

Anti-Supernatural
Assault Team
Book 1
The Seal Of Solomon

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ISBN: 147835657X

ISBN-13: 978-1478356578

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JUST A FEW WORDS FROM THE AUTHOR

What you are about to read is a combination of facts, theories and a lot of my own ideas to link everything in one piece. I decided to write a series of novels about special team to deal with paranormalia based on what I lacked in many movies and TV series. A.S.A.T. is a trilogy (or a longer series if my ideas keep coming.) Before reading this book, it is advised to read Book 0, which is simply a story of each member. Book 1 takes place a few days after Book 0 ends and covers time between October 1 and December 19, 2012.

“Take, O Solomon, king, son of David, the gift which the Lord God has sent thee, the highest Sabaoth. With it thou shalt lock up all demons of the earth...”

Testament of Solomon

1 THE BEGINNING OF THE END

October 1, 2012.

81 days remaining

1.

Another plane landed in San Francisco’s airport on this gorgeous, sunny morning. Like every day, there were lots of people everywhere rushing to their gates or trying to get accustomed to the new time zone. Some of them had just come to the city while the others were waiting to either pick someone up or to fly somewhere.

“What’s the purpose of your visit, sir?” asked a young man at the passport control.

“Excuse-me?” replied an Asian guy reading a colourful brochure he had found on the plane.

“Why are you here, sir?” asked the man again while the Asian was giving him a strange look.

“Ah, sorry, I didn’t understand you in the beginning,” said the man. “I am here to visit your beautiful cities,” he added putting his modern sunglasses into the pocket of his colourful shirt. Not willing to continue the conversation, the airport staff member answered.

“OK sir, please move on.”

The Asian picked up his bag, and walked farther to pick up his suitcase. He quickly spotted his possession among the others moving on a winding conveyor belt. He walked towards it, picked it up, and moved towards the exit. There were hundreds of people moving around. He saw lots of them waiting with names written on cardboards. He also saw families uniting and

businessmen meeting. He heard the airport announcement coming from the speakers. Like every other airport you need to be really focused to be able to decode the message. Even though the Asian spoke good English, he could hear only the words *Sidney*. As he was heading towards the exit, three security guards came up to him.

“Sir, please come with us.”

He understood exactly what was going on, but Arthur assured him that there wouldn't be any problem at the airport. He had no choice, but to let them escort him somewhere.

2.

The Asian was sitting on a modern office chair, in front of a wooden desk in a room with one wide window and a thick door. Two security guards were standing at the door. Someone entered. It was a man with short brown hair, a moustache and glasses. He was wearing a white, striped shirt and he looked angry. Having entered, he peeked at the Asian and asked.

“Is this the guy?”

The security guard nodded and the man walked to the other side of the desk, and then sat down.

“Carrying a weapon, huh?”

The Asian said nothing. He was only sitting patiently and hoping that everything would be OK. The men turned to his colleague.

“Does he even speak English?”

“I do understand you, sir; I just hoped that everything would go smoothly.”

“All right then,” the man was impressed by his level of English.

“Could you please explain to me, how on Earth have you managed to pass the Tokyo airport security with the sword? And Toku...tei is what? Your name or surname?”

“It's my name, and there was no problem with my luggage. They simply let me through.”

“How dumb are they, huh?” he exclaimed hitting his fist against the desk.

The door suddenly opened, and a man wearing a black uniform came in. He came up to the one sitting on the chair, leaned and whispered something to his ear.

“What? Who?” the second one replied as his eyes grew. He stood up discouraged and disappointed and unwillingly said. “Let him out.”

“What?” one of the security guys asked.

“You heard me, let him out.”

3.

The Asian was walking towards the exit with little satisfaction. Everything went exactly as he was told. As he left the main door, he placed his suitcase on the pavement and raised his hand.

“Taxi! Taxi!” he shouted.

Almost immediately a yellow cab arrived. He quickly grabbed his suitcase and rushed towards the car. As he was running, he saw a young adult carrying a large bag approaching him. It was a tall man with short blond hair. He was no older than 22. He waved at the Asian.

“Oh, you don’t have to help me,” he said to the boy, “I’m alright.” But the blond-hair lad ignored him, opened the door from the cab and got in closing it behind.

“You must be kidding me!” the Asian man yelled angrily as the taxi took off.

“Taxi! Taxi!” he shouted again, now irritated.

Another yellow car arrived. The man quickly looked around, then opened the taxi door, threw his bags in, and got in.

“Sir, you should put your bags into the trunk,” the white, curly haired cab driver suggested peeking at the rear-view mirror.

“I am really sorry sir but I’m in a hurry.”

The driver gritted his teeth, rolled his eyes, and looked back.

“Where do you want to go, sir?” he asked through his teeth.

“Please take me to the Dewey Monument” answered the Asian guy.

“You know, people usually go to hotels or their homes, but you, with such luggage to the monument?”

“Just take me there, please.”

The taxi driver pressed the accelerator, and the taxi took off. Seconds later, a tall black man with a big bag on his shoulder came out through the doors of the airport. He looked around the buildings, raised his eyebrows, and said indifferently.

“Phew. Sydney is much better.”

Then he went farther, and called a taxi.

4.

The Asian guy was in a cab admiring the city through the window. Everything looked beautiful to him. The tall buildings, the cable cars, hilly roads, the weather.

“Beautiful city, isn’t it?” he said to the driver.

“Yeah, whatever,” came the cold answer.

At first, the Asian man thought that the driver was rude to him because he hadn’t put his luggage to the trunk, but now he was sure, the driver was a racist. He ignored his being rude and kept on eyeing the towering sky-scrapers. The cab suddenly stopped.

“We’re here, it would be 80 dollars,” the driver said. The man drew out his wallet and took out a 100-dollar bill then gave it to the driver.

“Keep the change”.

The man looked at him and immediately changed his attitude.

“Do you need a helping hand with that bag sir?”

The Asian guy looked at him.

“No thanks, I’ll be alright,” he answered pulling out the baggage off the cab.

“Have a nice day, sir.”

The Asian closed the door, turned around, and saw the Dewey Monument up ahead in a vast square park. It was a large column with some greenish person on the top. This person was a full-length female, wearing a green gown. She was holding a trident in one hand and a wreath in the second one. It was a victory monument raised to commemorate Commander Dewey’s victory over the Spanish fleet in Philippines. As the man was approaching the benches nearby, he noticed the same youngster who had stolen his cab earlier. Not thinking much, he briskly went up to him.

“You!” he said irritably putting his luggage on the pavement.

The man peeked at him.

“You’re talkin’ to me?”

“You stole my cab at the airport,” the Asian guy shouted and took off his sunglasses.

The boy remembered him very well but he decided to lie.

“I didn’t see ya’, man,” came the answer.

“I was right next to the cab when you turned up and simply

jumped into the car,” the angry Asian guy yelled.

“So what? You came all this way here to tell me that?” The boy rolled his eyes. “And by the way, I see you didn’t have problems with finding another one, did ya?”

“Guys, guys, this is not how gentlemen behave,” some voice came from the left.

They both looked into the direction of the voice and saw a man in his sixties with a short beard and moustache.

“Arthur!” they both said simultaneously. Then they immediately looked back at each other with a surprise. “Do you know him?” they both asked.

“Of course I do,” the boy replied standing up, “That’s why I’m here.”

Arthur sighed, then said,

“Boys, please, if you are to work together, you can’t behave like this, and you certainly can’t hate each other.”

The men looked at each other.

“Work with this dishonourable man? No way!” the Asian guy exclaimed. “You told me something different Arthur when we met.”

“Whatever,” The blond man added.

The old man couldn’t let the argument continue. This is not what he was hoping for.

“Tokutei, Dan” he said firmly looking at them convincingly.

“Alright, I’m sorry,” the Asian said changing his attitude.

“If he says we need to make up, then we need to make up,” Dan replied rolling his eyes again.

“My name is Tokutei,” he reached out with his hand as a sign of a greeting.

“And I’m Dan,” the second man replied shaking his hand.

“Good, now we have to wait for two more,” Arthur said quietly.

“Two more?” Dan asked astonished. “You said you were looking for five people?”

Arthur looked into his eyes.

“That is correct. However, one person will join as later today.” he replied in a joyful voice.

Tokutei spotted another taxi stopping nearby. He turned his head and watched a black man get out of it. He grabbed his bag from the boot,

looked around, stopping his eyes for a while on the monument, then on them, and started to walk towards them.

“I guess we don’t have to wait for a long time though,” Tokutei said turning back towards the men.

Dan caught a glance of the man approaching.

“I guess this is number three.”

“I hope this is it,” The black man said glimpsing at the three men. He put down his bag, peeked at the monument in front of him, and smiled.

“That is correct Jason,” Arthur replied. “Please, meet Tokutei and Dan,” he added pointing at the men.

“Hi guys, I’m Jason, I guess, err, I’ll be your new teammate,” he said casually.

Tokutei made a fast step forward, bowed, and shook his hand.

“Nice to meet to you.”

Jason bowed adding a gentle smile.

“Oh, and we have the fourth person coming,” the old man announced looking at the corner of the street.

Everyone looked at that direction. They saw a tall Asian woman wearing black clothes walking towards them. She had long, straight hair, very beautiful complexion and a perfect figure. She was carrying a huge black bag on her shoulder.

“Wow, what a hotty,” Dan chuckled.

She came by, closely observing all the guys standing there. There was something strange about her. It wasn’t her extraordinary beauty or her bag that seemed much heavier than the bag of others. There was something wrong with her face. There was no smile on it, no emotions. Only her eyes were filled with sadness. Arthur noticed it on the spot. He knew exactly what was going on with her. He had been there a few days earlier. The woman quickly shook off her sadness, and put on her happy face.

“May I introduce to you Qiaolian,” Arthur announced beckoning at the woman.

The others smiled politely, and waited patiently to be introduced.

“Actually,” she said, “You may call me Lian,”

“And these are...” Arthur continued, “Tokutei, Dan and Jason”

Jason raised his index finger as a sign of interruption.

“Actually, you may call me O.D.”

Lian beamed.

“Nice to meet you guys.”

“I see, that the team would consist of all races, heh,” Dan said with a silent smile.

“You haven’t seen the best yet,” Arthur replied.

Tokutei didn’t say a word, he was only observing the situation. But he was more convinced that this country was filled with racists. O.D. cleared his throat, and picked up his bag.

“You said Arthur, there would be four of us, so what are we waiting for?”

Arthur glanced at his watch.

“You’re right. Time is money, so we’d better be going guys.”

Everyone grabbed their belongings, and followed Arthur. Dan caught up with him, cleared his throat to get his attention, and asked.

“Could you tell us something about the fifth man?”

“She will join us later in the castle,” the old man replied.

“She?” the boy asked simultaneously with Jason’s “Castle?” Arthur turned around and nodded.

“Yes, and Yes. Yet, now we must be going, so follow me.”

Only Tokutei didn’t say anything. He seemed to be disappointed with the team, but it wasn’t this. He moved back to his childhood.

He was five years old, sitting among fifteen other Asian boys like him. They were all outside in front of an old, Japanese, wooden house. No one was talking. Everyone was gazing at a figure sitting in front of them. It was a man in his early forties with scars all over his face.

“Your families have abandoned you, and left you to die. I have taken you. Not only have I become your new father, but your master as well. I do understand you are still children, and like every child, you have dreams. However, I regret to tell you, that most of your dreams would not be fulfilled. You shall spend your life here with the very people who are sitting next you. You should love each other, not hate. You should be glad to be chosen, to be able to change lives. You are being trained to become the best fighters, the best ninjas in the country, to save the world. It is the greatest honour of all. And I do hope we would treat one another as a family. What Otaki here has done was inexplicable.”

He pointed at a beaten boy sitting next to him. He had blood flowing from his nose, and bruises all over his face and arms.

“This behaviour will not be accepted in our family. Otaki,” he turned

towards another boy sitting on his right.

“You will be punished for what you have done. And let this be a lesson for the future for all of you.”

“And you?” Jason asked Tokutei snapping him out of his memories.

“Hmm?”

“Are you Chinese or Japanese?”

“Japanese. You?”

“Australian.”

“Ha! I knew it from your accent,” Dan added.

“At least they’re talking,” Arthur murmured.

5.

They left the square and headed towards the main street. Arthur pointed at the long Hummer limousine parked ahead.

“How do you like our transport over there?”

“I have only seen such cars in movies and magazines,” Tokutei said impressed.

“I like it,” Jason added casually.

“You don’t look surprised, don’t you love cars?” Dan asked amazed.

“Oh, I do love cars. You don’t understand how much. But I live, I mean I lived in a celebrity neighbourhood, and I saw something like this every day.”

Arthur fished a small rectangular piece of plastic out off his pocket, and placed it into his ear.

“Steve, we’re ready.”

It was an earpiece, through which he communicated with the driver. The back and the side doors opened.

“Alright guys, hop in.”

They went inside. Dan, Lian and Jason sat at the back while Tokutei and Arthur sat opposite to them.

“Alright Steve, take us home.”

As soon as the driver started the engine, all doors immediately locked, and the car took off.

6.

The Hummer was speeding along the city streets heading towards the

Pacifica State Beach in the south. The passengers were admiring the San Francisco's beautiful buildings and views through the window. Then the Daly City views which were no different from San Francisco.

"Were you serious about the castle, Arthur?" Lian asked.

"I see that you didn't read the materials I gave you," he smiled.

"Well, there was too much to read so I'm not even surprised."

"I-I wanted to read all of this on the plane, but um..."

"Just admit you have forgotten the materials, as I did," Tokutei interrupted.

"Still, not surprised," the old man smiled.

Tokutei went on to staring at everything they were passing by. He was really fascinated with the city, the people they passed, and the cars. It was all new to him.

"The famous cable-cars, I always wanted to see them," he muttered Dan looked at him raising one of his eyebrows.

"I don't know why you Asians are always like spoilt tourists."

"Spoilt?" Lian asked with a cold look.

"You know what I mean, girl."

"No I don't, so could you please tell me?" she asked again lowering her voice.

"Ya' know, groups of Japanese looking at the American monuments and attractions, always taking zillion of photos. So whenever you see such an excursion, you can only hear the sound of reel moving. You're always like, *now look at this, look at that, blah, blah, blah*"

"Oh, I know what you mean now," she replied. "But you're no better when you, Americans, are away from home."

"But you're right, Dan," Tokutei interrupted. "And I can tell why it is like that."

"C'mon."

Tokutei sat comfortably, scratched his head.

"Well, our nation has always been fascinated by your achievements, your greatness, and your culture. We watch so many American movies, and always dream to see those places for real. But when an opportunity comes, taking pictures or making a film, are the only chances for us to memorise our being there. It's not that an opportunity like that would come again. Japanese people do not earn money and they cannot afford going on distant holiday every few years. We're very busy people, and we do not have much

free time. Do you understand now?”

“Yup, I think I do,” the boy answered, “But still, I always find it funny,” he added amusingly.

Tokutei slowly shook his head. Dan realised that what he had just said might sound to the others as an insult.

“I hope you’re not offended, Tokutei.”

“I’m fine.”

Jason was sitting quietly listening to the conversation.

“What’s your opinion, O.D.?” Dan asked.

“I totally agree with you, Tok. We also live with the American dream, and if I had my camera with me, I would go sightseeing.”

“What ‘bout the castle, where is it?” Lian asked.

Arthur looked out the window, and squinted his eyes.

“Over there,” he smiled pointing at a towering building on an island on the horizon.

Everyone looked closer.

“Oh my God,” Lian gasped, as she almost lied down on Dan. “I’ve seen this on postcards before. I didn’t know you were renting this, Arthur.”

“Cause’ I’m not renting it. It’s mine,” he smiled again proudly.

“No way!” Dan exclaimed pushing off Lian.

“This is not the only thing I will surprise you with,” the old man added.

“Living in San Francisco in a castle,” Dan daydreamed for a while.

Arthur took a deep breath and sighed.

“Actually, Daniel... well... technically it’s Pacifica, not San Francisco. But it’s San Francisco Bay, after all.”

7.

The limousine left the city. It was going along the Cabrillo Highway. The views immediately changed from bright houses, tall blocks of flats and colourful shops into green hills, tall trees and rocks. The magnificent castle disappeared for a while behind the hills, only to emerge once more as soon as the vehicle got higher. The ocean was spreading on the right side, and the weather was perfect for surfing. The car slowed down and turned left. It circled a large shop and headed for the area with two spacious villas. As soon as it passed it, the limousine slowed down, turned left, and headed towards a steep, three-metre side of a hill. Suddenly, the hill split into two,

and opened like a door, revealing a hidden tunnel. The Hummer accelerated and disappeared inside.

“That’s nice,” Jason said surprisingly.

“Where are we?” Lian asked giving furtive glances over the illuminated walls of the tunnel.

Arthur smiled again.

“This underwater tunnel leads to the Maldito Island; I had it built over ten years ago.”

The car was going inside a long tunnel with two way street, lit by thousands of spotlights. The wall ahead lowered, and the car reached the open air again. The group saw the thick forest surrounding the road. The vehicle continued moving along the road. The views were magnificent. The Pacifica shore was visible about three miles from the island, and the forest looked really amazing. After a while, the Hummer stopped in front of a huge castle. It had a wide, metal gate that lead to the spacious courtyard that was over 100 metres long. The courtyard ended with a five-storey building, from which erected a very tall tower. The south side of the castle had also five levels. The castle itself had about four towers on each side of the walls. The building was very clean, and looked as if it had been just restored.

“Wow, it’s enormous,” Lian commented admiring the large building.

“It looks better than in the postcards,” Tokutei added.

Arthur smiled, but said nothing. Out of a sudden, a strange sound came from the direction of the castle.

“What’s that sound?” Dan asked immediately throwing himself at the window.

“The gate is raising.”

“Now I know what will keep me up all night.”

“As long as you won’t leave the castle for nights, you won’t be bothered.”

As soon as the gate disappeared in the top part of the wall, the car rushed inside. Behind the front wall, was a courtyard very well-kept. There were two choppers parked near the southern wall, and several luxurious cars. The limousine stopped at the western wall.

“OK, we’re here. Take your luggage,” Arthur said pressing a button on his rectangular piece of plastic causing the door to open.

Everyone got out. Tokutei went first to the boot of the car in order to take

out all the bags. He thought he was the strongest of all, so he wanted to help the others. Dan walked closer to Lian and tapped her shoulder.

“Well, I’ve got way less to carry, so I can help you out.”

She looked at him indifferently and replied.

“I’m fine.”

“If you say so,” the boy replied with a silent laugh.

“You can have my bag,” Jason said, “I have way a lot to carry.”

Dan’s smile immediately disappeared, but he didn’t want others to think of him as if he was hitting on Lian, so he walked up to Jason right away.

“Alright, O.D,” he said unwillingly grabbing his bag, and then marched towards Arthur.

“OK, follow me,” the old man beckoned, and walked towards the main door.

The rest followed him, and seconds later, they were all inside.

8.

The inside didn’t look like a typical castle you see on the movies. Everything had been modernised. The walls had been painted in more modern and brighter colours. The unnecessary things, like spears or swords had been removed. Even the floor had been covered with glossy boards, which were probably hiding some kind of heating underneath.

“What a cosy place,” Tokutei complemented glancing over the spacious hall with many paintings on the walls.

“Thank you, Tokutei. Anyway, I will take you to your rooms now. Then, I will leave you to go sightseeing.”

“I will definitely get lost here,” Lian said with a silent laugh.

The old man turned around.

“Actually, you won’t. You will be provided with a digital map of the place with hmm... inbuilt GPS.”

On hearing that, Dan slowed down.

“Are you saying that some pretty girl’s voice will lead me to a bathroom?”

“That is correct, but not only bathroom. The pretty girl’s or boy’s voice will take you everywhere inside and outside the castle, including the city.

“Awesome.”

The old man went up the spiral stairs and turned right. The rest of the team

slowly followed him, constantly looking around admiring the unusual interior of the castle.

9.

After a while, they were walking along a long corridor several storeys higher. The walls were painted in brown-red, and from about six foot high, the colour gradually changed into bright yellow. Arthur stopped at the next stairs leading up and down, and turned around.

“Each of you will get their own floor.”

The old man was full of surprises. First the castle on an island, now one floor for everyone. What else does he have in his sleeve? He was really generous. And the floors themselves were vast and spacious, typical for castles.

“What a life!” Dan shouted joyfully comparing his old room to the size of his future home.

“To avoid quarrels or any misunderstandings, I will be the one who will assign the chambers.”

Everyone stopped, put down their luggage and waited for Arthur to continue.

“So, this floor and the next one will be taken by the girls. The last three ones will be given to Dan, Tokutei and Jason.”

O.D. grinned, “I’m gonna have the best view, wonderful.”

“Wanna switch?” Dan suggested.

“No switching!” the old man raised his voice, but he could see a grin on everyone’s face.

Somehow he wished to tell them the best part, but he knew, that without the last member it would be unfair. Yet, he couldn’t help giving them good news, so he continued.

“To make you even more thrilled, in every chamber, there’s an ensuite bathroom, 70-inch TV, menu with a huge choice of food. Err... What’s more, oh yes, computers, gym and err, you will see yourself. Any questions?”

Lian raised her hand,

“I have one.”

“Yes?”

“What do we have to do now? Apart from unpacking, of course.”

“Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. It’s now...” he peeked at his fancy, gold

watch, “Almost 12, so you have 2 hours to unpack and accommodate, and at 2 p.m. sharp, we’re going to have a dinner together.”

“Dinner at 2?” Jason asked surprised.

“Well, it’s too fancy to be called lunch.”

“Where are we going to meet then?” Tokutei asked.

“Just go downstairs to the hall, and I will take you to the dining-room. You’ll find a special watch and a tablet PC on your beds. They’re equipped with the digital map of the whole place.”

“And what about the facilities here?” Dan asked. “Can we use them?”

Arthur thought for a while, then boomed.

“Yes, of course, everything here is at your disposal. Any other questions?”

He glanced at the team, but they all shook their heads.

“Great, so if there are no more questions, you may go to begin your new life here.”

Tokutei raised his hand and asked.

“Just one more question, Arthur. You said there would be five of us. Where is the fifth one?”

“You will meet her at 2 p.m.,” the old man said turning around. O.D. walked up to Dan.

“OK, you may give me my bag back.”

The boy handed it over to him. Lian went up to the door, opened it and went inside. Before closing it she turned around to the group.

“See ya guys later,” she said joyfully and closed the door.

The boys went upstairs while Arthur headed downstairs.

10.

During these two hours everyone managed to unpack their luggage and put their clothes into wardrobes and drawers. They were also able to stack their bathrooms and check what the rooms had to offer, and there was really a lot. Each floor looked the same. Every room was very huge, about 2000 square metres. Actually it wasn’t a single room, but a huge apartment divided into several single rooms, storage areas and different facilities. Every storey had four balconies. Two overseeing the courtyard, and two overseeing the ocean and the peninsula. Moreover, the interior was far more expensive than in any regular hotel. Everything was modernised.

The beds disappeared in the walls, the toilets were self-cleaning, and the Jacuzzi had several additional bonuses for lazy and tired. Even the kitchen itself was different from a typical one. If you wanted to cook, you simply pressed the needed products on the special tablet, and seconds later the products magically appeared in the container in the fridge. If you didn't feel like cooking then you simply pressed the icons with desired dish from the digital menu, and several minutes later it was brought to you from the castle's main kitchen. Everything fresh and hot. However, every floor was different. It was all designed to suit the needs of each member. Lian and Tokutei had a special room with walls filled with weapons of all kind. One third of Dan's apartment consisted of a laboratory for his projects. And Jason. Well, he had his own shooting range.

11.

It was almost two o'clock. Tokutei was walking in the castle, admiring the paintings and architecture. Arthur did change much in the castle, but there were many old Spanish paintings and sculptures as well. Jason was resting on his spacious bed in his room or a chamber, to be more precise. He was tired with the long-haul flight and needed rest. It was him, who had the longest flight, after all. Dan was checking out the laboratory. Lian was trying out the tablet PCs they had been given. She reached the Arthur's office. The door was made of steel, covered with thick leather. There was a small sign on the door with letters AW. She went up closer, knocked the door and got in.

"Excuse-me Arthur, may I talk to you?"

The old man was doing something on his computer on the desk. The computer was a super-machine. There were four, 30-inches screens, lots of papers. The desk was illuminated by the spotlights installed in the ceiling. Although the desk was filled with technology and papers, there was still a small room for a photo of a beautiful, young woman. Actually it was the first thing, Lian caught eye of.

"Go on, how can I help you?"

She got closer to the leather armchair in front of the Arthur's desk and sat comfortably on it. She looked around the office. There weren't any shelves or bookcases. Everything was replaced with servers and monitors. She wasn't surprised by it because she used to have something similar in her and her brother's office. What surprised her, however, was a huge painting of a

night sky. It was hanging in the middle of the wall over the servers.

“I was wondering... you remember... the day we met, on the bench. You told me then that you’d tell me about the key and my brother.

“Hmm... I do remember that.”

“That’s why I came here.”

“Now, when you’re here, I can tell you. I remember I told you weren’t ready then, but I’m not sure whether you are ready now.”

“I need to know. That’s why I came here.”

“Your brother is in a very distant place. No one can reach him at the moment.”

“What do you mean?”

“Chang wasn’t the only demon back then. Somehow the others have obtained the information about you having the key. Your brother was supposed to be a bargain card in case you wouldn’t give this item back.”

“So where is my brother?” she tried to get this desired information.

“He’s kept by the demons.”

“Where?”

The old man took a deep breath.

“In Hell.”

Lian’s eyes filled with shock.

“And the key, you see, is a magical tool. It can open the door from Hell anytime someone is inside. I didn’t want the demons to have it, so I hired you, knowing that you’re the best to retrieve it.”

“Is there a way to save him?”

“Apart from giving back the key, yes. But we are not able to do it yet.”

“Not yet, hmm. You know, Arthur, I still can’t believe many things you say. I just hope, no one will use this key as an act of evil.”

“I hope that, too. Fortunately, it’s kept safe here. And don’t worry about your brother. We’ll save him.”

“Thank you, Arthur,” she said standing up.

She now knew about the key and her brother. The information however, was devastating. But she was a patient woman, and she did realise the severity of this situation.

“Don’t bother going to your room. We’re having dinner in 8 minutes.”

“I’ll wait downstairs.”

“Actually, we may go there together. There is one more thing I need to tell you.”

12.

Dan was in his room looking out the window. He glanced at the watch and turned round heading towards the door. He decided, not to be late, so he left his room earlier, and slowly headed downstairs. While he was walking along the corridor on the second floor, glimpsing over the paintings on the walls, he saw a figure of a woman at the end of the corridor. He couldn't see her clearly because of the dim light, but he noticed that she was tall; nearly six feet. She was closing the door to the room trying to fit the key into the lock. The boy slowly approached her. When he was about fifteen feet from her, he raised his voice and said.

“It works for your handprint, you know.”

The girl noticed a small screen next to the door and placed her hand there.

“The lock is only a decoration.”

“Oh, thanks, I just thought...never mind.”

As he was a few feet from her, he scanned her from top to bottom. It was a girl in her late teens; 18, maybe 19. She was wearing regular jeans and a blue top showing her perfect figure. She had long, straight, black hair with white highlights. The girl saw his face, and became really intimidated by his handsomeness. She quickly looked down at the floor, then at him and statured,

“I-I am Surya.”

He could easily see that she was nervous and didn't want to make the eye contact with him.

“And I'm Dan. Nice hair by the way.”

“Thanks,” she replied raising her eyes.

Dan looked deeply into her weird, whitish eyes and froze. Something was wrong. The boy's eyes grew with horror, as he made a step back.

“Is s-something wrong?” the girl asked slightly dropping her jaw.

Dan took a glimpse at her lips and noticed two of her teeth being a little longer than the others. At this moment, Dan realised who she really was. He quickly took off a pistol, he had always been carrying behind his belt and aimed at her yelling,

“Vampire!”

The girl quickly reacted by hitting the gun off his hands.

“No, you don’t understand, I’m...” she couldn’t finish, as Dan threw himself at her, trying to knock her down. She pushed him away using much more strength.

“I’m not a vampire!” she exclaimed.

But the boy wouldn’t listen. He took out a silver knife attached to his shin, and again attacked the girl.

“Stop!” someone shouted from the other end of the corridor.

The strange girl grabbed Dan’s arm blocking the blow and pushed him onto the ground. She saw O.D. speeding at them.

“What the fuck are ya’ doing, Dan?” he asked furiously.

“She’s a vampire. We’ve been breached.”

“I’m not a vampire!” the girl shouted again.

Dan moved back and lowered the knife. Jason came closer. The boy kept looking at girl’s fangs and white pupils.

“So how would you explain your eyes and fangs?”

The girl leaned against the wall and took a deep breath.

“I’m a Dhampir, and I am like you; vampires disgust me,” she tried to explain.

Jason caught up with them, and stopped between her and Dan.

“Dan, for God’s sake, this is Surya, the girl Arthur was talking about.”

The boy was in shock, he didn’t know what to say or how to behave. He looked down and bellowed,

“I’m sorry, I really thought you were one of them.”

Surya put her hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t worry, everyone does.”

“I’m sorry, but my original profession was a vampire hunter,” the boy continued. “It was just a reflex.”

He tried to save his face by being polite in front of Jason.

“That’s OK. You wouldn’t have killed me anyway. I’m too strong for you.”

Having heard that, the emotions cumulated in him. But this time, he followed his brain, and didn’t do or say anything irrational. He had to wait this one through. Even though he hated all vampires and vampire-like creatures, he wasn’t happy to work with one of them. No matter how pretty or good she was. He simply despised of such creatures.

“It’s almost 2 o’clock,” O.D. announced, “We’d better go

downstairs, I'm starving.”

They turned around and headed towards the stairs.

On their way down, Dan couldn't help asking.

“O.D. , how did you know about Surya?”

“Well, I met her an hour ago while I was sightseeing the castle.”

“I see.” he turned left towards the direction of Surya.

“If ya're a dhampir, so you must have some powers of a typical vampire, too.”

He tried to pretend he was OK with a dhampir being near him. But still, he hated those things regardless if it was a vampire or a dhampir. The girl made a concerned facial expression and replied,

“I don't have blood thirst, if this is what you meant.”

“OK, never mind.”

And the rest of their way they walked in silence.

13.

They finally reached the ground floor. There was already everyone else. Arthur peeked at Dan, O.D. and Surya.

“I see, that you've already met Surya. That's wonderful.”

They slowly walked down the spiral stairs, and joined the others downstairs.

“OK, so just a quick introduction for those who haven't met her yet,” the old man said approaching the dhampiric girl.

“This is the fifth member, her name is Surya.”

“Hello everyone, nice to meet,” she said expecting their reaction concerning her unusual eyes.

But their reaction surprised her.

“Hi there,”

“Nice to meet you too.”

And nothing else, no talking about her eyes, no talking about her hair, no pointing her out or shouting *kill the monster*. It was different from her usual life back in New York, and everything Arthur had told her, about finding appreciation and friends, turned out to be true. Well, not everything, Dan was still the problem. But she hoped it would work out.

Arthur quickly took a glimpse at everyone.

“Well, you must be hungry, let's go to the dinning-room.”

As soon as he said that, he turned left and walked towards the door while the rest followed him.

14.

They entered the dining-room that was at the end of a long corridor. They saw a long round table and a huge mirror on the wall. The table itself was covered with a white cloth, and on it, there were silver spoons, knives and forks. Arthur must have thought of everything. The round table was perfect for everyone to see one another. And of course no one could feel inferior or superior.

“Don’t be shy,” he suggested pointing at the table. “Sit. The waiters will bring the food shortly.”

“Are we gonna have every meal together?” Jason asked.

“No, Jason, only today,” the old man replied casually. “I want you to break the ice, you know. Not to start off the wrong foot.”

“I think we broke the ice back in the Hummer, didn’t we?” asked Dan walking towards the table.

“Not deep enough,” the old man smiled. “So let’s get started,” he added as the second door in the room opened and waiters came in carrying silver trays with various sorts of foods.

The rest of the team sat at the table and waited for the food. Even though they had access to various foods in their room, no one ate anything, not even a snack. They all had to have their stomachs empty for this special dinner. The staff served the dinner, and everyone started to eat.

15.

The dinner was almost over. However, during the meal, no one said a word. They all had been eating in a complete silence. When they all have finished, the waiters brought in the wines. Surya spotted the wines. She immediately recognised them. Couldn’t stand it anymore, she boomed,

“They must be at least 150 years old.”

“Actually,” the old man beamed. “They are much older. They were made in this very castle back in the days when the Spanish ruled.”

The staff poured everyone a glass of this sophisticated beverage. Arthur stood up tapping the glass with his knife. Yes, he had now everyone’s attention.

“I see, you’re not much talkative yet, but it will change. Now, I would like to raise a toast.”

Everybody grabbed their glass and stood up. They all knew that Arthur had

something important to say.

“You are very eminent people, very special and unique. I promised you a better life, a life where all the other problems will disappear, and all the questions will be answered. A life of acceptance and tolerance. We aren’t here only to help people, the USA, the world, but also to help ourselves. I believe that we can create a perfect working environment, a perfect life, and what is more important, we may become one family. To ASAT.”

“To ASAT.”

Everyone raised their glasses and took a long sip.

“Wow, it’s very good,” Jason complimented the wine.

“I have never had an opportunity to drink something as old as this,” Tokutei added.

Arthur didn’t sit down. He put down the glass and continued.

“The plan for today is... Well, we will have a short meeting now. Just to assign the roles, and tell you what we will be doing here, apart from ghost chasing.”

“And killing vampires,” Dan added with a smile.

“Then, you may do whatever you like. And believe me, there will be plenty to do.”

“So do you want us to have this role assignment here, at the table or where?” Lian asked curiously.

“Well, if everyone has finished, we may go to the briefing room. What would you say?”

Everyone nodded eagerly.

16.

After a while they were in the briefing room. It looked like a classroom with desks and chairs. Only that it was modernised. The walls were painted white, and it had speakers every few metres. The chairs themselves look as if they had been taken from a conference room. In front of the chairs, there were desks with screens, keyboards and mouses on them. The board, which was actually a large, 200-inch screen made everyone feel a few years in the future. Arthur was standing in the front, behind a vast wooden desk. The others were sitting comfortably at their desks.

“Alright, I will first start with talking about our common purpose, then everyone will say something about themselves; who you were back

then, and your expectations about your new life here, and lastly, we will decide who will teach what.”

Jason raised his hand.

“Yes Jason?”

“I’m baffled. Teach? You mean it will be something like a school?”

“You will have some classes here to learn from one another, and please, if you have a question, don’t act like a child and raise your hand, just ask the question.”

Dan turned over to Jason and mocked him. He raised a hand and whispered.

“May I please go to the bathroom?”

Tokutei and Lian laughed silently.

“Dan, please, I want you to focus, because this stuff is very important.”

Jason neglected Dan’s mocking and continued.

“Guys, please be professional. And Arthur, you see, it’s our first day. We don’t know one another yet. We are from different backgrounds, even countries, and we all have different habits.”

“He’s right,” Tokutei added. “It will take some time before we get used to one another.”

Arthur nodded his head and scratched his neck.

“I completely understand that. Yet, I have an impression that you’re afraid of me.”

Dan and Lian immediately dropped their eyes, Tokutei looked left, and Surya and Jason laughed silently.

“Eh, Anyway, I will start from beginning,” the old man said sighing quietly. “Our group’s acronym A.S.A.T. stands for Anti-Supernatural Assault Team. The group has been formed not only because of the fact that I wanted to, but also on the President’s request”

Everyone was looking at him and began to listen patiently. Finally something important.

“I had been observing every single one of you for many years before you met me. You are the best in what you do, but about this, we’ll talk later.”

Everyone got very interested in what Arthur was saying, and they were listening carefully to get to know this valuable information. After all, now they were going to learn the true reason for their being in the organisation.

“Each and every one of you has already had some contact with supernatural beings,” the old man continued. “However, in this job we are not going to fight single haunting or possession or a vampire attack.”

“Why?” Lian asked with disappointment.

“There are lots of ghost hunters who deal with that. We are a lot more serious group that is to deal with organised groups of supernatural beings. Something similar to what Dan has been a part of. Yet, the main goal of our organisation I will reveal tomorrow during the mission briefing. I do not intend to spoil your first day here or to give you a sleepless night.” They were all staring at Arthur, glancing from time to time at one another. Everyone started to take this job very seriously. There was a greater cause for their being there. Something much bigger than dealing with, like Arthur said, organised groups of supernatural beings.

“Everything you need, everything you want, will be provided for you. You are not obliged to stay in the castle all the time. The whole city is open for you whenever you like. Except the missions and training sessions, of course.”

“But how would we get off the island?” Lian asked.

“Well, it’s not a problem. The courtyard has lots of garages with several vehicles at your disposal.”

“And the helicopter?”

“This is actually for the missions and for me. Feel free to use other vehicles. Alright. You know the basics now, so I want you to say a few words about yourselves. You know, just to get to know each other a little bit better.”

He walked the desk round and leaned against the smooth edge with his back.

“Let’s start with you Tokutei.”

The Asian man stood up and took a glimpse at everyone.

“My name is Tokutei, I am... Err... I used to be a member of a Japanese special force, called the Dragons. I like martial arts and cooking. Err...That’s all, I think.”

“What about your expectation here?”

Tokutei looked impatiently around the room trying to think.

“Apart from practising my stuff, killing some monsters, I want to have access to the kitchen to prepare meals of my own choice.”

“You’ll certainly will, you’ll certainly will. OK, Thank you, maybe

now you Dan?”

“He didn’t say much, did he?” Surya commented.

“I don’t want to force you to speak, just say as much as you like.

Well, Dan?”

Dan didn’t stand up. He only looked at everyone and said calmly.

“My name is Daniel Night, I’m a vampire hunter. I’m also an inventor, so you bet I’ll bring a lot of fancy gadgets to this team. What else... I don’t know what to say more.”

“Thank, you. Jason,” Arthur beckoned at O.D.

The man stood up.

“I’m Jason White.”

On hearing this, Dan burst out laughing. Everyone looked at him strangely.

“Is something wrong, Dan?” Arthur inquired being absolutely sure why he reacted in that way.

The boy replied still laughing.

“Nothing, Just your last name’s White, and ya’re black, it’s funny, man.”

“Are you a racist?” Jason asked.

Dan’s smile immediately disappeared.

“Dude, no, why?”

“I heard your comment on Tokutei earlier in the car, and it was rude.”

“I apologised to him!” he raised his voice.

“Jason is right,” Surya added. “You tend to be rude to other people.”

“Eh, I am sorry Jason, OK? I didn’t want to be impolite,” the boy said through his teeth.

“OK. I admit I used to have some racism problems at school because of my last name.” Jason continued fiddling with his fingers. “But coming back to me, I’m a former member of Australian S.P.S.U., which is an equivalent to your SWAT. I love fast cars and weapons.”

“I love fast cars, too!” Dan yelled immediately changing his attitude, which sounded a little unnatural.

Arthur looked at the direction of Lian and Surya.

“And the girls, Lian, what’s your story?”

“I’m Qiaolian, but you may call me Lian. I’m a former Chinese spy. I like... Err... Shopping, like every girl,” she said amusingly.

“So you won’t be disappointed,” Arthur laughed.

“I also like martial arts. Even more than like, I love them. I used to be a national champion several years back.”

On hearing this, Tokutei scanned her from top to bottom and slowly nodded his head. Quite a competition he found.

“OK, and there is Surya. Tell us something about yourself.”

The girl stood up.

“Hi, I’m Surya. As you probably have noticed...,” she peeped at

Dan with her angry, white eyes, “I’m not a human.”

She paused and waited for others reaction, but everyone was looking at her and listening what she had to say. Only Dan was glancing over the room as if he was not interested with her at all.

“I’m a dhampir- half vampire, half-human. But believe me, I have nothing to do with vampires. I hate them, and I fight them, although many a time I was misunderstood and had to run from hunters.”

“I can assure you, Surya,” Lian said heartily, “You’ll find acceptance here. Right guys? Like Arthur said, we may become one big family.”

“With six of us that’s a hell of a family,” Dan chuckled.

Arthur walked the desk round and picked up a remote that was lying near the computer mouse. He pushed some button on the device and said.

“So now you know a few things about one another. I know that isn’t much, but a good info to start with. Let’s now move to role assignment.”

As soon as he pressed the button, the screen went black and some writing appeared on it.

“As you can see the first role is Martial Arts training. Many of you are trained in Martial Arts, but there’re still a lot of things to be learnt.” Tokutei looked around proudly knowing he’s the most skilful person there. After all he had spent his whole life training, practising, fighting, and what is more, he was the one who had survived the skeleton horde attack a few days earlier.

“Yes, I think that the classes considering martial arts should be conducted by you Tokutei, as you are the most adept here,” he said taking a sit on his wide, leather armchair.

“Excuse me?” Lian interrupted indignantly “What about me?”

She felt offended to have been neglected by Arthur. She was too an expert

in Martial Arts. She had been trained in numerous styles, and had always found a way out in many situations.

Arthur stood up from his chair.

“I watched you both in action, I personally believe, Tokutei is a far much better candidate.”

“B-But I know kung-fu,” she boasted.

“And I know Karate,” Tokutei replied.

Lian yelled with distension,

“And I know Aikido!”

“And I know Battodo,” the man replied.

Everyone was gazing at the quarrel in a slight astonishment.

“Should we stop this?” Jason whispered.

“No, no ,no,” Dan replied. “Let’s wait and see how it turns out.”

“And I know Wushu,” the woman exclaimed.

“And I know Taekwondo, Wing Chun, Judo, and much more” he shouted.

“And I know...”

Dan interrupted, “...science. Thus, I’m gonna conduct the gadgetry classes, thank you.”

He leaned back and grinned. Both Lian and Tokutei didn’t know what to say. Arthur grimaced

“Yes, Dan will teach you how to use the latest inventions. But what we shall do with the martial arts classes is up to you.”

“I ain’t gonna watch these two quarrel,” Surya complained.

“I have an idea,” Jason suggested, “We can have classes with both of them and decide who is a better teacher.”

“Sounds good to me,” Surya spoke with a loud voice.

Arthur pressed another button on the remote and the writing on the black screen changed again.

“The tactics and the assault classes will be conducted by Jason.”

Jason sneered proudly.

“The weapon handling classes I wanted to give to Lian, but if there is a conflict between you and Tokutei, Jason can take them over.”

Lian scowled,

“B-But I, too, wanna teach such classes.”

Jason scratched his head.

“So let’s do the same, let the others decide who will be the

teacher.”

“Deal,” Lian answered firmly.

Arthur pressed the button again, and the writing changed.

“The last classes will consider supernatural entities. How to recognise them and deal with them and... um ... I will teach this, and as far as vampires are concerned I would like to use some help from Surya and Dan. Mainly because of the fact that you have the largest knowledge in this area.”

“Oh, it’s gonna be just as I expected it,” Surya said thrilled.

“OK team, I won’t keep you here anymore,” Arthur announced.

“Now the surprise.”

Everyone directed their eyes at Arthur and waited for the news.

“In the castle, apart from the facilities you have on your floors, there is a swimming pool, a gymnastic hall, a shooting range, a course for training. What else um... Oh yes, on your new accounts, each one of you has been sent 1.000.000\$, so you may spend it on eBay or just go to the city and have a ball.”

He could see a wide grin appearing on everyone’s face and their eyes filling with excitement.

“Wow, one million,” Jason exclaimed unbelievably.

“A million bucks,” Dan added, “It should cover the basic expenses.

“If you decide to buy anything, have it sent to the Alpha Point address.”

“What is it?” Lian asked.

“Alpha Point is that complex of villas we passed on our way here. The ones before the tunnel. I suggest you should read the manual on your computers, everything is there. Where to buy clothes, accessories, guns and so on. Well, so that’s all for today, enjoy yourselves tonight because tomorrow we are starting working. And it will be hard.”

Dan and Tokutei glanced at everyone in uncertainty.

The old man smiled gently.

“Yes, you may go now. If there are any questions don’t hesitate to visit me in my office or just call me.”

The group went out. Dan came closer to Tokutei.

“Hey, Tok, ya’ wanna go to the city with me?”

The Asian guy thought for a while then boomed,

“Well, I can’t, I want to see the hall, and do some shopping on the

Internet.”

“How about you O.D.?”

Jason turned towards Dan.

“I wanted to check the guns, but yeah, why not, let’s go.”

Lian ran up to Surya. She decided if guys wanna stick together, she will stick with the other girl in the team.

“Do ya’ have any plans for now?”

The girl looked at the hand watch.

“I wanted to buy some clothes, and then check the weaponry room. Wanna join me?”

“Actually, I wanted to check the weapons too, so maybe we can meet hmm... in two hours there?”

“Yeah, that should be enough time for the shopping,” Surya replied joyfully.

“Great, later then,” Lian turned around to guys, “See you later guys.”

“Bye,” they replied simultaneously.

17.

Several minutes past. Dan and Jason were in the courtyard. They were walking along the rectangular wall surrounding the gigantic place.

“Arthur said something about some rides in the courtyard,” Dan said looking around in search for anything that looked like a garage.

“According to the tablet they should be over there,” O.D. answered pointing at the wide door nearby.

They went closer and opened the door. As soon as the men entered, they froze in amazement as dozens of fancy cars appeared before their eyes. Dan couldn’t help himself and ran into the garage. After all he was a car fan, and he loved them so much.

“Oh my God,” he shouted dribbling. “DB9, 911 GT, Maserati, Lamborghini, Mustang. Only the pearls.”

“Look over there,” Jason exclaimed pointing at some vehicle. “A Mercedes SLR.”

“Yeah, I freakin’ love cars. Unfortunately, I had to leave my Porsche back in New York.”

He went up to the McLaren and smoothly moved his hand along its silver, metallic body.

“And what ride do ya’ have?”

“I always wanted to own a fancy car, ya’ know, like something here. But, um,.., you can’t afford such a car from a S.P.S.U. salary.” Jason said sadly.

“Now you can buy one or five,” the boy replied with a silent laugh. “Moreover, you can buy any car you want.”

“Yeah, ya’re right. Yet, I don’t think we can use these wheels.”

“Who will notice?”

“Actually, Arthur. Look, there’re dozens CCTV cameras all over the place.”

Dan looked around and counted at least fifteen cameras in this very garage. Jason walked up to an old Porsche.

“I didn’t know he collects such cars. I just thought he was an old rich businessman, who goes to fancy parties and travels around the world with his wife. ”

“I’ll call him and ask,” Dan stated as if he was thinking about something else.

“If he travels?”

“No, if we can take them for a spin.”

He took out his tablet and found the phone function. Jason walked away admiring the beautiful cars, while Dan dialled the number and placed the earpiece into his ear.

“Arthur? Hi, Just a quick question, what cars can we use? ...err...OK. Thanks, bye.”

“And what did he say,” Jason raised his voice from a few metres away tapping an old Jaguar.

“He said the surprise is waiting in the second garage.”

“Where is it?”

“I guess next to this one. Let’s go.”

They went out and saw the second gate next to this one.

“Let’s see what a surprise he had for us,” Jason said curiously trying to imagine what was behind this door.

Dan opened the gate and froze in disbelief. However, Jason didn’t know why he was gaping at the car inside. It was indeed a sports car, but the boy wasn’t as surprised as few minutes before.

“What is it Dan?” Jason asked.

“I-It’s my Porsche,” he replied stunned. “I left it to my aunt. The

old man must have brought it here”

“So whata’ we waitin’ for?” Jason asked walking towards the right door.

“Ya’re right, no time for getting sentimental, hop in.”

Dan’s eyes were bright with happiness, as he was opening his precious car door. They got inside. The keys were in the ignition. Jason noticed something attached to the steering wheel.

“What’s that note?”

“I don’t know,” the boy replied taking the piece of paper and reading it out loud.

“We can never forget about our dreams. Arthur.”

“I don’t know what he meant by this,” Jason raised his eyebrows.

“You see, this car was my dream. I started saving money when I was a teenager, and when I finally got it, I couldn’t leave without it.”

“It’s so nice of Arthur, that he had it bring here.”

“You don’t even realise how.”

“So shall we hit the city?”

Jason nodded, as Dan turned the key, starting the engine with a roar, and they left the garage. After they had passed the gate, they headed for the tunnel and drove towards the city.

18.

Meanwhile Tokutei went downstairs to check the gymnastic hall. He went inside and looked around. It was an enormous place. Nothing he had ever seen in schools or on TV. It looked rather like an airport or a military hangar. There was lots of cold steel attached to the wall on the right. He could see there Bo Staffs, samurai swords, Chinese swords, nunchucks, three-section staffs and much more. In the middle of the place, there was a wall covered with ropes for climbing and a dozen of mattresses around. Near it, there were training bags hanged on chains, and wooden dummies. On the other side he saw a small ring or rather an arena for fights. At the end he could see poles, obstacle courses, and much more.

“Paradise,” he murmured coming closer to the weapons.

He looked at the red samurai sword, came closer and took hold of it. He carefully scanned its saya and slowly drew the sword. It reminded him of the teenage days among other Dragon members. He was a 15-year-old boy then. He was sitting in a typical, old-fashioned Japanese room. He was

wearing a shitagi- a traditional Japanese shirt, and hakama- wide trousers. When a person was standing straight hakama looked like a long skirt, but in offensive and defensive positions it looked really flashy and marked the movement of the legs.

The boy was polishing a blood-red katana with a small rag and some liquid. The wooden walls of the room were covered with long paper Japanese letters. Suddenly, another Asian boy rushed inside.

“Tokutei, you should be ready by now,” he shouted.

Tokutei raised his eyes, and peeked at the boy.

“I’ll be ready in a minute,” he answered calmly.

“Why do you always have to do it so long?”

“I want my sword to perfect. I want it to be clean and shiny while I’m training.”

The boy sat next to him and observed him. He was trying to persuade him to move faster and go outside. When Tokutei finished his activity, they stood up and they both went out of the room. The place looked like a traditional Japanese village. The huts were made of wood. There were seven buildings in a straight line nearby a narrow stream. The village itself was situated on a hill surrounded by the mountains. In front of the tallest house, there was an arena surrounded by wooden dummies. Around the arena, there were a few other similar Japanese boys sitting. They were all dressed in black hakamas with white shitagi shirts. The boys were kneeling in a line in front of a man, who was wearing the same clothing. He was bald, in his early fifties. Next to him, there were fifty, large, black bags lying. The man noticed the boys coming and turned towards them.

“Tokutei, Tomoya, you are finally here. Please join the rest,” he said calmly.

The boys put in their swords on their left side, behind the belt, and kneeled next to the others.

“Students,” the man spoke again. “Today, we shall practice the ultimate technique you have been taught recently. Who can remind us the basis of it?”

The man looked at boys. They all raised their hands.

“Maybe you, Shikura,” he said pointing at the teenager on the left.

“Yes, master. We can only use this techniques being under attack by many opponents,” the boy said. “It consists of the finest, fastest, as well as the most effective moves,” the boy continued.

“Good, Shikura,” the master replied. “Each and every one of you has their sword clean and ready.”

One of the boys raised his hand.

“Yes, Yuko?”

“How will we practise it, Sensei?”

“Convicts of course,” sensei replied sneering pointing at the bags.

Tokutei came round. He was back in the gym in the Maldito Castle. He put away the sword, turned round, and left the gym.

19.

In the meantime, Lian was browsing the Internet buying various clothes. She was about to buy another dress when, she heard knocking at her door. She quickly rose from the chair, ran towards the door and opened it.

“Surya, I thought we had two hours for shopping,” Lian said surprisingly.

“It’s been two and a half already,” the girl replied with a laugh.

“Oh my God, I didn’t even buy everything I wanted. Come in. I’ll be done in a minute”

Surya went inside looking around the place.

“Your apartment is similar to mine. We have the same room organisation.”

“Do we? I love it. I can finally take a break from hotel rooms.”

“Yeah, hotel rooms,” Surya replied sadly.

They reached the computer. Surya took a glance at the screen.

“I see that you’re still online and you bought the same dress I did.”

Lian rolled her eyes as if the fact that Surya was going to have the same dress bothered her. The dhampiric girl tapped Lian’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry. I bought plenty of dresses. There is a small chance that I’ll wear this one. Anyway, Lian, maybe you’ll finish the transaction, and we can go, hmm?”

Lian glanced at the screen.

“Tell ya’ what, we may go now, I will pay for it later.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Great,” Lian replied turning the screen off.

The girls left the room and headed towards the stairs.

“Where’s the weapon room? Lian asked. “I didn’t have time to

check it,” she added.

“Well,” Surya murmured, “It’s in the back of the castle, near the gymnastic hall and the shooting range.

“Ok, so let’s go there.”

20.

A few minutes later, they reached the room. Inside there were lots of shelves with different sorts of weaponry.

“Look!” Lian shouted with excitement. “There’re different categories of weapons.”

Surya scanned the writings carefully.

“Yeah, there are grenades, heavy stuff, assault rifles, sniper rifles, pistols. Everything we need,”

“I wonder whether I’ll find my favourite one,” Lian asked opening the door with *sniper rifles* written on it.

“Which is what?”

“Barrett m107,” she replied with a grin taking out the very rifle.

“Just like my old one. And how about you? What do you like?”

Surya checked the assault rifles storage.

“Actually, I always fought with daggers, but if I had to choose, the best one would be this one,” she said pulling out a HK ump 45 SD.

“Not bad, not bad.”

“So what would ya’ say, girl? Wanna shoot?”

“You bet I do, let’s shoot some targets.”

The girls walked towards the opened door separating the rooms, and they found themselves in a shooting range. The room itself, was no different from a traditional shooting range. Every shooter had their own section, and they could adjust the distance and the type of the target.

21.

Jason and Dan returned from the city. They parked the car in the garage and got out of it.

“That was nice,” The Australian guy said pulling out a big paper bag from the Porsche’s boot.

“I had a great time too.” the boy replied grabbing two other bags.

“And it sounded gay.”

“Haha. Anyway. I’ll go to the shooting range now, Wanna come?”

“Actually, I wanted to see my lab. If I’m supposed to be responsible for the gadgetry we deal here with, I’d better check what kinda’ gear we have here.”

“You have a lab?”

“Yup.”

“No way!”

“I’ll give you a tour some time. I guess, see you later, then.”

“See ya’.”

The men entered the main hall and split up.

22.

The girls were still in the shooting range, firing at human-shape figures.

“So, Lian, you used to be an assassin, right?”

“Yup, a hitwoman actually,” she replied calmly.

“What was it like?”

“Well...” she said finishing another clip. “It was extremely dangerous, but I loved it.”

“You loved it?” Surya asked stuttered.

“Yeah, I did enjoy taking out world most wanted. You see Surya, if it hadn’t been for me or others like me, the crime rate would be way higher now in China. I’ve eliminated over 1000 targets, and believe me, I don’t regret killing any single one of them.”

“I see,” the girl answered reloading her HK.

Suddenly, the door opened and Jason went in.

“Girls,” he greeted them warmly.

“Jason, you too, wanna shoot a little bit?” Lian asked stroking her assault rifle.

“Yeah, need to practice to keep accuracy at a high level.”

“So feel free to join us,” Lian suggested getting closer to the rifle sight.

Jason grabbed an M4, and went to the third box. He put on the headphones, and the shooting began. They were all very good shooters. After all, Arthur had chosen them wisely. He was observing them on one of the screens in his office.

“At least, they don’t hate each other,” he smiled.

He was glad that the team was getting closer, tightening the bonds, finding

mutual interests and topics.

He took a glimpse at the second screen that was showing Tokutei outside the castle, practising some martial art form in the woods opposite the castle. Then the old man looked at Dan's Lab. The boy was working on something, but Arthur could only had a vague idea about Dan's project. He pushed off his chair and went back to work on his computer. The screen was showing some object in a shape of a hexagram and a map of Thailand.

23.

Dan left the laboratory, and went to his bedroom. He went passed his fancy bed, with the bags he'd brought from the car. Then he sat in front of his computer and typed in some website address. The screen turned black. And big letters NYVHA appeared. Yes, he visited the very website, he used to spend lots of time back in New York. Then he saw Mike; his friend, online on Facebook. Not thinking much he wrote first.

"Mike, wassup, dude?"

"Dan? OMG. How is SF?"

"It's great. Everything's great. But enough of all that. How is the company?"

"We've got 40 mbrs already. Still recruiting."

"Any new missions?"

"A few. Most of the vampires were wiped out the other day."

"Great."

"We all miss you here, bro. Sorry must dash."

"OK, cu."

October 2, 2012

80 days remaining

24.

The truck was speeding along the street at this very dark night. It stopped at the supermarket with a screech of brakes. The store was empty, at least it looked as one. The back door opened and the team jumped out. Tokutei, Lian, Dan, Surya and Jason stood in a line. They were holding assault rifles, and they all were dressed in black uniforms. Arthur stepped out last.

"OK guys, this is it. The seal is in the supermarket. The vampires'

leader has it.”

“What about...” Dan asked but his sentence interrupted an explosion coming from the supermarket.

The blast was so strong that it deprived the nearby buildings of their windows. Everyone fell on the ground and covered their ears as the cloud of fire flew over them. Arthur raised his head and looked around, while the others tried to see something inside this huge supermarket.

“It has already started. No time to waste. Go!” The old man yelled, then got up.

The team rushed towards the ripped window of the supermarket. Tokutei was leading the way having a tight grip on his bluish sword. Behind him, there were Dan and Lian followed by Jason, Surya and Arthur. As soon as they got in, dozens of vampires appeared among the broken shelves. Some of them had pistols while others were using machineguns or assault rifles. Some others were holding traditional weapons, like swords, sabres, daggers or knives.

The shots began and the team immediately jumped behind the tables and shelves.

“Try to take out as much as possible!” Arthur ordered.

Jason was using HK MP4. He leaned out, took a quick aim at the creatures creeping in the corridor, and then took a few shots. Each shot was a 100% accurate. As a result the upcoming vampires dropped numb onto the ground. Tokutei managed to move to the nearby shelf. He peeped over the shelf to check how many enemies were in that aisle. He noticed a few zooming along the destroyed shelves. He leapt out from behind the shelf and rushed towards them. The angry creatures raised their weapons and immediately after that a series of bullets flew towards him. The Asian man jumped at the shelf and leapt off it towards the second one. In this way he avoided the bullets. After that he jumped onto the floor and converted the current momentum to gain more speed and power to leap one more time and reach the opponents. As he was passing them thirty mph his sword cut through them. Then aimed for three more right behind them. Kill, kill and kill.

Meanwhile, Surya and Lian couldn't move anywhere because of the heavy attack from the other side.

“Eh, I can't stand it anymore,” Lian complained.

“Me, too,” Surya replied reaching out for the grenade, then took

out the safety pin and threw it over the table. The loud explosion filled the room seconds later. Lian rose to estimate the number of the remaining creatures. She spotted a few at the back and quickly took them out. Afterwards, a bunch of enemies ran just ahead of them and shots flew towards her, so she ducked back down.

In the meantime Jason, Dan and Arthur were covering one another in the remains of the fridge section. They had knocked down a few fridges to make a blockade as well as a place to hide behind. Dan and Jason raised their weapons and shot in the dark from time to time. When the shots calmed down, Jason raised his head to check what was going on. When he did that, he noticed Tokutei a few metres ahead fighting with a vampire who was using a samurai sword as well. Dan and Arthur stood up. Then, they noticed a large group of vampires running from behind the corner. They all started shooting.

“Take cover!” Arthur shouted and crouched back behind the fridges.

“What about Tokutei?” Dan asked.

“There is nothing we can do now,” the old man shouted, as something fell next to the three men.

“Oh no,” Jason said in a concerned voice seeing a grenade right next to his leg.

There was no time to pick it up and throw it back, because no one knew when the safety pin had been taken out. It could explode any second, so the only choice they had was to escape.

“Run!” Dan shouted turning away from the grenade, as the adrenaline levels in his body reached almost maximum.

Arthur was the furthest, so he didn’t know why they had to run. He was too far to see what was going on there. Even though he was in his sixties, he was still in a perfect condition. He started to run realising the thing that had just fallen among them was a grenade. Dan caught up with him, but he slipped on a blood stain and fell over. Jason jumped over the stain and crouched to help Dan out.

“Run! Leave me!”

Jason didn’t know whether to listen to his colleague or to save himself. The survival instinct told him to get out of there, but his code said something totally different. But then he noticed this specific look saying *I’m ready to die*. Jason not thinking much made a dart towards Arthur. Then, the grenade

exploded. The blast full of fire covered Dan and spread absorbing Jason. Arthur was gaping in disbelief that he was losing his men. The very men he had been looking for since he decided to devote his life to saving the world. Then he spotted the vampires running at him. He also noticed Tokutei lying on the floor covered in his own blood and much more vampires rushing from that side towards his body. The old man quickly came round from the shock and started running towards the exit.

“Under heavy fire,” a female voice shouted in his earwig.

“Girls, we’ve got three men down. Abort the mission. I repeat about the mission.”

He ran next to the shelf where Surya and Lian were hiding. As soon as they saw him they made a dash after him heading for the exit. The shots came from behind. One of the bullets hit Surya in the leg. The girl fell and turned around to counter attack. Lian stopped and walked up to her colleague.

“Grab my shoulder. I’ll get ya’ out of here!”

Arthur managed to reach the hole where the entrance used to be. He was confused what to do. Ran back to girls or to save himself. He already lost three men.

In the meantime, Lian was able to help Surya get up. They were limping towards the door. Yet the cloud of bullets reached the girls. The projectiles pierced them like raindrops sink into to water. One after another rapidly sieved through their bodies. They both fell onto the burnt floor. Arthur was observing it from the distance. He had no weapon, no ammo, no team. He decided to turn and run towards the truck. As he was doing so, a couple of vampires reached him.

“Where do you think you’re going, huh?”

But Arthur said no word. He was still in shock. The vampire pressed his finger onto the back of Arthur’s neck paralysing his body. He then leaned over and sank his fangs deep into his skin. Arthur screamed out of pain, and opened his eyes. He found himself sitting on his bed in his spacious bedroom. It was still the middle of the night.

“Just a dream,” he whispered trying to catch his breath.

But then he jumped out of the bed and rushed to the bathroom. He switched the little spotlight on and stood in front of the mirror. Then he slowly turned his neck right and uncovered his shoulder.

“Just a dream,” he sighed realising there were no spots on his neck. He went to the balcony and sat at the table admiring the million bright dots

of San Francisco, Daly City and Pacifica. He knew the next day would be very difficult, not only for him. He would have to do more than his best in order to make sure that that dream would not come true.

25.

The night passed, and a new day came. It was 9 o'clock. Everyone was in the briefing-room waiting for the Arthur's lecture and then the classes. Learning from one another wasn't such a bad idea. Everyone had some unique skills which could be shared with the rest.

Tokutei and Dan were sitting in the first row. Dan was slowly sipping his hot coffee.

"I heard Dan," Tokutei turned to his colleague, "That you spent all last night in the lab."

"Yeah, I took some guns from the storage and altered them."

"What did ya' change?" Lian joined the conversation.

"You'll see later," he smiled turning round to the girls and Jason.

"And you, how did you spend the evening?"

"Practising," Tokutei replied.

"Shopping," Lian said.

"And sleeping," Jason added.

The door opened, and Arthur came in.

"Good Morning everyone, I hope you had enough sleep because today we have a lot to do."

He went up to his wide desk. The light dimmed and the screen showed big letters A.S.A.T.

"I understand you may feel like at school during these classes, but there are lots of things to be discussed before we will go on our first mission."

"I hated school," Dan murmured.

"As I promised, we will start with discussing why we are here and what our main goal is. Then, we will move to supernatural beings."

Everyone stopped whatever they were doing and tried to focus on what their boss was about to say. The greater goal, finally revealed.

"You all probably think that I have chosen you to fight supernatural creatures. Yet, there is a far more important purpose for your being here."

"He loves keeping us in the dark," Tokutei commented.

“I thought killing those fucking things was the reason,” Jason added.

Arthur looked at them and said seriously,

“I told you yesterday that we’re going to deal with the most difficult situations, but before we can do that, our main aim is to prevent our world from being destroyed.”

Everyone looked at his serious face.

“What?” Dan shouted in disbelief.

“What do you mean?” Surya added covering her mouth.

The old man took a deep breath. He understood it will not be easy. There was still some time left to accomplish this goal, and like Tokutei said, keeping them in the dark any longer, won’t do any good.

“It’s very complicated. Let me try to explain everything in simple words.”

He pressed some keys on the small computer keyboard on the desk, which changed the A.S.A.T. logo into black background. Seconds later a photo appeared.

“Look at the screen.”

The screens showed a picture of a grey circle. It looked as if it was carved in a stone.

“What about it?” Surya asked.

“It’s the Mayan calendar,” Jason added.

“I’ve read it’s going to end this year,” Lian commented.

The guys looked at it closely, but they didn’t notice anything specific.

“You’re right Lian. You cannot see it on this example, but I can tell you that the last day on this calendar is 21st December 2012.”

“Wait a minute. It’s in less than three months!” Dan exclaimed as his eyes grew wide.

Tokutei dropped his eyes as if he was thinking about something. Then he boomed.

“What will happen then?”

Everyone moved their eyes away from the screen and looked at Arthur.

“There are many theories. One of them says that the polar peaks will reverse.”

“Does that mean that the compass will point south instead of north?” Jason asked.

“Probably,” The old man replied with uncertainty. “But there is a

worse theory, however.” Arthur continued. “The second one, well, the scientists believe that because of the fact that the number of natural disasters, namely tornados, floods, tsunamis and so on, is increasing or to be more precise, has increased dramatically over the last few years, by the end of this year, they will be lethal to our planet, and the continents will be destroyed. Others believe that some other parallel universe or realm will emerge on that day. However, I personally believe...err... That’s a lie. I don’t believe, I know. I have found out and proved that on that very day the realm that would emerge would be hell.”

“Hell exists?” Tokutei asked in disbelief as his jaw dropped.

“And where did you think demons come from?” Lian asked.

“Demons are real?” he asked in even more amazement.

“I had a chance to fight one,” The Chinese girl replied. “And believe me, they’re as real as you and me.”

Arthur sighed and asked sarcastically,

“May I continue?”

“Sorry,” came the answer from Lian.

“As I said, Hell is going to open on that day. That means, that everything that has died so far would come back to life. And everything that is dwelling down there, would come up here.”

“I won’t believe it,” Surya said.

“Is there a way to stop it?” Dan added with a slight fear in his voice.

“There is a way. Does anyone here know who King Solomon was?” he asked hopefully.

“THE Solomon? The son of David, this one?” Jason asked.

“The very one,” the old man replied, “Do you happen to know the term Seal of Solomon?” he added.

Lian raised her hand.

“I heard about the plant.”

“No, no, not the plant,” Arthur replied surprisingly thinking. *What’s wrong with her.*

“I’ve watched some documentary about it,” Dan interrupted, “It had some connection with those triangles of Israel.”

“Indeed,” came the answer.

The screen displayed some photo of two triangles superimposed over each other.

“This is the Seal of Solomon,” he continued, “I want you to read the text on your tablets, and after that we can discuss the case.”

He turned around and pressed some other button on his control panel. The tablets that everyone was holding showed a short text about the mysterious object. They started to read, and Arthur sat down for a while to rest his feet.

A few minutes passed. Arthur was sitting at the wide desk looking at his team. Everything he learned about them from his observations and texts was true. They may be the best in what they do, but they are still human. It was natural for them to have questions, to have doubts. However, he was surprised that they didn't panic, nor did they make a big fuss about the fact the world is going to end.

When he noticed that his crew have finished reading, he stood up and kept on talking.

“So now, you basically know something about the Seal. To cut long story short, the Seal of Solomon is the symbol of two triangles in a shape of a hexagram within a circle. King Solomon used to wear it on a signet ring. Thanks to this powerful object, he succeeded to seize and control 72 demons. Yet, he failed to seize the most evil one; Cizin; the Mayan god of death.”

He could see huge interest and disbelief in everyone's eyes. He noticed dozens of questions arising in their heads. And he realised that he would be bombarded with them any second now.

“But...” Dan interrupted, “the text gives a list of these 72 demons, and one of them is Lucifer, which I thought was the worst one.

“It's complicated, Dan. Cizin has always been deceitful, and he used some other demon to play the King of Hell.”

“Who is this Cizin anyway,” Surya asked. “And what's his connection with the Mayan calendar?”

The screen changed and displayed some figure of a strange looking creature. Similar to human but its head looked like the one of a lizard.

“This is Cozen, the Mayan God of Death, which, moreover, was the first embodiment of Cizin. He was the creator of the Mayan calendar.”

Lian interrupted,

“So what with the year 2012, why is it the end of the calendar?”

“As far as I know, he wanted to organise his kingdom downstairs, and slowly move upstairs. But it wasn't easy and it doesn't take a day or a

year. It took him over 4000 years, and now he is ready to bring Hell here on Earth. Actually this is only a theory. Hell is a different universe. People believe it is underground because of two facts: the first is that Hell looks like underground caves with lava rivers and so on. The second one is that to get to Hell you can get through one of the portals situated as deep as 25 kilometres below the ground.”

“When I was in school,” Dan interrupted, “The historian said that there was some miscount in the years of Christ born, and now it should be a few years ahead.”

“That is correct, but the calendar started on 11th August 3014 BC our time. It does not count months or leap years because there were no leap years then. It was Julius Cesar who introduced leap years. And of course, when the scientists learnt to read the calendar, they counted the leap years and the miscount. Hence, it does not end on 31st December.”

Dan slowly shook his head.

“And only six of us must stop it?”

“No. There’re more, but we are the most important ones. I have found you among the best. And I failed to gather more people. You know what you must know about it.”

Tokutei raised his eyes.

“Wait a minute. You said we could stop the end with the Seal. Where is this Seal now?”

“You’re right, Tokutei. Only the Seal can stop Cizin from bringing Hell here. Actually it can stop Cizin by locking him inside. Yet, the Seal itself is no longer in one piece. The legend has it that when Solomon lost the Seal, Cizin had it broken into five pieces. Each piece lays in a different part of the world. At the moment we know the location of three.”

The old man came closer to the desk and sat on it.

“Enough of all that. Our first mission is about the first piece. But before I can tell you more, you must all know what is need to know. Each of you have encountered some paranormal activities in their lives. That is why there won’t be so many questions. We will start with discussing vampires and to do so, I ask you, Dan,” Arthur pointed at the boy, “To share with us your huge knowledge about them.”

Dan gave Arthur a surprised look.

“Why me? I’m not ready to talk in front of the audience.”

“Dan, believe me, it’s not as scary as you may think. These are the

people you'll be working with, so talk to us as if you were talking to the hunters at your place," the old man replied convincingly.

The boy stood up unwillingly and went up to the front, while Arthur took a sit in the first row.

"Well, OK, I will try to tell you the main things about vampires. First of all you all know what a vampire looks like," he pointed at Surya. The girl scowled and shouted

"I'm a dhampir! Not a vampire!"

"Potato, potato," he said the same words with a different pronunciation. "Dhampirs and vampires are almost the same."

"Could you tell us the difference, please, and stop making stupid comments about Surya." Arthur asked.

"Well, OK. A vampire is someone who became one, either by having been bitten by a vampiric creature or by having been conceived by two vampires, while a dhampir is someone whose one of the parents' was a vampire. Clear?"

The boy started to walk from one side of the desk to the other.

"Oh yes, and there're also some cases where a woman was raped by a vampire and her baby becomes a dhampir."

"So, what's the difference between a vampire and a dhampir, Dan?" Lian asked glancing at Surya. "Besides having different parents."

"Hmm, a dhampir doesn't have all the vampire's features. For instance, they may not be afraid of light."

"Surya," Jason said enthusiastically, "Which powers do you have?"

"I don't like talking about it," she blushed. "Moreover, I told you yesterday which powers I don't have."

"We wanna know what you can do," Lian interrupted. "You know everyone here is special. What about you, tell us, would you?"

"Come on Surya," Tokutei interrupted, "Tell us something about you."

The timid girl peeked at Arthur sitting in the front row. He knew exactly what her look meant, and he also knew, at the same time, that she had to leave her past behind and move on. And to let her know that, he slowly nodded his head.

"Oh, alright then!" Surya boomed. "First of all, I sense a vampire presence, I mean I am able to say which one is a vampire, which one is a human. I also have their speed and..."

“What about teeth do you have them?” Tokutei interrupted.

“Guys, it’s really hard for me to talk about this.”

“So, what ‘bout those teeth, huh?” Dan asked seriously although he already knew the answer.

“Yeah, they sometimes go out, but I don’t have blood thirst, though! And I have never drunk blood!”

Arthur could not stand her inconvenience in that situation any more. He had to do something. Overcoming her shortcomings, and talking about what differs her from other humans was too hard.

“Dan, can you please talk about vampiric features and their behaviours, then of course about their elimination.”

The boy looked at Arthur and gave him a fake smile,

“No problem.”

Tokutei leaned a little bit towards Lian.

“He doesn’t seem to be stressed anymore.”

“Yeah, he got used to it.”

“OK, so as I said everyone knows what a vampire looks like. They have fangs, yellow or red eyes. Their skin is slightly drier than ours and, hmm... they also like to hiss or speak strangely.”

“Why?” Jason interrupted.

“No idea, they’re just fucked up.”

“Actually,” Surya disturbed, “They make such sounds because when their fangs go out they move their jaw a little bit lower not to bite themselves. Hence such a sound.”

“I didn’t even know about that,” Arthur sighed.

“Anyway,” Dan continued being in the moment. “Everything you see in vampire movies is generally true. They drink blood to satisfy their thirst. However, they are vulnerable to sunlight or rather UV light. That’s why one of the preferred weapons is a flashlight with a strong UV light. They also don’t like garlic. I personally don’t use garlic against them.”

“Why?” Jason asked again.

“In one word because your hands stink after it. What I like to use is dead man’s blood. Oh yes, it’s the best weapon. Especially when the bullets spent the whole night in that liquid.”

Dan was speaking so eagerly that everyone, including Arthur, was listening to his every word with huge interest.

“Oh, what doesn’t work are crosses and religion signs. Tried that, did

nothing.”

Tokutei interrupted Dan’s speech.

“What about silver bullets?”

“Um, they are used on vampires, too. However, silver is not as lethal as dead man’s blood.”

“Actually,” Arthur interrupted, “Many creatures are vulnerable to silver, but this is not for today.”

“Well, what to say more about vampires. Hmm, they’re hardly ever alone. They usually live in large groups. Families or clans. Ha, I have destroyed many of them.”

“No boasting please,” Arthur added amusingly, then stood up and looked at the group.

“Dan, I think that’s all. More, you don’t need to know for today. You have now one hour to do what you want, and I will prepare the briefing for your first mission.”

When everyone was leaving, Dan asked Arthur,

“I understand that there is no time for leaving the island, is there?”

“That is correct, Dan. Just take a rest.”

“If I may suggest,” Jason said, “Can we do the briefing now, and then have more time for the preparation for the mission?”

“I agree with O.D.,” Tokutei added.

The old man thought for a while, then agreed,

“Alright then. Let’s do the briefing now. If everyone could return to your seats, please.”

Lian and Surya turned around and walked back to where they were just sitting. Arthur went behind his desk, put some disk into the front of the computer, and after that some information appeared on the board saying *First part of the Seal*.

Arthur sighed then took a deep breath.

“Alright team, this is your first mission together. As I mentioned before we have three months to collect all five pieces of the Solomon’s Seal. The first one is in Los Angeles. Well, it should be there soon.”

The screen changed into the panorama of LA.

“Tonight, there is going to be a concert of some metal groups. Don’t ask me which ‘cause I don’t know. Anyway, on this concert, there will appear, some important vampire.”

The screen changed again, now showing a pale man with long white hair.

“Reiz,” Surya whispered.

Everyone looked at her.

“Do you know him?” Lian asked surprised.

“He visited our cell once or twice back in the days when I pretended to work for vampires. Everyone treated him like a king. He is very dangerous though. I remember when he killed a human once, using only one finger.”

“Hmm,” Arthur thought, “Yes, he is very powerful, and unfortunately for us and at the same time fortunately for us, he has got one part of the Seal.”

Jason leaned towards Dan, and asked baffled.

“Why unfortunately for us if he has the Seal?”

“Reiz very bad, hard to kill, we can die, got it?”

Jason nodded, and Arthur continued.

“But, as far as the mission is concerned, we’ll have to go to LA and find Reiz there. The previous lecture was purposefully about vampires, so you now know how to deal with them. Any questions?”

“What about weapons?” Lian asked.

“Actually,” Dan interrupted, “It won’t be a problem. There’re approximately 10,000 projectiles submerged in dead man’s blood in my lab.”

Arthur looked at Dan alarmed and surprised, while the others were staring at the boy in disbelief.

“I don’t wanna know where you got the blood from,” Surya said.

“It doesn’t matter. What matters is that we can now kill vampires with regular weapons, not by throwing garlic at them,” he replied amusingly.

The old man stood up and headed towards the desk. He seemed to be worried about something. Where the hell he got the blood from? The whole castle in filled with cameras. How could he miss this. The old men then turned around and went on talking.

“Anyway, we will go to LA, hit the concert, find Reiz, and take the Seal from him. I suggest you get some rest now, and then prepare for the mission. We’re going to meet in the hall at four sharp.”

“OK,” came the warm answers.

Everyone stood up, turned around and walked towards the exit. While they were walking, Tokutei tapped Dan on his shoulder.

“Where did you get the blood from?”

“Oh, I visited the graveyard yesterday.”

“We visited,” Jason leaned over.

“OK, I don’t wanna know more,” Tokutei replied, then sped up to the exit.

26.

A few hours passed. Jason got interested with the vampires and was reading some information on the Internet. Lian had been sleeping for a while, and then she continued purchasing stuff she needed. Surya didn’t want to rest. She had taken some weapons and went outside to practise her accuracy near the waterfalls. Tokutei was practising in the woods nearby. Dan had gone to his lab to prepare the clips with blood-covered ammo. He had also managed to construct some UV grenades. Afterwards, the boy went to the Arthur’s office. The old man was sitting at his desk reading some message boards on the Internet. Dan came up to his door and knocked three times.

“Come in, Dan,” he heard a strong voice from the inside. The boy opened the door and stepped in. The old man was sitting comfortably in his wide armchair. He looked around the office and was amazed by the technology it was filled with.

“Arthur, Sir.”

“Just Arthur, without sir,” the old man replied.

“Ok, Arthur. I wanted to talk to you about the mission.”

“Come in Dan, sit.”

The boy came up to the desk, and sat at the armchair in front of Arthur’s desk. He was still glancing at the screens and modern items around him.

“What is it Dan?”

The boy felt very official in the office. He felt a little bit stressed, then took a deep breath and said.

“I was thinking about the weapons. I know you said there would be a few vampires, but, I if I may suggest, we should take some UV spotlights with us, too. I saw a few in the basement yesterday.”

Arthur closed the window on the screen and pushed off the computer.

“You’re right, Dan. Surya and We are the only ones who have any experience in dealing with vampires. I understand the team may not be ready yet. What is more we don’t know how many vampires there will be.

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is, we will take the spotlights. Hmm... I think, there should be a few in the truck."

Arthur took off his glasses.

"You see. I'm like you Dan, I always take extra cautions even if I am dealing with only few enemies."

"I don't think taking cautions and being hunters are the only things that we have in common," the boy laughed.

The old man smiled and put his glasses back.

"You'd better go and have at least this last hour of sleep. I don't want you to fall asleep during the mission."

"You're right. I'm going."

The boy stood up and headed for the door.

"And one more thing Dan."

"Yes?"

"If you ever have any doubts, questions, suggestion, feel free to ask me or anyone in the team."

"Ok, thank you, Arthur."

Dan left the office and went to his room.

27.

It was almost four o'clock. Tokutei was waiting near the main stairs. He was wearing his black ninja suit, and he had his mighty sword on his back. Lian appeared upstairs shortly. She was also dressed in black. She had two pistols on each side and one assault rifle on her back. On seeing Tokutei she burst out laughing.

"Tokutei?" she said between the laughs. "Why the heck are you wearing the ninja mask?"

"We're going on a mission, which is at night, which makes me wear a mask. Which makes me invisible. I do not understand your amusement."

"Actually, the mission is in the evening, and you're not going there as a spy or someone to hide in the dark. Take this freakin' thing off."

"She's right," Surya said stepping in. "The vampires will see you anyway, so there's no need to wear a complete ninja outfit."

Before Tokutei had a chance to react, he heard a loud laughter coming from the stairs. It was Dan.

"Ha, ha. Oh my God. Tok, what the fuck, bro."

"Alright, he convinced me!" the ninja replied taking off the mask and

hiding it behind his belt. "The mask is gone, happy now?"

"You know what Tokutei," Lian continued. "You should consider wearing pants like me, with side pockets for useful staff."

"Do you want me to take them off, too?"

"Not now, but I really advise you to wear something more useful next time."

"And again, I agree with her," Surya interrupted. "Sword will not be the only weapon you will fight here, so you will definitely need some extra space."

"What are you doing?" Jason asked appearing upstairs, while Surya and Dan reached the hall.

"Just laughing at Tokutei's clothes," Dan replied.

"What's wrong with them?" Jason asked walking slowly downstairs. Dan stepped back and leaned against the wall. He heard Arthur coming in the other hall.

"Now, only pocketless trousers, but you should have seen him with the ninja mask," Lian laughed.

"Stop laughing at my clothes. Back in Japan we wore this kind of clothes for two reasons. First to merge into the environment, and second to respect the tradition."

"But you're now in the USA, not in Japan," Jason added. "You must change you're habits."

"But I've always wore such clothes."

"And did you put everything behind your belt?" Lian asked with a silent laugh.

"No! We also had small bags or rather pockets attached to the inside of the upper part."

"Whatever, it's four o'clock where are the rest?"

As he had said that, Arthur came in. He was also wearing specific combat clothes. Black combat trousers, a black vest with numerous pockets, but he wasn't carrying any guns.

"Guys, you do understand that we have a weapon storage in the truck?"

