger. "We've discussed this. We're team 1, remember?"

"Yes, sorry," he replied nodding noticing his aunt boring her eyes into him.

"Dan, focus, please," she said calmly.

Dan stood up, and tucked the guns behind his belt. Some passing black man interrupted.

"I'm going to the roof edge to have a better view. Are you guys coming?"

"No," Mike replied. "We ain't gonna have such a good view there."

"You don't have night vision goggles, so you won't see much."

"I'm still going," the black man insisted.

The ship was slowly approaching the dock. It was a long, rusty vessel, with dozens of containers on it. Many hunters gathered on the roof and were carefully observing the dock.

"This is it," a plump man sitting next to T said.

Everyone was watching the ship. Some of them were using binoculars, others their bare eyes.

A small group of hunters were observing everything on the screens on the other side of the roof. The video camera was situated on a crane near the water. Thanks to that position, the person operating the cameras could show almost everything that was going on.

"The ship has stopped," said the voice on the radio.

"Keep reporting," another one said with a low male voice.

The boys were looking and listening with interest.

"A track is arriving from the west," the voice on the radio continued.

"Team 4, check it out!"

"Confirmed," the woman's voice whispered among fast moving steps.

"Team 5 is in position," another voice interrupted.

“Zoom on the containers,” Dan’s aunt asked.

Dan dropped his eyes. He was thinking again about the true identity of his aunt’s. Mike took a peek at Dan.

“Dan, I know that something bothers ya’, but please, this is very important”

His thoughts were interrupted by another voice on the radio.

“The containers are being unloaded”

“Watch the container number 13,” another voice added.

“This is team 2. We have spotted the 13th container. I repeat, we have spotted the container number 13.

Mike grabbed the walkie-talkie, pressed some button and asked.

“What does it look like?”

“It’s red, the third one from the top,” came the answer.

“Zoom on it,” the boss ordered.

“There it is,” T said pointing at the screen.

Dan crouched at the table, and leaned his elbows against it. The containers were being unloaded and put on the concrete area near the ship. Lots of hiding hunters were watching the ship, preparing for the inevitable. Another husky voice spoke on the radio.

“This is team 4, the people in the truck are humans.”

“Understood,” another voice replied.

“Guys, prepare the spotlights,” came the order from the woman, as she turned around towards the huge lights behind her.

Then she quickly turned back.

“Team 3, prepare the grenades.”

T was observing two people at the right spotlight. They were checking whether the wire was inserted correctly. When they finished, one of them showed his thumb up. Then T took a glance at the other two guys at the left spotlight. When they confirmed readiness, he looked at Mike and nodded.

“This is team 1,” Mike used the walkie-talkie. “The spotlights are ready.”

The crane picked the large metal container with the vivid number 13, raised it and put it on the street next to the other containers. As the crane was moving for the next container, another voice interrupted.

“Team 3 in position. Team 1, direct all the spotlights at the container,”

“Roger that,” came the answer from Dan.

The man turned to the guys operating the spotlights, and drew a circle in the air with his finger. They didn’t have problems with understanding his gesture, and directed the spotlight at the container.

“Team 2,” the boss said, “Observe the area.”

“Copy that.”

“Team 3, move closer to the container and wait until it is opened,” another order came from a low-voiced man.

Team 2 consisted of five people; four men and one woman. They all were carrying assault guns; HK XM8. They were waiting at the containers that had been unloaded weeks earlier. These containers were only fifteen yards from the one with number 13. As they heard the order, they quickly ran to the side of the next container.

“This is team 4, there are two men approaching the container from the north.”

“North?” T asked with a doubt. “But that means they must have been here before us.”

“No time for questions,” Dan’s aunt interrupted. “Check their temperature.”

One of the men from team 4 pressed some button on his assault rifle, and looked through his scope. He pulled back his head, and looked again.

“Bloodsuckers,” he said through the radio.

“Do not engage,” came the order from a low-voiced man. “Let them open the container.”

“Luke, you’re right,” the boss interrupted. “We’ll take them all out with one rail.”

Luke was a former general. He retired at 47, and joined the NYVHA right after it. He and Leonora; Dan’s aunt, formed a perfect strategic team. They understood each other perfectly, and never disagreed. This was one of the reasons they both could give orders without any arguing. During this mission, Lukas was in a complete different place than Leonora. He and the remaining hunters were in the main base. He couldn’t take part in any of the missions, physically, because he was paralysed. Thus, the only way to give orders was from the headquarters. He could both see and hear exactly everything that Leonora did on the roof, and moreover, he was in a safer position.

Mike grabbed the binoculars, ran up to the hunters gathered at the edge of the roof, and looked at the direction of north.

“What do ya’ see?” One hunter standing next to him asked.

“There they are.”

“Team 4 again. We have a clear vision on them. One of them has got a metal tool. I think these are pliers. The second one is clear.”

The two vampires were wearing dark, leather coats. One of them was bald with a stylish beard running from one ear to the other. The second one had short, jarhead like hair.

“Do not take any action till the container is opened,” Luke’s low voice spoke on the radio.

“Team 5,” the voice continued, “Stay where you are.”

“Acknowledged,” the female’s voice answered.

“This is team 6. We are at the container number 4. Team 4 has joined us. We have a clear vision on the targets.”

“Everyone, wait for the orders,” Leonora’s voice sounded in the earpieces.

The two vampiric creatures came to the container number 13. One of them grabbed, and pulled the chain that kept the door close. Another one looked around suspiciously, then cut the chain with the pliers.

“Team 1,” Luke’s voice spread, “Stand by for my signal, and turn the spotlights.”

“Okey dokey.”

Dan and Mike were watching closely what was going on. Every next message that came through the radio kept everyone in suspense.

“I can’t wait to see all these creatures burn up,” some other weird voice spoke amusingly.

“This is team 3, we’re waiting for the orders.”

“Team 3, as soon as the door opens, throw the grenades.”

“Copy that,” the voice replied.

“All the other teams, standby.”

“Team 2 is standing by.”

“Team 4 and 6, standing by.”

“Team 5, standin’ by.”

The massive door started to open, as two men stepped aside pulling the metal knobs. The spotlights were situated on such an angle that they could easily enlighten the whole interior. The building was situated 110 yards from the container, but it was close enough for the light to be effective. Everyone was watching the dark interior being slowly revealed. They could expect everything. A horde of angry vampires might trickle out from the container. Or there might be more vampires in the area willing to take the new ones to their nest. Everything was possible, and the truth was about to come out.

Team 3 was waiting approximately ten yards from the container. Two of the members were holding grenades. They were ready to throw them inside and end everything. When the door was almost opened, it all began.

“Now!” Luke shouted.

Having heard the orders, two hunters from team 3 threw the grenades. One of them rebounded from the wall, and fell at the bald vampire’s feet. The second fell inside.

“Fire up those lights, God damn it!” Leonora shouted to the men on the edge of the roof.

All the spotlights brightened up and the light shot inside the container. The grenades instead of exploding, burst with beautiful brightness producing as much UV light as two spotlights all together. The two vampires, who had just opened the door, vaporised into a cloud of dark ash. Everyone was looking in amazement and hope that nothing more was to be done. The whole dock was lighted up with pure, white light. Even for humans, the light was too bright, and every hunter had to cover their eyes. The number of spotlights, as well as the grenades made the port so bright, that the rails could be seen from the other side of New York.

“Oh no!” some voice screamed through the radio.

Dan looked at Mike and said with a troubled voice, “Something is not right.”

“What’s the status?” Luke asked.

“I can see shit on the screens,” some hunter replied.

“What’s the status of the fucking container?” Luke asked again irritated.

Silence. No one could see anything through the thick, rails of UV light. Then the grenades wore out, and the spotlights were turned off.

“Will anyone answer me!”

Then the silence was broken.

“This is team 4. The container is empty, I repeat the container is empty. No signs of ash.”

“That’s impossible. Our source must have been accurate,” some other man said.

Suddenly some strange growling noises and screams came through the radio.

“What’s going on there team 2?” Leonora asked impatiently.

The radio went dead. Dan looked at Mike concerned, then took a glimpse at the screens. Nothing.

“Team 2? Team 4? Damn it!”

All of the members of team 1 that were at the edge of roof were looking around to spot all other teams and find out what was going on. The noise came through the radio, but it was too damaged to be recognised as anything. The hunters were scanning the area around the container to spot any of the teams. Then they heard shots coming from the area around other containers. The same shots came through the radio. Having heard that, they immediately ducked and took cover. Then the shrieks came from the same direction, and seconds later from left and right. The screams accompanied by thuds and snorting noises were coming from the radio.

“Any team, what’s your status!” Luke shouted, gazing into the monitors.

“This is ... 4...” the message was disturbed by screams that were heard from both; the outside of the roof and the radio. “The....pires... lots of ...,” the man’s shouting voice was cut off by a snort.

“Team 4? Do you read? Team 4?” Leonora shouted.

Another message came. About ten of the hunters who had been on the edge of the roof, ran up to the table with the monitors and tried to see anything. The sounds coming through the radio sounded like a war film. Screams, noises, shots, grunting noises, fast steps. Then T noticed something on one of the screens.

“Look!” he shouted pointing at the monitor.

Everyone else directed their eyes there. The camera was showing the parking lot at the port. There were several cars parked. However, the disturbing view was a hunter running backwards shooting at something. Next another appeared and another. They were all running away from something. As one of them was trying to reload, something zoomed through the parking lot, jumped onto the hunter and took him down. The same happened to the others.

“... is team... every....dead... trap,” the voice continued, then the silence spread through the radio.

“Shit.” Luke’s voice came. “Everyone, get to the roof.”

While Mike was running towards the nearest spotlight, Dan took out the pistols from behind his back, and yelled,

“Turn around the spotlights!”

The hunters of team 1 were confused. They looked at the screen showing the area around container 13, and spotted several human bodies. One of them was still crawling trying to reach his weapon, but something quickly ran onto him, and ripped his head off. Again the low voice shouted through the walkie-talkie.

“All the remaining teams, run to the roof! This is the only safe place now. I’ll...”

The message was cut. The screens went down.

“They are jamming the signal!” Mike shouted putting his sunglasses on.

The spotlight operators turned them on, and almost immediately the thick rail of light sieved the roof. Every hunter who was there was wearing sunglasses not to be blinded by the intense light.

Mike and some man were turning around another spotlight pointing it at the door while the rest were briskly gathering all the weapons.

“Stand in front of the light!” Dan shouted to everyone, as he was nervously looking around.

“Behind you!” another voice screamed through the speaker followed by the series of sounds of shots.

“Radio is back on,” Leonora sighed with a slight relief.

“This is team 3, they’ve got us. We won’t reach the roof...”

“Burn motherfuckers!” some other voice exclaimed.

“Take cover!”

A high-pitched squeak came next followed by a dozen of shrieks and squalls.

Everyone was listening to the bizarre noises and scary sounds, but they didn’t see anything. They could only imagine the hell that was taking place down there. All the spotlights were now enlightening the roof.

“Kyle!” Mike shouted, “Have ya’ got any grenades left?”

“There should be a few in my bag,” the men replied wishing that the others hadn’t taken them, when he asked them to.

