

ONCE UPON A DEADLAND

Darker Times, Darker Choices....

ALVEEN WORO

Dedication

To my friends and family, thanks for adding an ink to my story.

For Yole, Praise and Anny.

I hope we remain solid for decades to come.

And Every Genuine *Werey* in my life.

Warning

This book contains scenes that depict gory violence and heavy language that some readers will find offensive.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are all products of the writer's imagination and are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, events and locales is all a matter of coincidence.

The writer,

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INTRODUCTION

Ringsville is the most developed city in 'Black County' State of the United States of America, with thirteen districts including Craxton (the downtown of the city), Upper Hill is where most of the city's elites reside. Sharktown is where most industries are found, Bedbug and Trisword are the least developed areas. Opera Town is a place known for exclusive entertainment. Fishplain is the economic region and Arrowtail is the coldest community barely habited with mountain plains and thick woods. HennyKane Island is the private island owned by the billionaire family the HennyKanes. The rest areas include, Greentown, Leafonia, Dec and Pin Citi.

It's been nineteen years since Kord's Rebellion ended. But still there really hasn't been peace since then. They say when you cut the head of a hydra snake, two more will take its place. The defeat of Kord inspired more formidable forces to challenge the city's governmental system. One of the most tragic moments since the Rebellion ended was the massacre of a whole secret spy agency who played a key role in bringing down Kord and his allies.

Some say the brutal attack was a retaliation by Kord's disciples. Others say it was orchestrated by one man. Kord's son.

This is the story of what these long years of terror had placed in stock for the future. And now, all men must pick a side to defend their home or tend to destroy it.

EPISODE I: LIFE AROUND HERE

*"THAT'S CREATIVITY IN A NUTSHELL. A MESSY TUG-OF WAR WITH THE IMAGINATION TO ERASE THAT
FEELING THAT NOTHING REALLY MATTERS ANYWAY"*

-ZOE WHITTALL

Dec

11:37 am

Idris Delcoy was an ex-CIA and RCF (Ringsville Crime Federation) agent who had returned to his birth city six months earlier. Idris was a six-foot-tall African American who had handled divorce three years earlier. He had always considered his life a failure and had come to live with it. He recently acquired a one-bedroom apartment in the finest parts of Dec.

Just past 11 am that morning, Idris was having a good rest when he heard movement in his hallway. He stealthily picked up his licensed Glock and stood up walking towards the hallway, he crouched at the side of the wall for a few seconds after noticing the sound was gone, he swiftly rolled out pointing the gun into the hallway and there was James.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?" James Halloway asked looking at Idris strangely.

Idris stood as he sighed. "What are you doing here, pal"

"Offering my old friend, a very spectacular job" James grinned showing his incredibly white teeth.

'It better not be police work, Halloway. I'm *done*."

"You aren't, brother. Have you put into thought why a grocery shop won't employ your ass?"

'Why?" Idris asked uninterestedly.

"Because you are CIA, and CIA ain't gonna get a minor job like that. Not in Ringsville, you won't. And then, you still happened to be RCF material, people hate RCF" James walked into Idris' empty sitting room and made himself a cup of coffee.

"Was, James. Was a CIA Agent, but not anymore. I'm done killing people, Jimmy." he clarified collapsing on his sofa.

"I didn't say anything about killing, Delcoy, I need you. The Police Commissioner just put us as the lead detectives in a robbery in Leafonia happening right now" James explained taking the last of the black coffee into his mouth.

Idris winced. "Wait a damn minute, who's we?"

"You have a job now, pal, get off your ass. We've got criminals to catch" James quickly threw a badge on Idris' lap and made for the door. A confused Idris hurriedly swept his gun off his person and wore his jacket and following James out.

Bedbug

11:57 am

"This might not be a very good idea" Billy suggested as he stared down at the mart.

"Oh, it's the best idea in a long time, pal" David replied smiling "It's an easy job, boys. No security, we take what we want and get the hell out" he added with much enthusiasm.

"Okay, so how do you intend to walk into a mart like that and just get them give you the cash?" Jon asked without a clue. He was African American and the youngest of the three friends.

Jonathan was a prodigy, he had always dreamed of becoming a successful entrepreneur with his own tech business, sometimes he wondered what he was doing with the others. He never liked stealing and he could also say the same for Billy. David on the other hand was a professional thief. He became an orphan at seven and had since learnt how to survive on his own.

And though he was totally different from the rest, Billy and Jon loved David like a brother.

"It's easy, guys. We have two pistols and a getaway driver" David explained glancing at Jon as he smiled.

"Getaway" Billy nodded slowly thinking. "Are we stealing a car?" He asked.

"Maybe, maybe not" David exhaled rubbing his palms "I mean, we pull at least ten grand from that place and we are off in Jon's grandpa's truck"

Jon gave David a shocking look "Are you crazy? My grandpa's truck, for real?"

Billy shook his head in disagreement "He's right, David. That's too big a risk. If his grandad finds out we took his truck, we are in for jail. And I'm not going to jail, I've got a little sister"

"So, what do you suggest, geniuses?" David asked leaning off the ledge of the building.

"Remember Old Clarke?" Billy inquired.

"Yah, the old scary man that lives in Roosevelt Lane" David replied uninterested. He wondered where Billy was going with this.

"He has a truck; he travels out of town on weekends and he leaves his truck behind"

Now, Billy had David's full attention. "No kidding," he replied delightedly.

"I'm being serious, pal" Billy replied.

David whistled "The old man's truck it is," he stood up as he turned around walking towards the exit door. Jon and Billy looked at each other. Billy could see the fear in Jon's eyes, they have stolen before but in less public environments. Jon needed the money anyway; he'd use it to pay for his grandpa's treatment. Billy's palms crashed gently on Jon's back as he smiled.

"It's okay, Jonathan. This could be a good change for all of us" Billy said helping Jon up. "Come on, pal, let's go home."

HennyKane Tower, HK Enterprises headquarters

CRAXTON

12:08 pm

Denver HennyKane watched the busy Craxton streets from his large office window. He could see the rush the people were taking on. Sometimes he'd always wonder where humans were running to. After all, life was too short to spend your time in a dead place, that was his ideology. This city was not worth the rush, he would believe.

He could also feel his chest pounding; he wanted this to stop already, the pain, the troubles, he wanted all of it to end. Still deep in thoughts, his secretary burst into his office.

"Sir, the meeting starts in five minutes. The board is waiting," she notified him waiting for his usual reply.

"Thank you, Miss Candice, I'll be there in no time," he replied without turning his back.

She nodded respectfully and walked of the room.



"Mr. HennyKane?" Joe Decker called out to Denver.

There was no reply, Denver was deep in thought and it bothered the board as they watched their CEO in an unusual mood, that h had been on lately.

Lara Gillian patted his hands gently, "Denver?"

Denver turned to her startled. "Mrs. Gillian?"

"Are you okay? You haven't been yourself these past days" she added with concern. Denver used to be a vibrant leader. He handled the company with a firm grip, but recently, things had been off. He'd been acting off. He was hard to reach. His working hours were reduced drastically. He eventually put up a fake smile, it was so good that they became relieved "I'm doing great. Thanks for asking."

"Well, if you are now, we can go back to business," Reece Bowie replied quite impatient.

Denver cleared his throat and stood up looking at his directors "Well as you all know I'm here to fulfill the HennyKane dream. My family dreams. The HennyKanes aren't in Ringsville without a purpose. We have an important role to play since time immemorial. In fact, we are one of the earliest dwellers of these lands. My father used to say our ancestors were nomads. Always wandering searching for a solution, and that very blood still flows in my veins." he began "Every year, this city records a death toll of over a thousand plus victims from a new variant of blood disease. I have decided to open a lab in Pin Citi for hematology related diseases and it will be well funded under the HK extension program because as my father would always say; one life saved.... is a win for the whole world"

He waited to see their reactions and everyone looked completely blank until Lara Gillian applauded then a few others, soon everyone was applauding.

"That's a good one, Denver" Joe Decker commended still crashing his wrinkled palms.

"Well, what's in it for us in a deal like this? It isn't a charity organization, right?" Reece Bowie asked. He was always the least impressed one.

"Talk about the only hematology firm in Ringsville, Bowie, there's definitely a large profit on this one" Mrs. Gillian tackled his question.

Now sitting on his chair, Denver could barely hear what they were saying, he could feel his chest pounding hard, his eyes became pale as he fell off his chair to the tiled floor and from what his board members could see, he was convulsing. He vomited blood continuously and in no mean time, there was medic in the meeting room.

Craxton High,

CRAXTON

3:00pm

"Okay, guys, that'll be all for today. And don't forget there'll be a test tomorrow" Mr. Graham sang out to the eleventh graders who were already tripping out of the classroom.

Damon HennyKane had just finished storing his bag pack with books and noticed Elizabeth Conrad was doing likewise. He had always had a thing for Lizzie (as she was fondly called by everyone) since fourth grade and he never had the courage to spill out his feelings. But today was going to be different, he knew that.

He tried to gather courage and speak to her in the normal way he always did and then he remembered the words of his older brother "Fear and cowardice is not in our blood. You, Damon are a true HennyKane and you must always remember to seize your moment. No matter the consequence, what matters is courage...."

Those words always gave him courage. He walked up to her. Right now, was his moment to shine. He hoped.

"Umm, Lizzie, brave thing you did in class today. I mean... standing up for Henry earlier today, it was really nice" he acknowledged in the sweetest way possible.

As usual the pretty sixteen-year-old brunette girl gave the purest of smiles. "Well, what can I say, Damon, I just can't sit down and have my friends being bullied on, that's one of the reasons why we come to school, right?" She giggled seeming to appreciate Damon's concern.

"Yeah, totally" for a moment he felt stupid wondering the next thing to say. "Uh, what about dinner at my place? My butler is making an Asian delicacy, I bet you'll like it" He grinned being hopeful.

She in turn made a sad face. "Oh, Damon, that does seem like fun but today is my aunt's birthday and there's a little celebration at home. I can't afford to miss it, well, you send Gareth my warmest regards"

Damon was astonished "You do remember his name?" forgetting the fact she had turned down his offer.

"Yes" she answered. "He is a nice man"

Damon sighed "Bet he is" This was beginning to get weird "Well, can I walk you out at least?" he requested politely.

"Yes" she smiled.

Craxton High Playground

3:08 pm

Josh Ward and Nick Aiden threw a ball at each other and clearly the aim was to catch it and throw it back. Nick was in the mood feeling like he was on a football pitch, perhaps Josh also had mutual

feelings till his eyes caught sight of the pair a couple of yards away. He could notice Elizabeth smiling and giggling to whatever *bullshit* the HennyKane kid was saying and even if he hated to say it, they did look romantic.

All these happened in a few seconds before the hard ball struck Josh's forehead.

"Ouch!! What was that for?!" he asked irritated looking at Nick who obviously didn't give a care in the world.

"You weren't paying attention, dude. Was just getting you back in the game like real sportsmen do" Nick laughed annoyingly. He however figured the reason why Josh was distracted.

"Oh! It's Lizzie Conrad again. Perhaps you could ask her for an autograph, you know, tell her you are her biggest fan. She might end up just falling for you"

Whatever Nick was trying to say sounded like sarcasm and it made Josh a lot angrier.

"I don't get it, I've got a thing for her since third grade, man. Why does she have to choose that dummy over me?" he winced confused.

Nick scoffed "Dummy? Bro, he is a billionaire, a philanthropist and a diplomat, he is what any girl would want"

Josh scoffed uninterested "I mean, I'm not a billionaire, definitely not a philanthropist nor a freaking diplomat but I'll give you one better, I'm the son of the Police Commissioner. I'm gonna get my own Camaro on my 18th birthday and....."

"Are you done?" Nick mocked "Nothing's going to beat being a billionaire, okay? The dude has his own bloody island. You stay in a five-bedroom duplex in Greentown."

Josh sighed frustrated "He's not a billionaire, his brother is a billionaire, so cut it out. Why are we having this conversation in the first place?"

"You didn't catch the ball, remember? It's entirely your fault."

Still feeling irritated, Josh watched the pair stroll over to the parking space.

"Hey, Josh, if you hate this guy so much, how do you keep sharing tables with him during family dinners?" Nick inquired curiously with a grin.

"He's died multiple times in my head" Josh gave himself a half smile.

Damon was still in an amusing conversation with Lizzie when he noticed his ride was here. "Oh shit"

"What?" Lizzie asked concerned.

"It's nothing serious, my rides just here, that's all" Damon replied with a charming smile.

"I'll see you around then, HennyKane boy." she teased.

"You two, Lizzie" he waved jogging towards the 1960 black Royce. Resting on the passenger's door was Gareth Brooklyn. He was the HennyKane's personal butler and since the boys became orphans, he became a legal guardian until Denver turned twenty.

"Hey, Gareth" Damon smiled hugging the old man. Gareth was 68 years old and had been a loyalist to the HennyKanes for nearly four decades. He was the most trusted servant in the island. Damon in particular hated the title for any of the workers back at the manor.

"So, it's the friendly girl now?" Gareth asked smiling.

"Save your breath, old man. She's just a friend, a very good one for that matter"

Gareth nodded unconvinced "If you say so, master Damon. If I may ask, sir, did you succeed in the dinner invitation?"

Damon shook his head in disappointment "None fell through, Gareth, let's just go home" he said jumping into the back seat feeling so exhausted.

Gareth sighed heavily sitting in front "Well, we are not going home, sir."

Damon was confused now sitting up right "Then where are we going?"

"The hospital, it's your brother, he had another *dramatic* episode at work"

Damon fell backwards on the car seat. "Not again."

Leafonia

3:12pm

Halloway drove his Chevrolet Malibu towards the Crime scene, there were cop cars everywhere and he packed just on the restaurant drive way.

He emerged out of the car with Delcoy following behind. "Well, tell me you don't miss this, Delcoy?" Halloway asked.

Delcoy scoffed "What's here to miss?" He asked taking a quick look around the area. He noticed Sharpshooters in adjacent buildings probably ready to snipe down the robbers. "This isn't fun, Jimmy" he shook his head in frustration.

Just strolling away from the car, they bumped into Officer Ploroe Farm, a police officer who was very loyal to Halloway.

"Detective Halloway" he called out feeling exhausted.

"Quite a day, huh?" Halloway asked.

"You can say that, sir. The Commissioner has been trying to contact you"

"Really?" Halloway quailed softly.

"Yes, sir" Ploroe focused his attention to the mute Delcoy "This must be your new partner" he concluded smiling.

Delcoy shook his head smiling "Oh no, I am far from a partner, Officer"

"Ploroe, Officer Ploroe Farm" he introduced himself formally with a handshake.

Delcoy took the hand swiftly "Idris Delcoy"

Ploroe paused for a moment "Are you Muslim?"

Delcoy took in a deep breath. He couldn't recall how many times he's been asked that question "I was, but I left when I was thirteen and..."

"Oh, come on" Halloway cut them short. "Those robbers don't have time for you two to exchange your backgrounds"

He quickly walked past Ploroe, a couple of cop cars and policemen before getting to Commissioner Harold Ward who looked really stressed out.

"Commissioner Ward?" Halloway walked up to Harold.

Harold didn't look impressed at all.

"Where the hell have you been, Halloway?" He took a glimpse at Delcoy. "So, you spent your morning recruiting an Ex-CIA and RCF Agent for a restaurant robbery? How impressive" Harold cursed looking away.

"What is the situation?" Halloway inquired.

"Well, we gat eyes all around. They are not going anywhere, there are barricade tapes to show the danger areas. And worst part is.... they haven't made contact" Harold replied.

Delcoy bit his lower lips "I know how these situations end. They'll ask for a lot of money and a getaway ride or plane"

Halloway shook his head "That won't happen"

Harold scoffed "James, there are twenty-six hostages in that building and we aren't putting their lives in jeopardy just so you could play the hero cop card"

James sighed "I didn't say anything about being the hero cop, Ward. I just feel we can't let these assholes get away"

"Has any face been recognized at least?" Delcoy asked.

Harold nodded, "Yup" he handed a couple of files to Delcoy. The first image was a mugshot of a smallish and fit Italian man.

"That's Bernardo Eckhart, he's in charge of the robbery. He is forty-three years old and he was a mechanic. After his nine-year-old daughter Leah Eckhart died of cancer four years ago, Bernardo took to crime" Harold explained.

Delcoy switched the files. A masculine man with unkempt beards was seen in a private photograph
"And who is this guy?"

"That's Solomon Hargrove, former Ringsville firefighter. He is Canadian and he is thirty-one. It's all we know"

Delcoy rubbed his jawline "So out of nine robbers you could only crack out the faces of two?"

Harold smirked "I'll consider that smart, Mr. Delcoy."

At that moment Ploroe ran towards them with a walkie-talkie in his hands.

"Commissioner, we've got a call from the restaurant"

A startled Harold snatched the walkie from Ploroe as quickly as possible "Hello?" he called out.

"Commissioner Harold Ward?" the voice from the other side said sounding ruthless.

Harold glanced at James and Delcoy "Yes, you are speaking with the Ringsville Commissioner of Police"

"Good" the voice replied "Listen we have your hostages all tied and wired up, now you listen to me, you are going to prepare a sum of twenty million dollars in an Mi-8 chopper, you'll fly it over here and we'll be gone. You'll never hear from us again"

Silence fell on both sides for some seconds.

Harold glanced at James and Delcoy once again "Look, Mr. Eckhart, Ringsville is currently running out of Iron birds, so, I'll do you a solid. How about we get you a bullion van and then...."

"Do you think I'm joking?!" Bernardo burst out with rage.

"Perhaps I can just press this button and we can all die" they could see Bernardo storm out of the restaurant in blazing fury.

All guns were on him.

Halloway ran ahead all cars over the barricade tapes facing Bernard one on one.

He turned back facing his fellow cops "Drop your guns, all of you!" The police officers obeyed slowly dropping their firearms.

Delcoy shook his head from where he stood. "Here we go. He's out of his fucking mind"

Bernardo was not smiling "I have twenty-six hostages in the building all wired up and ready to blow so don't think of being the smart cop you claim to be. I asked for twenty million dollars and a helicopter, is that so hard to get?" he yelled frustrated.

Halloway panted taking a glimpse at what Bernardo held in his hands.

Bernard noticed also. "Yes, Detective. That's the fucking button. Just a tiny push and it'll detonate and there'll be nothing left of those hostages"

"And your men?" Halloway asked pointing at the restaurant.

Harold picked his walkie speedily "Snipers, eyes on the hostiles we need a simultaneous execution."

"Roger that" the lead sniper replied from his side of the radio frequency.

Bernard knew something wasn't right before answering Halloway's question "They'll die for a good cause"

"Snipers on targets, on your go, sir" The lead shooter reported.

Harold Ward waited for the perfect moment.

Bernard was almost carried away by the discussion with Halloway. And Harold knew when "Now!" He instructed over the walkie, shots were fired flying into the building cracking the windows and dropping all hostiles.

Bernard was alerted "Fuck!" He attempted pressing the detonator before a bullet hustled through his right palm dropping the device. The device fell straight preventing it from detonating. Halloway saw his opportunity and quickly took down Bernard with several shots to the chest.

"Gotcha" he exclaimed, turning backwards to see who had fired the shot that dropped the detonator and he realized it was Delcoy, the only man still holding his pistol.

Halloway nodded impressed. "That's my partner, bitches!"

Harold walked towards Halloway as he addressed some cops. "Get the bomb squad in there, now!"

"Yes, Sir" a cop nodded as others followed. "You did it again"

Halloway acted blank "Did what?"

"Played Hero"

"Played Hero?" He scoffed "The way I see it, I was bait, Commissioner. Idris is the real hero" he smiled as cops gathered Delcoy congratulating him for his bravery and the fact he was an Ex RCF Agent.

"There'll be a little party in RVPD. You coming, right?" Harold asked Halloway patting him on the back.

Halloway looked at Ward. "A party for killing armed robbers who robbed a restaurant?" He winced making Ward sound stupid.

Ward was silent for a while. "People could've been killed, James."

Halloway made some room between him and Harold Ward "No, sir, I won't be there. I got lunch with Diana" he smiled to ease Harold.

"Remind me how you honestly still flow with your ex?" Delcoy asked now standing beside him.

"Not everyone takes things personal" he replied Delcoy's question.

Delcoy smiled getting the concept of Halloway's sarcastic answer.

"Well then, I'll see you guys around" Harold remarked giving James a friendly blow and then shaking hands with Delcoy. "Nice one, rookie" Harold winked catching the expression on Delcoy's face. It was a shocking one.

The two men walked to the Malibu and Delcoy was a bit taken aback "Did he just call me a rookie?"

Halloway nodded boarding the vehicle. "I bet he did. Commissioner Ward likes to joke around, Idris. Don't take it to heart"

Delcoy scoffed "Fuck it. I saved the day"

Halloway laughed "Did you?" He glanced at Delcoy and put the car on the streets of Leafonia.

CRAXTON CENTRAL HOSPITAL

CRAXTON

3:44 pm

Denver was already recovering from his episode that occurred at the office few hours earlier. He was lying on the hospital bed reading a magazine. He was placed in a private room, he hoped what happened wouldn't put his workers in confusion. Just then Damon barged in rushing into the arms of the weak Denver.

He groaned a little as a chuckling followed. "Whoa, Damon, what are you doing here?" He asked.

Damon unlocked himself from Denver. "I am your brother. You don't expect me to hear about this and stay at home."

"I... I don't like you seeing me this way" He sighed rearranging himself on the bed as Gareth walked in

"Master Denver" he acknowledged warmly.

Denver nodded. "Yeah. Gareth, I need you to drive Damon home"

Damon grumbled "I just got here"

"Go home and have some rest. I'll be fine" he replied patting Damon's hair.

"Hey, I'm seventeen I can make...."

"Hey" Denver caught him short. "You aren't an adult yet, young man. Now go home and get some rest"

Damon took in a long deep breath "So you are missing Gareth's special dish?"

Denver nodded. "I'll get mine here" he smiled "Go freshen up, young man" Damon nodded and gave Denver a convincing smile.

"Come home soon"

Denver chuckled "Always. You have the strongest brother in the world"

"Now, off we go, Master Damon" Gareth interrupted leading Damon out.

Ward Residence,

GREENTOWN

6:34pm

All the duplexes in St. Harvey Avenue were similar. Most of the residents drove the same speck of cars and it was awkwardly quiet, maybe because the Ringsville Police Commissioner lived there too. Harold Ward drove his brown colored Aston Martin V8 Vantage into his garage.

The Ward's duplex was very different from the other rows of houses. It was larger and had a bigger lawn, perhaps it was one of the benefits of being a Police Commissioner.

He emerged out of the car wondering how he was going to approach his two children and explain why he missed picking them from school. He gathered courage and waltzed into the foyer taking a quick glimpse to the left where the sitting room was, he noticed Joshua was on his video game and it seemed the youngster barely cared if his father was home.

Harold now dropped the carrier bag he brought along near the entrance and walked into the room.

"Whoa, look who's home early" Josh commented still focusing on his game.

Harold smiled feeling the depth of Josh's sarcasm. "Look, I'm sorry, I know I promised I'd pick you and your sister from school today and we'd have a great time but duty called" he explained.

Josh jeered lightly, he paused the game and turned his attention to his father "That's the problem, isn't it? Duty always calls. You could have phoned at least. I know what you are facing out there. I saw the news; a group of armed robbers were killed trying to rob a restaurant. I get it, but you never put us first. Thanks to Nick's dad who stopped by, and dropped us off."

Aside the fact Harold knew Josh was angry, he was kind of glad at the way his seventeen-year-old son always looked calm in situations involving his father.

"I'm sorry, son. I got pizza though" Harold smiled knowing it'll get Josh's spirit back up.

Josh smiled unconsciously. "Yah, right. For compensation, I'm getting one of your slices" he bargained.

"Deal" Harold concluded shaking hands with Joshua. "Where's your sister?" He asked taking a glance at his surroundings.

"In her room, as always" Josh replied returning focus to his game.

Harold took the stairs to his daughter's room and knocked slowly.

"Who is it?" The soft and warm voice from inside asked.

"It's the police, open up" Harold was trying to make a practical joke seeing if it'll get to her but there was silence for some seconds until he heard footsteps and the bolt behind clicked aside. The door opened slowly and Harold caught the beautiful face of his eighteen-year-old daughter Jessie. She was considered one of the prettiest girls in Craxton high and no one dared mess with her or else spend their night in a prison cell.

"Hi" Harold smiled.

"Hey" she replied "Is this a night shift?"

Harold laughed at the question "Night shift, for real? I don't do night shifts" He noticed she wasn't in the mood.

"Would you let me in at least"? He asked, she gave him a vague look and made more room between the both of them

"I'm sorry about today" he apologized sitting on her soft bed.

"It's Okay. I wasn't all that concerned, at least you got the bad guys."

Harold winced "Yeah, I guess so"

"Did you kill anyone?" She asked collapsing on the bed just beside him.

Harold laughed dryly. "No, no, no. I didn't"

She nodded.

"How was school?"

"Well, you know, same boring stuff. It's practically a loop" she responded looking at the ceiling.

"Hmmm" he smiled "I got pizza"

She half smiled "I'll be down in a minute"

Harold stood up hastily "you better be quick before your brother takes it all" he warned walking off.

Ringsville Acropolis Hill Prison,

Arrowtail

7:35 pm

This was the last place any one in Ringsville would want to be. It was full of criminals who had screwed up Ringsville a big deal.

The worst of the worst were in there, but somehow the wardens were able to make the best of the prisoners. In the last twenty-six years, no one had ever escaped the Acropolis building unless they turned out dead. The security was at its peak and the structure of the prison was uniquely designed.

The whole building was literally on the side of a mountain and most people who tried escaping, fell to their deaths somewhere in the waterfalls that flowed from the mountain and came flowing out right under the building.

A prison guard walked to the cell number 316, as he knocked on the gates hard waking the sleeping inmate.

"Hey, Coulson, it's dinner time. Don't make me repeat myself" The potbellied man warned dragging the gate open. The inmate stood up and turned to face the sadistic guard.

"Please, tell me we aren't having omelets" Lloyd Coulson teased light heartedly. He always knew how to make a joke out of everything.

"Make your way to the hall, jackass" the guard ordered as he shut the gate as soon as Lloyd walked out.



Lloyd sat alone on a table that would have been able to carry seven others. Everyone had second thoughts of eating next to the most feared criminal in all of Ringsville.

Lloyd Coulson was a name that struck fear in every nook and cranny. He had lived his whole life in pain and anger and he grew to channel that anger to a greater purpose, hunting the city that destroyed his future. For years, he was given the title, the Bigwig of Ringsville. He used to be the boogeyman of the city. No one truly slept soundly while he still roamed the dark nights.

He caught the sight of a fellow prisoner who was also well feared, Nigel Burgan A.K.A Bearhug, a huge and dangerous fellow, it was hard to tell what Bearhug actually did that got him in there. However, no one dared ask. Lloyd smiled sighting him walking over to his table with his tray in hand. Just like Coulson, Bearhug ate alone so the fact that a skinny little guy joined him pissed the hell out of Bearhug.

"Table's full, dummy, find somewhere else to choke"

Lloyd Coulson smiled viciously staring at him. "I have heard a lot of things about you, big guy. And places like this aren't meant for us. So, I'm making you an offer. Do you want to get the heck out of here?"

Bearhug paused then slowly looked at Lloyd "What would make me try an escape plan with a thing like you?"

Luckily for the duo, Lloyd wasn't the easily pissed one "I'll be right back, maybe this would change your mind. But in the meantime, feel free to eat my dinner" He stood up and walked away as the confused Bearhug watched. Lloyd walked over to another table where a gang sat. He walked behind their leader, Julius Stevenson A.K.A Huntstone another powerful inmate, Lloyd tossed his hand over Huntstone's shoulder, and picked a piece of fried chicken from the tray.

"Excuse me, fellas. It's all I'll need" he said quickly retreating to Bearhug's table before Huntstone could even turn around.

"Hey, you psycho, that's mine!" Huntstone replied in anger charging from his seat towards the pair. Before he could get to the table, Lloyd had done justice to the chicken.

"How dare you?!" Huntstone yelled in fury.

Bearhug laughed unconcerned "You are in a lot of trouble, Coulson"

Huntstone grabbed Lloyd by the shoulder to pull him off the seat but Lloyd was rather prepared. He grabbed the tray and slammed it on Huntstone's head as he crashed on the tiled floor.

The hall was in shock for a split second before everyone broke into a fight. Bearhug dealt with anyone who had crashed his dinner and the fight lasted for almost three minutes before the wardens got it under control taking Lloyd, Bearhug and the bruised Huntstone for isolation.

Some few minutes later, Bearhug was thrown into a cell as he yelled at the group of guards.

"Party ain't over, suckers"

They laughed "Oh, yeah?!"

"Lucky for you Bearhug, you've got a companion" one of the guards said.

Bearhug turned around to see Lloyd walk into the cell.

"You" he said coldly

The guards laughed loudly as they walked away "That's your punching bag"

Bearhug clicked his fingers ready to rearrange Lloyd's face.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, calm down, big guy. This was all part of my plan"

Bearhug released his fist trying to understand Lloyd. "What do you mean?"

"We needed to be in the same cell so we could discuss better"

"I told you I'm not working with a psychopath like you"

"If you want to get out, you'll need me" Lloyd had the most sinister of smiles.

Bearhug sighed "What's the plan?"

"Leave that to me. All you have to do is protect your key. And I am your key." he grinned.

Main Characters Introduced in Episode 1

James Halloway

A brilliant RVPD detective who recruits Idris Delcoy as a new partner to solve crimes in Ringsville. He is also a son like figure to Commissioner Harold Ward. James is an honest cop who has made sure he did good even in compromising situations.

Billy Conrad / The Death Crow

A young adult who is friends with petty burglars, David and Jonathan. He is also the older brother of Elizabeth Conrad. Later on, he becomes the instrument of Eden.

Denver HennyKane

The first son of Wilbur HennyKane. He is a reclusive multi-billionaire science researcher, CEO of HennyKane Enterprise and the older brother of Damon. However, he is diagnosed with a rare blood disease that would claim his life soon enough making him a desperate man.

Lloyd Coulson / The Bigwig

An anarchist, terrorist, psychologist and sociopathic criminal who has a grudge with Ringsville for unknown reasons. He is an adopted son of Kord a revolutionary.

Harold Ward

The current police commissioner and the father to Joshua and Jessica 'Jessie' Ward.

Damon HennyKane

The youngest of the HennyKane boys, a scholar who has a thing for Elizabeth Conrad.

Jonathan Lamar

An African American teenager who is a brother figure to Billy Conrad and a fellow petty burglar.

Idris Delcoy

A former CIA and RFC agent, recruited by Halloway. Idris knows both sides of the game. He was born into a world of gang violence but has since evolved into a better man.

Jessica 'Jessie' Ward

The daughter of Harold Ward and also an eventual victim of Eden.

Joshua Ward

Jesse's younger brother and an archenemy of Damon even as family friends.

Elizabeth Conrad

Billy's younger sister and a charm in CRAXTON high.

Gareth Brooklyn

The HennyKane Butler and personal assistant to Denver. Gareth has been looking after the boys since both of their parents died.

David Logan / The Cassowary

A petty burglar, drug addict and close friends of Billy and Jonathan.

EPISODE II: EDEN

"I WILL NOT PLAY AT TUG O' WAR, I'D RATHER PLAY AT HUG O' WAR."

-SHEL SILVERSTEIN

1999

YEARS OF THE KORD REBELLION

The day the city of Ringsville became a new game entirely was on the 19th of June. The government was at the peak of corruption, the city was a complete disaster until a man decided to take laws into his own hands.

The rebellion was bloody. It was led by a ruthless man named Kord. That was the only name anyone ever knew.

Kord began a powerful resistance that so many political figures within and outside Ringsville feared his growth. Though most people had never seen him, all they knew was his name. They were always taken aback by sudden explosions in churches, schools, banks, and parks.

It was a dangerous period in the history of Ringsville's existence. After every attack from Kord's Rebellion, banners often flew over the city, private letters were sent to high-ranking personnel from Kord. And the letters always said the same thing.

"THE TERRORS WILL STOP WHEN THERE ARE NO LONGER RED PEOPLE"

Of course, this absurd message Kord passed around was a total waste of time since no one knew who the red people were.

Five months after the chaotic revolution began, the actions that would change Ringsville forever occurred.

November 11,

1999

Leafonia

A school bus was transporting students to Leaf Academy when they were ambushed by Kord's minions. The abduction was quick and stealthy except they left the Driver for dead when he tried to fend off the abductors.

That day, twenty-two teenagers were captured, blindfolded, and taken to an unknown warehouse probably somewhere near the Opera Harbor.

They were placed in a straight line; the scene led the youngsters into a great panic.

"Shut up!!" One of the guards yelled out in anger and silence followed. Only a little while later, sobbing began by mostly the female students who were yet to handle the state they had found themselves in.

A chuckling voice was heard from a dark passage right ahead. All the children looked quickly to see who it was and a man walked out. Kord.

They didn't need to be informed that the man whose name had been the cause of many deaths and discussions was standing right in front of them. Though they were terrified, it kind of prevented them from letting out loud screams that they knew would land them in more trouble than they already were.

He gave them a vicious look and smiled broadly in a way that confused the children.

"Well, well, well, I'll be damned" He exhaled softly. Kord was surprisingly handsome and somewhat in his mid-forties. He had a small cut on his left eye brow and he kept anchored beards. He scanned the group of children and nodded several times.

"First of all, I'm gonna have to apologize for the treatment. I'm a terrible host. And I wanna calm down a major ripple" He paused for a while trying to construct his speech so as not to confuse his young audience.

"I am not the bad guy. You all are definitely too young to understand any of these things. I bet they called you all the leaders of tomorrow, huh? Well, let me burst you bubble. There's no tomorrow. Not with the way this city was going" He explained.

"This city is built on a lie and everyone is way too blind to see it. But you? You are the lucky ones, the chosen ones. In the sense that you'll help fight for the cause of the Rebellion. You all are now children of Kord and we will save our city together as a team" He smiled and nodded as he scanned the line of teenagers ahead of him who seemed not to be following whatever he had just said.

"Bull-shit" a voice spoke from the line of hostages said which caught everyone's attention including Kord's.

"I'm sorry?" Kord replied interested.

A young boy looked Kord right in the eye "You are not a savior. You are a vicious son of a bitch. People like you don't save, they destroy. You think the city is rotten? How sure are we it won't be worse in your hands?"

The place was as silent as a graveyard. Kord stared astonished.

"Wow" he applauded. "There always gotta be the one with balls" he walked towards the kneeling boy. Kord sighed heavily and squatted in front of the boy.

"What's your name?" He asked rather calmly.

The boy was trembling due to the punishment but he showed no form of fear at Kord's presence. He stared into the older man's eyes with plain disgust. All he could see was darkness "I will never succumb to a mad man. People are dying every day because of your rebellion, the city is fine as it was, you punk. If you really are a hero, come out of the shadows and face the government, show them you are not a scared little..... " Before the lad could finish his speech a knife cut past his throat in a flash that no one saw it coming until blood began gushing down. The boy jerked a little trying to gasp for air but soon he was on the ground and some seconds later, he had died.

The rest of the students screamed aloud unable to process what had just happened. When they had screamed to their heart's content, Kord withdrew his knife staring at another boy who had been looking down the whole time.

"What a waste, a young boy of his age has been so brainwashed he knows no clue of the villain"

"His name was Luther" the boy Kord had taken interest in replied.

Kord smiled walking towards the other mystery boy. There was something in him he just admired. "Luther" Kord scoffed "that's a fine name for a fool" he walked towards his new friend "And you, what is your name?"

The boy was quiet for a while then stared into Kord's blue eyes. "Lloyd. Lloyd Coulson"



PRESENT DAY

Acropolis Prison,

Arrowtail

12:05 pm

Lloyd smiled deep in thought about his early days. He looked towards the sky and tried to put together how he got here. With his instincts sure of what was coming next, he noticed Huntstone and his stooges preparing to attack him from all angles in the open recreational park.

If Lloyd was to be an ace in something it would be sensing danger. He had sensed it but he knew there was no way out of the attack. He couldn't possibly take down seven men led by the vengeful Huntstone. The guards for sure loved to see the prisoners gang up and take him down.

Lloyd was rather calm as the squad slowly approached his position. As Huntstone was about to charge at him, Bearhug arrived sitting on the bench just beside Coulson. His presence called for an immediate retreat, Huntstone wasn't ready to face Bearhug though he wasn't really afraid of him.

"You were seconds away from having a black eye, Coulson" Bearhug enlightened.

Lloyd scoffed "I saw it coming, pal. I knew you weren't far away."

Bearhug shook his head like he could care less what this deranged lunatic was saying. "You promised me an escape" he reminded Coulson.

"I did" Coulson nodded.

"It's been three weeks... you haven't told me what the fuck you are playing at?"

Coulson drifted closer to Bearhug "Like I said, Bearhug, you are the muscle, relax and let me do my thing."

"I am relaxed, Coulson. I'm fuckin' relaxed, you don't want to see me unrelaxed."

Coulson tsked "Fine. Ringsville experiences a terrible hurricane every sixty-five to sixty-eight years. I have made my calculations. The next one will take place in a couple of weeks."

Bearhug winced finding it hard to decipher Coulson's so-called plan "So..?"

"Acropolis is built on a hill, it's not such a powerful one that once withstood the Kord Rebellion. Everything succumbs to nature at some point and now?..... Is Acropolis' time" he smiled broadly.

Bearhug was still lost at this point.

"So, you mean the hurricane will most likely crumble Acropolis?"

Lloyd nodded impressed "Yes, Bearhug. Absolutely. You're getting' the hang of it"

The expression on Bearhugs face didn't show that he liked this plan. "And where are we gonna be when the storm takes on the city?" He asked Coulson in confusion.

"There will be chaos in the prison and my assumptions? They'll try to transport us to another prison"

"Your assumptions? Our escape and survival are based on a friggin' assumption?" Bearhug asked slowly boiling with rage.

"Look, dude, I'm not God. Everything we do is based on an assumption... It may or may not happen. But whatever happens, we'd be ready"

Bearhug's gaze was locked on Lloyd "Seems like we have ourselves a deal, but don't make me remind you what would happen to you if you screw this up"

Lloyd smiled "You don't have to remind me, Bearhug" he responded cheerfully but what Bearhug didn't understand was that every mastermind had a contingency plan. Sometimes it wasn't about being all physical.

CRAXTON

1:10 pm

In the basement of a Catholic Church, the rising leaders of the Ringsville Underworld which referred to themselves as the Comrades gathered together. The Arabian Falcon Jared Hussein and Canadian Derek Lander were powerful drug kingpins, Barney Caine and Alex Sullivan were into arms dealing, Thomas Rico was a professional money launderer. Thomas or 'Tommy' as he was fondly called was a half Cuban and half Venezuelan. Also known as a very skilled tactical player in the crime world. He was a representative of the Maltese Crime Family based in Venezuela. His job was to run Venezuelan Organized criminal operations in the heart of Ringsville and no better way to do that than join the most recognized criminal organization in the city's underworld, the Comrades.

The five men sat on the round meeting table awaiting the presence of their new head. Derek Lander was the youngest in the mob he was only forty-four years old and also one of the most ruthless. He had this mentality of quick retaliation whenever anyone got in his way or tried to sabotage his business. He was the least comfortable in the room since he didn't like their new head. The Comrades was a name many people in Ringsville were very familiar with, but no one really knew who the mob consisted of.

Two guards opened the exit door as a man who donned a long coat and a hat entered the basement to notice the only light that shone in the room was above the middle of the table making the room less bright.

The man whose name was Artem Endario sighed exhausted and slowly sat on the chair of the head. "What's with the darkness, my fellow comrades?" He asked twitted.

No one laughed but Artem didn't seem bothered.

Artem was sixty-eight-years-old, the line of business he was into, no one including his fellow Comrades knew. He was simply referred to as a successful business mogul who in fact had a reasonable share in the other's businesses. It was what the benefit the leader of such a criminal organization.

The power Artem possessed infuriated and threatened Derek Lander. He felt the man who was now running the Ringsville underworld was nothing like the rest of the mob. He might have shown a lot of responsibility and submission to the comrades and their goals but Derek was still not satisfied, he had a feeling that Artem was a snake who was going to crumble their establishment. But whatever Lander had in mind, he was too scared to share with his fellow comrades. He knew what Endario was capable of.

Artem cleared his throat. As always, he would address the table in his calm, subtle and intimidating voice. He took off his hat and smacked the dust off the side. "Gentlemen – we all know why we are gathered here. The former head of this organization, Warren Delgado sadly passed on three weeks ago putting me as the next in line to handle the affairs of this firm. The old man was a good and fair leader who saw that all our needs to grow our separate businesses were met." He paused for a while looking towards nothing in particular. "May the old man's soul rest in peace" Everyone nodded in agreement. "Now, all I can say is____ the affairs of this organization would continue from the shadows." He exhaled taking a quick glimpse at everyone. "Any questions?"

Hussein raised his hand. Artem nodded, "Falcon?"

"The RVPD has been patrolling the Opera Harbor, that's our biggest port, we have to find a way to get those bastards off our business grounds" Falcon complained. He looked really troubled. The others agreed.

Artem sighed relaxing on his chair "Well, I'll tell you what, *Falcie....*" Artem was fond of giving people crazy nicknames "If you want to get the cops out of your business, slow down on the imports. Shut down your warehouse for at least one month. I bet you the cops would lose their trails"

Everyone was silent, most saw sense in what Artem suggested except Lander.

"Are you nuts?!" He attacked Artem verbally "Do you realize how much we would lose if we seize importation for thirty days?"

Artem adjusted "No, Derek, enlighten me" he replied sarcastically with a smile meant to annoy Lander.

"It's April, the Atlantic patrol streamlines transportations in May. You are indirectly cutting our gain for two fuckin' months. April is one of the best months for importation!" He yelled out loudly.

Artem stared at Derek who just realized he had been standing all this time while he was making his point. "Derek. You amaze me, but I have only a few things to say to you. It's your business with Falcon, you both run the drug dealings. But lest you must forget I own twenty percent of the profit and you think coming up with that idea brings me joy?"

Derek was silent trying to lessen his rage.

"If you are however exposed it is important you don't snitch. And you will kindly pay me my percentage from the previous gains. Is that clear?"

Derek hesitated before replying, "Yes."

Artem smiled sure something reasonable had hustled into Derek's thick skull "In the meantime, there's an auction ceremony at Don Delgado's mansion for his artworks. You all are expected to be there. To at least purchase one in his memory" Artem announced as he arose donning his hat.

"That'll be all, folks. I'll kindly take your leave to prepare for tonight's ceremony" he concluded before leaving through the exit door.

Barney Caine laughed calmly immediately after Artem left. Thomas Rico turned to face him "What's so funny?"

Barney tried to bring himself back to order as he gave Derek who sat embarrassed a disgusting look "Perhaps you don't think before you talk, Lander. Endario is here to make sure none of us gets exposed by the police."

Derek scoffed uninterested "Come on, Barney. I have moles in the RVPD, why do we need to be afraid about what Ward and his minions are planning?" He said as he stood up again.

Barney gripped his fist still staring at Derek "Just as he said, Lander, if you ever get exposed you wouldn't dare snitch, yes?"

Derek paid no attention to Barney and tapped Falcon on his shoulders "I'll meet you at the auction ceremony"

Falcon nodded confused with how he was going to lose millions of dollars throughout the whole of April.

Derek quickly exited the room with his bodyguards

Barney Caine shook his head disappointed "What a punk!"

Conrad Residence,

Bedbug

1:26 pm

"So, you won't be home till midnight?" Billy asked Maureen joining her on the dining table. She had a series of documents scattered all over the table.

"It's going to be a long night, Billy. And a busy one, if you want, I can take Lizzie along if you have things to do" Maureen suggested.

Billy thought it was a great idea, he hated babysitting.

"No, I don't want to go to that party" Lizzie charged from the lobby into the sitting room joining her aunt and her older brother.

Billy turned to face her "Why? It'll be great, there'll be affluent personalities. I'm pretty sure some of them would want to listen to your speeches about global warming or the environmental negligence here in Bedbug" he mocked her.

Lizzie hated Billy beyond human comprehension sometimes "I have a school project and I was hoping you could check out a book for me from the Craxton Central library"

Billy sighed uninterested.

"You want me to go to Craxton to get you a book?" he asked hoping he had heard wrong.

Lizzie moped knowing she wasn't going to repeat herself. Maureen looked at her wristwatch "The ceremony starts at six. I need to be there before two to coordinate things. Billy, you can just hitch a ride with me, I'll drop you by the library"

Billy grumbled. "For the record, you owe me" he pointed at Lizzie who winked at him and ran off into her room. He quickly helped her gather her papers and dropped them into her office bag. Leaving Lizzie behind, the two left the apartment and boarded Maureen's BMW.

Maureen Evans was the legal guardian of Elizabeth. Billy was already an adult so he could make his own choices. Maureen was an event planner and coordinator, a real workaholic who had devoted her life to taking care of her nephew and niece since both of their parents passed some years earlier. She loved the pair as her own and would do anything to keep them safe.

CRAXTON

RINGSVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT (RVPD) HEADQUARTERS

1:45 pm

Ward was having a tough day in his office, it got to a point that when anyone called via the landline, he ordered his secretary to lie that he was at home resting.

Eventually, James Halloway barged into his office without knocking. The only officer who would dare do that.

The secretary followed swiftly trying to explain "Commissioner Ward, I tried to stop him" she complained panting.

Ward readjusted on his chair and sighed in relief. James was probably going to calm down his nerves. "It's alright, Hanna. You can go back to your post"

She nodded and walked out quickly.

James watched her leave in amazement "Where do you get all these sexy secretaries, Ward?"

Ward was not in for jokes at the moment. "Cut the crap, James, what do you want?"

"It's Mayor Ham, he's been trying to reach you. So, he sent me to deliver his message...."

Ward put his left palm on his forehead "What the heck does he want?" he asked frustrated.

"He wants you to give a speech in the Delgado art auction"

Ward took off his glasses looking James in the eye. "What?! Oh, you have got to be kidding me, Halloway. I have had enough for one day. Now he wants me to deliver a speech in the auction ceremony?"

James nodded looking down "It's what it'll seem like... We all know the donations Warren Delgado has given to the Police Force in the whole of Black County. He did a lot of good"

Ward stood up uninterested in what James was saying "Oh, save me the bullshit, James. The man was a corrupt son of a bitch. A criminal who poisoned this city. We couldn't get anything on him, good thing he's dead"

"Well, he left a decent legacy behind, that's what people would always remember. So do everyone a favor, Ham in particular, and just figure out something to say"

Ward picked his jacket "Let's get the hell outta here, and go get something to drink, I'm office sick" he replied leading James out of the office.

James laughed knowing the man really needed a break "Where's your partner by the way?" Ward asked James as they walked through the second-floor lobby of the Headquarters building.

"Oh...he's in the car" James replied.

Ward chuckled "Nice, having a guy with RCF protocols might not be such a bad idea" he teased.

"I know, right?" James responded as they approached the elevator.

HennyKane Island

2:38pm

A blue Cadillac Sedan drove into the Manor premise, Gareth Brooklyn came down to help Denver HennyKane out of the back seat. Denver freed himself from Gareth slowly. "I'm fine, Gareth, I can walk" he assured him.

Gareth smiled locking the car door behind them. As they proceeded towards the house, Damon rushed out to hug his brother. "Welcome home, brother"

Denver sighed relieved. "It is good to be home" the pair led him into the house where they passed through the foyer into one of the sitting rooms. "Um... Denver?" Damon addressed his older brother

"Yes"

"There's someone here to see you"

Denver wondered who it could be. He didn't expect anyone from the office to come pay him a visit at home. He did not like anyone coming to the island unannounced except the servants. And speaking of servants, Denver had fired more than half of them while he was still in the hospital believing they weren't useful.

He relaxed on a chair and waited to see who it was until Christine Walters came out from an entrance.

Christine Walters was Denver's first love, they met in college and dated for two years. They eventually broke up but they still kept in touch. She was now a renowned medical doctor and physicist. Denver was really happy to see her after such a long time.

"Christine" he said happily as he tried to stand up with his cane but she quickly ran to stop him with smiles all over her face.

"You don't need to get up, Denver. I'm right here" she sat by him. At this time the room contained only the pairs' presence.

"It's so good to see you"

"You too, Denver. It's been a while."

"No kidding" they laughed. "So, how's work? Do you still work in DC?" He asked holding her hands.

She shook her head "No, I returned here four months earlier, I was going to pay you a visit. When I heard about what happened to you in your company, I knew it was back" she patted his hair.

Denver sighed "They couldn't just keep it private"

"Well, good thing word got out, because I wouldn't have heard. I have something you might want to see.

Denver flinched "What's that?"

"It's something related to your disease."

Denver exhaled letting go of her hand "Forget it, Christine. The test reports are out. I have less than a year before I become a corpse. I'm living on borrowed time" he noted.

Christine disagreed. "Don't say that Denver, we can find you a cure"

"There's no cure for my disease, Christine. Mine's different, it's been in the Yates blood for generations. It's the same thing that killed my mom"

Christine made him look into her eyes "It's too early to lose hope, Denver. You have to see this"



Denver led Christine to his private office. Where she inserted her drive into his computer. A clip began playing on the screen. The video was taking place in a lab full of computers and science equipment. A man advanced in age appeared standing in front of the camera.

"This is Day eight of Project Trojan. And I am Doctor Sactor Polaris. Today, I have deciphered one of the greatest discoveries of the early Ringsville scientists. What the late *Neville Kent* said about an alternate world sharing a gate with our city is true. I have confirmed it. I have been running a series of tests on the atmosphere and it's been showing signs of meteorological glitch"

Denver glanced at Christine "What the hell is he talking about?"

"Wait for it" she replied.

The clip continued.

"Somewhere under Ringsville's soil, there's an energy field that sometimes glitches into the mainland, it releases powerful energy spikes and affects whatever it touches" Doctor Polaris continued. "I believe this gate if found..... can lead us into an inter-dimensional world that Neville Kent called Eden. A place so full of pure energy it can probably cure any sort of disease. This is the future. This is what can transform Ringsville into a National treasure for hundreds of years to come" he smiled ending the video.

Denver still stared at the empty screen trying to understand what he had just watched. "What the hell?" He exclaimed "That's just some random theory. Yes, I run a billion-dollar science firm but this is some Star Trek bullshit" He faced his gaze at Christine. "You don't believe it do you?"

Christine smiled "I do, Denver, it can be the only way to save your life."

Denver sighed cleaning his eyes. "Okay, let's talk to this Doctor Sactor Polaris, let's see if he can explain more to us"

Christine bit her lips. "That's pretty much a problem."

Denver frowned confused "Why?"

"He's been missing for a month now. I was able to break into his office in City Lab two days after he disappeared and I copied this file. After I left his office a group of dangerous-looking men arrived and took all his files. It seems they were looking for this. But they didn't know I already copied and destroyed the original files"

Denver wiped his mouth confused "You what?" Denver tried not to be alarmed. It would not be good for his health. What kind of conspiracy are we getting ourselves into Christine?"

"Whatever is going on, Polaris missing, and men coming to confiscate all his files proves there's an element of truth in his research. If we find this Eden, we can cure not only your illness but every other type on this planet"

Denver pondered for a while, he grabbed Christine by both arms. "Listen, this must never get to anyone, okay? Give me the drive. Here's the safest place it can be."

Christine nodded in agreement. "So, what do you have in mind?"

Denver exhaled. "We continue Polaris' research. But right now, I need a nap" he teased.

CRAXTON

3:31pm

Billy jogged through the busy Craxton streets with Lizzie's requested book in hand. He had just left the library after a long search. He caught sight of a tram headed for Bedbug and hurried to board it before it left. Just a hundred meters away, he bumped into a female figure dropping his book.

She moaned but quickly reached out for the book before it could touch the ground.

"Sorry" Billy apologized before he could get to see her face.

"It's no problem" she replied standing to her feet. She waved the hair covering her left eye to her back allowing Billy to catch her face. And he lost mental balance when he saw her face. Looking into those eyes, he went numb.

She looked at him with a smile on her face "I'm Jessica. You can call me Jessie for short" she stretched her hand for a handshake hoping it'll bring Billy back to his senses.

He blinked severally taking her hand. "I'm Billy" he smiled. He totally forgot the tram and dared to ask her for a request "Uh... are you in a rush or would you like to have tea?"

She grinned "Sure"

They talked for over an hour in a nearby café, Jessie was laughing to Billy's jokes. She was highly interested in his personality.

"So, what do you do for now?" She asked.

He sipped his tea. He was definitely not going to tell her he was a professional burglar. Gosh!

"Well, I graduated from Leaf High two years ago. I ran a two-year Mechanical course in Sharktown's Saint Garrick, things got pretty rough, so, I dropped out. And now I assist my aunt with her Event planning. It pays pretty well"

That was a blatant eye, Billy hated event planning.

She nodded impressed. "And if I may ask, what about your parents?"

Billy went mute for a while but put up a smiling face. He never really liked sharing any detail about his parents.

"Well, I don't talk about them... But they both died" he replied looking away.

She stared at him feeling sad for asking in the first place "I'm sorry to hear that"

He quickly brazened up and found a way to toss out the awkwardness that filled the air. "No, it's fine. So, you said your last name was Ward?"

She nodded smiling. "Yes" knowing what he was going to say next.

"Are you the daughter of Commissioner Ward?" He asked surprised.

"Yeah, I am" she replied. She got that a lot, like her father was a movie star.

He nodded impressed but deep down he was uncomfortable with the fact that he was interested with the daughter of a man who had sworn to take down criminals, burglars included.

They talked some more and he offered to accompany her home.

Ward Residence,

Greentown

5:11 pm

Billy walked Jesse to her front porch. "Thanks so much, Billy. It was a pleasure getting to know you"

He tucked his fingers down his pocket grinning "Ah... the pleasure is all mine, Jessica Ward" they smiled at each other just as the door opened and Harold Ward emerged dressed in black suit.

Ward sighted Billy, he wasn't used to seeing boys escort his daughter to their front porch. The presence of Ward made Billy's heart beat rapidly.

"Hey, dad. Where are you off to?"

She asked holding Billy's left hand.

"Ah....there's a party I have to attend. It's an emergency" he replied still fixing his eyes on Billy.

Jessie cleared her throat. "Dad, this is my new friend, Billy Conrad"

"Nice to meet you, sir" he stretched his hand for a handshake.

"And Billy, this is my father, Harold Ward"

Ward took the hand giving Billy a tight grip "You look familiar, son. You live around here?" He asked. He pretty much enjoyed scaring him.

Billy mouth felt dry. "No, sir" he smiled. "I live in Bedbug"

"Ah..." Ward nodded "I would love to keep this up, guys, but I've really got to scram. But before I go, there's someone who's here to see you"

"Who?" She asked curiously. She knew her friends from school wouldn't dare visit. Everyone was afraid of her father, as she attempted to peep into the house a masculine figure popped out. Billy had no idea what was going on but he could tell the sight of this handsome-looking young lad really excited Jessie as she let go of Billy's hands and hugged him. Ward quickly sneaked away to attend his party.

After a couple of laughs from the hugging pair, they unlocked from each other's embrace and Jesse was keen to introduce Billy to this guy she had been hugging.

"Billy, meet my best friend, Harry Carstlin. Harry, meet my new friend, Billy"

They shook hands.

"How are you doing, pal?" Harry smiled excited to meet Billy.

"Good, good" Billy replied "And you?"

"Oh, never better" they smiled at each other.

"Oh, Harry, I missed you. How's the tour?"

Harry made a disappointing face. "Once again, you don't want to hear about it" They laughed.

"Oh... Billy. Harry is a Corporal in the US Marine Corp"

Billy nodded acting like it didn't freak him out. *What's with this girl's family?*

Harry gave Billy a friendly blow on the chest "Don't let her scare you, I'm not dangerous"

Billy faked a smile "Isn't that something?" Luckily for him, his cellphone rang as he drifted away and hurriedly took it. "Hello"

On the other end was David's voice "Yo, Billy, it's me, David"

"What's up?"

"Things went out of plan. The robbery is tonight"

The update shocked Billy. "Don't joke around, stupid"

"I'm deadass, serious. Meet us at the Foams junction, ASAP" David instructed before he cut the call.

Billy slowly put the phone into his pocket.

"Is everything, Okay?" Jesse asked.

"Yeah, yeah. Just gotta attend to my little sister so I've got to go" he replied.

"Alright. You take care." she waved smiling, so did Harry.

He did the same and took off.

"Strange dude, but I like him" Harry commented.

"I know, right"? Jesse replied pushing Harry into the house. "Tell me all that happened, Harry"

Warren Delgado's Mansion,

Upper Hill

6:06 pm

The party had barely begun as affluent people drove in with expensive cars. James's Malibu followed suit and stopped at the entrance where he emerged with Harold Ward and Idris Delcoy all in black tuxedos.

Idris observed the lit mansion erected right in front of him "Man, now this is what I call a house. God damn!" he commended licking his lips.

James shook his head embarrassed. "You've been saying that since we entered Upper Hill. Quit it or you'll scare the rich people away"

Ward shunned the nagging pair "Shish... Let's just do this and get the hell out of here"

James nodded "I agree" as they all walked into the building.

Delgado's large foyer decorated in gold was the center of the event. It was a cocktail party and all his artworks were placed all around the wall. The small but visible pulpit was set ahead on high ground where a lady dressed in a simple but gorgeous grey gown climbed the stairs to the pulpit.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen" she began warmly beaming with smiles "Welcome to the Delgado Art Collection for auction. As you know, a great, nice, and influential man whom we looked up to as a powerful inspiration was snatched away by death after a brief case of pneumonia. Before he died, it was Warren Delgado's wish that his beloved paintings were auctioned in order to fund the Delgado foundation for the less privileged stationed in Boston, Massachusetts. We must remember Delgado wanted the best for this city...."

"Oh, please" Ward mocked silently triggering a short laughter from James and Idris.

The host continued, "And now, I'll call on stage another great entity who has taken the burden to serve our beloved city for a brief speech. Ladies and Gentlemen, Mayor Dillon Ham"

The hall was applauding as the fifty-year-old man climbed the pulpit, he hugged the host who now stepped back to give him enough room.

He sighed heavily shaking his head "I'm short of words." He smiled "Delgado left us sooner than we expected, but he didn't leave us hopeless. He showed every citizen of Ringsville that we were more

than we thought. We must never let his greatest goal of bringing balance to this city slide. That's why before the auction is officially opened, I would like to call on our very own RVPD commissioner to say a few things. Commissioner Harold Ward?"

Once again, the foyer was vibrating with a round of applause as Ward hustled to the pulpit. Ham quickly hugged him "Good luck"

Whatever!!

'Ahem' Ward cleared his throat "I remember my first year as Police Commissioner, I first met Warren during his Acropolis renovation and..... " As he continued his speech the Comrades were all gathered at a spot apart from Endario who walked over to another Billionaire, Anthony Birdleaf who was around Artem's age.

Birdleaf was a close associate of Delgado. But he knew nothing about the uprising underworld once managed by Delgado. He had an idea that the Comrades existed but he wasn't concerned who were a part of it. And, he didn't know Artem was a member himself nonetheless the new head. Tony is what many called a one-man army. He was an influential business mogul who had sponsored many international crises. He made his millions mostly by aiding militants hoping to cause national unrest in weaker countries.

He stared at what would be Delgado's cheapest painting. On the painting depicted a six-headed hydra fighting itself.

Endario stood side by side with Birdleaf and joined him to observe the painting.

"If I'd be honest with you, Anthony, this was the last painting I expected you to have interest in"

Birdleaf smiled "Perhaps the human mind is designed to look only on the surface. I'm bent on going deeper"

Endario nodded "Still doesn't explain why you are staring at the painting"

"I am going to buy it. It's the reason I'm here" Birdleaf turned to face Endario "Well, I'll leave you and the rest of Delgado's loving community to buy whatever other painting suits your desire"

The thing that annoyed Birdleaf about Endario was that the fool wouldn't stop his charming smile.

"The thing is I'm not up for the big toys too, Tony. Delgado is smart to understand that the right painting doesn't fall into the wrong hands."

Birdleaf slowly frowned. "Do you really believe Delgado wanted a positive change for Ringsville?"

Endario sighed looking back at the painting. "No man knows any man's desire. The thing is he's dead. It's all that matters"

The crowd applauded once again as Ward departed from the pulpit to join Delcoy and Halloway.

"How'd I do?" He asked the pair.

Idris bent his lips "Pretty good... for a liar"

James chuckled as Ward rolled his eyes unconcerned.

Just then a woman who would appear to be Maureen Evans was sighted by James from a distance as she ordered some waiters around. James winced "I know that lady"

Idris looked too. "You do?"

"Yeah... But I can't remember where"

Idris scoffed "Maybe you both had a one-night stand"

James didn't pay attention to what he said knowing this face was from a different situation entirely.

A Super Mart,

Bedbug

9:37 pm

The alarm rang loudly as two masked robbers with a couple of different duffel bags ran out of the mart into a truck.

"Drive, drive, drive!!" David yelled at Jon who was behind the wheel. The youngster put the gear in drive and hit the streets of Bedbug.

"Jesus, that was scary" Billy admitted taking off his circus mask. "For the record, David, we are never doing a public robbery again"

"Agreed" David nodded impatient with Jon's driving. Soon, three police cars patrolling the area were tailing them with sirens blaring out loud.

Jon looked through his rear-view mirror "Fuck! We've got company, guys"

"Well, loose 'em" David yelled, he checked if his magazine was loaded and when he confirmed it was, he cocked it back onto his Glock and fired at the police cars tailing them.

Billy was alerted "What are you doing, David? You could kill someone"

"Well, I don't want any of us to go to jail, so I'm doing the necessary" he stuck his head out of the truck and fired again destroying the headlights of the cop car in front. "Lose these dimwits, Jon. You can do this"

"I'm trying!" Jon replied struggling with the wheel. In a short time, eight cop cars joined the pursuit making sure they crashed the truck. Jon eventually lost his grip and the car somersaulted into a shallow ditch.

Before the cops could slide down to check out the wrecked truck the trio had already made for a run as the police followed on foot.

The lads knew the area and easily lost the cops, they ran out through an abandoned warehouse and waylaid a taxi driven by an aged man.

"Get out, old man!" David threatened pointing his pistol at the old man's head after the driver's door was forced open. Billy and Jon loaded the man's trunk with the duffel bags of stolen cash.

"I don't have any money, kid" the old man pleaded unwilling to step out of the car.

David panted impatiently "We don't want your money, just get out of the car"

The old man hesitated.

"Yank him out, goddammit!!" Billy cursed as he shut the trunk.

David attempted to yank out the old man but he proved rather persistent. He stepped on accelerator throwing David out of the car.

"Fuck!!!" David yelled standing up and firing several shots at the vehicle ahead. The bullet flew through the back shield, then hustled through the driver's head rest before making its way into the driver's skull.

With the driver losing control the car swerved off track and collided with a stationed tanker causing a massive explosion, burning the driver, the car and all the money to ash.

David and the other two stood shocked.

"What did you do?" Billy yelled attempting to knock David out with his gun. Jon stopped him "We have to get out of here. The cops must have seen the flames by now"

The pair took off leaving David who sighted a surveillance camera and shot it down with his last bullet then followed the escape route the others had taken.

Main Characters introduced in Episode 2

Artem Endario

A brilliant business man who is currently head of the uprising underworld organization known as the Comrades. Artem is a mystery to the people of Ringsville and his business rival Anthony Birdleaf is the only one who knows about his past.

Anthony Birdleaf

A billionaire and Artem's former friend turned rival. Birdleaf is vile and powerful. Since Delgado's death, many consider him the new godfather of the city while others give the title to Endario.

Mayor Dillon Ham

The callous mayor of Ringsville who is bound to do anything to protect his political image.

Harry Carstlin

Jessie's best friend who is a soldier in the marine corp.

Derek Lander

A Canadian drug dealer and a member of The Comrades.

Falcon Jared Hussein

An Arabian drug dealer, Derek Lander's business partner and a member of the Comrades.

Maureen Evans

Billy and Elizabeth's aunt and an event planner who has a dark past from Kord's Rebellion.

Christine Walters

A medical doctor and researcher tasked with tracing the location of Eden believing it can save her friend, Denver.

Doctor Sactor Polaris

A brilliant Doctor who is currently missing after he confirmed the existence of a gateway to Eden.

Kord the Rebel

A leader of a brutal resistance who swore to bring balance back to Ringsville with excess violence. He is also the foster father of Lloyd Coulson. The era of Kord's rebellion is known as one of the darkest in Ringsville's history.

EPISODE III: TRAILS OF EVIL

"THE CRIMINAL IS THE CREATIVE ARTIST; THE DETECTIVE ONLY THE CRITIC"

-GILBERT K. CHESTERSON.

Upper Hill

10:12 pm

The party was reaching its peak. The guests were eager to purchase at least one of Delgado's paintings.

Maureen avoided the chaos and settled on an empty balcony. She lit a cigar and clipped the peak with her teeth. She didn't smoke around Billy and Lizzie. In fact, they didn't know she smoked in the first place.

She watched the trees for a while and slowly drifted her gaze towards the beautiful horizon. She chuckled thinking of her little sister, Rose. She wished she hadn't thought of her now.

"A beautiful view indeed" a masculine voice commented from behind.

Maureen knew that voice. She refused to reply and continued smoking.

"It's alright. I didn't expect you to look at me anyways"

She sighed "What do you want?" She asked leaning off the terrace.

"I guess, I just missed you" the voice replied.

She scoffed turning around to face Endario "You missed me? You shouldn't"

Artem smiled walking towards her "How are you doing?" He asked, Artem could not remember the last time he was a caring father.

Maureen looked around feeling worried "You shouldn't be here, dad. Birdleaf is literally down in the foyer"

Artem grinned hugging her "Screw Birdleaf" he replied "Ah... I can't remember the last time someone called me that" He hugged her "It feels good"

She showed no form of emotion "We had a deal"

He freed himself from her. "I'm tired of pretending, Maureen. I want us to be one family again. You, me, Brandy and my grandchildren" he paused "Speaking of grandchildren, when are you going to introduce me to them?" He inquired.

She stared into his eyes for a while "Never. I promised Rose I'll keep her children safe. If your enemies know about Rose's kids, they'll come for them. That's something I can't allow to happen"

Artem exhaled, slowly taking the cigarette from her mouth and tossing it down the balcony. "I made you both a promise that I will end this, and I will. I will spend my last days with you and my grandchildren. Till then? I swear to your mother and Rose, I'm not losing anyone else to this madness" He assured her kissing her forehead.

She couldn't hold it anymore and let the tears drop "I love you, dad"

Artem drifted backwards smiling "I know you do. I just need you to hang in there" He turned and disappeared into the party.

She wiped off her tears and took in a deep breath believing she could still handle things.

Back at the party, the Hydra painting was next on auction. It was moved to the stage right next to the Host who now stood in the pulpit. "It's been a long night, gentlemen and ladies. We've successfully auctioned fourteen of Delgado's paintings" she started "Now this is one of his earliest paintings. The Last Head. The painting would commence with a bidding of a hundred and ten thousand dollars"

Delcoy scoffed "Who's goanna buy that ugly ass painting for a hundred grand? That thing is scary"

Halloway nodded interested "You'd never know"

A Chinese Politician Lan Shufen contested speaking with a thick Mandarin accent "I'll take it for a hundred and thirteen thousand"

The host caught sight of the man "Do I hear a hundred and thirteen thousand?"

"A hundred and fifteen" another voice spoke from the crowd.

"A hundred and twenty" a woman countered.

"Is it a hundred and twenty I hear? Back to you, sir" The host pointed to Shufen.

"A hundred and thirty thousand" Shufen responded.

"A hundred and thirty. To you, madam" The woman shook her head. She couldn't go higher. And going....." the host announced.

"I'll take it for three hundred" Tony Birdleaf emerged from within the crowd.

Everyone was shocked looking at the old man purchasing the painting.

"I hear three hundred thousand from Mr. Birdleaf, sir" the host stated.

Another voice rang out from the crowd. "Make it four hundred thousand, will you?"

Every one turned to see the last purchaser, Endario. He walked forward joining Birdleaf who was already eager to collect the canvas.

"Four hundred thousand from Mr. Endario" the host confirmed "To you, Mr. Birdleaf"

Birdleaf sighed, Artem was just a big nuisance always trying to get into his business. Now, all he had to do was buy for a very high amount Artem would eventually have to back down.

Birdleaf believed Artem had no clue what that painting really meant to Delgado and if he was going to leave a message it'll be in that piece of canvas no one would want to buy.

"Seven hundred thousand" Birdleaf responded.

"I hear seven hundred thousand from Mr. Anthony Birdleaf" the host announced.

James and Ward winced at the bidding for the last head painting.

"What's so special about that painting?" He asked Ward confused.

Ward bent his head confused as well. "Perhaps they are just art fanatics and can probably detect quality when they see one" he explained to the oblivious looking James.

"Or... they are two pompous punks just trying to show the room how much they can spend on something stupid" Idris commented.

Halloway nodded seeing reason with Idris. "That's one thing"

Ward glanced at the two and snatched Delcoy's glass from his hand "I think that's enough for one-night, young man" He placed the glass of wine on a tray carried by a waiter who was passing by.

Birdleaf glanced at Endario hiding his anger "This painting belongs in good hands, Artem"

Artem nodded smiling still not looking at Birdleaf. "And you consider yourself good, yes?"

Tony didn't answer the question but instead faced the host.

"The bidding is closing, sirs" the host announced.

Artem cleared his throat "I'll take it for a million"

The guests exclaimed at the mention of the amount.

"I hear a million, to you, sir" the host pointed to Birdleaf who hesitated before shaking his head to show he had backed down. "A million it is, gentlemen. The bidding for the last hydra head is closed" he announced hitting his gavel on the pulpit stand.

Everyone applauded.

Tony frowned and faced Artem. There were other ways to get that painting. He was a lunatic who went beyond human imagination to get what he wanted and he believed the annoying Artem knew his potentials by now.

"Congratulations, Endario" he gave Artem a hug and kissed him on the cheek. Whatever these two aging men shared was scary and confusing.

Endario smiled knowing the struggle for this mysterious painting wasn't over. The funny thing was that both parties just had a hunch that maybe Delgado had left something important in that canvas that both of them needed.

"Thank you, old friend" he acknowledged ejecting himself from Birdleaf.

Artem hustled through the crowd and whispered to his personal bodyguard, Martin Carstlin, who was actually Harry's older brother.

"Get your men to take that painting to the vehicle then meet me at the driveway, asap" he ordered.

Martin nodded signaling three of his subordinates to get the painting from the stage. As Artem proceeded out of the building he sighted Maureen on the stairs and paid her no attention and neither did she.

Bedbug

7:33 am

The taxi explosion site had officially become a crime scene. James and Idris regretted attending the party in the first place. They both couldn't have a good night's rest before Commissioner Ward put them in charge of the case and they strongly wished he hadn't.

The scene had barricade tapes from the road all around the warehouse where the robbers had run through.

Halloway walked towards the burnt car where the Forensics were taking samples. He folded his arms as Idris joined him.

"It's one hell of a robbery, Idris"

Idris felt really pissed "So, these *niggas* blew up a driver and a sum of seventy grand into kingdom come, fuckin' amateurs!"

"They escaped at least. Smart" James applauded.

"What about the truck the robbers crashed in the canal?" He asked Delcoy.

"We've ran prints on the vehicle, we've got nothing related to the robbers" Delcoy replied.

"But you got something?" James inquired.

Idris nodded "Yeah. The truck belongs to an Abraham Clarke"

"Who's that?" James asked.

"He's a Vietnam War veteran. He's been out of town. We've asked his neighbors; they confirmed his garage was broken into. There's proof. I don't think the old man has anything to do with this"

"Keep him on check though"

Idris nodded "Noted"

The head forensic stood up from the side of the car and took off his nose mask.

"Got anything?" James inquired.

The scientist sighed exhausted. "We found a .45 in the driver's skull. He was shot by the robbers. The bullet passed through the back windshield and hit the victim's head. It's what caused the accident. He was dead before the explosion" he explained.

James nodded knowing the Forensic scientist had literally done his job concerning the driver's murder "This was all a mistake. They didn't expect it to get this far"

"Well, it did" Idris replied.