"No one told us," Surya shook her head.

"There're the same weapons you're carrying."

"Well, we'll know better next time," Jason answered.

"OK. If everyone is here, then shall we go?"

Everyone nodded. The old man walked towards the main door while the rest followed him. It opened, and they headed for the courtyard.

28.

When they reached the courtyard, they saw the same chopper that had been standing there since the day before. Apart from the chopper, there was also a massive, black truck. It looked like a typical, American truck with a long semitrailer. It had a huge A.S.A.T. logo on both sides.

“Wow, what a beautiful machine,” Dan complemented.

“This is one of our mobile units,” the old man explained. “This one has been slightly improved. Soon you’ll see the others.”

The back door was opened and everyone got inside. There were two couches on each side, covered with black, white and blue leather. There was also a round table between them with keyboards and screens on it. Near the cabin, there was a mini-bar and storage for weapons. Everything looked really luxurious.

“Leave all your weapons in the storage and take a sit,” Arthur suggested, “And off we go.”

Surya, Dan and Arthur made themselves comfortable on the sofas. Jason and Lian went to check the weaponry while Tokutei went to check out the fridge and the mini-bar.

29.

On their way to Los Angeles, Tokutei made everyone a sandwich. After all, he had the most cooking experience, so he wanted to show off. While they were eating, no one said a word. Dan could feel the uncomfortable atmosphere, and couldn’t stand it anymore, so he decided to be the one who would break the ice.

“Arthur, what about you? We know you only from TV and papers. Maybe you will tell us something about ya’, huh?”

Arthur sighed, looked out the window and said,

“Alright, what do you want to know, guys?”

“Everything,” Lian beamed.

“Your hunting jobs,” Dan exclaimed.

“How you started all this,” Tokutei added.

“And your past,” Jason suggested.

“As well as your travels,” Surya said.

Arthur glanced from one person to another. He couldn't even remember all these questions.

"Guys, that's just too many questions to answer all of them, but alright, I can tell about my first job as a hunter. Well this first job also made me a hunter."

Everyone said comfortably and immediately they were all ears. At last they would learn something about their *boss*. Since they met him, he has been very mysterious, and by what he was doing, showing, and saying they could only deduce, put all the pieces together to have an vague image of him.

"Well, it was about fifteen or sixteen years ago, just after I bought the castle. I got really fascinated with the supernatural entities. I read thousands of books and web pages and talked too many experienced hunters about everything. I used to be the curious one. You know, the one who asks dozens of questions. But to cut long story short..."

"No, don't cut," Jason interrupted.

The old mad gave him a surprised look.

"OK, as you wish. Well, a few days after I moved to the castle, I had some problems with sleeping. I woke up too often...hmm... to be more precise, it was because I could hear some strange noises somewhere in the castle. In the beginning I didn't pay a lot of attention to it because the castle was old and the floors, as well as the stairs were made of wood, and, as you probably know, old wood makes some strange sounds when humidity changes. Anyway, after a few nights, I got really worried, as lots of things changed their places."

"Could you give us any examples?" Lian asked.

"For instance, the door of the bedside cabinet opened by itself or the bath became full of water during one night. But the strangest thing that happened then, was when I was walking along the corridor towards the balcony, I passed a few paintings and I noticed that something wasn't right. A person in one of the paintings had a wide grin. I stepped back to make sure that my eyes did play a trick on me, but the face changed into an angry one. In that very moment I was sure that the castle was haunted, and I had to do something about that.

"What did you do?" Tokutei asked.

"First I looked into the history of the castle and I found out that it belonged to some Spanish count who was infamous for killing new born children. Don't even ask me why. This is what I read. What was also

fascinating was that the castle used to be on the top of a mountain. The ocean used to be a little bit further than it is now, and there was a road leading from the mountain to the settlement, which later developed into San Francisco. But coming back to this count. The local villagers rebelled against the count and assaulted the castle. They manage to kill the count. The castle itself, however, became cursed and abandoned, hence the name Maldito castle, from Spanish *Maldito*- cursed. Since I learnt all these things, the noises at night increased, and more strange things began to happen. You probably want examples. Well, I heard laughs, steps, baby cries and shrieks. I even once woke up and saw bloody baby hand-prints on my pillow. Then, I came back to books and tried to learn how to get rid of that previous locator and his victims. I read that to get rid of such ghost, I had to find their remains, which was quite difficult, as you know the castle is huge. Yet, I tried. I searched all the floors, and the basement. Yet, all I found was some children bones.

“What did you do with them?” Lian asked curiously taking another bite.

“What the book said, I covered them with salt and burnt. After that, the small handprints disappeared, but the noises did not. I even saw the ghost himself once or twice. However, because I couldn’t find the remains of the count, I had to find some other way to... let’s say kill him. I knew that to temporarily get rid of the spiritual form is to mix the spiritual body with salt for example using a shotgun and salt bullets. I invented a way to damage the body. I mixed salt with iron, thus the salt elements mix with spiritual body permanently. Yet the spirit appeared again, but weaker and damaged. One night I took a walk in the castle and found the ghost. Then, I shot it, and made it chase me. I ran to the small room I created somewhere in the basement. When the ghost flew there, I shot it again, and locked the room.”

“Didn’t it leave?” Tokutei asked.

“It couldn’t. The walls of the room are made of mixture of Iridium, one of the densest elements on Earth, and salt. The spirit is bound to stay there forever.”

“Imagine how angry it will be, and what it will do, when someone let it out,” Dan commented.

“That is why I hope no one will let him out.”

“Could you tell us one more story?”

“I wish I could, but we’re already here. But, don’t worry, I’ll tell you more on our lectures.”

30.

The truck stopped in a huge parking lot near some main road. There were lots of buildings around, and the panorama of the city spread across the horizon. Arthur waited until the truck stopped.

“Before we leave, Jason and I will tell you what the plan is, one more time.

The old man activated the computer, and some photo appeared on the screen situated on the back door. It was showing a bird’s eye view over some square surrounded by buildings.

“This is the place where the concert will be,” Arthur said. “It is about half a mile from here. The main scene is situated at the end here. Jason could you tell us the plan.”

“I suggest we split into two teams. I don’t know you guys as good as Arthur, so maybe you can suggest what the squad should be.”

“No problem, but first tell me where you want to send the teams.”

“I was thinking about sending alpha team to merge into the crowd, while the second one should be on the roof.”

“I see, well, so starting from bravo team. A good sniper will do a perfect job for Lian. Jason, you will also be in beta one, as your weapon is too big to hide. And the last person will be me.”

“That means, that Tok and I are in alpha team,” Dan inquired.

“What about me?” Surya asked a little bit angry and confused for having been neglected one more time.

Arthur took a deep breath and spoke.

“Surya, since you’re a dhampir, the vampires may recognise you, and after the incident in New York, you’re on the vampires’ enemies most wanted list. We may not risk jeopardising our mission.”

“What incident from New York?” Dan asked curiously.

He had been in NYVHA for many years and he had dealt with numerous cases. He started to wonder whether he had met Surya before.

The girl blushed,

“Never mind, you don’t wanna know,” she replied slowly rubbing her hands.

“I do!”

“It’s of no importance now. Arthur, do you mean that I’m not going to take part in this mission tonight?” the girl asked sadly.

“No, as soon as the concert starts, you will join bravo team and help us locate Reiz.”

“Uff, OK, that sounds good to me,” the girl sighed with relief.

“Alright guys,” Jason raised his voice, “All in all, Arthur, Lian and I will go on the rooftop. Dan and Tokutei will; merge into crowds. Clear?”

“Clear,” “Yeah,” “Yes,” came the answers.

The back door opened. Arthur walked towards the weapon storage.

“Take everything you need. But hide the guns, so you won’t look suspicious there.”

“Ha! It’s good that I told you to take the mask off, Tokutei,” Lian laughed.

Tokutei replied with a grumpy face and stuck his tongue out. Dan grabbed a silver case from the weaponry and went back to the group.

“Listen guys,” he opened the case. “These are the UV grenades I was talking about. Take two and hide them.”

Jason and Lian grabbed the grenades.

“They work like regular ones. Just take the pin out and throw it.”

Surya and Arthur grabbed theirs. When the boy walk up to Tokutei, he was surprised.

“Tokutei, grab two.”

“Sorry. I don’t use such weapons.”

“Are you kiddin’ me?”

“No, I was trained in traditional martial arts and traditional weapons. Grenades are not part of them. I do not need them.”

“Oh for God’s sake, Tokutei,” Lian yelled. “Just take at least one and hide it, will ya?”

The warrior shook his head, reluctantly grabbed one grenade, and placed it behind his clothing.

31.

They stood in line outside the truck and waited for Arthur to go out. It reminded him of his nightmare from the previous night, but he couldn’t have these thoughts mess with his head.

“We’ll have contact with each other through these earwigs,” the old man said opening his palm with six small devices.

They were no bigger than a fingernail, transparent, with a little speaker and a microphone inside. They were perfect to keep communication with one another without others know about it.

“I have more surprises for you, but not for today.”

“Why?” Dan asked.

“The provider failed to ship them on time. But coming back to the mission. The sun will disappear in about ten minutes. The concert starts twenty minutes after the sunset, so try to find that evil son of a bitch quickly, and don’t make too much trouble.”

“What about me?” Surya asked.

“Surya, you stay in the truck for now, when we find Reiz, we’ll let you know.”

“Understood,” the girl nodded heading sadly back to the truck. The team separated. Lian took a suitcase, and went after Jason and Arthur towards the block of flats, while Dan and Tokutei headed for the entrance to the square.

“And one more thing guys,” Arthur said through the earwig, “Don’t get yourself kill.”

“We won’t,” Tokutei replied firmly.

“You can count on us,” Lian added.

As Dan and Tokutei were walking towards the main gate, Dan looked at Tokutei’s sword and asked,

“I don’t think you should carry your sword like this. Put it deeper, will you?”

“I’ve completely forgot about it. My apologies.”

The warrior raised his arms up, then moved them behind the back and pushed the handle of the sword with his palms until it disappeared behind his clothes.

“I can feel the sword with my ass.”

“Are you sure it’s the sword?” Dan replied with a laugh.

Arthur, Lian and O.D. reached the door to the building. O.D. looked in an alarmed manner at the main entrance to the square.

“Something is wrong here. If the concert is about to start soon, where is everyone?”

Arthur and Lian looked at the entrance, too.

“Maybe they’re coming from the other side,” the girl replied.

“Let’s not spoil the mission, shall we?”

“Right. We’ve gotta’ get to the roof, and find a good sniping position,” Lian said looking around the place.

“The Sun is down,” they heard Tokutei’s voice through the speaker.

“I hope there won’t be many vampires,” Jason said.

“Have you ever met any?” Lian asked.

“No,” the man replied confused.

“So, why do you ask? Are you afraid of them?”

“Afraid?” Jason laughed. “I don’t know the meaning of fear.”

“Alright, brave boy.”

Arthur opened the door to one of the block of flats.

“Follow me.”

They entered the huge rusty staircase and headed upstairs.

32.

Meanwhile, Dan and Tokutei reached the gate. There was no one around. They went through it and found themselves in a large rectangular square surrounded by block of flats.

“Where the fuck is everybody?” Dan wondered looking around over the empty square.

“Maybe it’s not here,” Tokutei added.

“But the stage is there.” He pointed at a large stage on the other side. “Shall we contact the others and ask?”

“You’re in the open mike,” Arthur announced walking up the stairs.

“Great, and I was about to give my opinions about you guys,” Dan said humorously.

Tokutei crouched and touched the ground with his palm.

“We are on the square, but it’s hmm... how to say it, empty. There is no one apart from us.”

“It’s impossible, the concert starts in less than twenty minutes.”

“Maybe it’s a cover for something else? I mean there is no concert, but only the vampires’ meeting,” Jason added.

“Let us wait for fifteen more minutes,” the leader said opening the door to the rooftop.

Alpha team has reached the rooftop. There were four block of flats connected with each other surrounding the square. The view from the

rooftop was magnificent and the whole city could be seen from there. The vast square below was really empty. It looked as if the concert was to start, but not on that day. Arthur walked towards the edge to take a look, while Lian and Jason started unpacking the suitcases with guns and computers.

“We’re on the roof to your left.”

Dan and Tokutei looked at him.

“OK, we can see you, but what about the mission?”

“We’ll have to...”

“Wait...” Dan interrupted.

“Yes wait and see what will happen,” the old man finished putting two screens on a foldable table.

“No, Arthur, I mean, something is not right,” the boy said looking at the main gate.

“Hide there,” Tokutei said pointing at a toilet.

“A toilet?”

“No, behind it.”

“Alright guys, take cover,” Arthur said, “We’ll see what’s going on from here.”

Tokutei and Dan ran behind the white, metal box that served as a toilet while Arthur and the others crouched and observed what was going on. Suddenly a horde of people shoved through the gate, and ran inside. They were elbowing one another to be as close to the stage as possible.

“I don’t understand this,” Arthur said. “Why didn’t they come until now.”

“So if everything has come back to normal,” Lian interrupted, “I’ll assembly my sniper rifle.”

“If everything has come back to normal we may merge into the crowd now,” Tokutei added.

“Guys, stick to the plan, we have twenty minutes to find him.”

“Roger that,” Dan answered as they went out from behind the toilet and joined the crowd that spread across the square.

Everyone around them was dressed in leather jackets, coats or dark clothes. Most of them had long hair or were completely bald. Dan leaned over to Tokutei and said with a sarcasm,

“Yes, we’re merging perfectly.”

Lian was attaching the scope to the rifle when she took a glimpse at the square below.

“My God, there are like 5000 people down there. How are we gonna find Reiz?”

Jason was talking to Arthur.

“It will not be difficult. We still have guys down there.”

Lian assembled the sniper rifle and lied down next to it. Jason mounted a small camera on the rifle scope and plugged it into the Arthur’s notebook.

“Now we can see what you see, Lian,”

“I presume, this Reiz guy will appear somewhere in the VIP section, which should either near the scene or...”

“On the balcony,” Jason finished.

33.

The sky was getting darker and darker after the sunset, and the concert was about to start. The crowd was cheering and they were looking forward for the music to start. Suddenly, someone entered the scene. It was a black-leathered dressed guy with long greasy hair. He grabbed the microphone and started shouting.

“I see that many of you folks, came here! That’s fuckin’ awesome!” The audience replied with a joyful scream.

“Are you ready for the Death Call?”

“Yeah!” the audience shrieked.

“Here they are!”

Having shouted that, the lights appeared behind him revealing four musicians. One was sitting at the drums the rest were holding guitars. They started playing heavy metal music and everyone around began to enjoy it.

“Great!” Tokutei shouted to Dan’s ear. “I hate such music!”

“Me too! But, Tok, you do understand that I can hear you through the earwig. No need to shout at me, right?”

“Right, sorry.”

“We’d better find this blood-sucker fast, take the Seal and get the hell out of here. I’m gettin’ noxious”

34.

The band was playing loud music and everyone was screaming and jumping to its rhythm. Jason, Lian and Arthur were sitting at the notebook, closely observing the square from the roof.

“Lian, something’s happenin’ on the balcony,” Jason announced

pointing at the balcony at the end of the square.

Lian crawled a few inches to her Barrett m107 sniper rifle, and placed her face at the scope. After that, she pointed the barrel at the balcony and zoomed the view. Her weapon had a digital sight. It was so precise and accurate that it could enlarge an object 200 times without any light lost. Arthur and Jason looked at the screen displayed on the laptop. There was a round table on the balcony and a few people standing around it. They were wearing black suits and had Uzi guns at their side. The door on the balcony opened, and a man wearing white suit entered. A few others followed him dressed in red.

“It’s him,” Arthur said casually as if it wasn’t the first time he saw him.

“A real vampire,” Jason whispered. “So this is what they look like.”

“Dan, Tokutei, Reiz is here,” the Asian girl whispered through the earwig.

“Where?” Dan replied looking around.

“On the balcony near the stage.”

The boys quickly peeked there. Tokutei tapped his back to feel for his sword.

“What shall we do now?”

“Wait a minute,” Arthur ordered.

“I guess everyone on the balcony is a vampire,” Dan said observing them vigilantly.

“I can take him now, Arthur,” the Asian woman suggested placing her finger on the trigger.

“No, we don’t know if he has the Seal on him. Moreover, we don’t know how many vampires are here.”

Lian moved back from the rifle and crouched near the screen. Arthur rubbed his chin.

“We must bring Surya in. She will point us the vampires, so we will know what we’re dealing with.”

“Arthur?” Dan asked.

“Yes.”

“We need to bring the spotlights, too. You know, just a precaution. Please tell Surya to bring two.”

“You wanna a poor girl to carry two spotlights?” Jason shouted angrily. “You must be kidding, I’ll go and help her.”

“Bring her in,” the old man confirmed, “Tokutei will join you.”

“Understood.”

“What about me?” Dan asked indignantly, as Tokutei disappeared in the crowd.

“Try to get closer to the balcony, but not too close.”

Jason slowly moved to the door leading to the staircase.

“Tokutei, meet me at the gate in five.”

“OK.”

“Arthur, where are the spotlights?” Jason asked opening the door to the staircase.

“The driver will tell you.”

“OK.”

Having said that, he went through the door and headed downstairs. In the meantime Tokutei was thrusting through the crowd towards the gate. His former training prepared him to move among people as smooth as possible. He twisted his body when he had to pass between two people, then turned it the other side to go past another ones. The crowd didn't even react.

“Surya, come in,” Arthur said.

“Finally,” the girl replied joyfully.

“We sent Dan and Tokutei to bring you here.”

“At last I can do something useful. Cooking is not my thing.”

“Sorry, I meant Tokutei and Jason, not Dan. They are going to bring the spotlights. And I want you to come to point us the vampires before we move in.”

“OK, so I'll take the spotlights out and wait for the guys,” she answered with a huge grin.

“They're in the locker next to weapon storage. Wait for the boys to help you.”

“You know I can manage,” she smiled.

“I do.”

35.

Meanwhile, Dan was left alone among heavy metal fans. He felt different. He knew he didn't belong in this crowd and he couldn't stand it anymore. The boy slowly made a few steps backwards.

“OK Dan, just great, you were left alone here,” as he was saying this he bumped into some man. He immediately turned around and looked

at Dan angrily.

“Sorry man, just passing through.”

Then, he saw two fangs sticking out from the man’s mouth.

“Great a vampire,” he thought and carried on to the balcony.

Tokutei managed to squeeze through the gate and caught his breath. Jason was already waiting for him.

“Shall we go then, Tok?”

The Asian man nodded and they headed towards the truck.

36.

In the meantime, Lian and Arthur were observing the screen showing Reiz and some other individuals. They were sitting at the table with some red drinks and no food. There were two laptops between them. It seemed they were doing some business there. The men in red suits were standing around watching the hall behind and the concert beneath. Lian pushed herself off the rifle.

“So, Arthur what’s next?”

“What do you mean?”

“After we know which of them are vampires, what do we do next?”

“Hmm, it depends on the number of enemies. If there are only few vampires, we will go from the roof directly to the balcony. If not, well, I don’t know, but we will have to reach the balcony anyway.”

“Luckily for us, we have those magic bullets Dan made.”

Arthur glanced at the crowd below.

“Dan, have you seen any vampires yet?”

“Yeah, I saw a few among the crowd. I don’t think they all came here only for the concert. Something big is going on.”

“Stay where you are, and... um...I don’t know,”

“Dance,” Lian added.

“Yeah right, Lian, no one is dancing to this music, they’re just jumping.”

“So jump with them,” the old man said amusingly.

Dan rolled his eyes, and reluctantly started to jump like others directing his eyes up.

“This is just great. I would’ve never had to do that back in New York.”

37.

The music was spreading around filling the air while the sky became completely dark and cloudy. Lian went closer to Arthur.

“Arthur, I wanted to ask you something off the record.”

“Come on. I’ve turned the channel off.”

“Why did you let Tokutei lead the martial art classes. You know I’m a better person for it. I was a world champion in Wushu three times.”

“Both of you are probably the best fighters in the world. I chose him, because he has lots of experience, not only in the field, but also in teaching others.”

“I still don’t agree with your decision.”

“You’ll have to to,” Tokutei said entering the roof with Surya and Jason.

Tokutei and Jason were carrying two, round spotlights; each about one yard in diameter.

“Where to put the spotlights?” Jason asked.

“Just leave them near the computer.”

Arthur turned the channel on and watched the others put the spotlights. Surya caught sight of Reiz on the monitor screen and stopped.

“It’s Reiz. Those two red guys are his toys. They do all the dirty work for him.”

“Is she there?” Dan’s voice spread through the headset.

“Yeah, I’m here.”

“Good, now would you please take a look down and do your work, ‘cause I’m fed up with all that jumping.”

Surya took the binoculars and pointed them at the jumping crowd.

“So Surya,” Lian asked, “Are there many vampires?”

“Oh no,” the dhampiric girl froze in disbelief.

“What is it?” Arthur said.

The girl’s jaw dropped, and she couldn’t say a word.

“What do you see Surya?” Tokutei inquired.

The girl moved away the binoculars.

“We must immediately take Dan out of there.”

“Why? What’s going on?” Dan asked through the earwig slowing down his jumping.

“Are there many of them?” Lian asked putting her hands on Surya’s shoulders to help her snap out of her state.

“Surya, come on, how many?”

“Everyone there is a vampire! Every single one of them,” she said desperately dropping her eyes.

The team froze and stared at her in shock. Having heard that, Dan immediately stopped jumping and took a few glances around. He noticed a young pair drinking blood from the bottle. Then he looked at someone else baring her fangs, then at another person and another. He almost lost his balance. He had never seen so many vampires in one place. 5000 people were there, and all of them were vampires and he was the only human squeezed among them. His legs started to shake, as he was gaping in a shock at the ground.

“Dan did you hear that?” Arthur asked.

But the boy didn't reply.

“Dan, do you copy?” Arthur repeated.

“Yeah, I copy. Just get me the hell out of here!”

Surya, still terrified, glanced over the screen at the square below, and then back at Arthur.

“We must do something quickly!”

Arthur turned to Jason calmly, as if this hadn't disturb him.

“Any suggestions?”

Dan was standing nervously among the people below. He could feel the vampiric looks directed straight at him.

“Why didn't you take the infrared camera! Or at least Surya earlier!”

The old man took a deep breath.

“Dan, we couldn't. She couldn't have been seen by others here.”

“But she is there now!”

“But everyone is at the concert now,” Lian replied.

“You'd better think of something quickly,” came the suggestion through the earwig.

Jason thought for a while.

“I think Lian should stay here with someone, while we will go on the roof over that balcony and...”

“And?” Arthur asked.

“And I shall bump there and kill everyone on the balcony,” Tokutei boasted plugging some wire into the spotlight.

“You won't take him, he's too strong and powerful,” Surya said with fear in her unusual eyes. “But more important, what about Dan?”

“Dan, try to elbow through the crowd towards the gate, and join us on the roof,” Arthur ordered.

“Understood,” the boy answered and walked slowly towards the gate.

Tokutei and Arthur finished installing the spotlights. The two circles were standing on both sides of the table, connected to one of the notebooks; the one with two joysticks at the keyboard. Jason scratched his head and boomed,

“So, Lian and I will stay here.”

“No,” Surya interrupted, “I’ll stay. Like Arthur said, I’m one of the most wanted, I can’t go down there.”

“OK, so Lian and Surya will stay here, while me, Tokutei and Arthur will go for the Seal.”

“Acknowledged,” came the answers.

Surya looked at the second screen where the spotlights were connected.

“Wait Arthur, how to use them? I used to work on the manual ones.” Arthur stopped and came back to the girl.

“I almost forgot. It’s the latest model. You use it like a video game. Just move the joystick where you want the spotlight to go. Look, I pressed it left, the crosshair moves, and the spotlight on my right moves, too.”

“What about the second one?”

“You have the second joystick for it. When you want the light to turn, just pressed fire with your thumb. I’ll let you know when.”

The girl looked at the two joysticks attached to the keyboard.

“OK. Thank you, Arthur.”

Arthur turned around and walked towards Tokutei and Jason. Seconds later, they ran along the roof towards the balcony on the other side.

“Lian,” Arthur’s voice spread through the earwig. “In the backpack next to the computer, there’s a sound-detecting device. Could you use it to overhear what they’re saying?”

“No problem.”

The girl crouched at the backpack, and took the device out. It had a long handle with a plate-like object at the end, and it looked like a small satellite. Such devices were perfect for spying.

While she was activating the device, the men reached the place over the balcony. They were on the other side of the rectangular building. The door to the staircase was locked not only by a key but also a massive padlock was

hanging at the knob. The Asian man, drew his light-blue sword, swung it once, then put it back behind. The padlock fell apart and the lock let go.

“We can’t go this way,” the old man said disappointed after seeing the whole entrance covered in debris.

Tokutei took a glimpse down. He had a perfect view at Reiz and his entourage below. Jason knew exactly what his colleague wanted to do.

“Tokutei, I don’t think going there alone will be such a good idea.”

“Don’t worry O.D. I can get there and kidnap this Reiz guy.”

“No, Tokutei,” Arthur denied. “It would be better if we go one storey lower and take him when he goes inside.”

“But here is no door leading down.”

Jason and Arthur looked around.

“We have to go this way,” the black man pointed at the wall just over the balcony.

Arthur leaned over and saw a few windows one storey lower. One of them was ajar.

“No problem, I will prepare the rope,” Arthur said, reaching out for the rope inside his bag.

“I don’t need this,” Tokutei replied already climbing down the wall. Suddenly, Lian sounded through the earwig.

“We have the audio, I will put it through the channel.”

“What are they saying,” Tokutei whispered standing on the window sill that was three floors over the balcony.

He was holding onto the edge of the roof having his feet stamped solid on the window sill of the last floor. Lian and Surya were observing what was going on at the table, while they and the others tried to detect what the vampires were saying. The black creature standing next to Reiz leaned towards him and said.

“Sir, the humans are above us.”

Having heard that, everyone froze in disbelief and shock. How did they know it? Could they smell them? If they could, than they probably knew about Dan lost in the crowd.

“What’a?” Jason whispered looking down from the roof.

He saw Reiz raising his head and looking up at Tokutei with his yellow-red, angry eyes. The others who were on the balcony also looked up in wonder.

“Kill them,” Reiz replied with a sneer to the creature next to him. The vampires wearing red jackets took out the Uzi pistols.

“Tokutei get the hell out of there!” the old man shouted stepping back, as dozens of bullets flew past the roof edge.

All of the vampires that had gathered on the balcony were shooting. They were aiming at the Asian guy three floors above. As soon as the shots started, the music stopped and every vampiric creature that was on the square stopped and looked towards the balcony to see what was going on. Lian threw herself to the sniper rifle and pressed the trigger. Split a second later, a massive bullet hit one of the vampires at the table. The huge calibre of the Barrett rifle ripped the enemy’s chest out, and pushed him off the balcony. Dan heard the shots and turned around. He was almost at the gate, when all the surrounding vampires started to run towards the balcony. Surya was standing frozen in horror and couldn’t do anything. She hadn’t expected such a situation, no one had. Arthur and Jason couldn’t do anything but keep their fingers crossed for the whole situation to finish happily. Tokutei looked down trying to have a solid grip on the sill.

“Take the mask off-my ass,” he said ironically, as the bullets broke the window and little pieces of glass fell onto the balcony and the square. Lian heard his ironic sentence and replied.

“They would have noticed you anyway. Get the hell out of there!” Hardly had she said when she pressed the trigger again taking off another vampire from the balcony. The bullet blew his head and the numb body fell next to the table. One of the vampires zoomed upstairs to the window that had just been broken. He intended to grab Tokutei and push him of the window sill. He quickly threw his hand out, but Tokutei was faster. He grabbed it, pulled the vampire out of the window. As he was doing so, he realised that those creatures are much stronger than humans, and he had to use more strength to deal with them. Another bullet broke the window he was standing at. However, thousands of sharp pieces of glass falling at him, made him let go of the window sill. Simultaneously one of the bullets hit the sill he was standing on and as a result Tokutei lost his balance. Split a second later, he found himself hanging, holding onto the window wing. He realised that there was little time, and he had to pull himself up. Otherwise he might fall. Jason and Arthur couldn’t do anything yet. The plan didn’t go as they planned. It was supposed to be a quick mission. Count the vampires, wait until Reiz is inside, kidnap him and take the Seal.

“He won’t make it,” Lian whispered with a trembling voice. Tokutei glanced down and noticed that there were two armed enemies still

shooting. As he was pulling up, some bullet hit the window wing. It creaked and the wing broke. At the same time, Tokutei pulled himself up to grab onto something, just anything, but the gravity won, and he failed to find anything in reach. The Asian warrior lost his grip and started to fall towards the balcony. As he was gaining speed with his back down, Lian pressed the trigger again, and one of the vampires in red was pushed inside by a massive bullet. Tokutei passed the third floor, and started to twist his body. He did understand there was no way he could fall on his back. If he did so, he would break it. Passing the second floor, he managed to be in a position to land on his feet.

Lian and Surya were gazing at Tokutei fall, but there was nothing they could do. They saw him land onto the table. His body hit it with such a huge force that it broke the table and hit the floor. Every glass of blood that had been standing on the table broke. Tokutei couldn't gathered his thoughts. The fall put him in shock. There were more than ten vampires around him including Reiz and his one red-dressed helper. Four of the enemies were lying dead on the floor. Suddenly, a voice came through the speakers on the stage.

“Humans on the roof!”

As he said that, the lights that were illuminating the band, turned, and pointed at the roof and the balcony. Arthur and Jason realised that the shooting was over, so they quickly ran towards the edge to see what was going on with Tokutei. The Asian guy was crouching on his one knee among the wooden pieces of the table. He quickly stood up, and reached for the Katana sword carried on his back. However, before he managed to touch the handle, Reiz had rushed up at him with an inhuman speed and had kicked him onto the stomach. The kick was so powerful, that the recoil made Tokutei flew backwards. His body gained an enormous speed. It hit the brick barrier of the balcony, broke it, and flew behind it.

Jason and Arthur were staring at it from above.

“Oh no,” Arthur stumbled.

“Oh no,” Lian and Surya said the same gazing at his teammate falling right into a pound of thousands of angry and blood-thirsty vampires. Tokutei was in shock, he didn't know what had just happened, and to make matters worse he didn't even come round after the fall from the roof. The warrior could feel the pain from the powerful kick on his stomach, the kick so strong, that it paralysed his diaphragm, blocking his breath. He hadn't

felt this feeling for a long time. Vain Tokutei. He had known better, he had disobeyed Arthur's order, and underestimated the strength and speed of vampires. But now he was doomed.

38.

Tokutei was sitting in the village watching his teammates fight.

"Tokutei, Tokutei!" his friend shouted.

The boy raised his head.

"What?"

"You're after me. Alright?"

The master stood up from his seat after another boy had passed the test.

"Yoshi, you shall next."

"OK, I'm going, wish me luck," the boy sitting on Tokutei's right raised, then ran to the arena where people wearing white hakamas dragged away the bodies. He drew his shiny sword and waited for the yakuza to be set free. Other people with white hakamas loosened up yakuza's rope. The men sprang up to their feet. They spotted a few weapons lying on the ground after their predecessors. Some of them grabbed swords, others Bo staffs, yet some others nunchakus. Then they threw themselves at Yoshi. The warrior was ready for the attack. He took a glance at every opponent with his eyes only, while his head remained still. He was estimating which enemy to take out first. Then the action began. The boy jumped into the air, and cut through the first one, while the second one aimed at his feet. He quickly twisted and eliminated the bottom one. Tokutei and the others were watching the fight carefully. Yoshi immediately chose what to do next.

"Six to go," Tokutei whispered.

Then, he spotted an opening when Yoshi stabbed someone behind him.

"Oh no," he whispered.

Yoshi realised he had made a mistake. The coming blade from the front penetrated his chest. The boy fell on his knees leaning against the floor with his hand and then fell, as the blood from his chest spread onto the soil. Everyone was starrng in disbelief. The yakuza members shouted with joy.

"Yeah! You're down mother fucker."

"If we can take one, we can take all of them," one of them yelled.

Every boy raised and drew their weapons. The master shouted,

"No! It's Tokutei's turn."

The young warrior came up to the arena, while the assistances in white

hakamas released five more yakuza.

“We’ll slash you like we slashed your little friend,” one of the villains yelled beckoning at the boy to come up. The boy said nothing. He stood up next to his friend’s body and waited for their first move. The yakuza made a dash towards the boy all at once. Tokutei was still in a little shock for losing his friend, but he knew this was the test that would tell if he really can become a great warrior.

Some of the yakuza jumped into the air, others ducked and aimed for the legs, while the rest surrounded the boy. He noticed three blades coming from above, and a long wooden staff flying at his legs. He quickly blocked the swords jumping simultaneously, then bent and made an aerial; no handed cartwheel; over the second swing of the Bo staff. As the master says, ultimate technique is used only if one faces many opponents. If one wants to survive, they have to choose only the most effective and best moves to both avoid the attacks and strike precise blows at the same time. Everyone was watching what the boy was doing. Block, block, then stab followed by a butterfly twist with a kick, then stab again, block at the back, jump with a spin followed by a cut, then a double leg over the enemy and another sequence of block cut, kick, jump, spin. The number of yakuza diminished. The fewer there were, the easier it was. Finally all of the yakuza were dead. Tokutei put away his Katana into the saya and bowed towards his master, then turned around, and bowed one more time towards the boys sitting in front of the arena.

Suddenly he heard someone clapping. He knew it couldn’t have been one of his mates, nor the master. They simply don’t use such thing. The boy turned towards the direction the sound was coming from, and saw the same man in white who was watching the whole test. The man came up to the master and said something to him pointing at Tokutei. Unfortunately, the boy was too far and couldn’t hear what they were saying. Then he noticed his master beckon at him to come to them. He also beckoned at one more member; Sato. They slowly walked towards the two men, while the assistants dragged away the victims’ bodies.

“Mr. West,” the master said, “These are Tokutei and Sato, our finest students.”

“Nice to meet you, Tokutei, Sato. I’m Arthur” the man said bowing down.

“Nice to meet you, sir,” the boys replied with a bow.

Arthur looked again at the master.

“They will be perfect. Train them well, my friend.”

The master replied with a gentle smile.

“I will return in fifteen years, when they turn twenty eight.”

“As you wish, Mr. West.”

39.

Tokutei was falling from the balcony with several bricks around. Everyone; his team and the vampires were observing the fall. The creatures waiting just below the balcony made a step back, creating a small space, so that the falling body won't hit them. Dan was at the gate. When he saw his teammate falling he rushed after the horde to try to save his colleague. However, he barely squeezed between the dozens of enemies in front of him. The warrior was in shock, he failed. He couldn't even twist his body to land properly. The stomach hurt so much. It's the end. The last Dragon is bound to die. His body finally hit the square. His back almost crashed against the concrete. The pain made him close his eyes. As soon as Tokutei hit the ground, all the surrounding vampires threw themselves at him trying to suck as much blood as possible. Countless nocturnal creatures jumped onto one another creating a pile as tall as the first floor.

The whole thing, since the moment Reiz said “*Kill them*” to Tokutei's hitting the ground, lasted less than fifteen seconds, but it destroyed the whole plan ASAT had created.

“Dan, don't go back there!” Surya's voice shouted through the headset.

“I need to help him!”

Dan was able to take out his two Desert Eagle pistols and started to shoot at the ones that blocked his way.

“He's dead!”

“I need to help him!” Dan shouted desperately.

He didn't care that he might die, too. He just sped through the crowd towards Tokutei.

“We lost Tokutei!” Jason's voice spread across the audio channel. As soon as Tokutei hit the ground, Lian switched into auto-mode on her modified Barrett rifle and started shooting hopelessly at the crowd below. The reloads took less than a second, and every shot, pushed her one foot to the back. Arthur was gaping at the whole situation in horror. It was like in

his dream. They were failing even though they were supposed to be the best of the best.

“Tokutei, the best member he could find, failed,” he thought. Jason turned around towards Arthur, and saw his scared face. The old man pushed himself off the edge and leaned against the door to the staircase. Jason didn’t know what to do. He had to say something, He slowly shook his head.

“He probably died of an impact,” he said to cheer everyone up, but then he realised it was stupid to say.

Suddenly, Arthur saw a glow behind Jason. He ran to the edge, as Jason rapidly turned around and looked down. They saw a wide hemisphere of white light. It was coming from under the vampiric creatures that had covered Tokutei’s body. The light sieved through the vampires’ bodies, and spread in the shape of a few-yard dome. Surya and Lian were still paralysed with shock and only their pupils reacted to the bright light. Then it disappeared leaving only a ten-yard hole in the horde of vampires with millions of pieces of ash floating in the air. The ash filled the space between the enemies and the roof in a shape of a black cloud. The rest of the vampires had covered their eyes and either ran the other way or stood still. Lian grabbed her rifle again and pointed it at the black cloud, trying to see anything. Nothing. The ashes were too thick.

“What the hell has just happened?” Jason exclaimed as confused as never before.

The flakes were gradually gathering on the street making the air clear enough to see the blueprint of a man standing in the middle of the circle. Lian blinked several times. She couldn’t believe her eyes. The man was standing solid on his two feet holding a sword with a light blue blade.

“Tokutei,” the Asian girl whispered happily.

“He survived,” Arthur murmured not being truly convinced what he was seeing.

Tokutei was standing in an attack stance, holding his bluish sword in front of his chest.

“He took the grenade,” Dan whispered stopping among the vampires.

“Another human!” one of the vampires at the end shouted spotting Dan standing still with two pistols in his hands.

The boy realised what he had just done. Tokutei survived, and the vast

group of nocturnal creatures were now interested in him. For a few seconds he was standing with his mind racing, seeing dozens of vampires running towards him. He immediately turned around and started to run back to the gate, shooting only those who approached him too close.

“Turn the spotlights on!” he shouted through the earwig.

Surya jumped to the two joysticks right next to the second screen. She activated the spotlights and a thick rail of white light shot out at the crowd, burning the blood-thirsty creatures that were chasing Dan. The two lights looked like huge laser guns that burnt everything it met leaving only small smoke of ashes behind. Lian took a glance at Surya, and she quickly realised how powerful these spotlights were. Her Barrett sniper rifle looked like a knife next to a minigun.

40.

All the vampires surrounding Tokutei shrieked and hissed. Some of them were hurt by the deadly UV light that had already killed dozens of them. They didn't wait long. As soon as they saw the blueprint of the man with a glowing sword, they made a dart at him quickly closing the circle. Tokutei rapidly looked around only with his eyes, as his head stayed still, then he cut the closest one diagonally left, quickly turned around and cut off the hand carrying a gun of the one behind him, then turned round sieving his sword through the next one's chest, and again turned back to finish the handless creature. The Asian warrior swung his sword quickly cutting through the surroundings enemies. His katana decapitated some of the incoming opponents; others had less luck and lost their feet, legs, arms and even guts. If he noticed that someone had a gun, he dealt with them first, and after that, he attacked the others. The adrenaline produced in his body made him move so fast that the enemies didn't stand a chance.

Jason and Arthur were watching everything from the top.

“Here's our chance to get inside!” Jason yelled looking back at Arthur.

“OK, give me the rope, I'll go first.”

“Hold it,” he replied tying the rope to the metal chimney on the roof.

The old man tightened his grip on the rope and quickly jumped onto the remaining piece of the sill below. Jason looked startled.

“Wow, the old man is fitter than me.”

Having said that, he grabbed the rope and climbed down after him. They went through the broken window into the room. It was an empty bedroom with bullet holes in the ceiling. It looked as if it had been abandoned for many years. The previous tenants might have been evacuated from the building. Hence the empty rooms, and the debris in the staircase.

“We need to get to the staircase,” Jason said taking out his HK M5.

41.

Meanwhile, Dan managed to get to the staircase. He was running up the stairs with a long vampiric tail behind. Luckily, Surya was doing a good job and many of the creatures turned into a black smoke leaving a pile of clothes behind. But still, the boy was being chased by quite a big horde. Dan turned around and took out those, who were, he thought, the most dangerous ones. The vampires are stronger than humans and faster. A lot of them didn't use the stairs but jumped onto the wall and used that way to get to Dan.

“Two floors to go,” he moaned throwing one of his UV grenades back.

Seconds later the light spread and got rid of the one-third of the tail chasing him.

“One more floor,” the boy murmured to himself looking up.

He jumped every few steps to get to the others. Then one of the vampires grabbed him by his jacket and pulled back. Dan reacted quickly implanting his foot into the opponent's face. Then regain his balance and rushed upstairs. The door was right in front of him. He leapt off the ground and opened it with a kick. Then out of the sudden, a creature caught the boy, and threw his arms around him aiming his fangs at the boy's neck.

Operating the spotlights from the laptop, Surya immediately turned one around and pointed it at the door. Dan covered his eyes and let himself fall onto the rooftop. The strong rail of light burned the coming creatures. Dan opened his eyes and saw a blueprint of a girl. She was standing sideways with her head turned at the screen. She was holding two joysticks. The boy quickly got up.

“Saved by a dhampir, I hope others didn't see it.”

“Thank you will suffice,” the girl replied.

“Thanks.”

The girl smirked, then turned the spotlight around to kill the opponents still

being on the square. Dan tried to hear whether there were any creatures left in staircase but he heard nothing. He reached to the bag for more clips and reloaded, then looked at the square covered in bodies where Tokutei was still fighting. Some of the enemies were running towards Tokutei. Others were rushing onto the walls towards the roof. The rest headed for the balcony. Lian noticed it, grabbed her Masada assault rifle and shouted,

“Dan! Surya! Stay here, I’m going to help Arthur and Jason.”

“I’m goin’ with you!” Dan replied.

“No! Someone needs to operate the spotlights while the second one needs to cover the back.”

“Eh, alright, go!” the boy answered unwillingly and turned towards Surya.

“Focus on the walls,” he said indifferently as if he forgot that she had just saved his life.

Surya sighed looking down and continued illuminating the upcoming vampires. They were almost everywhere. The walls surrounding the square were covered in them, as well as the opposite roof. Two spotlights were not enough to take them all. Suddenly, a few creatures appeared on the roof a few yards from them. Dan reacted quickly taking accurate shots at them. Then he heard lots of hissing sounds coming from the staircase. Not waiting anymore, the boy took out a UV grenade, activated it and threw it inside the staircase.

“I’m out of UV!”

Next he turned right where a few enemies had just jumped in. He quickly eliminated them, and looked at Lian running on the right side of the roof.

“Direct them at Lian!” he told Surya, spotting a few vampires catching up with the Asian woman.

Surya immediately directed one rail at her teammate burning the creatures. Lian noticed a few of them running at her from the front, she raised her weapon, aimed and flawlessly took them out. The rail of the spotlight covered her back. When the danger was gone, she turned around at Dan and Surya, and spotted several vampires climbing up the wall right in front of them. She realised Surya wouldn’t be able to take them out with the spotlights.

“Dan! They’re climbing from the front.”

The boy quickly rushed forward.

“Protect the spotlights!” Surya shouted.

42.

In the meantime, Jason and Arthur got two floors lower. The inside of the building changed as they entered the second floor. The last two floors were abandoned, but these were still kept in perfect conditions. There was a clean carpet on the floor. Doors were polished, and nothing seemed to be broken. They reached the balcony, but there was no one. Some voices were coming from the room at the end of the corridor.

“There!” Jason shouted, and started running towards the double room at the end.

Arthur followed him. As soon as they left the balcony a couple of vampires appeared from the staircase. O.D. quickly took them out with his precise shots. Arthur heard hissings from behind. He briskly turned around and dealt with the four new creatures. They reached the double door of the room at the end of the corridor.

“No time to waste,” Jason said opening the room with a powerful kick.

The men ran inside raising their guns. To their surprise, they saw only one vampire there.

Arthur shot him in the leg, came up to him, thrust up a piece of garlic into his nose and pushed him with one hand against the wall.

“Where is Reiz?”

The creature replied with the hiss, as its face turned red. The garlic was slowly killing him from the inside.

“Where’s Reiz, I won’t repeat again.”

“D-Down-s-stairs,” the creature replied.

Jason was gazing at the situation in wonder. He didn’t know the old man was capable of doing such things. Perfect interrogation method. The old man let go of him and went back to Jason, as the enemy suffocated to death, sliding down the wall.

“Where did you get the garlic from?”

“A true hunter is always prepared for everything,” he replied running towards the stairs. “Come ‘on Jason, we don’t have much time.” As soon as they left the room, dozens of those creatures ran up from the stairs.

Jason immediately replied with fire, while Arthur threw a UV grenade down

the stairs. A white flash came a moment later. Then a few vampires got in through the balcony. Arthur pointed his M4 at them and fired.

“Come on!” Jason shouted, running down the stairs.

The old man quickly finished them and joined him. Jason threw another grenade towards the balcony and they both headed downstairs. The hissing of dying creatures came from the floor they had just left. The men were running downstairs. They failed to notice one of the enemies following them along the ceiling of the staircase. He was crawling silently, and as he was about to drop himself on Arthur a shot came from behind. Both men immediately turned around, and saw an infected body of a dead vampire as well as Lian standing behind it with a smoke coming from her weapon barrel.

“What about the roof?” the old man asked.

“Dan and Surya are doing quite well.”

“Alright, come with us.”

They ran one floor down killing the upcoming opponents.

43.

Meanwhile, in the square Tokutei was dealing with the remaining vampires. The circle around him was slowly disappearing. Although the group was small, the vampires didn't give up. These creatures never surrender. They fight till the very end. Several jumped up in the sky to attack the Asian guy from above. He quickly leapt in the air and performed a horizontal spin, so that his sword created a circle that split the incoming creatures into parts. As soon as he landed, he started to chop the rest. Cut, cut, kick, cut, duck, jump, cut. The door below the balcony suddenly smashed opened and Reiz with his entourage ran to the square.

“It's impossible,” the vampire in the red hissed. “Over 5000 vampires were here and now, less than 100 left.”

When Reiz saw Tokutei being still alive and mostly all of the vampires killed or burned, he shrieked loudly out of anger. The scream was heard inside of the building, as well as on the roof.

“Dispose of them!” he shouted loudly to his bodyguard.

The red-dressed vampire aimed his M4 at the spotlight and soon a series of shots flew towards it.

“Get down!” Surya screamed to Dan covering him with her body. They both fell near the laptop, and split a second later a series of bullets

whizzed above their heads. They heard the sound of breaking glass and a noise of a short circuit.

“Spotlights,” Dan whispered. “We lost the spotlights.”

They were lying face to face for a moment looking each other into eyes as the bullets were thrusting into the roof around them. Dan was staring into the girl’s black and white pupils. Suddenly she screamed as her eyes opened. At the same time her fangs appeared. This view freaked him out, and he rapidly pushed her away towards the laptop.

“What the fuck was that suppose to mean? Did you wanna bite me?”

The bullets stopped. Someone must have taken the enemy out down there.

“I’m so sorry Dan, it’s not what you think,” the girl explained herself.

“I don’t wanna talk about this,” he rolled over and stood up.

Then a red stain on Surya’s back caught his eye. He peeked at the rooftop next to her and saw three more stains. Then it occurred to him what had happened a moment before. It was not her fault. She simply got shot.

“You’re shot.”

“No, it’s a piece of glass from the spotlight. It’s nothing.”

“If you say so.”

“I’m sorry Dan, I freaked you out.”

“W-We must go d-down,” he stuttered grabbing his guns from the roof.

“I’ll take the stairs. We’ll meet downstairs, right?” he suggested heading for the broken door of the entrance.

“Err... OK,” the girl replied confused.

Dan rushed towards the staircase. Surya watched him disappear. As soon as he vanished, the girl scowled, touched her back and rolled her blouse up trying to look at the down part of her back. She saw an inch deep hole there and blood stains around it. It was no piece of glass.

“Come on, Come on,” she murmured to herself still looking at the nasty wound. Suddenly, the burned skin started to heal. The metal bullet that caused her scream, was pushed out from her body. It was the very bullet that could have wounded Dan if she hadn’t covered him.

Momentarily, the wound magically disappeared.

“Every time the same,” she sighed and jumped down off the roof, then ran towards Tokutei.

She saw him cutting vertically up through the almost last vampire there.

Then he jumped and made another spin. Reiz and his fellow vampires were standing at the entrance to the building. The vampire in red was lying dead next to him. Then three creatures ran out through the door. They had Uzi pistols and were ready to shoot Tokutei. Before they were able to squeeze the triggers, three objects flew from the direction of Tokutei and headed towards them. These were the ninja stars; shurikens. The sharp metal weapons nested in each vampire, but apart from a hissing, nothing else happened. The vampires didn't fall down. They removed the shurikens and dropped them onto the ash-covered ground. The warrior realised that his shurikens hadn't been covered in dead man's blood, and thus they could do no harm to them.

"Shit," Tokutei cursed seeing the creatures being on the point of shooting him.

As he was standing there trying to catch his breath, he could hear Arthur, Jason and Lian breaking through the remaining vampires inside the building. But they would never manage to be in time. As the vampires were pressing the triggers, a few wheezing bullets came from his right. They hit each enemy in the hands causing them to loosen their grip and release their guns. One of the Uzi started to shoot, but luckily, the bullets went up in the air. He knew exactly where the shots came from. It was Surya. The girl pushed her gun onto her back, jumped into the air as two sharp daggers emerged from her handcuffs. Before she landed, she successfully decapitated these three vampires. As she was aiming at those standing next to Reiz, he saw her and quickly threw a round kick at her legs causing her to flip and fall.

"Surya," Reiz hissed, then turned around to run back inside.

At the same time, the two vampires took out shiny samurai swords from behind their backs and attacked Surya. She was lying on the concrete ground, and was a little bit stunned. There was no way she could hear the attack. Tokutei quickly advanced on them blocking their swords just above Surya's head. The girl quickly rolled away, while Tokutei popped their swords up and stepped back.

44.

Meanwhile, Jason, Arthur and Lian were near the exit from the building. They were running next to each other shooting at the very last vampires.

“Right!” Jason shouted seeing two of those creatures crawling up the wall. Lian quickly reacted and eliminated them. Arthur shot a series at the remaining ones trying to escape. Then they noticed the door leading outside, and in front of it, Reiz running towards them. They also saw Surya and Tokutei outside preparing for the last fight. When Reiz realised he was surrounded he had no choice but to fight his way through.

A few metres further, Tokutei and Surya were standing next to each other awaiting the attack. The vampires moved first, both striking from above. The blades were blocked. Tokutei diagonally cut left down, but his sword was blocked, so he moved the weapon over his head and performed the same cut from the other side. The vampire blocked it again. The Asian man could see the difference in their strength compared with the previous vampires he fought. They were very fast and focused. They must have been important since Reiz had been doing some business with them. Tokutei threw another blow, then he swung his sword over the head again and cut horizontally left. The blades met again. Surya, in the meantime attacked with a stab. The second vampire pushed away her first blade, but the second one stabbed him in the chest. The girl quickly pulled it out, and cut horizontally from the right with her both blades, one after another. The red-dressed creature blocked both of them, pushed them off and moved his sword diagonally up from the left, then the same from the right. Surya blocked both blows.

At the same time, Reiz, rapidly threw a fast kick, simultaneously kicking all three weapons off Arthur, Jason and Lian’s hands, then punched the old man in the face, and moved towards Jason and the girl. It happened so swiftly that they didn’t even have time to react.

Outside, Tokutei blocked another blow. He quickly ducked and tried to hook the opponent with his leg, but the nocturnal creature jumped up and aimed for Tokutei’s left arm. The Asian warrior rapidly stood up blocking it. Next he attacked from the same side. His blow was blocked again. The opponents’ eyes met for a moment. Tokutei sneered then quickly span counter-clock and cut horizontally left. The vampire managed to move his sword from left to right to block, but Tokutei’s spin gave his blade so much power and speed that it cut through the blocking metal and slipped through the enemy on the height of his shoulders. Meanwhile, Surya constantly cut and blocked. The enemy was too slow to manage to block all of her blows or to touch her with his blade. The wound in his chest soon

weakened him. The girl attacked from the bottom moving her dagger up. It hit the metal blade and popped it up. Then the second dagger came from the left and slashed the opponent. Both bodies split and their leaky parts fell onto the ash-covered ground.

“Done,” The girl sighed.

“It’s not over yet, look,” he pointed inside.

Reiz was fighting with Jason and Lian. He was very fast in attacking. Suddenly, Dan appeared out of nowhere. He rushed inside and shot the creature in the leg. The powerful shot almost ripped the leg off. Reiz reacted quickly and swung his arm hitting Dan away. Tokutei ran rapidly towards Reiz, raised the light-blue sword above his head, and while he was pulling it down over the opponent’s head, Reiz blocked the blade with two flat palms, causing Tokutei to let go of his weapon. Surya rushed after him, but Reiz kicked her away. Lian quickly joined, and they both fought with the white vampire leader. Reiz threw away Tokutei’s sword and engaged in the fight.

“Killing you will be a pleasure to me,” he said through hissing.

“We’ve just killed over 5000 of your kind, and you still have hope,” the Asian girl wanted to say, but said nothing.

The Japanese warrior performed a round kick with his left leg, but the enemy blocked it with his right hand simultaneously blocking Lian’s kick with the left one. Tokutei chambered his leg only half-way and kicked one more time several inches higher, then chambered and kicked two feet lower. Lian was using side, round and hook kicks. Yet every single attack was successfully blocked.

In the meantime, Jason went up to Arthur, kneeled and poked him.

“Arthur, Arthur, wake up,”

The old man opened his eyes, and saw Lian, Tokutei fighting Reiz, Dan lying a few metres further and Surya trying to get up.

“Go help them,” he whispered.

Jason nodded and headed back to the group.

Lian wanted to hit Reiz with a chop, punch combination, but he was too powerful. He pushed her away with every block. Tokutei knew they had to use more advanced and stronger moves, and the best way to do so were either to attack from the air or use Wing Tsun fast moves like sticking hands. Tokutei advanced closer, he snapped Reiz hand, then the second one, and started a chain punch right into his chest. The strong punches did

little harm, and seconds later, the vampire pushed away Tokutei and focused on Lian. Jason didn't know what to do. He wasn't as fast as they were. Shooting was not an option. They were moving too fast and he couldn't risk wounding any of his teammates. He glanced at Surya. She was still on the ground.

"The kick must have been very strong," he thought. Then he looked at Dan lying unconscious on the ground. He was closer to him than Surya, so he decided to help him.

Reiz was aiming to hit Lian on the arm, she blocked it straight away. Then Tokutei jumped from his right leg and performed a tornado kick. The speeding leg smashed Reiz's block and hit his shoulder. Lian realised she has to use the same manoeuvres, too. They both span, Tokutei left, Lian right, and they both side kicked Reiz right into his chest. The two kicks tore off his suit revealing a strange tattoo and some necklace. The combined power pushed Reiz away a little bit, they span back made one step further and round kicked from both sides. Reiz moved a little bit back. They looked each other in the eyes.

"Let's finish him," the Chinese girl suggested."

Tokutei nodded. Arthur only stood and stared, while Jason was trying to help Dan come round. At that moment they were unable to help. Both warriors made one step to the front, jumped high and span opposite direction. One spin, then the second one. They both twirled for a second, then Tokutei strengthened his right leg while Lian did the same with the left one. They both performed 720 hook kick. Both legs met on Reiz's head, hitting it from both sides and squeezing it to the centre. Even though he was a vampire, his bones were not much stronger than humans. The blood poured out from his eyes, mouth, nose and ears. Then, his skull broke into pieces. The warriors landed on the ground, looked at each other and smiled.

"I'm starting to like this job," the Asian warrior said.

Dan regained consciousness and Jason helped him stand up. He looked around and saw several things: headless Reiz lying in his own blood, next to him Tokutei and Lian catching their breath, Arthur standing nearby rubbing his face, and Jason helping Surya get up.

"Eh I missed the best part again," he complained.

45.

Everyone went up to the dead body. The team stood up in a circle

around the bleeding corpse and watched it for a second.

“Is he dead?” Jason asked.

“I don’t think a headless vampire can be still alive,” Tokutei said picking up his sword.

Arthur went closer to the body, bent over and reached out for the necklace. He pulled it hard, ripping it off the vampire’s neck. The chain uncovered the creature’s chest with a tattoo. It caught Dan’s eye immediately. It was a symbol similar to a pentagram, but there were eight arms with arrows pointing outside at each end. When everyone was focusing at the necklace Arthur was holding, Dan was completely lost in his thoughts.

“Finally, the first part of the Seal,” the old man said.

“Only four to go,” Lian added.

“If we have to undergo through such a hell for every single piece, then I’m definitely in,” Jason said amusingly.

Dan rejected the outside world. The thoughts from a few days back hit him. He remembered the conversation with his aunt. The charm he received from her on that day. The very charm with the riddle inside. Now it occurred to him, that this strange tattoo may be the solution to it. He had seen this tattoo earlier in many vampires’ nests. But no it was no time to solve it. He had to put aside these thoughts and join the conversation.

“I also liked the whole situation,” Dan added.

“Because you did almost nothing,” Lian commented.

“If it hadn’t been for me, you wouldn’t have even thought about the spotlights,” Dan replied.

“So what, we would have used more ammo then,” Surya commented.

Arthur put the necklace on, took a deep breath and spoke,

“How can you say that it was exciting for you? The plan was different. If Tokutei had done as I said, we would have just kidnapped Reiz and take the Seal.”

“But, Arthur,” Surya replied. “We’ve killed thousands of vampires. Isn’t it a good thing?”

“It is, but look, we almost lost Tokutei. What’s more, any of you could have been killed. We weren’t prepared to deal with such a large number of enemies.”

“But we did well, didn’t we?” the Jason said confidently.

“You did and I’m glad we’ve succeeded.”

“I don’t know about you,” Tokutei interrupted, “But we should leave.”

Arthur looked up at him.

“He’s right, we don’t know what or who will appear here, and without the spotlights and ammo we’re doomed. We’d better go.”

They headed towards the gate across the empty square covered with millions of pieces of ash, clothes and vampire bodies.

“What a slaughter we’ve done,” Lian commented looking around. Dan gently kicked one of the bodies.

“I don’t regret anything. The fewer these blood-suckers there are, the better.”

Surya came up to Tokutei.

“Are you alright?”

“Of course, why wouldn’t I be?”

“The fall, duh,” Lian added.

“And the kick,” Surya added. “I’m stronger than human, but this kick knocked me down.”

“Ah yes, I forgot about it. But I’m fine, I was trained to withstand such falls.”

46.

They finally reached the gate. There was no one outside, and the parking lot was covered with empty cars.

“Does anyone need medical attention?” the old man asked scanning the area for any living vampires.

Everyone shook their heads.

“Great, so we have to pick up our stuff and return to the castle.”

They headed towards the staircase. While they were going up the stairs, Surya caught up with Dan.

“I’m sorry for the fangs back then.”

“Don’t talk about it, will you?” the boy answered as if he wanted to ignore her.

“As you wish,” the girl answered slowing down to Lian’s pace.

“You were really good tonight. I mean those moves. I wish I could learn much from you.”

“You will, I’ll be teaching the martial arts here,” Lian replied proudly.

On hearing this, Tokutei came up to them.

“No, you won’t.”

“Tokutei, you were also great,” Surya continued, “Especially with the sword. I can’t imagine anyone taking out so many vampires at once or surviving such a fall. I mean, when we were fighting together I knew you always had my back. We make a great team.”

Tokutei said nothing. They were walking up stairs among black ashes.

There were also several bodies of vampires lying on the stairs.

“What about me?” Lian interrupted. “Didn’t you enjoy our fight with Reiz?”

“I have never met anyone more powerful than him. Our fight must have looked funny for the others.”

“What do ya’ mean?”

“Every time we kicked him or hit him, he pushed us away, and we ran desperately back to him. He was playing with us like with dogs.”

“But we took him down. This is what counts.”

“And you, Surya,” Tokutei looked at her I think you beat me with that jump from the rooftop,” Tokutei replied.

“But you’re a human and I am not!”

“But still, I treat you like one.”

“Me too,” Lian added.

“And I’ll be the one who will be teaching you the martial arts,” the Asian guy said amusingly.

“Over my dead body,” Lian replied.

“Guys stop arguing, you were both great.” Surya said putting her palms on their shoulders. “If you hadn’t cooperated, Reiz would’ve probably defeated us all.”

“You know, Tokutei, she’s right.”

Tokutei didn’t answer.

“Wouldn’t you say so?”

“Alright, I admit. I found it pleasant to work with both of you. Happy now?”

“I must say,” the old man spoke walking through the door to the rooftop, “Everyone was great tonight. As you said, Tokutei with his Katana manoeuvres. Lian, with her great sniping skills, and martial arts techniques. By the way, Lian. Could you disassemble your Barrett?”

The girl walked towards her sniper rifle and started to take it apart.

Arthur continued.

“Surya, who is skilled with daggers and you must remember it was her who burnt most of the blood-suckers. Jason, who came up with the whole plan, and who did a great job inside. And of course you, Dan. You’ve invented all these toys. You made the ammo. You, my friend, are responsible for this,” he pointed at the bodies spread across the rooftop. We wouldn’t be alive if it hadn’t been for all of you. And what is more important, we wouldn’t have the first part of the Seal.”

Everyone felt comforted. They packed all the things. Before they headed back downstairs, the team stopped for a while and looked at the square. The huge area looked as if a great battle happened there. Over 5000 vampires killed by five people and one dhampir.

“And we did all of this,” Dan said proudly.

“Who will clean this mess?” Jason asked.

“Don’t worry, Jason. We have people for this job. No one will ever know that we were here.”

47.

Half an hour later, Tokutei and Dan were drinking coffee in the truck, while Jason and Lian were eating something warm. Surya was cleaning her daggers and Arthur was checking something on his laptop. Lian came up to Tokutei.

“Hi there.”

“Hi!”

“Just wanted to know. How did you manage to kill so many vampires and not get killed or even wounded.”

“Well, this is called, don’t laugh, The Ultimate Technique,”

“I’m not laughing,” the girl said trying to stop herself from bursting into laughter.

“OK never mind, you won’t understand this,” he replied disappointed.

“Oh com’on tell me about it.”

“Forget it!”

“No means no,” the girl said turning around and walked away. He looked down at his stomach and rolled up his uniform. He saw a huge bruise spreading across his perfect muscles. Then he remembered the powerful kick from Reiz. The very kick that pushed him so hard to the back

that he broke the barrier and fell down. He had never experienced anything like this before. Yet, he said nothing. Surya noticed what Tokutei was doing and rushed to him.

“You’re hurt.”

Arthur heard this and immediately stopped what he was doing.

“Let me see it.”

“It’s nothing.”

Surya ran for the first aid kit located in the weaponry. Lian, Jason and Dan were sitting in silence, watching what the others were doing. Surya came back with the kit.

“It doesn’t look good. I’ll have to check your ribs,” Arthur said checking the nasty bruise.

“My ribs are fine. The bruise spreads across the stomach only. Only my muscles hurt, nothing more.”

“Still, I’ll need to check it.”

Lian stood up and headed for the kitchen.

“Oh, Tokutei, stop being so stubborn.”

“Eh, alright. But when we arrive at the castle, OK, Arthur?”

“There is no other option,” the old man replied. “I don’t have the proper equipment here.”

October, 3, 2012

79 days remaining

48.

It was almost 5 o’clock in the morning. The truck emerged through the tunnel on Maldito island, and headed for the castle. A few minutes later it stopped in the courtyard. The back door opened, and everyone got out. While they were walking inside, Arthur accelerated and stopped at the main door. He turned around.

“I know you’re tired, so I’ll not keep you down here anymore. Go, have some sleep now.”

“What about the next mission?” Surya asked.

“Well, I have the information about the next part of the Seal, but we can’t go there yet. You need to rest for a day or two.”

“I think I’ll go to my lab for a while,” Dan said convincingly walking after Arthur inside the castle.

“Lab?” Lian replied surprisingly, “I saw you sleeping like a baby on our way back, so don’t tell me you have still some energy to do whatever you do there.”

“Four hours of sleep was enough for me, and as you said, Lian, I didn’t do much on the mission,” he added sarcastically.

“I don’t get you!”

“Really, guys? Do you both wanna argue again?” Jason interrupted. “I could do with some sleep right now.”

“Wonderful idea,” Surya added, “I’m going to take a long bath and sleep until dinner time.”

“Me too,” Jason added, and headed after Surya upstairs.

Arthur was listening to the conversation, pretending to be texting some message on his mobile.

“Two days have passed and they’re acting like a family,” he whispered shaking his head.

“I heard that,” Tokutei said with a smile.

Arthur smiled back and headed towards the lifts. He stopped and turned round.

“Tok, meet me in the medic room in five.”

The Asian man replied by nodding his head. Arthur, Jason, and the girls disappeared inside the lift. Dan came up to Tokutei.

“Hi, I just wanted to ask you if I could borrow your sword to my laboratory.”

“Err, what for?”

“You know, I saw a bit of your fight, and I would like to upgrade the sword a little bit.”

“But still, what for? I like it the way it is. Moreover, it’s made of a meteorite. Thus it’s so sharp and resistant.”

Dan stopped at the stairs, and stood in front of Tokutei.

“I can make it sharper, I can make it so sharp that in combat you won’t even have to use blocks, as the opponent’s blade will break against yours.”

Tokutei’s eyes wide opened, and a grin appeared on his smooth face.

“Now you’re speaking my language.”

“Does that mean that I can borrow it for till tomorrow?”

“Sure, take it,” the man said handing his beautiful sword to Dan. The boy had a close look at it, then turned on his heel, and disappeared in

the staircase.

49.

Arthur got to his office. He stepped in and took off his black vest. Then he took the necklace off his neck, and gently raised the little piece of the Seal.

“Beautiful,” he said under his breath staring at the piece of metal. Next he walked towards the wall filled with screens.

“Safe, activate,” he said loudly.

Suddenly, one of the screen pushed forward and from the right side of the wall pulled out a smaller screen. Arthur placed his eye right in front of it, and seconds later a sound of something moving started to be heard from the hole behind the screen. It was getting louder and louder. Then a small, metal box appeared in the hole. Arthur opened the box, and placed the Seal inside. He closed the box, and said.

“Safe, deactivate.”

The box disappeared in a long, dark corridor, the small screen disappeared too, and the large screen returned to its place. The box was situated on a lift that safely carried the precious object somewhere in the castle. When everything returned to its previous state, Arthur walked towards the door and left the office.

50.

Dan opened the door to his room and went inside. He put down the sword onto his bed, then he took off the uniform, put on something more comfortable, and sat down at his computer. He typed something in the search engine, and the screen filled with photos of various vampiric symbols. A few of the photos showed the same symbol that he had seen on Reiz’s chest. He, then took off the charm from his neck, opened it, and placed the piece of paper that was inside onto the scanner. When the square filled with numbers appeared on the screen, he placed the symbol onto them. The arrows that were at the end of each side of the figure pointed at the several numbers. Dan grabbed something to write and a piece of paper from his printer, and wrote the numbers down.

42761652

“What the fuck are those?” he whispered.

2 EVERY WITCH WAY

October 4, 2012

78 days remaining

1.

The sun started to rise above the flat horizon of the Pacific ocean. It was 4:30 in the morning and the Maldito castle started to look not as scary as at night. In the huge gymnastic hall, which was situated at the back of the castle, Tokutei was doing his daily training; practising some of the moves he had been taught, keeping fit, practising fighting, and so on. The hall was as big as a football pitch. The walls were painted red and there were also old-fashioned windows near the ceiling, which looked like those from old castles. The whole gym was packed with various weapons and training equipment, as well as obstacles and ropes. One wall was covered with numerous traditional weapons. There were katanas, Bo staffs, spears, kamas and different types of sabres. Tokutei was practising different moves without any weapons. He jumped into the air, then kicked into split pushing away two bags on both sides. As soon as he landed he jumped again and made a spin to the right, kicked the right bag that was coming back to its previous position, then rotated one more time and kicked the second bag with his other leg. Next he climbed up a rope to some four-yard high obstacle and leapt from it performing three front flips as if a deep swimming pool was right below. As he landed on the wooden floor, the

front door creaked opened. He looked at it immediately and saw Lian coming inside. She was wearing a traditional Chinese martial art uniform often used in Wushu arts.

“Tokutei, what are you doing here?” she asked with a surprised voice.

“I’m having my daily practise, what about you?”

“Me too. I start the routine at five every morning.”

“Well, I start at four,” he boasted.

“I wanted to start at four, but last mission made me sleep an hour longer.”

“How is your belly?”

“Why do you all care so much about it? Everything is fine now.”

Tokutei turned right and walked towards his towel.

“You know, if you want to, I may move to the woods,” the man suggested unwillingly.

“No,” she replied firmly, “We may practice here together.”

“How about a sparing, then?” he offered reaching out for a bottle of water.

Lian looked at him and smiled,

“OK, you may show me all that ten styles you have been trained in.”

“Fifteen,” Tokutei corrected.

“Ten, fifteen, twenty. It makes no difference to me, as it is I who will still kick your butt,” she laughed.

The man put aside the bottle and walked towards the little arena in the middle of the room. Lian put her bottle of water on the same table and walked towards Tokutei.

“I’m ready,” she said eagerly.

“Don’t you need to stretch first or at least warm-up?” Tokutei asked surprisingly.

Lian looked at him in embarrassment. Fighting with someone as masterful as she is requires stretching not to pull any muscle.

“Err, yeah, I-I forgot.”

She turned back and walked towards the mattresses.

“Give me ten minutes, will ya?”

“Sure,” he replied, then went on to practice some punches and kicking.

2.

The girl has finished her warm-up exercises. It is important to stretch first not to pull a muscle. Many people do know this. However, still many do not know that one has to stretch after training, too. When Lian was ready, she walked towards Tokutei.

“Are you ready now?” he asked.

“Of course.”

“Don’t be afraid, I won’t hit you... hard.”

“Don’t worry, Tok. You won’t hit me.”

They stood in front of each other on a round arena. It was approximately five yards in diameter. Tokutei bowed looking deeply into her hazel eyes, as she put her right fist to the open left palm and bowed a little bit. Then swung her arms and crouched into a defence position. Tokutei received it as an invitation for a fight, so he rushed at her. He quickly got rid of her right hand by hitting it, and performed a chop with his right hand. She immediately blocked it with her left arm and swiftly turned around wanting to do a hook kick into his head. He ducked feeling the wind of the zooming leg above his head.

“She’s fast,” he thought, but there was no time for thinking.

He had to follow his instinct and habits. When she finished the kick, she crouched still spinning. She straightened her left leg in order to kick his ankle, but he jumped over the speeding leg. Lian didn’t stand up, still ducking she performed the same kick but with her right leg. Tokutei jumped again. Next she stood up and threw another hook kick from her right side. Tokutei only made a step backwards and felt the fast moving air on his face. As soon as she finished the kick, she changed direction of rotating, and tried to kick him with a great round kick aiming at his head, yet he ducked.

“So you like kicks, huh?” he asked smiling.

She chambered her right leg, but didn’t change the position, another round kick came. Tokutei didn’t have a chance to duck out of it, so he blocked it with his right hand near his left shoulder. Next another round kick came a little bit lower, but he blocked it with his left hand at the chest level. Lian didn’t finish on it; she threw another round kick aiming lower. Tokutei blocked it with his left hand at the belt level. Yet, another round kick came at his knee. The Asian man quickly turned blocking it with his foot. She looked at his face in a little angry look. Tokutei only smiled. She greeted her

teeth and jumped kicking from right with a round kick, then from left with another round kick. Both of them were blocked. She dipped turning back to him, then jumped and swung her legs like in a butterfly kick. Tokutei managed to avoid the first one, but the second leg hit him on the shoulder. Lian landed, and turned around with a grin. Tokutei frowned,

“That’s it. I’m done playing with you.”

“Bring it on!” Lian replied making a circle in the air with her arms. Tokutei jumped high in the air, chambered both legs and kicked Lian with the front kick, she blocked it by an X block, which was basically crossing two arms on wrists. As soon as he landed he jumped one more time, now his first kick came with the left leg, the second one from the right leg. Once again they were blocked. He turned around, chambered his left leg then turned more to face Lian. Next he quickly leapt from the ground throwing a tornado kick. Lian ducked and his leg swung over her head. As soon as he felt the ground, he made a spin in the opposite direction and performed a hook kick with his right leg. Lian only made one step back and bent a little bit to the back so the zooming leg flew in front of her nose. Tokutei turned around landing on his one knee, placed both hands on the wooden floor and side kicked at her chest. The powerful kick knocked the woman over. He noticed a grimace on her face, quickly stopped the fight and came up to her.

“Are you OK?”

She opened her eyes and pushed off the ground, then attacked him with a chop, followed by a Wing Chun triple punch. The speeding hands of Lian’s were blocked by Tokutei’s enormous reflex. He successfully blocked series of chops, punches, and elbow strikes.

3.

They were fighting for over an hour. They both mixed numerous martial arts styles. During this time, Tokutei managed to hit Lian few times, and she did the same. Thousands of punches were blocked or avoided. They both showed great speed, strength, accuracy and perfection. The fight finally stopped.

“Well, well Lian, quite skilful you are,” he said trying to catch his breath.

“Thanks, you’re too,” came the answered, as she was leaning against the wall. “Could you possibly teach me some moves of yours?”

He looked at her with a grin.

“No problem. But I would like you to teach me that Wushu techniques you just did.”

“I thought Wushu was one of your martial arts style,” she said in confusion.

“That is correct, but I put the least pressure on it. And now I see that I can learn more advanced moves,” he replied walking towards the table with water.

She walked after him to drink a little bit after a tiring sparring.

“I didn’t know that you know Wing-Tsun.”

“How can I not know it?” he replied. “I know it’s a Chinese martial art style, but it doesn’t mean I can’t have been taught it, right? Anyway. I learned it when I was ten, and now I know it’s the best and the most useful one.”

Tokutei grabbed the bottle and took a few deep sips. Lian grabbed a towel and wiped the sweat of her face.

“I agree to that,”

“But I’ll still be teaching the martial arts classes.”

She looked at him huffy.

“We’ll see about that.”

Tokutei peeked at the large old-fashioned clock above the door.

“It’s almost 5:45. I’ll have to practice my weapon skills now, so if you don’t mind, I’ll leave you now.”

Lian put away her half-empty bottle and said calmly.

“Me too, maybe a Bo staff sparring?”

“You’re so eager to question my skills, aren’t you?”

“That’s because I wanna teach the rest of team instead of you!” she said proudly.

Tokutei scowled, glanced at the weapons, then at her.

“Fine,” he said determinately. “Let’s do it! The one who wins will conduct the fighting classes. Deal?”

“Deal,” came the quick answer.

They walked towards the tall black stand with several Bo staffs of different length. Tokutei picked a thick black one and made a few spins to get used to it. Lian picked a longer Chinese Wushu staff. They both walked back to the arena and stood in front of each other.

“Remember, Lian, don’t treat me like your teammate, and treat me like

your enemy.”

“I’m already doing it,” she said running at him.

Tokutei prepared for the attack. The rushing staff came from above at his head. He quickly raised his Bo and kneeled placing the staff above his head. A thud spread around the hall echoing from all walls. Lian reacted quickly by spinning her staff 180 degrees and attacked from below. Tokutei only lowered his arms to block it. He stood back into the offensive position and attacked Lian from the right, then from the left. She placed the staff horizontally to block the blows, then jumped into the air, spinning her staff over her head, and attack from above once again. The man stepped back feeling the wooden stick rushing down. He quickly spun the staff to make, so-called, figure eight manoeuvre and forward strike. Lian wasn’t fast enough to block it and was hit on her arm. A scowl appeared on her face. She rapidly grabbed her staff at the end and pushed it towards Tokutei’s chest. He pushed it away with a circular motion of his weapon, then counterattacked by a similar thrust. Lian ducked out of it. The fight continued.

4.

After a series of strikes, blocks and dodging Lian didn’t manage to hit Tokutei even once. The man didn’t even try to hit again until she at least touched his body with the staff. She couldn’t. Finally she gave up.

“One hit can’t decide about winning. Let’s call it a day, shall we?” Tokutei nodded spinning his staff behind his back.

“I will practise my Wushu now, so maybe some other day we will finish it,” she added.

Tokutei glanced at her and replied,

“If you say so.”

“What about you?”

“I’ll practice on a wooden dummy now. But please, no sparing for today. I have to do my own stuff.,” the Asian man begged.

Lian smiled and nodded, then walked to the left side of the hall and started doing some Wushu forms. Tokutei headed towards the other part of the hall. There were ten traditional wooden dummies. Each of them looked like a wooden pole with three arms and one leg. It was a perfect training teacher to practice strikes and accurate moves.

5.

After a while, the clock stroke seven o'clock. Tokutei was playing with some nunchakus and Lian was practising some kicks.

"I'm gonna finish now, so take care," Tokutei raised his voice so that Lian could hear him.

The girl finished the manoeuvre and replied eagerly,

"Me, too, we're having breakfast soon, so I'd better take a shower and get dressed."

They put away their weapons, grabbed their towels and bottles and headed for the exit.

"I guess we gonna spend mornings together, huh?" the girl laughed.

"But if you're to interrupt my daily routine, I'll move to the woods."

"Oh come 'on, Tok. The routine is boring. I loved the today's sparings. Oh, and I heard Surya wants to join the morning trainings."

"I don't know."

They went out to the corridor.

"You can't be such a boring dude. Break the routine, practice something else. If I were you I would rather kill myself than practice every day the same things."

"I have way too many things to practice. My training varies. It only repeats every third day."

"Still a routine. Listen, We may practice together, and I'll make sure you will practice everything you always practice, but in a different order."

"I don't know, maybe."

"You're not easily convinced, are you?"

"As you can see."

"Ok, see you at nine."

"Bye."

They split up, and everyone went to their room.

6.

Later on, Tokutei was in his en suite bathroom. He was buttoning a white casual shirt. It was his fourth day here and he was getting accustomed to this new life. He glanced at his reflection in the huge wall mirror, and touched the bruise from the kick of Reiz's. It was almost gone, but he could still feel the powerful kick on his muscles. He finished buttoning the shirt, and then left the room. While he was walking along the tall hallway, which

walls were covered with old Spanish paintings interlined with candlesticks, he saw Dan carrying the katana sword.

“Oh, Tok, Hi.” he said loudly.

“Hi Dan,” came the surprised answer. “I see, you’ve finished up my sword.”

“I have examined your sword, and I must say, that nothing like this have I ever seen.”

“I know, it’s made of a meteorite.”

“Whatever it’s made of, this element can’t be found on Earth. Where did you get this from?”

“My master gave it to me. It’s said to be the most powerful cold steel ever produced. And this one is over 400 years old.”

“Right. Anyway, I wanted to tell ya’, that I’ve improved your sword.”

“Improved?” Tokutei replied confused.

“Yeah, I’ve sharpened it with a laser, so there is only one layer of atoms at the very edge of it,” the boy said as if he was boasting of his skills. Tokutei took the sword and looked at its blue-glowing blade.

“So if you drop the bare blade onto the soil it would slip right through the Earth nucleolus?” “No, it’s too wide. But, you can cut through anything now.”

“I could cut through anything so far,” came a casual answer.

“No, remember the other day? When you used your sword to block? Now you can forget about it. No blocking with the sharp side. As I said, it would cut literally through anything. What’s more,” Dan continued, “I’ve engraved with a laser a few spells to dispose of demons and spirits. I also implanted salt and iron molecules along the blade edge.”

“Where did you get these from?”

“I’ve spent some time with Arthur yesterday. He taught me all of this.” Tokutei looked at him in amazement.

“Wow! So now it can be called a true ultimate weapon,” he replied amusingly.

“You bet it can. I’m also working on a more advanced Bow staff,” the boy added.

“It’s called BO staff,” Tokutei corrected.

“Whateve’ dude, when I finish t, you will shit your pants after you see what it can do,” Dan bragged.

“That would be great, Thank you,” Tokutei bowed.

“No problem, this is what I do.”

“I’ll leave the sword in my room, and join you for the breakfast in a minute,” Tokutei announced walking back to his room.

Dan nodded, turned around and headed for the stairs.

“Oh, and one more thing,” Tokutei shouted.

“Yeah?”

“Don’t mention it to Lian, I mean the Bo staff. You see, she can get really jealous.”

“Don’t worry,” Dan laughed. “For her, I have something different,” he added.

Tokutei scowled and opened his door.

“Later.”

Then walked inside.

7.

Almost everyone was sitting in the dining room. The same room they had their first meal together a few days earlier. Surya was talking to Lian sitting next to her. Both girls had their hair pinned. There was also Dan having conversation with O.D. The door creaked opened and Arthur stepped in. He seemed to be full of energy, and cheerful.

“Good morning everyone,” he greeted his teammates enthusiastically. They stopped chatting, looked at him and replied,

“Hi,”

“Hello,”

“Good morning.”

Arthur sat at the front part of the table.

“Where is Tokutei?” came a curious question.

“I’m here,” the man answered walking into the room. “Hi everyone,” he sat near Surya.

“All right then,” the old man said, “If everyone is here, we may serve the breakfast.”

As soon as he said that, a few waiters came in through the second door leading to the kitchen. They were carrying silver trays with different kinds of foods, jars with coffee and tea, and some bowls with colourful salads. They put everything onto the table and left.

“I know I promised you that meals will be served directly to your rooms, but this is our fourth day, and just to get used to one another, I

decided that we should eat together just one more time.”

No one said anything; they were only looking at Arthur in silence.

“OK, I see, that you can’t wait eating, so let’s get started.”

They threw themselves at the food and started their breakfast.

“Did I mention to you that the salads were prepared by Tokutei?”

Lian’s eyes grew wide, as she remembered his words from a few hours earlier about his starting training at four in the morning.

“Do you ever sleep?”

Tokutei felt her cold look.

“Of course I do, I made them before the morning training. It took me only half an hour.”

“Ah, alright. I just thought, you spent the night in the kitchen.”

“No, I’m not that crazy,” he replied, then grabbed the bowl with salads and placed some on his plate.

While they were eating, Jason raised his head, looked at Arthur and asked,

“Sir?”

