



Shattered Reality, 007

Anger. Frustration. Violence.

All the key ingredients that made up the recipe known as James Evans. He wasn't the smoothest of drinks. James was more of a Molotov cocktail.

Explosive.

Deadly.

Arriving at his home, James bolted from his vehicle, up the front steps, and through the front door. Slamming the door shut behind him, his wild eyes scanned the hallways. The kitchen. The bathrooms and bedrooms. Even the basement.

Nobody was home.

His wife and children, gone.

It was perfect. Just what James needed so he could cave to his anger. His frustration. So he could give into the violence slithering through his veins, icing and boiling his blood simultaneously, in what seemed to be a repetitive motion. It moved forward and backward, like a snake crushing its prey, moving its body every which way needed to keep its victim at bay.

The violence was the snake.

James was the victim.

The prey.

James returned to the basement with a stand alone mirror from the master bedroom. Once in the basement, he placed the mirror against the wall, and removed the black long sleeved shirt he'd been wearing. Dropping to his knees, James stared at his reflection.

The man in the mirror.

And the number one contender to the SCW World Championship noticed the look in his eyes, as it matched the very expression on his face.

It was a look of disgust.

James spit at his reflection, the remnants of the powder Amy had thrown at her during the opening moments of their New Orleans street fight lingered, clinging to his taste buds.

"Amy has always been a formidable opponent."

Those were his words, not the words belonging to any of the voices in his head. “But even in victory...even in slaughtering her metaphorically speaking,” he sighed, shaking his head, “I’ve been left feeling empty.”

James’ focus zeroed in on the center of his forehead. He wasn’t admiring it for the clean skin or anything of the sort. He was looking at the impression left from the kendo stick Amy used to lay waste to him, cracking him over and over again, swinging away to garner the win for herself.

He made a fist. “Empty,” James repeated. “Empty.”

And then, he struck himself. Fist to forehead. His knuckle cracked. Bone to penetrating skin, touching bone with one solid strike.

Letting the pain run its course, the slight sting blending in with his rage, James exhaled. “Even with his cash in, even with the destruction that was to be presented in New Orleans, the SCW placed all their focus on Xander, Selena, Lexy, and even Syren.”

His eyebrows furrowed, his focus returning to the center of his forehead. Exhale. Another strike, and the sting was familiar but a bit more constant.

“They don’t take you seriously,” James said, grinding his teeth. “No matter the amount of power bombs you hit Amy with, no matter the elevation you leapt from, the camera crews were more concerned with Lexy.”

The pain continued to linger like the powder, “They were more concerned with the developing love story between Xander and Selena.” James couldn’t help but chuckle at that notion. Oh, how he hated them both. That hatred ran through his body, attacking his muscles, as James made another fist and struck himself in the same spot for a third time.

There was more force behind it.

“And why don’t they take you seriously, James?”

His eyes honed in on his reflection, as James leaned closer to the mirror, never breaking his gaze.

“Because they already believe you’re going to fail.”

Failure? Against Cid Turner? For the SCW World Championship?

Surely not.

“But it is so.”

He shook his head.

“But why?” James blinked, knowing the answer before it rolled off his tongue. “Because failure is already in your head as well. Isn’t it?” Another strike followed. Bone to bone. The knuckle cracked along with the skin.

Blood formed slowly along the edges of the small gash.

“It’s even part of your little story, isn’t it?”

I checked the clip in the gun. Everything was in its right place, but I couldn’t help but wonder if I was.

I agreed to do these jobs, committing to this line of work, this darker shade of violence, out of sheer necessity.

Possible desperation.

But I was here, sitting in the car, letting the shadows dance around and cloak us.

Us being myself and my partner, Waylon Creek.

We'd served together, finding ourselves taking out the trash, working for a man named William Heaven. Our mission as hired guns was to bring forth the fall of many men. Men who'd been deemed the ultimate evil.

We'd been sent to sort things out and right wrongs done unto those who couldn't defend themselves.

We were the balancing act between the light and the darkness.

Together, Waylon and I had shaken the terrorist group known as the Phantom Troupe to its very foundation. They labeled us the Shinigami.

The Japanese word for 'death gods'.

We were to continue that work, but we were no longer working for Heaven. Hired by your typical mysterious benefactor named Alex Debourias. A Canadian businessman, known in his line of work as a real heartbreaker.