Mike ran to fetch them, as a woman’s voice appeared again on the radio,

“Team 1, they are coming to you, be prepared.”

“How many?”

No answer.

“How many?”

Twenty people that gathered on the roof crouched in readiness in between the spotlights. The rails were illuminating the whole roof, so everyone was safe, as long as they stayed in the light. None of the hunters was armless. They were all carrying either pistols or cold steel or assault rifles. They were waiting in almost complete silence for the door to open. The only sounds that they could hear were buzzing of the spotlight. Then they heard the steps coming from behind the door. They were gradually becoming louder. Everyone was waiting in horror for the door to open. The knob on the door turned around. Mike’s eyes grew wider, as Dan

was focusing on taking a shot the moment he would see anything. The metal door creaked opened, and a bunch of men ran inside.

“Don’t shoot! It’s our guys!” T shouted seeing familiar faces.

“Hold your fire!” another one added.

There were about ten hunters. Some of them had their clothes torn. Others had some open wounds. One woman caught Dan’s attention. She had a long knife in her hand, covered in blood, and she had five cuts on her shin that looked like a scratch of some claw.

“Which team is it?” T asked trying to figure out who had just came.

“I see members from team 2, 3, 5, and 4.” Someone replied.

“Take those lights off us!” one of the running men shouted gasping out of tiredness. He caught his breath and continued.

“They are climbing up the walls!”

A tall man dressed in a leather jacket, who was operating the left spotlight noticed something moving in the shadows on the other side of the building. He wanted to illuminate the spot, but some dirty, yellow hand grabbed his leg, and quickly pulled him down, causing him to fall from the roof. The light instead of illuminating the spot, directed at the sky. A short man operating the next spotlight noticed it.

“George!” he screamed desperately turning his spotlight rapidly down enlightening the wall, and leaving the roof in semidarkness.

As soon as he did that, he heard a sound of scratching and saw a dark figure jumping high in the sky. The man tried to follow it with the beam of the light, but he was too slow. The creature landed just next to him. It was a humanlike woman. She was completely bald, with red eyes, and she was wearing a long, leather coat. The creature hissed revealing its strange blood-covered teeth. What was strange in it was that two fangs were much longer than humans’. The blood was leaking down along them. It was obvious. She was a vampire. The weird creature raised its hand as if to attack the man. However, just before the attack, she hissed again and made a sound of raspberry, when simultaneously her body was sieved through by a thick light beam of another spotlight. The creatures immediately vaporised into millions of burnt parts leaving only clothes. The bits immediately disappeared in the air while the man was staring at them in shock. It all happened too fast for him to process the information. One of the other hunters had used the left spotlight and saved his life.

“Grab the spotlight and find those leeches!” he shouted.

“Th-Thanks,” the man stuttered, then quickly came out of the shock and turned around the spotlight, trying to find another vampire.

“No time for thanking! Move from the edge!” the other one shouted.

Now there were more than forty people on the roof, armed and ready for another attack. They didn’t suppose the vampires would use the walls to get to them. They didn’t even suppose they had to fight that night.

9.

The whole building was surrounded by vampires that were slowly climbing towards the roof. The four-storied building was covered with them. Dan and Mike were standing in the light of a spotlight, back to each other, watching the surroundings. Dan was holding two Desert Eagle pistols; his favourites. Mike had a Glock pistol in his right hand and a long, silver knife in the other one. Something moved above the door. They both briskly looked at that direction and shot. Nothing happened. Suddenly, the black blueprint of a creature jumped high into the air and aimed at the group of hunters. Yet, someone managed to point the stream of light at it. The vampire hissed, then vaporised into tiny burning pieces. Afterwards, another vampire was spotted by a spotlight operator, but before the deadly rails could kill it, the light went unexpectedly off. The creature landed in the middle of the roof. Many a person aimed

and shot finishing him off. Mike looked at the spotlight to see what had happened to it. He noticed a hole in the glass and a little knife knocked into the bulb. Out of a sudden, another light went dead. There were no more spotlights left.

“We’ve lost the spotlights!” someone exclaimed.

The hunters were left in almost complete darkness. Fortunately, the moon and harbour lights were slightly lighting up the roof. Everyone took their glasses off.

“Fuck!” someone moaned.

“We’re doomed now,” another voice complained.

As they were waiting for the unknown, dozens of grunting and hissing noises came from all directions. The scrimmage began. A few vampires flew in from the direction of the port grabbing one hunter who didn’t even have a chance to turn around and defend himself. Two other hunters that were standing there quickly shot a series of bullets at the vampires. The creatures fell trembling to the ground. Another couple of those creatures attacked from the direction of the door, taking out another couple of hunters. Yet, they were killed by lethal blade of other hunter’s sabre. Mike, Dan and his aunt were fighting together against all the creatures that jumped in from the spotlights direction. Dan had always been very accurate. His every shot hit the target.

The silver bullets had been kept in a large container of dead men’s blood, thus they were baneful to the vampires. Although Mike had as much experience as Dan, the stress of the situation made him lose focus, and as a result he missed approximately every second shot.

There were fewer and fewer hunters left. Every single one tried their best to survive. The roof was covered with ash and bodies.

“Mike!” Dan shouted, “How many grenades did ya’ find in my bag?”

“Only one!”

“Damn it! Give it to me!”

As he was saying this, one of the vampires threw himself at him, and knocked him over. The creature opened its mouth and tried to bite Dan on the neck. The boy was able to take his knife out and stab the leech in the stomach. The vampire fell over trembling. Leonora, who was nearby crouched at him, and reached out her hand to help her nephew to stand up.

“Be more careful,” she said.

“I am.”

“We don’t have time for family talk,” Mike said sarcastically. “Take the grenade,” he added, throwing the grenade over to Dan.

As soon as he caught it, another vampire threw himself, now aiming for Leonora. The boys shot at him taking him out. Yet, there was another after him. This creature was much faster, and scratched Leonora’s shoulder. The woman fell down. The creature threw itself onto her and as he was about to rip her face off, some other hunter stabbed it in the back with his dagger.

Another group of vampires rushed inside through the door. Some of them got quickly killed by T, but he soon ran out of ammo. As he was reloading, moving backwards, he felt a huge pain in his back and his body moved forward. As he was turning around, he spotted another group of vampires who had just burst onto the roof and pushed him away. As soon as he felt, he tried to feel for his knife at his belt. And when he did, he pulled it hard, but the weapon got stuck. Then a round ball rolled next to him.

“Grenade!” someone shouted.

Someone had chosen a perfect moment to use it. He immediately closed his eyes and waited for the explosion. Seconds later a white light filled the roof.

Everyone had closed their eyes. They heard terrible loud shrieks coming from everywhere.

“Reload!” Leonora shouted. “They gonna be here any minute now!”

There were about thirty hunters on the roof. Some of them were hurt, others were angry, yet some others were filled with fear. They helped one another stand up, reload, or check their wounds. Dan took a short glance at Mike, then at his aunt. They were both worried. He saw many hunters hurt, and many dead among them. The scratching sounds, followed by hissing came from behind the edge. The fight continued.

10.

Meanwhile, a few hunters were defending themselves from the north. They shot every vampire that was in sight, but the increasing number of enemies prohibited them from holding the current position and forced them to move back towards the broken desk with monitors. Some other hunter was eliminating the opponents by his long sabre. Another numb vampire fell onto the ground after being split by his weapon. After that the next one crouched in. The hunter cut off its arms, and then after a spin cut his head into half. As he was looking around to check whether anyone needed his help, some other vampire had crept silently from the back, and sank his fangs into the hunter's neck. The man screamed out of pain, then went down onto the ground. No sooner had his numb body hit the roof than the bullet from Dan's pistol sieved through the creature's head.

"Fuck, that was the last bullet," Dan moaned furiously.

"I'm out too" Mike announced.

"Great," some hunter said sarcastically.

"Moving to cold steel," Mike continued.

"No other choice."

The fight was getting harder and harder every time a hunter was killed or turned to reinforce the vampire army.

11.

After a while, there were only fourteen hunters left, forming a tight circle in the middle of the roof. Several of them were hurt, others tired, and to make matters worse, none of them had any bullets left, only silver blades. About eighty bodies, both of the hunters as well as the vampires, piled the rooftop.

"Use the grenade, Dan," Leonora asked.

"Not yet..."

The vampires were closing in on the circle from everywhere. The tired hunters had nowhere to hide, still nowhere to run.

"Use the grenade, that's an order."

"Not yet." He looked at everyone, and continued, "On my signal, every one lay down."

"All right,"

"As you wish,"

"This'd d better be good," the hunters replied.

Fifty vampires were slowly coming closer, snorting from time to time. They weren't moving as fast as they could. They didn't even attack. They only wanted to tighten up the circle. One of the hunters swung his dagger, trying to kill, or at least hurt the enemy next to him, but it was faster and quickly moved to the back, then zoomed to the front, and knocked his dagger away. The other creatures did the same. When all the hunters were left armless, facing one another's back, the vampires stopped, and one of them stepped forward.

"You pathetic people," he said in a despising tone.

It was a long-haired man with a beard and moustache. He was wearing a long black leather coat.

“You may wonder why there was no one in the container. Your perfect plan to destroy so many of us has failed. You were double crossed by one of ours.”

“What?” T asked in disbelief. “That’s not true.”

“Oh yes it is. Your *reliable source* was one of us. It was him who told you slightly incorrect information.”

“Slightly!” One hunter yelled. “No information was accurate!”

“You’re wrong,” the vampire replied casually still talking as if he was superior. “The transport did arrive, yet it was two days ago, and all of my fellow vampires here,” he pointed at his colleagues, “...were there.”

Some other vampire made a step forward and asked impatiently.

“Can I bite one of them now? Please, please, please.”

“Patience, Lytan, patience.”

The long-haired vampire started to slowly walk around the circle of hunters.

“I don’t want to kill you,” he hissed, then scanned the roof filled with the bodies.

“Well, maybe not all of you. The most efficient and best of you will be turned into us, the rest...” the creature came closer and picked one of the wounded hunters “... will be fed on” as he was sibilating the sentence, he bit his long, sharp fangs into the victim’s neck, and started to suck his blood. The hunters were looking at them hopelessly. It was over for them. Fear was the only emotion they felt, and they couldn’t help it. They lost every hope for winning, or even surviving. They were so scared, that neither of them could utter any sound.

“What are you waiting for?” the vampiric creature hissed to his fellows raising his eyes from the victim’s neck, “Turn them!”

All the gathered vampires sprang savagely at the petrified humans.

“Now!” Dan exclaimed, throwing the last UV grenade high into the air.

Every left hunter dropped on the ground, and covered their eyes. As the grenade was in the air, its shell fell off, and a white, bright UV light spread all around the area creating a vast, white sphere. The luminous grenade produced so much light, that nothing was visible. The thick rails went through the vampires causing their sudden death by turning into a cloud of black ash. Dan slowly opened his eyes and looked up. He saw other hunters slowly raising from the ground, and millions of yellow-red-black scraps falling down like snowflakes.

“Is it over?” one of the men asked.

“I think so,” some other one replied checking up his wounded arm.

“Aunt, are you alright?” Dan asked silently as she was brushing the vampire remains off her coat.

She took a glimpse at Dan and said.

