



### **A History of Violence: Book III: Precium, Chapter One**

The bell rang and “Duality” began to play throughout the arena. When that occurred, I knew what it meant. I backed up every single word I had said leading up to Breakdown. I outlasted everyone involved. I outlasted the lower end talents like YUYO. I outlasted Kimberly. Bree. I outlasted Selena, Deanna, and Ace. I outlasted Syren. I outlasted Owen, and I became the new SCW World Heavyweight Champion. It wasn’t Adam Allocco or Xander Valentine. It wasn’t Kandis or Asher Hayes. It was me. I defended the United States Championship, tearing through anyone and everyone I could get my goddamn hands on, and then, I pushed myself a bit further, doing what nobody thought I’d do. What nobody wanted me to do. I won the whole goddamn thing, and after thirteen long years, the Heavyweight Championship of the World was back in my possession.

Yes, thirteen years ago, I walked into Tactical Warfare, and I dropped not only Jake Starr, but Hurse, with Kingdom Come, driving my knee into their skulls, before I pinned Hurse, claiming the championship for the second time. The reign was short lived, as I lost the title to a bunch of fuckery caused by the love/hate relationship between Glacier and Justin fucking Davis. The artist formerly known as Thorn took the belt from me. Now, sure. I could’ve won it back, had I stuck around, but when I saw that the office was going to keep me from Thorn, booking me against my bitch, Jason Zero for the umpteenth time, I saw the writing on the wall. I decided not to renew my contract at the time. I came back, ready to reclaim the throne so to speak, but it was as it always was for me. I had to start out at the bottom.

Defending this country took me away and kept me away for years. When I did come back, they wanted me to get to Regan Street. They wanted me to mentor not only her, but

Sienna Swann as well. They wanted me to stay in the shadows, just as I had to do when defending the United States. I've never been keen on being a backburner player. I want to be in the fight. I battled through injuries. I battled through circumstances that only I, and a select few within the United States military, know about. When I returned from losing my father, I'd made it a vow that I was going to run roughshod over this fucking place, and that is exactly what I've done. Glory, Owen, Chance, all of them. Faced 'em. Beat 'em.

While I was doing that, this company was too busy filming the bullshit between Adam and Xander. Put me in the ring with them, and I'll treat them like I did Abernathy and the other soldiers in the desert when I fought to be Talbot's Chosen One. Xander can talk about how often he's beaten me. I'll go for his jugular. I'll pick out his weaknesses and use that shit against him. I'll smack Adam like the fucking bitch he is. People want Ace to rise up and take this? I scouted him. I'll do what that depressed fucking addict wants someone to do, and I'll put him to sleep. For good. But, before any of that can happen, I'm going to meet Owen for the fourth time. My World Championship, along with MY United States Championship, is on the line. Double or Nothing. Everything on the line. To those marketing this match, it's for the buzz. It's for the media attention. For me, it's a way of life. All I know how to do is put it all on the line.

I know this company doesn't want me as a champion. This company doesn't like to see me as a winner. My first World title win in SCW? Mr. D booked me against Jason because he figured I'd buckle under pressure. He figured I'd fail. What did I do? I beat Jason one, two, three, and threw that shit in his face. This company likes to stack the odds in my favor. It likes to see me fall. It doesn't like me being confident like this. That scares them. I'm the personification of anger and violence. Xander can be our 'Boogeyman'. I'm the motherfucker you send to kill the fuckin' 'Boogeyman'. I welcome the SCW and its matchmakers to line anyone up, I will knock them the fuck out and send them out on a goddamn gurney.

Last year, I told everyone in the U.S. title tournament, and those watching around the world, that I was going to take what I wanted. What I wanted was the U.S. title. What I wanted was the World Championship. What I wanted was for the SCW to get better. I did all that. A few weeks ago, I said that I was unimpressed by the Champions of SCW. I set out to change things, and that's what I fucking did.

Being the SCW World Heavyweight Champion comes with responsibility. I know that. I've been here before, and I thrive under the pressure that comes along with it. I know it'll be a bumpy ride, but I don't fear that. I'm not anyone's favorite in this company. I know people want Owen to rise to the occasion and beat me. Some even want him to 'murder' me on the microphone, and in the ring. I've never been afraid to disappoint the fans, or the boys and girls in the back. I'm not here to be liked. I've earned respect in many ways. I've achieved my goals, but there are more goals to pursue. There are more fights to win. There are more missions to complete. After the Pay-Per-View, I'm putting Owen, not only out of my misery, but he's going in my rearview.

**There are those who feel I don't belong here, but when the golden boy and I collide, I'll roughly remind everyone of just who in the hell I am, and I will leave no doubt. I'll just leave Owen lying, clinging to life.**

Another fight. Another beast. This one was known as Dom, and Dom had me in a chokehold, his bicep pressed against my throat, trying to choke the life from me. My arms flailed for a moment, my hands trying to grab anything and everything I could, but he was able to slip away from my grip, even as my fingers went to wrap around his nose.