“Are you mad at me or something? I thought we were supposed to call each others’ names,” he replied amusingly.

Everyone stopped eating and looked at the two men.

“He he, I forgot. I just wanted to ask you what time we should be ready for today.”

“Oh yes,” Arthur replied scratching his head. “We should do the next mission. Be ready at nine sharp in the briefing room.”

“OK,”

“All right,” they replied and continued eating.

“Since we know the location of the second part, we can’t wait much longer.”

Arthur could still sense the distance between some group members. It was obvious that there was this tension among them. They cooperated well the other day. He saw them acting like a family, and now? They act as if they grew apart a little bit.

“It’s been only a few days, they would get accustomed soon,” his mind tried to explain.

8.

The clock struck nine. Everyone was in the briefing room. Lian, Surya were sitting in the first row while Dan, Jason and Tokutei behind them.

They were all chatting about various things when Arthur walked in.

“I hope you don’t mind my turning the light off,” he said casually switching the lights off. Everyone shook their heads, while Arthur walked fast towards his wide desk.

“I will start then. If you have any questions, ask them only when I have finished.”

“Is he angry or something?” Tokutei whispered.

“Yeah, he didn’t like your salad,” Lian replied sarcastically.

“He seemed fine in the morning,” Tokutei added.

“I wonder where we’re going this time,” Jason whispered.

“Guys, please,” the old man tried to calm them down.

Arthur pressed a button on his modern desk, and the screen behind him displayed some picture.

“Two days ago, we managed...you managed to retrieve the first part of the Seal,” he pointed at the picture showing a piece of the ring, displayed on the wall.

“The second one belongs to a very evil witch,” he pressed a different button, and the picture changed showing an old, ugly woman. She had long white hair similar to Surya’s. But her hair was dirty, damaged and uncombed. She also had a long, pointy nose with a huge mole. Her teeth were either yellow or missing.

“Look Dan, it’s your girlfriend,” Jason said.

“That’s an ugly one, it’s your type,” Dan said.

Everyone chuckled.

“Yes, good point Dan.”

“Where did you get this picture from?” Jason asked.

“This one comes from the 90s. I don’t know who took it. Anyway, to deal with her, we must deal with other obstacles as well. “She is said to live in an old mansion that is here in the United States.”

The picture changed. The new one was showing a huge old house or rather a ramshackle surrounded by a thick mist.

“She is a 400-year old creature, and a very powerful one.

“So, what, she can fly on a broom or something like that?” Lian asked.

“You were to ask questions later,” Arthur replied seriously. “But, if I were you, yeah, I wouldn’t resist either,” he added amusingly. “Coming back to your question. I meant rather something like casting spells and using other tricks like illusions. This time it won’t be just killing the

enemies. We would have to really do our best in both fighting and thinking.”

“So what can we expect there?” Surya asked.

“Yeah, I don’t wanna be surprised like the other day,” Jason added. “A few vampires turned out to be a 5000 horde.”

“Well, I don’t want to lie to you, I never did,” Arthur replied calmly, “I’ll be honest with you. We may expect there everything connected with witchcraft. Ghosts, spirits, demons, name it.”

Dan looked around and boomed,

“Do you mean that ...”

“Yes Dan,” the old man interrupted, “We must take all kinds of weapons,”

“How did you know, this was what I wanna ask you?” the boy inquired surprisingly.

“Just a wild guess. But coming back to the topic. The second part of the Seal is said to be in the ring on her right hand.”

The picture changed again. This one showed a medieval ring with a skull on it. It looked slightly scary.

“Did I tell you everything?” Arthur thought. “Oh yes the main thing. You, I mean we will have to go through a labyrinth to get to the mansion.”

“You mean, like an underground labyrinth?” Surya inquired.

“No, Surya, a thick hedge labyrinth full of traps.”

“That’s just spices the mission a little bit,” Jason commented.

“OK. That’s all. I will present more details on our way there. You have four hours to prepare, then we will set off.”

“But...” Lian tried to ask.

“You don’t have to know anything more apart from getting prepared for anything, for which you have four hours”

“That’s quite a lot of time,” came another comment from Jason.

“I could go to Alpha Point and collect my eBay stuff, the packages should be there by now,” Dan announced.

Arthur scratched his head.

“Some of the packages are already there. By the way who bought a yacht?” Arthur asked.

“My yacht is here? That’s great!” Lian shouted with excitement.

Everybody looked at Lian with a little shock. What did she spent her money on?

“Eh...Please wait,” he said to everyone. “What I am going to tell you is directed to all of you.”

Surya and Tokutei stopped at the door. Jason and Dan sat on a seat next to them. Lian also sat down and everyone prepared for what Arthur was going to say.

“If you want to purchase vehicles, boats or any other means of transport, don’t waste the money I gave you, just send me what you need exactly, and my employees will take care of it.”

Lian blushed. It was a mistake for her to move so fast. two million a month and she had spent it all not only on the yacht itself, but also on various clothes and other girly stuff.

“So, what you are trying to say, Arthur, is that I wasted my money on the yacht.”

“That’s correct.”

“You’ll have to wait for another salary,” Tokutei laughed.

Lian replied with an angry look and left the room.

“Girls...” Jason commented.

9.

After a while, everyone was in the weaponry room. Dan and Jason were giving advice what weapon to take. The boy grabbed an M16 assault rifle and checked its condition.

“Like Arthur said, to kill a zombie we can use everything, so I suggest that we take something with lots of ammo, and accuracy. And this one here is not a good example”

Jason was fumbling among the weapons attached to the wall.

“Well, if we are to fight in a small area, the best gun will be...”

“I don’t like using assault rifles in small areas,” Lian interrupted which sounded more like a complaint, “I prefer pistols, they are precise enough for me.”

“What about you Tokutei?” Dan asked, “Do you still believe in cold steel?”

“Of course,” he replied with a silent laugh.

“Maybe just a little pistol?”

“Tell you what. I never used such weapons, so I guess my accuracy is poor.”

“You used one of my grenades the other day, and it saved your life, so

what will ya' say Tok? A little pistol? Huh?"

"I don't know..."

"Maybe a few shots in the shooting range?" Dan suggested reaching out his hand with a pistol to Tokutei.

"Hmm... OK," he replied grabbing the gun.

"I'm going with you," Surya said. "Let's all go and practice the shooting for a little while, shall we?"

"I'm in," Dan said

"Me too," Lian added.

They grabbed the weapons and went to the nearby shooting range.

10.

The targets, both round and human-shape had already been prepared. Surya and Tokutei walked to the right side of the room. Dan scanned the room, and immediately had an idea.

"Guys, I know what we can do with this room."

"What do you mean?" Jason asked.

"Look, every time the workers have to prepare new targets, and... admit the targets look like those from the 80's. What if we make it a little bit virtual."

"Virtual?" Lian thought for a while. "Like a computer head?"

"No, nothing like that. I mean, instead of the cardboard and paper targets, we would have holograms of real creatures, people and so on. Moreover, they could move slower, faster, appear out of nowhere."

"You should talk to Arthur about this," Surya suggested coming up to Tokutei staring at a pistol in his hand. "Do ya' know how to handle this, Tokutei?"

"Aim and press the trigger, if it is what you mean?"

The girl smiled and put the clip into her assault rifle.

"Alright, so show me."

Tokutei aimed at the target and slowly pulled the trigger. However, something blocked the trigger from being pulled to the end.

"Something's wrong," he murmured looking suspiciously at the pistol.

"The safety is on."

"Yeah, I knew that," he replied unlocking the pistol.

Then he aimed at the target and fired. A little hole appeared in the down left corner of the human target.

“Hmm, not bad for the first time, do it again, but try not to move your arms at all after locking them on the target.”

“I’ll try.”

He pointed his weapon at the target again, locked his arms and fired.

Another hole appeared near the left ear of the drawn man.

“You see, you’re getting closer and closer.”

“But I was aiming at the heart.”

“Try again.”

In the meantime, the others were successfully shooting at the targets.

Although the targets didn’t move, they all were quite good at it, and weren’t paying attention at what Surya and Tokutei were doing. Lian was trying out a Masada rifle, which was a modern version of an assault rifle with several components like sights, grenade launchers and so on.

“I’m getting to like this one,” she said with a grin.

Jason looked at her.

“Wanna try the shotgun?”

“No, thanks, I prefer being precise. You know I don’t like to inflict much damage around.”

Tokutei took another shot. The target was full of holes, but only few were within the black blueprint of a human body.

“I’m a novice here, I won’t learn it today”

Surya smacked her lips.

“You think I started with 100% accuracy? Practice makes perfect. Look,” she said aiming her assault rifle at the target and firing a series of shots. “You see?”

The man looked at the black blueprint which head was full of bullet holes.

“The more you shoot, the better you are. And how do you think you can take out a vampire or something else from a distance?” she added pressing some green button on the wall.

The blueprint changed for a new one. Tokutei tucked his hands behind the belt and took out a few silver shurikens; ninja stars. Surya peeked at them surprisingly and confused at the same time. Seconds later, Tokutei threw them at the target still looking at the dhampiric girl standing in front of him. Her white eyes moved left and her jaw dropped after seeing two stars nested in the head and one in the heart.

“Ok I take back what I’ve just said. Maybe guns are not for you.”

“Yet,” he finished.

11.

After a while Jason was in his room searching something on his computer. Suddenly, he heard knocking on his door. He slowly stood up and went to open it. As he was walking, he glanced at a screen at the door which was showing the view from outside. He saw Dan with a metal trolley packed with metal boxes. He pressed the knob, and the door opened.

“Dan? What are you doing here?”

“Hi, I was working in the lab on some ammunition and I brought you some for the mission. You can thank me later,” the boy said fast, then grabbed one of the boxes and gave it to Jason.

He put it on the floor next to the door and opened it. At the same time Dan quickly turned around and headed further.

“W-Wait. How is it different from the previous one?”

“I’ve put four types of ammo into one clip. There are silver bullets, bullets that had been submerged in dead man’s blood, regular ones and bullets that explode.”

“The exploding ones are new, what are they for?” Jason asked examining the clip

“Everything that can be killed by ripping apart.”

“It can get useful for tonight. I’ve been reading about undead and supernatural creatures now.”

“Wow, I wish I had some time for this, but the lab keeps me busy.”

“If you tell Arthur, he may employ some assistance to do the mundane work for you,” came a suggestion.

“You know. Maybe you’re right. Yeah, I’ll talk to him, but now I have to deliver the rest of the boxes to the team. See ya’.”

“See ya’.”

O.D. closed the door and returned to the computer.

12.

Lian was lying on her bed playing with her pistol between her fingers. She was constantly taking the clip out and in. She was thinking about the life she left back in China. The life she used to live every day.

Lian was sitting on the bed in a hotel room. She was wearing black trousers with several pockets on the sides, and a green top revealing her flat stomach. She also had her hair pinned into a pony-tail. The apartment

seemed to be an expensive one. Big TV, double bed, golden lamps and everything perfectly clean. Suddenly a message popped up on her black laptop on the table in front of her. She jumped from the bed and rushed to the table. The message in a chat window showed:

“You will have a new date, C47.”

“Details,” she typed back.

“Sent on your phone,” A new message appeared.

Lian took out her phone from her black trousers, looked at the screen, pressed some button and started reading. Then she typed back the message on the laptop.

“I’ll take it.”

She heard the knocking on the door which pulled her out of daydreaming. She walked slowly to open it and saw Dan with one metal box left on his trolley.

“Let me guess, special kind of ammunition,” she said with a gentle smile.

“Yup, it should do for tonight,” Dan replied.

The woman took it and put it on the table.

“Wanna come in and have a drink, Dan?” she offered as she was coming back towards the door.

“I’d love to, but I gotta finish some work up in the lab. Maybe another time.”

“I see, So, see ya’ later.”

“Bye, Lian,” Dan replied, then turned round and headed towards the lift.

13.

It was almost four o’clock. Tokutei and Jason were in the main hall, waiting for the others.

“So tell me O.D.,” the Asian guy asked.

Jason turned towards him not knowing what his teammate wanted to ask him.

“Your name is Jason White, so why O.D.?”

“You’re not the first one who asked,” he replied amusingly. “O.D. stands for audacious,”

“Audacious? I don’t know this word.”

“Hmm, it’s the same as fearless,” he replied.

“Why fearless, huh?”

“I’m literally fearless. You know, I’ve got this condition, this brain failure. I lack of chromosome responsible for emotion called fear, hence I can’t feel it.”

“A man with no fear you say?”

“And because of this failure, I think, Arthur chose me.”

“Not a failure,” a voice spoke from the left.

Both men turned towards the direction of it and saw Arthur coming in.

“But a blessing. I believe that being deprived of fear is a huge advantage, and I chose you not because of it, but because of your tactical skills. You see Jason, O.D., I investigated numerous special forces all over the world, and, yes they were good, but only you could deal with the supernatural activities back in Sydney.”

“Because I can’t feel fear! If it hadn’t been for it, the monks would have ripped me apart.” the blackman replied.

“But you do have feelings of panic and over-reacting, and back then, you showed none of them. You know how to stay calm, that’s one of the reasons why I chose you.”

Jason flattened his lips, and said nothing.

“Monks?” Tokutei asked.

“I’ll tell you some other time,” Jason replied.

“I see that you are ready,” Lian shouted from the stairs.

She was carrying a Masada rifle, and two revolvers behind the belt.

“No swords?” Tokutei asked.

“I don’t think I need one. Oh and I see you’re not wearing your stupid mask.”

“Didn’t you learn your lesson from yesterday?” Tokutei asked irritated.

“Bullets won’t stop everything,” Arthur added.

“So why do you and Jason not have any blades, huh?” the woman said with a silent laugh.

“I can’t use them,” Jason answered shrugging his arms.

“And I have a dagger in my boot,” Arthur added. “But you know,” the old man continued, “Tokutei will teach you how to use cold steel, and believe me, they will be useful, soon.”

Next Dan showed up carrying a lot of grenades and the Masada assault rifle on his back.

“You know Dan,” Arthur said, “The plane has already been loaded

with all the weapons and ammo we need. So there is no need to take those grenades.”

“Yeah, I know that,” the boy said trying to wriggle, but still everyone knew he was lying. “I just took more of them, just in case.”

Everyone laughed for a moment. Then Surya appeared. She was carrying two Desert Eagles and two blades behind her belt.

“I found a box with some ammo next to my door.”

“Yes, Dan gave them to everyone,” Jason said.

“Why didn’t you give her the box directly like you did with everyone else?” Lian asked.

“Err... I ... um... thought she wasn’t in the room,” the boy replied making it up.

The Asian woman inclined herself a little bit towards him and whispered,

“Do you really have to show that you hate her so much?”

Dan dropped his head and turned towards Arthur.

“So if everyone is here, shall we go? The witch ain’t gonna kill herself.”

Arthur nodded and added,

“Follow me.”

Then he went towards the right door of the stairs. The group followed him.

14.

Soon, they reached the spacious hangar situated below the castle, somewhere near the south side. Inside there was a modern jet that looked more like a spaceship rather than a jet. The black machine had a huge A.S.A.T. logo painted on the side and on the tail. There were also two of the choppers and a dozens of metal containers similar to those on cargo ships. The other wall of the hangar seemed to be a wide, metal gate.

“Wow, what a machine!” Jason praised. “I have never been down here.”

Arthur took a glimpse at him and smirked,

“That’s because I blocked this part on your tablets till now.”

“That’s way better than the Hummer or the truck,” Dan added.

“Hop in guys, you’ll definitely enjoy the flight,” Arthur said.

The team boarded the plane. The inside wasn’t much different from the inside of the truck. The only difference was that it was a little bit wider, and there were windows in the side walls. The machine turned towards the metal gate that started lowering. The gate was a twenty yard-high and thirty-

yard wide metal door with rocks attached from one side, so from the outside the gate perfectly composed with the tall cliff.

“This castle is outstanding!” Lian exclaimed looking out the window. “A hidden gate in the cliff, Arthur, you’re a genius!”

Arthur turned around at Lian and smiled. The plane accelerated and took off.

“It’s my first time,” Surya said enthusiastically.

“You never went by plane before?” Tokutei asked.

“Nope, never. I spent my whole life in New York.”

“I hope, you’re not afraid of flying,” Lian added opening the fridge.

“No, no, it feels... hmm interesting.”

Dan gave her a strange look.

“Wait a minute. If you have never flown, so how did you get from New York?”

“By bus.”

15.

The Sun was slowly coming closer to the horizon as the plane was zooming through the sky just above the thick clouds. Tokutei was staring at the window admiring the magnificent view. Surya was doing the same, but she was listening to some music at the same time, constantly humming the tune. Jason, Arthur and Dan were talking at the table filled with some refreshments, while Lian was sitting alone with fixed eyes on the floor, unknowingly fiddling with her black hair band.

She was back again in her memories. It was a dark moonless night. She was standing on the roof of some glassy tower block in some big city. The block was about forty-storey high. She was wearing black trousers and a bulletproof vest. She also had a headset in her ear and black sunglasses on above her forehead. The girl took out a mobile phone, and dialled some number.

“It’s me, I’m on the roof.”

“Good, C47, follow the plan,” a voice from the phone said.

“Acknowledged.”

She opened a half-empty backpack that was lying next to her and took out a rope from it. Then, she hammered the spike, which the rope was tied to, into the edge of the roof. Next, She stood on the edge, looked down and crouched. She didn’t seem to be scared of the height or a strong wind that

was blowing into her hair. Not waiting any longer, she started to slowly push herself down the wall. As she was fifteen stories lower, she stopped and looked through the window right next to her. The room was dark, and the girl couldn't see anything. She took out a pointy object from her side pocket of her trousers, and pressed some button on it. The object tripled like a tripod and three rubber suckers appeared at each end. The girl sucked it to the glass in three different points in the distance of fifteen inches from one another. Then she took out a small metal pen-like object from her vest pocket and pointed it towards the window. A blue laser shot off burning through the glass. Lian used it to draw a big circle in the window. She pulled the three legged item and the circle of glass slowly stacked out from the window leaving a circular hole inside. The girl carefully put away the cut glass and stepped inside releasing the rope. Next she lowered modern sunglasses that she had on her head and pressed some button on them. The sunglasses immediately started to glow green, making it able for her to see in the dark. She looked around and saw that she was inside some office. She walked towards the door and knelt at it. Then she took out a long wire from her trousers pocket and tucked it into the gap between the door and the floor. It was a small spy camera connected wirelessly with her sunglasses. The girl could see a corridor leading to some stairs. She checked the corners for the security cameras. There was one in the middle of the corridor moving from side to side. She smacked her lips and waited for the moment when the camera was moving towards the stairs, then she quickly opened the door, stepped in closing it behind her. As the camera was going back, Lian jumped onto the wall with one foot, then leapt up and grabbed the pipe from extinguishing system near the ceiling. She quickly raised her legs and hanged them on the pipe. She was above the camera out of its sight. She sat on the pipe, and waited till the camera moved towards the stairs again and when it was coming back, the girl arched her back, made a flip grabbing the pipe with her hands and pushed off it, flying towards the stairs. Next she ran a few steps down not to be caught by that camera and crouched again. She took out her mobile and dialled the same number.

“I thought, you dealt with the security systems,” she complained.

“I thought that, too. They must have a double system. Wait a minute.” Lian took out the spy camera again and pushed it down stairs to check the room below.

“OK, the system should be off now, check if the cameras are

moving.”

“They are not,” she replied.

“Alright, the object should be somewhere in the middle of the room.”

Lian went downstairs. The place looked like a museum. She saw numerous desks and shelves with thousands of historical objects. There were coins, blades, crowns, furniture. Every single one placed under a glass box.

“Guys, fasten your seatbelts, we’re about to land,” Arthur said.

Lian raised her head, looked at her teammates, then fastened her seatbelt tightly.

“Were you sleeping?” Tokutei asked seeing her awkwardly shaking her head.

“No, just thinking too much.”

The plane was slowing down. All of the four engines moved and pointed down, and the machine started to go slowly towards the ground. The massive engines changed the plane landing system into the one similar to a chopper. It was very useful for landing anywhere the pilot or the crew wanted, but the disadvantage of such landing was consuming too much fuel. Finally, the machine landed on the meadow in the middle of a huge forest.

Arthur unfastened his seatbelt, cleared his throat and said,

“I want the men to help me unload the weapons.”

“What about us?” Surya asked.

“You may put on the necessary equipment then,” the old man replied, as the door of the plane started to lower.

Arthur, Jason, Tokutei and Dan went out of the plane, and headed to the tail. The weather wasn’t so good. Although it wasn’t raining, the mist was everywhere. In some places it was even so thick, that it covered the sky. The ramp was already opened and inside the storage, there were lots of metal boxes, no bigger than a typical box for tools, and weapons attached to the walls. Arthur went first, stepped on the ramp, and turned to the group.

“Dan and I will take the boxes out, while the rest of you will bring the weapons.”

The boys nodded and climbed up to unload the boot.

Soon, Surya and Lian went out of the plane. They had their weapons already with them. Surya scanned the thick, dark forest surrounding the meadow. It looked empty and terrifying.

“Come on,” the Asian girl tapped her shoulder passing her at the door steps.

She nodded, and followed her down. Next they both went up closer to the boxes.

“Can we help somehow?” Lian asked throwing her Masada on her back.

“We have just finished unloading,” Arthur replied putting the last box on the grass.

Dan went up to the boxes and sat on one of them.

“What’s the next step?”

The old man opened one of the boxes revealing different kinds of clips.

“These are the same sorts of clips that Dan gave you. You may grab what you need and we may set off.”

The men went back to the plane for the equipment they left inside.

Meanwhile, Arthur placed a small earwig into his ear and said.

“Jack, eject the Eagle Eye.”

“Yes Sir,” the voice replied.

“And Jack, as soon as we’re gone, switch into the invisibility mode.”

“Understood, Sir.”

Having said that, he looked at the roof of the plane cabin. Some mechanical sound came from there, and it started to open. It immediately caught attention of the rest of the group. Seconds later something that looked like a rocket launched into the sky.

“What’s that?” Lian asked gazing at the diminishing point in the sky. Hardly had she said that when Dan and Jason ran out from the plane.

“What the hell...”

“Easy guys,” the old man assured. “It’s Eagle Eye. Something like a personal satellite. The rocket will raise the satellite on the height of 20,000 feet and the balloon filled with helium will hold it on that level.”

“And how will it be useful for us?” Tokutei asked.

Arthur started to walk towards the boxes with ammo.

“Well, the satellite would be our guide to lead us through the labyrinth.”

“But how would we see the video feed from it?” the Asian girl enquired.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” the old man wide opened his eyes reaching with his hand to the pocket of his vest.

“I forgot to give you these,” he took out a small metal case. He opened this, and inside there were little round objects.

“Contact lenses?” Surya asked confused.

“They only look like contact lenses but these tiny things will allow you to see the feed from Eagle Eye and...”

“Eagle what?” Dan interrupted who didn’t hear Arthur for the first time.

“The satellite!” Surya answered rudely.

“In simple words,” Arthur continued. “This thing replaces the whole computer screen. Oh I wish I’d given them to you during the briefing. I simply forgot, too many things are going on.”

“Better late than never,” Jason smiled. “He he, back in S.P.S.U we had video cameras on our shoulders, or in our helmets,” he added.

“Are you boasting?” the Asian girl asked.

“No, no, no. What I’m driving at is that... um, I just want to point out the difference in technological development between Australia and the USA.”

Arthur went closer to Surya, and reached out the open box.

“Everyone, take one of these and place it into your eye. “It is connected with your tablets, watches and headsets, so whenever you want to, you can turn the vision on or off.”

Everyone took the small glass items. Tokutei looked closely at the tiny, transparent object, moved it closer to his eye, then pulled his hand rapidly back.

“How to put it on?” he asked baffled.

Surya had placed hers without any problems, and walked towards Tokutei.

“Let me help you. Give me the lens.”

She gently touched the lens lying on Tokutei’s tip of the index finger. It was the first time they touched. He was very surprised, as he thought that her body temperature would be lower than a human. It wasn’t. The lens immediately glued to her finger and she turned over her palm.

“Open your eye wide,” her soft voice spoke as she grabbed his eyelid and made sure he wouldn’t close it. Then she gently placed the lens onto his pupil, and moved back.

“Done. Was it so hard?”

“Actually, not,” came the answer from Tokutei, as he blinked several times to get used to the lens.

“Anyone else needs some help?” she looked at every one, but they all shook their heads. Arthur checked the feed from the Eagle Eye.

“You should already know how to use your tablets and watches, so feel free to check it out.”

Tokutei pressed a button on his watch and immediately a picture from the satellite displayed in his left eye.

“Wow, this thing is amazing. But, why is everything so tiny?”

“You can zoom whatever part you like. Just as I taught you yesterday.”

Tokutei touched the screen of his tablet and moved it around rolling the scroll from time to time.

“I can see our plane.”

“Have you checked the gardens?” Jason asked, playing with the tablet.

“No, where are they?”

“Zoom out and you’ll see.”

“Oh my God, I thought it was a forest, but this labyrinth is gigantic.”

“I can see it too,” Lian added.

“And we’re supposed to find the way out of it. Just great,” Dan added.

“Don’t be such a nagger,” Surya smiled. “It can be fun.”

Arthur grabbed an assault rifle lying on the box.

“HK MP4,” Dan said proudly, “But why did you loaded the regular clips?”

“Dan, we do not have any regular clips here. Everything has been replaced with your triple ammo clips.”

“Actually its quadruple. Anyway guys, do you all know how to switch the ammo?”

“By this magical button?” Lian asked sarcastically pointing at a small button located on the left side of the gun, right next to a small LCD screen.”

“Exactly. The screen shows the type of ammo you’re using. REG means regular, SLV is for silver, and EXP stands for...”

“Explosives,” Lian finished. “We do understand the abbreviations, Dan.”

Jason pressed the button several times, until the LCD screen showed *REG*.

“I suggest, we should all start with the regular ammo.”

“Why?” Surya asked confused.

“Because I believe we’re gonna meet the zombies first.”

“Zombies hmm, I always wanted to see one. I wonder what they really

look like,” the girl raised her eyes and tried to imagine them.

“Like you, but bald and less scary,” Dan whispered.

As soon as he said that, everyone looked at him awkwardly. His joke wasn’t funny at all.

“Dan, cut this crap already!” Lian shouted at him.

The boy rolled his eyes and replied unwillingly,

“Sorry.”

Surya slowly shake her head still keeping the eye contact with Dan. Jason grabbed M4 and said,

“So are you ready to set off, guys?”

“If you have everything you need, we’d better take off now,” Arthur announced putting a backpack on.

The group started walking along a curved path towards the direction of the forest. Arthur turned around and took a glimpse back at the plane.

“Jack, switch into invisibility mode,” he ordered.

“Invisibility mode?” Lian asked.

Suddenly, the plane disappeared.

“Wow! How did you do that,” Tokutei exclaimed staring in disbelief at the empty meadow.

“There are LCD panels beneath the thick transparent shield.” Arthur explained as if he was bragging.

“It displays the screen from the cameras placed on the other side, creating the illusion of invisibility,” Dan added.

16.

The group entered the forest. The path curved along the old, tall trees. Most of them were thick and seemed to be there for hundreds of years. Some of them were cracked while the others were leaning to one another. All the branches had no leaves, and the dry bark combined with the shape of the branches gave an illusion of someone sitting there.

“I suggest going in a circle formation,” Jason said. “We never know what’s in there.”

“Good idea,” Arthur replied. “Tokutei and Lian go to the front, Surya and Dan, take the sides while Jason and I stay at the back.”

“I hope someone is watching the view feed from the satellite,” Lian said with some uncertainty in her voice.

“Don’t worry Lian, I have it in my left eye,” Arthur answered.

“Me, too,” Dan added. “Playing with the zoom is fun.”

“Just focus on the mission, Dan,” the old man implied.

“It’s almost dark,” Surya said glancing at the sky, as the clouds started to float away revealing the stars and the moon.

“We may switch on the night vision,” Jason suggested.

“I don’t need it,” Surya announced.

“Of course,” Dan commented sarcastically. “Miss dhampir doesn’t need computer technology because she obviously can see in dark.”

“Stop it Dan! I don’t need it either,” Tokutei added.

Lian looked at him in wonder.

“I understand why Surya, but you?”

“I don’t trust computer eyes,” the Asian man replied seriously. “I only trust my own eyes.”

“No way, dude.” Dan laughed. “Don’t even tell me you have eaten carrots all your life.”

Tokutei turned around and looked at Dan.

“Listen, Dan. After spending much time in closed dark room, your eyes begin to see details. They get accustomed to darkness and after sometime even red colour is visible.”

The others looked at him in amazement. They realised what a hard training he must have had to become such an eminent warrior.

“For instance, you see everything in black and green through your technology. I um...” he paused looking around quickly, “Can see some blood on that bush,” he finished pointing at the thick bush among scary trees.

“He’s right, there’s some blood on the leaves,” Surya confirmed.

“It must’ve been some animal,” Jason added. “I hope.”

17.

They were walking along the wide path bending left. Some of them were controlling the area through the Eagle Eye, others were just looking straight ahead.

“By the way guys,” Dan broke the silence, “Always make sure what kind of ammo you are using. You don’t want to shoot something close with explosive bullets.”

“You should think of a way to connect that small LCD with the lenses in our eyes,” Jason suggested.

Dan stopped and looked at him in surprise. Everyone was glancing from one person to another not knowing what was going on. Dan was just standing there thinking about something. Suddenly, he boomed.

“You’re a genius, Jason!” “As soon as we return, I will construct the link. Oh yes, It will be perfect, The lens, oh and the tablet will simultaneously show the kind of ammo your weapon is using. And if you’re using two weapons, there will be two bars, just like in FPS games. Genius.”

“Are you done?” Surya asked sarcastically.

Dan gave her a cold look, then turned around and continued walking with a smile.

“Oh, It just got to me,” Tokutei boomed. “Why haven’t we landed near the mansion itself, Arthur?”

“Look through the Eagle Eye,” the old man replied.

Tokutei pressed some button on his watch and activated the view.

“Come on,” Arthur continued. “Everyone, look at the labyrinth.”

A few members of the team focused on feed from the satellite.

“I can see nothing but the labyrinth,” Tokutei murmured confused.

“I can’t find the house either,” Lian added scratching her hair.

“Where is that ruin?” Dan shouted.

Arthur smiled.

“Can’t find it, can you? There is a strong spell casted over this land which allows the mansion to be seen only after dealing with the labyrinth itself.”

Dan thought for a while.

“Are you saying that if we got stuck there, we would never find the mansion?”

“Err..basically yes.”

“Shit, that’s fucked up, man” Dan stumped his feet.

“So why do we need Eagle Eye if it doesn’t show us the way?” Lian enquired.

“Eagle Eye will show us what’s ahead of us.” “I told you guys, finding those pieces of Seal will be very difficult,” Arthur reminded.

“The forest is ending,” Surya announced pointing straight ahead.

A few metres ahead, the path was gradually turning into a green lawn which ended up with a tall, thick hedge. On seeing this, the old man cleared his throat, and spoke.

“May I remind you guys that we are fighting for our planet’s safety.

However, as long as we are not noticed there, we don't need to use force. But still...if we do, be on your toes."

Everyone nodded and seconds later they all stopped at the entrance to the labyrinth. It was a few yard-tall, green, thick hedge with a four-yard wide corridor branching into countless paths.

"Which path should we take?" Lian asked.

Jason was scanning the green net through Eagle Eye.

"It's no use using the satellite, if we don't know where the house is."

"I agree with Jason, Eagle Eye is useless here," Lian added.

"You're partly right," the old man replied clicking something on his digital watch. "It won't help us find the mansion, but it will undeniably help us see what's ahead of us."

"It's completely dark now, we should move in," O.D. announced peeking at the cloudless night sky.

"The formation remains the same," Arthur said while everyone crossed the plant gate.

As soon as they were inside, a tremendous rustle came from behind. They turned around and saw the gate overgrowing with the hedge blocking the way out.

"What's going on?" Surya asked feeling a chill running down her spine.

"She knows we are here," came the answer filled with worries.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" Dan shouted looking through the Eagle Eye. "Do you see these dark points ahead of us?"

Arthur pressed some button on his wrist watch to check the area.

"Wolves! Turn right!" he ordered trying to catch sight of them ahead.

Everyone immediately turned into the path on their right, and started running.

"Jason!" the old man shouted, "Keep an eye on the map and lead us."

"I'll try!"

They could hear a howl in the distance, then another closer and another even closer.

"There're more ahead of us!" Dan shouted.

Jason quickly scanned the area.

"Turn left, then right!" he ordered.

They were quickly running along green walls, when another howl came from the gate.

"Damn it! They are closing in on us!" Jason shouted.

“We’ll have no choice but to fight!” Lian yelled turning back. She saw Jason, Arthur and Surya running a few feet away from her and, to her horror, she noticed something moving behind them. Suddenly, in front, three dark figures emerged from behind the corner. Everyone stopped trying to catch their breath.

“Wait a minute,” Dan said after looking closely at the creatures.”They ain’t no wolves, they’re fucking werewolves!”

He could easily see that their bodies were much bigger than humans. They also had extremely unnatural muscles covering their limbs and chest, their eyes were filled with loath, and their dense saliva was dripping from their mouths. The creatures stopped and stood on their two hind legs.

“How to kill them Arthur!?” Lian shouted. “You haven’t taught us that yet.”

Arthur was gazing at the hairy creatures tapping the switch on his HK with one hand.

“Silver bullets! Use silver bullets!”

The creatures revealed the spiky, sharp teeth with lots of saliva trickling down from their huge mouths. The middle creature roared and instantly started to run at the team.

“I have to switch the bullets!” Surya shouted as her hands trembled.

“I’m not waiting any longer!” Jason exclaimed glancing at the LCD panel on his weapon.

It was showing capital letters S, L, R.

When the beasts were a few metres ahead, they quickly leapt from the ground as if to attack from the air. Tokutei rapidly drew his sword and jumped forward, performing three cuts. He leapt from the ground, then looked around at the teammates as six pieces of hairy creatures fell onto the soil.

“Behind you!” he shouted to the rest spotting a few attacking beasts. Arthur and Surya managed to change the bullets into the silver ones. They quickly turned around and noticed five angry-looking werewolves willing to rip them apart. Not spending much time to think, both of them quickly aimed and shot. Dan prepared his assault rifle and joined the others. The lethal bullets sieved through the beasts’ bodies ending their lives immediately.

“That was a close one,” Lian said wiping sweat off her forehead.

“It worked, it really worked,” Dan started to dance happily.

Arthur checked the amount of ammo left in his gun.

“The silver bullets work on them in the same way as regular ones work on humans.”

“We’d better keep going before the rest of those creature turn up here,” Jason suggested catching up with Arthur and restoring formation.

“I think,” Arthur spoke, “I should be watching the area. You, Jason, engage into the operation.”

“Alright.”

They walked forward and turned into next corner.

“More beasts approaching!” Arthur announced keeping his eye on the area.

The team stopped, while a few werewolves appeared before them. Lian, Surya and Dan shot at them taking each of the humanlike wolves out.

“Tango down,” Jason down.

“Cut this soldier crap out,” Dan commented with a silent laugh.

“Next turning right!” the old man shouted.

Tokutei was running in the front holding his bluish sword in his hand. Suddenly two axes appeared on both sides of the hedge zooming horizontally into him. He quickly jumped high realising that he had stepped into something that activated the trap. While being in the air he turned around to check whether the blades will reach his teammates. Fortunately, they were a few steps behind.

“Traps? Here?” Lian asked unbelievably.

“I didn’t know the Labyrinth was so protected,” Arthur said. “Tokutei! Your reflexes are way off this world. Could you take the lead and keep an eye on such things?”

“No problem, Arthur.”

Lian peeped at both of them and murmured ironically.

“Your reflexes are way off these world, take the lead, you’re so great, blah, blah, blah.”

They were on the run again. After turning left into the next path, Arthur shouted again.

“There’re gonna be a few in the front. But there’re many chasing us!” Having said this, seven werewolves ran from behind the corner, advancing on the team. Arthur, Dan and Jason turned round and saw a dozen of these beasts running from behind. Surya and Lian took a series of shoots into the upcoming monsters, while all the others tried to eliminate the ones in the

back. Tokutei was standing keeping an offensive passion, ready to attack. He heard three swishes on his left and on his right. Split a second later, the werewolves in the front fell onto the soil. The girls were faster; they didn't let him play with the enemies. He looked back and saw that the others also succeeded in taking out the targets.

"It isn't as hard as I thought," Surya commented.

"You haven't seen the worst part yet," Arthur smiled. "OK, we may go," he added.

"Wait!" Dan yelled checking the screen in his microcomputer.

"There's something different ahead of us. And it's coming really fast."

"Let me take a look," the old man said analysing the area in the front. "Impossible!"

"What is it Arthur?" Surya asked.

"It's a troll, switch into exploding bullets!"

While Dan and Lian were switching the ammo, they heard footsteps, or rather thuds coming from the front. Everyone looked ahead. They saw a large, brown creature with big yellowish eyes, and a wide mouth. It was running on its legs, holding a huge hammer in its hand. On seeing this, Tokutei started to walk backwards, not knowing whether to attack or wait.

"I thought trolls were only in fantasy books," Jason commented.

"I thought that, too," came the answer from Arthur.

Not waiting anymore, as soon as the right bullets were ready to shoot, Dan and Lian took a series of shots. The bullets hid inside the creature's body, but the monster didn't stop, nor did he shout or showed any sign of grimace.

"I thought those were exploding bullets!" Lian shouted slowly withdrawing.

"They are!"

When the beast was about ten yards ahead, sudden explosions came from the inside of its body tearing it apart. The pieces of meat and blood spread around, but the explosions weren't strong enough for the pieces to reach the team.

"You should definitely change the delay time, Dan." Lian suggested changing the ammo.

"Yeah, you should be glad they even went off. I haven't tested them."

"What?" Surya yelled. "You gave us an untested material?"

"We had only few hours!" the boy explained. "If it wasn't for these

bullets, the creature would have run over us!”

“He’s right.” Arthur interrupted. “Don’t blame him. You should be glad that you have something that can kill those creatures.”

Dan gave the old man a warm look.

“Thank you Arthur. You do realise, guys, that regular bullets would have killed neither the werewolves, nor this beast, nor even the vampires from the other day.”

Surya and Lian dropped their heads as if they were admitting they were wrong.

“Sorry, I didn’t think about it this way.” Lian apologised.

“Guys, no time to talk. Keep going,” Jason said beckoning at the way ahead. “Who knows what we will meet on our way.”

18.

After a while, the team was a few miles deep in the Labyrinth. They were all crouching by the wall, having a rest.

“I think we’re lost!” Surya spoke looking impatiently around.

“According to Eagle Eye, we’re about 1/3 deep.” Dan added being focused on what he could see through the feed from the Eye.

Arthur hanged his guns over his shoulder and stood up.

“I told you, don’t use the satellite to find the way in, but to check if something is about to attack us.”

Lian dropped her gun on the ground and sat down leaning against the leafy wall.

“If we had turned into that way then, we might have found the way out.”

“What way?” Tokutei asked.

“The one where werewolves almost killed us.”

“It was like an hour ago! We can’t go back.”

“I still believe we should be going,” Jason said.

“Yeah, if we keep going, we’ll at least have chance to find a way out.” They stood up and went ahead. Tokutei was leading looking out for the traps. Lian was a few metres behind next to Dan and Surya. Arthur and Jason were checking the area.

“Another werewolves from the right turn in the front!” Arthur announced.

Tokutei accelerated and drew his katana, while the beasts were rushing at

him. He raised his sword and cut through them with ease. Suddenly, the earth shook and Surya felt something pulling her up. It was a thick brick wall that emerged from the ground. Not thinking much, the girl jumped forward, as the wall raised up blocking the way. The girls were on the same side as Tokutei, while the others were blocked on the other side.

“What has just happened?” Tokutei shouted.

“Another trap,” Arthur replied. “But, Tokutei, please, do not shout, you’re in the open mike, remember.”

“Can you blow it up?”

“Move back,” Dan said, “I’ll place a grenade there. It should do the work.”

“OK.”

Everyone moved a few steps from the wall, as Dan planted a grenade at it, then joined Arthur and Jason. The grenade exploded filling the air with a thick cloud of ash and leaves. Arthur covered his eyes as some pieces of the ground and leaves covered his uniform. Seconds later, the cloud was slightly thinner, and everyone was gazing at it with impatience, brushing the dust off their clothes and guns.

“Come on, come on,” Jason murmured trying to spot anything.

“No!” Dan shouted irritated seeing the wall not even damaged.

“It won’t budge,” Jason commented.

“I’ll check the way. Maybe the paths join somewhere,” Dan put forward taking a sip of water.

The old man walked to the wall and tapped it several times trying to estimate something.

“I have no idea what it is made of. It must be some kind of her spell.” He turned round and went back to Jason and Dan.

“Tokutei, stay with the girls and move forward. We will still have the audio contact.”

“Roger that,” he replied turning towards the girl with a grin.

“Why are you smiling?” Lian asked through her teeth.

“Never mind.”

“Do you find this funny that were divided?” the dhampiric girl asked.

“No, of course not. It’s just fun that I’m stuck with girls not guys.”

“Great. Now let’s go,” Surya replied.

They ran forward. Arthur got back to the men.

“We have to work in two teams now.”

“Too bad, they all know the kung fu stuff,” Jason complained while they took the turning on their left.

Dan looked at him surprisingly.

“You worry about that? He has got the girls, and we don’t. Oh lucky he.”

“I thought, you didn’t like Surya,” Jason asked.

“I don’t,” came the cold answer after he had turned the mike off.

“Now is a good time to talk about it,” Arthur interrupted making sure the channel was switched off.

“Don’t we have a mission to accomplish?”

Arthur gently poked Dan with the barrel of his gun.

“We do, but right now, we are in the middle of a labyrinth and we, because of the fact that we are separated, may talk about that matter.”

“Yeah, Dan, Why d’ya’ hate her so much?” Jason asked looking forward to the answer.

Dan looked around to check whether they were really alone.

“OK, I’ll tell ya’, but please, mum’s the word.”

Both Arthur and Jason slowed down and listened carefully to what Dan was about to say.

“It is not that I don’t like Surya, it is that I hate all vampires.”

“B-But she is not a vampire!” Jason exclaimed.

The boy listened to the echo for a few seconds worried if the girls may hear this shout.

“Vampires and dhampires. You see, both of my parents were killed by those undead creatures. And I swore I would devote myself to make this species extinct!”

“But Dan, you must understand that Surya is different. She hates them, too.” Arthur said calmly trying to convince him once and for all.

“I’m aware of it, but still, if you don’t like chocolate ice-cream, you don’t like them all.”

Jason looked at Dan in confusion,

“Why would anyone hate ice-cream?”

“Maybe that was a bad example, but you get the gist. What I mean is that this loath is in me and it activates automatically, subconsciously when I encounter any of the vampires. No matter whether I have to work with them or live with them or even share the same car with them. I still gonna hate. You see now?”

“Haters gonna hate,” Arthur murmured remembering the catchy phrase.

“Dan, dude, you know you have problem, don’t ya?” Jason stated looking at him in confusion.

“But...” his next sentence was interrupted by Arthur.

“Werewolves approaching from the front.”

19.

Meanwhile, Tokutei, Lian and Surya were walking along tall, green hedges. There was nothing ahead of them, nothing behind them. No traps, no enemies, just the three of them. Then the Asian man stopped at the hedge.

“What is it, Tok?” Lian asked seeing him drawing his sword.

He stepped towards the hedge, made a swing, then another, and another.

“What is he doing?” Surya was watching it not knowing what his intentions were.

“Why didn’t I think about this earlier.”

“About what?”

“Breaking through the wall?” the dhampiric girl asked.

“Cutting through it.”

Then, the hole in the wall started to fill with thick branches and new leaves grew as fast as if they appeared out of nowhere.

“Tok, stop it, it’s useless,” Lian tried to persuade him.

“We’re doomed,” came the concerned answer from Surya.

“Do you think, we will find the way out, Tokutei?” Lian asked.

“I know it. Maybe not by a shortcut, but look, we haven’t seen a werewolf or anything for a while. It means that we might have killed them all...”

“Or we are so far from our destination that even doggies can’t find us,” Surya interrupted.

“Don’t be so pessimistic, Surya. Speaking ‘bout being lost, which way to take now?” Lian asked.

“According to Eagle Eye, we are in the east side, so let’s try going towards the centre.”

“If the house is hidden, we should go towards the north where the labyrinth is over,” Lian suggested.

“No, the centre should be our destination. We shouldn’t go to the

north”

“Tokutei is right, if we go to any side of the labyrinth we may leave it instead finding the house.”

“So what should we do?” the Chinese girl asked making herself vulnerable to any suggestions.

“Let’s turn here left and try to reach the centre.” Tokutei replied. He walked towards the junction and turned left. Surya was right behind him while Lian noticed something on the right.

“Wait guys, there is something glittering on the ground.” She walked towards it, crouched and picked it up. The others watched her examining the shiny object.

“What is it?” Surya asked slowly walking towards her.

“It’s just one of our silver bullets.”

“Strange,” Tokutei said.

Having said this, he spotted two thick walls emerge from the ground closing the junction. The walls were about ten metres high, and seemed to be much thicker than the one that had divided the team earlier. Tokutei stayed on the left, Surya in the middle, and Lian on the right side. The walls had risen in such a way that left Surya with only one way out.

“Surya! Lian! Are you OK?” He shouted desperately.

“You do understand that we can easily hear you through the headset?” the Asian girl replied sarcastically. He suddenly lowered his voice.

“Oh, of course, miss know-it-all.”

Lian looked at the wall, then turned around and started walking towards this obstacle.

“I’ll contact Arthur.”

She pressed some button on her wrist watch, and seconds later she heard Arthur’s voice.

“Lian, nice to hear your voice again. What’s wrong?”

“We’ve got separated.”

“So have we,” Dan added.

“How did it happen?” Tokutei asked.

“Tok, you guys are alright?” Jason’s voice sounded joyfully.

“Physically yes, what happened out there?”

“Dan went to take a piss and then some wall came out of nowhere,” Jason answered leaning against the wall.

Arthur was walking along a corridor with his gun ready.

“Even though we’re separated now, we may find the house six times as fast as if we were working as one.”

Tokutei turned around, and started walking forward.

“But we’re six times weaker at the same time.”

“You must all be using Eagle Eye now,” the old man suggested.

“You’ll never know what’s ahead of you.”

“I’m out, a couple of werewolves are approaching” Tokutei said, then ran quickly forward taking out something from his pockets.

“Good luck, Tok,” Surya’s voice spread in his earwig.

Suddenly, three beasts appeared in front of him. He threw something shiny at them. These were shurikines-ninja stars. The sharp silver stars plunged into the animals, killing one and hurting two. The man didn’t stop running. He drew his sword, raised it above his head and accelerated gaining speed similar to a sprinter. When there were only a few yards between him and the monsters, he cut vertically down, splitting one of the beasts, then cut diagonally up to the right, cleaving the second one.

20.

In the meantime, Lian was scanning the area trying to decide which way to take. She was walking very slowly being focused on what Eagle Eye was showing.

“OK, if I’m here,” she murmured to herself. “And Jason is there, and Surya, hmm, I can’t see her and the others. Maybe Tokutei was right, maybe I should really head for the centre.”

She looked up in the sky at the starry night and started daydreaming again.

She was back in the museum. The spacious room was filled with shelves and glass showcases with numerous exhibits. Lian was carefully walking towards a black, wooden box with a golden medallion behind glass. She slowly approached it, looked around, then rapidly punched the glass with the butt of her pistol. A gentle smile appeared on her face realising that the alarm was cut off. She was just about to grab the medallion when the voice spoke in her headphone.

“C47, someone’s there.”

“What?”

She quickly grabbed the medallion and moved back looking forward to the answer from her handler.

“I don’t know. There are a few figures on my screen. Move back immediately!”

While she was running towards the stairs she looked back and noticed about ten black shadows behind her. Her curiosity made her stop. They were all wearing black clothes and masks covering their faces, but revealing only eyes. One of them glanced at the broken showcase.

“The medallion!”

“There!” another one said pointing at the woman.

Not thinking much, Lian turned around and rushed upstairs. The men made a dart after her.

“It looks that not only we wanted this medallion,” she said through the headphone.

“They must have cut off the alarm,” the voice replied. “Don’t engage unless you are under attack.”

Lian was running along the stairs, heading up. The men were chasing her. They seemed to be moving in a more acrobatic manner. One line of stairs took them either one or two jumps. The woman constantly turned back to take a glimpse at the distance between her and them. Then she heard one of the men shouting.

“Tokutei, knock her down!”

Lian came round and saw something moving in the leafy corridor ahead. She quickly looked through Eagle Eye to check what it was, and noticed a large bird flying towards her.

“Something’s wrong with it,” she murmured to herself.

The bird looked like an eagle crossed with a crow. Its head was really thin and it had no feathers and eyes. The other weird thing she noticed about this creature was that the claws looked as if they were made of bones only tipped with sharp blade. At first, she thought that a plane had hit it or another bird had attacked it, and it was just falling from the sky. But then she spotted that it was moving its wings and making straight at her. Not waiting anymore, she pulled her weapon up and shot. The bird fell numbly on the ground.

“Guys!” she spoke through the earwig.

Arthur was standing over a dead werewolf’s body, reloading his HK.

“What is it Lian?”

“I’ve got bad news. Something new is attacking us.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“So what does it look like?” Jason asked.

“It is something like a big eagle bird but...”

Tokutei interrupted,

“It has no eyes.”

“Right, how did you know that, Tok?”

“I’ve just killed a few, and there is a flock of them coming.”

A terrifying caw or rather hundreds of caws spread in the air. Arthur looked at the sky and saw lots of dark dots approaching from somewhere in the labyrinth.

“A flock? It’s more like a swarm to me.”

“How to kill it?” Surya asked gaping at hundreds of those creatures slowly covering the air.

“I used silver bullets, they did the job,” Lian answered.

“I’ve read about those birds,” Arthur added switching his ammo into explosives. “They’re vulnerable to everything. But they never appear in such large groups.”

“So how would you explain that?” Lian asked while she couldn’t take her eyes off the flock.

“I wouldn’t. I can’t”

He raised his gun without aiming and shot three bullets in three different points of the dark cloud. Seconds later, the explosions came followed by a terrible squeal. It automatically focused the attention of everyone. Dan switched his ammo into the explosives and did the same.

“Look, it’s raining birds,” he sang to a melody of a popular pop song seeing dozens of dead bodies falling down from the sky.

“No time to sing,” Jason replied. “There’re too many of them.”

Everyone started shooting, slowly making the cloud of birds smaller. Surya was moving back shooting with the exploding bullets at the flock. The bullets exploded like a grenade after hitting something. When a creature got hit, the explosion turned forty others into leaking piece of meat. But then, to everyone’s surprise the cloud spread, as all the remaining birds scattered and swooped down towards the labyrinth.

“Regular ammo, switch into regular ammo,” Arthur said nervously realising the danger they were in.

The birds covered most of the labyrinth and began to attack the ASAT team inside. The first group headed for Dan.

“Not good, not good,” he murmured taking out two Desert Eagles. He peeped at the LCD panel showing *REG*, then raised his pistols, aimed and let the bullets whirl into the angry creatures. One of them managed to grab one of his pistols and drop it onto the ground. Dan knew he couldn’t continue using only one barrel, so he immediately threw himself at the lying gun nearby. Then another bird bit his arm.

“Fuck off,” he said through his teeth hitting the creature with the second pistol.

The stunned bird dropped next to him. The boy could feel the wound left by the sharp claws. Next he crouched right before the next creature was able to grab his head. He quickly turned round and took a few shots taking down the creature. Next he spotted several others approaching from two angles. He kept on shooting, simultaneously feeling for the gun with the second one. As soon as he felt the metal barrel, he grabbed the gun, turned it over and got rid of the upcoming birds.

21.

Lian however, was in much more difficult situation. She was facing three times as many birds as Dan, and to make matters worse, she was attacked from all directions. Her clip was about to end, and yet, there were dozens of creatures to take out. Eventually, she was out of ammo. One of the birds hit her leg, but the girl quickly kicked it away. She found the next clip at her belt, reloaded and started shooting again. The birds were swooping down from all angles, and she couldn’t keep up with turning from left to right, then round, then left again. As she was about to turn around and check her six, but she failed to do it fast enough. Lian felt four sharp claws penetrating her uniform and stabbing her back. After that she couldn’t feel the ground under her feet. As she looked down, she saw being lifted up by the very bird behind. Her leg acted as an impulse and rapidly rose up till her shoulder, so that she could kick the creature with her toes. The bird let go of her, and she fell onto the ground loosening the grip and letting go of her gun. She quickly shook her head, coming round, and found herself kneeling on her knees and hands. The girl knew what she had to do. Fighting those monsters with no gun was impossible.

“Lian!” she heard from her left.

She wanted to turn her head to check whose voice it was, but another bird rapidly landed on her back, knocking her to the ground. She quickly turned

around to free herself from the deadly claws, and then she saw one of her teammates about fifty metres from her running towards her. Even though he was far away, she recognised him by the bluish glow of his sword.

“Lian!” Tokutei shouted again.

Then three of the birds landed on her, and another, and another and one more. She tried to stand up, but the birds were too heavy.

“Aaah...” her voice filled with pain echoed in the labyrinth.

It was so loud, that every other member of ASAT could hear it. As Tokutei was zooming to help her cutting through the upcoming birds, he noticed a wall emerging from the ground.

“No,” he whispered tightening the grip on his sword and gaining greater speed.

The wall was getting higher and higher. Too high for him, to run over it, so he jumped as high as he could, and grabbed the edge of the wall with his one hand. The grip was too weak, which made his fingers to slip and eventually fell onto the ground. Not being discouraged, he quickly stood up trying to find a way in. Lian’s scream was heard both through the channel and the wall blocking the way.

“Lian? Are you OK?” Dan asked concerned, but apart from the flutter and scream, there was no response.

Tokutei was examining the wall. He remembered that explosives wouldn’t do any good. Neither would cutting the hedge. The flutter of the wings was getting more intensive.

“Lian! Lian!” Arthur tried to make contact with her.

“She has been knocked by the birds,” Tokutei’s voice replied. “I’m a few yards from her, but the wall is blocking the way.”

Then it hit him. He remembered the conversation with Dan from that morning. He realised what he had to do.

“Tok, you’re the closest one, do something about it!” Jason’s voice spread.

“I have an idea,” he said hopefully standing in front of the wall. He raised his katana, and diagonally cut down to the left through the wall. Next he cut left, then up, and right again.

“It worked.”

His sharp sword was able to cut through the wall without any difficulty.

“What worked?” Arthur asked.

“I cut a hole in the wall,” he replied jumping through the it.

He saw about fifteen birds covering Lian. His reaction was obvious.

“Hang on, Lian.”

With his left hand he felt for the shourikens at his belt and split a second later three of these stars flew right into the birds. Next he jumped into the air, cut through the creatures that were flying over her body, landed and penetrated the rest with his sharp blade. He could see Lian almost unconscious. Her face had three cuts. One on her forehead and two on her cheeks. Her uniform was torn in the chest area, and on her leg. There were blood stains all over the cuts. The Asian man put his sword on the ground after he had made sure the air in that area was clear.

“Let me see those wounds,” he whispered.

“How is she?” came a concerned question from Arthur.

“I’m fine, just a few bruises and cuts. Help me Tok get on my feet,” she asked reaching her hand out.

Tokutei grabbed her hand and pulled it towards him.

“We need to do something about those wounds,” he said.

“It’s nothing. These are only minor cuts,” she replied taking something out from her backpack.

“I’m glad you two are back together,” Arthur said. “But we need to finish the birds before we can move any further.”

Tokutei and Lian heard a few cows coming from the direction of the wall. He swiftly headed towards the dead birds to retrieve his shourikens.

“I’ll deal with it,” he suggested seeing that Lian had taken out a first-aid kit. “You fix yourself up.”

The Asian woman nodded, while Tokutei prepared himself for the attack. The birds came, and the warrior used his sword perfectly to successfully eliminate the threat.

“Don’t waste the ammo on them,” Dan exclaimed. “Use the grenades, or exploding bullets instead. You’ll be likely to take out more using less ammo.”

“There’re only a few left here.” Jason commented as he was changing the ammo into the explosive ones.

“I’m done here,” came the message from Dan.

22.

After a while, there was nothing left of the birds except hundreds of bodies spread across the labyrinth.

“What’s your status?” Arthur asked changing the ammo into silver again.

“I’m fine,” Lian replied.

“Fine too,” Tokutei added.

“A few scratches, but that’s nothing,” Dan announced

“What about you, Jason, Surya?” Arthur asked.

“I’m fine,” the girl answered.

“Jason?”

There was no answer.

“Jason, do you copy?” Arthur asked again.

“I’m OK, sir, sorry about the silence, but I think I found the house.”

“What do you see? Describe it to us” Arthur asked surprisingly and impatiently.

“Err. There is a vast graveyard with a really old house on a small hill.”

“Looks like it. Everyone, Look at Jason’s position and try to get there ASAP.”

Dan focused on the view from the Eagle Eye.

“According to the map, he is somewhere near the middle.”

He took a glance at the screen of the area to memorise where Jason is.

Next, he took a turn left and started to jog straight. When he was near the next junction, he heard some noise coming from behind the corner. The boy stopped at the edge with his back against the hedge. He took out a silver dagger and waited for that something to appear. The noise was getting louder and louder. When Dan felt it was the right time to attack, he made a swing with his right hand, trying to stab the creature. He followed the dagger with his eyes and saw that it was stopped by two other hands. He couldn’t see the creature clearly because of the darkness. Seconds later, he found himself lying on the ground with the opponent on him. The boy was shocked. What had just happened? He looked up and saw a girl. It was Surya.

“Shit,” he whispered realising that he had made another mistake with that girl.

“What the heck are you doin’! Are you tryin’ to kill me!”

“No, I thought you were a werewolf, or something” the boy replied in a shock.

“Yeah, right. Didn’t you see me through the Eye?” the girl asked angrily still sitting on him and blocking his hands.

“I memorised Jason’s position and jogged towards him. I didn’t use the Eagle Eye afterwards.”

Surya looked at him suspiciously.

“You’re talking nuts.”

“I’m sorry, OK? I really thought you were a werewolf. By the way, why are you still lying on me?”

The girl realised she hadn’t let go of his hands.

“Sorry,” she wanted to say, but instead she said, “Because I still think you may try to kill me after I let you go.”

“It was a mistake.”

“I want you to apologise to me,” came the next sentence with a smile.

“I won’t apologise to a dhampir,” he replied firmly.

“Unless you apologise or I won’t stand up.”

“You do realise we have a mission to do. Anyway, you underestimated me.”

Having said that, he immediately twisted his body, raised his legs, and soon he was on the top. Surya gave him a surprised look, but before she said anything, he stood up, grabbed the silver dagger from the ground and put it inside of his left boot.

“Are you coming?” he asked brushing the dust off his uniform.

The girl was looking at him for a moment, then placed her hands next to her head, raised her legs and got up onto her feet.”

“You still owe me an apology.”

“Will you two please stop arguing already?” Lian’s voice sounded through the earwig.

“Lian, calm down,” Dan said turning into the left road.

“Where are you going?” The girl asked confused.

“To O.D.,” he replied indifferently.

“But this way seems to be leading to him,” she answered pointing the opposite way.

“I don’t think so,” he turned around and disappeared behind the corner.

She sighed, rolled her eyes and followed him.

“Eh, wait!” Surya shouted running after him.

Dan peeked at her,

“I thought you were going the other way.”

“I don’t want to go alone.”

“Mhm.”

They both started to run slowly in the labyrinth towards the flickering dot symbolising Jason.

23.

In the meantime, Tokutei was zooming along the path with his one eye focused on the screen and the second one on what was ahead of him. Lian was running right behind him. Suddenly, in the distance, he saw something different than green walls. He sped up and ran towards it. The walls ended on both sides and he saw a ramshackle surrounded by a graveyard. It was a three-storey building totally made of wood. It had a few towers with large windows. There was no light inside. The mansion was standing on a small hill covered with wither leaves. The graveyard began by the hill and surrounded the mansion. They could see a few hundred graves there. The team was too far to see the names or the dates on graves, but they didn't look anything modern. In the distance, they could see the vast walls of the labyrinth.

“I'm in,” he announced through the earwig.

“There's Jason,” Lian spoke bending over and catching her breath.

“OK, I can see you,” Jason replied. “Don't move anywhere, I'm coming.”

“I'll join you three shortly,” Arthur's voices sounded.

Jason finally joined them. He scanned Lian, shook his head, and gave a comment.

“You look like crap, girl.”

“I felt worse.”

“One thing is sure, you have to find a new uniform when we come back.”

“No,” came a long, low, sarcastic below.

24.

Meanwhile, Dan and Surya were standing in the corridor with no idea where to go. There were no ways to go further.

“That's perfect! Another dead end, Dan” she complained, and turned back. “And you said you memorised the route.”

“I did, I mean, the general idea of the route.”

“We have to return to the previous junction.”

She started to run towards the junction. Dan rolled his eyes and followed her. He saw her taking the first turning right. Not waiting any longer, he accelerated to catch up with her and tried to focus his one eye on the feed from Eagle Eye. They were running almost hand in hand. They turned right, left, right again, then left and saw Arthur at the end of the corridor.

“Arthur!”

The old man turned around.

“Nice to see you both.”

“I guess, the end of this tangled paths is over there,” Surya said joyfully beckoning at the point where walls ended.

“Yeah, this should be it.”

“So everyone made it, good,” Dan said with a gentle smile.

The three of them went to the end of the labyrinth. Tokutei, Lian and Jason were already waiting for them eating sandwiches and drinking hot tea from the flask.

“Wanna join us?” the Asian man suggested handing out a wrapped sandwich towards them.

“Indeed,” Dan replied grasping the sandwich before Surya managed to take it first.

She shook her head, and sat near Tokutei, while Arthur took off his backpack and sat down near Jason.

“We need to rest for a while and regenerate.”

“And then what?” Dan asked taking another bite, directing his eyes closely at the old mansion.

Arthur glimpsed at everyone.

“We wait.”

“Wait for what?” the boy continued.

“For her next move.”

“What if she doesn’t make any?” Tokutei asked slowly sipping his tea.

“Believe me, she will. She will not give us the Seal so easily.”

Jason grabbed his clips from behind the belt.

“I suggest, if we must wait, check the ammo and reload your guns.”

Dan took off his backpack and started rummaging it.

“If anyone is short of some ammo, Jason and I have lots of spare clips here.”

Lian came up to Dan.

“I can use some. The birds ate most of mine.”

“Luckily, they ate only little of you,” he replied glancing at her wounds. Suddenly, some strange noise came from the directions of the graves.

“What was that sound?” Surya asked rapidly standing up.

“Something like a moan,” Dan answered looking attentively at the direction of the sound.

“Here, we go. Prepare your weapons.” Arthur ordered.

“Look!” Tokutei spotted something.

He saw some bizarre creature emerging from behind of one of the graves. It looked like a deformed human with no muscles, only skin on thin bones. It also had massive palms tipped with sharp claws. It immediately noticed the group at the labyrinth edge and made a dash towards them. Jason quickly raised his gun and shot at it. The monster fell on the ground, but quickly jumped back on its feet and kept on running.

“What the...” Dan said gazing in disbelief as the monster’s wounds healed up.

“What is that thing?” Surya asked shooting at it several times.

“Don’t use this ammo. It’s a ghoul,” Arthur shouted seriously as the creature was still making at the team.

“Great, now how to kill it?” Lian yelled as the creature was a few metres from them.

“Bullet’s won’t do,” the old man announced making a few steps back while Tokutei stepped forward with his sword ready, and horizontally cut the creature.

Its dark, slanting eyes gradually whitened as a loud moan filled the air.

“But a blade will,” the Asian man added seeing two pieces of flesh fell numbly onto the ground.

Arthur looked at Tokutei, then at the team.

“Listen up, I haven’t taught you about ghouls yet. I thought we wouldn’t encounter them here.”

Everyone focused on what the old man was going to say.

“I read something about them in the Library the other day,” Jason said proudly.

Arthur smiled at him and continued his lecture.

“Ghouls are creatures that live around graves and graveyards. They feed on human flesh. They always live in small groups, which is very dangerous for the opponents. As you have just seen, regular bullets did nothing, as the monsters quickly regenerate. But blades and fire will do the

job.”

Dan took a glimpse at Tokutei.

“But he’s the only one with a sword here.”

“Not only him,” Surya interrupted as two sharp blades ejected from her cuffs.

Arthur pressed the button twice on his assault rifle.

“I also said that fire repels them, therefore you should use the explosives bullets here.”

Jason switched his ammo into explosives.

“You also said that they live in small groups, but what I see there,” the black man beckoned at the graveyard, “Doesn’t look like a small group to me.”

Everyone turned around. They saw hundreds of these scary monsters walking slowly towards them.

“That’s just perfect,” Dan commented ironically, changing the ammo. Arthur carefully scanned the area estimating the number of ghouls.

“Tokutei and Surya! Go to the front and take out the ones that will come too close. The rest, burn them out.”

“Or rip them apart,” Lian added.

The bulk of ghouls were running towards the group, while dozens of shots spread in the area. There were about fifty of these creatures willing to eat the living human flesh. Every single bullet that had plunged into the monsters exploded tearing their bodies apart. Tokutei and Surya were observing the situation, being ready for the attack if any of the creatures came too close. Two of the monsters were running along the right side of the labyrinth wall. No one was watching them. They jumped out from the corner and suddenly, they were dangerously close to the team. Not wasting any more time, Surya span straightening her arms tipped with silver blades. The sharp metal went through the monsters, quickly depriving them of lives.

“Not bad,” Tokutei complimented.

Then he spotted another one coming at them. He stabbed his katana into the ghoul’s hearth, twisted it and quickly withdrew.

“You too,” the girl replied with a smile.

Arthur looked at the mansion for a second. Something caught his attention. He saw a dark figure move inside.

“We must be going towards the mansion!”

They started slowly walking towards the graveyard still fighting hundreds of monsters closing in on them.

“Look there!” Tokutei shouted beckoning at one of the graves. Surya and Jason looked at that direction and saw two ghouls gobbling an arm of a dead body that was sticking out from the grave.

“That’s just sick,” Jason commented and shot towards the ghoul. The bullet hit the creature pulling its body towards the back, then the explosion finished the job. Suddenly, the half eaten arm of a dead person started to move as if it wanted to pull the rest of the body up. Tokutei ran up to Arthur.

“Arthur, you did forget to tell us about the ghouls, but you were right about them.”

The old man moved his finger away from the trigger and glanced at the grave that Tokutei was pointing at.

“Zombies,” he said casually.

Lian, Dan and Surya heard Arthur and also took a glimpse over the undead raising from his grave. Almost immediately all graves started to shake. Heads and limbs plunged through the ground slowly unearthing themselves, and dead began to rise. Lots of the bodies were decayed or half-eaten by the ghouls. Some of them didn’t have arms or legs, others had their guts hanging out.

“I don’t think I should remind you how to kill them!” Arthur said casually, finishing another ghoul ahead.

“I don’t understand one thing,” Surya asked observing the zombies. “The graves are old, so why do those zombies have flesh? Shouldn’t there be only bones?”

“That’s a good question, Surya,” the old men replied. “Unfortunately, I don’t have a straight answer to it. The only theory I can come up with is that this is the work of some spell.”

“Spell, or no spell, we need to get to the mansion,” Jason exclaimed.

“And there you can ask the witch about the bodies,” Dan added.

25.

The team was slowly moving forward. They were near the first graves, when Jason boomed out of the sudden,

“Lian, Dan, change the ammo into regular one, Arthur and I will remain on explosives.”

“Roger that,” came the answer.

Lian waited till the current clip became empty, then she reached for a spare one at her belt and reloaded. As soon as she changed it she aimed at the upcoming dead and fired getting rid of a few ones. Being an assassin made it kind of as a reflex to shoot three times at one target, but she knew she couldn't waste the ammo. She had to change her habits. One target one kill with a direct shot in the head.

While they were moving towards the mansion dealing with the horde of dead and still a large number of ghouls, a couple of werewolves returned from the labyrinth. Tokutei noticed that and briskly let the others know.

“The wolves are behind us!”

Arthur turned around for a split of second. But this turn lasted too long. He stepped into a grave and stumbled almost falling onto stone debris of some gravestone. He quickly regained his balance, and spoke,

“These are the remaining ones. You see, the witch can only summon one species at a time. The werewolves were sent to the labyrinth as soon as we entered, but not every one of them found us.”

A gentle smile appeared on Lian's face.

“Does that mean we not gonna see the birds anymore?”

Arthur nodded and took another lethal shot at the approaching ghoul. Tokutei looked around in order to check whether his mates will manage with the opponents, and rushed towards the couple of werewolves. Lian noticed this and shouted.

“Tokutei, no!”

He only glanced at her with a smile and continued running at the creatures.

“You'll die, you fool!”

The beast noticed the human and rushed at him. Tokutei raised his sword and leapt from the ground, then started to spin placing the katana horizontally. The high jump and four spins worked like a shredder with the first three creatures. As soon as he landed, he continued spinning and eliminated two more. Then he jumped again and stabbed the next monster through the eye, directly into the brain. After that he span again, cutting the next werewolf diagonally down. It all lasted for a few seconds, but there was still one more. Tokutei took a quick breath turned his sword, so the sharp edge was pointing up and moved it vertically up as strong as he could making the beasts split up into halves. He rapidly made one more spin to estimate the number of the opponents in his reach. Seeing there were none,

he turned around and ran towards his mates. Lian had been glancing at him for this whole time waiting for a moment she had to step in and help. He had proved her wrong.

The walking dead were trying to encircle the team. The ghouls were doing the same.

“They’re trying to trap us!” Dan shouted seeing the dead and the ghouls closing in on them.

“Why aren’t ghouls eating the dead?” Lian inquired.

Arthur pressed the button on his gun causing the empty clip to fall out.

“That’s her spell!” he yelled back feeling for another clip of ammo.

“They’re gonna eat us if we stay here!” Lian shouted worryingly.

Jason noticed some small construction near the hill. It was a dome supported by eight columns which seemed to have been used as a place for dinners or group meetings.

“Let’s run to that something!”

The others looked in that direction and headed there immediately.

“I’ll run first,” Tokutei shouted, “And you, Surya, take the back!”

The white-eyed girl nodded and withdrew towards the back. She took out one of the powerful Desert Eagle pistols, so now she could both shoot and cut. The team was running fast among the empty graves, eliminating the dead and the ghouls. Eventually, they reached the bower.

“We have no choice but to stay in a circle,” the old man order checking the ammo.

The bower was very small. The wooden dome with a small oculus was right above them. The inside was so small that when everybody stood in a circle, they could touch the other people’s backs. Every single person except of Tokutei was fighting. The Asian man was standing there with his sword ready, constantly glimpsing at the dying creatures, but none of them had reached them yet. Then he noticed three zombies, slowly walking towards his left side. They were making grunting noises, and their flesh were rotten. He quickly made a step forward, made three cuts and returned to his place.

26.

The constant shots sieved through the dead and ripped the ghouls. The number of both creatures was too high for the team to withstand the attack. The monsters were getting closer and closer. The air was filled with

an odour of dead human flesh as well as the sounds of bullets, explosions, moaning and groaning.

“No use being here,” Arthur said uneasily.

“The house is on the hill. Let’s run there and barricade the door,” Surya suggested still shooting at the zombies and monsters that were getting dangerously close.

Tokutei shook his head.

“Yet, we don’t know what we’ll meet there and how many of them.” Arthur glanced at the mansion, then at the opponents, then at the mansion again.

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We will focus on shooting Ghouls and, as Surya suggested, run to the building.”

“Why on ghouls?” Dan asked reloading his weapon.

“Cause’ they move fast and the dead not,” Jason explained.

“If we have no other choice, then let’s go,” Dan commented.

“First check your ammo, and wait for my signal.”

Everyone checked the number of bullets. Those whose ammo was too low had to reload.

“Now run as fast as you can!”

Everyone took a deep breath and started to run as fast as they could heading towards the hill leading to the mansion. Tokutei led the way, while the others tried to catch up with him. There were several rotten dead walking on their way. Tokutei focused on eliminating them, while the others were sprinting behind him. Dan was running out of ammo, but he didn’t say anything. He spotted a ghoul running at his teammates from the right. Not thinking much, he fired. Yet, the bullet missed the target and hit some grave. Then another one flew out from the Dan’s barrel and another. One nested in the arm of the monster while the second one hit its stomach. Then the explosion came from the bullet that had hit the grave followed by two explosions from the creature’s body. The boy reached for the last clip to his belt. While he was doing that, he felt a sudden hit on his shoulder and split a second later, he found himself being pulled away from the group. Lian quickly turned around and saw Dan lying on the ground with a grey ghoul trying to take a bite off his neck. The monster had come from the left and knocked the boy over. It was trying to submerge its teeth into Dan’s face, but the boy was hopelessly trying to push the creature away.

“Don’t shoot!” Jason shouted. “You’ll kill Dan.”

On hearing this, everyone stopped to observe the situation. Surya was taking care of the back. She didn't hear Dan's being knocked over, but she did hear Jason's order. She right away turned around. No sooner had she seen the boy wrestling with the monster, than she threw herself to help him. She made a dash towards him decapitating three zombies on her way. When she was very close, she leapt into the air and pointed her blade down, then fell onto the ground plunging the metal cutting edge into the monster's back. The creature burst out screaming and let go of Dan.

"Run to the others!" the girl yelled as the ghoul's wound healed in the twinkling of an eye.

The creature made a grunting noise and rapidly jumped at Surya. She quickly span to make her blade move faster and cut off the ghoul's head. Dan grasped his gun from the ground. He was still in shock.

"Are you alright?" Lian asked in a worried voice.

"I think so. Let's hurry up!"

"OK guys," Arthur exclaimed, "We have to hurry up."

Tokutei turned around and kept running towards the building. The others followed him. Jason was shooting at the ghouls running from the back left corner. Lian had no ammo left. She was observing the huge mansion in front of her. Now it was much more visible then from the entrance to the graveyard. It was a three-storey buildings made of wood. Not every window had glass in it and almost every wall had a few holes that time had made. There was a tower at the top of the building with green light coming from the inside. Each corner of the mansion had a marble creature on it.

The team was near the front door. Tokutei turned around to the group and shouted,

"I'll investigate the upper floor. We'll meet inside."

"Tokutei, no!" Arthur shouted, but it was too late.

The Asian guy jumped on the small roof over the porch and rushed inside through the broken window.

"You fool, you never listen," Jason whispered, then quickly aimed his HK M5 at the front door.

"I'll smash the door."

"No!" Surya yelled, "We won't be able to lock ourselves up."

O.D. lowered his gun and accelerated towards the door. When he was right at it he pressed the knob, but the large, two-wing door was locked. Arthur looked at the sky, and noticed black storm clouds approaching.

Then he looked around. The zombies and the ghouls were approaching from every direction.

“We have no choice. Jason, kick the door!”

The well-built man pushed the left wing of the door so hard that the lock broke and the door opened to the inside. Next, he walked in and looked around with his gun ready. Everything was in mess. The narrow corridor lead to some door about eight yards further. The darkness covered the corridor, and only few rails of moon light found their way inside through the holes in the ceiling. The layer of dust was so thick that it covered small metal objects left on the tables and also other pieces of furniture. The creepy spider webs spread in the corners and between the furniture and the walls. Jason turned around to help the others get in and noticed that the ghouls were right behind them. Not waiting any longer, he shouted.

“Hurry up! They’re behind you!” then tore a rotten board off the wall. Everyone rushed inside one by one. When he was about to close the door after Surya, one of the Ghouls stabbed her from behind, causing her to fall on her knees. Dan, who had entered the hall last but one, noticed the dhampiric girl on her knees and ran up to her kicking the monster as hard as he could. The ghoul let go of her and fell behind pushing away the other four creatures near him. However, there were still lots of them rushing at the door. Dan and Lian quickly helped Surya get inside. When Jason saw that everyone was safe, he pushed the door closing it right before ghouls’ faces. As soon as he did that, he put the vast board on two metal hooks mounted on both sides of the door frame to prevent the doors from opening. Hardly had he done this, when several sounds of banging came from behind the door.

“Facial,” Lian said wittily.

Meanwhile, Arthur tried to pull a wardrobe towards the door, but his old body was too weak. The others noticed that, ran up to him and pulled the piece of furniture to strengthen the blockade.

“We’re safe,” the old man said wiping sweat off his tired forehead. “For now.”

Jason glanced at everyone. Something was bothering him.

“Where the hell is Tokutei?” he asked angrily changing the ammo.

“He hasn’t come yet,” Lian answered.

“He must be still upstairs,” Surya added checking her shallow wound on her back.

As she said that, some strange sound came from the upstairs. It sounded like broken glass followed by a series of thuds. Then it silenced. Everyone looked surprisingly up trying to figure out what was going on above them. Dan tightened the grip on his gun, checked the empty status of ammo, and said,

“Whatever caused that noise, let’s hope that Tokutei was the reason for it to stop,”

“Tokutei, come in,” Dan tried to contact him through the channel.

“Tok, are you there?”

There was no response.

“He must have switched off the channel,” Jason suggested.

Lian wanted to add something, but before she had any chance to make a word the wardrobe blocking the doors moved dangerously to the front.

“They will break in any minute now,” Arthur took a deep breath placing his left hand on the butt of his gun.

“Reload and move further,” Jason added reaching for the clip to his backpack and threw it to Dan.

“Did you notice those weird statues on the roof?” Lian asked confused.

“Those are gargoyles,” Arthur explained. “They were put on the roofs to protect the houses and drive away evil spirits,”

“I don’t understand.” said Jason. “If those statues are used for driving away evil spirit, why are they on this house?”

“I really don’t know” Arthur sighed shrugging his shoulders as the wardrobe moved again followed by another bang from behind the door.

“No time for chatting, Let’s move further,” Surya said reloading her Desert Eagles.

Everyone stood up and slowly walked along the narrow dusty corridor towards the room at the end. Lian was going first looking at the old dirty items in the hall. Suddenly, the wall next to her broke and two rotten hands emerged grabbing her by her neck. Being in shock, she raised her leg so high that she was able to penetrate the wooden wall and kick the person behind her on the head. Even though her kick was strong, the hands didn’t loosen the grip. As soon as Jason saw the wall breaking, raised his gun and shot twice. One of the bullets hit the elbow of the creature, the second one went through the hole made by the Lian’s boot and nested into something. The hands numbed, so the girl could set herself free from the grip. There

was a door a few feet further. Surya ran there using her vampiric speed to see who was on the other side of the wall while Lian crouched rubbing her neck trying to gasp some air. Surya took a glimpse into the room, then leaned back and said surprisingly.

“It was just a zombie.”

The Asian girl looked up at her with a frown.

“Just a zombie? What the heck was it doing here?”

“There must be a backdoor,” Arthur said with a serious voice.

“Well,” Surya sighed. “So, all in all, we’re doomed outside, we’re doomed inside.”

“I guess you’re right,” Dan added taking a shot at the end of the corridor where another undead appeared.”

Arthur peeked there and started to think what to do next. They couldn’t go outside. They couldn’t stay inside, at least on that floor.

“We have to get to the last floor. To the tower,” he announced not being truly convinced whether it was a good plan or not.

“I think, we must first find Tokutei,” Dan proposed his option.

“He will be where we’re heading.”

“So let’s go.”

They moved further along the dark corridor with a corpse lying at the end of it.

“If the dead are here, that means that the ghouls also found the way in,” Jason said with a worried voice.

“Let’s first get to the stairs, then we will talk,” the old man ordered, as a dangerous ghoul rushed inside limping on its four limbs.

Lian shot it immediately and then rapidly turned round realising what a horrible mistake she had just done.

“Take cover!”

She knew she shouldn’t have used the exploding ammo in such tight areas. And now they had to act quickly before the bullet would explode. There weren’t many things behind which they could hide from the blast. The ghoul kept walking towards the group. Arthur and Jason hid behind rickety table while Surya and Lian jumped back towards the wardrobe that was blocking the main doors. Dan didn’t know what to do; all places were already occupied, and he had only few seconds before the bullet would explode.

“Fuck!” he yelled throwing himself at the rusty, broken wall where

Lian had kicked the zombie.

As soon as his feet ejected from the floor, the monster exploded. The blast was so powerful that it pushed Dan harder to the wall. The remaining boards broke immediately and the boy was pushed to the next room. The dust scattered everywhere while the pieces of wood filled the air, then violently landed all around. Numerous splinters penetrated the furniture, the walls, the ceiling and the floor.

“Is everyone alright?” Jason shouted chocking himself with the dust and ash.

“We’re fine” Lian said for herself and Surya.

“Me, too,” Arthur added.

“What about Dan?” Jason asked trying to gasp the boy’s sight in the blurry room.

“I’m fine,” Dan’s voice came from the large hole in the wall.

When the cloud vaporised in the air, they noticed a large crater in the floor. The two side walls were completely destroyed, and there was a burnt hole in the ceiling with a piece of grey carpet hanging out.

Dan climbed back through the wall.

“Great Lian, that was simply great.”

Lian looked sadly at everyone with a guilty face.

“I’m really sorry guys, I forgot about the consequences. Everyone is fine, though”

Jason brushed the dust off his uniform, and wiped his eyes.

“Since we can’t use exploding ammo here,” Jason said. “That means, that only Tokutei and Surya can kill ghouls.”

“Yep, and since Tokutei disappeared, I’m the only one here,” the white-eyed girl said stroking her blades.

“We’re really screwed,” Dan moaned slowly realizing how more dangerous this mission was.

“No time to complain, Dan,” Arthur interrupted. “We’d better be going.”

Lian checked the status of her ammo, and pressed the button under LCD panel.

“Guys, make sure you have regular or silver bullets. Don’t repeat my mistake.”

27.