Officer Ploroe arrived in a haste "Detective Halloway. There's something Farrell wants to show you"

James winced at the mention of the name "Who's Farrell?" He asked.

The question surprised both Idris and Ploroe "Are you kidding me?" Idris asked.

"What?"

"Steve Farrell? He's the RVPD ace computer analyst. The dude with the clumsy attitude" Idris explained.

Halloway was thrown off balance. "Oh, that guy!" he scratched his head.

"Yeah. That guy, Jimmy. He's a fuckin' brainiac. I've been your partner for three weeks and guess what? I know his name"

James made a pale face "Good for you, Delcoy" he turned to Ploroe. "What does he have for me?"

"A surveillance footage" Ploroe replied.

James rolled his eyes. "Why didn't someone fill me in with that way earlier? God! I've got a migraine" He let Ploroe lead him and Idris to a van.

Ploroe opened the back doors as the pair could see the vehicle set with monitors, different gadgets, and keyboards all around the geek who was revealed to be Steve Farrell.

He smiled seeing the pair. "Detective Halloway. Please come in"

James hesitated before climbing into the van, he hustled towards Farrell who was sitting behind the driver's seat with a monitor at his front.

"So, you are RVPD's best?" James forced a grin.

Steve Farrell smiled "I highly doubt that, detective. I'm in here, a tiny van accessing the video footage from a surveillance camera for a petty robbery carried out by amateurs" he cursed trying to hide his disappointment.

"At least we agree on one thing" Delcoy smiled winking at James for Steve mentioning the word amateurs.

"Anyways" He operated on his computer "Here's what I've got for you. One of the robbers dropped this while they were escaping" Steve played the footage showing one of the masked robbers running away from the crime scene and jumping through an uncovered manhole as a disposable proof containing something unknown falls into the hole.

"Wait, wait, what's that?" James asked pointing at the stuff that had fallen into the manhole.

"All I can see is a disposable proof, it can be our ticket to finding these guys" Steve replied.

James cheered shaking Steve's shoulders. He turned to Ploroe who was standing outside with Delcoy. "Ploroe, get as many cops and patrol dogs into that sewer. Find that proof. The current couldn't have washed it far away. And even if it did, find it!" he ordered stepping out of the van. He then turned to Farrell.

"Hey, Farrell, you are today's hero" he smiled slamming the van doors before Farrell could even react.

"What now?" Delcoy asked

"Oh, we wait" James replied.



YEARS OF THE KORD REBELLION

1999

Following the abduction of the students heading to Leaf Academy, more abductions were carried out by Kord's minions. Most of these abductions failed due to the intervention of a spy agency called Tick

Bug Agency. They singlehandedly rescued more than seven hundred teenagers who were almost taken by Kord's men.

Lloyd Coulson was one of the unlucky teenagers who were successfully abducted. He had watched his fellow school mate get his throat slit and now he was stuck on an Island belonging to Kord.

It was a small island on the Atlantic several miles from Ringsville. The island was sloppy covered mostly with large pine trees and noble firs.

Kord's large building was at the top of the island he called it a Kennel. The teenagers were blindfolded before they were brought to the island so they wouldn't know their way out.

Lloyd was camped with sixteen-year-old Toby Aion. Toby was far from brave. He had panic attacks at night and it always kept Lloyd at the edge of his bed.

"Thanks" Toby Aion acknowledged Lloyd after his last attack. Lloyd had helped him with a glass of water.

Lloyd nodded and put Toby on his bed.

"I'm Toby by the way, Toby Aion" the boy stretched out his hands for a shake.

Lloyd took the hand slowly "Lloyd Coulson"

"So, how'd you get here?" Toby asked.

Lloyd walked back to his bed and laid on it gripping his pillow tight "I'd rather not talk about it"

Toby sighed and rested his head on the concrete wall of the small cubicle considered rooms.



PRESENT DAY

Acropolis Hill Prison,

Arrowtail

8:47 am

The prisoners were called into the dining hall for breakfast. Lloyd stood in the long row of hungry inmates. He held an empty tray in his hands as Bearhug joined him.

"Rough day, huh?" Bearhug asked poking Lloyd from behind.

"Yo... Quit it" Lloyd charged. He finally got to the counter where the cook served his food tray with vegetables and salads.

"Awful" he cursed walking towards a table. Everyone on the table dispatched as Lloyd settled down. Bearhug joined him.

"You don't look okay, Coulson?" Bearhug remarked.

Lloyd gasped feeling sick "I'll be fine"

"You've been having bad dreams" Bearhug noted looking at Lloyd who bent his head trying to shake off the pain.

Lloyd wiped his face with his palms "They are not dreams. They are memories. Bad memories I can't get out of my head" He explained picking up his rubber spork. He paused and turned to see Huntstone and his minions take a nearby table. They were giving Lloyd a very troubling look before they sat down.

Oh, Lloyd missed the old days when anyone who simply had a grudge against him had his neck snapped. He chuckled. Those days weren't far away anymore. He assured himself.

He turned back to face his food and Bearhug. "Hey, my four o'clock"

Bearhug quickly took a glimpse. "You think he's gonna be a problem?" He asked paying more attention to his food.

Lloyd nodded "He is a problem. He's still pissed about his fried chicken. I wish I can just poop it out and give it back" Lloyd joked.

Bearhug laughed. "I'll be back" he stood from his table and strolled over to Huntstone's. Huntstone in turn quickly stood up and locked eyes with the large man.

"You've got a problem, man-ape?" Huntstone asked prepared for anything.

"You are my problem" Bearhug charged.

"Oh, yeah?" He flinched "Why's that?"

"Coulson has nothing on you. You leave him be"

Huntstone laughed "Unbelievable, big guy. Now you stand up for that little devil. What are you, his talking hound?"

Bearhug sneered "You've been warned, Huntstone..... or you're gonna get it"

"Your words don't scare me, *Giganticus*. I've fought monsters larger than you" Huntstone boasted.

"You can be under his cane but I'll break him at the right time. I'd be delighted to go through you"

Bearhug grinned. He would enjoy taking Huntstone down. He nodded walking away as he rejoined Lloyd's company.

"Seems we have ourselves a rumble" Lloyd chuckled.

"Oh, I'm gonna so screw him up" Bearhug boasted.

"Bet you will" Lloyd replied.

Bedbug

9:58 am

Squads had been sent down the sewers hours earlier searching for the so-called nylon proof.

James and Idris waited in the Malibu drinking soda.

"I swear I'm going to the spa after this" Idris confessed rubbing his neck.

"Spas got its poison" James countered. The two sat silent for another minute before James' walkie blared out.

"Roger! This is officer Ryan. Does anyone copy?" The voice on the other end spoke through the radio transmission.

James picked his walkie.

"Copy, this is lead Detective James Halloway. What's your status, trooper?"

"I think we found your stuff, sir"

James got out of the car in a flash "What have you got?"

The officer under the sewer winced looking at the soaked nylon proof. "It contains drug pills"

James had the drug analyzed by the Narcotics department immediately it was brought out from the sewers.

"It's what many people might call roofies but actually Rohypnol or Flunitrazepam. It's a drug to help anxiety" The pharmacist on site explained to James and Idris.

"How does this help"? Idris asked disappointed.

"We've got to find the drug dealer who sold it to the robbers. That way we can figure out who they are" James replied.

"How do you know he would spill? I wouldn't" Idris said.

James sighed "We just have to try our luck, Idris. We torture him if we have to"

Idris bit his lips. "I've got to clear it out for you, my bro, torturing is no longer a thing. How do we even find the drug dealer in the first place?"

James looked around "Seems like our day with Farrell isn't over"

Idris smiled giving James a friendly blow "You remembered his name"

They both laughed walking to the Malibu.

An Apartment in Bedbug

10:00 am

David washed his face with water and stared into the mirror hung on the wall of the small bathroom. He still couldn't believe how he just blew up their last heist, both literally and metaphorically.

A hard bang was heard on the door "I'll be out in a sec, Jon" David swallowed his saliva in fear. He eventually found some courage and walked out of the room to find Jonathan pouncing around the small sitting room.

"Hey, calm down. Where's Billy?" He asked.

"He left. He said he couldn't stand you right now"

David nodded "Okay, I fucked up. I'm sorry. Jesus Christ!" he collapsed on a chair.

"Man, we made headlines. He pointed at the mute television. On it was news about the Bedbug robbery that left an innocent driver dead.

"Okay. Maybe we should leave town. Let's go to Billy's house. Let's just you know... have a break" he suggested to Jon.

Jon shook his head in disagreement "Billy warned about you going to his house, remember? His aunt doesn't know about you in the first place. And it's better that way"

David was confused at that moment. He was very sure the police wouldn't be able to uncover their identities but still, there was a possibility. His heart was pounding. He remembered his pills. Those drugs would ease his mind.

"My roofies, Jon" he remembered he had given them to Jonathan before he and Billy proceeded into the mart.

"Yeah, yeah, sure" Jon nodded pretty sure he'd still have them. He searched his coverall pockets used for the heist but they were empty. He was shocked.

"I..... I can't find them"

David arose in paranoia "This is a bad time to joke, Jonathan" he walked towards Jon.

Jon tried to calm him down "Uh, just calm down. The cops won't find it. We don't know where we lost it. They can't possibly trace it to us"

David was unconvinced he immediately thought of going back to his home in the sewers. No one would ever find him there.

Craxton High,

CRAXTON

11:14 am

It was the last day of school. It was time to get the summer everyone wanted. Josh Ward and his best friend Nicholas 'Nick' Aiden walked to their lockers in a crowded hallway full of teenagers.

"You've got any plans tomorrow?" Nick asked Joshua opening his locker.

"Nah, my mom's returning from Berlin. So, I doubt if my dad would let me out" Josh explained to Nick as he searched his bag pack for his locker key.

"What's happening tomorrow though?" he asked Nick who was looking really eager to spill.

"Some of the boys in Greentown are having a forest bike race. I'm gonna be there. Wish you'd make it" Nick replied.

It did sound interesting. Joshua had not cycled for a race in a long while but he had something bothering him. His keys. He couldn't find them. He knew he had kept them in his bag, or had he not?

"Can't find my damn keys" he complained to Nick dropping his bag on the floor.

"You sure you put them in your bag?" Nick asked.

Josh was not sure if he could answer that question.

"Looking for these?" A voice that happened to be coming from the figure now standing in front of Josh asked. Josh knew who it was. But God, he strongly wished it was someone else.

He looked up to find Damon HennyKane holding the key in his hand with a cheerful smile.

"Yeah" Josh replied standing. He slowly took them from Damon

"You dropped them on your way out of the cafeteria," Damon said.

"Oh, thanks" Josh was grateful for the kind gesture from Damon but he couldn't just stand the guy who was crushing on his Lizzie. The funny thing was, the HennyKane's and Wards were family friends due to both of their father's long friendships.

But the grudge with Damon started two years back when he realized Damon liked Lizzie. Both families haven't had dinner in a long time and it was due to Denver's withdrawal. He lost connection with the Wards after his father passed.

On the other hand, Harold was rather too busy with his work as commissioner than sitting down with the HennyKanes that no longer had members of his age. But perhaps he didn't see it that way. It was just work.

"So... uh, it's the last day of school, fellas. You know you guys can stop by the Island anytime. I'll show you around" Damon offered kindly.

Oh, Nick would love that but he knew Josh would disagree "That'd be a wonderful idea, Damon...." Nick replied excited before Josh cut him short.

"It would be lovely, Damon but we got stuff throughout the week. Maybe some other time" Josh explained.

"Oh... that's cool, Josh" he nodded. Perhaps he was tired of asking people to explore his gigantic island near the heart of the city. He knew his mates were just scared of Denver. There were rumors that the HennyKanes were fading vampires. Damon barely paid attention to those rumors but there was a time a teenager called Benjamin referred to Denver as a bad blood.

Denver heard of it and crippled Benjamin's father's company. The devastated father and son had to leave the city for an unknown location.

Damon stretched his hand for a shake and Josh hesitated before taking it "Alright, boys, got to scram" he said.

You'd better, Josh replied in his mind.

The pair watched Damon walk away down the end of the hallway.

"Damn it, Joshua. You've got to stop beefing this dude" Nick charged at Josh frustrated.

"I ain't beefing nobody, Nicholas" he replied still watching Damon walk away.

"You know the healthy thing to do?" Nick asked Josh.

"What?" Josh turned to face Nick.

"Talk to Lizzie. You are hating a guy because he likes a girl you are afraid to express your feelings to" Nick might have been Joshua's best friend but he was sure to scold him when he was wrong.



Damon juggled into the swimming hall; he took a quick glimpse around the building until he found whom he was looking for. Elizabeth Conrad.

Her presence alone put a smile on Damon's face.

He walked over to where she was. She was sitting beside two of her friends. Allie and Sarah. They were both swimmers for Craxton High but Elizabeth wasn't. Lizzie was more of a bookworm. And definitely one of the brightest in her class.

She immediately stopped talking when she sighted Damon. The other girls turned to see the teenager approach them. They smiled seeing Damon.

"Hi, Damon" the two girls acknowledged simultaneously giggling. He smiled waving back "Hi, guys. Last day, huh? What a buzz"

They laughed at what they considered a joke. But when they noticed he was here to see Lizzie, they stood up awkwardly and Allie spanked her in a friendly manner.

"We'll be outside" they tiptoed off sight.

There was silence for a little while before he spoke narrowly escaping the same thing that he had just said to the two girls who were no longer around.

"Hi" he smiled.

"Hey" she responded. He hesitated before sitting down. "So, what's the plan for summer?" He asked having a morbid thought that that might have been a weird way to start a conversation.

She looked up smiling as she hummed softly, Damon interpreted it as her thinking.

"I don't really know, Damon. I guess I'll just find a part time job or something"

"What about you come around?"

Lizzie must have misunderstood the word 'around'.

"Around?" She asked.

"Yeah...." he paused "I mean the island. I can be your tour guide" he laughed.

She gave him a vague look that scared him. *God that was a stupid idea.* He thought.

She burst into laughter much to Damon's confusion. "I was messing with you, HennyKane boy" she punched his shoulder softly.

He laughed. He did adore the way she joked around.

"It is a good idea, Damon. When would you be free?" She inquired.

Lizzie had heard so much about HennyKane Island, it was almost the size of Pin Citi which was the smallest district in the city and now she had a VIP ticket to tour the island. It was worth a shot. The island had only the HK Manor which was erected in the middle of the island. Most of the land was covered in thick trees all around.

Damon was excited. Finally, he could bring a guest on board *the mysterious island*. Gareth would be thrilled. He said to himself "How about I call you?"

She nodded smiling "Deal"

He also nodded satisfied. He stood up from the seat. "So, I guess this where I ghost?"

She looked up at him grinning "I guess so"

He clumsily walked out as he acknowledged the two girls who were now returning to join Lizzie at the side of the pool.

Bedbug

12:09 pm

The Chevrolet Malibu rode through the streets of Bedbug while the car stereos blared out to James's and Delcoy's hearing.

"Farrell, speak to me. Any location yet?" James spoke out to Steve Farrell through the walkie as Delcoy drove.

Farrell responded, his voice buzzing through the radio "We've got something. The nylon serial code is traced to No. 14 Cruise Boulevard. It says the place has been shut down for three years"

James nodded "Seems like our dealer is playing ghost. But even ghosts have flaws" he said as he drove into the close. There were a couple of junkies standing near the building. The building was actually a garage and it looked abandoned.

"You think our guy is among those junkies?" Idris asked James.

James shook his head "My instincts disagree" he paused studying the perimeter. This was the ghetto. Every cop was super meticulous when they stepped into gangster territory.

"Alright, Idris. Remember this is only a hunch. We might be wrong"

Idris nodded in agreement.

"Here's the plan. These street guys are fast. Sneak in through the back, I'll deal with these ones and in break in through the front the front. Cool?"

"Cool" Idris replied. He picked up his Glock and stuck it at the back of his denim pants as did James. They emerged from the car simultaneously and separated with Idris taking the back of the empty building grounds.

James strolled to the silver garage gate and tried to open it slowly ignoring the boys nearby. But they did notice him.

"Yo" one of them called out walking towards James.

James stopped and faced the youngster.

"Can I help you?" he asked the boy who was overwhelmed by James's question.

"No, homeboy. Can I help you? You lost or something?" He asked chewing his gum in an annoying manner.

"No, I'm not lost. I'm right where I'm meant to be"

"Is that right?" The teenager alerted the rest of the gang who quickly joined him.

James sensed he may have caused trouble and he sighed "I'll tell you what. I'll give you guys three options. Two are in your favor, all three are in mine"

The boy scoffed "Oh yeah?"

James nodded "Yeah. Listen. One, I'll give you a hundred bucks and you lads be good patriots by telling me what's behind this gate. Two, I'll give you a hundred bucks and you just mind your business, and three, you get in my way and I'll fuck all six of you up"

They stared at James for a while and burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"So, what's it gonna be, fellas?" he asked becoming impatient with these insensitive punks.

"How about we just mess you up and take your stuff?" The boy replied as they all laughed.

James nodded "Very primitive terms"

They all yanked out knives and daggers from their pockets ready to stab James to death. James had been in such situations countless times and he knew how to react.

The first boy attacked, James quickly dodged his strike and easily kicked the knife out of his hands. He proceeded by bringing out his gun and hitting the attacker on the nose dropping him.

"Ah!" he cried as blood gushed out of his nostrils. "My nose. You broke my nose, you lunatic!"

James nodded now facing the others who hesitated "Anyone else?!" He yelled.

They all took off leaving their wounded mate on the ground.

"Jackasses" he cursed cuffing the boy to a pole. "Now you be a good boy. I'll be right back" he dragged the gates open and proceeded into the dark building.

He pointed a flashlight to have a better view of his surroundings. He could hear a male voice echoing coming from the far end of the building. James stealthily walked to the end following the voice. He noticed the deeper side of the building was way brighter as the sun shone in from a skylight.

James could see large bags of what would be cocaine and pills piled up all over the place. The man with the voice sat on a comfortable chair making a phone call and backed James as he chuckled at whatever conversation he had with the other speaker.

James pointed the gun at the man. "RVPD! Hands in the air"

The man now startled threw his phone away and jumped off the chair. He turned facing James in fear "The hell?"

"Hands in the air!" James yelled as the Latino American swiftly cooperated.

"Look, detective. You got to calm down, we can come to an agreement"

James sighed uninterested "You are going to jail, brother" Jail, that word was hell to a lot of people in this vicinity. He let his instincts take control of his body. He'd rather get shot than go back to prison. He made for a run through his back door as James followed swiftly "Shit!" he cursed.

The man ran through the dark hallway and clumsily burst through his wooden back door into daylight but his speed was rather too much and didn't see Idris from the side of the building who tased the hell out of him dropping him to the ground.

"Gotcha" Idris smiled as a panting James joined him. "God! He's a runner, Delcoy" James knelt down trying to catch his breath.

Idris apprehended the suspect and dragged him back into the building.

20 minutes later

Water splashed on the suspect's face as he jerked back to consciousness "Wake up, princess" Idris slapped his cheek softly.

"Man, this is Cruise Boulevard. This place is going to be crawling with gangsters in no time" he assured the pair now holding him hostage by tying him to a chair.

"Oh. That's been taken care of" James replied with a smile that troubled the man.

In those twenty minutes he was knocked out by Idris' taser, backup had been called and the vicinity was swimming with cops.

But James made sure only him and Idris interrogated the suspect while all his goods had been confiscated by the Narcotics Department.

"What do you want?" He asked the pair.

James sat opposite him holding the man's ID. "it says your name is Carlos Luciano. Yes?"

The man hesitated before nodding.

"Is it okay if I call you Carlos?"

"Call me whatever you want to call me, detective, just get me out of here" he pleaded trying to loosen himself from the cuffs.

"There was a robbery in Downtown Bedbug on the eve of yesterday"

"I have nothing to do with that" he responded almost immediately.

"Let me do the talking, Carlos" James paused taking off his jacket. "This small nylon proof containing Rohypnol was found in the crime scene. It was left behind by one of the robbers. You see, we tracked you down with the serial number. All we needed was a genius behind the computer. Now we need to know who bought this drug yesterday. Cause we don't expect a dealer to carry his product around in a sales proof while he robs a Super mart. Besides, you aren't even licensed to sell these"

"You've got one theory right, detective. I did not rob a super mart. And second of all, I don't keep a catalog of who buys my supplies. I can't help you with finding out the identities of your robbers" Carlos explained trying to play smart with James.

James on the other hand was a lousy cop. He did whatever he pleased as long as he got him to the truth. "Carlos Luciano, I'll go easy on you one last time. Tell me who bought this particular pack of Rohypnol yesterday?" He asked getting impatient.

Carlos gasped for air letting fear dry up the water on his skin and replacing it with sweat. "I don't know, amigos. I swear"

James stared at Carlos for a while then moved his focus to Delcoy. "Let's do it the hard way then" he replied getting off his seat.

Carlos looked around as the two men got busy. "Wait, wait, wait, a goddamn minute, fellas. What's the hard way?"

They ignored him and soon Idris returned with a bucket of water. They raised Carlos' legs shifted the bucket under him finally placing the legs into the cold water.

James returned with a long electrical wire. He cut both ends open and plugged one into the nearest socket as he prepared to drop the other into the water.

Carlos struggled in his chair. "You can't do this to me. I've got rights. You wanna fucking electrocute me? I want a fuckin' lawyer, you hear me?!"

"With me? You don't have rights" James clarified about to deep the other end into the socket. This was a type of torture Carlos knew he did not want to experience. Protecting the identity of a random customer would do him no good.

"Stop!!!!" he yelled out loud.

James stopped looking up at the terrified man

"I'll tell you" Carlos said.

James sighed "It's about time" he dropped the wire and returned back to his seat.

"It was one man. A young man"

"What was his name?" James asked calmly.

Carlos hesitated before speaking. "David Logan, he's a street thug. And he knows his way around town" Carlos described "It's all I know, okay?"

"I believe you, Carlos" James stood up picking up his cellphone and quickly dialed Farrell's contact "Hello, Steve, it's me Halloway"

"Detective?" Farrell responded.

"I need you to run point on a David Logan from Bedbug"

"Hold on" Farrell replied running to his computer. After a few seconds, he replied "Alright. Here's one. David Logan, aged twenty-three. Both parents deceased. He actually hails from Trisword. His ID reads he rented an apartment in Liner Avenue in downtown Bedbug two weeks ago"

James felt satisfied. "That'll do. Thanks, Farrell"

"Nothing to worry about, detective" Farrell replied ending the call. James quickly opened the garage gates letting the cops and Officer Ploroe back into the building.

"Listen carefully. Ploroe, pick a squad and take the suspect to HQ. I need Narcotics to sweep this place clean. It's all proof of criminal activity. The rest of you, we have a suspect to catch" he ordered walking out of the building into the hot sun as Delcoy followed.

"I'll drive" Idris offered.

James nodded "All yours"

They both entered the Malibu and sped into the streets as other cop cars followed suit.

David's New Residence,

Liner Avenue.

1:02 pm

"I've got to go home to my grandpa. He'll be needing my assistance by now" Jon explained to David who lay on the sofa in the sitting room

Jon knew David still felt guilty for blowing up their biggest heist. "Hey, it's alright, we don't blame you for what happened. Billy is just paranoid; he'll be better by tomorrow, I promise"

David still didn't reply. Perhaps he would cherish some alone time. Jon picked up his bag. "I'll catch up later" He added before walking out of the apartment building into the lobby.

Jon walked out of the building into the streets of Liner Avenue. Just a hundred yards away from the apartment building entrance, he could see the row of cop cars storm the area without blaring out their sirens.

Jon was terrified watching the force men troop out and proceed into the building premises.

It was nothing close to coincidence. Jon knew they were headed for David's apartment.

He could see the famous hero detective James Halloway and a fellow African American lead the other cops into the raid.

To avoid suspicions, Jon walked swiftly into an alley and attempted to call David, but in that split second, he wondered if the police would hack into David's phone if he was caught. And yes, there was a great possibility the police would do just that.

Jon feeling scared, guilty, and useless watched as they proceeded into the building as he prayed that they had missed his address.

David on the other hand was still lying down when he heard several footsteps approach his doorstep. He quickly stood up picking up his gun and sneaked towards the window that would give him access to the fire escape at the back of the building.

He tried raising the windows but he realized luck was not on his side. The window was stuck. He prepared to smash it open with the butt of his gun but the cops broke in first.

"RVPD!!!" James yelled pointing his gun into the room. He noticed the youngster had a gun at hand too.

"Drop your weapon!" Halloway ordered but David wasn't going down without a fight he raised his gun to fire at James and they both shot a couple of rounds at each other before the other policemen could proceed into the room.

Idris fired a bullet into David's knee dropping the youngster.

"We got our man" he concluded turning to James who winced at nothing in particular.

"Are you okay?" Idris asked.

James groaned as Idris opened his jacket to see two bullets had hustled into James's shirt knocking him off balance.

"James? Stay with me. Someone, get me medic!! Man down. I repeat, man down!!" Idris yelled aloud. James could hear Idris' voice fading slowly and soon the sound was gone so was sight. And the only thing left was pitch black.

Major Characters introduced in Episode 3.

Martin Carstlin

Artem Endario's bodyguard and head of security. He is the older brother of Harry Carstlin.

Steve Farrell

An underrated computer prodigy working for the Ringsville Police Department.

Toby Aion

Another adopted son of Kord who was Lloyd's best friend and brother figure during his days in the Kennel.

EPISODE IV: TWO DEVILS, TWO SINISTER PLANS

"MY POINT IS THAT WE'RE DEALING WITH TWO DEVILS WHO BOTH WANT TO RULE HELL."

-RUTA SEPETYS

Bedbug

2:45 pm

Billy had lost appetite throughout the day. His aunt, Maureen had asked what was wrong with him but he didn't give any valuable reply. He felt bad for just storming out of David's apartment without having a conversation with him. He let his anger get the better of him.

Billy was done, he wasn't going to burgle into anyone's house or point a gun at anyone again. He would put no more violence in the world. It was time to be the responsible adult that he always wanted to be and look out for his little sister, Lizzie.

But first, he would sit his other two best friends down and talk them out of the crime life. He knew Jonathan was tired as well, but David was the problem. *One last time, Billy, do this for brotherhood.* He said to himself as he sat up on his bed preparing to call David with his phone. He was about to press the dial button when he heard the news reporter speak about the Bedbug robbery on TV.

Billy dropped his phone and walked into the sitting room where Maureen and Lizzie sat also watching the news.

"Breaking news today from Bedbug downtown as the tireless efforts to find the perpetrators behind the robbery leaves one of Ringsville's finest, James Halloway in critical condition after facing a standoff with one of the suspects"

Billy sat on a chair with his eyes fixed on the TV.

"During the afternoon rush of the city" she continued "Detective Halloway led a homicidal manhunt that successfully unmasked the identity of the robber who committed the murder. His name is revealed to be....." at that moment Billy prayed it was a wrong person the RVPD had apprehended.

"... David Logan"

Billy's heart almost exploded; he found his chest too heavy to carry.

"Things went out of track when the police tried to apprehend him. The suspect fired rounds at the police hitting James Halloway. Our sources claim the detective is in a coma and on the verge of death, but we strongly believe he will get back to his feet and continue serving this city wholeheartedly. David Logan was also wounded in course of the shootout and is currently in police custody. This is Rita Holland reporting live from Bedbug Downtown"

Maureen quickly turned off the TV believing she had heard and seen enough. She knew James from a previous life but she acted numb watching the news.

She turned to Billy who tried to hide his fear. There was a great possibility David would rat them out.

Maureen sat beside Billy "Are you okay?" She patted his head.

"Yeah, yeah. Just so much chaos around us" he replied breathing heavily.

She sighed. "Well, we just have to be smart and vigilant, trouble isn't far away" she commented as she stood up walking away.

Thanks aunt, worst advice ever. Gosh

Billy would have to hear from Jon. He wondered what he would be feeling at the moment.

Upper Hill

Tony Birdleaf's Mansion

2:45 pm

Meanwhile, Tony sat in his robe also watching the news on his TV. His eight-year-old son Max sat on the ground in front of the couch Tony settled on and was playing with his toys.

Max's mother and Tony's wife was Chloe Birdleaf. She was a beautiful blonde and a former model. Chloe was way too young to be Birdleaf's wife. She was found by Tony in the Miss Ringsville Beauty Pageant nine years earlier. She had lost to another model, Sofia Antonio in the finals.

Tony on the other hand married her not just for her beauty but to compensate her for her loss. Slowly, he fell in love with her and he didn't need her to reciprocate his love which he knew she didn't. She was a thirty-three-year-old woman who should have married someone of her age range. But here she was with this business mogul who would be seventy in two years' time.

Her joy officially began when she gave birth to Tony's son Max. Though she was sure Tony wouldn't leave much of his fortune to him since he already had an older son Brandon fondly known as 'Brandy' who he adopted many years ago.

Brandy was in his late thirties and was Tony's adopted son but Tony loved him like his own.

This was one of the reasons Tony and Artem were at odds. Brandy was one of the unlucky boys who lost everything to the rebellion.

Artem took the young boy in when he learnt Kord had blown his parents to bits in one of the explosions.

Brandy stuck with his last name 'Gene' to remember his fallen parents. He now had two older step sisters in his life who loved him. Maureen and Rose. He was the only one who knew Artem had kids.

At the time more tension had surfaced between Artem and Tony. Tony however learned of Brandy when he was in his mid-twenties. Tony had finally found a way to cripple Artem.

So, Tony abducted Brandy and proved to him that his adopted father, Artem was a ruthless killer.

The gullible Brandy believed Tony's testimonies and traded sides leaving Artem devastated.

Well, now, Brandy was a successful lawyer in a Central firm. He was the district attorney of Ringsville and had overseen the trial of Lloyd Coulson.

Though Brandy was now on Birdleaf's side, he never mentioned to the old man that he knew Endario had children. That was a secret he'd keep to his grave. He really didn't trust both men any longer. He just wanted to be left alone.

Chloe did not hate Brandy but she feared what he could do to inherit the old man's wealth and leave her and her little son with nothing.

"Daddy, will you come play with me?" Max asked raising his toy train to his father's face.

Tony lifted his head higher to catch up with the news on the TV, but when the nagging didn't seem to stop, he yelled out to his wife.

"Darling, come get this child out of my sight!"

Chloe who was helping the maid in the kitchen walked hastily to the large sitting room. She yanked him from Tony's front looking into his blue eyes.

"How many times have I told you not to disturb your father when he's watching TV?"

Max frowned "I just wanted to play with him"

Chloe sighed. "You will, honey, but not now. Come help mommy in the kitchen. I'll give you some cake" she held Max's hand as they both walked out of the sitting room.

Tony was glued to the TV as he heard the news caster report the gunning down of James Halloway. He chuckled in delight. "Some nerve"

He watched her mention the name of the young man who had been behind the shooting. "So much chaos. He's got potential" He quickly phoned his business assistant, Edward Mojo, a skilled war veteran who fought in the Somali wars. He swore allegiance to Tony.

"Hello, Eddie" Tony spoke immediately Edward picked up.

"Tony?" Edward replied.

"I think we've got a mad dog" he smiled evilly "I want you to give me everything you find on a twenty-three-year-old David Logan from Bedbug" he ordered.

"On it, boss. I'll be at your home first thing in the morning" Eddie assured him ending the call.

Tony relaxed on the couch with a satisfying smile.

Special RVPD Detention Facility,

Pin Citi

CRAXTON

7:21 pm

David was put in an interrogation room on Ward's orders. They cuffed him to the table where he sat for hours with no one in sight. His leg was no longer bleeding after a quick first aid treatment but it still stung like hell.

Idris walked into the room with a document in his hands. He gave David a disgusting look and shut the door behind him. In a jiffy, he sat opposite the younger man.

"David Logan" He paused dropping the document on the table "Just David Logan? No middle name?"

David did not reply.

Idris was prepared, showing no form of impatience "it says here both parents dead. Tell me about them?"

David still didn't reply. He wasn't giving Idris anything.

Idris sighed. "Listen to me, you punk! The government has jurisdictions, that's the only reason I haven't snapped your neck, *yet*. My partner, a good and brave man who just wanted this city to get better is now being operated on because of your stupidity. If you want to see the light of day again

and still wish to have a bright future you had better answer my question or lord knows my black ass is the last thing you'll ever see"

The room went cold, silent filled the air for seconds before David cleared his throat to speak "What do you want?"

Idris fixed his eyes on David "Now we are talking. You are going to give me the identity of your two accomplices"

David shook his head in disagreement. "I agree to my crime. I robbed a super mart, stole an old man's truck, destroyed government property, and killed an innocent man. That was all on me. Those guys didn't do anything. I cajoled them into this. It's not their fault. You have the guy behind everything that happened last night. Me"

Idris sat in his chair beginning to boil with rage. "This isn't going to end well if you don't cooperate, son"

David panted "I need a lawyer. Get me a lawyer"

Idris slammed both of his palms on the table "Shut the fuck up!!" the room went cold. Idris adjusted on his chair. "You intentionally shot a cop. According to the Black County constitution, that's ten years imprisonment for attempted murder and an extra twenty for murder. Lucky for you, I got friends in high places. Give me names and I'll spin this in your favor"

David looked at Idris trying to hide his fear "You better pray to whomever you serve, brother. You pray my partner survives the operation"

"I'm sorry" David apologized "I'm sorry for opening fire, but I'm never going to tell you who the other two of my accomplices are, detective. Do your worst" he responded fearlessly.

Delcoy stood up after seconds of silence. "Well, hope you enjoy prison food? Because you are sure to get a whole lot of it in Acropolis. I'll make sure you end up there" he walked out with his file in hand.

Delcoy walked into the well-lit lobby where he met Officer Ploroe talking to his partner, Alan Fridge.

"Here's the deal, boys. You are in charge. I'm going over to Craxton Central to see how Halloway is doing. Make sure no one talks to him"

"Copy" the two replied nodding.

Delcoy arrived the City's Central Hospital as fast as he could. He took the elevator to the fourth floor and met Commissioner Ward, James' seven-year-old daughter Sharon and Diana Stone, James' ex-fiancée in the waiting room.

"How's he doing?" He asked quickly.

Ward shook his head "The doctors aren't out yet"

Delcoy was devastated. He didn't know what he'd possibly do if he lost James. Diana stood up and patted him on his shoulder. "Hey, Idris, it's going to be okay. James is a strong man. He'll pull through this one" she assured him softly before helping him take a seat.

She sat by him and rubbed his back to ease him off the tension. In a few minutes time, the doctor arrived. He took off his surgical mask.

Doctor Charles Rudolph was the best surgeons in Craxton. He was an aging man pretty older than Ward but he still had the skills in him.

Ward and Delcoy quickly walked towards him leaving Diana and Sharon in the waiting seats.

"How did it go, Rudolph?" Ward asked tapping the man's shoulder. They had been friends for more than twenty years and they knew each other pretty well.

The doctor took in a deep breath looking the two anxious men in front of him in the eye. "The operation was successful" he announced.

Successful was the word needed right now. As long as James was still breathing, they could deal with the rest.

"Unfortunately, you cannot go inside to see him now," Rudolph said.

"No problem, doctor" Idris replied.

"The bullet hit his spine. There's a chance he might not walk again. But James is a fighter, and hear me out..... if he can be mobile again, get him to retire" Rudolph instructed.

Idris and Ward glanced at each other.

"He's going to be okay, Ward" Rudolph assured him shaking hands with Ward.

"If you'll excuse me" he walked past them down the lobby into his office.

Diana teased Sharon who was giggling aloud. "Daddy's gonna be fine. Now you have to go home and get some rest"

Sharon nodded in agreement knowing she had spent too much time in the hospital.

Diana waved at the duo standing near the theatre as she walked Sharon towards the elevator.

"What do we do with David Logan?" Idris asked Ward.

"He's the Column's problem now. They have to decide his fate" he turned to Delcoy "You go get some rest pal, it's been a long day"

Idris sighed. "Maybe I should be here. By his side"

Ward smiled. "You heard the doctor. He'll be fine. James is one tough son of a bitch. Come, I'll buy you dinner" he said leading Idris off the floor.

DEC

Jon's Residence

8:14 pm

Billy wore a blue sweated hood that night. Unlike April in Ringsville, the weather was cold. Billy wondered why. He walked over the well-mowed lawn to the porch of the Lamars.

He took his time before he knocked on the door.

The first time, there was no reply. He knocked again and waited before a faint voice replied from inside the house.

"Who is it?" Jon asked.

Billy could hear the footsteps getting louder and soon it stopped. The knob twisted and the door opened allowing Billy see Jon face to face.

Jon gave Billy a vague expression.

"Jonathan, who is it?" Wade Lamar, Jonathan's sick grandfather asked from inside the house.

"Nobody, pa. It's just Billy" Jon replied. He signaled Billy for passage unto the porch. Billy gave room as Jon walked out of the house and shut the door behind him.

"What are you doing here, Billy?" Jon asked, it was obvious he was not in the mood.

"Did you see the news?" Billy asked.

"Of course, I saw the news. I was there. I narrowly escaped. What if they had caught me? Who'd take care of my old man?" He asked in a terrified.

"You've got to relax. I tried calling you"

"I was scared to answer. I thought maybe the cops must have reached you too. So, it could have been a trap" he explained.

Billy bent his head. "I feel bad for David. He doesn't deserve this. Maybe it's my fault. I should have never left"

Jon winced in confusion "What would you have done?" He asked in a mockingly.

"He's most likely going to be locked in Acropolis" Billy said worried. He realized the legendary anarchist; Lloyd Coulson was also locked up there.

"He's going to be locked up with maniacs, the likes of Lloyd Coulson" he said lamenting.

Jon shook his head. "You do know there's nothing we can do, right?"

Billy hesitated before nodding "I guess so"

"Why, don't you go home? We'll catch up tomorrow" Jon said giving Billy a warm hug.

"I love you, man" Billy said.

"You too, bro. Be safe" Jon replied letting Billy go. He watched as Billy walked into the streets and soon, he was out of sight.

Ringsville Law Firm,

Pin Citi

10:06 pm

Brandy rested his head on his office desk. He was exhausted from the day's work and had drifted off into nothing. The office was totally empty and he believed he was the only one left until Diana hit his desk.

He jolted up awakened from his slumbers looking around swiftly to find his pretty colleague staring at him with a smile of gold.

"Diana? I thought you would have gone home" he said stretching his aching bones while he yawned.

"I did. I came back to get a file from a previous homicide case. A have a very stubborn client" she explained.

He looked at her. He observed as her hair waved down her back. "Did you go to the hospital?" He asked helping her look for her file.

She nodded affirmatively while her eyes were fixed on the paper stacked table. "Yes. The operation was successful" she replied.

He nodded. "Thank God for that"

"Aha!" she exclaimed when she found her file. She turned to him "Hey, it's pretty late to be at work. Everyone's gone home"

He grinned. "Well, uh... I've got my work all cut out me, it's not an easy task to be *the* district attorney, Diana. I'm okay spending late nights in the office" he defended. He made sure he had stressed on that.

"Six years and you are still whining about that" she taunted lightly "I disagree with you being here though. Alexx is coming over to pick me up. You can hitch a ride with us" She suggested

Brandy laughed "You are kidding, right? No offense but you know I don't get along with that crazy fiancé of yours" he noted adjusting on his chair.

"Why? Alexx is a nice guy. Yes, he can be really annoying sometimes but come on, he's not as bad as you make him seem" she countered his claim.

Well, what girl won't protect her partner?

"Let me at least walk you down" he offered.

She smiled broadly "That'd be lovely, Attorney Gene"

They both laughed as he accompanied her down the five-story building to the gates of the Law firm building.

They stood in the cold for about two minutes with Brandy regretting not bringing his jacket to keep her warm.

In a moment, a black Ferrari drove towards them and parked in front of the gates.

"Guess Romeo has arrived" Brandy remarked sarcastically as they both watched Alexx emerge from the driver's seat. The well-built six-footer rushed towards the duo and quickly threw his jacket over Diana's shoulder.

"Hi, babe" he acknowledged with a charming smile meant to annoy Brandy. Diana smiled "Good of you to be early" she noted punching his belly softly.

He jerked and chuckled "Yes, ma'am" he turned to Brandy who at this time just stood there looking at the love birds at it. "Hey, Attorney Gene"

He faked a smile nodding at Alexx "How's it going?"

Alexx kept his annoying smile straight at Brandy "Good, good. Just here to pick up my queen"

Brandy knew what Alexx was driving at "That's grand" he commented.

Alexx winced softly "Is it?" he inquired immediately throwing Brandy off guard "You were going to walk an angel out into this cold and you didn't even think of getting her a jacket to keep her warm. Bad, bad colleague" he teased still smiling.

Diana noticed the heat between the two men who kept their eyes locked. She put her left arm on Alexx's chest.

"Babe, let's just go home" she requested.

Alexx nodded giving Diana a long passionate kiss. "I'll be there, honey, wait in the car. I'm just gonna give Brandon Stark here some man-to-man talk"

Diana hesitated but decided she leaving was probably the best thing to do. She walked towards the sports car and entered shutting the door behind her.

"You see, Brandy. I know you want her. But she's just not your type. Don't you see?" He pitched to Brandy.

Brandy knew Alexx was insecure. That's the only reason why he would say that to his face. He kept mute sure to get the loud-mouthed fellow out of his face.

When Alexx was convinced Brandy wouldn't reply him he turned around and walked towards the car.

Brandy watched him drift away but couldn't keep mute totally. "Maybe you should mind what you talk about on your TV show" Brandy s out suggested out loud.

Alexx stopped in his tracks and turned to face Brandy. He was already standing at the back of the vehicle. He smiled sure to piss him off "Maybe you can be my next guest" Alexx chuckled, he winked at Brandy and boarded the vehicle before speeding out of sight.

What a punk. Brandy swore in his mind. He despised Alexx's cocky personality in every way possible.

Alexx DuBois was a TV presenter for the famous Ringsville TV show 'The Early Coffee' he also owned an internet blog site where he spent his free time exposing government conspiracies. Many people admired and adored Alexx but feared for his safety considering the kind of jokes he cracked and his parodies of famous people, Birdleaf included.

Birdleaf had already had a discussion with Brandy on how they'll sue the owners of the Early Coffee show and those who sponsored DuBois's blog and make them pay, but current business situations and other sinister plans made him drift his mind from bringing down those who were publicly damaging his reputation.

Brandy watched as the car drove out of sight he turned to proceed back into the building when he heard a voice from behind.

"I have got to say this, that guy is really, really annoying" Artem chuckled walking out of the dark. The old man also happened to be looking at the car before it disappeared. He turned towards Brandy.

Brandy was not in the mood for Artem's sarcasm. "What do you want, old man?" Brandy asked beginning to succumb to the cold night's brutality.

"You know... just some simple father and son talk that'll sink into your head"

Brandy rolled his eyes in frustration "Here we go again. I told you, I'm never coming back. Don't you get it?"

Artem stared at Brandy vaguely. He possibly didn't know what to do to get this dummy to understand. And sometimes Artem really wished he didn't care anymore.

"Brandy, listen very carefully" This time his voice was different, subtler, even Brandy couldn't ignore it.

"This... would be the last time I'll approach you, son. You are a grown man. You can make your own decisions and I totally respect that" Artem paused. He didn't mind if Brandy would still bother to listen but he just felt he the need to air out his mind. He noticed how Brandy still cared but tried to cover it with anger and pride.

"I rescued you from the Rebellion as a boy. I gave you hope. I put a roof over your head when Kord took your parent's life. I brought you into my life and made you like my child"

Brandy shivered wishing he could just avoid all these mumbo jumbo crap.

"Brandy, you had two older sisters who loved you. None of them deserved the pain you brought"

That statement did not make matters any better but triggered Brandy instead "I brought pain?" he cut Artem short.

"I brought pain? I never showed you any ungrateful behavior for making me a part of your family but why did you have to lie to me?"

Artem looked away, he made sure brandy did not get to see the weak side of him.

"You lied to me, Artem. You lied to my sisters. You were one of the assholes who engineered the rebellion. You were an ally to Kord. You are a ruthless killer. Whatever you did in the past, I would have forgiven you but you still haven't changed. I only protect your reputation in Rose's memory"

Artem sighed looking for the right words to say. "I have told you times without number. Everything I did was for a reason. I had to protect my family. You, Rose, Maureen. *They* were out to get us"

Brandy stared at Artem panting. "I am tired of all this, Artem. I'm done with you and you should come to terms with that. I made a vow after Rose died. If you want to get my forgiveness, take in Roses children they deserve to know their grandfather" Brandy said turning his back on Artem.

Artem charged after him "Listen!"

Brandy stopped but did not turn back to face Artem.

"Lloyd Coulson is getting out of Acropolis soon" Artem announced to his hearing.

The name Lloyd Coulson made Brandy's chest beat hard. He could never forget he was the prosecuting lawyer who locked Lloyd behind bars with the help of Birdleaf, Mayor Ham and over a hundred other witnesses.

He swallowed spit trying to hide his fear. He turned to face Artem. "That's not possible. Acropolis is a very secure facility. And how do you know about his plans in the first place?"

Artem didn't reply sighing deeply.

"Now you are aiding the son of the psychotic rebel who claimed the lives of my parents and thousands of other citizens?" He asked. Brandy wasn't surprised. Artem hadn't changed at all. But now, he was going to join forces with a maniac destined to burn Ringsville to the ground. Coulson was Ringsville's number one public enemy after Kord.

"All I'm saying is you have to be careful; I can do my best to protect you from Lloyd but you have to be cautious"

"I don't need your protection" Brandy replied.

Artem smiled knowing Brandy was just a proud man who needed to witness real danger to get a wakeup call.

"Look, I have had enough. I have to go back to work" Brandy noted getting impatient.

"Brandy, one last thing"

Brandy looked at Artem. *Any more bad news?*

"I love you, son. But God knows I'll never forgive you if you ever tell that lying piece of crap any of my plans. I take it you are on neutral ground"

Those words were a lot heavier than they sounded.

Brandy was done. He was never going to accept Artem back into his life but he had never and would never rat off any information to Birdleaf.

"You have my word. Your war with him does not concern me. I am not anybody's weapon" he replied and returned into the building.

"And yet, out of the blue, you became District Attorney covering up Tony's sub level dirty little secrets" Artem replied to his own hearing, he watched Brandy walk away till he was out of sight. The

old man was deep in thought and couldn't find the courage to walk. Soon he was joined by his personal bodyguard, Martin Carstlin who grabbed his left shoulder.

"Come on, Artem, we have to go. It's a cold night" Martin said.

Artem nodded, he was done here.

With Brandy or no Brandy, Artem was going to finish what he had started and he knew he needed Coulson as a remarkable ally. That was truly a force to be reckoned with.

The Column,

CRAXTON

11:54 pm

The Column was the city's governmental firm. It was where the mayor and his subordinates operated from.

It was also the place where special criminal-related cases were trashed out by Mayor Ham and the members of the City's Council. It was a bizarre system the metropolitan city practiced that baffled many other factions of the United States.

The council included six powerful political figures in the city. Warren Delgado was one of the six members until his death having been a long-time politician and lawyer. Artem found it a big scheme to discard people that were threats to their governance. He never believed corrupt men should decide the fates of any human being they found guilty.

It was a few minutes to twelve, Mayor Dillon Ham exited his office as he walked towards the elevator, he pressed the buttons. He stood waiting for the cubicle to arrive and when it did, he found Harold Ward resting on the walls.

Ham winced at the Commissioner's presence "Ward?"

Ward smiled walking out of the elevator. "Mayor. Hope I ain't taking much of your time?"

Ham could not see the commissioner come all the way here and then refuse to give him an audience.

"No, not at all. I just concluded work for today but pretty sure I can find some time to give a legend like you a listening ear" he laughed patting Ward on the back.

They both relaxed on a long visitor's bench. "So, what brings you here, Harold?" Ham asked taking a deep breath.

"Well, Dillon, I'm here on behalf of David Logan" Ward explained.

Ham nodded "Oh, yes. That little punk who blew up an old man and a super mart's entire income in a car explosion and cemented his profile by gunning down one of Ringsville's finest detectives in one day"

Harold scoffed "Yes... that punk" He repeated.

"What about him?" Ham inquired.

"I realized the Column Council has decided to handle his case without giving him the right to legal counselling. Everything we are doing is against democracy. Listen to me as a friend and a mentor. I know he's fucked up but let me take responsibility for his actions"

Ham didn't understand what Ward was driving at. "Take responsibility for what, Harold?" He frowned.

"Instead of sending him to Acropolis, I suggest a therapy program. Sending him to that cage is unhealthy. The kid is too young for that. He still has a chance to change"

Ham stared into Ward's eyes. "I might be Mayor, Harold, and everyone believes I've got the mantle to act according to my will but it's not like that" he explained standing up.

Ward sighed in frustration also getting up from the bench.

"Look, I know it's difficult. But listen, he doesn't deserve this"

Ham nodded and tapped Ward's shoulder "Alright, I'll look into it. Probably talk to the council see what they think, okay?"

Ward smiled "Thanks"

Ham gave him a warm hug. "How's the wife?" he asked as they walked out of the building together laughing at each other's jokes.

HennyKane Island

12:12 am

Denver sat in his office; he had his eyes glued to the monitor as he watched the video of Doctor Sactor Polaris' discovery about Eden for the fiftieth time. With every time he saw the clip, he felt a little more attracted to this Eden.

As Denver watched the clip, he wrote down notes. He honestly didn't know what he was doing. He was even more convinced he'd be a dead man before he ever found this inter dimensional world.

"Denver?"

He could hear Damon calling his name softly from outside the office. Denver paused the clip turning towards the doorstep as Damon in his pajamas walked in.

"Hey, buddy. Having trouble sleeping?" he asked with a smile on his face.

Damon looked all around the office. It was stuffed with large books, city maps, and history posters. This was not where he imagined a sick man to be lurking around in his final days.

"You've been up all day; you need to have some rest" Damon suggested.

Denver drew a stool nearby and had Damon sit on it.

"Hey, it's not your duty to worry about me" Denver said with a smile.

Damon winced in confusion. "So, you expect me to care less when the only family I have left in this world is about to die from a blood disease? Come on, Denver, don't bullshit me"

Denver realized tears were about to gush down his brother's eyes.

Damon was a tough lad, but when it came to family, he lost all his courage. He was still a baby when his mother, Katie Yates HennyKane also died of a rare blood disease, but his father, Wilbur was of different circumstances, Damon knew him to be a good and wise man. They would play golf together on the large fields of the Manor and go camping. Wilbur even took Damon to the Tower sometimes.

He was the little boy's hero. And like every troubled rich man, Wilbur died of heart failure.

Denver knew the old man missed his wife dearly. He had begged Wilbur to remarry but he swore Katie was to be his first and last wife.

And so, he drank alcohol excessively, and thought of her every day watching the stars and speaking to her everywhere he was. Damon was too young to know what grief was. He thought his old man was nuts, until one day, his heart couldn't carry the pain and the weight of her death any longer.

He died in his bathtub on Damon's tenth birthday.

A day the lad would never forget.

So maybe people did have wealth but people like Damon were far from happy.

Denver pressed the boy's head on his chest kissing his hair. "It's going to be okay"

That didn't take back the tears. Damon let them roll down his cheeks.

"I don't want to lose you, Denver. Please" he sobbed.

Denver held the boys head and made him look into his eyes. "You won't"

"You swear?" He asked cleaning his eyes with his knuckles.

Denver looked at those eyes. He saw the fear of loneliness in those eyes. Those eyes that were of HennyKane blood proved to Denver that there was something worth fighting for.

Yes. There was a reason why he couldn't leave this world yet. His brother.

"I swear" he said confidently pulling his younger brother back into his arms.

He turned to his computer monitor and saw the image of Doctor Polaris.

Denver knew. One way or another if this was the only way to stay alive, he'll have to crack out the whereabouts of this Science genius. He had to.

The place was all dark; it was definitely night fall.

Snowflakes dropped from the black sky and filled the ground. James fell down crashing on the melted flakes. He tried to navigate through his surrounding, he was in a pavilion or at least it was what James could picture.

There was a big tree at the center of the four-cornered garden. A really big tree with golden leaves.

There were columns around the pavilion supporting the pavements covering all four sides.

James felt a hard kick on his back after he fell. Someone had definitely pushed him. He was sure of that too.

He looked around to see who did.

When he had a glimpse of what might have, he was terrified. It was a man-like creature. He was all covered in black burns and it seemed blue energy was emitting from his bright openings.

James didn't take his eyes off the terrifying creature. He still wanted to see this monster standing in front of him while he lay on the ground like a scared little child.

This man-like creature grabbed a young girl by her neck and raised her sky high as far as his arms could go.

She was gasping for air. James cried. He had no idea why he was crying. It was okay to feel emotion for an innocent entity going through pain. It was totally human, but this was different. He felt like he knew this girl. He would describe her to be in her early teens. Twelve probably.

He didn't know why he was weeping for her. But he really wished he could fight the cold. Fight the pain and whatever force was holding him down.

He wanted to save her from this man-beast.

He was nothing near what James had ever seen.

The beast laughed evilly and turned his focus to James still holding the girl up sky high.

"I told you, Jimmy. I told you you'll fail. You've always been a failure" the creature whose face was burnt to ash laughed aloud as blue energy particles emitted endlessly from all parts of his body.

James winced; he knew that voice. He tried to crack out who had that voice but he got nothing.

He wondered why he felt so useless, why he couldn't do anything.

Why he couldn't stand up.

Why he couldn't save this girl and why he was stuck in such a mystical place.

"You've failed. You and your allies have failed" the faceless creature laughed some more as James stared in horror as he snapped the girl's neck and threw her lifeless body away.

"What are you?" James asked trembling.

"I am the truth. The truth everyone tried to omit"

Whatever the creature said, it made James a lot more frightened.

Soon he heard a voice from everywhere screaming his name.

Now his memory was coming back. He didn't know how he got into this horrific scenario but he remembered feeling bullets burst through his chest.

The voice got louder as the faceless monster approached him.

"James!" the voice screamed louder.

He closed his eyes before the creature could reach him. He heard a beeping sound and gasped opening his eyes to daylight where Idris stood over his face.

"It's alright, pal. You're back" Idris smiled.

Major Characters introduced in Episode 4

Brandon 'Brandy' Gene

A solicitor and the present district attorney of Ringsville who shares a past in Artem's life. He is also Tony's adopted son. Brandy understands the conflict between the two men who have played father figures in his life. He knows how valuable a tool he is and so tries to stay out of sight doing everything to be a fair lawyer, but fair doesn't count being Birdleaf's son.

Alexx DuBois

A TV icon and Diana Stones fiancé.

Diana Stone

A seasoned lawyer who was once engaged to James Halloway. She is also Brandy's colleague.

EPISODE V: DO YOU MISS THE OLD DAYS?

"YOU CAN NOT ESCAPE A PRISON IF YOU DO NOT KNOW YOU'RE IN ONE."

-VERNON HOWARD

Craxton Central Hospital,

CRAXTON

8:27 am

James had been up for almost four hours. He had been fed a bowl of salad. Diana and Sharon who had arrived shortly after he woke kept him company until Idris returned from the mall and Ward from RVPD.

"I highly recommend he spends one more night" Doctor Rudolph suggested to the visitors in the room after Sharon nagged Diana that she wanted her father back home.

"Of course, doctor, he still needs to recover" Idris concurred with a nod as he carried Sharon on his lap.

Rudolph was relieved "Well, guys, I have to take my leave. I have other patients to attend to"

The visitors thanked the veteran surgeon as he stepped out of the room.

Harold turned to James who was smiling.

"How are you feeling, son?" He inquired.

"Oh, much better. I'm ready to get back to duty"

The room fell into silence as Idris and Ward glanced at each other.

James read the room immediately "What's the problem?"

Idris cleared his throat "*Jims*, you have to lay off work for some time, man. For a really long time" he answered.

James looked at everyone from Ward to his seven-year-old daughter.

"Sharon?" He called out to her "Are you in on this?" He asked the little girl jokingly.

She shook her head "No, daddy" she replied with a naughty smile.

He looked at everyone again as he scoffed "You guys have got to be joking"

Ward whistled. Even on the sick bed, James could not stop giving him a hard time "Look, it's what's best for you" Ward stated. He looked at the room and realized he needed some alone time. "Please, I need to talk with him" he said out loud as Diana, Sharon, and Ploroe walked out.

Idris stood up joining Ward beside the sick bed where James laid.

"Dude, you gotta relax. We got the kid, okay? He's refused to spill the identity of his accomplices but he's definitely our guy. Take a break" Idris insisted.

James was not comfortable with this. He loved the rush, the action. It was all that mattered to him after his little girl.

"For how long?" He asked.

"As long as possible. You have a broken rib. Don't sweat it" Ward reported without any form of remorse.

James sighed. He was barely five hours out of coma and he could already feel so much tension all around him.

He had been gone for two days. He needed to know all that had happened in the city. With his case. His suspects. The kid who gunned him down. He wanted every little detail.

"So, how's the kid doing in detention?" He inquired.

"Well..." Harold paused. "He's been denied proper counselling by the Column"

James cursed in frustration. "Shit!"

He knew what the Column could do to criminals who were tossed under their power. He knew where David was going to end up. Acropolis.

God. That was not a place he wanted a young man to be. Yes, David Logan might have pulled the trigger that nearly ended his life, but James knew the kid was probably going through various psychological problems and he needed help, probably a facility but did not deserve being sent to a hellhole that was Acropolis.

"Maybe we can do something. Get the council to change their mind. He needs an institution" he suggested.

Ward rubbed his face. "It's exactly what I suggested to Ham. He told me he was going to look into the matter and discuss it with the rest of the council.

Idris gave Ward a disturbing look. "You know nothing good ain't gonna come from that, right?" Idris countered.

Ward was silent. He knew his efforts were probably a waste, he knew he had to try. Ham might have seen sense in his opinions but it was hard to convince the other members of the council.

"Look, I cannot bear to see this Logan kid end up in Acropolis. It's not just right. He's damaged, not evil" James said frowning.

The other two nodded in agreement.

"Yo, why don't you think of getting your ass off that bed and let *them* big dogs worry about kids like Logan, huh?" Idris taunted, but he realized something else was bothering James.

"Hey, brother, you look pale you got something you want to tell us?" He added.

The question had Ward noticing the anxiety on Halloway's face too.

"Yeah, what's wrong, son?"

James looked towards nothing as he bent his head. "Fuck it. I didn't want to say it 'cause, man does it feel weird?" He chuckled lightly "I had this dream" he began.

Idris winced hoping it wasn't going to be what he was expecting. "Hold up, brother, is this one of those running through a tunnel scenario?"

Ward hit Idris' shoulders "Let the man speak"

James looked up at the pair facing him. "No. It's not one of those running down a tunnel scenario" he replied. "This was different. If I think about it over and over again, I believe it wasn't a dream at all. Maybe a trance or vision or something" he said.

James didn't believe in the supernatural or fantasies. Not in witches, demons or hell. Or visions. He believed they were all made up to scare people. But what he had seen made him doubt not just himself but his beliefs. It was way too real.

"A trance?" Ward asked confused.

"Yes" James nodded. "There was this.... darkness. It was definitely nightfall. And it was like there was a war. I.... I was in a sort of pavilion and I was confronted by this monstrous-looking man. There were bright blue particles coming out from all over him. He called me by my name like he knew me" James narrated stammering.

Ward and Idris glanced at each other.

"Then he grabbed this girl by her neck. I tried to stop him but I was useless. Unable to walk or stop him. I watched him snap her neck and toss her body into the darkness. It seemed like he wanted something from her and as soon as he got it, he killed her" He paused again wiping his eyes "I don't read meanings to dreams or anything tagged superstitious but guys, this had me cold. Like it was happening or was going to happen" he said.

The pair remained silent for a while. "I've got to say this... but pal, I'm short of words. Maybe it does have a meaning, maybe it doesn't. Either way there's nothing you can do about it. I suggest you let it slide"

Oh, that was what he wanted to hear. Someone who would tell him it was just his mind messing with him. That everything he saw was just trauma from his past and it meant absolutely nothing. He would toss this dream or whatever away but a part of him still pricked him never to forget.

He smiled sure to get his mind off of it. "I'll try to" he replied "Where's my little girl? Daddy misses her" He cheered as the others walked back into the private room.

Birdleaf's Mansion,

Upper Hill

9:48 am

Tony was sitting with his wife Chloe in the swimming pool lounge behind the house. She wore a black bikini as they were having a serious conversation until a maid arrived interrupting them.

"I'm sorry, Sir, Ma'am" she bowed respectfully.

"What is it, Laura?" Chloe asked adjusting on her chair.

"Mr. Mojo is here to see you" she announced.

Tony coughed. "Ah. Eddie, I did send for him. Please bring him here" he ordered as she walked away hurriedly.

Chloe looked at Tony, her mind was not at rest "Why is Eddie here? Is everything alright?" She asked concerned.

Tony sipped his glass of wine. "It is darling. Everything is fine. It's just business. Important business" he assured her with a smile.

She didn't like the fact that Tony never discussed business dealings with her. She knew he must have been involved in deadly schemes but she felt the necessity for her to know what he was doing. Perhaps, her involvement could keep her family alive.

Edward Mojo arrived with a suitcase in his hand as he joined the pair in the lounge. He was a man of great stature with a terrifying face. One could tell that face had survived hundreds of deathly blows. When he was present in Tony's house, he'd always scare the hell out of little Max.

"Eddie" Tony sang aloud hugging him.

Eddie laughed "How are you doing, old man?"

Tony grinned "Doing great, I guess"

Eddie nodded "I love that" he turned to Chloe who sat down. "Oh, if it isn't the most beautiful woman in the world" he acknowledged her with a smile as he kissed her soft knuckles.

She giggled. "You never stop with the flattery, Eddie"

"It's not flattering if it's true" he replied as they laughed before he sat down.

Tony whispered into Chloe's left ear. It was obvious he had begged her for more room, so he could have a private talk with Edward Mojo.

Though he knew she wasn't comfortable leaving, he watched her go as she tied her robe.

Tony turned his focus to Edward. "Well, Eddie, what do you got?"

Edward opened his briefcase swiftly. "Maybe you were right about this kid, Tony. Do you believe in coincidences?"

Tony mumbled undecided. "I don't know what to believe in these days, Eddie" he said.

Eddie smiled "Well, I don't. You wanted someone who could shake the city's core, well he could be a weapon"

Tony was not sure if he was following Edward.

"What do you mean, Eddie? Let's focus on the heist for the last hydra painting. We need this kid for the plan. And we can prepare him for whatever comes later"

Eddie rubbed his eyes "Tony, what if we are wrong? What if it's just an ordinary painting and there's no meaning to it?" He asked.

"I have a hunch. A strong feeling. It has to be Delgado's secret painting. I believe it contains a location or perhaps coordinates to that last Tick Bug fort. That place has all we might need to proceed to the next phase" he explained in almost a whisper even in a large space that contained all both of them.

Eddie moved closer to Tony "Are you really sure?" He asked concerned.

Tony nodded. "I knew Delgado and I knew his taste. But what we will never know is if he wanted us to find it"

Eddie sighed. "Why do you think Delgado wouldn't want you to find it if he was making you successor to the *Reds*?"

Tony spat out in disgust hearing Edward say those words "Don't, don't say that to me, Eddie. That's insulting. I was one of the *first Reds*. I started it and he came along when things went sour and by some miracle, he saved it with *Duwall* money. Delgado was not my friend, he was a user, a leech. The only reason I stuck with him for nearly thirty years was because he had so much that I needed, but he never cared to share it"

Edward raised his hands in submission 'I'm sorry, sir. I did not mean it like that. You know I got much respect for you, but do not worry about the dead. Delgado's gone and that was nature's call. If we are to find that place, we will, but now, let's plan the future" he said before passing a photograph of David Logan to Birdleaf. "I know how we can win him over"

Tony looked at the picture "How?"

"Like I said, I don't believe in coincidences. This boy was destined to come our way" Eddie started.

Tony wondered what Edward was driving at.

"David Logan's father was Dominic Logan and he was from Trisword, David has not actively been there since his father's demise. Dominic was killed by a trooper when David was around five or six years old. I did some research. The trooper was Ferdinand Park who was a mentally deranged man. Following Dominic Logan's death, Park was found not guilty by the judge and jury. The case was concluded as suicide. Would you like to know who pulled the strings?"

Tony stared at Eddie interested "Who?"

Eddie smiled "Harold fuckin' Ward"

Tony's watched Eddie in awe. "You've got to be joking"

"Turns out that was his ticket to becoming Police Commissioner" Eddie concluded sipping wine as he relaxed on his chair.

Tony was deep in thought. "If we can prove to the Logan kid his father was killed by a policeman and justice was denied due to Harold's intervention, we've created a monster"

Eddie nodded. "We've really got ourselves a mad dog"

Tony nodded laughing. "You bet"



2 weeks later

David Logan's case had yet to be concluded. He was put in total isolation. He only saw the police guard who arrived to give him food and when he came in to take it out, and that was all. He spent fifteen days looking at the walls preventing him from leaving and the more he watched them the more he lost hope.

His thoughts grew darker by the day. He imagined what it would be like returning to the world, a world that saw him as a vicious monster and decided to lock him up because it pleased them in doing so.

HennyKane Island

11:40 am

Denver walked out of the mansion towards the Ford truck parked near the gates of the manor. He wore a brown leather jacket with jean pants and a baseball cap. It was obvious he was trying to establish a disguise. He opened the driver's door before Gareth called out to him.

"Master Denver?" Gareth yelled out walking towards join Denver.

Denver paused turning around "Gareth?" He acknowledged.

"Sir, may I know where you are going? I can get one of the servants to accompany you" he suggested. Just in case the young billionaire had another episode.

Denver chuckled "You don't have to worry about me, Gareth. I'll be a good boy" he said sarcastically hoping to get the old man off his back. He boarded the truck shutting the door behind him "I'm just going to have a bottle of beer is all" he added.

Gareth nodded. "Well.... Damon was going to make a request. It would seem he was sure you'd say no"

Denver placed his elbow on the window frame of the door interested. "And what is that?"

"You know it's spring and you don't really let him wander off into the city. So, he wanted to bring a guest over. A good friend of his from school" Gareth requested in Damon's favor.

Denver looked away before nodding. He'd do anything to put a smile on his little brother's face "Sure. He has my approval" he replied with a smile.

Gareth also smiled. "Well, thank you. And be safe"

"I will, Gareth" he replied driving out of the Manor through the shady path covered in beautiful trees before he crossed into downtown Craxton through the Island's bridge.

A minimart,

Dec

12:03 pm

Idris and Ploroe walked to the counter where their goods would be scanned for purchase.

"That'll be eight hundred bucks and fifty cents" the young female vendor stated.

Idris dipped his hands into his pocket before Ploroe stopped him.

"Don't worry, detective, I got this" he assured Idris as he gave out his card to the young lady. Idris realized what was going on. Ploroe was trying to impress the pretty lady over the counter table.

"You look familiar, sweetie. Have we met before?" he asked with a broad smile on his face.

She shook her head swiping his card on the POS machine. "I'm afraid not, sir" she replied.

Ploroe nodded. "I've got to say I haven't seen a lot of pretty girls in this part of town. And yours just brought back memories like we've met some time ago"

Okay, this was a terrible way to flirt. Idris was disgusted with Ploroe's dry sense of humor or whatever he was trying to get at. "That's enough, pal"

Ploroe turned to him "Sir, I'm trying to make a connection here"

Idris faked a smile. "Brother, that right there... is the worst thing I've ever heard a guy say to a girl, or maybe if I had said it, it would have been way cooler" he replied as they noticed the vendor giggling to Idris' verbal brutality.

"Oh, thank you very much for making me look like an idiot, sir" Ploroe acknowledged sarcastically.

Idris nodded collecting the packaged goods "Oh, you don't go tripping on that shit now, officer. It's my pleasure" he noted walking out of the shop. Ploroe sighed and turned to the girl, he crossed over his call card to her.

"Here's my number, sweetie. Call me" he winked as she collected it slowly. He ran outside to join Idris who was headed for the car.

"Can we agree you'll never do that again, detective?" He begged collecting a bag from Idris.

Idris scoffed "Can we agree you'd stop being a moron?"

Ploroe frowned as they approached the cop car. They put the goods in the back seat and were about to enter the vehicle when Idris caught sight of a black van.

He stopped staring at the vehicle yards away from theirs.

Ploroe stopped too looking at what Idris was staring at. "You okay, sir?" He asked concerned.

Idris shut the vehicle door throwing the keys to Ploroe who caught them.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"Go home" Idris ordered walking away from the car as he walked towards the black van.

Ploroe was confused but had no choice than to follow orders. He entered the cop car and sped off.

Idris had reached the black van and looked around but there was no one in it.

"Yeah. I know those moments when nostalgia kicks in. You know, seeing something that brings memories. The good, the bad, and the motherfuckin' ugly"

Idris knew that voice. He turned to see who had spoken, it was Rick O'Neal devouring a pack of crackers as he rested on another vehicle.

"Rick?" Idris acknowledged amused. That was one of the last people on earth he was hoping to see.

Rick tossed the pack away and looked at Idris. "Nice of you to return to Ringsville without paying us a visit" he said walking towards Idris.

Idris searched for words to say, but nothing came.

"I'd really enjoy punching you but you know everyone loves that face" he said. The pair stared at each other for a while before they burst into laughter. They quickly hugged.

"How are you, pal" Rick asked giving Idris more space.

"Where do I begin?" he replied chuckling.

"Oh, man. It's been sometime"

Idris nodded "Affirmative" he looked around as three men in suits joined them. "I guess this wasn't a coincidence?" He asked Rick.

"I'm afraid not, Delcoy. It's time to answer for your sins" Rick replied with a smile. "It's time to come home"

Delcoy looked at the hefty men. They weren't here to joke. "So, are you going to blindfold me?" He asked rolling his eyes.

"Nah, not you" Rick replied leading Idris into the van as the men followed. The van engine was kicked back to life and drove out of sight.

Rick O'Neal was an RCF agent. He had worked by Idris' side for about five years before Idris left the city after he gave up on Secret Service life.

Now Idris had returned to Ringsville after those three years but never bothered to return to his RCF family. He knew he had screwed up but he wanted out and sooner had he arrived, James had approached him with a job as a Ringsville Police detective.

Whatever came his way he was ready, he hoped.

Nexus Golden Pub,

Craxton

12:24 pm

Denver took a seat in the bar. He couldn't remember the last time he went out for a drink or the last time he did anything fun. In the last two weeks, he had been on the island researching about Eden while he had maximum attention from everyone in the Manor.

He also missed the tower. He wanted to return to work, the Tower was currently run by the Board and he was pretty sure they were doing a good job.

He had gulped down two large mugs of beer and slid the glass back to the attendant. "Another one, please" he requested. He bent his head to avoid being recognized by anyone. This was him going incognito.

A man took the seat beside him "Get me a bottle of Gordons" the man requested from the attendant. He sniffled lightly giving Denver a quick glance before looking back at the attendant doing his job.

The man paused turning sideways again trying to capture the face he had just seen. *Oh, this was a good day.* "Denver HennyKane" he chuckled in excitement.

Denver knew his cover was blown, first he tried to avoid the acknowledgement but he knew he had to reply. He turned to face the man beside him.

"I'd suggest you keep your voice down, buddy" he replied sternly

The man put his hands forward to show submission. "Yes, sir"

Denver looked away collecting his mug from the attendant.

"You know I heard what happened to you at your company" The man said.

Denver didn't reply as he focused on the reason he was here, his beer.

"I'd say we met for a reason" he said.

Denver dropped the mug and looked at the nagging man beside him.

"What do you want?" He asked.

"I'm Ethan Gibson" The stranger stretched his hand for a shake. Denver looked at the hands before he slowly took it. "I'm a scientist..... just like you, but my project is considered private. I run a lab out of town in Orangemill. I'm interested in helping save your life" he said in a serious tone.

Denver scoffed "I'm not sick" he replied.

Ethan tsked collecting his own drink from the attendant "Oh, come on" he sipped a little before he continued "For a man who has collapsed and gushed out blood in public places three times in one year, whose maternal side comes from a long line of people diagnosed with this unique blood disease, I'm pretty sure you are sick, really sick" he concluded with a smile hoping he had gotten Denver's attention.

Denver did not know what to say to this strange man.