His second in command, Dean Black, found us. Said Alex liked our work. Said he found it to be the definition of supreme. The offer was more money than we'd ever seen before, and would likely never see again.

The word we used was 'yes' and then, we received our targets.

They weren't necessarily evil, but they were in the way of what Alex wanted for his business. Power.

Greatness.

Our first target was some drug riddled imbecile named Giovanni Aries.

Parked outside his residence, which was a RV nestled in a gypsy trailer park, it didn't take a scientist to fight out Aries was alone.

He had no friends, other than increased delusions. He reminded me of those lunatic preachers I'd see standing in the middle of abandoned parking lots, waving the Good Book in the middle of the air while spewing garbled sentences of nonsensical rhetoric.

According to Aries, humanity was engaged in a war against lizards.

I checked my watch. It was time to move, and move we did, sticking to the shadows as we'd been trained, bobbing and weaving in and out of the dark, along with the other empty RVs, before we reached his.

Waylon and I made sure our guns were ready once again before giving another a nod. Waylon was the first one in and I followed.

Aries swung at him violently, with a cane. It caught Waylon in the ribs and I fired off a silenced shot, striking my target in the abdomen. He flew back, landing on a leather chair, already soaking with his blood.

"Good shot," he coughed up pink bile, letting it splatter near our feet as Waylon gathered his bearings. "Who sent you?"

I looked at Waylon before Aries spoke again. "I'm not going to live. At least show some respect. Was it them? The Lizard people?"

I shook my head. "No," I said before mentioning Alex by name. Aries was going to die. What difference did it make?

He laughed. "Of course."

"What's so funny about that?" I asked.

"You don't know what you've gotten yourself into, I'm afraid. And it's too late."

"Too late for what, huh?" I asked. "Too late for what?"

"You'll see."

"Fuck this," Waylon said before taking aim and pulling the trigger. Whatever was left of Aries' mind ended up painting the kitchen walls.

Stage one of our task was complete.

James' eyes rolled in the back of his head, as the last strike nearly knocked him unconscious.

Giving himself a moment to catch his breath, letting the pain echo from his head all the way down, James cursed himself.

"Why are you punishing yourself? Did Amy not do a good job? Despite her little speech after the match, she almost snuck one by you. She could've submitted you once again. She could've hit the BlackOut and pinned you," the words flowed until James physically bit down on his tongue. More pain coursed through him, but it silenced the questions.

But not for too long.

"Why are you punishing yourself?" It was his voice of reason.

Abel.

And James had never been happier to see him.

"The stories," James sighed. "The conversations with Patel. This feud with Cid. It doesn't feel like the world, or even just the SCW, is taking it as seriously as I am."

"So, that's where this feeling of failure is coming from?" Abel asked, crossing his arms as he began to pace back and forth.

"Yes," said James, letting his head hang like a lone survivor on the battlefield, his body and mind riddled with defeat.

"Let's talk about it. This match you're going into with Cid. Shattered Reality, a concept you've come up with."

"Yes."

"What do you want from it?"

James shrugged. "We'll be surrounded by glass. Weapons will be behind the glass."

"I know," Abel said. "But what do you want from it? If you can't answer that, then this is all for nothing. It's as simple as that."

"But it's not!" James bellowed.

"Then what is it that you want?"

“I want Cid to know me. I want him to know I’m truly unlike anyone he’s ever faced. And I want him to know while he says whoever beats him will have to kill him to do so, that he will have to resort to the darkest parts of himself in order to not only beat me, but to survive.”

“That,” James sighed, “he’s not going to be the same Cid he’s been. If he wants to beat me, he will have to be the Cid that mocked Jason Wheeler by playing dress up just as that Faust wannabe always did. That he’ll have to be the Cid he made his own game show parody for the master of game show parodies in Greg Cherry. He will have to resort to being the Cid that bitched, moaned, and belly ached for weeks to have a match as Cid vs.Cid.”

“And why does he have to do that?”

“Because that was Cid at his most dangerous. That’s what I want.”

“So, you want to be punished in this match.”

“I need to be pushed beyond my brink, to have a near death experience,” said James. “I believe that’s why I’m beating myself up now over everything. That is why I’m feeling like a failure. I’ve been left with nothing but dissatisfaction.”