Letting my arms relax, despite the pressure building, I managed to tell myself to calm down. I was wasting too much energy, that if I broke from the hold, I would be easy pickings. I tried to wedge my fingers in between my throat and his bicep, but to no avail, so I did what I felt was best. I tapped out. It'd been a good fight, but he caught me, and instead of risking brain damage, I submitted. The crowd around us clamored for more, cheering Dom as he released the hold.

I pushed myself to my feet and stepped out of the circle, where Landon met me. We were in another musty basement, where everything smelled like sweat or old fried chicken. He handed me a bottle of water, which I chugged rather quickly, before snatching his bottle and finishing it off as well.

"Help yourself," he said.

"I'm doing all the work," I replied as I leaned against a nearby wall so I could regain my bearings properly.

"Looks like you were losing," he said, scoffing which offended me.

Leaning in close, I whispered, "I'm doing this shit for you. Show some fucking respect," my words were stained with the taste of blood, it filled my mouth of copper each time I spoke.

He leaned in as well as Landon replied, "You're doing this for your fucking country. Don't forget that."

I hadn't forgotten. I'd been with Landon and his operation for a month at that time. I'd been winning fights, pretending to be someone I wasn't, going to sleep and waking up coated in violence, marinating in it like a piece of meat.

Landon continued, "And you losing isn't going to get us any closer to where we need to be. I don't care that you got caught. You can't tap out like that. It shows weakness, and right now," he scoffed then, "I need you to be as close to fucking perfect as you possibly can be."

"You want perfect?" I asked, shaking my head and wiping away blood from my cheek, before walking back towards the circle. He called after me in his fake Cockney accent, asking me what I was doing but I ignored him, as I jumped back into the lion's den. Dom looked away from his fans, his eyes settling on me. I spit at his feet, blood splattering on his boot.

He smirked at me as I motioned for him to come towards me. The onlookers began shouting once again as Dom and I circled one another. Money was passing from hand to hand. The guy Landon wanted me to impress turned away from whomever he was talking to in order to see what the commotion was all about. Dom threw a punch, and I dunked it, before driving my knuckles into his ribs. I followed that up by connecting with his chin, not only with my fist but my elbow as well. Dom's body twisted as he slumped to the floor. He was almost completely out, and I knew I couldn't let that happen. I grabbed Dom by his ears, pulling him up as I talked trash, wanting to motivate him so I could give the man known as Babak the show needed to keep his attention.

Dom managed to headbutt me. I admit that he caught me pretty good with that shot. I let go of his ears and staggered back. I wasn't sure if my nose was broken, but I didn't have to assess the damage as Dom charged towards me. I wrapped my arms around him, just above his elbows before lifting him off his feet and planting him back on the floor with as much brute force as I could. The boys in the crowd seemed to enjoy that. Catching a glimpse out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Babak smirk. He liked it, too.

Dom tried to push himself up, but I ran over, driving my knee into the side of his skull, sending him onto his stomach. He tried to push himself up once again, but I was already on Dom, wrapping him, as he did me, my bicep squeezing around his throat. He flailed around like a fish out of water just as I did, but he didn't try to calm down. He didn't try to fight back. All he could do was panic and choke before the flailing stopped. Dom was out cold, and I was the winner once again. Letting him go, I stood up and dusted myself off as Landon gathered up our winnings. He led me back to where we were before. Handing me a towel, he whispered, "Looks like you got his attention. Hopefully that's a good thing. I just wish you'd done what you just did, a little earlier. You know what I mean?"

"Gotta give the people a show," I said, trying to catch my breath.

"It's not about giving a show," he said, his words becoming ghosts that would haunt me from then on out, becoming part of who I have been as a wrestler, "It's about getting the job done."

"And I got it done," I fired back. Our eyes remained locked on one another, but I could tell we were both checking our surroundings through our peripherals. Just one more thing you learn to do as a soldier. "Babak is here, but I don't see 'him'. I thought he'd be here," I said, referencing Talbot.

"Well," Landon began, now standing beside me, still scanning the rest of the room, "we already know they've talked," he said, talking about a few weeks prior at another fight. It was underground, too. Landon and I were invited by Farhad after I'd won a few fights. We were there, but we stayed in the shadows, going undetected while we watched Talbot sit down and have a drink with Babak. "But I'm like you," Landon added, "I don't know where he is. I'm surprised that the son of a bitch isn't."

I didn't want to ask the question, but something felt it was necessary, "You don't think he's caught on, do you? Like, you don't think he knows about us and the mission?"

Landon paused for a moment. I could see it in his eyes. Uncertainty.

He eventually shook his head, "No. There's no way. Only a select few know about the mission. Those I work for...they want to bring his ass down. Fucking traitor."

I nodded, saying nothing else. I just knew that while my question regarding Talbot being a traitor had been answered, he was indeed a traitor with a brain. He was fully capable of being one step ahead. He lived and breathed war. He knew the risks and Talbot knew how to survive. He'd seen things Landon had never seen. I was sure of that, too.