Ethan dipped his hand into his pocket and dropped his company card on the table sliding it over to Denver. "You have all the time in the world to think about my offer" he stated as he rose up with his bottle in hand "Just know time is of the essence, my friend" he added walking away.

Denver watched him walk away, he observed the black glowing card taking his time to feel the texture.

Leafonia

12:38 pm

The black van approached a ditch, at the side of the road was a high wall. The van slowly turned towards the wall and drove at it like it was going to collide with it but a small part of the wall opened and the vehicle drove in with the wall closing behind it.

The van drove through the tunnel where they stopped at a checkpoint with armed guards.

"Name?" One of the guards inquired looking into the van.

"Agent O'Neal, Silverwing Division" Rick replied.

The guard profiled Rick's face and ordered the checkpoint gates to be opened as the van drove through. They arrived at the ground level where a lot of agents were seen coming in and out of the Ringsville Crime Federation building.

Rick helped Idris out as they both looked at the big structure in front of them.

"Do you miss the old days?" Rick asked looking at Idris who had his mouth wide open.

"Yeah. I guess so" he replied as the pair proceeded into the building. They passed through the glass foyer into the massive hall. Idris missed everything he saw. It had changed a lot. It felt all new to him.

They took an elevator to the third floor where they entered a meeting room. In the room was the Director of the RCF, Stanley Owens and two other agents. A blonde man, Ian Larson and an Australian young woman, Becca Luna.

The three officials stopped talking as Idris walked in. This was awkward, he wished the ground could open up and swallow him. They were his task force. The four of them were the best of Owens' tactical team in the agency until Idris left.

Becca and Director Owens smiled joyfully seeing Idris again, but you could tell the expression on Larson's face wasn't a good one.

"Idris Delcoy" Owens acknowledged going over to hug Idris. Becca followed suit. "It's been a long time. We missed you" she said warmly.

"Well, I'm here now" he said chuckling "You guys do look good. The job must be going good"

"Give me a break, Idris, don't act like you want to be here" Ian charged standing up from his seat. He approached Idris.

"You think you can just leave us and casually walk back into our lives?" He asked.

Idris sighed, perhaps Ian had good reason to be angry "Ian, I'm sorry. I really am. You were the best partner I could ever ask for, but I was tired. It was my choice. I had to move on" he explained hoping the vexed Larson would understand.

"We don't need you anymore, Delcoy. In fact, we never did" he sneered walking back to his seat.

Idris flinched at Ian's remark. "Wait a minute. What does he mean by you guys don't need me?" He asked looking at Rick. "What is going on?!"

Director Owens cleared his throat. "We are calling you back into active duty" he said.

Idris watched in shock. "No, no, no, sir. I can't return to duty. I'm done. I've got a job at the Ringsville police department"

Owens nodded "Yeah, yeah. I heard. That's pretty low of you, son. How much does it pay? You now live in a one-bedroom apartment in Dec. You have got to be crazy"

"Look, I'm okay with my job" Idris replied. Now, he just wanted to leave the facility.

Owens shook his head in disagreement "I'm afraid you no longer have a job in RVPD"

Idris was confused. "What do you mean?" He asked.

Rick collapsed on a nearby chair. "Director Owens made a call to the commissioner. You are now RCF property" he explained smiling.

Idris was furious. He wanted to strangle the old man who was standing near him. "You now exchange people like goods? You went behind my back and tossed me back into this circus?" he replied rageful.

Rebecca patted his shoulder "We need you back here. The moment we heard you were back in the city, we made arrangements"

Idris observed every single one of them in the room. He couldn't believe he allowed Rick trick him into coming. "You'd have to give me some time to think about it"

Owen nodded. "That'll do, Delcoy. But I have to tell you, there are bigger problems than what the RVPD is handling now"

Idris sighed folding his arms. He possibly didn't know what to say.

Ian adjusted on his chair giving Idris a cold look "This is the moment you thought you could avoid, Delcoy, but no one outruns destiny" he said.

Bedbug

6:14 pm

Billy wore a well dry cleaned grey long sleeve shirt with dark jeans. He combed his hair properly. He was beaming with smiles. Lizzie walked into his room; she could quickly tell he was looking good for a girl.

"Who's the lucky girl?" she asked smiling.

Billy turned from the hanging mirror on the wall and faced her. "It's not what you think, Lizzie. It's a date but not that sort of date" he explained.

"I don't care if you are going for a business date or a ritual, Billy. Who's the girl?" She asked again resting on the door post with her arms folded.

Billy sighed. "Jessica Ward. I believe she has a brother in your grade"

She quailed softly. "Josh's sister, you are going on a date with Joshua Ward's sister? That's a first" she said delighted. She loved Jessica Ward's personality. Her brother, Joshua was a good person but way different.

"Does he know you are my brother?" She asked walking into the room.

Billy thought for a couple of seconds before shaking his head. "I'm pretty sure he doesn't" he said turning from the mirror to face Elizabeth. She stood in his way as she straightened his collar.

"You know it's not that sort of date, Lizzie" Billy assured her putting his right hand on her tender shoulders.

She grinned. "Maybe it should be that sort of date" She always wanted Billy to find love, but Billy wasn't keen, at least it was the attitude he oozed out for people to sense.

Billy scoffed. He looked into her eyes. He knew something was bothering his little sister. "Is everything alright, Lizzie? You know you can tell me anything" he said.

She looked down. She wanted to let it slide, but it had been troubling her and she really wanted to air it out to someone who could sense her curiosity.

"Billy?" She started looking back into his eyes "Will I ever find my father?" She asked.

God. He had wished she hadn't asked that. Yes, she was young, about seven years old at the time but she knew what was happening between her parents.

While she and Billy had breakfast one morning, there was yelling from both parents in their room.

She had asked Billy who was twelve at the time what was going on but he told her not to pay any attention.

The yelling from both parties continued for minutes before Rose ran out towards the children in the dining room.

Lizzie could see her face was red. She must have been badly hurt by their father, Cletus Conrad.

Rose ran towards Lizzie and carried her quickly as she turned around looking at the entrance she had hurriedly emerged from.

Cletus walked out like a ferocious man ape. Lizzie could see the anger in his face. He was mad with rage. He could probably kill someone with his bare hands.

"Billy, into your room" he ordered in a low but terrifying voice. Billy swallowed down spit in fear as he ran into the corridor heading straight for his room.

Rose sobbed holding Lizzie tight in her arms. "Please, Cletus, you don't understand" she begged realizing she was far from the door and couldn't possibly outrun her pissed husband.

He had his belt in hand sure to use it on someone. Lizzie wasn't sure if the belt was prepared for her but she was as terrified as her mother.

"Rose, you dare let me raise a child who isn't mine for seven years?" he sneered walking closer to the pair slowly. "The only way we can have a perfect family again is if you tell me who that bastard is. That bastard who you let sleep with you"

Rose shook her head in disagreement it was an identity she couldn't let out. "Listen to me, Cletus, this was all a mistake. It doesn't matter if I cheated but that was in the past. You love Elizabeth, it's all that matters" she explained.

Cletus drifted his gaze to the little girl in Rose's arms. The little girl who he had believed to be his offspring for seven years. The little girl he had shown all his love.

"She's no daughter of mine. She's not a Conrad" he replied giving her a cold look.

She's not a Conrad. That was a line from Cletus that stuck in Lizzie's head till this very day.

Billy was short of words. He possibly didn't know what he'd say to her.

"Does it matter who your father is?" He asked "He abandoned you before you were even born. He's not someone worth searching for, Lizzie. You have me and Aunt Maureen and we care and love you. It's all that matters" he said hoping it'd ease her mind.

Lizzie smiled hugging Billy. "It doesn't help much but thanks"

He chuckled resting his cheek on her hair "I'll take that"

Maureen walked in amused to see the two hugging. "Oh, wow. That's something you don't see every day" she commented.

The pair were released from each other's hug.

"Hey, Aunt Maureen" Billy acknowledged with a smile.

"Hey, Jackass" she taunted. She quickly turned to Elizabeth. "Lizzie? Your ride is here" she announced.

Ride? Billy quickly took the time to observe her to see that she was wearing a black gown.

"You have a date?" He asked.

She looked at him with disappointment "It's not a date, Billy" she replied.

He stammered. If there was something he hated it was boys getting around his little sister. "But can I at least know who it is and what's going on?" He asked curiously.

Maureen joined them in the room. "Damon HennyKane invited her to have a tour of the HennyKane Island" she explained helping Lizzie out of the room.

Billy winced in confusion. "And why wasn't I told earlier?" He asked.

Lizzie tsked "Please, Billy, don't sweat it. It's a tour, not a date"

Maureen scoffed bent to make Billy more uncomfortable. "So... what if it's a date?" She countered "This is a HennyKane we are talking about. The richest there is in the city. Way to go, Lizzie" Maureen tapped hands with the teenager leading her to the sitting room. Billy quickly followed the pair hoping he would find her date waiting inside the house or in the lobby. Wherever he found him waiting he was going to have a serious discussion with him.

He stormed into the sitting room seeing it to be empty. He looked down through the widow since they were on the eleventh floor and he saw a limo.

"If I were you, Billy. I'd worry about taking this special girl to your own date and leave your sister be. Perhaps, there's a storm coming. You don't want to be cut in traffic. Girls hate waiting" Maureen stated.

Billy shrugged sweeping Maureen's car key off the shelf. "Hey" he addressed Lizzie. "Have fun, but not too much fun" he warned pointing at her.

She smiled walking out of the apartment.

Maureen turned to him. "Are you kidding me?" She asked embarrassed.

Ward Residence,

Greentown

7:02 pm

Jessica also sat in front of her mirror putting some lip stick on her lips. She wore a short dark blue gown. She was still busy on her appearance when a knock came on her door.

"Come on in" she requested. Her mother, Julia Ward proceeded into the room.

"Hey, mom" she smiled seeing her mom through the mirror standing by her shelf.

"You look really beautiful, dear" she remarked walking over to give her eighteen-year-old daughter a kiss on her cheek.

"Thanks" Jesse replied with a smile.

"So... " Julia began. "Do you really like this Billy kid? I mean, you've known him for just two weeks and he's asking you on a date" she inquired.

Jessie turned towards her mother. "Mom, I think he's a really nice guy. I mean, he's cute, caring, and smart. We are going slow but he's pretty fun to be with. Perhaps, it's not a real date, you know? Harry is going to be there"

Julia flinched. "Harry?"

Jessie nodded.

"And does Billy know your best friend will be there?" She inquired concerned.

Jessie sighed "I haven't told him. But I think he'll understand" she winced not sure of her own words.

Josh tugged his head into the room. "Uh, Jessie. He's here" he announced quickly disappearing out of sight.

Jessie took in a deep breath as she stood up taking a final look in the mirror.

"Come on, Honey. There's nothing to worry about. You look good" she assured her daughter.

Jessie tried smiling as she walked out of the room through the hallway before taking the stairs. She could see Billy standing in the foyer alone with a bouquet of flowers in hand.

He looked up to see Jessie walk down the stairs with a much older woman he believed to be her mother following behind.

"You must be Billy" she said beaming with smiles as she went over to hug him.

"And you must be Mrs. Ward" he smiled as she let him go. They shook hands "It's a pleasure, ma'am" he greeted.

"Oh, please" she smiled giving the younger pair more room.

"Hi" Billy said.

"Hey" she replied hugging him.

"You look beautiful... as ever" he remarked breathing heavily.

She chuckled "Thanks, Billy" she looked at the bouquet pointing at them. "Are those...?"

Billy looked at what was in his hands. "Oh, yeah" he stretched the bouquet at her. "They are for you" he grinned.

She took the bouquet smelling them immediately. "Wow, they smell really nice"

"I'm glad you like them" Billy grinned nervously.

Julia cleared her throat remaking her presence known to the youngsters "I think the earlier you leave the better, guys" she warned.

Jessie turned facing her mother. "Mom, what's wrong?" She asked worried.

"Your dad sent me a text. He says there's going to be a storm in the city. You don't want to get stuck in traffic" she replied.

Billy nodded. "I heard about the storm. It's going to be a short one though. Maybe we should head out" he added

Julia winked leading the couple out of the house. "You drive safely, Billy" she said.

"I will, ma'am" he replied opening the car door for her to enter. He followed suit as Julia stood on the entrance compound as she watched the car zoom out of sight.

"What was that about?" Billy asked curiously as he drove the BMW out of Greentown.

"Oh. It's about my dad. I couldn't tell him I was going out on a date with you so I begged my mom to tell him. It seems she couldn't pull it off either" she explained.

Billy nodded. He began to feel being interested in the daughter of the Police Commissioner's daughter was probably a bad idea.

"Well, I've got something to tell you." she said turning to face Billy.

Billy gave her a quick glimpse so he could focus on the road "Yeah?"

"Harry's going to be at the Park. I didn't tell you earlier because I honestly didn't know how you were going to take it" she said.

Shit! Not the military dude. He was conflicted at that moment, but this was his first day out with her. He wasn't going to show any form of disappointment.

"Oh, it's fine" he said faking a smile.

She returned his smile satisfied as they drove towards the Craxton Fun Fair Park.

Reaching the park, the trio rode the roller coaster and played many other fun games in the populated park. They were now strolling past a large circus tent while they discussed about politics and other interesting topics.

Harry was rather friendly and Billy greatly enjoyed his company. They connected in so many ways than he could have imagined. Both boys tended to have the same view about almost everything.

Being with Harry, Billy really regretted his previous life more. Harry spoke in such a way that Billy was beginning to slowly adore him.

Harry also talked about how he enlisted and his time in Iraq. Billy however thought of enlisting too. It was a very satisfying idea at the moment. To escape the chaos and outrun his dark past.

"Ice cream!" Jessie yelled out in excitement. They had been walking for over twenty minutes and this was the first ice-cream stand they were seeing.

Jessie turned to face the boys. "Does anyone else want some?" she asked with a smile.

The two boys nodded in unison. She giggled jogging over to the stand. They both watched her go. Harry could notice the look on Billy's face. He liked this girl and he knew it.

"She's a real beauty, Billy, ain't she?" Harry commented gazing at Jessie who was now at the ice cream stand.

Billy glanced at Harry taking a few seconds to process his statement. "Yeah, she is" he replied not sure why Harry had said that.

Harry placed his right hand on Billy's shoulder "Can I ask you for a favor, buddy?"

Billy looked into Harry's eyes, he wondered what this was about. Maybe the soldier was going to tell him to leave his girl alone.

"Yeah. Sure, Harry, sure" he stammered.

Harry sighed "You see, Billy. I can feel the connection. Jessie likes you too. She's never talked about a guy the way she's talked about you"

Billy was flattered. He knew Jessie liked him but talking about him all the time? That was some next level deal.

"Look, Jessie has been my best friend since she was six. I took her like a sister and I'd protect her with my life, but things changed when I enlisted. I'll be thousands of miles away fighting for my country" he paused taking a glimpse at Jessie who was now returning with the cups of ice cream. "I need you to protect her" Harry continued. "Can you do that for me?"

Billy shrugged. Of course, Harry wasn't expecting him to say No. It wasn't going to sound right and now; he was going to have a very heavy mantle which was taking care of Jessie not just loving her.

Billy nodded to Harry's question "I promise, Harry, but it doesn't give you the right to die out there. You are coming back" he replied hugging Harry.

Jessie joined them immediately with a suspicious smile on her face. "What'd I miss?" She asked holding cups of ice cream in her hands.

They couldn't reply before thunder and lightning tore through the clouds. Everyone in the park was startled.

Billy looked up observing the sky. "I guess this is it. Earlier than we thought, but it's here" he said as the rain began to drizzle as it slowly increased and everyone had to disperse towards shelter abandoning the lit park.

ACROPOLIS HILL PRISON,

Arrowtail

10:06 pm

Lloyd's peaceful sleep on his prison mattress was interrupted by a heavy vibration of the correctional facility followed by a raging sound of thunder.

Lloyd turned over to see Bearhug engaged in a series of exercises in the small cell room.

"Hey, Bearhug" Lloyd called out in a whispering voice as he sat up on the mattress.

Bearhug stopped working out turning towards Lloyd. "Hey, Coulson, you are up" he noted dusting his chest.

"Yeah. I guess it's here" Lloyd said looking at the ceiling.

Bearhug paused "What's here?" He asked obliviously.

"The day we've been planning towards" Lloyd had a smug smile on his handsome face making Bearhug a little bit uncomfortable. "The storm is here, pal"

Bearhug could not believe it. He was dumbfounded. He might have been by Lloyd's side through the past weeks but he still doubted the absurd theory.

And here they were, he had heard the unusual large clash of thunder and lightning blaring from the skies but his mind never drifted to the thought that this could be the storm that could lead to their escape.

Within what would seem like a never-ending joy, Bearhug's happy face disappeared. There was another problem.

"But" he stammered. "It's been on for over an hour now, Coulson. I haven't seen a single guard. Do you think they'll come to our aid? Or maybe the storm wouldn't make such a daring impact on Acropolis" he complained.

Lloyd winced. If only Bearhug could stop his panicking. "Relax. My predictions aren't wrong. The fact that a storm like this is taking place in April, in *Ringsville*, is enough proof to know I'm not wrong" he explained.

Bearhug panted. "So, we have to get out of here before the building collapses. Yes?" He inquired deeply troubled.

Lloyd stood up easing his muscles. "Yeah, big boy. Now you get it" he walked to the cell's gate as Bearhug followed.

Lloyd caught sight of a guard. He was rather young, clumsy and looked dimwitted.

"Hey, son" Lloyd called out.

The young man was sure not to pay Lloyd any attention but the nagging only continued.

"Come on, lad. It's just a simple question" Lloyd added softly.

The guard hesitated but what could possibly go wrong? He walked hastily towards Lloyd's cell gate.

"How can I help you?" He asked.

Lloyd smiled "Right. We can notice there's a heavy downpour outside the building. Can you tell us what your superiors are doing about it?" he inquired calmly.

The boy shook his head as he shivered unconsciously due to Bearhug's terrifying presence. "I'm afraid I can't leak out any decisions carried out by my superiors"

Lloyd sighed "I get it, you are just a rookie in the business, but we need to be assured we won't be here when things get out of hand"

The guard was confused. "Wh.... what things?" He asked beginning to shiver.

"The rain, pal. It's not just any ordinary rain, lad. It's a storm. I can bet Acropolis won't be standing by the end of the it" Lloyd replied with a vicious grin.

The boy let his mouth open with shock rippling down his whole body. "What? You mean Acropolis is going to collapse?" he asked trembling.

Lloyd nodded. Bearhug was beginning to get what Lloyd was driving at.

"So, are your bosses gonna leave us here to die, or what?" Lloyd asked beginning to bathe the boy in fear.

"Just look up and see the effects already impacted by the storm" Lloyd requested.

The boy terrified at Lloyd's words took a quick glimpse at the ceiling letting the florescent lights blind him.

Bearhug knew this was his moment. He poked his giant hands out of the cell, grabbed the guard's collar and brought him to himself slamming the fragile man to the cell gates a couple of times till he passed out.

Lloyd looked at the unconscious boy on the floor whose face was now covered in blood. "Damn it. I was beginning to like him, but still, one would agree this is no job for a nerd, right?" Lloyd chuckled. He squatted as he quickly whisked the cell gate keys out of the boy's pockets and opened the gates.

"You are simply formidable, Coulson" Bearhug cheered.

Lloyd smirked "Oh, save it, big guy. We aren't off harm's raider yet" he stated.

They now stood in the long-lit cell corridor with inmates in their cages yelling out to the loose Coulson and Bearhug for help.

Three guards proceeded into the corridor to find the two prisoners standing at the far end. "What the...!" one screamed out.

"Hey, you, stop right there!" another yelled as the three held their bats in hand running towards Lloyd and Bearhug.

Bearhug grinned in excitement and clashed his fists together. Taking three guards down wasn't going to be a problem. This was what he was built for.

"Come get it, boys" he replied calmly.

Lloyd tapped him "Hey, Mr. Ferocious, the plan isn't to keep on punching people. We've got to start a major distraction" Lloyd explained.

"Which is?" Bedbug asked.

"Prison Riot" Lloyd replied. He ran to the end and opened a circuit box mounted on the wall. He tore out some colored wires as all the gates in the row opened up with the inmates quickly rushing out trapping the three guards in the middle of the long corridor.

"Oh, hell" the second guard cursed "We are fucked"

The prisoners attacked quickly, but they didn't just take on the outnumbered guards, they also fought themselves causing a massive stampede.

Bearhug laughed impressed. "Goddamn it, Lloyd, you don't stop with the flatters" he remarked. He realized they were at the end. "What now, genius?" He asked.

"*Protect your key*" Lloyd replied. "I'm your way out of here, remember?"

Bearhug nodded. "Copy"

With Lloyd at his back the big man fought his way through the angry inmates who were having the duel of their lives.

The white florescent lights turned red with sirens blaring out. It was time for emergency protocol and the facility was on lockdown.

More riot guards arrived hoping to be able to control the inmates and push them back into their cells. They held rifles with rubber bullets, heavy bats and shields but the fight had spread over the main parts of the prison even down to the dining hall. It was out of control.

Bearhug broke into one of the surveillance rooms taking out the four watch guards in charge.

"Alright, Coulson, what are we looking for?" He asked looking at the many screens right at his front.

"Just guard the doors, I've got this" Lloyd ordered. He searched through the tables for a particular book. He stopped searching when he found what he was looking for. A blueprint of Acropolis.

"Nice" he replied scrolling through the big book.

"What do you got?" Bearhug asked standing near the door.

Lloyd found a particular route and traced it on the monitors. "Alright, Area XI" he nodded satisfied "Come on, Bearhug, we've found our way out" he stated quickly rushing out of the room as Bearhug followed.

They ran down the stairs to the ground floor, Bearhug resisted a couple of guards before they reached a steel door. On the wall near the door wrote Area XI.

"What's this place, Coulson?" Bearhug asked.

"If I'm correct, Bearhug. It's a secret basement or lair out of the building. It'll take us to a stream"

Bearhug nodded "Lair sounds more badass"

"Suit yourself, big guy" Lloyd replied uninterested. Right now, he couldn't care less what his escape route was called so far it got him out of this ridiculous place.

Bearhug tore down the door letting them stroll down a long staircase.

They emerged in a goods room with many wooden boxes containing food ingredients and spice.

"This is it, Bearhug. After this next door we are free birds" he said joyfully.

He walked to the door realizing it needed a code to be unlocked. "It needs a password. Told you this was top notch"

Lloyd loosened the cover plates to get access to the circuit board.

"Hurry up, Coulson" Bearhug nagged impatiently.

Lloyd sighed "Relax... I'm going as fast as I can" he worked on the board for another twenty seconds before the doors opened. The two men laughed aloud in joy.

"Holy Shit!" Bearhug yelled, he could not believe this was really happening.

Lloyd prepared to stand before a sharp knife hustled through his hands. It took a few seconds before Lloyd could feel the pain. He screamed aloud unable to move his palm since it was now pinned to the wall.

The knife was tossed from someone behind Bearhug.

Bearhug turned to see Huntstone standing with great delight. "I told you, Bearhug that freak is going to taste my fury" he spat out.

Lloyd chuckled annoyingly trying to withstand the pain. "My, my, that's a very nice knife, Huntstone. I can see why they don't let us into the kitchen" he joked fighting the pain.

Huntstone turned back to Bearhug "Move, *Giganticus*. Don't make me go through you" he warned.

Bearhug smiled. "Come get some, you punk"

Lloyd yelled "Get him, tiger!"

The two ferocious men clashed, exchanging punches and throwing each other at boxes and walls. They fought for a while but it was clear Huntstone was having the upper hand.

Lloyd could not believe it. He knew Huntstone was powerful and tactical but he never believed he could take *the* Bearhug down.

Huntstone picked the large man up and threw him out of sight.

Lloyd could tell he was next. He tried to unpin the knife from the wall but the pain was massive. He couldn't handle it. At that moment, he had to give credit to Huntstone, he was a good aimer. Lloyd always believed he was the greatest dagger wielder in the world, but from a distance, Huntstone may have knocked him off of that list.

Huntstone approached him slowly. There was nothing preventing him from tearing his annoying foe from limb to limb "Here we are, Coulson" he smiled "Just you and me, just how I had imagined it"

Lloyd chuckled slowly blacking out. "You know, pal, we can put aside our differences and get out of this together" he proposed.

Huntstone shook his head in disagreement "Thanks for leading me down here but I'd do the escaping alone" he raised his right foot to bash Lloyd's face into the wall but Bearhug quickly intervened at the last minute and tossed Huntstone away from behind.

"Wow... that's what I'd call a last second encounter" Lloyd commented laughing in relief.

Bearhug knelt down on one knee and thrust out the large knife leading Lloyd to scream aloud.

"It's okay, Coulson. I've got you" he helped Lloyd up and they both walked down a corridor as the building quaked.

They arrived at a flooded cave where a speed boat was tied to a wooden jetty.

Bearhug sighed in relief. "That's what I'm talking about" he helped Lloyd into the boat before boarding it himself. He started the speed boat engine and they sped out of the cave which was at the foot of the hill.

The thunderstorm continued as the hill began to crumble with Acropolis tumbling into the stream causing a massive wave that almost wrecked the boat before it sped into the forest swamps.

Major Characters introduced in Episode 5

Rick O'Neal

An RCF agent in Delcoy's old team which is considered as Director Stanley Owens' most tactical special team.

Ian Larson

An RCF agent and Delcoy's once best friend turned rival.

EPIISODE VI: ALL THAT HAD FALLEN

"I ALWAYS TRY TO TURN EVERY DISASTER INTO AN OPPORTUNITY."

-JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER

CRAXTON

10:19 pm

The storm was far from over. Billy and Jessie took shelter in a large pub. The building was buzzing with sweet slow jazz music.

Billy sat at a table trying to get on the internet with his android phone but there was no network, it was dead. He turned his focus to Jessie who was dancing on the dance floor all by herself.

He smiled watching her very attractive slim feminine body move to the melodious sound from the speakers. She laughed as she danced. She stopped when she noticed Billy was watching.

Billy waved at so as not to make the scene awkward. She waved back and jogged over to his table.

"Hey" she said joining him.

"Hi" Billy replied with a soft smile. She held his hand while she stood.

"Maybe we should have taken the risk of joining Harry in the rain" he mentioned.

Jessie sighed bending towards Billy's face. "Billy, driving into the storm wasn't an option you know that. We both loved Harry's company but he understood I wanted some alone time with you. Only you" she winked.

Billy smiled. Wow, this was going faster than he hoped. "I like that" he replied smiling.

She winked and gave him a soft kiss pressing her face on his. Billy realized she was already on his feet when she detached her lips from his.

"Come, let's dance" she requested pulling Billy behind her.

Billy shook his head in disagreement. "Uhm.... Jessie? I don't really dance" he confessed as he slid past some figures before they reached the dance floor.

Jessie turned to him putting her arms over his shoulders. "Everyone dances, Billy Conrad. They just need the right teacher" she replied as she moved to the rhythm. Billy slowly followed placing his hands on her hips.

Jessie was rather impressed. The way Billy moved; he didn't sync to the music like an amateur.

"Wow. I'm impressed, rookie" she remarked.

"Tell me, who taught you how to dance?" She asked looking him straight in the eye.

Billy scoffed blinking a couple of times like he was a robot scanning through his brain for answers.

He sighed "My mom"

Jessie hoped he'd continue. She really wanted to know more about the woman who gave birth to this mysterious lad she was falling for. For what reason, she didn't know.

"My mom was the most beautiful person I ever knew. She was my hero. My *LadyBug*" Billy noticed that the last word, got Jessie wincing.

"Well, it's a nickname my aunt Maureen called her. I guess it was a title she enjoyed herself"

Billy took in a deep breath. Every time he thought of his mother, he always felt some type of way. Not a good or bad feeling but an unexplainable one.

It just kept ringing in his head. "My mom was really pretty and amazing, Jessie. I guess that's why my dad was overprotective of her"

Jessie chuckled "I'd love to believe it's where Lizzie got her beauty from" she added.

"Betcha" Billy remarked as they both laughed.

"Well, my mom had to leave sometime when I was thirteen. The next couple of days, we heard on the news her ship had wrecked in the Atlantic. It was the last we ever heard of her" he narrated.

Jessie went pale. "I'm sorry, Billy. But there's a chance she could still be alive" she tried assuring him.

Billy shook his head in disagreement "For eight years, she's been gone, Jessie. If my mom was still alive. She'd been back by now. She would have been back, if not for me, for Lizzie" he replied.

Jessie saw the darkness in his face. She brought herself closer to him as they continued flowing to the slow rhythm.

HennyKane Island

10:44 pm

Damon and Elizabeth walked through a long hall with pictures and paintings of HennyKanes.

"Who's this guy?" Lizzie asked pointing at a portrait of a man in a long purple regalia with a wig.

Damon joined her. "That's Benedict HennyKane. He was known for being part of a formidable squadron that fought against the South in the civil war " Damon explained.

Lizzie nodded. "Wow," she remarked. "So.... what about *the* HennyKane himself?"

Damon looked at her "What about him?"

"What do you know about him. What's his story?" she inquired with great interest.

Damon tucked his hands into his pockets as they continued their stroll down the hallway

"Well..., My dad used to say he was one of the early founders of this city. In the mid 1700's, he was a wealthy gunsmith. There was an occurrence that he wrote about in his personal journal. In 1752, over twenty years before the independence war, there were creatures emerging from the underworld or as he said the humans called it, *Valekrok*. These creatures came from this mythical underworld Valekrok which was believed to be in the massive woods terrain near Hartford where he resided. The townspeople complained of everyday massacres from these sinister creatures. They took children and women back into the underworld and killed most of the men" Damon stopped seeing the fear in Lizzie's eyes.

"It's just an old folklore, Lizzie. It happened almost three hundred years ago" he explained.

She giggled. "I'm not scared, Damon. It's just that I don't believe in the supernatural" she replied.

Damon flinched lightly "Maybe you should" he commented. They laughed as they walked out of the hall into a cloister.

"Please, don't let me interrupt, continue" she requested.

Damon cleared his throat. "When the massacres performed by these sinister beings seemed to do nothing but escalate, a group of brave men dared to venture into the vast woods. They prepared booby traps and led the creatures into an ambush. Though mankind won the fight, it was at a great cost" Damon smiled

"When the survivors returned to their lands, they were rewarded. HennyKane was given his own island in the once possessed forest territories. Slowly, migration began and when people were sure the creatures weren't going to return, they developed the lands and slowly it grew into a metropolitan city" he finished his folklore waiting to see the expression on Lizzie's face.

Lizzie opened her mouth trying to find words to utter. "That's..... That's an amazing story" she said.

Damon scoffed. "Story makes it sound like it was fabricated"

"Well..." she replied grinning "I've studied the birth and history of Ringsville, Damon. There's no reference to a sinister war or the so-called underworld, or what did your ancestor call it, Valekrok? Yup, that definitely sounds made up. HennyKane was mentioned as one of the founding fathers of the city but there was no war, at least not like what you just told me" She explained.

Damon nodded. "Well, history is altered. I believe the writers thought no one would believe a war like that was fought. I didn't believe it until I read it in his journal. So, yes, there's a great possibility it did happen"

Lizzie stared into his eyes. "So, you are telling me there's a chance we are standing above a world of mystical creatures?" She asked holding Damon's right arm.

Damon smiled "You bet"

Lizzie quailed. At that moment, she wished Damon had told her none of it. She turned her focus to what they were now standing in front of.

Yes. They were in the squared opening in the far parts of the Manor. The storm had little effect on the island, Lizzie wondered why. It was raining cats and dogs all over the city and for some reason, the island was barely wet. She could see the large oak like tree right in front of her. She was amazed by the golden leaves as she drifted from Damon and walked towards the nearest branch.

"Wow, Damon are these real?" She asked touching the golden leaves.

"Awesome, right?" he replied grinning.

She turned to him "What are they?" She asked curious. She had never seen anything like it.

"We call them the Seeds of Golden Hades" he replied.

She turned back to look at the enticing gigantic plant standing in her way. There was something that really called her to the tree. It was the same kind of tree James had seen in his dream.

"It's the last of its specie" Damon commented. "It was planted by the creatures from the underworld"

"Valekrok" Lizzie responded in a taunting manner as she smiled.

Damon nodded getting the message "Yes, Valekrok. Look, let's just call it the Underworld. That name sounds really made-up" he suggested.

Lizzie laughed "Agreed"

"Well, as for the tree, the Ringsville settlers saw it as a bad omen and brought down any one they found. HennyKane saved this one for its beauty. Unfortunately, there are no seeds to replant"

Lizzie looked at Damon for a while. If there was a strange tree sitting in the heart of the island, there was proof that Damon's story had a lot of truth in it.

Gareth joined the pair. "Master Damon, Ms. Conrad, supper is ready" he smiled leading the way out of the squared opening.

"Thanks, Gareth, we'll be right there" Damon replied watching him leave.

Lizzie grinned. "He is the nicest" she said excited.



The dining room contained Denver, Damon, Elizabeth and Gareth enjoying the latter's chicken chettinad dish.

"This is really tasty, Gareth. Damon wasn't wrong about your cooking" she remarked with a delightful smile patting Gareth's fist.

"Thank you, Ms. Conrad. Everyone does worship my cooking" Gareth bragged.

"I don't" Damon replied as the trio laughed except for Denver who sat at the far end of the table.

There was total silence for almost two minutes. Lizzie cleared her throat looking towards Denver.

"So, Mr. HennyKane, Damon has shown me around your island. It's a real beauty" she stated.

Denver dropped his fork. He was not in the mood for discussions of any sort. All his mind was centered on was the man he had bumped into at the pub.

He placed his thumb on his forehead and scratched his itchy skin. "Yeah. It is beautiful. Thanks for finding time to stop by" he replied still looking at his dish.

Damon noticed his brother's awkwardness "Denver, are you alright?" He asked.

Denver cleared his throat before raising his face as he struggled to smile. "Yeah, I'm good. Just tired is all"

Gareth quickly cleaned his hands with the napkin as he tossed his chair backward to give him room to stand. "Would you like me to take you to your room?" He asked Denver

Denver took a quick glimpse at Lizzie. He didn't want to make the situation more complicated than it already was. "No, Gareth, I can handle myself" he replied.

They looked at each other as Gareth sat back on his chair. This couldn't possibly get any weirder.

Lizzie remained silent as she cut off pieces from the chicken. Gareth turned to her. "So, Lizzie"

She quickly took her focus to him "Yes, Gareth"

"Did you learn anything spectacular on your stroll through the Manor?" He inquired hoping to ignite an interesting conversation.

Damon was in for this one. He gazed at Lizzie hoping she'd say something astonishing. Denver on the other hand continued slowly on his meal.

"Well, I learnt a lot about the great forefathers of the HennyKane dynasty. Especially the first HennyKane" she stated.

"Oh, really" Gareth replied amused "And what about the first HennyKane?"

"He's a war hero. Damon said he was one of the brave soldiers in the eighteenth century who fought back the sinister creatures from the mystical underworld that laid beneath present day Ringsville. Then, he was rewarded this island for his bravery...." she narrated.

Denver had heard something that hit his mind off guard. Only one word had triggered his whole body he straightened up and cut Lizzie short. "Wait... wait a second" he pleaded. Everyone turned to him. "Did I hear you right? Did you just say mystical underworld?" He asked frowning.

His expression displeased Damon.

Lizzie smiled. "I know the mystical wasn't necessary. But yes, he spoke about the underworld"

Denver paused deep in thought. He turned to Damon. "Where did you get that idea?" He asked in a rather disturbing tone.

Damon scoffed not sure what was going on "I read about it in HennyKane's personal journal. It was passed from generation to generation. It's in dad's office shelf" Damon explained, he thought Denver was going to scold him for going through their fathers' belongings.

Denver unconsciously bumped his back at the chair. If he wasn't thinking wrong, he might have just figured out a big pot hole in the city's history. What if Eden and this underworld were the same thing? He thought. He never paid attention to his father's teachings about their heritage but there was one he had just remembered. The seeds of Golden Hades. The weird golden tree at the building openings of the Manor.

He remembered his father vividly saying that the tree was from a blessed but sacred world. The tree never withered. It bloomed in every season because it had a unique origin. God. Denver was dumbfounded forgetting the other part of Lizzie's story of sinister creatures from the underworld.

He unconsciously stood up and walked out of the dining hall. Everyone was troubled by his strange behavior Damon was rather embarrassed.

"Told you that was a highly morbid story" Lizzie replied.

Damon smiled returning focus to his meal. "Right" he commented knowing there was more to Denver's behavior.

Dec

11:49 pm

The rain was still on, accompanied with loud thunder and lightning. Billy and Jessie had left the pub and were now driving through a hill side.

"This storm is far from over, Billy" Jessie said.

"Maybe we can stop by an inn" Billy replied putting more fire in the vehicle's engine. They could barely see through the windshield. The wipers were doing their best job to swipe off the rain but all was to no avail. The windshields were as blurry as they could get.

Jessie relaxed on the passenger's chair and looked at Billy who was focused on the road. "Billy?" She called out to him softly.

Billy fixed his eyes beyond the shield. "Yeah?" He replied.

"Thanks for today. You really put a smile on my face" she remarked.

Billy grinned looking at her. "It's no problem, Jessie. I had fun myself. Don't forget, I'll always be here for you, okay?"

She chuckled and looked at her twelve right out of the windshield. She saw rocks slide from the hill into the road blocking their way.

"Billy, look out!!!!" she yelled terrified. Billy turned, he realized he was too close to the rocks. He colliding the vehicle with one would be a story he most likely wouldn't live to tell. In that split second, he quickly turned the wheels to his right and rammed the car through the railings.

Though they had avoided the rock collision they were far from safe. The car tumbled down the sloppy hill, with windows breaking, Billy and Jessie danced along the car as it tossed continuously.

The car was still rolling down the hill when something strange happened. The car paused in the air. Though Billy's face was badly wounded he could understand what happened, he knew the car was hanging in the air.

He struggled to look at Jessie who was also wounded, he saw the terror in her eyes. He groaned "Jessie? What's going on" he asked but Jessie could not utter a word. A piece of glass had found its way into her throat.

They looked right out of the shattered windows and bright lights phased out of the ground towards them.

It happened quickly but Billy felt the silver glowing substance enter him. It gave him an unusual feeling that relieved him from the current tension. Billy could see a different energy substance drive into Jessie it was green in color. He groaned trying to hold her hand but the gravity had returned allowing the car tumble down the hill till it landed on a Container field. People who had witnessed the final crash had rushed to the wrecked vehicle and found the two victims were already unconscious. Probably dead.

HennyKane Island

Denver barged into his father's office. It was the same way it had always been since he was little. He browsed through one of the stacked book shelves hoping to find HennyKane's journal.

Gareth joined him shortly "Master Denver" he began "What's going on?" He asked confused by Denver's unusual behavior.

"I need that journal, Gareth" he replied as he continued with his search.

Gareth sighed. "Can you please tell me what is really happening?" Gareth asked anxiously.

"Damon mentioned a mystical world right under Ringsville. I've got to know more about it" he paused realizing he had found the journal. It was an old brown paper hard cover note. It was really telling its age.

He drew the book out of the shelf and dropped it on the office table.

"You do know it's a myth, right?" Gareth asked.

"There's truth in every myth, in every fucking story" Denver replied.

He moaned just as he opened the book. He felt a terrible pain in his stomach. He gasped for alerting Gareth. He screamed aloud dropping to the ground as he coughed out blood.

"Sir, stay with me" He yelled aloud kneeling by Denver's side who was already convulsing.



The storm had stopped its terrifying attack on the city of Ringsville. Many buildings were not only affected by the rain but were also brought down. People hadn't seen anything like it in their life time.

RVPD,

CRAXTON

2:09 am

James and Harold Ward sat in the latter's office. They had a busy day and decided to spend the night at work. Though James was relieved from duty, he stopped by the station to assist Ward.

He couldn't bear staying home doing nothing.

"Maybe we could order some burgers again, Ward" James suggested yawning.

Ward dropped his pen relaxing on his chair. "Really? Burgers? Come on, Jimmy. Let's just end this and go home and enjoy a good meal" he replied.

They had realized the storm had stopped and it was quietness that filled the city air.

Ward's phone rung aloud. He sighed before taking his time to look at the name of the caller popping up on the screen. It was his wife, Julia.

He wondered why she would call now. Maybe she was worried. "Hello, Darling" he answered as he picked the call.

The other side of the line didn't express any sign of warmth. He could hear his wife's voice and she was sobbing.

His heart jumped out of his chest at that split second. "Julia? What's wrong" he asked calmly showing no sign of worry.

She sobbed a little trying to catch her breath. "It's Jessie"

Ward adjusted on his seat with a curious James sitting opposite him. "What about Jessica"? He asked.

"She... she was in an accident, Harold. A car accident" Julia replied stammering. She continued crying.

Ward was shocked by the news. He remained calm standing up. "What hospital is she in?" He inquired picking his jacket from the rail.

"Craxton Central" she replied sobbing.

Ward nodded. "It's alright, Dear. I'll be there in a moment. Just relax yourself, okay?"

She nodded doing her best to be calm "Okay"

Harold ended the call.

"Is she alive?" James asked worried.

"Yah, it'll seem so" he replied hiding his fear as he led the way out of the office.

HennyKane Island

1:25 am

Damon stood beside his brother who was lying unconscious in his bed in the large room. Lizzie stood beside him holding his left hand.

She saw the sadness in Damon's face.

"He's getting worse" Damon said. "He doesn't deserve this. No one should go through this"

Lizzie sighed. She didn't know what to say to him. She was here by Damon's side but she had no clue what had happened to her own brother.

The pair stood by the bed side watching Denver sleep for minutes before Lizzie heard her phone ring.

She dipped her hand into her purse and drew out her phone, she could see the caller was her aunt, Maureen.

"I've got to take this" she said to Damon.

Damon nodded "Sure"

"Hello, Aunt Maureen?" He heard Lizzie say as she walked to a corner. It was a few seconds later he saw the terrifying expression on her face as she slowly opened her mouth in shock.

"Lizzie, what's wrong?" Damon asked walking towards her.

He could see a tear drop from her eye.

"My brother. He was in a car crash" she replied as she tried to stop the tears from rolling down her eyes.

"Oh, my God! What hospital?" Damon quickly asked.

Craxton Central,

CRAXTON

1:50 am

The hospital was full with people. Billy and Jessie weren't the only victims of the heavy storm. Other people had witnessed the deadly wrath of nature, and some had even died before they made it to the hospital.

Harold and James joined the chaos they hustled through panicking crowds before they emerged at the fourth floor. Harold already knew who was in charge, it was his old friend Doctor Rudolph and his team who had previously saved Halloway's life.

Harold and James met Julia, Josh, Harry and a few friends at the end of the hallway near the Accident and Emergency Unit. It was a large blurred glass door.

Julia sighted her husband and hugged him the moment he reached her. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. She looked up to Ward. "Harold, I'm sorry. It was all my fault. I should have never let them leave. I should have told you about this" she explained sobbing.

Harold patted her gently. "It's okay, sweetie. Don't blame yourself for this. They are kids they just wanted to have a good time"

Speaking of kids, Harold realized his daughter wasn't the only one involved in the car crash. He gave the edge of the corridor a quick scan to see a woman probably in her mid-forties standing and talking with some friends.

He let go of his wife and walked towards her. He humbly shook her hands. "Ma'am, I am so sorry about what happened" he apologized.

She smiled "Commissioner Ward, it's no one's fault. All we can hope now is that our kids get better"

Harold nodded. "You are right" he wiped his face. "We hope they get better, and they will"

Maureen smiled thanking him for his support, she looked away and her glance met with James'.

She saw the look on his face. She knew they might have met earlier. James walked towards her. It was the same lady he caught sight of at the Delgado art auction.

"Good day, Ms." he acknowledged.

Her nod was hesitant as she tried to force a smile. "It isn't much of a good day, Detective"

James nodded in agreement. "I know right? How insensitive of me" he scoffed "It's a terrible thing that happened, but we do hope it doesn't get worse"

Maureen wasn't sure if James was here to share his sympathy or support. But it bothered her.

"Have we met before?" She asked.

James winced, he himself wasn't sure where he had seen her but his brain told him it was a really long time ago.

His eyes shone when it was obvious that he had figured it out. He clicked his fingers at her. "Pin Citi Riot, 2001"

The statement hit Maureen hard. It brought back a deep memory she wished he hadn't. The Pin Citi riot was one of the events that highlighted Kord's four-year rebellion. James was caught up in the riot between Kord's minions and the police force.

He should have died; he was just a young boy who was prone to danger in every way possible. All that would change when he was rescued by two young girls of his age. One which was now standing right in front of him. James realized they were members of a special operative.

James was forever grateful to the pair, especially Maureen. Though he wanted to know more about them, Maureen had begged him to keep their identity a secret.

And now here she was, that ass kicking young girl was now a woman living a normal life.

"I do remember you" she replied not showing much excitement.

"I'm sorry if this is a bad time but I never really got the chance to say a proper thank you. You saved my life. I wanted to meet you again. To know what you really were. You inspired me to become who I am today" James narrated.

Maureen paid much attention to James. She opened her mouth to speak just before she sighted Elizabeth run towards her. She felt Elizabeth's body touch hers before she could even turn her face.

James was thrown off guard by the teenager.

"Aunt Maureen" Lizzie cried.

"It's okay, dear. Your brother is going to be fine" Maureen replied hugging her.

James winced at the mention of aunt. If he was thinking straight, he got his mind on one thing. He remembered vividly that Maureen's partner during the rebellion was her sister.

Could it be? Could this pretty brunette girl be the daughter of the other mysterious lady who saved his life?

His curiosity almost took the better of him as he was about to ask more questions. He realized the lady and the young girl were having a moment.

He smiled and walked off before Maureen could notice anything.

Josh was surprised seeing Lizzie here, not only did her presence shock him but also that of his rival. Damon.

Damon had held Lizzie's hands as they walked down the hallway towards the others with Gareth behind.

Once again, the Wards and HennyKanes might have been family buddies but Joshua did not expect any of them to send their support, at least this early.

He stood up and walked towards Damon who was now talking to Harold.

"Hello, Joshua" Damon replied noticing Josh's presence.

Josh failed to reply. He smiled and just stared at Damon.

Damon was unable to understand the context of Josh's reaction.

Harold noticed the tension and cleared his throat. "Alright, boys. I'll leave you two to it" he stated and walked off.

Damon watched him go. "I'm sorry about your sister" he apologized sincerely.

Joshua nodded wishing he could say anything. He was filled with rage considering the fact he just watched Damon and Lizzie walk towards the group holding hands. Damn it, it was official. They were in love. But worse, why did he care about that now?

His big sister was in the ICU fighting for her life, he had put the puzzle together and now he knew his sister was into Lizzie's older brother, his rage could only get more intense. How could he let this happen?

Damon observed the mute Joshua trying to understand what the dude was thinking about. "Look...." Damon started "I know you don't like me and honestly, I don't know why. But whatever the reason is, can it be water under the bridge? I mean, you are a very cool guy, we should be friends, we've got a lot in common"

Joshua did not expect that "Once again, I'm sorry about your sister. Hope she gets better" Damon concluded walking away.

Joshua felt stupid, he should have said something. He watched Damon walk towards Gareth and then he turned his gaze to Lizzie who was sitting on a bench with her head to the ground. He gathered courage and walked towards her. He engaged her in a conversation just to cheer her up.

It wasn't till another fifteen minutes before Rudolph came out with two other doctors. Everyone rushed towards them.

"Rudolph, how did it go?" Ward asked quickly with the others eager to get an update.

Rudolph sighed. It was obvious he had had a tough night. "Ward" he started "Both of them are alive"

The news had the group relieved with Ward hugging Rudolph.

Harry noticed the doctors were rather troubled.

"Guys? I don't think the doctors are done with their report" he announced with everyone reducing their level of excitement.

"Is there more, Rudolph"? Ward asked.

Rudolph nodded "I'm afraid so" he paused "Forgive me for saying this but no one could survive that sort of crash. Even if you did, you are most likely to end up as a vegetable. Both parties however have regular vital signs. Their wounds have healed up in a couple of hours. It's a miracle, Harold"

Everyone was silent unable to process what the doctor had just said. Harold turned to his wife before looking back at Rudolph. "What do you mean?" He asked.

The second doctor, a petit woman walked forward with a tablet in hand. "Commissioner, both patients happened to possess some sort of energy symbiotes in their genes. We don't know how long it's been, but we realized it quickly repaired their worn-out tissues and healed every deformity in both bodies"

James winced folding his arms. "I'm sorry, did you say symbiotes?"

The female doctor nodded "Yes. Both patients have been seen to house two different kind of energy symbiotes. It is a scientific wonder. It's nothing like we've ever seen"

Ward turned to Rudolph "Someone please speak English!" he yelled in frustration.

James tapped Ward's left shoulder. "Harold, the kids are alive and healthy. I think that's all that matters"

The others seemed to concur though they didn't understand what the doctors had just said.

Damon flinched feeling sort of confused "I'm sorry, folks, but how'd you find this so quickly?" he inquired.

Rudolph took off his glasses "After we noticed the rapid improvements in both patients, we immediately took action. We did a very advanced x-ray scan to see what could have caused this miraculous development, and voila" he concluded with a hand gesture.

"You did that in less than three hours. Can I see the scans please?" Damon asked gently collecting the screen pad from the doctor's hands. He accessed the X-ray scan of both Billy and Jessie. Lizzie joined him.

"This is strange. This is beyond what the doctors can interpret" he commented. He noticed the shapeless silver like form in Billy's body and a green like form in Jessie's.

He wondered how the scan could even read color.

"Hey, you sure your equipment is working?" Joshua asked who happened to be peeping at the screen pad too.

The female doctor slowly took the device out of Damon's possession "We have the best equipment" she replied.

"When can we see them, doctor?" Julia inquired from Rudolph.

"Roughly after twelve hours" he replied before nodding then he walked out of sight with the others.

Ward had forgotten Rudolph's report and was simply glad the kids were alive and stable. He held his wife's hand tight in relief, they smiled at each other just as his phone rang.

He took a peep; it was from work. This was a bad time for work.

"Are you going to answer that?" Julia asked sarcastically.

Ward stood up from the bench giving her a brief kiss. "Baby, this is work. It could be an emergency" he explained taking the call.

"Commissioner Harold Ward on the line" He responded.

The other end replied. "This is Sergeant Gale, Sir. Code Black, I repeat Code Black" the officer reported. "Acropolis has fallen"

"What?" Harold exclaimed; he took in a deep breath before cutting the call. He turned to James who was already on his feet.

"What's wrong?" James asked putting on his rain jacket.

"Acropolis has fallen" Ward replied

James was shocked "What do you mean fallen?" He asked not sure if he had heard right.

Ward turned to Julia. "Julia, this is a big deal. I can't pass this one"

Julia frowned "Harold, this is your daughter in the hospital. What could be worse?" She asked.

"Five thousand lives. That's what's worse. I'll make it up to you, I promise" he kissed her again as he and James rushed out of the room with everyone staring.

"Cops" Joshua scoffed.

James drove while Ward sat in the passenger's seat. "How could this happen? Acropolis is a highly secured facility" Harold said.

James sighed "He only said Acropolis has fallen right? We don't really have a clue what he meant. Let's just hope it isn't that bad"

Ward panted. "How am I going to tell this to the Ham?" He lamented.

Arrowtail

6:44 am

It was another thirty minutes before they reached the cliff where Acropolis once stood. The site had been crowded with police vehicles. James parked the car at a corner as they both walked out of the vehicle.

"Harold, this is bad. This is really bad" James stated terrified. They hustled to the edge where they watched remnants of the once powerful fortress float on the stream of the Arrowtail Forest way down below.

"God damn it!" Harold cursed. The pair were joined by Sergeant Gale, Ploroe and his partner Alan Fridge.

"Morning, Commissioner. Detective Halloway " Gale acknowledged.

"What in the actual fuck happened here?" James asked.

"It was a terrible disaster, sir. It seemed there was a riot in the facility before the storm washed the building down the hill till it crumbled all the way to the stream" Ploroe narrated.

"God" James recreated covering his mouth.

"Any survivors?" Harold asked.

"Yeah" Gale replied.

"How many?"

"Eleven"

James eyes shone bright "Are you fucking kidding me? This facility held five thousand inmates and two hundred prison staff, and you are telling me only eleven people survived?"

The officers failed to give James an answer.

"Just great, guys. Just fucking great" he replied with rage.

"Any progress with the bodies?" Ward inquired.

"Yes, Sir" Ploroe answered. "We had river patrol and frog men search and fish out the bodies"

"And how many so far?" James asked.

"About five thousand and seventy bodies" Ploroe replied.

James sighed glancing at Ward "And Lloyd Coulson's?"

Ploroe paused before replying. "We haven't found his body yet"

Harold felt his heart explode "What?!" he gasped for breath "Listen, I want you to get Forest Patrol in those woods right away. If he's alive he couldn't have gone far and we need to stop him before he gets out of our radar. Go, move your fuckin' ass's people" he ordered as they both watched the three cops dispatch to carry out their superior's orders.

Arrowtail Woods

7:53 am

Bearhug and Lloyd walked through the woods. They were exhausted, tired and hungry.

"Oh, Shit" Lloyd cursed dropping down near a tree log.

Bearhug stopped and turned around realizing the psychopath was slowing him down.

"What now, Coulson? You want some milk"? He asked frustrated.

Lloyd laughed resting on the log. "Funny thing you asked, big guy. I would really be delighted if I got some"

Bearhug joined Lloyd on the log. "You know, I never thought we'd really succeed with the plan"

Lloyd scoffed. "All you need is faith, Bearhug. Faith"

"What are you going to do now we are out?" Bearhug asked.

Lloyd chuckled "I'm not really sure. I heard there's a new five-star Ethiopian restaurant in Leafonia. I'd love to check it out and maybe kill some few people" he replied.

"What about you?" He asked Bearhug.

Bearhug scratched his forehead. "Start afresh I guess"

Lloyd smiled and they were silent for a few seconds.

Bearhug stood up dusting his prison uniform. "We have to move, Coulson. They will be looking for us by now"

Lloyd laughed. Bearhug winced wondering what amused his partner in crime "Is something funny?"

"No. Not at all. It's just that... I didn't think you'll make it this far. Sincerely"

Bearhug paused not sure he understood what Lloyd was saying "What do you mean by that?"

"Come on, pal. Haven't you heard by now the Bigwig of Ringsville, which is me by the way, always stays on top? I am a lone survivor"

Bearhug gazed at Lloyd, his body began to boil with rage.

"The plan, big guy never involved you surviving. To be honest, I didn't think you'd make it this far. For all I knew, Huntstone was going to tear you into pieces. You just happened to surprise me"

Lloyd knew he had vexed the large fellow to his peak.

"Huntstone wasn't wrong about you. You are a greedy son of a bitch and I'm gonna kill you" he sneered as he charged at Lloyd. He tapped Lloyd's neck, raised him up and pinned him against the nearest fir tree.

Lloyd groaned gasping for air. He coughed knowing Bearhug was seconds from breaking his neck or choking him to death.

Bearhug tightened his grip. "Who is the *big-fuckin-wig* now, punk? The all-powerful and formidable Lloyd Coulson dies a very meaningless death" he boasted.

Lloyd smiled as he bled from his nose and mouth. "Oh, Bearhug" he coughed out blood. "I might end up dying a meaningless death, but I'm not dying today" he replied.

Lloyd quickly whisked out the kitchen knife Huntstone threw at him from the back of his pants. He pointed the knife edge at Bearhug's eyes and poked both sockets continuously.

"Ahhhhh!" Bearhug screamed letting go off Lloyd. Lloyd fell to the ground and watched as Bearhug yelled in pain. "You little monster. I'm gonna kill you, rip out your ball sacks" he cursed as he searched around. He had very little sight left but he could still detect Lloyd's presence.

He summoned his final strength and charged at Lloyd once again.

Lloyd had the moment and slit Bearhug's throat before he could even touch him. He watched the large man struggle on the ground until he bled to death. He noticed he had used Kord's finishing technique in slaying Bearhug.

"Well, this isn't the time to be remorseful, Lloyd" he said to himself and walked away from Bearhug's corpse.

EPISODE VII: BEFORE THE DARKNESS

*"THE SOLE ART THAT SUITS ME IS THAT WHICH, RISING FROM UNREST, TENDS TOWARD
SERENITY."*

-ANDRE GIDE

YEARS OF THE KORD REBELLION

Kord's Kennel

The abducted teenagers were trained in a large arena. They were involved in a lot of physical training and were forced to fight each other till one of the combatants yielded.

Lloyd was a genius in studying his opponent's moves and tactics. He would let them think he was afraid and intimidated, and when they felt relaxed, he would easily overpower them with their own fighting technique. This impressed Kord seeing Lloyd's potentials.

Toby Aion on the other hand was not the combat type. He had never really won a fight and to be less lucky he was slatted in to fight with the ruthless and blood thirsty Hank Slade that morning. Before the fight, Toby was certain he was going to spend the next week in the infirmary. A place none of them wanted to be.

Hank smiled the moment he saw Toby. He was going to get his fists full. The coordinator, a Kord minion and a sadist just like the others in the kennel placed the pair on a fighting mat and flung a white flag between them to show the match had commenced.

Kord sat on a terrace watching the duel.

"Show me what you got, pussy" Hank teased hitting Toby in the chest.

Toby was afraid to fight back while Lloyd who was Toby's roommate watched in disgust.

Hank got tired of the bullying and threw a heavy punch at Toby dropping the sixteen-year-old to the ground.

Toby groaned spitting out blood. He could hear the crowd laughing at him and cheering at Hank. He figured staying on the floor was probably the best thing to do.

Hank pounced on Toby while he was still on the floor. He rained punches and slaps on the young boy as he screamed for help.

Hank was enjoying himself and was far from being satisfied just before someone held his right hand which was on its way to inflict serious damage on Toby's left eye.

Hank froze taking his time to see who had the guts to suspend his hand while in action. And his eyes met with Lloyd's.

"That's enough, pal. Mickey Mouse has had his share of ass whooping" he said boldly. Not a lot of people stood up to Hank. Lloyd let go of his hand. It was a tight grip. Hank wouldn't have been able to break free even if he wanted to.

Lloyd bent down to help Toby up.

Hank frowned "Who the heck do you think you are, you punk?" He yelled.

Lloyd looked back at Hank "you said it yourself, I'm a punk. And I'm that type of punk you don't want to piss off" he replied helping the weak Toby out of the arena.

Kord watched from his terrace in amazement. There was something in Lloyd. Something no one else apart from himself saw. He smiled impressed as everyone waited for Hank to react. But deep down the young boy felt nothing but shame and fear.

PRESENT DAY

Acropolis Hilltop,

Arrowtail

9:15 am

The frenzy at the top of the high hill did nothing but increase. The news companies had arrived to cover the story with reporters having to ask Harold Ward questions. He replied 'No comment' to every question they threw at him as he promised to make an official statement later in the day.

James walked behind a van and phoned Idris. He tried over six times but Idris failed to pick up. Maybe he was taking a break. Now? he asked himself.

Harold inhaled deeply "We have to wait for forest patrol to give us some info"

James shrugged "What If they don't find Coulson? What do we do?"

"I don't know, Jimmy. I don't know. We don't even know if he's alive, okay?" Harold replied tensed.

"You heard the survivors. He started a riot before the prison collapsed. He had a plan. He waited for the storm" James countered.

Harold dipped his hand into his rain jacket and brought out a pack of cigarettes. James looked at him strangely. "I thought you had quit smoking, Harold?"

Harold nodded trying to fight his anxiety "I did. I'm just taking one sip. It's a cold Thursday" he replied.

James frowned snatching the pack from Harold's right hand. "You've had enough"

"I haven't had any yet" Harold grumbled.

They both heard Harold's walkie buzz.

James yanked it from Harold's belt before he could reach for it.

"This is Detective Halloway. What have you got?" James responded quickly.

"We've surveyed most of the woods, Sir" the Forest Patroller reported.

"And.....?" James inquired holding the radio closer to his ears.

"We've found a dead body. It was an inmate"

James quailed "Is it Coulson?" He asked.

"I'm afraid not, Sir"

James turned off the walkie handing it back to Harold.

"Guess we have to check it out for ourselves" Harold suggested.

"You bet your ass" James replied interested. He really hoped his thoughts were wrong. He prayed that Lloyd Coulson was dead but his body was probably washed away by the heavy current of the river. That would explain why the river patrol couldn't fish out his remains.



James, Harold, and four other cops walked through the wet woods. They had driven through the forest path until they reached the area where the Patrollers had reported the dead body was. And now, they had to walk on foot before reaching the crime scene. It took them over ten minutes.

There were crime scene tapes around the nearest trees. The scene was full with patrollers, forensics, and policemen.

James walked near the body which was now covered with a large sheet. He squatted flipping the top part of the cloth over to see the face of the large corpse. The face was pale and the eyes were swollen with flies and ants all over.

"Shit!" James jerked covering the body. "Who's this?" He asked.

"That's Nigel Burgan" one of the forensic scientists responded. She quickly handed a file over to James, it was Bearhug's criminal record. The information was copied from the online prison database.

"Nigel Burgan" James repeated slowly running through the database with his eyes. "Also known as Bearhug. Currently serving fifteen years prison time without chance of parole for attempted murder and arms trafficking" James handed the file to Harold as he faced the others. "How does this help?" He asked.

"Bearhug was Lloyd Coulson's cellmate for the past one month" one of the surviving prison guards reported.

"And who do you think did this?" Harold asked pointing at the corpse.

"Most likely Lloyd Coulson" one of the forensic scientists replied.

"And why do you think Coulson would kill his own cellmate after they escape?" Harold asked.

James scoffed "He's a maniac, Ward. No one knows what that dimwitted terrorist thinks in his head" He turned to the scientist. "Guesses won't do it, guys. We need proof"

The female scientist squatted flipping the sheet over again with a plastic tool. "Look at the wounds. Both eyes were stabbed severally, probably seven times. It was a fast strike" she then pointed at the widely cut throat. "Check out the opening. That's a Kord signature finish. The perpetrator is no doubt a goddamned professional. Lloyd Coulson on the other hand is well known for being a dagger expert. The cuts were perfect and swift" she explained standing up to her feet. The term Kord signature finish was now a killing technique well known by people who lived through or knew a lot about the Kord Rebellion.

Kord was known for carrying lots of daggers and knives to a fight and slitting his enemy's throat when he was at the end of his battle. *It was a technique he taught his children.*

James whistled folding his arms. "Wow. That's just diabolical. So, we technically have a mad dog back on the loose, great" he commented as he turned to Ward. "Look, the news of the Acropolis collapse is everywhere. On the news, papers, and social media. Ham gave you till twelve noon before you address the issue on the Column stairs" James raised his hand looking at the time on his wristwatch.

"We have approximately two hours to figure out something" he added.

"We can't openly tell the world Lloyd Coulson is loose. People will be terrified. That's the last thing anyone wants to hear" Harold replied.

James concurred. "We don't have to tell them that. But you've got to figure out a brilliant speech. Talk about the thousands lost in the collapse. Send condolences to their family and loved ones and assure them of a safer city"

Ward could feel the sweat dripping all over him even amidst the cold weather. "Don't worry, James. I've got this"

James nodded "You do" he gave the older man a friendly tap on the back.

Craxton Central Hospital,

CRAXTON

11:00am

A lot of friends who had come to show both the Wards and Conrads sympathy were now gone. The waiting room was now scanty. Damon had sat near Lizzie the whole time assuring her that her brother would be okay. He also went down the building and bought food for her and Maureen.

He was very cautious of the time and discovered it was eleven in the morning. He had to check on his brother who was also receiving treatment at home.

"Hey" he said to Lizzie.

Lizzie who had been resting her head on his shoulders looked up to him. "Yeah?"

"Uh... I've got to home. I need to check up on my brother" he said.

Lizzie nodded yawning. "Thanks, Damon. You've done more than enough" she responded as they stood up together.

Damon grinned. "Take care. Go home and get some sleep if you can" he added.

Lizzie shook her head in disagreement "No, I'm good" she smiled "I'll walk you downstairs" she suggested.

"No. You stay here" he replied grinned. He hugged her and walked away. He turned to Maureen and raised his hand waving at her.

"Have a good one, Damon" she waved back with a smile.

Damon strolled down the hallway to the elevator where he bumped into Joshua and Nick who were walking out.

Nick smiled excited seeing him "Damon HennyKane!" he acknowledged jovially hugging him.

"Hey, Nicholas. Glad to see you around" Damon replied.

"I know, right? Dude, the storm was deadly as fuck. It took out my tree house. It's really sad what happened though, right?" Nick said.

Josh coughed to get both boy's attention as they looked at him. "I am standing right here, fellas. Please, can you not talk about what happened? It doesn't help" Josh pleaded.

Damon scoffed putting his hands forward to show submission as he walked into the cubicle.

"I'm sorry, Josh. I do hope they get better. Bye for now" he replied as the elevator doors closed leaving the emerging pair to look at nothing but the door.

Nick turned to Josh. "Dude, why didn't you tell me he was here?"

Josh rolled his eyes and walked away leaving the oblivious Nick standing in amazement.

The Column,

CRAXTON

11:52 am

The Column compound was crowded with news reporters and bystanders waiting for the Police Commissioner to address the issue concerning the tragedy that befell the Acropolis Prison due to the dangerous storm that had just concluded hours ago.

Ward spied through a window; he could see the congregation waiting at the bottom of the Column entrance staircase from an empty room.

"All the buzz for what, James?" He asked putting on his coat.

James joined him "You know, a story. Everyone wants a good story. You give the people what they want to hear, you become a hero. If you say the truth..." James paused, then sighed "You never know what they want" he concluded. He realized he didn't think before he spoke.

The doors flung open as a lady with glasses proceeded in. She was the Deputy Mayor of Ringsville and close friend of Ham. Her name was Rene Jackson "Commissioner?" She addressed him. She was also a strong political fanatic. People believed she was even more politically motivated than Ham, and that was actually true. But Ham was an agile leader, he never really gave Rene the opportunity to shine in the six years he had been mayor.

James and Ward turned swiftly "Yes?"

"It's time" she announced leaving immediately.

Ward nodded. "On my way" he replied taking in a deep breath.



Ward stood on the pulpit stationed at the top of the stairs which gave him enough distance from the crowd.

He cleared his throat before he uttered a word. The world was watching, he had to be careful in his statement. He took a quick glimpse at James who stood near a large pillar at the side of the building entrance.

"Good day, people of Ringsville" he began looking at the little sheet where he had written down his speech "In absence of Mayor Dillon Ham, I have been given the opportunity in addressing you all on this tragic day in the history of our metropolitan city" he took a deep breath before he proceeded. Everyone was watching. The Conrads and Wards watched from the hospital. Artem and Martin Carstlin watched Ward's speech on television from the former's secret fortress.

"Following the heavy storm that occurred throughout the night..." Ward continued "We experienced the destructive force of nature. Many buildings, structures, and most importantly, people were affected. And one of the governmental facilities greatly affected by the storm was the City's Penitentiary, Acropolis Hill Prison. We were shocked at the news of the facility's collapse. On behalf of the Ringsville Police Force and every other governmental firm in this city, we deeply sympathize with the families and loved ones of the victims who perished in not just Acropolis, but other locations in the city. The RVPD will do its very best to support the families through these difficult times" he concluded with a nod. "If there's any question to be asked, I'm open for answers" he added. This was the part Harold hated, and his protégé James had come to despise it too.

The crowd roared with voices from every corner. Ward pointed at a female journalist "Yes, you with the grey suit at the front row" he called out.

"Janice Maxwell for *Caesar's Quest*. Commissioner, we heard your daughter was also affected by the storm in a car crash. Is it just a rumor?" The female journalist inquired.

Ward hid his disappointment wondering why it was a necessary question at this particular moment.

"Yes, it is in fact true. She is stable and currently undergoing treatment at Craxton Central" he replied.

Another journalist raised his hand as Ward pointed at him.

"Paul Willer for Ringsville 93. According to the Acropolis record, how many inmates did the facility hold?"

Ward cleared his throat. "The Acropolis Penitentiary held a total of five thousand and seventy inmates and over two hundred prison staff" Ward responded hoping it was the end to that. He knew where

this cunning journalist was pining for. Ward prayed he didn't ask the question he was trying his best to avoid.

"Well, how many of these victims' bodies were found?" He further inquired.

Ward glanced at James before turning back to the crowd. "Well over five thousand and twenty bodies were retrieved in one piece"

"And what about Lloyd Coulson's body? Has it been retrieved yet?"

James moved away from the pillar he was previously resting on; he could feel his chest pounding loudly. This was exactly what he hoped Ward would be able to avoid, but it was already too late. There was no escaping this.

"Well..." Ward stammered unable to find the right words. Lying wasn't going to cut it. If he said the police had been able to fish out Coulson's body, the press would have wanted proof. Lloyd was a serious concern for the city and no one dealt with his case politely.

"Well... Lloyd Coulson's corpse was in fact not part of the bodies that were discovered" he responded; he felt his palms become sweaty.

People began to murmur from the crowd.

"Are you saying Lloyd Coulson is loose?" Another female journalist asked terrified.

The murmuring increased.

Ward raised his hands to calm the tension. "It is not a sealed fact. Coulson could be dead. Maybe he was swept away by the river or his body is still somewhere under the ruins but we assure you that whatever has happened, the RVPD will get to the bottom of it. Your families can sleep well at night and not worry about any mayhem. If it is confirmed Lloyd Coulson is alive, the RVPD will conduct a manhunt to find that criminal and bring him to justice" Ward concluded.

The noise from the crowd died down in time until a man amongst the congregation yelled out "You could have killed that psychotic rebel a long time ago. Why didn't you?"

The murmuring started again save louder than before.

Rene Jackson the Deputy Mayor quickly shoved Ward aside in a subtle manner as she placed her lips near the microphones. "Thank you, everyone for your time but that will be all for today" she announced as she and Ward walked back into the Column building with the officials of the crowd control slowly moved the crowd out of the compound.

"Fuck this!" Ward cursed throwing his coat at a chair in frustration. James joined him in the room.

"You've got to relax, Harold. You did your best" James said trying to calm the paranoid man.

"Of course, they want to know if Coulson is dead" he said to himself as his frustration transformed to anger.

James scratched his head looking up at Harold. "What do we do now?" he asked.

Harold sat on a chair panting for a while "We wait. We wait till Ham returns. I'm goanna really have it out with that guy. Always running from problems, then who does he slot in? Me! I do his dirty work while he goes out to those expensive political dinners and fancy sports meetings. I have had it, James. I have a family to cater for. I can't always be the bad guy. Not when that prick still calls himself Mayor" He realized Rene had been in the room too. The young politician was silent as Harold lamented. "You" he pointed right at her "Is the title 'Deputy' just for a show or what? Why didn't he kick you out there, huh?"

Rene drank a glass of scotch "This is a criminal matter, Commissioner Ward. Ham felt it best the people hear it from you. You are the head of the justice department; they'll know it's serious when it's you saying it" she explained. Her calmness bothered Ward who had been pacing up and down the room.

James nodded placed both of his hands on his waist "That's....." he chuckled "She's got a really valid point, Harold"

Ward looked at him. "What? Oh, wow, Halloway. Bravo. You wanna give me one of those long speeches about perseverance and..."

"No. I'm not" James cut him short "I'm going to clear my head. Maybe do some thinking. Why don't you go get something to eat and join your family at the hospital?" James suggested walking out of the room.

Ward sniffled "That's actually a good idea"

An Abandoned Warehouse

Tony Birdleaf sat with some of his henchmen including Edward Mojo who had all been watching the live broadcast of Harold's statement on TV.

"If Coulson is out there it's a red flag for us, Tony, you know that" Edward said smoking a pipe.

Tony scoffed "All this wasn't a mistake" he replied.

Edward winced "What do you mean?"

"Destiny is playing out. Our story with Coulson isn't over" Tony explained standing up.

"Do you think he has allies?" Edward asked

Tony smirked "Lloyd isn't our problem, Eddie. It's been six years since Coulson last made headlines. This city has grown and left him in the quagmire. We have things to find and you need to burst that kid out of prison" he responded, he stood from his chair, wore his glasses and exited the building.

Edward stood up once he had smoked the life out of his pipe, he alerted the others. "It's time, boys. Grab your arsenals!" he ordered.