“Why can’t Cid be dangerous when he’s claiming he’ll have to be killed in order to lose the title?”

“Because,” James exhaled, “despite his claims, Cid feels he has nothing to truly lose. He’s done it all. He’s been in main events on the biggest stages. He’s won championships. He’s beaten the biggest names. He’s done it all. Cid,” he scoffed, “wants to be challenged, but he truly doesn’t want to be beaten. But he, like me, isn’t satisfied. He truly needs his back to be not only pressed against the wall, he needs to be pressed through the fucking wall, so he justify dropping this hero charade, and cave to who he truly is. He needs to feel in danger himself so Cid can truly come alive, and let out the part of himself that needs the chips stacked against him and to feel that desperation, where he’ll pray for Jay Gold to return and save him.”

Abel nodded. “Well, saying I’m sold would be an understatement. I think you just needed to get it out, to let yourself hear it.”

James nodded as well, remaining silent.

“Now,” Abel continued, “the feeling of failure is still there. How does it connect to Patel and the stories?”

The footage was decrepit.

It made my stomach turn and my skin crawl. I wanted to pour acid into my eyes, but I knew such a thing wouldn’t help.

What I had found, what I had seen, would remain burned within my memory for the rest of my days. I wanted them to be over, but not before I brought an end to the days of Cid Turner.

There were two females.

Amelia.

Glory.

They had been brought to the very house Waylon and I'd been sent to by Cid. They were forced into the very room I stood inside, the anger and disgust mixing into a cocktail of violence that would become one with my bloodstream, and become the reason for my heart to beat.

In the room was a metal bed frame that had been bent in a variety of ways, along with a cheap mattress that had been soiled in a variety of fluids. All of these were key ingredients to the type of filmed media I'd discovered.

Amelia and Glory had been beaten and raped by our two targets, a couple so sick and degrading that killing them didn't feel like justice. Their names were Xander and Selena.

Xander would do the beating and the raping, before Selena would slit their throats. She would offer comfort, acting like she cared, caressing their crying faces before placing what appeared to be a glass shard to their jugulars and a few moments later, Amelia and Glory were no more.

But that didn't stop Xander from having his way with the corpses. Once he was done, Selena would bury them. She did so with glee, like she had the time of her life burying them like they were nothing. Like their existence was beneath her in every notable way.

What tore into my flesh was the fact that Cid seemed to be the man behind the camera, the director giving commands for the types of performances he just had to have. While he seemed to cower at times due to Selena's menace, he was able to coach Xander like a pup being led by his master.

"We need to get the fuck out of here," Waylon whispered, trying his best not to look at our surroundings. It consumed me like the rest of my emotions. It was part of me. A disease I simply couldn't beat.

"We need to finish the job," I said.

"You just want to kill them for what they've done. We can just walk the fuck away right now."

I looked at Waylon. There was uncertainty in his eyes. "They don't deserve to live. I'm not leaving until the job's done. Until they're no longer breathing."

Waylon looked at me, ready to protest but he sighed, instead. Stepping aside, he let me pass. I went into the kitchen area of the makeshift shack. Xander and Selena were zip tied to chairs. We had roughed them up but only a little. The videos distracted us from finishing what should have been a quick in and out. I wished it had been, but looking at them afterwards, I knew there was no going back.

"You're going to die now," I said. "But it's not going to be slow like I intended it to be. You both deserve to feel the same agony they felt. Those girls...you deserve to feel their fear."

"Stop talking!" Selena shouted, only for me to punch her in the throat, knocking her to the floor.

I turned to Xander. "What? Not going to speak up for her? Do you need him to tell you what to say?"

"Do what you're going to do," he said.

Taking my gun and gripping so I could pistol whip him until I could no longer lift my arm, I replied. "I'm going to."

I exhaled, the video footage running through my mind once again, and then, I proceeded to do what needed to be done. What had to be done.

And even with their groans of agony, and the laughter Selena gave before it turned to cries of pain and prayers for the end, I didn't feel satisfied.

After their fate matched that of Amelia and Glory, I met Waylon at the car.

He said nothing, but I knew he was aware of what I thought.

"He has to pay, too."

"Who?"

"You know who."