“I felt worse.”

Then she looked around, and realised that this very mission was not even close to a success. Dozens of bodies of her employees lying around covered in black ash. It was a terrible lost.

“The radio is back on!” T exclaimed.

“What the fuck happened there?” Luke’s both angry and concerned voice came through the speaker.

Leonora and the others quickly rushed to the table.

“Our source was a mole. It was all along a trap... on us.”

“What are the losses?”

“About 90 %”

“How much!” he cried.

“I’m devastated, too. As soon as we get back to the base we need to...”

Her sentence was cut by a sound of a black helicopter that had appeared in the night sky. It was heading for the roof. Every single hunter left stopped whatever they were doing and directed their attention at the machine.

“I hope there aren’t any more vampires up there.” Mike said grabbing a dirty dagger from the floor.

“Leonora, what’s it that sound,” Luke asked confused.

“Some kind of a chopper.”

As the chopper was landing on the roof, everyone stepped back. Some of them were already holding weapons. They could expect everything. The helicopter landed, the engine turned off, and the blades of the propeller were tardily slowing down. The door opened and a man wearing a white suit stepped out. It was Arthur West.

“Hello there,” Arthur said, “Please lower your weapons. I intend to do no harm.”

“Who are you?” one of the men asked.

“My name is Arthur West.”

Having heard this name, Luke remembered meeting him way back in the army and later in one of the missions. One of the hunters squinted, and shouted,

“Hey, I know ya’. You’re that guy who owns a diamond mine.”

“That’s correct,” Arthur smiled. “I must apologise I couldn’t come earlier, and assure more of you would be still alive. Please forgive me.”

“What are saying? Leonora interrupted.

“I must say, honestly, I didn’t know it would be a trap. I just... I’m sorry again. So many brave hunters lost their lives tonight. I wish there had been something I could do.”

“If you can bring their lives back, that would be a think you could do,” T joined the conversation.

“Unfortunately, I cannot do this. The reason I am here tonight is that I want to offer one of you a unique chance. And by one of you I mean you Dan.”

The boy raised up his head and looked at the man. This was more shocking and mysterious information for him.

“What are you talking about? Why me?”

“Because you are unparalleled, like everyone I need. You see, Dan. I have been observing you for a long time. I consider you to be one of the best, or even the best in what you do.

“Why do you need him?” Mike enquired.

Arthur looked at Mike and smiled.

“Well Michael, I am forming a special group to fight supernatural creatures, like the ones you have just defeated. But this is not the only reason. We have very little time left before what you do as a part time job, would become a full-time life.”

“What is he talking about?” some hunter whispered.

“I need five people who are the best in what they do. Not only is Dan finest in vampire hunting, but he is a professional in computers and inventions as well. And I am seeking such people. So what would you say Dan, will you join me?

Dan didn’t know what to say. So many things happened in one night. And his mind was trying to block all of that. He turned to his aunt for advice.

“What do you think aunt?”

“I think it’s an honour for you to be chosen. You have great potential, you always have. You should go,” came a sincere answer.

“Go Dan, you earned it. Hadn’t been for you, we would be dead now,” Mike added.

“Mr. West,” Luke’s voice came through the radio. “This is Lucas Lantiewski. We met...”

“Yes, I remember you,” Arthur interrupted.

“I know exactly what you are talking about, and I want to add that Daniel Night is a perfect candidate for your team.”

“Thank you, general.”

The boy reached out his hand to the man, as the pilot turned on the engine.

“Alright then. I want to accept your offer.”

Arthur shook his hand, and took out an envelope from his white tuxedo.

“Take this. There is everything you need. We’ll meet in San Francisco in a week.”

“San Francisco? Wow,” the boy said in disbelief.

“Good bye for now,” Arthur said with a smile, and turned around.

“Hey sir!” Mike shouted. Arthur turned around again.

“Yes, Michael?”

“If you ever get bored with Dan, take me on. I will be waiting.”

“I think, you have a lot of work to do here. You have lost lots of men. You need to train new ones. Yet, if any big operation is happening, we will be there. Farewell for now.” The men disappeared inside the chopper, and momentarily the machine rose into the air and flew away.

Book 0- Part 4- Jason White

Not a ghost of chance

September 30, 2012

1.

It was a few minutes after midnight. Traffic in Sydney limited only to ambulances, taxis and people returning from second shifts. Along one of the main streets of the city, a black vehicle was speeding. It was a rectangular truck, covered with bulletproof body and glass. Inside, there were twelve people. All of them were wearing dark uniforms, bullet-proof vests, and some of them had black balaclavas on their heads.

“OK guys,” said the man sitting behind the driver seat. “I’ve got some new info.” Everyone looked at him.

“Don’t tell us sarge that they’ve decided to give up cause I wanna shoot somebody,” one of the men laughed.

“You won’t be disappointed, Greg,” the sergeant replied. “A helicopter with some back-up has just landed on the roof. Too bad, the reinforcement is for the bad guys.” One of the guys raised his gun.

“Does it mean that our plan has changed?”

“The plan is the same. Philip and I will inform you about everything from here. The only thing that changed are the pairs, so listen carefully,” the sergeant beckoned at the soldiers, “Bob and O.D., you’re the Alpha team, John and Jane, you’re the Bravo team, Henry and Lucas, you’re Charlie, and finally Greg and Robert, Delta.”

The car turned into a dead-end street and stopped.

“Alright, guys, we’re here. Everyone grab their gun, and do what you must do,” the sergeant ordered.

The men got up and took their guns, then, one of them opened the truck door and they all jumped outside. It was a dark, dead-end street with two, mouldy walls on each side. As soon as they got out they spread and each pair followed their own particular plan.

“Philip,” the sergeant raised his voice to the man sitting next to him at several monitors. He was wearing only a uniform and a vest. He also had a tiny earphone stuck at his right ear, which was covered by his slightly longer hair.

“Yes, sir?” the young adult answered.

“Keep an eye on Bob, it’s his first mission.”

“Understood,” came the answer.

“Which one is it?” the sergeant asked beckoning at the monitors. Philip looked at the screens that were showing views from everyone’s cameras installed either in their helmets, or on their shoulders.

“The one in the top left corner, sir,” he answered pointing at the screen that was showing two members opening a sewage hatch.

“OK guys, just follow the plan.”

2.

Three soldiers ran towards the building opposite the nearby skyscraper. As soon as they reached the junction two of them split up, and ran towards both corners of a wide building. The third one, carrying a large suitcase, ran straight ahead towards the door. Another pair had gone down to the sewage. The next one got closer to the main entrance of the tower block. Meanwhile, the ones that had split reached the both corners of the building while the third one got to the main door, opened it and rushed inside. The black man who was on the left side of the building took out a long pointy metal object off his back and pressed a button in the middle of this pipe. The item immediately spread into a tripod with a video camera on the top. The second one did the same. They both left the tripods on the pavement and rushed towards the main entrance of the skyscraper. In the meantime, two other soldiers reached the back of the skyscraper.

The sergeant was focused on what was going on in the screens. His eyes were wandering from different views of each member’s camera. Philip was carefully observing the vivid picture from the two tripods.

“Audio test,” the sergeant murmured. “Alpha check in.”

“This is alpha team,” came the answer from the people in the sewage.

“Bravo,” the man gave another order.

“Bravo team is checking in,” A female at the entrance confirmed.

“Good. What about the Charlie team?”

“Ready to rock,” came the answer from the three man waiting at the back of the skyscraper.

“What about you Delta? Have you joined the Bravos?” the sergeant asked again.

“Yes sir, we are both at the entrance waiting for the orders,” the black man standing near the glass door answered.

Bravo team was standing opposite them rechecking their assault rifles.

“And finally, Eye, check in.”

No one answered.

“Eye, do you copy?” the sergeant asked impatiently.

“This is Eye, sorry sir, but I had problems with opening the roof door.” the black man with a huge suitcase replied.

“OK. All teams, take your positions, and wait for the orders. Eye and Philip will update us with the targets’ positions.”

“Roger that,” came the answer from the soldiers.

The man, who was on the rooftop of the building, opened his wide suitcase revealing a massive, metal object inside. It contained parts of a sniper rifle. He took out each piece one by one, and put them together.

“You’ll see what my baby sees, sir.” The man said with his strong black man’s voice, then pressed a small button on the top of the rifle sight.

“Copy that,” sergeant replied. “Alright, we have the visual, switch into infrared,” he added. “Acknowledged,” Eye replied pushing another button on his sight.

As he did that, one of the screens in the main truck switched its colours into infrared. Thanks to it, no wall was an obstacle.

“OK, Eye, scan the building,” sarge ordered.

Eye slowly moved his rifle to the left, then up, and then to the right.

“Damn it,” he said angrily, “Do ya’ see what I see, sir?” he added with a little shock.

“How many are there, thirty? Forty?” Philip asked looking nervously at the screen showing many red and yellow human blueprints among blue walls.

All the other screens were showing what the soldiers were seeing. Two of them were walking along a narrow, round corridor, with a small, shallow stream in the middle. The next four screens were showing Delta and Bravo team approaching the main entrance. The next two were showing Charlie team crouching at the back door. The last two belonged to the tripods that were directed at the glassy building.

“Bravo and Delta!” sarge shouted. “There are too many of them at the main entrance, you can’t get in this way.”

The four members were waiting on both sides of the main entrance. It was a wide, glass double door with no knobs or hinges. They opened automatically every time someone came closer. But this night they were inactive.

“So what are the orders, sir?” Robert from team Delta asked.

“Join the Alpha team. You’ll all enter from the underground.”

“Roger that, sir,” the man replied and rushed with the others to join the team in the sewage.

“What about us, sir?” Lucas from Charlie team standing at the back of the sky-scraper asked.

“Charlie, you have no choice but to join the others. You will all have to act us one.”

3.

The six soldiers met at the sewage hatch. They slowly climbed one by one down a rusty ladder to join the two members waiting below. The unpleasant smell was floating in the air, and greenish water was pouring along a dirty pavement. Soon, everyone was in the sewage tunnel.

“Which way to take?” the tall man without a mask asked through the headset.

Philip pressed some keys, and momentarily one of the screens changed into a digital map of the sewage.

“Go right, John” he ordered.

Everyone started to go along the pavement. Squeaking of rats filled the empty corridor from time to time, and their mates’ steps echoed in the distance.

“OK, stop,” Philip spoke again, “On your left, there should be a crate.”

“Yeah, I can see it,” John replied.

“Open it. The corridor will take you to the basement of the target.”

O.D., the tall black man, put his assault rifle on the floor and pulled the black crate as hard as he could. The heavy metal object started to move slowly towards him. Robert hanged his gun on his shoulder and rushed to help his teammate. The crate moved faster. They were pulling until it broke, then O.D. threw it into the sewage. He grabbed his M4 from the ground, and they all entered a low, narrow corridor.

“You should see the ladder. The entrance should be near,” Philip’s voice came through the earpiece.

“Acknowledged,” came the answer from Robert.

He climbed down a broken yellow ladder. The rest followed them.

“OK, we see the entrance,” John announced.

Eye was observing the whole area through his rifle sight.

“There are no hostiles in sight, you may proceed,” he said calmly.

