

Prologue

"If you must know, we are in a secured UN military facility in the Caucasus Mountains, where--"

An explosion shakes the room, cutting Hades' introductions short. It's followed by gunshots and screams, which are getting closer all the time.

"Ack...too soon, too soon. They were not supposed to find us here." His face seems nearly the same color as his lab coat--blood red.

"So much for a secure facility" I joke, shocked at my own undaunted attitude in the face of an impending threat. The Ukrainian scowls and opens his mouth as though to say something else, but drops to the floor, a drugged dart in his shoulder.

A swarm of troops rushes into the room, dressed in black combat suits and full face masks. I am unarmed and allow myself to surrender. Securing my wrists, they half-drag me down the hallway, also white-washed concrete blocks, but splattered in blood and littered with dead bodies. A few of these are also in black, but most appear to be Russian regulars, and are wearing Russian camo and jade helmets--presumably Hades' men.

I am half dragged to a large hole blasted in the wall. Hades hadn't lied about our location, based on the savage wind hurling a blanket of snow through the breach. Outside, rappelling lines are already secured and waiting to transport us into the sub-arctic oblivion.

In my bewildered confusion, I give in to crazed panic for just a moment. I attempt to break from my captors and throw myself to certain termination. As I near the edge, however, a piercing sensation slams into my lower back, almost like a bee sting, but from a bee as big as a raven.

My knees buckle under me--then everything goes dark.

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## **Ares**

I open my eyes--and immediately snap them shut again, having unintentionally fried the image of an LED worklight onto my retinas.

"Oh dear, my apologies. Here, let me turn that off."

I force myself to open my eyes again, and it looks like I'm in some sort of medical facility, very technologically advanced. Standing beside the bed is a man no more than five foot four, but every last inch looks like muscle. His accent is definitely Russian, and he's dressed in black combat fatigues.

"Do I know you? You look vaguely familiar."

"I am your handler, Ares."

"So you're the one Hades warned me about." I attempt to get up, only to realize that I am, in fact, strapped to the bed.

"Hades fed you lies, actually. He told you I'm a Russian fugitive leading a rogue UN black operations group known as Babylon Circle, yes?"

"Something like that. How did you--"

"And no doubt he also told you I brainwashed you and used you as one of my own agents. No surprise, really." Ares paces the length of the room, about twenty feet, and back to my bedside.

"The truth of the matter is, I'm no fugitive, and Babylon Circle is no rogue agency. I am a law-abiding Russian citizen and can go home any time I like. And the Circle is a covert special operations group, something like the Central Intelligence Agency on an international scale. We report to the UN Security Council, and always have."

I'm relieved to know I'm in the hands of the United Nations, but I still don't know what they want with me.

"Why am I here?" I demand. Ares points to the only patch still adhered to my combat fatigues, the crossed M40 rifles signifying a scout sniper.

"You are Goshawk, a former Marine in a UN task force. Your skills as a marksman were quite impressive, and attracted attention from...shall we say...considerably higher ranks. We inducted you into Babylon Circle, but shortly after, you vanished: captured by Hades."

I remember none of this.

"When was this, exactly?" I ask.

"Some months ago. Hades had plenty of time to presumably torture and brainwash you, but we finally found you and came to rescue our newest member. Welcome home, Goshawk."

"If you say so. But why am I tied down?"

Ares smiles broadly.

"You were clearly in a distressed frame of mind, given how you nearly launched yourself to certain death. You remember that much at least, do you not? We wanted to make sure you weren't going to attack us before we could explain what happened."

The Russian unstraps my wrists and hands me a black suit like his own.

"Get dressed, you missed much of your training. Prometheus will be here in a few minutes to examine you, make sure Hades didn't mess you up too bad, physically or mentally."

Ares walks down the hall, and I get to work changing my wardrobe.

What is it about this man that I believe his every word? The way he talked, one would think we were very familiar with each other, but I honestly can't remember any sort of service with the UN, or any induction into a secret UN-sanctioned black ops team. Still, the clothes are a perfect fit, and though in new condition, feel like I had already broken them in. I hope this 'Prometheus' person will maybe know something when he arrives.

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"Alright, and how are we feeling today?"

An olive-skinned man walks into the room, sporting a long white lab coat. His hairline is well-recessed in front, but behind, wavy locks hang to his neck. His accent sounds vaguely Italian.

"I guess I've probably been worse, though I don't know when. You are Prometheus, I take it?"