"Heads up," Landon whispered, nudging me in the side. I looked up to see Farhad walking towards us, a huge smile on his face. With the cockney accent in full force, Landon said, "Evening, Farhad. How are ya, mate?"

"As you know," he began, "you two were guests in this world. Now, you have become permanent. You're no longer just visitors."

Landon shot me an arrogant smirk before looking back at Farhad, "Well, that's what we like to hear, ain't it?" he asked, nudging me again.

"So," I spoke up, which seemed to catch them both by surprise, as I hadn't really talked much since making first contact, "what does that mean exactly?"

"Yeah," Landon said, looking like he was trying to keep his composure, "what does that mean?"

"It means that the person who runs the fights wants to put money on you. He wants to invest in your fighter," Farhad said as he locked eyes with Landon.

"Hey," I said, getting the old man's attention, "I'm the fighter. I'm doing the work. You can talk to me," I was just as surprised by my sudden emergence of confidence. "Do we get to meet this guy, or what? How does it work?"

"He does want to meet with you. In fact, he's here tonight."

"Does he got a name?" I asked, beating Landon to the punch.

"Babak," Farhad said, bowing his head. I figured it was done to honor the man. "I can introduce you when you're ready..."

I cut him off, "We're ready now..."

Landon stepped in, "Give my fighter and I a few moments, would ya?" he asked before pushing me back, creating distance so he could drop the accent and talk to me, soldier to soldier, "What the fuck are you doing?"

“What the fuck do you mean?” I asked, looking over his shoulder to find Farhad staring at us. “You need to follow my lead. I’m getting us where you want us.”

We locked eyes as Landon said, “This is my operation. You follow my lead. So, dial it back, soldier. Are we clear?”

I shook my head, “Crystal.” He sighed before returning his attention to Farhad, telling him that we’d love to meet the man with the plan. I didn’t know if it was the high from the fight, or something else, but I wanted to meet Babak. I wanted to beat the truth out of him, and I wanted to get Talbot. The feeling of rage mixed in with betrayal, like a deadly cocktail no one dared to sip on.

Farhad motioned for us to follow him. Landon wouldn’t look at me. As we approached, I minded my surroundings, survival mode kicking it up a gear or two. I saw men with guns. The enemy of my enemy. And there he was. Babak. He was beefier than I expected. A scar then ran from the top of his forehead, over his right eye, which was covered by sunglasses, and down his cheek, disappearing in a jungle of a beard.

“These are the two we’ve spoken about, Babak.” Farhad said, introducing us.

“Pleasure to meet ya,” Landon said, extending a hand. Babak took it and the look in Landon’s eyes told me that the man’s grip startled him.

“Is this your fighter?” Babak asked, motioning towards me by tilting his head to the right.

“Yeah,” Landon said, choking up a bit, nearly dropping the ridiculous accent. I remained at ease, while he recovered, “that’s the man, right there,” he joked, pointing at me with his free hand.

Babak looked at me and I nodded while he spoke, “You’re a very good fighter. Where did you learn to fight like that?”

“From my father,” I said, just as I had told Landon after my first fight. “I fight to survive. To me, it’s life or death, and I’d rather stay on this side of the ground.”

“I can admire that,” Babak replied, flashing a toothy grin. One of his fangs had a silver cap on it, which made me wonder if he’d been a fighter himself. He certainly had the size for it. That thought made me wonder if I could take him in a fight. I knew if that were to happen, it would truly be life or death. “Our fathers,” he said, bringing me back to reality, “made us who we are, no?”

I nodded, “Yes, indeed.”

Silence fell between us for a few moments before the big man spoke once again, “How would you like to make some big money?”

“Yes, we’d love...”

Landon tried to respond but Babak lowered his sunglasses, exposing a gray eye and a cold glare, "I wasn't talking to you," he said, before looking back at me, "But what about you?"

"That's what I'm here for," I stated calmly. I knew there was no way that I could back down. I could tell Landon was losing his cool. Babak could tell, too. He saw that more as weakness than me tapping out. I could sense that.

"So," Babak began, "tell me. Why did you go back and fight Dom? He made you submit."

I scoffed and shrugged. I felt my shoulders as they ached from the fight. My brain screamed at my body, telling it to fight through the pain. To learn from it. To grow. "I'm not one to go down without a fight. If I can still fight, then I will. If I lose, I'll make sure I get my win back. And," I growled, "I don't take no for an answer."

The big man grinned. Landon did too, albeit uneasily. Babak nodded, "I like that, too. In saying that, I'd like to offer you the chance to fight for me. You would work for me. We could make a lot of money together. How does that sound?"

I glanced at Landon, who tried to hide the fact he was slowly shaking his head no before I looked back at Babak, knowing what I had to do. There was no way around it. It was now or never. "Yeah, I like that idea."

"Good," said Babak, "Come back here in a week. I'll be sure to have something lined up for you. A big, big fight. Lots of money."

He extended his hand, and I went to shake it, but I paused. He looked up at me and I grinned. I knew he felt disrespected, but something didn't sit right with me, as I said, "I don't mean to rub you the wrong way, but this feels a little too good to be true. Do you know what I mean?"