Surya led the way, while Lian changed the ammo into regular one. They went through the hole in the wall and saw a bunch of rotten undead walking straight at them. Lian, Jason and Dan started to fire at once, while Surya scanned the room for Ghouls. A lightening lit up the sky for a moment, then the thunder shook the mansion.

“Clear!” Dan shouted after taking out the last one.

“The stairs must be somewhere near,” Arthur announced.

Surya checked the Eagle Eye.

“Fuck, they are surrounding the building.”

Having said that, she heard a huge thud coming from behind, followed by a gentle breeze. Everyone turned around and saw dozens of ghouls racing through the broken main door right at them.

“Run!” Lian shouted desperately rolling a grenade at their feet.

They hurried to the next room. It looked like a dining room with a large rectangular table in the middle surrounded by rotten chairs. There was a dusty, broken mirror opposite the window, and a few paintings hanging on the left and the right side of the mirror. Above the table, there was an old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the ceiling. At the end of the room, there were two doors, from which a couple of zombies emerged. Lian, Dan and Jason shot at their heads immediately. Seconds later another one broke through the left wall, but was taken down at once. Surya was leading the way. She turned left hoping for the stairs to be there. Yet, the next room seemed to be kitchen filled with zombies and ghouls. The girl threw herself at the ghouls, while Lian and Dan who rushed right behind her took down the walking dead. Arthur turned around before running into the kitchen in order to check how far the ghouls were. Realising the creatures were moving faster than them, the old man sped up. Then the explosion came completely destroying the hall. The walls were shred into pieces, the ceiling vaporised and the pieces of leaking meat spread around along with sharp splinters. Jason was the last one, just before entering the kitchen, another zombie broke through the wall next to him. After seeing Arthur passing him and the fact that he was now the last one, Jason didn't even turn around to stop the creature. He had no choice but to accelerate, too. He could feel the monsters' claws just behind his back. As he was running through the kitchen among the cupboards and cooking tools, he grabbed some pot lying on the cooker and threw it behind him. The hit slowed

down the monster a little bit. The next room was right ahead, and as soon as he entered there, he closed the door behind him stopping the ghoul. The team found themselves outside the kitchen. It was a wide hall with the exit at the back. The long, spacious room had a large, rugged carpet on the floor that led to the winding stairs. There were also several doors leading either to left or to right. It seemed that the left wall was an outside one. The winding stairs led to an inside balcony with a view of the hall below. The room was filled with a dozen of zombies walking in the hall, on the stairs and the balcony. Moreover, ghouls were trying to break into the hall from the kitchen, but Jason had moved an old chest of drawers at the door.

“Hurry up guys!” Surya shouted as she jumped on a handrail.

Arthur and Dan shot the zombies near the stairs and rushed up to the next level. Lian and Jason did the same. The kitchen door broke and the two groups of ghouls running behind them joined together. A few of them jumped onto the stairs right behind the team. Surya was already upstairs, she sucked her daggers into the cuffs, took a grip of the handrail and leapt downstairs to eliminate the danger. She ejected her daggers again, cut the ghouls into half, while Arthur shot the Zombies on the balcony. In the mean time, Dan decided to use the explosive ammo. He aimed at the ghouls downstairs and shot. The bullet flew right into the ghoul’s eye, making him slip on the carpet and lose balance. The monster immediately got up, and rushed outside as if he knew he would explode. Then an explosion spread destroying a couple of boards in the outside wall. The zombies walked into the room and headed for the stairs. Jason moved a little back to Surya, took out a grenade, then grabbed one of the zombies climbing on the stairs and stuck the explosive right into its mouth. Next he raised the zombie and threw it onto the stairs.

“Run to the others,” he said to Surya, while the undead rolled knocking down two others behind him.

O.D. turned round and raced upstairs to the others.

“Take cover!”

Everyone ducked and covered their heads while red rotten guts spread around along with the cloud of dust and pieces of wood. The cloud slowly disappeared and the noises below silenced. Arthur got up and asked,

“Is everyone OK?”

Then he scanned the balcony. It occurred that the structure surrounded the room below and ended with another stairs leading up.

“We are,” came the positive answer, as the noises spread again. Lian went up to Jason and Dan.

“Why did you both use explosives? You saw what happened before when I blew up the corridor.”

“Yes I did,” Jason answered casually. “But now, we are upstairs, and they can’t reach us.”

Dan looked at the horde of zombies and ghouls downstairs surrounded by pieces of guts and limbs. The creatures were making grunting noises trying without any result to leap up on the first floor. The boy looked back at Jason.

“O.D. you’re a genius!”

The man replied with a stupid mine as if he wanted to say, *What the fuck?*

“And you, Dan?”

“Well, Lian, look, since Surya is the only who could deal with Ghouls, I thought I could help, so I shot one. I made sure that everyone was safe first, so don’t blame me. My explosion did no harm to us.”

“Maybe you’re right, maybe that was a right thing to do.”

Arthur noticed that Lian was being different.

“I think, we take a rest for a moment. Reload, eat, drink.”

“What about Tok?” Jason asked.

“I’m sure he’s fine. He can do well on his own.”

“I’m gonna shoot those bastards downstairs,” Dan laughed walking to the edge.

Lian leaned against the wall, as another thunder filled the air. She closed her eyes for a moment, and got caught up with her memories once again. She was standing on a rooftop surrounded by ten black-dressed men. One of them stepped further and said angrily.

“Give it to us!”

“In your dreams ninja boy,” she said running at him.

Tokutei was able to block her kick-punch combination, and then tried to strike her back, but she easily avoided the strikes. The other ninjas were watching the two of them fighting with excitement. None of the opponents was able to hit the second one. After a minute, Tokutei moved quickly at her, but he didn’t notice a Wing Tsun kick into his shin. Lian knocked him off balance, which made him fall at her simultaneously making the medallion to roll off Lian’s hand. Tokutei landed on the girl and they both looked at the medallion rolling towards the edge of the roof. The Asian

man rapidly threw himself at the object. Lian did the same. Unfortunately, he was too slow to catch the medallion and it fell off the roof. He quickly turned around straightening his leg to slow down and eventually to stop. The other ninjas saw Lian made a dash down.

“They’re gone,” one of them commented casually.

“Not really,” Tokutei said, as Lian emerged back again zooming up. Her backpack was equipped with little wings that had spread as soon as she reached the medallion, creating a paraglider.

“We have failed,” the other ninja added watching her disappear between the buildings.

“Lian! Lian!” she heard Surya’s voice.

The girl came quickly round forgetting what her mind was stuck on.

“Girl, c’mon. Nobody’s resting we’re goin’ to find Tok.”

28.

Another lightening flashed quickly followed by a thunder. All the remaining zombies and ghouls gathered below.

“I’m fed up with all these shooting,” Dan complained. “They won’t stop coming.”

“Tokutei should be somewhere here,” Lian boomed, then headed for the nearest door.

The others followed her raising their guns. Dan was the last one. He turned around at the zombies and ghouls below and murmured to himself,

“Hmm... what the heck.”

Then he threw one grenade towards the hall and joined the others. They went to the next room. There was no one inside. It looked like a bedroom with a big double bed and a large ripped rug under it. No sooner had they entered, than an explosion came from downstairs.

“What was that?” Arthur asked with a concerned voice.

“Sorry, I just felt this itch to finish them off,” the boy replied with a silent laugh.

Arthur shook his head and sighed.

“Just let others now earlier, will you?”

“I will.”

“No zombies here?” Surya asked curiously.

They moved to the next room. It was a huge bedroom with a large hole near the door, through which they could see the destroyed hall with walking

undead below. At the end, there was a broken window and a few steps from it, Tokutei was lying unconscious.

“Well Lian, you blew up Tokutei back then,” Dan said ironically.

“Stop making fun of it,” she replied with a scowl as her hand shook. Arthur and Jason came up to Tokutei and crouched at him. Arthur reached his hand to Tokutei’s shoulder.

“Tokutei, wake up.”

There was no reaction. He placed to fingers at his neck.

“He’s alive. Wake up Tokutei.”

“Maybe I’ll try,” Jason suggested and turned him over so now he was facing the ceiling.

Then, he hit him gently on the face with an open hand.

“Tokutei! Tokutei!” another slap came.

He wanted to hit him even harder. But as his hand was flying at his teammate’s face, something stopped it. The blackman quickly looked at it and saw Tokutei’s hand holding his wrist.

“Don’t even think of it,” he said through his teeth.

“At least his reflexes are OK,” Surya smiled.

Arthur grabbed Tokutei’s left arm, while Jason grabbed the other one and helped him to his feet.

“What happened?” Tokutei asked.

“I thought you would tell us” the old man replied.

Lian dropped her eyes and gathered her strength to say what was hurting her.

“Tok, it’s probably my fault. I accidently used explosive ammo down there, and when it exploded... you see the hole.”

Tokutei looked at everyone confused while another thunder boomed.

“I only remember that when I jumped through the window and I moved to this room...Err... something must have hit me on the head.”

“We’d better be going,” Jason said looking if anyone or anything was coming.

“Wait! Where is my sword?” Tokutei boomed looking around desperately.

Everyone scanned the room for the light-blue, metal blade, but it wasn’t there.

“I cannot go without it. It was a gift from my master.”

“Maybe it’s somewhere near,” Dan said looking under the bed.

“We’ll find it. Let’s go,” Lian added.

“I can’t leave the building until I find it.”

“We’re not leaving the building, ‘cause Jason blew up the only stairs,” Dan said.

“At least he saved us,” Surya replied frowning. “Tokutei, come on!”

“Alright,” he replied unwillingly.

They all left the room and went back to the balcony to use the second stairs. While they were circling the room below, Lian couldn’t take her eyes off the zombies and ghouls gazing at them from the hall.

“Look at those creatures lurking there.”

“If they had a chance they would kill us,” Jason added.

29.

They reached the stairs and went to the next floor. The rotten, wooden steps creaked under their feet. Sometimes the creaks were so annoying that they sounded as if the stairs would collapse any minute. The only sources of light were the constant lightings crashing around the mansion. With every bolt, the light flashed up the monsters faces below and made them even scarier.

“It’s pitch black here!” Dan complained turning the night vision on. Lian looked around the empty balcony and went towards the only door.

“I can’t see no candles. Can you see anything, Tokutei?”

“Don’t question my abilities,” he replied amusingly.

They entered a big room. It looked like a study or a library. Luckily, it was illuminated by four candles situated on a small candlestick at the wall. Under it, there was an old desk surrounded by shelves and bookcases filled with old dusty books.

“No need for night vision, Dan,” Arthur said spotting the candles nearby.

“Why are those things here?” Dan asked astonishingly pointing at the gargoyles placed in two corners.

The two similar statues looked like demons. They had wings like angels, arms tipped with sharp claws and massive legs. Their heads had big eyes, wide nose, and a huge mouth with long teeth.

“No idea,” the old man replied shrugging his arms. “They are always placed outside. But why did she keep them inside, I don’t know.”

“She’s some crazy bitch,” Jason commented poking one gargoyle with

the butt of his gun.

“Look!” Surya shouted pointing at the open door between the rooms.

“Yet another stairs,” Dan added sighing.

Jason left the Gargoyle and walked towards the door.

“They must be leading to the tower.”

“Don’t waste your time, just go,” Dan said and followed Jason towards the ajar door.

The others were just after him. Tokutei glanced at the statues again and stopped as his body filled with shock.

“My sword.”

The others turned around and noticed that one of the gargoyles was holding Tokutei’s katana in his hand.

“What the...” Dan couldn’t believe his eyes. “It wasn’t there a few seconds ago.”

“No way. It’s another move of hers,” Arthur explained raising his gun.

“Eh... I’m going for my sword and I don’t care whether it’s her move or ours.”

He came closer to the statue, reached out his hand for the sword and slipped it out from the stone hand.

“You see, nothing happened,” he said coming back to the others putting his precious weapon in the saya.

They turned around and headed back to door. Jason slightly kicked the ajar door and slowly stepped to the corridor. The open door now revealed stairs leading to the last floor of the mansion. Jason went first.

“It must have been some kind of a joke,” Lian said stepping on the first step of the stairs.

“Well, it’s not funny!” Tokutei bellowed catching up with the others. Dan waited at the door as everybody passed him, then just before leaving the room, he glanced over his shoulders at the statues one more time.

“Yeah, about that, that, j-joke,” he stuttered beckoning with his finger to Tokutei to turn around.

“What is it?” the old man asked coming back to the room.

One of the statues was standing in the middle. Tokutei turned around and looked directly at the gargoyle. Its scary eyes were looking exactly at Tokutei’s. Yet, the statue was standing still.

“This is definitely not funny,” the Asian man said with a

disappointment drawing his blade.

“I know what’s going on,” Arthur started to walk backwards. “We” better withdraw keeping our eyes on the statues. They only move when no one is looking or...”

The flames of the candles suddenly disappeared.

“In complete darkness.”

They were staring at the dark place where the statues were last seen.

Suddenly, another lighting flashed making the gargoyles be visible for a split of second. Both statues were caught frozen in the middle of the room with their jaws wide open, teeth out, and wings spread. Another lightening flashed. The gargoyles appeared again a few yards before the team froze in the pose as if they were ready to attack. The room became dark again, until yet another lightening lit it up. The statues were right in front of Lian and Surya. They had their claws near the girls’ faces. The lightening disappeared when another spread. The girls managed to make one step backwards while angry looking monsters were right at their faces, having something shiny touching the statue’s arms. It was Tokutei, who had managed to block the Gargoyle’s claws with his sword. When the room became dark again, a sound of cut spread. Jason made a step back shouting,

“Switch your night vision back on!”

They did as he said. Dan noticed two demon-like statues running at Tokutei. They both had no arms. Tokutei was able to see them only when the lightning struck. Then, the bright lighting blinded the warrior’s eyes and he had to rely on his hearing and other senses before the next bolt cut the sky. One of the monsters hit the man with its stone head while the second one hit him with its huge heavy wing. Tokutei fell down.

“Go ahead, I will deal with them!”

The room became bright again. Tokutei tried to stand up, when he noticed the monster’s foot over his head. He quickly rolled right before the light disappeared and kept on attacking them. Every time the lighting struck he was able to see them, but there was no time to perform a cut, as the darkness came, the statues managed to move away.

“We can’t leave him here,” Surya yelled taking out her Desert Eagle and shooting at the statues.

The others were looking through the night vision as the bullets left only small holes in the stone bodies.

“Bullets are useless, go!” Tokutei shouted, as one of the creatures

punched him so hard that he flew towards the wall.

“Use the night vision Tok! Don’t be stupid,” Arthur shouted. The Asian man saw the creature frozen in front of him as another lightening made the room bright. He managed to press some button on his watch, then stood up. Everything became green around him. He was able to see the movements of the creatures very clearly. They were fast, really fast.

“Let’s play.”

As soon as he turned the night vision on, he tightened the grip on his sword and swung it around. The blade went through the stone, the man made a spin, raised his sword and vertically cut down through the second monster. Both gargoyles fell apart. Arthur looked at Tokutei and said calmly,

“Now do you believe me that our equipment is useful?”

“Sometimes,” Tokutei replied unwillingly, but then a smile appeared on his tired face.

Lian looked around the room. Something was not right.

“Guys, weren’t there two more statues on the roof?”

“There were,” Jason replied.

“So this isn’t over yet?” Dan added disappointed.

“Let’s move on,” the Asian man suggested putting away his sword and wiping sweat from his hair.

The team once more left the room and headed for the stairs in the corridor.

30.

The stairs led them to the last floor. It was a large room with bookshelves and mirrors around. Everything was covered in dust and spider webs. The floor had no carpet, and there were two chandeliers hanging from the ceiling slightly illuminating the room. The ceiling was covered with some pentagrams with ancient writings and signs. There was also an old armchair facing a vast and tall window ahead of it. It seemed that someone was sitting on it.

When everyone got upstairs, they stood in circle and gazed at the armchair.

“She’s there,” Arthur whispered taking his backpack off.

Lian made a few steps forward.

“So let’s go there, take the Seal and get the hell out of here.”

“First leave the backpacks here,” he said.

She was confused with Arthur’s behaviour. The witch was right there and

they weren't doing anything.

"You're going nowhere," the creepy, squawky voice spoke from behind the armchair as another lightening flashed outside. As soon as the words echoed in the room, every window closed and locked, the stairs they had taken turned into dust and scattered while the entrance was closed by some stone wall. Everyone froze, as the armchair slowly turned around creaking. They saw a hideous old woman sitting on it. She looked as if she was 200 years old. Her large, bulging eyes had that *madness* inside. Her face was extremely thin. It was as if there were no muscles under her skin; only bones. She was wearing long ragged black dress. Her long bonny fingers were tapping against the wooden arm of the armchair. She giggled and spoke again.

"No one ever managed to get so far. What's more, few were able to finish the labyrinth alive."

Nobody reacted. They were just standing and gaping at her. Dan couldn't stand it anymore.

"What do ya' mean no one?"

The witch laughed as her white, tattered hair glinted by yet another lightening.

"You think you're the only one trying to get to me? In the 18th century there was a group like You. They heard about the Seal, but they were too weak to find a way through the labyrinth itself. Oh and yes, after World War Two an army was raised to dispose of me, but... how to put it. You probably saw them in the graveyard. Perfect material for ghouls, you know. By the way, would you prefer to end up as ghouls, zombies or werewolves?" she chuckled.

"Give us the Seal, Laima," Arthur said angrily making a step forward.

"Why would I?" the witch laughed.

"You know the world would end in three months."

"The world would end anyway. With or without the Seal."

Lian and Dan froze in shock.

"You really think, you can stop Him?" the witch continued. "You see, he came to me few hundred years ago..."

"Is she talking about Cizin?" Jason whispered turning to Arthur. The old man glanced at him and nodded.

"And what, did you send him home?"

"Ha ha," the witch guffawed, "He gave me the piece of the Seal to

protect it against everyone and everything. And especially against young demons.”

“I don’t understand, why demons?” Tokutei asked.

“Because if a young demon should have the Seal, they could destroy Hell.”

“That’s why there is a devil’s trap on ceiling.”

“Devil’s what?” Surya asked.

“It keeps the demons away, or locks them inside,” Arthur replied.

“Cizin predicted that humans would eventually try to retrieve the Seal,” the witch continued.

“I’m really sorry Laima, but we will take the Seal anyway.”

“So try it,” she answered amusingly with a chuckle.

Dan made a step forward.

“Can we kill her now?”

Arthur nodded and raised his gun.

“Com’ on boy, show me what you’ve got,” came the squeaky answer.

“Whata’ bout the Seal?” Jason asked.

“It’s in her ring.”

Dan aimed his weapon towards her and took a shot. A silver bullet flew out from his gun and sped towards the old witch. Just as it was about to hit the target, it disappeared.

“What the...” Dan murmured raising his eyebrows.

Then he and the others raised their guns and started shooting. A hail of bullets raced towards the witch and each and every one of them; silver, exploding and regular, disappeared right in front of her.

“Bullets are no use,” Tokutei said and rushed towards.

As he was about to perform a cut, he stopped and moved back. The witch laughed.

“What’s wrong with you?” Lian asked. “Cut her!”

“No, what if my sword disappears, too.”

“So kick her!”

“What if his leg disappears?” Surya asked.

The others looked at her with their eyebrows raised as if they wanted to say *you must be kidding*.

“What?” the girl asked not understanding their reaction, “It’s a witch. She can do that.”

Everyone, including the witch was having the same look.

“Fine! I’ll do it myself.”

Having said that, Surya rushed towards the witch, jumped straightening her right leg while tucking in the left one and flew at the woman. Right in front of her, the witch grabbed Surya’s foot and threw her at the wall. It seemed it didn’t take her much strength to do that. Surya broke a few boards on the impact and fell onto the floor. On seeing this, Tokutei threw himself at the witch, but she did the same with him.

“OK, if Tokutei can’t touch her, then no one can,” Dan said.

The Asian man raised his head from the ground.

“Everyone! Take cover!”

It just came to the witch that while she had been blocking his attack, he planted a grenade under her sleeve. The grenade exploded lifting all the dust, filling the room with a large and thick cloud. Everyone fell on the ground and protected their eyes from the dust and the blow itself. A few seconds passed and the dirt was slowly falling down revealing the room. Lian was trying to stop the cough. She opened her eyes and looked around. She saw Arthur, Dan and Jason next to her. Surya lying in the corner, and Tokutei standing on the other side. The grenade destroyed most of the attic, but when the air cleared out, she saw the witch still sitting in her chair as if nothing happened. The wall on her right was full of holes and cracks, but the vast mirror on the other side had only few holes and fractures. The boards were hanging from the ceiling and from the ripped walls. The ceiling was mostly blown up and the floor had holes everywhere. However, the Devil’s trap was untouched. The blast completely smashed the front wall, creating a huge gap between ceiling and the floor. Two backpacks fell downstairs. The noises of ghouls and zombies were coming through the hole. Everyone stood up.

“What now?” Dan asked.

“We can’t shoot her, cut her, blow her up, not the faintest idea,” Jason replied.

“Are you done, Arthur?” the witch asked. “Is that all what you’ve got? You may destroy my mansion, the ghouls will rebuild it anyway.”

“There is one way,” he whispered to the teammates around him.

“I know what you are talking about,” the witch spoke again. “Do you really think you can break the pentacles?”

“What pentacles?” Lian asked.

“The devil’s trap and other rings,” the old man replied. “We must

break them somehow.”

Surya got up after having been thrown. There was a piece of wood nested in her arm. She grabbed it and slowly took it out, then threw it away. Her wound quickly healed, but no one noticed it. They were looking at the ceiling, where the magical rings were carved.

“Screw this!” Tokutei said and threw himself towards the ceiling.

“Look out!”

“Behind you!” Lian and Jason shouted as he was about to sieve his sword through the pentacles.

He felt a cold grip on his leg, then was suddenly pulled back down. He immediately turned around and saw two gargoyles. The creatures were holding onto his legs, pulling him towards the hole in the front wall. The pull made him loosen up the grip and release his sword. Split a second later, he was on the floor.

“No way,” he said angrily trying to hang his fingers onto something, but the smooth floor didn’t have any holes on his way.

As he was about to be thrown away through the hole where the front wall used to be, a sharp blade cut through the marble claws letting go of Tokutei. The warrior looked back to see whose blade it was. He saw Surya standing beside him.

“Thanks,” he said reaching out for his sword.

“Help me deal with them!”

Tokutei quickly jumped on his feet, grabbed his sword back and rushed towards the clawless statue.

“Aren’t they suppose to be seen only in darkness,” he asked.

“Another spell?” the dhampiric girl asked.

“Another spell,” the Asian nodded.

Meanwhile, Arthur, Jason, Dan and Lian were standing in the other part of the room, casting furtive glances at Tokutei and Surya, as well as the witch. The old, hideous woman was sitting comfortably in her armchair, laughing at the situation.

“You fools, you will all die here! Ha, ha, ha”

Arthur tried to find a way to get the Seal from her. They could neither shoot, nor attack her directly.

Lian took a quick glimpse over the situation. Not thinking any more, she inhaled more air and rushed towards Tokutei who was fighting with the gargoyle. The Asian girl jumped, made a spin and side kicked the living

statue, pushing it out of the room through the hole in the front wall where the windows used to be.

“Cut the pentacles!” she shouted to Tokutei, then peeked at Surya and noticed the monster knocking her to the ground.

“Help Surya!” Tokutei yelled.

He strongly tightened his grip and rushed towards the witch. Surya had managed to cut off the gargoyle’s wings, in the meantime, and strike some stabs in the statue’s body. The gargoyle was about to crush lying Surya with its head. The dhampiric girl raised her eyes at the upcoming stone head. Lian was quick enough to block it by crossing her arms over Surya’s face, then attacked the creature. She felt a huge pain in her arms. The stones were too heavy to block or to kick. When she was on the point of kicking it, she felt a strong and painful hit at her back. The girl fell on the floor near the hole and rapidly turned around. She could see out of the tail of her eye Surya standing back on her feet and Tokutei rushing back at the witch. She also noticed the very gargoyle she had just kicked out of the room leaning over her body. She raised her foot and attacked the stone creature one more time.

Tokutei leapt into the air and raised his sword above his head. The witch turned her head around gazing at his move with a smirk. Then she straightened her arm hitting Tokutei in the knee and pushing him away. The boy fell and rolled on the floor towards the huge hole in the front wall. He rolled past Surya and Lian and fell out.

“Oh no,” Jason whispered feeling helpless.

He wanted to do something. Yet, neither he, nor Dan and Arthur could do nothing. Bullets disappeared right in front of the witch. Explosives couldn’t be used because of the others fighting in the blast range.

Tokutei had managed to grab the edge of the floor with his one hand, holding the valuable weapon in the second one. He peeked down and saw dozens of undead just waiting for him to fall.

“You’re not gonna get me,” he murmured.

Surya stabbed the gargoyle one more time, leaving another hole in his stone body. Lian focused on most sufficient kicks, and simultaneously tried to avoid the upcoming punches, hits and strikes. If she blocked them, the force of speeding stone could even break her arm. The witch turned back at the rest of the team just standing doing nothing.

“You really think your attacks could break the pentacles?”

Dan saw Tokutei climbing back up. He leaned over to Jason and encouragingly whispered,

“Come on.”

O.D. looked back confused. But when he caught a glimpse of Tokutei making another attempt, he knew what Dan had on his mind.

“You really don’t know what Tokutei’s sword is capable of,” Dan told the witch rushing towards her. Jason followed him. They both simultaneously punched the witch, being totally aware that she would block it. As soon as she blocked their both punches she looked at them and grinned. Dan indicated her to turn around with a gentle smile on his face. She immediately looked up she saw Tokutei with his sword cutting through the protecting pentacles. Her grin immediately disappeared and turned into anger.

“Impossible...” she whispered.

Laima let go of Dan and Jason, stood up, and walked towards Arthur. Surya and Lian were still fighting with the living statues. The armless and wingless creatures were full of holes and fractures. The girls noticed that the pentacle was broken. Surya rapidly kneeled on one knee, span, and cut with both of her daggers through the gargoyle one by one. The statue split horizontally in half. Lian in the meantime, was dealing with the second statue. Tokutei and Surya rushed towards her to help.

“Help the others!” the Asian girl shouted, then a stone wing hit her on the head making her lose consciousness.

No sooner had they taken off, than the monster grabbed and pushed Surya towards Arthur. The girl lost her balance and hit the floor so hard that it broke and she fell downstairs. Tokutei immediately engaged into fight. Dan turned around at Jason lying on the floor next to him. He also saw the witch approaching the old man. To his surprise, the broken mirrors on the walls showed no reflection of Laima. He quickly got on his feet and rushed there to help his boss. As the hideous woman was about to grab Arthur, Dan threw himself at her. The witch reacted quickly pushing him back to the floor. At the same time, Jason attacked her. He didn’t know what he could do, but at least he tried. As he was about to pull her away, he felt a strong grip on his neck. It was the witch’s wrinkled hand. She raised him with her one hand, span him over her head and threw him towards the wall. His speed was so high, that his body easily broke through the wooden wall, then fell on the roof outside. Split a second later the roof broke with a creak

and Jason fell one level down with a huge thud. Dan stood up again and stepped back taking out a small pistol from beneath the leg of his pants. Just before he was on the point of shooting, Arthur attacked the witch with a knife, leaving her a long bloody cut on her arm. The witch screamed and pushed Arthur away towards the vast hole where the front wall used to be.

Meanwhile, Tokutei was coping with the last gargoyle and Lian was still lying unconscious on the floor nearby. The warrior was tired after the whole night of fighting. However, he knew that the future of the world depended on this situation. He bent his head near his knee, raising the other leg up, and jumped doing an aerial; no handed cartwheel. The angry gargoyle swung its last wing towards Tokutei's head, but as soon as the boy landed, he span and cut through the upcoming wing, ampit and jaw of the gargoyle's. The creature stopped moving and fell into the hole in the floor splitting into two parts. Tokutei swiftly turned and everything got to him what had happened within these few seconds. Lian was lying unconscious on the floor. Jason and Surya had been thrown downstairs, Dan and Arthur were next to be dealt with. Not wasting any more time, he rushed to help the others. Dan aimed his pistol and shot. The bullet hit the witch on the leg forcing her to fall on her knee. He shot for the second time hitting her into her stomach.

"I-I underestimated your team, Arthur," she stuttered writhing in pain. Arthur picked up the silver knife from the cracked floor and stepped forward.

"The piece of the Seal, Laima!"

Tokutei stopped in front of her holding his blue blade at her throat while Dan stood at him and aimed his Desert Eagle at her temples.

"Never!" came the strong answer.

"Give us the Seal and we'll let you live."

"Cizin would kill me anyway!"

"Laima, don't be stupid! We need that piece."

The witch slowly stood up pushing away Tokutei and limped towards the front wall. Tokutei and Dan didn't know what to do. They knew they had to wait for the Arthur's call.

"Laima! God damn it!" The old man said through his teeth and looked at Dan.

"Shoot her! Shoot her now!"

Dan took another shot at her stomach, her body trembled but she kept

limping towards the edge. The storm was brightening up the room from time to time.

Then another bullet came, and another. Her body trembled with every hit. The weakened woman stopped on the edge of the floor. She turned around towards the group and calmly said.

“As I told you earlier, the Seal won’t save the world.”

“No, Laima!” Arthur exclaimed watching her fall out.

Arthur, Tokutei and Dan raced to the edge and looked down. They saw dozens of ghouls ripping her body into shreds. Then all the zombies fell numbly onto the ground as if the life force dwelling in them vanished. Lian opened her eyes and slowly stood up on her feet.

“What’s going on?” she saw ghouls dragging the dead bodies back to their graves.

“The witch died,” Arthur explained. “And the spell that raised the dead is gone now.”

“And the ghouls are not longer their best friends. They went back to feeding on their flesh,” Dan added.

Lian turned around and scanned the damaged room.

“Where’re Jason and Surya?”

“The witch threw them downstairs,” Arthur replied. “I hope they’re OK.”

“What about the Seal?” Tokutei inquired.

“It’s down there!” Dan said pointing at the remains of the witch.

“Where?” Tokutei asked.

“Down there, this shining object in the guts. It’s her ring isn’t it?”

“Yes, it could be the Seal,” Arthur said warmly.

“Let’s check what’s up with Jason and Surya, and get down there,” Tokutei suggested walking towards the hole which Jason had made with his body.

“Jason, Surya, What’s your status?”

He could hear Surya waking up.

“I’m OK. Wait, I see Jason...I’m going there.”

Tokutei was listening to report Jason’s status.

“I’m with him. And Tok, he doesn’t look so good,” the dhampiric girl replied with a sad voice.

“We’ll be there in a minute,” Arthur announced then added, “Dan, Lian, pick up our stuff and join us downstairs.”

Arthur and Tokutei crouched at the hole in the floor and jumped downstairs onto a handful of dust and pieces of boards left after the falling floor. There were still the remains of the two gargoyles, they had fought earlier. Arthur rushed to the next room which used to be a study or an office many years back. Surya was crouching near the rotten broken desk. Jason was lying next to her. Dan could see a big hole in the ceiling. There was a lot of blood around him. The old man came up to them. He looked up at the large hole in the ceiling and sighed. Tokutei ran after him with two backpacks he had just picked up from the previous room. Dan and Lian followed him. They were carrying one assault rifle and another backpack with ammo.

“Jason, can you hear me?” the old man asked gently pushing his arm.

“He’s been unconscious since I found him,” Surya replied sadly.

“Tokutei,” Arthur asked, “Is this the backpack that fell down during the explosion?”

“Yes, it is,” he replied keeping an eye on Jason.

“Quickly! Give it to me! There should be our medical supplies.”

“Is he gonna be alright?” Dan asked.

“It doesn’t look good,” Surya replied. “He seems to have a broken rib and I can’t stop the bleeding from his stomach.”

Arthur took out a bandage and a few swabs.

“Take his vest off,” he told Surya as he poured hydrogen peroxide onto one of the swabs. “Or not, we may hurt him even more. Use your dagger and cut it, will you?”

The girl slowly rolled up Jason’s vest revealing a wooden spike plunged into his stomach. She ejected one of her daggers from her cuff, slid it under the uniform and cut it up. The vest broke into half.

“That’s a nasty wound,” Tokutei said. “I can help you take it out” Dan and Lian were watching the whole thing hoping for their teammate to be OK.

“It’s dangerous,” the old man said injecting some morphine into Jason’s arm. “Just stay there.”

“I just wanted to do something useful.”

“You did a lot today,” the old man said with his voice raised.

“Everyone did, but now his life is in danger and I need to act quickly, so please just wait.”

Tokutei turned around and left the room. Dan and Lian didn't even notice it. They were too busy observing the whole situation.

"Surya, wipe out the blood around the wound, and I will try to take the spike out."

"OK," came the willing answer.

She grabbed the swabs and started wiping the pouring blood while Arthur put his fingers around the spike and slowly pulled it out."

A slight grimace appeared on Jason's face. The wooden piece left a few inch hole inside Jason's body. Surya quickly started to disinfect it while Arthur pressed some button on his watch and stood up.

"John," he said through the earwig. "Can you see us through the Eagle's Eye?"

"Very clearly, Sir."

"Bring the machine here, Mr. White needs immediate medical attention."

"Yes, Sir."

"And John."

"Yes?"

"Tell Bill to deal with the ghouls here."

"Ghouls?" came a surprised answer.

"He'll know what to do."

"Yes Sir. On my way, Sir."

Arthur turned back and scanned Jason.

"We need to check his arms and legs for any fractures."

Surya nodded and gently began checking her colleague's arms.

31.

Meanwhile Tokutei jumped off the building and headed towards the vast blood stain left after the witch. He looked around trying to estimate the position of the ghouls. There were lots of them lurking downhill near the cemetery. The monsters were dragging dead bodies back to the graves to later feed on them. Several monsters spotted him and made a dart towards him. He was rummaging the witch's guts with his sword. Then, he noticed there something shiny. He crouched and picked it up.

"The Seal," he whispered with amazement looking at the object. He tucked it behind the belt and took a glance at the upcoming ghouls, then rushed towards the mansion. He noticed two assault rifles on the ground

near the front wall that must have fallen out during the explosion, so he quickly put his Katana back into saya, grabbed the guns, and turned around.

“Sink or swim,” he murmured then pressed the trigger and started shooting at the monsters. The recoil immediately popped the weapons up, and as a result the bullets hit no one. He realised he had to lower the weapons in order not to shoot the sky. The speeding bullets hid the ghouls, but their wounds quickly healed.

“Err... these are not the explosive bullets,” he whispered surprisingly, then jumped onto the window sill, and from there on the roof over the porch, and back to the second floor. The ghouls gathered below moaning.

32.

Dan and Lian had broken the bed, and changed it into the stretchers. The four of them, together gently moved Jason onto the stretcher. Arthur and Surya were constantly wiping the blood off his wound.

“Where have you been Tokutei?” Arthur asked seeing him enter the room.

The Asian man took out the little piece of the Seal from behind the belt and reached his hand towards Arthur.

“I went for this.”

Arthur froze in shock.

“The s-second piece,” he stuttered.

“Where did you get this?” Surya asked.

“I went outside and took it out from Laima’s guts.”

“What!” Arthur exclaimed, “Why did you go alone!”

“You saw what happened to Jason,” Lian added.

“But Jason was with us all the time, and still we couldn’t help him” Tokutei replied.

Suddenly, a sound of the jet engine came from behind the window.

“Hurry up!” Arthur ordered, “Dan and Tokutei, take the stretchers and we are out of here.”

“Tokutei, grab from the back, I will lead,” Dan suggested.

“Alright. B-But there’re still many ghouls outside.”

“Don’t worry,” the old man replied opening the door to the corridor.

The plane landed outside scaring off the ghouls. Every monster fled

somewhere because of the horrible sound of jet engines.

Arthur and Surya walked out through the main door. There were many dead bodies around and everything was filled with pieces of boards and dust. Dan and Tokutei were carrying Jason and carefully walked out passing round the remains of the dead. Finally, Lian went as the last one. She was holding her Masada assault rifle scanning the area for the ghouls. The door of the plane opened and Bill went out.

“Quickly take Jason to medical centre,” Arthur ordered.

Everyone boarded the machine, the door closed and the plane raised in the sky.

33.

Surya sat onto the couch while the rest took Jason in.

“What about the ghouls?” she asked. “We’re ASAT, we should finish what we started.”

Tokutei put Jason carefully onto the second couch.

“We have what we came for.”

“But those creatures may kill more people.”

Arthur fell onto the couch tired and fed up. He was holding the second piece of the Seal in his hand.

“They won’t”

As the plane was razing into the air, the ghouls returned to the cemetery. They walked around a suitcase left on the ground. The curious monsters looked at it amazingly. One of them came closer on its four limbs and started to sniff it. Then the suitcases exploded. The blast was so powerful that it wiped the whole mansion out and a part of the labyrinth.

3 HAUNT HIGH AND LOW

December, 4, 2012

17 days remaining

1.

Tokutei and Dan were sitting in a sophisticated cafe right in the centre of San Francisco. There were only few customers inside even though it was Friday evening. Tokutei was slowly sipping hot cup of coffee, while Dan was playing with his mobile.

“It’s true what the commercial says,” Tokutei smiled after taking another sip. “This coffee is wow.”

Dan put away his cell phone and grabbed his cup of coffee.

“Mine should be warm enough to drink. I hate drinking hot beverages.”

He took one sip, closed his eyes and purred.

“Mmm, delicious!”

“I would like to try their toasts, too,” the Asian guy suggested grabbing the shiny menu from the middle of the table.

Dan put the coffee cup back on the table and turned around.

“Excuse me,” he accosted the passing young waitress.

“Yes?” the girl asked softly taking out a tablet PC.

“I would like to order two toasts, please.”

“What kind of toasts?”

Tokutei made a surprised face.

“Err,”

“We have salami, pineapple, mushroom and cheese toasts,” the waitress explained brandishing with her tablet.

“I would like a pineapple one?” the Asian man decided.

“And a salami for me.”

“Anything to drink?”

Tokutei pointed at the cup of coffee.

“One more espresso, please.”

“And I’ll pass.”

“OK, the toasts will be ready in a few minutes,” the lady announced, then walked towards the customers a few tables further.

“What a hottie, huh?” Dan said amusingly checking her butt.

“Too short for me,” came an indifferent answer.

Dan scanned Tokutei from top to bottom.

“Too short? You’re way shorter than me. What do ya’ want? a giant?”

“No, someone as tall as me.”

“What about that one?” the boy said pointing at a woman sitting alone a few tables further.

“She seems to be nice. Nice breast.”

“Nice? They’re lovely!” he exclaimed. “You know Tok; this is our first time talking about girls.”

“Hmm, what about that last week quarrel?”

“What quarrel?” Dan asked astonishingly trying to find the situation his teammate was talking about.

“Oh you know, the one about when we were walking in the park late at night, and you saw some lonely chick sitting on the bench and she was like crying.”

“Heh, you call it a quarrel?”

“Yeap, you were like; I’m gonna talk to her, and I was like, no way, and eventually you went up to her and...”

“I know, I know, she turned up to be a vampire waiting for lonely men to suck up their blood, and I had to kill her afterwards,” the boy said sarcastically. “What a waste. But still, you call it a quarrel?”

“Sounds like a quarrel to me.”

“Oh Tokutei, you must still learn a lot about life. Speakin’ of which. I wanted to ask you something. You’re a samurai.”

“A ninja,” Tokutei corrected.

“Potato, potato. I always saw in movies that people always gave

names to their swords. What do ya' call yours?"

"Betty," the Asian replied casually.

"Are you serious?"

A gentle smile appeared on Tokutei's face which quickly turned into laughter.

"Actually, I have never given any names to my weapons."

Dan finished up the coffee."Anyway, coming back to girls..." a phone started to ring out of the sudden. Dan picked it up.

"Hello..."

Tokutei looked at him as if he knew something bad was going to happen.

"He's still with me," the boy continued. "What? Could you give us at least a few more minutes to finish up the coffee?"

Tokutei rolled his eyes and his face saddened.

"Alright, we would be there as soon as possible," Dan moaned and hanged up.

"Arthur?" Tokutei asked rhetorically.

"Yeah, we've gotta get back to the castle; he said something about the third piece."

"Just wonderful," the Asian man replied ironically.

"Don't complain, Tok. It's been almost two months since we found the last piece. It's about damn time."

Tokutei quickly grabbed the coffee cup, poured it all into his mouth while Dan was preparing the money.

"Come on!" he said putting the money on the plate.

They stood up and headed towards the exit. While they were passing the bar, the waitress went out from the kitchen carrying a silver tray. Tokutei caught an eye of the tasty toasts, and the beautiful smell hit his nose.

"Aren't you gonna eat your toasts?" she asked politely.

"I'm sorry ma'am, but we need to go," Dan explained. "The money and the tip are on the table."

Tokutei was looking at the toasts and coffee like a beast on its prey.

"Tokutei, hurry up!"

The man made a step towards the waitress.

"Actually, I will take these," he said grabbing the toasts and the coffee rapidly.

"But Sir, you can't take the cups outside."

"Tokutei! What the heck are you doing?"

He put away the toast back onto the tray, and drank the whole coffee with one swallow. The waitress was staring at him in amazement.

“Tokutei! God damn it!” Dan shouted.

“Alright I’m going,” he said grabbing the toasts again and ran towards the exit. “Want your toast?” he asked with his mouth full.

“You can have it,” came the cold answer. “I’ll eat something in the castle.”

2.

The men left the cafe and raced along the pavement to the nearby parking garage. The sun has already disappeared and the sky was getting darker and darker. They reached the entrance to the parking garage, went under a red barrier, and headed towards the elevator.

“You’re sure you don’t want the toast?” Tokutei asked after he finished the first one.

“No, I said I’ll eat something in the castle,” the boy answered as the door of the lift opened.

“Why’re you so stressed?”

“I don’t wanna talk about it,” Dan replied dropping his eyes. The door to the elevator opened, and they stepped in.

“Hmm, Are afraid of the next mission?”

“No, yes, I don’t know. A little bit.”

Tokutei gave him a confused look.

“Why?”

“We’ve met several types of creatures, so far. Every next one is worse. I just fear we may meet something we cannot beat.”

The elevator took them to the third level of the parking lot, which was situated on the roof. The door opened, and they stepped out. There were hardly any cars and only the corners were lit.

“Oh Dan, there’s always a way. Just believe in yourself. And what’s more, we’re much better than two months ago. You taught me to use guns, I taught you some...”

“What the fuck,” the boy whispered seeing something strange. Tokutei slowed down and looked at the same direction.

“There’re some guys at your car!” he said taking another bite of the toast.

The Asian noticed five people walking around Dan’s black DB9. They

looked as if they wanted to break in. One of them was looking through the tinted windshield, while some other was trying to open the door using some small, portable computer.

“No way!” Dan added accelerating.

As they were getting closer to the car, one of the men fumbling at the car door noticed them.

“Jack, pss,” he riveted the attention of the others.

They all immediately stopped what they were doing and made a few steps towards Dan and Tokutei.

“Can we help you, guys?” Dan asked politely.

“That’s a nice car,” the tall, well-built man with no hair said.

“Is it yours?” the second one wearing a bandana added.

“Yup.”

Dan was keeping the eye contact with the bald one.

“Actually, we wanted to borrow it,” another baldy with a long beard said.

“Borrow is not an appropriate word,” the forth one laughed silently making a few steps forward taking out a knife. “I think take it will be more suitable.”

Dan was still staring into the bald man’s eyes and Tokutei was eating his toast. The man with a bandana came up to Tokutei.

“Aren’t you gonna say anything?”

“I’m eating,” the Asian man replied swallowing another bite.

“He’s eating,” the baldy raised his voice amusingly glancing at his fellows and turned around.

The others burst into laughter. The fifth one wearing a red bandana, a short moustache and a beard took out a pistol from his leather jacket and started walking towards the boys aggressively aiming at Dan. The baldy standing before Tokutei turned back towards him, looked him into his eyes, and poked Tokutei’s arm causing him to release the half-eaten toast. The Asian rapidly flashed his arm hitting the guy in front of him in the face with an open palm. After it, he ducked catching the toast before it touched the ground. The man grabbed his nose feeling the pain. The blood started to sieve through his fingers.

“You’re gonna regret this,” the other one said advancing on Dan with a knife.

He was twice as big as Dan, and the fact that he was wearing gangster

clothes, as well as having several tattoos on his face made him look even more dangerous. The boy quickly made a spin giving his opponent a hook kick in the knife, then threw an accurate round kick right into his face. As the hurt man was falling down, Dan moved forward for the bald guy with a long beard. The fifth one with a gun ran towards Tokutei shouting as if he was going to overtake an elephant. Tokutei took another bite and kicked the upcoming man with a crescent kick simultaneously knocking him out. Dan, in the meantime, overpowered the guy with the gun. The last one was standing with his jaw dropped, his eyes wide opened, and trembling with shock.

“I-I will g-go,” he stuttered turning around.

Seconds later he fled from the parking lot as fast as he could.

“OK, I’m done,” Tokutei announced swallowing the last bit of the toast.

Dan quickly ran around his car, carefully scanning it for any dents, defects or anything that group could have done. He found nothing.

“We’d better hurry up,” he replied opening the door of his DB9. “I don’t wanna hear Arthur yell at us again.”

They got inside. Soon afterwards, the engine started with a roar, and the car left the parking lot leaving the four unconscious men lying on the asphalt.

3.

Twenty minutes later they reached the castle. Dan parked his DB9 in the courtyard right next to Mercedes SLR, Hummer, the ASAT truck and two choppers. The whole courtyard was well-lit by large spotlights placed on each side of the roof. The castle itself didn’t look scary at all even though it was completely dark around. Dozens of lights coming from various rooms in the building, as well as several workers made the look more pleasant.

Dan and Tokutei got out of the car and ran inside. Arthur and the others were already waiting in the briefing room. The boys rushed inside.

“Sorry we kept you waiting, we ran into some trouble,” Dan explained taking a sit in the third row.

Arthur slowly nodded in silence, and walked towards his desk.

“So everybody is here. That’s perfect, we may start.”

Tokutei leaned to Lian.

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t get what you wanted.”

“Never mind, I’ll buy it tomorrow.”

Arthur pressed some key on the keyboard and the large screen behind him activated.

“I contacted you as soon as I obtained this information.”

“The Seal, yes?” Jason asked.

“That’s correct. It’s been almost two months since we found the second piece.”

The screen changed into a satellite photo of northern Europe.

“One of the government’s secret agents, who is spying on Scandinavian peninsula, learnt that the third piece is in the possession of a demon called Groth.”

The screen displayed now a hideous creature with two horns on his head and red eyes.

“We know he is staying in the town called Pyramiden situated on Svalbard near Norway. It used to be a Russian mine some time ago, but then it became empty. I’ll be honest with you, it is a ghost town, and I mean literally, a ghost town.”

“So it’s like it’s filled with ghost?” Surya asked.

“That is correct. I know you have little experience with ghosts.”

“But we dealt with that haunted mansion two weeks ago,” Dan interrupted.

“That’s true, but as far as I know, now we are going to deal with different kinds of ghost.”

“What kinds?” Tokutei asked eagerly.

“Hmm, Angry spirits definitely, some poltergeists, and hmm... I don’t know. We shall see. I only received a short briefing a few hours ago.”

“Luckily, we had those lectures about dealing with ghosts,” Lian said amusingly.

“When are we going?” Surya asked.

“We’re flying at two a.m. You’d better pack your stuff immediately.”

“Now?” Dan asked.

“Yes, now. I’ll tell you more details when we have landed.”

Everyone stood up and headed towards the exit.

“O.D.,” Arthur said. “Please wait.”

“I’ll see you guys later,” Jason said turning back and walking towards Arthur.

“Jason, do you think you’re ready for the mission?”

“Of course, sir. You know I didn’t have any problems with those missions during last month.”

“Those were some minor missions. Now we’re going for the third piece. You realise the danger of it, don’t you?”

“I’m not afraid.”

“I know you aren’t, you can’t be. But what I’m getting at is that if you don’t feel confident enough, don’t go, or stay in the plane and monitor the whole mission.”

“I will participate like everyone else, Arthur.”

The old man wasn’t so sure whether to put Jason on this mission. After all he had been seriously injured eight weeks earlier.

“Arthur, every next mission is more difficult. If you want me to stay, there gonna be only five of you.”

“Actually, Jason, there’s going to be two more.”

“Who?”

“Two government agents. Anyway, are you absolutely, 100 % sure, you’re ready for the mission?”

“I am.”

“OK. But don’t get yourself into much trouble, will you?” the old man sighed

“I’ll try, Sir. I mean... I will.”

“Fine, so be ready in three hours.”

Jason nodded and soon afterwards, left the room.

4.

Dan and everyone else were in the lift at that time.

“Tokutei,” Dan interrupted the awkward silence. “If ya’ wanna get this new weapon we were talking about, go with me to my lab now.”

“You bet I will,” came the eager answer.

“How can he always get the best stuff and we don’t, huh?” Lian complained at the top of her lungs.

“You got your HK enhanced, and the Masada as well, so why the heck are you complaining?” Dan tried to explain.

“You have improved his katana,” Surya interrupted. “What about my daggers, huh? I’ve been waiting for them since forever.”

Dan dropped his eyes.

“I finished them last week, but... I forgot to give them to you,” the boy replied.

The lift stopped and the door opened.

“Well, I can go with you, guys and take the daggers.”

“No, no, no. I suggest you prepare your clothing and so on, and I will bring you the daggers myself in an hour.”

“But...” Surya started to say something.

“No buts, I have to show Tokutei his new weapon, so see you later,” he said pushing her out off the lift.

“Err...” Lian murmured confused as the door closed.

“What? I hate arguing with dhampirs.”

“You did nothing with her daggers, Dan, did you?” Lian asked.

“Nope,” the boy replied.

“You know, you have to make it up to her.”

“Yup. That’s why I must do it now or she will complain to Arthur that I hate her or whatever.”

The lift stopped, the door drew aside and Lian left giggling.

“See ya’ later.”

“Bye”

“See you.”

As soon as the door closed, Tokutei tapped Dan and asked.

“Dan, we’ve been living together for two months now, and you still treat Surya like an enemy.”

“I know, it’s hard for me to overcome this loath for vampires and dhampirs. But you must admit I’ve made some progress.”

“Little,” came the cold answer.

“This is not that I treat her like an enemy, I also treat her like a rival. Look, I used to be a hunter back in the days, and now seeing that a thing I hunted does something better than me, puts me in an awkward position.”

The lift stopped and the boys stepped out.

“A hunter was, is, and will always be better than a vampire, or a dhampir,” the boy continued. “I’m gonna prove it all the time. It’s something like you and Lian. You argue all the time about who’s better at what. So you can’t blame me.”

“You’re right. But... eh, never mind.”

They were walking slowly towards the door in the middle of the corridor.

“Coming back to this special weapon, could you at least tell me what it is?” Tokutei asked pumping with excitement.

“I told you it was a surprise, be patient, Tok.”

Dan took out something like an access card and flashed it across the reader near the metal door. The light on the device immediately changed from red into green and the boys went in.

5.

Dan’s lab was a vast chamber. There were lots of tables with test-tubes and lots of electronic devices. At the back, there were three spacious, plastic containers, where projectiles fell from conveyers above. On the right there were four, 60-inches screens displaying various formulas, drawings, and pictures. On the left, there were five robotic arms similar to those in a car factory. In the middle, there were three rows of tables filled with electronic gadgets, equipment and weapons. Everything looked like a warehouse combined with a scientific lab and a factory.

“You know this is the first time I’ve been to your lab?” Tokutei murmured looking around in wonder.

His eyes couldn’t focus on one thing. They were wandering around the lab couldn’t figure out what was going on there.

“You know, I think only Arthur has been here before. Anyway, Tok, follow me, I’ll give your new toy and um... then I’ve gotta do the daggers for Surya.”

Tokutei followed Dan towards the corner near the screens. The boy grabbed some shiny metal pipe, about fifteen inches long that was placed on two stands.

“This is it.”

“An escrima?” The Asian guy asked referring to a wooden, stick-like weapon used in hand-to-hand combat.

“No, it’s a Bo staff.”

“Isn’t it too short for a staff? You must remember from my lessons that a Bo staff is about seventy inches long”

“Just take it and press this tiny button,” Dan sighed handing the pipe over to his mate.

He grabbed it with two hands and pressed the small button at the top as Dan said. As soon as he did this, two thin pipes pulled out from both ends.

“Wow,” Tokutei said surprisingly gazing at the six-foot long

weapon. "Now it looks like a Bo staff, but why is it so thin?"

"You'll see in a minute. The weapon itself is made of titanium and carbon fibre thus it's so light and hard. Moreover, there's no need to make it as thick as the central part because it still won't break and you'll have a bigger control when the ends are thinner."

"Indeed," the boy replied swinging the staff around.

"But Tok!" Dan exclaimed. "Don't swing this thing in my lab, God damn it or you'll break something."

"Sorry. Hmm... What does this button do?" he asked eagerly, then pressed another button on the other side of the handle.

Almost immediately a two-foot, thick, white light appeared on both sides.

"This is what I wanted to show you."

"A lightsaber."

"Not a light.."

Tokutei interrupted making a swing over his head,

"Now I feel like Darth Maul."

"Tokutei! Listen to me!" the boy shouted calming his mate down.

"This is a strong UV light designed to kill those which are invulnerable to regular strikes."

"Vampires."

"Yes, vampires. And its rail is so condensed that it can cut or rather burn through anything. Now Tokutei, please, if you want to play with the staff go to the gym or outside, I need to enhance Surya's daggers."

"OK, OK." Tokutei said turning off the staff. "You don't need to wreak your anger on me. Just wait till tomorrow when we're in Norway."

"So all in all. You have a regular Bo staff and a Bo staff with UV light. Take it and enjoy it."

"And there's one more function."

"What?"

"A torch," he replied with a laugh.

Dan didn't find it funny.

"Just take the weapon, Tok. I'll see you later, alright?"

"OK," he replied leaving the lab.

When Tokutei has left, Dan walked to the other side of the lab. There were two silver daggers lying on the floor in the corner, under two miniguns. He crouched and picked them up. Next, he put them on some machine lying on the table on the left, near robotic arms. The machine

looked like a regular support for a sword with mechanical clamps. When the clamps touched the daggers, Dan walked up to the computer nearby and started to search for something. After a few clicks, a picture presenting some writing in an ancient language appeared. Dan pressed *enter* on the keyboard and suddenly the mechanical arm that was near the support, lowered and a thin, blue laser started to carve the picture on the blades.

6.

In the meantime, Lian was in her chamber preparing for the mission. She was walking from a huge wardrobe to her water-bed singing some popular pop song that was being played from her computer. Her chamber looked very modern and traditional at the same time. One wall, the one without windows, was covered with numerous weapons. There were swords, nunchucks, three-section staffs, staffs, kamas and many others. All the cold steel was on the right, while the left side of the wall was full of guns. There were several sniper rifles, assault rifles, pistols, grenades and chains of ammo. On her bed, there were combat trousers, a dark vest and a belt with numerous gadgets. The girl stopped at her wardrobe and started to rummage through the clothes for something more. Seconds later, she closed the wardrobe after finding nothing and walked back to her bed. She glanced at a large clock opposite the bed. There was still some time. Then she opened the bag, and started to put ammo inside.

7.

Jason was sitting in his room at the computer, uploading some webpages to his tablet. His chamber was rather modern. There were a few digital posters with sport cars on the walls. Opposite the bed, there was an enormous TV screen with a wall full of movies and gigantic speakers around it. In his personal gym, he had a wide, digital view of Sydney. It helped him feel a little bit like at home while he was working out. Every piece of furniture looked as if it was from the future and was in a white colour with a few elements in black. The armchairs and the sofa were covered with black and white leather.

Jason peeked at the clock on the computer, and stood up. He turned off the screen, moved towards his wardrobe, took out the rucksack, and started to pack.

8.

Half an hour passed and Dan was ready with the daggers. He was going along the corridor on Surya's floor towards her room. He had the daggers with him. He hadn't been here since the day he met her. He remembered exactly how he attacked her, and had to be stopped by his teammate.

"You'll just put the blades at her door and get the hell out of this floor," he murmured to himself crouching at her door. "On the other hand, Dan, the others will give you a good wiggling again for discriminating Surya. So... Maybe you will just give it to her and disappear without a word. Or... Hmm, sink or swim."

He stopped at her door, reached out his hand and was about to knock. But before he did so, he stopped his hand, sighed, slowly shook his head and then finally knocked. Next he stepped back and waited for Surya to answer the door. Yet, nothing happened. He came up and knocked once more, now more intensively and vigorously. Still, the girl didn't answer it.

"Maybe I really should leave the weapons here and get back upstairs."

He slowly pressed the knob and went inside not being truly convinced of what he was doing. He looked around glancing over the beautiful furniture and decor of Surya's room. He felt cosy and warm inside.

Her chamber was much different than he had expected. Actually, it was nothing he had expected, to be precise. It wasn't either dark, or covered in typical vampiric symbols or style. The apartment looked very girly. White, green and pink colours dominated. There were flowers along the window, very well-kept. The wall was decorated with various photos that seemed to have been taken by Surya herself. Some of the photos presented the most popular monuments of San Francisco, New York, while others showed nature; waterfalls, deserts, mountains. There was a pink sofa at a desk with a computer, covered with fuzzy cushions. Dan also saw there a teddy bear.

"Surya? Are you here?" he shouted, but no one answered. "She must be at the shooting-range," he murmured, then went up to her bed covered with dozens of cushions, and put the daggers on it.

Suddenly, the door near the window opened releasing a cloud of steam from the bathroom. Dan immediately directed his attention at the steam, and saw a blueprint emerging from inside. It was Surya. To his surprise, she

was only wearing her underwear, a towel on her head, and an iPod in her ears. She walked towards the huge wardrobe on the other side of the room, gazing at the floor and dancing to the rhythm she was hearing, still not being aware of Dan's presence.

"Surya," the boy spoke silently, but she couldn't hear him because of the music playing loud in her ears.

Dan was standing with one dagger in his hand staring at the sexy nineteen-year old girl. He didn't know what to do, as she couldn't hear him.

Moreover, seeing her in underwear only was more awkward to him. He thought to come up to her and tap her shoulder, but no, not a good idea. Dan doesn't touch dhampirs. Surya reached the wardrobe and untied the towel letting her long, wet, black and white hair cover her shoulders and back. Dan put the second dagger on the bed and decided to sneak out of the room. He started to walk slowly towards the door still looking at Surya with his eyes wide open. Then suddenly, the girl turned around and on seeing Dan screamed covering her body with the towel from the floor. She quickly pushed away the headphones off her ears and realising it was a familiar face, shouted,

"Dan!"

"S-Surya," the boy stuttered gazing at her beautiful, young body.

"Dan! What are you doing here?" the girl asked surprisingly still covering herself with the towel.

"This is not what it looks like. I just came to give you your daggers. See, they're on the bed.

"Why didn't you knock?"

"I did knock... several times, but since there wasn't any answer, I came in and the rest you know."

"I see," came the cold answer.

She grabbed some shirt and quickly put it on, covering her legs with the towel.

"OK, thanks for the daggers. What exactly did you do with them?"

"The same stuff that I did with Tokutei's sword. Demon curses, salt molecules, sharpening with laser. ,,

"That's wonderful. Thanks again."

"Yeah, you're welcome."

"Sorry, I can't talk right now, but I have to prepare for the mission."

“I see, I’ll be off now,” he said walking towards the door still behaving in a timid way. The girl followed him with her eyes, and when the door closed she went towards her bed to check out the daggers.

9.

Dan was walking slowly along the corridor thinking about the incident that had just happened. It reminded him of the events from the past. His memories brought him back to 2004.

“This is it, Danny,” a familiar masculine voice said.

“Finally,” the boy reacted waking up on the back seat of a black SUV.

He could hear the raindrops tapping against the metal roof and the windshield of the car.

“I thought I would fall asleep because of this long journey.”

“Dan, you did fall asleep,” the boy with short black hair sitting next to him said.

“Never mind, what’s the plan Lucy?” Dan asked some woman sitting in the front seat.

She had straight, long, blonde hair pinned up. Her face was very smooth, apart from a small mole on her left cheek.

“We’ll go there armed and loaded, and shoot all of the vampires nesting inside,” the woman replied turning around with a smile.

The car stopped in some dark forest. The engine went silent.

“Mike, help me out,” the driver said to the boy sitting next to Dan.

“Alright,” the boy answered, then opened the door of the car and stepped outside.

The rain was pouring down, and the sky was darker than usually. Mainly because there were no lights around. Dan and Lucy stepped out, too and ran to the boot of the car. Dan looked around and saw only an old house and a thick forest surrounding it.

“Are you sure this is the vampires’ nest? It looks like a haunted house to me.”

“Don’t worry,” Lucy assured. “We will definitely find some vampires there. Right Jack?” she said to the driver, who had just stepped out of the car.

“Right,” he answered as pouring rain was falling down on his

wrinkled cheeks.

Mike grabbed three shotguns from the boot and gave them to the rest.

“Did you check the UV lights, Mike?” Jack asked.

“Yeap, back in New York.”

“Alright boys,” Lucy cut in. “It’s time we kicked some fangboys’ asses.”

They walked towards the old house through the pebbly path surrounded by tall, thick grass. When they got to the door, Dan asked surprisingly seeing something odd,

“The door is open.”

Everyone else looked at it in astonishment. It was not part of their plan.

“Something’s wrong,” Jack said poking the door with the barrel of his gun.

“Let me just peep inside,” Lucy suggested looking in through the gap between the wall and the ajar door.

Next, she beckoned to the others to come in, and stepped inside while the others followed her quietly .

“What’s that horrible smell?” Mike asked immediately covering his nose.

The hall was covered with mud and blood stains. They quickly scanned the room. The inside was rather old. Everywhere was furniture at least thirty years old. Some of it was broken or moved, as if some fight had just happened there. The chandelier was still swinging from left to right, and some blood was dripping along the old, wooden stairs leading to the upper part of the building.

“What the...” Jack said gazing at the blood.

Dan crouched and touched the ash lying on the floor.

“Vampire’s remains,” he whispered gently rubbing the dust with his fingers.

“Something must have happened here,” Mike added walking towards the next room.

“Mike!” Jack whispered. “Let’s check that room first,” he added pointing left with his barrel.

The boy turned around and they all entered the next room. It was a sitting room with lots of chairs lying in all corners. There were more blood stains around and several, dirty clothes on the ground. The carpet was rolled up and the window was broken letting the gentle, night wind blow inside.

“Do you think some hunters got here before us?” Lucy asked looking at the destroyed paintings.

“We were supposed to be the only ones,” Jack replied firmly. Suddenly, the door of the next room creaked open, and everyone switched on their UV lights attached to their guns, directing the rail at that side. The rail illuminated a blueprint of a girl.

“She’s not a vampire! Turn the UV lights off,” Dan announced. They caught an eye of a young girl, in her early teens wearing long, black coat standing in the door.

“Who are you?” Jack shouted surprisingly. The girl had medium-long blonde hair and blue eyes. She was about eleven years old. She had red cheeks and very smooth skin.

“She’s not a vampire for sure,” Mike assured. They slowly walked towards the mysterious girl, who, so far, said nothing.

“Look at her face!” Dan beckoned. Her face and hands were covered with blood.

“There are no vampires here,” the girl said casually.

“What?” Dan exclaimed. “How do you know that?”

“Who are you?” Jack asked again hoping he would get the answer that time. “And what are you doing here alone?”

“I’m a hunter,” the little teenager replied with no emotions.

“Aren’t you too young for a hunter?” Dan asked.

“I’m almost twelve,” she replied.

“What happened to the vampires?” Lucy asked. “Did you do all of this by yourself?”

“Yes,” the girl replied calmly wiping the blood of her forehead.

“Do you have any name?” Dan asked.

“Yes, Natalie,” the girl answered turning around.

“Where are you going?” the boy asked seeing the girl walking to the next room, but she didn’t answer.

Lucy ran up to her and caught her by her arm.

“Natalie, who sent you here?”

The girl turned around and answered,

“I came here with my father. He’s a hunter, too.”

“Where is he now?”

“Those vampires killed him,” came the sad answer.

Mike was standing near Jack while his eyes were wondering between Jack

and the girl.

“Where is your mother?” Lucy asked.

“She’s dead, too. I had only my father in my life,” Natalie replied sadly.

Lucy turned back to Jack and raised her eyebrows as if to indicate something. Mike poked Jack with his elbow. The man sighed and rolled his eyes bellowing,

“Alright, Alright. Natalie, what would you say if we took you to New York and help you find a life there?”

Lucy glanced at Jack with a silent smile.

“You’ll be given home, food, and opportunity to work with many other hunters. What do ya’ say?”

A small smile appeared on a girl’s face.

“Dan, Dan?” Jason’s voice sounded in his head. “What are you doing here?”

The boy raised his eyes and looked around finding himself sitting on the stairs.

“O.D. I-I was just...”

“Daydreaming, I know. Anyway, I was looking for you to ask you something.”

“Com’on.”

“Well, have you invented any gun that can get rid of ghosts?”

“Yeah, we’ve been using the iron-salt bullets. They could do the work.”

“Right, but apart from this?” he said peeking at all the corners.

“Err... not yet. Why do you ask? Salt is sufficient.”

“The problem is, um, I’m allergic to salt.”

“No way!” the boy burst into laughter.

“It’s not funny, Dan.”

“Sorry, He he, but, it’s just odd. You fear nothing but you’re allergic to salt.”

“Shit happens.”

“Hmm... OK O.D.,” he stopped his laughter. “I’ll try to make some substitute but not for this mission. We don’t have much time, do we?”

“We don’t. That would be marvellous, Dan. Thanks.”

Jason turned around and went upstairs. Dan returned to his chamber.

December 5, 2012

16 days remaining

10.

A few hours later, they were all in the plane. Jason, Lian, Tokutei and Dan were sleeping. Arthur was checking some satellite photos on his notebook, while Surya was reading a book.

“What are you reading?” Arthur asked glancing at her through his glasses.

“Err,” the girl raised her eyes from behind the book. “Vampire hunter,” she replied amusingly showing the cover to Arthur.

“I see, and where are you now?”

“The girl discovers that all her friends work for the vampires. Why do you ask? Have you read this?”

“Yes, A few years ago. It gave me a lot of tips on hunting and dealing with blood-drinkers.”

“Yeah I know. It’s a great book. It’s so gripping that I simply must continue reading.”

“Did you know, that it was written by the vampire hunter himself, based on her life?”

“Really?” she put the book on her laps and turned towards Arthur. “You must be kidding. It all happened for real?” she said in disbelief.

“Yes. Actually, I used to work with her a few years ago.”

“No way, is she still alive?”

“Read it,” the old man replied beckoning at the book.

Surya changed her position and continued reading. Arthur took a quick look at everyone and went back to his work.

11.

It was nine in the morning and they were still flying. Lian opened her eyes and looked around. She saw everyone sleeping. Jason was the one that caught her eye. He was lying with his head directed backwards, drooling on the leather sofa. A gentle smile appeared on her face and she stretched moaning silently and stood up, then walked to the larger window near the weaponry. She could see nothing but the white clouds and water below.

“We must be still above the ocean,” she murmured to herself.

Next she headed to the small kitchen near the cockpit and started to make something to eat.

“Where are we?” Tokutei yawned waking up.

“Over the ocean.”

“Hmm food,” he muttered wiping his sleepy eyes.

Afterwards he stood up, took a glimpse at everyone and went up to Lian.

“What have we got here?”

He opened the fridge and dived in.

“Hamburgers and hotdogs, yummy.”

“I don’t feel like having fast foods for breakfast,” the girl complained.

“So what are you gonna eat, a salad, cause’ you’re a girl and has to keep fit?”

“No, sandwiches, eggs, regular stuff.”

Tokutei put a hamburger and a hot dog to the microwave above the fridge and turned it on.

“There is no better food than hot food,” the boy said with a grin.

“I agree, but the only hot thing I’m gonna eat will be the eggs and the coffee. Oh, since I’m making myself a coffee, do you want some hot tea?”

“Tea?” Jason’s voice came from the beds.

“Key word,” Lian said amusingly. “So what with the tea, Tok?”

“Yes, it would be fine.”

“I could do with a cup of tea, too, Lian,” Jason suggested.

The microwave beeped. Tokutei opened its door and took out his breakfast looking at it as if it was his first meal for many months. Next he headed towards the table between the kitchen and the beds and sat down. And that was all. He didn’t take the food, nor did he look at it even though a few seconds before he was about to throw himself on it and gobble it.

“Why aren’t you eating?” Lian asked surprised. “It will get cool.”

“I’m waiting for you.”

“B-But it will be still a few minutes before I finish making the sandwich. And still.. eggs need eight minutes of boiling. So there is no need for you to wait for me.”

“Hmm, if you say so.”

“Well, Tok, Jason said looking into the fridge packed with fresh food. “You may wait for me. I’ll have what you’re having.”

“OK, so hurry up,” the Asian guy said taking a deep breath over the sweet-smelling food.

“Mmm, what smells so nice?” Surya asked waking up with the book in her hands.

“Everything that is delicious,” Jason replied closing the microwave door.

Arthur opened his eyes and got up.

“You just couldn’t be any quieter, could you?” he asked not even trying to make anyone feel sad for him. “Well, if everyone gets up, so will I.”

“Heh, only Dan isn’t hungry,” Surya said peeking at his colleague still sleeping.

“Dan!” Tokutei shouted. “Wake up! Breakfast is served,” he added taking a bite of his hotdog.

“He had a hard evening, let him sleep,” Arthur replied.

Then they heard a loud snore coming from Dan’s mouth as he turned over. They looked at one another and almost immediately everyone burst into laughter. Still, it didn’t wake Dan up.

12.

After a while, everyone was sitting at the table having their breakfast. Only Dan was still sleeping, but although the team tried to behave quietly in the beginning, they weren’t at that moment. They simply realised Dan must have been too exhausted after a few nights that he had spent in his lab, that he had to simply recharge for the mission.

“So tell us Arthur, what’s the plan for the mission?” Lian asked sipping her warm, delicious tea. “Apart from finding the third piece.”

“Well, before we land you can take showers and put on the winter uniforms. We will land on the top of the mountain, um... I forgot the name. It was a catchy name...what was it... Anyway the one, which is the nearest to Pyramiden. Special agent Clark Johnson as well as Natalie Dunkin will be waiting for us there and together we will fly down to the town”

“Down to the town,” Lian repeated making it a catchy rhythm.

“Why to land on the top? Hmm? When we can land near the town,” Surya asked.

“Probably because of the fact that we’ll be operating during the day, and we don’t want to be visible.” Lian explained.

“That’s correct,” the old man confirmed. If we are lucky enough, we will have the Seal before it gets dark.”

“Ghosts don’t come out during the day, do they?” Jason asked.

“Actually they do, but they’re hardly visible or invisible. They prefer darkness and shadows.”

“But we may expect only ghosts and demons, right?” Lian asked.

“Right,” Arthur replied. “As far as I know, or rather my source says, we won’t meet anything else.”

“This demon... the one who has the Seal,” Jason tried to ask something. “Can’t he bring dead back to life?”

“Probably, but even if we do meet any zombies there, there won’t be as many as we met in the labyrinth. Not so many people visited Pyramiden, or stayed there, and certainly only few died there.”

Tokutei grabbed his empty plate and carefully stood up not to bump the table with his knee.

“What about vampires? There won’t be any vampires?”

Suddenly, Dan jumped out of his bed taking out a silver knife that had been attached to his shin.

“Vampires!” he said angrily looking around.

“Calm down Dan, we were just talking about the mission,” Tokutei said trying to restrain from bursting into laughter.

“But, that’s glad you’ve finally woken up,” Surya added. “It’s after ten.”

Dan slowly put back his knife, stood up and stretched feeling the relief he had not felt for a long time. After all, during this few-month stay, he had only several nights where he had a chance to sleep as long as now on the plane.

“Why are you eating without me?”

“Arthur said that you had a difficult night and needed much sleep, so we didn’t wanna wake you up” Jason explained.

“That’s true,” Arthur confirmed.

“Although, we tried to behave normally, but you were sleeping like a log.”

“But I wanted to have breakfast with you guys.”

Tokutei reached the kitchen compartment and placed his dishes in the dishwasher.

“You can still have it,” Lian answered taking the last sip of her

beverage. "I'll certainly have another cup of tea."

"At least someone wants to accompany me."

"I don't think anyone will move from the table yet," Arthur added.

"Actually, I'll have a hot shower now," Jason replied standing up.

"If we are to be ready in short time, I suggest we get ready before we land."

"So you go first, and I'll be the next in line," the Asian girl smiled walking towards the kitchen.

"OK," came the answer, as O.D. was heading towards the bathroom near the tail.

13.

It was getting near noon when the plane finally began to get lower. Its speed gradually dropped until it was a few hundred yards above the mountains. Then its engines turned towards the ground and the huge black machine was slowly getting closer to the top of the mountain until it gently touched it and turned the engines off. The weather outside was windy and cold. After all, this arctic ghost town was situated only 1200 km from the North Pole. The thick layer of clouds covered the summit blocking the view and nothing apart a few rocks covered with snow was visible. When the plane landed, the side door opened and a short stairs ejected from the floor. Arthur walked out first and saw some man in his early thirties standing near the landing zone. Some shorter woman was accompanying him. They were all dressed in heavy jackets with fuzzy hoods and they seemed to have got used to the cold.

"Arthur, finally here," the man said taking off the modern sunglasses.

"Yeap, we're a bit late, but I hope we'll make up for the lost time." The old man went down the stairs and approached the man. The rest of the team followed him.

"Cold, cold, cold," Jason kept repeating not having experience such weather before.

"It's not so cold," Dan assured.

"Maybe for you, but in Sydney it never snows, it's always warm, I have never felt so cold in my whole life."

"Who are they?" Surya asked stepping out next.

"These should be the guys Arthur was talking about," Tokutei replied.

Arthur waited until everybody came closer, so he could introduce them.

“Clark, Natalie, this is Surya, Tokutei, Dan, Jason, and Lian.”

“Nice to meet you,” everyone said firmly shaking hands with Clark and Natalie.

“Aren’t you cold?” Clark asked zipping his heavy jacket up.

Everyone was wearing their combat uniforms that looked rather light for that kind of weather. They weren’t different from their traditional ones at first sight, but appearances can be deceiving.

Dan tapped his chest several times as if to indicate something hiding beneath.

“Actually, our uniforms have one electric layer that heats the individual. They may look as if they’re light and thin, but in fact they’re as warm, or even warmer than the jacket you’re wearing.”

“And I thought I had all the latest gadgets,” Clark replied amusingly beckoning at his computerised sunglasses.

Arthur peeped at Dan and commented,

“Most of our gadgets, as far as weaponry is concerned, are invented or enhanced by Dan.”

“Maybe you should consider working for the government, Dan?”

Clark suggested amusingly.

“No, thanks. I feel good where I’m now. If I changed teams, who’d gonna stop the end of the world?”

“The end of the world!” Clark exclaimed with shock.

“He doesn’t know,” Natalie replied lowering her voice.

“Tell me, I believe I need to know.”

Jason came closer.

“He already told you, the world will end and we are trying to stop it.”

“Eh,” Lian sighed. “To cut long story short; If we don’t find five pieces of the Seal we won’t be able to stop the demon responsible for the end of the world.”

Clark’s jaw dropped as he was staring at them in disbelief.

“He made the same face as you Tok, when you learnt about it,”

Dan said.

“Demon, s-seal?”

“Guys, please,” Arthur interrupted. “We need to get ready to get to the town as soon as possible.”

“We’ll tell you later,” Tokutei replied turning round.

Everyone walked towards the open tail of the plane. Clark was standing in the same place for a few seconds, paralysed with the information he had just learned. Then he boomed,

“And I thought ghosts were the worse.”

14.

The tail of the plane lowered till the end creating a ramp leading inside. Clark, still being in shock, couldn’t help asking more questions. He saw two girls standing near the tail watching the others taking out various things from the plane. Not thinking any more, he walked up to Surya.

“Were they serious about the world’s end?”

The girl looked at him warmly, trying to calm him down with her positive thinking. It’s been two months since she learned that the world would end and she got used to that thought, and the one that she knew deep in her heart that she was one of the people responsible for stopping it.

“Unfortunately, they... I mean we were.”

“I thought you were looking for this thing for some government experiment.”

“They simply didn’t tell you the whole truth. But I’m glad you’re willing to help us.”

Jason and Dan picked up backpacks from the storage in the tail and handed them to everyone.

“Dan,” the old man shouted. “Let everyone take their weapons.”

“OK,” the boy replied handing the last backpack.

Everyone stepped inside and grabbed assault rifles, pistols, daggers and grenades. Natalie grasped two grenades from a different compartment. Dan noticed it and ran up to her quickly.

“No, not these one. These are the UV grenades. They’re used for vampires only. Take the one... take the same as the others.”

“Remember to take extra salt,” Arthur reminded.

“Salt, eh” Jason replied with an awful face.

Arthur opened his wrist watch and took out a small round transparent piece that looked like a contact lens. Next he carefully put it into his eye. After that, he took out a small earpiece and placed it into his right ear.

“John, do you copy?”.

“This is John.”

Clark was looking in amazement.

“Who’s John?” he whispered to Surya.

“The pilot, he’s responsible for the medical assistance and taking care of the plane.”

Arthur turned towards the beautiful view of the island that emerged among the clouds and ordered.

“Fire Eagle Eye.”

“Aye Aye, Sir.”

“You probably wanna know what Eagle Eye is, don’t you?” Surya whispered to Clark.

“The satellite monitoring the area,” Clark replied proudly.

“Huh, so that wasn’t a new thing.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

Steam came from the roof of the plane, and seconds later it opened.

“I love this part,” Dan murmured to Natalie standing next to him watching the satellite shoot into the air.

Surya looked at everyone putting the microcomputers into their eyes and tiny headsets into their ears.

“We’ve been using Eagle Eye in almost every mission,” Clark continued.

Arthur gave something to Lian and pointed at Clark. The girl came up to them and said. “Here, put it into your eye and the second one.”

“Into my ear, I know,” Clark replied.

“Right,” came the cold answer.

Then she went up to Natalie and handed the devices over to her.

“Thanks.”

The girl smiled, turned around and went back to the others.

“Does anyone take a shotgun?” Jason asked out loud seeing one of them lying near the bags.

“I do,” Tokutei answered seriously.

“Tok, a shotgun? Really? You must be kidding,” Dan laughed.

“Yeah, I was,” came the answer with a huge grin.

“So I’ll take it,” the old man replied picking up the metal gun.

“They never failed me. And I believe a salt-shooting shotgun will be a perfect weapon for today... or tonight,” he added hanging it on his shoulder.

“Is everyone ready?” Natalie asked.

“Yeah,”

“Ready,” the others replied.

She went towards the steep edge of the mountain beckoning to the others to follow her. Everyone came closer to the point where the mountain rapidly ended and a precipice began. The clouds covered everything below, and no one couldn't see what was down there anymore. The other peaks of the mountains were seen in the distance. The flat surface of the sea flashed even further. The sun was making the snow sparkle, which gave an illusion of the air being slightly warmer.

“Where exactly are we going to fly?” Tokutei asked.

“Good question,” Surya added. “The only thing I can see are the clouds ahead, oh and other mountain summits.”

“We're gonna fly through it,” Clark replied. “Pyramiden is a few miles from here.”

“Fly through the summits?” Dan asked.

“No, the clouds.”

Lian came up to Arthur. She seemed to be concerned with something.

“Something is not right. How are we going to use Eagle Eye when there are so many clouds?”

“There is no need to be worried, really. Jack will lower Eagle Eye on the cloud level, so we would be able to use efficiently. Everything's gonna be just fine.”

Clark pushed some button on the arm of his backpack causing two small wings emerge from it.

“I'll go first,” he said, then threw himself off the cliff.

The wings quickly caught the air and Clark began gliding towards the clouds.

“Follow me,” Arthur told the others beckoning at the gap.

Next, he ran towards the edge and jumped spreading his arms and legs like a flying squirrel.

The others followed him and soon everyone was gliding towards the clouds.

15.

“This is awesome,” Dan shouted enjoying the carefree glide.

“Dan, open mike, please,” Jason's voice sounded.

Lian, Tokutei and Surya seemed to be enjoying the flight. They turned from

left to right, span, raised and lowered their height.

“Guys,” Arthur’s voice came through the earwig. “Please focus on the mission. If you want to fly, you can do it in California.”

“Sorry, Arthur,” Lian replied getting back into the order.

The whole fun disappeared, and they had to focus on two things; follow Clark, and mentally prepare themselves for the mission. As soon as they hit the clouds, the visibility lowered.

“Shit, I can’t see him.” Surya murmured.

When she lost the visual of Clark, she tried to follow Arthur. The others did the same. A few minutes later, the clouds ended and they could see beautiful, clear air and the empty town of Pyramiden on the ground and a sea gulf nearby. Everything was covered in snow. The abandoned buildings spread next to steep mountains that were disappearing in the clouds above. There were several houses, warehouses and a few blocks of flats typical for old, Russian architecture. There was also a conveyor leading up to one mountain, and a small harbour built at the gulf itself. One of the mountains, the one with the conveyor was in a shape of a pyramid, hence the name of the town. Eight figures were floating in the air, gradually heading for the town.

No sooner had they emerged from the clouds than Dan got caught with the memory of the past again. He got back to the year 2005. He was dancing with Natalie at some disco in New York. There were lots of people dressed in bizarre costumes or in formal clothes. Everyone seemed to have a good time, not only because of the music itself, but also because of the amount of alcohol they had consumed. There were dozens of couples enjoying their time together, but one could meet also many single women and men, who just came there with friends to wind up after the long year. The hall was decorated with balloons, and in the middle, there was a vast sign saying “Happy new year 2006!” The people were dancing to a fast electro song and everyone was jumping and swinging their arms around in the rhythm of the rapid beats and high-pitched melody. The weird looking DJ with tall puffy hat announced with his radio-like voice.

“Now something to get you closer, guys.”