"I am. And you are Goshawk. Tell me, what do you know about yourself and your past?"

"I was a former US Marine...I think."

"You think?" He takes a syringe of a clear liquid solution, thicker than water, but only by just enough to be noticeable. He injects my shoulder.

"I honestly don't remember for sure. What's that?"

"Merely a synoptic medication to help improve your recovery. So back to my questions, what *can* you remember?"

"The Room. That is as far back as my memory goes."

"Then we will start there. Tell me everything."

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## **Hades**

Ten by ten by ten cubicle, masonry block construction. White paint on the walls, no windows. A bare sixty watt bulb hangs precariously by its wires, intermittently flickering. A single four by six door on one wall, three inches thick and made of solid steel, hinges on my left. Opposite the door is a single steel bed frame, where I sit, assessing my situation. Under me is a mattress more reminiscent of a sheet of plywood than a legitimate sleeping surface. At the foot of the bed, a sink and toilet. The floor is poured concrete, and by the massive cracks running through it, evidently the pour was on top of a poorly prepped foundation which is exposed to a lot of

water, or extreme temperatures, or perhaps earthquakes. I swing my legs off the bed to stand up, but my bare feet hit a freezing surface. So, extreme temperatures it is.

I look down at myself and realize that apart from being barefoot, I'm dressed in military camo. US Marine Corps M81 woodland, to be exact. My shoulder patches are gone. My name patch is gone. Though the camo pattern is recognizable, I find myself unable to remember who I am, where I'm from, or the details of my deployment. If I even was deployed in the first place.

My thoughts are interrupted by the abrupt hiss and clunk of a hydraulic lock. The door opens to a man at least six foot tall or more, in a maroon coat. His chupryna, a distinguishably Ukrainian hairstyle, is jet black.

"Good morning. Forgive us for your inhospitable quarters. It was necessary to hide you away for a while, where they couldn't find you and you couldn't do any damage."

"Where who couldn't find me? And who are you? Is America at war with your country? Is that why I'm here, as a prisoner of war?"

"All in due time, my friend. Call me Hades. I represent the United Nations, and we have reason to believe that you were captured by an ex-Russian soldier who calls himself 'Ares', and who leads a terrorist organization known as the Babylon Circle. They brainwashed you and erased your memory; that is why you can not remember who you are. In the end, they turned you into a warrior for their cause, but we managed to recapture you and are going to try and break your brainwashing. So, if you will kindly put on the shoes that you will find under your bed, we will begin."

Sure enough, there's a pair of combat boots under the bed. They seem to fit, but I don't see my name where I would've written it if they were mine. As I put them on, I attempt to learn more about my situation.

"Do you know who I am? Do you know anything about me? Where even are we, exactly? Judging by the floor's temperature, I'll assume we aren't exactly in the jungle."

"I'm afraid I don't know your real name, but your callsign is 'Goshawk', and you were a sniper in the US Marines before being captured and experimented on. As to our location, you would assume correctly. "If you must know, we are in a secured UN military facility in the Caucasus Mountains, where--"

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And what happened next?" Prometheus inquires, wrapping my arm in a blood pressure cuff.

"There was an explosion, a bunch of angry dudes swarmed my cell, and next thing I know, I'm here. That is the only thing I remember."

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## Meeting Shadow Team

The elevator opens to a long hallway of red brick walls and charcoal-colored steel doors. Three doors down on the left, Ares knocks. The door is opened by a muscular Brazilian, who frowns when he sees me.

“Razor! The new guy is here.”

“Bring him in.”

Ares leaves, and I follow the Brazilian into the living quarters. I’m fairly impressed. I was expecting just a bunkroom plus washroom type of deal. There is actually a whole multi-room apartment, and it’s anything but shabby. We go all the way to a den in the back, where four others are sitting around a coffee table playing cards. One has his back to the doorway, but as he stands and turns, I know this must be Razor.

Sharp, precise hundred-eighty degree turn. Knife on each wrist and at least three on the belt, probably plus more that I don’t see. His nose could pass for a hawk’s beak, and he’s shaved cleaner than a baby. If he wasn’t scowling at me--and maybe if his eyes didn’t look sharper than his short-fade crewcut--I might have laughed at the infantile smoothness. But he’s clearly not a man of humor.