Abel winced as James provided the gory details of the story, depicting the violence of the scenes with characters he conjured up based upon Valentine and Frost.

"It sounds like you're succeeding within your story thus far," said his voice of reason.

"There's more to it," said James as he took another look in the mirror. There was a small skin split in the center of his forehead.

"So," Abel scratched the back of his head, "why are these characters appearing? Why are you naming them after other SCW wrestlers?"

"For this particular story," James let out a heavy breath, "it's based upon the current SCW landscape."

"Go on."

The three-time SCW Champion continued. "Amelia and Glory, they were challengers to Cid and his World title reign. The focus was more on Xander and Selena. Xander going into the Chamber. Selena and her ongoing battles with the Glimmer Sisters. Hell," he shrugged, "How often has Selena trashed 'old-timers' only to try and talk new faces like Amelia out of going for the World title?"

"I see," said Abel.

"It's there for everyone to see," James replied, running a finger over the split skin. "And Amelia along with Glory, they were formidable opponents just as Amy was with me. But as Amy proved with her speech, the fight just wasn't there for either of them."

"Why do you think the fight wasn't there for either Glory and Amelia when they faced Cid?"

"The proof was out in the open."

"That's why there was talk of fear and them not standing a chance for the characters in your story that were based upon Amelia and Glory?"

James nodded. "They're not as big in star power and names like Selena or Xander, or even Cid for that matter."

"Meaning?"

"Just as it feels to be for me," they locked eyes, "Amelia and Glory...the world had already counted them out. Look at how things ended after Cid beat Glory. He celebrated with his family. They huddled up like a cold winter's night, putting on their sympathetic faces, giving the

audience someone they could believe in. They didn't believe in Amelia or Glory. But Cid," James scoffed, "with his injury and his attitude, how can anyone *not* believe in that?"

"But you said Cid didn't want to lose, despite having done it all?"

"Because this is all Cid has," James smirked. "2006? He did skits as a golf player and stepped into other athletic shoes, only to fail. Like Asher Hayes, the same guy Cid and Holly framed with drugs, he's an addict."

"Do you think Cid feels the same way about you? Or that there's a chance he could fail?" Abel asked as he resumed pacing back and forth as James remained in a kneeling position before the mirror.

"Cid doesn't know how to feel about me," the two-time Underground Champion rolled his eyes. "He talks about me being deadly in one breath, but then talks about how I was a lame ass in another."

"I know what I'm capable of when that bell rings. I know that despite my capabilities, I have to work within the realm of rules," James stated. "I've never been a lame ass. Cid has always added humor and an arrogant jock attitude when he's been on camera, but I remember when he returned in 2020. The man was scared shitless. He will never allow himself to look weak. I've worn my heart and flaws on my sleeve, on my face...every fucking where for the entire world to see."

"Meaning what exactly?"

James met Abel's gaze yet again. "Cid is afraid. I'm not."

"And why do you think that is?"

"I've been judged every single day of my life since 2016. After what happened with Amy. With Kennedy. After what I did to Ace. I have been judged," James exhaled sharply, "and I've kept moving through the blood and the muck."

Abel nodded. "You sound confident when describing yourself, James."

"What's your point?"

His voice of reason shrugged. "I'm just puzzled, I guess. I'm still waiting for you to tell me where this sense of failure truly stems from and how it pertains to your story. You've not even told me where Patel plays in all of this."

"I told you there was more to the story," said James.

"Well, I'm listening."

"We can't do this."

Waylon drove us through the night. The sky was black but the rage inside me burned bright. I felt it in my bones.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you just can't go against Cid fucking Turner."

I looked at my friend, my fellow soldier. He was scared. I knew he didn't have the stomach for what I was ready to chase down and burn to the ground.

“I don’t care what stories you’ve heard, Waylon. The fucking psycho deserves what’s coming.”

“It’s not just stories. Don’t you remember what Aries said?”

“What?”

“He said we don’t know what we’ve gotten into and that it was far too late.”

“After what we saw, I don’t care.”

He shook his head. “Fuck it. We can’t do this. I can’t.”

And then, I pointed my gun at Waylon’s head.

“He was right. It’s far too late,” I cocked the gun. “So, you’re either with me or you’re against me.”

We locked eyes.

“Now...choose...”