"I can't say that I do," Babak replied as he pulled his hand back. "Is something the matter?"

"How do I know that I can trust you?"

"How do I know that I can trust you?" he fired back.

"I guess neither of us know the answer to that question," I said.

"Right you are," Babak stated before climbing to his feet, "I believe we will just have to take one another at their word."

With him as close to me as he was, there was part of me that wanted to sink my teeth into his throat before ripping it out. But, I didn't. I had to play the part. I had to be a good little soldier. I sensed he respected me enough to have me beaten within an inch of my life, which he could've done easily. Letting out a soft breath, I took his hand in mine and shook it, as I said, "You've got a deal."

He grinned, "Good. This pleases me."

I nodded, "I will see you in a week." I nodded once again, as Babak did the same, before I turned to walk away with Landon, only for the big man to call after me. He called me 'fighter'. Looking at him, I said, "What is it?"

"Don't bring that pussy with you," Babak said, pointing at Landon. I gave another nod before we made our exit. Landon remained silent until we were far enough away, just like we always had to do after leaving a fight. We had to create enough distance, before meeting up at the rendezvous point.

Once we got there, Landon grabbed a beer out of the fridge. The rendezvous point was a room within a room more or less. It was equipped with food, water and beer, as well as places to sleep just in case we needed to go off the radar for a while.

"Something wrong?" I asked, breaking the silence as I could tell he was beyond frustrated.

"Yeah, there is," he bellowed, "You're out of fucking line, Hudson! This is my operation. I'm in charge! You need to remember that and fucking respect it!"

"You're pissed at me yet look where we are...because of me!" I shot back. The mission had changed me. Being in the desert, being involved in war did that to a man. I seemed to evolve almost daily, adapting to the violence I was subjected to almost routinely. "The motherfucker wants me to fight for him. Maybe that'll get him to open up to me, to trust me, so I can get more intel! For you!"

Landon sipped his beer, glaring at me. He swallowed and lowered his gaze, shaking his head and sighing, "Look," he said, "I know we're getting closer. Just not as close as I'd like us to be, under circumstances I didn't want us to deal with. But here we are..."

"Exactly," I said, "here we are. It's not the way you planned it but if there's one thing I've learned out here," I continued, "is that nothing goes the way you want it. War doesn't give a damn about your plans. You have to roll with the punches."

"And that's exactly what we're going to do," he said with a nod. "Roll with the punches. So," Landon stepped closer to me, "keep yourself in shape, and make sure you're being fucking careful. You're going to be going out there alone. I won't be able to have eyes on you. You have to be fucking solid. Are we clear?"

"Yeah," I said before grabbing a beer myself. I chugged it down. My body needed rest. I grabbed a shower, using what little bit of warm water could be pumped into the room within the room. Once that was done and I was dressed, it was time to return to base. To Talbot, and although Landon didn't have his suspicions, I did. I was curious to see how things would go down between Talbot and I once he saw I was back.

Once we arrived, Landon reminded me that I needed to be careful. To mind my surroundings. I knew what he meant. He wanted me on high alert. Being in the desert, I didn't know any other way to be. I could kill a man, easily. A gift and a curse.



The greeting upon my return wasn't as warm as it was when the mission first began. I was gone more than I was at base. It had become routine like everything else. I made my way over to my bunk. It was new as I was no longer near Abernathy. I'd gotten moved down the line, away from everyone else due to my constant absence.

Throwing my gear down and storing it in its proper place, I climbed onto my bunk, staring up at the ceiling, drowning out everything else around me. It was hard to change from one thing to the next. I could do it, but it wasn't easy. I adapted to my surroundings, but like a chameleon being consumed through its camouflage, it took some time.

Abernathy's voice chimed in my head. It helped pull me away from the fighting, away from the war going on inside as well as out, "Yo big man. Welcome back."

"Thanks," I said, still staring at the ceiling.

"How did things go this time?" he asked.

This is where I had to resort to lying. Lying was becoming much easier, especially to those I considered friends and family. Even when I could talk to my mother, I'd always tell her that things were going great, that I had adjusted really well. That I couldn't wait to come home for a visit. The truth was that things were shit and that would never change. I didn't want to come home anymore, because when I did, I always wanted to be back in the desert.

"They went pretty good," I said, recalling how exhausted and frightened I used to seem when I'd come back. I adapted. I evolved. War was becoming second nature. The violence had taken over, possessing me like a demon that I knew I'd never shake. "Another win for the good guys..."

Abernathy chuckled, "And who are the good guys exactly?" His question, in jest or not, bothered me. Before I knew it, I was on my side, glaring at him. Putting his hands up in surrender and taking a step or two back, he said, "Easy man. I'm just fucking with you."

"Are you sure about that?" I asked, swinging my legs off my bunk and finding myself standing before him. "We're the good guys. We're here for a reason. For a purpose." Talbot's words, along with Landon's, were now part of my lexicon. We were all on a mission. Everyone else needed to get in line, to get with the fucking program.