“Acknowledged,” one of the soldiers said.

They ran fast through the door to some room with two huge turbines. There were several bodies around, and walls were covered with blood.

“What happen down here?” Henry, asked.

“Jesus, these people ain’t no amateurs, that’s for sure,” O.D added.

“We’d better keep movin’,” Robert ordered.

They rushed farther through the corridor, then left, and up the stairs. The basement walls were grey and dull. The floor was cracked, and was covered with nothing, but the dirt and dust. As they were passing through the next corridor, near the workers’ lockers, the voice of sergeant came through the headset.

“All gates have been closed. You’re now in a lockdown.”

“Good. Nothing comes in. Nothing comes out.”

Everyone stopped and looked around. They saw a half-closed security gate in front of them. The lock was crushed. They could also see a dead body of a white-collar worker lying in the corner next to a red flare.

“Nothing to glare at, proceed,” sarge ordered.

They moved farther. The soldiers got to the main hall with the elevators. The colour of the walls changed into yellow. The floor had a carpet on it, and there was a lot of furniture around. The floor was covered with vast fresh blood stains. The soldiers stopped for a while. Greg followed the blood stains, and found another body of an office worker standing by the wall, surrounded by bullet holes. The huge wound on his back must have glued him to the wall.

“They did spare no one.” Henry whispered.

“The elevators are out of order, you have to find another way,” Philip announced.

“How hot is upstairs, Eye?”

“Three tangos on the second floor, far from the stairs.”

They walked towards the open door near the corner, and entered another room. The desks were overturned. There were lots of papers and cans thrown about randomly on the floor. They opened another door and saw wide stairs leading up.

“Proceed with caution,” came the order from sarge.

The second floor looked even worse. It was a typical office, designed for many people to work in; a main corridor with several cubicles on each side. The teams stepped in, and saw dozen of bodies with red holes in their chests and heads. Some of them hadn’t even had any chance to run away because they were still sitting at their desks. Some of the desks were overturned, others were broken or moved. Everything was in mess. The lamps were still swinging from left to right, flickering from time to time.

“Three targets approaching,” Eye said indifferently.

“Roger that,” Greg replied putting his finger on his shotgun’s trigger.

They entered another room, just round the corner.

“What a melee,” O.D. commented silently, glimpsing at the perforated bodies of employees and security.

The walls were full of bullet holes and stains of blood.

“What’s their status, Eye?” John asked stopping at the next corner.

Eye looked through the sight.

“They’re in the next room, totally unaware of your presence.” he answered.

“And you’d better keep it that way,” sarge added gazing at the monitors.

Robert walked slowly towards the door, reached out his hand as if he wanted to open it. Bob tapped his shoulder, and shook his head. Robert pulled back his hand and kicked the door open. Two of the soldiers rushed into the room aiming at the three figures of terrorist. The villains were wearing black uniforms with headsets at their ears. They were all carrying

bulletproof vests, so shooting anywhere, but the chest was the only option. The shots came shortly, penetrated three heads, and the villains fell dead onto the ground.

“Clear!” Henry shouted, while the others ran inside and took their positions.

“They know you’re here,” sarge announced.

“Let’s move!” John shouted to the team.

Robert peeked at the bodies one more time, and headed farther towards the next door.

Everyone followed him.

“How many are there?” O.D asked.

“Eleven,” came the answer through the headset.

“Don’t worry, Eye will help you,” sarge said amusingly.

Henry opened the door and went inside. He saw a small but wide room. On the other side of the room, there was a ten-yard long corridor with three thick columns supporting the ceiling. There were also two offices on each side of the corridor, to which one could get directly from the corridor or from the small room connected with it. Henry noticed two figures at the end of the hall. He aimed his M4 at one of them and shot with a three-burst series. The bullets hit the terrorist’s head. At the same time, the rest of the team came inside. The second terrorist turned towards the soldiers, but suddenly his head exploded, spluttering the walls with fresh blood, as a terrible report came from the outside. It was Eye and his Barrett.

“Nine to go,” Philip informed.

Henry noticed an overturned desk on his left and quickly jumped there, O.D. and John followed him. Robert, Greg and Bob jumped to the right side hiding behind two columns. Jane and Lucas wanted to join Greg and Bob, but there was no time, as a voice came from the hall.

“Target sighted,” someone shouted with a British accent.

Then a series of shots came from the office on the right. John wanted to fire towards the direction the shots came from, but the voice of his colleague prevented him.

“Man down!” Greg shouted.

Everyone looked at the door, they had just come from, and saw Lucas lying on the floor with a puddle of blood spreading under him.

“Shit!” sarge shouted. “Hold your position!”

“Sarge, inform them about targets’ positions, I’ll try to take out as many as possible,” Eye’s voice came through the headset.

“Roger that, Eye.”

John quickly peeped to check the entrance to the office, then took out one of the grenades, activated it, and threw it inside.

“Grenade!” someone shouted desperately from the office.

Then the explosion came, followed by the sound of breaking glass. And after it, a sudden report spread, as the thick voice of Eye came through the headset.

“Target eliminated, six to go.”

Sarge and Philip were looking at the screens.

“There are two targets coming through the left office!” sarge announced.

Henry felt a few bullets hitting the desk he was hiding behind. He waited for the perfect moment to stand up, and shoot back, but the shots wouldn’t stop. Bob quickly slid out from behind the column, aiming his gun towards the moving figures, then shot directly at the approaching men. He hid back, and yelled.

“Tango down!”

“Status!” John shouted.

“Only four remaining.” Philip informed as another Barrett report came.

“Three,” Eye corrected.

“They’re about to enter the corridor,” sarge added.

John, O.D. and Henry quickly made a dart towards the right office, and crouched at the window sill, while the rest followed Bob, and entered the second office on the left. The dead bodies of terrorists were lying among the broken chairs and computers. John, O.D. and Henry were slowly moving below the window sill between the office on the right and the corridor. Henry stopped. He looked at the two teammates, and pointed his finger up. The men looked at the window sill and heard footsteps on the pieces of glass in the corridor.

“Eye! Hold your fire!” sarge shouted. “The hostiles are between our guys.”

“Report!” a voice of a British terrorist came from the office.

“Target lost,” another one replied.

Henry wanted to throw a grenade to the corridor, but he wasn't sure whether he would do more damage to his own people than to the bad guys. While he was turning, he stepped on the broken glass which cracked under his shoe. The terrorists noticed that.

“The office!” one of them shouted turning towards the broken window.

Another one took out a grenade and activated it. But suddenly, Bob and Jane stood up at the window of the second office, and precisely shot the three terrorists in the head.

“Grenade!” Jane shouted, as she and Bob ducked at the sill. The grenade fell between the three bodies and exploded tearing them apart. The pieces of human flesh, as well as the tiny fragments of the columns, walls and windows flew into both offices.

“Clear,” Phillip said checking the monitors.

“The floor is clear,” Eye added.

The team met at the end of the corridor. O.D. looked at the Lucas's body.

“We'd better keep going,” he said to the rest brushing the dust off his uniform.

“What about Lucas?” Jane asked with sadness in her voice.

“He's gone, there is nothing we can do about him right now,” Bob replied tapping her shoulder.

“Like O.D. said, keep moving to the next floor. The stairs are in the next room.”

4.

The seven soldiers reached the next floor. As they were approaching the door leading out of the stair case, John asked,

“What's the status?”

Philip checked the monitors.

“The next room is clear.”

The soldiers went inside. They saw a long narrow corridor, with tall glass windows on one side that lead to some office. There was an office worker's dead body lying on the floor.

“Shit!” sarge shouted. “Prepare yourselves, they're coming from the front door!”

“How many of them?” Bob asked.

“Eight.”

“I'm ready in case you ask,” Eye announced.

John broke one of the windows with the butt of his weapon, then everyone hid inside of the office, as the front door broke open. Eight angry-looking guys with assault rifles rushed inside searching for targets. One of them slowed down, as he noticed the broken window. He walked slowly towards it, and then some force threw him at the wall, as the bullet from Eye's Barrett went through him. The others glanced at him, and ran forward. Bob leaned right trying to spot the enemy. Then a sound of several shots came, and before he managed to pull himself back in, he fell on the ground with a hole in his forehead.

“Bob!” Philip exclaimed.

The rest of the group couldn't say anything not to blow their position, which the terrorists were probably aware of. They were trying to hide behind the overturned desk and a wardrobe. Greg, O.D. and Henry looked at one another. Henry beckoned with his head. Then they all

leaned from behind the furniture and started to shoot, taking the enemies out. Luckily, no one else died in this very action.

“Clear,” Eye announced.

“But Bob...” Greg tried to say something.

“I know, Greg,” Henry tried to cheer him up. “This isn’t an easy mission.”

“Good job men,” sarge said. “I mean... about taking God damn bastards. Now move farther, the conference room is close.”

“Acknowledged,” Henry replied trying to suppress all the bad emotions and focus on the mission.

The team ran back to the corridor and towards the door. Behind it, there were another stairs leading up.

“What’s the situations up there, sarge?” O.D. asked.

“Seems to be clear, but proceed with caution.”

The remaining six soldiers went up. They saw another corridor with offices on both sides. The floor was covered with blood and bodies. Everything was in mess. The desks were overturned, or moved. The lamps were either moving or hanging on one wire.

“Be free to go farther, there’s no one in there,” Eye informed.

Greg opened the door and they went inside. The wide room looked like a warehouse. There were lots of cardboard boxes piled up. On the right and left, they could see stairs leading to the next level of the storage.

“It’s a double-level room,” John said looking around.

Phillip looked at the computer blueprints of the building in confusion.

“Damn it! Take cover!” he shouted.

“What’s wrong?” Jane asked, while she and the others rushed towards the wall.

“They’re up there!” he yelled, as several terrorist showed up on the second level.

Almost momentarily a hail of bullets flew towards the team.

“Taking fire!” John shouted.

The soldiers had nowhere to run, there were only boxes around and they were under heavy attack from above. They all had no choice but to shoot back. Eye was watching the second floor through his Barrett sight trying to take out the terrorists, but they were running from side to side. He pressed the trigger, but the bullet missed the target. It took him a few seconds to reload before taking another one. In the meantime, O.D. and Greg successfully took out two men above them.

“Tango down!” O.D. exclaimed.

Meanwhile, John was shooting at the two men running down along the stairs. The bullets hit the first men, but the shots from the second one hit John on the leg. He fell onto the ground releasing his assault rifle. He rapidly grabbed his leg to check the depth of the wound. Henry was running backwards shooting at the man next to the second stairs. Suddenly, the terrorist flew a few feet to the back.

“Eye,” he murmured to himself, and then he noticed John falling onto the ground.

He looked towards the direction where the shots came, and send a burst there. The terrorist screamed and fell on his knees, as two streams of blood trickled from his chest and arm.

“Got’im!” he said.

Having reloaded, he quickly scanned the area. He saw Jane lying on the floor, O.D. and Greg scanning the upper level and Robert crouching under the stairs.

“Clear!” he shouted running towards John.

“Clear!” Greg shouted back.

“Clear!” Eye added.

“What’s the status?” Sergeant asked. “We lost vision from Jane”

“Jane is gone!” O.D. yelled checking Jane’s pulse.