Delcoy Residence,

Dec

1:16 pm

James knocked on Idris' door twice. There was no response at all. He knocked again and waited a little while but still, there was no response. He quickly remembered he had a key to Idris' apartment.

James dipped his hands into his pockets and brought out the key and drove it into the keyhole, but he realized the lock was different. "Son of a....." he cursed sighing. The day couldn't possibly get any weirder.

He waited for over a minute wondering what to do next before he turned to leave. He walked down the doorstep and proceeded towards the small gate of Delcoy's apartment.

He heard the same door he tried to open click and screech open. He stopped in his tracks and turned to find Idris standing at the door post.

"For a moment, I thought you were dead, pal" James taunted lightly, he noticed Idris wasn't in the mood for jokes. "Are you okay? I've been calling your line for hours. What's going on?"

"I.. I needed some time to myself" Idris explained.

James nodded "Yeah, that's totally fine. But you should have given your partner a heads-up or something"

Idris shrugged "You don't know, do you?"

James stared obliviously "Know what?"

"I'm no longer your partner"

James froze in one spot staring at Idris. He laughed a little before getting back into character "What do you mean you are no longer my partner?" he asked.

"Ward and Director Owens struck a deal. I'm back with the RCF. And they did it behind my back"

James was dumbfounded "You've got to be joking. I've been with Ward for the past twenty-four hours. He didn't mention anything relating to your transfer"

Idris rested on his door post. "You never know what's Ward's next play. Those old fuckers, right?"

James looked around wishing he could break something out of anger. He turned his focus back at Idris "I need you, buddy. I need you. There's tension all over the city. Lloyd Coulson is missing. Acropolis has fallen. We've got a metropolis to clean up" he pleaded.

Idris sighed. "You know Owens as much as I do, James. You don't wanna disobey that grumpy old man"

"What kind of deal did he strike with Ward anyways?" he asked.

Idris squinted his eyes trying to remember "I think the RCF would take control of Trisword surveillance"

"Fuck!" James cursed.

They both could hear the sound of a vehicle. James turned to see a Black Pickup truck stop behind his Malibu nearly hitting the bumper.

James watched RCF Agents Rick O'Neal and Ian Larson step out of the vehicle.

Ian whistled in amazement strolling past the Malibu before they proceeded into Idris' compound.

"My, my" Ian smuggled "That's a beautiful Malibu you've got there, Detective Halloway"

James forced a smile "Tell me about it"

"Detective?" Rick acknowledged walking past him.

"Agent O'Neal" James responded genuinely. He had no problem with the RCF, it was Larson he hated.

With Rick walking past him, he turned his focus to Ian who was now standing in front of him.

"Busy day, huh?" Ian inquired.

"Oh, you have no idea" James answered.

"You know we heard about Acropolis. It's a real tragedy. And Coulson, out in the wild like a hungry tiger. Can you and your cop buddies handle that? You sure look out of luck on your first day"

James smirked "We've got it under our belt. Thanks for your concern"

Ian laughed "Suit yourself, pal" he walked past James now arriving at Idris' doorstep.

James turned seeing Idris about to close the door.

"Good luck finding a new partner, Jimmy. I'm sorry" Idris concluded shutting the door.

James felt backstabbed by his own mentor, all day long, he had been with Ward, but the latter didn't think it wise to update James on the current state of things. This was the moment he needed Idris the most. Thanks to Ward who wanted the Trisword district off his hands, that was no longer possible. For some reason, the RVPD were really skeptical about patrolling Trisword.

James stormed out of the compound with vivid anger as he boarded his Malibu and sped unto the streets of Dec.

Craxton Central,

CRAXTON

2:09 pm

James stormed out of the elevator as he headed for the ICU, he found Ward approaching him as he made a phone call. The two stopped when they reached each other.

James panted waiting for Ward to finish his phone call. It was over a minute before the call finally ended.

Ward exhaled "Ham returned earlier than planned" he informed James.

James frowned; he could care less about Ham at the very moment "When were you going to tell me?"

Ward was thrown off guard wondering what had led to James's sudden change in attitude "I have no idea what you are talking about, Jimmy" he said in defense.

"Delcoy's transfer and a deal with Owens?" James sneered.

Ward sighed again. Things weren't getting easier. "Look, I was going to tell you. But it's been a hell of a day. I've forgotten about that until right now" He replied "And besides I don't think I need to run anything by you"

"This might mean nothing to you, Ward, but you should have told me first. I was the one who recruited Delcoy, remember?! And now you just let the RCF take him back like he's an asset?"

"James. Look, I get it. You are pissed, but I've been through a really hectic day. Owen's is going to handle surveillance on that godforsaken place called Trisword. That's a relief, right?"

James quailed as he gazed upon the older man. It was obvious Ward wasn't remorseful about his decision to backstab him.

"Why don't we have this talk when I return from the Column?" He insisted with James failing to reply
"Right now, I've got to see Ham"

James scoffed "Why not? Run off and tell him how he tricked you into being his fool just as you tricked me"

Ward frowned at James "That's not it"

"Then what?!" James asked.

"The Column Council has decided that David Logan be tried tomorrow. They aren't fucking around, James"

They looked at each other for seconds.

"I'll call you when I'm done, okay?" Harold concluded giving James a friendly tap on the shoulder walking towards the elevator.

James wondered why Ward was so concerned about the Logan kid. If anyone should be concerned, it should be him. It was James the kid gunned down and he hadn't forgotten.

RCF Headquarters,

Leafonia

2:54 pm

Agent Ian Larson and Rick O'Neal led Idris into a room where Agent Becca Luna and Director Stanley Owens were waiting. The room was well decorated with white sofas and a leopard-skin-themed rug. It was a simple but eye-catching design.

"It's good to have you back, Delcoy. You made the right choice" Owens acknowledged warmly pointing at a sofa for Idris to relax on.

Idris put his hands forward. "Hey, guys, look, I'm here but like I said 'on my own terms'. I believe I have the right to assist the Ringsville Police Department when I can"

The room was silent for some seconds with everyone looking at each other.

Owen cleared his throat "We'll look into that" he replied sitting down as Ian and Idris followed suit.

"What's the mission?" Idris inquired picking up a glass of juice that was kept on a table beside him.

Rick walked near a projector and turned it on as he approached the screen, on it was the image of a man with glasses.

"That is Doctor Sactor Polaris, weird name, I know" Rick began pointing at the image on the screen. "He's a science genius who specializes in astrophysics and meteorology. Doctor Sactor *here* works in City lab and does his research concerning the earth's crust and whatever science bullshit comes with that" Rick reported.

Idris dropped his glass of juice and shrugged obliviously. "And what's all the fuss about. Did he witness a crime or kill someone?" he asked.

Becca adjusted on her chair. "No, Delcoy" she replied "This man is currently missing for almost two months now. No one knew where he lived or who he made contact with. He was simply a mystery. He spent most of his time in the lab"

"So do you think he was abducted?" Idris inquired.

Ian nodded "Most likely. It's our best guess. There's no trace of any sort but we believe he was dragged into a terrible conspiracy"

"Well, why would someone want to kidnap *this* Doctor Polaris. What did he find or what didn't he find?" Idris further asked.

"That's why I needed the whole team. My best team" Owens responded "First of all, I need you four to run a clean investigation on City Lab. A few weeks back, we had a report that a group of unknown men broke into his lab and stole his projects. I want to know what Polaris was working on"

Ian nodded as he stood up from his chair. "We'll be on it right away, Director" he assured.

Owens cleared his throat to get Ian's attention "Agent Larson?" he called out as Ian paused turning to face Owens.

"Sir?" he answered.

"I need Delcoy in charge of this case. You three should work under him" Owens instructed as Ian moped in shock.

Rick nodded "Understood, Sir" he responded as he and Becca walked out of the cozy room.

"Director, are you breaking my balls right now?!" Ian asked quite furious.

Owens chuckled "And why would I want to break your balls. What good does that do me?" he asked sarcastically.

Ian's fury would do nothing but escalate as he pointed at Idris. "He's not prepared. He's been out of shape for three years" He countered.

Idris nodded "He's right, Sir. I can't be the head of any op. I don't want to be. I can't" he protested.

Owens seemed rather convinced "My decision is final, boys. Now you go out there, work as a team and crack this case" he concluded.

Ian panted storming out of the room as Idris followed confused. He caught up with Ian in the walkway

"Hey, don't get all spicy on me, Larson" he attacked.

Ian stopped walking looking Idris in the eye "Don't you dare call me that. We are no longer buddies, just partners" he sneered storming off.

"Oh, that's how it's gon' be, huh?" Idris yelled watching Larson leave.

RVPD Special Detention Facility,

Pin Citi

8:13 pm

David sat on the grounds of his cell as he used one of his sharp fingernails to craft caricatures on the cell walls.

He heard footsteps marching towards his door but he paid it no attention.

David had been in that facility for weeks and he had given in to his ill fate. He had accepted the fact that he was never going to see daylight again or be free, but what pained him the most is that he didn't snitch on his friends and he knew they were out there smiling and must have probably forgotten him while he was in here, in this hell hole all alone.

The doors of his cell were opened up and he still didn't move as he continued on his wall craft.

The two detention guards approached him as one observed the carvings which had covered the walls from top to bottom.

"The hell, Logan, did you live in a fucking cave?" he asked as he and the other guard pulled Logan up to his feet.

"It's time, kid" the other guard said as they walked him out of the room.

"Are you going to kill me now?" David asked as he watched the two men drag him away.

"No. We are taking you somewhere you'll prepare for your trial"

"I have a trial?" he asked uninterested.

The first guard nodded. "I'm afraid so and walked him into a bulletproof van. They chained him to a chair behind the sealed driver's seat and made they sure he was comfortable.

"We good to go" the first guard said locking the van doors. There were six guards at the back of the vehicle with David. The van was kicked back to life and drove steadily into the Craxton streets with an escort of police vehicles protecting the asset.

The Column

CRAXTON

8:30 pm

Ham's car stopped in front of the building as he emerged from within.

He found Rene Jackson and Harold Ward waiting at the top of the stairs.

He sighed seeing Harold and slowly climbed towards them. From a distance, he could tell when Harold was in one of his nasty moods.

"Mayor Dillon?" Rene acknowledged politely taking Ham's briefcase. She turned around and walked into the building giving the two men room to discuss.

"I know that face, Harold. That's the face of pure hatred" Dillon Ham tweeted. He too could care less how Harold felt about how he ran his city.

Harold clapped once sarcastically "I never thought you could read minds"

Dillon scoffed "Come on, Harold. I get it, you want an apology? Fine, I'll apologize" he smiled "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have let you speak on my behalf concerning the collapse, but I was out of Black County. I needed someone who I could trust to take my place. People needed answers and they needed them quickly. Besides you are a Police Commissioner you should be doing stuff like this" He explained.

Harold was not falling for Dillon's schemes "And what happened to Jackson? I thought that's what *deputies* are for?"

"Seriously?" Ham scoffed "I want that girls slate clean, if you know what I mean" he grinned, of course Harold had no clue what he was talking about. Can we just talk inside? It's a cold night. All my time in this city and I've never witnessed an April this cold, goddamn it" Dillon cursed shivering. It was indeed an unusual April, one that brought a terrible storm that no one had witnessed in nearly seventy years upon the territories of Ringsville. Ham walked past Ward hoping the Commissioner would follow in his steps but the old man proved rather resilient.

"That's not why I'm here. You know why I'm here"

Dillon hoped it wasn't what he was expecting Ward to say; he was tired of his nagging. "Yes, I know exactly why you are here, Harold. The Logan kid. What would you have me do? A vote was passed on by the members of the Council. Majority had it that the *asshole* be prepped for trial first thing in the morning. We've gotten him a sound lawyer since he's too broke to get one for himself"

"That's bullshit" Ward sneered disgusted.

"What the hell do you want from me, pal. Transporting him here this night was my idea. I can't trust these people. I'm keeping him in a good accommodation till his trial" Dillon tapped Ward's shoulder in a friendly manner and walked into the building leaving Harold to handle the cold.

NetCrate Bridge

8:39 pm

The NetCrate bridge was the longest bridge in the city and the RVPD detention convoy was now halfway through it.

The driver was playing an Elvis Presley track which everyone seemed to be humming along except David.

David seemed not to be interested in anything at all. He had given up.

Considering the fact that the car in front of the van was a bulletproof salon car, the driver and the passenger of the van could see way ahead of the drive way.

Fog first filled the air and they read it as an effect from the cold weather.

They eventually broke through the thick fog and what the driver had seen got him dazzled.

The driver pressed his chest against the steering wheels to get a clearer view of what was ahead of their convoy. It was a tiny figure standing meters away.

He picked his walkie contacting the driver ahead in the salon vehicle.

"Roger, Roger. This is Echo 3. Do you have a vision on our twelve?" he said out on his radio speaker.

The driver ahead quickly replied. "I see it" he paused "Is.... Is that a man?" he asked confused.

The vision was clearer now. They could see a masked man hold an armed rocket launcher in hand targeting the convoy.

"What the f...!!!" the driver of the salon car yelled just as the rocket spat out of the launcher flying straight at the small vehicle and colliding with its bonnet blowing the car into bits.

"Shit!!!" the van driver stepped on the brakes of the automobile as he got hold his walkie again "Roger, Roger!! Does anyone copy? We are under attack. I repeat we are under attack!!!" he yelled out to realize that he had lost connection.

He looked at the guard on the passenger seat in fear knowing there was no escape. Two bullets fired from a sniper's rifle tore through the so-called bulletproof windshield and hit both driver and passenger in the head killing them instantly. At this time, civilians had taken off from the ambush point leaving their vehicles behind.

The two cars ending the convoy were also blown to bits before they could think of reversing killing every passenger on board.

Due to the fact that the van was also soundproof, the guards and David who were in the back of the RVPD van heard nothing but rumbling.

The first guard tried his walkie but no one answered. "I think we've lost communication" he reported to the squad as they all clung tightly to their rifles.

"Everyone, stay quiet" he ordered once he began hearing unusual noises.

The masked man who stood ahead of the now wrecked convoy approached the van and entered the driver's seat. He quickly slid aside a small opening between the driver's seat and the back container consisting of David and the armed guards and threw in a cylindrical device which released a strong gas.

The guards tried to hold their breaths as long as they could, but for how long? They eventually succumbed to the harsh smell and passed out including David.

The masked men who were eight in number tore down the steel door of the van and shot all the guards dead while they were unconscious.

The lead masked man took off his mask. It was Edward Mojo and his minions who had orchestrated the ambush.

"Quick! Get the package. We've got four minutes before this place is run over with cops" he ordered as he glanced at his stopwatch.

Two of Edward's minions unchained the unconscious David and carried him out of the van.

The squad could see red and blue lights approaching their location as they walked to the edge of the bridge.

They tied themselves to hooks that were stuck to the bridge rails.

"Ready, boys?" Edward asked taking a quick glance at everyone who looked ready to jump including the hefty man who had placed David on his shoulders.

They all nodded in unison.

"Now!!!!" he yelled as they all jumped from the bridge into a lifeboat sailing past the bridge columns.

The lifeboat sped up when the squad crashed on the deck.

The cops who had arrived at the ambush scene the earliest found no trace of any escape as the fog covered the whole terrain.

While this terrible thing happened, in the Craxton hospital, Billy opened his eyes as he gasped for a heavy breath.

Main Characters Introduced in Episode 7

Hank Slade

A teenager who was also abducted in the rebellion. He is Lloyd's violent foster brother and antagonist during his days in Kord's Kennel.

Rene Jackson

Mayor Dillon Ham's deputy and personal assistant with high political ambitions. Ham refuses she exposes herself to the public.

EPISODE VIII: MONSTERS YOU MADE

"TERRORISM IS THE TACTIC OF DEMANDING THE IMPOSSIBLE, AND DEMANDING IT AT GUNPOINT."

-CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

August 17th, 2005

An old library,

Trisword

1:57 pm

There was a knock on the doors of the building, the librarian, a man in his thirties hastily walked to the door. He was anxious and somewhat terrified.

"Who's there?" he asked looking through the peep hole. He saw a man on a police coat.

"I'm Officer Park. I'm here to get you into witness protection" the man said.

The librarian hesitated before opening the door halfway. He then poked his head out. "Can I please see a badge?" he requested.

The officer exhaled looking behind before he dipped his hands into his pockets and yanked out a police badge at the librarian's face.

The badge was pretty authentic, the librarian could see that.

"Can I come in now?" the policeman asked.

The librarian nodded giving the cop more room to proceed into the building.

The policeman took his time to observe the large hall of books all stacked on ceiling-tall shelves. It was quiet and empty. He could the librarian was all alone.

"Nice place you've got here" the policeman remarked.

The librarian ran off to get some books. He stacked up a great number of heavy books near the duffel bag he prepared to pack them in. The policeman approached him.

"We can leave now, Officer. I promise to tell you everything I know as long as I and my son are protected by the government..." The librarian was yet to finish speaking before he saw the mouth of the policeman's Glock inches from his face.

The librarian was shocked raising his hands yielding. "What's wrong, Officer? What have I done?" he asked confused.

Park trembled trying to hold his weapon at arm's length. "I'm sorry, sir. But I can't let you leave this building alive" he replied.

The librarian was no fool, he could tell the cop was conflicted with what he was about to do. He understood the officer wasn't doing this of his own free will, and neither was he happy with it.

The librarian put both his hands up placatingly. "Listen, Officer. We can figure something out, okay? You and me, we can fix this mess. You don't wanna kill me. I've got a son, please just calm down and drop your gun"

Park sobbed. "You don't understand, he knows everything about me. He's going after everyone I care about" he cried as he clicked the gun off safety mode "This isn't a negotiation. I'm sorry" he concluded pulling the trigger.

He watched the librarian's tear open from the close range shot as he fell flat to the ground.

Park panted finding it hard to breathe, he gasped in confusion. He watched the dead body lying there in a pool of blood.

He could not believe what he had just done. He had just killed an innocent man. He eventually found some strength and lit the place on fire as he quickly ran out.

The building was eventually raised down, burning everything in it including the librarian's corpse and everything that could have been proof.

PRESENT DAY

The Column,

CRAXTON

9:16 pm

Ward and Mayor Ham sat in the latter's office as the pair argued, Ward was disgusted at Ham's negligence to his work, at least it was he saw it.

"You really think I'm not doing enough good, huh?" Ham asked quite upset with Harold's allegations.

"Dillon, there's a lot more you need to know about your people. A lot more, because you know nothing and you've been sitting on that chair for six years" he replied.

Ham rested on his office chair loosening his tie. "You know, I've been the best mayor in Ringsville since the rebellion. It was during my first year, Lloyd Coulson was finally apprehended. I do my best to connect with my people as much as I can. What?! You want me to know the names of every single person that lives in my city?" he asked sarcastically.

Ward failed to reply sitting opposite the Ham. "You are unbelievable, Dillon" he finally said as he stood up.

Ham's landline rung aloud.

"Here we go again" he grumbled picking the phone.

"Mayor Ham here" he answered.

Ward waited for a couple of seconds only to see Ham terrified as he dropped the line.

"What now?" Ward asked worried.

Ham threw the nearest file away in anger and frustration. Maybe he was also paranoid.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" He cursed. "Fuck!"

"What the heck happened, Dillon?!" Ward inquired concerned.

Ham looked up at Ward "A group of deadly mercenaries ambushed the convoy and disappeared with the Logan kid" he reported.

Ward did not know what to feel. He was definitely troubled, but he tried to stay calm, so much had happened in almost two days. He wished he could just end things.

"Who do you think would break the Logan kid out?" he further asked.

Ham frowned standing up from his seat. "How the fuck do you expect me to know that, Harold? Maybe it's his Bedbug accomplices for all I know" Ham replied in frustration.

Ward got uncomfortable, perhaps it wasn't supposed to be a very big deal but for some reason, his conscience pricked him. He knew his past was catching up with him.

"What do we do now?" he asked.

Ham placed both hands on his office desk. "We start a manhunt. Put out a word for his arrest. David Logan must be found"

Ward winced "Wait... what? A manhunt? If anyone deserves a manhunt, it should be Lloyd Coulson not some regular junkie"

Ham frowned beginning to get upset with Harold's nagging. "Lloyd Coulson is a myth. What's your proof that he's really out there doing something diabolical? The RVPD will be concerned about what

is proven. Armed men attacked a police convoy, killed twenty police officers and fled with Column property. If I'm being correct this is a big deal. We are facing dangerous men, Harold. This Logan kid has terrible friends in high places"

Harold had put together all Ham had said. It made a lot of sense, but he still believed David didn't deserve that much heat. "Ham, listen...." he pleaded in hopes of reasoning with the mayor but he was interrupted by an irritated Ham.

"Commissioner Ward, you have orders. I suggest you get to them" Ham replied coldly.

Ward moved backwards; he really had this one out of his hands. "Mr. Mayor?" he nodded in acknowledgement before exiting the office.

10:25 pm

David woke up in shock. He panted heavily terrified, he wondered what was going on and he got here. He realized his breath was hot shortly before it dawned on him that there was a thick sack cloth over his head.

He heard male voices whispering and some talking louder than others just around where he sat.

He was cuffed to the back of the wooden chair and jerked trying to gain freedom.

His restlessness alerted the men as one of them quickly yanked the sack cloth off his head. He was startled. Bright light blinded his sight for a couple of seconds.

Slowly, he was able to analyze what was in his surrounding with the florescent lights giving the place it's actual brightness.

There were about twelve men in the building. It was a warehouse. All the men looked directly at David which bothered him. They were dangerous in stature.

A man which obviously was their leader stood ahead of David and placed a can of water with a straw towards David's mouth which he hurriedly sipped till the bottle was empty.

David adjusted on his chair trying to find the right words to say. "Who are you. Why am I here?" he asked.

The man squatted to keep his face and David's on the same level "We saved your life, kid. The government...? They were one step from making you the criminal they want the world to see you as"

David winced. Was this supposed to be a joke? Did Billy and Jonathan pull this off and pay some terrifying looking men to prank him?

"Look, sir" David started politely "I don't know who you are or what you want with me, but I'm not going to be in your little circus shit or whatever this is"

The man chuckled.

A voice from behind spoke "Oh, you will be a part of this circus, David Logan. You just need to see things from the right perspective" David gaped into the darkness to see who had spoken.

Tony Birdleaf emerged from the darkness and tapped the man in front of David.

"You've done a great job, Eddie" Tony praised Edward Mojo as got back on his feet.

Edward turned to his henchmen "Time out, boys" he signaled them to give Birdleaf and David some alone time.

The group of men dispatched in different directions leaving David with Tony who sat on a chair opposite the former.

"What do you want from me? Why did you rescue me?" David inquired.

Tony smiled "So many questions. You'll get answers, kid" he replied ordering Edward to take the cuffs off David's hands.

David moaned touching both of his wrists. The cuff marks were vivid.

"Tell me about your parents, David. Remember, we are here to help you. We are allies, we want the same thing" Tony stated.

David scanned Birdleaf from head to toe. There was no way they would want the something "Which is...?"

"Liberation. We want to be recognized. Not being stepped on like trash. You have potentials and together we can bring order to this fallen Republic. We can save the city. The world is evolving and we are lagging behind"

"You are a billionaire with a lot of international connections, I hear you are now godfather of this city. What do you need a guy like me for? I'm just a regular guy from the west side"

Tony smiled. "But you aren't just an ordinary kid, David. You are a weapon. A weapon against oppression, and I will help you see it"

David wondered how Birdleaf was going to prove to him that he had a purpose but he was sure in for a treat. Besides where else did he have to go?

He heard footsteps of a man creeping up behind him. He knew it was Edward, he tried to turn to see what he was up to till he felt a painful prick in his neck.

Edward had injected him with a dose of something. He jerked. "The fuck did you just put in me?!" he groaned.

"It'll take you off the road for a while. Rest. We have a lot to handle, tomorrow and beyond" Tony explained.

David could feel his nerves weaken and his eyes dazzling. "Oh, shit" he said softly passing out.

NetCrate Bridge

10:22 pm

James parked his Malibu near the crime scene. He walked out of the car and hustled through the crowd of policemen and approached the spot where the ambush had happened.

He saw the bodies of the police guards carried into a coroner's van.

"Damn" he said in astonishment reaching the front line where the barricade tapes were placed.

He saw Ward near one of the wrecked police vehicles talking to other force personnel.

James refused to cross the barricade tapes he didn't want to get involved in this. He already had his hands full.

"Commissioner Ward!" he called out to Harold.

Harold turned around to see who it was. He was surprised to see James. "James?" he replied walking away from the others and joined James. They were only separated by the tape.

"I thought you took the day off?" Harold asked.

James nodded looking around. "Trouble never seems to end, does it?"

Harold failed to respond.

"I got the beep. Jessie and the Conrad kid are awake. Did you?" he asked Ward.

Harold nodded. It was obvious he was happy with the recovery update on the kids but also stressed with the current events. "Yes, I did. Unfortunately, I can't visit the hospital right now, James. This is serious" he sighed.

"Do you think it was Logan's old crew that bust him out?" Harold asked.

James shrugged. "I don't know, but whoever did this means business. If you can wield a deranged child, you are on your way to wreak havoc" James stated.

Those words struck Ward really hard "This is bad, James. This is karma" he lamented.

James took his time to observe Harold. He saw paranoia in the older man's face.

"Ward? Is there something you wanna tell me? I've got all night"

Ward grasped his chest, he needed to get out of this place. He turned to Lieutenant Sally Foster, an overweight man and a loyal police officer.

"Lieutenant Foster?" Ward called out to him.

Foster turned to him "Yes, Sir" he responded quickly and walked towards the two men.

"I'm putting you in charge of the cleanup. I've got some personal business to take care of. You try and get river patrol to locate that lifeboat" he instructed.

"Yes, sir. On it right away" Foster replied and ran off.

Ward turned to James. "Let's go have a beer, Jimmy" he suggested to James.

The two boarded James' Malibu and drove off the bridge back into downtown Craxton.

Craxton Central

10:37 pm

It had been over an hour since Billy woke up from coma. Jessie had also woken up, but only half an hour after Billy did.

Billy looked around his surrounding trying to figure out where he was. His sight was sharper than before. He could see bright blue particles float across the room and he didn't understand what it was. It was eye catchy but unusual.

Sometimes, these weird blue particles would disappear, sometimes they reappeared briefly. Billy began to feel he had a problem with his vision, but sincerely, it was the last of the energy symbiote he had acquired phasing with his body.

There were five people present in the room which included Lizzie, Aunt Maureen, Jonathan, Mrs. Aya who was a close neighbor and lastly a nurse who worked with Doctor Rudolph.

He could see Jonathan sitting beside him. Jonathan was excited and talked a lot but Billy could barely understand what he was saying.

At times, he could even hear the voices of a person loud and clear in the next room loud and clear, and other times, it was gone.

While Jonathan was busy having a discussion with Billy who had an oxygen mask around his face, the doctor spoke to Lizzie and the women in the room about Billy's speedy recovery.

"It's good to have you back, bro. I would have been here much earlier, but my grandad hasn't been any better" he explained.

Billy heard what his friend was saying and he wished he could reply.

Jonathan flinched hoping his best friend recognized him. "Don't worry, I heard Jessie woke up not too long ago. She's okay" he reported to Billy.

The next sound Billy could hear vividly was the reporter's voice on the TV in his room.

"Breaking news this evening" he began "Tension in Ringsville as Police Convoy transporting Bedbug robber David Logan gets ambushed" the male reporter read.

Jonathan jerked in shock turning around to face the TV. Billy also struggled to look at the screen. Everyone was watching.

"Though there are no proper footages of the ambush, our sources claim the gunmen were eight in number. They carried automatic rifles and heavy arsenals as they fired several rocket launchers at the convoy. Sadly, all twenty guards were brutally murdered in the assault leaving two civilians seriously wounded. The gunmen absconded with the young David Logan whose trial is scheduled to begin in the Column at dawn tomorrow. The rumors at this time claim the attack is either orchestrated by Logan's former accomplices or by ruthless anarchist, the Bigwig Lloyd Coulson who the citizens of Ringsville believe is hiding somewhere in the city. This is Cole Higgins reporting live from NetCrate Bridge, Ringsville. Stay tuned for more news" the reporter concluded as the news transited towards a different topic.

Jonathan who had his mouth wide open all this time turned around in shock looking Billy in the eye. "What the fuck?!" he said terrified, his brain was yet to process what he had just watched.

Billy was also confused and disturbed by the news, but he could only have those feelings as his mask prevented him from talking.

The Holy Trinity Sanctuary,

Leafonia

11:08 pm

Harold Ward and James Hallway approached the entrance of the church building.

James observed the area, he wondered why Harold would bring him to a church "What are we doing here, Ward?" he asked.

Harold sighed "You want to know the truth, right?"

James was not sure if he was supposed to answer that question.

"The truth is behind these doors" Harold pointed at the church doors.

"Should we knock?" James asked.

"It's the house of God, James. Do you knock before you proceed into your parent's house?" Harold asked sarcastically.

James shrugged. "So much for religion" he replied.

Harold remembered James was an atheist.

He pushed the doors wide open and they both walked into an empty hall.

"What now?" James asked losing his patience.

Harold proceeded down the aisle with James following behind. He hated to be around or within religious sites.

"There's no one here. Let's get the heck out" he whispered.

"Sorry. The church is closed for now"

They heard a male voice speak softly from a hallway.

They waited until a middle-aged man walked out. He held a mop in his hands. He also donned glasses and when he noticed he knew the man who stood ahead amongst the pair, he took off the glasses in shock. "Harold?" he said as he dropped the mop and walked over to Ward who had been smiling. They hugged for a long time.

James had no idea what was going on.

The strange man unclasped himself from Harold as he glanced at James.

"Detective Halloway?" he acknowledged.

James nodded. "Hello" he replied in a bizarre manner.

The man turned to Harold. "What brings you here, old friend?"

"I'm here to clear my conscience, there's someone here who needs to hear the truth" Harold replied.

The man swallowed. James could read the fear all over this strange man.

Harold turned to James. "James, this is Reverend Ferdinand Park. He was a former sergeant in the police force"

James smiled surprised "Oh, that's something you don't see everyday" he taunted.



10 minutes later.

James and Ward sat on chairs placed in a circle. Reverend Park had gone to get them some soda.

"Look, Ward, we don't have time for an old pal reunion. We have bigger problems to deal with" James complained feeling uncomfortable.

"Relax, Jimmy. You've been asking me why I've been acting strange. Well, here's your ticket to finding out" he replied.

James quailed finding Ward's statement unusual and absurd.

Reverend Park arrived with two can sodas. He handed the soft drinks to his visitors and joined them in the circle.

"So, what have you come to clear your conscience about?" Park asked.

Harold was mute for a while before facing Park. "Have you ever wondered if God is punishing you for all the wrong things you've done?" he asked Park.

Park chuckled then mumbled.

James sipped a little out of his soda. "What's going on, guys? Help a man out here" he pleaded; he was in distress.

"Tell him" Ward instructed to Park.

Park exhaled "It had been a couple of years since Kord's rebellion concluded" Park began. "I had just been promoted from trooper to Sergeant by the late Commissioner Adams. I was the happiest man at the time knowing I was higher than the men who despised me and called me a failure. At the time, Harold was Captain and I was placed under his command. During these years I believed to be a period of rebuilding, rumors began to fly that some secrets relating to Kord's rebellion were in the hands of several individuals. They stated that these files could prove the existence of the Red people Kord was trying to flush out of the city's political system"

James listened to Park's story attentively.

"I was assigned to retrieve one of *these* witnesses who held this sacred information into witness protection" Park paused for seconds before continuing his story. "The night before I went for the mission, I was called via landline by a man with a mysterious voice. He called himself *The Blue Doctor*. He threatened me, he told me I had to kill the witness and burn every form of evidence he had in his possession"

James adjusted on his chair; Park's story was getting spicier. "What were his reasons?" he asked.

Park was shaking, it was obvious the story still disturbed him. "I don't know. He was probably one of the Red people, I guess" Park replied.

"He threatened to kill everyone I ever cared about. The man really gave me the creeps, Halloway. He mentioned every single one of their names and where they resided. This man gave me the daily routine of my little cousin Mickie who resides in Cuba. He promised to kill everyone I cared about. You know at first, I thought it was a bluff. I literally cut the call on him, then thirty minutes later, he phoned back and made me check on my cousin, Mickie. Mickie told me his close friend and fellow worker had just choked on his lunch at work. The poison was intended for Mickie but this *Blue Doctor* wanted to send me a message" Park shivered "Whoever this blue doctor was, he was dangerous and he wanted me to know what he was capable of"

"Some hours later, he called me again. This time, he promised to kill everyone I knew simultaneously unless I finished his assignment"

James sighed dropping his soda. "So, let me guess, you killed the witness?" he asked.

Park bowed his head. "Before I became a police officer, I swore to my family and the law that I'd be a good and honest cop as much as I could be. The blue doctor proved to me that I was wrong. That I could break my oath and become a dirty cop overnight and kill the innocent so that mine could live. I had no choice, Halloway" he continued his narration.

"I eventually went to the library where the witness worked. He was terrified but felt relieved when he saw me. He told me he would share everything he knew about the Red people if I promised him and his son protection. I acted like I was there to help but I broke my oath, I killed him and burnt down the library. Made it look like someone else had gotten to him before me"

James was overwhelmed.

"A lot of people didn't believe it was the work of the so-called Red people. I was written out as a deranged maniac, the whole RVPD wanted my head but Ward came to my rescue. In court, he brought proof convincing the jury that someone had indeed gotten to the witness before I did, it wasn't my licensed gun anyway"

James turned to Harold in shock. "You knew, didn't you?" he asked disappointed.

"Mayor Rory Harris was a very disturbing man. He wanted to protect the legacy of all force men till he retired. He made sure every governmental body under his tenure were tagged as heroes by the masses. He gave me the job to clear any proof that Park was the killer. My partner Quaid Woodslake further convinced me to do it" Ward explained.

James rested on his chair. "And everyone thought you were the good guys. Men who wanted to bring balance to Black County State. Everything was a lie" he said, he set his gaze upon Park. "Honestly speaking, I can't blame you for what you did. Family is everything, but that was your ticket to proving a massive conspiracy. Kord might have really been nuts, yes. Did he go too far by forcefully recruiting teenagers? Yeah, I would know because I narrowly escaped abduction myself. He went too far with his army of lunatics killing people all in the name of redemption. But what if he was right? What if there were really Red people or whatever they are called? What if these guys were worse than him?"

Park sighed heavily. "I made a terrible mistake, kid. I've lived with that pain and guilt all my life. I went through mental facilities. They tagged me crazy. When I was out, I chose to give my life to Christ. I felt my life was a testimony and I began seeing things from a whole new perspective. Since then, this building has been a beacon for hope and salvation. A place to reconnect with our Heavenly Father" he explained.

James scoffed. He still didn't know how this story helped their case. "So how does all this confession help?" he asked.

Ward rubbed his face; he was exhausted and tired. Most of all, he was scared. "James" he started "the witness was Dominic Logan"

James was beyond overwhelmed; the day couldn't possibly get stranger. "Logan? Like.... David Logan's...?" he asked.

Ward nodded "Yes"

"Why do you think I never visited the kid while he was in detention? My conscience couldn't carry it. Walking into that room and acting like I never knew him. Like I didn't know I contributed to the fact that he chose this path of destruction. He is a psychopath of our own creation"

James stood up trying to add up his theories. "Could it be this so-called Blue Doctor was the one who burst out the kid?"

Park disagreed "So you kill the father and wait seventeen years for the son to grow up to be a junkie and do what break him out when he becomes a target of the government?" he asked rhetorically "That doesn't make much sense. I mean you go through all that stress for what? What's your endgame?"

Ward also stood up sipping the last of the soda. "If it is him, this was a very masterful plan. I'll give him that. He watched the boy become rogue. He could probably tell him what the RVPD had done concerning his deceased father. He could start a rampage"

"He's just one kid, Harold. He's harmless" James clarified.

"Yeah, he's one kid who had an army of skilled mercenaries break him out of police custody. Open your eyes, James. Look at the bigger picture" Ward countered.

James could tell his mentor was simply paranoid and was now cooking up dark conspiracy theories to fill up his appetite.

Park intervened trying his best to calm the two men. "Hey, guys. Don't just start cooking up absurd theories. Come on, this isn't CSI or some crime TV show. Get it together" he said.

"Thanks for your time, Park. God bless you" Ward appreciated the man of God and shook hands with him.

"I hope your God has forgiven you" James taunted bluntly when he exited the church building with Ward. The pair boarded the Malibu.

Ward snubbed James and sat in the car like he was deaf

"So now I'm the guy who has earned the silent treatment?" he asked.

Ward scoffed "I know you think I'm a bastard, Jimmy. That I am just like the rest of 'em" he said. "I don't blame you. There was a time when I was like you. Young and bright, and goddamn tough. You'll grow older in this line of work and you'll learn to compromise. It doesn't mean I'm a bad person. I had to do what I did. I defended a policeman under my wing. The shame was all of ours to bear. I knew he was innocent. He had no choice"

James couldn't care less "Look, Harold. I don't give a shit, Okay? I don't even want to think about it right now. So, if you don't mind, let's just get the heck out of here, okay?" he responded coldly. He kicked the car back to life and sped off.

CRAXTON

11:34 pm

In the basement of a Catholic Church, the Comrades gathered again handling matters concerning the criminal underworld.

"I'd greatly suggest renting a new container ship, *the Vulgaria* seems to be a great target of the River Patrol. The ship has been ransacked four times in two weeks, Artem. I can no longer take such risks" Alex Sullivan reported before the table.

He was in charge of one of the biggest ships used in smuggling arms in and out of the city through the Sharktown ports.

Sullivan was very cautious about protecting his reputation. To the outside world, he was a Christian fanatic. He was a very religious entity and a well-recognized philanthropist. He gave charity donations to schools, churches and other gatherings that needed it. But within the table, he was very cunning and ruthless. He reasoned with Artem Endario's ideas more than any other member of the Comrades.

Derek Lander always called him a weakling. Anyone who saw things from Artem's perspective was his enemy.

Sullivan was known by the others for being extra careful when he imported his heavy arsenals into the city. He usually would hire the Container ship '*the Vulgaria*' as his vessel for bringing in dead animals used for meat. Those carcasses actually contained proofed arms.

No one's mind would ever go to tearing up the belly of a dead creature to check what it contained. But he no longer liked the way the Ringsville River Patrol ransacked the vessel from top to bottom when it was about anchoring at the Sharktown bay. Falcon Hussein and Derek Lander smuggled arms the same way through the Opera Harbor but Sullivan was way more meticulous.

Artem was about speaking before Derek burst into a long awkward laughter. It was awkward because he was the only who seemed to be amused. Everyone turned towards him.

"Oh, I'm sorry, my fellow comrades. Do continue" he pleaded smirking.

Artem cleared his throat "What in God's good name is so funny Lander?" he asked placing his arms on the table.

Derek adjusted on his seat. He shrugged.

"What are you worried about Alex?" he asked ignoring Endario. "I mean.... You are wise guy to run a dual business, beef and weapons. What makes you think the patrol will ever find out one of Ringsville's most influential persons is a megaton arms trafficker?"

It took sometime before the silence that followed Derek's speech dissipated. Artem again was about speaking before a voice from the hallway darkness laughed aloud.

Everyone turned towards the dark lobby wondering who would have the guts to laugh. They would assume it was one of the guards who might have found Derek amusing but the voice got louder and the figure approached the larger room where the meeting was being held.

The figure eventually emerged and the table containing six men were looking at what would seem as the last man they'd ever believe would be in their presence.

"Hello, all you entitled Ringsville cocksuckers" Lloyd let out a smug smile. He donned a black and very attractive three-piece cross breasted suit. Everyone except Artem were pretty shocked and somewhat terrified by his sudden presence.

He chuckled looking at what he wore. "I know, right? It's magnificent. I got it from a shop in Montana Lane. It cost thirty thousand dollars. Unfortunately, I beat the living hell out of the vendor's ass and took the suit since I'm not very liquid right now. Truth is, I've never been. The Bigwig of this city doesn't need money to do shit"

Artem analyzed the suit. "Are you sure your story is all accurate? You want to tell me you beat up a clothe vendor and stole a suit worth thirty G's?" he asked unconvinced.

Lloyd pointed at Artem. "Attaboy" he replied moving closer to the table. Lander was the most terrified, he was one of the mobsters who testified against Coulson in court to save his own ass.

"What are you doing here, Coulson. Shouldn't you be dead or something?" Thomas Rico asked confused.

Lloyd quickly whisked a chair and sat near Rico. "You know I always had a soft spot for Hispanics, right? They are not only beautiful but they know how to make every second count" he replied snatching Rico's apple as he took a bite. "Hell rejected me, Tommy. How did *Mark Twain* say it again?"

Artem clicked his fingers "You go to heaven for the climate, and hell for the company" he replied smiling.

"That's right, Endario" he applauded "And there goes the Italian in the room. Wow, everyone's a scholar tonight. That's lovely, I'm aroused" he remarked tauntingly. "I heard the Comrades were a boring clan of disease infecting pigs, but I guess I was wrong" he chuckled taking another bite at the apple he had taken from Rico's possession. "I'm not interested in the climate or the company. I have a city to run and I guess that's why I'm still here.... with the living" he sniffled "Back to your genius question, Tommy. I myself can't really decipher how the hell I got out of Acropolis. God rest the souls of those we lost" he scoffed as he glanced at the apple. "This is one sweet fruit, guys. I never knew how tasty apples were until right now" he added. He scanned the men in the room looking for a particular figure.

He winced. "Where's Delgado? Where's that swine?" he asked.

Artem smiled. He seemed the most relaxed. "Delgado sadly passed over a month ago, Coulson. He is no longer head of the Comrades" he answered.

Lloyd cursed in disappointment. "Fucking hell... I prepared a really amazing dagger just for him. He was on my blacklist" he explained.

Delgado was one of the people Lloyd considered a ruthless bastard. He had always promised himself he'd end the man once he broke out of jail.

No one seemed to understand what was going on. The city's most notorious criminal was in their hideout interrupting their meeting.

"How did you know about this place anyway?" Falcon Hussein questioned him.

"Coulson knows all. Coulson hears all. Coulson sees all. I can tell you what brand of boxers you putting on right now. I was there when you showered this morning, and I thought to myself: those are a very fine set of eggs you got dangling between your legs" he laughed. "Too far?" he realized Hussein wasn't smiling. "I am so sorry, okay? God, you are so sensitive, fuck!" he rolled his eyes. He turned his focus towards Lander who had been trying to hide his fear.

"Derek Lander. The king of rats. It's so good to see that face of yours. How's the hustle?" he smirked.

Hussein cleared his throat standing up. "Can someone please tell me what the heck is going on?" he asked. "Why is he here?"

Artem adjusted on his chair. "I called him here, Hussein. You can save yourself the trouble and sit down"

Hussein hesitated before sitting. "You are working with Lloyd Coulson?" he asked not sure he even knew anyone in the room anymore.

Artem clicked his fingers. "The world is evolving, Hussein. It is about time we evolve too. The enemy is not the police. It's not the government or your fellow Narcotics rivals" he started. "The enemy is a virus. It's been in this city longer than you can imagine. Long before Kord's brutal rebellion. That virus has been spreading, slowly corrupting the mind of the next generation with one goal; destroy and conquer. This is the new world order and it doesn't favor any of us. Lloyd Coulson is not the enemy. He is not a friend and he isn't your ally. He's the cure. That is why we must put our differences aside, come together and defeat the enemy. A war is coming, my friends. And if we hope to scale through it, you had better be ready to do what it takes to survive it. Ruling now won't save you when it comes" he concluded.

Sullivan sighed. "Who then is the enemy, Endario. What are we fighting?" he asked.

"The Red Covenant" Lloyd quickly chipped in grinning.

"What is the Red Covenant?" Derek Lander inquired confused.

Lloyd immediately slammed his hands on the table alarming everyone. He turned to face Derek. "I don't want another word from that mouth of yours, Lander. Not until I walk out through that door" he threatened. That was the Bigwig Derek remembered.

Derek froze in terror. Everyone could tell the mobster with all his power was in fact intimidated and frightened at Coulson's presence.

"The Red Covenant is a secret organization created to...." Artem started just as Lloyd cut him short.

"Don't forget the word 'occult'. It is an occult organization" Lloyd objected.

Artem wondered why that was so important "I have heard you, Coulson" he turned to the Comrades. "The Red Covenant is a secret sinister and occult organization run by a group of shadowy individuals known as the Red people"

Hussein chuckled finding Artem's speech ludicrous "Artem, are you telling us that you still hold on to the rumors that the Red people Kord were trying to fight were real?" he asked.

Artem gave him a subtle but disturbing look. "Yes, Falcon. That is exactly what I'm trying to say"

"These Red people have one single goal" Lloyd took over from Endario. "And that goal is to find a mystical interdimensional world some scientists called Eden. Actually, Neville Kent was the first to call it Eden and what a ridiculous name that is. These people tend to find this world and milk every mineral source they can get their hands on. It's what they've been building towards in the last thirty years. These psychos plan to use this power to recreate our world, make it a new world where they'll be all powerful, they'll annihilate every resisting force on our world, starting with the kingpins of this city. That's you and you, and you and you" he explained pointing at the comrades one by one and intentionally skipping Derek Lander.

"Isn't that what you want?" Barney Caine asked Lloyd. "Conquer. Annihilate. Destroy. Isn't that your sole purpose, Lloyd Coulson? That's all you are just like the man who raised you. If this Red Covenant is real, you could be the ring leader for all we know" he countered.

"Speak for yourself, Barney" Sullivan antagonized. He faced Artem. "How do we know who these Red People are?" he asked.

Artem smiled. "You don't. No one can really tell; you could be one of them. Anyone could be one of them. We have the balls to tell you this because we know you are no threat to us or the Red Covenant. The Comrades are a farce, it was Delgado's side project. A simple hobby"

Lloyd stood up feeling satisfied. "This war cannot be avoided, gentlemen. If you want to stay on top you've got to stay on our side. That's the only way you are useful. You don't need to know much for now. Just be the pawns as you've been designated to be" he concluded arraigning his coat. He smiled at Artem "See you around, old timer" he twitted drifting out of the room like a phantasm.

The place was cold and quiet before Derek spoke.

"You all have got to be kidding me!" he began quite vexed. "That was Ringsville's most wanted criminal. He's messing with your heads. You all are really going to fall for that crap?!" he yelled in bewilderment.

Artem cleared his throat "Sit your ass down, Lander" He ordered calmly.

"I'm doing no such thing!" he replied sternly.

"There are no Red people. Kord was just a mad man who went on a killing spree. Lloyd was his abducted son for crying out loud. He clearly called us pawns. Are you all that daft?" he protested.

Sullivan chuckled "Just admit it, Lander. You are only paranoid. I know it's okay to be scared because you publicly testified against him. You called him a vicious lunatic and an entitled retard. I get it. But let us come together as a group that we are and investigate for ourselves. Maybe we thought we ran this city's underworld. It's beginning to be crystal clear that we were wrong"

Derek panted. He was so rage full he could have shot Sullivan or Artem right now if he had a gun at hand.

As long as Lloyd Coulson was involved and he had joined forces with Endario, there was no way he could possibly fall for their presumed games. He was going to get to the bottom of this.

His suspicions concerning Artem were now confirmed. The old man wasn't here to help them grow; he was here to separate and destroy them and he now wielded a powerful human bomb, Lloyd Coulson. What pained him most was that the others were too blind to see it.

Artem was pleased. Everything seemed to be just falling in place. This was it.

The end had begun. It was either he brought them down or they brought him down.

Either way, he was ready for the struggle.

EPISODE IX: A TIME TO BE FULLY 'HUMAN'

"IF THERE IS TO BE ANY PEACE, IT WILL COME THROUGH BEING, NOT HAVING."

-HENRY MILLER

Craxton Central,

CRAXTON

12:16 pm

The rate at which Billy and Jessie recovered really amazed everyone, from the medical personnel down to their family members and friends.

By eight the following morning, Billy was breathing fine and he could feel his legs and feet unlike the previous day. He wanted to see Jessie but the doctors told him it wasn't time yet but she was also undergoing a speedy recovery.

"They said there was a virus inside you. Something out of the ordinary" Jonathan taunted hoping to scare Billy who was resting on his hospital bed.

"That's a lie, Jon" Lizzie antagonized. "It wasn't a virus. It was... an energy symbiosis. The doctors couldn't tell what it was, but it is doing a great job in your cells. They might want to run some tests on you later on"

"No kidding" he scoffed overwhelmed. He remembered something strange and bright had burst into him while the vehicle tumbled down the hill. His head must have really hurt at the time and maybe he was seeing things. Probably it never happened.

All he wanted right now was to see Jessica and tell her everything would be alright. Where did his assurances get any of them? His thoughts were however interrupted by Harold Ward who proceeded into the private room.

Billy was startled seeing Ward. He didn't know why he was scared. Yeah, maybe it was because he almost killed his only daughter in a fatal car crash.

"Mr. Ward" Billy acknowledged adjusting on the hospital bed.

Jon stood from the bedside giving the commissioner and his best friend enough room.

Ward smiled sitting on the bed just beside Billy.

Billy's brain went blank. Ward's presence had shaken him so much he was too scared to utter a word.

"I'm really sorry about all that happened during the night of the storm" he started mumbling "I should have asked for your permission before taking..... " he said before Ward waved his hand over his face to cut him off.

"It's okay, kid. No one blames you for what happened. I know you are a good kid. You just wanted to take Jessica out and have fun. There's no crime in having fun. We all just have to be careful next time, alright?" Harold stated.

His statement relieved Billy a lot.

The elderly man rubbed Billy's hair affectionately getting up from the bed "Get better. The doctors say it's a miracle either of you survived the ordeal. Thank God for that" he added. Billy nodded humbly.

"Good talk, son. They said you and Jessie are going to be out in a couple of hours or a day at most" he reported.

Billy chuckled "Sounds like good news, sir"

"Attaboy" Ward replied, he acknowledged Maureen who had been sitting at a corner reading a news bulletin but had eavesdropping on their little chat and walked out.

City Lab

12:39 pm

Agents Idris Delcoy, Rick O'Neal, Ian Larson, and Rebecca Luna walked into the large science research facility.

They took the elevator to the sixth floor where Doctor Polaris' massive work fraction was located.

The four RCF agents proceeded into the long bombproof glass hallway. Both sides of the walkway were walls of glass displaying offices and laboratories on both sides.

They arrived at what would be Polaris' office and lab. It was easy to figure because the door leading to the office had Polaris' name as a space tag.

"This is it" Rick stated trying to open the door, but it was locked.

Larson cursed in frustration. "It needs an access card, you dummy" he said pointing at the card slot attached to the door.

"My bad" Rick replied with an embarrassing smile.

A tall man in a lab coat approached them. "Can I help you, gentlemen.... and lady?" he asked wondering why four individuals dressed in simple day-to-day outfits were trying to gain access into Polaris' office.

Idris looked at the scientist "Yeah, pal. Bet you can" he responded.

"We are RCF Agents"

The scientist looked at them suspiciously. Anyone could come into City Lab these days and claim to be whoever they deemed fit "Can I see some ID please?" he requested politely.

Idris nodded. "Sure" he dipped his hands in his back pocket and brought out his RCF ID card handing it to the curious scientist.

The man took his time observing what was in his hands.

"Doesn't look too legit. But what the heck do you want?" he asked returning Idris' outdated card to him.

"We are here to get information concerning the disappearance of Doctor Sactor Polaris. Do you mind telling us what happened?" Becca inquired.

The scientist scoffed. Finally, someone thought it was about time to remember that mystery man. "No one knows who Doctor Polaris is, guys. He's been working here for more than fifteen years but none of us really knew anything about him. He spent most of his time in his office. To be honest, I thought he was pretty nuts" the scientist explained to the agents.

Rick winced "Aren't you all?"

Idris turned to Ian. "There's gotta be some way to figure this out"

Ian nodded. "Can we see your surveillance footage?" he asked the scientist.

The man nodded. "Sure, fellas. This way" he replied leading the way down the glass hallway. "I'm Elli Clive by the way" he introduced himself as they were walked on. The agents were swift to return his acknowledgment.

The five of them proceeded into the large but dark room. There were three camera operators in the room.

"Good day, boys. We've got a little bit of a request. These RCF Agents would love to have a peep at our security footage" Elli instructed.

The men were silent. They were probably surprised.

"Sure thing, sir" the first one who seemed to be in charge answered. He felt it was out of protocol for government officials running through their property without a search warrant. He felt violated beginning to accept the fact that City Lab was too vulnerable of an establishment.

He clicked severally on his keyboard as the monitor screen changed from one picture to another. He yawned. "Okay, what are we looking for?"

The scientist cleared his throat. "Roll back to March 27th. I believe it was the last day Polaris was seen at work" the scientist clarified.

The operator wiped his eyes as he worked on his computer. It was over a minute before he arrived at the said date. "Here we are. March 27th" he reported.

The team of agents watched Polaris in his office. They could see the middle-aged doctor finish up his work and leave at the official closing time. They also saw him exit the building premises and that was the last of it.

Ian was not satisfied "I don't know about you guys, but there's something wrong about that clip"

"What is?" Elli asked curiously.

"I think it's kind of weird the way he left. Besides doesn't he work late nights?" Ian inquired.

The scientist nodded "Yes. Most nights"

Idris chuckled. "I agree with you, Larson. It is weird how he left. It felt kinda unusual. Like he was prepared for what was coming next"

Ian nodded. "Exactly. Maybe he planned his own disappearance"

Elli laughed with the agents looking at him.

"Something funny?" Idris asked.

"Polaris was a brilliant doctor, no doubt. He had no friends, but why would he ghost just like that? He loved his work. He enjoyed City Lab" Elli explained.

"Maybe he might have done it to get attention" Rebecca suggested.

Elli looked at her and rolled his eyes in frustration. "Polaris is working towards a Nobel Prize Award, gentlemen. What other form of attention could he possibly need?"

Rick licked his lips trying to fix in the puzzles. "Aren't there stationed cameras outside the lab compound?" he asked the scientist.

"No. No cameras for another three clicks" Elli answered.

"That's enough room for a lot to happen" Idris noted.

"But....." Elli stammered as everyone returned their attention towards him. "Two days after Polaris went missing a group of men broke into his lab. We tried to stop them but they were sent by the government. They confiscated most of his files and equipment and left. We thought maybe they were Feds or so.... but they took most of his work"

"If they were the FBI, they had no right to arrest or detain any high-profile individual in this city without consulting the RCF first, or the RVPD" Becca clarified.

"Do you have the footage though?" Idris asked Elli.

"Yes, we do. That isn't all by the way"

"There's more?" Ian asked.

"Yeah" Elli nodded.

"Shoot"

"Before these men arrived, a fellow colleague proceeded into Polaris' office and copied something from his monitor before leaving" he narrated.

Rick folded his arms. "And let me get this straight. You guys, in fact no one in particular bothered interrogating him concerning what he did, right?" he asked Elli.

Elli sighed "It was a female colleague and no, we didn't bother asking her because we believed they were working together"

Rick scoffed "You believed they were working together?" he asked disappointed "All you bloody geniuses. Just a bunch of fuckers" he cursed.

Idris faced the operator. "Please play us the whole footage from March 29th"

"Yes, sir" the operator replied carefreely with a long depressing sigh.

"Here we go" he announced once he had found the said date.

The team and Elli watched the footage from Polaris' office. A few minutes to twelve noon they saw a female colleague proceed into the office. She searched around the large room for some time before accessing one of his computers. When it looked like she got what she wanted, she copied everything into a drive and walked out. Almost an hour later, a group of deadly-looking men forced an entry into the same office and confiscated all his equipment. It took them more than an hour to move everything important out of the building.

Rick was pissed. "And you have security in this facility. What are you guys paying them for, for crying out loud?" he asked frustrated.

"Look, they claimed to be from the government, okay? Besides we are just a joint-owned lab, not Area 51" he protested.

Becca observed the footage closely. "Wait a minute. I know that guy" she pointed at the man on the screen who happened to be the leader of the men believed to be government officials.

"Who?" Idris asked looking too.

"That's Edward Mojo" she said. "He's a war veteran. He owns a lot of local businesses in FishPlain and Leafonia. I know he is a trusted associate of Billionaire investor Anthony Birdleaf and he's far from what you'd consider a nice guy"

Rick kissed her on the cheek. "You are a genius, Luna. A fuckin' genius" he praised.

She unclasped herself from his embrace irritated by his flirtation. "If I could remember vividly, you called geniuses a bunch of losers" she countered.

He laughed feeling embarrassed. "You, my dear are in every way higher than a regular genius. You are a....."

"Will you shut the hell up, O'Neal?" Ian replied. He faced Elli. "What about the girl? What's her name?" he asked.

"She's Christine Walters. A medical doctor specialized in cardiology. She's helped this establishment in a lot of legal issues and otherwise" Elli explained.

"So, she's an asset. That's why asking her why she broke into an office of a missing scientist was so difficult for you guys to do?" Rick asked mockingly.

Idris cleared his throat to get the attention of his squad. "Alright, boys. We've got ourselves a busy day. To buy time, here's the deal. Me and Larson will go over and find Mojo and interrogate him, while you and Luna find Walters and do same" he ordered.

Rick nodded "Cool, cool" he turned to Rebecca "Agent Luna, it would seem we've got ourselves a date"

Rebecca chuckled refusing to take Rick seriously. "Get outta here, sicko" she teased.

Ian faced Elli. "Thanks for your cooperation, Doctor Clive. You've been of great help"

Elli smiled "Anything for patriotism, right?" he replied with a broad smile.

"That's right" Idris smiled back.

HennyKane Island

1:57 pm

Denver woke up suddenly on a sofa. He looked at his surroundings, he was in a small parlor. He remembered vividly that he left his room and went to have a drink in the bar.

He wondered why he had even done that. The liquor must have been what threw him off balance and got him on the sofa.

He looked beside the sofa and there was the bottle, the rest the alcohol he had failed to consume had poured all over the rug.

"Fuck" he cursed frustrated. Was he having a hangover or as the illness doing overtime? He was living his last days battling with a rare type of blood disease and here he was still drinking to a stupor. What a waste.

"Denver?" he heard a feminine voice call him from a passage. He knew that voice. He turned his head to see who it was. Christine Walters walked into the room.

"Christine" he replied softly. He was so exhausted that he found it hard to smile.

She looked all over the room and was disappointed at how Denver was living. She rushed to him and raised him up placing his back on the sofa.

"You should be at work" he said, his eyes still dazzling from the alcohol.

"How can I possibly be at work when I'm trying to get you help, Denver? I told you not to lose hope" she said.

He managed to chuckle. "Don't you think we are way past hope?" he asked looking into her eyes.

She did the same failing to reply. She sat near him. "We are going to find this place, Denver. I promise you. You aren't going to die" she said with much confidence.

Denver knew how ridiculous that sounded. At least if Christine's face was the last thing, he ever saw he would be satisfied. He had totally put Ethan Gibson's card away. He found it a waste of time.

He was ready to accept his fate. Every man would die someday. His was here.

"I was thinking, maybe we could go out for lunch" she suggested with a persuasive smile.

He said nothing. He sighed looking away. "I found something" he said quickly changing the topic.

She winced eager to hear what he had to say. "What did you find?" She inquired.

Denver bent his head not knowing exactly how he'd explain his rather bizarre discovery. He eventually raised his head and looked at Christine.

"What do you know about the tree in the pavilion?" He asked.

She opened her mouth unable to utter words. It was probably the last thing she expected him to talk about. "The Seeds of Golden Hades?" She further asked to be sure of Denver's question.

He nodded.

"Well, you told me they were just weird plants that had been on your family grounds for over ten generations" she replied.

Denver clicked his fingers. "Yes. Exactly. Why, Christine? Why isn't this tree found in other places?"

She paused trying to get what he was driving at. "Why?" She repeated.

Denver nodded. "Yeah" he answered almost immediately "Because we might have been seeing things from a much more battered perspective"

Christine kept starrng "Your point?"

"When we were much younger..." he began making himself more comfortable on the sofa. "My father used to tell us legends about the seeds of the Golden Hades. How our forefather, HennyKane himself had planted the seeds in the pavilion. He'd say the tree was from another world."

He paused waiting to see the reaction on Christine's face but it wasn't a funny or surprised one. He had lost her somewhere.

"This isn't funny, Denver. You told me your dad was just messing around and those stories were just mere fairy tales" she countered.

Denver placed a hand on her shoulder. "I know I said that, but what if I was wrong? HennyKane helped his people fight back creatures from a world sharing a gateway with this city. That's where the seeds of Golden Hades come from. Those leaves are from another world, that's why they never wither. It's an unusual tree, Christine. Whatever it is.... It doesn't obey the laws of nature here"

Christine scoffed "So your point is, the mysterious tree on your building grounds is from Eden?" She asked.

Denver nodded "That's exactly what I'm try to say"

Christine shook her head not being able to process what she had just heard. "This is bonkers. You've got to be joking" she stated. "HennyKane's stories as you claimed dealt with fighting creatures from an unknown world"

Denver realized Christine wasn't getting the message, but then again, who would? He looked deep into her eyes. "How about I let you take a leaf?" He suggested.

Christine went mute. No HennyKane ever let anyone pluck a leaf from the seeds of Golden Hades nonetheless take one home. "Are you being serious?" She laughed in bewilderment.

"Deadass serious. If this tree indeed comes from Eden, it could have some source of energy that can heal my disease. We might have turned a blind eye to the solution the whole time" he said.

Speaking of disease, Christine could see how Denver's health had deteriorated. His eye sacks had become very noticeable. He was growing pale day by day and his veins were visible. Christine felt goosebumps run all over her skin as she patted him softly.

"It's going to be alright, Denver"

Denver bent his head. He was tired of people treating him like a child. "It's always going to be alright" He looked at her. "Don't sweat it" he smiled finding some strength to stand up from the cozy sofa.

Denver walked her through the foyer to the door. "When last did you stop by the tower?" She asked.

He scratched his hair "A month and a week, I guess. I've been too busy surviving than thinking about my family's business"

She laughed. "Well, that's something. I'm pretty sure they've got things under control"

Denver nodded. "Yeah. You know, you should come work for me. We have better resources than City Lab would ever have and you'd make a really good CEO"

"That should be the seven hundredth time you are trying to win me over. I love working at City Lab, Denver. No conditions, no workovers. Just you and your fuckin' project"

Denver bit his lower lip trying to flirt. "You are weirder every time I see you"

Christine made a sad face. "Aww, Denver. That's so sweet" she teased.

They both laughed. "I'll get into this leaf once I'm settled" she said after she had taken one leaf from the pavilion.

"Sure thing. And make sure no one knows about it. Curious folks would want to know what you have. Now, that's gonna be a problem"

Christine nodded immediately. "I'll do my best"

Denver opened the door for her and on the porch were two individuals on casual outfits. Denver could tell they were definitely government officials.

"Mr. HennyKane? Doctor Walters?" Rick O'Neal acknowledged stretching his right hand forward for a handshake. "I'm Agent Rick O'Neal and this is my partner, Agent Rebecca Luna. We are from the Ringsville Crime Federation Department"

Denver took the handshake. "Can I see some ID?" He requested.

Rick tossed out his RCFD Card and pointed it straight at Denver and Christine's faces. They both could see it was authentic.

"How can we help you?" Denver asked.

Rick cleared his throat before speaking. "Well, we are actually here for Doctor Walters. Sorry, we had to come to your island and disrupt your moment"

Christine was concerned wondering why RCF agents would be looking for her. "It's okay. I was about leaving. How.... how did you know I was here?"

"We stopped by your home, your plumber mentioned you were out to see some rich dude. We figured it'd be here. Considering you both are good friends" Becca answered.

"That's about right" Denver replied sarcastically.

"Well, am I in any trouble?" She asked glancing severally at the two agents.

Rick waved his head from side to side. "Uh, no. You aren't. We just have a few questions to ask you is all. It's about your colleague who's been missing, Doctor Sactor Polaris"

Christine swallowed "It's about time the force took it seriously"

Rick grinned. "Do you mind if we sit down somewhere?" He asked politely.

Denver nodded. "Sure thing. Come on in. I'll get the maid to get you something to drink" He replied giving the two agents more room into the mansion.

"Oh, that'll be lovely" Rick replied.

Cho Avenue,

FishPlain

1:49pm

Ian and Idris strolled through a busy street as they approached a Chinese Restaurant belonging to Edward Mojo.

"You like Chinese food?" Idris asked Ian as they walked.

Ian scoffed. "*Like* wouldn't be the word, you know?" he replied.

"I spent three years of college sharing a bunk bed with a Japanese foodie. He was like four of me. You couldn't possibly not like Asian food if you had to deal with him. I'm a big fan of Asian food at the moment" Idris explained.

Ian gave him a glance "Hey, focus. We aren't here for a meal"

Idris looked back at his partner. "Why can't we do both?"

"It'll be like breaking protocol"

"Fuck protocol!" Idris countered tauntingly.

Ian stopped him just by the restaurant doors. "If we lose our cool, it'll be us they'll be fucking, not protocol. Do you understand me? I know Owens made you head of Silverwing but you haven't been in this city for years. These guys find one thing wrong about you; they'll kill you dead"

"I don't think you should be worried about me, Larson. You are the hot-tempered one. It's you we should be worried about" Idris said sternly. They proceeded into the large hall full of hungry customers. Both men could tell it was a restaurant with very high personalities. Most people looked at them when they walked in. The agents stood still felling like they had walked into their own waterloo.

"Why are they looking at us like that?" Idris asked in a whispering voice.

"I could ask you the same thing" Ian replied scanning the hall as four men who turned out to be security guards walked up to them.

"We will be needing those guns, fellas" One of the guards requested as polite as possible.

Ian turned to him. "And why the fuck would I do that?"

Idris scoffed trying to get between them. "I think what he meant to say was: we don't have guns. We are just looking for your boss"

The guard who obviously in charge turned towards Idris. "Hand over your guns..... now!" he ordered in a more subtle but threatening manner.

"I'm an RCF Agent, asshole. We have every right to walk into your establishment with arms!" Ian yelled yanking out his Glock and pointing it at the guard as the guards swiftly retaliated pointing their automatic rifles at Ian and Idris.

"I'll count to three. Drop your weapon" the head guard commanded.

"Or what? Are you going to drop an agent in public?" Ian asked clicking his gun off safety mode.

"Slow down, amigos!!" They heard a voice from a terrace on the first floor.

They all looked up seeing Edward Mojo. He smiled resting on the rails. "If you want to turn my place of work into a bloodbath? You'd have to reconsider. No one's killing any government prick on my property" He focused his gaze on Ian and Idris. "But seriously, people don't walk into this place with arms, not even the military unless you've got a fuckin' warrant, which I bet you don't have"

"I can arrest your guards for harassing a state agent" Ian threatened.

"Can you? There's over fifty customers who can testify they saw you going beyond your jurisdiction ruining private property and causing mayhem" Edward clarified.

Ian knew what that meant. He had no jurisdiction here, he slowly lowered his gun and handed it over to the guard who yanked it from his hands in fury. The same was done to Idris.

"Come on up. Let's chat" Edward requested winking.

The guards led the two men through the stairs to the first floor. "Do you realize I'm in charge?" Idris spoke to Ian as they proceeded up the stairs.

"Don't give me that bullshit, man. You were just going to let them take us out"

"This is run by a very powerful individual. You have no idea what strings they've pulled in the political system. You spoke of us getting fucked and you were the one who was three seconds from initiating that" Idris countered.

They met Edward Mojo on the first floor where he led them to a table. "Please make yourselves at home. Anything you want, it's on the house" he offered as all three men settled down.

"Anything, you have will do" Idris responded.

Edward nodded satisfied, he rubbed his palms and signaled the nearest waitress. He turned to Idris wincing. "And don't I know you? Black guy busting criminals with that self-righteous meatloaf, *James Halloween*"

Idris didn't find that amusing for a start. "It's Halloway" he quickly corrected Mojo.

Edward waved his left hand over the table. "I know that" he adjusted on his seat as the waitress brought forth their meal.

"So, what brings two Ringsville Crime Federal Detectives to my den?"

"That's a very beautiful question, Mr. Mojo. You know, we just need some questions answered" Ian replied.

"Shoot!" Edward replied.

"Do you know a Doctor Sactor Polaris? Smart guy. City Lab scientist, that sort of smart" Idris asked observing Edward who picked up his chopsticks. "Yeah, why not?" He's one of the few people in the

city with a key. Heard he was working towards a Nobel prize award or Life Time Achievement Award" he frowned in confusion. "Fuck it. It's one of 'em..... Or both. Smart guy like you said"

"Mmmmm" Ian murmured taking a sip from his soup. "He's been missing, Mr. Mojo, for almost two months now"

Edward paid attention as they spoke.

"Do you know about that?"

"Of course. Everyone knows Polaris has been missing. Sad thing. It is good to know someone has finally taken the matter up"

Ian nodded. "Sad thing indeed. My question here is; why were you in City Lab two days after he went missing? And not just you, you brought a squad of scavengers tearing down the whole place looking for important science equipment that he built by himself and used for valid research. You confiscated his office files and whatnot"

Edward looked at the two men for a while as he chewed his mouth. "You know, when you say 'Scavengers' we sound like really evil people" he chuckled aloud. Slowly the chuckle became a long unbearable laughter.

"So, you don't deny breaking into government property and looting the said equipment?" Idris asked.

Edward waved his hands again. "You got any proof I did that?"

"Funny you should ask that" Ian replied, he cleaned his hands with a napkin as he placed his hand into his jacket pocket and brought out his phone. He pointed the phone screen at Edward's face where a footage was seen of Edward giving orders to his men in Polaris' lab.

Edward scoffed looking away from the phone. "Now, that's solid. Very solid"

"Let's start over again, shall we? Why were you there? Why did you take Polaris' equipment?" Idris asked.

"There are some questions I won't be able to share with you boys. I'm afraid that would be the most important question of the day" Edward responded smiling.

"Well, we are asking nicely, Mr. Mojo. If we had to return here with a warrant, hell will have to break loose. And nobody wants that" Ian chipped in.

"You don't have to return at all. I mean leaving here could be a big problem for you folks" Edward added.

"Is that a threat?" Ian charged adjusting on his chair.

"It's not. Eddie here just likes to be *discreet*" a voice behind Ian and Idris spoke. They turned around to see who it was. Anthony Birdleaf.

"You call that being discreet?" Idris asked.

"Tony" Edward stood making a seat for his boss.

"Eddie? I can see you have visitors" he said relaxing on a chair. "And not just any visitors, no? RCF Agents" he had a smug smile on his face.

"Yes, Tony. They came asking questions" Edward responded.

"Ahhhh, impressive" Tony exclaimed calmly. "And what questions were they asking?"

"We wanted to know why your lieutenant, forced entry into City Lab and took Doctor Polaris' equipment two days after he went missing?" Idris asked.

Tony chuckled. "That's a good one" he cleaned his face with a handkerchief "But there's no ulterior motive, gentlemen. Mojo went there on orders"

"Whose orders? Yours?" Ian asked.

"My orders from a higher power, Councilman Adam Banks" Tony replied

Ian and Idris looked at each other as they turned back to Birdleaf. "What does Councilman Banks have to do with this?" Idris asked.

"Well, he told me your guy, Polaris, was missing. The scientist happened to have sent a mail to Banks telling him he was going outta town. He didn't feel safe in the city anymore. It seems like someone wanted him dead for the things he researched about. And so, he requested Banks to confiscate his equipment, files and research. Everything of value before terrible people who worked on the same project got to it. Banks then came to me. He wanted Polaris' lab swept clean and get his properties out. And then I ordered my man here, Mojo to clean it up with his boys"

The table of four was silent for a while. "I don't ask no questions. Banks and I were in the same political party for five years. He's a good friend of mine. I did what he requested, *hopefully for the greater good*"

"Where are they now?" Ian asked.

"India. Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Zimbabwe and a couple of other countries that needed that research. It's being sent to schools"

"I don't think you have any right to move those things overseas, Mr. Birdleaf. If Doctor Polaris left this city in stealth mode, his works should be given to government officials and by that, I mean City Lab. Right where it belonged and right where it already was" Ian countered.

Tony nodded. "You've got a good point there, son. But like I said, I was following orders from a Column councilman. Someone who I consider a dear friend and someone who I think *is* the government. So, I think you are done here with your investigation. You've got any problem, it's Banks you'd have to meet" Tony suggested as he rose up from his seat. "Now if you'll excuse us. We've got business to attend to" he concluded walking away. "Come on, Eddie. Time is Money" he added as Edward also stood up. "Sorry, folks, but I do hope you find the answers you are desperately looking for" he twitted.