“Just so we’re clear, I was against getting a grunt straight from the Marine Corps. Shadow Squadron has a long history of only recruiting operators who have been in the circle for years. You implants are too weak, too soft. But Ares insisted you were the best sniper he could find. Mark my words, you screw up, and I’ll kill you myself.”

“Okay then, I guess I just won’t screw up. So do I get any introductions?”

The young Asian at Razor’s right stands up and extends his hand.

“Shadow Four, callsign Zeus. All around electronics expert and professional hacker out of South Korea. Welcome to the team.”

The next figure at the table is...a lone female among five men?

“Salut. I’m Shadow Three, call me Moab.”

“Mother of all bombs? Lemme guess...GIGN explosives expert?”

“Intuitive, I see! I tell you what, Razor, I think I like this one. What say you, Fives?”

“He seems okay, but I’ll decide after I watch him shoot”, the man to Razor’s left is extremely well groomed for being in a special forces tactical group.

“Judging by your accent, you’re from Germany?”

“Close. Belgian counter-terrorism, actually. Shadow Five, at your service. I answer to Blitz...or, on rare occasions, Fives. And you’ve already met Caiman, our Brazilian counter-terrorism expert, and Razor from California. I will be honest with you though, your predecessor left some pretty big shoes to fill.”

“What happened to him?”

“You don’t want to know,” Moab insists. “It was ugly.”

Razor motions me to a chair.

“Take a seat, Six. A good card game is fast and unpredictable. You do well here, you might survive when the paper squares are replaced with flying lead. Maybe.”

“Dutch Blitz? Yeah I can hold my own in Dutch Blitz.”

The Belgian laughs as he hands me a stack of cards, “Don’t talk too soon. My callsign is not solely related to combat performance.”

Blitz isn’t wrong. He takes the first two games by a landslide. Razor takes several smaller victories, and even I get one or two in, before Blitz wins multiple times in a row. At the end of the game, Blitz is naturally well ahead, and Caiman is close behind. But surprisingly, I’ve tied with Razor for third place. I’m not sure though whether he likes that I’m on the ball, or if he’s mad I tied with him. I don’t ask, and he doesn’t offer the answer.

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The First Mission

Three weeks since my assignment to Shadow. I’m spending much of my time at the range, retraining my trigger finger after who-knows-how-long in captivity. On Razor’s insistence, most of my targets are at two-thousand meters, an extreme range for any sniper with any rifle.

There is only so much one can do, however, and with no missions or deployments on schedule, I’m quickly getting bored. Just yesterday, Zeus said something big is being planned, but he had no idea what. I guess we’re about to find out, cause we’re currently in what Razor says is the briefing room. And when I say ‘we’, I mean there are a lot of other operators in here beyond just Shadow team.

The door swings open. Everyone immediately looks in that direction, and they are not disappointed. Ares is here.

“As most of you know, the Babylon Circle is a very well-kept secret. We intervene in the world’s affairs every day, but in the shadows of the backstage. Still, we are not without a nemesis. Our

greatest threat, a group known as the Arayot Confederacy, who answers to the self-proclaimed 'Confederated Republics of Scotia', or 'CRS'. They once upon a time spent no small amount of resources combatting our every move for several previous generations. But we now have an opportunity to strike at the very heart of their operations."

I can feel the room's atmosphere tingling with excitement. There must be more than one individual who is very familiar with these named adversaries. I think I may well be the only one who isn't. But Ares pays no heed to my confusion and continues his monologue.

"The most aggressive the republics have ever been was under their first leader, Angus Carmichael, just after the Civil War. His line has since been replaced by another clan, which has proven to be somewhat less-aggressive. But we have good intel that a new Carmichael heir may soon be born, and if permitted to grow, may one day return the Republics to their former aggression. And in its current strength, we could very well lose everything. This heir must be removed, lest the coming world peace be obliterated by these radicals. I am assigning mission command to Shadow One, he will have final authority on all details of the operation. Razor?"

Razor steps to the front, evidently taking over the briefing.

"The mission is simple. Teams Two through Eleven will insert ten miles south of Lionsgate, the Republic's capital. The U.S. government has granted airspace for two C-130's on an unspecified United Nations mission. Meanwhile, teams Twelve through Sixteen will insert over the Canadian border along with soft armor transports. Team One will insert by helicopter west of the city, to corner any evacuation attempts. We will be inserting in daylight, but once everyone is in position, we will be attacking under nightfall. Any question?"

Blitz raises his hand. "How soon can we expect to deploy?"