“And John is hurt,” Henry informed.

“Just a scratch, I’ll be OK.”

“Are you sure?” Greg asked.

“Yeah, just help me stand up, and we can move on.”

“Go upstairs and through the door,” Sarge ordered.

Sarge started to think whether the whole mission had any sense. Maybe they should wait for some backup? He has already lost three good men there, and none of the hostages has been rescued yet.

“I know that losing three members is hard for you. But, we’re here for a greater good. We must save those hostages before those bastards do something stupid.”

5.

The remaining five soldiers reached the next floor, Greg opened it, and they found themselves in another hallway.

“If you go straight, turn right and go upstairs, you’ll be near the conference room,” Philip suggested.

“What about the terrorists?” John asked.

“There is only one just near the stairs,” sarge said.

“Not anymore,” Eye added after a low gun report spread.

Seconds later the team were upstairs. They saw a terrorist’s body lying near the stairs.

“The conference room is at the end of the corridor,” Phillip informed.

“I don’t suggest you should go there, too many hostiles,” sarge added.

“What is the plan, sir?” John asked.

“We may use the ventilation system,” sarge replied.

“Wait, sir! something’s wrong,” Phillip interrupted.

Eye, Philip and the sergeant were gazing at the infrared screens with about twenty yellow-red human-shape stains. Suddenly, a few similar stains appeared, but of different colour. They were slightly blue.

“Do you see it sarge?” Eye asked.

The sergeant screwed up his eyes, and looked closely at the screen.

“Everyone stop!” he ordered, “Something is not right.”

The team stopped near the entrance to the conference room, and waited for some explanation.

“What the heck is that thing?” he asked himself.

“I have never seen anything like this,” Philip added.

The blue blueprints came closer to the bright ones. Suddenly, a weird sound spread from behind the door accompanied by the screams. Every single soldier looked at the door in wonder and disbelief. Some of the bright humanlike shapes changed its colour to the same as the moving shapes. Others spread and vanished, yet some others fell apart and a few pieces of them spread in all directions of the room, then diminished.

“I don’t know what is happening,” Eye said. “They all changed the infrared colour, as if...”

“As if what?” O.D. asked impatiently waiting for the order to break in.

“As if they were all dead, as if they were all ripped into shreds” Eye replied in disbelief.

“What should we do, sir?” Robert inquired.

The sergeant looked at the monitors, then at Philip, then again at the monitors.

“We can’t waste any more time, Proceed with caution,” he ordered.

“Acknowledged.”

The five soldiers came closer to the door. Greg beckoned with his finger as if to show Robert to kick the door open. The man approached it at once and kicked it so hard that it opened immediately. Everyone rushed inside one by one scanning the room with the foresight.

“Clear,” Robert shouted, after checking the left side of the room.

“Clear,” O.D yelled checking the right side.

“Lower your weapons boys, I think we’re done here,” John announced scanning the room.

There were a few bodies of office workers around, but no terrorists. Blood was everywhere; on the floor, walls, even on the ceiling. Nothing else, no guts, no bones, nothing, only litres of blood.

“Have you got the visual, sarge?” Henry asked.

“Yeah, what the hell happened there?” he asked with a shock. “Where are the terrorists?”

“Sir, everyone disappeared after that horrible sound,” Henry replied.

“There is nothing left, only blood.”

“And the hostages?”

“Gone.”

“Eye, do you see any activity in the building?” John asked.

Eye looked closely into the rifle sight and checked the whole building.

“No, no one, only you guys,” came the answer. “That’s weird. All the terrorists downstairs disappeared, too.”

“Can anyone tell me what the hell happened!” sarge shouted angrily.

“Someone or something killed the terrorists,” O.D. replied.

Everyone was looking at the blood stains wondering what might have happened.

“I’ve never seen anything like this,” Henry commented taking a closer look at one of the blood stains.

Back in the truck, Philip and Sarge were also trying to figure out what was going on. Philip was moving the front video cameras trying to see anything suspicious. He found something. One of the screens showed something moving in the corridor.

“Oh no.”

“What is it Philip?” sarge asked.

“Something’s coming,” he announced desperately.

“I can see it too,” Eye confirmed.

“It’s the same thing that was before.” The sergeant said rubbing his forehead. “We have no choice, evacuate the building at once,” he ordered.

The soldiers quickly turned around and headed for the broken door.

“What do you see?” Robert asked running towards the open door.

“I have no idea, but it doesn’t look human.”

“Where is it?” Henry asked catching up with Robert.

“It’s on the stairs. Take the first right.”

“What about the lockdown?” O.D. asked.

“We will turn it off ASAP,” sarge replied.

The soldiers were zooming through the corridor, listening to the orders about which way to take.

“Take the lift,” Philip said, “The one on the right.”

“What about that thing, Eye?” Robert shouted to the microphone.

Eye was scanning the building following the human-shape things.

“One is in the conference room, the other one is in the staircase,” came the answer.

“There’s also one more,” sarge said looking at infrared screen.

“One more? for Christ’s sake!” Greg shouted.

The soldiers stopped at the lift. The sign above the door was indicating that the lift was one floor higher.

“Call the lift,” John said impatiently.

Henry pressed the button and waited for the lift.

“Just press the fucking button!” John burst.

Sarge didn’t know how to react, but he tried to correct John’s behaviour anyway.

“John, I know you’re wounded, and you may feel scared, but believe me, we’re all trying to figure out what is going on.”

“What are those things anyway?” O.D. asked as the door opened revealing a dimly-lit elevator.

“I really don’t know,” Philip said uncertainly.

“They can’t be humans for sure,” Eye added. “Their body temperature is too low.”

“Hurry up,” Philip exclaimed, “Those things are moving really fast.”

The soldiers jumped into the lift. They still were holding their weapons tightly and looking out for the unknown. John pressed the 0 button several times nervously, while others were staring through the closing door. Suddenly, something grey sped in front of them in the corridor as the door closed.

“Did you see it?” Robert asked when the lift started to go down.

The others shook their heads and tightened the grip on their weapons.

“We still don’t have any visual,” Philip stated. “There are no working cameras in the building.”

“Look!” sarge shouted to Phillip, pointing at the screen.

The three figures quickly rushed downstairs. Everyone was waiting for the lift to reach the ground floor. While it was getting closer to the bottom, Philip was checking the blueprints of the building.

“As soon as the door opens, turn right and make for the door.”

“Roger that,” Robert replied.

Henry checked the ammo level, took a glance at everyone, and said.

“I don’t know what will happen next, but we must keep it tight and leave the building ASAP.”

The lift finally reached the lowest floor. The soldiers raised their weapons and prepared for the unknown.

“Eye!” sarge shouted to the microphone, as he was watching the mysterious things approaching the level one. “Take them out!” he ordered.

“As soon as I have a clear shot, sir.”

Eye put his finger on the trigger, and carefully observed the positions of the figures.

Meanwhile, the door of the elevator opened, and the soldiers ran out. They saw a long corridor leading to the wider room and the main entrance. Everything was covered in blood as if someone poured it on the walls with a hose. The soldiers immediately turned right and made for the exit.

“Damn it,” Eye yelled. “They are on the same floor. They’re too fast for me!”

Suddenly, the same creepy noise spread again a few feet back, behind the corner where the elevators were. The team turned around, but they didn’t stop running.

“Holy shit!” Robert shouted, as a strange grey creature emerged from behind the lift. It was a half transparent, rotten, human-shape thing. It looked like a monk with a long ragged robe and a vast hood on its head covering the whole face. Then another appeared and another. The creatures saw the soldiers and stopped. Then, out of nowhere a hole appeared in the monk’s head followed by a sniper rifle report. The bullet went through the being and hit the wall behind leaving a large hole and a smoggy trace coming from the back of the head of the

ghost. It had been a perfect opportunity for Eye to take a clear shot. However, the hole in the monk quickly fused and the scary creature accelerated.

“Oh my God,” sarge shouted in disbelief, gaping at the screen.

Phillip was also paralysed with fear, and couldn't say anything.

Even though, the Eye's Barrett had no chance against the ghosts, the soldiers started to shoot at them. Yet, the bullets went through the transparent bodies, plunging into the wall.

“Run!” O.D. exclaimed turning around.

The others did the same, but the scary phantoms started to chase them. They caught up with Robert and suddenly disappeared in his body. The man stopped as if he was paralysed, opened his mouth, but didn't say anything. His cheek started to wobble, and then his arm. The others were running towards the door, but they took a glance at what was going on behind. Henry's body started to shake, and then it was torn into millions of pieces. The ghost emerged again and aimed for John and Henry. Seconds later there was nothing left of them.

“Oh fuck!” it was the only thing Philip could say from the truck.

Sarge wasn't better. He had much more experienced, but he had never seen anything like this. He had never had any contact with paranormal beings, and having seen it for the same time, drove him into such a shock, that he lost his voice and rational thinking.

O.D was running towards the door, stepping in his teammate's guts, when he saw Greg being attacked by the mysterious undead. Greg screamed desperately as the monk's long bonny hands tore his vest and stomach. He fell down, but didn't release his gun. The monks threw themselves at him. He tried to repel their attacks, but losing too much blood limited his strength. Greg moved his gun, pointed it at his head and pulled the trigger, ending his pain.

“Damn you, Greg!” the voice of sarge in the headset exclaimed.

O.D. couldn't do anything, but he kept running towards the exit. As he was about to kick the glass window, and make his way through, the angry spirit blocked his way just in front of the door. O.D. tried to stop himself, but his speed was too high and caused him to slip and fall. His M4 landed a few feet farther. All the remaining spirits flew up to him, and gathered around him. He was staring at them indifferently, but he wasn't scared of them. There was a reason behind that; he couldn't feel any fear. And this disability was due to one, unfortunate, childhood accident.

The first monk lowered himself and looked deeply into the man's, emotionless eyes. O.D. noticed that the monk's face was covered with numerous deep cuts and his eyes were gone. He also noticed that his silver-brown transparent clothes were covered with different signs he had never seen before. Eye was closely observing it through the sight. He had switched the infrared view off, as he could easily see his mate near the glass window at the main entrance. O.D. thought he would be ripped in any second, but to his surprise, the monks turned away and sped towards the exit, then disappeared outside.

“What the...” sarge said still gazing at the screen. “What's their position Eye?” he asked regaining the control of his thoughts.

Eye was scanning the area with his rifle trying to find the spirits.

“Target lost, sir!” he replied still looking for them.

Philip and sarge were staring at the screens. A few were showing the view from the killed soldiers. Some others were showing only pieces and shreds of the remains of human bodies. Yet some other ones were showing nothing. Probably, because they had been destroyed. O.D.'s shoulder camera was still operating normally showing the ceiling covered with vast blood stains. Red dense drops were falling down onto the floor from them. The two turrets set outside were still operating without any malfunction. Suddenly, the screens from the turrets dithered. One of them inclined the picture as if the turrets had fallen onto the pavement. The second one turned around pointing towards the wall zoomed at it as if it was thrown against the bricks.

“They are not finished, yet” Philip said with a terrified voice.

“Sir! I see them at the turrets,” Eye announced.

“Do not shoot, it won’t do any good,” the sergeant ordered.

“Acknowledged.”