Ian and Idris collected their guns and walked out of the building as they crossed the streets.

"If Councilor Banks knew Polaris was leaving the city because he feared there was an attempt on his life, why didn't he make a statement to the police?" Ian asked Idris in confusion.

"Well, my theory here is.... Polaris must have told him not to trust anyone. Hence, it'll explain why the research is scattered all over the globe. It's gonna be impossible to recover all that" Idris replied.

Ian stopped walking as Idris turned to face him. "What do you got?" He asked.

Ian clicked his fingers. "The Walters girl. She was Polaris' colleague. And on the surveillance footage, we could clearly see her copying his files a day before Mojo and his thugs took his stuff. She might know something"

Idris concurred. "Let's get to HQ and wait for Rick and Becca's report"

HennyKane Island

2:37 pm

Becca slid her hands through a shelf of old books in one of the Manor's guest parlors. "The Sheffield Pontifex!" She exclaimed in bewilderment. She brought out the book showing it to the rest three who sat on sofas in the parlor.

"How do you know about the Sheffield Pontifex?" Denver asked filling his glass with wine.

"My dad used to tell me and my brothers about it when we were kids. Said we'd never see it even when we were adults" she narrated.

"And why would your dad say something that dark to his kids?" Rick asked tapping his fingers on his lap while his wine glass was in his left hand.

"This book is banned in over two hundred countries. The United States included" she responded with a short giggle.

"What is it about?" Christine asked curiously.

"I don't know" Becca replied.

"It's mostly centered on a Roman empire context and soon the railings fall off, shifting to global politics and satanic conspiracies building for centuries" Denver explained sipping wine off his glass. "It's a complicated book, I bet even Einstein couldn't decode it's true meaning" he concluded Becca shone her eyes slowly returning the book to the shelf. "That'll do it" she remarked taking a seat near Rick.

"So, back to why we are here" Rick began. "Sactor Polaris. He went missing on March 27th. It was barely forty-eight hours since he ghosted that you, Doctor Walters sneaked into his lab and copied some of his files if not all. What we wish to know is what you copied and where that drive currently is. Everything is evidence as of now in this case"

Christine glanced at Denver. "Well, I don't deny sneaking into Polaris' lab but I did it because I was concerned about him"

Rick leaned forward. "How so?"

"Polaris was a scientist who stepped on toes because of his sort of research. I knew this because I was one of the close people in his life. He always talked about how organizations who needed his research would threaten to take his life. And when he had left that very day, I was worried. Polaris always left a message, he spent most of his days in the lab. So, if he had gone without a word, I knew he had gone AWOL" she explained.

"Are you saying someone assassinated Polaris because of his research?" Becca inquired alarmed.

"Might be" Christine replied.

"That's why we need that drive and its content. What was Polaris working on that drove people crazy?" Rick asked.

"I don't... I don't have the drive. And Polaris' research isn't something you'd take seriously" Christine countered.

Rick smirked. "Try me"

The room was silent for a while.

"Doctor Walters, you don't look like a bad person with ulterior motives. But the fact that you've chosen to hide information from a State Agent, you are giving me that idea" Rick said.

"Look, there's more to this than we'd ever understand" Denver chipped in. "She brought that drive here because she felt it was the safest place it could be"

"Look, Agent O'Neal. There's a conspiracy building up. And we don't know who is involved and who to trust. If you really want to help, I suggest you tell your superiors you didn't get anything vital from Doctor Walters" Denver added.

Rick looked at Denver for a moment before glancing Becca.

"Was that supposed to be a joke, Mr. HennyKane? Because if it is, it isn't funny. I don't think that's a smart choice" Rick said.

"So, what is... the smart choice?" Denver asked "Going back with that kind of information to your headquarters. Do you trust all your agents? Do you trust your director?"

The atmosphere would go quiet again. "Let us help each other, Agent O'Neal. Let us trust you to keep Polaris' work in safe hands" Denver continued.

"And what makes you the safe hands? I'm sorry, but you are a scientist yourself, right? You run a multi-billion-dollar company that's been trying to buy out City Lab for years now. You could be the enemy for all we know" Becca countered.

"I know, I'm not saying I'm a saint. I ain't. But this, this is beyond me. You could try. Take that drive, all of Polaris' work. Give it to your superior. See how that turns out" Denver suggested.

Rick dropped his glass on the nearby table. "If you want me to believe you, both of you, tell me what the hell's on the fuckin' drive" he requested frustrated.

Christine cleared her throat knowing it was the only way to gain Rick's trust. "Polaris was working on an astrophysical project. Something about an interdimensional world. He called it Eden, actually many scientists who worked on the same thesis did" She elucidated.

"This world, Agent O'Neal, this world contains an unfathomable supply of pure energy. Its entrance is somewhere in the city. It's not exactly under us. It's hard to explain. Right there in Polaris' words, he believes Eden kisses Ringsville's surface once in seventy years. That emergence causes a massive storm like the one that occurred some days back. At that exact moment it's energy flows out into our surface and affects different things. You must have heard of a junkyard with floating scraps all over the atmosphere during the storm?" She asked.

Rick nodded in great bewilderment.

"That right there, O'Neal, was a point of contact" she ended.

Becca sighed "So, why are people trying to... kill him for this thing. For what he discovered?"

"Because he wasn't the first to dedicate his life's work into looking for it" Denver chipped in. "Neville Kent was obsessed about it too. People have been looking for a way to gain access into this strange world for decades. They want to drain out the life from that world for their own benefit. My guess is

to conquer. The government shouldn't have knowledge like this. We know who run it. The Cabals" he concluded.

Rick was short of words, he usually bit of his finger nails when he was nervous and he was doing just that. He had been put in a very tight spot and pondered on what would be the right thing to do.



A couple of minutes later, both agents boarded their vehicle with Rick in the driver's seat.

"I don't like this" Rebecca said distraught.

Rick rested his head on the head rest. "What are you talking about, Luna?"

"We shouldn't have left there without that drive. That was fuckin' amateur hour!"

She noticed Rick wasn't responding. "What's up with you?" She asked.

Rick scratched his forehead. "I don't think we are ready for this. Ready for this whole conspiracy shit. Did you hear anything those people just said. There are dangerous mixed up in this"

"And that's the idea beyond, the RCF, O'Neal. Bringing down dangerous people. We have jobs. Duties. It doesn't matter who we answer to, Rick. We do the needful"

"Exposing Polaris' works to God knows who wouldn't bring the man back. I'm in to find him not get mixed up in some devilish cosplay" Rick noted starting the vehicle and zooming off the Manor premises.

Ward Residence,

Greentown.

4:11 pm

Harry Carstlin led Jessie into her bedroom slowly placing her small bag on the nearest desk.

"Phew. Home sweet Home" he exhaled exhausted.

Jessie sat down on her bed looking at the four walls of her room.

Harry looked at her. She felt odd. "What's wrong?" He asked.

She bent her head. "I was really scared, Harry. Really scared of death. And that particular moment I thought it had all come to an end"

He sat beside her. "Trust me, I didn't have to go through being thrown off a cliff and I don't imagine being any less painful than being in a war, but I've had my share of fear and pain, Jessie. I totally understand you. What happened to you was a miracle." he said to her. He would do anything to make her feel at ease.

"I've seen a couple of my mates get blown into shreds. I've undergone therapy and I won't say I'm better now. I still have nightmares but I did overcome that fear. And I know you can too. I mean look at you, silly" He jerked and scoffed making gestures around her body. "There's no scratch, if it isn't God then I wonder what. You have nothing to fear. You should have been dead but you aren't and so is your boyfriend"

She looked away. "About that. I don't think we are still a thing"

Harry winced "Why'd you say that?"

She paused before speaking. "I had this weird thing pass through me during the accident like it's been calling me. Next thing, I was unconscious. After the accident, after I got better, I felt different. I felt less passionate. Like, a part of me was dead. Like, I couldn't be Jessie again. I couldn't be the old me again. Like I was meant to be someone else" she narrated.

Harry studied the vague expression on her face. He swallowed before tilting his head an inch away from her. "Jessie?" He called out to her slowly. She turned to him having the same blank expression.

"Yes, Harry"

"Are you sure you are really alright?" He asked.

She made a faint smile like she had been practicing years to make it. Harry stood up. "I'm.... I'm gonna go. You should have some rest, settle in. I'll call later" he concluded kissing her on her forehead before walking out of the room. He took the stairs to the dining where he met Julia Ward setting the table and Josh at a corner operating his mobile phone.

"Harry? Come on have a seat. We are about to have dinner" she invited him with a cheerful smile.

He stopped in his tracks. "Oh, I'm afraid I'll have to miss this one, Mrs. Ward. I'm sorry, thanks by the way" he replied.

"You should eat something, bro. I heard soldiers out there eat only expired canned food and lizards. When you are in the city, live the city" Josh added still on his phone.

"Joshua, don't be insensitive" Julia countered.

Josh shrugged "It's the truth though"

Harry chuckled. "He kind of has a point" he exhaled looking away before looking back at Julia.

"Are you alright, son?" Julia inquired.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I'm good. Actually, it's Jessie I'm worried about. She's acting strange. I think she needs some time to get her head clear"

"I don't think anyone is ever the same after a car accident especially when you come out alive, and you look fresher than you did before the crash" Josh chuckled. He noticed his joke wasn't found amusing by the other entities in the dinning room. "She'll be fine" He added again returning his gaze to his phone screen.

Harry pointed at him. "Thanks for that" he acknowledged. "Well, I'll be going now"

"Be safe out there, okay?" Julia mentioned.

"Will sure do"

"Uh, how's your older brother, Martin? We don't see any of him these days" Julia inquired.

"He's cool. Working lots of shifts. But he's good" he replied.

"Wonderful to know. And he still works for that businessman, right? Eh... Uh" she turned to Josh who had drifted to the table to steal some chips. "What's his name, Josh?"

"Artem Endario, I guess?" He replied unsure chewing some chips.

Julia nodded. "Yes, Endario"

Harry scratched his head. "Yeah, he still works for him"

"You have to be careful, Harry. The media only has bad things to say about businessmen. Especially the ones who don't support the government and my husband doesn't like him much either" Julia warned softly.

Harry smiled. "The media has nothing good to say about nobody, Mrs. Ward. I'll be sure to send my regards" he replied and stepped out of the Ward duplex.

"Something doesn't seem right, Josh. Don't you agree?" She winced in thought.

Joshua nodded looking at the bowl of chips. "Yeah, mum, something is definitely off with your bowl of chips. I don't think there's enough salt. Are you making it for Grandpa or something?" He asked concerned.

She sighed. "I don't think Grandpa has teeth for chips"

"Then, who did you make tasteless Chips for?"

Ringsville Crime Federation Headquarters,

Leafonia

4:22 pm

Ian and Idris barged into a conference room where Director Owens was holding a meeting with several high-ranking officials. Everyone paused seeing them.

Owen took off his glasses taking a deep sigh of relief. "Excuse us" he ordered the officials calmly as they left as quickly as possible.

"I needed that break, guys" he commented.

"Did you know?" Ian asked quite vexed.

"Know what?" He asked.

"Councilman Adam Banks" Ian replied. "He had Polaris' research shipped across international waters. Please tell me you didn't know about that?"

Owen tapped his pen continuously on the table "I didn't know. He only told me to take Polaris' disappearance seriously.

"What a cluster fuck" Ian cursed.

"What did you find?" Owens turned to the calm Idris. "Well, it seems Doctor Sactor Polaris faked his own disappearance for something yet to be understood. Banks tell you why? Did Banks tell you Polaris told him before hand?" Idris asked.

Owen shook his head in disagreement. "He didn't"

Just then, Rick O'Neal and Becca Luna proceeded into the conference room. "Oh, there you are" he acknowledged.

"Anything?" Idris asked.

"Nothing useful" Rick replied. As of the moment, he didn't feel safe to share his discoveries with anyone and he made Becca promise to keep her mouth shut as well.

Owen stood up and walked towards the window. "Effective immediately, I want the case on Sactor Polaris closed" Owen ordered.

"Why? Cause your buddy, Banks ran the city alongside Delgado?" Ian asked.

"Because, I don't want you guys caught in the wrong side of things. Leave it be" he explained.

"RCF was established to solve crimes, bring balance to Ringsville. Not cover up the foul play of those on top" Ian stated.

Owen waved his head in disagreement. "RCF was established to keep the city alive, to keep it in one piece. Even if it was to maintain a lie. You should be smarter than this, Larson"

Ian nodded disappointed. "Guess I'm not. But I won't believe in a lie, Owens" he concluded walking out as Rick and Becca followed. Idris looked at Owen for quite a while. "Hasn't changed a bit, huh?"

Owen jeered. "It hasn't, Delcoy"

Idris smiled and walked out.

NOTE: THE SHEFFIELD PONTIFEX is not a real book.

But it'll be.....

EPISODE X: TICK BUG

"ALL WARFARE IS BASED ON DECEPTION. THERE IS NO PLACE WHERE ESPIONAGE IS NOT USED. OFFER THE ENEMY BAIT TO LURE HIM."

-SUN TZU

Halloway Residence

Barrow Lane,

CRAXTON

7:38 am

"I told you, Jimmy. I told you you'll fail. You've always been a failure" The terrifying man spoke again in James' recurring nightmare as he woke up in his bedroom in shock.

"Uhhhh" he sighed in relief, pulling his palms down his face. He turned towards the door to find Diana Stone in the doorway looking at him with a suspicious smile. She was in a pale grey suit and pants with a white inner. Obviously, she was ready for work.

"Don't look at me like that" he jokingly cautioned as he stretched his left hand over the desk near him and got hold of a bottle of pills.

"Bad dream?" She asked folding her arms.

He swallowed two pills, drank some water and took a deep breath before replying her. "Yes, Diana, it was. Happy now?" He asked standing up from the bed.

"I made breakfast" she said.

He nodded. "Cool. It must be a good day then" he replied following her to the dining room where he found Sharon and Alexx DuBois consuming separate bowls of crisp.

"Morning, Daddy" Sharon acknowledged James' presence in enthusiasm.

James smiled. "Hey, Sugar Bear" he smiled settling in on a chair near her. He turned to Alexx. "Hey, Buddy"

Alexx waved back trying to swallow what was in his mouth. "James, man. I just wanna thank you for letting me eat at your place. Diana couldn't make some solid food and she said you wouldn't mind so here I am. I really need to eat something worth it before work" he explained showing sincere gratitude.

James smiled filling his own bowl. "No, it's okay. I'm not really wary of strangers. Not that you are by the way. But I'm very welcoming. So, it's actually a pleasure to have one of Ringsville's most prominent faces have breakfast in my humble abode" he replied giving Alexx a friendly back tap.

Diana moved to him with a frying pan containing a pancake. "Pancakes?" She asked.

James nodded. "Yeah, sure"

She slid half of it onto an empty flat plate in front of him. He looked at her with a smile. "Thanks"

She winked and placed the other half in Alexx's plate. Alexx grumbled romantically. "Oh, sweetheart. You're gonna make me fat" he teased watching her take the pan away. "So, how's police work, man. Shoot some bad guys recently?" Alexx asked James who was focusing on his meal.

"Nah" James responded picking up a fork. "I don't even know who the bad guys are these days, DuBois" James replied uninterested sitting carelessly on the dining chair.

Alexx looked at him interested with a suspicious smile. "Mmmmm" he murmured delightedly "So, is it a subject you wish to talk about on my show? You know me, James. I can always create a schedule for you. We can talk about the hypocrisy of our so-called leaders and government agents and the rotten political system and whatnot"

James gave Alexx a stern look. He must have felt Alexx must have been really insensitive to bring that up as a suggestion. "Really, a media interview? You want me, a Ringsville Police Officer to be a guest on your *Conspiracy Theory* show?"

Alexx nodded ignoring the sarcasm of James' intriguing questions.

"Are you trying to get me killed?"

Alexx burst into loud laughter that made James concerned.

"What's funny?" He asked wincing.

"It even gets better, James" Alexx replied. "I mean, you feel the truth will get you killed. Is that how much you know about the deceit?" He asked.

Diana interrupted them abruptly. "That's enough" They both looked at her. "There's an eight-year-old at the table" she reintroduced the presence of Sharon whom the two men engulfed in their talk had forgotten was present.

James smiled rubbing Sharon's hair who was about done with her breakfast. "Nah, she's good. Aren't you, honey?"

"Mmmmm hmmmm" she replied with an assuring smile.

"That's about it" Alexx replied picking up his coat hung around the empty chair nearest to him.

Diana patted Sharon on the shoulder. "Come on, dear. It's time for school" she ordered as Sharon stood up hastily rushing to get her bag.

"Oh, you don't have to, guys" James cut in assuring the pair he could take his daughter to school. Deep down, he was just being polite, but glad they had offered to do his duty. He wasn't really feeling the day.

"It's no big deal, we are going to pass by her school anyways, besides seems like you could use the morning" Alexx replied shaking hands with James.

"If you say so. Drive carefully" James acknowledged quickly.

Sharon wore her bag pack in rush to leave the house.

"Hey, you forgetting to give your old man a hug?" James called out to her as she returned swiftly to give him a hug and a peck on the cheek. "Love you, Daddy. Always" she said and ran out before James could reply.

"Love you too, dear. Have a wonderful day." he said watching his little girl running off, he slowly took his gaze to Diana. "Thanks for the breakfast, Diana. You are a lifesaver"

"Oh, it's nothing" she grinned walking out of the house behind Alexx. "Don't do anything stupid, James" she added shutting the door behind her.

He smiled before taking a deep sigh.

Container Ship,

Fishplain Bay,

FishPlain

8:24 am

David Logan was being catered for by some of Birdleaf's henchmen onboard a vessel. He wasn't told by anyone that he was on a ship but he could tell from his confinement that he was in a cabin. Steel walls and all. It was sometimes stuffy, but he was comfortable. It had been over a week since he was blindfolded and placed there. Anthony himself had paid him a visit twice but he still didn't have a clue what his mission was.

While he was in his compartment, he had lots on his mind as he stared straight towards the overhead. Some of his major thoughts were sinister and it was all centered on his mates, Billy and Jonathan. He had regretted not giving up their names while he was in RVPD detention.

If they were in his situation, he had no doubt that they'll turn over his name. Billy particularly, David recalled how pissed the former was at him before he was apprehended. Whenever it came to his mind how he was played by his own friends he would grow angrier.

He was still deep in harboring dark thoughts when his door was flung open. He was startled and placed both legs on the floor as he watched Edward Mojo proceed in. God, he wished these thugs could learn some courtesy and understand the importance of privacy and boundaries.

"Had a good sleep?" Edward asked.

David stared at the terrifying man before nodding.

Edward gave him a stern look but not in a daring manner. "Up then, we got something for you" he replied throwing a shirt hung on the wall at David. He walked out hoping the latter would follow.

David took some time getting set. Edward poked his head through the door. "Giddy up, boy" he sneered just as David followed him through the passageway.

David accelerated his pace in order to catch up with Edward. "Hey, mister" he called out.

Edward didn't reply. "I've been here for over a week; I don't even know your name or what I'm really doing here" he added.

Edward stopped turning to face David. "You call me whatever you wish to call me"

David winced. "Anything?"

Edward looked at him. "Anything"

David nodded in affirmation. "Cool. I'll call you Doug, then. I wanna know why I'm here"

"We saved your life. We are giving you a chance. You think those who had the gavel to decide what goes on in this city are the good guys. Or do you think they care about you?" Edward asked.

David shook his head "No"

Edward scoffed. "Birdleaf hopes you can be an instrument for change. And we know one of the cabals who pull the strings. His name is Artem Endario, he's manipulative and fuckin' dangerous. You are gonna have a glorious purpose. In return, you get full access to Birdleaf's resources" he explained.

Both men looked at each other for a short while. "You are not alone, Logan"

David couldn't find words at the moment. He just stared vaguely at the well-built man in front of him.

"In the meantime, Mr. Birdleaf has instructed you to attend some medical tests. Just to put your physical and mental health in check. Is that okay with you?" Edward further asked.

David scoffed. "Of course,"

Edward nodded patting David's hair. "Follow me" he instructed. In a short while, they were in a large compartment. David could definitely tell it was a science lab. It was full of science equipment; most he had never seen before.

There was only one man in the space. He had a grey muffler on and was seated backing them. He was probably writing. David could see what it was from where he stood, it was a physical equation.

"Mayton?" Edward called out to the man.

He turned to face them immediately. He was a good-looking man and not at all clumsy. He looked like an action star from a high-octane movie. Definitely, nothing like a doctor as David would have hoped or expected.

"Well, well, fellas" he said delighted. He put on his medicated glasses to see the pair better.

"David, this is our top science research genius. Mayton Skivinchi. He's someone you'd consider a living prodigy" Edward introduced the man to David.

Mayton scoffed embarrassed. "These guys give me much more credit than I deserve" he teased. He stretched his hand for a shake. "You must be David Logan. Heard a lot about you"

David took the hand. "Really. What did you hear?" He asked.

"Well, you are a pretty wild card. And that's mature word for *crazy*" Mayton joked as they both laughed except Edward.

"No time for silly jokes. Skivinchi, you got an hour with the kid" he turned to David. "After that, you go back to your room. Lunch will be served" Edward ordered and stepped out of the room.

David turned to Mayton who was still sitting. "Please, join me" Mayton offered warmly as he set a stool opposite him. David sat on the stool.

"Your first therapy session?" Mayton asked.

David winced then chuckled. "They didn't actually tell me it would be a therapy session"

Mayton nodded also smiling, he turned to the table on his right and picked up a large screen pad.

"Well, from my own research, at your age you've gone through a lot. So much chaos. You need some time to travel to your past and fix those broken pieces" he explained.

"I didn't think you that kind of doctor" David countered.

"Oh, yeah? What kind of doctor do I look like?"

"I don't know but definitely not a shrink" David shrugged.

Mayton smiled "I'm nothing close to a shrink, David. I'm not a doctor either"

David flinched surprised "really?"

"Yeah, really. I'm a scientist. I'm the kind of guy you'd say has an idea about everything. So I guess I'm a prodigy after all" he taunted.

David smiled sniffing "I agree"

He operated his screen for a while before facing David again. "So..... you are Dominic Logan's kid, huh?" He inquired lightly.

David studied Mayton's facial expressions. It was blank but also concerning. "Yeah. Did he mean something to you?" He asked.

Mayton scoffed. "David, your father was a local hero. You might not know this, but he was one of the figures who discovered shocking state secrets after Kord's Rebellion had ended....."

"And he got murdered because of it. I don't think that's much of an achievement" David chipped in before Mayton could finish speaking.

Mayton nodded. "Well, life's not fair, is it?" he rhetorically asked "I believe that yes there was something more to it. There's evil out there, pal. The ones who had him silenced still tried to have you silenced" he chuckled viciously "Touche"

David was trying to figure out what Mayton's endgame was. He knew what he did was wrong, robbing and killing that old cab driver was no good deed, but Mayton seemed chill about it.

"All I'm saying is, we aren't in control of our lives. This government, they make the choices for us. And we wait, till they make us criminals and have our heads for it. Not anymore. You can be your own man, David. You will have a chance to avenge your old man... the right way" Mayton ended smiling in the least charming way possible. Their eyes locked.

"Do you feel like you can be of a greater purpose?" Mayton further asked.

David sniffled. "I'm interested to see where this road leads"

Mayton smiled impressed with his young patient. "We are getting somewhere" he pointed at David. "So, David Logan. Tell me about your past. About your life, your regrets, your ambitions"

Mayton requested holding the screen pad in hand.

Ringsville Police Department Headquarters,

CRAXTON

10:31 am

As always, James barged into Ward's office. He could see his superior on the phone pacing from one end of the room to the other. After a while, he ended the call. "Jimmy" he acknowledged throwing his phone on his office desk carelessly. "To what do I owe this pleasant surprise?" He asked sarcastically.

James scratched his head. "I was at my desk, I felt I should see how you are holding up" he answered.

Ward scoffed taking a good look at James who wore a baseball jacket on ripped denim jeans. "I'll live but you look like shit"

James nodded collapsing on a sofa. "Well, my mind's been doing a lot more work than my body. I'm sorry, I haven't really been the same since you took me to your little confession zone. I've been thinking about all you said and I was wondering if we're really making a difference; if we were... *if we are* really the good guys"

Harold Ward looked at James with affection. "James, I'm... I'm sorry. I did what I had to do. These lies are what's keeping the system going. I feel guilty every day since then, but..." he sighed deeply. "I am still a person. And I make mistakes but I'm out for a change. That is what separates us from the bad guys. They drown in their faults. I need you to promise me that you'll be there for me through the difficult times and I assure you..... it's gonna be all sunny again"

Like it ever was. James thought to himself. The city had always been in despair even long before he was born. For generations, people had hoped it'd be different but it never was.

James nodded. "It's you and me, Ward. You fucking know that" he said assuring Ward all was in order.

"I just got off the phone with a very pissed Ham" Ward reported.

"What's he being pissed about today?" James inquired.

"The Logan kid, James. It's making the public see us as incompetent. And furthermore, Ham is terrified that people are about to realize David was the son of Dominic Logan. I mean, do you know how bad that is?"

"You tell me. The guy's dad died and they think it was a cop and so...? Is it our fault he turned out to be a drophead?" James replied least concerned.

"That is just dark" Ward flinched. "Most people who were quite politically informed during the rebuilding knew about how Dominic Logan supposedly shot himself. A man who was about to share state secrets about why Kord was right but went about his rebellion the wrong way. And now, the cops are trying to crucify this boy who was left on the streets of the city after his father's murder. That is a very sympathetic story. And people are naïve. There's been no sightings of David. None at all. I can tell you the citizens are on his side and they are probably pissed those bullet wounds he put in you didn't kill you"

James jerked on his seat and moved closer to Ward. "Well, it's going to take more than that to put me in the fuckin' ground, old man" he bragged. "Bullets can't kill me" he teased.

Ward nodded sipping a glass of water. "That's the kind of attitude that's gonna get you killed, son"

Conrad Residence,

Bedbug

10:54 am

Maureen walked into the kitchen to see Billy working on a broken sink pipe. "You shouldn't be doing that, Billy. I'll get a plumber to fix it. You need to rest" she insisted warmly.

Billy shook his head in disagreement. He moved out of the cupboard and picked a nearby napkin "There's no need. I'm just about done" he replied.

She walked to the fridge, opened it, and shoved out a bottle of milk.

Maureen turned in a glass for herself and pointed the bottle at Billy. "You want some?" She asked.

Billy nodded. "Sure thing"

While she was at it, Billy had his face on the floor, he was deep in thought until she handed his glass to him. "Is everything okay?" Maureen asked concerned placing a hand on Billy's cheek.

Billy didn't hesitate. "I've been having dreams. Dreams that feel too real to be dreams. Like memories but not mine"

Maureen was interested but also confused. Billy wasn't the one out of the two children she catered for to be transparent. He kept his affairs to himself.

"Whose then?" She further inquired.

Billy looked at her. It wasn't worth telling anyone. "It doesn't matter. But I have some questions. And I need answers"

Maureen flinched. Billy's attitude since the accident had been concerning. He would have mood swings. In his younger years, he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, but he was on his medications and so he was easy to handle but this really bothered Maureen.

"Okay." she replied. That reply did not ease her mind.

"What happened to my mom, Aunt Maureen? What really happened?" He asked.

He could immediately feel her heart beat faster. His strange new abilities were baffling even to him. He could tell she was not at rest but her expressions would say different. She was calm. "I thought

we've gone over this?" She responded somewhat triggered. "What do you want to know, Billy? How she had to leave when your dad was going nuts or how she died in that Shipwreck? What part of the information didn't you get right?" Her tone slowly rising.

"My dad wasn't going nuts, aunt Maureen. And I don't know what it is that you're hiding, but there's something you aren't telling me. She would have taken us along. Did someone try to kill her?!" He roared even to his own dread.

"Billy!!" She yelled back hoping to keep the situation under her control. "Leave the past in the past. Your mother would want you to. There's no way forward if you keep dwelling on it" she urged.

Billy felt his own heart pounding in rage. "With or without your help, I'm going to get answers" he vowed walking past her.

"You are your own man, William. And I love you for that. But don't let anger cloud your decisions and your judgement" she pleaded.

He stopped in his tracks for a second and then walked out of sight.

Maureen picked up her phone and texted an unknown number. The text read "We need to meet"

HennyKane Island

11:14 am

Denver and Gareth sat in one of the dining halls going through old company files.

"Do we still have access to the Shanghai Dome Programmes? I mean, we invested over three million dollars in infrastructure. It seems our allied efforts seem to have backfired, no one's keeping me posted on that" Denver demanded in total curiosity.

"Well, I did get some solid information, the Dome faced some minor setbacks. The other investors wish to sell it to an Indonesian conglomerate. Perhaps, there will be lots of....." Gareth explained as Denver's phone rang.

He picked it up to find out it was Christine "Christine?" he said delighted.

"Hello, Denver" she replied smiling from her end.

"Is everything all right?" he asked standing up from his chair and approaching one of the large hall windows.

"Yes, but I have a little setback. The leaf from the Golden Hades tree, it-it disintegrated" she reported, her voice depicted confusion.

Dead Silence.

"Denver? Are you still there?" She asked from her end of the line.

Denver nodded like she could see him. He stared outside, looking at nothing in particular through the window. "What does it mean?"

"I think, its roots have a special bond with the rest of the tree and there's been a sort of adaptation since it's been there for over two hundred years. I think..... The Seeds of Golden Hades has been purifying your Island and it's what's buying you time, temporarily" she responded.

It all felt like a serious joke. "That's something" he chuckled knowing how ridiculous that sounded. *This was no superhero movie.* He thought to himself. "Don't you think that's a little bit off?"

"You were right about that tree. It's a blessing but it's only slowing the spread. We don't have much time, Denver"

Denver nodded. "No shit" he replied sarcastically "I want you here when you can"

Christine concurred. "Stay safe, I'll be there when I can" she exhaled. Could it be she had failed him?

"You too" he replied before ending the call. He sighed turning to face Gareth who had been watching with great concern. "Is there anything I can do, Sir?" He asked.

Denver shook his head collapsing on a chair. "Gareth, when I die. Do me a favor and make sure no one cuts down that tree in the sky pavilion"

Gareth squinted curiously. "Might I know why you've grown a sudden interest in the tree, sir?"

"Let's just say: It's my family's legacy. It's been on this land for generations. Consider it sacred, future HennyKanes can go there and connect with the ones before them. Is that good enough?"

Gareth burst into laughter. "I believe so, sir. That is the most medieval thing I've ever heard. I like it" he commented still chuckling in amusement.

Soon, Denver was laughing too even if he didn't know why or what was actually amusing.

Secret Underground Base,

CRAXTON

12:03 pm

Artem Endario and Lloyd Coulson boarded an elevator headed to the sub-level of a building construction site. Lloyd looked at Artem who had his face fixed at jammed doors as they went lower.

"If you have something to say, Coulson, spill it" Artem requested calmly.

"Fine. But if you must know, Picasso, you called it"

"Maybe I'll put a bullet in my ear before I hear you whine about anything again"

Lloyd laughed "You did belong to a terrorist organization so yes; I believe you can do that" he sniffled "But on a serious note. What's with you and bunkers?" Lloyd asked with great interest.

Artem kept his face straight at the elevator doors. "We are fighting a war. It's best to stay off the battlefield" he responded.

Lloyd diverted his gaze from Artem and also focused on the doors. "You know, I can't tell if you are speaking metaphorically or literally. But you are definitely the only man who can make a coward's quote sound cool. God, you are so dangerously crude"

Artem shrugged. "I like a good sport"

They could feel the elevator stop; they had reached the sub-level as Artem drew apart the steel gates of the cubicle. They walked into a large hall full with gadgets and armory. There were people moving around occupied with their various work.

"This right here is the future. This is the way we stop those maniacal bastards" Artem addressed Lloyd as they proceeded deeper into the incredibly large basement hall.

Lloyd nodded impressed. "You've been busy"

Artem smiled looking at Lloyd. "And you've been in jail. You know this is the only way, Coulson. Birdleaf is growing an army, we best grow ours too"

"It's not always about the muscle. You and I know that. He can have the whole fucking world on his side but a man with a master plan is still God" Lloyd replied biting his lip.

Artem placed his right hand on Lloyd's left shoulder. "That's why I have you. You are the weapon Birdleaf doesn't have. But I can assure you he's building his"

Lloyd nodded in affirmation "That we can totally agree on"

"Come" Artem requested leading Lloyd to a faction with a few people constructing technical lab equipment. They stopped inches from a man whom Lloyd could tell was their leader.

"This is our research party. They are going to help us flank down any ulterior motives from Birdleaf and his henchmen. With science, of course" he said pointing at the man in charge. "This is my lead scientist. Renowned Astrophysicist, Doctor Sactor Polaris. He's been a great part of this mission. I don't think we'd be here without him"

There he was, the man the city had deemed missing and possibly dead. A free man who was running his own research team for political rebel, Artem Endario.

When Polaris figured he wasn't the only one who knew about Eden and was trying to find it, he felt his life was at stake and decided to know more about what was being played out, he sought help from an old friend, Artem who had helped him during his financial crisis.

Sactor believed Endario was there to find Eden and use its resources for good rather than the chaos he believed members of the Red Covenant had hoped to discover it for. But that was where he had it all wrong. Endario had no plans to take anything from Eden, he wasn't doing all of this to find some mystical realm. No, he was here to put an end to that madness. He was here to wipe out everyone who was obsessed in finding such a cursed place. And of course, he had failed to share this information with Polaris. He needed a fanatic to find other fanatics. It was a brilliant plan.

So, Sactor informed another old school friend, Councilor Banks of his impromptu departure and how he felt his life was at risk by some occultic fellows.

Sactor had no idea Banks was friends with Birdleaf whom he had contracted to move his lab equipment and research for safekeeping.

Birdleaf discovered nothing useful and scattered Sactor's equipment to various countries.

But this was due to the fact, Christine Walters had broken into his lab earlier and taken the only source of evidence Birdleaf would have needed which wasn't really helpful either.

"Pleasure, Mr. Coulson. We've been looking forward to your arrival" Doctor Polaris acknowledged stretching his hand for a shake.

Lloyd flinched. "Are you fuckin' with me or is your actual name Sactor Pol... Pol. What was the last one? I mean- what's that? Jewish, Polish, Finnish. Indulge me"

Sactor was speechless not knowing the right reply to give Lloyd. He had heard the famous anarchist was a time bomb and could lose his cool at any time.

"Well, uh....." He started just as Artem gently pushed the amused Lloyd away.

"That'll do it, Coulson. He's Irish, but I'm afraid he's never been there. Happy now?" Artem clarified.

Lloyd kept on being intentionally petty. "Irish? No, come on. Who gives his child such a quippy name? I bet he was bullied in school. He might have never even had a girlfriend. I mean look at him" He replied still joking lightheartedly.

Artem gazed at Lloyd. "Are you done making my employees feel like dropheads"

Lloyd flinched "Oh, come on. They are dropheads. But it's good. Trust me, it's an honest start"

They took a short staircase to higher ground. Lloyd collapsed on a sofa while Artem sat on a wooden chair next to him.

"So, you've been out here longer than I have. What's the plan?" Lloyd inquired.

"There was an auction at Delgado's manor. Most of his paintings were sold for a lot of money, I happened to buy one of them. The least expensive one. I knew Delgado quite well. He was the kind of guy who enjoyed puzzles. I knew if he was going to leave something behind, it'll be that painting, the least expensive. He was a man of true art" Artem narrated.

"A fucking cunt was what he was" Lloyd replied disgusted.

"Lloyd, I found something in that painting. It was an anagram puzzle. Delgado was everything we thought. He was probably one of the Red People. The puzzle we believe is the last secret fortress of Tick Bug Agency" Artem explained.

Lloyd placed both legs on a steel railing paying close attention to Artem's words. What was Delgado doing with the location of a fallen Spy Agency? Lloyd thought to himself.

Tick Bug Agency was one of the greatest obstacles Kord and his forces had to deal with during the rebellion. They fought tooth and nail to end the war but it seemed they didn't truly understand the war they fought. They had rescued more than a handful of children who were abducted and were being transported to Kord's Island known as the Kennel.

"So, you are telling me Delgado had something to do with the Tick Bug massacre?" Lloyd asked.

Didn't you have something to do with the Tick Bug massacre? Artem threw in a rhetorical question for Lloyd in his mind.

Artem shrugged. "If he has this kind of coded information only a Tick Bug Agent would know how to decipher, he definitely had a hand in it. We are very clear the Red People were behind the massacre, right?" he further explained.

Lloyd sighed looking around. "Artem, we are outnumbered. Outgunned" he said ignoring Artem's question.

Artem flinched disappointed. "What the hell is wrong with you? You aren't the type to give up so easily. I told you, we know about Delgado's involvement. We are beginning to get those at the top"

"If Delgado was in affiliation with Birdleaf, why did he trust you enough to take over The Comrades? Why didn't he just give Birdleaf the puzzle in the first place?" Lloyd asked.

"Because, the Comrades are just a cover-up. They think they run the city but it's all a lie. A decoy. Delgado was just putting those men who call themselves Kingpins as bait. All of them. The Red Covenant is the real deal. And like I said, the old man liked games. I don't know why he didn't just hand over the painting to Birdleaf" Artem explained.

"So, it's either he didn't trust Birdleaf that much or he's just a dumbass" Lloyd replied.

Artem grinned. "Either way, we are lucky to have it"

"You do know Birdleaf will come for that puzzle, right?"

"I don't doubt that" Artem replied.

Lloyd stood up "if you don't mind my asking, where is it?" He inquired.

"In safe hands, with someone I trust"

Lloyd flinched before smiling. "Is there something you aren't telling me?"

"No. Just that my source is-was a Tick Bug Agent. One of the few survivors still in this city. And if anyone can understand Tick Bug Protocol codes, *he* can. He's our best shot to find out where that facility is and what they were hiding that the Red Covenant wanted"

Lloyd applauded. "Very impressive, Artem" he smiled, "Very fuckin' impressive"

Birdleaf Manor,

Upper Hill

1:24 pm

Anthony Birdleaf walked down his gold staircase to one of the three large foyers in his massive home. He wore a white robe and it was obvious he had just had a hot bath as steam oozed from his skin. He looked around to find his young wife, Chloe all dressed up in a black gown with a grey purse headed for the door.

"Honey?" He called out to her.

She turned in shock just a few inches from the door. "Yes?" She replied.

Anthony made it off the stairs to the ground floor and walked toward her. "Where are you going? It's vacation time. You know this is the only time I am truly free. We are yet to have a discussion about where Max can have a spectacular holiday" he pitched.

She sighed before smiling nervously. "About that, yes. We can talk about that when I get back. I have some things to run by at the bank" she looked at Anthony, he didn't seem to be buying it "I have some things to put in check" she added.

He nodded. "Right. Well, why don't I have two of my guards escort you?" He offered.

She waved her head in disagreement. "Oh, come on, Tony. You know I don't like the attention. It's not a big deal, and then I'll just stop by the mall and get Max a few clothes for this trip we are yet to plan" she teased.

Tony scratched his head. "All right. You be careful out there" he moved closer to her and gave her a peck on the cheek.

She grinned. "I love you" she said before opening the doors and walking out.

Immediately, a maid walked in from another door. "Sir?" She called out to him humbly.

Anthony turned around to face her. "Yes?"

"Sorry to disturb you, but there's a man here to see you" she informed him.

"Oh, I wasn't expecting anyone. Who is it?"

"He said his name is Derek Lander, sir. And he has serious business to discuss with you" she replied.

Derek Lander??

He was a powerful gangster in Fishplain and also one of the most ruthless members of the Comrades. Anthony wondered why Lander would pay him a visit. He had no interest in the Comrades, that was Delgado's petty side project.

"Take him to one of the balconies" he ordered.

Some few minutes later, he was in khaki shorts and a white polo shirt, he joined Derek Lander on a small balcony with a table fully equipped with tea and bread. Lander was smoking a pipe as Anthony sat on a chair opposite him.

Derek adjusted realizing he was in the presence of a very powerful man not just in Ringsville but in the whole country.

"Mr. Birdleaf?" He greeted the older man.

Anthony remained mute giving Lander a disturbing look.

"I'm gonna cut to the chase, Lander. I'm a businessman and as such, I'm very occupied. Why the fuck are you here?" He asked coldly.

"Umm, so sorry to barge in on you like this. But I'm here because I believe you want to keep your part of the city that you control"

Anthony kept his gaze on Lander. "What was that supposed to mean?"

"Mr. Birdleaf, I know you want nothing to do with the Comrades but there is a plot that will destroy every powerful mob boss if not stopped and it starts from there. After Delgado died, Artem Endario took control of the Comrades. I think the others are too afraid to stand up to him, but I've always known he's a green snake who wants to destroy all we've built. And once he's done with us, he'll spread his madness to the rest of the city"

Anthony quailed in shock but didn't show that outwardly. "Did you say the leader of the Comrades? Was he ever a member of the Comrades?" He asked curiously.

"For over two years now" Lander replied.

For a brief moment, Anthony Birdleaf wished he had paid attention even if it was a tiny bit to what was going on amongst the mafia clans.

Then he realized Endario was planning something bigger than he had imagined that he would go as far as infiltrating a criminal establishment and be their leader to get what he wanted.

"That's not all. He's got help" Lander continued drawing back Birdleaf's attention. "He's working with Lloyd Coulson. That son of a bitch is still alive, he didn't die in the Acropolis Collapse and now, he and Endario are planning something big"

Anthony nodded in bewilderment. Lloyd Coulson was one of the last people he ever imagined Artem would dare partner with. Is that how desperate he had become?

It all began to seem Lander's confessions were far-fetched.

"How do I know you aren't making all these up?" He inquired.

Lander sighed "Why would I risk making up cock-and-bull tales with one of the most powerful men in this city? I'm here because I know you hate Endario, that's one thing we have in common. If he isn't stopped, he's gonna destroy everything in his way. All that we have built and worked hard for" he paused trying to figure the rest of his speech. "This man is a maniac. He talks about an Occult organization called the Red Covenant. The same one Kord allegedly started a rebellion over. Do you know anything about that?"

Anthony grew more interested in Lander's speeches. "What does he know about the Red Covenant?" He asked tossing aside Lander's earlier question.

"Well.... well," Lander stammered. "He and Lloyd Coulson are planning to find all of its worshippers and bring an end to their mad beliefs. But that's bullshit, right? The Red Covenant isn't real. At least not anymore, they were wiped out during the Rebellion?" He asked curiously.

"You are absolutely right. There is no such thing as the Red Covenant. Not anymore" Anthony replied.

"Endario is trying to mess with you all. Steer you off course. That's what he does. He's a chief manipulator and I'm grateful you brought this to me" Anthony thanked him as they shook hands.

"But...." Lander wasn't satisfied "Why don't we just put a bullet in his goddamn brains? That'll end all of this madness" he suggested.

Anthony smiled. "Why haven't you tried? Don't worry, you don't have to answer that. We both know why. He's like Jesus right now and his death inflicted by someone who hasn't seen the coming catastrophe it'll breed is dumb as. You don't want to be the one ordering the hit, you don't have the power or the resources to fight the fifty heads that will retaliate. Not everything is about physical violence. Know this and it might just save your life someday" Anthony advised Lander as they both stood up.

"If things go south, know that I'm with you, sir" Lander addressed Anthony with respect.

"You already are" Anthony responded.

"Have a good day" Lander concluded walking out of the balcony.

Anthony sat back on his chair picking up his phone as he dialed Edward Mojo's cell number.

In a jiffy, the other end responded.

"Tony?" Edward started warmly.

"Eddie, you won't believe the fucker who stopped by my home?"

"Who?" Edward asked concerned.

"Derek Lander. He's one of the most respected thug bosses in Ringsville. Turns out Artem is now the leader of the Comrades and he's in affiliation with Lloyd Coulson. We are way behind schedule" he said feeling some sort of defeat.

Durden Duvall Football Stadium,

CRAXTON

1:52pm

Maureen sat on one of the spectator's seats at the top of the stadium, a junior football team was in session training and so, the stadium had a good number of audiences there to cheer the team up. Though Maureen was far from sight, she had her dark goggles on to make her identity less conspicuous. She had been there alone for almost an hour slowly dying of boredom and impatience.

"Oh, look. It's the Trisword Antelopes" Artem said in delight right behind her left ear throwing her off balance. "Love those guys" he added.

"Jesus Christ, dad" Maureen cursed in shock which slowly turned to anger. "Don't ever do that again" she warned.

Artem crossed over the seat to settle down beside her as he took off his coat and hat. "You've never liked being surprised and it's so uncool" he teased making a sad face.

She looked at him with disdain. "That's not a surprise. That's a silly prank, and no one likes that"

Artem took in a deep breath. "I beg to differ" He pointed at the football team way down on the field. "You've never been a fan of sports. Remember elementary school, when that batter struck a ball that went straight into your head?" He burst into laughter "Man, that was a very funny experience. And to think he was your crush" he jeered at her.

"There was nothing funny about that. I was in the clinic for three days; I had a pounding headache for the rest of the semester. Why would you even bring that up?" She asked disgusted.

"Because, I don't get to tease you all the time. I mean, we haven't seen face to face since Delgado's art auction. Let me be a father. Once in a while" he replied with deep concern.

"That's so sweet, but you don't have to be mean" Maureen insisted.

Artem placed both hands forward to show submission. "You got me. I'm sorry" he apologized taking his focus back to the football pitch. "Wait a goddamn minute. Are....are those junior players?"

Maureen gave him no reply.

"You know, I could have delivered the painting myself instead of mailing it to your address" he nagged calmly.

"We had an agreement. We don't want you making contact with the kids" she reminded Artem.

He quailed. "And you think that doesn't bother me?" He asked. "I get to grow old and not meet my grandchildren because I'm trying to keep them from a group of devilish freaks?"

"Rose's wishes" Maureen stated clearly.

They were silent for a short while observing the team continue practice.

"So, why did you text me?" He asked. "Did you just miss your old man, or did you finally crack the puzzle?"

She looked away. "No, it's not about the Tick Bug puzzle. I doubt if I'll ever be able to crack that. Its code was way more advanced than my pay grade during my time in the field. But no, this is about Billy"

Artem looked at her with concern. "William?" He asked.

Maureen nodded. "Yes. I know I robbed you of getting to visit him while he was in the hospital and I'm truly sorry about that, but it was for the best. Billy is getting better and I mean really fast than one could have ever imagined. It's feels like there's something in his genes just like Rose" she explained, "But it's eating into his attitude. I think his bipolar has resurfaced and is quite more intense than before. He's asking questions about her, dad. And he's become more verbally aggressive. I'm afraid I might have to tell him the truth one day and it will break him" she complained terrified.

Artem patted her hair gently. "There's no truth to tell him. His mother died to ensure he and his sister had a good life. And if he's showing signs of Eden blood, we would have to use it"

Maureen jolted. "What?"

"You heard me right" he replied.

"Billy's not a weapon, dad. Rose wouldn't want that" she charged at Artem.

"How would you possibly know what she wanted?"

"I won't let you drag her children into your war"

Artem scoffed. "My war? This was my mistake but not mine alone. If I have to involve my own flesh and blood capable of helping make things right, I would do it, Maureen. Without a second thought. People have made sacrifices for this. Thousands of people have died because of a sick obsession. Not anymore, not while I still breathe"

Maureen stood up; she had heard enough. "Maybe I shouldn't have met with you. You are no different from Birdleaf and the rest of them"

Artem laughed aloud. "You and I both know that's cow shit. I am ten times the man Birdleaf would ever be. And where are you going? We just got engaged in a really fun conversation"

"You are despicable" she remarked in disgust walking past him.

"I'd take that. Listen...." He called out to her as she turned to face him.

"Try again to crack that puzzle. You have forty-eight hours and if you can't, I'll have to take it back. Finding that basement can do us some real good. And I might be meeting my grandson a lot sooner than you had imagined" he noted.

"You know that's not possible. Goodbye, dad" she concluded walking away as she headed for the exit doors.

A Building Alley,

CRAXTON

1:31pm

Chloe walked hastily towards a black Audi packed in the alleyway. She boarded the passenger seat sitting by Martin Carstlin who was on the driver's seat. They shared a long passionate kiss.

"Were you followed?" He asked her looking through his rear window.

She looked back too. "I don't think so. I took three different cabs just in case"

Martin nodded feeling safe. He kissed her again.

"Are you alright?" He asked concerned.

She smiled looking at his worrisome face. "Don't I just love it when you show how much you care?" she bit her lips passionately.

Martin looked away. "I don't want you getting hurt, Chloe. I do miss you, and Max, though. When do I get to see him?" He asked.

Chloe sighed. "Martin, he's just eight years old. He'll definitely tell Tony things. I mean, you guys are planning to kill him, right? When he's dead, we can finally be together" she assured him.

"Chloe. It's not that easy. This isn't just about Birdleaf, the scheme is bigger than you can ever imagine. And doesn't he share business information with you?"

Chloe nodded. "He does, only the legal ones. These days, he's barely home, it's like he's building something. It's you I'm worried about, babe. You've been with Endario for a very long time. I'm sure he'll understand if you want out"

Martin held her soft hands in his. "Endario is like a father to me. He was there when things were rough and he offered me a chance to make those who put me and my brother in this situation pay. I'm doing this because I have to. I'm doing this for all of us" he explained.

"We might not see for a long time. We are planning a trip out of the country. It's going to be the three of us, but I know Tony, he wouldn't be with us for long. He never is" she informed him.

Martin nodded. "That's actually good. Get Max out of the heat. When all of this is over, and I promise you, it'll be soon. I can finally be with him and we can be an actual family"

Chloe chuckled with a tear dropping from her eye. "I love you so much" She kissed him briefly again.

"I love you more" he said as he watched her get out of the vehicle.

Martin bent his head on the driving wheels. He had so much to lose if he failed. He had fallen in love with Chloe just a year after she was married to Birdleaf and ever since, their love had bloomed even producing a child, Max. A child Tony believed to be his.

Though he ran a paternal DNA test, Endario had helped Martin get the doctor fake a test to prove Tony was the biological father.

And ever since, they had trapped Tony with that lie.

Conrad Residence,

Bedbug

2:44pm

"Billy" Billy jerked up from sleep. He heard the whispering voice clearly like whoever spoke was right by him. He sat up and placed both hands on his head. He couldn't deal with the way he felt anymore. He could hear people talk from other apartments. And even from the street down below. What was happening to him?

He stood up. He felt more agile than ever, but also it was like his mind was not keeping up to speed with his body. He staggered into the corridor. He was going to learn how to be more stable with his strange gifts. He drifted deeper into the long walkway and stopped by Maureen's study room. It seemed she had forgotten to shut it before she left, she never let either of the kids into that room. It was sacred.

Billy moved towards the door and grabbed the knob tightly ready to slam it shut, but he caught a glance of a painting on her reading table a split second before the door kissed the post.

He paused giving him more room to look. Well, it was just a brief peek, this might be his only chance to ever gain access into the room.

He stepped in walking gently towards the canvas which had slightly been torn at the upper left side of the painting. It was an art of a hydra with one of its head being decapitated. It was a very disturbing

painting, Billy could tell. He was curious. He wondered why his aunt would try to ruin the canvas. What was beneath it?

He tore the piece a little more to give him a better view. What he saw was a lengthy piece of anagram indicated with advanced codes that resembled hieroglyphics. Even as strange as it looked, Billy knew this wasn't the first time he had seen this. He had a vague idea of what it was. He tried to crack his brain to remember where he had seen such an exact print.

He shuffled through his memories until he got it. Yes! His mother, Rose. She had an exact work, unless it was the same thing. Billy was present when this canvas was delivered to their address and handed to Maureen. She had instructed both him and Elizabeth not to go near it not to mention touching it.

Something told him this was serious business. His aunt was keeping something from them. Rose had tried many times to teach him to understand this anagram while he was still a young boy. Could it have meant something? Was his mom preparing him for something much bigger than he had imagined?

He wasn't going to make his presence here noticeable. He yanked out his phone and took several photos of the anagram code before leaving everything intact. He walked out of the room and slammed the door just as he had previously planned.

He dialed Jonathan's phone number immediately leaving a voicemail for him "Hey, I know you are pretty occupied but we have much to discuss. Meet me at the Wesley Bus Junction" he instructed grabbing his jacket and walking out of the apartment.

Viscount Avenue,

Bedbug

2 hours later

Billy and Jon stepped out of the bus and walked straight to an empty street full of deserted buildings.

"Billy, what the fuck are you doing. What are we doing? This is one of the shittiest parts of town and I don't wanna have my throat slit by some freak" Jon nagged desperate to know what Billy's goal was.

Billy refused to reply focused on his smartphone. He was looking at the anagram and it seemed like he was trying to decode it.

"What are you doing?" Jon asked again.

He stopped taking a deep breath. "Okay, listen to me very carefully. There are a lot of things I haven't told you since I got out of the hospital"

Jon nodded. "I'm all ears"

Billy mumbled trying to find the best way to explain his current situation. "Okay, I think I have superpowers"

Jon gave him an unserious look before wincing. "What?! Are you high on something?" He asked dejectedly.

Billy blinked severally. "I know, it sounds crazy"

"It is crazy, homie" Jon backfired.

"Remember those energy symbioses the doctor said were in my genes?"

Jon nodded in affirmation.

"They haven't always been there. I feel like.... I know I got them during the accident. While the car was tumbling down that hill, there was a sudden freeze in time. I saw a bright light appear from nowhere and burst right into me. It felt amazing and painful at the same time and then one burst into Jessie too but it was different in color. It looked green" he explained.

"So, you have superpowers and Jessie has superpowers?" Jon asked smiling. He knew how ridiculous that sounded.

"You still think this is a joke?" Billy asked frustrated.

"No. No, not at all. I'm just overwhelmed. It's just hard to process is all"

"I can tell you a couple of things that'll probably freak you out right now"

Jonathan was not sure he wanted that.

"There are about five rats rumbling through the dirt a couple of yards back searching for food"

Jon was staring at him in total confusion.

"Let's confirm that theory, shall we?" He picked up a nearby rock and threw it at the pile of trash as five large rodents dispersed into different directions.

Billy scoffed confirming his theory.

"I can tell you that there are about eleven dropheads in this lonely building adjacent to our position. All too hungry and too weak to even attack us"

Jonathan watched his friend spiel. "What the actual fuck, Billy? You have super hearing. That's cool"

"Echolocation" he corrected Jonathan. "It isn't just the hearing; I can feel vibrations even from the ground. I can feel things moving at a distance, moments before it gets to me" he walked closer to Jonathan. "I found something that maybe might help us understand what's going on with me. It's a very advanced anagram with hieroglyphic codes, my mom tried to teach me how to decode this exact thing eight years ago before she left. It's all coming back, and if I can figure it out, I might just be able to understand Jessie's situation too"

Jonathan rubbed his palms together. "Don't you think we are doing things way above our skillset? Why don't we inform a third party, someone who's more familiar with this kind of thing?"

Billy chuckled "Yeah, right. Who do you wanna call? Einstein?"

Jonathan looked away feeling the heat from Billy's sarcasm. "No, we should definitely not call Einstein because he's dead" he replied.

"Maybe I didn't know that" Billy teased. "We have us and that is enough. I'm halfway through deciphering all of it" Billy stated.

"You know, you should really consider MIT. Robbing banks was the dumbest thing we've ever done and I'll always feel regret for that. Look where it got David. A fugitive and an enemy of the state. He escaped and didn't get in contact with us. Doesn't that bother you?" Jon inquired.

"David's a grown man, Jonathan. He can take care of himself and leaving this shit bag of a city is the best thing he could have done for all of us. You very well know that" Billy replied.

"What makes you think he's left?"

Billy paused not wanting to answer that question. "Okay, I think we are close," he said.

Jonathan peeked trying to get a glimpse of the anagram on Billy's phone. "How do you know where you are going?"

"It's in an advanced language my mom thought me, I always felt it was just stuff she made up, but it seems it was an actual code a group of people worked by and she was probably one of the few folks who understood it"

Jonathan bit his lip. "She seemed like a real pro. I'll give you that" he remarked.

Billy nodded. "We can agree on that. So, the code is transcribing into actual coordinates right here in West side Bedbug"

After they walked for a couple of minutes they stopped at the end of a deserted street. A large warehouse was halfway demolished and there was a small door on the side still erect.

"I think we are here" Billy said.

"This is really creeping me out, dude" Jonathan said as they jumped over the wired fence. They walked to the door. Jon touched it feeling the texture.

"Is.... Is that titanium?" he asked.

"There's a combination lock on the knob" Billy noted.

"It's a five-digit code"

"Looks like we came all this way for nothing. Would you try punching through the door, though? I mean you might have super strength. Or you can even try phasing through" Jonathan suggested.

Billy gave him an upsetting look. "I'm not going to punch a bulletproof door made up of over twenty tons of titanium"

"Just saying. It would have been really cool" Jonathan shrugged.

Billy looked at his phone studying the small addition to the main anagram code. "It's a number" he said "That's 81206" he flinched looking at Jonathan.

"That's Elizabeth's birthday. August 12, 2006" he added in shock.

Jonathan scoffed. "Well, I gotta say it now if you won't: This is officially weird" he scratched his head in confusion. None of it seemed right by him. "Come on, Billy. It's got to be a coincidence. That could mean absolutely anything"

Billy waved his head in disagreement. "But it isn't. It's my mom, she did all of this. She wanted me to find this"

He put in the combination lock as the door opened, they could see a staircase going down towards infinity. It was dark.

Billy took in a deep breath. "You don't have to do this if you don't want to" he said to Jon.

"You should have said that before you dragged me all this way" Jonathan replied with contempt.

"Let's do this" he lit his phone flashlight and they took the staircase as it went deeper. They finally reached a second door, but this time, it had no passcode. They opened it and walked through it. They found themselves in a void of darkness. It was pitch black.

Their flashlight rays could only go yards from them. Jonathan sighted a changeover switch by the side of the wall and turned it on. In a jiffy, the place was lit up by fluorescents like a white themed park.

It was a large hall. Just one large hall with massive electronic devices at different corners. They both could see the Tick Bug logo visibly stamped on the wall to their left.

"Billy? I think we might have just found the last abandoned Tick Bug base" he stated in amazement.

"Pray tell" Billy replied overwhelmed.

Main Characters introduced in Episode 10

Mayton Skivinch

An ace physicist, tech genius and medical personnel who is a Birdleaf employee tasked with running therapy and polygraph tests on David Logan for his pending mission.

EPISODE XI: WHAT DOES A CROW LEAVE BEHIND?

"I FIND THE IDEA OF VIGILANTE JUSTICE VERY ATTRACTIVE. I LIKE THE IDEA THAT THE MURDERER DECIDES THAT THIS PERSON HAS GONE TOO FAR, AND NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO HIM UNLESS SHE DOES SOMETHING TO STOP HIM."

-DONNA LEON

Viscount Avenue,

West Side Bedbug

5:04 pm

Billy scanned through the various computer devices in the now empty hall. They were all dusty but still quite useful in the present day.

Jonathan scrolled through his phone with much focus. "Okay, I think I found it" he said to Billy who turned to face him.

"Go on" Billy responded.

"Wikipedia says Tick Bug Agency was the biggest threat to Kord's Rebellion and later Lloyd Coulson and his allies. After they helped end the Rebellion, their cover was blown by Lloyd Coulson who raided all the known locations the tick bug agents operated in. Many of the agents were also killed. I think this was the only base Coulson couldn't find. And every agent who knew about this place are all dead" Jonathan explained.

Billy looked around; he was probably trying to figure out something.

"What?" Jon asked.

"My mom. She was-she was one of them. She was a Tick Bug Agent"

Jonathan sighed heavily. "And how does that make you feel?"

"I think it's a thing of pride to know she was fighting for her government, but she... also died because of it. And my aunt wouldn't think twice but avoid telling me and Lizzie the truth. We deserve that. She was a hero and Lloyd Coulson had her and her colleagues massacred!" Billy ranted in anger.

Jonathan walked towards him. "Billy, your mother died in a shipwreck in the Atlantic. How could she have been murdered by Lloyd Coulson?"

Billy rested on one of the wedges of the large monitor tables. "Investigations carried out confirmed there was an explosion on the ship. Someone stowed a bomb on a passenger vessel, Jon. She tried to run, but Coulson found her anyway" he replied ragefully. He exhaled and turned left heading for the door.

"Where are you going?" Jon asked concerned.

"Going for a drink. You coming?" Billy replied.

Jon nodded "Yeah, sure" he ran to catch up with Billy.

"Let's pick this up tomorrow" Billy added as they turned off the lights and exited the basement.

Quanto Barbados Pub,

Bedbug

6:23 pm

Heavy rain poured outside the pub where Billy and Jon were having pints of beer.

Billy sighed. He was probably depressed after what he had just found out.

"So, now we've found this place that you believe your mom who disappeared eight years ago wanted you to find. What do we do now?" Jonathan asked.

Billy played with his empty beer mug continuously. "I don't know, Jonathan. I don't know"

"Maybe she wanted you to be something, a symbol for the city. To show that the Tick Bug Agency didn't fall after all"

Billy turned to Jonathan slightly offended. "Okay, how does a person like me who doesn't have a single training about the ways of a secret service possibly be of help to anybody? And why me? I was once a fuck up" he grumbled.

"Not before you had this..... this thing in you" Jon replied touching Billy's chest. "I know it sounds silly, but you've really made me interested. I want to know more about that place and how it affects us," he said "Look, I've got to go home. Tomorrow, let's meet up in the basement again. Let's explore more" Jon suggested tapping Billy on the back. "Don't be a cunt, okay?" he added jokingly walking out of the pub.

Billy scoffed requesting another pint from the bartender.

While he was still drowning in his despair, his senses began to quiver like a beacon. Like it was warning him that there was danger lurking around.

"Yo, look, it's Culkin" he heard a young man say as others laughed mischievously. Billy turned around to find four boys around his own age sitting near the window and making jest of a passerby who they happened to know.

"Let's go get our hands dirty, boys" another one in the gang said as they rose up and exited the building in the same direction the frail young man had gone.

Billy turned to the bartender handing her the bill and a tip.

"Keep the change" he insisted walking out after the boys before she could even reply.

The rain wasn't a very heavy one but it was consistent, pouring down like it was the end of times. The young men caught up to the boy they referred to as Culkin.

"What's up, Culkin? What are you doing in this part of town, huh?" They asked poking at him.

"Please, just leave me alone" he begged just as one of the boys tossed him into the nearest alley.

Culkin fell to the wet grounds as he crawled in the opposite direction hoping he could get away from them but one of the bullies raised him up by his collar. "Go back to your freak house, weirdo!" he taunted punching him in the face which sent Culkin back to the wet grounds as they kicked him over and over again. "Get up, pussy! Is that all you can do?" They yelled kicking him continuously.

"Hey!!!" The bullies heard an angry voice call out to them from the alley entrance. "Leave him alone" the hooded man commanded closing in on them.

They all looked at each other and laughed. "You better get the hell out of here if you don't want us to tear you into pieces!" One of the boys warned.

Billy could feel his blood pumping; his body was urging him to attack. He wasn't in control anymore.

The first boy ran at Billy preparing to punch him.

Billy dodged the attack and grasped the boy's jaw. The boy immediately felt powerless as Billy threw him away. He flew over the alley and hit his face with the edge of a trash barrel knocking him out.

The other boys had seen what had happened. They must have felt a sudden fear, but they were three in number. There wasn't any possible way only the hooded man could take them down.

All together, they attacked Billy.

The first grabbed Billy at the waist and tried to pull him to the ground. But Billy was firm, he knocked the second boy in the face with his right knee instantly breaking his nose. He then grabbed his hair raising it up to make their faces meet, he punched him severally until he was on the ground.

Billy turned to the third bully who had attempted to kick him. At the same time, he felt the fourth bully wielding a big stick and was already on his way to strike him.

His senses were sharp and didn't fail him one bit.

He decided to follow his instincts and gave both attackers room. The wood-wielding bully unintentionally struck his mate on the leg breaking his kneecap as he screamed in agony.

Billy went for the stick and yanked it from the boy's hands twisting it and smashing the bully's head with it sending the boy to the ground.

The third bully groaned in pain unable to walk as his leg was now broken. He looked at the hooded man who slowly began to approach him "Wait... wait. I'm sorry, sir. Please do not hurt me. Just let me go, I won't-" he pleaded in fear as Billy grabbed his head and smashed it unto the nearby wall continuously until half of the boy's face was battered drooling with blood.

"This is my territory, bitch" Billy stated softly almost in a whisper smashing the head on the wall one last time before the bully collapsed on the wet grounds.

Billy turned to Culkin who had been watching in fear.

Culkin panted heavily. "Go, get out of here" Billy ordered.

The frail young man gathered strength and fled past Billy; he couldn't fathom what he had just witnessed.

Billy on the other hand was shocked of how powerful he had become. Some days ago, he was recovering in the hospital and now he was beating up bullies in an alleyway. He looked at his hands, the hands he had used to take out his attackers. He felt scared and impressed at the same time.

He observed his victims as they lay on the floor, what if they were dead?

Though he tried to feel some sort of remorse, he couldn't. His mind wouldn't let him be weak. He had grown more brutal.

He backed the alleyway entrance and noticed it was a dead end. There was a large wall about forty meters from where he stood. He wanted to try more of his abilities. He smiled in delight and ran for it. As he got closer, he felt his body taking control. He leaped off the ground and grabbed an escape fire railing, he swung to the next one and climbed holding the top ledge of the high wall.

He looked down in astonishment as he laughed aloud. "Whoo-hoo" he screamed climbing over the wall unto the building top running off, jumping from one building to another, switching of his mind and letting his body take control.

Conrad Residence,

Bedbug

8:05 pm

Billy walked into the sitting room to find Elizabeth and Maureen discussing on the dining section.

They turned their focus to him when he entered. He had been drenched from the rain.

"Where have you been?" Maureen asked getting up to assist him.

He placed his hands forward to stop her. "I'm fine" he insisted.

"Billy, you are just recovering. You shouldn't be out in the rain. Do you want to get pneumonia or something?" Lizzie demanded becoming really troubled with her brother's reckless behavior.

He sneered "I said I'm fine, Lizzie. I needed the walk. I'm feeling better than ever" he responded walking towards the hallway.

"We have been discussing, Billy. You have to start your medications again" Maureen announced to his hearing.

Billy knew she was referring to his bipolar medications. He hadn't taken them in over seven months after his doctor claimed he was getting better.

He turned to face them "I said I'm fine" he repeated.

Maureen waved her head from side-to-side in disagreement. "I don't ask much from you. You are 21 and you still live under my roof. Only this I request of you. Tomorrow, I'm getting those medications and you will resume taking them" she responded without mincing words. "Now, get those clothes in the washing machine before you flood my house" she instructed walking out of sight.

Billy gave Elizabeth a quick glance before proceeding into the darkness of the hallway.

The Same Alleyway

9:14 am

The next morning, the entrance had been overrun with police vehicles. James parked his Malibu at a corner and walked out with Officer Ploroe Farm.

They approached the entrance of the alleyway which had now been sealed off with crime tapes.

James scanned the crime scene, there were few forensics on sight taking photos of the blood stains all over the place. A female detective approached him.

"Detective Holloway?" She inquired.

James turned to her nodding. "Yeah. And you are?"

She stretched her hand for a shake. "Detective Maisie Blake. Homicide from the fourth precinct"

James smiled broadly. "Pleasure. What are we dealing with?" He asked pointing at the mess in the alleyway.

She shrugged. "Not much. Turns out a couple of bullies were badly beaten by one man. They were lying there unconscious for roughly twelve hours, one of the residents on the left apartment building, an old woman was the first to see them when she came out to throw out her trash. She called 911. I was first on the scene with some rookies" Blake narrated.

James scratched his jaw line putting together the pieces. "Right. So how do you know they were bullies?" He inquired.

She turned to back the entrance and pointed at a surveillance camera stationed at a light post facing the alleyway. "There's security footage. It caught everything. We have our guy on it" she walked in the direction of a police van. "If you'll follow me, please" she requested as James followed her.

She opened the van doors where James could see Steve Farrell operating a laptop. He smiled seeing James. "Detective Halloway"

James winced less in the mood "Farrell" he replied joining him.

"So, it's quite simple" Farrell explained playing the surveillance footage for James to watch.

On the footage, it rained as four young men ambushed a smaller man and dragged him into the alley. James watched as they lynched on him before the hooded man showed up.

After a brief conversation, which they couldn't hear because of the trickling sound of the rain, the bullies attacked the hooded man who single-handedly took them out in quite a strange fighting style.

James sighed. *Another circus freak*, he thought. "So, he's a ninja?" He asked.

Detective Blake chuckled. "That's one way to put it, detective" she replied.

"This individual might have some physical enhancements. I've never seen one man this relaxed take out multiple hostiles in such professional technique" Farrell blinked severally. "Except in martial arts movies of course" he added.

"Is there much of an investigation to do?" Detective Blake asked James. "I mean, he did the right thing. He stood up and fought for the weak. Bruised some assholes"

"You think?" James responded. "I was sent the medical reports before I got to the scene, Detective Blake. Three out of these four men will never walk again. One's face is totally disfigured and another now has difficulty breathing. Isn't that a little bit harsh?" He asked.

Blake shrugged. "They asked for it. They deserved it" she replied.

James scoffed. "Yeah. They did, all right" he turned to Farrell. "Does the footage have him leaving the alley? We should be able to track him from there"

Farrell bit his lip wishing he could be of more service to his superior. "No, sir" he replied playing the rest of the footage. The hooded man watched the bullied victim run out of the alley while he himself walked deeper into the alley beyond the coverage of the surveillance camera.

"Where'd he go?" James asked taking a closer look at the laptop screen.

"No one knows, sir. He just... vanished" Farrell replied.

James stormed out of the van. "That alley has to have a second exit" he said walking back to the alleyway entrance as Detective Blake followed him swiftly.

"Except it doesn't" she replied.

"What do you mean it doesn't?" He asked bending over the tapes as he proceeded towards the crime scene with Blake behind

"There's no exit, Detective. Just a large wall connecting both buildings" she explained.

They both passed the fight scene and approached the large high wall. James took his time observing the structure. "There's no way one man could climb that. The nearest fire escape balcony is over fifteen feet. How did he do it?" He asked turning to face Blake

"I don't know" she responded.

"And you are pretty sure, he didn't come out from this way?" James pointed at the alleyway entrance.

"The footage would confirm he didn't" Blake answered.

James nodded convinced. "That's strange. We might be dealing with a really strange fellow, detective" he confessed a little bit worried. "Get Farrell to ID the victim who ran out. He might have seen our mystery guy's face" he ordered.

Blake nodded. "Sure thing. I'll be on it, right away" she said walking away.

James looked up in astonishment "How is it possible to get hold of a railing that high with no ground support?" He asked himself.

Birdleaf Manor,

Upper Hill

9:55 am

Brandy Gene proceeded into the large foyer which was empty most of the time, he wondered why Birdleaf would live in such a gigantic house when he didn't want company.

"Hello, anyone home?" He called out as Max walked through a door a few seconds later.

Max must have recognized Brandy's voice. "Brandy!!" He screamed in excitement and ran over to hug him just as Brandy raised him from the ground.

"Look who it is, it's my hero" Brandy playfully teased as Max giggled.

"I missed you" he said as Brandy placed him back on the ground.

Brandy sighed squatting so his face could meet with Max's "I know you have, kiddo. I've missed you, too. But I'm a very busy man. Just like dad" he explained making a sad face.

"Why don't you move in? I want to spend more time with you. Please" Max begged.

Brandy smiled. "You know, lawyers are very occupied in their line of work. But I'll see what I can do. For my little Max? Anything is possible" he assured Max as they hugged.

"Max? Come over here" Chloe ordered calmly as she stepped into the scene.

Max grumbled. "I was just playing with Brandy" he explained.

"I know that, but your brother is a busy man and we have somewhere to be. Don't we?" She asked impatiently.

Max grumbled once again as he turned to Brandy. "Mom's taking me to see a movie" He whispered into Brandy's left ear "Don't tell daddy" He pleaded with a smile.

Brandy smiled looking at him "I pledge to my Lord" he vowed jokingly.