"Yeah, yeah," Abernathy said, "we're the good guys. We're out here killing kids and shit."

His statement took me back to the night outside the compound Abbas had holed up in. I saw a flash of him clutching his lifeless son, covered in the child's blood. Hearing my name shouted at the other end of the hall became my saving grace. The voice belonged to Talbot. The traitor.

My saving grace.

Abernathy and I shared a look. I knew that he felt I was a completely different animal altogether. He knew that I knew. I broke from his gaze and made my way towards Talbot, who led me into his office, closing the door behind us.

"Welcome back, soldier."

"Good to be back, sir. Thank you, sir," I said, trying to make my growing disgust for the man. The enemy of my enemy. My enemy.

He looked me over, more than likely analyzing the bumps and bruises on my face. The look of a fighter. "What the hell have you gotten into? You're coming back more and more looking like you've been beaten to shit."

I shrugged, "Just a little tussle with the enemy. Gotta take the good with the bad. You know? Roll with the punches, right?"

"I feel that," Talbot chuckled, "goddamn do I feel that," he shook his head and took a seat at his desk, keeping his eyes on me, "Where were you at this time?"

I tried to keep the 'life' from draining from my face. My suspicions of him rose a bit higher. I asked myself the question I asked Landon. Did Talbot know about the mission?

I went with the only thing that I could, "That's classified, sir. You know that I can give out that kind of information."

"The government and their fucking secrets," he said, chuckling once again. "Well, I'm just glad you're back. Maybe we can keep you a little longer this time."

"Maybe so," I said, looking back at him, seeing not a father figure any longer. A traitor was in my line of sight, and all I wanted to do was to have him in my scope, my finger grazing the trigger before I pulled it, and ended him, making him pay for his sins. For his fucking secrets.

"Are you alright, soldier?"

"Sir yes, sir."

"You were looking at me pretty hard. You've not decided to take one for the team with Landon, if you know what I'm saying. You know?" he chortled, "One of those 'don't ask, don't tell' situations." I wanted to punch him his perfect smile before driving a knife through his fucking heart.

I smirked, "Not at all, sir. I love pussy."

"Ah, me too," we shared a laugh, "I can't wait to get back to the world. I'm going to get as much pussy as my old ass can stand."

"Will there be anything else, sir? I'm pretty tired. Landon keeps in the sand more than you'd expect."

"Yeah, yeah," Talbot said with a nod, "Get some rest." I saluted him before turning away. Just as I went to leave his office, he called out to me, "Hudson?"

Facing him I said, "Sir?"

"Just remember who your enemy really is. Okay?"

I nodded, "You do the same, sir."

**I've said it. I've preached it. I've made it well known that I've always wanted to preserve the life of pro wrestling, this chosen profession of mine. I have fought for it. I have bled for it. I have damn near died for it. It's just the way I'm programmed, and being programmed is something the military does to anyone who enlists.**

**You are programmed to become a killing machine. You live, breathe, sleep, and eat with that mentality. That at any given moment, you could be under attack, and you must defend yourself until the enemy, or yourself, is no more. While being slightly watered down, I use the same approach to this sport. Sure, I could kill a man or woman I step into the ring with, if I was so inclined, but I'd rather not spend the rest of my life behind bars. But, I live, breathe, sleep, and eat this business. I want this sport to live on long after I'm gone, be it the SCW as the top name in the industry, or another. And that is why, despite not really showing it at the time, I was slightly puzzled a few weeks ago when I was finally presented with the SCW Heavyweight Championship of the World, because the fans booed me.**

**So, I guess we're back to that again. Am I mad about it? No. They pay their money for their tickets. They can do whatever the fuck they want. Confused by it? Yes. They booed me last year because I beat Owen's head in. I had a clear reason for it. I don't like him. I felt I was being overlooked because of him, so I took matters into my own hands. This company, and its fans, don't like when I do that, obviously. They'd rather me just sit around with a smile on my face. They'd rather me be happy that I've got a job, and that I can collect a paycheck. That's not how I fucking operate. But, after being in this business for as long as I have been, I know how the fans operate. They're fickle and will change their minds at the drop of a dime. I can't help but think of Glory Braddock when it comes to that subject.**

**Thinking about it now, I'm sure the fans, the SCW Universe, started to boo me because of how I gained so many pin falls and submissions. Colleen decided to help me out. She clearly wants me to get into her pants, which isn't happening. She was willing to lay her career down so I could continue advancing mine. Who would I be to say no? I mean, when that bell sounded, I wasn't in an arena. I was in the desert. I was on a battlefield, and all bets were off. It was all about survival. And I did what I did to survive, to walk out as champion.**

**It reminds me of the movie ‘A Few Good Men’, where Jack Nicholson’s character, Col. Jessup, is on trial. He delivers a monologue that has grabbed me in my guts. He says...**

*“Son, we live in a world that has walls, and those walls have to be guarded by men with guns.”*

