

Tiberius Rising

Tiberius Rising

By : **ParkourDude91**

A book which follows seargent stryker and his men under his command through tours of duty through afghanistan, iraq, and more.

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Tiberius Rising : Chapter 1

This book is dedicated to pC. Timothy Smitts.

Seargent Ramirez checked the sight lines on his rifle. All clear. Wind was blowing southwest at a velocity of 6 mph, and with a slight movement of his hand he adjusted the rifle to compensate for drift and windspeed. He calculated the distance to target, the ballistic drop of his bullet, and factored in the Bernoulli effect. All was clear, and all he had to do was take the shot. His spotter, Jenkins, announced the distance to target: 1.3 miles away. His name: Omar Khadr.

"Hold fire", said Corporal Stryker. "Look i know you can get ahead of your self when your sniping Ramirez. But we need this one alive." Ramires shot him with an angry glare, but then stood up and left the Barret .50 cal rifle with matte black finish for concealment. Attached to the top receiver piccitanny rail was a 36x zoom scope and red dot hybrid sight. The weapon was a custom job if Stryker had ever seen one. With a smooth hairpin trigger pull, it was easy as a walk in the park to scope out some tangos, and with the enhanced ergonomic pistol grip and cheek rest for sniping, it was easier than ever to truly eliminate your target down the barrel. The butt stock just helped stabalize the recoil even more making this weapon not only a deadly choice for long-distance killing but a marvel of modern bleeding edge tech.

But none of that was important, what was important on this mission was getting the hostages out alive; there were ten of them, all Reuters reporters that were doing some embedded journalism story on terrorism and just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time but that's the risk you take when you fly into a warzone Stryker thought out loud and then he looked over to Ramirez who was clearly getting very impatient.

"Sir hes going to get away if we dont take the shot", he said. "Civillian lives are at risk! I know you think you're some kind of war hero, but if we can't save our own people we're supposed to protect, then what the FUCK can we do sir?" Ramirez may have had a steady hand for sniping, but he had a hot head and a filthy mouth. Still though he was Strykers #1 right hand man for any situation involving long-range fire.

"I said hold fire! Get a hold of yourself Ramirez. I'm the ranking officer here. If we shoot him now we have a chance of hostages dying. They are using them as human shields - sick and twisted. And if we let civillians die, we will be court-marshalled sooner than you can say FUBAR, rookie." said Corporal Stryker.

Ramirez sighed and went back to the rifle. His spotter was tracking the terrorist's every move to make sure they didn't get the drop on them. They were in an abandoned tower barely over a mile from their location - an old yellowed stone building the wall of which had been blasted out by an IED round or a mortar. Stryker couldn't tell which, and it didn't really matter. In any case, the hole in the wall offered a perfect spot for sniping - they could cover a very large angle from this position without being spotted. But of course the main force was the one that was important: they were just storming the front gates when it was time. Stryker's team was more tac support than a spearhead. But none of this mattered now.

He got a call on his radio. "They're threatening to take out one of the hostages if we don't end our siege", the commander told him. Stryker grimaced. These people are no more than barbarians, but they at least know when they are surrounded. "We can't let this guy get away. No offense sir... but I'm taking the shot", he said. The commander began screaming through the radio. He took it off his vest and tossed it out the window. His squad looked at him, shocked.

"What? Don't tell me you've never seen me do that before." he said. The squad laughed, giving him a pat on the back. It was true, just like the old days Stryker had always been a lone wolf on the battlefield. But this time, it was no joke. This was high stakes stuff, they were dealing with a terrorist the likes of which had never

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been seen before. But none of that mattered now. He ordered Ramirez to get away from the rifle.

"It's all lined up for you, sir. Take the shot." he said in his familiar Mexican accent.

Stryker laid down near the rifle. He took it in his hands, and looked through the 36x magnification lens. He saw a terrorist in a burkha holding an innocent male journalist like an human shield, who was clearly terrified, crying his eyes out in fear. Stryker zeroed in on the terrorist's head. There he was. Omar Khadr. The man he had been hunting for the last two years of his life. This was it. It all came down to this moment. He placed his hand in the trigger guard, and slowly pulled back the trigger...

BOOM!!! The round rocketed out of the flash hider. Omar ducked out of the way just in time, and the hostage's head exploded. Stryker dropped the rifle, horrified. He looked around the room.

"Holy shit, searge..." said jenkins.

"This is FUBAR if I've ever seen one", ramirez added.

---THIS IS A WORK IN PROGRESS IT IS LIABLE TO CHANGE AND BE EXPANDED AT ANY MOMENT!! -Jace

Chapter 2: Rimfire

The round rocketed through the air... past the ground troops stacking up on the front gates and right into the journalist's head.

He thought of home his job, all the people he knew, the things he did with his life... and how he ended up in this hellhole, 3 thousand miles from home, it all went flashing before his eyes before the very last thing he would ever see: a .50 cal round right between his eyes. In an instant, it was all over for Ken Thompson, an innocent man who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time...

Omar Khadr stood to the side of him, now in cover from the sniper fire, and looked at the body with disgust.

"Throw the capitalist dog off the walls!" he commanded his soldiers who heaved the body out of the hole in the wall that Stryker sniped into and it landed with a thud in the harsh desert sand right in front of the american troops stationed outside waiting for the all-clear to storm the building and go loud on the threats inside.