"Four days. Use your time to prep well. We will be on our own once we deploy. There will be no resupply points, no medivacs, no support of any kind except what we pack. I will be deploying with the rest of my own team to the west, but I will be in constant radio communication with the rest of the assault element. All further question, see your respective team leaders. Dismissed!"

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## **New Divide**

Whoever authorized this mission couldn't have picked a worse night. The sky could not be more black, except for sporadic lightning strikes in every direction. The north winds are blowing with hurricane force--to which point I'm glad it's blowing from behind me, where it won't interfere with any shots I have to take. The driving rain, however, does me no favors as I attempt to scope out the road in the valley below me.

My earpiece buzzes, no doubt Razor or Caiman calling from the ridgeline opposite from my position. I take my finger from the trigger long enough to switch my mic on.

"Shadow Six here. Go ahead."

“Zeus and Moab reported a convoy leaving the city, headed to us. Four Republic Security SUV’s, white and green. Target is in the third vehicle. Get ready, you only get one shot.”

On my left side, Blitz lays on the muddy ground with a rangefinder.

“See the speed limit sign just before the second bend? That is your reference point. Range to target is one, nine, nine, eight.”

So this is why I keep getting two-thousand meter moving targets at the range. That’s the distance at which I’m supposed to disable the evacuation vehicle. But the range never factored for a wall of water.

My fingers tremble--whether from the cold or my anxiety, I don’t know--as I draw the bolt and chamber a .338 Lapua Magnum round. For this mission, my Blaser R93 has been switched out with an Arctic Warfare AWM. Its fluted twenty-seven inch barrel with a 1:11 twist rate will stabilize the round more effectively for this extreme range.

“Shadow One to Shadow Six, convoy is approaching the first bend. Prep for contact.”

“Copy, Shadow Actual. What is my priority point of impact?”

“The engine block, Goshawk. You’re carrying API’s. Hit the engine block and we can all go home.”

Armor piercing incendiaries. Out of nowhere, a shudder goes up my spine. This is no tag and bag operation. The Confederation’s future leader is going to perish in a gasoline fireball. By my hand.

The Confederation’s future leader. My future nemesis. The future threat to world peace. You can’t negotiate with a terrorist. My resolve steeled at this thought, and I methodically slowed my breathing as four pairs of headlights came into distant view.

The first car passed my point of aim. Time slowed down as the second car drove through. To my distant left, a jagged lightning bolt struck somewhere out on Flathead Lake. Then a second flash, contained in the clouds overhead, illuminated the whole valley for a brief instant. I knew the wind was still howling, and the rain was still pouring, but my ears heard nothing but Razor’s voice.

“Take the shot! Take the shot now!”

My finger tightens down on the trigger and a flame bursts from the end of my barrel with a thunderous boom, sending the projectile on its three-second journey.

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

A plume of dirt rises from the ground beside the road. "Negative impact," Blitz radios to the rest of the team.

"Copy negative impact," Razor responds. Shadow team, regroup. The storm grounded our choppers. We'll have to pursue by car."

"Do you really think we can still catch up?" Caiman doesn't sound like he's in any sort of good mood. "We lost them thanks to our new idiot."

Zeus enters the comms. "Chill out, Caiman. That shot would've been hard enough without a hurricane, so unless you could've done better, give New Guy a bit of slack just once. But I intercepted intel that suggests they're headed to a boat launch on Pend Oreille. If they're smart, they'll probably wait for the storm to die down a bit before they try to cross. We can catch up."

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Aftermath of New Divide

"All units, fall back. Target eliminated," Razor says, turning his back to the raging lake. He returns to the car, as does Blitz. But I watch the small sailboat disappear into the darkness, till a warm orange glow catches the corner of my eye. Zeus and Moab had lit a small cabin up the hill from the dock, and now the flames rose like a signal flare in the black sky.

When I return to the car, Caiman is even more upset now. But at least some of his anger is directed at Razor now. Unfortunately, that may make Razor all the more upset with me.

"Target eliminated?" Caiman backs the car and drives north towards our exfil. "You just watched them sail away and you call it target eliminated?"

"Look at the storm out there, Caiman. That boat will be ripped to shreds before it makes the shoreline. The very best boat pilot in the world might get lucky, but if they were really the best, they wouldn't try it. Only a fool would try to sail in that. Though for the record, it never should have come to this!"