Eye was almost fearless. It wasn’t anything to do with his disability or lack of this emotion, but he had had lots of difficult experience with violent world. He had been thought to hide his emotions and deal with them either later, or never. At that moment he was closely observing one spirit destroying the turret when suddenly the vision in his rifle shook. He immediately pulled back and saw one of the monks floating ahead of him.

“Make it quick,” he said neutrally accepting the consequences.

The ghost threw himself at him, grabbed his body and threw it off the roof. Eye crashed against the pavement. On seeing this Sarge shouted to the driver,

“Tim! Take us as far from here as possible. At once!”

Tim, the driver, immediately started the truck and pulled back. The heavy truck turned into the street and shot ahead.

6.

O.D. was lying on the floor listening to everything through the headset. He finally gathered some strength to get up. He looked around the blood-covered walls and limbed across the smelly gore towards the exit leaving his weapon behind. The smell of guts was in the air, and being the only one alive started to strike at him. The red drops were running down the broken glass. He finally got out. It was still dark outside and he didn’t know what to do. He wiped the blood of his black face and scanned the area. There was no one around and his whole team had just been slashed. He reached the junction and saw the S.P.S.U. truck at the end of the street. It was lying on its left side, and one leg of the driver was hanging out.

“I’m really sorry for your team, Jason,” a man’s voice spread.

O.D quickly turned towards the direction of the voice and saw a blueprint of a man standing in the shadows. O.D realised that he left his gun back in the building and didn’t have any weapon to his disposal. Before he had any chance of saying anything, the voice spoke again.

“Please don’t fear me. Well, I know you are not able to feel fear,” the man stepped out from the shadows revealing his white tuxedo. “But don’t jump into wrong conclusions,” he added slowly walking towards O.D.

The soldier was looking at him flabbergasted.

“Who are you? And how do you know all that?” he asked.

“You know what? Each one of you asks the same questions when they see me, so I will make it quick.”

“I’m all ears,” O.D said casually.

“Well then. My name is Arthur, and I have been watching you and others like you for a few years now. Why? You may think. I am establishing a group; a special force, to be more precise; that will be dealing with such things like those Dutch monks.”

On hearing it O.D quickly asked in wonder,

“Dutch monks? How do you know that?”

“They were brutally murdered many years ago before any of these buildings was built. But this is not what I wanted to say. I want you to join my crew. Your invulnerability to fear, as well as years of experience in S.P.S.U. will help a lot.”

OD dropped his head and started to walk nervously around.

“I don’t know what to say. After losing all my team, I don’t want to be in this country anymore. I don’t even know whether I want to continue helping others.”

“You won’t be alone,” Arthur assured. “Our base is situated in San Francisco.”

“That means that I’ll have to move there, isn’t it right?”

“That is correct, Jason, but you don’t have to worry about that.”

O.D. stopped and glanced over his shoulder at the lying truck and then at the tower block he had just escaped from.

“All right then, I’ll join you,” he said not being truly convinced.

“Good,” Arthur smiled, “Take this envelope, everything you need is in there,” he added handing the envelope to the man. “Come with me, I can take you home if you like.”

“No, thanks, I have to be alone for a while to gather my thoughts.”

“As you wish. Then, see you soon, Jason,” the man said turning around.

Book 0- Part 5- Qiaolian Shu

One Way or The Other

September 26, 2012

1.

The city of Beijing was quiet that night. Lots of skyscrapers brightened it up with thousands of windows. The China World Trade Centre; the highest building in the city, was towering upon the beautiful view. The clock was about to strike midnight when the door opened and a tall Chinese man carrying a suitcase entered the apartment. There were three other men in the room. One was sitting at the desk while two others were standing on both sides. They all were wearing black suits with white shirts and red ties. The room itself had almost no furniture. Apart from the desk and three chairs, there was also a wide bookshelf and nothing more.

“Mr. Chang,” the sitting man said. “You’re never late.”

The tall man came up, and put the suitcase on the desk.

“I want to do it quickly, Mr. Lung,” he said angrily. “I don’t want to repeat the same mistake like the last time” he added.

“You’re right, Mr. Chang. Open the suitcase,” the sitting man said.

It was the 84th floor. Five hundred yards away, on a rooftop, there was lying a black figure watching the men through the sight of a rifle. Next to her there was a black case and a small black backpack. The figure moved revealing its sex; female. The woman had slanted eyes and her long black hair covered her shoulders. She was wearing a dark uniform with numerous pockets both in her vest and her trousers. Her pale face was round and of extraordinary beauty.

“The target is in the range,” she whispered through the wireless headphone as she was observing Mr. Chang opening the suitcase.

“Has he got the statue?” the voice in the headphone asked.

The opened suitcase revealed a brown figure of a lion. Mr. Lung stood up and as he was approaching the suitcase, the voice in the headphone spoke again.

“C47! Do you see the statue?”

The woman moved back from the sight and whispered,

“Affirmative.”

“Shoot them all at once and retreat the statue!” The voice exclaimed. “Well... you know what to do.”

The woman looked back through the sight and aimed accurately. The cross in the sight was moving around Mr. Chang’s body, then stopped right at his head. Her finger slowly pressed the trigger causing the massive bullet go through the barrel and zoom towards the target. The projectile pierced through the office window and thrust into the skull of the tall man. The

confused bodyguards immediately threw themselves towards Mr. Lung to cover him with their bodies.

“Get down boss!” one of them shouted as the other one was looking through the window to spot the shooter.

Mr. Lung ducked holding the statue tightly while the Asian woman tried to find a free spot to take him out.

“It won’t do.” The woman said pulling back her rifle.

She threw it aside and grabbed another one that was near her bag. It looked like a crossbow mixed with a modern Barrett rifle. She pressed some button near the trigger. As she did this, immediately some sharp silver spikes leapt from the bottom and she thrust the object down into the solid surface of the edge of the roof. Then she aimed this thing at the China World Trade Centre, trying to hit the window sill one level higher than the apartment. Her finger pressed the trigger. A long arrow flew out from the weapon dragging a rope behind. The arrow hit the sill so hard that it went through the wall and hatched itself on the other side. The woman took off a longitudinal metallic thing from the pocket of her trousers, grabbed it tightly on both sides of the rope and pushed herself off the roof.

The bodyguards were carefully seeking the shooter when suddenly, another hole appeared in the window followed by another and another. The surprised men pointed their gun at the window but they saw nothing.

“It’s coming from up there!” the bodyguard screamed as he looked and his colleague. The second man said nothing. He fell on his knees, and then on the floor. The bodyguard was looking at him for a few seconds watching the blood pouring out of his head.

“Don’t you just stand there,” the boss shouted terrified, “Take me out of here!”

The woman was sliding down towards the office, holding the slider with one hand and the pistol with the other. She was shooting towards the building. The last bodyguard couldn’t see her, because of the fact that she was wearing clothes in the colour of the background. He could only hear the high-pitched sound of the slider rushing along the steel rope. It was getting louder and louder. The woman let go of the slider about fifteen feet from the window. She was flying with the speed of 50 mph which enabled her reach the window. She made a front flip taking out the second pistol and zoomed inside. The bodyguard and Mr. Chang didn’t have any chance to hide or to do anything. As soon as she was able to spot the target, still being in the air, she aimed and shot several bullets one after another. The silencers installed on the barrels caused the bullets to wheeze through the air. One of the bullets hit Mr. Lung on the arm causing the statue to be dropped onto the ground. The enemies fell on the ground as C47 landed successfully on the carpet. She heard the statue breaking next to her. She quickly looked around to check whether there was anyone else to threaten the mission. There was no one. Only four bodies were lying around. The smell of the shots was hovering in the air. She looked down at the pieces of the statue, and saw some object lying among the statue debris. It looked like a large, metal, old-fashioned key. The woman put away her guns and slowly approached it. She crouched and grabbed the object realising that it must have been at least 500 years old. Then she noticed some kind of strange writing on the other side of the key.

“What may that be?” she asked herself when a male voice in her headphone spoke.

“C47, what’s the status?”

She stood up still looking at the picture and reported.

“Targets have been neutralised, but the statue has been destroyed”.

“What!” the voice exclaimed. “Our employer may not be satisfied with it,” he continued.

“Maybe it’s not a complete dead loss, there was some old key inside.”

As she was saying this, a humanlike shape rose behind her.

“It must be the key to the ...” the voice stopped for a split of second then shouted, “Oh no! How did they find me...”

The figure behind C47 turned out to be Mr. Chang. It had a huge hole in the forehead and his eyes were closed. The girl wasn't aware of his presence, as she focused on what was happening on the other side of the headset.

“No...” the voice shrieked accompanied by the strange growling noises.

“What's going on there?” the woman inquired. “D-Do you copy?”

“Lian...” the voiced wheezed. “... Take the key and...” It stopped.

“Chenglei, Chenglei...” she shouted to the headphone, as the undead man raised his eyelids revealing his red, scary eyes.

“Chenglei? Brother?”

He quickly hit her on the back with a strong elbow punch. She fell down a bit paralysed and stuttered. She needed a few seconds to come round and think clearly. But there was no time. Something had just happened in the headquarters, and something had just hit her. Not thinking much, the girl quickly turned her head and saw the man whom she had just shot.

“It's impossible!”

“Impossible?” he enquired casually. “No. Unbelievable? Maybe.”

“B-But I shot you,” she said with a scared voice. “You have a hole in your forehead, you should be dead!”

“Dead? It takes much more than a bullet in my head.”

The woman quickly took out her pistols, aimed and fired. The bullets nested in the enemy's chest. His body shook and pulled back every time each bullet hit it, but nothing else happened, he didn't fall down, neither did he felt it. He raised his head and said slightly irritated.

“Can't you understand. Bullets don't hurt me.”

“What, are you?” she asked while hiding the guns in the holsters on her trousers.

“You don't wanna know, give me the key back. It belongs to us,” the man said.

“Never!” she shouted throwing herself at the opponent. She performed a fast round kick aiming at his head, but he was faster. His hand quickly grabbed her shin and blocked the zooming leg. Not thinking about it, she jumped using her second leg, kind of like a reflex, and made another round kick from the other side. The man let go of the first leg and grabbed the second one, causing her to fall. She quickly stood up, made a few steps and rose into the air straightening her right leg while chambering the other one under her groin. Yet, again he was faster, and caught the kicking leg, then span around, releasing the woman. A bit disoriented, she flew towards the wall.

“Ah!” she screamed as she hit the wall, causing the paint to crack. Her black uniform got a little bit dirty and the handle of her backpack torn. Mr. Chang came up to her.

“Give us the key you inferior human!”

She raised her head wiping some blood from her forehead and shouted,

“So take it!”

She quickly pushed herself off the ground and started running towards the door. The man made a dash after her. She opened the door and jumped into the corridor. There was no one else. Not thinking where to run she rapidly turned left and zoomed towards the stairs.

“Fuck, he is still there,” she thought while looking back.

She rushed upstairs, still checking what the distance was between her and the strange creature.

“Damn, he's faster!” her inner voice spoke again.

Not having enough options, she turned into the corridor two floors above and ran towards the window at the end. The man was getting closer and closer.

“This is a dead end!” he exclaimed. “There is nowhere to run.”