As soon as he said that, the song gradually changed into a slow tune. Everyone there closed up and created pairs. Dan held Natalie’s one hand, putting his second hand onto her back. They started slowly rocking, feeling the slow rhythm of the song. They were dancing really close to each other

constantly looking at other people around.

“Did you see anything suspicious?” the girl shouted to Dan’s ear.

“No, nothing. How about you?”

“Nope.”

Although it was almost midnight, and they were still teenagers, the discotheque was full of others like them. It looked rather like a fancy dressed party or a school ball, than a new year’s eve party at a discotheque.

“Alright everybody,” the DJ announced. “One minute to midnight, so ya’d better find someone to kiss quickly.”

“Maybe they’re not here,” Natalie shouted to Dan’s ear.

“Let’s see and wait.”

The song was getting till the end until it stopped rapidly. The DJ grasped the microphone and shouted.

“You’d better have someone beside you, as there is only 10, 9, 8.”

Everyone stopped opposite to each other and loudly counted down with the man. Dan was holding Natalie’s hands, looking deep into her glittering eyes. Their lips were whispering the numbers along with the crowd.

“7, 6, 5.”

He noticed that her hands began to tremble as if she was worried or afraid of something. The counting continued.

“4, 3, 2.”

Dan half closed his eyes and got closer to Natalie’s lips.

“1.”

The girl trembled more intensively, but did the same, and gave in to that special moment. They were about to kiss when a terrible shriek came from the second level of the hall. The boy immediately withdrew and looked towards the platform behind him. Natalie sighed with relief as if she was glad the kiss didn’t happen.

“She’s eating him!” another petrified voice came from above.

Everyone immediately fled in panic creating a huge chaos. Dan crouched and immediately took out two silver knives from his boot and handed one to Natalie. Next he took a glimpse at her and shouted.

“Let’s go!”

Then rushed towards the stairs elbowing through the crowd, and completely forgetting about what could have happened a few seconds before. The girl followed him. Suddenly, the music stopped as the DJ desk became empty. Jack was waiting near the stairs taking a close look at

everyone running down.

“How many?” Dan asked.

“I’ve counted four upstairs and a few blocking the main entrance.”

“Dan!” Jack shouted.

“Yeah?” the boy turned around.

“Use this,” he said throwing him a grenade.

Then another scream came from the direction where the entrance was. People were running downstairs trying to escape from the unknown. One of them accidentally pushed Dan, making him lose his balance, and not catch the grenade. The round object fell somewhere among the crowd. Dan understood he had to get it back, so he immediately made a dash after it.

In the meantime, Jack ran towards the puddle of blood near the entrance. A few metres further, there was a bald man struggling with another girl. Jack immediately accelerated and stabbed the creature with the knife. Almost immediately another appeared and another. Natalie caught up with Dan trying to catch the grenade, but some other person kicked it away.

“You go up, I gotta take the grenade,” he ordered to the girl.

She passed him, and seconds later she found herself upstairs right next to a vampiric girl feeding on some teenager’s body. Natalie quickly made a spin and threw a hook kick aiming at the vampire’s head. The powerful kick caused her to fall over the barrier onto the dance floor, then she cut the throat of the next one with the silver knife.

“Where are the rest?” she yelled to Dan.

“Downstairs!” came the answer, as the boy finally picked the grenade up.

He stood back on his feet, and looked at the dance floor. To his horror, he saw a dozen of vampires closing in on the shocked people. He took out the grenade, activated it and threw it near the feet of one of the bloodsuckers. One of the vampires noticed it, turned around and shouted to the boy.

“You really want to sacrifice everyone here?”

“It’s not a regular grenade,” the boy replied with a smile.

Natalie was observing everything from the balcony. She saw Jack covering his eyes, so she did the same. Then the grenade opened and thick rails of UV lights spread in all directions filling the room with white laser-like light. A terrible squeak filled with pain came from the clouds of pure light. Dan and Natalie were still covering their eyes, waiting until the grenade would run out of power. When it happened, they saw only frightened people and

thousands of small black flakes falling around onto empty clothes.

“It’s done,” Jack said with relief turning towards the crowd. “It’s OK now, you’re all safe.”

“Dan, look out,” A voice shouted.

“Natalie!”

Dan quickly stopped daydreaming and found himself a few metres above the ground, flying right into the snowy field. His senses and reflexes reacted quickly, but they were too slow to correct the situation. The boy skidded along the snowy pile and slid onto the field. His speed was automatically reduced by the thick layer of snow, until he stopped a few metres further, leaving a long trace in the snow. Everyone else spotted the whole situation and quickly landed near him.

“Is he OK?” Tokutei asked.

Surya was the closest, so she immediately came up to Dan lying on the field.

“What the heck was wrong with you?”

“Nothing,” the boy replied indifferently.

“Your mind was somewhere else wasn’t it?”

He bit his down lip and nodded unwillingly.

“And by the way, my name is Surya, not Natalie,” the girl said then turned on her feet and walked back to the others. “He’s OK.”

16.

A few minutes later, everyone was taking out their guns preparing for the mission. About half a mile from there were several blocks of flats and houses. Everything looked abandoned and silent. A gentle breeze filled the air and made the temperature feel colder than a few hours earlier. The Sun had already disappeared behind the mountains, and darkness began to set in. Dan was checking how much ammo he had.

“I’m glad we have those thermosuits.”

Natalie gave him a jealous look.

“Our heavy jackets are not so bad, after all.”

“That’s true, but you don’t have so much movement in it,” he smirked.

“Look at that mountain!” Lian interrupted.

“What’s wrong with it?” Tokutei replied.

“Can you see that shape?”

Natalie glanced over the conveyor leading up the mountain.

“The town was named after its shape. But, I don’t think it has some mythical history.”

Arthur took a deep breath.

“It’s dark, we should be going. We’re already late.”

“I really hoped we’d operate during the day,” Dan complained.

“Now we’re screwed.”

Suddenly a strange howl came from the direction of the town.

“Please tell me that was a wolf,” Lian said worryingly trying to spot something through the night vision.

“It rather sounded like a bear,” Jason replied.

“What bear can live on such a back of beyond?” Surya asked trying to spot something through Eagle Eye.

“Polar bears,” Arthur answered casually. “But I doubt whether they are here.”

“Just great.”

Natalie raised her index finger.

“Actually, Arthur, there’re some polar bears on Svalbard.”

Clark grabbed a shotgun and started to walk towards the empty town.

“Bear or no bear, we have no choice, but to go there.”

The rest of the team grabbed their weapons and followed him.

While they were walking, Natalie noticed that Tokutei didn’t have any guns with him.

“How do you expect to repel a ghost using this shiny metal thing?”

“Right, are you going to scare them with this?” Clark added.

Tokutei gave them a cold look and before he had any chance to say a word, Dan interrupted.

“I’ve enhanced his katana by engraving spells, curses and signs on it. I also placed there salt atoms, so yes, basically this sword is more powerful than any weapon here.”

“Thank you Dan, I was going to say this,” the Asian man replied raising his eyebrows.

Natalie looked at them surprisingly slowly saying.

“I see.”

“So Clark, Natalie, what’s your story?” Tokutei asked. “How did you end up dealing with ghosts?”

Clark and Natalie exchanged looks. The girl gave him a look saying *you start*.

“I used to be a freelance spy and a soldier of fortune back in the

days, but later I signed a contract with the government and now I continue doing what I did, and also do some paranormal stuff.”

“What paranormal stuff?”

“You know, ghosts and haunting.”

“What about demons, zombies and vampires?” Dan asked.

“Nope, never had a chance to see any.”

Dan directed his attention and Natalie and waited for her story. She said nothing.

“Well, and ya?”

The girl shook her head as if she was knocked out of a daydream.

“Sorry, I had something on my mind. My story is simple. I worked in New York...”

On hearing this, Surya looked at her and seconds later she was all ears.

“And a few years ago I got an offer to leave New York and move to the capital city to work for the government. I was paired up with Clark, and here I am.”

Dan scanned her from top to bottom thinking whether they had met before. The Natalie he knew was also slim and tall, but she had different cheek bones.

“No, it can’t be her,” he thought. “It’s impossible.”

17.

They were going along the only road that led to the town from the south side. The road was not wider than a few metres and looked rather like a footpath. It led to a junction with the main road connected docks with the town square. Everything was dark and there were no lights around, only several stars emerged from behind the clouds from time to time. They were passing a bulk of water in a *L* letter shape. The empty blocks were right ahead and behind the blocks, they could see the container leading to the steep mountain.

“What’s that stink?” Lian asked as she felt something repelling in her nose.

“Yuck, I smell it, too,” Tokutei added covering his nose with a glove.

“Gulls’ crap,” Clark replied. “After the town was abandoned in 1998, the animals moved in. Thousands of seagulls have their nests in the windows. Hence that odour.”

“And we’re going to breathe it for several hours,” Surya added.

“Don’t worry,” Arthur said with a gentle smile. “The human nose gets used to any smell after several minutes. Soon, you won’t be even aware of it.”

They passed a concrete square that used to be a heliport.

“Guys!” Dan boomed. “Look through Eagle Eye. These seagulls are everywhere.”

They finally got to the first building. It was a small two-storey house covered in snow. The walls weren’t destroyed at all, instead they looked, as if someone was still living there.

“No ghosts activity yet,” Jason announced reading the data from his eye-computer.

“Which scale shows spirit activities?” Clark asked.

“The EMF in the left top corner if you didn’t put the computer upside down,” Lian replied.

“I don’t have it?”

“You must activate it first. The blue button on your watch,” the Asian woman explained.

“Oh yes, now I can see it.”

Arthur walked towards the door that, to their surprise, wasn’t covered in any signs or boards. There was even no padlock on it.

“Surya, Dan, come with me, we’ll check this building.”

“No way, I’m not goin’ in,” Dan stated firmly.

“What? Are you afraid of ghosts or something?” Surya asked sarcastically raising her eyebrows.

“No, but I prefer if we all go there together,” he replied peeking at Natalie.

“Oh that’s why you wanted to stay in the car and monitor the mission two weeks ago.”

“No,” the boy replied firmly trying to find an excuse. “The more, the merrier.”

“I’ll go,” Jason said.

“OK, Help me with this door,” Arthur replied after he had pressed the knob, and realised that it was locked from the inside.

Jason came up to Arthur, let go of his weapon which started to dangle on the belt and kicked the door. The wood immediately cracked and the door smashed open. Almost immediately a dozen of gulls flew outside croaking

loudly.

“Fuck!” Surya shouted trying to protect her hair from the claws.

“Easy, they will do no harm,” Jason said calmly. “They were only a little bit startled.”

“No harm, right,” she replied putting her hair back in order.

Jason, Arthur and Surya stepped inside. The eye lenses in their eyes automatically made the room visible.

“Oh my God,” Surya said spotting something strange. “Everything is left as if the people suddenly disappeared.”

“I want to see it,” Dan’s voice sounded through the headset.

“You can always join us,” the girl encouraged.

The hall immediately turned into a living room. There was a table in the middle, some chairs around it, a wardrobe, and an old, ragged sofa. The windows had no glass, and it was the only way for the seagulls to enter the building. The birds excrements were everywhere. Arthur slowly walked up to the table nearby. There were three plates with food and glasses with water. He touched the glass with his finger and said.

“The legend has it that the Russians who lived here had only several hours to pack their things and leave. Those who didn’t want to be left behind were forced to leave everything as it was.”

“Look there!” Jason exclaimed pointing at the corner of the room.

“Is it a cat?” the dhampiric girl asked in disbelief.

“Only a skeleton of it.”

“Guys, we don’t have time for this,” Arthur said. “We must find the sign. Check the walls and under the carpets.”

“What sign?” Clark asked through the headset.

“The one saying where the Seal is.”

Arthur slowly walked upstairs while Jason and Lian spread into the rooms.

“The sign can be anywhere, but most likely it can be painted on some wall.”

18.

In the meantime, Tokutei was slowly scanning the area outside the house, while Lian, Clark and Dan were slowly sipping hot tea out of the flask.

“Tok, come, have some tea with us,” Lian encouraged.

“Not now, something is not right here.”

“Of course it is,” Dan replied. “No one lives here apart the animals.”

“I mean...I can sense something bad is bound to happen.”

Having said that a sudden, terrible, loud, low howl came from the centre of the town. It was so loud and sudden, that Dan spilled tea onto the snow. Natalie and Clark looked towards the direction of where it came from.

“What the hell was that?” Clark asked frowning his eyebrows. Then another howl came followed by a high-pitched shriek. Several seagulls flew above in panic.

“Where’re they flying to?” Dan asked concerned.

“You should be asking what they are escaping from,” Natalie replied following the seagulls with her eyes.

Arthur was checking the walls upstairs. He was looking behind an old painting when the howls came.

“What is that noise outside?”

“I have no idea?” Jason replied.

“Tok, Dan, Lian, can you see where the noise is coming from?”

“No, but it’s near.”

Surya was in the kitchen throwing the paintings down off the wall.

“The strangest thing is that I can’t see anything through Eagle Eye.”

“Me neither,” Lian replied scanning the area.

Tokutei was still listening to every sound that came from the town centre. Then he heard something and ran towards it.

“I’m going to check it.”

“Tokutei!” Arthur said entering another room. “Don’t go there alone! Dan, go with him before he does something stupid!”

“B-But.”

“I’ll go,” Lian replied standing up.

She grabbed her gun and ran after Tokutei. Clark looked at Dan and slowly shook his head.

“Tok, wait,” Lian shouted seeing him disappearing round behind the corner of a block of reddish flats. She accelerated, turned right and saw Tokutei standing a few metres further. She stopped next to him as the EMF indicator exploded with huge numbers.

Arthur was going down the creaking stairs.

“Tokutei? Lian? What is that activity?”

Lian turned rapidly around trying to see anything suspicious.

“We don’t know yet, Arthur. The numbers are jumping like crazy, but we see nothing.”

19.

Surya left the bathroom that she was checking and headed back towards the main door. Suddenly her EMF started to beep.

“Something is here,” she whispered through the headset.

“My EMF can see it too.” Jason added looking under the bed in a children’s room.

“I’m reading over 60 here,” Arthur said.

He stopped on the last step right next to the table with the glasses and plates, and felt a cold blast on his neck. Almost like a reflex shivers went down his spine.

“I read only 20 here,” Surya said.

“Here’s 27,” Jason added. “But Arthur, something is near you.”

The old man looked at the picture on wall next to the stairs, then at the dusty wardrobe on the left. The EMF rose to 72. He felt the cold air on his neck again. It wasn’t wind, he realised. The man turned around and saw someone standing two steps behind him. It was a medium height man in his mid thirties. He was wearing a blue uniform covered with black stains. His face and hands were covered in dark smoke and deep, nasty wounds. Arthur could see some pieces of meat hanging from his cheeks, and a burnt scar right in the place where the eye used to be. On seeing this, the old man immediately stepped back. To his surprise, he forgot that it was the last step, and he almost lost his balance leaning backwards.

“Leave!” the man spoke monotonously with a Russian accent, then he flickered like an old bulb and vanished.

Surya and Jason ran to the hall to check what was going on there.

“I don’t understand this,” Jason said confused. “The readings dropped to 0.”

“Maybe it was in some other room.”

“No,” Arthur said slowly going to the main door. “It was here. I mean the spirit.”

“Did you see it?” Surya asked.

“Yes. Let’s go out.”

“What did it look like?” Jason asked eagerly.

“Did it hurt you?” Dan asked through the headset.

“I’ll tell you in a minute,” the old man said opening the door.

Clark and Dan were standing outside waiting for someone to come, while Natalie was putting the flask back to the backpack. When Dan noticed the three of them stepping out, he immediately asked.

“So what did you see there?”

“Where’s Tokutei... and Lian?” the old man asked forgetting that they had run to the town centre.

“We’re near,” a female voice replied.

“What about that spirit activity, Lian?” Clark asked.

“It has disappeared out of a sudden,” She said coming back with Tokutei.

“The howl is gone, too,” the man added taking out a sandwich.

Natalie zipped her backpack and remembered that Arthur hadn’t replied to their question yet.

“Arthur, what did ya’ see there?”

“It was strange. I saw a Russian miner, burnt all over his face.”

“Why didn’t you shoot it?” Jason asked.

“It wasn’t aggressive. It only told us to leave. Forget it, let’s move further.”

Everyone grabbed their belongings and started to walk towards the direction Lian and Tokutei came from. Arthur caught up with Clark.

“Clark, you said you knew the history of the town, didn’t you?”

“More or less.”

“You told us it would be a ghost town, but you didn’t mention what ghosts dwell here.”

“That’s because I didn’t know. You’re concerned with that miner spirit you saw, aren’t you?”

“I can’t take my mind off it.”

“I thought everyone left the town,” Dan joined the conversation slowing down.

“I thought that, too,” the old man added.

“Hmm... several people died here,” Natalie commented. “Maybe you saw one of them.”

Lian looked at the sky and saw the clouds cumulating above the town.

“How much exactly is several?”

“About 200.”

“200!” Dan exclaimed. “How did so many people possibly die here?”

“141 died in a plane crash.”

“What plane crash?” Lian asked with interest.

“The Russian plane was taking new workers to the town, and suddenly and mysteriously it crashed. Moreover, 23 were killed a year later in an explosion in the mine. The rest died in single accidents or of some diseases.”

Tokutei frowned.

“But, still who or what made that terrible noise?”

“That’s a good question,” Arthur raised his index finger.

Jason looked towards the direction of other buildings.

“Too bad, we can’t see it through Eagle Eye.”

“So, let’s investigate it,” Surya added.

On hearing this, Clark interrupted,

“I don’t think we should do it now. We must find the sign and that piece of the Seal.”

“He’s right,” Arthur said. “We should move further. There’re way too many buildings to investigate.”

20.

They finally reached the next building. It was a block of flats near the centre of the town. Lian walked towards the door which was seemed to be locked from the inside. She looked at Surya and said amusingly,

”You’d better watch for your hair.”

Then she kicked the door so hard that it broke the hinges and flew inside. Surya quickly ducked and covered her hair, but to her surprise nothing flew out of the hole. She slowly stood up looking at the entrance.

“Where are the gulls?”

“That’s weird” Lian looked inside, then stepped in.

“Lian wait!” the old man shouted.

The girl moved back glancing at Arthur.

“Yes?”

“I think we should split into three teams. This way it would be much quicker to check all the buildings here.”

“Our usual teams?” the girl asked.

“I think so. Clark will join Jason and me while Natalie will join Dan

and Tokutei.”

Lian stepped back inside.

“Surya, come on.”

“OK, so we are moving to the next one,” Tokutei announced.

“And we’re going to check the gym,” the old man replied. “Ah, and one more thing. If anything strange happens let the others know.”

“Right,”

“OK,”

“No problem,” came the answers.

Dan, Tokutei and Natalie walked towards the next building. They were walking along a stony road next to a longer block of flats. They could see the town centre on the other side through Eagle Eye. Tokutei remembered something. He looked back to check how far Natalie was. She was walking a few feet behind them. Not waiting any longer, he turned to Dan and asked him without hesitation.

“Are you really afraid of ghosts, Dan?”

“No, it’s just that..”

“Come on. You can tell me.”

“Alright, alright, I’m afraid of ghosts, I admit it. I fear them. I don’t know why, I really don’t. Happy now?”

Tokutei started to laugh quietly.

“You’re not scared of vampire, or zombies or werewolves, but ghosts? Seriously, Dan?”

“But, Tok, don’t you dare tell anyone.”

“Actually, we heard everything,” Lian’s voice came through the earpiece.

“What!” Dan exclaimed changing his attitude and getting angry.

“You forgot to switch the channel off,” Jason added with a silent laugh.

“Don’t you laugh O.D. Not everyone here is *Mr. I fear nothing.*”

Tokutei smashed opened the door.

“Come on Dan. I promise there would be nothing to be afraid of. And even if there is, you’ll have to get used to it.”

The boy waited till Natalie caught up with them. He let her go first, and then he followed them unwillingly inside. The interior was no different from the previous building. A table in the middle, a dusty wardrobe in the corner, no spider webs, lots of seagulls excrements spread on the floor, the

table and almost everything. The darkness of the place made Dan slow down. His hands began to shake, but he quickly overcame this.

“Wait, I don’t know if I can do this, Tok.”

“Everything will be alright. I’ll help you beat the fear of ghosts. But now look for the sign.”

“Stick close to us, Dan,” Natalie said warmly beckoning to him to come closer.

The boy accelerated and moved further. He started scanning the walls in the hall. He noticed that there were still flower pods on the window-sills with extremely dry plants in it. He quickly turned round to check the wall at the door which they had just come in and saw a big white polar bear standing right before him with his mouth wide open as well as his sharp teeth standing out. The boy screamed and rapidly moved back stumbling over an old, ragged carpet rolled on the floor. He lost his balance and realised he would hit the floor. As he was falling down, he felt two hands on his back, and then a push to help him get back on his feet. He turned his head around and saw Natalie.

Tokutei heard Dan screaming and quickly reacted.

“What is it Dan?”

“Bear!”

“Take it easy. It’s only a stuffed bear.”

Dan wiped his eyes and looked closely at the animal realising it was really a stuffed one.

“Someone must have caught it and stuffed it here.” The Asian man continued. “I presume you don’t want to split up, so come with me to the next room.”

“I’m gonna check that one over there,” Natalie indicated at a dark room on the left.

21.

Meanwhile, Jason, Clark and Arthur were investigating the gym. All the walls were covered with tiny wooden boards. The floor was covered with some rubber substance, typical for gyms. There was also a big, round logo with the name of the town in the centre of the gym. A few rails of night sky were coming inside through the vast but short windows that spread all over the right wall, right next to the ceiling. There was also a balcony where people used to watch games played by the citizens of

Pyramiden. The front and the back walls had two, black and white goal posts. There were also two baskets, each hanged on two, metal ropes.

Jason and Clark slowly walked forward scanning the room.

Suddenly their EMFs started to show high numbers.

“My spiritual activity broke 50,” Arthur announced with a low voice.

“55, and raising,” Clark added.

Arthur was looking around trying to spot any spirits. It was crucial for him to get the location of the Seal, so they could finally end the mission and return to San Francisco.

“63,” Clark continued.

As they were walking along the rubber surface, a few figures emerged in the middle of the hall. They looked like miners and they all were covered in coal. Some of them had their faces burnt. Others didn't even have one.

“Look!” Jason pointed towards the figures.

“Leave this place,” one of them spoke with the Russian accent.

“We can't” Arthur replied firmly making a few steps forward.

“You must or he will kill you,”

Clark peeked at Jason. He thought for a while. Did they mean that demon Groth or who. He could feel the air getting colder in the room.

“87” he whispered, as Arthur made yet a few steps to the front.

“We have come here to find one of the pieces of the Seal of Solomon.”

“The Seal must never be merged!” the ghost shouted zooming towards Arthur.

Split a second later it was right next to his face. Arthur felt cold blast of the spirit, but it didn't scare him. He only blinked and kept the eye contact with the apparition. Jason and Clark had their weapons ready to fire.

“Never again!” the voice continued disappearing for a moment to appear again as if its power was not strong enough to keep its spiritual body visible.

Almost immediately all the other ghosts appeared around Arthur. They were standing there, surrounding him and gaping as if they hadn't seen a alive human for a long time. Jason raised his gun and aimed at the group. Arthur shook his head showing to Jason not to engage yet.

“He's trying to get the location of the Seal,” he whispered to Clark. Then all the ghosts surrounding Arthur spoke simultaneously with a low,

Russian accent.

“He has the Seal. He guards the Seal, and He raised us to keep the Seal unreachable!”

Having said that, the leading spirit threw himself at Arthur and split right at his face. The two, transparent ribbons passed next to the old man on his both sides and joined again behind him creating a shape of a human.

“Human, the Seal will never be yours. You can either leave...” it flickered again and disappeared only to emerged again next Arthur’s face. “Or die.”

“Then I choose none of your options,” the old man said taking out a handful of salt from his pocket and threw it at the spirits. After that he quickly ducked and shouted,

“Shoot them!”

Jason raised the shotgun and took a shot. The salt penetrated the ghosts’ spiritual bodies creating a white cloud. When it vanished, the ghosts were gone.

“They won’t appear again,” Jason assured.

Arthur stood up and brushed the salt off his clothes. Then pressed the button on his watch and said.

“Girls, Dan, Tok, we had some spiritual encounter in the gym. It seems these ghosts were raised by some demon to prevent anyone from taking the Seal. It may be Groth we’re dealing with.”

Jason reloaded the salt and sneezed, then again.

“Bless you,” Clark said.

“Thanks,” came the answer followed by another sneeze.

Arthur took a glimpse at Jason and Clark, and continued,

“I tried to get the location of the Seal, but the ghosts didn’t seem to cooperate.”

“Our EMFs show nothing,” Tokutei’s voice came through the headset.

“And let it stay that way. Oh and guys,” Arthur continued. “If you do encounter anyone don’t hesitate to shoot them. They are far from being friendly.”

“Or slash them,” Tokutei added.

“Yes, or slash them.”

“Understood.”

Arthur switched off the channel, and went back to Jason and Clark.

“You were right Arthur,” Clark said, “They won’t appear again. The EMF readings dropped to 0.”

“These spectres won’t, but according to you, Clark, we may face up to 200 spirits. Anyway, this is not the most important thing how many spirits we can meet, but where that goddamn sign is. Check the walls. Especially behind that huge grey banner above the tribunes.” They split and everyone went to investigate different part of the gym.

22.

In the meantime, Surya and Lian were checking the top floor of another building. Lian was tearing off Russian posters hanged on the wall, while Surya was checking the floor.

“OK, the channel is off. You know Lian, I never thought Dan would be afraid of ghosts.”

“I know what you mean, this is weird. Vampires and zombies don’t move him but ghosts? Who would have thought?”

“But Surya, every child is afraid if ghosts, then some of them simply either don’t care or realise there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

“Hmm maybe because of the fact that he we was raised without parents made him still scared of them.”

“Maybe.”

Lian pushed away a dusty chest of drawers and tried to find anything there.

“You know, He’s not such a bad guy after all.”

“I do, but his attitude towards me, eh...”

“You must admit, he’s changed... slightly.”

Surya looked under a metal bunk bed.

“You’re right, slightly. But I can still feel this indifference from him.”

Lian pushed the chest of drawers back to its place and stood up.

“I’m gonna investigate the bathroom now. Let me know if anything strange happens.”

“Sure, I’m switching on the channel between two of us.”

Lian went into the bathroom and almost immediately Surya’s EMF started to beep.

“Lian! Come quick! Something is about to happen.”

Lian ran out of the bathroom and returned to the previous room. Surya was standing next to a bunk bed, constantly looking around.

“The readings are high,” she glancing at the corners.

Suddenly the vase on the wardrobe started to move towards the edge.

“Surya! Look!”

The vase reached the edge and fell onto the floor breaking into thousands of pieces.

“Poltergeist,” the dhampiric girl said under her breath gazing at the broken vase for a moment.

Then she went on scanning the room and froze her eyes on Lian. There was something

“Behind you!”

The girl turned around and saw a man standing before her. He was wearing old, dirty clothes and he had only half of his face. Leaky piece of burnt meat was dangling from his skull.

Lian, not waiting anymore, raised her Masada assault rifle and fired without any hesitation. The ghost turned into a white cloud and disappeared. The EMF readings dropped to 0.

Surya looked at Lian strangely as if she wanted to say. *Why did you do that?*

“What? Arthur told us to shoot them on the spot.”

“He also told us to find the location of the Seal. We might have at least tried.”

23.

Dan, Natalie and Tokutei were walking along the main street. It was pitch black, but they could see something, almost everything thanks to their night visions. There were two lanes with two sets of buildings on each side, leading two one block of flats on the other side of the town. They could see a Pyramiden crest right in front of that building. It was a round sign with a polar bear in the middle, and Russian letter surrounding the sign. Behind them, there was a huge head of Lenin's. They were slowly walking forward, observing the buildings. The snow was crunching under their boots and nothing apart from their breaths could be heard. Suddenly the same terrible, low howl came from the centre of the town scaring the gulls. Tokutei turned around and scanned the area. The seagulls were flying away, and he could see nothing apart from the Lenin sculpture.

“I'm going to check it. Don't go anywhere Dan!”

“Like I want to.”

“Wait, I'm going with you,” Natalie exclaimed and made a dart after Tokutei.

“If anyone is outside,” Arthur’s voice came through the earpiece. “Go and check the howl.”

“Tokutei and Natalie are on their way,” Dan replied nervously tapping his foot.

He wandered in a circle for a while looking at the abandoned buildings, then realised, he should have gone with them.

“Wait for me!” he shouted, but his teammate disappeared among the horde of escaping birds.

“Fuck!”

“OK Dan,” he murmured to himself looking at the Pyramiden crest.

“Ghosts are not scary. OK, they are, but you may get used to them, like the others did.”

Suddenly his EMF readings rose to 70.

“That’s just great.”

He took out his Masada gun and leaned against the wall checking the area. Trembling with shock, he said through the headset.

“Tokutei, my EMF is high.”

The only response he could hear was the empty noise.

“Tokutei, do you copy? Tok? Anyone?”

Yet, there was no response. Dan crouched slowly, and anxiously stared at the EMF readings, as well as the feed from Eagle Eye. The readings were getting higher and higher. He raised his head and saw a dark figure emerging a few yards in front of him. The boy immediately started to shake and pushed against the wall with his back trying to hold his weapon steadily.

“Tokutei!” he cried desperately while the figure sharpened enough to be recognised as a woman.

Her skin was rotten and her eyes were pale white. She had long, blonde hair. She slowly stumbled towards him, as if her leg was injured. The boy gathered his strength and stood up aiming his gun at the upcoming spirit. The woman opened her mouth and growled,

“No one can have the Seal.”

Dan immediately pulled the trigger and took a shot. The salt reached the spiritual body of the ghost and blended with it causing the spirit to turn into a white cloud and vanish.

“That was a close one,” the boy sighed with relief.

Then suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder. The boy jumped screaming

like a little girl and quickly turned around. He had eyes filled with fear. But it all went away, as he recognised Surya and Lian.

“Girls, you’ve scared the shit out of me.”

“Easy Dan,” Lian said.

“Why do people always grab someone from behind in the scariest moment instead of just saying. Dan, while they are getting closer.”

“Err.”

“We do it unconsciously,” Surya laughed. “Anyway, you scream like a little girl.”

“It isn’t funny!”

“Take it easy Dan,” Lian said. “Where’s Tok?”

“He ran towards that howl.”

“By himself?”

“No, with Natalie. He told me to stay here.”

“Tok, are you there?” the Asian girl tried to contact him. “Tok? Tok? Shit!”

Lian checked the status of her ammo and took a look into the darkness ahead.

“Eh, no time to waste. Let’s go there. Com’on Dan.”

24.

In the meantime, Tokutei was near the block of flats, which was at the end of the town. There was a long, snow-covered conveyor that led to the mountain nearby. He was looking around trying to find what could make that terrible, low howl. Natalie was right behind him trying to catch her breath

“Damn, you’re fast.”

“Indeed,” he replied without a smile. “We need to contact the others. Guys?” he asked through the headset.

But the only thing he could hear back was noise. He sat on the doorstep leading to the inside of the block of flats and focused on scanning the area through Eagle Eye. He noticed that his team-mates’ positions were mostly in the first part of the town, and the nearest people were Arthur, Jason and Clark a few blocks away. Suddenly, he heard some noise a few storeys above him. The EMF metre rose to 20.

“Let’s check it,” Natalie suggested stepping in.

He stood up, drew his sword and immediately followed her. The readings

rose to 90.

“That’s gonna be interesting,” he murmured to himself tightening the grip on his sword. He followed Natalie towards the stairs ahead, passed her and slowly started to go up. A sudden thud focused his attention. He looked upstairs and quickly jumped onto the handrail as a little red metal bicycle slid down along the stairs. Natalie got filled with shock as she pulled herself to the back.

“Not scary!” Tokutei shouted making a few steps up. He noticed something on the last step, a piece of paper. He crouched and grabbed it.

“What is it?” Natalie whispered looking over his shoulder.

“I don’t know. It’s in Russian.”

“Let me see that,” she grasped the paper and examined it carefully.”It says; Sasha, meet me at the playing fields.”

“It’s just some note.”

The warrior stood up raising his eyes. He spotted three men standing before him. One of them had no legs, the other two had rotten green bodies and white, pale eyes. They were wearing ragged and shuttered jackets with black holes everywhere. One of them pushed Tokutei so hard that he fell onto Natalie causing her to lose her balance. It didn’t take much time till they both hit the stairs and rolled down losing their consciousness.

25.

Meanwhile, Clark, Arthur and Jason were fighting with a few ghosts in the nearby block of flats. They were in an empty apartment on the last floor. Clark and Jason were constantly taking shots at the appearing spirits, while Arthur was checking the walls for signs.

“Clear, moving to the next room!” the old man said running to the children’s room.

There was a small cot and lots of toys lying on the floor. The walls were covered in old paint and nothing else. The old, broken window was on the left side with a good view on the other buildings. Jason and Clark moved after him.

“I’ve got something!” Arthur shouted seeing some drawing on the floor.

The others only took a glimpse at it and returned to dealing with the spirits. The drawing presented a wrinkled man with red eyes, who was holding

something in his hand.

“It’s that demon,” Jason said.

“Why would anyone draw a picture of a demon here,” Clark asked.

“I don’t know,” Arthur answered. “Maybe they wanted to show us something?”

Clark took another shot.

“Or warn us.”

The EMF readings dropped dramatically to 0.

“I don’t understand it,” Jason scratched his head. “Did we kill all of them?”

“You can’t kill a ghost, O.D.” Clark replied. “You may only imprison him.”

Arthur walked towards the front door of this empty apartment.

“We’d better check the rest of the floors.”

26.

Surya, Lian and Dan were in the centre of the town. They haven’t moved anywhere hoping Tokutei and Natalie will return quickly. Lian was walking in circles. Dan was watching Surya making snowballs and throwing them at the buildings.

“Can anyone hear him or her or anything?” the Asian girl repeated.

“Give it up, Lian,” Surya sighed throwing a snowball at the wall.

“Something is blocking the signal.”

“Luckily, we’ve got Eagle Eye to see the others’ positions,” Dan added turning the satellite vision on. “Err guys, I have no vision here.”

“Impossible!” Surya exclaimed turning the feed from Eagle Eye, too.

“Great, first the audio, now the video,” Lian said throwing her weapon against the ground.

“Too bad, I got used to it,” the dhampiric girl added.

Dan squinted his eyes, then boomed.

”Do you remember from Arthur’s lectures that if there is a powerful paranormal being in the area, it can dim all electronic devices.”

“Uff, you cheered me up, Dan,” Surya said.

“How could I cheer you up? I just proved there is some powerful paranormal being somewhere near.”

“Because this something isn’t powerful enough to break our night

vision.”

“Since now, we have no choice but to rely on each other. We can’t see either the position of the others or hear them.”

“Let’s move where Tokutei and Natalie ran,” Surya suggested walking to the left.

Lian looked around noticing that her night vision started to become blurry.

“Dan, do you remember the last position of the others’ before Eagle Eye went dead?”

“I saw Clark, Jason and Arthur’s signal in the East side of the town. I don’t remember Tokutei’s”

They went about fifty yards and stopped next to some monument. Lian came closer to it.

“Lenin?”

“You must be kidding?” Surya answered looking at the statue.

“Well, it used to be the Russian town after all, so I’m not surprised.”

Suddenly, the scary low howl sounded again. Everyone looked at the direction of it, but they couldn’t see anything.

“What the fuck is that?” Lian asked.

She glanced at the Lenin statue one more time and then at the buildings on her right.

“They are definitely not bears,” the boy added.

Surya made a few steps forward.

“To me, it sounds like a train.”

“A train?” Dan laughed. “What kind of a train make such a low noise?”

“A slow moving one?” the girl replied amusingly.

“Dhampirs...” he shook his head.

27.

Tokutei was lying on the floor at the bottom of the stairs. Natalie was lying next to him with her leg on the bicycle. He heard the loud howl and slowly opened his eyes, looked around and blinked several times. He saw Natalie, and then it all struck him. He realised where he was and why he was on the dusty floor. He rapidly sprang to his feet and patted his back, to check whether his sword was there. When he realised it wasn’t, the man started to look for his mighty weapon near the place he was lying.

“Arthur? Lian? Dan?” he said through the earwig, but there was still no response.

“Damn it!”

He noticed the sword lying in the middle of the stairs. He quickly grabbed it, returned to Natalie, and crouched.

“Hey, Natalie, wake up.”

The girl murmured something, and turned on her back opening her blue eyes.

“What happened?”

“We fell. Com'on we have to get back up.”

He reached out his strong hand and as soon as he felt her grip he pulled it in helping the girl stand up. She adjusted her uniform and checked her weapon. Next they went up the stairs. The EMF reader showed 0.

“Where're those spirits?” the girl asked scanning the room.

“Don't ask me, I'm new in this business.”

While the Asian was walking along the corridor constantly checking the EMF readings, he noticed something on the door at the end of the hall. He came up to it to investigate the weird thing closely.

“Natalie, look at this.”

It was a picture of a ship sinking with hundreds people on it. There was also a writing in English that was saying, *Pyramiden is not for us!*

“Why is it in English?” The warrior murmured to himself.

Next he opened the door and went inside. The apartment looked almost exactly like every one else. Everything was left as if people had disappeared momentarily. Natalie went up to a broken window with wither flowers on the sill. She noticed Dan, Surya and Lian walking along the road below.

“There're the others,” she said joyfully turning around.

Tokutei took a glimpse out the window. Not thinking much, he turned around and rushed downstairs after Natalie. As they were speeding along the stairs, the EMF readings rose to 70 and he heard some moans just round the corner. The warrior knew he must focus that time, so he tightened up the grip on his Katana, accelerated to outrun Natalie, and prepared himself to strike a blow. When he finally reached the ground floor, his eyes grew wide as he saw three ghosts of miners blocking the stairs.

“I prefer Zombies,” he murmured to himself, then cut through their spiritual body with an ease. The miners turned into a white cloud and disappeared. EMF showed 0. Tokutei turned at the corner and headed

towards the main entrance passing tables and boards. Next he found himself outside.

“Lian! Surya! Dan!” he shouted running towards them.

“Look! It’s Tokutei!” Surya shouted surprisingly.

“Where’s Natalie?” Dan inquired thinking the worse.

“Here,” a female voice replied as she ran out trying to catch her breath. “Damn, he’s fast.”

Dan sighed with relief, and made a few steps ahead slowing down his teammate.

“Why didn’t you come back for me!” he said angrily.

“The radio went down, and I saw that the girls found you, so I moved on,” the Asian man explained.

“I thought we were a team!”

“Guys, Guys!” Lian interrupted. “Leave the quarrel aside. We don’t have time for this.”

“She’s right,” Surya added. “Since our audio channel is down and we can’t communicate, we need to find the others and come up with a good plan.”

Natalie frowned trying to get the feed from Eagle Eye.

“Eagle Eye is down, too?”

“Something powerful is blocking the signal,” Surya replied. Tokutei gave Dan a warm look as if he wanted to apologise.

”Look Dan, I’m sorry. Next time I’ll take you with me.”

“Or not leave me alone, man.”

“Are we OK?”

“Yes. So tell me Tok, what’s up with that howl? Did you find anything?”

“No, and I have no idea what it was.”

“Yeah, we neither,” Surya added.

Tokutei came up to the girls and put back his sword into the saya.

“Have you found any signs?”

“Nope.”

“Nothing, You?”

“I only found some strange poster. It said in English that Pyramiden is not for them.”

“Hmm, that’s strange,” Lian said, then looked around. “Now we’re screwed.”

“What’s wrong?” Natalie asked looking at Lian.

“That,” the Asian girl answered pointing towards the direction the howl came from.

Natalie turned around and her eyes grew open as she saw a thick fog coming towards the town. The fog was several yards high and a several hundred yards wide. It looked like a sandstorm, but instead of sand there was mist. It was gobbling the buildings on its way.

“It’s physically impossible!” Dan yelled. “A fog can only appear when the ground is cold and the air is warmer. The air can’t get warmer at night.”

“We’d better go inside and wait,” Natalie suggested pointing at a building nearby.

“I don’t think, it would be a good idea,” Surya replied with a grimace. “You see, we need to find the others first.”

Tokutei was gazing at the fog trying to spot anything.

“I think Dan is right. We won’t be able to see anything in the fog, so I vote for hiding inside.”

“Alright,” Surya said unwillingly. “So be it.”

Dan went towards the buildings. When he realised that the others stayed behind him, he turned around. “Are you going?”

“Yeah,” Tokutei replied. “Girls, come on!”

“Let’s go into that block of flats, shall we?” Lian suggested.

“I’ve already checked this one,” Tokutei announced. “Let’s move to the next one.”

While they were going, Lian turned around in order to check how far the fog was. She immediately turned back quickly and sped up.

“Lian, what’s wrong?” Tokutei asked.

“I noticed something in the fog,” she said with a trembling voice.

“What?” Surya asked turning around.

“I-I don’t know, s-something big, very big and scary.”

“I don’t see anything, apart from that the fog is getting closer and closer.”

“C-Come on, guys,” Tokutei shouted impatiently. “I know it’s not safe to be here right now.”

They stopped at the entrance to the building, when the strange howl came again. It sounded as if it was coming from the place where Lenin’s statue was.

“It’s coming from the fog!” Tokutei announced gazing at the

upcoming cloud.

“Yeah, but this time, you ain’t gonna check it,” Lian said pushing him inside.

“OK, OK.”

Surya and Dan followed them.

This building was different. It had all its windows filled with boards. The furniture was rather cleaner and the floor was covered in snowy footprints.

“Dan, close the door!” Lian ordered heading upstairs to the next floor.

She stopped and turned around.

“Are you coming?”

Then out of the sudden, her EMF reading raised as she heard a low groan behind her back. She turned around and saw a thin, pale creature emerge in front of her. She quickly took a few shots, turning it into a white cloud.

“Why the shooting?” Dan asked after he had closed the door.

“Someone was here.”

Another howl spread outside.

“Look out the window!” Surya said pointing at a small space between two boards.

“Never have I seen such thick fog,” Natalie said amazingly gaping at the grey cloud behind the window.

Next another howl came from the town, now much louder than the others. A powerful and noisy thud followed it, then another and another. Natalie could feel the vibes sieving through her body.

“What the heck is it?” Tokutei asked irritated.

“Guys, leave it and come with me upstairs,” the Asian woman tapped her feet, nervously looking behind.

Dan, Surya, Natalie and Tokutei left the window and rushed upstairs. They entered a dark corridor filled with snowy footprints and turned into the first room. The howl and the thuds were getting louder and more mysterious.

“Whatever makes that sound it’s coming closer,” Lian stated, while Dan rushed towards the next room.

“Quickly! Let’s hide in the bedroom over there.”

Surya ran next.

“To me it sounds as if the howl was coming from the fog, and the thuds from outside the town.”

“We’ll find out later.

The thuds were even louder making the earth shake. Whatever was making them was coming towards the town. Tokutei ran to the first room as the last and slowed down. He turned left noticing a wider gap between two wooden boards in the window.

“Tokutei!” Lian shouted seeing her team-mate coming towards the window.

“Wait, I just want to see what makes that sound.”

“You won’t see anything! The fog is too thick.”

Suddenly the EMF readings rose to 37.

“Tokutei! Hurry up!” the Asian woman shouted impatiently, while the others waited in the next room.

“Wait! I think I saw something,” he whispered focusing his sight on the fog.

Having said that, he felt a shiver running down his spine as all doors shut and the boards ripped off the windows.

“OK, it persuaded me,” Tokutei said with a trembling voice, then ran towards Lian as fast as he could.

“The EMF reads 60!” Surya announced holding the door knob. Then yet one more howl spread, and the thuds continued. Lian closed the door to the bedroom and the five of them sat on the double bed.

“Don’t panic, don’t panic,” Dan repeated.

“We’re not panicking!” Surya shouted.

“I was talking to myself.”

Something caught Natalie’s attention. She raised her head and turned her ear towards the door.

“Did you hear that?”

“What?” Lian asked.

“I can hear some strange noises coming from downstairs.”

“Something is down there,” Surya said.

“Something is down there, something is outside, I can’t stand being here anymore,” Dan cried impatiently.

“You’d better have your weapons ready, as it’s coming up,”

Tokutei stood up drawing his sword.

“It’s coming for us!” Dan stuttered for fear.

“Dan! Pull yourself together!” Surya tried to cheer him up.

“Hush.” Tokutei silenced everyone, as he heard some steps on the stairs behind the wall.

The thud outside stopped after one more howl.

Dan looked at Lian and whispered.

“I don’t know, Lian what you saw in that fog back then, but I believe that it was making that thud.”

“I don’t know, to me it was coming from the outside,” the girl replied. “You’d better pray it won’t find us.”

Lian started to sound scared even though she tried to hide her emotions, this time she was really afraid. Tokutei made a few steps towards the door.

“Fuck! My night vision is dead!” Surya whispered.

“Mine too,” Dan added.

“It must be something huge since it can dim even night vision,” Tokutei explained.

The steps from the corridor were getting nearer and nearer until they stopped at the door to the apartment.

“Be ready to shoot on sight,” Tokutei ordered then placed his index finger on his lips as if he wanted to indicate that everyone should stay quiet.

They heard the door being smashed and the steps sounded again. They could hear something moving on the carpet just behind the door. Next a sound of cracking wood came. Surya glimpsed at petrified Dan and showed him to shoot second. Tokutei was standing at the door with his sword ready. The steps came towards this door and silenced. Lian raised her eyebrows in astonishment. Then the door smashed opened hitting Tokutei and pushing him to the back. Everyone pointed their guns and when they were about to shoot a familiar voice sounded.

“Tokutei?”

“Lian, Surya, Dan?”

“Natalie?”

“Arthur?” Lian asked as her jaw dropped. “What? How the? What?”

“We came to check the building,” Jason replied casually. Clark turned towards the broken windows where the white cloud was floating.

“And this hell of a fog is too thick to operate outside.”

Dan stood up with a gentle smile on his face.

“I’m glad we’ve found one another.”

“Too bad every single electronic device is dead,” Lian murmured

angrily.

“Apart from the EMF itself,” Surya added.

“Yeah, we have the same problems with our stuff,” Clark commented.

Arthur looked back at the broken window. Next back again at the team.

“It’s probably because of that thing in the fog. It must be deadening our devices.”

Tokutei put away his sword.

“Yeah, what is that thing anyway?”

“We don’t know, but whatever it is, it has a huge spiritual power,” Arthur tried to provide any answer. “By the way, did you find anything?” Lian sat on the bed in the corner.

“Actually, Tokutei said he had found some poster. What did it say, Tok?”

“Something about that Pyramiden is not for us and there was a picture of a ship sinking.”

Clark came closer to Lian and sat next to her.

“We found some poster, too.”

“Yeah, but it was in Russian,” Jason added. “And it had a picture of a demon.”

“Do you think this thing in the fog is our demon, Arthur?” Dan asked trying to overcome his fear.

“It could be, I don’t know. I haven’t seen it. What I know for sure is that howls and thuds are made by two different things.”

Lian stood up and came up to the others.

“I think, since we’re together again, we should go outside and face it anyway.”

Dan shook his head.

“A few minutes ago we were scared as hell because of it.”

“You were scared, Dan,” Surya replied.

The boy rolled his eyes and answered trying to sound serious.

“But I feel more secure when we are together.”

Suddenly a terrible high-pitched moan came from the downstairs. Everyone looked at the direction of it, as the EMF readings rose to 95.

Tokutei drew his sword and stepped forward.

“That’s gonna be way interesting.”

“Let’s move to the corridor,” Jason suggested tightening the grip on his weapon.

They walked towards the broken door of the apartment, listening carefully to the scary, upcoming noises from the downstairs and outside. Then out of the sudden, the frightening howl sounded again.

“It gives me creeps,” Dan said trembling.

Surya gently gave him a warm pat on his shoulder,

“I know how you feel, but Dan, we need you to focus, OK?”

He looked into her eyes, then it got to him that her hand was on his shoulder. Almost as a reflex, the boy twined to get away from it. The girl looked at him weirdly and sighed, but he said nothing. No apologies, nothing.

28.

When they reached the corridor, almost immediately all the doors began to open and close simultaneously. Dan jumped and threw his arms around Surya who was walking next to him.

“Now you wanna hug?” she asked raising her left eyebrow.

Everyone, including the dhampiric girl, stopped and looked at the doors surprisingly and stuttered. The young hunter slowly opened his eyes and quickly jumped out.

“Err, the doors scared me.”

“If you say so,” Tokutei replied making one step forward, holding his blade tight and strong.

Jason took a few shots ahead of him, and the doors stopped shutting.

“Ha! It worked!”

Then the doors began moving again faster, and harder. The carpet covering the whole floor rolled towards the door at the end of the corridor causing all the pictures and paintings on the walls to drop.

“Not,” he added disappointed.

The carpet then rolled towards the team. On seeing this, they turned around and moved towards the other end of the corridor. The carpet was rolling very fast creating a growing cylinder. Then it stopped. The stairs started to creak as something heavy began to crawl upstairs. The grunting noises and moaning accompanied it.

“We need to get out of this building!” Arthur ordered.

Everyone rushed until the middle of the hall and turned towards the stairs.

As they did so, almost immediately the noises silenced and they didn't see anything on the stairs as if it disappeared simultaneously with the noises.

"What the?" Clark looked around.

"Come on! We need to get outside!" Lian reminded walking down stairs.

They rushed down the stairs, past the apartment and towards the exit. Finally, everyone left the building and found themselves in the thick white fog. They could see nothing further than a few metres. Not even the building behind. When everyone left, the main door shut loudly and the strange howl spread again out of the sudden as the EMF readings rose to 97 and then to 104.

"Looked at the readings!" Surya shouted.

"I never thought they could exceed 100," Jason added as his eyes grew.

Arthur looked around anxiously.

"If the readings are over 100 it may mean only two things. Either we deal with a horde of spirits, or a powerful demon."

"Or both," Tokutei added.

"One thing for sure," Clark announced. "We're in a great danger and we must stick together."

Dan dropped his gun onto the ground as his mouth wide opened.

"What is it Dan?" Surya asked running up to him.

"T-The readings..." he stuttered petrified.

"Oh my God," Tokutei shook his head lowering his sword.

Everyone focused on the readings.

"251," Lian said.

"280 and raising rapidly," Jason added as several grunting sounds surrounded them.

"380!"

The noises were coming from everywhere and everyone stood in shock glimpsing at the readings and the fog around.

"What's going on?" Dan moaned crouching trying to feel for his gun.

"457," Lian shouted, and then the beeping noise stopped."

"I-I don't understand," Clark stuttered with fear in his eyes. The EMF stopped, but I can still hear those strange noises coming."

Arthur half-closed his eyes and responded seriously.

“That’s because the EMF is dead. I have never seen the readings go above 160. This is a way too serious and powerful thing we’re dealing with!” The eight of them were standing a few metres away from the door. Growling, grunting and roaring noises were heard in the fog. Some of them were close, but lots of them were coming from the other part of the town. Suddenly, a shape emerged from the fog on the left. Then another and another. The same happened on the other sides.

“They’re comin’,” Lian shouted.

Spirits were coming from everywhere. Everyone immediately reacted, shooting enhanced salt bullets at them. Most of the spirits were miners. Some of them had no limbs, others were headless. Yet some others had their guts lingering outside their stomachs. However, every single one of them had some burnt marks on their bodies or clothes.

29.

The salt was hovering in the air, and the sounds of shots spread in the town.

“Inverse circle formation!” Arthur shouted.

Everyone knew what they had to do. They came closer to one another and created a circle leaning with their backs against one another. Only Tokutei was fighting a few yards away with his sword. Every cut he made, every strike he blew turned a spirit into a white cloud which faded away within a few seconds. Suddenly, the frightening howl sounded again cutting through the fog. It was literally coming a few feet from them making the ground shake.

“Tokutei!” Lian yelled, “Get back to the formation.”

He finished the last two spirits and jogged towards the group taking a position in the front. Everyone looked at its direction and noticed dozens of spirits running at them from the fog. They didn’t look like miners or Russians or like any other spirits they had faced before. They had furs on their bodies, long beards, and helmets with horns. Some of them even had swords or axes in their hands, and they all were shouting and yelling.

“Vikings?” Jason asked in disbelief keeping his finger on the trigger.

“Where the hell they came from?” Tokutei asked preparing for the block from one of the spectres.

The two blades met, and the Asian warrior wanted to push the ghost away

from him, but as soon as he extended his leg it sank into the spiritual body of his opponent. Lian noticed it and shouted.

“These are ghosts Tok! You don’t kick ghosts!”

Tokutei quickly stepped back and span cutting through the opponent, turning it into a white cloud.

“I forgot, alright?”

The slaughter began. Hundreds of ghosts both miners and Vikings appeared from all directions. The salt was hovering in the air which made Jason sneeze from time to time. The team leaning against each other’s backs took constant shots at the upcoming enemies. Arthur noticed a bigger blueprint deep in the fog. He was different from the others because of his size. He was holding a long horn in his hand. Arthur saw him bringing the horn closer to its skeleton mouth. As he blew the horn the terrible howl filled the air.

“It was them all the time,” the old man said surprised.

“Yeah Surya a train,” Lian said ironically, finishing the clip.

The dhampiric girl gave her a cold look then turned it into a gentle smile. Then something hit her out of nowhere. She looked down at the ground and saw a brick. Almost immediately another brick flew from the fog, but the girl dodged it.

“We’re having some poltergeist activities!” she shouted when a large, long metal pipe rolled fast knocking everyone over.

It looked like a pole used for flags. Some spirit must have ripped it from the ground and thrown it at the team. Jason and Clark quickly grasped their guns and continued firing at the opponents.

“Is everyone alright?” the old man asked trying to get up.

“Yup,” came the answers.

As soon as he stood up, he glanced at the upcoming spirits, then at the team and said firmly.

“We need to get back inside!”

“I agree!” Dan said running first towards the door.

The others followed him. Clark was running last. As he was about to enter the building, something pulled his leg and he fell. Natalie turned around and crouched grasping his hand tightly. She tried to pull him back inside, but she was too weak. Surya joined in and she used her dhampiric strength to help Natalie. A few spirits came dangerously close, Arthur and Lian eliminated them immediately, as Surya and Natalie managed to pull Clark

inside. Only a split of second saved them from the large monument of Lenin, which emerged from the fog and smashed the entrance.

“We won’t stop them so easily!” Jason shouted letting others pass him and run upstairs.

“Run to the top floor!” Clark ordered looking back at the spirits, while Arthur took out a bag of salt from his backpack and spread it on the first step.

Tokutei only took a glance at it and realised what it was for. Not thinking much, he rushed upstairs passing others so he could take down any vicious spirits they could meet on their way.

“Where are you run...? Lian asked but before she managed to finish the sentence her teammate disappeared up in the staircase.

30.

When everyone finally reached the last floor, they stopped to catch their breath. They found themselves in a similar corridor to where they had been attacked by poltergeist. There was a long, brown carpet on the floor, lots of paintings on the walls and snowy footprints all over the carpet. Surya noticed that one of the apartments had its door ajar.

“Come on in!” Tokutei’s voice came from the inside.

Surya went first and as she was stepping inside, she spotted a stripe of salt on the doorstep. She looked around while the others were entering, and saw Tokutei energetically sprinkling the window sills with the salt.

“Not bad,” Arthur praised. “Come on guys, help him close the area. Spirits cannot pass the barrier of salt.”

“So we’re gonna be safe there?” Dan asked entering last.

“From spirits and ghosts, yes, from demons, no,” Clark replied opening a bag of salt he had taken out from his backpack.

Jason and Arthur took out the salt bags from their bags, too and drew a white line along the walls. The salt line created a rectangular shape cutting the apartment off the rest of the world. They all hid inside and waited for the spirits.

“Here they come...” Dan stuttered listening to strange noise coming from the corridor.

“Easy Dan,” Jason tried to calm him down.

Hardly had he said that when a few of them emerged from the walls. The Viking spirits didn’t seem to be happy because of the salt line. They were

standing half-emerged in the wall staring angrily at the people inside the room.

“They can’t pass the salt lines!” the boy shouted with relief, as the spirits stopped beside the line.

Now they had a chance to look at them closely. Some of the spirits had metal helmets with long, sharp horns sticking out from them. All of them were very well-built and their bodies were covered in animal fur or shiny armor. They were holding shields and long swords, or axes in their large hands. Most of them had numerous wounds through their bodies, which probably caused their deaths.

“Don’t shot them yet!” Arthur ordered gathering his thoughts. Surya glanced at him in surprised, but seconds later she realised what he meant.

31.

More and more apparitions gathered around and the grunting and growling noises became louder. The team was standing inside the rectangle of salt and were staring at the ghosts of miners and Vikings. The old man made a few steps ahead and said.

“We don’t want to harm you, but we will have to if you don’t give us the piece of the Seal we’re seeking.”

All the spirits moaned together.

“We have been raised by Heith, only to protect the Seal.”

Everyone were looking around at the dozens of creatures speaking simultaneously as if they were under some spell.

“Heith?” the old spoke confused. “What happened to Groth?”

“Groth has been slain,” the ghosts replied together. “Heith is our master.”

Dan leaned over to Surya and whispered.

“It really creeps me out.”

“Not now, Dan,” she replied reluctantly observing the situation.

“We need the Seal,” Arthur continued, “To stop the end of the world.”

“No one gets the Seal, the Seal must never be found. The Seal must never be merged. The Seal must never be used. We have been risen to protect it.”

“But you will never have a peaceful eternal life if you serve that

demon.”

“Hith is not a demon.”

On hearing this they froze in shock.

“Not a demon?” Lian muttered. “So what is he, a ghost?”

“He raised us, he controls us.”

Jason rolled his eyes and shook his head. Next he leaned a little bit towards Arthur.

“Eh, let’s shot them anyway.”

“Everyone who seeks the Seal shall be deprived of their lives,” the spirits continued.

“Arthur, we have no choice,” Natalie said. “We’ve gotta get to Heith, and nothing, even them can stop us.”

As she said that, the thuds outside spread again. Tokutei looked at Arthur surprisingly.

“I thought the Vikings made that sound.”

“Apparently not.”

Suddenly all the boards were torn off the windows and a terrible cold blast penetrated the room, blowing the salt away. Dan looked at it terrified, as his body started to shake.

“We should’ve listened to Jason. We should’ve killed them when we had a chance.”

The evil ghosts threw themselves at ASATs. The salty shots filled the air again.

“Tokutei!” the old man shouted taking a shot at the ghost next to him. “Focus on the Vikings!”

“Will do!” the warrior replied rushing at them.

A strong cut followed by another cut, successfully turned the Vikings into a wisp of white smoke. Tokutei couldn’t stop himself from throwing kicks even though he did know that his legs won’t do any good. Jason’s sneezing increased, but the rest didn’t pay attention to it. They were fully focused on dealing with the spirits. Dan took a glance at the ceiling and immediately shot aiming at the hanging iron lamp. The chain broke and the chandelier fell down crushing a bulk of spirits.

“Not bad Dan,” Lian praised.

“But you know iron will only work for a short time,” Arthur added. Then the loud thud spread again as a dreadful stench filled the air.

“What’s that smell?” Surya asked.

“I have no idea,” Clark replied. “It comes with the thud.”

“It smells like those zombies from the other day,” Jason added.

“Worse,” the dhampiric girl complained.

“The thuds are too loud. That sound is coming from the piazza,”

Natalie shouted.

Tokutei spotted something moving behind the window. It was an enormous thing that went passed the building. Every thud that came made the whole structure shake.

“There’s something huge moving in the fog!”

As soon as he said that, all the ghosts in the room flickered and disappeared as a horrible loud hum came right from behind the window. At the same time the night vision, the EMF, Eagle Eye and the radio went back on.

“What the...?” Clark said under his breath as something broke into the room from behind the wall on the left.

It sounded like a dozens of bricks fall. Almost immediately the next wall, which was separating those two rooms, cracked then rapidly vaporised breaking into pieces. They saw an enormous paw emerging from among the pieces of bricks and furniture. It had five large fingers tipped with Fifty-inch claws. The palm swung across the room destroying everything on its way. Everyone ducked out of it, as the sound of tumbling bricks filled the room. The paw smashed the windows and the front wall on its way. While falling, Dan looked back and saw Surya being pulled towards the second wall by the speeding paw. His eyes grew wide with terror as he shouted desperately.

“Surya!”

Then the claw tore the wall and pushed Surya outside the building.

Almost immediately, the part of the roof collapsed covering the floor. The paw swung so fast and with such a huge force, that the whole building wobbled for a moment. The rest of the ASAT members crawled to the door leading to the hallway. They were all in shock. No one would expect that something like this could happen. Tokutei, Dan and Lian were gaping at the damage left by the mysterious paw, and their eyes were trying to locate Surya. As soon as the roof collapsed, the huge irregular hole in the place where the walls used to be, showed off an enormous monster. It was about sixty feet tall and its rough dark skin had no hair. It looked like a large thin alien on shorter legs but with long arms. Its wide head had eyes like a dinosaur and two long fangs were sticking out of its flat mouth. It was

holding unconscious Surya in his left palm. The monster looked at her and threw her towards the mine situated on the mountain nearby.

“No!” everyone shouted with fear and terror.

“What the fucking fuck is that?” Tokutei asked in disbelief changing his American accent into his old Japanese one.

“A draugr,” Arthur replied withdrawing to the staircase. “Come on! We need to get lower.”

“What about Surya?” Jason asked.

“There is nothing we can do now!”

“What the hell is a draugr?” Clark exclaimed standing up.

Everyone got up on their feet and ran after Arthur. They found themselves in the empty corridor. The EMF readings were showing 0.

“It’s something like a ghou, but it can change its size.”

Lian was constantly repeating.

“This is what I saw in the fog then. It was it.”

As they were running down the stairs, they heard the thuds again and the sound of bricks tumbling both; on the last floor, as well as the outside. The monster must have hit another wall.

32.

Arthur ran to the corridor on the second floor stumbling on the last step. He regained his balance and quickly turned left to an open apartment. It was on the other side of the building, so the draugr would have to go around in order to reach them.

“We’re safe here for a while,” he shouted to the others catching his breath.

“Will you eventually tell us what the hell is that thing that took Surya?” Dan asked impatiently as the rest of the team rushed inside.

“It was a draugr, which is simply a body of a dead Viking. I thought they were only legendary creatures, but I was wrong.”

The thuds spread again, as the building started to shake with every step. The walls began to cover with cracks and fractures which were getting longer every time the monster made a step.

“It’s coming here,” Clark announced sadly while crouching away from the wall.

Tokutei was carefully listening to the heavy steps holding his mighty sword really tight.

“If it is the body of the dead, why is it so huge?”

Arthur dropped his head. He looked desperate and hopeless. His mind was racing and his heart was beating wildly.

“It can increase its size, thus he can clutch its opponent. As far as I know, it is invulnerable to weapons, so I have no idea what to do now.”

“There must be a way,” Dan said.

“The legend says that only a hero can defeat a draugr.”

“We’re all heroes, aren’t we?” Lian exclaimed slowly losing herself.

“To some degree we are, but I feel helpless now,” the old man said in disappointment.

They had faced lots of ghosts and spirits that night, and they, somehow managed to be still alive. Arthur hadn’t prepared them for such a danger yet. Moreover, he himself hadn’t been prepared for it. His mind was wondering between various texts he had read about Nordic legendary creatures trying to recall a way to stop that thing. He raised his eyes and peeked at his team. Everyone was listening to the upcoming thuds that were surrounding the building.

“We need to try everything we have!” Jason exclaimed.

Arthur turned around trying to spot the monster outside the window.

“For now we have to switch the apartments. It’s getting too close.”

They ran out of the apartment and rushed into the opposite one. Arthur went first and Natalie and Clark were the last. As they were entering, everyone heard a boom and sound of rocks falling from the apartment they had just left. Clark heard Natalie scream, and when he turned round, he saw her lying under a piece of wall. He rapidly moved to her, pushed away the wall and helped her get up. Then the stepping began moving around towards them.

“We can’t stay here, either,” Lian said.

“She’s right,” Clark added. “We won’t live long for sure if we stay here.”

Arthur closed his eyes for a moment, then boomed,

“We’re going outside.”

He headed back to the hall and ran downstairs with the others. The outside door were just a few steps away.

33.

They all found themselves outside. The loud steps were coming

nearer and nearer and the fog wasn't so dense anymore, but they could only see as far as a few yards. The pavement was covered with piles of salt and pieces of bricks and walls from the apartment above. There were also a few things lying around that had been thrown by poltergeists. They could see the Lenin's head, the flag pole and some rocks. Jason, Tokutei and Lian looked up at the apartment. The building looked horrible. The last floor was completely wiped out by the draugr and there was a wide fracture coming through all storeys. Dan looked at the side of his gun and shouted.

"We need to hit it with everything we had, maybe something does harm it."

The rest of the team nodded with concern.

"Use different ammo!" Lian yelled.

The earth shook with every single step of the huge monster. The rocks and the bricks on the pavement jumped every time the monster made a step.

Then they saw it coming.

"It's enormous!" Natalie shouted as her jaw dropped.

It was the first time they could see the creature in its full size, and from their perspective it seemed to be even larger. As soon as it emerged from behind the corner, the shooting began. Jason and Clark used salt and iron bullets. Lian changed her ammo into regular one while Dan selected explosive bullets. Arthur was trying silver bullets, and Tokutei and Natalie were waiting patiently for the reaction. The salt rebounded from the draugr's skin like a tennis ball from the wall. Silver and regular bullets sank inside its body, the monster didn't react. To him a single bullet of such a small calibre was like a bite of an ant to a human. Although, when we are bitten by ants we do feel it because of the venom these insects have. Dan's explosive projectiles also disappeared in the monster's body. Everyone waited for the explosions, slowly moving to the back. The small explosions appeared in the legs and the torso of the huge creature. The giant roared and stumbled. The roar echoed in the mountains.

"Explosive bullets!" Dan exclaimed with hope in his eyes. "Use the explosive ones!"

"I don't have any!" Jason shouted.

"Use the grandees then!" The boy suggested slowly stepping to the back.

The monster regained its control, and went on advancing on the tiny people. It was now furious, and more determined to stop the team.

Everyone was moving backwards as the enormous legs approached. Arthur, Dan and Lian changed the ammo into explosives and took several shots at the feet and the head. A moment later the explosions penetrated the draugr's gigantic body. The explosions were so strong and harmful that the creature inclined to the left and hit the nearby block of flats, immediately turning two floors into debris. Everybody was gazing at it in amazement. The monster was gasping, as its huge black eyes directed at the minute people below. The black pupils were sieved with anger. The monster took a deep breath and pushed itself off the building. Hundreds of bricks fell onto the rocky pavement. The draugr roared and threw itself at ASATs.

"Run!" Clark shouted turning around and making a slash straight ahead.

The others immediately turned around and simultaneously took off as fast as they could. The monster jumped up high and as it landed the ground shook so hard that Lian and Arthur were thrown into air and fell onto the cracked pavement. The others lost their balance, but quickly regained it. The draugr raised its foot over the Asian girl.

"Lian!" Arthur shouted crawling away a few metres further. She only looked up at the sky-dimming instep and realised it was over for her. As the foot was zooming down, Clark was able to rush towards her and pull her away so hard that she was almost thrown towards the group. However, the push was so strong that he failed to turn round. Everyone was staring helplessly as the heavy foot covered and clutched Clark.

"He saved me," Lian whispered, as the sound of breaking bones spread from under the massive foot.

They couldn't believe what had just happened. First Surya, then Clark. The monster seemed to be unstoppable.

"Aim at pressure points!" Tokutei screamed running around the monster.

Dan reacted straight away. Lian grabbed her Masada and aimed it at the monster's neck. Numerous bullets hit the creature's into the pressure points, which are the most vulnerable points on the body. The impacts itself didn't stop the monster from making another step. Everyone, still being in shock, waited for the bullets to blow up. Finally, the blast of fire came from the Draugar's arms, chest, legs and neck causing it to shudder and then fall backwards onto the ground. The fall revealed the flattened Clark's body. He looked awful. Some of the bones were sticking out from his uniform, his

skull was broken in many pieces and vast puddle of blood was spreading in all direction..

“Is it over?” Lian asked gazing at the large, rotten body in front of her.

“Let’s hope so,” Arthur replied wiping his forehead.

Tokutei came up to the corpse and to his surprise, it began to shrink. He immediately jumped back and watched carefully what was happening. The body was getting smaller and smaller until it became of the size of a regular human. Now when it was smaller, it could be seen that its body was no so different from a ghoul, and looked rather like a combination of an alien with a ghoul and a zombie.

Tokutei came again closer.

“Is it dead?” Natalie asked.

“I don’t know.”

He stopped in front of it and kicked it gently with his leg.

“I think it’s dead!” he shouted to the others.

The rest of the team also began to approach. Then the creature immediately opened its black eyes and grabbed Tokutei by its leg. Then quickly stood up and spun Tokutei over his head.

“He’s not dead!” Lian shouted raising her gun.

The explosions must have only weakened the draugr, so it was no longer able to control its size.

Having felt he was grabbed, the Asian warrior reacted quickly. He drew his Katana and swung it cutting of the creatures arm.

He got up looked at Lian and answered ironically.

“You don’t say?”

The creature’s arm immediately grew anew. Tokutei moved aside realising it won’t be a good move to attack the monster.

“I know why you’re here,” it spoke with a scratchy voice.

“It can talk,” Jason said with astonishment.

“You destroyed most of my minions. I underestimated you.”

“His minions?” Dan murmured. “Is it possible that he is...”

“I am Heith.”

Arthur’s eyes grew wide. Heith a draugr? It was not what the intelligence said.

“I thought Heith was a demon.”

“I was given the sacred piece of Seal to protect it from humans like

you, Arthur.”

“How did he know your name?” Jason asked in shock.

The draugr laughed and spoke casually.

“Demons talk about you, and your little, so called, redemption group. All Seal holders know what you’re up to.”

Arthur stood and stared without saying anything. Lian looked at him and poked him gently.

“Come on! Say something!”

Heith spoke again.

“Cizin’s messenger visited me a week ago. He warned me that you would come. Hence, we were prepared for you.”

“If you, Arthur won’t say anything, I will,” Dan said making a few steps ahead.

“Thank you for your life story, dude, now give us the Seal.”

Jason glanced at Dan and couldn’t believe that all his fear has vaporised so quickly. A few minutes earlier, he was almost paralysed on seeing ghosts. Now, he was mocking a draugr.

“Ha! The Seal is in me, and since I’m invulnerable to weapons you will not receive it.”

“So we will keep on fighting for this,” the old man said firmly aiming at him.

Heith strained his muscles and frowned as his body started to shiver. Nothing happened.

“No! It’s impossible!” he said with disappointment in his voice.

“What’s wrong Heith?” Dan said amusingly. “You can’t get bigger again.”

“So what, I will kill you anyway,” he shouted spreading his arms. Almost immediately the fog got thick again and dozens of ghosts emerged from it.

“Here we go again,” Jason spoke estimating the number of opponents and reloading his shotgun.

The draugr withdrew into the fog and disappeared. Tokutei began to chase it.

“I’ll help him!” Lian yelled, then vanished in the white cloud.

34.

The ghosts emerged from the thick fog and attacked Arthur, Jason,

Natalie and Dan. There were only four of them left which made them withdraw towards the broken block of flats.

Meanwhile, Tokutei was zooming through the fog cutting through the spirits. Lian changed the ammo into the salt one and dealt with the remaining ones. Most of the encountered creatures were ghosts of the miners who had drowned in the sea. Their bodies were pale and their eyes were white. Every cut and shot turned them into a white wisp. Tokutei was looking around trying to spot the draugr. He saw its blueprint ahead of him, so he jumped up high there and raised his sword to perform a cut. However, as soon as he landed the blueprint disappeared. He looked surprisingly. Then heard Lian's voice.

“Behind you!”

He turned around rapidly and saw Heith flying right at him. He set his Katana and stabbed the creature. A high-pitched shriek spread. Then the creature attacked again. Tokutei stabbed it one more time and afterwards ducked and cut off its leg. The limp quickly healed and the draugr threw itself at Tokutei one more time overthrowing him onto the ground. Lian finally caught up with them and leapt from the ground kicking the monster off her teammate's body.

“Let's finish him.” she said.

The rest of the team were dealing with the ghosts. Dan had so much determination in him, which influenced his accuracy. He wasn't scared anymore. Somehow, the fear disappeared and he could act as precisely as he did on every other mission. His shotgun shot salt bullets directly into the upcoming spiritual bodies. Jason focused on taking out the ones on the left, while Arthur took the right side. Natalie was still in shock. The pictures from her colleague's death were stuck in her mind which weakened her ability to focus on what was going on. The spirits were slowly closing in on them. They could hear the shriek of the draugr, coming from the fog from time to time. One of the ghosts with his chest opened managed to avoid the salt bullets and emerged right in front of Dan's eyes. The boy burst out screaming and fell on his back. The fear came back to him. Arthur noticed the incident and took a precise shot at the rotten spiritual face.

“Get up Dan!”

“Thanks,” he answered jumping back on his feet.

Tokutei and Lian were fighting Heith. The ninja's strong cut's

disposed the creature of limbs and sometimes pieces of his body. Yet, he quickly healed and still continued to fight without any symptoms of being tired. The girl's strong kicks only pushed it away for a split of second. Tokutei performed another cut. No sooner had the limb fallen off than a new one grew back. Then the warrior felt pain in his back followed by a shot that sounded in his ears. He turned around and saw nothing apart from the fog and a cloud of salt. He quickly realised that one of the spirits had got to him. It must have stabbed him with something and Lian had just taken it out.

“Are ya’ OK?”

Tokutei checked the wound with his finger. Luckily, it was just a scratch. He tightened the grip on his sword after he had noticed more ghosts emerging from the fog.

“I’ll deal with the spirits! Do something with that alien!”

The girl slashed at the draugr, while Tokutei kept the spirits away.

35.

Not so far from them, the situation was getting worse and worse. The spirits were only a few yards away, and the distance between them was getting smaller and smaller. Jason took a glimpse at the ammo status.

“Last two shots!”

“I’m out,” Natalie shouted.

Arthur glanced at his ammo status. It didn’t look so good either.

“Follow me.”

Then he shot left where there were only two spirits and made a dash towards the fog. The rest realised that it was their only way out and had to run after Arthur to survive... a little bit longer. The spirits followed them at once. The EMF readings were showing 240. Dan was sprinting as the second one, breathing heavily. The adrenaline produced in his body gave him that extra kick. As they were running, something appeared ahead of them.

“Look out!” Arthur shouted dodging a red, rectangular piece of something.

He turned his head, following it with his eyes and it occurred to him what it was; one of the bricks from the block of flats.

“Poltergeists,” Natalie’s voice came from behind.

The old men turned around and saw a hail of bricks flying right at them.

Unfortunately, because of the thick fog and the number of bricks, he only managed to cover himself. The pieces of wall hit him on the legs, making him fall. Hardly had he hit the ground when the rest of the team were knocked over by the shooting weights. The ghosts were right behind them.

36.

“Have you got any explosives left?” Tokutei asked cutting through another spirit.

“Two!”

He left the ghosts and rushed right at the draugr.

“Shoot him! Shoot him now,” he shouted kicking Heith so hard that it fell backwards a few yards further slightly disappearing in the fog. Lian immediately changed the ammo and pressed the trigger. The bullet hit the monster in the stomach, then exploded. The guts spread around. A few bloody pieces of body flew out from the fog. The remaining ghosts stopped, flickered and disappeared.

“Is it over now?” Lian asked staring at the guts around.

37.

Dan opened his eyes and found himself lying on the ground. The ghosts were everywhere. One of them grabbed Arthur by his leg and threw him a few feet further. The boy tried to get up, but something pushed him to the ground. He looked at Jason lying unconscious next to him among a few bricks. There were two spirits on him. They raised him by his uniform. He tried to spot Natalie, but the girl was nowhere to be seen. Then the ghosts flickered and vanished. Dan closed his eyes.

It was 2007, he was walking along the corridor of a huge tower block. He was wearing some elegant suit and he was holding a bunch of flowers in his hand. He stopped in front of the leather-covered door, took out mouth freshener from his pocket and spread it into his mouth. Next he knocked at the door.

“One minute!” a female voice came from the inside.

He straightened his jacket and checked his hair. Then a sound of the lock opening came from the other side and the door opened.

“Wow, you look wonderful!” he said seeing Natalie wearing a long, white, summer dress that perfectly fitted her slim body. Her long blonde hair fell past her shoulders, and her gorgeous smile made

Dan feel timid again.

“He he, thanks Dan,” she replied amusingly.

“These are for you,” the boy said handing out the red flowers.

“They’re beautiful. Come on in. I’ll just put them to the vase.”

“Are Judy and Emma in?”

“No, they re on some mission, so feel like at home.”

She went back inside and disappeared somewhere in the kitchen. Dan stopped in the hallway and looked around. His eye cast over some painting on the wall. It was a white tiger walking on the snow.

“OK, we may go now,” the girl came out of the kitchen.

They went outside and into a bus.

About an hour later, they were walking in Central Park side by side. The weather was really beautiful, and many people decided to stroll there, too. Trees were covered in green leaves, ducks were floating in the nearby pond, and children were playing dodgeball on a nearby meadow.

“How long have we known each other?” Dan asked.

“About four years?”

“I remember the first day we met... in that vampire nest.”

“He he, don’t remind me about it. I was eleven then, covered with blood. I wonder what you thought of me then.”

Dan pointed at the bench nearby.

“Let’s sit. Well, seriously... I thought you were some kind of a maniac or a psycho.”

“I’m not surprised. You saw me covered in blood, though”

“First impression, is the most important one, huh?” he said with a silent laugh moving closer to Natalie.

“I can’t believe that this is our first real date.”

She looked into his masculine eyes.

“We have been working together so many times.”

“And how many times we had to pretend to be a couple. You know... for the mission’s sake.”

Then they silenced as their eyes locked on each other. Their heads slowly began moving closer and closer. Dan closed his eyes and slightly opened his mouth. Natalie did the same. They could feel this raising desire within themselves, as their hearts started to beat faster and faster. Dan held his breathe just before he was about to touch her with his lips, and completely gave up to that very moment. It was after all, what he always wanted to do.

He had been in love with Natalie for four years, and now his dream was coming true. Their lips finally meet. But, then suddenly, Natalie opened her eyes widely and pushed herself back, touching her upper lip.

“What is it?” the boy asked surprisingly.

“I’m sorry, Dan, I must go,” the girl cried standing up.

“What? Did I do something wrong?”

She turned around, and he saw her eyes filled with tears.

“No! It’s me, I must go. I’m sorry, Dan!”

“Natalie! Wait!” he shouted standing up as the girl was running away.

He ran after her, but she disappeared somewhere behind the bushes. He looked left right, but he couldn’t find her among the crowd.

Some noise brought him back. He opened his eyes and saw the ghosts return. He gathered his strength, but the same force pushed him back to the ground. He lost every hope.

38.

“Tok, is it dead?” Lian’s voice sounded.

Tokutei looked around the fog and the gore surrounding them. Next he spotted the draugr’s blueprint emerging from the fog.

“No,” came the sad answer as he tightened the grip on his weapon. Almost immediately the ghosts appeared again around. The creature’s front was opened and they could see all the organs healing in a blink of an eye.

“The Seal,” Lian whispered spotting a small shiny object in the draugr’s heart.

The Asian warrior boomed and rushed towards the enemy cutting off its limbs and sieving its body. He moved his sword so quickly that even Lian couldn’t see the blade. She aimed her Masada and started to shoot the spirits around them. In the meantime, Tokutei stabbed the creature right into the chest and pulled it close. Next he stepped back and pushed Heith away. Lian spotted that Tokutei was holding the draugr’s heart in his left hand. He clenched his fists crashing it and took the Seal out of the leaky remains.

“No!” Heith shouted in his squeaky voice realising what had just happened.

Tokutei turned towards the creature whose chest began to heal. He saw two sharp blades emerging from the fog behind it, followed by a blueprint of a

woman.

“Surya...” the Asian girl whispered.

The blades surrounded the creature’s neck from both sides. Surya had her hands crossed, so she quickly held them out, making the blades cut through the neck.

“Shoot it!” she shouted moving aside.

Lian rapidly aimed and the last explosive bullet got stuck into the opened neck. Seconds later, the explosion tore the body apart. At the same time the spirits around vanished, and the fog started to clear up.

“Now it’s over,” the warrior announced hiding his sword back into its saya.

“Let’s move back to the others,” Surya suggested.

“I thought he killed you,” the Asian woman said peeping at the guts around.

“It takes more than a throw to kill me,” she smirked.

39.

Arthur, Jason, Natalie and Dan heard the explosions and all the ghosts immediately disappeared. Dan pushed himself off the ground, and got up on his feet. He ran to Natalie to help her crawl from under the bricks, while Jason dealt with Arthur.

“They’re gone!” Dan shouted joyfully. “They’re finally gone!”

Natalie wiped the blood off her cheeks.

“Lian and Tokutei must have killed him.”

Arthur rubbed his shoulder. He could feel something was wrong with it.

“Is everyone alright?”

“Yeah, minor wounds,” came the answer from Dan.

The fog began to get thinner and the visibility increased. Three blueprints heaved into view from the grey cloud.

“Surya?” Jason asked in disbelief seeing the white-eyed girl walking next to Tokutei and Lian.

“How did ya’, how h-how ?” the boy stuttered.

“Hi guys,” she said cheerfully.

Arthur stepped ahead still rubbing his shoulder.

“I’m glad you’re alive. Are you OK?”

Surya brushed aside her long hair.

“Yes, luckily I fell on a pile of snow.”

Jason inserted his last clip into his gun.

“So now we have to find the Seal and get the hell of out here.”

“Actually,” Lian said putting her hand into the pocket. “We have it.”

She took out her hand and opened her palm revealing the third piece.

Arthur came closer and looked at it startled.

“The third piece,” he said gently taking it.