Razor turns to the backseat and glares at me. His eyes feel like cheese graters. I want to turn away and cower, but afraid that will only make things worse, I force myself to stare back at him, unmoved.

“Ce n’est pas la mer à boire, it’s not the end of the world,” Moab comes to my defense. “Maybe next time, don’t post your sniper almost a mile away from the target. I don’t care how good he is, nobody could have made that shot in that storm. But what’s done is done. The target will probably die, and if for some reason he does not, we will find him again. This is what we do.”

“The storm wasn’t supposed to be that bad, I’ll admit,” Razor growls. “But the ambush point was already selected. We didn’t have time to adapt. But just to make sure we did our job, Zeus, I want you to keep eyes and ears on the region. You catch wind of anything fishy, don’t go to Ares. Come to me.”

“Wilco, Razor.” Zeus doesn’t look up from his laptop.

Blitz throws his helmet to the car’s floor. “The whole mission was a—”

“Blitz, you know the rules,” Razor snaps. “There will be no swearing in my squadron.”

“Yes, Razor. Seriously though, it was screwed up to begin with. The strike force was too small, the weather was against us, and the city was too well prepared. We had to have taken bad casualties. How about it, Zeus? How many did we lose?”

“We did good to get out of there when we did,” Zeus pales as he examines the after-action reports trickling in to our intelligence network. “The other teams didn’t make out very well. Fifteen and sixteen never made it into Scotian territory. Twelve was wiped out early in the fight. Thirteen and fourteen made it as far as the target’s home and razed it, but they took heavy losses and had to fall back, allowing a second evacuation convoy to escape. I don’t know who it was. Some minor vip I guess. The primary target definitely fled west.”

“What about the south insertion?” Razor asks. Zeus shakes his head. “They did extensive damage, but we lost five teams completely, and the others took casualties. Even taken by surprise, the Arayot Confederacy didn’t go down easy at all. If our assets had remained engaged any longer, the Scotian military would have had time to mobilize and we all would have been wiped out.”

I still don’t know who all these enemies are, but knowing that they wiped out over half our invasion force, I start feeling sick in the stomach. The sense of heavy casualties seems familiar, but I don’t know why. All I know is, I’m going to devote my life to the range. Whoever I was in the life I can’t remember, and however I ended up in Babylon Circle, I’m here. These are my people now. I’m going to protect them, and I’m not going to miss my next shot.

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## Blitz Explains Dynamics

It's twenty-four hours after my first mission, and we're now back at base. Razor and Caiman leave our apartment and go down to the on-base tavern, and Zeus retires to his bunk. Out in the main living area, Blitz reclines on the couch with his Gameboy and a glass of sweet tea. I join him, sitting in a metal folding chair across the room, but all I do is sit there, chin resting on my hands, thinking about Razor's reprimands.

Moab comes over from the kitchen area with a couple beers, and offers me one.

"Don't mind Razor. He's harder on himself than anyone else. Yes, the mission could have gone better, but you can't blame yourself. And hey, après la pluie, le beau temps. Or how you say...eh...after the rain comes good weather. In so many words, hang in there. Things will get better."

"So, you find me better company than the people in the tavern?" I ask, taking the bottle. It occurs to me that I have no recollection of ever drinking beer before.

Moab shrugs. "Some people drink till they're dead to the world, Others drink till they think they run the world. I have no ambition to be either a vegetable or a rabid animal. One bottle to take the edge off life is sufficient for me. Cheers."

We both take a sip. And in this moment, my mouth concludes that I definitely have tasted this beverage somewhere before--and it didn't like the stuff back then, either. I half-spit, half-choke, and the sip sprays out on the floor.

"Sorry about that. Ugh, this stuff is horrible."

Moab just laughs. "Not to worry, you are not alone. Blitz can't stomach alcohol either." She walks back over to the fridge and tosses me a soda. "Isn't that right, Fives?"

Our companion glances up from his game. "I've always been a teetotaler. Razor enjoys grilling me for it, of course. But as far as I'm concerned, alcohol is the work of the devil."

"The devil? You're a spiritual man?"

"Hardly. Lets rephrase that. Alcohol would be the work of the devil if the devil existed."

"I see. So, here's a question for the two of you. Being new and all, I'm a little unfamiliar with the whole political demographics. The people we fought today, the Arayot Confederacy, the Republic of Scotia, who are they?"