"Come on now" Chloe ordered stretching her hand so Max could take it.

Brandy rose up looking at Chloe. "Hey, Chloe" he waved at her.

She faked a smile. "How are you?"

"Well, you know. It's not easy being the district attorney of a place like Ringsville but I'll survive. I have been surviving" he grinned.

She looked at him from head to toe in the least pristine manner. "You've been DA for years now. I thought you'd have found a way to adjust?" she taunted.

He looked at her and smiled, he wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of showing her how disappointed and unwelcome he felt around her. He exhaled to let out the rage in his soul, then poked at her. "How about you? How has life been treating you. Heard you hosted a modelling show in Acapulco, terrific" he applauded.

She forced a smile. "Thank you. I have been doing very well"

Brandy nodded. "Cool, cool" he replied looking down.

He and Chloe had never had a connection. Though they never fell out verbally, he knew she didn't like him and he couldn't blame her. He could understand she felt he was going to take over Tony's fortune once he was dead and possibly leave her and Max with nothing. But he had no business in the old man's business. He had made quite a name for himself.

"I'm gonna go" he said drifting from them awkwardly.

"He's in the field" Chloe reported.

"Bye, Brandy" Max waved at Brandy who smiled before walking out into the large field behind the house. He strolled over to Tony who was involved in a game of skeet shooting.

Tony reloaded his shotgun with shells as Brandy stood next to him.

"Pick up that rifle" Anthony ordered softly pointing at a gun that laid still on a table.

Brandy hesitated. "You know I don't like guns"

Anthony held his gun steadily as a frisbee flew into the air, he aimed and shot destroying the target.

"I've done a lot of things I regret, Brandy. But do you know what my biggest regret is?" He asked turning to Brandy. There was no response.

"Not having to teach you to defend yourself... physically. And to think I don't have a lot of regrets" Tony scoffed.

Brandy looked away. "Is that why you called. To say all this?" He inquired quite disgusted.

Tony took in a deep breath. "You wouldn't come so what would you have me do? I always wanted to train a son who would grow up like me. To be tough. I specifically sent you to law school and I'm proud of what you are now, but it isn't enough" he explained.

"What else would you want from me? I mean, I handle your legal dealings. I keep your businesses in check. I am your eyes out there. I've quite earned my place, don't you think?" Brandy contested.

"But I want more from you, Brandy" he aimed again as the frisbee flew over the horizon. He fired but this time he missed. "You have to take what's yours. Join me and let's bring the city back to its former glory. The glory days before the Duvalls dared to feed on this city" Tony begged.

Brandy fixated his gaze on the ground. "Dad, I don't want anything to do with your schemes. You are yet to grow up and leave the past in the past. Leave Artem alone. Whatever you are planning, stop it. Think about Max and Chloe, be a father. Let the rivalry end" Brandy pleaded.

Tony scoffed. "Did Artem put you up to this? Because I know you still meet with him. You know how much I hate traitors, son. And don't forget what he did to you. He's not your father. And he'll never be. He sponsored Kord's Rebellion. They caused the death of your parents and thousands more. What part of that don't you get, huh?!" Tony replied in frustration.

Dead Silence.

"Never forget who gave you a second chance. I saved you. Made you my boy. I gave you purpose in a world that had forgotten people like you" Tony caressed Brandy's cheeks. "Please, don't be on the wrong side of this struggle. You know I have to do the necessary" he stated.

Anthony eased himself when he realized Brandy wouldn't speak to him. He sat on a chair and drank off a water bottle. "I'll be out of town in a couple of weeks. I'm taking my wife and son to Australia for a charity event. I need you to handle all of my main businesses in Craxton, Pin Citi and Leafonia. I'll have Mojo cover the rest"

Brandy flinched deeply disappointed by his old man. "And you couldn't say all of that on the phone?"

Tony shrugged "I'd say it again, it takes quite a lot to see you, and it pisses me off" he glanced at Brandy. "It shouldn't be so difficult to see my son, don't you think?" He asked with a smile.

Brandy rolled his eyes disappointed "Good talk" he concluded walking.

Delcoy Residence,

Dec

10:33 am

James walked into Idris Delcoy's apartment. He proceeded into the living room and found Idris sitting carelessly on a long sofa watching a boxing match on his flatscreen TV.

"You are a fan of Carson?" James asked leaning on the wall.

Idris didn't pay him any attention with his eyes still fixated on the big screen. "He's a good lightweight" he replied.

James winced. "Nah. The dude can do better" he commented as he walked over to the fridge.

Idris gave him a glance. "Hope you ain't here to give me another part-time cop job? 'Cause I ain't interested" he made himself clear.

"I wouldn't dare" James replied as he poked his hand into the fridge and yanked out a bottle of beer.

"Yup, that's better" he remarked as he uncapped it with his teeth and collapsed on a chair.

"So why are you here?" Idris inquired; he placed his back on the sofa just as the fight displayed on his flat screen came to a conclusion.

James rolled his eyes exhausted. "Came to pay an old friend a visit. Is that a problem?"

"Not until you ask for my help to catch bad guys, which we aren't very good at"

James chuckled. "That's a good one" he drank his bottle of beer halfway before placing it on the nearest table. "There's a job, though" he announced.

Idris sighed heavily in frustration "Oh, come on. Are you kidding me?" He charged at James.

"No. I'm not. Look, Ward told me you were having second thoughts about RCF and this is different, okay? Way different than hunting down robbers" he explained.

"Nothing is different, James. It's like a freaking loop. You... You come to my home and offer me these bizarre jobs, but I'm fine, you dig? I don't need no help" Idris stated clearly without mincing words.

James smiled. "You see because that's where you are wrong. It's not a loop. Last time I came here to offer you a job, you weren't watching TV or-or drinking beer. You were drooling in your own misfortunes. Pardon my language. But I gave you a fucking purpose. You need me, Idris. Just the same way I need you"

"I don't need you; I don't need..." He replied just as a badge thrown by James landed on his lap.

"I took it from Ward. It belongs to you not in an archive. I didn't come here to bow before you, so you have five minutes to get yourself cleaned up and meet me in the car. If you don't, I'll never get in your way again" James concluded standing up. "And thanks for the beer" he added walking out.

Idris watched him leave "What a douche!" He cursed standing up.

The Tick Bug Basement

Viscount Avenue,

West Side Bedbug

1:49 am

Billy sat on a swivel chair going through one of the Agency's top-secret books just as Jonathan entered.

"Ahh. It never gets old. The massive view" he remarked cheerfully walking towards Billy who was focused on the book.

"This book holds the names of the highest ranked and most skilled Tick Bug agents" he responded "My mom was one of them" he looked up at Jon. "She was a member of a special task force known as the Ladybugs" he scoffed lightheartedly, "Now I know why aunt Maureen called her 'my bug', surreal"

Jon settled beside him. "The Ladybugs were legends, Billy. My grandpa used to say they were a team of deadly female Tick Bug spies. He said they changed the tides of the Rebellion. If not for them, Kord would have taken control of the whole city long before his demise."

Billy nodded. "So I've heard" he skimmed through several pages of the book at hand. "A man named Kenneth Sparrow was the executive chief of this base and it was the last resort. The contingency. If the other bases were discovered, this was where they'd all come. But that didn't pan out as planned. I guess Coulson and his minions got to them first. Every single one of them. I don't think there's anyone left out there. Even if they are, they wouldn't dare be in this city" he explained. Obviously, he found nothing tying his aunt to Tick Bug.

Jon exhaled before scratching his hair "What about your mom. She didn't make it back here too?" He asked.

Billy stood up. "She did. But.... she felt it wasn't her fight anymore. And being the last of the survivors, she prepared this base for me. She changed the anagram code to her own. That's why this place can't be found even if there were agents who survived the massacre and wanted to return. Chief Sparrow trusted her that much"

"And she believed that you could be the one who could wage a war against the villains?"

Billy nodded. "I'm counting on that"

"Billy, this whole charade-" he pointed all around them "this was her plan eight years ago. How did she know you would be this man? This man with super strength and everything?" He asked confused.

Billy folded his arms. "My aunt told my sister and I that my mother could see things. Visions, the future. That sort of thing. She saw a bad conclusion if she had stayed. That's why she left, Jonathan. She saw what I was going to be and maybe it was the only way we could win" he replied. A sudden fear gripped him. He knew even with his newfound abilities; he didn't stand a chance against the dark forces of this metropolis.

Jonathan hugged him. "It's okay, Billy. We are here now, aren't we?" He smiled. "We've come this far. For that, your mom wasn't wrong and I think she'll be proud. She believed you would find this place and you did, and by some miracle you now have special abilities. I don't think it's a coincidence. Now all we can do is utilize what we have, live up to her legacy and make Lloyd Coulson and whoever else was involved in the massacre pay for wrongdoings"

Billy nodded in agreement. "She left a letter at the end of the book" he announced flipping to the end of the hardcover print and then slipping out a handwritten letter on a white sheet of paper. He handed it to Jonathan.

Jonathan observed the note carefully.

My Dear Billy, the letter read.

He began reading.

If you found this, then I'm probably dead, and that means you successfully solved the puzzles. That alone makes me proud of you. Whatever you are now, I still and will always be proud of you. I believe you are beginning to understand now why I had to leave. Don't blame your aunt or your dad. He may not have always been the nicest of people, but he loved you and he loved your sister. No matter what happened. He was just scared of losing us.

Jonathan glanced at Billy, he turned back to the piece of sheet in his hands.

I want you to know what I've seen. And I want you to know you are the only person I believe can stop it. I've seen what you are a meant to be. A hero. A protector of this city. A symbol of hope and justice. Someone the weak can look up to during this difficult times.

The very worst of men have been before me and they plan to destroy this city and then spread that evil to the rest of the world. But not if you stop them here. A seed uprooted from the ground cannot grow roots. When I was a LadyBug, I did my own investigations on the city's underworld, there's my list of people you'll need to stop if they are still alive as of the time you get this and I really hope you do. The rest you have to find on your own. I didn't have enough time to get to the bottom, for I only scratched the surface but I believe you can and you will do more than I ever did.

This is who you are, Billy. Fly away from your nest and hunt for prey. Be the Crow. My Crow.

Jonathan folded the letter once he was done reading. He looked at Billy. "She does want you to be a hero"

Billy scoffed. "I am no hero. Two months ago, I was robbing shops to make ends meet and now, suddenly I am going to be a crime fighter?" He shook his head. "That sounds impossible. It's all happening too fast. Way too fast" he complained.

"So, what do you say, brother? Do we close up shop?" Jonathan asked. He would rather not push his friend into something he wasn't feeling. "We can forget this. Live a normal life. We can still be regular men in Ringsville. It's what your mom wanted, not what you want"

Billy was anxious, he felt entrapped in a box. Every feeling he had was heated up to a hundred percent. "I want to give this a try but..." he stammered. "If I go out there, I'm not promising to be the nice guy. I can't control these powers sometimes. It's like whatever is inside me has a mind of its own, and it is not reluctant to be lethal. People will get killed. People who try to get in my way"

"And do you think that defeats the whole idea your mom had in mind?"

"I don't know, Jon. But fuck being normal. I have these gifts for a reason. I might as well try them out for some good" Billy said.

Jonathan nodded. "I'm with you, but you don't have any tool or gadgets. Are you going to go out looking for some bad guy's attention dressed in some regular hood?" He asked concerned.

Billy slid out a panel with buttons "Well, why you were away, I did my digging. It seems Tick Bug was designing their first special op suit to fight Coulson and the other threats after the Rebellion but they couldn't launch it before they were sabotaged. It was under the Crow Project, a Watch Night Code" Billy pressed one of the buttons and a small part of the wall right in front of them separated. A large armory closet jutted forward to Jonathan's surprise.

"Oh, my God!" He exclaimed standing up. He walked closer to the closet which was stacked from top to bottom with amazing spy gadgets he had never seen. There were also heavy caliber guns but what caught his attention most was the suit itself. A black light armor with tinted yellow patches. He caressed it.

"This is coated with *Arabian Vylan*. A very rare metal considered one of the strongest on the planet, heat resistant. Bullet and bomb proof." he laughed unable to comprehend his excitement. "Billy, this right here, is the real deal. They will never see you coming"

Billy grinned also quite excited. "Wait a minute" he cut Jon short picking up a tool that resembled a batten it was tinted in gold.

"Are those nunchakus?" Jonathan asked curiously.

Billy chuckled. "I don't know, Jon. See any chains??" He asked mockingly.

Jonathan pointed at a tiny button at the middle of the short tool. "There's a button"

Billy nodded. "I see it" he pressed it as a sharp spear protruded out from one of the openings narrowly missing Jonathan's nose.

"Shit!" He yelled jerking backwards.

Billy held it firmly observing the long weapon he was wielding. "It's a spear"

Jonathan waved his head from side-to-side in disagreement. "No, Billy. It's a harpoon. You got to fish out those piranhas, dude" he replied as he laughed aloud.

"Ready to give it a spin?"

Billy smiled nodding. He turned to Jonathan. "I haven't shown you the garage yet" he said.

Jonathan's eyes shone bright. It was like he just found out Santa's secret lair. "There's a freaking garage?" He asked overwhelmed.

Billy scoffed. "Well, who's dumb enough to make this kind of artillery and not throw in some easy transportation for its wielder? Were you be expecting me to take the bus?" He asked jokingly.

"That makes a lot of sense" Jonathan replied, they walked to another wall with Billy pressing a screen pad imprinted on it. The wall opened as they yet again saw another hall but smaller, way smaller.

In it was a large bike augmented with the rare Vylan metal. The motorbike was also designed for speed and an antiwar tank for whoever donned the enhanced Crow suit. There were high caliber guns attached to the machine. It was really something to behold. "Awesome" Jonathan remarked in excitement. This might have just been the best day of his life, but perhaps, he had no idea what was coming.

"I know, right?" Billy replied. "It is tagged as the Crow Wing by Sparrow himself. Designed as the automobile for the agent beneath the suit" he explained.

Jonathan exhaled. "Too bad, they didn't get to launch it and fight those sick bastards"

Billy punched him on the shoulder lightly. "We are here, aren't we?" Let's finish what they started"

Jonathan grabbed Billy on both arms "You have to promise me, Billy. You have to promise me you will abort if things go south. You don't have to die to prove something. All that hero talk is bullshit. If heroes were real, your mom and the rest of the LadyBugs will still be here. Tick Bug would still be here, they got too cocky and it cost them everything. Listen some of these guys we've been tasked to hunt, they are more deadly than we think, all we know about them is only in the papers" he stated worried.

"And what's your definition of things going south?" Billy countered.

Jonathan flinched frustrated. "You'll know when you see it. Don't just get yourself killed out there" he pleaded.

Billy nodded. "I'm counting on it," he said boldly walking out of the garage

"So, what now?" Jonathan asked following him out.

"We are hitting one of those locations on my mom's list"

Jonathan winced. "Wait, today?"

"Yes, today, tonight" Billy replied.

Jonathan walked up to him "Whoa, whoa. Listen here, pal, you don't have enough combat training, I know we've been in this kind of situation before but we were on the wrong side of the law. Are you sure you don't want to devote some time into training?" He pointed at the garage with the walls slowly closing. "There's an automobile out there, two times the weight of a quadbike. Wouldn't you want to learn how to...? I don't know, ride it?" He further asked.

Billy placed the book on one of the monitor tables. "I'm not a kid. I've got this"

Jonathan placed his hands forward to show submission. "Cool, cool. If you are ready, I am. What do I do?" He asked.

Billy pointed at the monitors around them. "These things are-or-were built to help assist the agent and the Crow wing. You will be my eyes out there. You do know much about tech, right?"

Jonathan shrugged "I know everything you know about tech, weirdo. You'll know it won't be enough. We need a pro"

Billy tsked throwing a larger book at Jonathan which he caught "When we get to that bridge, we'll cross it, but for now, let's deal with what we have"

Jonathan observed the book. "A manual for tech operators?" He inquired.

"Yeah" he read his mother's journal again. "Here," he pointed at a spot on the book as Jonathan joined him.

"What's that?"

"This was dated approximately five weeks before she left for good. It has to be one of the freshest locations" Billy explained to Jonathan.

"Well, what's the deal about the place?" Jonathan asked interested.

"I think it's a warehouse in Opera Town. A drug port hopefully. Just a mile from the harbor. It has a straight route from the port"

Jonathan did not think it was a wise idea. "Hopefully? We don't want to bust a regular legal warehouse that makes.... I don't know. Books or diapers, right?" he stated.

Billy sighed. "Well, there's only one way to find out" he tapped Jonathan's shoulder. "It feels good to make some positive change, wouldn't you agree?"

Jonathan laughed lightheartedly. "Well, let's get you on the field and see how much good we are talking about here, Mr. Crow" he responded jokingly.

Billy slightly cringed. "Mr. Crow?" he flinched. "Uh-uh. Not happening"

Jonathan smiled. "We really do need to work on your alias, though. We need something really badass" he paused deep in thought. "Oh, I got one. Agent Crow?!"

"What?! No freaking way"

"What about the Boogie Crow or the Knight Crow? Or better still, the Crow Knight"

Billy walked away probably trying to suppress his irritation. "Isn't that a little too derivative?"

"What is?" Jonathan asked.

"Never mind" he replied. "Let's forget about the alias for now. We can always figure something out later" Billy suggested walking towards the armory closet to take down the suit

Dec

11:22 am

James gave Idris a glance and smiled as they patrolled through the streets of Dec.

"What?" Idris asked.

"Nothing. Just happy to have my best bud back on the seat, riding with me is all" James replied.

"Yeah, right! Well, just so you know this is only for a short period of time"

James nodded with his hands steadfast on the steering wheel. "Yeah, yeah, whatever. So, what made you quit RCF after one week?"

Idris looked out of his window. "I didn't quit. I took a break. Every member of my team did"

"Must be for some hardcore reason I believe"

"Sorta" Idris replied. "Turns out the guy we were looking for didn't want to be found. He left a message for the Council. And they kept it to themselves. If we had known about such intel way earlier, we could have intervened, but it's a dead end. We were asked to close the case because a councilman who happened to know the state of events was involved way earlier"

James scoffed. "Shit! Delcoy. That is hardcore" he responded amused.

"Yeah, well. I'm getting used to it. Being a tool"

"Aren't we all?" James responded looking at Idris. "You just got to try. That's all that'll ever matter. But there are always the monsters sitting up there pulling the damn strings"

His radio blared out, "Detective Halloway? Do you copy?" Farrell's voice engulfed the interior of the Malibu.

James cleared his throat responding to the transmission. "I'm here, Farrell. What do you got?"

"So, I tracked the kid to a subway station and was able to ID his face. His name is Culkin White and I got his home address" Farrell reported.

James nodded satisfied. "That's a good one, Farrell. Email it ASAP. And thank you"

"Anytime, sir" Farrell concluded ending the transmission.

Idris smiled impressed with James noticing from the edge of his eyesight.

"Now, what?"

"You finally remembered his name" Idris replied twitching his brows which made James uncomfortable.

James rolled his eyes. "Oh, grow up!" He replied.

Culkin Residence,

Northern Bedbug,

Bedbug

11:54 am

The two detectives stood on the front porch of a quiet Bedbug suburb bungalow. James knocked on the wooden door for the third time.

"You sure anyone's home?" Idris asked.

James took in a deep breath "I don't know"

"Who is it?" A feminine voice called from inside. In a few seconds, the footstep increased and the door was open. James stood in front of an elderly woman in a long house gown. She would have been in her late fifties to early sixties. Terror was written all over her face sighting two strange men who looked very much like police officers.

"Mrs. White?" James addressed politely.

She nodded "Yes?"

He grinned. "I'm Detective James Halloway and this is my partner, Detective Idris Delcoy"

She tried smiling. "Why are you here?" She asked.

"Well, uh. We are looking for your son, Culkin. Is he home?" James inquired.

She began panting much to James's notice. She showed more emotion than any of the two men had expected "Oh, my God. What did he do?" She asked concerned.

"Nothing at all, ma'am. We just want to ask him a few questions. He's not in any trouble" Idris assured the older woman.

She opened the door wider a little relieved "Come on in" she offered cleaning her face with a handkerchief. "Sorry for my reaction, officers. We don't get force men on our door steps in this part of town. They call this neighborhood *the heaven of Ringsville*" she narrated leading them to the living room.

James winced before smiling "In Bedbug? That's very promising" he replied sarcastically. Bedbug was one of the underdeveloped areas with gang violence swallowed by every mayhem man could imagine. So, the woman's testimony seemed strange, though it was a new layout of Bedbug and it was well built compared to downtown. It was an incredibly small quiet suburban neighborhood; it was indeed heaven in hell.

She led them into the living room as they sat down.

"Would you like anything to drink? A soda, tea or maybe coffee?" She offered.

They both shook their heads "No, thank you, ma'am"

She smiled at them "Just one moment, I'll get Culkin for you" she gently stepped out of the sitting room into a walkway

"You know this is useless, right?" Idris whispered to James.

"Why would you think so?" James responded.

"Why are we concerned about some guy who beat up four fuckups?" Idris inquired confused. "Don't we have bigger problems?"

"This guy is not your regular guy. He can be a pending problem for the RVPD, I tend to get things in place before it does. I'm not saying I'm going to arrest him; I'll just like to know who he is and then keep tabs on him. I feel it wise to do so" James explained.

Their whispering was cut short by Culkin's presence.

Culkin swallowed spit out of anxiety when he saw the two men. He wondered what he must have done. "Officers?" He greeted.

"Culkin White" James smiled. "Please have a seat"

Culkin sat on a chair opposite them. Both men could see the large bruises on his face.

"Um, am I in any kind of trouble?" He inquired slightly distraught.

"No, you aren't" James responded. "How did you get those bruises?"

"Um" he paused looking at the ceiling.

James sighed. "You really got to think about it?"

Culkin groaned still feeling his ribcage ache badly. "No, sirs. I ran into a pole. You know, it was raining cats and dogs. It was pretty dark, and I was in a hurry. It was just a quick painful experience" he narrated.

"A pole, huh?" James repeated, "Who would have thought?"

"Do you know it's a crime to give false information to the police?" Idris asked.

Culkin had his mouth open unable to speak out words.

"Do you know it's a crime, a felony in fact to protect the identity of an enemy of the state?" Idris added.

James quailed turning to look at his partner, "Felony? Jesus, Delcoy. You are gonna give the kid a heart attack. It's really not a felony to lie" he whispered.

"I know it isn't. I'm trying to spook the kid. Play along, dummy" Idris responded also in a whisper. Culkin looked at the two men with total confusion. He cleared his throat to get the attention of the two policemen. "Sorry, but that's a really loud way to whisper"

"Good thing you heard. It's all to show how much we want the truth from you. And trust me, kid. We are going to get it" James countered. "So, I'm gonna ask you again, Mr. White. How did you get those bruises?" James asked.

Culkin took in a deep breath before finding the courage to speak. "Okay. I was attacked by four boys. They work in a gym somewhere in Parsley, it's just by my workplace"

"And where do you work?" Idris asked jotting down important information.

"In a pharmacy" Culkin replied.

His mother stormed in quite alarmed. "Culkin, you told me you ran into a pole" she stated getting all emotional again.

Culkin nodded becoming stressed. "I didn't want to get you worried, ma. I'm good. Look at me, I'm totally fine"

"No, you are not fine" she replied before turning to the detectives. "Who did this? Did you find the boys who hurt my poor Culkin?" She asked interested.

James smiled. "We did, ma'am"

"Good" she exhaled. "I'm going to sue them for assaulting my boy"

"Do calm down, Mrs. White. Those boys aren't going anywhere. I think karma has already caught up with them. They are in the hospital. Two of them are in coma. They were badly... and I mean this when I say this, they were badly beaten" Idris reported.

She looked at them for a while. "Are you saying..... my Culkin put them in the hospital?"

James shook his head "Oh, no, Mrs. White. With all due respect, I think the only thing your brainiac son can put in the hospital is himself, and believe me that's a complement" he twitted bluntly. "But he might know who did put them in the hospital?"

Culkin adjusted in his seat becoming uncomfortable. "I don't know who he is, Officer. I swear"

"Did you see his face though? I mean come on. You should have been able to see his face?" James pushed on.

Culkin stammered. "How... how could I have? It was dark, it was raining, there was a goddamn hood over his head. I only got a tiny glimpse, okay? After what he did, I was even too scared to look at him. I didn't know what he'd do to me. All I can say is, he's around my age, maybe a little older" He explained to the two detectives.

"Are you a hundred percent sure about this?" Idris asked.

Culkin nodded. "Yes, detective. I'm pretty sure its not someone in your age group. But I mean, why does it matter?"

James queried. "Why does what matter?"

"This hooded guy. He saved me, right? Why are you hunting him?" Culkin threw back.

"Who said we are *hunting* him?" James replied before getting up.

"You were the only witness on the scene, what did you really see him do?" Idris further asked.

Culkin shrugged. "He... he was really strange. Weird in fact. Him throwing punches and knocking off their attacks like he knew their fighting skills. Like he had this sort of quick reaction, you know. He was super strong. It didn't feel natural and it scared me"

James simpered. "That fear you had, Culkin is the exact reason why we have to find this guy" he declared. "Thank you for your time, if you see or hear anything that could possibly help us. Contact us" he added.

"Thank you, kind sirs" Mrs. White greeted the two policemen with much appreciation leading both men out.

"Well, that was entertaining" Idris commented as they approached the Malibu packed at the side of the street's walkway.

"Tell me about it" James replied interested.

"I wish my mom was that concerned when I came back home with bruises" He explained. "She'd always want me to take more bruises from the same guys until I could stand up for myself"

James looked at him. "And did you ever stand up for yourself?"

Idris scoffed. "Nope, I was fucking nine years old, man. But I had a better plan"

James chuckled, "Let me guess, African Oppenheimer. You nuked the school and the bullies with it" he taunted.

"Fuck you" James shot back. "Here's what I did. I urged my dad to intervene. He brought seven of his friends, they ambushed the dads of the kids who bullied me in a bar and beat the hell out of them. Those kids never bullied me again. They were too busy worrying about their own fathers setting out of the hospital alive. In fact, I was feared in school after that"

James smiled in amazement. "That... that is something" he remarked laughing.

"I know, right?" Idris chuckled as they boarded the vehicle.

"What now?"

James shrugged. "I don't know. We may never find this guy, that's for sure. We just have to look out for suspects with similar outlets"

"He's going around beating folks up, right? Someone will definitely get on with his whereabouts. He's not a ghost" Idris replied.

"You don't know that for sure" James sighed heavily. "Culkin said he was terrified" he turned to Idris "Doesn't that bother you?"

Idris looked out the window. "With all the maniacs like Kord, The Duvalls and Lloyd Coulson have gotten a piece of eating off Ringsville, no. No, it doesn't bother me. This guy adds nothing to the bigger picture"

James nodded feeling a little bit of relief "I really want to believe you"

"Let's go get something to eat" Idris suggested.

Unknown Warehouse,

A mile from Opera Harbor,

Opera Town

8:25 pm

Billy laid low on a building roof about six hundred meters from the targeted warehouse, he had donned the Tick Bug Crow suit and it was well fitted. He had his mask on which had some extra features like the ability to enhance images, it was also bulletproof like the rest of the suit and it had a bird-like design similar to an actual crow.

He had an earpiece in his ear so he could communicate with Jonathan who was back in the basement operating the computer monitors tasked with navigating the Crow through the city.

Billy zoomed in with the mask lenses to get a closer view of the warehouse. He could see articulated lorries moving into the compound premises and parking in the building.

"Trucks are pulling in" he reported "It's like they are closed for the day. They were headed from the harbor"

"Did you see what they were transporting?" Jonathan inquired.

"Not yet" Billy replied. "Switching to thermal" he reported switching the mask lenses to thermal so he could read heat signatures in the building.

"What do you see?"

Billy scanned through the building walls. "I see thirteen hostiles, heavily armed. It's not a diaper warehouse, Jon" he reported.

"Noted" Jon nodded with a smile.

"I'm going in" Billy said standing up.

"Copy. And please, be careful" Jon begged a little frightened.

Billy failed to respond jumping off the rooftop in the direction of the warehouse.

In the warehouse, the lorries were being off-loaded. It contained dead animals, horses and bulls as they were carried towards the abattoir section of the building.

"Go, go, go. Hurry" the man in charge urged the other men. "We are way past curfew" he checked his watch.

Billy proceeded into the building through an open skylight. He walked stealthily through the walkway of the top floor of the building. He gained access into one of the slaughter rooms.

"It's a slaughterhouse" he whispered to Jon through the earpiece. He moved closer to one of the carcasses and realized their bellies had been stitched up. He pried out an opening with his hands and skimmed through the would-be contents of the animal's stomach.

He felt something solid and grasped onto it slowly thrusting it out. He could see vividly transparent bags of cocaine.

"Jack fucking pot" Billy said in bewilderment.

"Hey! Stop right there" A man behind Billy ordered pointing his rifle at him.

Billy paused trying not to make matters worse.

"I'm not gonna say this again. Hands in the air!" he commanded. He was observing what the intruder was wearing, he probably had an idea that bullets might not penetrate the outfit, so hopefully he would cuff him.

Billy slowly took his hands up. The man held out his walkie. "Hey, does any one copy? We have an intrud-" he couldn't finish before Billy thrust out his harpoon full length and slashed the man in the chest narrowly missing his neck.

The man grunted firing a few rounds at Billy. The bullets made no impact. Billy grasped the thug's neck picking him up from the ground and throwing him out of the room back into the walk way. The man groaned in pain, he felt his back broken, he watched in terror as the masked man walked out of the room into the hallway bending down and punching him until he passed out.

"Did you hear that?!" One of the armed men said jerking up from his seat in the ground section where the others were.

The leader picked up his rifle. "That came from the top floor!" He stated turning to his men. "You two go check what the fuck is going on. You four, flank!" he commanded as the men dispatched into different directions. In a jiffy, the electrical power supplying the building was shut down.

The leader yanked out his walkie. "Change of plans. Head to the power room. We've got some serious issue here" he instructed. He noticed the warehouse doors which were computerized had been shut trapping them in with whoever was sabotaging their night.

The armed men lit their flashlights to make sure they didn't miss anything as they tried to keep the situation under control. One of the men sent to check the power room flew through a window on the first floor into the ground section of the warehouse alerting the others.

"Over there!" One of the armed men shouted firing at a strange figure by the now shattered window. The others followed suit raining heavy fire on whatever they saw in motion.

The intruder slid through the first defense on a pavement platform knocking them out one by one with the others below still firing aimlessly.

Soon, he disappeared again.

"Where'd he go? Did anyone see what he looks like?" The leader asked trembling. "Show yourself, fucker!!" He yelled out firing several shots into the atmosphere.

"Right behind you!" Billy replied in a whisper slicing through the leader with his harpoon as he grunted falling down.

"Over there" the others yelled shooting at where the masked intruder had been standing.

Meanwhile,

James and Idris sat on the hood of the Malibu devouring hamburgers by a Fast-Food Restaurant.

"I got to say this, Bedbug makes the best burgers in the whole of Ringsville" James remarked enjoying his meal.

Idris scoffed. "I hate to say it, but fuck it, I actually agree"

Both their walkies blared out. "All units be advised" the female voice on the radio reported. "Residents report massive gunfire coming from a warehouse in Opera Town, 17th Avenue off the Panel"

James turned to Idris. "That's not very far from here" he picked up his walkie. "This is Detective Halloway, I'm a klick away. Will be heading to the location ASAP, over!"

"Copy that, Detective. Backup is en route, ten minutes out" the female voice on the radio replied ending the transmission.

James and Idris slid off the bonnet boarding the vehicle. "Let's go, Delcoy" he kicked the engine to life and drove out of sight.

Back at the warehouse, the intruder had single-handedly taken down most of the armed men, except one who was hiding under one of the lorries. When he heard sirens blaring nearby, he rolled out holding his rifle tight. He turned to the doors and ran towards them hoping to open them manually, but the intruder's harpoon thrust through his left leg dropping him to the ground. The man groaned in pain beginning to cry as he watched the masked man slowly approach him.

The intruder stretched his right hand forward as the harpoon flew out of the wounded man's leg and fell right back into his hand. There was a magnetic ring around the glove that could send the harpoon back to its wielder in a short distance.

The wounded man trembled with fear "What the fuck do you want?! Who are you?" He asked trembling.

The intruder placed his feet on the man's wounded leg putting more pressure on the wound as he watched the thug scream out in pain.

"Please, please. Stop!!" He begged.

"Who's your employer?" The masked intruder asked.

"I'll tell you, just stop" he pleaded.

The intruder took his feet off the injury "Speak"

"His..... name is" The wounded man groaned. "Falcon. Falcon Hussein" he stated.

"Good" The intruder nodded satisfied. "When they come for you, tell them, you tell them *the Death Crow* came for justice" he concluded walking back into the darkness.

The wounded man began passing out just as James and Idris gained access to the building.

"RVPD, hands up!!" James yelled out to the man who was beginning to black out. Soon, both detectives realized this was not what they thought. Someone or a group of people had attacked the warehouse.

"Shit! It's a drug port, James" Idris said looking around.

James held the man in his arms "What happened here?" He asked.

The man grunted weakly, "he said he was the Death Crow. And he's here for justice" he replied passing out.

James turned to Idris. "Call an ambulance. Pronto!" He yelled. "I'm gonna check the back, see if I can find anything" he said running into the darkness.

He climbed over the compound wall after exiting the building and landed on a lonely road to find a masked man in a steel suit about to board a bike.

"Hey, you stop right there, or I'll put you down!" James ordered pointing his Glock at the Death Crow.

The masked man stopped turning slowly, he gave James a stern look. "We both know that'll be a very bad idea, detective. You are pointing the gun at the wrong guy" he replied turning back to board the Crow wing.

James stood there unable to fire. He watched as the masked man boarded the large unusual-looking automobile and ride out of sight with dust filling the atmosphere. Idris joined him.

"Who the fuck was that?" he winced.

James lowed his gun. "I don't know but I think we may have just found our alley guy" he replied taking a deep breath.

"We've got company, we got to go, James. We'll deal with this later" Idris replied leading James back towards the compound.

EPISODE XII: NO JURISDICTION

"A TRUE OUTLAW FINDS THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE PASSION IN HIS HEART AND THE REASON IN HIS MIND. THE OUTCOME IS THE BALANCE OF MIGHT AND RIGHT."

-J-Ax

A Catholic Church,

CRAXTON

10:14 pm

The Comrades gathered in their usual basement all seated except Endario. It was over thirty minutes after they gathered before he eventually arrived.

"Oh, my dear comrades" he smiled taking off his fedora hat. "Sorry, I was caught up in a lot of things" he explained.

Derek Lander as usual had already lost his patience beginning to boil with rage. "Well, Endario, if you must know, we are always all caught up in a lot of things. But we always make time for our meetings, don't we" he replied bluntly.

Artem laughed briefly looking around him. "I'm here, aren't I?" He asked sitting on his chair on the round table. "So why the sudden meeting?" he asked further.

There was silence for a while.

"Haven't you seen the news yet?" Alex Sullivan asked.

Artem waved his head obliviously. "I'm afraid I haven't. Are the UFO's finally attacking?" he teased chuckling to his own delight.

Derek sighed heavily, he felt Artem wasn't taking the affairs of their organization seriously.

"Artem, our Opera Warehouse was raided, most of the guards are dead, a couple are in the hospital, and only one is conscious and receiving treatment"

Artem jerked. "Oh, wow. That's exciting"

The other Comrades gave each other quick glances "What's exciting about that?" Thomas Rico asked "We just got drugs and arms worth forty-two million confiscated by the Ringsville Police. The last thing I would want is my operation sabotaged by the RVPD. The Maltese will have my head"

Artem adjusted on his seat. Now he realized the matter at hand wasn't as big as they made it seem. "Oh, so if the police were the ones who raided the warehouse, why didn't you all get tipped? If I remember clearly, you have cops under your payrolls, right? At least one or two cops who work for you should have informed you beforehand of such plans. So, pardon me if I'm a little bit confused of why this is my problem?" He explained flaring up.

They hadn't seen him quite vexed in a long time.

"Except this wasn't the cops, Artem" Barney Caine replied.

Artem froze. "Not the cops, huh? Whom then? The Asians from Trisword? Heard they always wanted a piece of Opera Town"

"It was one man" Alex responded "he took down all of the guards. The police only arrived a minute after he had left" Alex Sullivan chipped in.

Artem flinched. Perhaps he didn't hear well. "One man?" He repeated.

Lander put his hands on the table. "You know the codes of the Comrades. If there's any loose ends, we have to deal with it"

Artem shrugged. "Enlighten me on your point"

"There's a survivor. He's currently being administered treatment, but he's going to snitch. Rat out who his bosses are" Lander explained.

"And who runs operations in Opera Town?" Artem demanded.

Lander pointed at Falcon Hussein who had his head down the whole time.

"He runs the transportation and distribution to smaller vendors. I take care of the ports and River Patrol" Lander further reported.

Artem sighed heavily. "That's not good"

"We have to find a way to kill him before he spills. It is the code. Delgado wouldn't hesitate to strike" Lander suggested.

Thomas Rico nodded in agreement.

Falcon raised his head and looked at Endario. "I've worked hard to get where I am today and now, I plan to keep that position. If I get exposed and can't be protected, I'm bringing you all down with me" he threatened standing up and walking out.

Lander watched him leave. "You see, that's what I'm worried about. We have to kill that guard"

Artem sipped water from a glass on the table. "When did this raid happen?"

"Roughly two hours ago" Sullivan replied.

Artem nodded. "And what are the odds the police haven't interrogated this guard already?"

The Comrades looked at each other.

Lander flinched. "Our involvements can't be exposed, not until the police get to Hussein. We can still end this" he suggested.

Artem stood up. "You want to start a war with Hussein's people?"

Lander scoffed. "I'm not going to sit down while we do nothing. Someone has to take a fuckin' stand"

Artem put on his hat "And I believe that 'someone' is you" he simpered. "Have it your way" he stood up from his seat and walked out with Sullivan following behind in hopes of catching up with him.

Lander turned to Thomas Rico and Barney Caine. "Artem is going to be the death of us. Same with Hussein, we have to do something" he chipped in.

Barney bit his lip irritated by Lander's nagging. "You don't want to turn the Arabians or the Muslims on us now, do you? We fought hard to get them on our side. The last thing we'd want is the news, police and the full force of Mohammed's followers on our asses" he stated standing up and walking out.

Lander sighed "I have a plan" he whispered into Rico's right ear.

"We can be the last two men in the game" he offered.

Tommy paid attention "I may not like the way Artem runs this organization, but I think he's saner than you are" he replied.

"Oh, yeah? Well sanity will not keep you alive in this business. Guts will, you represent the Maltese Crime Family. You know what they'll do to you if you lose their stand on this city? They'll hang out with your balls; you'll dangle from the pillars of the NetCrate Bridge."

"Shut up, Derek. You know nothing about the Maltese Crime Family. And don't come here telling me how they kill people. You don't know shit!" Tommy countered offended.

Lander placed his hands forward in submission. "My bad, Rico. But you know what I mean. We have to deal with this loose end before we focus on who this madman who thought it wise to attack us"

Tommy sighed "I'm listening"



On the aisle of the church building, Sullivan caught up with Endario.

"Artem, I thought we were friends?" he began.

"We are friends, Alex"

Alex scoffed. "Then you really want to make me believe what Landers and the others say about you"

Artem tilted his head confused "What do they say about me?"

"They say you are a snake. And you plan to crumble the Comrades"

Artem whistled "That's new. I wonder why they haven't got the balls to say that to my face. But you see, Sullivan. That's why I like you. You don't care whose ox is gored"

"Stop with the flatters. I think I deserve to know the truth. You owe me that... *as a friend*. Last time, you had Lloyd Coulson interrupt our meeting while you talked about stopping a dangerous cult called-I don't know what, and now some strange man single handedly takes down our warehouse and you don't sound bothered or alarmed about it" he looked Artem straight in the eye.

"These are matters that can be raised in front of those other dumbfucks. Matters that can start a mutiny and get you impeached. But I have respect for you, you've helped me many times in the past. But there's more, isn't there?" He inquired quite disturbed.

Artem tried to find the right words to say to Sullivan.

"Are you trying to sabotage the Comrades. You think this is a game?!" Sullivan asked. "If you put me and my family in harm's way. If you make me a government target, I'm gonna come after you, Artem. You know how much I like to protect my family and my reputation?" He threatened getting tensed.

Artem moved closer to him, it would take more than a red face and protruding veins to scare him. "Alex, if you care about your family and your reputation, this is the perfect time to leave this city. This isn't a game; this isn't about staying on top. This is war and started long before you became a crime boss, long before Kord made you hide in your basement. You can't stop what's coming. If you don't pick a side, if you don't get the picture before judgement day, then I'm sorry, that's on you. I did my best to warn you" Artem made himself totally clear without mincing words. He tapped Sullivan's elbow in a friendly manner and exited the church building.

Sullivan watched him leave while he stood there in confusion. He had the slightest idea what was going on.

Bedbug Medical Institute,

Bedbug

11:01 pm

James and Idris walked into the private ward where the wounded warehouse guard was slowly recovering.

His left hand was cuffed to the bed to prevent him from playing any foul games.

James sat beside him while Idris stood.

"Let's make this quick for you, Jerry. You were part of a squad of men tasked with keeping a drug and arms storehouse. There's no easy way out for you, you are going to court, we'll get you a lawyer. And I assure you, you'll go to jail, serve some prison time, but that's all good. What I can help you with is leverage. You tell me who your employer is and I make sure your time behind bars is reduced" James offered calmly.

The man whose name was revealed to be Jerry looked at the two men. James was calm and friendly; the new black guy, not so much. "What is this? You too playing good cop, bad cop?" He asked with dry sarcasm.

The two detectives said nothing.

Fear suddenly gripped him realizing he had gone too. "Look, my employer is a very powerful man. If he finds out I snitched, I'm a dead man, fellas. My family is history. You can as well just put a goddamn bullet in my head, right here, right now" he clarified.

"Jerry, I know you want to do the right thing. If you don't help us, we won't just be coming for your family, but everyone who you care about. Everyone who knows a tiny little detail about your line of work will be going to jail. Your kids? Juvie, my friend. That's where they'll end up" Idris threatened with a smile. He was always on the offensive; it was necessary James who was more of an established police officer would be less salty.

James gave Idris a terrifying glance that meant 'that was probably too far'

It was obviously just a threat; he knew Idris didn't mean it.

James turned his focus back to Jerry who was highly terrified. "There you go, Jerry. And we are the good guys. That's the good guy offer. Let's help you. We know your employer will probably do worse"

Jerry adjusted to a more comfortable position on his hospital bed. "You have to promise me you'll get my family out of this city immediately I give you his name" he requested.

James and Idris glanced at each other "You have our word, Jerry"

"Don't tell anyone else, I want you too to get them out. There are cops who work for the whole crime ring. Not all men with badges can be trusted" he explained. "The guy I work for, his name is..... Falcon Jared Hussein"

Idris winced. "Falcon Hussein? That's the Arabian investor and businessman who runs the Islamic Community in FishPlain"

Jerry nodded. "Yes"

James rose up with agility. "And what about the masked man who attacked you today? What did he want?"

Jerry gasped. "I don't know, man. He just wanted to end the dealings I guess" he responded.

"He said his name was the Death Crow and he was here for justice"

"Yeah, I think you said that when you wanted to give up on the land of the living"

James turned to Jerry. "We have your home address; we'll be heading there now" he assured him before walking out with Idris.

"Juvie, for real?" James asked Idris slightly disturbed. "Your threats are beyond me, pal"

Idris let out a smug smile. "Meh, had to get him to talk"

They walked into the building's parking lot towards the Malibu. "So, who do we get first. Jerry's family or that jackass Hussein?" Idris demanded.

"We got to kill two birds with one stone, I bet Falcon Hussein already knows about all of this. I made a promise to Jerry"

Idris jeered. "Yeah, you made a promise to a cold blooded Sicario" he teased.

"We take a squad to Jerry's home address and get another squad to Hussein's house" James clarified.

Idris nodded. "Fine by me"

They drove out of the parking lot and arrived at the hospital entrance where over twenty armed police officers stood waiting for them.

James and Idris walked out of the Malibu and addressed the squad. "Okay, listen. We'll be splitting into two factions. I and Detective Delcoy will be leading a squad to one of the locations to extract Jerry Jenkins' family. The rest of you will follow exact orders from Officers Ploroe Farm and Vincent Chad" James pointed at the two police officers who moved forward and saluted.

"Farm, you get to City Law firm and get a judge to sign you a warrant. You guys are going to lead a raid into Falcon Hussein's residence. No matter what happens, I need him alive" he elucidated.

Both officers in charge nodded in affirmation.

"Hurry!" He ordered walking back to his vehicle as Idris followed. They sped out of the compound as a police van escorted them while another van containing Farm, Chad and other officers drove for Hussein's Residence.

Viscount Avenue,

West Side Bedbug

Bedbug

11:06 pm

Billy washed his face in one of the sinks of the empty male bathrooms in the Agency complex. He looked straight in the mirror and he couldn't fathom what he had just done and how he was okay with it. How he felt it was the right thing to do. He knew someone other than the police had to intervene in the city's misdeeds. But he might have gone too far.

When he donned that suit, he felt different. A different sort of power rippled down his skin. They say the mask depicts the real character of a person. Was he always this brutal? He had left a streak of disaster where he had struck. It was scary and yet satisfying to this his new persona.

"Feeling guilty wouldn't change any of this" he heard his own voice speak from the mirror just at his front over the rinsing sink. Billy jerked before taking a closer look at the figure in the mirror. It was him, but not really. It wasn't what he was doing. The figure smiled viciously.

Billy wiped his eyes roughly before looking again. "Who are you?" He asked frightened.

"I'm you, Billy. The part of you that has been awakened by this emergence" the figure in the mirror replied.

"What emergence?" He winced.

"The emergence, Billy. The one that gave you all of this. This gift. *We've been searching for someone who had the DNA of a person from the other side and you were right where you needed to be.* That crash, Billy. That crash wasn't an accident, we chose you because we want this to end as much as you do. You were destined for this" the figure explained.

Billy was seriously confused for many reasons. He was talking to a conscious figure on the mirror trying to make everything make sense. It was crazy, that he knew.

"We?" He queried. "I mean, what do you want to end?"

"This cruelty, the chaos. Mad people from your world want to gain access to ours. Such exploration can cause an incursion that can implode both our realities into an endless void of nothing. We've lost so much to your world, Billy. You need to understand that if any man from your world dare try to create another gateway to ours, consider your reality extinct" the figure further warned.

"Your gifts, Billy. You have to right the wrongs. If we can just get down those who want to find our world so badly. If you are not ready, I can take control when we walk out in the dark and don that suit. This is not a game; blood will have to flow all over this city to end this. It's not the time for regrets"

Billy looked away trying to process everything. "Your mother, she was special. She had gifts like you and she knew you were the solution. We can't let them get to the other side; it'll be carnage. And I'm from the world that demands peace-"

"Who are you talking to?" Jon asked.

Billy was startled as he turned to find Jon at the bathroom entrance. "No one" he replied shaking his head.

Jon winced. "Right" he walked into the bathroom. "Are you okay?"

Billy looked into the sink. "Yeah" he replied.

"You really fucked up those bastards. Must have felt pretty good" Jonathan teased.

Billy scoffed. "Sort of. It was scary though"

Jon nodded grinning. "Yeah, right. So, it's the Death Crow, huh?" He smiled poking his friend in the belly in a friendly manner.

Billy chuckled looking back at the mirror where the figure was now in sync with him. "I guess so, Jonathan"

They laughed for a while.

"Intimidating, I got to give you that" Jonathan remarked. "Bad guys will be terrified"

Billy looked at him with a serious face. "You know this is only going to get worse now. The Mafia, the organized criminal underworld of Ringsville, even the police and the RCF. They know they have a new enemy. Things are going to get dirtier now, I have to get to this Falcon Hussein. He might have answers that I'll need to continue my mission"

Jonathan nodded. "Well, we can get on it tomorrow"

Billy also nodded too in agreement. "Will do" They looked at the bathroom and realized how messed up it was. No one had been there for approximately twelve years.

"I know what you are going to say, Billy. But can we hire a cleaner?" Jonathan suggested.

Billy laughed. "That's breaking Tick Bug Protocol and exposing our secret hideout" he replied walking out.

Jonathan shrugged. "Unless we ain't Tick Bug agents. They are dead, remember? And..... why don't we blindfold her so she doesn't know where she's working?"

Billy frowned lightly "We can handle it ourselves" he concluded.

112th Square Line,

Dec

11:38 pm

James's police convoy packed a few blocks from Jerry Jenkins' home. He led the front team while Idris took the back. They had the belief that Hussein's men might have reached the family first in case he dared speak of his name.

James held a shotgun firmly in hand and sprinted quietly into the Jenkins' front yard. He signaled a cop to hide by the door while the others were behind him waiting for his command.

James exhaled and gathered momentum stepping hard on the front door breaking it down. He jumped into the apartment where he found three children screaming in terror.

"Police, get down!" Another officer yelled as they trooped in one by one with their weapons in hand.

James sighed in relief realizing the family was still in one piece. Idris's team also broke in from the back door leading the terrified woman to the sitting room.

"What is going on?" She asked terrified and confused. "Ma'am, I believe you are Jerry Jenkins' wife, yes?" James inquired.

"No" she replied. "I'm his ex-wife" she looked around her. The policemen were storming through the house going through her furniture and documents. "What the hell is going on?!" She asked again this time yelling. "Do you even have a warrant for this?"

James placed his left hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry for interrupting your peaceful night like this, but your ex-husband, he is involved in some really bad things that now happened to backfire. He claimed his employees could have you and your kids murdered because you were his family"

She looked at him with great shock. "Jerry said he was into construction for HennyKane enterprises. He was paid pretty good money, that was what he told me" She explained.

James sighed. "I'm sorry. I really am"

"Is he safe though?" She inquired concerned.

James nodded. "Yes, ma'am. He is in the hospital under police custody, but he'll be fine. For now, we have to get you out of here. Out of the city, it's not safe" James urged.

"Come on, we got to move" Idris said carrying the youngest of the three children. James led the family into the van and the convoy zoomed off for the nearest train station.

Meanwhile....

Hussein's Residence,

FishPlain

11:35pm

A simultaneous police raid was being conducted in Fishplain.

Chad and Ploroe had the armed squad surround the building.

Ploroe observed the duplex with his binoculars. "There are armed guards on duty. I count four on the perimeter"

Chad nodded prepared. "We can take them, Ploroe"

Ploroe frowned. "Remember, no rush. No stupid actions. We need Hussein alive"

Chad concurred. "I hear you. But when it comes to choosing between him and a cop, I'll drop that bastard" he assured.

After a short silence he scoffed.

"What's funny?" Ploroe asked.

"Reminds me of Afghanistan, you know?" he waved his head deep in thought. "Taking down the ISIS. It was an eyeopener to what the world really was. A fucking sand bag!" he cursed.

Ploroe smirked keeping away his binoculars. "Well, glad this isn't Afghanistan. This is home, brother. Things work differently over here"

Chad gave him a quick glance. "Indeed, Ploroe. Indeed" he remarked.

"Let's go" Ploroe ordered signaling the rest officers to move stealthily towards the compound.

The cops jumped over the wall and proceeded to the nearest glass door beside to a swimming pool.

Ploroe exhaled holding his gun tight. "Going in, on one, two-" he barged into the large dining hall as Chad and four others followed behind.

"Take the stairs" Chad ordered two of the police officers. The house was quiet and empty. Ploroe had an ideology that Arabians liked to acquire big spaces and leave most of it completely empty. He, Chad and the other two proceeded into the hallway and opened another exit door which gave six other officers who had flanked the building from the other side access into the house.

They swept the building carefully. "Target in sight!" Chad yelled as two heavily armed guards shot at them. The cops took cover exchanging fire with the guards.

"Jesus!" Ploroe yelled. "Who are these guys?!"

The police and the armed guards exchanged fire for a few minutes, but the latter were eventually outgunned.

After Chad confirmed the guards were dead, the squad gathered in the living room unable to find Hussein.

"I don't think he's here, sir?" One of the police officers said.

Chad disagreed. "He's here. I can feel it" He assured the team looking around.

Ploroe scoffed. "What are you, some sort of Jedi?" He teased.

Chad looked around again reloading his rifle with a new mag, "One final sweep. From top to bottom. He's here somewhere. The dude must have a panic room" he stated as the squad proceeded to clean the house.

Chad, Ploroe and five other officers took the stairs to the next floor barging into a room they believed would have been Hussein's.

It was empty and spotless. Ploroe sighed exhausted. "We got to call it in, Chad. The fucker isn't here"

Chad observed a slight opening from the wall opposite them, a ray of dim light passed through. He signaled the rest to move backwards while pointed his rifle at the wall. He fired twice shattering the fragile wall which was actually a door to a panic room with surveillance monitors.

The bullets had severely hit Hussein in the chest. He was in his night wear as he had held his own rifle firmly before the shots hit him. The gun slipped out of his possession. He staggered kneeling and gasping for breath.

Chad smirked in satisfaction. "You know for a mob boss and someone who happens to be a member of the Comrades, we got you pretty easy. Thanks for your lame ass security" he mocked the wounded man.

Ploroe watched confused. "What the hell is the Comrades. He's wounded, he needs a fucking ambulance, Chad. We need him alive, remember?"

Hussein touched his chest as blood oozed out. His eyes dazed knowing for sure he was beyond saving. "Allah has done his part and my mission here is complete" he groaned resting on the wall. "I swore that if I went down, the others will too"

Ploroe winced. "What others?"

"The Comrades, dummy" he replied vexed. "I'll give you all their names, we run the Harbor and many other criminal operations together. Derek Lander, Barney Caine, Alex Sullivan, Thomas Ric-" he confessed as Chad pointed the rifle at him and fired again putting a hole in Hussein's skull as his lifeless corpse laid on the ground slowly.

Ploroe jerked in shock. "What the fuck! What the actual fuck, Chad?" He cursed in total confusion "What did you just do?!"

Chad reloaded his rifle without any care in the world. "He had it coming, Farm?" He turned to Ploroe "We all knew that"

"We got to call it in. You are in a lot of trouble" Ploroe threatened.

Chad squinted his eyes. "I'm looking forward to that!" He replied pointing his rifle at Ploroe firing even before the latter could raise his own weapon. Ploroe fell to the ground with two holes in his chest.

Two other officers were alerted ready to act on Chad's shocking turn, but the other officers who were at the scene happened to be on Chad's side and opened fire also killing the other officers.

Chad looked at the dead bodies. "Fuck! That's not how I expected this to go" he commented.

One of the officer's grew pale. "We should have killed Hussein before he spilled those names. They'd still be alive by now" he cautioned pointing at Ploroe and the other dead bodies.

"And what? Break a general order without cause?" He sneered. "One way or another, who wasn't part of the plan, was going down" he yanked out his walkie tuning his radio to Halloway's frequency.

"Detective Halloway, this is Officer Chad. Do you copy?" Chad said on the radio.

After a while, Halloway responded. "Halloway here, over"

Chad sighed. "Sir, we succeeded in raiding the compound. But-" he paused "There is bad news, over"

Halloway responded after a couple of seconds. "How bad?" He inquired.

Chad scratched his forehead like James could see him. "We got multiple casualties, sir. Hussein included. He got us in a shootout, we returned fire in self-defense. Three of ours were killed, Ploroe included" he reported.

Halloway flinched devastated. He parked on the side of the road to process what he had just heard. He and Idris had just put Jenkins' family on a train out of the city and they were on their way back.

He bent his head in pain while Idris looked out of the window. Both men were deeply affected by the information on Ploroe's death. He was like a protégé to James. Just as he was to Ward.

"Sir?" Chad acknowledged after James failed to respond.

James cleaned a tear from his eye, "I'm here, Chad" He replied sniffing. "Get forensics on site and sweep the house. We need any form of evidence. We'll be there as fast as we can" he ordered.

"And the news? There's no way they wouldn't hear about this" Chad queried.

James started the car engine. "They are not the problem, Chad. Follow the orders"

"Roger that, Sir. Over and out" Chad responded ending the transmission. He looked at one of the corrupt officers with satisfaction. He kept his walkie and picked his smartphone dialing a number.

"It's done, sir" Chad reported once the call had gone through.

Thomas Rico nodded. "Good job. Tell the boys they'll get paid in a few minutes" he assured Chad ending the call.

Derek Lander sat opposite Thomas Rico in the Redberry club at its most reserved spot.

Thomas placed the phone on the table while he picked his pipe "Hussein is dead"

"Hey, keep your voice down" Derek said trying to shush Rico. "We are in the most sophisticated club in this city. And have you forgotten who owns it?"

Rico shrugged, "Sultan Solo?" he said wondering why that was important.

Derek Lander nodded looking around to make sure no escort was around them. "Solo's a goddamn Muslim, Rico. You don't want him hearing it from your lips that his fellow brother has been gunned down. We just might not leave this club alive. So, finish up that drink and let's get the hell out of here"

Rico scoffed. "Whatever. It's not like they can even hear us, the music's too fuckin' loud"

Derek drew nearer to Rico. "What about the rat's family?" He inquired.

Thomas sipped from his glass of scotch. "I sent some hitmen over, there were bunch of cop cars at the location. Seems like they got to the family first. Well, they are not our concern anymore"

Derek sipped a glass of vodka. "Yeah, Artem is. And whoever is on his side. He has a plan and it's to bring us down. He is playing an invisible God, Rico. Even if all our names get out, the cops will have nothing on Endario. His name is not in the books, he's a ghost. Delgado said it himself" he explained.

"And we are the wild cards. His puppets" Thomas replied in disgust.

"You are damn right about that" Derek clinked his glass with Thomas'

"Salute"

Hussein's Residence,

Fishplain

1:28 am

James and Idris arrived the scene, Hussein's house was already surrounded by police vehicles as government officials trooped in and out. Firemen had gone in to put out a fire in Hussein's office; the room had burnt to the ground with all his files, most of which the RVPD could have used as solid evidence against the Comrades.

The Ringsville 93 News had arrived the scene to cover the incident. The reporter stood in front of the half-torched building while her cameraman locked the camera on her face airing it live.

"Okay" she began arranging her suit as she smiled at the camera. "Breaking News this morning, Arab Business Mogul and Islamic Philanthropist, Falcon Hussein has been gunned down this morning by the Ringsville Police at approximately eleven pm last night. Sources claim that the raid was conducted due to Falcon Hussein's involvement in the earlier Opera Town Warehouse which has been revealed to be a drug and arms storage facility. Hussein and his guards opened fire at the police which led to the death of three officers, the police in turn returned fire killing all the suspects. The surviving captain of the raid squad, Vincent Chad has reported that Hussein had set his office on fire once he realized there was no way out. The files could have led the police to a bigger cartel conspiracy taking place in this city" she reported as James and Idris watched her nearby.

The reporter caught sight of Harold Ward who had returned from the compound and was approaching James and Idris.

"There is the Police Commissioner, Harold Ward. Let's see what he has to say about the situation" she said hustling through the crowd and catching up to Ward before he could reach the pair.

"Commissioner Ward" she began, pointing the microphone at Harold's mouth. "What do you have to say about the several events that have occurred in the last few hours?" She inquired with the camera pointed straight at Ward's face.

He sighed. "Well, uh. A lot has been going on. So much faster than we had imagined. Hussein was an asset, no one wanted him dead. And I feel sorry for his family and the community he had strived so

hard to build. But when your intentions conflict with that of the American government, it is necessary you'd be put in check before it becomes the very thing that places us towards annihilation" he paused before continuing. "Falcon Hussein was a member of a drug ring and a high commander in the organized crime world. He had been spreading harmful substances and arms through the streets of this great city and we had to take action. Ammunitions worth eighteen million US dollars were found in that base" he explained calmly.

The reporter nodded. "And what about the warehouse raid?" She asked.

Ward looked at her. "What about it?"

"Residents who live around the building claim the shootings had already begun long before the police had arrived, meaning it wasn't the RVPD who organized the raid" she stated.

Ward looked at the ground. "No, it wasn't"

"Then who was it then?"

"It might have been due to a business disagreement. They could have fired rounds at themselves" Ward explained.

The reporter simpered. "But sources claim that a masked man well bodily protected was seen exiting the warehouse premises moments before the police arrived"

Ward clapped his hands once becoming impatient. "That's all I know, ma'am. The police are very well doing their best to get to the bottom of the matter. For all we know, it could have been a triggerman from a rival gang. One who isn't happy with the cartel. But like I said, we are working on the matter, now if you'll excuse me" he excused himself from the reporter and her cameraman.

The reporter turned towards the camera again. "Well, there you have it, folks. There is unrest in the eastern parts of Ringsville and do best to stay in your homes till it is safe to walk at dusk. This is Angela Paige reporting live from Ringsville 93 News, FishPlain" she nodded as the camera lights went dim.

Harold walked up to James and Idris. He could see the despair in their faces. "Can someone please tell me what the hell is going on?!" He barked.

James looked away. "Seems like you know more than we do, Ward" he replied.

"Do you find this amusing?" He charged at James.

"What is this with this masked man everyone is talking about? And I heard you could have shot him, James. Why didn't you?"

"I don't think the masked man is our problem, Ward, and I don't believe bullets would have done anything to his suit"

"Suit? What suit?" Harold inquired.

"He wore a tight armor; it was obviously bulletproof. He looked really intimidating. This guy is no joker" Idris explained to Ward.

"We can't have a vigilante running around the streets of this city. That's madness. What do you think this is? Batman?" He sneered. "Now, that raid led you to this, which has now claimed the lives of three officers. Those men had families, James"

James nodded quite fed up with Ward's complaint. "Harold, don't make it seem like it's evitable. Cops will die in this line of work. You think it doesn't hurt me that Ploroe is lying somewhere in a fucking body bag? We have to find the other bastards who have a hand in this. Hussein was not the only one who was a part of this. It's a cartel, we cut just one head of a very big hydra snake" he responded sternly.

Ward panted heavily. "Where's the other officer who you put in charge of the raid?"

James pointed to an ambulance where a wounded Chad was receiving treatment from a gunshot that inflicted a flesh wound to his left arm.

"Why didn't you handle this yourself?" Ward asked James while he observed Chad.

"We had a job, we had to get the family of Jerry Jenkins out of the city, he claimed his employees could get them executed if he ratted their identities out"

Ward winced. "Now who the fuck is that?"

"He's the survivor from the warehouse raid" Idris replied. "He's receiving treatment in the Bedbug medical institute"

"I want to hear from that guy" Ward said pointing at Chad. Both men could see Harold's focus had been on Chad who was receiving treatment in the ambulance.

The three men approached Chad just as the nurse patched his arm up. He groaned looking at them as they stood in front of him. "Commissioner Ward? Detectives?" He acknowledged sitting up right.

"How are you doing, Officer Chad?" Ward asked without any form of care in his voice.

Chad smiled briefly before nodding. "I'm gonna live, sir. It was hell in there, though. But we had to do what we had to do" he replied.

"So, Falcon Hussein had guards who fired rounds at you and your squad, yes?" Ward interrogated Chad.

"Yes, sir" he replied. "Hussein himself was ready for any sort of attack. He took down Officer Ploroe Farm. There was no way he was willingly gonna come in. He closed in on us, we had to defend ourselves"

"You see...." Ward winced looking at the ground deep in thought. "What's bothering me is how no single evidence could be retrieved, no surveillance footage, yet there are cameras all over the house, his office has been burnt to crisp. Not one single file" he said confounded.

"He set everything of value on fire, Commissioner. We did our best to save files but-it was out of our hands" Chad replied sadly.

After a short silence, Ward nodded acting like he was convinced. "You are given a one week leave. Rest, get yourself back in shape" he ordered.

"Thank you, sir" Chad grunted faintly.

The three men walked away from him.

"I don't know what went down, but the cops all have the same story, and honestly, I don't fuckin' buy it. This Chad guy seems off" Ward complained.

"Well, that's something we have in common" Idris replied.

James mumbled. "Jenkins did say something about some crooked cops working for the Cartel"

Ward clicked his tongue. "Does that surprise you, pretty boy? Nearly twenty years in this job and that's just getting to you? Of course there are cops who definitely work for the bad guys. Grew up" he looked around worried, "But this is not a drug cartel, this has everything to do with the organized crime of the city. The Comrades" he stated.

"Never heard of 'em" Idris replied.

"You've never heard of them because they don't want to be heard of. Ten years ago, we had some intel from an inside man that the Comrades was the city's next big crime syndicate after the so-called Red People Kord was trying to vanquish. We heard it was Delgado's pet project"

"What happened to your inside man?" Idris asked Ward out of curiosity.

"Died in a car crash before we could get anything of relevance out of him"

James chuckled. "Well, that's promising"

"You think Delgado was behind it?" Idris further asked.

Ward shrugged. "What do I know, and what the fuck does it matter now?"

"There's no proof that there's a table above that controls all the vicious deeds in the city, Ward. Not the Red People, not the Comrades. The last time a set of dangerous people held this city in their grip was the Duvall family and most of them are now dead, in prison, or in hiding" James chipped.

"And you think no one else can take back control since that time? It was thirty years ago, James. A lot can—and has happened" Harold clarified just as his phone rang in his pocket. He yanked it out and looked at who the caller was, it was Director Owens.

He took the call. "Owens?" He acknowledged from his side of the line.

"Hello, Harold" Owens replied from his side. "I know you've got a lot on your hands, but there's something you need to see. Get up here to RCF as soon as you can. It's important" He ordered cutting the call.

Harold looked at James before keeping his mobile phone.

"What was that about?" James asked.

"He wants me in RCF headquarters"

James nodded. "Is everything all right?"

"I don't know, Jimmy. He did kind of sound worried" he frowned.

James and Idris glanced at each other. "Well, let's go" Idris replied leading them to their vehicles.

Tick Bug Basement,

Viscount Avenue,

Bedbug,

1:56 am

Billy placed the Crow suit back on the armory closet and pressed the button as the rack slowly slid back into the wall.

"Don't you think it's time to go home?" Jonathan asked exhausted.

Billy turned to face him. "You go, Jonathan. I've still got my hands full"

Jonathan winced confused. "Got your hands full with what? You bust those bastards, cut yourself some slack, dude. Take the night off"

"Falcon Hussein. He runs the harbor; the drugs and arms came through with his approval. I need to question him"

Jonathan was dazzled by his buddy's ignorance. "You haven't seen the news, have you?"

Billy shrugged. "Not really, why?"

Jonathan plugged his phone to the projector which sent rays to the nearby wall. The rays projected pictures from Jonathan's phone.

"Hussein was killed yesterday at about eleven pm. That's barely three hours ago" he broke the news to Billy.

Billy read the news article carefully. "How-- did this happen?"

"The police, Billy. They tried to get to him. Seems like you weren't the only one who the guard ratted out his name to" Jonathan explained.

"So, they killed him?"

"Well, it says here that that the cops acted in self-defense. He was supposed to be taken in----- alive"

Billy frowned. "Vincent Chad" He read on the screen.

"Yep. He was the cop who led the raid, the other one died in a crossfire with Hussein and his henchmen" Jonathan reported.

"He is a witness, I guess I have to interrogate him"

Jonathan scoffed. "Are you out of your mind? You want to interrogate a cop? That is going way out of line, brother" he cautioned.

Billy turned to him. "If I really want to make a change, we have to break some rules. We don't need laws, that's why I'm here"

Jonathan stood up from his seat. "Then what's the difference between you and the bad guys?"

Billy mumbled. "You have to trust me, Jon"

"This isn't about trust. You might end up assaulting an officer. That'll make you no different from a criminal in the eyes of the law" Jonathan explained. "Let it go"

Billy slowly hit his hand on a nearby pillar fighting his anger "Damn it!" he cursed.

RCF HQ,

Leafonia

2:35 am

Harold, James and Idris proceeded into Owen's office where Owens and Ian Larson were waiting.

"Owens?" Harold greeted.

Owens bowed his head in respect. "Commissioner Ward? Please sit" he made room for Harold to sit on the chair nearest to him.

"Agent Larson?" James acknowledged.

Larson shook hands with James and Idris.

"Make yourselves comfortable" Ian said turning to Idris. "You with the cops now?" He asked.

Idris shrugged. "I told you, I work with whoever I feel like working with"

Ian scoffed "Ballsy"

"And you why are you here?" Idris asked Ian. "Thought you were taking some to reflect on your life?"

"I was doing that, until Owens called me back in. He said it was pretty important"

"And is it important?" James threw in.

Ian looked at him with disgust. "Why don't you shut the fuck up and listen to what Owens has to say?" Ian shot back bluntly.

James smirked, "If they don't teach you manners in RCF, Larson, I'll be glad to run a free course for you, fucking weasel" he sneered.

"Will you boys quit it?!" Owens flared up in frustration.

"What are we dealing with here?" Harold asked Owens.

"That raid in Opera Town, it's been raising a lot of dust. Residents around the perimeter took photos, it's out in the wind. The social media for start" Owens explained.

"What's out in the wind?" James asked.

Owens picked the TV remote and pointed it at a large screen turning it on. Everyone could see a picture of the masked man on his bike.

"The guy who raided the warehouse" Idris said.

"Yeah, that guy" Owens replied turning to Harold.

"Doesn't this ring any bell?"

Harold looked at the picture on the screen carefully.

"I am afraid it doesn't" he replied before turning back to Owens.

Ian exhaled. "That suit right there is pretty similar to the one from the Crow Project under the Watchnight code"

"Kindly speak English, pal" James pleaded mockingly.

"Twelve years ago, the now extinct Tick Bug Agency started a program known as the Watchnight code. They had their best technicians on it. They were taking law and order to a new fucking level" Ian narrated. "This suit right here," he pointed at the screen, "-was a prototype. We believe it to be the only one of its kind. Tick Bug found the last of a very rare metal known as the Arabian Vylan to coat the suit. It is a very strong piece of steel unlike anything man has ever seen. This was supposed to be their next big move. A Tick Bug Agent was designated to don this suit and strike fear in the hearts of criminals. Not even assault rifles could take that down. The bike and all-" he paused "It's not some random person cosplaying. This is Tick Bug" he elucidated.

There was silence for a while.

James cleared his throat. "Well, that's not possible. I mean, Lloyd Coulson had all the Tick Bug agents murdered, that was the highlight of the last decade. Why would they suddenly pop back on the big screen?"

"That's what we have to find out. He's not a threat for now, he just helped us bust a drug ring. An intel the police nor the RCF had" Owens responded.

Ward was deep in thought. "If this is really a product of Tick Bug then we might have a lead to finding Lloyd Coulson. He orchestrated the massacre, right? This guy will definitely be out to find him"

"Death Crow!" James said.

Everyone looked at him.

"Death Crow, that's his name. He is carrying the 'crow' title from the project. So, yes. He has to be a Tick Bug agent. At least one survived and he now wants revenge" James stated.

"Well, it's a long time to finally grow some balls for some payback" Ian replied, "Having a vigilante running around the city would be a stain on your legacies, fellas. Especially if he's doing your fucking jobs" he cautioned. "Which, let's be honest, he's already pretty good at" he chuckled.

"The dude's going around killing people. I don't think that's what Tick Bug wanted" Idris replied.

"Tick Bug's a lost cause. Their protocols don't mean shit anymore. It was their bragging that got them in harm's way, if you'll remember" Ian countered.

Idris waved his head obliviously. "Please remind me, Larson. I don't seem to recall"

Ian sighed. "Years ago, Tick Bug was feared all over Ringsville. Those guys cemented their names after the *Ladybugs* crippled Kord. They turned the tides during the Rebellion. They rescued hundreds of children and ended the wrestle" he explained.

James looked at the table. His mind flashed back to his youth days during the Rebellion when he was almost abducted by Kord's men. Until two women saved his life and many other children that day. The one which was older, he had recognized some weeks back in the hospital who turned out to be Billy's aunt and the other who looked like her but younger. He knew they were definitely Ladybugs. What surprised him was that Tick Bug would send girls that young to the field. And he would be lying if he said they didn't deliver.

James could tell that they were probably sisters and the younger one which was now a mystery to him was his age mate.

Ian's explanation brought his mind back to the room.