Arthur looked at it with relief and hid it into his watch. Dan put his gun onto his back and leaned against a bigger piece of the wall, while Surya looked around anxiously.

“Where’s Clark?”

Tokutei put his hand on her shoulder.

“He didn’t make it.”

“The electronic devices are back online,” the old man said activating the audio channel and the feed from Eagle Eye. “John, bring the plane here. We’re going home.”

“I’ll fly with you to San Francisco,” Natalie said. “My mission here is done.”

“No problem. I’ll arrange a flight to D.C. tomorrow,” came the answer from Arthur.

40.

The fog completely disappeared and the seagulls returned. After a while, the huge plane landed near the town. Everyone rushed there, as the side metal door opened. Arthur ran first. He stopped at the door and waited until everyone got in. When everybody was safe and sound, he boarded the plane. The door closed and the machine rose into the air.

“I’m hungry like a horse,” Tokutei said walking towards the kitchen “Anyone wants a sandwich or something?”

“I could do with a cup of hot coffee,” Arthur took off his gun.

“I will help you!” Lian suggested. “But first I need to jump into some casual clothes.”

“Dibs on the shower,” Surya yelled.

Jason, Natalie and Arthur sat at the table. Dan hesitated for a moment. His mind started to wonder, and his eyes began to close.

“Too many things happened today, I think. I’ll go to bed.”

“You’ve earned it, Dan,” Tokutei smiled.

December 6, 2012

15 days remaining

41.

An hour later Surya, Dan and Jason were in beds while Tokutei, Lian, Natalie and Arthur were talking at the table drinking some beer.

“I really thought Surya was dead,” Lian said.

“Fortunately, she made out of this in one piece,” Tokutei replied taking a long sip of cold beer.

“Fortunately, WE made out of this in one piece,” Arthur corrected.

“Apart from Clark,” Natalie added sadly.

Dan was lying with his eyes opened. The thoughts from the past hit him again.

It was the next day after Natalie had left him in the park after the big kiss was about to happen. Dan was waiting in the briefing room in the hunters’ headquarters. It looked like a typical office of a white-collar worker; a wooden desk with a computer on it, lots of papers, windows with blinds. There were a few hunters around coming and going. Dan was gazing at the door, checking out who was coming in. With all his heart he was hoping that the next person would be Natalie, so they could talk about the previous day. He couldn’t understand what had happened. It was supposed to be his first kiss, with the girl he had loved for such a long time. Suddenly, Mike stepped in with a sad face.

“Mike!”

The boy came to Dan.

“We need to talk.”

“OK, sit down.”

“Not here, alone.”

Dan’s face saddened even more. The teenager stood up and followed Mike to the exit. They left the room. Mike stopped behind the door, turned around and said.

“Dan, it won’t be easy to say.”

“What? It’s about Natalie, isn’t it?”

“Dan, there has been an accident.”

“What accident?” the boy asked with a shock leaning against the

wall.

“Some vampires attacked the apartment yesterday.”

“Oh my God!”

“They destroyed everything.”

“W-What about Natalie,” the boy stuttered trying to gather his thoughts.

“Dan, she didn’t make it. I’m so sorry.”

Dan’s eyes filled with tears, as he turned around and rushed for the exit.

“Dan!” Mike shouted with grief. “Dan!”

“Dan! Dan!” a female voice sounded.

Dan opened his eyes and saw Surya standing next to the plane bed.

“Dan get up, we’re in San Francisco already.”

He looked around and saw that the plane was empty.

“Where is everybody?”

“They’ve just left. Come on! You don’t want to spend the whole day here, do you?”

“No, I don’t” he replied feeling a few tears in the corners of his eyes, then stood up, left the plane and followed Surya to the castle.

December 7, 2012

14 days remaining

42.

Surya walked into the briefing room and headed towards her seat. Lian, Arthur, Tokutei were already sitting there. To her surprise, Dan wasn’t sitting with the others, but he was standing at Arthur’s wide desk, constantly rubbing his palms.

“Oh Surya, have ya’ got a slightest idea why he brought us here?” Lian asked glancing at Dan.

“No, I don’t.”

“Neither do we.”

Surya looked at Arthur indicating that maybe he knew what was going on.

“Don’t look at me, I know as much as you do. And since it’s not a lecture about inventions or vampires, we just have to sit and wait.”

The girl sighed and sat next to Lian. As soon as she felt comfortably on her favourite chair, Jason entered the room and rushed to the front.

“Jason, please sit down,” Dan beckoned at a free seat next to Arthur. “I know that you’re preparing for capturing that demon guy, but there’s been something that had been bothering me for a long time. I won’t keep you waiting any longer, so I’ll cut long story short. I have received this charm or medallion or whatever you may call it, with numbers.”

The screen above displayed a square made of random numbers.

“It’s some riddle my parents gave me to solve and so far, I have managed to select the numbers by using the vampiric symbol that we found of Reiz’s chest the other day.”

He pressed some button and an eight-arm pentagram covered the numbers. Each arrow pointed towards one number. Next the screen changed into the selected numbers. Dan continued,

“I have put the numbers into an order starting from the top arrow and I got 42761652. I tried everything: street addresses, car plates, Google, telephone numbers and still have not a vague idea what they mean. Hence, I have invited all of you here to help me.”

Everyone looked at the numbers trying to figure out what they mean.

“Have you tried letters in the alphabet?” Jason asked thinking he knew the answer.

“Yes, nothing.”

Arthur scratched his head and smacked his lips.

“Maybe this is some code?”

“Already tried, no results.”

Everyone was staring at the screen, examining the numbers. If they work together, they may find the answer quicker. After all, it took Dan more than a week to select the ciphers.

“Wait, I think I got it!” Lian boomed.

Everybody immediately looked at her looking forward to her next statement.

“There’re eight numbers, right? If we divide them into half and then into half again we would get 42 76 16 52.”

“Are you trying to say that this is some combination to a safe?”

“No, I think these are some coordinates.”

Lian stood up and went fast to the desk.

“Let me check where they point,” she eagerly typed them into the computer.

Everyone was looking at it in wonder. The screen changed into the satellite

photo of Europe. The green arrow was pointing somewhere between Croatia and Italy.

“Is it under the sea?” Tokutei inquired waiting for the map to enlarge. Lian started to scroll the mouse, simultaneously making the map bigger. The point which the arrow was showing started to become clearer and clearer. Then a white dot began to emerge near the arrow.

“It’s an island,” Arthur murmured.

The arrow was pointing at a small island situated on the border of the Mediterranean Sea and the Adriatic Sea.

“It can’t be right,” Surya spoke slowly shaking her head.

Dan leaned against the side of the desk.

“I think it’s the solution.”

Arthur cleared his throat.

“How can you possibly know that, Dan? You can have several different coordinates if you start from different arrows.”

“I know it’s the answer. I remember my parents used to take me every summer to Croatia when I was a child. I remember taking a boat trip around the islands. This must be it.”

He threw arms around Lian and filled with delight and joy yelled to her ear,

“Thank you, Lian, thank you.”

“But don’t shout to my ear,” she pushed him away. “I don’t wanna go deaf before thirty.”

Arthur stood up and headed towards the exit.

“So, Dan. You have your little mystery solved.”

“Not yet, Arthur. I need to go there.”

The old man turned around and smiled gently.

“Just make sure to be back before the tenth.”

December 8, 2012

13 days remaining

43.

The scenery was simply marvellous around the Croatian islands even though it was December. The Sun was shining and the sound of floating sea was in the air. Dan was steering a modern, white boat. Tokutei was sitting at the back watching the islands nearby. They were both dressed in

jeans and light jackets to cover them from the breeze blowing from the east.

“This is it,” Dan raised his voice looking at the satnav attached near the rudder.

Tokutei stood up and leaned against the barrier. The boat slowly turned towards the island and stopped.

“Why are we stoppin’? The Asian man asked.

“It’s too shallow here. We need to take the jet ski.”

Dan turned off the engine, released the anchor, grabbed the GPS and moved to the back of the boat. There was a red jet ski hanged on two steel ropes. He pushed some button on the wall, and the jet ski fell onto the surface of the water.

“Grab the spade,” the boy said taking a seat on the jet ski.

Tokutei lifted the seat up and took out a shovel from the storage inside. Next he jumped onto the back seat of the jet ski. Dan started the engine and they headed for the island. The island itself wasn’t much different from all the other islands in that region. It was covered with rocks and grass. The tall rocks on one side had a building on the top. They reached the shore and got off the machine.

“The GPS points up there,” he pointed at the building.

“I hope it’s not inside.”

“We shall see.”

Tokutei grabbed the shovel and followed Dan along a steep hill. The small stones and rocks, that the whole island was covered in, made it very uncomfortable to walk.

“It’s not in the mansion. It should be right ahead of us,” the boy said as soon as they reached the top.

“Does someone live here?” Tokutei pointed at the building on the right.

“I have no idea. I remember travelling with my parents on these islands, but I don’t remember anything in particular.”

“I bet some rich guy owns this place.”

“No time for talking. And... And...We’re here, and I don’t think we will use the shovel anyway.”

They saw an irregular rock no bigger than a turkey with the coordinates carved on it.

“Just help me lift this rock, will you?”

Tokutei nodded, dropped the spade and crouched at the rock placing his fingers under one sharp corner. Dan did the same.

“OK, one, two, three, up.”

They used a lot of strength, and the rock slightly lifted.

“Push right!” Dan bellowed holding his breath.

They both pushed to the right about one yard and put the rock onto the ground. The empty space revealed a metal box buried among small stones. Tokutei stepped aside and observed the whole situation, while Dan grasped the box, which had a rectangular shape 20 inches long and 10 wide. There was no lock, no paddle, nothing. He blew the dust off it and opened it slowly.

“What is inside?” Tokutei asked trying to peek what the box contained.

“Some papers,” came the answer.

“What papers?”

Dan took out a folded piece of paper, opened it and started to examine what was in it.

“Well, what is it?” Tokutei asked impatiently.

“Wait a moment.”

The boy saw some sketches and schemes of something, but he needed some time to figure it out.

“Dan, what is it?”

“I think this is some kind of a instruction how to build some weapon.”

“Against vampires?”

“I think so. Nothing else dies of UV light.”

“If it has been buried here for over a decade, so why has nobody constructed it yet?”

“It needs specific technology which has not been invented then. I think I can build it now.”

Tokutei leaned over Dan’s shoulder.

“So how does it work?”

“From what I can see here, it’s something like a UV spotlight, but it covers much more space. I don’t know. We’d better get back to San Francisco. I’ll try to build it.”

“I still don’t understand why was it buried here, and why you got the riddle to get for the plans.”

“I have no clue, man. Maybe my parents tried to create it. Maybe they

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buried it here to protect it. Maybe they were killed because of it. I really want to know. We'd better be going back.”

They both got up and headed down to the beach where their jet ski was parked.

4 THE LESSER OF TWO DEVILS

December 10, 2012

11 days remaining

1.

It was late in the evening. Arthur was sitting at a table in a huge mansion somewhere in San Francisco. He was wearing his white tuxedo and a black, stylish bowtie. The hall or rather a ballroom was filled with people wearing elegant clothes around. Women were dressed in long dresses, some of them with uncovered back, while men were wearing typical suits or tuxedos. The majority of the gathered people were dancing to classical music played by an orchestra. Others were sitting and chatting or walking around the hall. The balcony overlooked the whole ballroom. But the tables were situated on the second level, opposite the balcony, so whoever was eating couldn't see what was going on downstairs. The balcony was surrounding the ballroom and finished with wide stairs on the other side of the hall. The orchestra was playing right below the balcony, so whoever was standing there and had too much alcohol in their blood, could easily spill something on the drummer below.

Arthur finished his non-alcoholic drink, put the glass aside and peeped left at Dan leaning against a balcony barrier above the hall.

“Do you see the target?”

“No, I've lost visual on it several minutes ago.”

Lian was dancing with Tokutei below them looking around suspiciously. She was wearing a long black dress with one arm while Tokutei had black suit and a black, elegant shirt underneath.

“He’s near the stairs,” the girl said spotting someone standing at a handrail.

It was a medium-height, young adult, no older than twenty five. He had slightly longer hair with a short pony tail at the back of his head. His face was serious, as if there were no emotions dwelling inside. He was wearing a white suit, similar to Arthur’s tuxedo. And that’s it. He was simply standing there waiting for something.

“Alright I’m heading there,” Jason added straightening up his tie.

Arthur looked around anxiously.

“Surya, go with Jason.”

“In a minute,” she answered correcting her make-up in the bathroom.

Dan looked down at Jason who was moving towards the stairs at the end of the dance floor.

He stopped at the little buffet with drinks and refreshments and said,

“The target is alone.”

“Good,” the old man replied. “Don’t let him see you. They know about us.”

“So what exactly am I supposed to do?”

“Just keep an eye on him.”

Dan walked around the balcony and then down to the buffet. He spotted Jason walking across the ballroom and Surya walking towards opposite direction. As they were passing each other they exchanged warm smiles.

Dan stopped at the buffet table with lots of delicious foods. He grabbed a slice of a cake and turned around to check whether anyone was looking at him suspiciously. In the meantime, Surya joined Jason.

“He’s got quite a young look for a 400 year-old demon.”

Arthur stood up and headed towards the bathroom.

“It’s just a human body he possesses. You don’t wanna see his real appearance.”

The song ended and Lian and Tokutei smiled at each other.

“I’m hungry,” The Asian man said scrubbing his stomach. “I’ll hit the buffet.”

“OK, I’ll go and check up on the others.”

Tokutei noticed Dan devouring the piece of cake. Not thinking much, he briskly went up to him.

“What’s up Dan?”

“That’s a very tasty cake. You need to try it, man.”

“I’m starvin’ so I’ll eat anything,” he replied reaching out for the slice.

2.

Meanwhile, Surya and Jason were sipping champagne, observing a man in a white suit. “So, Surya, tell me how you feel with us after so much time?”

“Seriously O.D.? Now? When everyone is listening? Forget it.”

“Is it really so bad?”

“Of course not, I feel better than at home for sure!”

Suddenly, the door over the stairs opened and two men with tonnes of gel rubbed in their long black hair entered. They had black suits with black shirts and black ties. One of them had an earring glittering on his left ear. They quickly took a glance over the crowd and slowly went downstairs.

“O.D. Look!”

Jason turned around and asked quietly.

“What are they up to?”

“They’re vampires,” the girl announced.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m never wrong!”

Jason spoke through the channel peeping at these two men slowly walking down the stairs.

“Arthur, we have a situation.”

“What is it?” the old man asked washing his hands.

“Two vampires appeared. They seem to have come for Paralth.”

“Keep me notified.”

They went up to the man the team was observing, and one of the vampires whispered something to the man’s ear. Paralth slowly turned around and looked at the crowd suspiciously, then the three of them headed back upstairs.

“The target is moving out,” Jason announced.

Arthur left the bathroom, spotted Dan and Tokutei at the buffet table, and stopped.

“We need to get behind that door. Lian, Tokutei, You’re spies, you may go there undetected. Jason, Surya, you will enter from here.”

“What about me?” Dan asked angrily feeling he was left behind.

“You’ll go with me outside to monitor everything.”

Tokutei pushed the remaining piece of the cake into his mouth. He beckoned to Lian to join him and they both left outside. In the meantime, Jason and Lian went towards the stairs leading to the wide door.

“We can’t go in there,” Jason said stopping Surya.

“Why?”

“These guys guard it.”

Surya glanced at the two well-built, or even over-built men at each side of the door.

Then she glimpsed left and right.

“There’re unguarded door,” she noticed a door at the end of balcony.

“Let’s go.”

They headed towards the small door on the other side of the corridor.

3.

Meanwhile, Lian was climbing onto a tall plant that was growing around the back door. Tokutei was following her a few feet lower.

“Nice panties,” he said with a silent laugh looking underneath her long black dress.

“Don’t you have anything better to stare at?”

“Err... from that angle, nope.”

“Ah! This dress is really freaking me out!”

“Not me...”

They both got to the roof of the mansion. The view from the roof was amazing. It covered most of the city centre and the ocean in the distance. They could even see the Golden Gate Bridge. A few yards ahead, there was a glass roof in a shape of a pyramid. Lian peeked back at her colleague and saw him taking something out from the inside pocket of his jacket.

“Hell no, Tok. Don’t you even start with the mask.”

He put it back without a word and began walking towards the glass. Lian was a few feet ahead.

“I don’t understand why Arthur wants us to get in from here. I can’t move freely in this dress!”

“Stop complaining and help me with the glass,” Tokutei answered trying to open one of the windows on the slanted glass.

“Eh, You’re doin’ it wrong. Step aside,” the girl moaned taking out

a pen-like object.

She went towards the window pointed it at the glass and pressed some button, causing a thin violet laser rail to draw a circular hole in the window. Tokutei was looking with a little anger and amazement simultaneously.

“If I have my sword, I would have done the same.”

“Aha, and how would ya’ take the cut glass out, genius?”

Tokutei scratched his head while Lian made sure that the pen was sticking to the glass tightly. Next, she gently pulled the cut glass and said with a silent smile.

“Voilà!”

4.

In the meantime, Dan and Arthur were sitting in the truck parked somewhere outside. The old man was monitoring the screens that were displaying the view from the inside cameras. Dan, however, was trying to take off his suit.

“Dan, stop fooling around and help me.”

The boy quickly took off his jacket, threw it on the white-leather couch and sat next to Arthur.

“OK O.D., you have a clear way. Paralth is in the room at the end of the hall.”

“Roger that,” came the answer through the speaker.

Surya and Jason slowly walked along the hall towards the big wooden door at the end of it. The corridor was about three yards wide and fifteen metres long. The floor was covered in polished boards, and the walls had paintings that were reproductions of famous masterpieces.

5.

Lian and Tokutei dropped the ropes and let themselves down onto the floor. The room was dark, with a long table in the middle, surrounded by modern, stylish chairs. The walls were empty, and there were no windows. The only light that could illuminate the room were two lamps standing on both sides of the table. Lian looked around, when she heard Arthur’s voice coming through the headset.

“They are in the next room, proceed on my mark.”

Lian and her colleague came towards the thick door separating the two rooms. They could hear Paralth talking, but they couldn’t understand a

word; it was too much deadened.

“Jason and Surya are standing behind the door, on the other side of the room,” Dan announced.

“So why the heck did we have to go through the roof?” Lian asked with a little anger.

“Look under the table,” Arthur suggested.

Tokutei raised his eyebrows in surprise, then quickly walked towards the table, crouched and noticed two objects taped to the surface from the underneath. He unstuck them and showed to Lian. A big smile suddenly appeared on the girl’s face.

6.

Surya and Jason were standing at the other door trying to listen what was going behind it. The voice wasn’t as deadened as from the other side.

“Remember, the target cannot leave the body,” Arthur reminded.

Dan stuck a small spycam through the gap under the door. The video feed went straight to his microcomputer in his eye lens. He noticed that four of the enemies started moving towards the room where Lian and Tokutei were waiting.

“Tok, Lian, they’re goin’ straight to you.”

Tokutei immediately took a glimpse at the rope hanging from the roof. Lian glanced at him anxiously, then quickly scanned the room hearing the footsteps on the other side of the door. There were four of them. Apart from the two guards, Paralth there was also a mysterious person wearing a red suit. He had sunglasses even though it was dark, long moustache surrounding his mouth and joining a short beard below and hardly any hair on his bald, pointy head. He stopped at the door, as one of his two guards came to it and pressed the knob strongly.

“I think you’ll be satisfied with the gift I have for you,” the man in a red suit said with a gentle smile.

“I hope so.”

The door opened, and they slowly stepped inside Paralth followed them. One of the vampires went towards the table to switch the light on.

“It won’t be necessary,” the demon said.

They came up to the table and sat on the tall chairs. The two guards stepped aside and waited. The vampire glanced at the small lamp at his end

of the table.

“It will be over in two weeks. I want only this city, nothing more.” Tokutei and Lian were holding to each other dangling on the rope above them. Paralth sniggered fiddling with his fingers.

“You must be out of your mind. Why do you want sunny San Francisco, when you can have something much, how to put it... more vampire-friendly?”

“What do ya’ mean?” he asked squinting his eyes.

“Cizin will let you have the whole state, any state, providing you gather all vampires from the whole world.”

“It will be a problem, you know.”

“You have two weeks. The prize is really worth fighting for.”

Arthur and Dan were carefully listening to them while Jason and Surya were quietly creeping towards the room.

“Why do they want all the suckers here?” Dan asked taking a sip of some juice.

Arthur shook his head anxiously.

“I don’t know, but something big is going on.”

“Yeah, the end of the world.”

Arthur rolled his eyes and sighed.

“Jason, Surya, attack on my mark. Tokutei, Lian, um... just don’t let go of each other.

“Like I will,” Tokutei whispered tightening up the grip on Lian’s smooth back.

One of the guards heard Tokutei whisper and rapidly raised his head.

“Someone’s here!” he boomed spotting two people swaying above. Paralth slowly looked up and immediately his face filled with anger making every vein on his body visible.

“ASATs,” he said tightening his fists.

Arthur gritted his teeth and shouted.

“Go! Go! Go!”

Surya rushed forward opening the door with a kick, Jason followed her. Tokutei and Lian let go of each other and jumped down. The two black-dressed vampires covered their boss. The red-suited vampire panicked and rushed towards the window as the demon rushed towards the other door from which Surya and Jason came. He lowered his body and slipped between them. The vampires who were in the other room made a dash after

their boss.

“Follow Paralth!” Arthur ordered staring at the screens.

Surya took a few shots at the escaping vampires. One of the bullets hit the bodyguard, while the second vampire threw himself at the window after the one in red suit.

“What about the vampires?” the dhampiric girl exclaimed not knowing what to do.

“They mean nothing,” the old man replied. “Paralth is our main target.”

Surya, Jason, Lian and Tokutei slashed after Paralth. He ran to the other room, through the door and towards the window.

“Damn he’s fast,” Jason complained.

The demon jumped through the window breaking the glass and landed on the grass. Tokutei jumped after him.

“He’s running towards the parking lot!” Lian announced following Tokutei.

Dan immediately stood up, grabbed his jacket and ran outside. Arthur only glanced at him, but he didn’t say anything to him. Instead he touched the earwig in his ear and shouted.

“We must follow him. Get to your cars immediately!”

7.

Jason had left the building and run towards the parking lot. It was a large space with several fancy cars and motor bikes parked around. The palm trees made this typical lot look more appealing, especially with such a luxurious mansion next to it. Jason was zooming as fast as he could, but his suit was slowing him down. He could see Paralth running a couple of yards ahead of him. Suddenly, a red Porsche pulled over next to the demon. The door pushed opened and he disappeared inside. Jason quickly took out his car keys, pointed them in front of him desperately clicking the open button. Almost immediately four orange lights glittered at the end of the parking lot.

“Don’t let him escape,” the old man’s voice sounded through the earwig.

“Too late, he’s already gone.”

When Tokutei and Lian saw demon getting into the car, they turned a little right and ran towards the main street through the green lawn.

“I will literally cut this dress!” Lian exclaimed angrily almost losing her balance at the kerb. Tokutei turned back and smirked.

“Stop complaining.”

He headed towards the stone fence, leapt up, grabbed the top of the fence, and in no time he was on the other side at the main street. He saw the red car turning the corner on his right. He heard the tyre screech and then saw a silver-black DB 9 pull over and drift left, so that the car stopped facing its right side towards Tokutei. The door opened up and he saw Dan inside shouting.

“Hop in!”

The boy looked up and caught eye of Lian trying to jump over the fence. She tore a part of her dress and finally jumped on her feet.

“Fucking dress,” she murmured to herself brushing the dirt off her arm.

She quickly jumped to the backseat while Tokutei sat in the front one. The car took off with a screech.

Meanwhile Surya was heading along the parking lot. She jumped onto a car, from which she quickly leapt onto the second one. Then she jumped up high, made a front flip and landed on a black and white motorbike. A black Mercedes McLaren stopped behind her. Then she heard Jason’s voice through the headset.

“Hurry up! Someone’s coming!”

She looked back and noticed a dozen of angry looking people speeding towards the motorbikes parked in the area. She quickly took off and headed towards the main street. Jason followed her, while the upcoming guys grabbed their bikes and joined the pursuit.

8.

The red Porsche was speeding along the streets followed by a DB9. Surya and Jason were catching up. The traffic was not so heavy at this time of the evening, but it was still dangerous enough to travel along the streets.

“Arthur where are you?” Dan asked passing a minivan.

“We’re on the other highway. Everyone! Try to stop him somehow.”

“Dan! We have a tail!” Surya exclaimed.

He glanced at the rear-view mirror and raised his voice trying to catch up with the Porsche ahead.

“Lian! There is a Masada riffle hidden in the back of my seat. Try to take them out.”

She turned around and saw a motorbike with Surya and Mercedes SLR next to it. She also saw several motorbikes chasing them. She quickly opened the locker between the seats and took out the gun. At the same time Dan drifted into a U-turn and both Tokutei and Lian were pushed to the side.

“You’re not driving a bag of potatoes, Dan,” Tokutei said firmly trying to push himself off the door.

“You want me to catch up with them, or not?”

He took a glimpse at the side mirror. Lian peeped at the ammo status.

“What are those guys?”

“They are certainly not vampires,” Surya said outstripping a white Mazda.

“So I’ll just go with regular ammo.”

Jason shifted the gear and pressed the accelerator as hard as he could. He passed Dan’s DB9 and came closer to the Porsche that was zooming between the cars. Some of the outrun cars stopped out of the sudden. Others didn’t do anything and carried on driving. Car chase was a typical view for citizens of San Francisco, and some of the drivers were used to it. They didn’t even bother honking.

“Dan!” Arthur’s voice sounded. “Let Jason and Surya deal with Paralth. Since there are three of you take the motorbikes out.”

As he was saying that, several gunshots came from behind. The bullets hit the body of the car and broke the back window.

“Like I have a choice,” the boy murmured changing the lane.

Lian turned around quickly, stuck out the barrel through the broken window and started shooting at the men on the motorbikes. She managed to hit two of them. The group separated and a few bikes accelerated outrunning the Aston Martin.

“Oh no you won’t” Dan said pressing something near the GPS screen. Almost immediately two miniguns emerged from the top of the hood. He pulled some lever below the steering wheel and the miniguns blew bullets at the passing motorbikes. Almost immediately one biker fell off the machine right in front of Dan. He reacted quickly turning his wheel and skimmed the vehicle. Some other bullets penetrated the second person. He lost control of his motorbike and felt numbly onto the road, while the other two sped up and got closer to Surya.

“Fuck!” Dan cursed aloud stumping his foot on the accelerator.

“I’m done!” Lian said putting her gun aside trying to get rid of the pieces of glass from her torn dress.

Meanwhile half a mile ahead, Jason was closing in on Paralth. The red Porsche unexpectedly turned into another corner. Jason did the same. He constantly glanced at the rear-view mirror to check if any motorbike was getting dangerously close to him. He saw two catching up with Surya.

“Surya! Behind you!”

“I know,” the girl greeted her teeth taking out a gun that had been attached to her motorbike. She turned around and took a few shots at the men. One of them got hit. He shuddered, but quickly regained his balance. The other one shot a series of bullets with an Uzi. Several bullets hit the Surya’s bike. Luckily, they didn’t damage it nor did they harm the girl. She tightened the grip on her gun and focused on the road. She could hear Dan speeding not so far from her.

9.

Arthur was in the truck monitoring the whole thing. One of his screens was showing feeds from traffic cameras, while the other two the feeds from Jason’s and Dan’s cars.

“Where are you, Arthur?” Jason asked.

“No so far,” came the answer.

Something caught his attention. He saw that the red Porsche changed the lane and now was going against the stream.

“He’s on the other lane.” the old man announced.

“I won’t risk it,” Jason replied keeping his car on the right lane.

Dan got closer to the last man on the motorbike and tied with him. The guy on the bike took a glimpse at Aston Martin and aimed his gun at the window. Dan gritted his teeth, then firmly turned the wheel hitting the bike with the side of his car. The impact made the opponent let go of the weapon, but he didn’t fall. Dan repeated the manoeuvre causing the man to fall onto the street. Surya was just a few metres ahead. She headed down the street and followed Jason. Unlike him, she turned into the opposite lane. The traffic was much heavier there, and it was much more difficult to avoid collisions. The sound of hooters filled the air. As she was getting closer to Jason, some truck was heading right at her. She tried to slow down and change the lane, but something was wrong with her bike. The brake didn’t

react properly no matter how many times she hit the brakes. The girl quickly scanned the area and made a decision. She turned left, then right to avoid the truck and the next car speeding on the second lane.

“I have no breaks!” she shouted through the earwig getting back to the right lane.

“Hold on! We’re coming,” Lian said carefully scanning the traffic. Both Tokutei and her looked at Dan as if they wanted to say, *come on! Aren’t you gonna do anything?*

Dan sighed shaking his head.

“Don’t look at me like this.”

He accelerated and seconds later they were zooming side to side.

“Tokutei! Grab the wheel!” The boy quickly opened the door.

“What?” the confused Asian man answered surprisingly seeing Dan leaning out of the car.

Not thinking much, he reacted quickly and grabbed the wheel trying to keep the control of the car. Lian was staring at the whole situation not knowing what to do.

“Surya, give me your hand!”

“No way! It’s too dangerous!”

“Come on!”

“Look out!” she shouted changing the lane as another car zoomed between them.

“Surya! I’ll pull you here.”

The girl looked ahead, then at Dan. She sighed and reached out with her hand towards Dan’s. They grabbed each other, then suddenly, Tokutei turned left then right and Dan fell out of the car onto the road. The dhampiric girl’s eyes grew wide as she quickly pulled him onto the seat behind her.

“Sorry!” the boy heard Tokutei’s voice.

“What the hell Tok, Have you ever driven a car?”

“The problem is that this is my first time.”

On hearing this, Lian elbowed to the front seat.

“Move!” she shouted seeing a car moving right at them from the front.

She grabbed the wheel and regained the control of the car and quickly changed the lane avoiding the upcoming van. Tokutei saddened and dropped his eyes. Lian gave him a weird look and shook her head. Tokutei

peeked at her.

“What? He didn’t ask me if I could drive.”

“Just keep your fingers crossed for them to get out of this safe and sound, will ya?”

10.

Meanwhile Jason managed to catch up with Paralth.

“Sorry babe,” he whispered gently stroking the wheel of his SLR, and then turned his wheel to the left pressing the Porsche to the sidewall. The side mirror was immediately ripped off and the left side of the car turned into millions of sparks. The Porsche hit the lamp and the driver door fell out. The impact was so strong, that the driver of the Porsche fell out, too. Paralth quickly changed the seats and grasped the wheel tightly. He rapidly pushed Jason away and sped up. O.D. did the same and pushed him back at the wall. Unfortunately, he couldn’t keep it long, as an upcoming car made him pull back. The demon stumped on the accelerator as hard as he could and his Porsche moved away from SLR.

“Let him go!” Arthur said.

“He will lose us!” came the angry answer.

But then he realised what was Arthur’s plan. He noticed a black truck turning right about a mile ahead. He realised it was Arthur and slowed down.

11.

About half a mile behind him, Lian was speeding 180 mph next to the damaged bike with Surya and Dan on it.

“Dan, we’re gonna pull you inside. Hold on!” she shouted avoiding another collision.

The boy looked around anxiously.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

Lian glanced ahead and noticed several cars dangerously close to each other. She immediately pulled back.

“Hold on tight!” Surya shouted then sped up.

“What are ya’ doin’, woman? Are you crazy? Why the hell are ya’ speedin’ up?”

“To survive.”

The boy put his arms around her and leaned his head against her uncovered

back. He could feel her soft, smooth skin on his cheek. The dhampiric girl widely opened her eyes for a split of second, then smiled when she felt his warm cheek. But then she focused on the road and quickly passed the upcoming cars. Lian and Tokutei were just next to her.

12.

The red Porsche was zooming 250 mph per hour as the air was whistling against the back spoiler. The demon passed several more cars, then the road emptied and he noticed a truck standing horizontally on the whole side of the highway. He pressed the breaks at once, but his speed was too big to effectively stop the car. As a result the Porsche smashed against the black ASAT truck.

“He’s immobilised,” Arthur announced.

Jason slowed down and stopped his scratched Mercedes near the accident. At the same time Surya passed another car. She realised she wouldn’t be able to stop the motorbike before the truck, so she, turned round, grabbed Dan tightly and jumped up pushing the boy to his chest. The bike went a little bit further then fell on its side and slid along the road creating hundreds of sparks. The girl landed safely on the empty street holding Dan in her arms. She let go of him, but he had still his arms around her like a little baby around their mother.

“You may let go now.”

He slowly opened his eyes and realised it was safe.

“It all happened too fast,” he said spotting the ASAT truck a quarter mile ahead.

“Come on Dan!” the dhampiric girl said taking off. “We need to catch up to them.”

Lian and Tokutei stopped the car near the smashed Porsche, got out and surrounded it. Arthur was already waiting for them. The car had its roof dented inside and the front was fixed under the truck. There were also pieces of glass from windows and lights spread around. However, the ASAT truck was clean. Jason slowly walked up holding a gun pointed at the cabin. He noticed the body lying on a blown-off airbag. Arthur aimed his gun at Paralth and shot.

“Huh?” Tokutei sounded surprised.

“It’s a marker of holy water. He won’t be able to leave the body now.”

“What now?” Lian asked examining the wreck.

“Tokutei, Jason, drag him out!”

While the two of them were pulling the body out of the wreckage, Surya and Dan finally arrived.

“Did we miss anything?” the girl asked.

Dan quickly ran to his car ignoring everyone else.

“You definitely missed the crash,” Jason laughed.

Dan walked anxiously around his car mumbling,

“The back window, left side, rear light.”

“Dan what’s up?” Lian asked.

“I’m checking the damage in my deebie. Uff, it doesn’t look so bad.”

Jason and Tokutei dragged the body out.

“You worry about your ride? Look at my girl.”

Dan took a glimpse at the SLR standing near. It had a vast dent on its side, the mirror was gone, and the door seemed to be stuck.

“We would have a lot to do when we go back.”

“I won’t go to sleep until this beauty is repaired,” Jason smiled. “What about him?” he beckoned at the demon.

“Take him to the truck!” the old man ordered. “We’re going back to the castle.”

“What about my bike?” Surya asked.

“Ask Dan to take it inside as well. We’ll fix it at home.”

“Danny,” she said calmly fluttering her eyes.

The boy was already sitting in his car not willing to leave it.

“Dan! Come on. You’ve heard Arthur.”

He rolled his eyes, then stepped out of the car and unwillingly walked back along the road towards the motorbike. Tokutei got out of the truck.

“We will put him in the cage... just in case”

Jason was about to step out after Tokutei, when he heard Arthur’s voice.

“I hope Jason stayed there to keep an eye on him.”

O.D. immediately turned on his feet and went back inside. Tokutei walked down the ramp scanning the area. He boomed with astonishment,

“Where’s Dan?”

“He went for my bike,” the dhampiric girl replied with satisfaction.

Dan was unwillingly wheeling the broken motorbike, moaning,

“Girls, they always know how to persuade you. They will make you

do whatever they want.”

When he finally came up and took the bike into the truck, he heard police sirens in the background. The old man looked at his watch.

“They were supposed to be here earlier. Time to clear out!”

Dan and Tokutei went back to Aston Martin while Jason headed towards his McLaren. The rest of the team went into the truck.

As soon as Tokutei closed the door, his colleague boomed.

“And you, my friend, have two weeks to learn to drive.”

“I’m sorry alright! When you fix it you can teach me.”

“Ha! I’m not gonna teach you on my deebee, we’ll find something else.”

“Eh, let’s forget about it.”

The huge vehicle turned around causing the Porsche wreckage to detach from its side. There was only a small dent after the crash, nothing more. The truck turned onto the right lane and joined the traffic. Jason and Dan followed it.

13.

A few hours later they were back in the castle. Everyone was in the basement of the structure, just opposite the hangar with aircrafts. The room was lit by spotlights placed on the top of the walls and directed down, so it could easily illuminate the whole place. Paralth was lying on a wooden table tied to it by four thick, leather belts. Arthur was standing next to him.

“Where is the Seal!” he shouted.

“I’ll tell you nothing,” came the casual answer.

“You know you will eventually tell it to us.” Dan said amusingly.

“You may torture me as long as you want. I’ll be silent as a grave.”

“Jason hit it!” the old man indicated at a lever of some torture machine.

O.D. pushed the lever and suddenly, water started to drip onto the demon’s forehead.

“Chinese torture with holy water. It should work.”

The little drops dripped every few seconds and splashed against the demon’s bald forehead. Every single drop immersed into the skin causing its cell to vaporised. Paralth started to scream at the top of his lungs, then shriek as if he was on fire. Every muscle on his face tightened and his black eyes turned red. Everyone was standing near him watching the torture with

a lot of attention.

“And he said he would withstand everything,” Lian commented.

“I’m done, I can’t stand this shriek anymore,” Surya complained turning round. “I’m going upstairs.”

A few seconds passed and the hole in Paralth’s forehead was becoming deeper and deeper. The bone of the skull was slowly emerging, and blood was running down his left cheek.

“Alright! Alright! I will tell you!” the demon shouted. “Just please stop this thing!”

Arthur beckoned to Jason to turn off the machine. He pushed the lever and the water stopped dripping.

“The Seal is in Pyramiden.”

Lian rolled her eyes and dropped her hands.

“He must be freaking kidding us. We have already been there.”

Dan patted her on the shoulder.

“Sweetie, he’s playing with us. He knows that. He did recognised us back in the mansion.”

The demon directed his eyes at Lian and stuck his tongue out. Then burst out into laughter. Arthur walked to the lever and pressed it himself. The water started to drop again and the shriek went on.

“Stop this!” Paralth cried as his whole body trembled.

Arthur moved the lever and waited.

“You know what, ASATs. Whatever you do to me, I’ll still go back to Hell and return in a few days in a new vessel, so c’mon, will you continue please?”

“Actually, I will. But first I wanted to show you something.”

He slowly walked around the table so that Paralth would have a good view on him. The old man had grabbed something from a table, a gun. He opened the cylinder and took out one of the bullets.

“Do you know what it is?”

“Bullets won’t kill me.”

“Look closer,” he leaned over the body.

The demon examined the bullet with his eyes, then he saw something, that automatically changed his mind.

“The piece of the Seal is in Attica Prison.”

Everyone looked at him in disbelief.

“What?”

“Cizin has a son named...”

“Paymon,” Arthur whispered.

“Yes. He is the holder of one of the pieces. He has been locked there in 1930s as soon as the prison was opened. Every time his body rotted he changed it to a prisoner who had got life sentenced, so that the Seal would never leave its walls.”

Arthur put the bullet back into the revolver.

“That’s all we needed to know,” he said aiming at the demons head.

“Wait, wait, wait. I thought we had a deal.”

“I don’t make deals with demons,” he pressed the trigger and the projectile nested in the Paralth heart.

A terrible shriek spread around the castle, as its body glittered and stopped moving. Everyone was standing and gazing at the whole situation. The old man turned his head and looked at them.

“Meet me at seven hundred sharp in the briefing room. We’re going to prison.”

Lian’s eyes grew wide as she felt Tokutei’s gentle tap on her shoulder.

“Don’t tell me you’re surprised?”

“I’m not. I just... I hate prisons, brr. I really do.”

14.

In the meantime, Surya went upstairs to her room, then straight to the bathroom. She took off her dress, had a quick shower. Next when she has dried herself with a soft towel, she put on a shirt and tracksuit bottoms. She was too tired to clean her make up, so she only brushed her teeth and walked towards her double bed. She stopped, peeked at the lights spreading in the distance, outside the window and let herself drop onto the quilt.

“Gush, I’m so tired,” she murmured yawning, as her white eyes froze on the ceiling.

It was 2004. She was an eleven year-old girl. She didn’t look like other girls. Her white-black hair and creepy white pupils could scare a regular person. She was standing at the door in the hallway of some hotel. There was no one around her. She was nervously tapping her feet in some catching rhythm, then glanced impatiently at the watch. Suddenly, she heard footsteps coming from the staircase. She quickly put a hoody on, and turn

back to hide her appearance. She only took a glimpse at the person behind her and she saw a tall boy with short straight hair. He was holding a large bag in his hand.

“Sorry for being late,” he said catching his breath.

Surya took off her hood, and smiled.

“You wouldn’t be if you’d taken the elevator, Mike.”

Yes, it was the same Mike who was Dan’s best friend. But why was he there?

“Are you ready to do this?” he asked opening the bag.

“I have no choice, do I?”

Mike dropped the bag onto the floor. Next, he took out the keys and opened the door on his right.”

“So let’s do this then.”

They went inside. It was a typical hotel room. A double bed in the middle and a table in the corner with a stylish mirror above it. The curtains were hanging from the ceiling, partly covering the windows.

“There’s a bathroom, so let’s go straight there,” he said casually.

Surya walked inside and sat on a stool in front of a huge mirror. Mike followed her. He put the bag onto the toilet and unzipped the second pocket.

“OK. We will start with the hair. You can’t have these black and white stripes around them.”

He took out a dye paint and a hairdryer. Then he began the whole operation.

15.

After a while, Mike took away a towel lying on her head, and dried the remaining wet hair.

“I don’t like this colour,” she complained seeing blond hair.

“You’ll get used to it.”

He went back to his bag and took out a box.

“You need to hide these dhampiric eyes of yours, so these blue contact lenses would do the job.”

The girl carefully put them on and looked at herself in the mirror.

“I look completely different.”

“You are now a completely different person and you’d better stick to it. No one must know who you really are.”

“Don’t ya’ think I know that,” she took a glimpse at Mike and smiled.

“Listen, since you’re now a complete different person, you have to behave differently. I mean, no fear for humans, they’re not gonna know who you really are. You can’t go by Surya anymore. Your new name would be Natalie.”

“I can go with that.”

“Your life story is easy; your father was a hunter and your mother died at birth. I think they will fall for it.”

“So what’s the plan now?” She asked standing up.

“You will go to the mansion we were talking about. There should be about twenty vampires, so that’s no problem for you. We’re gonna arrive late, so remember to stick to the plan. If everything goes as I think, they will let you join us.”

“Understood.”

December 11, 2012

10 days remaining

16.

It was almost seven o’clock in the morning. Jason left his room and headed downstairs. He saw Surya in the main hall, so not thinking much he caught up with her.

“Hi S,” he greeted her with a smile.

“Hi, O.D.,” came the answer with a yawn.

“Did you have enough sleep?” he asked warmly even though he saw her yawn.

“Pff. I wish. I couldn’t sleep till four.”

“Worried about the mission, huh?”

“Um... Yeah, that too.”

They went to the briefing room. Everyone was already waiting there.

“Arthur, you look horrible,” Surya pointed out noticing his tired eyes and yawning.

“I had to work all night. But, look who’s saying that. You don’t look so good either.”

“I had trouble with my sleep.”

“Anyway, if everybody is here, so we may start.”

He pressed some button on the keyboard and all the lights dimmed. The screen on the wall simultaneously displayed a picture of the prison.

“I was talking to the president this night and he agreed to provide help. Tokutei, Dan and Jason will go to Attica prison. You cannot go there as ASATs, of course, so you’ll have to go there undercover. Unfortunately, we cannot bring any weapons there.”

“Why?” Dan asked surprised.

“Prison rules. They say someone else may find it and use it against everyone else. Blah, blah.”

Tokutei was gazing at Arthur.

“What about earwigs?”

“Since they’re undetectable and you do have to have some sort of communication with us, thus taking earwigs is obligatory.”

“If the boys are going inside, what are we going to do then?” Lian asked.

The old man sighed and rubbed his tired eyes.

“Unfortunately, this is a male prison, and we can’t risk have you there.”

“But we can take care for our asses,” the Asian girl assured.

“I’m sorry. You may only monitor the mission from the outside and provide assistance from there.”

Dan smacked his lips.

“What exactly do we have to do there?”

“You have to find Paymon. There are twenty seven prisoners serving life sentence. You must find which one of them is possessed by our demon and retrieve the Seal. Any questions?”

Everyone took a glance at one another and kept silent.

“If no, then you have less than two hours to prepare for the mission. We are leaving at nine sharp.”

17.

It was almost 11 a.m. The ASAT plane landed a few miles from Attica prison. Two prison buses were already waiting there. The back door of the plane slowly descended and the interior revealed three men. They were Tokutei, Dan and Jason. They were already wearing prison, orange clothes. The men slowly walked out, and went up to four policemen and two prison guards waiting there.

“Oh my God!” one of the policemen said. “You guys look exactly like those criminals locked up there.”

“That was a compliment,” Jason replied smiling.

“Yeah, Surya gave us a complete make up,” Dan added checking whether the gel rubbed in his hair was still there.

One of the prison guards came up to them.

“I’m sorry, but we’ve got to put these on you,” he said ringing with the cuffs.

“We’ve gotta’ keep it real, right?” Dan replied with a silent laugh.

The men put the handcuffs on the team members’ hands.

“Alright, let’s move it on,” he said turning around towards the buses.

Arthur returned to the plane. Surya and Lian were sitting on the couches sipping some hot coffee from their mugs.

“Well, girls, seems like it is you and me only. We’re going to have a lot of fun.”

“I really wished we could go inside,” Lian complained.

“Like I said before, women are not allowed there, and the danger of those all sick busters willing to rape you. No way, I couldn’t allow it. We’re lucky enough to get permission to get other.”

Surya put away her empty mug and stood up.

“What if we didn’t get any permission?”

“It’s out of question.”

“Why?”

“You see girls, back in the 90s’, the former president visited me to discuss the end of the world issue.”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Surya squinted her eyes putting the mug into the small dishwasher. “You mean, that you have talked to the president himself about the end of the world?”

“That bothered you?” Lian joined the conversation glancing at Surya. “I didn’t know you knew about the end of the world back then.”

“Girls, girls, please, too many questions, as always. As far as I know, people knew about the end of the world back in medieval times. You remember the witch was talking about some other groups that were trying to find the Seal. And, Surya, yes, I do know the president, the present one as well as the two before him. It was a funny story, you know. The government somehow obtained the info that I was forming the group to

fight supernatural entities. And when the president visited me, I thought he wanted me to stop all of this, but I was wrong. In fact, he wanted me to continue the project and gave me his full support.”

“Wow. So the story of ASATs dates back to the nineties,” Lian commented processing what she had just learned.

“I don’t understand one thing,” the dhampiric girl returned to her seat. “Why did it take you so long to find us?”

The old man rested his feet as he sat comfortably on the white couch.

“Listen, it’s not that I was looking for the people for all these years. Some of them I had been observing long before. I had to make sure, they’re the best. For instance, I visited Tokutei when he was a child. In fact, you, Surya, I met in New York a long time ago.”

On hearing this she leaned forward and boomed,

“What? When?”

“Heh, I can only tell you one thing; Operation Rise and Shine.”

These words brought Surya back to 2005. She was running along a well-lit corridor. Her blonde pony tail was dangling behind her. She was holding a long, silver knife in her left hand. While she was running, she put her right hand into a side pocket of her black jeans and took a grenade out.

“Natalie! They’re downstairs!” she heard someone’s voice behind her.

“I’ve got it.”

The girl reached the end of the corridor and turned left into the stairs leading down. She ran past some dark clothes lying in the pile of ash, but she ignored it and kept on running. The staircase looked rather old. It hadn’t been painted for at least thirty years, and the smell inside was terrible. She turned on the last level, and then she saw three people downstairs waiting at some wooden door. Two of them were adults, and the third one was Dan. When he saw her, he brought his index finger closer to his mouth. The girl immediately slowed down and became silent. The man with short hair on her right showed three fingers, then bended his one finger; he was counting down. When he lowered his hand, Dan kicked open the door and everyone threw their grenades inside. Then he closed the door rapidly and waited. They looked at the gap between the door and the floor and saw white light coming out followed by a loud, horrible shriek. Suddenly, something hit the door from the other side. The two men pushed it back not to let go that something from the inside. They could feel the hard scratch from the other side, which gradually disappeared.

“It’s done,” one of the men said opening the door. They entered and saw a large room filled with falling black ashes. They were everywhere, slowly covering the floor. Apart from ashes, there were lots of empty clothes scattered around.

“It’s over. Dan, Natalie, run to the others to let them know.” They both nodded, turned on their heels and ran upstairs.

18.

Outside the building, there were about a dozen of people talking. It was a daytime, and the sky was clear. A few cars were parked outside the entrance to an old block of flats, typical for Brooklyn.

“Come on, where are they,” a man with grey hair said looking at his watch.

Dan and Natalie ran out of the building with two other hunters.

“It’s over!” they shouted joyfully running towards the group of men.

“Over. Did the grenades work?” the man asked.

“The grenades worked, they’re all dead. Over thirty kills,” Dan was dancing out of joy.

“So this was the operation Rise and Shine,” some man said.

Dan and Natalie looked at him. He was wearing a white suit and a white hat.

“As you see, Mr. West,” the other man said. “Our hunters are perfect for such missions, no matter how old they are.”

“Yes, congratulations, the mission was well prepared. Keep on training them. We don’t know how many vampires there shall be around in the future.”

“Surya?” she heard Lian’s voice which made her snap out of the past.

“Yup?” when did you meet Arthur?

“A few years ago in New York. He was observing one of our major missions.”

19.

Attica Correctional Facility is a super maximum security prison situated in the town of Attica, New York. It was built in 1930 and was designed and prepared for the most dangerous criminals to serve their sentences. The prisoners serve there all kinds of sentences; from short ones

to life ones. Some of the prisoners are transferred there after they made problems in other prisons.

In 1971, there was one of the biggest and well-known riots of all time. Over 1000 inmates rebelled and took control of the prison holding 33 staff members hostage. As a result, 39 people were killed.

20.

The walls of the prison emerged in the distance. The bus reached the south-east corner and turned left. Dan looked out the windows observing the facility.

“This place is huge.”

“It’s the biggest prison in our country,” the guard commented. The bus drove to the west side of the prison, past the spacious parking lot and stopped at the main entrance to the facility. Before the gate opened, the bus had to wait for a few seconds. The main guard turned around to the prisoners.

“Remember guys, don’t make any problems. We won’t be able to treat you differently.”

“Don’t worry,” Jason said. “We’re gonna do our job not interfering with yours.”

Tokutei looked out the window. The gate started to move, slowly making a gap. The driver took off, then stopped behind the gate.

“OK, we may take them out,” the other guard said through the walkie-talkie.

The guard sitting on the front seat opened the door and walked to the end of the truck, then opened the back one. The second guard stepped out while the first one had his gun ready if any problems occurred. Dan, Jason and Tokutei stepped out just after the guard. They saw tall fence and lots of prisoners behind it starring at them curiously. This was a typical behaviour for all the prisoners. They always were checking the newbies to estimate who they were going to deal with. They were all wearing the same orange clothes. Only their shoes were different. The ones who were in charge had designer shoes, while the others were wearing old worn ones or even nothing.

“Move your ass!” the guard said to Tokutei gently striking him with the butt of his gun.

He turned around with a surprised face then moved straight ahead.

“They are good,” Lian commented watching the whole situation. They entered the building and headed towards the prisoners section.

21.

A few minutes later they were all walking along the corridor with cells on both levels. Unlike other prisons, this one was well-lit and looked rather clean. The walls were painted in bright colours, and the bars were far from being rusted. The prison must have been renovated after the riot in 1971. Everyone was staring at them from the overcrowded cells. In the beginning each cell was designed for one prisoner only, but now there were bunk beds inside to increase the maximum capacity. All prisoners stopped whatever they were doing, stopped and began to comment the newbies entering their new home. Nobody seemed happy to see these new faces there.

“Look at these fish,” some inmate said.

“It’s gonna be fun,” Dan murmured smacking his lips.

“That pretty boy gonna be mine,” he heard someone else’s comment.

The first guard leaned his head right to the walkie-talkie installed on his shoulder and said.

“Open 6b.”

Then the beep spread and the metal door on the left opened. Next he pushed Dan inside.

“Close 6b!”

They moved forward as the beep spread again and the door closed. The guards took the rest up the stairs.

“Open 40d and e. These two are for you.”

Tokutei took the first one, while Jason moved to the twin cell next to it.

“Have a nice staying,” the guard said closing the door.

As soon as the cell closed all the other prisoners went on to do what they had been doing before.

Tokutei put his clothes onto the bunk bed at the wall and looked around. The cell was rather small as for one person, but having spent most of his life in a similar size room, made him get used to such conditions.

“Jason, Dan, can you hear me?”

“Yeah, Tok, I wish to find this demon guy as fast as possible. The conditions here are unbearable.”

“Don’t be so modest, Dan,” Jason said calmly sitting on his bed. “We will begin our work as soon as the cells open.”

“Talking about the opening,” Surya’s voice sounded through the earwigs. “You don’t have to wait too long.”

“What do you mean?” Dan asked confused.

“They close all the cells when someone new arrives.”

“But we saw a few of them outside,” Dan added.

“That’s true, they don’t waste time to bring them in, so they have a tiny lockdown.”

Having said that, the beeping sounded three times and all the cells opened.

“Here we go,” Jason said gritting his teeth and stepping outside. He could hear other prisoners comments in the distance.

“Finally, the big yard.”

“It’s lock up time!”

Lian was sitting in the truck. She was gazing at the security cameras feed displayed in front of her.

“Quite a nice home you have,” she commented.”

“Shut up,” Dan murmured.

“O.D. Dan, try to find the guys from the list,” she suggested.

“What about me? I’m starving,” the Asian man said hiding his bag under the mattress.

“Try to avoid trouble.”

“You know I never cause any.”

“You’re always getting your way.”

“Yeah, right.”

“Don’t yeah right me, Tok and stick to the plan.”

“Guys,” Arthur’s voice sounded.

“Arthur! Finally.”

“Don’t waste time on rubbish. Do as the girls say.”

“This was what I was saying,” Tokutei replied walking nervously in circles in his cell.

Arthur leaned over his keyboard and pressed some keys.

“I’m activating feeds from your microcomputers. You may switch them on or off whenever you like.”

Tokutei stood up and headed towards the exit. As he was about to step out three black muscular men blocked the entrance.

“Hello freshie,” one of them said with a thick voice.

“Excuse me, but I’m busy now.”

“Hah hah. Look fellows. Mr. Nice Guy will be perfect.”

The man on the left wearing a T-shirt with torn off sleeves made a step forward.

“What are you in here for?”

“I bet he’s a chester.”

“We don’t like chesters here.”

Tokutei looked down, then at the men.

“I don’t go to the gym. I like my chest the way it is.”

Having said that he heard laughs in front of him, as well as in the earwig.

“Chester is prison slang for child molester,” Lian explained still trying to stifle her laugh.

“Like you said, boss. He would be perfect,” the man on the right wearing a tight shirt said.

“Yeah, how would you like to become our bitch, huh?” the boss suggested amusingly.

Lian, Surya and Arthur were listening carefully to what was going on, watching the feeds from both prison cameras and his micro computer.

“Don’t waste time on them, Tok,” Lian said.

“I’m sorry, I really have to go,” he replied elbowing through them and going out.

“Hey, hey, hey! We ain’t finished with you!”

“I said I was busy,” his calm voice hit the blackman’s ears.

“Nobody walks away from me. Oh, you will go down, bitch!”

“Yeah, you will,” his fellow yelled.

Tokutei ignored it and casually headed for the stairs down.

22.

Meanwhile, Dan reached the main hall surrounded by cells. There were lots of inmates everywhere. They seemed to be enjoying their time out of cells. The boy carefully looked around and spotted Jason walking down the stairs. He quickly came up to him passing some prisoners.

“I don’t like this place,” the boy said rubbing his palms against each other.

“So you’d better find him quickly.”

“I prefer graveyards. At least zombies look less scary than them.”

“I suggest,” Lian’s voice sounded. “You split up.”

“Yeap, she’s right, you don’t wanna be seen with whites. I’ll go outside and breathe some fresh air, and You, O.D., may sniff around here.” Jason raised his eyebrows hoping Dan was kidding. The boy grinned and tapped his shoulder.

“Great, I knew you would understand.”

He didn’t let Jason say anything, but turned around and disappeared among the crowd.

“Bye!” Jason said confused and slowly walked towards the large group of black people. As he was approaching them, they slowly raised their eyes at him.

“Whaza homies.” he said trying to start conversation.

“What do ya’ want?” a medium-size, well-built man replied standing up.

“I’m just looking for someone.”

Suddenly he heard Arthur’s voice.

“Ask him about John Cage.”

“Who?” the same prisoner asked angrily.

“John Cage.”

“We don’t know no Cage. Now piss off.”

Some other one raised the bottom of his shirt revealing a knife.

“Hit it.”

“Maybe that’s a bad approach,” Surya suggested searching for something on the laptop she was sitting at.

Lian glanced at her female colleague biting her lower lip.

“Can you think of something better?”

“If we have the photos of the prisoners who serve life sentence, we will find them quicker.”

Arthur stood up and headed for the kitchen.

“I’ll call the warden for the files.”

23.

In the meantime, Dan was strolling outside. He saw several people working out in the workplace. He also saw some people playing basketball on the concrete court at the fence.

Attica prison was constructed in such a way, that there were four separated square-like places to spend time outside. Each was the same. It had a poor basketball court, a baseball pitch. Outside the main facility, there

was also a big football field.

He walked towards the benches where some elder man was sitting and sat next to him.

The old man was in his sixties. He was writing something in an old, faded notebook. He glanced at Dan then said.

“You’re a fish aren’t you?”

“Yeap.”

“I have been in this prison for so many years that I can recognise your types of behaviour.”

Dan replied with a surprised look.

“What behaviour?”

The man coughed, then took a deep breath.

“You look at everyone around. Well not just at everyone, but at everything as well, as if you see it for the first time. If you were in the same place for a few months, you would be fed up with it, not curious. And the last but not the least, you wouldn’t certainly walk alone.”

“You’re alone,”

“I’m old, I have some time ahead of me, so everyone knows that I don’t fit.”

“What are you writing?”

“A book, a made up story that is set in this very prison. I wanna publish it sometime.”

Dan peeped at the notebook. It was about 4/5 filled with words.

“Anyway, I know what your true intentions here are.”

“You do?” the boy asked widely opening his eyes.

“You couldn’t have come here for no reason. You’re seeking some information. That’s why you’re here.”

“OK I won’t be beating about the bush. I am looking for a certain person.”

The man rubbed his tired eyes.

“And who that may be?”

Suddenly, Surya’s voice interrupted

“Dan, don’t talk to him. He is one of the guys who serves life sentence.”

“My friend’s brother is in this prison,” the boy replied cleverly.

The old man spotted something in the distance and quickly stood up.

“I must go for now.”

The boy raised his eyebrows, then heard Tokutei's voice in the earwig.

"Dan, four guys are approaching you."

The boy quickly turned around and spotted a group of well-build man walking at his direction. These were the same men that talked to Tokutei earlier.

"Great," he murmured.

"Eh fish!" the masculine, leading one shouted.

"What?" he replied rolling his eyes.

The worried voice of Arthur's sounded in his earwig.

"Dan, don't get involved, get rid of them."

One of the men around got irritated and boomed.

"Don't ya' talk like this to Mr. G."

They stopped at the benches surrounding Dan. He could smell their sweat from a few yards.

"What do you want?"

"It's our prison you know, and you're gonna have to pay us some damn respect!"

"Yeah respect and money," the one standing behind Dan added.

"Dan! Say something like that you'll pay when your girlfriend visits you," Surya added.

"Alright, I'll pay tomorrow when my girlfriend sneaks me some money."

"That's the kinda' attitude I was talking about. Now move from my bench, bitch."

Dan stood up and headed towards Tokutei at the end of the yard.

"I really want to hit that guy," he murmured angrily.

"Don't bother, Dan," Tokutei replied. "Remember what I taught you about patience and anger control."

"Actually," Lian interrupted. "It was me."

"Don't even start you guys! You both told me about patience, and discipline, and controlling my anger, so please don't even start this quarrel of yours."

Surya's eyes grew wide and filled with a bright, shining colour, as a wide smile appeared on her young face.

"I've got the list!"

"Finally, and there're some photos, too!" Arthur added peeping at her screen.

“Guys!” Lian said. “We have photos and names of everyone serving life sentence. However, there’s some news. Good one and bad one. Which one do you want to hear first?”

“The bad one,” came a loud answer from Tokutei.

“The good one,” came two other answers.

“Alright, the good news is that we have those photos, which I’ve already said. The bad one is that there are thirty two, not twenty seven prisoners on the list.”

“So maybe you could upload that list onto the computer in our eye-lens, huh?” Dan suggested.

“This is what we were going to do,” Surya interrupted.

Arthur scratched his head and looked what the girls were doing on the computers.

“OK. The list has been sent to your computers. Try to find out which one of them may be the demon we’re looking for.”

“OK, we’ll try to find everyone from the list,” Jason replied taking a walk along some corridor.

24.

It was a dinner time. Everyone was waiting in the canteen for the meal. Tokutei and Dan were standing in a queue next to each other, while Jason was already sitting at some table. The canteen itself was of a size of a normal gymnastic hall. The roof was supported by two rows of thick, tall columns connected with each other by arches. The food division section was behind the right set of columns. The middle was filled with white tables and each table had four, round seats on each side.

It was Dan’s turn. He reached out with the tray he was holding, and the man in front of him, submerged an aluminium ladle in the pot full of disgusting-looking food, then he threw it onto the boy’s tray.

“Mmm yummy,” he said ironically making a grimace.

“Neh. I appreciate all kinds of food,” Tokutei added.

Arthur and the girls were also having dinner on the plane.

Surya swallowed another bite.

“If they are having that crap, so we’d better not tell them that we’re eating fried chicken.”

“I heard that,” Dan said with an annoyed voice.

“Ups, I thought we turned off the channel.”

“Yeah, right. You said it on purpose,” the boy added.

“Now it’s switched off,” Lian replied after she had pressed something on her wristwatch.

Dan waited for Tokutei to get his meal, and they both headed towards Jason. He looked up from his dinner and said through the earwig.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea for us to be seen together.”

“OK, I will sit somewhere else.”

Dan turned left and walked towards the table with some white guys. He saw one seat empty, so he thought he could sit there. One of the men noticed the newbie approaching and slowly shook his head with a stone face. The boy got the sign and sat at an empty table nearby.

Tokutei also chose some empty table and sat there. While he was eating his meal, he heard Dan’s voice in his ear.

“The blacks are coming towards you. One of them is the guy from the list.”

The Asian man raised his eyes and spotted the same black men who had trouble with him in the morning. One of his fellow murmured something to him and he pointed at Tokutei’s table.

The four men came up to him, put their trays on the table and said casually.

“I don’t like when someone doesn’t pay respect to me.”

Dan was listening to the whole thing. He thought he could give his colleague some piece of advice.

“Tok, they talked to me earlier today. They only want money. Tell them you would pay them the next day.”

“I said then I was in a hurry,” he said casually taking another bite of his dinner.”

“So what? When I say, you listen and obey.”

“Tok, don’t make any trouble,” Lian’s voice sounded.

“Hey, I thought you switched off the channel,” Dan said irritated.

“We did, but we didn’t switch the feed off. We had to switch it back on when one of the suspects approached Tok.”

The black man leaned forward.

“Now give us your roll!”

“No way.”

“Tokutei!” Lian sounded again.

“I won’t give away my tasty roll.”

The black man’s face filled with anger as he leaned even further hitting the

table with his strong hands.

“If you don’t wanna give it me, you won’t have it either,” he said spiting over the roll.

The Asian man noticed the spit falling right onto his roll. He quickly moved it away simultaneously replacing the spot with the guy’s tray so that the spit fell directly onto his roll. It all happened so fast that all everyone could see was that the roll disappeared and appeared again on a tray. Tokutei grabbed his one and bit it. The man roared and pushed him onto the floor. Almost immediately a dozen of other prisoners raised and gathered around.

“Tokutei! God damn it! We told you not to cause any trouble,” Arthur said annoyed.

“Tok, don’t fight,” Jason’s voice sounded calmly. They guards are watching.

“Take the blow,” Lian suggested. “It will be over. And you’ll avoid trouble”

Tokutei got up quickly glanced at the four black men around and lowered his guard.

“Give him what he whant, G,” one of the man laughed. More and more people joined the circle around.

“Yeah, give him what he deserves,” some other prisoner exclaimed raising his fist.

G raised his arm and prepared to strike a blow, then one of his mates said anxiously. “Pigs!”

He quickly stepped out and shouted madly.

“You’re a dead man, you’re dead!”

“He doesn’t look like a zombie to me,” Dan said amusingly standing up because someone had covered his view.

Jason replied with a cold look. Dan shook his head and said,

“Eh, you didn’t get it.”

The guards came up to Tokutei. G immediately stepped back and tried to overcome his anger.

“Is there some kind of a problem?”

“No, everything is fine.”

“And let it stay like this.”

They turned around and walked towards some other guys in the corner, while Tokutei got back to his meal.

25.

It was getting late and the sun has already disappeared. Almost everyone was in their small cells. Jason, Dan and Tokutei were lucky enough to be in separate cells. Most of the other prisoners didn't have so much luck and had to stay in pairs. Dan was sitting on the bed looking closely at the list displayed in his eye.

“Arthur, are you there?”

“What is it Dan?”

“We have identified seventeen suspects so far.”

“Does anyone seem to be our demon?”

“I don't know. This black guy, Mr G or something, seems to be our main suspect. He rules the prison, and everyone pays him.”

“Hmm... it does sound like a demon behaviour.”

“Yeah”

“Any other suspects?”

“There is some guy,” Jason joined the conversation. “He's quite strange. I saw him bully other guys.”

“If we only had holy water, it would be much, much easier. You'll have the whole next day to identify our demon.”

Suddenly some male voice sounded through the speakers.

“Five minutes before closing cells.”

Tokutei was practising various chops, punches and kicks in his small cell. Suddenly he heard some steps behind him.

“You, bitch, tomorrow you and me behind the shed.”

“Excuse-me?” Tokutei asked turning around seeing Mr G at his cell.

“You heard Mr G. You die tomorrow, scum!”

“I thought you said I was already dead.”

Mr G got even angrier. He raised his fist as if he wanted to strike a blow at the bars. Then he heard some voice behind him as something touched his back.

“Move to your cell, G!”

He turned around and saw two guards. They were checking if everyone was in their cells.

Tokutei went back to his exercise.

“Tok! What was that about?” Jason asked.

“He is angry at me for the dinner incident.”

“And the earlier incident as well,” Dan added.

“Why do you always have to get into trouble?”

“He’s our main suspect, as Arthur said. If that’s true, tomorrow it will be over.”

The cells closed and the lights turned off.

“Alright, Tok, I’m going to bed now.”

“OK bye.”

“Bye guys,” Jason’s voice said calmly.

“Remember to switch off the earwigs,” Arthur reminded. “I don’t know how long the battery will last.”

26.

Tokutei was lying in his bed gradually falling asleep. As he was in the first phase of dreams he heard noise outside the bars of his window. He opened his eyes and looked at it, but there was nothing. Feeling tired, he closed his eyes and put his head back on an uncomfortable pillow.

“Psss, Tokutei,” a woman’s voice came from the outside.

He quickly opened his eyes and stood up. He was in this bizarre state after waking up, and for a few seconds he couldn’t distinguish reality from his dream.

“Lian?” he asked surprisingly seeing her holding onto the bars.

“What are you doing here?”

“I brought you something.”

“What is it?”

“A hot hamburger,” she said pushing a package between the bars.

“Well, at least it was hot a few moments ago.”

“Wow, thank you.”

“I know you like this kinda’ food very much, and I couldn’t stand thinking about you eating this prison crap, so I brought you something to cheer you up.”

“It was edible,” he replied taking a huge bit of the burger.

“I brought you also this,” she added pulling a long object inside.

“My sword,” the warrior exclaimed with excitement.

“Be quiet, I don’t want anybody to see me here. It wasn’t easy to get here.”

He quickly grabbed his precious weapon and hid it under the bed with a huge grin on his face.

“Wait, wait, wait. How on earth have you got into a supermax?”

“I’m a spy, I know a few tricks.”

“What about the others?”

“I have two more hamburgers for Jason, and Dan. I must go.”

“Lian wait.”

“What is it?”

“Bring me pizza tomorrow, please.”

“We don’t have pizza on the plane.”

“I know that. But I bet there’s a pizzeria in Attica, somewhere.”

“Eh Tokutei. With such an attitude, you won’t get anything tomorrow,” she said, then moved to the next window.

Dan’s cell was downstairs. It wasn’t difficult for her to move down, but she had to be very careful in order not to be spotted by the guards or the cameras.

“Dan, pss.”

The boy opened his eyes and rapidly got up looking around.

“Lian?” he asked with a sleepy voice seeing a black blueprint and a few rails from spotlights flying around.

“I have a hamburger for you.”

“A hamburger? But it’s the middle of the night.”

“You wanna eat their crappy food or my hamburger now?”

“I don’t know, you woke me up.”

“Oh just take it.”

She gently slipped it between the bars.

“And I have your favourite Dessert Eagle, too.”

The boy reached out for the pistol with a smile.

“Wow, thanks. But you know I can’t have it here.”

“If you identify the demon, it will come useful.”

“Thanks again,” he whispered, then headed back to the bunk bed.

He frowned, and quickly turned around.

“How did you get here anyway?”

But she was no longer there.

“Eh, never mind.”

27.

Arthur was fast asleep in the plane and Surya was outside walking around the field. She could see the lights of the prison above the horizon in

the north-west part, just behind small woods. Within a few seconds, she found herself in the memories of the past.

She was sitting with Dan on the bench dressed as Natalie. They were about to kiss. Their heads slowly got closer and closer to each other. Dan closed his eyes and slightly opened his mouth. Her body filled with warmth and total willingness to touch him with her soft, and never kissed before lips. She couldn't stand it anymore. She finally gave up and kissed him. For a few seconds the kiss was pleasant for her. She loved this indescribable taste of his masculine lips. Then she felt something strange out of the sudden. She felt as if her fangs were about to emerge. Surya rapidly pulled back and stood up.

"What is it?" the boy asked surprisingly.

"I'm sorry, Dan, I must go," the girl cried standing up.

"What? Did I do something wrong?"

She turned around, and he saw her eyes filled with tears.

"No! It's me, I must go. I'm sorry, Dan!"

"Natalie! Wait!" he shouted standing up as the girl was running away.

He ran after her, but she disappeared somewhere behind the bushes. He looked left right, but he couldn't find her among the crowds.

She was running away hearing Dan's voice somewhere behind.

28.

She ran back to the apartment she was staying at and laid down on the bed with tears all over her face. Her make-up was smudged, one of her lenses was lost revealing her whitish pupil. Suddenly the sound of knocking came from the direction of the main door.

"Go away!" she shouted.

"It's me Mike! open up, Sur!"

She stood up and stumbled to the door. Next she opened it and let Mike in.

"I came as fast as I could. Come on, sit down and tell me about it."

They both sat on the bed. Surya was still crying.

"We were on a date, finally our first normal date, without pretending, without killing. After a while, we were sitting on some bench in the park and it was really romantic, you know. And then we kissed."

"You got what you wanted," Mike boomed knowing that he might sound rude. "So why are you crying?"

“It was my first kiss, and so pleasant, and simultaneously I felt fear.”

“The fangs?”

The girl nodded as her eyes filled with tears again.

Mike hugged her and tried to comfort her.

“You’ll get used to it and the fangs will never come out in such situations. It was just something new for you.”

“I thought I was in control of my disability.”

Mike slowly shook his head as he smacked his lips.

“Natalie, I mean Surya. In the beginning it was difficult for me, too. But later I learned how to control my fangs. If Dan knew who I really was, he would kill me without thinking.”

“I don’t want him to learn my identity. I can’t learn to control these freakin’ fangs. I’m so sorry. We must kill Natalie.”

“What! Listen to yourself! No, if we do so, you will have to go back to living in the shadows. Do you really want that?”

“Dan hates vampires, they killed his parents. If he gets to know that I am a dhampir, he will either hate me forever or... or kill me.”

“No, he wouldn’t do that if he loved you,” he lied.

“Stop that Mike! You said that he would kill if he knew you’re a dhampir, and you both are much closer.”

“You’re right. Therefore, if this is what you really want, we will have to come up with some plan what to tell Dan.”

Surya wiped her tears off her smooth cheeks.

“Tell him I’m dead, you hear me! Tell him that vampires killed me or whatever just tell him something that will erase his memory of me out of his head,” she said angrily, feeling Mike’s tap on her shoulder.

“I’ll tell him that.”

“Thank you, you’re a good brother.”

“If you want to, I can help you rent a flat somewhere in the city.”

“Thank you, but I will manage. Our mother taught us to be independent, didn’t she?”

“She did.”

“Surya what are you doing here?” Lian’s voice sounded. “It’s late, and it’s December and you’re walking outside? Come with me inside.”

The girl looked around. Then glanced one more time at the glow from the prison and headed with Lian towards the plane.

“Did anyone see you?”

“Surya, please, my job was not to be seen,” she said proudly.

“Were they surprised?”

“Tokutei literally gobbled the hamburger, and Jason and Dan put them aside. They simply don’t appreciate food as much as Tok.”

December 12, 2012

9 days remaining.

29.

The next morning, Jason woke up after he had heard the beep signalling the prisoners to wake up. He stood up and noticed everyone going downstairs. They all head towels with them. He got out of the cell and stopped at Tokutei’s one.

“Tok, come on!”

But the cell was already empty.

He quickly turned the channel on.

“Tok, where are you?”

“I’m heading for the showers, why?”

“Nothing, I just thought you would wait for me.”

“I thought you didn’t want others to know that we know each other.”

“After what you did yesterday I don’t care.”

Tokutei entered the bathroom along with other inmates. Everyone was to take their clothes off and hang them near the entrance. The guards were waiting at the entrance checking if everything was going fine. They had to make sure that no one rapes anyone or no one gets raped by others. Tokutei went inside and took a few glimpses around. The wall covered with tiles had one shower every single yard. There were no cubicles or any glass separating each one, so you could see the others taking shower next to you. He saw Dan at the corner. He quickly scanned the others around and noticed that one of them was glancing at Dan’s bottom from time to time. He also noticed that some of them had little red dot on their neck. He stepped at the wall and turned water on watching the guy closely. Jason came to the showers, and took the one next to Tokutei’s.

“That guy is checking out Dan’s ass.”

Jason took a quick glance. A medium-height, fat man with shaven head and

only moustache was peeping at Dan from time to time.

“Dan’s gonna handle is. He’s a big boy,” the black man replied.
The boy turned around and looked at the man strangely.

“You have quite a nice ass,” the bald man said washing his stomach.

“And you? What are you? A Russian strongman from first half of twentieth century?”

“To you I can be everything.”

“Fuck off,” he replied calmly.

Jason looked at Tokutei.

“You see I told you he would handle it.”

The man stepped towards Dan.

“Or fuck you?” he suggested with a neutral voice.

Dan raised his left eyebrow, turned around and left the shower.

“Pepsi generation, I love them the most,” the fat man mumbled.

As Dan was leaving three black man came in.

“You Asian bitch! Remember about today!”

“I told you I don’t want to fight you!”

“You don’t have to. I’m the one who will fight you,” Mr. G. replied amusingly coming closer. “Now move!”

Tokutei ignored him.

“Didn’t you hear Mr. G, scam?” one of his fellows asked pulling his weight around. “He wants to use this shower.”

Tokutei glanced at them.

“There are lots of others free.”

“I wanna this one,” he raised his voice leaning forward to Tokutei

“He’s like the big baby,” Surya commented listening to the conversation. “I want this one, blah, blah.”

Jason came to Tokutei and pushed him away.

“He said move!”

Tokutei understood his intentions and walked away. Mr. G. looked at Jason.

“What’s your name?”

“O.D.”

“What is it short for?”

“Audacious.”

“Now I know why. Hey listen, you seem to be quite like us, wanna hang out with us?”

O.D. realised how important it was to be in the elite of the prison.

“Yeah, why not?”

G. smiled and grabbed the soap. He took a glimpse at the fat guy on his right.

“Don’t even think of this fatty.”

30.

When Tokutei was walking across the hall he noticed more people with strange dots on their necks.

“Dan, I know you can hear him. If you can’t talk right now, I understand.” he spoke through the earwig. “I noticed that some of the prisoners had some red dots on their necks. Contact me if you know what it means.”

Dan didn’t reply, but he checked out others necks and noticed the weird dot.

“Lian, Arthur, Surya,” Tokutei continued. “Please check this dot, for me. I’m getting worried.”

“I have never seen anything like this,” Arthur replied. “I’m on it.”

31.

About an hour later. Dan was walking around the prison talking to some people.

“Lian, I’ve checked four people. None of them seems to be our demon.”

“I still bet this is that Mr. G guy.”

“Me, too. Ah listen. Tokutei told me he spotted some red dots on some prisoners’ necks. I have no idea what it means, but it is something weird and definitely not a birth mark.”

“Arthur is looking into it. We’ll let you know when we have the answer.”

Dan came closer to another man. It was a middle aged, medium size, plump guy.

“Hey, listen.”

“What is it?”

“I just wanted to know if you can smuggle fags in here.”

“You chose the wrong guy.”

“You’ve got a life jolt, you should know about such things.”

“Well, I don’t. Now piss off!”

Dan turned around and moved further.

“You know Dan,” Lian said. “It’s hard to find him like this. We need to find another way.”

“Let it not include talking to them,” Jason added. “I hate it.”

“Tok what are you doing?” Lian asked. “You turned your vision off.”

“Sorry, I was in the bathroom. You don’t really expect from me having this thing on even in the toilet, right?”

He came out of a toilet cabin and washed his hands.

“Eh, Tok, you’d better go outside and deal with the G guy. I really need to know if he’s a demon or not.”

“He’s preparing himself for the fight,” Jason added standing at his cell looking at G. stretching out.

“Let me remind you Tok,” Arthur joined the conversation, “That you cannot fight. However, if he is our demon you’d better take the blow and play unconscious. You don’t want to die, do you?”

“May I at least fight like a crap and lose?”

“Yes, that would a better idea.”

32.

Dan went outside. It was a little bit cold, but nobody cared. Lots of people were working out or playing basketball. Others were simply chatting on the nearby benches or at the fence.

“Where is Surya?” he boomed realising he didn’t hear from her for a long time.

Lian looked at Arthur confusingly. “Err, she’s sleeping.”

“I see that everyone’s working their fingers to the bones,” the boy chuckled, then headed towards the bench at the end of the yard.

Lian switched off the channel and turned towards Arthur.

“What now?”

“We have to find a way to find this demon.”

“We can’t have them going from prisoner to prisoner splashing holy water into their eyes.”

“There must be some other way,” the old man scratched his head.

“We may kill all the prisoners at once.”

“You must be kiddin’, Lian! What are you saying? These are people.

Living human beings.”

“But they are outcasts, people who will never be normal again.”

“You’re wrong. The Attica prison has a very good, so called, repair program. Lots of those criminals go out changed and live normal lives.”

“As far as I know there’re the worst scum of the country. Those who made problems in other prisons. I don’t think they may be, how you said it, repaired.”

“But still, Lian, these are humans, and we don’t kill humans.”

“So what should we do now, Arthur? Any suggestions?”

“We have to study all the ways of recognising people that are possessed by some spiritual force.”

“Alright, I’m getting down to this.”

33.

Meanwhile, Tokutei was heading to the storage in the yard. He was very unwilling to do so, but following the samurai code, he had no other choice. It was for the sake of the mission.

“Hey Tok!” he heard some familiar voice behind him.

He quickly turned around and saw a thin man running at his directions. He looked like every other prisoner, except he was much slender. He had a bit longer, black hair, and a short beard, trimmed in some pattern. His orange, prison uniform was too baggy from him.

“What is it?”

The man stopped at him and Tokutei realised why he knew this voice.

“Surya? What the heck are you doing here?”

“I had to come. I’m not really a supervision person, you know. I felt this itch to do something actively”

On hearing that Jason and Dan joined the radio conversation.

“Surya! It can’t be.” The boy exclaimed irritated.

“Do they know you’re here?” Jason asked totally not surprised.

“They? If you mean the guards, or prison authorities, then no.”

“What did Arthur say about all of this?” Tokutei asked scanning the girl from top to bottom.

“He agreed. Besides, Lian can deal with everything on her own.”

“B-But you’re a girl. You mustn’t be here,” Dan’s voice came from the earwig.

“You didn’t recognise me in this disguise, Tok. I can merge into the

crowd.”

“You’re right.”

“Anyway, I’m here on the mission on my own. Must dash.”

“Yeah, about that. I must be going to deal with it.”

“Take care Tok!”

“You too, S.”

The girl turned around and headed towards inmates working out in the outside gym. Tokutei walked towards the storage. It was a wooden shed at the end of the yard. When he came to the door and opened it, he saw seven black people standing there. He could see Jason among them. The shed was empty. There were no tools, no tables, nothing.

“Hmm colourful,” Dan commented seeing everything from Tokutei’s feed.

“Colourful, indeed,” the Asian man commented.

“Sorry Tok,” Dan sounded again. “I have to do my job. Good luck. Switching off the channel”

“What was that, bitch?” one of them asked tightening his fist.

“What the fuck was that?” the second one added hitting his fist against his palm.

“Mr. G. I have an idea,” Jason said stepping out. “Let me handle him.”

“You? Ha, ha, No, this is something I have to do on my own. This oriental is my personal problem.”

On hearing this, Lian joined the conversation.

“Oriental? If it weren’t for the mission sake, I would give you my personal permission to kick his black, nigger ass.”

“I insist,” O.D. added making a step forward.

“No way, this bitch over here disrespected me. I have to deal with it myself,” he spoke with the thick black man’s voice. “Find yourself someone else.”

“Are we gonna do this or what?” Tokutei asked slowly walking forward.

“Ha, ha, you’re not afraid. Too bad. If you knew who I was, you would already shit your pants.”

“Why should I be afraid?”

“Yeah, you’d better be,” the other black man added.

34.

Meanwhile, Dan was sitting outside with the same man he had talked to the day before. They were alone on the bench chatting. The elder man had his notebook open, and was writing some sentences there from time to time.