**While I don’t have a gun, I do have my skills. Skills I learned through one of the toughest wrestling training regiments in the history of this sport. It was like the military basic training, but there was nothing basic about it. This company, this industry, this sport needs wrestlers such as myself to keep it alive. The work horses. Those who don’t need the fancy gimmickry bullshit and a famous last name.**

**Col. Jessup says...**

*“You don’t want the truth because deep down in places you don’t talk about at parties, you want me on that wall. You NEED me on that wall!”*

**He continues...**

*“We use words like ‘honor’, ‘code’, ‘loyalty’. We use these words as the backbone of a life spent defending something. You use them as a punchline. I have neither the time or inclination to explain myself to a man who rises and sleeps under the blanket of the very freedom that I provide and then questions the manner in which I provide it.”*

*“I would rather you just said, ‘thank you’ and went on your way. Otherwise, I suggest you pick up a weapon and stand the post.”*

**Those words. Honor. Code. Loyalty. We can even throw in the word ‘integrity’. To the bookers, the owners, and the majority of the SCW roster, those words are buzzwords. Something to place next to a hashtag. Something to tweet about. A theme to a promo, to convey a narrative that they’ve conjured up in their mind.**

**I have a code. I am loyal to this sport. I fight with the only kind of honor that I know. Honor in a fight is doing whatever is necessary to win, because as I’ve stated in my own promos, I treat each match like it’s a war, and all is fair in love and war. I love this sport, and I go to war for it, just as I went to war for this country.**

**In war, life is important. Life, along with information. I had to use and manipulate those who were my enemies, in order to gain information that, in turn, saved lives. I didn’t ask for permission from a fan base, or my comrades. I didn’t ask if they would like me for doing what I felt I had to do. So, the fans...they can boo me because of what went down between Colleen and myself. Owen, and the rest of the so-called ‘good guys and gals’ in the locker room, can try their best to chastise me, but at the end of the day, I don’t give a damn what anyone thinks.**

**I wanted to win. I wanted the SCW World Heavyweight Championship.**

**I did what I felt I needed to do.**

**I was honorable and loyal to myself.**

**The rest of you can fuck off.**

**Because the SCW World Heavyweight Championship...**

**...this...this is mine...**

The memory faded as I woke. It was the night after Body, Heart, and Soul, where I forced Chance to submit, in order to retain the SCW United States Championship. After I spoke to Landon, uttering the code word 'Precium', and realizing what that meant, I struggled for sleep. I was thankful once it consumed me. Glancing at the clock, I realized that it was damn near check out time from the hotel. I also heard a lot of noise coming from outside my room.

Getting up and stepping into the living room area of the suite, I saw Talbot in the kitchen, cooking away. I guess he heard my footsteps across the floor as he looked at me as I drew nearer. A grin formed as he said, "Good morning, sunshine. Boy, do you look like shit or what?"

Smirking, I gave a wave as I replied, "I don't think you have any room to talk, old man. You were fucking sauced last night. How much did you have to drink?"

"What's it to you?" he asked, sounding slightly offended. I just stared at him, which grabbed Talbot's attention, causing an increase in his irritability. "Alright. Fuck. I celebrated your big win," he said, "you're my prize student. You went out and kicked ass. Like," Talbot sighed, smiling like a proud father. The enemy of my enemy, "I know there were moments that you could've put that little prick away earlier than you did, but hey..."

"I was introduced to violence," I interrupted, "You know? The violence you taught me about."

He nodded, "It is the violence that separates us from other men," he said before silence fell between us. I glanced over at the pans he had on the stove, "Oh. Want some breakfast? I drank as much as I did," Talbot winked at me as he went about flipping bacon and some eggs, "and I figured I needed to refuel. There's no telling how many times I threw up last night."

"Old man can't hold his liquor?" I joked, and for a moment, it felt like old times. Like father, like son. Something that I had always wanted, but I had to force a change within my way of thinking. I remembered Abbas. I remembered Precium. I remembered who stood before me. The enemy. That was a fact I simply could not forget.

"You've got the 'old' part right," he replied, giving a chuckle mixed with a wheezing cough. Maybe his old age truly was creeping upon him, I thought. Maybe death would reach Talbot for Landon and the U.S. government did. Part of me wanted to feel sorry for him and his declining health. The part of myself I had to ignore. "So," we locked eyes as I returned to reality, "breakfast?"

Snatching a strip of bacon out of the pan, I shook my head, "Nah. It's almost time to get out of here, so enjoy yourself. I'm going to get ready. I suggest you hurry up," I said before disappearing into the master bedroom section of the suite. Closing the door behind me, I exhaled as I closed my eyes. Resting my head against the door, I told myself to rid my mind of any weakness. I couldn't have thoughts of Talbot as a father figure. I had to keep those thoughts in check. To bury them, just as I wanted to bury him.

I focused my mind on the conversation with Landon from the night before. I stood outside on the hotel balcony. I wasn't in some American city. No, I was back in the desert, at least in my head. I was fighting the good fight like the soldier I'd been born to become.

"Tell me your current situation," Landon had said.

"He's in my hotel room, passed out," I replied, "but he's been tracking Abbas."