She realised that there was no exit apart from the huge window in front of her.

“It’s no use kicking the doors or checking if they are open,” her mind raced. As she was just about to be caught, she leapt onto an adhere wall putting one foot on the right side of the window and the other above it, and strongly leapt off it performing a wall flip. As she was upside down, just over the man, he grabbed her head with both hands as if he wanted to slow himself down using her as a brake, but he was rushing too fast. The window ahead of him would be the only thing that could stop him, or so he thought. The creature hit and broke the window pulling the woman behind him, and they both fell out through it. Several pieces of broken glass thrust into their bodies. It was an 84th floor. C47 finished the back flip still being held and pulled by her head. She gathered the entire remaining strength dwelling in her tired and hurt body. She quickly moved her leg towards the enemies back, kicking him as hard as she could. As a result he let go of her, and started to spin. Afterwards, she pulled a string attached to her backpack, and felt a strong jerk, pulling her up, as a large parachute boomed from the backpack.

“Who’s inferior now?” she said as the man’s spinning body was speeding down towards the pavement.

His body crashed into it breaking almost every single bone in his body and destroying the internal organs. The sound of the crash echoed in the air. There was no one on the ground to see it, only C47 who was slowly decreasing her height with the parachute. The woman slowly landed on the other side of the street. She detached the parachute and sat on the nearby bench.

“I hope it’s over now,” she moaned looking at her bruises.

Next she took out her little tablet and clicked a few buttons dialling a number. She could hear only the sound of waiting call in her headset.

“What’s happened down there,” she wondered.

Then she took out the key from one of her pockets and looked at it closely. Why the heck did this guy need it so bad. But then she realised the key must be very old. The statue that had been broken was at least thousand years old and that meant that the mysterious object had been put there a long time ago. It occurred to her that the key might have been even older than she had assumed and whatever it opened, it must be also very old. She took a glimpse at the Chang’s body lying not so far from her. The corpse of Mr. Chang moved. On seeing this, the Asian woman boomed.

“You must be fucking kiddin’.” she groaned, as his body raised and looked at her with his evil red eyes.

He set his arm and leg, then started to rush towards her. He didn’t have time to set his second arm, which was dangling behind him like a flag. She jumped up and tried to escape towards the nearby train station. The man ran after her. She reached the dimly-lit platform. There was nobody around apart from some homeless lying on a bench.

“Shit! I’m trapped,” she yelled to herself realising there was nowhere to run.

Chang grabbed her and threw her onto the empty track. She tried to protect herself but it was no use. He then jumped next to her with a thud.

“I won’t ask again. If you don’t want to give us the key, we will take it from you.”

She was lying on the track covered in her own blood. Out of the sudden, she heard some noise coming from the outside of the platform. She realised it was a train, so she reached her hand towards the rail and tried to push herself out of the track. The sound was getting louder and louder, and she didn’t have enough strength to pull herself up.

“What do you think you are doing?” the man asked ironically, while coming towards her.

She was too weak to answer or to catch a full breath. He grasped her hair and kicked her with his left leg. Then threw her further onto the railway.

“F-Fuck you!” she stuttered out splitting with her blood.

The three lights of the approaching train were visible in the small distance. The man sat on the exhausted woman and started to rummage for the key with one hand, as the other one was dangling numbly behind him. She tried to protect herself, but she was too weak. Another whistle spread around.

“Where did you hide it!” he wondered while the train was only seconds away. She raised her arm, pressed some button with her index finger causing a key to emerge from her black cuff and shouted,

“Take it, asshole” she spit, and threw the key a few feet further onto the railway. Chang, not thinking much, immediately made a dart towards the front, while C47 laid flat along the track. Suddenly, the black bottom of the locomotive covered everything she saw. Chang grabbed the key and quickly laid down, too, to avoid being hit by the locomotive. Yet, his dangling arm stayed behind as the train came. The numb limb hooked against a hanging spike from the locomotive and the whole body was pulled behind the speeding machine. The woman closed her eyes. She could only hear the clatter of the metal wheels while the carriages were skidding a few inches above her. When it passed, she slowly raised her arms trying to stand up. She looked at the rails in front of her, and saw a few metre-long blood trace with guts all around.

“Well, well. You were actually invincible.”

She limbed along the rails and carefully looked around. Suddenly, she stopped and crouched above the smelly remains.

“There you are,” she murmured grabbing the key from between the cut fingers. She hid the object in her pocket and headed for the platform. As she was trying to climb on a head-level platform edge, she heard a voice.

“Need a helping hand?”

She looked up and saw an elder man wearing white clothes reaching out his hand towards her.

“I’ll be alright,” came the answer as she was struggling with the wall.

“Will you?” Arthur asked.

“Eh,” she sighted reluctantly as she grabbed his hand and let herself be pulled up.

“Quite a nice performance you did there, Miss Shu.”

She immediately let go of his hand, looked at him suspiciously and said.

“How do you know my name? Who are you anyway?” She immediately took out her pistol and aimed at him.

“Believe me,” Arthur smiled, “I didn’t come here with bad intentions. There is no need to use weapons.”

She was looking at him as if she was slightly convinced but not fully. What was this white man doing in the middle of a night in the railway station? Was he observing her?

“Please Miss Shu, let’s sit and talk.”

She put away her weapon and replied wiping her blood off her lower lip.

“OK.”

They walked a few yards further to the bench.

“You know, Miss Shu,” Arthur said, as she was checking up her hurt leg. “I have never seen anyone to kill a demon this way.”

She lifted her head and asked in disbelief.

“A demon?”

Arthur smiled a little bit.

“That is correct. Well, that used to be a human, before he was possessed by a demon. You know, I saw people casting spells on them, trapping them forever, shooting their eyes with holy water, but never ever have I seen anyone completely destroying their host.”

She was gazing and simultaneously listening to his every word.

“I’m really sorry about your brother, I couldn’t save him on time.”

Her jaw dropped as she froze in shock. A few minutes ago she had the last contact with her handler; her brother and now this man was talking about him as if he knew what happened.

“Who are you? How do you know all that? How do you know my name and my real name, how ...”

“Please, too many questions,” the old man interrupted. “I will answer each and every one of them, but one at a time. Alright?”

“I’m sorry,” she said calmly. “But you see, so many strange things happened to me tonight.”

“I understand your situation. After going through such things, like tonight, one seeks answers to their questions, so I won’t keep you in uncertainty anymore.”

“I’m all ears,” she said eagerly.

“My name is Arthur. I know all about demons because I fight them, and I know your name, because I have been observing your work for a long time.”

The woman was gaping at him, but she couldn’t say anything.

“I realise, this is strange for you, but it’s true.”

“W-Why me?” she stammered.

“I’m searching for the best people all over the world to join my special organisation that fights...” he pointed at the remains of Chang. “...those things.”

“I almost died here, and you want me to fight more those things?” She said angrily.

“Not only demons, many others,” Arthur replied calmly. “You’re the best hitman, or should I say hit woman in the world. I want you to join me, and find more answers to the questions you have.”

“What if I don’t have any questions?” she asked.

“Believe me, you do, you have just asked them.” he replied amusingly. “For instance, you still don’t know what happened to your brother, or what the key is for.”

“My brother! Is he alive? Tell me!”

“Yes, he’s alive. But he is not in China anymore. I will explain everything soon.

“I want to know!”

“Miss Shu, you’re not ready for this answer yet.”

“When will you tell me?” she inquired wiping remaining blood from her shoulder.

“Soon,” he put his hand in a pocket of his suit, “If you agree to join my group.”

He took out an envelope.

“Read carefully what is there and consider my proposition. In more than a week you will know all the answers.”

She took the envelope and opened it, while Arthur stood up and headed towards the near stairs. “How will I find you?” she shouted.

Arthur turned around.

“Everything what you need is in the envelope.”

She looked into it with amazement.

“What’s that?” she murmured to herself while taking out the papers from the paper container.

To her amazement, she found there a cheque for 20, 000\$, plane tickets, as well as some other papers. “It was you...” she shouted, but there was no one in sight. Her voice weakened. “Who hired me for this mission.”

It all hit her. It was him whose voice she had heard two days earlier. The same men who had given her this very mission. And he seemed to know so many things about her. But the most important question was, what happened to her brother back then. He was her handler, and all she heard from him was *they found me*. To know the answer about his whereabouts she had to follow the instructions from the mysterious envelop. There was no way she could refuse this proposal.

Book 0- Part 6- Surya

September 28, 2012

Half the fangs

1.

The streets of New York were very quiet that night, as if the city was dead. Suddenly, several people jumped out from behind the corner, carrying pistols, and revolvers.

“Where did she go?” a tall, black man in the front shouted.

“I saw her running here,” one of them replied.

“There she is!” another one shouted pointing at a dark shape ahead of them that was flitting towards a dark street between two blocks of flats.

“After her!” the first one ordered.

The men ran after her.

“This is a dead end,” another one announced when they have turned into the dimly-lit street.

“She won’t run anyway now,” some other man added.

It was a narrow street situated between two abandoned buildings designated for demolition. The road wasn’t used for anything apart from police cars to hide in from time to time to control the traffic during the day. After dusk, traffic vanishes and there is no need for the police or anyone to be there.

“Kill the monster!” the man carrying a baseball bat shouted.

They were getting closer and closer to the tall thick wall illuminated only by a single lamp. In front of them, beneath the wall, there was standing a young girl. She was facing the wall, trying to find a way out. When she realised there was no exit, she quickly turned around.

“She’s just a child,” one of the women in the crowd boomed after seeing her late teenage body.

“So what,” some man yelled. “She’s still no human.”

“Please you don’t understand,” the girl shouted to them with a begging voice, hiding something in the pocket of her long black leather coat.

“You’re one of them!” someone shouted from the crowd aiming his gun at her.

“I’m not!” she screamed, as her shoulder-length, straight black and white hair trembled. “I hate them as much as you do.”

“Don’t listen to her!” the tall black man yelled. “She tries to trick you!”

The petrified teenager kneeled and looked at him with her white-pupil cat eyes saying,

“Why do you judge me without letting me prove whose side I am really on?”

He looked at her young face and those begging eyes, then turned around to the others.

“You all saw what she can do, we must kill her,” he said, turned back, and pointed his gun at her.

“I beg you!”, she cried as a sound of a shot spread around.

The girl half-opened her mouth, as her strange eyes grew wide. She looked down, and saw blood pouring out of her stomach onto her smooth palm.

“Leave her alone, she’s mine!” a sudden voice reverberated from above.

“We’re not alone,” one of the men whispered to himself when everyone looked up.

“Do you see anything?” the man at the back asked.

“No,” another one replied.

Suddenly, a pale bonny hand emerged from the darkness behind the last man, followed by pointy fangs and scary yellow eyes. Nobody else saw it. They were all gaping up seeking the unknown owner of the voice.

“Ah!” the unaware man shrieked as the sharp, lethal fangs pierced into his neck. His colleague, who was standing nearby, turned immediately, and saw a human-like creature standing in front of him sucking blood from the numb man.

“They’re here!” he shouted to everyone, pointing his trembling hand with a gun at the creature.

He quickly pressed the trigger, and a few shots flew towards the creature, but the bullets missed him. The girl raised her weakened head and looked at the black man, who had just shot her.