Blitz sets his Gameboy down. "That is a lengthy story, my friend. It all started in the 1860's, when the American Civil War happened. The south tried to secede, the north didn't want that to happen. Neither did the Circle.

"This organization existed back then?"

"Eh...not in the exact form as it is today, but yes," Moab nods. "There has been a body of people striving to bring peace and unity to the world for...oh, I'm actually not certain if anybody knows exactly how long. Suffice to say, we had players in the Civil War. We had to make sure the north would win, because you can't just have a bunch of independent little nations popping up here and there and everywhere, doing their own thing. There's too much division, too much potential for conflict. Peace requires unity."

"Okay. So what happened during the war?"

Blitz takes a drink of his tea. "People were flocking west by the dozens during that same time period. Especially ex-confederates who knew they were losing the war, and they just wanted to start a new life somewhere. One of these was a sharpshooter from Virginia, Angus Carmichael."

"The one Ares mentioned? Who started the Republics?"

"Yes. The wagon train he joined left too late in the year, and they got lost in a blizzard while crossing the Rockies. They ended up on the shore of Flathead Lake, built a small colony, and somehow managed to survive the winter. Fast forward a few years, and Angus Carmichael convinced the rest of the settlement that they should start their own independent nation. And that's how the city of Lionsgate came to be. That's where our last mission took place."

"And your predecessors, they didn't try to stop Carmichael?"

"Unfortunately, they were so occupied with the war that they did not have much presence in the far west till after the war. And by the time they realized what was happening, Angus Carmichael had rallied multiple settlements in the region. Each one declared itself an autonomous city-state--or a republic, if you will--and together, they formed a confederation."

"The Confederated Republics of Scotia," I conclude.

"Precisely. And at that point, we could do nothing. They formed militias, prepared themselves for an all out war. And the Union Army had depleted its finances and morale to beat the Confederate States, so they couldn't put an end to this new threat."

"So what did the Union do?"

"They formed a loose alliance. Basically, America will leave Scotia to do its own thing, if Scotia doesn't interfere with America. But of course, the Circle's predecessors were not strictly American. They started a covert war. Spies, propaganda, attempting to kill people off and making it look like accidents. But the Scotians had their own secret army, the Arayot Confederacy. They fought us at every turn, hunting us down aggressively. Till Angus Carmichael died. His son, Douglas, became the next leader, his leadership caused a division, the Republics exiled him and chose a new leader, and ever since, they've fought more defensively than offensively, giving both them and us time to build our strength."

“No offense, but they seemed a bit stronger than us the other night.”

“There were a lot of botched details involved in that, but you are not totally wrong. Their radical ideology of independence tends to attract many of the world’s top innovators. Why these people would flock like stupid sheep to the devicive ideals of independent thought, instead of helping us to advance the world to unification and peaceful security, I will never know. But as a result, their technology, medicine, military strategies--everything--they have advanced much faster than the rest of the world.”

Moab scoffs, taking another sip from her bottle. “Can you imagine it? I mean, the very idea that any common, run-of-the-mill peasant has some “inherent” right to be his own person. Think of the chaos that we would have if everybody here in the Babylon Circle just did their own thing. Why, even in the council itself, while there is no official leader, and the other members of the council are free to give their opinions, the final decision is most often deferred to Ares.”

“People want to be ruled,” Blitz avowed. “Whether they let themselves be ruled by a physical government, or by one man, or by a religious deity, its in their blood to be ruled by a higher power. And that is where the Babylon Circle comes in. You and I, we are higher than the average person. We were born strong, and chosen to uphold the law. People like Razor were born even stronger, and their skills caused them to be chosen as leaders. Then you have individuals like Ares or Hades, or the other members of the council. They are the smartest and strongest among us, whereby they rule over all, and no one is above them. The council gives an order, we carry it out, nations bow in submission, and peace flourishes. This is our mission. Law, order, unity, peace.”

“I like the sound of that.” I grin and stand from my chair. “When the others get back, tell them I’m down at the shooting range.”

Moab chuckled again. “They will be gone for quite some time. Like I mentioned earlier, some people drink till they are dead to the world. Razor and Caiman will not be back for the next twenty-four hours.”

“And I will still be on the range,” I insist. “Sniping is more than just shooting. It’s also fieldcraft. I’ll pack like I’m headed out for a mission, I’ll eat and sleep down there tonight, and I’ll be back when my food runs out.”

“Now that is a good way to earn Razor’s respect,” Blitz nods. “Good hunting.”