"Abbas?" Landon questioned, "Are you sure?"

Looking back into the hotel suite, I noticed no movement before I replied, "Yes, I'm sure. I saw the motherfucker with my own eyes."

"You did?"

"Yes," I said, "I even spoke with him. He's in America, using a fake name."

"Jesus Christ," Landon sighed, "I've no doubt Talbot got that son of a bitch into the States, just like I've no doubt he helped set Abbas up with a life he didn't deserve."

The creeping thought of taking the life of his son snaked its way into my mind. Did he not deserve a good life after what I did? I remembered shaking my head, like I was trying to shake loose the thought so it could fall from my brain and rot away.

"Are you still there?" Landon asked, his voice bringing me from my thoughts, which I needed.

"Yeah, yeah," I said, "I'm still here." I exhaled heavily, "So, what do we do now?"

"Try to get that son of a bitch to talk," he barked, "He's kept his ass out of so much trouble. I don't know who he had in an office that vouched for him, but Talbot's not getting away from me this time."

"And Abbas?"

"What about him?"

"What do you want to do about him?"

"Well, what does Talbot want to do?"

I checked the suite once again. Still no movement. "He wants us to kill him," I said, "and by us...I mean, he and I. At least, that's the impression I've been given."

"He wants to kill him, huh? That's interesting. Any theories on that?"

I scoffed, "I'm not sure," I said as I began to pace back and forth, looking into the suite as much as possible, "Maybe he doesn't want Abbas to come clean about it all? Like I said, I'm not sure."

"That sounds like a good place to start," Landon replied. "I'll check to see if there have been any contacts made with Abbas. He could be a turncoat, looking to save his hide by giving someone else up."

"Just let me know," I said, ending the call, along with the memory. Talbot was still in the kitchen, and I needed to keep up with appearances. I grabbed a shower and packed all my things once I was dressed, before finding him in the kitchen still, washing dishes. "Ready to get out of here, old man?" I asked, as he turned to face me, "We've got a flight to catch."

"Right behind you," he said as he dried off his hands. I waited for him to gather his belongings, which wasn't much, and we left the room then the hotel, catching a cab to the airport. Once we were there, we had some time to kill, and Talbot wanted to get a drink, so I followed him to an airport restaurant that came with a full bar. Keeping my eyes on him, I began to remember Landon's instructions. To get Talbot to talk.

He sipped his drink before glancing over at me, "Something on your mind, son?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"I've known you for a long time, Hudson. I'm sure I can tell when you've got something on your chest that you want to rid yourself of."

"Perhaps you're right."

"Of course, I am," he said with a smirk and a nod before sipping on his drink some more. To be a traitor, I thought, he sure was confident. I couldn't stand it. The urge to slam him face first into the bar crossed my mind more times than I'd care to admit. Just know it was there, my child.

"So, what do you want to talk about?"

I shrugged, not knowing the best way to proceed, other than to just do it. As the words began to build in the corners of my mouth, I reminded myself once again, that he was the enemy. A traitor. He was owed justice for the wrong he'd done. The wrong he subjected me to. "I wanna talk about Abbas..."

"What about him?" he asked, and I noticed a sudden change in tone. He gulped his drink then and ordered another. That time, a double.

"I asked you 'why now' the other night, and you couldn't really give me an answer," I said, "I want to know the truth, Talbot."

We locked eyes as he turned to face me.

"You owe me that much," I added.

"The truth can be an ugly thing," he replied softly. "It comes out of nowhere most of the time. Even though we expect it, it doesn't always turn out the way we wanted, or thought it would. Do you understand?"

"The only thing I understand right now, is that you're avoiding the question."

"I just don't think you'll like the truth."

"You should know me well enough," I began, "to know that I can handle a lot more than you seem to think."

I held his gaze for a while after I said that, and I couldn't help but wonder where the conversation was going to go. Would he tell me the truth, or would it be another lie? Deception was part of a soldier's training, and if he was the treacherous bastard I'd grown to see him as, then there was no telling what side of Talbot that I'd see. We were both liars when we needed to be. Hell, he was the best, and that's who I had learned from. Something told me, at that moment, that I wouldn't be able to get to him by being the good guy. I had to be the villain. I had to show him the violence was still there.

"And that's all well and good," Talbot said, ordering a third drink before looking at me, "but every man has their breaking point."

I looked at him as he said that, and I began to wonder what his breaking point was. If he was a traitor, he had to have had one, right? Something had to set him off, to make him converse with the enemy. Looking him up and down, I tried to study him, to see him as an object. Not a person. More of a dead body, something I could dissect and pick apart, letting the organs reveal all his secrets.

"You say that like you've reached yours," I replied before ordering a drink for myself. Something told me that I was going to need it. "So, what was it?"

"Are you trying to psychoanalyze me, son?" he gave a gruff smirk, "You don't want to see into my head, kid. Trust me. If you could see the things I've seen."

"I've seen a lot of the same things," I fired back. "You can call it a psychoanalysis if you want," I sipped my drink, "That's fine, and maybe I am. All I'm trying to do is to get an understanding of why you want to get rid of Abbas."