“I tell you what freshman. You can’t be a freelancer here, or you will end up like me. Although, I found a way to live with others without causing any harm.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, if you carry on hanging out by yourself here, others will either ignore you, or you’ll end up as their doll. However, if you find a group you belong to, you will have no conflicts here. Unless they attack each other.”

“What about the riots?”

“Ah riots, you see there was one in early seventies. Many people were killed. But now, there are no riots. And if there was one, they have tear gas installed in the ceiling. Also, the guards are doing their job fine.”

35.

In the meantime, Tokutei was standing surrounded by the villains. Mr. G stepped ahead putting a knuckle-duster on his fist. Everyone around was standing and starring at the whole situation. Suddenly, Tokutei heard Lian’s voice in his earwig.

“Tok, there are 90% of chances that he is our target. If he noticed that you can fight and he reveals his true power, we’re all doomed.”

He rolled his eyes and took the defensive position.

“Any last words before I kick the crap out of you?” G guy asked with a smirk.

“Kutabare,” which is in Japanese *suck you*.

Everyone looked strangely at him.

“Whatever,” his opponent said and threw himself at him.

Tokutei dodged the first two fast blows.

“Tokutei God damn it!” Lian shouted angrily. “Stop being such a pain in the ass!”

He rolled his eyes one more time, then threw a blow towards the black man. He slowed it to such a degree so his opponent would easily block it, and so he did. Mr. G blocked his arm and immediately punched back as

strong as he could. The speeding fist plunged into Tokutei's face. It was so strong that Tokutei turned around spilling some saliva out of his mouth and dropped onto the ground.

"You see, that wasn't so difficult," Lian's voice came through the earwig.

"Get up you son of a bitch! I'm not finished with you!"

But the Asian man didn't move.

"He's playing dead!" someone shouted.

G came up to him, bended over, grabbed his shoulders and raised him up.

"Wake up you scum!" he shouted shaking him forward and backward.

Jason looked with a concerned manner.

"What if you really knocked him out?"

One of the men pointed at Tokutei,

"Finish him off."

"Eh, he's no fun at all. One blow and he's unconscious. If I finish him now, I wouldn't have any pleasure from beating him in the future."

"I think, he learnt his lesson. He won't bother you again," Jason added.

"He's right, boss. Leave him here and let's go!"

G let go of Tokutei and headed with the others towards the exit. While they were on the point of leaving the shed, Jason looked back at his team-mate lying stiff on the wooden floor. Next he left closing the door behind him.

"Tok! Get up!" Lian shouted.

Yet, he didn't move. She looked at Arthur.

"I'm starting to worry."

The old man shook his head.

"If he is the demon, he could have used his whole power to knock him out. Look," he indicated at the screen next to him.

The girl glanced at the biosigns and smiled.

"Tok, I know you're faking. Your bio readings are normal."

He opened his eyes and got up.

"Shit. You really had to spoil the whole fun."

"What about the blow?"

"He punches like a girl."

"Hey, I'm a girl and I can beat you."

"In your dreams, Lian."

Arthur joined the quarrel.

“Hey! Cut it off already. We don’t have time for this.”

“Sorry.” the both said simultaneously.

“Now go back to work. We must know for sure if he is our demon or not.”

Lian hit her forehead with her open palm.

“We’re stupid.”

“What is it. L?” Tok asked brushing the dust off his orange clothes.

“We could have made a Devil’s trap in the shed to make sure.”

“It was actually not a bad idea,” the old man replied scratching his head. “But now, we’re too late.”

36.

Dan was still talking to the man on the bench.

“You have been here for a while, so you should know about everything that happens here.”

“Not everything. But, hmm... what I know for sure is that I can’t mess with some groups here.”

“Yeah, the blacks.”

“The blacks rule the prison. In fact, they have since that riot. Everyone has to pay them. Poor families had to smuggle money during the visits so they can pay the rent in time. If they fail, they’re beaten up so long till they lose consciousness.”

“So basically, you pay, you have no problems, you don’t pay, your life is screwed up here.”

“Well, you may always have problems, even if you pay every month. There are lots of other groups like Nazis or Muscles.”

“And the guards don’t react?”

“They are all corrupted. They take bribes, and turn a blind eye to everything. Hey listen, Daniel was it?”

“Yup.”

“Why don’t you go with me to my cell, I can give you some tips how to stay out of trouble.”

“Alright.”

They stood up and headed towards the building. Lots of people were doing some exercise outside. Some of them were running. Others were playing basketball. Surya was talking to someone at the main entrance. She noticed

Dan, and immediately turned around.

“What is it?” the short fat bald guy asked.

“No nothing.”

“You saw someone, didn’t you? Someone you didn’t want to see.”

“You can say that.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. Once I met my victim’s brother here. And believe it or not, he was twice as me. If it hadn’t been for my bitches, I would be biting the dust now.

Dan and his new colleague went past them and went inside.

37.

Jason was with the rest blackmen at the cells upstairs. They were watching everyone below as if they were controlling the situation. They looked like kings having everything they wanted apart from freedom of course.

“Tomorrow is the payday. We will earn some cash,” one of them said.

“Cash?” Jason asked curiously.

“Yeap, everyone has to pay us, or they will end up like that Asian bitch.”

Suddenly, three guards and one doctor ran across the hallway. The guards made sure that the prisoners made a passage for the doctor. They were all on a hurry. Something must have happened.

“Hmm, that would be nice,” G. said watching them.

“What’s going on?” Jason asked.

“We gonna know in a minute.”

Every inmate that was around followed them curiously. The guards and the doctor rushed into some cell where someone was lying on the floor.

“Keep them away!” the doctor shouted to the guards.

They immediately reacted and blocked the entrance to the cell. A few second later two paramedics appeared carrying a stretcher.

“That’s interesting,” G said watching the whole thing from the second floor.

A moment after all prisoners spread out as if they all lost interest in what was going on. The paramedics slowly walked out of the cell and headed back along the hallway with a long black bag on a stretcher. The guards and the doctor accompanied them.

“Another one kicked the bucket,” One of the G’s fellows said amusingly.

Jason’s eyes wide opened. He realised what he had to do.

“I’ve gotta go.”

“OK, nobody keeps you here, man” the same guy said totally neglecting Jason.

Jason walked down the stairs and activated the channel.

“Lian, Arthur, I know how to find our demon.”

“Go on,” the girl replied curiously.

“If he changes bodies when his host dies, he must choose someone who is young, new and also serves life sentence.”

“I see,” Arthur replied. “But you didn’t consider how long the demon may be in his current vessel, so he may be either young or older.”

“No, you don’t understand. If we check the deaths of convicted criminals and dates of arrivals of new life-serving criminals, we may find out who our demon is.”

“Brilliant Jason!” the old man exclaimed out of joy. “Now, you’re thinking.”

He turned around to Lian and said through his wide grin.

“You heard him, girl, you know what to do.”

“I hope we’ll finish this work today,” she said opening some files on the computer. “I will check the deaths of last prisoners and compare them with arrivals of new ones.”

38.

Meanwhile, Tokutei was in his cell. He took a glimpse at his gorgeous sword hidden under his mattress. He really wanted to practice with it for a while, but the conditions didn’t allow it. As he was gazing at the wonderful weapon, he heard someone coming into his cell. He quickly looked at that person and saw his teammate.

“Surya, did you find anything?”

“No nothing, but I overheard Jason’s conversation. We will soon know who the demon is, so we can take the Seal.”

“Dan?” Tokutei asked, but there was no response.

“Dan..”

“He must have forgotten to switch the channel back on,” Lian’s voice came through the earwig.

At that moment, she was working on the computer while Arthur was pouring tea to the silver cups nearby.

“I have it!” she shouted.

“What?”

“The demon! Look, on March 17th, 1980 James Gutter died here. One day earlier George Hut arrived to serve his sentence here. I bet this is our one.”

“It doesn’t prove anything yet,” came the answer from Arthur.

“There’s more. Listen. James Gutter came into prison on December 23th, 1950. Three days later Patrick Longhorde died here. Both had life sentences.”

“Send the photo to everyone.”

She opened the channel and sent the photo to everyone’s micro computer in their eye lenses.

“Everyone, we have found Paymon. I’m sending you the picture.” Tokutei smiled. “I really hope this is the G guy, I wanna kick his ass so bad.”

39.

Jason was in the bathroom washing his hands. When he got the picture of the middle-aged man, with long hair, his jaw dropped in surprise.

“So it’s not Mr. G,” he murmured to himself.

Dan was with his new friend in his cell. He had his channel switched off, but the microcomputer was still working. He was sitting on the bunk bed watching the old man hiding something in his shelf. Dan noticed that he had received something on his computer. He waited for the message to load. It was the picture of the demon. As soon as he got it, he realised that the person in it is actually the person who was sitting before him. He immediately got up and said stuttering,

“S-Sorry, I-I gotta go.”

George looked at him in astonishment.

“Why? I was ‘bout to teach you how to avoid conflicts.”

“I’m sorry, I have to go. He stood up and headed towards the exit.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay?”

“I would like to, but I must hurry up. Maybe later.”

He briskly left the cell and rushed upstairs activating the channel.

“Jason, Tok, Are you sure you haven’t made a mistake? I had been

talking to him before I got the picture, and he didn't even seem to be possessed. He's actually a nice guy."

Jason left the bathroom and headed upstairs, too.

"Yeah, we all thought it was that G guy. Lian thinks, she's sure. It's gotta be him."

"We will have to attack immediately," Arthur said. "We should be there in ten minutes."

"Guys, go to Tokutei's cell," Lian ordered. "The guards left there your uniforms."

"Actually, they're in my cell," Jason replied. "I told them to move it there."

"Eh, now you're telling me that. I'm right at Tokutei's cell. We're gonna go there together."

Dan went inside the Tokutei's cell and saw a man standing by the wall while Tokutei was cleaning his sword.

"Who's that?" he asked pointing at Surya. He didn't recognise her in this disguise.

"It's me, silly."

"Surya? So this is what your disguise looks like. You should wear this beard more often. It suits you."

"You don't look your best in that orange uniform, so shut up."

Jason went inside the cell.

"He's right. You do look ridiculous."

"Anyway. If everyone is here. We're going to Jason's cell for the uniforms. Err... I mean you're going, cause I've got mine underneath," the Asian raised his orange shirt revealing a black uniform.

"Yeah, once again, you're more prepared than us," Dan answered shaking his head.

Surya unbuttoned the orange uniform.

"Actually, I've got mine underneath, too."

"Tokutei," Arthur's voice sounded. "You'd better hide the sword, you don't want to be seen with it yet."

"Don't worry. I'll hide in my trouser-leg."

"You'd better leave it under your bed. You'll pick it up in a minute."

40.

A few seconds later they were in Jason's cell. Jason took out a sheet from his bed and covered the entrance. The others quickly took off their ugly orange uniforms and put on their favourite, black, ASAT trousers and vests.

"Where are the weapons?" Dan asked looking under the bed.

"Didn't the guards bring our weapons, too?"

"Unfortunately, we need to go to the jet for them," Surya replied.

"I only brought your sword, Tok, and Dan's Desert Eagle."

"OK, we may go outside," Tokutei suggested leaving the cell.

"Try to be undetectable." Lian added as the others followed their colleague

Outside the cell, they were surprised to see Mr. G waiting.

"Go downstairs, I'll join you in a second," the Asian guy said turning into his cell.

"Eh! Slanting eyes! What do ya' think you're doin' in this black outfit?"

"Shut up!" he said kneeling in front of his bed.

"What the fuck was that!"

"S.H.U.T. U.P, it means don't open your mouth to utter sounds, got it?"

He grabbed his sword and ran outside the cell pushing Mr. G away. Dan, Jason, and Surya were waiting downstairs.

"What was that? What have ya' got there? A weapon? I'll kill you now, I will so fucking kill you!" the muscular man shouted not even thinking through his words.

He made a dash after Tokutei. The others inmates looked at the whole situation and threw some surprising comments.

"Why are they dressed like this?"

"There's a woman? Can you see her? Look a woman."

"He's got a sword!"

"Who the fuck are these people and what's goin' on?"

However, no one from the team reacted. The guards were making sure that none of the prisoners would attack. One of them turned to the guards.

"Aren't you gonna do something? They've got weapons!"

Surya looked at them in indifference, but she couldn't hide her white pupils. A small prisoner leaning against the wall saw it, and immediately froze in

shock. The team heard Lian's voice on the radio.

"Yeah guys, you can easily blend in."

"You don't say?" Tokutei replied taking a glimpse at his sword.

G slightly calmed down under pressure of this situation and ran behind them outside. His eyes were wide open and veins on his skull were visible. The guards noticed it, and one of them ran quickly towards him trying to prevent him from attacking Tokutei. As he was about to throw himself at Tokutei not even realising what was going on, the Asian man quickly turned around and kicked the upcoming furious guy in the stomach. The kick was so powerful, that Mr. G flew a few yards back losing his consciousness. The guard caught him and helped him stand up on his feet, not even saying a word.

"What do you know," Dan commented. "He really is a pussy."

When the G man stood up, a dozen of prisoners went outside gazing at them in curiosity. No one knew what was going on, and why the guards didn't react. Almost every inmate that was doing their stuff outside stopped and stared at them. The sound of the jet spread in the sky, as a huge black machine emerged from behind the forest. It got closer to the baseball field and slowly lowered itself to the pitch until its wheels touched the grass. The jets turned off.

"What is all of this?" the prisoners asked each other.

The side door opened, and everyone went inside. Lots of prisoners gathered around and stared. The guards were watching the prison over from the towers, they knew exactly what was going on, and they were getting ready to this. Suddenly the voice spread through the speakers.

"Every prisoner is to go to their cells immediately. I repeat. Every prisoner is to go to their cells immediately."

Everyone was standing around and commented, but only few listened to the order and turned around.

"What's going on."

"Is it some kind of an army?"

The voice spread again.

"If you don't go to your cells, now, we will have to use force."

These words convinced most of them. Everyone knew that tear gas pipes were installed everywhere, and they could be used anytime. They turned around and headed to their cells constantly looking back at the black machine. The guards ran inside and made sure that everything was going

according to the plan.

41.

When the ASATs boarded the plane they headed directly to the storage unit near the showers. Arthur and Lian were already waiting for them.

“I’m glad to see you,” he said.

“We’re too,” Dan replied.

“Well, look at you guys!” Lian smiled. “One night in prison and you look completely different.”

“You say?” Jason replied with a stoned face.

“Shut up and give me some real food,” Dan pushed towards the kitchen.

“Wait for me,” Tokutei threw himself after Dan.

“Heh, Surya, You didn’t work too much there,” Arthur said amusingly.

Lian headed for the storage unit.

“You were there for an hour or so, right?”

“Yeah, but now I will have some fun,” she replied reloading her favourite HK UMP 45 SD.

Arthur grabbed a shotgun and started putting shiny shells into it.

“There is still one problem we need to face inside.”

“What is it?” Jason asked.

“The red dot you spotted on some prisoners. Lian found what it meant.”

“Yes, while we were looking for an appropriate method to find the demon, I noticed this dot in some picture. It’s an ancient symbol meaning *Host to be*.”

“What?” Dan asked gobbling a piece of a sausage and a slice of bread.

“It means they can be easily possessed, you stupid.” Surya explained rolling her eyes.

“That’s perfect. That means we may face more demons there. That’s what you meant, Arthur?”

“Unfortunately,” the old man answered unwillingly. “It depends on the number of individuals with those red dots.”

“To avoid any trouble I asked the warden to lock everyone up.”

He took a glimpse at Tokutei drinking some soda, then at his watch.

“Anyway, if you all are ready, we may start.”

“Alright, let’s do it!” Dan shouted wiping his mouth from pieces of the sausage, and walked towards the jet exit.”

He proudly stepped out and made for the entrance to the building. The rest of the team followed him. Tokutei leaned to Lian.

“Why is he walking so proudly?”

“I think, he wants to boast or to act bossy in front of everyone.”

“Maybe you right, he likes to be admired.”

42.

There were six armed guards standing at the door making sure everyone is locked inside.

“Should we go with you?” one of them asked.

“No,” the old man replied. “I suggest you go to your towers and if anything happens, shoot at sight.”

“What do you mean by if anything happens?”

“If you see, for instance prisoners running outside killing others. Is it clear?”

“Yes sir!”

Dan opened the door and went inside, he stopped at the stairs and waited for the others.

“I was in his cell fifteen minutes ago. I will lead the way.”

“OK. As soon as you see him, we must immobilise him. Otherwise, he may run away.”

“How?” Lian asked.

“He may leave the body.”

“No, I mean, how can we immobilise him?”

“Direct shot with holy water.”

They went across the hall, through the main area, and towards the second hall. Everyone was in their cell staring at them in astonishment.

“His cell is in this hallway,” Dan announced.

As they were walking along the hallway, they heard strange voice coming from Paymon’s cell. They quickly sped up and saw him sitting on his bed with his eyes closed whispering in a strange, foreign language.

“Oh no! Shot him quickly!” Arthur shouted realising that he had known about their coming.

Jason raised his gun, aimed at the demon, but as he was on the point of shooting, the ground started to shake and walls began to crack.

“What is all of this!” one of the prisoners nearby shouted not knowing what to do.

Paymon stopped talking and slowly opened his red, glowing eyes, then looked at the soldiers.

“Too late,” he spoke with a low, scary voice.

The voice so scary that it crept everyone out. The floor cracked and hundreds of black smoke clouds squeezed through the narrow fractures.

“What’s going on?” Lian asked losing her balance and dropping on her knee.

“As I thought demons!” Arthur exclaimed as the smoggy clouds spread around the prison dimming everything.

They flew into each and every cell and hit the prisoners’ eyes disappearing inside. It looked as if every cloud was sucked in through people’s eyeballs. Seconds later their bodies froze and didn’t move a muscle. Jason regained his balance, aimed again at Paymon, but before he had any chance of pulling the trigger, the enemy had come up to the bars, and had blown it away without even touching the iron. Then he started running towards the main hall.

“After him!” Dan shouted raising his gun and shooting.

He missed. The bullets only swished near Paymon’s ear and hit the wall ahead.

“The demons won’t get away as long as they are in the cells,” the old man shouted making a dart after Paymon.

The others did the same, but as soon as they made the first step the beeping sound spread around and all the cells opened.

“Yeah, we’re screwed,” Lian commented in a worrying voice raising her gun.

Then all the lights started to flicker.

“Somebody please shoot him!” the old man shouted firing.

“The guards must be possessed, too,” Tokutei said drawing his sword running after the demon.

“He must have marked them somehow,” Surya added taking a few shots.

Nobody could hit him. The flickering light was too distracting and he was moving too fast, so all the bullets went past him. A few seconds later the

whole hall was full of possessed prisoners. They had come out of their cells, and didn't seem to be helpful. On seeing them, Jason stopped.

“What now?”

“Use the holy water bullets to paralyse them!” Arthur ordered.

“And healing bullets to exorcise them.”

Arthur knew exactly how to deal with them. He had been working with Dan on putting what he learned earlier into more modern and more convenient weapons. The first bullet, the one containing holy water immediately paralysed the victim for a day. It also made sure that the demon wouldn't leave the host. The healing bullet, on the other hand, contained a laser-sculptured text that deprived the host body of the demon. If shot right, the host could survive.

“No way I'm gonna shoot at those things,” Tokutei said cutting off the head of the first one.

“Tokutei! They're human beings,” Lian shouted, as she switched the bullets into exorcising mode.

“Tok!” Dan yelled passing him. “Grab the pistol and just shoot.”

The boy threw to him one of his two Desert Eagles and ran forward taking shots to paralyse everyone ahead. Arthur, Jason and Dan were leading, clearing the way out. When a demon possessed the host, he could spread his own strength into the host's muscles and thus he was not only much stronger than a human, but also faster, and resistant to regular weapons. However, when a host's body was hit by a bullet containing holy water, it was immobilised after few seconds for about a day. This was how long the water stayed in the organism. The water itself was a direct shot to the demon's body restricted him from any move.

Two of the possessed prisoners threw themselves from the nearby cell at Lian, who was at the end of the group. Surya quickly noticed it, turned around and immediately took two shots at their arms. When their souls weakened, Lian pushed them away and quickly exorcised them with second type of ammo by shooting at the same wound Surya had created, or close to it. Next she accelerated to catch up with the group. Finally, they reached the main hall, which was a concrete square with cells spreading along its two sides on the first and the second floor. The orange uniforms were everywhere. Every single inmate was running at the soldiers trying to eliminate them.

“Where's Paymon?” Jason shouted.

“I spotted him upstairs,” Tokutei added shooting another one. He wasn’t comfortable using a pistol. It took him a few months to be able to shoot where his mind wanted. Yet, there was still a long way ahead of him to master this art.

“There he is,” Arthur pointed at the second floor. Then suddenly, a bunch of guards jumped out of the corner and knocked Jason and Arthur down. Before others had a chance to shoot or to do something, the guards had grabbed them and threw them at the wall. Dan tried to shoot them, but they dodged his bullets. Lian and Surya took several shots, too. Luckily, some of the bullets hit the opponents immediately paralyzing their body.

“Are you OK?” Dan shouted.

“Yeah, don’t get too close to them,” Jason replied rubbing his shoulder.

43.

They were standing at the last cell of the corridor, which ended with the main hall. About twenty demons were already taken down and exorcised. About fifteen were lying down paralysed with holy water. And about thirty left their bodies out of fear, which was a surprising emotion for demons. Some of the prisoners began to wake up. They seemed very confused and terrified seeing the whole situation. Not every one of them remembered what happened when demons were in charge of their bodies. What is more, although they were the worst criminals of the country, they were still humans and they were in the same shock as ordinary people after such experience.

Tokutei missed one of his shots and hit the possessed person right into his stomach. He instantly crouched at him to check his pulse. While he was doing that, he caught an eye of four prisoners run from back corner where the corridor began. They were accompanied by three, armed guards and they were zooming as fast as vampires could.

“Behind!”

He took several shots taking down two of them. The other four dodged the bullets, jumped and threw themselves at him by jumping forward like a lion jumps at his prey. Tokutei held out his hand with a pistol and tried to aim at such a speedy target. He was not yet prepared for such actions. As they were in the air, some identified shots spread in that direction and the

attackers fell onto the floor as Tokutei made a step backwards. He turned around and saw Surya with a big smile, holding her HK. The thin, grey smoke was still coming out from the hot barrel.

“Don’t thank me.”

Arthur moved back to Tokutei. He took the backpack off his back, opened it and took out a small item tipped with a sphere.

“Tokutei, I need you to stick it to the ceiling in the main hall.”

“Only to stick it?”

“And to press that small button below. Go!”

He grabbed the item, put it onto the ground. Next he reloaded his gun and picked the item back up. Then quickly rushed ahead towards the hall full of guards and prisoners. As he passed the last cell he accelerated to his limit and jumped straightening his right leg throwing a jump side kick right at the upcoming demon. The creature rebounded to the back. Tokutei could feel his larger mass. It was as if the demon inside added twice as much weight. As soon as the Asian man landed and regained his balance, he jumped again as high as he could and held on to the lamp sticking out from the ceiling of surrounding balcony just below the second level. A few demons gathered below him and tried to take him down, but he climbed onto the lamp and leapt from there onto the second floor. There were several demons near the barriers, that had come out of the upper cells. As Tokutei was climbing up, he took three shots at the approaching enemies, but he misjudged their strength and as a result was pushed off down to the demons gathering on level one.

“Oh no,” Dan whispered gazing at his teammate falling down.

The Asian man quickly tightened the grip on the object, but despite this, he could feel it slipping through his fingers. He had no choice; it was either the object or his weapon. He let go of the pistol and grasped the item with the second hand. As he was falling, he grabbed the concrete edge of the second level floor as hard as he could. He could see Paymon a few yards from here. From that angle he could also see his teammates fighting at the transition of the main hall into the corridor, trying to push themselves inside. The demon that had pushed him off jumped and stamped with his heel onto the piece of the floor where Tokutei was hanging. Yet, the warrior had let go of the hand, switched them throwing the mysterious item slightly up. Next he grabbed the floor with the second hand and caught the object with the first one. It was a dangerous move, but it was either falling down to the demons

or trying to finish the task. He glanced at Paymon. He saw him lose his balance as one of the bullets had hit his shin. The demon leaned towards the barriers and fell down among the other demons. Tokutei looked back at the edge he was holding to, and saw that the demon was very persistent to get rid of him. He wanted to jump again on Tokutei's fingers. He raised his hand making a grunting noise, then his body became stiff, as he lost balance and fell on his side. Tokutei turned around and realised it was Lian who had saved him. He climbed up the barrier and leapt off it gripping the pipe under the ceiling. Then he climbed along it, approximately to the middle of the ceiling. Next he activated the object and stuck it to the ceiling with the sphere shape pointing down. It started to load making a high-pitched sound. Arthur and the others were looking at it, still shooting at the possessed inmates.

“Dispose of the pipe!” he shouted.

Tokutei drew his Katana sword and looked at the pipe that was right below the strange object. With his sword he cut the pipe at one edge and quickly moved back cutting it at the other one. Then he jumped back onto the second floor. The object loaded and shot with a red light. It displayed some strange red circle on the main floor. Some of its parts disappeared and appeared again while others were blurry.

“Come on, Come on,” the old man whispered checking something on his microcomputer in his eye lens.

The demons seemed confused by the red light, but they still tried to get rid of the ASATs.

“Got it!” Arthur said pressing some button on the wrist watch. The red light switched into the blue one and the strange lines and shapes on the floor turned into dozens of tiny sparkles and smokes. The demons began running in confusion as sparkles surrounded them. Then the sparkles rapidly vanished in the air. Tokutei glared at the floor and saw that the blue laser had burnt the Devil's trap on it. What a great idea. Well, it wasn't so great after all. The deadly lasers had chopped some of the prisoners and the demons were trapped inside their bodies.

“Did it work?” Dan asked shooting at the ones outside the circle

“It should have,” the old man replied. “This laser is very accurate.” The prisoners were very furious. They knew exactly what the Devil's trap was.

“Noooo!” one of them shouted desperately running in circles trying

to cross the edge, but it was useless.

“It can’t be!” the other one added, as the rest stood and stared in disappointment, shock and fury.

They couldn’t leave their bodies anymore as long as they stayed inside. And since the trap was laser curved, there was nothing they could do.

“It’s the Devil’s Trap!” Lian exclaimed with hope in her eyes.

“Actually it’s the fifth pentacle of Mars, but it does the same work,” Arthur corrected looking at the trapped prisoners. “Jason, Lian, check the cells around.”

When the two of them spread, he focused his eye on something that was displayed on his microcomputer. It was written in an ancient language. He opened his mouth and soon the foreign words came out of it. Surya and Dan looked at him strangely.

“Exorcism,” the dhampiric girl whispered.

As he started to read the text, the prisoners began to tremble trapped in the circle. Some of them kneeled, others dropped on the ground, yet some others stood still. Tokutei was still standing on the second floor watching the bizarre behaviour of the demons below. Their red eyes slowly faded as all of them looked up opening their mouth. Suddenly, a horrible shriek spread from each and every one of them as a thick black cloud of smoke flew out of their eyes, joining into one enormous cloud that simply vanished in the air.

Arthur stopped reading as Surya came up to him.

“Did they go back to Hell?”

“Only the ones who escaped earlier. Everyone locked in that circle disappeared and will never bother humans again.”

Lian and Jason returned.

“We found only two left. They have been exorcised.”

“Good!” The old man replied. “Now proceed to Paymon.”

“Tok!” Lian shouted at the top of her voice. “Paymon should be somewhere there. Look for him.”

“Firstly, Lian!” he shouted back. “Don’t yell across the whole prison, when you can...” he activated the channel, “...use this way.”

Lian’s face went red as she could feel others’ laughing eyes on her. She made a mistake she always criticized Tokutei for.

“Why are you standing like this!” She said to break the silence. “Go and find our demon!”

“When Jason hit him, he fell among the others,” Dan said quietly. “He ain’t no shapeshifter, he should be somewhere there.”

Tokutei jumped over the barrier and landed among the prisoners. He started to look for the elder man with grey hair. Even if he was exorcised he couldn’t have taken the piece of the Seal with him to nothingness. As he was walking among the bodies he felt a grip on his ankle. It was almost a reflex when he raised his sword to defend himself, but then he noticed it was one of the prisoners waking up.

“Dude, what was that?”

“You don’t wanna know.”

He went on seeking for Paymon.

“You’re too slow,” Jason said entering the hall.

“Let’s help him,” Surya suggested running after him.

When they all entered the main hall, they could see lots of blood stains from both the bullets and the lasers. Dan crouched down at one of the lines of the Devil’s trap. He slowly examined it and realised it was a few inches deep.

“It was a wonderful idea to create this, Arthur.”

“Indeed it was,” he replied turning over one of the prisoners.

Some other one woke up and tried to get up.

“What’s goin’ on?”

“You’d better return to your cells. You don’t wanna know what happened,” the old man replied.

44.

A few minutes passed. They were still searching, but there was no result. Tokutei and Jason helped a few prisoners come round and escorted them to their cells, while the rest intensively checked the bodies within the circle.

“He’s not here,” Lian boomed.

Surya turned the last person over.

“Arthur? Is it possible that the holy water didn’t paralyse him?”

“If he is as powerful as it was written in ancient books then yes, it is possible.”

Tokutei returned from one of the cells.

“If so, therefore he either ran towards the bathrooms or the kitchen.”

“Or outside,” Surya added.

Arthur sighed. But it was no sigh of relief or anything like this. He was tired with this mission. It was supposed to be a quick action; capture Paymon and take the Seal. No other demons, no exorcising prisoners or killing them.

“Arthur? What shall we do now?” Dan asked.

Arthur was still lost in his thoughts.

“Arthur?”

He quickly gathered his thoughts.

“We have no other option, but to split up. Even though he is hurt, we can’t go alone on this one.”

“I’ll go with Dan, And Lian may go with Tok,” the dhampiric girl suggested

“No, we must mix.”

“Jason, you’ll go with Tok, Lian go with Dan, and Surya, you’re going with me.”

“Alright,”

“OK,” they replied.

Still, it could be heard that some of them were not satisfied with the Arthur’s choice.

Jason reloaded his gun and checked the amount of the clips left at his belt.

“Since we have been here for two days, me and Tok should check that corridor,” he said pointing at the hall leading to the bathrooms and showers.

“No problem for me, so Surya and I will check the canteen.”

“And we’re gonna check the outside,” Lian murmured.

45.

A few minutes later Tokutei and Jason were slowly walking along the corridor towards the bathroom. They went past lots of open cells, but there was no one inside. The corridor, which used to be well-lit and clean a few days ago, now had flickering lights all over it dropping moving shadows everywhere, and there were stains of blood on the walls and floor.

“Why are there so many blood stains?” Tokutei asked.

“I believe that either from wounded demons, or from unpossessed prisoners.”

“Hmm... the demons may have attacked them.”

“Or the other way round.”

Finally they reached the showers. The lights were off, but some sunlight was coming inside making the bathroom look shady.

“Can you smell it?” Jason asked.

“Smells like blood.”

Suddenly a panting sound came from the dark corner.

“Demon!” Tokutei shouted jumping into attacking stance with his sword ready to either strike a blow or block something.

Jason raised his gun and aimed at the dark corner of the bathroom with the attached torch under the barrel. Then suddenly, a strange face emerged.

“Please don’t shoot!” he begged.

“Mr. G?” Jason asked in disbelief seeing a black man with his face covered in blood and his uniform torn.

“That weird thing was inside me, man. I could feel it. I really could feel as this fucking thing controlled me. It left right before someone did this,” he tucked in the orange trouser-leg and revealed a deep gunshot wound.

“Holy water bullets,” the Asian warrior whispered.

“You’ll be alright,” Jason assured. “These bullets do little harm to human beings.”

They could see that although the black man was very muscular and used to rule the prison, after having been possessed he turned out to be a sissy-boy. He didn’t even mind Tokutei being there. G stood up and reached his hand towards Tokutei.

“I apologize for what I did earlier, man. A-Are we cool?” he said with a scared voice.

Tokutei smiled and replied.

“No problem.”

“Who are you guys, anyway? Are you some kind of soldiers?”

O.D. glimpsed at Tokutei seeking approval of revealing who they were.

When the warrior nodded, Jason started to talk.

“We’re a special group to deal with such things like those demons.”

“So why are you here?”

“We had to find one particular demon here, thus we needed to come here in disguise,” Tokutei added.

“Did you hear that?” G asked hearing something whistle outside the bathroom.

“Something’s there,” Tokutei replied moving towards the obscure door.

“We gonna take you out of here to a safe place. Follow us,” Jason said leaving the bathroom.

Suddenly, Mr. G stopped and tried to say something, but the voice couldn’t go through his throat.

“Tok, wait, something is not right. Look at him”

“What’s wrong?”

The prisoner kneeled grabbing his chest with his two palms. Jason bent at him and hit his back.

“Infection from the wound or is he chocking?”

“I don’t know. Are you OK?” he hit him one more time, but G fell on his side and still chocking tapped the floor with his open palm. Jason crouched at him and checked his pulse with his two fingers. Tokutei noticed a frown on his face and he knew what his colleague was going to say.

“His gone.”

“Maybe a heart attack?” Tokutei asked slightly tapping the black man’s chest with his foot.

“I’m not even surprised. After what he went through with you and a demon.”

46.

Lian and Dan were heading along some other corridor. They heard some strange sounds coming from where they came from. The same sounds were heard in front of them. Then they noticed two prisoners running from behind. One of them fell numb on his stomach while the second one managed to run four more yards and fell down, too. Every living prisoner hiding somewhere in the main hall mysteriously started to choke until they fell dead on the ground.

“Something’s wrong with the prisoners,” Lian announced.

“They’re all dying!” Arthur said looking as several of the inmates choked themselves to death in the canteen.

Surya ran up to one of them to check his pulse.

“He’s gone.”

“Something weird is happening,” Jason added. “Did we do this?”

“I hope not,” he heard Arthur’s voice in the earwig.

“Let’s move on.”

They made a few more steps, when Tokutei turned around and asked strangely. “Where’s Mr. G.?”

Jason stopped and quickly looked back at the empty bathroom floor.

“He was right there a moment ago.”

Then he heard Lian’s voice in the earwig.

“Everyone except us is dead. I don’t know why.”

47.

In the meantime, Surya was in the canteen checking the kitchen. The large room was empty. There was no food, apart from the smell of burnt one, of course. A few dead bodies were lying on the floor. She took a glance at the one she had just checked pulse, but he was gone. She stopped and thought for a while. Was it the same row she was in before? Not waiting any longer, she ignored it and proceeded further. She walked towards the counter, jumped over it and ran straight to the kitchen to turn the cooker off.

“At least we won’t cause a fire here, Arthur,” she giggled to herself. But then when she turned around she saw something that made her eyes grew wide.

“You wanted to see undead,” she said a bit worried staring at the rising corpse before her.

One of the guards, who had just been lying dead on the ground, had begun to move and stand up.

“Surya get out of there!” Arthur yelled, switching the ammo into regular one.

The girl rapidly dived out of the way as the old man took one shot at the guard’s head.

Every single inmate and guard that had been dead a moment earlier rose in the same state.

“They are coming back to life!” Dan’s voice spread.

“Technically, they’re still dead,” Arthur explained looking around for any more corpse.

Dan and Lian were in the yard outside. A dozen of angry-looking dead were slowly stumbling towards them. Lian slowly got her weapon ready to shoot.

“That means that every prisoner here is dead because of us.”

“Not because of us,” Jason replied. “Because of that demon.”

“That’s good news though,” Arthur said casually.

“Why?” Jason asked seeing about fifty of walking dead hobbling a few yards ahead where the corridor finished and the main hall began.

“Because, we know Paymon is still here.”

“You mean, he raised them?” Dan exclaimed pressing his trigger.

“Yes, Dan.”

“Too bad so many people had to die,” Surya added.

“Once a criminal, always a criminal. They wouldn’t have changed anyway,” Tokutei said hiding his sword into saya.

“What are you doing?” Jason asked looking anxiously at the rising number of walking dead.

The dimmed light darkened the corridor and only thin sunlight rails came inside through the bars of the cells.

“Switching weapons. Yet, I believe we’d better go the other way round.”

“Why?”

“There are too many of them.”

“You didn’t have problem with that in the labyrinth, remember?”

Tokutei rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, but then, we weren’t separated.”

Had he said that, the EMF readings jumped.

“Guys, we read 20 on EMF,” Jason announced making a few steps back.

“We feel it too,” Surya confirmed slicing through another inmate. One of the zombies was walking slowly at Arthur who was focused on the EMF readings. The zombie moaned loud which made Arthur turn around and shot him in the head.

“I have no idea, how, in God’s name, paranormal beings are here.”

Dan and Lian managed to kill the zombies that were in the yard. The boy stopped as everything became quiet. He started to look around suspiciously. First at the turrets, then around them.

“We don’t read any here,” he said. “However, I remember that Paymon said something about a riot in the seventies here.”

“A riot?” Jason asked, while Tokutei closed the barred gate of the bathroom area.

“Yes, he said something about people who rebelled. I don’t remember everything, but there were about thirty deaths.”

“So you want to say that we’re screwed anyway?” Lian added trying to hear something in the yard.

Dan made a step forward, then he heard something by the south tower. He immediately looked there, but he couldn’t see anything. The strange noise came from the entrance to the building. He pointed his Desert Eagle there as he saw a couple of orange-dressed zombies breaking out the door.

Arthur reloaded his M16 after taking out yet another zombie and scratched his head. Sweat was slowly running down his forehead, but it didn’t stop him to continue.

“If our demon raised them, and Lian and Dan can’t read any EMF outside, it means he must be still in the building. Lian, Dan, come back inside. We need to find him as soon as possible.”

“You heard him,” Lian said to Dan. “Move your ass and help me break through that horde.”

Dan checked the ammo and they both ran towards the entrance. They were running constantly shooting at the prisoners and guards that were coming out of the building.

“On the wall!” Lian yelled changing the clip.

Dan quickly turned right and fired at two guards trying to climb down the outside wall. Lian was a faster runner, so she reached the door first. She ran forward, kicked one of the zombies as hard as she could, then hit him with the butt of her gun and took a shot at his head. As soon as she was about to enter inside, something fell right behind her. She glanced down and saw a body.

“They’re on the roof!” the boy shouted looking up and focusing his fire there.

The Asian girl nodded and turned around running inside. As soon as she entered the building, she saw a dozen of the dead inside, both guards and prisoners. She immediately squeezed the trigger, aiming only at their heads. One fell onto another overpowering him. Some other leaned left at the wall, leaving a red trace as he slid down the wall. Then a sound of a shot came from the outside, followed by Dan’s scream. She realised it must have been shot from some other weapon than they were using. Lian immediately turned around and shouted

“Dan?”

As she was about to run outside again, she felt two hands grabbing her shoulders, then something pulled her to the back. She leaned right, raising

her left leg and rolled to the front throwing the opponent over her and landing on him. She was lying in such a way that she could see Dan crawling a few yards further towards the door. She noticed that he was trying to find something on the towers. She also noticed that his right leg was bleeding.

Then out of a sudden, the second zombie crouched at her and grabbed her leg as if he wanted to take a large bite of it. She quickly used her second leg and kicked him in the jaw so hard that the kick dislocated it. Next she reached her hand to the assault rifle lying nearby, grabbed it and shot the other two zombies.

At the same time, Dan sighted one of the guards on the towers aiming at him with a rifle. The boy started shooting with sharp ammo. Suddenly a hole appeared next to his arm followed by a gunshot. The boy's several bullets hit the wooden post and the wall, making the guard miss the target; which was him. The guard reloaded and aimed again. Dan had nowhere to run. Well, maybe he had lots of places to run, but he wasn't able to. His one Desert Eagle ran out of ammo, but there were still a few bullets left in the second one. He saw that the guard lowered his body and looked into the scope. He was about to shoot, when one of Dan's, 50 calibre bullets penetrated his chest. He overbalanced and fell over landing on the ground at the basketball pitch. The boy rolled on the other side glimpsed at Lian dealing with several zombies. He was about to help her get rid of a few when he heard some grunting noise behind him. Lian quickly stood up closing the door behind her and rapidly ran up to Dan. As she was running something grabbed her shin and she fell again. It was one of the zombies that had fallen from the roof.

"What was that scream," Arthur's voice spread through the earwig. Dan noticed that the guard he had shot stood up and was speeding towards him.

"It's a demon!" the girl shouted trying to release herself from the strong grip.

Dan quickly switched the ammo and started shooting again. Holy water locked inside the bullet paralysed the possessed victim. The whole situation from the shot to that moment lasted no longer than ten seconds. Lian crawled a few yards further and shot the annoying enemy, then quickly made a dart towards Dan.

"Lian! Dan! What is going on?" the old man's voice sounded

impatiently.

“Dan’s been shot,” she announced casually, as if she didn’t care.

“What!” Surya interrupted anxiously.

“It’s nothing,” the boy assured.

“Let me see this leg,” she said after having checked the area.

“It’s nothing, just help me stand up,” the boy said trying to get up by himself.

The girl grabbed his hand as thud after thud spread from behind the door. While Dan was standing up, he felt terrible pain in his calf.

“Ouch, fuck.”

Lian looked at him raising her eyebrows.

“OK, you’re goin’ nowhere now. I must see your leg.”

The boy unwillingly dropped his pants and Lian took out the first aid kit from her backpack.

“The wound does not seem to be deep. I will only clean it and put some bandage on it to stop the bleeding.”

Another thud came from behind the door which bended it slightly outside.

48.

Meanwhile, Arthur and Surya were dealing with several walking dead that limped to the canteen from the main hall. One of them was hobbling towards Arthur. The old man swiftly kicked the table that was next to him to the front, so that the table hit the zombie in the stomach with its edge. The zombie lost his balance and fell on the ground. After that Arthur shot him in the head.

“The readings are higher!” Surya shouted running towards the old man.

He looked around, but there was nothing strange visible.

“We’re are about to face something paranormal,” the girl added. Some other zombie was walking towards them when suddenly a chair moved next to him. Arthur noticed a small mist above the chair.

“Like you said.”

While Surya was switching the ammo into salt bullets, the mist appeared again, but this time it became brighter and more vivid. It took a shape of a human and its pale colours gradually changed into more human ones. It was a ghost of a black man wearing prison clothes.

“A prisoner?” she asked surprisingly shooting it, while Arthur took

out the remaining zombies.

“Paymon must have raised those who were killed in the riot some years ago.”

“Dan said there were about thirty. Unfortunately, we don’t know how many were killed since then.”

The girl looked around to check the area, but there was nothing else visible.

“We have had the first paranormal encounter. These are the ghosts of prisoners killed in the riot from the past,” her voice spread through the earwig.

“Really?” Jason replied standing in a dark corridor with Tokutei. They were stuck between two groups. There were about forty angry-looking ghosts ahead and about twenty mad zombies behind. They were slowly closing in on both of them.

49.

In the meantime, Lian managed to get inside, getting rid of all the zombies behind. Dan had his arm around Lian while he was slowly jumping forward holding only his one pistol. As they entered the big corridor with cells on both sides, Dan let go of Lian.

“I will wait here,”

“What?”

“I’m slowing you down. I’m gonna wait here in the cell.”

“I am not leaving you,” she replied surprisingly.

“Lock me in the cell and regroup with the others, OK?”

“No way! You’re going with me,”

“You saw how much more difficult it is for both of us to proceed.”

“How is Dan?” Surya’s voice sounded.

“The bullet went through. I managed to stop the bleeding, but his leg hurts.”

“I am OK! Don’t listen to her”

“If by OK he means that he cannot stand or walk, then yes, he is OK,”

Dan cut off the channel and turned to Lian again.

“Lian please, I can handle myself. Go!”

He leaned against the wall as Lian smacked her lips and took a peek over the corridor.

“I can’t lock you here, but I can block the door, so they can be

opened from inside only, alright?”

“Sounds good to me, as long as I don’t have to go anywhere.”

Dan jumped into first cell and lied on the bunk bed, while Lian closed the door blocking it with some metal object and ran towards the end of the corridor. Dan took out two pistols switching the ammo in the first one into salt and iron mixture while leaving the second one with regular bullets. Suddenly his EMF readings jumped to 70. He activated his channel again.

“Lian?”

“What is it?”

“Can you come back?”

“Why?”

“The EMF readings are high.”

“You will have to deal with your fear of ghosts on your own as I have a situation here,” she said cutting the channel off.

The dark empty cell made Dan even more scared. He could smell the sweat of its last resident combined with cleaning chemicals. He could hear shots coming from somewhere in the building, as well as moaning of walking dead. He pressed his body to the wall and gazed at the empty corridor with his small eyes, waiting for something, just anything to emerge.

50.

In the meantime, Tokutei and Jason were surrounded by two groups of supernatural creatures that were slowly approaching from left and right.

“How many are there?” Arthur asked.

“About sixty all together,” Jason replied.

“We’ll be there in a minute.”

Tokutei was holding his Bo staff in two hands. He pressed two buttons on it and almost immediately the short handle lengthened on both ends while a thin light appeared from the handle to each end.

“Wow a lightsaber,” Jason commented.

“Thank you, Dan can’t see it,” the Asian man replied turning the UV light off.

Jason raised his gun and asked.

“Are we gonna wait for them, or what?” he turned his head where Tokutei had just been standing but he was no longer there.

“That means no,” he laughed seeing Tokutei running at the horde of zombies.

The black man turned the other way totally trusting his teammate to take care of all the zombies behind. He didn't wait any longer and started firing at upcoming ghosts with salt and iron bullets making them disappear forever. Every single ghost as soon as disappeared lowered the EMF readings. Tokutei was a good fighter. He knew how to use such staff effectively. He began hitting the zombies either on their chest or legs or their heads. They fell down on the ground, but soon managed to stand up. Effectively, yes, on humans who were still alive, not on the ones that rose from dead and have their nervous system switched off.

"Maybe I will use the light," he murmured to himself turning the UV light on.

The staff made the corridor bright again. He started to swing it, not feeling the resistance of the enemies anymore. The light was so thin that it worked like a laser and went smoothly through their bodies. Feeling this advantage, he slashed right into the horde and started his real battle. He made a swing to the left with one end, penetrating through two orange uniforms. Then he turned round, still swinging with the staff dealing with four behind him. He felt a strong grip on his right side, but quickly hit the enemy with right tip and jumped into the air only to come down onto the next opponent. Slash, kick, cut, hit and eventually kill.

51.

While they were fighting, Dan was sitting on the bed locked in the cell. He was gazing at the EMF readings that were jumping between 60 and 80. He remembered what that meant back in Pyramiden. The boy slowly leaned forward to the bars of the door when someone appeared right behind it making horrible grunting noises. He jumped back shooting the zombie into the head when another appeared gripping the bars and shaking it backward and forward as hard as he could. He took him out and leaned against the wall again staring at the bars with both of his weapons ready to shoot on sight. Everything became strangely quiet. There were no zombie moaning, only the beeping of EMF readings. He leaned towards the door again to look at the dark corridor. Suddenly, he felt a cold breath on his neck behind him and quickly turned around as chills ran down his spine. There was nothing there. He felt the same cold breath on the other side and turned around but yet again, he saw nothing, so he sat back comfortably on the bed and gazed at the bars with his guns ready to shoot and his arms

trembling.

“It used to be my cell, you know,” a strange voice came from his right side.

The boy rapidly turned his head and saw a transparent blueprint of a man that gradually became more and more vivid. It was a black man wearing an orange uniform. There was nothing unusual about him except the fact how he had got there. Before Dan had any chance to answer, the man spoke again.

“I can feel your fear and I like it!”

Having said that his face got grey, his eyes got strangely wide and filled with petrifying darkness. His jaw dropped and his mouth became dark, too. It all happened within a split of second. The ghost threw himself at Dan and knocked him onto the floor. He fell partly on his hurt leg and the pain filled his body again.

Dan was paralysed with fear. The shock prevented him from any positive reaction. The ghost got closer to his mouth, so all Dan could see were the large, terrifying, black eyes. However, when he saw the ghost trying to get inside of him, his fear immediately disappeared. He tightened the grip on his pistol and shot the paranormal creature. Its face rotted immediately, as a loud shriek came from its mouth, and the spirit disappeared. Dan quickly came round, climbed back onto the bunk bed and waited for the next danger.

52.

Jason eliminated all the ghosts in front of him. He turned round to check on his friend. Tokutei was still cutting through the remaining zombies. The smell of burnt flesh was in the air, but it didn't prevent him from continuing. The last three zombies were limping a few yards ahead of him. He took a deep breath and rushed at them, but before he had any chance to make a swing, the dead fell on their knees as three bullets went through their heads. The Asian man slowed down and saw Lian walking from behind the corner.

“What a nice lightsaber you have there. I also want to have one just like this.”

Tokutei smiled and turned it off.

“Talk to Dan.”

“Speaking of, where is he?” Jason asked walking towards them.

“He couldn’t walk, so he stayed in the cell.”

“And you left him there alone!” Surya exclaimed walking out with Arthur from behind the second corner.

“He wanted to be locked, so I did as he wished.”

“With all due respect Lian,” Arthur said. “But I think you should have notified us.”

“He’s right,” Tokutei added. “You switched your channel off and made me, I mean us, worried.”

“Sorry guys, but you don’t realise what hell I went through.”

“YOU went through?” Jason exclaimed. “We had real hell here, you know.”

Surya noticed that the situation was becoming uncomfortable between her colleagues, so she interrupted.

“I think we have disposed of most of the ghost and zombies, so we’d better find our demon, OK?”

“We’d better do this before he leaves the building,” the old man added.

“Ah, If anyone only knew where he is hiding,” Lian added checking the EMF readings.

53.

Dan was sitting on the bed glancing at his pistols, waiting for next enemies to appear. The EMF readings were showing 0, the corridor was empty and silent. As he was leaning forward to the bars, he heard something slowly moving from the left. He knew it wasn’t a zombie because he didn’t hear any moaning or grunting noise. He squinted his eyes to focus on the right side from which the noise was coming. When the shuffle got loud enough, he raised his pistol and waited for the creature to appear. To his surprise he saw Paymon slowly limping towards the door. His left trouser-leg was torn and there was a nasty wound right on his ankle. The demon was passing next to the cell totally unaware of Dan’s presence. The boy slowly grabbed his second gun lying on the bed, gently pressed the button switching the ammo into holy water bullets and aimed. He was watching closely the possessed body limping forward, and when he was about to press the trigger, the demon rapidly turned around and waved his hand. Dan felt some invisible force straightening his fingers, which made him lose his grip and let go of the pistol.

“Danny, Danny.”

Dan activated the channel, but he didn't say anything. He didn't want the demon to know he had contact with the rest of the team.

“What is it Dan?” Jason asked, but all he heard was Paymon's voice.

“I could easily kill you right now, but you'll be dead in a week anyway.”

“Paymon is with him,” Surya announced while starting running ahead.

“Let's hurry up!” Arthur added and with the rest followed her. Lian accelerated yelling,

“Hey, wait, you don't know where I left him.”

“OK, lead the way,” the girl replied.

Dan said nothing. He was only sitting there looking into the demon's reddish eyes, listening to what his teammates were saying and hoping they would come here soon.

“I'm sorry boy, but I have to go now. Too bad you work for them. You could have become one of us with your demonic nature.”

Having said that, the creature turned and limbed towards the door.

“You won't leave the building.”

“Quite clever boy,” he said seeing a stripe of salt at the door. “It would work... If I were a ghost.”

As soon as he said that, Tokutei appeared at the end of the corridor and right after him Arthur Lian and Jason. They raised their guns, aimed, and a second later a hail of bullets flew towards Paymon. He reached out with his palm stopping the upcoming projectiles and laughed. Dan managed to grab his gun and as he was to shoot, the demon reached with the second hand and pushed the boy against the wall.

“You are quite skilful. You all managed to beat my fellow demons and the ghosts and zombies I have raised. I could easily turn these bullets back at you, but what fun would be that? It's true what they have said about you; you're all determined to have this piece of the Seal. Yet, you need something more to stop me.”

“Try me!” Surya shouted emerging from behind the demon pushing her two daggers into his shoulders, then quickly jumped back as the bullets that were moveless in the air rushed towards her and the demon. The projectiles sieved through Paymon's body, and the mixture of salt and

holy water paralysed his whole victim. Surya quickly opened the cell and ran to Dan as the others rushed towards the trembling body.

“How is your leg? Show it to me.”

“Can’t stand up, but I’ll be OK.”

Arthur stopped at the lying demon, and bent down.

“I need that piece Paymon. And I will take it from you.”

He took out one of Surya’s daggers and stabbed the demon’s red eye.

Almost immediately the eye colour changed into more human one.

“What are you doing?” Tokutei asked surprised.

He had not expected Arthur to move to such a degree, neither had the rest of the group. Arthur pulled out the dagger with an eye on it.

“If a demon possesses some human, the eyes are the only part of body where he can hide something from others.”

“Why didn’t he use the pocket?” Lian added.

“Or his anus,” Jason laughed.

Arthur smashed the eye and took out a small object from it.

“Because it would be a lot simpler to take it from him, right?”

Anyway you remember the last piece of the Seal. Draugr used to have it inside.”

He looked at the tiny, shiny object, then opened a small charm on his necklace and hid the piece there. Surya was trying to help Dan stand up.

“So there’s only one to go.”

“And how are we gonna find it?” Dan added throwing his hand around Surya.

Arthur pulled out the second dagger and handed both of them over to the dhampiric girl.

“We don’t have to look for it. I know exactly where it is.”

“How do you know?” Lian asked.

“Oh, I knew all the time.”

Surya hid the daggers into her sleeves and complained with confusion.

“If you always knew where that piece was, so why didn’t we go for it after finding the second one?”

“She is right,” Tokutei added. “We had two months of looking for the next piece, but we could have gone for this one then.”

“And the Seal would’ve been completed by now,” Jason added.

“If we had done this,” Lian interrupted, “This one would be the last one and the end of world would have been stopped.”

Arthur listened patiently to what everyone had to say, then explained,

“I’ll tell you everything on the way to the plane. Jason! Help Surya with Dan, we will have to see his leg on board.”

Jason grabbed Dan’s second arm and threw it around his neck.

“Hang in there buddy.”

“I’m not badly hurt. I just can’t walk, you know.”

“So you ARE badly hurt,” Lian smiled.

They headed for the exit to the yard. Everything was quiet and the whole way was covered with bodies of, both prisoners and guards. Tokutei was carrying his and Dan’s bag.

“What if we missed someone there? What if there’re still demons and zombies?”

“I don’t think so,” the old man replied taking a good look at the yard. “With Paymon’s death there was no force to keep these undead... um... not dead.”

“And what about the fifth part of the Seal?” Surya asked holding Dan’s arm tightly.

“If we had gone for the Seal then, and by then I mean in October or November, you would probably be dead by now. This piece is the most difficult one to get. We need a good plan and good weapons to take it. I will tell you more in the morning.”

Tokutei looked back at the prison full of corpses.

“What about the Attica, Arthur?”

“The government probably knows by now about it, and I believe they have already sent their clean-up team.

“I feel sorry for all these people who were killed here,” Surya added.

“You killed some of them, so stop being sympathetic,” Tokutei replied.

“Actually Paymon has killed most of them,” Dan murmured. “We only stopped the dead.”

“At least our country does not have to worry about the overpopulated prisons,” Lian added. “They can send some of them here.”

“OK guys,” the old man announced stopping at the plane. “Get on board and we’re good to go.”

The plane door opened, and they all went inside.

54.

Two hours passed. They were on their way back to San Francisco. Dan was lying on the bed with his leg rolled in bandages while Lian and Tokutei were cleaning their weapons, and Jason and Arthur were discussing something at the computer. Surya was glancing at Dan from time to time and at the view from the window. Her eyes got fixed on a river below.

It was 2009, late at night somewhere outside the city. Surya was sixteen years old then and was sitting on her motorbike dressed in tight, black leather. She had a small walky-talky attached to the steering wheel. She was eating a sandwich looking around carefully. The winding road was nearby, but her motorbike was standing on a small hill. The lights of New York City reflected in her black, shiny helmet. Suddenly a male voice came through the walky-talky.

“Everyone, we can see the convoy moving north-east. The presence of Reiz has been confirmed.”

“Roger that,”

“Understood,” came the answers.

She didn't say anything. She only was listening to what was going on. Then the voice spoke again.

“Everyone, wait on your positions until you have a clear shot.”

“Prepare the spotlights. John and Luke, monitor their positions.”

“The convoy is two miles away.”

“Dan, focus on the limousine. The others will take out the rest of the cars.”

“Understood.”

The girl took another bite when the voice from the second walky-talky came.

“Worf, Sir. We have our man surrounding the hunters. He was right, they will try to attack Reiz.”

“Sir, should we stop the convey?”

“No,” a thick woman voice answered. “Feed on them.”

On hearing this, Surya grabbed the first walky-talky and said. “Adam, the vampires know about your plan, they're surrounding you right now.”

“What? Who's this?” came back the confused voice.

“I'm a friend. I just want to help.”

“Can anyone confirm the vampires' activity around?”

“No Sir, there is no one except us.”

“Listen lady, I don’t know who you are and how you got this frequency, but we know what we’re doing.”

Surya rolled her eyes, dropped the sandwich, got on her bike and moved forward across the sand. She could see the convey coming in the distance, a few hunters on both sides of the road and the vampires slowly coming from all sides.”

“Sir, someone’s coming from the North!”

“John, check this out!”

The girl took out one Uzi from behind the seat, aimed at the two creeping vampires ahead and shot. The vampires squeaked and fell stiff onto the ground.

“Attack now!” she heard the voice from the second speaker.

“Sir! That girl was right. There are dozens of bloodsuckers around us!”

“Turn on the spotlights! Turn them now!”

Surya was moving on the motorbike. She could see the hunters fighting the approaching creatures. As she was moving on, she took out easily three other vampires. One hunter ahead was operating the spotlight, trying to burn the creature nearby. The vampire jumped very fast from one place to another cleverly avoiding the hot UV rail. As the monster leapt into the air trying to attack from above, the hunter raised the spotlight and burnt the enemy.

“The convoy is getting closer!” someone announced.

Dan took a few shots at the vampiric creature nearby and ran a few yards down the hill where the road was. He took out a grenade and crouched at a small bush. Surya was near. She noticed that two enemies were creeping on Dan from behind. The boy was focused on stopping the convoy, and didn’t see the enemies behind. The first car was only seconds away. It was a black jeep with bulletproof windshields. He pulled out the pin and threw the grenade at the first car. The object automatically glued to the side door and a moment later exploded, completely destroying the leading car. The pieces of metal spread around. Every single car behind it stopped and almost immediately a dozen of other vampires jumped out of the cars engaging into fight. As soon as they got out, a shower of bullets and spotlights directed at them, burning their bodies one by one. Dan was about to take his pistols out and join the rumble, when he heard hissing behind his back.

Before he had any chance to turn around, someone grabbed him from behind, and he felt a strong grip on his shoulder. Surya was rushing to help him. As she was close to him she jumped up from the bike, front flipped in the air and took the creatures out. The boy came quickly round and took a good look at her, but he could only see the blueprint of a thin girl with a black helmet.

“Who are you?” he asked confused.

The girl turned back and jumped on her bike. Next she sped away to help the others.

“Hey wait!”

He seemed confused for a second, and then joined the other hunters.

December 13, 2012

8 days remaining

55.

Surya opened her eyes and realised it was almost one o'clock. She glimpsed at Arthur sitting with Jason at the computer. The old man raised his eyes.

“It will be very difficult.”

“What are you doing?” the girl asked standing up walking towards them.

The screen was showing some plans of a building.

“We're planning the mission.”

“You'd better rest for a while,” Jason added.

“I wanna help, too.”

“OK then, sit with us,” Arthur said calmly pointing at the empty seat next to him.

The plane was flying across the night sky as the lights of San Francisco slowly emerged in the distance. The machine slowly began lowering its height aiming for the island with the huge castle in the east side. They yet not knew that the next days would be much worse than they all had expected.

5 HORROR OF HORRORS

December 17, 2012

4 days remaining

1.

The Nevada desert was very quiet on that late night. No animal sounds, no wind, nothing. The sky was clear, and the stars were the only source of light. Two soldiers were walking along a tall barbed fence.

“Did ya’ hear about Stan?” the one with a goat beard asked.

“Yeah, he’s gonna be a father now,” the second one replied looking at the watch.

“I told him to use condoms, but he kept saying it’s like kissing through the glass.”

“At least he will visit his home more often. Unless they kick him out from this piece of shit, God’s forsaken place.”

“Wait, can you hear it?” the first one asked raising his gun and looking outside the fence.

A strange noise was coming from a distance. It sounded like hooves and it was getting louder and louder. The soldiers were gazing at the dark emptiness, but they could see nothing. The second soldier squinted his eyes trying to see something, just anything.

“What is that noise?”

“I don’t know, but it’s getting closer.”

“Have ya’ got any info about some training or what?”

“Nope. Maybe they’re testing some new vehicle.”

“They ain’t no vehicles to me.”

They both were standing with their guns ready to shoot, gazing at the darkness outside the fence. The noise of the hooves was getting closer and closer.

“W-What is that?” the first soldiers stuttered feeling a chill running down his spine.

“Shoot!” his colleague shouted seeing several strange creatures emerging from the darkness.

The soldiers reacted quickly and immediately pulled the triggers. The creatures leapt into the air and jumped over the fence. The bullets hit their brown bodies, but it turned out that they did no harm. One of creatures landed between the petrified soldiers. They could see its unusually big black eyes and scary mouth with lots of long sharp teeth coming of it, which looked like a mouth of a piranha. The creature was taller than a human, but because of the hunched back it seemed to be the same size. It had so long arms with palms of a size of a human head, ended with spiky claws that touched ground with their massive wrists. Their muscular legs looked as if they were transplanted from a bull. The soldier focused his fire on this particular opponent, but the bullets couldn't get through its thick and rough skin. The monster made a step ahead and swung its long arm ripping off the soldier's weapon and half of his arm. Then the next creature landed nearby and swung its both arms at once from opposite directions, crashing the man's body. The impact was so strong that the soldier's head broke and blood trickled a few yards into the air. The second soldier activated the walky-talky on his arm and had managed to shout.

“Breached! We've been breached.”

The large monster leaned over him and bit off his head.

“Could you repeat it?” some voice came through the speaker, but all he could hear were the grunting noises of the strange creatures. Soon eight of these angry-looking monsters crossed the fence. They heard two cars approaching from the north. These were military Hummers with several armed soldiers inside.

“Sir! There's something!” some soldier announced.

The headlight illuminated the creatures making it visible to see almost every detail of their inhuman bodies.

“What the fuck are those things?” the driver of the first car commented with shock in his voice.

“I have no idea. Just shot'em,” one of the soldiers replied.

The men immediately started to fire at them using assault rifles and heavy machineguns placed at the top of each Hummer. The monsters spluttered and attacked the cars.

“Regular bullets do no harm!”

“Use the fifty k.”

Three creatures headed for the first Hummer. At the same time two soldiers jumped down out of the back and tried to withdraw constantly shooting at the targets. One monster got hit by the heavy ammo and was immediately pulled to the back. The second one jumped onto the car and knocked it over. No sooner had the gunner fallen out than two other creatures bit his spine and ripped it out spilling blood all over the sand. As it rushed towards the ones who had just managed to jump off the car, it lost its balance and fell numbly on its arms as three holes appeared in its legs. Then a few other bullets nested in its head depriving it of life. One of the soldiers glanced at the second Hummer to beckon a *thank you* sign, but another creature knocked him down and ripped him into half. The gunner on the second Hummer kept on shooting at the remaining six monsters that were heading right at them. Two of them leapt into the air and landed onto the Hummer creating a vast dent in the hood. Having done that, they swung their large arms and killed the rest of the people. When they have finished with the men, they started to run further.

2.

After a few minutes, the creepy creatures reached several big ditches. Few of them used their long arms to assail a small part of the first ditch, as if they were building a bridge while the others jumped over it and started digging a hole in the middle. Suddenly someone appeared behind them. It was a man with a long dark coat with medium black hair. He went up to the bridge that the creatures had just made, looked at it and smiled. Next he went across and headed towards the monsters that were digging a hole. One of the monsters found something buried inside; a small silver box.

“Move,” the man said casually turning his head a little bit.

He had really low voice; so low that the creatures feared him. He slowly walked towards the box while the creatures stepped away and formed a circle around him. The mysterious man crouched and grabbed the box, then raised and opened it. Inside, there was a small brown metal object that looked like an earring. He picked it up with his wrinkled fingers and spoke.

“It’s done.”

The creatures started to make high hissing sounds while the men turned around and walked out. From the height of about fifty yards it could be seen that the ditches were creating a spacious, twenty-yard long symbol. The lines were crossing each other and looked like a hexagram, like a Seal of Solomon.

3.

It was seven in the morning, in Maldito castle. Dan was sitting at his computer chatting with his old friend Mike.

“I heard about Attica this morning,” Mike typed.

“We killed’em all. 1 piece 2 go.”

“Sth big’s goin’ on.”

“What d’ya’ mean?” Dan asked curiously.

“The number of vampires diminished significantly and Ur aunt’s preparin’ sth. Sth big. Dunno what.”

“I haven’t talked 2 her since like 4ever.”

The boy glanced at his watch.

“Sorry Mike, must dash, briefing time. CU.”

“CU.”

He turned the screen off and went out. Soon he found himself walking along the corridor on his floor. He was wearing regular jeans, a black T-shirt and a white, unbuttoned shirt. He was still limping a little bit on his left leg, but there was no grimace on his face, so it looked that he had got accustomed to it. The boy seemed to be rushing somewhere, and he looked a little bit nervous. He reached the elevator and went down to the ground floor. He limped into the briefing room and boomed catching his breath.

“Sorry guys for being late. But you know...” he pointed at his leg. Surya, Lian and Tokutei were already sitting there while Arthur and Jason were doing something at the computer.

“You’re not late, Dan,” Lian said with a gentle smile. “We are not ready yet.”

Arthur whispered something to Jason and he slowly walked to sit between Lian and Tokutei, while Dan sat in the third row. The old man turned the light off and pressed something on the computer. The screen showed a big title *Seal of Solomon- Part 5*.

“I told you yesterday something about the last piece. Jason and I

spent almost three days on planning this very mission, not mentioning how much time it took me to prepare everything for it.”

Surya cleared her throat and gave them a strange look.

“Oh yes, and Surya also did her part here.”

The screen displaced a tall skyscraper.

“The Seal is situated in one of the tower blocks in Bangkok. The building is 50 storey-high and no human has access to it.”

“So who’s there?” Tokutei asked.

“The Seal is in the hands of a demonic goddess- Shax.”

The screen displayed a picture of a young girl with very smooth face, straight, long black hair and red eyes. Every regular male wouldn’t simply let her out of their bed.

“Uh what a pretty lady,” Dan commented rubbing his lap.

“Don’t be fooled by her beauty. This is only a vessel. She is more powerful than any creature we have met so far. Moreover, she is the goddess of very dangerous creatures called Orts.”

The screen changed and displayed a photo of creatures that looked exactly as those that had attacked the soldiers in the Nevada desert.

“Orts are hellish creatures. They’re to demons what tigers and lions are to us. More dangerous than demons we fought the other day, and much more dangerous than hellhounds. They have extremely sharp teeth that can easily penetrate human body. These monsters can easily bite your head off or any limb. And look at their exceptionally long arms tipped with pointy claws. One swing of such an arm can tear you into half.”

Jason looked at the group and could see anxiety rising in them. He didn’t have any good news, but he knew he had to say something.

“To make matters worse they only attack in groups like ghouls.”

“How do you know?” Lian asked surprisingly.

“I did my homework.”

Arthur switched the picture into a closer look at the monsters’ skin.

“They have very thick skin, deprived of any hair. Regular bullets won’t hurt them.”

“What about the explosive ones?” Dan asked.

“Unlike ghouls, they love fire. After all, they have been born in Hell, and fire is their element.”

“So how to kill them?” Surya asked.

“I bet my sword would easily go through them,” Tokutei added

proudly boasting off as usual.

“Your sword, Tok,” Dan replied, “Will go through anything, as well as Surya’s daggers and...” his eyes grew wide as remembered something.

“And...?” the rest asked impatiently waiting for the answer.

“And those special projectiles Arthur told me to produce two months ago.”

“That is corrected,” the old man continued. “Some time ago I asked Dan to invent projectiles almost as sharp as the edge of Tokutei’s katana.”

“His blade is way sharper than these bullets.”

Arthur got used to being interrupted while he was explaining something, but before he opened his mouth, Dan cut in again.

“And we have about ten thousand of them,” the boy added.

“Ten thousand!” Lian exclaimed. “But they must be too heavy to take them all.”

“You’re right, Lian, but we are only taking about thousand of them. The rest will be stored here.”

Lian scratched her knuckles then boomed.

“I doubt whether these bullets are the only type of ammo that can get inside of them.”

“And, as always, you’re right,” Jason replied with a smile.

“I bet heavy machinery can do the work,” she continued.

Jason chuckled for a while, but then he remembered that this not time for this.

“Fifty calibre does the work. Although it’s not as successful as against humans, but it can kill them.”

“I don’t need any ammo since I have my sword,” Tokutei interrupted. “So be free to use all of them.”

“Unfortunately, Tokutei, I suggest using only these bullets when we meet orts,” Arthur insisted.

“But we can still use our weapons, can’t we?” the warrior asked not being sure why Arthur didn’t want him to use his precious katana sword.

“In this case not. Orts are too dangerous, it doesn’t matter how skilful you are, you may still lose your head, or an arm too easily.”

“But...”

“No buts, Tokutei,” Arthur sounded very serious. “You have been

trained to use guns, so please use them if you meet orts.”

“Tell them Arthur about other enemies we are to face,” Jason suggested.

“Shax is a very powerful and highly-regarded figure in Hell and in paranormal world. Many species are under her command; vampires, demons, ghosts and orts, so I suggest be prepared... at least mentally.” Jason cleared his throat and leaned against the desk to rest his feet.

“So long about the creatures. Let’s discuss the plan of getting there.”

Arthur scratched his head and pushed his glasses closer to his nose.

“OK. It’s more interesting.”

The screen now displayed the blueprints of the sky-scraper.

“Unfortunately,” the old man continued walking from side to side, “We can’t go there through the front door.”

“Why?” Tokutei asked.

“Too many guards in one place, plus orts. We can’t deal with so many enemies at once.”

“Why?” the Asian warrior continued.

Dan gave him a cold look.

“Because some of us ain’t so flexible as you and can’t fight so well.”

“Yeah,” Jason interrupted. “The fact that you managed to survive the attack of hundreds of skeletons and you successfully escaped from under a thousand-vampire pile, doesn’t mean that this time you would be so lucky.”

“Especially with those orts-monsters,” Lian added with a smirk. Tokutei slowly shook his head and sighed opening his eyes wider.

“Alright, OK, we won’t go through the main door. Happy?”

Arthur sighed.

“We also can’t go using only one way. The reason for this is that we must separate the enemies, thus we will attack them from three sides.”

Dan leaned over to Tokutei to say something. Tokutei slightly turned his head towards Dan to hear what he was about to say.

“Guys, please. Now listen carefully,” Arthur sounded irritated. “We must split into three teams. The first team- Jason, Surya and me, we will go from the rooftop.”

Arthur continued,

“The second team- Tokutei and Lian, you will break into from the middle.”

“Hmm, flying, Me Gusta” Lian said with satisfaction.

“And who will be with me?” Dan asked taking a glimpse over everyone, then boomed anxiously. “B-But there’s no one else left who can be in the team with me! Great, just simply great. You know I barely walk and you want to send me there alone, I am so dead,” his voice changed into anger. “So fucking dead.”

“No, Dan. Since you can’t walk, you will operate from the truck. You will be our Eagle Eye. However, you will not be alone. I found a new member for our team.”

Everyone started to whisper and look around surprisingly. What was Arthur talking about? What member. ASAT was supposed to have six members not more. They all wondered who this person was. Arthur reached his hand towards the door.

“You may come in.”

The back door opened and everybody saw a mysterious man coming in. It was a medium-height black man, with short dark hair. He was already wearing ASAT uniform. He was walking confidently along the corridor between rows of chairs and glancing over the team. On seeing him, Jason’s eyes grew wide and his jaw dropped.

“Everyone, please meet Eye.”

Jason couldn’t believe he actually was looking at his former teammate who he thought had been killed by ghosts three months before.

“Eye? H-How? I-I can’t believe it’s you.”

“Hi O.D. Wow! You’ve changed... quite a lot, I suppose,” he said with his Australian accent.

“You know each other?” Surya asked confused.

Arthur went up a few yards further, towards the group. Everyone got up.

“Eye, you know Jason. This is Lian, our gunner and martial artist, as well as a mistress of being undetected.”

“Hi, I’m Eye,” the man said shaking hands with the girl.

“This fellow over here is Dan, specialist in guns and gadgets.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, too.”

“This is Tokutei, master of martial arts.”

“Hi,” Tokutei gently smiled shaking Eye’s hand.

“And this is Surya, specialist in everything.”

“Hi.”

“Hi.”

Arthur went back to his desk. He was wondering somewhere with his thoughts.

“Have I told everything?” he whispered to himself.

“When shall we be ready?” Surya asked checking the time.

“We are living in three hours. Get prepared. Take only guns, no ammo. Everything will be on the plane.”

Everyone headed towards the exit knowing there was still a lot to be done before setting off on the mission. Jason couldn't help his curiosity, so he went up to Eye and asked.

“I thought you were dead.”

“I thought the same about you.”

“I heard you scream, I thought the ghost pushed you off the roof. I was sure you were killed there.”

“That's partly true.”

“What happened that night? What do you remember Eye?”

The man directed his eyes to the right.

“I fell from the rooftop and when I came round, everyone was dead or gone. When the rest of the team came, and the rescue workers, they couldn't find anyone, there were only blood stains and guts. They couldn't find your body, so I immediately assumed you were dead, Jason. I'm glad I was fucking wrong.”

Jason was looking at him listening with interest.

“I didn't die, as you see,” Jason replied getting back to the memories from that period. “The ghost left me alone. “Those creatures could sense fear within you, and since I have none, they left me alone. Then Arthur came along and offered me this job, this new life, you see. This is now my new home, my life, and I do what I am best at.”

“Mhm, he came to me a few days ago and asked me to join your team. He said I could be very helpful, and he said you were alive, and you lived here, so I had no choice. I really wanted to do something useful.” Eye replied. “Back in Sydney, the government wanted to close our department, so I had to find something else.”

“You made a good choice. You're gonna like it here. These people are great. We feel so connected. Hmm... like a family.”

“What about this end of the world?” Eye boomed. “If you, I mean we, don’t stop it, this will be the last week of our lives.”

“That’s true. I spent a few nights planning every move for tonight’s mission. But with your guidance I feel more self-confident. It’s gonna be like the old times.”

“That’s great. I’m goin’ to my room now to prepare the guns and rest. I had a long journey, you know.”

“Alright pal. I’m really glad you’re alive.”

4.

Jason left the room and headed for the left stairs. He couldn’t believe that his friend was alive. This whole situation made his mind wonder in the past. As he was going up, he found himself back in 2003. He was waiting with the whole bunch of people in front of the back door of some mansion. They were all wearing black uniforms with vests and helmets.

“Take your position,” the voice spoke through the headset.

“All the snipers ready?”

The building was surrounded by typical blocks of flats. On the roof of each one, there were about five soldiers lying at the edge. Everyone had a huge powerful sniper rifle in front of them.

“Ready, Sir,” some other voice replied.

“Good, separate the terrorists from the hostage and wait for my order.”

“Yes Sir!”

Jason looked around. He was standing as the third one at the doormat. He let go of his assault rifle with one hand and scratched his nose. The other men next to him looked a little bit stressed and nervous. The voice spread again.

“Sir, we’ve got two snipers for one target. Waiting for your order.”

“Everyone, as soon as you hear the first report, advance.”

“Guys! This is it,” the first man said putting his hand on the knob.

Everyone took a deep breath and waited for the shots.

“Go!” the low voice ordered.

Hardly had he said that when about twenty shots spread within two seconds. That was the sign. The first man in the group opened the door and everyone rushed inside. There was a big hall with one wide stairs in the

middle leading to the second level. The hole had lots of painting on the walls, and old, fancy furniture between the doors.

“Clear!” the guy shouted having seen two terrorists lying in a puddle of blood near the door.

“Sir!” one of the snipers announced. “All targets have been eliminated.”

“You heard him. Go to the second floor,” the captain said. The hostages are in the first room on the right.

They did as he said. As they opened the door, they saw several dead bodies of terrorists’ lying around. There were also six hostages looking extremely confused.

“The hostages are safe! I repeat the hostages are safe!”

5.

After everything, when the soldiers were waiting outside, taking their heavy gear off. Jason was talking with his friend.

“That was a fast mission wasn’t it Eye?”

“I wonder why they never perform operations with so many snipers. It’s just a few shots and we have no men loss.”

“Maybe they don’t have so many snipers,” he replied with a silent laugh.

Suddenly a large car stopped near them and an elder man went out of it. He was wearing a dark expensive suit and black sunglasses. He headed towards the captain and shook his hand. Jason, Eye and other soldiers tried to overhear what they were saying.

“Mr. Grand, What made you come here?” the captain asked nicely.

“I heard about this operation. I must admit, it was quite a nice idea of using two snipers per one target.”

The captain took off his glasses and looked at the other man in confusion.

“Sir, are you here to congratulate me?”

“Unfortunately, not. I want to recruit, two of your best soldiers to the Sydney ‘SPSU.’”

“Losing two of my men,” he replied scratching his bald head.

“Hmm...I don’t think it’s gonna work.”

“Think about their career, Talkingson.”

The captain looked at his soldiers standing a few feet away pretending they weren’t listening to the conversation, then replied,

“You’re right. Come with me.”

They headed towards the group of soldiers and stopped there.

“Attention!” the captain shouted.

“This is Mr. Grant from ‘SPSU. He would...”

“I will continue from now,” Mr. Grand interrupted. “Thank you captain. I want two of you to join my team.”

“I recommend you these two adepts. Jason White and Mathew Eyeball.”

“What are your specialisations soldiers?”

“Recon, sir!” Jason answered.

“Sniper, sir!” came the firm answer from Eye.

“OK. On Sunday report to my office in Sydney. That’s all,” the elder man said casually, turned around and headed for his car. Jason glanced at Eye and smiled.

“Wow, we have been spotted.”

“It’s for your career,” the captain replied. “You will better serve the country in ‘SPSU.”

Jason found himself standing at his door. He realised what time it was. He had only two hours to be ready for the most important operation in his lifetime, and he had to be focused. He quickly opened the door, and stepped inside.

6.

Meanwhile, Dan came to Arthur’s office. He seemed worried, and nervous. He slowly walked towards Arthur’s desk and sat on an armchair. Arthur, as usual was working on his computer.

“Arthur, I need to talk to you about something.”

“Yes Daniel?”

“I was wondering what would happen if we failed to retreat the last piece. What would happen if by 21st we didn’t have the whole Seal.” Arthur slowly stood up and sighed.

“I was wondering when anyone would come to me and asks this very question. You’re not the first one, so I’ll tell you what I told Lian. I’d rather not think about this...yet. But sometimes the thought of failure fills my head. What would happen? I don’t know. I chose you from the finest men in the world. There are no better people to do this than your five. We must keep a good thought.”

“But what if we failed, if we were killed or not manage to collect the fifth piece of the Seal?” Dan really seemed concerned about this. Arthur put his hands together and began tapping with his fingers.

“Then the world will end. Hence we must do more than our best to make sure this will never happen.”

Dan looked down and his face saddened.

“I haven’t realised it was so critical until now. The future of our planet lies in our hands. I’d better be going and prepare thoroughly for the mission. We can’t fail, we simply can’t”

“We have been preparing ourselves during the whole staying here for this particular event. We won’t fail.”

Dan tried to smile, but couldn’t fake one. He simply sighed and left the office.

7.

A few hours later, Lian, Tokutei, Dan, Jason, Eye and Arthur were standing at the ASAT jet in the hangar. There were also a few choppers and cars located in the corners of this huge hall.

“Where the hell is Surya?” Dan asked nervously glancing at the watch on his wrist. “She should be here by now.”

“I saw her on the stairs five minutes ago,” Jason answered. Arthur looked at the stairs at the end of the hangar.

“There she is,” he said calmly as everyone directed their eyes at the spot.

She was carrying quite a big bag with her, but because of her inhuman strength it looked as if she had nothing inside. She quickly joined the group and apologised.

“Sorry for being late, I had a lot of things to take.”

“Girls...” Eye sighed.

The others took a glance at him and nodded with a gentle smirk.

“OK everyone!” Arthur said standing in such a way that everybody will see him.

“The plane is loaded. We have twice as much ammo as we had in the labyrinth, including explosives and special turrets.”

“Turrets?” Lian asked.

“That’s right, but those are for Dan. What’s more, we also have... um... You’ll see soon,” a huge smile appeared on the old man’s face.

“Arthur!” Surya exclaimed, “Tell us now!”

“You will see soon, don’t be impatient.”

“Oh come on!” the girl sounded even more irritated.

“No, no, no. Shall we board the plane now?”

“It’s high time,” Tokutei murmured rubbing his Katana handle.

They went up the stairs into the small entrance of the plane. Jason was walking as the last. He stopped on the steps and scanned the hangar.

“I wish it wasn’t the last time we see this place.”

“It isn’t,” Lian replied turning back.

As soon, as the they disappeared inside, the door raised and the plane headed towards the hidden exit in the rocks.

8.

As they were flying, Jason left the book he was reading and sat next to Arthur.

“You know what?”

“Hmm?”

“I’m worried about those orts.”

“Like everyone here,” Dan added putting his tablet away.

“I’m the least trained person as far as being flexible goes.”

“Are ya’ afraid, Jason?” Eye teased him examining the blueprints of the building.

“No! I can’t feel fear! What I’m trying to say is that I was seriously injured here once, and all because others can perform backflips, quick dodging and other acro stuff, and I can’t, which makes me rely on my weapon not my body.”