"Six years after the Rebellion officially ended, Tick Bug grew stronger, they felt they were unstoppable" Ian continued, "Kenneth Sparrow was an executive chief of the Agency, he was a loud and powerful man, he sure did want some positive change. But his biggest mistake was to let the press interview him. He announced the Crow Project on live TV assuring the people of Ringsville safety. He claimed the Crow would take out all possible threats once it was launched" Ian sighed relaxing on his chair "Well. we know where that big announcement got the whole Agency. Carnage, Coulson figured out the puzzle and went for them before they came for him"

Silence fell upon the room for quite some time. "That's a very sad story, Larson. You should never tell it to kids" Idris replied.

Ian shrugged. "Well, it's on Wikipedia" he clarified with a broad smile.

"What can we do about this Death Crow guy?" Owens asked Harold.

Harold looked at the table quite unsure of his own decision. "I don't care if it's a Tick Bug Agent. He's getting in the way of police work and the law at large; this city doesn't support vigilantism especially when it involves murder. Until he turns himself in for questioning and proves that his goals are in line with Sparrow's, he's a threat and an outlaw, and he'll be dealt severely as one" Harold concluded getting up from his seat.

He shook hands with Owens. "I'll keep you updated"

Owens nodded. "It's mutual, old friend"

James and Idris stood up also.

"Keep your eyes open, Delcoy. I think you came to this city at its darkest time" Larson commented.

Idris flinched. "I don't think there'll be anything worse than the rebellion, or the Duvall fallout or the Tick Bug massacre. I think I dropped by at a really good time" he added as the three men walked out.

"Do you really think it's a Tick Bug agent?" Owens asked Ian who was in turn ready to leave.

"Who else could it be? That suit was a very special program held in a much-classified base. I bet only a Tick Bug agent could find its location. I think someone just came to his senses" Ian replied before drifting out of sight.



The three men walked towards the Chevrolet Malibu and Ward's Aston Martin

"Well, that was eye opening" James commented.

"Why'd you say that?" Ward asked as they slowed their pace.

James frowned skimming through his thoughts. "If the Death Crow is indeed a Tick bug agent, then he can't be the hooded man in the alley. Culkin White claimed the man who saved his life was a dude around his own age" he explained.

Idris rolled his eyes. "Or maybe a Tick Bug agent prepared it's offspring for this task like he knew the massacre was inevitable" he chipped not even taking his own words seriously.

James stopped dead in his tracks. Idris' theory had hit him hard.

It was in the record that nearly all the Tick Bug agents were killed in the massacre, but James had encountered Maureen Conrad, who obviously survived it. Could she have had access to the last known Tick Bug base or did she have someone play the role of the Death Crow?

Could it have been Billy Conrad who was her nephew? The young man who was in a relationship with Ward's daughter? But Billy had just recovered from the hospital, how could he suddenly be a vigilante with so much fighting tactics?

Why would he even think that? It was funny to him just moments later. The mind, though. How far it drifts.

A lot flashed through his mind in a couple of seconds.

"What now?" Idris asked moving closer to James.

James blinked severally. "Nothing, I just... I just had a thought" he replied just as his mobile phone rang. He yanked it out to see who was calling him. It was Officer Alan Fridge.

James had put him in charge of guarding Jenkins' hospital room door.

"Alan, what's up?" James inquired impatiently.

"Detective? We've got really, really bad news" Alan responded from his end of the line.

James sighed frustrated. The night couldn't possibly get any worse "What happened now?"

Alan mumbled trying to figure out a way to break the news. "It's Jerry Jenkins, Sir" he reported.

"What about him?" James asked interested.

"He uh... he committed suicide, sir" Alan explained.

James quailed unable to process Alan's testimony. "He was cuffed to his goddamn bed; how could he possibly have committed suicide?" He asked in anger.

"He overpowered a female nurse who went in to give him a sleeping dose, he took her syringe and stabbed himself in the eye" Alan reported.

James paused. "Get the situation under control. I'll be there when I can" he replied discreetly.

Alan nodded from his end of the line. "Yes, sir" he said respectfully ending the call.

Ward stopped by his car and turned towards the other two men.

"You guys should take the day off, have some rest. You did good. I'll look into all of it" Ward said boarding his vehicle.

James and Idris waved, and then watched as he zoomed out of the RCF car lot.

"What do we do now?" James asked Idris.

Idris exhaled. "It's been a long night, but I've got one more thing to do" He said stretching his hand at James. "Give me the keys, let me drive" he requested.

James searched through his pockets and brought out his car keys handing it to Idris. "Where are we going?"

"Just some place" Idris replied entering the vehicle as James did same. The car was kicked backed to life and zoomed out of the RCF complex.

Dec

3:13 am

Idris stopped the Malibu by the curb of a bungalow. The area was quiet as it was early in the day and most people were still in bed.

James looked around. "What are we doing here, man?" He asked Idris.

Idris took some seconds before replying. "While you were admitted in the hospital after the Logan kid shot you, Ploroe and I would drive to this super Mart to get you cheap toilet rolls and chocolates. It was a prank we'd hope to reveal to you later on. But I guess we were way too occupied, you know" Idris narrated. "Ploroe was into this girl, she worked in the mart and I, uh... made fun of him for not being able to talk to her like a real cool guy. Well, he did win her heart after my bullying. In that short period of time, their romance blossomed, and it always put a smile on my face to know how the worst scenarios could breed happy moments" he paused and sniffled.

After a while he pointed at the bungalow by his side of the vehicle. "That's her house. Mary Fabian. She is a real wonder" he turned to James who had become terribly moody. "If I don't pay my respects now, James, I'll never come back here because if we agree or not, it's our fault. Our fucking fault. We killed that kid" he lamented.

Idris opened the door. "I'll be right back" he said to James before stepping out of the car and headed for the house he had previously pointed at.

James watched him ring the doorbell severally before a young woman opened the door. The moment she saw Idris, she burst into tears kneeling down. Idris raised her up and hugged her for quite some time.

James observed the scene for a while, and when he couldn't watch again, he looked away feeling guilty. He had not been close to Ploroe in recent times and it made him sad. If he could change the situation of things, he would.

The Early Coffee Studio,

The Grand Bulletin Media House,

Leafonia

9:00 am

The cameras rolled live on Alexx DuBois who sat on a comfortable sofa on the studio grounds with a large wallpaper bearing the show's title at his back.

"Good morning, people of Ringsville. It is another great day in God's three hundred and sixty-five. Welcome to The Early Coffee Show and I am your host as always, Alexx DuBois" he started with his focus straight at the camera. "Oh, so much has happened in the past few months in this wonderful city of ours. Spring didn't fail to deliver" he chuckled. "And last night seemed to be a very spectacular night. Those who are current with the news have probably heard of a raid from a single third party that was clearly not the RVPD or the RCF. And another raid conducted by the police that led to the death of renowned Arabian business mogul, Falcon Hussein. There are alleged rumors that Hussein was a drug lord and a member of a crime utopia that controls the city's underworld. Yikes!" he flinched in a sarcastic manner looking away from the camera and then laughing loud. His gaze was quickly fixed back to the cameras at his front.

"With that being said, let's dive into the topic of the day. I'd like to introduce a very influential man who has been on the wings of this city and has done his fair share of patriotism" he turned to an advanced in age brunette man who wore goggles, a white sleeve inner and a shorthand grey sweater.

"Doctor Earl Harris, welcome to The Early Coffee Show" Dubious acknowledged warmly with a handshake which the agile man quickly took.

"It's a pleasure as always, DuBois" Harris replied.

DuBois picked up his iPad and took a quick glimpse. "Doctor Earl Harris is a well renowned journalist, who wrote for The Ringsville Quarter for....." he said to the cameras before turning to Harris hoping he could help him out with the correct answer.

"Twenty-eight years" Harris replied swiftly.

"Twenty-eight solid years, folks" DuBois repeated. "Doctor Harris, you've been in the business of exposing corrupt plots and conspiracies breeding all over the city. You were part of the Four Elite Writers of the Quarter who published the article that exposed the Duvall family back in the day. You, sir, are a national hero" DuBois praised Harris' achievement.

Harris grinned nodding. "I've done my part of patriotism, just as you said"

DuBois smirked. "The reason why you are our guest today, and I apologize for inviting you at the last hour" DuBois started. "After the raid that occurred on the eve of yesterday in Opera Town, I mean, there's been a lot of humming to what is indeed occurring in our city. Footages show a masked man with a very advanced battle suit emerging from the building moments before the police arrived" DuBois displayed the footage of the Death Crow on the screen.

"I mean look at that suit, Doctor Harris" DuBois adjusted on his sofa, "Twelve years ago, you were the one who interviewed Kenneth Sparrow, the Executive Chief of Tick Bug Agency about his Watchnight code program. Does this look anything like the prototype he had displayed that day?" DuBois interviewed the older man.

Harris sipped a glass of water that was beside him. "In every way, yes, it does, DuBois. You know, till this very day, I do regret the fact that Sparrow wanted his program public. I should never have agreed to interview him. The sequence that followed after that is something no one in Ringsville would want to replay in their heads" he paused for a couple of seconds catching his breath. "It's not someone cosplaying. That is the Crow suit Sparrow had planned to launch. I saw the model myself" he replied.

DuBois had all his focus on the veteran. "So, are you saying that the Tick Bug Agency is still functioning?" He inquired.

"I can't say for sure, DuBois. But there is now a third leg, and it's out of Sparrow's intended plan. The Crow Project was not intended to claim lives without the approval of the police, but this man is a lone wolf, which makes him a threat to everyone. He has *no jurisdiction* to interfere in police business and kill criminals in the name of the law, unless he is able to come out and face the police and pledge his alliance as a Sparrow agent"

"It could be that whoever the Crow is, he's no longer interested in being a government puppet. Lloyd Coulson or the Bigwig of Ringsville as he was fondly called back in the day massacred all the agents who were in his way of ending the Watchnight Program. This man could help the law bring Coulson and whoever his allies are into the light" DuBois shipped in.

Harris nodded "That is a very good theory, DuBois. But we didn't need the Crow when Colson was caught and tried in the Column. We had a good DA and a good justice department. We don't need a madman breaking the rules playing God. I have been in the game long enough to know if you aren't under the guidance of the Column that the city's secret service works with, you are a criminal. The Crow or whatever he is called must come out and prove his allegiance to the city. He has helped in exposing a major crime plot, but the people of Ringsville need confirmation. They'll need assurance that he's not like the people he's trying to stop" He concluded.



Central Law Firm,

CRAXTON

9:44 am

Diana was seriously occupied in her office with work when Brandy Gene slowly flipped his phone over her eyes.

She could read the details in a jiffy.

"Your fiancé is going to get himself killed" Brandy said to her worried.

She looked up to him dropping her pen. "What is this?"

"He's going around interviewing Earl Harris about the Crow Project that has been off the grid for like ever. He's going to wake up bats that have been asleep. If Lloyd Coulson is alive, he's going to get involved again. It's dangerous" Brandy explained.

Diana observed him carefully before smiling. "When did you start being concerned about Alexx's well-being?" She queried.

"Dani, listen to me. We might not get along, right? But I don't want to see him get hurt either. I mean if he gets killed, it affects you, and then that affects me and that is not good for anybody"

Diana relaxed on her chair. "I love Alexx very much, but he loves what he does. He always wanted to tell the stories no one was willing to tell. He *is* making a difference, Brandon"

Brandy waved his head in denial. "There's no difference, Diana. You ever heard of the Four Elite Writers of the Quarter?"

Diana sighed wishing Brandy didn't interrupt her while she worked that morning "Brandy" she said exhausted.

"Listen, these guys were the best journalists this city ever knew. I mean the beat. In the 80's and 90's. These guys were *Smokin' Aces*. Earl Harris was one of 'em, and he's the only one of two still alive. You know why? The system smoked them out, they found too many dirty secrets and not just about the Duvall family, no. Your fiancé is making a mistake drawing a retired legend back into the hex. He's

gonna get himself killed if he doesn't stop being such a dick, Diana" he shut his eyes shrinking. "I apologize for using that word" he said while he watched Diana stare in awe.

He stood up straight. "Just-talk to him. He'll listen to you"

Diana looked away frustrated. "And what makes you think I haven't tried?" She asked.

"Then I guess he's fucked. He's the Lord's problem now" he replied sarcastically before walking out of her office.

Secret Underground Base,

CRAXTON

10: 34 am

Artem boarded the elevator which headed to the sublevel base where his operations were being carried out. He was impatient for reasons he couldn't possibly understand. He yanked out his smartphone from his coat and dialed Maureen's number before placing the device on his ear.

After a few seconds, Maureen answered.

"We have a lot of things to talk about!" Artem said sternly.

Maureen frowned feeling the authority from Artem's voice. "What is going on, dad?" She asked concerned.

"Have you seen the news?" He inquired.

Maureen murmured, "No, I haven't. Why?" she replied.

"There is a masked man dressed in a suit made with Vylan very similar to the one on Sparrow designed for Tick Bug. He's running about the streets unhinged. He singlehandedly took down a warehouse operated by the Comrades. What aren't you telling me, Maureen?" Artem shot at her.

Maureen paused in confusion. "Wait, do you think... do you think I solved the anagram puzzle and failed to inform you? Do you think I found the last Tick Bug fortress and I'm now running around taking down criminals in the Crow suit?" She charged at Artem with sarcasm quite vexed.

"You can't stoop that low, dad. Can you?"

Artem shut both eyes, he would punch something if he wasn't surrounded by steel. "Maureen, listen to me. There is no way on God's green earth would a person have found Sparrow's last base unless they could decode that anagram. Who did you show it to?" He asked.

"No one, okay?!" She flared up. "If there's someone who has found the base, then it must be an agent who survived. *An agent above fifth grade*. They must have returned to give Lloyd Coulson the payback he truly deserves" she stated.

Artem exhaled unable to accept Maureen's theory. He knew how out of place that sounded, but he couldn't possibly tell. She had no idea he was in affiliation with Coulson.

"You better be careful now, Maureen. If what you say is true, you should leave the city. Take the kids, if necessary, your fellow agents know your face. They'd want to make contact" He advised.

"I'll be fine. It's you I'm concerned about. If they know you are out there, they might be coming for you, too" she replied.

Artem looked at the steel doors deep in thought, he could feel the elevator stop meaning he had reached the ground floor.

"This will be the last you'll hear from me for some time, Maureen. I love you. I love the kids, too" he concluded and cut the call even before she could even reply.

The elevator doors opened as Artem walked out into a less busy hall. The basement was less crowded in the morning.

He took a short staircase to a special viewing room which was similar to a luxury box in a Football Stadium.

He proceeded in to find Lloyd by the large window observing what was going down in the hall.

Artem stood by him and they observed in silence for a couple of seconds.

Lloyd chuckled. "Artem" he called out to the older man standing by his side.

Artem turned to him without responding.

"Why do we tend to keep the most meaningful things from each other?" Lloyd asked.

Artem shrugged. "You have to be more specific"

Lloyd smiled. "There's a mysterious man dressed up in a Tick Bug Crow suit calling himself the Death Crow" he started turning his gaze to Endario. "First of all, you avoid telling me the identity of this Tick Bug agent you trust so much. And now, you fail to tell me he's cracked the code, and he's currently running around busting up operations of the Comrades, just like we had planned" he paused exhaling "My friend, if anyone between the two of us should keep secrets, you know very well it shouldn't be you. That's a red flag. You are an old man; you can die in your sleep and your dreams will die with

you. As for me, I still have my life ahead, theoretically speaking" he said looking through the glass again.

Artem bit his lip. "Have you asked yourself why I haven't disclosed the identity of this agent to you? Have you asked yourself why I decided to be in business with you?"

Lloyd smiled folding his palms behind his waist. "Oh, come off your fucking ass, Endario. You can't possibly be that naive" he replied disgusted before walking back to his seat knowing what Artem meant.

Artem approached him. "There's no justification until there is. If you are innocent prove it!"

"I did not order the massacre of over fifteen hundred Tick Bug employees for crying out loud, old man!" He shouted. God, he had been keeping that locked for years.

Artem watched Lloyd pant like he was going to have a panic attack. "There's no proof to show you didn't" he countered.

"There's neither any proof to show I did. I was framed" he replied.

"Framed by who?" Artem scowled.

"The Blue doctor" Lloyd answered.

"The Blue Doctor?!" Artem repeated, he didn't take Lloyd for the type who believed in made-up boogeymen.

"Yup. But I simply call him the 'Morbid Monger'. The devil himself. It could be even be a woman. I don't really know"

Artem chuckled lightly. "Lloyd, the Blue Doctor doesn't fuckin' exist. He's the scarecrow the Red Covenant created to put people in check"

"Unless, you are wrong, old timer. The Blue Doctor existed back in the day as much as I think he does now. He's a sneaky bastard, and do you know what you and Anthony Birdleaf have in common?" He asked grinning.

Artem failed to reply.

"You both don't believe in the Blue Doctor, and that will be the death of you guys. Not your immortalized rivalry. No, no, no, but your ignorance" he said sternly.

Artem exhaled. "So, you swear you had nothing to do with the Tick Bug Massacre?"

Lloyd laughed, "You don't really expect me to tell you if I did, right? 'Cause that'll be so dumb of you, But no, I didn't. I was at the right place at the wrong time, and the Morbid Monger saw his opportunity"

"What do you mean by 'right place at the wrong time'? What business did you have in Tick Bug Agency if you weren't there to kill them all?"

"That's where the confessions end. What are we doing now, sharing?!" Lloyd countered.

"Fine, I don't need you to tell me, but I know it's something that is very mutually beneficial to us"

Lloyd crossed his legs. "Old man, that's why I'm here. Because you are less maniacal than they are. If we didn't have use for each other, we'd probably kill each other in the park"

Artem relaxed on a sofa opposite Lloyd pouring himself whiskey. "I did have two good associates who were Tick Bug agents, I once swore vengeance in their memory to bring you down by any means necessary but I realized there was a bigger threat to not just this city but to the whole world. And I figured I needed the man who I blamed all these years for their dark fates" he explained. 'So, this Blue Doctor or Morbid Monger, whatever his fucking name is, he's working for the Red Covenant, yes?"

"I wouldn't necessarily say work for. I think he's a man preying on both sides. He might be a Red person, but this guy, this guy frames Red People too. This man just wants to see this world burn"

"Well, ain't that a piece?" Artem commented. "He seems like an old jolly good fellow"

"If you must know what business I had in Tick Bug, I'll tell you" Lloyd said. He did feel the need to share this with Artem, if he wanted the old-timer to fully trust him.

"You don't have to if you don't feel the need to" Artem quickly replied.

Lloyd smirked. "Just shut the hell up and listen" he shunned Artem bluntly. "Kenneth Sparrow came to me" he began, "He came to me when he felt their cover was blown. He said he needed a ground level criminal who had eyes and ears everywhere" he pointed at himself. "Me, I was his contingency. He realized I was by far not even a threat; I was an asset, and he needed me to get him into the real war. In return, my name would be scrapped out of the Agency's blacklist, but he had moles, agents who were loyal to the Red Covenant" he explained.

Artem squinted his eyes. "That's not true, Coulson. I see that you are trying to get pity here but that's—" he mumbled, "Kenneth Sparrow sent several agents to hunt you back in the day. You were one of his biggest targets. Why would he suddenly think you could be an asset to his cause?" He countered in confusion.

"Sparrow was a pretty smart man, but he was also fairly dumb" Lloyd chuckled. "The Crow suit isn't the only prototype he designed, Artem. You'd ask how I knew this, that's why I told you why I had affiliations with Tick Bug. There were two suits, both special in their own way, but the other one malfunctioned; it fried the brains of those who donned it during trials. So, he did his best to get rid of it, Birdleaf found it before he could"

Endario was stunned. "That's not possible. That's-that's bullshit!" he replied uncomfortable.

Lloyd nodded. "Everything's bullshit until it isn't. I know it's hard to accept the fact that Birdleaf is way ahead of you but it's true. He is. He has Sparrow's other suit, the one he called the Cassowary. A weapon of mass destruction, it could take down multiple threats quicker than the Crow suit ever could and it was unstable. It was a risk he couldn't afford. If the algorithm of the Cassowary suit had backfired and began killing civilians on the field, Sparrow and Tick Bug were done for. Birdleaf stole it while it was being broken up for parts. It was made out of Vylan anyway." Lloyd narrated watching Artem freeze in his seat. "You don't have to be petrified. There's been no sightings of the Cassowary suit and that can be only for one reason. Birdleaf hasn't been able to rewrite the algorithm and get a host powerful enough to don a suit that diabolical"

Lloyd chuckled continuing his monologue. "Do you want to know why I hate the Red Covenant? Not because they pushed Kord into a war he wasn't ready for, not because my future was destroyed. Not because they framed me up, and made me the city's number one public enemy. No, all that I can forgive. but because they took people I cared about away from me. You weren't the only one who had a string in Tick Bug. Do you know what it is to mourn for people who you began having a connection with and then still get blamed for their deaths? It's terrible" he said vexed. "I am not ready to die till I see every last one of them in the ground. I don't want to be a hero, that's a fantasy. I just want things back to the way they were before you and your friends started a deathly ass cult!" he shot at Artem.

Artem exhaled putting his glass of whiskey aside. "I'm sorry, Lloyd. I'm sorry that my ignorance caused you and thousands more a chance to make a difference. But that's why I'm here now, I'm here to help you end it. For good" he assured Lloyd before stretching his hand for a truce.

Lloyd looked at the hand for seconds before taking it. "So, Birdleaf wants both suits?" He asked Artem.

"I don't think he wants just the suit. There's more in that Tick Bug fortress than just the Crow. My agent isn't it by the way. *He's as surprised as we all are*" Artem replied.

"What's the plan, then?" Lloyd inquired.

"Birdleaf is going to think we found the fortress and unleashed the Crow, and that will most likely trigger him to unleash the Cassowary... if he has gotten someone who has the mental capability to don the suit. We can watch from the sidelines as they tear each other apart" Artem elucidated.

Lloyd scoffed. "It'll be nice to get The Death Crow on our side, though. Don't you think? We can't have two augmented killing machines out there and not have one pledge allegiance"

"Well, if the Death Crow is the type of man I believe him to be, you are a dead man, Coulson. Wanting to reason with him should be the last thing on your Wishlist" he clarified.

EPISODE XIII: POKER

"DEPEND ON THE RABBIT'S FOOT IF YOU WILL, BUT REMEMBER IT DIDN'T WORK FOR THE RABBIT."

-R.E. SHAY

Eleven Days Since the First Appearance of the infamous Death Crow.

HennyKane Island

11:21 am

Denver HennyKane and Christine Walters walked through the cloisters of a part of the manor.

They walked silently for a couple of minutes before Denver finally spoke. "So, how's work?" He inquired warmly from her.

Christine smiled cheerfully. "Don't make this about me, Denver. You know why I'm here" she replied.

Denver chuckled looking down. "Yeah, yeah. I know why you are here"

"The tree. I know you are trying to protect it. So why don't you let me run tests on it, right here on the island? You never know what I might find" she suggested.

Denver stopped walking; his eyes still fixed to the floor. "Christine, we've been over this. I'm not going to break a long family oath just because I feel like my life's worth it. I'm not that kind of man. That tree will not be defiled under my watch, not anymore" he clarified.

Christine was deeply troubled. "Denver, don't do this to yourself. Let me see what I can do to help you. You grow weaker by the day"

"You've done quite enough, Christine. Honestly, you've done a lot more than a friend can ask for. Being here in my final days. It's more than enough. More than you can possibly imagine" he assured her gently kissing her knuckles.

Christine bit her lips trying to fight her frustration amidst Denver's show of genuine affection. "You are a pain in my ass"

Denver nodded. 'I have known that for a decade, Christine. And I am grateful to be it' he teased as a drop of blood trickled down his right nostril. He flinched. "Oh, shit' he said laughing. He yanked out a handkerchief and wiped it off. "There we go" Just then did he notice the terror in Christine's eyes. He knew she hadn't still come to terms with the sad reality of his ill fate at the hands of a disease barely understood. "Christine-I"

She raised her hand to shun him. "I don't want to hear it"

"Master Denver, there is someone here to see you" a maid interrupted their conversation.

Denver turned to her with a charming smile "Who is it, Mrs. Lawman?"

The elderly maid shrugged. "I'm not very sure, sir. But I believe she's from the tower. Master Brooklyn is speaking to her in one of the living rooms right now"

Denver nodded. "From the tower, huh? Thank you." he acknowledged the maid before returning his focus to Christine. "This must be important; I've got to handle this" he said to her walking back from whence they came with her following behind.



Denver and Christine entered the living room where Gareth Brooklyn had warmly welcomed Candice Carver who was Denver's secretary while he was still active as CEO of HennyKane Enterprises.

Candice sat calmly with a cup of coffee in her hands.

Denver relaxed on a chair opposite her.

She smiled seeing him. "Mr. HennyKane. It's a pleasure to see you again. We've missed you at the tower, sir" she said humbly.

Denver grinned. "It's a pleasure to see you, too, Candice. What brings you to the Island unannounced?"

Candice cleared her throat before she replied. "The board, sir. They are planning a new layout. They want to launch a science expo on the abandoned Duvall Peninsula on Pin Citi"

Denver winced unable to believe Candice's report. "That's not possible, Candice. The Board very well knows HennyKane Enterprises has no business with any Duvall properties claimed by the government or otherwise" he replied with vexation. His veins protruded, any man in his right sense would know Denver had lost it. His rage bothered Christine.

"Denver?" Christine called out to him. "Please, do calm down" she pleaded placing a hand on his shoulder.

Denver took in a deep breath. "What else do you know, Candice?" He asked the young woman sitting opposite him.

Candice exhaled. "Sir, it's going to be a big project and most of the board are going with it. They have ninety percent of the shareholders on their side too. It's a new infrastructure to develop more of Pin Citi. Coming here to tell you about this make me lose my job"

"It's that bad, huh?!" Denver sneered; his eyes flashed with anger.

Candice nodded to answer his question.

"No one's going to fire you. Who's proposing this business plan?" Gareth queried.

"Reece Bowie, sir. He's drafting the company towards a new direction; he's won the board and they've abandoned plans to finish the Hematology firm that you earlier projected."

Denver grabbed an empty glass cup on a table nearest to him and tossed it towards a wall adjacent to him in anger.

His actions had everyone at their feet.

"Master Denver!" Gareth yelled going over to help him relax.

"Calm down, Denver" Christine pleaded trembling.

Denver turned to her with fury. "You don't tell me to calm down!" he yelled jabbing a finger at her. "This is my family's company. My family's legacy, and some dick thinks he can just come along and sabotage plans and rules that we've kept all through these years. No!" He barked at her as she backed away from him in terror. She couldn't remember when last Denver was this rageful.

"Please, Master Denver. You have to relax, let's think things through" Gareth begged him doing his best to calm him down.

Denver had his face down looking at nothing in particular. He was deeply pained by the news Candice had come to deliver; everyone could tell.

"There's nothing to think through, Gareth. This is my entire fault. I should have put you in charge as my representative. I thought those lunatics could keep up with my pace, but they are clearly way over their heads" he lamented.

"It's not your fault" Gareth responded trying his best to Denver.

Denver looked at Candice. "How did you know about this? You are my personal secretary and not for the general board. They'll never disclose such information to you unless I'm involved" he asked her.

"It's Director Joe Decker; he's the only one who's pretty uncomfortable with Reece Bowie's plan. He sent me to you" she explained.

Denver looked away nodding. "Gareth, get one of the cars ready" he ordered getting up slightly trembling.

"Where are you going, sir?" Gareth asked concerned.

"Where do you think, old man? I have to handle this" He replied walking out of the room.

"Can I drive you at least?" Gareth asked.

"I'll be fine" Denver replied, his voice fading out of the room.

HennyKane Enterprises Tower,

CRAXTON

1:06 pm

Denver proceeded into the ground lobby of the company tower. It was a large reception hall covered with glass walls and tiles from all sides. He wore a casual leather jacket as he quaked slightly, walking across the hall.

The building was stacked with busy people and everyone seemed to mind their business not even realizing the owner of the building they were currently on was in their midst. But once an employee had caught sight of him, everyone had.

"Look, it's Denver HennyKane" someone murmured.

He could hear whispers from all corners, but he was fixed on his goal.

"Mr. HennyKane, it's so good to-" A ground level security guard walked up to him with much enthusiasm.

"Not now, Grady!" Denver cut him short approaching one of the elevators. Everyone stared in awe and amazement as the billionaire stormed into the empty cubicle with the doors locking behind him.

Denver emerged out of the elevator on the 86th floor of the tower. He walked through an empty foyer and approached a reception room serving only the board member's meeting room.

There was a young man sitting behind the counter, he was the receptionist. He was on a phone call as Denver walked towards the meeting room door.

The man was dazed by what he saw. "I'll call you back, ma'am" he said to the client on the other end of the line. He dropped the phone immediately and ran over the counter to stop Denver.

"Sir, I'm sorry, but you can't go in there!" The receptionist urged standing in Denver's way.

Denver eyed the unfortunate fellow from head to toe. "Do you know who I am?" He asked pissed.

The receptionist shivered. "Um, yes, sir. You are Denver HennyKane, Sir" the receptionist replied bowing his head briefly with respect.

"Good, now get the fuck out of my way! I won't say it again" he warned leering.

"But, sir. I have been giving orders not to let anyone through these doors-" the receptionist explained as an impatient Denver grabbed his collars and shoved him through the meeting doors.

The receptionist fell on the ground with the long table full of directors and their secretaries turning back startled by the shocking scene. Denver walked in, giving the room a quick scan.

He saw Reece Bowie sitting at the far end of the table, on the seat Denver would have sat on if he was a present at the meeting.

"Mr. HennyKane" Reece acknowledged smiling. He took a much more comfortable position on the chair now Denver was present just to spite him. "It's good to have you back here, did you get word on the meeting, are you strong enough to take your position seriously?" He inquired in a callous manner.

Denver panted for a while; he was this close to tossing Reece out of the window, that was if he had the strength to.

"What are you doing?" Denver asked in a rather calm voice.

Reece scoffed finding Denver's question absurd. "What am I doing?"

Denver nodded; his focus fixed on the older man. "Yes, Bowie. You heard me. What are you doing?"

Reece took in a deep breath. "Well, if you must know, we are running your company, son. The company you have tossed down a dark path. We are taking it to a new level" he responded.

"And what's your definition of a new level?" he didn't bother waiting for a reply, "you tend to forget the power a CEO wields. You don't do shit! -without my approval. My grandfather started this company, my dad took over and made it a household name and now, it's my turn. You know very well what happened when the Duvall's ran this city. We've made it crystal clear HennyKane Enterprises would have no business in any of their properties, the Peninsula included. We cannot be associated with such. It's bad for the firm and it is bad for business. It makes us desperate. We already have a project ready to be signed by you all, Reece. We all agreed that was the plan"

"Well, here's an even better plan"

Denver sighed, "Listen to me, you old leech. The Duvall's are cursed, HK Enterprises will have nothing to do with them!" he charged at Reece taking a few steps further.

"Who told you about our plans to acquire the Peninsula? You should be in a hospital, Denver. You should be recovering while we launch this company away from oblivion" Reece urged.

Denver placed a hand forward to shun him. "Don't you fucking talk like you are doing this in my father's name, or in his legacy. Cause we both know you ain't" he turned to the rest of the board. "Every single one of you have missed the vision of this establishment"

Reece laughed. "Denver don't make a fool of yourself. You are better than that"

Denver scoffed. "Is that so? Well, if you continue with this project to open an Expo that no one gives two fucks about, I will have your head in a fucking basket!" He sneered at Reece.

Lara Gillian tapped her hands on the table to get Denver's attention. "Denver, please. Listen to me. I know you are concerned about the plans Reece has in hand, but it is a game changer. We are talking about a billion in revenue in just three months. We've had the calculations done. This will work. It'll be the biggest expo in the Eastern Coast of this country" she explained calmly to Denver hoping he would see reason with her.

"It's not always about the money, Mrs. Gillian. We are a research firm. Well respected worldwide. Most of you here might not have known this but the Duvall's tried to bring down my family's businesses thirty years ago. They tried to cripple us, but we strived through. We didn't fold. We are not going to purchase any Duvall properties. Anyone still owned by the family or by the government" Denver replied.

"Don't you think buying their properties and their assets is a good way to get revenge? Don't talk like a child" Reece countered. "Look, the motion's been passed, Denver. There's been a vote and eight out of eleven board members have supported the Peninsula purchase for an estimated value of two hundred million US dollars. The Shareholders are interested as well. This is the future, Denver. You don't need to support it, but I assure you, you won't regret it" he smiled viciously.

Denver nodded knowing there was nothing more he could do, at least at the particular moment. He took in a deep breath. "Reece, for the last time, call off the deal. We have bigger fish to fry than a science expo. It's not what we need in these trying times"

"This Bad blood your family and the Duvalls have, cannot affect the growth of this company. That idea died with your father and I'm pretty sure he'll be disappointed to know his golden son has failed to follow the times." Reece mocked in a soothing voice. Their eyes locked.

"Don't you dare mention my dad again, you bastard" Denver thundered with fury. "You sure have had this planned out for quite a while, Reece. You will be the most delighted when I fail to take my position back, right? When I die from this illness. Well, guess what I'll make sure it won't be you. Even if it's the last thing I get to do" Denver clarified.

"Sure, in the meantime, let's help you keep your company alive while you recover" Reece smirked.

Denver still had his focus on Reece for another couple of seconds. "Good talk" he concluded walking out of the meeting room.

Reece turned to Joe Decker who had been quiet the whole time. "You told him about the Expo, didn't you? Do you know how much money we will make from it in this city?" He inquired disappointed.

"Every company has protocols, Bowie. Your hunger has surpassed the ideology of this firm" Joe Decker replied standing up and exiting the room.

"What a douchebag" Reece laughed dryly. "Let's continue, shall we?" He addressed the other board members.

Joe Decker caught up to Denver just as he reached the elevator. "Denver, wait a minute" he pleaded.

Denver turned to him. "Why didn't you tell me earlier, Joseph?" He barked.

"Listen, I had my hands tied, okay? I thought we could come to a mutual agreement. But Reece is out of his fuckin' mind. We've all known that for years" he said.

"Well, for a mad man, he sure has a lot of people on his side. Lara Gillian, too. Didn't think that woman could turn, ever!" he lamented just as the elevator doors opened.

"You get some rest; get Gareth down here, if you have to. I trust him. Let him represent you. We can turn things around eventually" Joe Decker urged putting a hand on Denver's shoulder.

Denver walked into the cubicle. "There's nothing to turn around if I'm dead. That's exactly why I am not gonna die" he replied confidently as Joe watched the elevator doors close.

The Next Day,

CRAXTON

9:32 am

Martin drove his black Audi through one of the busy city highways. His younger brother, Harry was in the passenger's seat and he wore his military fatigue.

Harry gave Martin a quick glance, "You alright?" He asked looking through his window.

Martin sighed focused on the road. "Yeah, I'm doing great" he replied with a smile.

"Forgive me for being a pain in the ass, but you are my brother, and I know when something's up with you" he said.

Martin scoffed. "You *are* a pain in my ass"

They both laughed.

"But seriously, what's up?" Harry asked again looking at him. "Are you going to miss me? Or are you scared I'm gonna die this time?" He teased.

Martin nodded rolling his eyes. The word of mouth was powerful. "Okay, that's not funny" he remarked. "Of course, I don't want you to die. I just-" he paused, "I'm always happy when you leave" he said. "And I mean this in a very caring manner. This city is not for you"

Harry flinched curiously. "And what was that supposed to mean?" He inquired.

"Harry, this place? This place is a dead-end and what I'm doing, the effort we put is to make it better" he explained.

Harry scoffed; his gaze fixed on Martin as he drove. "You mean we, as in you and Endario?" He asked.

Martin hesitated before nodding affirmatively. "Yes"

Harry chuckled dryly. "That man is not your friend. He's not anyone's friend. You told me he supported Kord during the Rebellion. He clearly has a part to play in our father's death. And you want to fight for him? For his obsession over this city?" He charged angrily.

Martin raised his right hand towards Harry to shun him. "He supported Kord only before things went south, before that maniac lost control and didn't know when to surrender. Harry, what I do... is for us. To give us a better ho-"

"Oh, cut the crap, Martin!" Harry jumped in before his older brother could finish. "Don't act like you are doing these things for me. I enlisted in the army because of you, remember? And I thought, 'whoa, we are going to fight for our country together'. But no, you came back here, for what?!" He charged at Martin with rage. "Vengeance doesn't solve problems, brother. You should know that better than I do" he said looking out of the windshield.

Silence engulfed the vehicle for a couple of seconds

"I have a son" Martin spat out panting.

Harry turned to him seeing the fear in his brother's eyes. "Excuse me?"

"I have a son, Harry. A son I can't protect" He replied.

Harry was short of words for a while, "Where is he? Why are you just telling me this now?" Harry inquired hastily.

"Because it isn't safe. He's out of reach, but I'm fighting to get him out. I'm telling you this because..... because this could be the last time we speak" he said getting emotional. "It could be you out there or me in here, we are both fighting wars, Harry"

Harry looked at him in shock, "Fuck!" he cursed, "will you tell me his name at least?" Harry asked.

Martin drove into the bus station avoiding Harry's question for a short while, "His name doesn't matter. You'll get to meet him someday" he said turning off the car engine.

Harry panted, he found his older brother irritating at this point, "We are going to meet again, and I will be fully prepared to punch you" he concluded stretching his hand to the back of the vehicle as he quickly grabbed his duffel bag.

Martin nodded, "I really hope that day comes" he replied. He could see a familiar young man about Harry's age sitting with Jessica Ward as they held hands in the waiting area of the bus station.

"Is that your cue?" He inquired pointing at them.

Harry paused following his hand. He caught sight of Jessica and Billy.

"Yeah, they are" he answered.

"Who's the dude?"

Harry scoffed, "Why do you care?" He asked before stepping out of the vehicle. Martin stepped out too, but did not escort his little brother further. He watched Harry go, and all of a sudden, he wished things had gone differently.

Billy and Jessie stood up seeing Harry approach them.

"How are you doing, man?" Harry asked hugging Billy.

Billy chuckled, "With you here? I feel amazing."

Harry smiled then proceeded to hug Jessica, "Look at you, better than ever" he remarked.

Jessie giggled. "Just like Billy said: "with you here? I feel amazing"" She replied with a charming smile.

"Aww" Harry replied acting all sweet before hugging her again.

"I'm gonna miss you both" he said being emotional in a comical way.

"We are going to miss you more, dumbass" Billy responded grinning.

"That I don't doubt. You too have to look out for each other" he said, "You guys coming here to see me off, it really does mean a lot."

Jessie nodded, "You behave"

"I always do" Harry flinched jokingly picking up his duffel bag. "See you guys soon" he concluded walking past them towards a bus being boarded by fellow army personnel.

"Bye" She waved as Harry quickly turned to wave back, he glanced at his brother Martin who was still standing by the car. He hesitated before waving. Martin did same.

They watched him board the large bus until the vehicle was in motion and soon out of sight.

"I'm gonna miss him" Billy said.

Jessie nodded getting teary eyes.

Billy turned his focus to Martin who was about boarding his own vehicle.

"So, that's his brother?" He inquired.

Jessie nodded, "Yeah. He's a nice guy, but not much of a talker. He was in the military long before Harry enlisted, but he quit. He and my dad never really get along" Jessie narrated watching Martin start the vehicle and zoom off.

"Why?" Billy asked holding her hands.

"Different ideologies, I guess" she replied.

Billy jeered. *What else was new?*

"That's about right" he commented leading her towards her mom's Volvo which they had driven over.

Jessie flinched sort of terrified. "Billy? Are you sure you're okay to drive?" She asked.

"I got us here, didn't I?" He inquired.

"I'm just scared, you know... after last time" she replied.

Billy brought her waist to his. "That was a silly mistake, and I'll never let anything bad happen to you. I promise" he assured her with a kiss

She smiled a little relieved.

"About the accident, do you feel some sort of enhancements in you after we got out of the hospital? Things that don't seem normal?" Billy asked Jessie.

Jessie stared into his eyes. Something inside her became secretive. She loved Billy but didn't trust him enough to confide in him. She didn't trust anyone. "Apart from the fear of cars and driving? No, nothing" she replied faking a smile.

Billy nodded a little bit unconvinced. When he was with her, he felt a form of weakness in his bones. She took his mad side away, and it made him feel sane. He never thought a woman could make him

feel vulnerable. But it wasn't her, it was what was inside her. "Let's get you home, princess" he teased sweeping her off of her feet which made her laugh. He headed for the car parked meters away.

Ward Residence,

Greentown

11:18 am

Billy parked the car in the garage and walked Jessie to the front porch. They laughed at each other's joke. He held her waist tight, kissing her softly. "I've got to go now" he said to her in a whispering voice.

Jessie laughed, "You don't want to come in for some tea? Josh will probably be playing some video games. You know loves beating your ass" she insisted.

Billy shook his head slightly, "Nah, it seems like fun, but I've got to rest and you should, too" he suggested just as the door flung wide opened. He young couple could see Harold standing in the doorway. He didn't look pleased.

Billy was so terrified of him, or of what he was. Suddenly, he wondered why he couldn't sense Ward's presence as he approached them from the other side of the door.

"Conrad?" Harold said to Billy sternly.

"Mr. Ward" Billy replied awkwardly.

Harold faked a grin, so obvious that they realized it.

"It's Commissioner Ward, son" he corrected Billy.

Billy bent his head in a submissive way, "Oh, yes, Sir. My bad" he apologized.

Jessie could tell her father was trying to intimidate Billy for reasons she probably didn't understand.

"Dad?" She called out to him walking into the house, "Billy's on a schedule and he's already pretty late" she explained to her father.

Ward fixed his gaze on Billy, "You've been out of the hospital for barely three weeks and what? You think you are okay to drive?"

Billy failed to reply.

"And you drag my daughter into it" he added showing his level of disappointment.

Billy bowed his head, "I'm sorry, Sir. It won't happen again" he apologized.

Ward nodded. "I know it won't. You go home now, Billy. There's a psychotic killer on the loose who calls himself a vigilante. You have to be careful" He advised shutting the door on Billy's face.

Billy felt bad for how many people saw his alter ego the Death Crow. He just wanted positive change. He believed he had a calling to take out those who were corrupting the city. And even if the killing wasn't something he really supported, the other part of him wanted to. A drive in him made it necessary that villains didn't deserve to live.

He'd take Lloyd Coulson for example; a man who after his evil deeds was simply imprisoned for life in Acropolis, and somehow, he found a way to escape. "*They don't deserve a second chance*" He'd occasionally say to himself.

An Anchored Container Ship,

Fishplain Bay,

Fishplain

11:44 am

David Logan's medical and therapy sessions continued over the days. Though he still didn't know what Anthony Birdleaf was preparing him for, he wasn't really bothered by it. He felt peace in Mayton Skivinch's presence. He shared his past life and some of his darkest secrets with the doctor, and Mayton in turn shared his early life with David.

Both men had become friends and David didn't mind staying on board the ship even if he was being caged as long as he was with Mayton.

Today, Mayton had given him his daily dose of an unknown sedative to calm his nerves. Mayton always told David that he made most of his own drugs.

"Ahhhh" David sighed in relief as the needle slid out of his arm.

"That should make you feel better" Mayton guaranteed with a smile.

David nodded, "Thanks"

"Anytime, buddy. Anytime" Mayton replied dropping the syringe on a tray.

"Do you think Mr. Birdleaf is still going to have need for me?" David asked Mayton curiously.

Mayton jeered writing down the morning's report "Do you want him to?"

David shrugged dumbfounded.

"If you must know, Logan, there's a masked vigilante running around playing God" Mayton shook his head in disappointment. "Heads up, we now live a fucking comic book. This guy has done more damage than the cops have in months, and he's been around for barely two weeks. He's a threat to everybody. The dude doesn't give a shit" Mayton reported overwhelmed as he jotted down the days report.

"Is that who Mr. Birdleaf is scared of? Why I'm still here in hiding?" David queried curiously.

Mayton looked at him, then he scoffed, "That's one way to put it, David. Birdleaf is a very powerful man in the whole of Black County. Ever since Don Delgado died, some people already call him the new godfather. I don't think he's scared; I think he's just being cautious. Birdleaf wanted you to steal a code which could have given us the coordinates to a *dungeon*, if I must say, a really cool dungeon where this menacing dumb fuck unfortunately found first." He explained.

"So, I was out here to steal something? Isn't that what got me in trouble in the first place?" David inquired with disgust.

Mayton nodded, "Yes, but you are good at what you do, and Birdleaf found it fit to invest in you. He thinks you are the key to most of his problems"

David sniffled, "Well, that's heartbreaking. I don't think I'm that important just because my dad was unjustly killed by the system that was bound to protect."

Mayton returned to his notebook, "Then perhaps, you don't see what we see. And if you don't, all this-all this would be a waste of time and resources. You have a chance to change this city as we know it. You've told me all the wrongs that have played out in Trisword where you grew up. Wouldn't you want to save them now that you have the power?"

David heaved a sigh, "I don't know if I'm up for this. Maybe Birdleaf was wrong about me. Maybe you are wrong about me."

Mayton shook his head in disbelief, "Maybe I am. But do you know the problem with you?"

"What?"

"I think you've begun to love it in here, am I right?"

David paused, "What'll make you think that?"

"I'm not a fool, I've spent enough time to know what your biggest flaw is. You have the potential, but I don't think you can differentiate between being a free and being locked in a goddamn cage. You are a special, kid. You don't deserve to be any one's puppet"

David smiled mockingly, "What do you want from me, Skivinchi? The only man on earth who did his best to make me feel special was my father." his eyes moistened.

"Yes, your father. Did I ever tell you how incredible your old man was?" Mayton taunted.

David nodded slowly. He wondered why Mayton felt his father was a hero. "You said a pretty lot when we first met. But I don't think you knew him as much as I did. I might have been a kid, but I wasn't blind. My dad was human like everyone else. He didn't deserve what he got, but he had his demons" he replied.

Mayton placed both hands forward placatingly. "I'm from Trisword myself. I never really tell anyone that. I've tasted the injustice that that place suffers. A century ago, it was one of the most respected districts in this shit pile of a city. So, we are blood. But you don't know much about that place, do you?"

"I know enough. I grew up there. I made friends there. I had to leave eventually. It brought too many bittersweet memories of my dad. Then, I moved to Dec, and I made new friends"

Mayton smiled tauntingly, "And where are those friends now?"

David hesitated tightening his fists, "They are out the living their lives, I guess" he said pretending not to care.

"Hmmm" Mayton hummed observing David.

"And do they deserve to be happy while you rot in prison?"

David shook his head severally, "I had it coming, Skivinchi. I'm not a good person" he said.

Mayton chortled. "I wonder who made you that" There was silence for a few seconds. "Have you ever dared to ask yourself what really happened to your father?" He inquired.

David quailed "No. And I don't want to know, okay? Why the fuck does it even matter?"

"Why the fuck does it even matter?" Mayton repeated in disappointment. "Because your old man knew things that could topple a regime. His secrets were going to revive Kord's rebellion, but this time in the right way. People would understand why that sick fuck did what he did. The government couldn't have that. It was barely half a decade since it ended. The city was still healing. God, Black County was still healing. They couldn't afford another resistance. So, they did with him what they do to movers. Your old man was a threat. And so are you" Mayton explained.

David gave the doctor his full attention.

"They killed used the cops to kill your dad, and many years later, they start chasing you too. Might seem like a coincidence, but it's not. It's a pattern. These people, David, they don't deserve to be up there, they don't deserve to make the rules. They had a man in blue do their dirty work" Mayton stated.

"That man, he still walks freely in the streets of this city. His name is Ferdinand Park and he moonlights as a fucking priest. Do you know who covered his bloody tracks?" Mayton asked moving his swivel chair closer to David, "Harold Ward" he spilled, "The fuckin' Police Commissioner. They are all liars, Logan. You can be the resistance, a real one, one people believe in and are ready to follow"

"Why are you telling me all this, Skivinchi?"

Mayton clicked his fingers, "Because I believe you can take your own path. One that aligns with bringing down the ones who destroyed your future" he replied.

"So, let me guess, you don't... you don't want me to work for Birdleaf?" David asked confused.

Mayton became very serious, "Listen here, David, th-"

Their conversation was interrupted by Edward Mojo who barged into the lab.

"Sorry, folks" he apologized, "Am I interrupting something?"

Mayton sighed drifting back to his table, "As a matter of fact, Mojo, you are" he replied bluntly.

Edward scoffed without a care in the world, "Skivinchi? Boss wants to see you out front. Right now," he ordered.

Mayton nodded arranging his table. "On it" he said before turning to David who was left hanging in the middle of a really eye-opening conversation. "I'll be right back, kid" he said walking out.

Edward watched Skivinchi leave as he turned his focus to David who just sat there obliviously. "What's up with you?" He asked.

David shrugged unable to utter a word. "Well, I uh-"

"You be careful, Logan. You don't want to do anything that'll piss the old man now, do you?" He asked.

David shook his head. "No, sir"

Edward nodded somewhat convinced. "Then keep your distance from Skivinchi. He can talk a lot. Don't get carried away by that" He advised walking out and slamming the doors.

Mayton walked down the passageway to the end near the stairs leading to the ship deck. Anthony Birdleaf stood near it talking to two of the sailors.

Birdleaf sent them away once Mayton arrived.

"Skivinchi" Birdleaf addressed the younger man.

"Mr. Birdleaf?" Mayton acknowledged.

"Artem found the last Tick Bug fortress and he's released the one thing we needed unto our lands. The Crow or Death Crow as that bastard calls himself is a menace. That suit belonged to cause; it was a supposed to be for a greater purpose. At this point, I strongly believe the Logan kid is useless to me. His job was to help me steal that anagram code that I believed was in that ugly painting, but it's a waste. We have to switch to plan B" Birdleaf stated.

"And what's plan B, sir?" Mayton asked curiously.

"The Cassowary" Birdleaf stated.

Mayton paused shaking his head in disagreement. "No, no, no, no. Sir, that's suicide" he said quite disturbed.

Birdleaf placed a hand on Mayton's shoulder to calm him down, "Listen to me, Skivinchi. We have to do this. Both suits are the only thing that can get us into Eden without getting killed off by gamma radiation in seconds. It's the only thing that can make our enemies fear of us" he explained clearly.

"Sir, I have been working on that suit for over five years now, but I can't find out what has truly malfunctioned in it. We've had multiple trials and it fries the brains of the subjects every single time. It's not stable" he explained.

"What we need is a powerful, that's all. And I don't pay you to suggest things, Skivinchi. I pay you to build things and solve problems" Birdleaf jabbed a finger at Mayton. "We have to make sacrifices for the cause" he added, "You built a mind controlling chip in it, right? One that can override the Cassowary's original analytics?"

Mayton nodded, "But that will also cripple the subject's brain, Sir" he replied.

"I know that, but it'll do that on our own terms. It means we can remotely control whoever dons the suit. Once we can take control of the city and possibly kill whoever this Death Crow guy is. We can then deal with the fact that our only true obstacle... is Endario and Coulson. Then, we can find this Tick Bug fortress and *the orb* and that gives us a quick gate to Eden. Problem solved for the Red Covenant" he stated.

Mayton looked at Birdleaf slowly with terror, "Do we have a test subject?" He inquired.

Birdleaf scratched his head, "This was not my initial plan for the kid, but I guess he still turns out to be very resourceful. I'm pretty sure convinced that with a fucked-up mind like his, there's nothing we can't accomplish. He's powerful mentally and physically, I see it in him. He'll be a good weapon"

Mayton was not in support with any of Birdleaf's dark plans. "Sir, he's just a kid. We can find other worthy test subjects"

Birdleaf tapped his head in frustration. "If you weren't such a genius, Skivinchi, I'd have put a bullet in your head. You are a big pain in my ass!" he charged at Mayton as he growled. "At exactly six noon, I want you to begin running diagnostics on the subject and reinitiate the Cassowary program. Begin

the test. And let the kid have no idea of this. I don't want him having a panic attack before the experiment" he ordered walking away.

Mayton bent his head for a while. He didn't believe David needed to go out like that. *He's special*, Mayton said to himself. "Fuck this" he cursed walking through the passageway back to his lab on board the container ship.

He returned to the lab to find Logan sitting patiently waiting for him.

David could feel the tension written all over Skivinchy who walked over to a cupboard skimming through it.

"Is everything all right?" He asked.

Skivinchy paused taking his hands out of the shelf, "I don't have a choice, kid. Birdleaf wants me to run a test on you that can cripple your brain" he approached David. "Let me help you" he offered handing a surgical blade to David hastily. "Take this, you'll need it" he urged.

David's heart beat faster, he felt his chest would explode. "For what?" He asked hurriedly taking the tool.

"You'll know when to use it" Mayton assured him. "You'll never escape this ship alive; the Cassowary suit is in a secured vault at the ends of the ship. If you can get to it, you'll be able to fight your way out of here, and get revenge for your father. Do it for me, at least. You don't have to be Birdleaf's puppet, be your own man" Mayton urged quickly leading him towards the door.

"Wait, wait, wait. Just hold on a goddamn minute, Skivinchy" David whined turning around to face the doctor. "You are literally scaring the living crap out of me, man."

Mayton nodded once, "Good, you should be scared"

"I don't know what you want from me. What the fuck is a Cassowary suit anyway?"

"It's a computerized combat suit. It's a military grade piece of tech. It's your only shot out of here. I've been trying for years to fix the mechanics problem for Birdleaf but it's always a tragedy. But that's because I want it that way. I'm not ready for anyone to wear that piece of armor. But you aren't just any ordinary person. You are my friend. And I don't want to see you get hurt or die. There's a chip implanted in the suit's mask. It's meant to override the original system code of the suit. Nothing's going to happen to you, because I'll make it turn off the elimination button. You'll survive the process"

David winced in total confusion. "I don't have the faintest clue about what you're saying."

"Just get out of here before someone gets suspicious. And no matter what happens, you stay in your cabin till they come for you, alright?" Mayton instructed.

David hesitated before walking out.

"Will I ever see you again?" He asked giving feelings of disarray.

Mayton smiled, "We will see if fate deems it so" he concluded shutting the door.

David looked at the steel door for seconds unable to understand what had just happened.

He eventually found the strength to walk and he slowly approached his cabin where two guards were standing by to guard it. Guards were never by his door, Birdleaf never wanted him to feel caged, but now, he began to believe Skivinchi wasn't bluffing. He was about to be used as a lab rat.

"Hey, kid. You are to stay in here till noon. Do you understand?" One of the guards said coldly as David proceeded in.

David nodded fighting his anxiety, "Sure thing" he faked a smile watching the man slowly shut the door.

HennyKane Island

1:17 pm

Damon wandered through the house searching for Denver who he eventually found in his bedroom.

"Oh, there you are" Damon said relieved.

He noticed Denver was busy packing his clothes in a travelling bag, "Are you leaving town?" He inquired.

Denver nodded, he didn't take a glimpse at his younger brother even, "Yes, Damon"

"Business trip?" Damon asked further walking towards him.

Denver froze wishing Damon hadn't asked that. "Do you think I'm stable enough for a business trip?"

Damon shrugged. "So where are you going?"

"I'm going somewhere to clear my head. I'm going to find answers. I'm going to find a cure" he said impatiently.

"Answers. Answers to what?" David winced. "You heard what the doctors said. Whatever's going on with you is really rare. It's been in the Yates blood for generations. Nobody knows where it comes from, but there's no goddamn cure."

"You don't know that!" Denver yelled looking at his brother.

"I do know that, Denver!" Damon heaved a sigh, "Look, I don't want you dead. But what's worse is having to know you're out there on your own... sick! What if you don't find the answers you're looking for, huh? What then? What if you die out there and I never get to see you again? I'll never forgive you, or myself for letting you leave in the first place. This thing you are about to do, what are the odds of it being successful?"

"It doesn't matter what it is. I don't care if it's 99 to 1, it's worth a shot. That's what scientists do, they dare the impossible no matter what the outcome looks like, 'cause there's a chance."

Damon nodded, "Just don't come back in a body bag is all I'm saying."

"I promise not to" Denver smiled shutting his suitcase.

"How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know, Damon. But it's going to be for a while. Gareth is going to take care of you" he said patting Damon softly on the head just as Gareth walked in.

"Master Denver?" Gareth acknowledged.

"Get a maid to help with the bags, please." he instructed walking out as he staggered.

Damon followed him behind. "Does Christine even know you are leaving?" He inquired.

Denver shook his head. "No. We aren't really on talking terms"

Damon scoffed, "Yeah, how could you be after you yelled at her for having your best interest at heart?" he replied sarcastically.

They walked to the front porch of the house where a black 70's Dodge Charger was packed. Two housemaids who were present placed his luggage into the trunk of the vehicle.

"But, Sir, why do you wish to go on this wild venture all on your own?" Gareth asked with great concern. He held Denver by the hand and assisted him down the porch staircase.

"Gareth, don't you worry about me. I've got thousands of people doing my work. Let me for once do something on my own," he replied approaching the driver's door. He stopped and turned to face Damon, "You be a good kid, Damon" he said hugging Damon. "I love you, you know that, right?"

Damon shook his head smiling broadly. "No, I don't"

Denver chortled boarding the vehicle.

"You be safe, sir. Our prayers are with you" Gareth shook hands with Denver.

Denver saluted casually and starting the car engine. The car roared and zoomed out of the compound.

Ward Residence,

Greentown

5:04 pm

Harold Ward, Julia and their two children sat down on the dining table about to have dinner.

"Who's saying grace?" Harold asked giving the rest three a quick glance.

There was silence followed by a loud laughter from Joshua and Julia.

Harold winced, "What's so funny?" He asked.

"Nothing, honey. It's just you've got mustard on your cheek" she said to him as Joshua laughed harder.

Harold jerked touching his face to feel the mustard which had indeed stuck to his cheek, he picked a napkin and wiped it off.

"So, you think it's okay to laugh at the Police Commissioner because he's got mustard on his face?" He asked in a teasing manner hoping it'll make them laugh more.

He noticed Jessie was not in the mood.

"What's up, sugar bear?" He inquired.

Jessie held her fork in her hand firmly staring at her meal, "Nothing, I'm fine" she replied sternly.

Harold sighed realizing where her dark vibe was coming from, "Is this about earlier? Billy?" He inquired.

She blurted out, "Forget it, I don't want to talk about it!"

Ward scoffed a bit embarrassed, "Listen, honey. You want to hear it from me? Fine, I'm sorry, okay? I didn't mean to make him uncomfortable. I'm just being a caring father. I mean, after what happened weeks back, I think every man would do the same for his kid" he defended his resentment towards Billy.

Jessie dropped her fork looking at him, she was getting irritated. "I told you, I don't want to have this conversation!" She yelled at him.

Ward shook his head disagreeing with her. "It's not about what you want. We need to have this conversation" he urged. His gaze loosely fixed on her, "Talk to me, what is this about? I apologized. What else do you want from me?"

"I don't want you in my business, dad" she fired back. "I'm out of high school, I'm an adult now. And I can make my own choices, it doesn't matter what you think!" She lashed out.

There was silence for a few seconds.

"Harold?" Julia called out to her husband meekly.

Harold smiled broadly raising both hands placatingly, "No, it's all right, honey. It's all good" he noted, "So, this isn't just about Billy, huh? It's a..... a thing you've been building inside of you?"

"You've never trusted me with boys. You think I don't have good taste. What?! Am I a disappointment to you?!" She asked getting teary eyes.

Harold winced, "Oh, come on. You've got be kidding me, Jessica. Where the hell's that coming from? Why would you ever think that? I don't think it's not wrong to be a protective dad, and yes, you want to hear it?! Fine, I think you've had terrible boyfriends and it's brought a mental instability to you and that is what we have to work on. And now, there's Billy, this guy almost got you killed, and I'd have never forgiven myself for letting you go out with some random guy we have nothing on. I'm a police man and it's my job to be skeptical of people. And maybe, just maybe..... I don't like him and I don't trust him and he might not just be good for you, but that's not my take anymore. If you are happy, I'm happy, Jessie. But that doesn't mean I can't be a father, and if that makes you uncomfortable, well, there's not much I can do because I love you and I'll do anything to protect you" he responded pouring out his feelings. He had been frowning the whole time and it bothered the remaining two people at the table.

The room was once again engulfed by silence.

Jessie moved her chair backwards in hopes of leaving the dining room but Harold got up first.

"You know what? You guys have dinner, I've lost my appetite" Harold stated picking up his jacket.

"Seriously, dad?" Josh lamented in frustration. "It's just a simple disagreement. We have that all the time. Last time, mom threatened to sell my bike behind my back if I didn't change my pedals. She didn't leave the table" he said. He pointed at the food, "Look at all this, mom made this, let's just sit in total silence and eat"

Harold nodded with a smile before winking at his son. "Very smart words, Joshua. But uh-" he waved his hands around trying to make his point, "But there's a sort of..... what do you kids call it these days?" He nodded again once he figured out the word, "Bad energy, that's right. There's bad energy I can't condone right here on this table" he addressed them before walking out.

Josh also stepped out to catch up with his father who was now out of the building and heading for his car in the drive way.

"Dad?" Josh called out.

Harold turned around, "Yeah, son?"

"You know she doesn't mean it"

Harold nodded. "Yeah, I do"

"I think it's just PTSD. She's going through a tough time after the whole accident fiasco. You go easy on her" he pleaded.

Harold grinned trying his best not to be pissed just as he thought about the fight he just had with Jessie. "I'll be back first thing in the morning, we'll have a Yes Day"

"Ewwww" Josh flinched embarrassed, "Yes Days are for kids" he stated.

Harold turned away heading for his vehicle, "Last time I checked, Josh, you aren't even eighteen yet" he teased entering the car.

Josh watched him drive off till the vehicle was out of sight. He took in a deep breath and walked back into the house where he found Julia talking to Jessie both still at the table.

"Jessica, what's going on. You haven't been yourself since the car crash. Talk to me, I'm here for you" Julia begged holding Jessie by the hand who had her face down the entire time.

"Well, that's the thing, mom. I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel useless, I feel like a tool in someone else's game. I don't know who I am anymore" she complained facing Julia as she sobbed. "I think I'm sick, mom. I think there's something wrong with me, and it scares me. I feel like there's this thing inside me that's drawing a dark cloud over my life" she cried as Julia quickly went over to hug her in hopes of comforting her.

Julia gave a glance to Joshua who had been frowning, he couldn't play out what was going on. He walked out of the dining room; he was probably angry that there was nothing he could do to help his older sister.

An Anchored Container Ship,

Fishplain Bay,

Fishplain

5:57 pm

David lay on his bed unable to sleep. He looked at the overhead for minutes. He was scared and confused at the same time. He didn't really believe Anthony Birdleaf would actually want to cripple his mind just to get what he wanted. *What did he really want?* He wondered.

He felt uneasy like he had been injected with dopamine. He raised one of his hands to a visible point and watched his veins protrude out. Suddenly his head banged profusely. He grunted roughly rolling all over his bed. Soon, the grunting had become a long painful scream that alarmed the two guards outside his compartment.

When they rushed in to check what was happening, they found David lying on the ground somewhat lifeless.

"Shit, is he dead?" One of the two guards whispered to the other.

"Only one way to find out" the other guard replied squatting down to check David's pulse. He placed a finger on David's throat. What happened next, the guards did not see coming. David opened his eyes swiftly and he grabbed the guard's hand, he drew the guard nearer and slit his throat with the surgical blade Skivinchi had placed in his possession. He thrust the overpowered guard over to the bulkhead on his left instantly killing him.

The other guard was alerted shooting rounds at David who seemed to be dodging bullets. He got hold of the man's head and squashed it painting the compartment with blood and guts. He wiped his face with his palms and slowly exited the compartment, he couldn't believe he had just killed two men. He didn't know what had given him the drive to that, but he knew he wouldn't do that of his own accord.



Anthony Birdleaf, Edward Mojo and many other guards who were on the ship's deck heard the gunshots. They all could tell it was coming from within the vessel.

"What the hell was that?!" Edward asked turning to the armed guards.

"It's coming from the tanks below, sir" one of the guards said holding his assault rifle tight.

"I know it's from the inside the ship, you dimwitted cunt!" Edward yelled, "Get your asses down there and check what the fuck is going on!" He ordered slowly facing Artem who watched the men run into the stair way which led to the lower decks.

"What do you think it is?" Anthony asked.

"I don't know. Could be the Logan kid" Edward replied.

Anthony winced unconvinced, "He doesn't know about the chip test. Why would he want to escape?" He asked bothered.

Edward felt his walkie buzz out as he quickly levelled the device to his ears, "Speak"

"Sir, we've got a code red. It's David Logan, he took down two of ours and he's gone rogue" the guard reported, his voice quivered. Edward could tell whatever the guard saw made him conflicted.

"Well, find him!" Edward ordered facing Anthony. "He sounds terrified. Is that how dangerous this guy is?" He asked Anthony.

Anthony bit his lower lip not concerned about Edward's question. "Skivinchi. We can't let him get to Skivinchi. He's the best scientist we have for the Eden reserach" he complained anxiously.

"Shit" Edward cursed picking up his walkie again, "All units be advised. We need men at the Skivinchi lab ASAP. Protect the doctor, we need him alive" he ordered.



David barged into Skivinchi's lab. The doctor who was on his computer monitor was highly startled.

"Jesus Christ, David. You almost made me shit on my pants" he said panting.

David walked in. He looked different, he was pale white and his veins were very visible. He looked like a mutated killing machine and there was only signs of disdain and fury written all over his persona. Skivinchi should have been terrified seeing him this way, but it wasn't, and that was David's concern. He walked closer to Skivinchi leaving only a table in his path.

"Shitting on your pants is the least of your problems, Skivinchi?"

Mayton chuckled dryly, "Oh, yeah. What is my biggest problem, then?"

"What did you put in me?" David asked grimly.

Mayton stammered, "I-I told you I was going to get you out of here alive. This was the only way" he explained.

"I didn't ask what your plan was, I asked what you injected me with earlier today. Whatever it is, you put it in my blood before you knew what was coming" David sneered. He resembled a vampire hungry for blood.

Mayton panted heavily, "I had a feeling. Like you said, Birdleaf looked scared. I knew very soon, he'd be a desperate man, and that'll make him make drastic decisions. Let's say like using you as a lab rat"

"I'm done with your games, man. What the heck did you put in me?!" David roared slamming his fist on the table which left a mark on the steel table.

Mayton swallowed spit, "It's-uh, it's a serum. A biological weapon. My very own biological weapon that enhances every killer instinct in your body. A nanotech arsenal. No one's going to see you coming. I built it myself, David. And now, it's flowing through you. Consider it my personal gift"

"You.....you put a bioweapon in my blood stream without my consent?!" David barked at Mayton tossing the table which separated them. He gripped Skivinchi's chin tight as the latter grunted.

"David, I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to help you be a beacon. Something the people can believe in. You can finally find those assholes who had a hand in your father's death. You have to avenge him. You have to be the hero the people of Trsiword will look up to" Mayton gasped for air.

David let go of his chin. Skivinchi groaned softly before touching it as he felt the pain. "I don't want to be this, Mayton" he said looking at his arms. He couldn't believe how violent he had become.

"All right, Logan. I hear you. Birdleaf's guards are going to be here in a few minutes. You can surrender. Either way, he's going to use you as a tool. Lord, he might even kill both of us. I made you your own man."

David retracted, "I'm not going back into that compartment. I'm done here"

Mayton scoffed, "That's about right, Logan. You don't want to be here. Like I said earlier today, the Cassowary suit. It is stowed away in a vault in the deepest parts of the ship. If you can get to it, you can get out of here." He suggested.

David nodded, "Thank you" he appreciated Mayton for his assistance.

Mayton exhaled. "Don't mention, but first, you gotta hurt me really bad" he ordered.

David queried, "Why?"

"You have to make it look like I have nothing to do with this. Like you forced me to help you" he explained.

"Why don't you come with me?" David inquired confused.

Mayton shook his head in denial. "No, I still have a lot to conclude here. When it's the right time, we will meet again" he promised patting David's cheek. "Now, hurt me really bad" he requested.

David flinched distraught, "I'm sorry" he apologized.



The armed guards eventually reached Skivinchi's lab minutes later and proceeded in to find the place in disarray.

Mayton laid on the sole of the lab grunting, he was bleeding from his nose and mouth.

"Doctor Skivinchi" one of the guards said walking up to him. They could see he had been bruised severely.

"Are you alright?" The guard asked as the others surveyed the lab.

"What do you think?" He replied bluntly groaning just as Anthony Birdleaf and Edward Mojo walked in.

"Holy crap" Birdleaf cursed scanning the destroyed lab, "David Logan did this to you?" He asked Skivinchi.

Mayton coughed out blood. "He just barged in and tore the place down and beat the hell out of me" he narrated as blood slowly oozed from his nose.

"Why would he attack you, Skivinchi? Weren't you guys like Del Mar and Twist from *Brokeback fuckin' mountain*?" He inquired not buying Skivinchi's narrative.

Birdleaf gave Edward a glance.

"What?" Edward shrugged. "Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal. They were cute gay dudes. The movie lost Best Picture though" he clarified.

Birdleaf frowned. "You think this is funny?" He asked pissed before turning to Skivinchi "Why'd he attack you?"

"He wants out. He thinks my research could help"

Birdleaf turned to Edward again, "Take every single man with a gun to the vault. He's headed for the Cassowary and get me my chopper" he ordered.

"But we don't have to be so cautious. Even if he can gain access to the suit, the suit's analytical system would fry his brains out. It's a dead-end, he's fucked." Edward stated.

"We are not taking any chances, Mojo. Get every armed guard down to the keel to shoot him on sight and phone in my fuckin' chopper!" he ordered storming out.

Edward nodded, "You heard the boss, get every man down the ship and kill that brat. Go, go, go!" he instructed as the men ran out. Edward approached Skivinchi once they were the last in the decimated lab, "I don't know, Skivinchi, but there's just something off with you. I know you are a nasty bitch. Birdleaf doesn't know it but I do" he growled at the weak doctor.

Skivinchi chuckled, "You are just a lap dog, Mojo, and if you don't obey your masters call right now, it'll be you we all will be having for dinner" he smirked.

Mojo retreated, "All right, weirdo. Let's see to it then"



David proceeded into the ship's hold. It was quiet large compartment with big containers on all sides. There were florescent lights at the edge of the overhead around to illuminate the hold. After walking for a minute, he found the vault at the end of the hold. David walked up to it and realized the door was locked. Mayton had given him the pass code which he had quickly used in opening the vault door.

He felt a flush of fresh air sweep out of the vault engulfing him, and there was the suit. A well-constructed dark blue suit with grey patches. David caressed it softly. The material was hard, he could tell he was staring at a mini tank. Whatever it was, it was too good-looking to keep in a vault.

The head mask itself had the build of a human skull. He suddenly wondered why it was called the Cassowary.

He heard footsteps approaching the hold compartment.

"Time to take you for a spin, pal" he said to the outfit.

The guards rushed in with arms and arrived the vault just as David donned the suit. They watched him stagger out of the vault and fall face flat to the floor.

They pointed their guns at the motionless figure laying there on the hold's sole.

"I think the system was way too complicated for his brain. Just like the other test subjects. He's a goner" one of the guards stated picking his walkie and then contacting Edward, "Boss, I think he's dead. The suit fried the shit off his crazy ass" he reported.

"Good, get his corpse out of the suit" Edward instructed from the ship's main deck.

The guard went closer to take off the helmet just as the suit's system analytics rebooted waking David's unconscious body back to life. The chip Skivinchi had planted in the suit had overridden the suit's original programming.

He grabbed the guard and shoved him over a container to his apparent death alarming the others who rained heavy fire on the Cassowary suit.

It was clear the suit was bulletproof and not even a scratch could be seen.

David took his time to get up finally adapting to the suit's algorithm.

It scanned his apparent threats as targets and quickly calculated how to take them out.

David followed the suit's calculation and attacked the guards with a Kusari-Fundo in one hand and a Sai in the other, cutting through the attackers in seconds.

Birdleaf and Edward could hear the gunshots through the latter's radio.

"Did he just-?" Edward asked terrified, "He survived the process" he said to Birdleaf. "We should blow the ship, Tony" Edward suggested believing the situation was out of their hands.

Anthony shook his head seeing his chopper from a distance, "No, Eddie. That's gonna be a slap on all our faces" he replied putting a cigar in his mouth, "Whether we like it or not, we weren't wrong about the kid. We wanted carnage, right? We got it!" He said turning to Edward "Let the boys do their best, if he escapes this ship, he's going to do what we hoped for, but not just on our terms. He's going to unleash carnage. Perhaps he might even kill the Death Crow for us, later we can find a way to get the suit back. An actual human being survived the donning process. That's a good thing, Eddie."