"He's the one who got away," Talbot muttered, sounding defeated in every conceivable way. "We had a mission and we failed. Wiping him off the face of the Earth would be redemption for me. Hell, for you, too."

"Redemption for what?"

He looked at me like he'd rather slap me instead of having that conversation. Like I should already know the answer to my question. "Up until that point, I'd never failed a mission. And from what I can recall," he continued, "you never failed a mission afterwards. That shit bird Landon had nothing but praise for you."

All those missions, I thought. It was all a façade, my brain continued. You were the mission. You still are the mission.

**Owen said...**

*"But while you can talk about how you got me to tap at Rise to Greatness and yeah, that moment may live rent-free in my head, the fact is that because it does, it makes me more dangerous. But you are right...no rematches. No second chances. I either step up and get it done or Josh, you get the last laugh."*

**Owen, you fucking idiot. For all his tough talk, Owen knows that while I brag about tapping him out, I know it lives 'rent free' in his head. I know it does. Losing to me on the grandest stage of them all. A few months before that, I pinned him. Sure, I nailed him with a low blow, but I beat him. All is fair in love and war. Just like I beat him the first time we faced off. He was the 'golden boy', the 'prince', and I was a veteran who was struggling, so nobody gave me a sliver of a chance to win, and yet, I did. I know, in his heart of hearts, to Owen, I am a plague. I'm a virus, a sickness, a cancer, that he just can't beat, no matter what he does.**

**People who are sick, with something such as cancer, not only rely on science, but they rely on their faith. They pray to God for a cure. They pray to God to wash away their sicknesses, to cleanse them, and make them healthy again. Owen relies on tough talk and crowd reactions, doesn't he?**

*"And God knows we don't need to hear that forever. So, Josh...we'll get the match we both want...in Kansas City...and Josh, I just plan to beat you. So be ready because if I know one thing...I shocked Xander...I handled Hairless Penguin...I rose to the occasion with Kimberly Williams."*

**The crowd loved that one. I could hear it in his voice, and I could see it on his face. He loved every minute of it, too. He felt like he was on top of the world, but it wasn't just us. There wasn't a ref. A bell had not rung. He felt powerful.**

*"And I gave Adam Allocco the beating he deserved...but none of that will pale in comparison for how important April 23 will be for me. Because on that night, I END this by becoming a Double Champion and over you. Don't need 'feud' or 'match of the night'. Just need to win!"*

More tough talk. He was really selling the pay-per-view there wasn't he? And, I couldn't help but fall back into a trend of feeling unimpressed. He beat Xander. Yeah, I've been there, and I've done that. We can all be honest. Xander is but a shell of his former self's self. Owen also 'handled' Hairless Penguin. Penguin is a pussy who's too afraid of his own shadow, and the fucker still gave Owen a run for his money. And Kimberly Williams? She's good in the ring, but she relies on cheap parlor tricks and ripping off a superhero franchise to make herself slightly relevant. That nonsense overshadows her in-ring skills, and that costs her more than she realizes.

Oh, and let's not forget. He gave Adam Allocco a beating that he deserved. Much like Xander, Adam is a shell of his former self. Adam's heart isn't into this like it was last year for Taking Hold of the Flame and Rise to Greatness. He's the type to get the big win, only to piss it away because he got way too fucking complacent. I know all about being complacent. I know all about what happens in that ring when you don't give your all. With this sport, you have to give your all. It's not all about talking on the stick and selling shows. It's about what goes down when the fucking bell rings. Owen has been made to feel special with all the gimmicks, bells, and whistles. With me, they rang the bell, and I fought long and hard to prove that I fucking belonged.

Owen...you make me laugh.

Telling the world that he wanted this match when he ducked me. Tweeting me and saying that there was a list of contenders and that I wasn't at the front of the queue. When we stand across from one another, he's going to know that during his title reign, he was nothing short of lucky. That I spoke the truth when I said the SCW and the powers-that-be, protected him from me. He responded on Twitter saying that those powers had to find the match viable. It was the match he needed. The match I deserved. Owen wanted to call it an obsession, because he wanted to try and make me look like a fool.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes. He called it an obsession when the truth of the matter is that being the World Champion, to me, signifies one as the best. I felt, just as I feel now, that I was the best. I wanted to prove it by fighting for the World Championship. If you're not in this sport to be World Champion, to be at the very top of the food chain, then you need to get the fuck out of the way. So, yeah. Owen talks a big game. I remember how he told me that, in the lead up to our match at Rise to Greatness, that he was a lion, and the lion was ready to roar. Always talking a big game, but that talk gets turned to mumbles and grumbles. That lion's roar, thanks to me, became nothing less than a whimper.

**At Rise to Greatness, at Breakdown a few weeks, I more than proved I was at the head of the line. That I was more than viable. When the bell rings, Owen...you're no longer protected. All your words. All the cheers from the fans. Nothing will keep you safe.**

**Not from me.**

**As this won't be about feud of the year, or match of the night. It's going to be the match of your life.**