“Wait, wait, wait, bro,” Dan crossed his legs. “Don’t be so selfish. Tokutei spent many hours to teach me backflips and I still can’t do that damn thing.”

“But still, Dan, you can do a lot more than me.”

“So what, O.D.,” Lian joined the conversation. “You must admit that now you’re more flexible than before. And that’s all thanks to my training.”

“And mine,” Tokutei added.

“But mostly mine!” Lian boasted irritated.

“Don’t even start, both of you,” Dan bellowed.

Jason rolled his eyes.

“That’s true, I’m more flexible thanks to both of you. However, this is not the result I wanted to have achieved by now.”

“When we stop the end of the world, we will take care of you,” Tokutei answered.

Arthur thought for a while then said,

“But coming back to those orts, Jason. I know, they’re powerful, and we will be fighting in a close area. Nevertheless, we’re prepared to eliminate them, so please stop worrying and be professional. It the most important mission of all.”

December 18, 2012

3 days remaining.

9.

A few hours passed. Everyone was sitting waiting for the mission to start. The flights were always the worst. A few hours of getting mentally prepared were not an easy task, particularly when the world’s sake was at stake. Arthur put away his mug, and as he was fastening his seat belt he announced.

“We’re landing, so prepare yourself.”

Everyone sat down and fastened their seat belts, too. The jet lowered its height and as it was a few hundred metres above the ground, the engines faced down, so that the machine touched the ground as it was a typical helicopter. Finally the machine landed on a tiny meadow near some road. The city was seen in the distance. On the other side, they could see scattered light of the nearby villages. The meadow itself was gradually turning into a forest on both sides. There was a black truck, similar to the ASAT one and a black helicopter standing near the plane. When everyone had left, Arthur headed towards the truck.

“We have to take everything to the truck and to the chopper.”

The back door of the jet opened and everyone went inside only to come back again carrying big boxes.

“Take all the turrets to the truck,” Arthur ordered beckoning at the vehicle.

They took all the boxes to both vehicles and returned to the plane door.

“If there are no boxes left, take the weapons and gadgets and meet me at the chopper. Remember to take the earwigs, too.”

10.

After a while, when everything was prepared and everyone had their weapons as well as their equipment with them, they went to meet Arthur by the chopper. The old man waited until everyone came out and then he stood in front of them.

“Now the speech,” Lian smiled.

“Listen for a sec.”

When he knew that he had everyone’s attention he continued.

“We have little time so I’ll be quick. This is it, our last mission regarding the Seal. If we fail, the world as we know will disappear. Everything depends on us and no one else but us. Eye and Dan will drive the truck. The rest will go with my by air.”

“Err, Arthur?” Dan asked confused. “How will I know where to go?”

“The GPS will lead you. Anyway, it’s almost 1 a.m. We should be going now.”

Dan and Eye got into the truck, while the others boarded the plane.

“Dan, could you drive?” Eye asked opening the passenger door. “I will prepare the turrets.”

“No problem,” the boy answered heading for the driver seat. He started the engine and looked into the left mirror at the reflection of the chopper rising into the air.

“Here we go,” he murmured to himself.

“Dan, follow the GPS,” Arthur’s voice sounded through the earwig.

He looked at the GPS screen and followed the red arrow. The chopper was flying the other way. It was an old fashioned machine, with no doors on each side. Except the pilot of course. Arthur was standing in the middle holding onto some handle at the ceiling while the rest of the team were sitting at the side walls.

“Lian and Tokutei, as soon as we have landed on the roof, you will cast down on the rope approximately at the twentieth floor.”

“OK Tok, put this belt on,” Lian asked giving him a piece of leather.

“What is it?”

“It’s for the rope, I haven’t tested it yet, but now we will have a

chance.”

“As always, we are going to test new equipment on the mission.”

“Stop complaining and put this on.”

11.

“I’m at the destination,” Dan’s voice announced.

“OK, Dan, put the turrets in the spots. We’ll be there shortly.”

Dan and Eye got off the truck which they had parked one street further.

Dan glanced at the huge skyscraper on the left. It was a forty or fifty-storey tall, glassy building with lights switched on only at the bottom and the top. There was only one light switched in the middle of the building.

“This place is huge,” he commented.

“Are you having second thoughts?”

“No, I just gave a simple comment.”

Next they opened the back door and grabbed the turrets which Eye had unpacked from the boxes. These were heavy cannons on a tripod. Each of them had a small digital scope installed on the top of the barrel and a small aerial to connect with the main computer placed in the truck. Dan headed for the left corner while Eye walked towards the right one.

“Have you seen any of these in action?” Eye asked checking whether he had correctly placed the tripod.

“No, I haven’t. But During our classes, Jason mentioned something about them. He told me you used to use them back in Sydney.”

“Actually, we only used the camera ones. We never had access to the 50 k ones.”

“50 k does the work.”

“Oh yes it does. Just look at my beauty in the truck.”

Dan installed another tripod at the corner of the parking lot.

“You mean the Barrett?”

“Yup.”

Dan looked at Eye gazing at the building situated next to the skyscraper.

“What did you find there, huh?”

“I was just thinking whether to put two turrets there.”

Dan scratched his head.

“That’s not a bad idea, and the staircase seems to be open.”

Eye grabbed two turrets and made for the entrance to some block of flats opposite the glass tower.

“Wait for me in the truck.”

“OK.”

12.

The chopper was almost above the target. Arthur was holding the handle tightly watching the area below.

“You can see the building through the right door,” he said pointing at the hole where the door was supposed to be.

Everyone looked at the tall sky-scraper towering among the other buildings. The city of Bangkok was illuminated by millions of street lights, but as Eye and Dan saw, the building was rather dark, except the first and top levels as well as one room in the middle. The machine was getting closer to the roof until it stopped about ten yards above it and initiated the landing procedure.

“Can you see through the walls Eye?” Arthur asked.

“Like through glass,” came the answer.

Eye and Dan were back in the truck. The left wall was covered in six, thirty-inches monitors; three on the desk and three just above them. The first monitor in the left-down corner displayed two feeds from the turrets situated on the left side of the building. One regular view, and one night vision. The second one in the middle showed a 3-D plan of the building. The one on the right displayed two feeds from the right two turrets, one regular view, one infra-red. The top row was slightly different. Starting from the left monitor, there were two feeds from Tokutei and Lian. The middle one showed the view from the two turrets situated at the top of the building opposite the glass tower, while the right one showed feeds from Arthur, Surya and Jason.

“Alright. Stay with Dan in the truck and be our Eagle Eye.”

“Acknowledged.”

The helicopter was hovering about ten yards above the roof. There was a special landing place for helicopters with a big letter H painted on the concrete. The landing spot ended with a one level building, built on the rooftop. Also, there were stairs leading to the lower level of the outside part of the building. Surya tightened the grip on her weapon and looked out the window when suddenly, someone leaned from behind the air-condition device situated on the rooftop. He was holding some kind of a rocket launcher. No sooner had they realised what was going on, than the man pressed the button and a bright racket headed towards the chopper.

“Oh no,” Surya whispered, instinctively jumping out of the machine.

The rocket was nearer and nearer until it hit the front of the helicopter. The impact was so heavy that the whole machine shook and started to fall as a smell of burnt fuel and the sound of constant beeping spread all over the place.

Dan and Eye were gazing at the screens from the feed of each member. They could see the fire spreading and the view outside spinning. Jason lost his balance and fell on his knees. Arthur tried to push himself to the door.

“Jump!” Arthur managed to yell trying to keep his balance. Tokutei and Lian had jumped out immediately, a second before the chopper hit the edge of the roof. Then the machine crashed getting stuck on the edge..

“They’re gonna fall,” Eye whispered.

He wanted to use the turrets installed on the top, but the building was only a few storey high and the turrets couldn’t be used to help the others on the roof.

Arthur quickly crawled from the rocking, burning machine. Jason followed him dragging his backpack behind.

“Hurry up!” the old man shouted to Jason.

The blackman wanted to accelerate, but something stopped him. He turned round and spotted that his backpack caught on some sticking piece of metal. The machine leaned more to the outside. Arthur reacted quickly and reached his hand to Jason while he pushed his backpack as hard as he could tearing a piece of fabric off. As soon as they finally managed to crawl out of the helicopter, it leaned towards the outside, slipped on the edge and fell down smashing against the parking lot. Almost immediately all of the lights in the building turned on. Surya, who had landed a few second earlier, took off her guns and shot the man with the launcher.

“What’s going on up there?” Dan shouted to the microphone.

Yet, no one responded. He was watching the helicopter falling along the walls. Then it smashed right in front of the entrance.

“LZ is hot!” the dhampiric girl yelled. “Can’t you see what we see!”

There were three opponents armed and ready. They were dressed in uniforms, and had balaclavas and helmets on their heads. They all looked like humans and they didn’t have any intentions of asking question or solve the situation in a peaceful way. Jason and Arthur quickly crawled behind a

wooden box placed on the rooftop, while Tokutei and Lian hid behind three metal barrels on the other side.

“What’s going on!” Dan shouted shocked with fear trying to deduce what he sees from the feeds.

“They knew about us,” Eye commented directing the infrared turret up.

Jason leaned right from behind the box and took several shots at one man running from right to left. The bullets hit him and he fell near the wide, transparent door leading inside to the building on the roof.

Lian was leaning her back against the barrows.

“Don’t do anything yet,” she said to Tokutei, then leaned and shot at two men on the stairs near the wide door. She managed to take down one, as the hail of bullets hit the barrels. Arthur took out a grenade and threw it at the stairs.

“O fuck!” some voice came from that direction. Then the explosion spread shaking the whole rooftop.

“Clear!” Surya shouted taking out a helmet off the dead man’s head.

Arthur stood up, grabbed his backpack and headed along the rooftop towards Surya.

“Is everyone OK?”

“They’re fine,” Eye replied checking the vital signs displayed on the screens with feeds.

“Are they vampires?” Tokutei asked standing up and heading towards the opened glass door.

“Unfortunately, they’re not,” she answered. “They’re humans.” The wind was blowing heavily at this height as an awkward silence set in. Lian’s jaw dropped in shock.

“What are they doing here?” she asked walking towards Surya.

“I know only one way for humans to work for demons,” the old man said heading inside a small room behind the wide glass door.

“What is it?” Jason asked following with the rest after him.

“Selling their souls.”

As they entered inside, they saw a huge desk near the wall with two bullet holes in it. There were also LCD screens on the wall showing nothing, and a huge 3-D logo on the wall behind the desk. Tokutei walked towards the metal gate with thick bars next to the desk.

“Can you open it Dan?”

“I don’t have the access to the building, I only shoot here.”

“And watch,” Eye added with a smile.

Arthur sat on a chair for a moment.

“It would be tougher than I thought. We lost the chopper before we even landed.”

“Tok?” the boy asked peeping at his feed.

“Yeap?”

“Aren’t you supposed to go down with Lian.”

The Asian girl grabbed Tokutei’s shoulder and pulled him towards the door to the roof.

“Come on! Let’s stick to the plan.”

“Check the entrance, Dan,” the old man said switching the ammo into regular one.

“One minute,” the boy replied scanning the building digital blueprints.

Lian and Tokutei walked to the edge of the roof, where the part of it had been smashed by the helicopter a few minutes before.

“There is one door open one floor lower, near the air-condition stuff,” Dan announced.

“OK, let’s go,” Surya boomed running first out of the room. She turned right twice and headed down the stairs only glimpsing back if the others were following her.

Lian took out some metal box out of the backpack and put it onto the floor. To Tokutei’s surprise the box sucked itself into the concrete. Next the girl pulled out two hooks with ropes from the front of it and hooked one onto Tokutei’s belt and the second one onto hers.

“Is it safe?” he asked looking down.

“If you had tried it before.”

“And if not?”

“You’ll see,” she pushed him off the roof.

He didn’t scream, even though he was rapidly decreasing the distance between him and the ground. As he was falling, the rope unreeled from the box until it stopped after several dozen yards. He looked down at the wreck of the chopper. Also, he could see there the truck parked by the next street.

“You look funny, Tok,” Dan commented regaining his positive emotions. “He looks funny, right?” he peeped at Eye.

Eye pressed print screen on keyboard and saved the image in some directory.

The girl looked left at the lower floor as the rest of the team were running towards the wooden door. Jason was the last to enter. He took a glance at her and whispered,

“Good luck, Lian.”

“You too.”

Then she jumped. The rope extended to about fifty yards, then stopped near Tokutei who was hanging upside down.

“How are you doing? Did you miss me?” she asked ironically.

“I don’t like testing stuff on the mission.”

“It works fine,” she took out some laser from her pocket.

“Fine, right,” he tried to overturn.

“Is the room clear, Dan?”

“Unless they’re cold as walls, you may enter,” Dan’s voice sounded through the earwig. “I’ll guide you as soon as you get inside.”

The girl activated the laser and began cutting a large hole in the glass window.

13.

In the meantime, the rest of the team were walking along a narrow, dimly-lit corridor. There were lots of power boxes on the wall and long rusty pipes under the ceiling. The smell of rust was in the air. The sound of a fan was filling the room. Arthur beckoned at Surya and showed her to go first. The girl nodded and moved ahead.

“There will be steps soon,” Dan announced.

“Dan we have the map here, you’d better guide Lian and Tok,” Arthur replied raising his gun. Surya saw the light coming from behind the corner, she slowed down and turned left, then down the stairs into a small corridor with a metal floor. The light was coming from the lower floor. The metal crates were circling the room below. Suddenly, a strange voice came from the room.

“We have lost contact with the roof.”

“Something is going on.”

“Let’s wait for orders.”

As the team was slinking above them, they noticed two people wearing combat uniforms. One of them was leaning against the vertical pipes that

were surrounding the room, the other one was standing in front of him.

“Did you hear something?” the first one asked.

Before the second one managed to look around, Surya had taken three well-aimed hits, then moved down the stairs into the room. As she was passing one of the chimneys she heard some voice shouting,

“Target sighted!”

Next a series of shots flew towards her direction. She quickly dodged back behind the chimney taking a deep breath, while Arthur and Jason eliminated the threat.

“Don’t be in such a hurry,” Jason suggested reloading his weapon.

“Maybe you will lead, huh?” the girl asked smiling.

Jason smiled back and walked first towards the red door on the other side of the room.

14.

Meanwhile, Tokutei and Lian managed to get inside the office room. It had one desk, lots of shelves with stacks of papers and spotlights in the ceiling. A typical office for humans to work in and there was nothing suspicious; no guns, no blood, no symbols, nothing.

“Tok, Lian,” Dan’s voice came through the earwig. “Everyone is heading upstairs. Arthur, you may expect lots of, lots of company.”

“So we may easily leave the room,” Lian replied heading towards the door.

“No, they’re running through the corridor nearby and they ain’t no soldiers.”

“What are they?”

“Probably vampires, or fast-moving zombies, I can’t tell.”

“Fast-moving zombies,” Lian burst into laughter. “Have you been taking drugs?”

“Only for the pain, but it is not important.”

Tokutei walked towards the door drawing his sword while Lian changed the ammo and joined him.

“How many?” she asked putting her hand on the knob.

“On this floor, about forty, you’d better wait until they disappear.”

“No waiting,” Tokutei smiled and pulled Lian’s hand simultaneously opening the door.

“Don’t engage yet,” Arthur ordered.

“Too, late...” Eye replied.

There were dozens of vampires zooming through the wide, yellow corridor. Each of them looked either like a Goth or a Punk. Some of them were carrying weapons like swords or sabres, others had assault rifles and pistols. The corridor itself was several yards wide and seemed to be going across most of the structure. The walls were covered only in paint and nothing more. There were rectangular tiles along the floor, a little bit slippery.

“There’re two!” one of them exclaimed stopping a few yards in front of them.

“Shut up!” Tokutei answered quickly throwing a silver shuriken into his throat.

At the same time Lian started shooting at the upcoming targets.

“The team upstairs could hear the fighting sounds through the earwigs.

The old man shook his head.

“Eh, if you did engage so remember the rule: One shot, one kill. No need to waste ammo on those creatures.”

“I waste no ammo,” Tokutei replied cutting through an enemy.

“Take the right side!” she ordered Tokutei, while turning left and easily eliminated the increasing number of opponents.

Tokutei ran towards three vampiric creatures carrying blades. He cut through the first one without any problem, but his swing was blocked by the second one. He felt strange at first because his blade was supposed to go through anything, but soon he realised that something must have blocked it not from the blade side but from top or bottom. Immediately, the third vampire extended his arm in order to stab the Asian. Tokutei quickly kicked him with a round kick and without putting his leg he hook kicked the second one, then turned around and cut off their heads with one swing.

“How are you doing girl?”

“Bored, shooting doesn’t give me so much fun.”

“Maybe you should use your body a little bit, huh?”

As he was saying that another group of vampires ran out from behind the corner.

“Maybe not,” she replied firing at them.

Tokutei put away his sword and took out his modern Bo staff. He pressed the button and both ends immediately extended. He pressed another button

and a thick UV light filled both ends.

“It’s better for vampires.”

“Lian, Tok!” Arthur joined the conversation. “You need to find the main office. It should be on your floor.”

“Actually,” Dan interrupted, “They have made a mistake and they’re one floor lower than the target is.”

Lian looked at Tokutei’s scorn face.

“Ups,” she said looking only with her eyes from left to right.

“Let’s find the stairs!”

Dan glanced at the screen while Eye was focusing on the sniper rifle. He was scanning the building with his powerful scope connected with one of the truck computers. He could easily operate it with a mouse, as if it was a computer game.

“Guys, the stairs are in the third corridor, you need to go there.”

“Why haven’t you told us we were on the wrong floor?” Tokutei asked slashing through another vampire.

“Honestly, I didn’t know, but if anyone asks it was Lian who made that mistake, not me.”

“Guys, please,” the old man said with a little anger in his voice.

“We have a mission to finish, so please take it seriously.”

“Sorry, sir, we will, sir.”

“And by the way. You have the building plans in your microcomputer, so please use them.”

“We will, sir.”

“There are coming more of them!” Dan shouted.

“Now I can play,” Eye said with his thick black voice aiming at the sprinting enemies.

Having said that, he pressed the button connected to the laptop which was linked with one of the heavy sniper rifles situated on the turrets. As he did so, a bullet flew out of the barrel and sped towards the building, it went through the main wall, door, second wall and hit the vampiric creature round the corner. In the same second Lian and Tokutei ran from the previous corridor and finished the rest of the enemies.

“Dan, guide them, we can take care of ourselves!” Arthur ordered.

“No problem.”

15.

The rest of the team were slowly walking along the narrow corridor illuminated by two flickering lights that were making the room completely dark every few seconds. They were still in the roof area as the long pipes were cutting the room into half and the floor was made of a metal net or metal plates. They saw another metal steps leading down on their left. They could hear someone talking downstairs.

“Don’t worry, they’re sending reinforcement.”

“I’m not worrying about the intruders, you know, I’m worrying about the reinforcement,” the second voice replied.

Arthur showed to the others to advance. Jason leaned towards the stairs and quickly took out the two targets. Next they moved forward to a wooden door at the end of the corridor. Surya stopped right at the door and placed her hand on the round knob.

“What’s behind this door Dan?”

“Rooftop.”

“How many of those are there?”

“That’s the lowest level. Be careful though, there are three soldiers on the other side.

Surya kicked the door open and immediately took a few shots at the closest target. Before she managed to take any other out, the two soldiers had turned round and started to shoot. Jason hid back with Arthur while Surya crouched behind the air-condition box a few yards from the door. The bullets were swishing just over her head when suddenly a grenade flew from the inside onto the narrow steps ahead.

“Take cover!” the soldier shouted, but before they could do anything, the explosion had killed them.

The girl stood up and saw no one else there.

“Clear!” she announced.

The guys walked in.

“And we are on the rooftop again,” Jason complained.

“We’re on the other side,” Arthur added.

Having said that, he heard some hissing sounds coming from the inside.

“Behind us!” the old man shouted switching the ammo into silver bullets.

Three weird creatures emerged from the inside, rushing at the team. Arthur started shooting, taking out the first one, while Surya took out her daggers

and sliced the rest of them.

“Dan, guide us!” Arthur ordered.

“But you said I should guide Tok and L.”

“They have Eye, we need you now. The blood-suckers have just attacked us.”

“Alright, there is a dozen of enemies coming from the way you came, vampires mainly, I think.”

“Silver bullets!” Arthur shouted.

Jason quickly switched the ammo, while Surya jumped on a small roof just above the door and waited for the enemies to come out beneath her. The hissing was getting louder and louder. She could even smell their significant scent. Suddenly, Jason realised they could use other weapon. He took out and activated the UV grenade and threw it inside the building. It almost immediately lit up the corridor burning the rushing enemies. The corridor filled with hundreds of black flakes of ash.

“Above!” Dan shouted, as they saw blueprints of two vampiric creatures running down along the roof wall.

Surya immediately jumped up trying to stab the first, but he blocked her two daggers with his sabre. Jason and Arthur had waited until Surya got out of their range. The second vampire passed her and threw itself right at Jason below. He took a series of shots. The bullets penetrated its body, but the monster was zooming so fast that it hit Jason and knocked him over. Surya made a spin and cut through the first vampire then peeped at Arthur who was helping Jason get up. The black man smacked his lips and said,

“So so.”

“What do you mean *so so*,” Surya added.

“There are a few soldiers inside the building.”

Arthur ran towards the door right round the corner.

“Quickly! Help me block the door from the inside.”

The others reacted at once and made a dart after Arthur running inside the building. They got in, looked around the room to try to find something to block the door.

“Surya, help me move this wardrobe,” Jason asked pointing at a metal wardrobe at the desk.

Apart from the wardrobe and the desk there were also shelves filled with ammo and grenades. The lamp above was swinging from left to right, as if someone had just rushed this way.

Surya stood behind the metal wardrobe, and pushed it, easily moving it towards the door before even Jason managed to catch up with her.

“I see, you don’t need my help.”

“And they say that girls are the weaker sex,” the old man laughed.

“What about the ammo?” the dhampiric girl asked picking up one of the grenades.

Arthur took a look at the shelves, then at his weapon.

“Since our weapons have been modified we can only use these clips in regular weapons. But don’t hesitate to take some of the grenades.”

“OK guys,” Dan sounded through the Earwig. “Since the door has been blocked, you may move further... fast.”

Surya packed three grenades into her uniform pockets and led the way.

Jason and Arthur followed her. As they took off, several thuds came from behind the door that they had just blocked. Someone was trying to get in.

Arthur and Jason turned around to see if the wardrobe was able to withstand the hits.

“We can only hope, they are not as strong as you are,” he said looking seriously at the his teammate.

16.

Meanwhile, Tokutei and Lian were fighting with soldiers and vampires in a wide corridor one floor higher than they had been few minutes earlier. Eye was taking the shots every few seconds helping them dispose of the enemies much faster. He was sitting at the screens next to Dan and was operating two turrets installed on the left and the right side of the building. Instead of a mouse, he was holding two joysticks with one fire button at the top. He was constantly pressing them like in a video game. Every press released a 50 cal. bullet from a turrets that easily went through the walls and hit the targets. Tokutei was in control of the modified Bo staff. He was very good with it, and to his surprise, it worked better on vampires than the sword. Mainly for two reasons; he had one more end to use and he didn’t get dirty with blood from the opponents. Lian, however was used to the Masada gun. This assault rifle let her eliminate the targets at the distance, but she was also able to use her body to push away, hurt or even kill the ones that got too close. When Lian killed the last one that dared to show up, a terrible, scary sound came from down the stairs.

“And that will be what?” Tokutei asked sniffing the smell of a

burnt flesh from the fight.

“Someone is angry.”

“Like these soldiers weren’t,” he replied turning off the UV light. They ran farther towards the set of stairs and headed up. While they were running, they felt the building shake as if a small earthquake was in the area.

“What was that?” the girl asked reloading her gun.

“I don’t know but we felt it, too,” she heard a response from Jason. They stopped in front of the corridor with doors on each side.

“Dan, where now?” Tokutei asked.

The howl sounded again. It seemed to be closer this time.

“You’re one floor above the right one.”

“But that’s impossible!” Tokutei answered turning back. “You said we were to climb one more floor, and we did so.”

“Go one floor lower.”

“But then we will return to our previous floor,” Lian said getting angry.

As they were running on the previous floor, the sound came again. It seemed to be only two floors lower this time. They felt the building shake again.

“What’s that sound Dan?”

“It’s not a vampire,” Eye interrupted, “Something bigger, two of them. And there is one more thing; their body temperature is above human’s”

“Orts,” Arthur replied concerned. “Guys, don’t fight them, hide somewhere!”

Dan was scanning the building’s blueprints when he spotted something.

“There is a small storage room on this floor. Go there!”

Tokutei switched his staff off. As the two ends disappeared in the handle, he grabbed Lian by her hand and ran towards the storage along the corridor.

“Where exactly?”

“One... two... third door on your left!”

He rapidly pulled the door knob, rushed inside with Lian shutting the door behind him. The storage room was very small. There were several brooms inside and cleaning chemicals on the shelves. They were standing opposite each other. Tokutei could easily feel Lian’s perfect breast pressing against his chest. At the same time she could feel his strong body touching her

uniform. Their lips were also very close. But there was no other option. The room was too small for the two of them.

“You smell nice,” he commented smelling her sweet perfumes.

“Sweat,” came a casual answer.

They could hear the steps outside the door coming from the stairs. The steps and the scary chugging were getting louder and louder.

“There’re two of them,” Eye said. “And my God, I can only see their blueprints but they look scary.”

The steps were only a few yards away from them. As the creatures were coming towards the storage room, the steps silenced out of the sudden. Tokutei indicated with his head showing that they were waiting right behind the door. They could hear the heavy breathing of the beasts and the sound of saliva dripping, splashing against the floor.

“They can smell you,” Eye whispered.

Lian squeezed Tokutei’s hand and closed her eyes. She had no idea what these creatures look like in real life, but she could only imagine. Tokutei could feel the tension rising in her along with some other emotion; fear. Then out of the sudden, the creatures started to move again and walked towards the end of the corridor. The steps gradually faded away. Lian pushed away Tokutei and said.

“We may move on.”

The Asian warrior opened the door and they both ran into the empty corridor.

“Dan! Where are they?” Lian asked.

As she said that she heard the ort’s characteristic call a few yards behind her head.

“OK, never mind,” she added indifferently trying to hide her fear. Tokutei was standing in front of her slowly activating the Bo staff.

“Come to me quickly,” he whispered to Lian.

The girl made a few steps and turned around. To her amazement she saw a n eight-foot tall creature with a rough skin and a very ugly, monstrous face. Dan was looking at one of the screens that was displaying the view from Tokutei’s camera.

“It’s even uglier than ghouls,” he murmured.

Eye ignored all other screens and took a glimpse at the monsters.

“When I see this I ask myself; how much drunk a bull must have been to fuck a piranha.”

Arthur and the rest of the group were standing in a small room between two corridors.

“You need to see this,” Eye said. “Switch to Tokutei’s feed.”

Everyone displayed Tokutei’s feed in their microcomputers.

“Oh my God, Hell of a monster,” Surya admitted with a little amazement.

“Or rather a monster of Hell,” Arthur said.

“I have never seen anything like this,” Jason added touching his face.

Tokutei and Lian were slowly walking back as the monster was standing at the end of the corridor dribbling onto the floor and breathing really heavily.

“Guys! You need to avoid fighting them until we get to you,”

Arthur suggested.

He knew the true power of these creatures, and he realised that Lian and Tokutei had no chance of dealing with it so easily.

Tokutei looked at Lian.

“Shall we run?”

She nodded and slowly turned on her heel. To their surprise they saw the second ort standing and dribbling on the other side of the corridor.

“Shall we fight?” she asked raising her Masada gun.

“No, don’t fight them, you don’t stand a chance.”

“But we can’t run!”

“Dan, do something!” the old man shouted.

Dan was gazing at the screens of the blueprints trying to find a way out.

“I can’t see anything.”

The two orts started to walk slowly towards them. Suddenly, the first creature slowly leaned to the right as a small hole appeared in the wall followed by a loud reckon. It was Eye. Unfortunately, the bullet did no harm to the monster. It rebounded from its rough thick skin and rolled to the front. The two walls had slowed the projectile down and it couldn’t do any damage to the monster.

“I thought the 50 K would do the job,” Eye said disappointed.

Lian aggressively pulled the trigger shooting a series at the upcoming creature, but it had no effect, too. The bullets were too weak to penetrate the ort skin. At the same time, Tokutei used one of his Shurikens, throwing it at the ort. However, the sharp star only left a small dot on the monster’s arm.

“They’ll do the job,” Dan assured referring to the bullets. “There’re too many walls for the bullets to maintain their regular speed.”

“What now?” he asked.

“To the office on your right!” Dan shouted.

They quickly made a dart towards the door. Lian nervously grabbed the knob, but the door was locked. Tokutei kicked it and ran inside the office room filled with desks with computers and stacks of papers. The Asian girl looked back at the broken door. She could hear the orts gasping right behind the it.

“Well done, Tok, how are we gonna close it now, genius?”

“Quickly! Help me push it” he pointed at the metal cupboard.

Lian hanged her weapon on her back and pushed the cupboard towards the door.

“It won’t do,” Dan interrupted.

They heard a loud roar from behind the door, then a huge hole appeared in the wall right next to the door. The falling pieces of the concrete smashed the desk and the computer on it, and the wind created by the fall blew away the papers.

“You were right, Dan,” Tokutei commented.

The ort had swung his massive arms ripping the wall apart. After that he and the second one broke inside.

“And what now?” Tokutei asked.

“Now we fight,” he said running at them with his staff switching the UV light off while Lian moved back among the desks.

“Lian!” Arthur shouted dealing with the large group of vampires that had just rushed from the downstairs. “Use the sharp projectiles!”

“Of course!” she shouted hitting her forehead.

This all tempo, action, speed too much thinking, made her forget about the sharp bullets that Dan had prepared especially for the orts.

Tokutei hit the ort with his staff, but it didn’t do anything. The monster got even angrier and swung his arm at Tokutei like a cat swinging at a ball. He quickly moved back, while the arm hit the floor breaking through the concrete into the room below.

“No use fighting them!” Lian shouted switching the ammo into the sharp one.

The second ort walked in swinging his arms from left to right tearing the desks and computers apart. The furniture landed either outside the window

or spattered on the walls. Tokutei quickly turned around and threw himself towards Lian. The girl aimed and pressed the trigger. The sharp projectiles flew towards the upcoming ort. The bullets had been whetted by the laser. The very same one that was used to sharpen Tokutei's blade and Surya's daggers. They tipped only with hundred atoms of titanium at the very end of it. The bullets did as everyone expected. They easily pierced through the ort's skin and flew out on the other side.

"It worked!" Tokutei exclaimed.

Lian pressed the trigger again with a smile on her face and aimed at the monsters' heads. Seconds later, the orts were lying dead on the floor.

17.

Dan was gazing at the blueprints of the sky-scraper with a focused face. He was rotating them on the central screen, zooming in, out.

"Something is wrong here," he said quietly.

"What do you mean?" Eye replied scanning the building with the digital scope.

"The floor Tok and L are on, as well as the one above, are over one yard shorter than the other ones."

"There must be a floor hidden between them," Lian interrupted leaving the office while Tokutei was examining the ort's body with amazement.

"It is our floor for sure," Dan continued. "You will have to either dig inside or..."

"Blow it up," Jason finished.

"Exactly. What is more, the wall seems to be thick so you need to make a hole and stick the explosives inside."

"Dan, guide us down," Arthur joined the conversation. "Tokutei, Lian, try to make a hole, do not blow the wall up until we get there."

"Roger that," Lian confirmed.

Dan checked the heat-view of the building.

"I don't think they will make it. Everyone from the downstairs is coming there."

"Are there any orts?" Tokutei asked.

"No, I don't see any, most of them are human soldiers."

Tokutei crouched to pick up his shuriken from the tiles. He thought of several options. They could both hide again and let them pass them

unnoticed. Bad idea. The rest of the team would have to deal with them later upstairs. He couldn't simply allow it to happen. He knew what he had to do.

"Let's fight, shall we Lian?"

"Alright."

About two hundred soldiers and fifty vampires were running up the stairs. All of them were willing to stop the intruders, and none of them was afraid to die.

Eye took a glance at Dan.

"Hey listen. We can't simply watch. Grab the two turrets, I'll grab the other two. We're gonna take out as many as we could."

"Of course," the boy replied moving on his chair a little bit to the right.

They both grabbed the joysticks and started firing the 50 calibre ammo at the rushing horde.

18.

Arthur, Jason and Surya were still many floors higher. They were breaking through the office full of cubicles separating each worker's desk.

"Why the hell do they need this stuff for?" Surya asked.

"A cover story," the old man replied looking around.

"For what?" Jason asked checking the map.

"For what is really going on here."

Jason looked at the screen of one of the computers that was showing a document with a text in it.

"A fake company, great idea. We should use it for our castle."

"We don't need this," Arthur shook his head.

Jason sat down on a chair nearby.

"I think we need a few minutes of rest."

"He's right," the old man replied.

"Hey!" Lian shouted through the earwig. "What about us?"

"You still have an army to fight."

O.D. glanced at his gun and reloaded it. Suddenly he was caught up by the memories of the past.

He was on the raft with seven other soldiers. They were all dressed up in diving suits with wide oxygen tanks that looked like backpacks and they also had swimming masks on their faces, and their mouth were

covered with some black piece of cloth. They also had all their weapons hidden in plastic waterproof cases on their backs right next to the oxygen tanks.

“This is it guys!” the one in the front shouted.

Then he and the man next to him grabbed two long objects that looked like rockets and threw them into the sea. At the same time, the man in the back turned off the engine of the raft. The first one leaned back and let himself fall into the water. Seconds later, the rest of them did the same. The last man had taken out a plug from the rubber raft making the air slowly escape. As they were under water, they swam towards the long objects that had been thrown before and grabbed the metal handles at its sides. The objects looked like torpedoes with two handles on each side. Soon there were four people at each object. The man that was holding the front handle took a glance at his partner at the other torpedo-like thing and showed him the sign *OK* with his thumb. They both pressed red buttons in the middle of the handles and suddenly the engines at the end of the objects turned on, making them swim ahead as the raft was slowly sinking behind them. These objects were used by military divers to move faster underwater.

19.

The SCPU members were zooming towards an enormous tanker a few miles ahead. The bottom part of the ship was clearly visible under water. It was about fifteen yards submerged and about two hundred yards long.

“Remember, guys,” some voice in the headset said. “Try not to be detected, we don’t want them to kill the hostages.”

“Yes, sir,” came the answers.

As they were coming closer to the ship ahead, the team split into two units. One of them headed towards the bow and the second one towards the side. When they finally reached the vessel, they let go of the speeders and surfaced. The soldiers who were in the front took out a few suckers from the bottom of their oxygen tanks, and put two on their hands like gloves, and two on their shoes. Next they untied the tank and let them sink. The first one reached his hand up high and stuck it to the wall of the ship, and not using much force pulled it down. The sucker didn’t fall off. He reached out with the leg and then with the second hand. The rest of the team were following him slowly moving up. As they gradually got onto the deck, they

took off their diving masks, opened the plastic containers and grabbed the dry weapons. Jason was among the SCPU in the front. There were also his team-mates Bob and Jane. Eye was in the second team along with Henry and two other soldiers. He took out heavy sniper rifle; Barret from the plastic containers and started putting all the parts together. At the same time his colleagues ran towards the high tower in the back of the ship.

“Two tangos ahead,” Bob announced.

Jason reacted quickly and took them out with the silent shots.

“Tango down.”

They moved further passing a few massive containers used for transporting goods between continents. Eye managed to assembly the sniper rifle. Next, he aimed at the tower and slowly scanned it.

“Sixteen hostiles in the tower.”

“Acknowledged,” the second team confirmed eliminating one terrorist on their way.

At the same time he first team reached the tower.

“Three tangos behind the door,” Eye announced analysing the view from the infrared scope.

The second team joined them. Seven soldiers were waiting at the door. One of them showed the others to make a step to the side, while he walked up to the door and knocked twice.

“Ronson is that you?”

“Mhm, open the door,” he said with a Somali accent.

The door slowly creaked opened and as soon as there was a small gap, the soldier pushed the door with his body and rushed inside immediately making the opponent fall on his back. The other soldiers took a series of silent shots and eliminated all the other terrorists.

“The floor is clear,” Eye said.

Now they had a great chance of taking a good look at the enemies. They were Somali pirates who had taken over the ship. All of them were bald with tattoos all over their bodies. They were dressed in light green clothes. Torn T-shirt and vests full of holes.

The seven soldiers rushed inside and spread. Three turned left and the rest headed towards the stairs leading upstairs.

“Three targets upstairs. One in the corridor, two in the cabins.”

Jason was walking upstairs, right behind Bob. As soon as they got there, Bob slowly leaned to the left and took out the terrorist in the corridor. The

rest of the team emerged on the other side of the room. Then, the voice sounded from the inside of the cabin.

“Sor, are you OK?”

There was no response.

“Sor!”

Next the door opened, and a medium-height black man walked into the narrow corridor. He spotted his colleague lying on the floor in a thick stain of blood. Then immediately reached for his walky-talky, but before he could touch it, the SCPU team silently took him out. After that the second door opened and the third terrorist rushed inside. Jason noticed it, rapidly turned around as his fellow team-mate shouted,

“Tango right!”

He aimed and shot him in the head.

“There’s only one floor to go,” Eye announced. “Five terrorists and thirteen hostages.”

The team walked towards the metal stairs and ran up. Henry stopped at one of the two doors along with three other team-mates, while the rest were ready next to the second metal door to the main cabin.

“I’m waiting for your sign,” Eye said.

The team was standing at the doors, then suddenly the first man raised his hand and quickly pulled it down. It was the signal. They opened the door and rushed inside while Eye took one shot killing the first terrorist. Bob shot the first one on his right, while Jason took out one on the left. In the meantime, Henry killed one in the front, but before they could kill the last one, something went wrong. They saw that the last Somali terrorist was standing in the corner using one of the hostages as his live shield. He was holding a pistol at the hostage’s temple.

“Cease fire!” Jane shouted lowering her gun.

The blackman made a step forward.

“You’d better let me go,” he said with the African accent.

“Release the hostage!”

“Release him now!”

“So you could shoot me? No way, I leave with him.”

Jason looked outside the window at the bow where Eye was lying with his rifle.

“Take him out,” he whispered.

“No, too dangerous.”

“Take him out, Eye.”

The terrorist made another step.

“Let me go, or I’ll kill the hostage!”

“You don’t wanna do this, let him go.”

“First let me go!”

“Release the hostage immediately!”

“No.”

“Drop the weapon!”

“I shoot the hostage! I do it, I swear!”

Jason whispered again,

“Eye, kill him now.”

“I can’t” he replied in fear.

The terrorist made another step forward and tightened the grip on the hostage. The horrified man was about thirty years old. He had a wound on his neck, and very scared eyes filled with tears.

“Drop the weapon, this is the last warning!” Henry continued.

The terrorist noticed Bob raising his gun. He got scared and pulled the trigger puncturing the hostage’s head. Before he had a chance to direct his pistol at any soldiers, the bullet had gone through his head- Eye had pulled the trigger. Unfortunately, he was too late.”

20.

Arthur placed two explosives at each entrance of the office and walked up to Jason.

“Hey, buddy, don’t fall asleep.”

“I’m not,” he replied rubbing his eyes

“They’re coming,” Dan announced indifferently.

His eyes were tired, and he had to make himself another cup of coffee.

“How many?” Surya asked.

“A lot. Eye will help you.”

The old man peeped at Jason.

“Hey, Jason, get up, we need to take cover.”

He immediately jumped off the chair and took a few seconds to get round from his memories. Surya hid back between two plastic walls of the working cubicles while Arthur and Jason crouched on the other side and checked the ammo. They could hear squeals and shrieks coming from both directions that were gradually increasing.

“They are almost here,” Jason said putting his finger on the trigger of his favourite HK MP5. Seconds later, a horde of soldiers and vampires flew inside. Arthur pressed the button on his wrist watch and the explosives went off with a loud boom. The blast upturned and smashed first few cubicles. It ripped completely everyone who was within five yards from the bombs. Jason saw limbs and pieces of meat spreading across the room followed by blood fountains.

“Advance!” they heard someone on their left, then the squeals increased again.

Jason looked at Surya showing her one of the grenades. The girl knew what to do. They simultaneously rolled the grenades to each side of the room and waited for the next explosions. The second blasts destroyed what the previous one couldn't as far as the office furniture and accessories were concerned. One of the cubicle walls fell onto two walls above Surya, covering her hideout completely.

“There are still a lot to go,” Dan interrupted the silence. “I suggest you move forward towards the rest. And use the UV grenades.”

The three of them jumped out of the cubicles and headed towards the corridor. Jason turned around for a jiff in order to check the back. He saw a huge hole where the door used to stand and lots of gore hanging and running down the walls as well as the ceiling. The paint on the walls was burnt and in some places was leaking as a result of explosion heat. The explosions had destroyed all the cubicles apart from the two where the soldiers had been hiding. The front didn't look better. The two explosions deprived the room of the side wall, not mentioning the doors, and half of the ceiling. They could hear the shriek again, coming from the front. Surya ran first hiding back one of her Desert Eagles, as a sharp blade ejected from her cuff.

“Target sighted!” some soldier shouted from the front.

But before he had a chance to take a shot, Surya had got rid of him. At the same time Jason rolled one UV grenade towards the back while Arthur did the same with the front. Soon, another two soldiers emerged from behind the corner, but were quickly eliminated. Eye also helped by operating the roof turrets. The UV illuminated the rooms burning the upcoming vampires. However, the light didn't work on soldiers and the team had to use sharp ammo to eliminate them. The offices became empty again.

“It's not over yet,” Dan announced.

Suddenly, Arthur heard hissing coming from the office they had just left and quickly turned around shooting a series of bullets at the empty corridor, hoping some of them would hit the vampires. Almost immediately two of these creatures zoomed along the ceiling. Arthur had only seen them for a split a second, as they were moving very fast. He spotted one of them just above his head. Not giving too much thought, he raised his gun, but the vampire was faster and knocked Arthur over to the ground causing him to release his weapon.

“Arthur!” Surya shouted rushing towards him.

Meanwhile, Eye managed to kill the second monster. Seconds later, the girl slashed off half of the head of the vampiric creature and helped the old man stand up. As she was doing so, Arthur noticed another group of vampires at the end of corridor and successfully shot three of five. Jason spotted them running forward as if they wanted to block the front. He immediately pulled the trigger and two vampires fell on the floor with a horrible loud squeal

“You’d better hurry up!” Dan raised his voice. “There is a huge horde of those creatures approaching.”

Surya took out another UV grenade.

“Go! I’ll catch up with you!”

Jason nodded, reloaded and headed straight forward along the corridor.

“The stairs are just round the corner,” Dan’s voice came though the earwig.

Jason and Arthur turned into the staircase and rushed downstairs while Surya prepared herself to face the furious creatures.

“Surya get out of there!” Dan shouted.

“Are you worried about me?”

“Yes, err... maybe, maybe not, definitely not!”

Eye looked at Dan, raising his eyebrows and slowly shook his head. Next he went on shooting through the turrets.

Tokutei and Lian who were fighting downstairs made exactly the same face as well as Jason and Arthur.

“And what’s up with you?” Eye asked confused.

“Nothing, it’s just, t-that she was left alone there. We can’t stay alone. We must fight as one.”

“You like her,” Eye commented with a smile.

Dan wanted to answer, but he saw something dangerous on one of the

screens.

“They’re in the..!” but before he was able to finish the sentence the vampires moved inside towards Surya.

She was able to see their moves without any difficulty. Having counted more than twenty enemies, she turned round and headed towards the stairs, but one of the vampires managed to grab her leg and knock her over. She released the grenade and quickly cut through the creature’s hand. The rest of the vampires jumped into the air and threw themselves at her.

Fortunately, the girl quickly crawled to the grenade and activated it. Almost immediately the device opened and spread UV lights in all directions burning every vampiric creature around.

“Are you OK?” Arthur asked running downstairs.

The girl stood up looking at her shin where a long deep cut was disappearing in the twinkling of the eye.

“I’m OK. I will join you in a second.”

She grabbed her Desert Eagles from the floor and hyper-sprinted downstairs.

21.

Meanwhile, Tokutei and Lian had a very difficult situation. The number of the enemies they were killing was smaller than the number of the ones that were coming from downstairs even though Eye and Dan were constantly using the turrets to diminish their army. Tokutei knew that fighting with his sword would be too difficult, especially having so many enemies who could move three times as fast as him. The staff was a better weapon for this situation, mainly because of the second end. He was swinging the UV Bo staff dealing mainly with vampires, while Lian focused on eliminating the soldiers. The Asian warrior noticed that more and more vampires were using traditional, cold steel weapons. He noticed two with Bo staffs rushing towards him. Before he even had a chance to finish the ones he was dealing with, the stronger vampires had already thrown themselves at him and soon he found himself on the floor. Lian reacted quickly and immediately shot them off. Next there was still one vampiric creature left with a Bo staff. Tokutei quickly sprang to his feet, making a front flip, then aiming with one tip of his weapon into the chest of the vampire, landed back on the floor. To his surprise the powerful strike was blocked only for a moment before the hot UV blade melted through the

opponent's wooden staff and burnt his body. He sighed only to be overthrown again by someone from behind. Again, Lian helped him. The hissing sounds were everywhere and the smell of burnt flesh was hovering in the air. There were more coming.

"I can't do it anymore!" he shouted, then was knocked onto the floor again.

"Too many of them!" Lian yelled dodging the vampire's strike. She made a spin and kicked off one of them, then made another spin for the second time only to kick yet another, but before she was able to finish the rotation, vampire had pushed her onto the ground and threw her gun away.

"Do something!" Surya yelled at Eye who was shooting the vampires off.

"I am doing the fastest I can!"

"They have no more UV grenades!"

Tokutei tried to push away the four vampires who were on him, but he only was able not to let them bite him, or rip his body apart. From that position there were very few ways to protect oneself. The most effective one was probably the pressure points fighting. Tokutei constantly hit the pressure points on enemies' torsos and necks. If certain points were hit from certain angle and with a certain combination, the opponent lost his consciousness. When he was safe enough to get on his feet, there were still five more to attack him from all sides.

Lian was doing the same. She was hit by another two and quickly kicked them off, but yet some more grabbed her neck and pushed her back onto the tiles. She wanted to kick them off, too, but three of the creatures immobilised her legs and tried to bite her. The number of vampires was too big. Tokutei couldn't do anything more. He was able to perform one hundred punches within seven seconds, but it was still too slow, for the fast vampires, who could block most of them.

"Tok!" he heard from the left side realising Lian was in even worse situation than him.

One of the vampires on top of her was pushed a few feet to the back by a heavy bullet. Still, not enough. Tokutei glanced at Lian and gathered all his strength. He hit the vampire on the left twice; once in the neck and once a palm thrust into the cheek. Then turned and did the same with the one on the left. He kicked two others and quickly stood up. Next he made a slash

for his Bo staff lying a few metres further, grabbed it, activated it and started to spin in circles. He was moving so fast that the white, bright light looked like a sphere. He moved towards Lian eliminating every opponent on his way. When he was right at her he finished the spin on cutting through the creatures lying on her. When she was finally freed, he reached his hand to her to help her stand up and then felt a huge pain in his back. Some other vampire had kicked him so hard that he fell onto Lian. Within a second later seven vampires threw themselves at them and crushed them. There was nothing more they could do. The hissings and sputtering sounds were all they could hear. Eye tried to kill as many as he could, but more and more were coming. Dan did the same, but because of his nervousness he had problems with accuracy.

Suddenly, thick white light filled the staircase turning the vampiric creatures into dust. Tokutei raised his head and looked at the directions of the stairs. He could see three blueprints running through the rails. The light started to dim while a hail of bullets flew from the directions of stairs towards the soldiers nesting in the corridor. He wanted to turn his head, but was too weak and tired after the attack. Seconds later he heard a voice.

“Are you hurt?”

The warrior looked up and saw Surya reaching out her hand to help him stand up. He shook his head and grabbed her hand letting himself being pulled up back on his feet. At the same time Jason helped Lian get up. They brushed the black dust off throwing away the remaining clothes and weapons, and took a quick look around.

“Clear!” Arthur shouted.

“Clear,” Dan confirmed.

“Thank God, you came in time,” Lian smiled. “I thought it was over.”

“Yeah, it was a close one,” Tokutei added.

“Take these,” Jason said handing her four more deadly grenades.

“So where is this hidden floor?” Arthur asked.

“It is right next to the first stairs behind you,” Dan replied.

The old man scratched his nose and hanged his weapon behind. Next he and the others walked up to the stairs.

“Monitor the area, Dan!” Arthur ordered taking off his backpack. Jason went up to the wall and knocked it several times, listening to the sound.

“It’s thick.”

“I wonder...” Tokutei started saying when Jason cut in.

“Weren’t you supposed to make a hole here?”

“Yeah,” he ran up to the wall, drew his sword and stabbed it into the wall forcefully, then quickly withdrew it and stabbed it a little bit higher, turned it facing the blade down and strongly pulled it down.

“Here it is,” he replied making a few steps back while everybody was staring at four-inch hole in the wall.

“That was quick,” Surya commented.

“Anyway,” the Asian man continued, “I was wondering how everyone gets inside this floor or...”

“Gets outside,” Lian finished.

“You behave like an old couple, you know,” Dan said.

“Why?” Lian asked blushing.

“You already finish each other’s sentences.”

Tokutei dropped his eyes.

Arthur broke the uncomfortable situation.

“There must be a secret passage inside the floor or a portal.”

Eye took out a sandwich from his bag and took one bite of it.

“Or a hidden button in the elevator.”

“Anyway, we don’t have time to look for it,” the old man took out the explosives and stuck it into the hole.

“Move back,” he turned around and walked down the stairs.

The others walked behind the wall at the bottom of the stairs and waited for the explosions. The bomb went off with a loud noise. The explosion blast blew away the dust from vampires as a cloud of debris followed filling the air. Pieces of metal and wall landed everywhere making even more mess. When the dust slowly dropped onto the floor, Surya and Jason stood up and went upstairs. They saw an enormous hole which ripped the wall and the nearby windows apart. The rest of the team slowly followed them.

“It worked,” Lian said looking at the hole in amazement.

“Tokutei accelerated, took out his katana sword and ran inside.

“Tok, wait!” Jason exclaimed running after him.

When everyone has entered, they found themselves in the middle of a wide corridor. There were no doors on any side, and it seemed to be going across the whole building. Everything was painted white and the ceiling had halogen lamps every few feet.

Tokutei went first, making a step over the remains of the wall and looked around. He spotted two gates on each end of the corridor. Making another step, he slowly scanned the whole hall as the others went inside. Dan was looking at the screens in disbelief.

“No, no, no, that’s impossible.”

“What is it Dan?” Surya asked.

“I can’t see you on the screen. Only your personal feeds.”

Eye was checking the floor with the turrets. He rapidly moved the barrels to the left, then to the right and said annoyingly.

“Neither can I.”

“The walls must be filled with something, probably lead” the old man said.

“We’ll use only your personal cameras,” the boy suggested clicking something on the screen.

Lian looked left and right at the empty corridor.

“So, where now?”

“I don’t know,” the old man shook his head.

“We should go to either of these gates,” Tokutei suggested.

“Really?” Lian commented ironically.

“Don’t even start, we’ve just almost died.”

“Don’t argue now,” O.D. interrupted. Which gate?”

“Let’s check the left one.”

“OK,” came the answers as they all moved towards the left gate.

22.

They were slowly walking along an empty, ten-foot wide corridor. Lian squinted her eyes looking right, then left, then at the ceiling and back at the hole they came from. Next she boomed,

“Don’t you guys think it’s too quiet?”

Jason looked back.

“It’s definitely too quiet.”

Having said that, he heard a loud thud behind him. They immediately turned around and saw a thick metal barrier fall from the ceiling blocking the right side of the corridor.

“What the...” he said in confusion when a similar metal wall blocked the way on the other side.

They got trapped in the area, thirty-feet long between two, thick walls.

“Not good, guys, not good,” Dan commented shaking his head, but he couldn’t do anything.

Tokutei came towards the wall and tried to push it.

“It’s no use,” Surya crouched sticking her fingers underneath it. “They’re too heavy. If I can’t raise them, then none of us can.”

Lian leaned against the wall, crossing her arms and asked.

“So what now?”

“You can always blow some other wall,” Eye suggested.

“Wait,” Surya straightened her arm pointing with her index finger up.

“What is it?” Arthur asked.

“Hush, can you hear it?”

Tokutei focused his ears on the strange sound coming from behind the barrier.

“I think the gate is being opened,” Jason said.

“So why the heck did anyone close it first, huh?” Lian asked with anger.

Suddenly, several howls followed by heavy steps came from behind the wall.

Everyone was listening in wonder.

“What is going on there?” Lian asked.

Jason walked towards Arthur.

“I think we should blow the side wall and get the hell out of this corridor. Can you give me the explosives A?”

Arthur was confused by the whole situations. His team was locked in the corridor on an invisible floor. He took the backpack off, took out the explosives and handed it to Jason.

The stamping feet stopped. There was only the sound of heavy, deep breathing coming from each side of the walls. Jason grabbed the explosives and headed towards the side wall.

“Tokutei, could you,” he beckoned at the wall.

“No problem.”

“But could you please make the hole near this metal thing,” Lian suggested. “We don’t wanna be blown up, too, you know.”

The Asian warrior headed towards the wall and stabbed it with his sword making a similar hole to the previous one. After that Jason carefully put the explosives into the hole, while the others moved towards the front barrier.

Jason joined them seconds later and crouched waiting for the explosion. Suddenly, the barrier next to them started to move up squeaking loudly. Tokutei laid down on the floor and tried to peep under it to see what or who was behind it.

“Tokutei!” Lian whispered. “What the heck are you doing!” The two walls were rising and as they were slowly disappearing inside the ceiling, they began to reveal what was behind them. Tokutei quickly jumped back on his feet.

“No good, no good,” he said taking out his sword and standing in the defensive stance.

Everyone looked there and saw a huge crowd of orts standing across the corridor. The sticky saliva was dripping off their jaws and their hungry, scary eyes were gazing at the team.

“They’re on both sides!” Jason shouted, switching into sharp ammo.

Suddenly, the bomb they had just installed went off, blowing the dust and dirt into the corridor.

“They’re coming!” Dan shouted spotting several orts emerging from the brown cloud.

Eye was glimpsing from Dan to the screens, regretting not being able to do anything to help them while his colleague was focused on trying to see what was going on up there.

Jason and Lian started shooting into both ends of the corridor, slowly wounding, then killing the monsters. Arthur and Surya quickly joined them while Tokutei focused on the ones who came too close. Orts moved very fast making grunting noises that sometimes were so loud that they made the walls tremble. One of them was running along the wall towards the team, when, suddenly one of the bullets hit its shoulder. It quickly jumped onto the opposite wall, avoiding a series of shots. Tokutei noticed that it was coming dangerously too close. He immediately rushed towards the monster and prepared himself to strike a blow. However, he didn’t know if his Katana was still sharp enough to cut the ort’s skin. Yet, he remembered what Dan had told him the other day. He said that the sword had been sharpened with laser making it able to cut through anything and the material it was made of does not go blunt. He tightened the grip and diagonally cut left through the ort’s arm. The monster shrieked making the wall shake again and rapidly jumped onto the second wall, where Jason and

Lian were standing. It was moving so fast dodging the bullets, that nobody could hit it again. Tokutei followed it, caught up with the monster, and horizontally cut through its spine finishing it off.

“Get down!” Lian shouted turning towards him.

Tokutei realised that one more monster was right behind him. He immediately crouched as Lian shot a series at the rushing ort. While crouching, Tokutei raised his sword, so that the zooming monster slipped on its blade with its stomach. However, neither the bullets nor the blade succeeded to stop it. Lian had no time to do dive out of the way and the massive monster’s body knocked her into the wall. Surya noticed it and immediately appeared next to the body pulling it from Lian with her inhuman strength. Tokutei didn’t waste his time either. He ran up to his Asian friend and pat her on the shoulder.

“Lian!” he shouted seeing her unconscious, “Lian!”

He took a glance at Surya and gave her a look saying, help the others. The dhampiric girl got back to Arthur and continued fighting the orts, while Tokutei grabbed Lian’s head, hit her gently on the neck with his open palm and moved his fingers along her spine. It was a revival technique used to wake someone from the knockout state. The girl quickly regained consciousness.

“Are you OK?”

Dan was looking at her vital signs on the screen.

“The computer shows nothing apart from a few bruises.”

The Asian warrior helped her stand up, then left her and ran towards the next ort. Another three monsters broke through the bullets, as Arthur and Jason had to reload. Surya immediately rushed towards the first one shooting it twice in the head, then jumped and stabbed her dagger into the heart of the next one. After that, she made a spin and kicked the third one, then spun one more time cutting off its arms with one blow. Finally, she vertically cut down through the monster’s skull splashing the creature’s blood onto her uniform.

“You’re running out of bullets, Jason!” Dan shouted.

Jason gazed at the ammo counter that was gradually decreasing from 10.

“Really?” he murmured ironically.

Arthur was shooting a few bullets to the left, then another few to the right realising that the ammo was ending. He took a glimpse at the fresh cave in the wall.

“To the hole!”

Jason was the nearest. He stood right next to it and watched his teammates enter inside. Lian went first, followed by Arthur. Next Tokutei and Surya and finally Jason. The orts were too big to get through the hole, and the wall was too thick for them to break it. The team found themselves in a dark, spacious room. The walls were full of large paintings and there was no carpet on the floor. There were no windows and no furniture except one desk with a large armchair in the middle. It seemed as if the room went across the whole structure along with the corridor. Jason took a glimpse back and saw that ort couldn't fit into the hole.

“They're too weak to break the wall,” Arthur said catching his breath and reloading his gun.

“We can help them,” some voice said from the opposite corner of the room.

Everyone looked there raising their weapons. They saw ten human shapes emerging from the shadows. They looked normal, no vampiric marks or superhuman bonuses. All of them were wearing suits and none of them seemed to be dangerous enough.

“Who are they?” Surya whispered to the microphone.

Dan was carefully observing the camera view.

“Their body temperature is normal, they are probably humans.”

The leading man stopped a few metres ahead. Nobody lowered their guns. They were waiting for the strange people to make a move or just say anything. Suddenly, a very heavy feminine voice came from the right corner.

“I know why you're here, and I can assure you, that I am willing to give it to you provided you...”

“We do what?” Arthur asked anxiously baffled at the same time.

Tokutei leaned over to Lian, “There is a woman sitting,”

She gave him a cold look and whispered.

“I know, we have night vision in our microcomputers.”

“You fight for it,” the voice continued.

It was so low and scary that the team could feel vibrations running across the floor every time it sounded.

“Isn't that what we've been doing all this time?” Jason yelled.

“That is correct, Jason,” the thick voice filled the room again.

“However, you haven't tried my ten princes yet.”

Dan and Eye were gazing at the screens listening to the whole situation when the boy realised who they really were.

“Demons! They’re demons.”

“I am willing to give you my part of the Seal provided you beat these fellows over here.”

Surya made a step forward.

“Why do you wanna be so generous? You have the Seal to make sure, Cizin has his end of the world in three days, so why, huh?”

“The answer is very simple, Surya. I am sick of his plan, I like what I do here, I like who I am here. And when the world ends, Hell will rise, and humans will no longer be here.”

Having heard that, Arthur and everyone realised what the end of the world would look like.

“So, what is your interest in it?”

“Oh Tokutei, Tokutei,” she stood up from the armchair, but the shadow was still covering her completely. “Humans fear us. Imagine, when there will be no more humans, who would be afraid of me?”

Surya gave a quick glance at everyone trying to read their emotions. The demon continued.

“Oh, I see you’re interested in what the end will look like. Well, why not. I’ll tell you. First, every single human that died will come back to life, then other species will raise and take over the planet, then finally the demons.”

A frown of disapproval appeared on Dan’s forehead. He rolled his eyes and said.

“I think, she’s bluffing. Use holly water bullets and kill them now.”

“So what will it be?” one of the princes asked.

The old man glanced over his shoulder at his teammates. Tokutei and Lian willingly nodded their heads.

“Kill them, now, don’t risk!” Dan kept repeating.

“Alright, Shax. Let’s do this,” Arthur confirmed.

“What? No!” Dan exclaimed.

“Play with them,” the demon said indifferently making the walls and the floor vibrate again.

Having given the order, she made a step backward completely disappearing in the dark corner. The ten humanlike creatures threw themselves at the five ASAT members. Lian and Surya who had prepared the deadly ammo

shot immediately taking down two demons. Before they had any chance to press the trigger again, one of the demons had ripped off all of the weapons and threw them away.

Dan shook his head.

“I told you to do it earlier, but you wouldn’t listen to me.”

“Not now, Dan,” Surya replied preparing for the attack.

She immediately ejected her two daggers and patiently waited for both demons running at her, while Tokutei made a dash towards his blue-blade Katana sword, simultaneously avoiding the claws of the upcoming creature. He noticed that one of the hellish princes was holding an épée. He grabbed his sword and after that ran towards the very one opponent with the épée shouting,

“That one is mine!”

He was the only one wearing a coat, not a suit, and this was the same demon that attacked Nevada desert a day before. Lian had two nunchucks hidden behind her belt. She took them out and gave Tokutei a worrying look.

“No one ever bit an épée with a samurai sword. It’s impossible.”

Arthur who made a few steps back, took out two metal escrimas that he had been holding behind his back and prepared for the attack of other two princes.

Dan and Eye were watching the whole situation regretting not being able to help.

“So what that it’s impossible? Let him believe in himself,” the boy murmured gaping at the screens.

Jason had no weapon. One of the demons knocked him over only to sit on him, then looked him right into his eyes.

“No fear, that’s interesting,” he whispered with a hissing voice.

Jason immediately rolled onto him and started hitting his face with his fists, while Surya was protecting herself from two opponents carrying Bo staffs. She tried to cut through their weapons to have an open way to their bodies, but even though she was moving with vampiric speed, the demons didn’t let her strike a blow. They constantly attacked her. The girl had to block four tips of Bo staffs even ten times a second, and every block made her step backward. Two demons that were attacking Lian simultaneously threw a spin kick. One of them aimed at the head, while the second one at the legs. The girl jumped over the speeding low leg and tried to block the

second one, but the blow was too strong and pushed her away towards Tokutei. The Asian warrior, so far, didn't let himself get cut, but he didn't hit the opponent, as well. The red-eye demon straightened his hand blocking the zooming tip of the Katana, and immediately flew towards Tokutei's chest. The warrior barely managed to move out of its way and stroke the next blow cutting diagonally. However the demon moved back his sword with inhuman speed and blocked it in such a way that the sharp blade didn't even touch his weapon. At the same time, Tokutei threw a round kick at him, but the demon blocked his leg and pushed him away. Arthur, who was fighting two opponents at a time, attacked them swinging his escrimas from left to right. When he hit one of them and heard a loud shriek. He knew that all he had to do was to get rid of them with his metal weapons.

"Iron!" the demon shouted throwing himself at the old man, then knocked him onto the ground, making him release his weapons. After that a series of strong punches came at Arthur's face. Surya noticed it, she quickly side kicked the demon making him fall onto his teammate. Next she made two steps and cut through the demon. She saw that Arthur was barely conscious, but had enough strength to stand up, pick up his escrimas, and continue fighting. In the meantime, one of the hellish creatures grabbed Jason from behind and started to choke him. Jason rapidly took out a pistol from the holster on his leg and switched the bullets into holy water ones, then aimed and shot at the demonic prince behind him. The opponent immediately released the grip and fell on his knees. Tokutei was still fighting with the fencer. The fight was really aggressive and fast.

"Huh, and they call you the best?" the fencer asked with a gentle smirk.

"I never said that," he replied blocking another series of stabs. The demon was advancing on him not letting be touched by neither his katana, nor his legs or punches. Tokutei was moving back constantly blocking the attacks until the wall blocked his way out. After that the demon extended his hand, blocking the sword and hit Tokutei into the shoulder. Dan noticed the damage on the screen and slowly shook his head. He was slowly losing his hope. As the prince was about to strike the final blow, Lian joined in, knocking him onto the ground. Then helped Tokutei on his feet.

"I'm OK, help the others," he said rushing at the demonic prince.

Meanwhile, Surya and Jason were fighting together against three demons. The girl started to spin quickly whirling the daggers around while Jason picked the pistol up and took a shot. As soon as the demon got hit, it started to tremble, then fell onto the ground. The other two were distracted, so it was a perfect moment for Surya to cut through them, and she did so. There were only four demons left. The demon fighting Arthur, made him let go of his escrimas and grabbed the old man from behind. Arthur immediately stamped on his feet simultaneously hitting him with the elbow into the ribs, then grabbed the demon's hand and turned around. The monster reacted quickly and pushed Arthur onto the ground, threw himself at him and placed his hand onto Arthur's neck. The old man started to choke, but he quickly put his hand into the demon's mouth and pressed his jaw. The demon immediately released the grip and rolled on his back, as his body started to tremble. A few seconds later, when it stopped, Arthur put his fingers into his jaw again and took out a small round object from it. It was the ring he always wore, the iron ring that saved his life.

At the same time Tokutei was fighting accurately, being focused on his every move. He crouched and made a spin with a cut, then jumped and made another spin, and crouched again. Every time the demon dodged his attacks. After a series of fast spins, kicks and cuts, he raised his sword as he was about to cut from above. But, as he was moving the blade down, he immediately ducked and directed his sword diagonally to the left. The demon wasn't able to move his sabre quickly enough to block and exposed himself for the final blow. The sharp blue blade went through the body cutting it into two.

"Enough!" Shax shouted.

The vibration of her voice made the wall crack in several places. It was so scary that even three remaining princes stood still. Everyone looked at the direction of the voice. The demon slowly emerged from the shadow. It was a large, 7-foot high figure. Her head didn't have any skin and her eyes were pure white. There were two massive horns sticking out from her forehead. She was wearing a long red coat with a large hood. It was the first time Dan and Eye saw her.

"What happened to the blonde hottie?" the boy asked.

"I can watch this no more," she said swinging his hand.

As soon as she did it, some magical force pushed everyone towards the wall about three feet above the ground.

Dan and Eye were watching it with terror in their eyes.

“We have to do something,” Eye yelled, but there was nothing they could do.

Lian tried to push herself off the wall, but the force holding her and her teammates was too strong.

“You said you would give us the Seal!” she stuttered.

“Hah hah, and you believed that?”

“You said, you didn’t want the world to end, because there would be nobody to fear you.”

“You stupid human, you don’t understand anything. When the world ends and Hell rises, everyone will fear me, ghosts, vampires, orcs, werewolves. Every single species on this God-forsaken planet! And Hell will do anything they can to get what they want. Earth is only the beginning.”

Jason turned his head left and looked at Arthur desperately trying to catch his breath.

“Is this...?” he whispered.

The old man’s face looked very sad and miserable as he slightly nodded his head.

“I can no longer watch you kill my princes.” Shax continued.

“You’re good, you’re damn good. I must admit, you’re the only humans who reached us so far. The other Seal-seekers didn’t even get to the third piece. You know what I will do? I will personally take each and every one of you to Hell to rot in torture chambers.”

One of the Princes grabbed Lian’s Masada and started to watch it carefully.

“Mistress, their weapons have been designed not only to deal with us.”

“What do you mean?” another prince asked walking to him.

“Look, they have installed different types of ammo. There are bullets with holy water, explosives, silver, regular and salty.”

Shax half-closed her eyes, then boomed,

“Keep them. They will come useful.”

“So what now?” Tokutei asked trying to reach one of the shurikens in his belt.

“Now? Before I send you to Hell, I will take the remaining pieces of the Seal from you. Since the seal cannot be destroyed, we will break it into more than five pieces and send it all around this universe and the

others.”

“The Seal is concealed, you will never get it!” Arthur yelled.

“If you want to keep your and your friends’ precious life, you will give us the Seal back.”

Surya glanced at everyone. She could see her teammates helpless, but still willing to fight till the end.

“I am ready to die.”

“Me too,” Jason added.

“And me,”

“And me,” the rest of the team said.

23.

Dan was doing something on the computer, while Eye was cleaning some object in the back of the truck. It was a rectangular device about three yards long. It seemed to be made of metal.

“Do you think it’s gonna work?” Eye asked.

“If it doesn’t then we’re dead.”

He found something and displayed it on one of the screens.

“Just hold for a few more seconds,” he announced through the microphone.

Shax was slowly walking from left to right, while her demons were collecting the weapons.

“You know what Arthur?”

The old man raised his weak head and gave her a cold look.

“I will let you choose, who can die first and enter the gates of hell.”

Everyone looked at Arthur, realising the difficult decision he had to make.

“Nobody has to die... for now...unless you give me the Seal.”

Arthur glanced at his teammates. He could see disappointment and sadness in their eyes.

“Did you know that you are not the only humans who tried to bring the Seal back together?”

“Laima told us,” Tokutei replied.

“Ah Laima, that stupid witch. She found that piece by chance. “

Everyone looked at her surprised.

“Why that astonished look, huh? Don’t tell me you didn’t know the history of the Seal.”

“I know what I have to know. Cizin gave each piece of the Seal to

different creature.”

“Wrong, Arthur. He gave each piece to five most powerful demons; three sons and two daughters. Only Paymon and I were the original Seal holders. Reiz, Laima and that Draugr thing either stole it from them or found the Seal by chance.”

Arthur and the rest of the team were gazing in disbelief. So much new information they heard; Shax being the daughter of Cizin, the history of the Seal, the end of the world, other universes.

In the meantime Dan went outside and looked at the skyscraper. Eye went after him with the strange device and helped him put it onto his friend’s back.

“On my mark OK?” the boy said, still listening to what was going on up there.

“So who’s that gonna be?” the thick voice shook the walls again. “Could that be Jason, who let his own people die to rescue his own ass?” Having heard that, Eye’s eyes grew wide remembering the whole situation from the Sydney.

“It was a mistake that made me who I am now!” Jason shouted knowing that she was talking about ‘SPSU last mission, about the night he got recruited to ASAT.

Eye knew Jason did the right thing then and he held no regret.

The demon smirked and went up to Lian. As she stood in front of her, the she looked Lian into her eyes and read her mind.

“Maybe Arthur you want Lian to die first? But what would Tokutei say about that?”

Shax made another step to the right facing Tokutei.

He slowly raised his head and took a glimpse at Lian, then back at the bald demon’s head.

“Your feelings for Lian will make you do anything to stop me. I can see it. Oh what thoughts you have in your head. You want to take your sword and cut me. Well you won’t.”

Everyone looked at Lian and Tokutei in amazement and confusion. Tokutei gave Lian this strange look she has never seen on him before.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled.

Lian dropped her eyes but before she could say anything the Demon was standing before Surya.

Meanwhile, Dan was in front of the truck wearing the strange device on his

back.

“Are you ready Dan?” Eye asked putting his palm over the ENTER button on the keyboard.

“I’m ready.”

“Everyone, prepare for the blow,” Eye announced in the open mike. “Dan, waiting for the ready signal.”

“Or maybe, Arthur,” the demon continued, “You will choose Surya, who as a teenage girl pretended to be a human only to be close to Dan.”

As soon as he heard that, Dan’s jaw dropped as his eyes grew wide. Paralysed with shock, his head immediately filled with memories from the past, with the memories of his and Natalie’s mutual past. His thoughts were suddenly stopped as a loud swish sounded right next to his ear. Eye had pressed the key which launched the rackets from the roof of the truck. Three of them flew one by one towards the hidden storey. The first rocket, which was tipped with a sharp spike penetrated into the wall, went through it and exploded right at the end of the thick metal barrier which was separating the hidden storey from the rest of the building. Then the second one easily flew through the fire cloud and hit the second wall that was separating the long corridor from the room where the ASATs and the demons were. The third one went after it and exploded in the corridor enlarging the two holes. The dust and debris spread throughout the corridor and the room, filling the air and making everything invisible. Several orts’ bodies fell down from the huge hole in the building and smashed against the street. Dan quickly pressed the red button on the mysterious device he was wearing and seconds later he was flying right into the freshly-made hole. Everything happened so quickly that everyone inside didn’t have any time to do anything. The princes were trying to spot something in the cloud of debris filling the room. Then they saw a dot that was gradually changing into a blueprint of a man. Split a second later Dan magically flew inside with two Desert Eagles in his hands. He started to fire at Shax. One of the bullets hit her arm pushing her to the back. No sooner had Dan fired the next series, than one of the princes knocked him down. Shax came round fast, and swung her arm making Dan hit the wall right next to Surya. His head started to bleed and his eyes closed as he lost consciousness.

“Ha, ha, ha,” the demon laughed. “You almost got me. Yeah, that

was pretty good. I might say, almost perfect.”

Surya looked at Dan with sad eyes filled with tears. But he couldn't even raise his head.

“Where was I?” the demon asked ironically as he approached Dan.

“Ah yes, Arthur was supposed to choose who will die first. Unless, of course, you'll give me the Seal back.”

Dan slightly opened his eyes. Everything got to him as he took a glance over the room.

“Maybe Arthur I should kill Daniel now? Just look at him, he is barely alive.”

The demon stopped right in front of Dan and looked him into his eyes, then looked at Surya, who was staring angrily at her, trying to beat the mysterious force holding her at the wall.

“But, then Surya would be... a little bit upset.”

She went up to the girl and smirked.

“You see, Surya, Dan who hates vampires so much, who swore to kill each and every one of them, has feelings for one of his enemies... for you.”

Surya's eyes met Dan's. She could see confusion and awkwardness inside of them. He realised that this is the last time he sees her, and didn't want to leave it like this. He wanted to express his feelings, but the situation was not appropriate. He couldn't put his feelings first.

Shax walked back to Arthur.

“So you see Arthur, Will you let me break the love between Surya and Dan or Lian and Tokutei? Unless you want me to kill your favourite teammate; Jason. Of course you can stop it. All you have to do, is give me the Seal back, and I will let you live...longer.”

Arthur glimpsed at each and every one of his team members, then back at the demon.

“So who is this gonna be, huh?”

“Me,” the old man said firmly.

The demon raised one of her eyebrows expressing some slight amazement. At the same time, Dan whispered.

“Do it.”

“Guys I won't let you die out there,” Eye said aiming with the rifle at the hole in the wall.

He had Shax in sight, but the shot could kill Arthur who was in the same

line.

“You have to keep there a few more seconds. I don’t have a clear shot.”

“Do it,” Arthur murmured.

Eye remembered the whole situation from the other day. He was on the tanker waiting for a clear shot while the terrorist was holding a hostage as a shield. He felt desperate and his finger on the trigger started to shake.

“I don’t have a clear shot.”

The demon raised her hand and opened his palm.

“This is your last chance to give me the Seal.”

“How can I give it to you, when I don’t have it here?”

“I have enough of you!” she yelled as the floor began to vibrate and the walls started to shake. “When Hell rises I’ll make sure that every single demon will do everything to retrieve the Seal back.”

The previous fractures lengthened and the new ones appeared on the floor and the walls. Lots of red and yellow sparkles started to trickle from the Shax’s hand. Arthur glances at everyone as if he was saying goodbye. He was ready to die, but he felt really disappointed that this was going to end this way. The demon swung her arm towards Arthur. The old man closed his eyes tightly waiting for the painful death. Next he felt pain in his legs and then in his back and head. When he opened his eyes again he noticed that he was no longer hovering at the wall, but lying on the floor. He saw Shax falling on her knees before him. It was not until he saw a large hole in the demon’s neck when he realised that Eye had made the shot. The bullet had gone through the demon’s neck weakening her to such a degree that the magical force let go and everyone was released. However, Arthur was still baffled and didn’t understand what was going on. On his left, Tokutei made a dash at his sword, while Lian and Jason picked their weapons. Dan was more confused than anyone inside, and he neither went for the weapons nor he did anything to deal with the situation. He saw Surya throwing herself at Shax with her dhampiric speed and kicking her hard on the hand. At the same time Tokutei picked his sword up and rushed to the demon. He noticed that one of the demonic princes was about to shoot from Jason’s HK MP5. Jason and Lian grabbed their assault rifles. The blackman started to shoot at the prince, while Lian rushed towards the demon, who had just pushed Surya off. Hardly had she fallen on the ground when Tokutei passed her and cut off the demon’s right hand.

Jason killed one of the princes. The second one was on the other side of the room and was on the point of shooting Surya, who was about to cut off the Shax's head. Jason wanted to stop the demonic prince, he began shooting at his directions, but the demon was quicker. He had pressed the trigger and a series of shots flew towards Surya. Then, Jason's shots got him. Surya could hear them getting closer and closer. When she turned around to let the bullets pierce her, she noticed Dan right in front of her covering her with his own body. Her eyes grew wide, as she realised what was going to happen and what a terrible mistake he had made. She tried to use her dhampiric speed to push him away, but it was too late. Three bullets hit the floor and the wall behind, but another three went straight into Dan's body. The dhampiric girl grabbed Dan tightly and gently placed him onto the floor. She didn't care if the demon that had made the shots was dead or whether Shax still endangered her teammates. All she cared about at that moment was Dan. She quickly tore his shirt and checked the wounds.

The demonic prince had fallen dead. At the same time Jason and Lian fired several series at Shax not only immobilising her, but also severely wounding her.

"How is he?" Arthur shouted to Surya.

"Not good!" she said sadly trying to pull the bullet out of his stomach.

"His heartbeat is dropping!" Eye announced. "And his liver is failing"

Tokutei crouched at the Shax's body, grabbed her palm and took off the ring. Arthur was waiting right next to him. He took it, then gently separated the part of the seal from the rest of the ring. It took him only a few seconds, and when he was done, he placed it onto his palm staring at it in amazement.

"At last," he whispered joyfully closing his fist. However, this state of mind was quickly disturbed by Eye.

"His heartbeat is getting dangerously low!"

Having heard that, he took a glimpse at the rest of the team gathering around Dan. He walked slowly there and tried to peep over Lian's shoulder at Dan. He could see him barely conscious, lying in a puddle of his own blood that was getting bigger and bigger every second.

Surya couldn't feel his heartbeat anymore. She slowly raised her white eyes at everyone and said through her tears.

“He’s gone.”

An awkward silence filled the room. Eye was checking everyone’s vital signs when he heard Arthur in his earwig.

“Is he really gone, Eye?”

The heartbeat rate was showing 0, and the computer image of Dan’s body was showing numerous wounds as well as a few internal bleedings.

“I’m sorry, man,” he replied shaking his head.

Surya slowly stood up wiping the tears running down her smooth cheeks.

The rest of the team didn’t know how to react. Lian went up to her and embraced her gently.

Arthur took off a charm from his necklace, opened it and put the last piece inside.

“We can’t stay here for too long,” he said going up to the table and sit down on the nearby chair.

“Is it over?” Tokutei asked.

Arthur glimpse at Dan’s body.

“It almost is.”

“So now we can stop the end of the world?” Jason asked.

Out of the sudden, they heard laughter behind them. They turned around and saw Shax lying paralysed laughing with her scary low voice choking with her own blood from time to time.

“She’s not dead yet?” Lian asked raising her gun.

“So what that you have the Seal,” the demon spoke. “You need the signet ring, too.”

“The ring?” Tokutei asked curiously.

Arthur grasped his gun and answered with a gentle smile.

“The signet ring is well-protected.”

Shax spit blood onto the floor and grinned with satisfaction.

“In the Area 51, buried under a huge hexagram, right?”

On hearing that Arthur froze. He didn’t presume that Shax could have such information.

“The ring that looks just like this one,” she continued sticking out her tongue on which, there was a small, round metal thing.

“H-How did...” the old man stuttered running for the ring.

“I’ll make sure that the Seal will get back to its owner. Farewell, Arthur.”

Suddenly, two red, small circular holes appeared in opposite corners of the

room and three shadows zoomed really fast from one corner to the other. Then, the holes and the shadows disappeared. Everyone looked around confused. No one knew what was going on.

“What was that?” Tokutei asked.

“I don’t know,” Jason replied.

Lian looked at the floor and boomed.

“Look!”

ASATs directed their eyes at the place where Lian was pointing.

“Where is Dan’s body?” Surya asked in shock.

Arthur frowned and said.

“All of the bodies disappeared.”

The room was empty, and there was no one inside apart from them.

“Guys,” Eye interrupted. “You’re not gonna believe it.”

“What?” Surya enquired still feeling tears pouring out of her eyes.

“Dan’s localizer shows that he is moving with the supersonic speed.”

“How?”

“Where?” came the questions.

“Thirty kilometres underground,” Eye replied in disbelief.

Lian dropped her jaw as she felt a chill running down her spine.

“I don’t believe it. They’re taking him to Hell.”

“What about the Seal?” Surya asked. “We have all the parts. We should be able to finish it now.”

Arthur turned around towards the group.

“No. Without the ring, the Seal does not work.”

“So what are we gonna do now?” Tokutei asked placing his sword back to saya on his belt.

Arthur glanced at each person, took a deep breath and sighed.

“We’re going to Hell.”

Book 2- The End of The World

Part 1

The team returns to Maldito castle where they have to prepare for the judgment day. They're joined with the second ASAT team and are divided into two separate units. One goes to Hell for Dan and the ring, while the second one has to protect the Seal in the castle.

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Any questions? Contact Michael Keyth at mk@asatthebook.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Keyth was born In Poland In 1984. He was raised only by his mother and having only one parent made his childhood different from a typical one. After graduating high school, he studied English language in Polish city of Legnica and made a Master's degree in English language .

Since 2006 he has been working as an English teacher in the very high school he graduated from. He has never stayed in a native English country for longer than two days, but even though he decided to write in English. Being Polish and not being influenced by books but movies and TV series makes his work different from American and British literature. His series of novels- A.S.A.T. , Anti-Supernatural Assault Team- is an action, horror, adventure project directed mainly to young adults, but it has also become popular among older and younger generation.