“You’d better run away,” she said trying to get up.

Everyone took several shots at the man, but they couldn’t hit him. He disappeared in the shadows, and emerged again in a completely different place.

“He’s too fast,” someone yelled.

In the meantime, the wounded girl managed to stand up. She quickly ran towards the shadows ahead, then disappeared in the darkness. Everyone was gazing at the dark corner, listening to a few hissing and wheezing sounds followed by a loud shriek. The whole action lasted for about two seconds, then the girl emerged back dragging a body of the strange creature behind her. It had a huge hole in his chest, and blood was pouring out of its mouth.

“I told you I was on your side,” the girl said calmly. “Now please, leave before the others come.”

Not thinking much, the group turned around and ran away in a hurry not saying a word. A few looked back at her, others just sprinted as quickly as they could. As soon as they disappeared behind the corner, the girl unzipped her coat, rolled her clothing up and looked at the wound. She wiped out the blood from her stomach, then gently touched the spot, where the bullet had flown in. Yet, there was no hole, and no more blood was pouring out. It was as if the wound healed. Suddenly, she heard several rumbles coming from the shadows of the street. She quickly looked at that direction.

“Surya, Surya,” the voice said slowly and calmly as a dark man stepped out from the darkness.

His hair was long, and his skin was pale as if he had spent several hours in freezing cold weather. He had several scars on his face.

“Once again, you stepped into our way, and tried to cross our plans,” his hissing voice continued while others like him came out from the shadows.

They were all dressed in black leather clothes. Most of them had long dirty hair, and all of them had very pale skin. The girl rolled her blouse down and looked at the first man.

“You disgust me, Roth, you know that?”

The man looked at his companions and laughed,

“Yeah, I should.”

No sooner had he finished saying that, than someone shot a rectangular piece of metal on a long string towards Surya. The girl’s body started to tremble for a while as she tried to make a sound, then she fell on the ground losing consciousness. The vampire grabbed the object from the ground; it was a paralysar.

“Take her to the nest,” the pale man ordered.

The other vampires went up to her. Two of them grabbed her body and picked it up.

“I always hated that girl, why don’t we just kill her?”

“No yet, I want her to suffer a little bit more.”

Surya opened her white eyes and looked around. She was lying on a bed in the middle of the room. It was deprived of any windows, lit by hundreds of candles placed on the floor and the wooden stools. The girl tried to get up, but couldn't move her hands. Then she realised, she was tied to the bed. Suddenly, the door opened and the familiar pale vampire came in.

"As you can see, we had to take precautions to make sure you won't interrupt us this time."

The girl looked at him with a scowl and replied,

"What are you trying to do, this time?"

He came up closer and sat on a chair. He did realise he was making her more and more irritated, and he found that enjoyable.

"This is our final operations," he said. "Each and every hunter from New York will come tonight to New Jersey Port to set a trap on a delivery."

"What delivery?" she inquired.

"We will be joined by 50 vampires from Europe."

"If they are going to set a trap on you, they are bound to win!"

"You're wrong, Surya" the vampire smirked, "You see, the best thing about this is that they were told the package would be sent tonight, but really, the Europeans came yesterday. They think, they will be setting a trap on us, but at heart, the trap will be set on them."

The girl was looking at him with anger in her eyes.

"And this is all thanks to our double agent," he added amusingly.

Surya thought for a while, then boomed,

"Mike!"

The vampire looked at the door, then back on her.

"Yes, he is the dhampir who is the spy. Our agent sent among hunters. He does his job well, you see. And the funny thing is, no one even suspected him. Not even you, Surya. And you were so close back in the days."

Surya was devastated. All this information messed with her mind. All the memories she had, everything she did with Mike.

"Why don't you leave them alone!" she yelled pushing her body so hard that the whole bed shook.

"Because, we want to pick the best, and convert them, then feed on the rest," he answered casually.

"No!" came the cry.

"Oh Yes, you won't thwart our plans this time, and maybe when there will be no hunters in New York, you will accept who you really are."

"I am not like you and I will never be!" she shouted, as two fangs emerged in her mouth.

"Ha ha, look at yourself, you deny yourself."

The vampire stood up and headed towards the door. Surya was confused and didn't know what to say. Her emotions took charge and she boomed.

"I loathe you!"

The vampire turned around just as he was about to press the knob.

"One day you will regret you didn't accept yourself earlier," he looked down on her then left the room.

Surya looked around the room trying to figure her way out.

"I must stop them," she whispered to herself.

Next she pulled her arms to her chest as hard as she could, but the ropes didn't break. They were too thick.

"Come on Surya," she gasped, "You can do it."

She pushed her arms one more time, as her face reddened and her fangs came out again. The force was so strong that the ropes finally broke. She quickly sprang to her feet and put her black coat on. After that, she put her hands in the inside pockets of the coat and smiled, then rushed towards the door.

“Damn!” the girl murmured realising the door was locked.

Not thinking much, she made one step backwards then kicked the door to make it open.

“What was that?” one of the vampires that were sitting two rooms ahead asked.

“Surya,” the second one replied casually pushing himself from the chair.

After the door had been smashed, the girl ran inside the room taking out two silver daggers. Each about 20 inches long. There was no one inside, but she could hear two enemies approaching from the front door. As soon as the door opened, she jumped towards them, flew across the room, and cut their throats. Next she rushed to the next room as two numb bodies fell onto the floor. Another vampiric creature tried to stop her. Surya rapidly made a spin performing a hook kick which was so hard that made the creature fly across the room and hit the wall, leaving fractures around the place of impact. Hardly had she finished the kick, when some other vampire threw himself at her from the back. She tried to stab him in the eye, but he skewed his head and grabbed her two arms. Meanwhile, the second creature came round, stood up from the floor brushing the remains of the wall off his coat, and rushed towards Surya. While he was advancing at her, the girl dipped then jumped as high as she could banging the vampire, that was hanging on her, against the ceiling. The numb body got stuck near the lamp, as the girl threw one of her daggers at the approaching creature. The weapon pinked his eye with a splash of blood. Having landed, Surya realised that the body over her detached from the ceiling and started to fall right at her. While the second vampire was writhing in pain on the bloody ground, she used the second dagger to cut through the falling opponent. The stomach opened, but the dagger missed the spine, and thus the body stayed in one piece when it hit the ground. Then she grabbed one of the bodies by its legs and began spinning so fast, that the body was horizontally hovering in the air. While she was gaining speed, a few remaining vampires entered the room. She released the grip and let the body fly towards the upcoming horde. Its speed was so high, that it knocked the vampires over like a bowling ball knocks the bowls. Afterwards, the girl ducked and tore off her dagger out of the skinny head of the freshly killed nocturnal creature, then made a dart at the remaining three vampires. She kicked one on the head, then made a spin and cut the throat of the left one, while the right opponent crouched and jumped at her. Vampires are much stronger creatures than humans, and hence his manoeuvre knocked the girl over onto the ground. They fell among the bodies. The vampire crawled up and sat on her stomach holding her arms hard to the ground. Surya tried to break free, but he was too strong.

“Prith said to keep you alive for his own damn purposes,” he said looking with his yellow eyes deep into hers, “Yet, I ain’t patient enough to fucking do so.”

Surya tried to reach one of her daggers near her palm. Just a few inches. Her fingers walked along the floor and climbed onto the dagger.

“I can help you with that,” she said kicking him in the back with her knee.

He let go of her hands, and before he came round, the girl grabbed her dagger and cut off his head with one swing. The pale head rolled towards the wall, while the body fell near his fellow vampires. Surya stood up and rushed further. In the next room, she noticed a huge wooden door. She opened it and ran outside. It was already dark, and there was no one in sight. She was in the suburbs of New York.

“God damn it!” she shouted to herself hiding the daggers in her coat. “I’m too late.” She could see the river bank ahead and the Jersey Port on the other side of the river.

“I wanted to come for you later,” a voice came from the left.

Surya turned around to see who it was.

“But I didn’t know whether you will be still alive,” the voice added.

“Who are you?” the girl asked, seeing a man in a white suit. “I don’t have time now, I need to do something fast.”

The man seemed not to be surprised by her or by what she was trying to say.

“If you’re talking about the NYVHA, I’m going there myself. And believe me I’ll be there faster than you.”

The girl stopped and turned her body towards the mysterious man.

“Who are you, I asked.”

“I’m Arthur.”

“You’re not a vampire, so what are you doing here? And how do you know about NYVHA?” she inquired.

Arthur came closer to her.

“Let’s sit on the steps and I will tell you everything.”

The girl didn’t want to listen at first, but then she walked with him towards the stairs. They both sat on the steps leading to the vampires’ hideout.

“I’m listening,” Surya looked him in the eyes, fiddling with her fingers.

“I’m also a hunter, but I don’t fight only vampires. Demons, zombies, ghosts are my flavours of the life,”

Surya’s eyes grew wide as she heard those words.

“Demons and ghosts are real?”

Arthur looked at the sky for a while.

“Yes, they are as real as you, or the creatures you’ve just killed.”

She started to analyse his words.

“I understand I may have messed with your head. But, Surya, I will not be beating around the bush, but speak plainly. I’ve been admiring your work for a long time and I need you to join my team.”

She looked into his eyes and asked,

“Your team?”

“That is correct,” Arthur said, “I’m organising a special team that will fight supernatural creatures.”

As she heard this, she quickly stood up.

“I belong to supernatural creatures,” she said nervously.

“Look, we want to eliminate those things that endanger human lives, and you are on our side. I want you to join me.”

The girl didn’t know what to say.

“Look,” Arthur continued, “No one accepts you here. The hunters don’t want you, neither do the vampires. If you join me, you’ll find not only home, but also acceptance among other members. And also...” the man came closer to her and whispered something to her ear. Her eyes grew wide open, as she heard those mysterious words. It was something she longed to hear for a long time. Now she made up her mind, and knew that she had to join the old man’s team. Regardless what the other reasons are.

“Alright, let’s do this I want to join you,” she said happily.

The old man peeked impatiently at the other bank of the river.

“Good choice,” he said taking out an envelope from his suit. “Take this, there is everything you need to know and need to have.”

The girl took the envelope. Suddenly a bright, white light appeared in the sky in the distance. It seemed to be coming from the Jersey Port.

“The spotlights,” Arthur murmured.

“It’s already started...”

“As I said, everything is in the envelope. Now excuse me, as I need to make sure the vampires won’t get them first.”

He turned around and walked fast towards the shadows covering the left wall of the building.

“Save them, please.”

Arthur disappeared behind the corner.

Surya was standing still, as if she was paralysed by everything that had just happened. She realised that, at that moment there was nothing she could do. Just read the envelope, and follow the instructions there. As she was standing lifeless there watching the flickering spotlights at the distance, she heard a sound of a helicopter. She immediately turned around and saw a black machine flying over her. It was heading towards the port.

“What have you done Mike?” she whispered, as the bright rails of the spotlights went down one by one.

Book 1- The Seal of Solomon

Summary

The team arrives in San Francisco. They are taken to Maldito castle by Arthur and taught their true reason for being in A.S.A.T. Soon they learn that the world is going to end in three months and to stop it they need to find five pieces of the sacred Seal.

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