Edward sighed anxiously. "It's not a good thing if he's coming for us."

"No. As long as Endario thinks he's our weapon, we can leave the spotlight for now. He doesn't have to come after us. Let us let Endario worry about David." he slapped Eddie's cheek softly shortly before the chopper landed on the landing pad of the container ship.

Even with his arousing speech, Edward could tell Anthony was devastated things didn't go as planned. He must have felt like a fool.

"Let's go, Eddie" Birdleaf instructed as they approached the landing pad just as Skivinchi wielding a bag of documents joined them.

Edward flinched, "What is he doing here?" He asked Birdleaf.

"He's an asset for Christ's sake" Birdleaf replied exhausted as the trio boarded the chopper.

The Cassowary knocked the stairways door open and walked out watching the chopper fly out of sight.

There was blood all over the suit and it seemed he had killed every one who got in his way. He threw a grenade at a fuel pipe far off the deck causing a massive explosion on the ship. Birdleaf and the others could see the ship light up in flames from their chopper as it slowly plunged into the sea.

"Mother of god. What have we done?" Edward lamented while Skivinchi gave himself a satisfying smile.

EPISODE XIV: THE CASSOWARY

"TAME BIRDS SING OF FREEDOM, WILD BIRDS FLY."

-JOHN LENNON.

RVPD Headquarters,

CRAXTON

8:48 pm

Ward yawned in his office feeling exhausted, he was prepared to go home, but then he paused realizing he couldn't stand Jessie's attitude at the moment. He thought of their fight through earlier. He contemplated on calling on her mobile phone and apologize, but he couldn't do that either. He felt Jessie needed some time and space to accept the optics of the real world, and he was ready to honor that. He gathered his files in a shelf just as James walked in.

"Sorry, Ward. Door was open a few inches" James apologized. There was no reply from the other party.

"Are you okay?" James inquired.

Ward shut the shelf before turning around to face James. "I'm having a tough day, son" he replied sweeping his keys off the table.

"Family trouble?" James asked opening the door wider for Ward to pass through.

"Sort of. It's Jessica. She's..." Ward couldn't finish the sentence.

"Oh, she's being an adult?" James asked laughing.

"She's being a rebel. She always has been, but not this choleric. God! what happened to her in that crash?" He asked himself as they both strolled through the little office spaces towards an elevator.

"So, you left home to ease your head? Cause I was beginning to wonder why you were at work at this time on a Friday" James inquired.

Ward reached the elevator pressing the button, "I don't want to talk about it," he said to James coldly.

"Jesus. Alright, grumpy grandpa" James flinched irritated but in a teasing manner. "Do you want a beer?"

Harold shook his head, "Let's just catch up tomorrow, Jimmy. I'll be in the mood by then" he said walking into the cubicle.

James nodded. "Alright, then. Good night" he acknowledged watching the doors close before him.

Ward exited the RVPD building and boarded his vehicle. He sat in silence for a while. He decided he needed to speak with someone who could possibly understand what he was going through. He dialed Ferdinand Park's mobile number.

"Hello?" Ferdinand said from his end of the line once the call had connected.

"Park. It's me, Harold"

"Oh, hello, pal" Ferdinand greeted looking at his watch. It was a couple of minutes before nine o'clock.

"Harold, it's pretty late in the night. Are you doing great?" he stated.

Ward chuckled, "Yeah, I'm doing alright. I just need an hour to talk with you. It's about Jessie."

"Oh" Ferdinand exclaimed softly, "I'm open, you know I always am" he assured him.

When Harold was going through a tough time, he felt relief when he poured out his heart to his old force colleague.

Harold was not a very religious man but he was a believer. When Julia would take the kids to Sunday service in the Orthodox church they attended, he mostly wouldn't attend, blaming it on his job as a police commissioner.

"I'll be there soon" Harold said ending the phone call.

The Communion Sanctuary,

Leafonia

8:58 pm

Ferdinand placed the phone back on the landline hearing an unusual noise downstairs in the church hall. He lived upstairs in a two-bedroom apartment.

Ferdinand walked downstairs into the hall and gave it a quick scan. He knew Ward hadn't arrived already because they had just gotten off the phone.

Most of the hall was engulfed by darkness.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" Ferdinand asked looking around.

There was no reply. He noticed the aisle door was locked, so perhaps it must have been a junkie who tried to break into the church premises but failed. He felt relieved and turned away heading for the stairs which led back to his apartment.

"You know, I thought they were kidding when they said you were now a man of God" a voice from the darkness spoke.

Ferdinand was startled quickly turning around, "Jesus Christ!" he gasped for air.

He stood there trembling; fear wouldn't let him point his flashlight into the darkness and see the face of the man who had spoken.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Ferdinand asked, his voice quivering.

"It doesn't matter who I am, Father Park," the man in the dark responded. "Do you really believe you're now a righteous man?"

"Whoever you are, you listen very carefully: I'm not trying to be righteous, okay. I'm just trying to do what is right. I've done terrible things in the past and I've changed my ways, I want people to see the truth in the everlasting light of God and be reborn"

"So that's what you are? Born again?" He asked, Ferdinand could hear the voice getting louder, he could hear the man's footsteps leaving behind a kiss sound of metal. The figure was down the hall and was now approaching Ferdinand through the aisle.

"You can say all these things, Father Park. You can be born again, be saved by the Almighty himself, but it won't save you from man's justice. My justice." the man said finally walking into the light.

Ferdinand could see the young man donning a high-tech killer suit with his steel helmet in one hand and a Kusari-Fundo in the other.

"Who are you?" Ferdinand asked quivering.

"You took everything from me when you put a bullet in my father's head" the terrifying man sneered.

Ferdinand's eyes popped. "David Logan?" he said, "There's nothing that happened that day that can't be explained. I didn't mean to kill your old man, Dominic. I was forced to do it" he explained moving backwards.

"You don't get to mention his name, you filthy piece of shit! You will get what's coming at you!" He yelled at Ferdinand throwing the Kusari-Fundo at him.

The weapon went round Ferdinand's neck with the blades gripping him.

Ferdinand grunted unable to breathe, his neck was being shredded slowly by the sharp blades of the mysterious weapon Logan wielded.

"Unlike the type you served to my dad, I'm going to give you a much more painful death" he said with a vicious smirk.

"Ugh" Ferdinand groaned. "David, listen, I was forced into doing it by a mysterious man called the Blue Doctor. He threatened to kill my family if I didn't do what he asked" he explained with tears running down his cheeks.

David loosened the grip from the Fundo blades and drew them back to him.

Ferdinand fell to the ground gasping for breath. His neck was sore and it bled a little, he coughed continuously finding it hard to speak.

"I'm- I'm sorry" he apologized.

"I'm not" David looked down on him with fury bringing out a dagger "This city will burn, asshole. You should be lucky you won't be alive to witness what's coming" he stated striking Ferdinand's face with the dagger.



Harold Ward arrived the church some minutes after David's brutal encounter with Park. He waltzed into the building unbeknownst of what had happened in the church moments ago. He was engulfed by darkness as he proceeded in.

"Hello? Ferdinand! Are you up there?" He called out to Park but there was no reply. Something was off, he could feel it. "Ferdinand?!" He called out again drawing out his pistol walking stealthily towards the light.

He paused in shock seeing Ferdinand in his own pool of blood. "Oh, shit" he squalled running to his wounded friend.

Ferdinand was still alive, but he had lost too much blood. His face had been split in half and so, he found it really difficult to breathe.

"Stay with me, Park. Come on, don't you dare give up on me. You gotta fight, okay?" Harold sobbed realizing he needed to call for backup.

He tossed out his walkie, "This is Commissioner Ward reporting for immediate backup. We have a 10. A civilian's been badly assaulted. I need medic, ASAP" he reported on the radio.

"We read you, Commissioner. Can you give us your location please?" the female voice on the receiver side requested immediately.

"I'm-uh" he stammered, "I'm at the-uh, the Communion Sanctuary, off the 14th and 7th Layout of Leafonia. Send backup immediately" he replied.

"Roger that, sir. Backup is enroute" the lady replied ending the transmission.

"Who did this to you, Park? You tell me, I'll skin that bastard alive" Ward sneered with rage.

Ferdinand coughed our blood, "It's the Logan ki-kid" he coughed out blood grabbing Ward's arm. "It's not his fault, Harold. It's not his fault" he whispered before giving up the ghost.

Ward watched Ferdinand's lifeless body for a few seconds unable to process the devastating reality that had just occurred.

"Park?" He called out to the corpse in a whispering voice. He heard a loud vehicular sound from outside the church building. Ward stood up and ran for the door kicking it open. He watched an armored truck drive past his car recklessly hitting and crushing anything in its path.

In those split seconds, Ward caught sight of the driver's mask before watching the truck zoom off. "All units, be advised" he reported again on his radio, "I've got the suspect in sight in a black armored truck headed for the Halo Highway. The suspect is wearing a skull themed mask and he's armed and dangerous, you have permission to shoot on sight" Ward ordered.

"All units be advised, we have a 10-43, black armored car approaching the Halo Highway. The suspect is armed and considered dangerous, be advised." The lady broadcasted on the radio to police channels.

Ward rushed into his car and drove off towards the direction of the truck. For some reason, he believed he alone could stop an armored truck set on rampage with his Aston Martin.

Before he could get sight of the truck, more cop cars had joined him in the pursuit eventually overtaking him. The chase continued on to the Highway.

The truck devoured any vehicle in its path. David had stolen the vehicle from one of the Leafonia police precincts. There was carnage on the road as he took a left turn to one of the roads leading to Bedbug.

The cop cars flanked him from both sides in hopes of flipping it over, but they knew it was a very difficult attempt.

They pursued the truck towards a T-junction. The Cassowary tried to give the vehicle a hard left, but he couldn't because of the cop cars on both sides leading the truck to crash into an empty boutique.

More cop cars covered the perimeter with police men taking cover and pointing their weapons at the wrecked shop. Their major target point was the back of the truck.

Ward sneaked behind the trunk of a police vehicle where two cops were taking shelter.

"Commissioner Ward! Sergeant Larry" Sergeant Larry introduced himself to his superior, "I'm from the second Leafonia precinct. We have him trapped in the shop. There's no way out back and I think he wants a confrontation, sir" he reported.

Ward nodded in affirmation. "Good"

"Who is this guy? The Death Crow?" An officer asked in total dismay.

Ward shook his head, "No. I didn't want to say it, but I think it's David Logan."

Sergeant Larry winced. "David Logan? The Bedbug kid who gunned down Halloway?" He inquired.

"The current state of things have left me much worse than you can ever imagine, Sergeant Larry" Ward sighed taking a quick peep at the shop where the butt of the armored truck was clearly visible.

"Hand me the speakerphone" Ward instructed Larry who quickly complied.

Ward held it firmly standing up, his view was now higher than the car roof. "This is-" he hesitated. Ward knew it wouldn't be a smart choice to address the suspect by his name if it was indeed David. Park had been brutally murdered and he (Harold) could be next, he might have been going after people who had a hand in covering up his father's death.

Ward on the other hand was the lead initiator since he believed Park did not commit the murder of his own free will.

"This is the Ringsville Police Force, you are surrounded. There's no way out of this. I suggest you comply before it's too late" Ward warned, his voice blaring loud from the speakers.

There was complete silence as tension escalated. For some seconds, they had all assumed the crash had claimed the life of the maniac behind the wheels.

The scene was swallowed by a bright beam of light from the sky followed by a loud rotating sound of rotor blades.

Everyone looked up seeing a News chopper hovering over the scene.

Ward flinched disappointed, "How the heck did a News Chopper get here before ours?" He asked in rage.

"We are coming in live from the Hillyard Junction of Bedbug. It would seem the police have chased a psychotic suspect through the Halo Highway of Leafonia. The suspect has left a trail of death on the way. Sources claim the suspect is masked and heavily armed. He is believed to have brutally murdered a pastor Ferdinand Park, who is the founder of the Christian Association known as the Holy Communion Sanctuary situated in Leafonia. As of now, the killer has been surrounded by cops in a shop" the reporter aboard the chopper circling the scene reported live through a televised camera.

Viscount Avenue,

Westside Bedbug

9:39 pm

Billy was training in the recreational section of the basement. He worked his hands and feet on a punching bag just as Jonathan ran over to him. "Yo, dude. You've got to see this, right now!!" he called out to Billy.

Billy panted and whisked his water bottle following Jonathan to the main hall where the projector portrayed the live news of the Cassowary's rampage.

Billy heard the reporter speak about all that had happened.

"They say he's heavily armed and dangerous. He's gone on a fucking rampage" Jonathan explained in astonishment.

"The cops seem to have it under control. He's going to be clamped down. Besides, these guys don't want my help. If I show up, it'll be me they'll be shooting at" Billy responded not interested.

Jonathan gave him a troubling glance, "You don't mean that now, do you?"

Billy shrugged failing to reply.

Back at the Hillyard Junction

9:45 pm

Ward found it hard to see anything with the helicopter hovering over the crime scene with its large searchlight swallowing the scene. He turned to sergeant Larry. "I need you to find a way to get this stupid chopper out of here" Ward ordered loudly as found it difficult to hear his own voice.

Larry winced unable to get anything he said.

The back doors of the truck flicked open catching the police officers on sight by surprise.

The masked man with body armor stood behind a .50 caliber machine gun holding its trigger firmly, "Come get some" he said coldly, he pressed on the trigger opening fire on the squad of police cars in his view.

The machine gun rained fire at anything in its path killing a bunch of officers, blowing up police vehicles and a nearby building.

Ward laid on the ground with his hand on his head, he could feel bullets fly past every point around his current position. One had scratched Sergeant Larry in the arm as he screamed aloud.

"Shit! Heads down, Larry. Heads down!" he yelled before getting hold of his walkie. "Dispatch! This is Commissioner Ward, we need all the backup here, right... now!! Send in the fuckin' calvary" He ordered ending the transmission.

After half a minute, the shootings stopped, silence and smoke filled the air.

The chopper still filmed the scene broadcasting it live.

The Cassowary stepped out of the truck tossing out his Kusari-Fundo as he began spinning the chains continuously.

Several officers who weren't hurt emerged from their hiding positions and fired rounds at the Cassowary.

He stood in one place with the bullets hitting his armor and then ricocheting towards different directions.

Ward spied from a small opening, "What the hell?" his walkie blared out, "Sir, I have a visual on the target, do I have permission to open fire?" A sniper situated on a building ledge reported; his rifle faced the Cassowary from a distance over a hundred meters.

Ward exhaled a bit relieved, "Yes" he nodded. "You have my permission to fire" he ordered. Though he was eased with the fact that David Logan was going to be gunned down, he felt terrible inside. He had failed not just the kid but himself. He wasn't a just man as he had hoped. But now, he had no choice. He needed to stop him before more innocent blood was shed.

"Taking the shot" the sniper reported pulling the trigger.

The Cassowary was about to fling the Fundo blades at the cop cars with much velocity when a 0.30mm caliber bullet from the sniper's rifle hit the mask knocking the helmet off his head.

David fell to the ground groaning. His ear rung aloud bleeding a little bit. "Ow" he grunted, his eyes all of a sudden were blurry.

The sniper clicked out the shell and reloaded, "Taking the shot" he reported.

David turned around; he realized his helmet laid on the bare ground a few meters from him.

The reporter aboard the chopper had his cameraman zoom into the masked man's face.

"Oh, my God" the reporter exclaimed in shock, "I can't believe what I'm seeing. Folks, it turns out the man behind the mask is no other than David Logan, a criminal who has been on the run for months since his apprehension by the RVPD"

The sniper was dumbfounded unable to pull the trigger after seeing David's face. "The hell?"



Back at Viscount Avenue

Jonathan and Billy watched in shock from the Tick Bug base.

"Holy shit" Jonathan exclaimed lightly walking closer to the rays of motion pictures portrayed by the projector.

Billy quivered, he was totally perplexed. "It's-it's not possible" he stammered; his fists were shaking "Why's David doing this?" He asked trembling.

Back at the Hillyard Junction

David stood up gaining back balance. He observed the area and noticed the cops were shocked seeing his face. It was a perfect distraction, he knew that. He loaded his fist canon and pointed it at the building ledge where the sniper was situated before firing a tiny rocket missile.

"Oh, crap" the sniper yelled seeing the incoming assault, but it was too quick to avert. The shell hit the ledge blowing the sniper into shreds and wrecking the building's rooftop.

Before the cops could react, David rolled over to his helmet and wore it back swinging his Kusari-Fundo weapon at the vehicles and the police men. The blade was so sharp that it cut not just through cops but their vehicles and nearby poles in a second.

After the massacre, there was no target left in sight, and *The Cassowary* walked back into his truck and reversed out of the shop wreckage and taking the turn into Bedbug. He had unfinished business there.

Harold stood up from the side of the car where he hid and observed the carnage that had occurred right in front of him. There were decapitated police officers and multiple dead bodies all over the scene. Some vehicles were in flames and others had been cut in half. This had gotten out of hand. This was not a person to be reasoned with, Ward concluded.

"Jesus Christ" Ward exclaimed softly looking around him. Sergeant Larry also walked out putting pressure on his wounded arm. "Call it in, Larry. We need SWATs, choppers, ambulances, whatever you can get your fucking hands on. I want this place swept clean. I need the Calvary out there to take him out by any means necessary. Put an APB on that truck. Go!" He yelled impatiently.

"Yes, Sir" Sergeant Larry nodded before running off.

Harold flipped out his phone dialing James' number.

"Oh, thank God. I've been trying to reach you, old man" James sighed in relief.

"James, I need you to do something for me" Harold stated.

"Don't worry, Ward. Idris and I are on our way to you as we speak. Just stay there, okay? We'll be there in a couple of minutes" James assured him.

"James, listen to me" he winced exhausted. "Listen, it's the Logan kid. I think he's hunting down those who have done him wrong. I'm pretty sure who got him out of that bridge staged all of this. He's not alone. There's someone who wants payback. I'm not taking any chances; I don't know what the kid knows as of now" he said over phone.

"What are you asking, Harold?" James inquired.

"Get my family into the safe house, David Logan might know my home address. Once they are safe, you and Delcoy can join this fight" he requested.

"Will do. Be careful" James stated.

"I always am, son" Harold said ending the call.

Back at the Viscount Avenue

Billy paid much attention to the live footages. "He's heading towards downtown Bedbug. He's coming for us" he said terrified before turning to Jon. "Does he know where you live?"

Jonathan shook his head. "No, but even if he did, no one's home. My grandpa is in medical care"

"Well, he knows mine, I didn't just let him visit. My aunt and sister are home" he said anxiously. He phoned both Maureen and Elizabeth and neither of their phone lines seemed to be reachable.

"Something is wrong, Jon. I can feel it" he panted heavily.

"Just calm down, Billy. Just breathe" Jonathan pleaded placing a hand on Billy's shoulder.

Billy shook his head feeling distraught. "I can't be here. I can't. Shit!" he cursed walking away. He picked up his jacket heading for the door.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?"

"Going to make sure my family doesn't come across David who's clearly out of his goddamn mind"

"If you hope to stop him, wouldn't you want to take your suit?" Jonathan yelled as the distance between them widened.

"It'll raise too much heat, Jon. I just need to get my family to safety and draw David out of the city" he replied walking off.

Jonathan exhaled. "This isn't fucking happening" he remarked quite disoriented with the current turn of events.

Birdleaf's Manor,

Upper Hill

10:03 pm

Birdleaf's chopper landed on the field as he emerged out with Edward Mojo, the duo made their way into the mansion.

"Honey?" Anthony called out to his wife Chloe.

Chloe walked out of a room disturbed. "What is going on, Tony?" She asked looking around.

Anthony grabbed her gently by the arm, "It's okay, we are going on that vacation, right now" he said to her.

Chloe flinched. "Now?!"

Anthony nodded. "Yes, now"

"Tony, what's going on?" She asked frightened. "There's news of a rampage going on half way across the city. Why are we leaving on such short notice?" She inquired.

Anthony looked away not keen on Chloe's nagging.

"It doesn't matter, you hear me. There's just a lot of heat at the moment, and then, there's this thing happening across the city, just like you said. We are leaving now and that's all you should worry about. Where's Max?" He asked giving the house a quick scan.

"In his room" Chloe replied sniffing.

"Come on, hurry" Anthony gave her a kiss on the cheek. "Go get him" he requested with Chloe immediately drifting off.

Anthony proceeded into his office picking up some important files just as Edward joined him.

"We are all set, Tony" Edward announced.

Anthony squeezed his valuable documents into a light file bag. "Good," he remarked. "I'll be out of town for a while, so you'll be running the operations. First things first, I want you to get Skivinchi off the grid. Put him in some condo outside the city. I don't care, just keep him safe"

Edward sighed in frustration. "I don't like that guy, Tony. He's a snake. Can't you see what happened on the ship? That was him."

"Look, I don't have time for this. There's too much going on right now. Just keep my businesses in check" Anthony replied walking out of his office with his bag in hand as Edward followed behind.

The two men approached the passage to the back glass doors where they met up with Max and Chloe.

"Daddy?" Max said with sleepy eyes.

Anthony hugged him raising him up from the ground. "There's my boy. Where you sleeping?" He asked with much interest.

Max nodded wiping his eye sack slowly.

"Remember that trip I promised you and your mom?"

"Uh-huh" Max replied.

"Well, we are having it right now. We are uh- going to Disneyland, if that's where you want to go" Anthony said.

Max laughed, "Dad, no one wants to go to Disneyland these days"

Anthony gave Chloe a quick glance with a smile. "Whatever, buddy. You're the boss. We'll go ever you want us to go" He chuckled as they walked onto the field heading for the chopper.

"You folks be safe" Edward stated shutting the door behind Tony, he watched the chopper take off into the air and fly off into the dark sky.

Bedbug

10:21 pm

Billy sat impatiently in the back seat of a cab which was driving him home.

"Could you speed up a little bit, please?" He requested from the driver.

The cab driver looked at Billy through the rear-view mirror. "Sorry, pal. But there's a lot of traffic as you can see. There's been an unhinged maniac inflicting road rage all over Bedbug. It's insane, I'm sorry, but this is as far as I can go" he explained. "You know it's funny, where's the Death Crow when you need him? Probably shitting in his metal underwear somewhere. Maybe he's too scared to actually face this guy"

"You don't know that" Billy replied looking through the car windows seeing a lot of damage on the road and nearby buildings. It was obvious David had come to this part of town; he really hoped his suspicions were wrong.

Billy pulled out his phone and dialed Maureen's number once again but still, there was no response. He did the same with Elizabeth and still there was no positive result. His legs quaked as he panted, he had not been this scared in a very long time.

"Just do your best, please" He pleaded with the cab driver.

The driver nodded with his focus straight on his twelve "Sure thing, brother"

Apartment Building

10:25 pm

The Cassowary emerged from the elevator of the high-rise apartment building where the Conrad's resided. He had gruesomely murdered the two security guards in the elevator who had tried to stop him from proceeding further. The cubicle was painted red with their blood.

He walked stealthily through the hallway searching for the Conrad's door number. He had never been to Billy's home but Billy had once told him where he lived and that information was still fresh in his head.

David stopped when he found it. He took a glimpse at the door of the opposite apartment, there was pop music blaring loud through the walls. He could tell they were having a small party, so when he had flushed the Conrad's off the face of this earth, no one would hear or intervene.

He kicked the door open breaking the knob as he stormed in. The place was dead quiet.

David took a scan of the apartment, they could have been hiding, he wouldn't be surprised if Billy had a panic room. *Only criminals had panic rooms*, he concluded.

He walked into the corridor, he loaded his arm canon with a grenade and fired at the wall at the end of the walkway crumbling it. David walked towards it and realized it was a now ruined closet. He switched to thermal and gave the apartment a final scan. There was no sign of life.

10:33 pm

Billy emerged out of the elevator which contained the dead bodies of the security guards The Cassowary had brutally murdered. He ran over to his apartment in fear. Just as he reached the door which was now half way open, Maureen walked out of the opposite apartment where the party noise was coming from, her laughter disappeared seeing Billy sweating profusely.

"Billy?" She said walking up to him.

Billy sighed in relief, "Oh, thank God" he hugged her.

Maureen could not put together what was going on. She couldn't remember the last time, her hotheaded nephew gave her a hug but this was totally different, she knew that for sure.

"What is going on?" She asked him after he unclasped from the hug.

Billy sobbed. "Where's Elizabeth?" He inquired panting.

Maureen winced totally confused, "She's at Sarah's place" she answered.

Billy nodded. "Good, have her stay there" he instructed.

"What the hell is going on, Billy?! You are scaring me!" She yelled at him.

Billy rested on the wall catching his breath. "It's a long story" he replied.

Just then, Maureen noticed the door that was left open. She slowly proceeded in to see her home in total ruin. She put her palms over her mouth in shock.

Billy joined her. "He was here" he stated looking around.

Maureen turned to Billy. "Who was here?"

"It doesn't matter, I'll fix it. Don't just let Lizzie come home till it's all done" Billy instructed.

Maureen's eyes flashed with rage. "Don't you give me that crap, William" she fired at him. "My home is blown into shreds and all you can say is *"it doesn't matter"*? What are you hiding?"

Billy held her firmly by her shoulders. "I promise you, Aunt Maureen, just do what I say, and I'll tell you everything when I get back. Just return to your little soiree and ease your mind of the situation" he pleaded with her.

"Billy, how can I?" she called out to him with tears in her eyes.

"Please, Aunt Maureen. There's a psycho causing mayhem all over town. He killed two security guards in the elevator, I need you to call 911. They have to send someone to clean up the mess. You need to be where it is safe" he said to her.

"And you, where are you going?" She inquired concerned.

"I'm going to check up on Jonathan. I'll be all right" he assured her hugging her again before rushing out of the apartment.



10:40 pm

Harold Ward slowly drove through the streets of Bedbug searching for The Cassowary and his truck of destruction. He stopped and parked near a curb frustrated as he tossed out his car mic.

"Dispatch, no sign of the target, over" he reported.

"Roger that, sir. We've got sight of an armored truck that matches the description. It's currently driving through the Craxton outlets, we are in pursuit, over" an officer reported through the radio.

"Good, backup is on its way. Stay on it. Over" Ward responded ending the transmission and driving back on the streets as he headed for Craxton.



10:54pm

David stopped the truck in the middle of a Craxton flyover, he looked out the window observing a HennyKane Enterprises billboard on a building roof not too far off.

The Billboard read: With the Energy Power Source situated in our Tower Headquarters, HennyKane Enterprises ensures a safe and clean energy to light up Craxton and make it a better place to live in. Join us in securing a bright future for the generations to come.

A sinister idea had lit up in David's mind. If he could somehow gain access into HennyKane Enterprises headquarters, he could perhaps reverse that clean energy power source and raise Craxton and its neighboring communities to the ground. No one deserved to survive this plague. Now he knew that, he needed to teach this regime a bitter lesson. Whatever Skivinchi had put in him had made him really vile physically and mentally.

He heard sirens and saw blue and red lights closing on his location. He kicked the truck engine back to life and drove off leading the police convoy behind him towards the heart of not just Craxton, but the whole city.

Viscount Avenue,

West Side Bedbug

11:19 pm

Billy stormed in with Jonathan standing up from his chair once he caught sight of him. "Are they safe?" He asked Billy who was obviously furious.

"That bastard dared bring vengeance to my home. He was there, Jonathan. He was there to kill me and my family. That I can't let slip away!" he barked approaching the wall as the armory closet slowly slid out. Billy quickly took out the Death Crow armor and his harpoon.

Jonathan watched him carefully, "Are you thinking what I think you are thinking?" He asked Billy who was busy putting on the suit.

"What are you thinking, Jonathan?" Billy asked focusing on donning the outfit.

"Are you planning to confront and kill David?"

Billy scoffed, "Confront? Yes, but not kill, he's going back to jail. This time, properly. I don't care if I have to cripple him to get him to stop" he defended himself.

"Billy, this dude is our friend, man" Jonathan stated terrified.

"Was, Jonathan. Was our friend" Billy cut him short. "He's going around killing cops and civilians. He came to my house and tried to have me and my family slaughtered. People like that aren't friends. This has to end. If he doesn't listen to me, I'll have to do what's necessary"

Jonathan collapsed on his chair, "And what's your definition of necessary?"

Billy failed to reply.

"This is not how I envisaged events to play out three months ago"

"Shit happens, Jon" Billy commented as he finished wearing the suit, he walked up to Jonathan. "Hey, I need my wingman. Do you want to save this city? Then you have to grow some balls, pal"

Jonathan chortled wiping off his tears. "Give me a moment, will you? I'm not the guy with super abilities"

Billy scoffed "It's going to be okay"

EPISODE XV: TOWER OF VENGEANCE

"IF I MUST FALL, MAY IT BE FROM A HIGH PLACE."

PAULO COELHO.

Craxton

11:22 pm

Harold had joined the pursuit on The Cassowary's truck as James phoned him.

"Hey, Ward. Your folks are safe, where the hell are you?" He asked.

"Downtown Craxton with a police convoy, this guy is headed for Mint Lane" Harold reported.

James winced while Idris drove the Malibu. "Did you say Mint Lane?"

Ward nodded, "Yeah"

"That's the area occupied by the biggest industries" James said worried.

"So?" Ward asked.

"The son of bitch is headed for HennyKane tower" he replied.

Ward was lost, "What the hell's in there?" He inquired obliviously.

"It's a science firm, Ward. HennyKane Enterprise is rumored for experimenting on nuclear and biological weapons for the US government. I don't know, but that's a big building. They could have something quite dangerous in there" James explained over the phone. "He's probably trying to lure the convoy into the compound grounds and blow you all into kingdom come"

"Or better still, he could be trying to blow up the whole goddamn city" Idris added.

Ward froze terrified. "Could that be possible?"

"Like James said: It's a science research company. There's something in there he could definitely use as a weapon" Idris replied.

Ward's eyes flashed with terror. "Holy Shit" he picked up his transmitter. "All units be advised; the suspect is headed for the HennyKane tower. Flank down this truck."

The truck drove through the company gates and headed for the wide entrance stairs as the police rained heavy fire on the vehicle tossing it over just as it crashed through the glass walls into the empty building's foyer.

The police vehicles stopped near the stair way as the cops once again took spots to take down the target and where they could also protect themselves from incoming fire.

Ward stepped out of his vehicle addressing the police men, "Listen very carefully, these are like sacred grounds. We are to guard the perimeter till the SWAT shows up, does everyone copy?"

The police men nodded in affirmation.

"Speaking of SWAT, how far out are they?" He inquired randomly.

"Six minutes, sir" A random cop replied.

Ward nodded. "Secure the perimeter, spread out" he ordered.

David struggled to exit the somersaulted truck. He laid on the floor for a minute before he could stand up. He looked out through the glass walls he had partly destroyed. There was no attempt of any policeman trying to enter the building, his last assault must have really shattered the cop's bravery.

He looked around, leaping towards an elevator and then boarding it.

Some minutes later, two SWAT vans arrived the scene as able-bodied armed officers rushed out. They were eager for a confrontation.

"Good God, the Calvary's here, boys" an officer teased a little bit relieved as the squad of policemen cheered.

"Who's in charge here?" Ward asked as the SWAT team approached him.

"I am, sir" One of the team members shook Ward's right hand. "Captain John Bradley at your service"

Ward nodded satisfied. "All right, that'll do. Here's the deal. We are going in as stealthily as possible. We have to take down this guy and we have to be careful what we shoot at, it's a science establishment. There are several labs on almost every floor."

"Roger, sir" Captain Bradley nodded in affirmation.

Ward turned to an officer Ritchie, "Ritchie, I need you to call the mayor. Give him the situation report, tell him to pass an order to evacuate Craxton. Just to be on the safe side" he instructed.

Ritchie nodded. "Copy, sir. On it" he replied rushing to his vehicle.

"Let's go" Ward said to Captain Bradley.

"Sir, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you step down at this point. We can handle it from here" Bradley insisted.

"I'm coming with you, Captain. It's not an option" Ward replied.

Brandy turned to his men, "You heard the boss, let's fucking move!" he instructed as the other SWAT team members held their assault rifles firmly.

They jogged over the stairway into the tower's ground level with Ward joining the company.

The 75th floor

HennyKane Tower

11:30 pm

The alarm rang aloud in the main laboratory which was occupied by fifteen scientists. They were one of the few employees still on the tower grounds.

"I think we should exit the building, Foster!" Edna Farman, one of the female scientists suggested to the head scientist of their current project.

"We have a job to finish, Doctor Farman. We can't-" the exit doors blew open with heavy smoke as the Cassowary casually walked in.

"Holy Shit! It's the terrorist guy from the news" Another scientist who had been keeping tabs on his smartphone said quivering.

"There's no need to be alarmed, guys. He can't get through" Doctor Foster assured his colleagues reassuring the research team that there was a bulletproof glass wall between the hallway and the main lab which they were in.

The Cassowary observed everything in his view and walked towards the glass wall.

"Open it" he ordered calmly.

The scientists watched in the horror unable to move a muscle.

"Open it!" He yelled.

"Listen to him, Foster. I don't want to die in here" Doctor Norman urged trembling.

"He can't get through" Foster replied putting his faith in the bulletproof glass demarcation between them.

The Cassowary growled becoming impatient. He gathered momentum, he locked his metal gloves and struck the glass door inflicting a massive crack.

The scientists jerked in terror.

"Oh, Jesus" Foster exclaimed as a second strike dropped the glass door.

The Cassowary walked in observing the group. "Who's the head scientist?" He asked.

The group hurriedly pointed at Doctor Foster.

The Cassowary turned to him, "It's the only reason why you are still breathing" he returned his focus on the others "As for you all, if anyone dare sabotage my plans, I'll put your head on a stick and burn your wretched bodies," he threatened. "Just to keep you all in line..." a dagger slid out of his fist glove as he swiftly slit Doctor Norman's throat who was standing some inches away from him.

The scene left everyone shocked to their spines.

"That's just a warning" The Cassowary stated grabbing Doctor Foster up by his lab coat.

"Take me to the Security Hall. I need a top-class pass code" He ordered dragging Foster out of the lab.

"Everyone get what you need and get the heck out, now!" Another scientist instructed leading the team slowly towards the emergency elevators.



11:35pm

Doctor foster led The Cassowary into the restricted Security Hall.

The Cassowary looked around and saw a screen tab planted on the wall.

"What does this do?" He asked Foster.

"It's-it's an authorized defense system. It was designed for warfare, but Denver HennyKane got rid of the program after his father's death and used it instead as a last resort for company security. It's a powerful biohazard gas, it melts off anything that is considered a threat around the building perimeter. It cannot be recreated" Foster explained shaking.

"Why didn't they use it on me?" The Cassowary inquired.

"Like I said it's a last resort and you pretty much already fucked up the available security. And this hall is restricted. We weren't expecting such an attack. The Tower has never been attacked." Foster further explained.

"How far can the gas travel?"

"Just the compound premises"

The Cassowary nodded. "Then we'll use it for our first attack" he stated pressing the buttons immediately launching the gas through poles, vents and curb openings around the tower premises.



11:38 pm

"What the hell is that?" A cop asked pointing at the large fug slowly spreading towards them.

Officer Ritchie stood up to get a close look once he had got off the call with Mayor Ham.

"Is that... fug?" He cringed.

They watched the fug engulf a large tree near their position immediately melting it to its roots. The scene alarmed the cops.

"Fall back, I repeat, fall back! It's a melting gas, get your asses out of the compound!" Ritchie screamed out loud as the police men made their way through the gates back to the road. Several officers were caught in the stampede and were briefly melted in the chaos.

"Shit" Ritchie coughed. "What the hell" He turned to the others. "Is everyone all right? Get some ambulances here, we need might need some medical checkups" he suggested spitting on the ground. He felt his system already contaminated.



11:44 pm

The Cassowary and Doctor Foster walked out into a dark empty lobby.

"Where's the power source control unit?" He inquired.

"It's on the roof of the tower. Please just let me go" Foster pleaded.

The Cassowary grabbed him by the collar once again. "For something like that to power the whole Craxton is no small deal. I'm not a tech guy. I need a smart ass like you to help me do it" he sneered.

"Do what?" Foster asked confused.

"Help me reverse the energy from the power core" the Cassowary answered.

Foster looked at the terrifying mask for seconds. "That's lunacy. That's..." he stammered, "That's going to cause a massive earthquake. It'll tear down all of Craxton and the surrounding districts," he stated.

"That's exactly what I thought, doc. And it's exactly what I need a genius like you for" he replied as the SWAT team gained on them. They rained fire at their target who tossed Foster away so he wouldn't get hurt.

The Cassowary yanked out his Kusari-Fundo and flung around it around at a very high velocity. The bullets from the assault rifles made only a scratch on his suit. He tossed one end of the weapon at his attackers decapitating two of the team members.

Ward took cover behind a counter as the Cassowary went all beast mode on the SWAT team. He tore down their attack until most of them were dead. He picked a terrified Foster from his hiding place and took another elevator for the tower roof.

Ward jumped over the counter to help the three wounded SWAT officers; Bradley was one of the victims, he might have survived the Cassowary's fury, but he lost his right hand in the process. He shivered trying his best not to scream.

"Jesus Christ" Ward lamented unable to believe the carnage he had been witnessing all night. *It was one man for Chris's sake.*

"We got to send you guys back" Ward stated tying Bradley's hand with a bandage.

"No. What we have to do is end this, Commissioner. We just have to. We can't let him finish what he's started." Bradley panted.

Ward nodded, "We will stop him, but you can't do much right now" he made his point helping Bradley up as the other two wounded SWAT officers followed behind. All four men took an elevator headed for the ground floor.



Outside the HennyKane tower compound, ambulances had joined the police men. Most of the cops were taken away for checkup.

Just then, they heard a loud vehicular noise from a distance. Soon, the noise got louder and everyone could see the Death Crow on his spectacular bike arriving the scene.

The cops were alarmed pointing their weapons at him.

"Stop right there, pal" Ritchie ordered prepared to fire his gun.

The Death Crow stepped off his bike, "I'm not your enemy" he said. "If you want this to end right now, you have let me into that building"

Ritchie hesitated before dropping his gun, he glanced at a fellow cop. "We can't you in even if we wanted to" he replied.

"What do you mean?" The Death Crow queried.

"There's this poisonous fug all over the compound, you'll be toast long before you get into that building. It's roughly a six-hundred-meter run" Ritchie explained.

The Death Crow walked closer to the gate using the mask's thermal optics to scan the fug's chemical content.

"What do you read, J?" He asked Jonathan, that was now his field name.

"Uh, it's unique, but its particles are portraying signs of a matter parasite. This is beyond my area of expertise, Billy" Jonathan replied from the Tick Bug base.

"You won't survive it" Ritchie stated quite concerned for the masked vigilante who was standing ahead.

"My suit might not be able to withstand it's acidity level for long, but if I'm fast enough, I'll have enough time to get in before there's any major damage" he said.

"And if you don't mind me asking, sir, how do you plan on doing that? You got some kinda super speed?" He inquired with interest.

The Death Crow ignored Ritchie's questions as he turned back and boarded his bike. He kicked the engine back to life and gripped the accelerator handle tight riding through the compound gates and into the fug. His sight was blurry, but he kept the ignition in place speeding up the automobile.

He rode over the stairways and crashed into the foyer hitting the armored truck which still laid there battered and wrecked.

Billy grunted, even with the suit's protection he felt something had broken in his body. He struggled to stand up. "Ouch" he moaned.

"Are you alright? That looks like it hurts, dude" Jonathan remarked.

"I'm going to smack your little trap hole when I get back" Billy teased dryly.

"Well, what are the odds of you taking down David? No offence, but his suit seems like the upgrade" Jonathan said.

Billy nodded. "Thank you. You are officially not helping matters"

Just then, the elevators opened with Ward and the three wounded SWAT officers emerging out.

The Death Crow raised his harpoon ready to strike in case it was David or any other possible threat.

"The Death Crow?" Ward asked, his legs froze.

Death Crow nodded. Billy hadn't seen Ward since earlier in the day after their awkward encounter.

"Yes, Commissioner Ward. Relax, I'm on your side. What is the situation of things?" He inquired.

"The situation of things? You might just have to cut that bastard's head off!" Captain Bradley yelled collapsing near a pillar. "This guy is not to be reasoned with, if you want to take him out, don't hesitate."

Ward sighed. "He's headed for the tower's roof. His plan is to blow up the whole of Craxton with the tower's energy power source" he briefed The Death Crow.

Billy took a deep breath, he made sure it wasn't obvious that he was expressing fear.

The elevators opened again with several scientists rushing out.

"Hey, hey. Stop right there" Ward ordered.

"Commissioner Harold Ward" A scientist amongst the crowd recognized him.

"Are you folks alright?" Ward asked giving everyone a quick scan.

They nodded in unison.

"We have to exit the building, right now" another scientist suggested impatiently.

Ward nodded, "Will do. Let's move out" he instructed.

The Death Crow stood in their way. "You can't leave" he said.

Harold flinched, "Why not?"

"There's a massive fug of poisonous gas outside the compound. It'll kill you all in seconds" he stated.

"And I don't suppose I should ask how you made it through?" Ward inquired.

"You are right, don't." The Death Crow replied, "Every one of you will have to take shelter here on the ground level till that gas dissolves. Until then, we can only wish for the best. Downtown Craxton is already being evacuated as we speak" he addressed the crowd. "Commissioner Ward? See to it that these people are safe" he added.

Ward scoffed, "Look at this, how ironic. I've been a cop for thirty-eight years and I'm taking orders from you."

The Death Crow watched Ward for a second and then walked towards the elevator.

"Good luck kicking his ass. I guess the city's counting on you." Ward added watching the vigilante enter the cubicle as the doors closed behind him.



11:58 pm

The Cassowary and Doctor Foster were on the roof top of the HennyKane tower. It was by far the highest building in the city with a total of 104 floors.

The air was cold, Foster was shivering, David on the other hand couldn't feel anything because of his Cassowary suit.

Foster fixed his laptop to the circuit board mounted at the first platform on the spire. He was going to override the core system's algorithm and place in a new one that will cause an incursion blowing up the power lines as The Cassowary had ordered.

"How long does this take?" The Cassowary asked looking up at Doctor Foster who was on the platform.

"I have never done this before, no one has. But it'll take roughly seven to ten minutes" Foster replied as he continued shivering. He pressed a button starting the reverse launch.

The roof hatch door blew open with The Death Crow quickly running out and engaging The Cassowary in a brawl. The two enhanced individuals exchanged punches.

The Cassowary tossed out his Kusari-Fundo and whipped it at the Death Crow's bird-like mask igniting a spark.

The Death Crow gripped the blades and dragged the Cassowary towards him punching him on the skull themed mask making the latter lose balance. Billy picked him up and threw him away at a panel shattering it.

The Death Crow turned to Foster who clung right to the spire as the brief fight ensued.

"Turn it off!" He yelled at Foster.

Foster nodded turning his focus at the laptop, he was prepared to begin the abortion protocol before a dagger thrust through his neck pulling him down to the hard ground and killing him instantly.

"No!" The Death Crow yelled in shock as The Cassowary emerged from the wreckage.

"You must be the infamous Death Crow" The Cassowary said sharpening his Fundo blade with another dagger, "I got to say this, I'm a fan. I'm impressed with your work, but you are on the wrong side of this war" he stated.

"David," The Death Crow called out to him with his hands up showing submission "You don't have to do this. You are better than this. Please, stop" he pleaded.

The Cassowary froze observing his opponent. For a moment, he wondered if the Death Crow's technique was acting like he had yielded. "You have no idea who I am or what I'm capable of. You don't know what I've been through!" He roared.

The Death Crow nodded continuously, "Oh, yes, but I do. I've known you since your teen days" he replied slowly taking off his mask.

The Cassowary could not believe what he was seeing. It must have been an illusion of some sort.

"It's okay, David. It's okay. I know what you've been through. I know the battles you've had to face. I'm sorry I wasn't there when you needed me the most. Please, you have to stop this, this is madness" he pleaded.

The Cassowary stood there making no visible threatening moves. Billy could tell his old friend was shocked to his core beneath that suit.

"Take off your mask, pal. Let's talk, like the old days. Take all this piece of metal away, you know what we still are. What we truly are." Billy requested.

"You are *the* Death Crow?" The Cassowary asked.

Billy nodded hoping he was getting into David's head.

"You've been this thing this whole time and you didn't come for me? You know I was in custody; I was locked up by those fucking pigs and you wanted me to rot in there!" His voice quivered.

Billy stammered, "It's-It's not like that, David. I thought you escaped and you had left the city. I thought you had become a new person. But now, this can end. We can forget the past. I'll see to it that you don't get locked away anymore."

"What I've done in the cause of one night, Billy," Billy heard a scoff under that scary skull themed mask, "there's no justification, buddy. There's no way out. I didn't come this far to suddenly grow soft because my supposed friend came out here to what, talk?" He chortled. "In the time I spent in an RVPD cell, I kept asking myself how I got caught. You weren't happy after I burnt the money and killed that cab driver. You stormed out of my apartment like it was over, Billy. It was you, you ratted me out, and till the end of days I never snitched on you or Jonathan" he shook his head deeply pained.

"I swear that wasn't me, David. I had nothing to do with that. Why don't you take off that mask and let's talk" Billy insisted taking a step closer towards David.

"So, you can get a clean shot at my head, huh? No fucking way, what I'm going to do to you and this miserable place we call a city, it's not something you read in a book or you can dream of at night. It's something you have to see to believe and the world will know what happened here. *I'll make it a dead land*" he sneered quickly tossing the Kusari-Fundo at Billy's bare head.

Billy's instincts had kicked in even before David raised the weapon. He tilted his head, narrowly dodging the fast-rotating blade.

Billy rolled over and wore back his Crow mask.

"Last chance, David. Don't make me hurt you. More blood doesn't have to be spilled." he pleaded yanking out his harpoon.

"Give me your best shot" The Cassowary said attacking the Crow.

The Kusari-Fundo blades and the harpoon clashed making bright sparks drawing the News chopper's attention to televise the wrestle between both forces on top the tower roof.

"Coming to you live once again. We are circling around the HennyKane tower and what we are witnessing is legendary. The Death Crow is facing David Logan who is now being tagged *'The Cassowary'* by an anonymous account on social media which is now trending. And all I can say is, tonight has turned out to be more bothering than we hoped for" the reporter said terrified.

The Cassowary grabbed the harpoon out of the Crow's hands tossing it away. He rained punches on the latter.

The Death Crow picked the Cassowary up and thrust him against a pole.

"You came after my sister, and my aunt, that was crossing the line!" Billy barked.

The Cassowary groaned, "Oh, Billy. You are simply pathetic. Come on, you gonna cry?" he taunted Billy attacking him with a nearby rod.

The Crow fell to his knees as another punch from the Cassowary sent him crashing on the ground.

David turned his focus at the chopper and aimed with his fist canon before firing. "Show's over!"

"Incoming!" The pilot yelled as the tiny rocket missile hit the fenestron tossing the chopper down and soon out of sight.

Building Construction Site,

CRAXTON

12:01 am

Lloyd Coulson stood on the roof top of the building watching the wrestle up on the HennyKane Tower with a pair of binoculars. He couldn't really see anything apart from sparks and brief explosions. Artem Endario soon joined him.

"It's like Armageddon over there" Lloyd remarked pretty entertained, he finally put the binoculars down.

"You weren't wrong, Coulson. Kenneth Sparrow must be wailing in his grave. His two greatest gifts to the world wrestling on the head of a billion-dollar company. What a spectacle." Artem replied.

"What a joke" Lloyd chuckled. "Well, what can I say, Artem? I've lived long enough to know how these things pan out"

"What are the chances that The Crow wins?" Artem inquired folding his arms.

"You want just my predictions or you want to place a bet?" Lloyd asked glancing at Artem.

"You tell me"

Lloyd scoffed, "Boy, Birdleaf is really an asshole. Releasing a depressed maniac on the streets of Ringsville, that's how he's gonna find Eden?" He asked rhetorically.

"He thinks the Death Crow is working for us, I'm pretty sure that's why the Cassowary's been premiered. With the Death Crow running freely, he'd be a threat to the plans of the Covenant. " Artem replied.

"And a threat to ours," Lloyd countered.

Artem smiled, "I assure you, Coulson, the Death Crow is the least of our problems."

Well, if the Cassowary succeeds in defeating the Crow and blowing up Craxton, how's that power?" Lloyd asked confused. They had no idea this wasn't Birdleaf's plan at all. The Cassowary going rogue was the last thing he had planned for. He needed that suit. *He really needed that suit for something greater than just causing mayhem.*

"If I'm not wrong, we are in Craxton, aren't we?" Artem turned to him with a smug smile.

Lloyd also turned to him; their eyes locked. "That plucky bastard" he cursed.

"Speaking of an explosion that could cause a massive earthquake, we don't want to be up here if the Death Crow should fail to stop him. We will be safe in the bunkers; downtown is already being evacuated as we speak."

Lloyd scoffed, "How does being in a basement protect you from an earthquake?"

Artem walked towards the hatch. "Your choice, Coulson. Don't play any wild cards."

Lloyd gave the tower one last look before exiting the building rooftop with Artem.



Back at the HennyKane Tower rooftop

The Cassowary took his focus back to The Death Crow who was lying on the ground in pain. "Not so tough now, are you, Mr. Death Crow?" He taunted reloading his fist canon at the weak Crow.

Just as he was about to fire, an M16 grenade launcher shell hit his armor plate throwing him off guard.

"Take that, you punk!" The shooter yelled out loud. Billy found the strength to turn and see who had fired the shot, it was Harold Ward.

"You okay, buddy?" He asked helping The Death Crow up.

"I told you to stay down there." The Crow said grunting.

"Yeah, well, first of all, you are not the boss of me, and secondly, it looks like if I didn't show up, your guts would have been all over the place, now that would have been really tragic" Ward noted.

"Billy, the launch process!" Jonathan announced through the wire in Billy's ears.

The Death Crow looked up at the spire. "I need you to shut down that launch process up there on that computer" he instructed Ward, pointing at the laptop on the platform that was attached to the building's spire. "If that countdown ends, we are toast"

Ward nodded, "Maybe you aren't as bad as they say" he replied as the Cassowary stood back up wielding his Kusari-Fundo weapon.

"Go, I got this guy!" The Death Crow instructed calling the harpoon back to his hand with the magnetic glove. The two men clashed again exchanging blows and wrestling with their weapons.



12:05 am

The fog had cleared off as the survivors ran out to meet the police, News vans and the ambulances stationed outside the HennyKane Tower premises.

James and Idris had arrived the scene late due to the traffic breeding from evacuating Craxton.

"Captain Bradley, where's the commissioner?" James inquired stopping by Bradley who was being rolled into the back of one of the ambulances.

"He went up to help the Crow. He felt the Logan kid was too powerful. We tried to stop him, Halloway. We really tried." Bradley explained.

James nodded, "Alright. It's gonna be alright" he apologized before turning to Officer Ritchie, "Get me a couple of good men and evacuate this place, too. It could be catastrophic" he instructed.

Ritchie nodded. "On it, Detective"

James tapped Idris. "Come on, buddy. Let's go" he said rushing into the compound as Idris and several cops followed behind.



The Death Crow and the Cassowary continued their wrestle while Harold sneaked unto the platform. He gave the laptop screen a quick look, "What do we have here?" He could see the launch was 97% completed. "Crap" he exclaimed trying his best to abort it.

The Cassowary pinned the Death Crow on the ground punching his mask continuously till there was a visible crack.

"It's over, Conrad. There's no stopping this. He yanked out a dagger and stabbed Billy in the stomach. Billy groaned aloud. "Ahh" he yelled.

The Cassowary laughed, "You think you are the only one covered in Vylan? Only Vylan can completely destroy Vylan. This dagger's Vylan and so's our suit. Mine's just better than yours" The Cassowary stood over the Death Crow and reloaded his fist canon aiming it at Billy's cracked mask.

"Not today, David!" Billy yelled, he managed to hit the Cassowary's arm redirecting the shot.

The missile flew out of The Cassowary's fist canon hitting the spire causing it to explode and crumble. Harold Ward fell off and landed on a pole which impaled his chest.

Billy saw what had happened and prepared to run off to help the wounded Ward, but the maniacal David grabbed him by the neck. "Where'd you think you're going, dumbass! You've ruined everything." He screamed beginning to strangle Billy.

Billy gripped David's fist canon and squeezed it eventually shattering it. The pressure caused the stowed missiles to detonate a second after Billy got free of the Cassowary's hold causing a massive explosion which shattered the edge of the rooftop and took the latter overboard.

Billy went after him holding a railing with his left hand and grabbing David's burnt hand with his right.

The explosion had destroyed most of the Cassowary's suit and had scarred David.

"Uh" David groaned, his face was beyond recognition, Billy could see a bit of his friend's skull.

"Hold on, David. I got you" Billy said, the weight of the Cassowary suit was too much to lift back up.

"Let me go" David said gasping for breath.

Billy looked down. Damn, it was high, too high. No one could survive the fall. "I can't, David. I can't let you go, remember?" he sobbed, "You are my friend. You were like a brother" tears flowed down his cheeks.

David began to slip slowly, "Let me go, Billy" he requested weakly again.

Billy noticed the weight of both of them was too much for the railing which was now breaking off the shattered ledge.

"No, come on. Oh, God!" he cried out loud, "Don't do this to me, David. Come on, man!" He yelled in pain.

"Let me go, you dumb fuck!" David roared one last time as Billy reluctantly let go off his hand as the railing loosened to its last screw.

Billy looked away; he couldn't bear seeing David fall to his apparent death. "I'm sorry" he sobbed. "It's all my fault. I'm sorry" he said. He felt the railing break off for good. There was no way he could get back to the top.

The railing broke off just as James grabbed him by the arm, "It's okay, buddy. I got you" he stated gently pulling him back to the roof.

"Phew" James sighed.

"Thank you" The Death Crow acknowledged panting heavily.

James nodded, "I should be thanking you, you saved the day" he replied as Idris walked up to him

"We found Harold, James. He's not looking good, man" he reported.

James ran over to the pile of rubble where Harold had been buried under.

"Oh, my God" he exclaimed, "The fuck are you guys looking at, an invitation? Get him out of there!" He yelled with rage as the cops on sight dug Harold out of the wreckage.

They found a pole thrust through his chest. He was bleeding fast.

"Oh, God, Harold. Don't you dare! Don't you fucking dare you dummy" He cried holding the weak Harold in his arms.

Blood gushed out of Harold's mouth as he looked around, "Uh" he laughed dryly. For a moment, he didn't know what had happened, where he was and who was holding him at the moment.

"James? Is that you?" he asked in a mumbling voice.

"Yes, Harold. It's me. Please, Harold, please. Don't do this to me, please" he sobbed holding him tight. He turned to his colleagues, "Someone get us an ambulance, c'mon!" he requested desperately.

Idris sighed heavily, "James, man. We'll never get him down on time."

"Jimmy, don't you dare shed tears for me, son" he said with a grin, his teeth had been stained with blood, he looked at the black sky. "It felt great to actually do something good. I did good, didn't I?" he coughed out blood.

James nodded, "Yeah, you did, Harold. You crazy son of a bitch" he scoffed wiping his tears. "I'm sorry I wasn't here for you. I truly am" he sniffled.

"You-you did your best" Harold mumbled some more.

The Death Crow approached the scene, he watched James's hold Ward's weak body on the pile of rubble.

Harold shook his head, "You did your part. You didn't fold. You gotta promise me something..."

James nodded, "Anything, Ward. Anything"

Harold gulped "Tell, Jessie I'm sorry. I didn't mean to fight, tell her that her old man loved her till the end. Tell my family I-"

James watched Harold's face go stiff and his body grow cold. "Harold?" He looked at Idris who had knelt beside him. He wailed moving away from the corpse.

Idris stood up. "Get a body bag and a stretcher" he instructed two police officers.

The Death Crow stood unsure of what to do, he couldn't believe Harold Ward was dead. They had talked just moments ago and now, it was over. His girlfriend's dad was dead because of his carelessness.

Idris approached him. "Get out of here before more cops show up, then I can't stop 'em from arresting you" he advised the masked vigilante.

The Death Crow simply nodded taking the hatch door and exiting the roof.

Idris placed a hand on James's shoulder who was still sobbing "It's okay, buddy. It's okay" he hugged James for a long time.

The Column,

CRAXTON

7:53 am

Mayor Dillon Ham sat in his office drinking a bottle of scotch, it was his way of sincerely mourning for his old friend Harold. They might have gone through tough times, but they were solid. His deputy, Rene Jackson walked in.

"Drinking isn't going to bring him back. You know that, right?" She spoke to the devastated Ham.

"Then what will?" He asked looking up at her.

She proceeded into the spacious office. "Your live broadcast begins in minutes. The people need their mayor."

Ham looked back at his desk, "It was my fault. If I had just listened to him, Ward would still be alive right now. He begged me to let the kid have a normal trial, but no, I followed the fucking council. Look where it got him" he exclaimed feeling guilty. "God, how do I possibly walk up to his family?" He gulped down another glass of scotch.

"There's one thing I know for sure, Ward wouldn't want you sitting in here drooling in your own misery and crying over him. He'll want you to keep moving on"

Ham exhaled, "Fuck it" he cursed getting up.



Ham stood in front of a pulpit mounted outside The Column building. There were hundreds of journalists, press and viewers to hear his address.

"Folks, I honestly don't know how to address you this morning. The events played out last night were extremely tragic... and horrible, something this city hasn't witnessed in a while. Nearly a hundred people lost their lives in the rampage. The man behind these attacks who is now being referred to as The Cassowary was killed last night with the help of the masked vigilante the Death Crow. I stand here today not to talk about politics or win the hearts of the people. I stand here today to mourn the loss of a dear friend, a man who I considered a mentor, and his name was Harold Ward, the police commissioner who gave up his life to protect his home. To protect his people. We strongly sympathize with his family and may God comfort them through these turbulent times" he stated. "We are grateful that the evacuation was nothing but a simple drill precaution, and a part of this city wasn't decimated. I honestly can't say more than this, God bless Ringsville, and God bless America" he waved walking away as the press began throwing questions at him.

Ham walked back into the building ignoring their questions.

Viscount Avenue,

West Side Bedbug

8:11 am

Billy sat on a chair in the basement as Jonathan stitched his knife wound. Billy noticed Jonathan's hands were shaking.

"Are you alright?" He asked gazing at Jonathan.

Jonathan paused. "Are you really asking me that?" He fired back looking up at Billy. "Are we going to act like we didn't just watch David fall off a skyscraper to a very gruesome death?"

Billy shut his eyes for a few seconds, he'd rather not think about it. "I'm hurting as much as you are, Jon, but you know it's nobody's fault" he replied.

Jonathan nodded. "You're right, it's not nobody's fault, Billy. It's our fault. We initiated all of this the moment we agreed to practice grand theft auto with him. We should have influenced him, not the other way round"

Billy smiled; he remembered all the good moments he shared with him. "I'm gonna miss him. He was a pain in the ass, but he was my brother"

Jonathan nodded, "Semper Fi" he replied as the pair hugged.

Conrad Residence,

Bedbug

9:28 am

Billy walked in to find the apartment already being fixed by handymen. Maureen was moving around giving them instructions on how she wanted things to be arranged.

She stopped when she saw Billy who had a stitch on his forehead and chin. He staggered walking towards her, she hugged him in relief.

"Thank God you are alright, what happened to you?" She asked.

"Told you I was going to check up on Jonathan. It was chaos over there" he lied to her, "And the city was almost blown into shit" he scoffed.

Maureen made him sit down slowly, "Billy, what is really going on?" She asked worried, "There are a million houses in this city, why did this so-called Cassowary or..... David Logan whatever he is- was. Why did he come to our house? What do you have with him?"

Billy sighed taking his time before he spoke, "We were friends' way back, long before he went nuts" he narrated. "He was hunting people who turned their backs on him. We fell out pretty bad."

Maureen nodded. "Well, it's a good thing we weren't home" Maureen went pale, "I heard what happened to Harold Ward"

Billy nodded, "Yeah" he sniffled.

"Oh, those poor children. Have you reached out to Jessica, yet? She must be heartbroken"

"I'm heading there right now" he responded getting up.

"You be careful, alright?" She instructed hugging him again before leading him out.

"I will" he said walking into the hallway.



One Month Later

Harold Ward's funeral was being conducted on a cemetery. It was a big turnout.

His nuclear family was present alongside Billy who sat by the side of a weeping Jessie. James Holloway, Elizabeth Conrad, Damon HennyKane, Mayor Dillon Ham, Deputy Mayor Rene Jackson, Director Stanley Owens of the RCF, Idris Delcoy and members of his RCF team were also present. All were in black attire.

"Every man has his time," the Reverend officiating addressed the congregation. "And now is the time for a hero. Harold Ward was a devoted police officer who served this city for thirty-eight years and he gave up his life in the line of duty. What he did was a righteous act. An act of valor. No man knows his time, or how he or she would go, but doing the will of our heavenly father, is all we should be concerned about. Harold Ward was a devoted Christian, and he thought his family to live in God's light. I pray this day that our father in heaven show his mercy upon his children and upon his loved ones. And we believe, Harold Ward is in the bosom of the Lord. May his soul rest in peace. Amen" he preached making the sign of the cross.

"Amen" the congregation repeated.

"I would now like to call on the daughter of the deceased to speak on behalf of the Ward family." he announced calling Jessie to the pulpit.

Jessie wiped her face with a handkerchief sniffing profusely, "I don't really have much to say" she said once she got to the pulpit. If I was to talk about all that is Harold Ward, we would never get to leave here" she struggled to smile, "My dad, my dad was more than a hero. He was everything a daughter could ask for; we had our differences, but he was always there when I needed him. I can still remember when I was eight, he took me out for fishing, and I couldn't catch any fish. I remember saying to me, 'You can jump in and stir them up, they'll be so many to catch because they don't know it's a trap. We make a pretty good team, you know'" she scoffed looking down. "I thought he was being mean, but as I grew older, I realized how much he had been shaping me to be tough. He'd always call me his life partner; it made my mom jealous" there was a short chortle from the crowd. Julia chuckled wiping her tears.

After some seconds of silence, Jessie burst into tears, "It hurts now, because I didn't get to say 'goodbye'. We had a fight that evening, and if I wasn't rusty, my dad might have still been alive. I hope I get to make him proud someday. My dad Harold was nothing but an ordinary man, a man who has left behind such a great family, and that is his legacy." she concluded wiping her tears as she returned to her seat. Billy placed a hand over shoulders and kissed her forehead, "You did good, babe" he remarked smiling at her.

The Reverend returned to the pulpit more sober than he had been, "God is good, God is faithful." he stated. "We will now proceed to the interment."

As the coffin carrying Harold's corpse was laid gently into the grave, the police officers and a funeral band performing amazing grace honored him with a three-volley salute.



Damon walked to Joshua as the funeral attendees slowly dispersed after the ceremony had come to an end.

"Hey, Josh" Damon called out to him with a smile.

Josh smiled as well; this was no time to hold grudges. "Hey" he responded.

Damon looked at him, "My deepest condolences. Your father was a good man"

Joshua nodded. "That we can agree on" he looked around. "Where's Denver?" He asked, it was only right that Denver attended since the HennyKanes and Wards were close friends for two generations.

"Um, he's out of town for quite some time, but he sends his condolences as well"

Josh shook his hand. "Thank you for showing up, pal, it means a lot" he appreciated Damon's presence and walked off.

Rick O'Neal watched Damon who had finished talking to Elizabeth as he approached his car where his chauffeur waited for him.

Rick walked off hoping he could catch Damon before he boarded the vehicle.

"Hey, Rick. Where are you going, man? We are about to leave?" Ian called out.

"I'll be there in a minute" he replied catching up to the young boy.

"Mr. HennyKane" he called out to Damon.

Damon turned to him, "Yeah, and you are?" He inquired.

"Agent O'Neal" Rick introduced himself with a handshake.

"Pleasure" Damon replied taking the hand.

"I'm an old acquaintance of your brother. You see, he was a great in helping me crack a case. I was just wondering if you knew what was going on. No one's seen him for a month now, there was no public statement from the HennyKanes after the tower attack. So, I've been concerned, we still have lots to discuss" Rick explained.

"My brother's on a trip, part business, part pleasure. He's just flowing with the time." Damon replied.

Rick nodded, "Well, then. I'll be in touch once he returns"

Damon nodded. "Will do" he replied walking away from Rick and boarding his vehicle.

"What was that about?" Ian asked Rick once he returned to their vehicle.

"Just talk" Rick replied.

"I bet the dude is asking for half a million-dollar grant" Idris teased making Rebecca and Ian laugh.

"Ha-ha, very funny. Get out of my way, dummy" he pushed Idris aside before entering the vehicle.

Idris chuckled, "The hell did I do?" He asked.



Billy put his black coat around Jessie's shoulders as they walked to the family's minivan.

"If you want, I can stay with you all night" he offered.

Jessie shook her head, "No, you go home. I'll be fine. You've done plenty." she replied.

Billy flinched frustrated, "Oh, come on. I only wanna be with you right now" he teased her making a sad face.

Jessie chuckled as her face immediately went sour. "I know, I just..... I just think being alone right now is all I need"

Billy kissed her forehead. "It's fine by me if it's fine by you. I love you; you know that right?"

Jessie chuckled, "You know I don't hate you-" she replied with James Halloway interrupting their conversation.

"-What's up, love birds?" He asked.

"Hey, Uncle Jimmy" Jessie acknowledged hugging him.

"Oh, my sweet heart, I would have blessed you with a kiss on the forehead but your boy here beat me to it" he complained carefreely.

"Do you mind if I borrow your boyfriend for one minute?" He requested from Jessie.

Jessie looked at the two men, "Yeah, sure" she turned to Billy whose hands were in his pockets. "I'll be in the car" she notified him walking off.

After she had given them a great level of distance, James broke the silence. "Do you have any idea why I'm standing here in front of you?" He asked Billy.

Billy shook his head vaguely, doing his best not to look scared or triggered.

"I want to know why the Cassowary specifically came to your apartment. The only reason why I'm not asking you this in front of any other cop is because you date my goddaughter. I don't want to break her heart." James said.

Billy was dumbfounded but his reactions he kept blank. "He was an old friend. He was going around hunting people who turned his back on him," he explained.

James didn't buy it one bit, Billy knew.

"Oh, let me guess, you think I was one of his accomplices? Are you kidding me?"

James shook his head. "I never said that, William."

"It's Billy, sir. And you should be happy I'm not dead and neither is my family. David Logan was just crazy." Billy responded.

James looked down at the grass, "To be honest, it's good to see you in one piece" he tapped Billy on the shoulder. "Jessie would have died, if she had to lose you too"

Billy nodded. "Well, I'm glad she didn't"

"Yeah" James replied. "You know, I knew your mother" he said.

Billy looked at him with interest. "You did?"

"Yeah. We met once, that was a long time ago. She didn't just save me from Kord's minions, she guaranteed my future. Your mom was my hero. At that age, she was already feisty. She was a brave woman." he narrated.

Billy winced "How'd you know the person you are referring to is my mother?" He asked.

"I might be saying too much, but the moment I saw your aunt, I knew we've met before. They both saved me and a group of kids from being abducted by Kord's minions" James explained.

Billy looked away, "Well, how do you think two women like that could save teenagers about their own age?"

James smiled; he wasn't going to say more than he needed to. He knew what Billy was hoping to hear was *'Tick Bug'*. "It doesn't matter to me how they did it," he replied punching him lightly on the chest "You have a good one, kid." he concluded walking away from Billy and then towards Idris.

"You've been busy" Idris stated.

"Nope. Just clearing the air" he answered focusing his gaze at Billy "You see that kid over there?"

"The Conrad kid?" Idris asked curiously.

James nodded, "Yeah"

"What about him?"

"I'd like a close eye on him" James requested.

"What'd he do?"

"Nothing yet" James replied. "But he is the son of someone very important" he explained. "This has to stay between us"

Idris nodded in affirmation. "You got it"

Not too far from the cemetery, a female figure who wore a helmet and rode a motorbike watched Billy for minutes. She zoomed off, when the RCF vehicles began exiting the premises.



A Week Later

Bedbug

7:21 pm

Billy sat in a chair near the window of a restaurant, he was focused on his phone as Elizabeth slammed the table.

"Jesus Christ!" He yelled, "You scared me"

Elizabeth frowned. "Did I? We've been talking to you for minutes. Are we boring you?" She asked him. Just then did he realize Damon was present. Elizabeth had officially introduced him to Billy as her boyfriend at the beginning of their dinner.

"No, not at all" he scoffed "I'm just tired is all" he explained.

"So, Billy what do you do for fun?" Damon asked him.

Billy watched Damon for a while, "What I do for fun? How old are you, buddy?" He teased rubbing Damon's hair.

Elizabeth watched from her seat with disgust. "Billy"

Billy chuckled getting up and straightening his jacket.

"Where are you going?" She asked.

"I'm leaving you guys to do whatever you were doing before you invited me over" he replied, he turned to Damon. "Hey, come up here" he instructed.

Damon stood up looking Billy in the eye. "Yeah?"

Billy hugged Damon and placed his lips near the latter's left ear. "If you as far take my sister to your fancy bedroom, I'll kill you in your sleep, I don't care if you are the richest cunt in the city." he threatened in a whispering voice so Elizabeth wouldn't hear.

He moved back with a smile seeing Damon a bit terrified. "We good?"

Damon nodded. "Absolutely, man" he quivered.

"Attaboy" Billy tapped his shoulders and waved at his sister and stepped out of the restaurant.

"What did he say to you?" Elizabeth asked.

Damon faked a smile, "Nothing, just boy talk. He might have just threatened to kill me in my sleep though" he replied.

"Huh, killing you in your sleep. Just boy talk" she repeated unconvinced.

Billy walked out into the busy streets of Bedbug. He stood on the sidewalk and observed the busy world all around him. He loved his city; it gave him peace; it gave him a sense of purpose. While he kept on walking, he approached a group of young boys graffitiing a portrait of a crow bird on a nearby fence with an inscription that read: "*A hero to light up the darkness*".

Billy smiled cheerfully, satisfied with the fact that even young boys his age believed in the Death Crow's cause, believed in a path to a new peaceful world, and perhaps that was enough to keep him going. But he knew, the fight had only begun.

"History is much more the product of chaos than of conspiracy"

-Zbigniew Brzezinski

To Be Continued.....

AND...?

An Unknown Location

A black Dodge Charger sped through a dusty pathway cornered by large forest trees on both sides. The vehicle reduced its pace and stopped by a checkpoint. An armed guard walked out of the small house and stopped by the driver's tinted mirror knocking on it gently so he could know the identity of the driver.

The tinted glass slid down and there was Denver HennyKane.

The guard looked at him strangely, it was obvious he didn't know who he was, "Good day, sir. How can I help you?" He asked.

"I'm looking for your boss" Denver replied.

The guard watched Denver carefully. "Do you have an appointment?"

"No, I don't. But he's expecting me."

The guard nodded unconvinced. "Is that right? Hold on, I'll give my superior a call" he said.

Denver sighed impatiently. "There's no need for that, young man" he replied dipping his hand into his breast pocket and handing over a black card to the guard.

The guard observed the card for a while. Only special guests were in possession of that card.

"You are clear, sir" he concluded nodding in respect before walking back into the house to raise the blockade so Denver's vehicle could proceed deeper into the woods.

Denver said nothing and started the car engine, it roared before speeding through the checkpoint and venturing deeper into the uncharted forest as he headed for a facility erected a mile away. A facility occupied by the strange doctor Ethan Gibson. Denver at this point was prepared for anything.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT CHAPTER:

Lloyd Coulson and Artem Endario still operate from the shadows trying to sabotage the operations, but they might another formidable force that bears ties with Anthony Birdleaf and the Red People.

The Death Crow has made a mark in the city of Ringsville, but for how long? He will soon begin to realize that his life reality goes beyond the fortitude of a regular hustling adult and a masked hero. Billy knows that one day, he'd have to face his demons. He'd have to accept to cruel reality that trouble never ends, and he might have only made the Cassowary an idea.

There are dark secrets that shaped the city of Ringsville. And the truth might be the only way of heroes might have a chance to save their reality as they know it.

I HOPE YOU WERE INSPIRED.