Unfortunately for him the soldiers had better things to do, and so there Ken laid roasting in the desert sun with his blood staining the sand. He was not just another casualty... he was Strykers casualty. Not the first in the US conflict in afghanistan however Strykers first, the first innocent he would kill and he vowed it would be his last.

"DAMNIT!!" he exclaimed, dropping the rifle to the ground, trying to get the image of the poor dead man out of his head. He watched the whole thing from his scopes - the way they tossed the body out of the building like a useless peice of garbage. Stryker knew he was fighting terrorists...but this...this was a new kind of terrorism. Total disrespect for human life.

There was a knock on the door. "I TOLD YOU TO STAND DOWN!" his CO, Mag, said, barging in. "Hey no offense sir but this is a sniper's nest, why don't you go back to your desk job..." Stryker wisecracked. It was true they had a clear shot on him from here but that wasnt the point.

Ramires began packing up the rifle back into his kit and Jenkins radioed for them to hold off the storm of the building but it was truely too late. Even by the time he could reach them he could hear gunfire cracking from their radios, and see soldiers storming into the front gates with guns blazing. Shouts of "Allah Akhbar" echoed across the radio frequencies as tangos were nailed down in the soldiers sights one by one.

"Listen Stryker i know you think you're some kind of high-flying loose cannon" mag said "but we have Civillian lives on the line here, dude. You are going to need to keep your shit together on the line of fire if you don't want your ass court marshalled faster than you can say FUBAR."

Stryker grimaced at him. Ramirez and Jenkins looked at Stryker expectantly. Finally, he spoke. "Alright Mag. Lets go".

1500 HOURS: Specops Command Bunker

The freight elevator came to a halt and the doors opened as Commander Stryker sauntered throughout the underground bunker. The secret installation was located two miles underneath the ancient city of Kandahar - but it was not your typical bunker. This was a covert command and resupply center for all ground ops in the Kandahar area - and not only that, it was deep underground enough to resist anything short of a MOAB or a small nuke. On all sides of Stryker were reinforced steel, like some sort of high tech underground base.

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Suddenly though his examination of the base was interrupted by Mag. "You are to report to Captain Amerine for orders, as usual. He's not going to be happy with this situation", Mag said.

"I know..." Stryker said, looking down at his feet sadly.

They entered the bulkhead of the door into the situation room. Amerine stood in the middle of the room at the conference table, studying a map of Kandahar, with all the Taliban hot-spots marked with a red X. Across from him was a squad, obviously just having been briefed by Amerine, checking their gear in preparation for the next assault, planning their attacks as Arms Sergeants rushed back and forth to and from the armory carrying armfuls of Weapon Mods. At the bank of servers, Airstrike Controllers piloted Predator drones and shouted kill-orders into their microphones, commanding the gunners of Blackhawks and AC130's.

"Commander Stryker. Come in", Amerine said.

"Sir..." Stryker began

"At ease, commander", Amerine said. "There's no time for formalities."

"I'm going to make this quick..." Amerine said, ashing his Cuban cigar quickly. He walked away from the group of people to talk to Stryker privately, speaking in a hushed voice. "This isn't just a standard capture-or-kill. The terrorist you are up against has a fearsome reputation. He's been a thorn in our side for years, but he's been in hiding, and only now has he returned to Kandahar to plan his final attack. We are sending you in to take him out. You will select your own squad and gear, and we'll let you take it from there, but don't count on us for tac support."

"You're sending in just me and my squad? Captain, that's a suicide mission. You know we aren't equipped for that."

Amerine sighed, and looked down at the holographic map in shame. "Listen, kid. The brass wants you out of here for what you did to that journalist. But they're trying to take out two birds with one stone. They don't expect you to come out of this alive, Stryker."

"I know." Stryker said. Amerine looked up at him, surprised, but before he could say anything, Stryker said "But they're going to have to try harder than that. Because let me tell you something, Captain... My life is like a movie. And this movie doesn't have a surprise ending... the good guys win."

"...And you are the 'good guy'?" Amerine said, looking up at him with disbelief.

"Hell no... but I'm still going to win."

Chapter 3: Rising

-----CHAPTER 3: RISING

Stryker walked down the metal corridor. He had to tell his squad the news and set the situation five-by-five. Jenkins was terrified, Ramirez was pissed off. But Stryker knew this was coming. He knew that from the moment he killed that civilian, his career was over.

Stryker grimaced as he tried vainly to fall asleep in his bunkbed. He knew the days to come weren't going to be easy. "What's wrong, Commander?" Jenkins asked.

"I have a bad feeling about this mission... Specops aren't supposed to do anything like this. We're made for behind-the-scenes combat. Stuff you don't see in the headlines, but that makes the difference between victory and defeat every day."

"Si, commander. Neutralizing enemy AA, disrupting supply routes, recon and sniping... that's what we're here for. Single-handedly taking down the most dangerous warlord since Bin Laden - that's a whole different kettle of fish", Ramirez added.

"You're damn right", Stryker agreed. The next thing he knew, he was asleep. He didn't know it then, but it was the last decent rest he would get for a long time.

Chapter 4: ARNAMENT

-----CHAPTER 4: ARNAMENT

Commander Stryker woke up to the sound of jack-booted soldiers stomping on the floor above him. It was time to mobilize, once and for all. He woke up, and stood up in his bed to talk to his soldiers "Alright guys...it's time. We are going to take down this bastard once and for all".

"Searge..." Ramirez began. Stryker could see he wasn't looking forward to this mission. He knew every mission could be his last, but with this one..

"Searge nothing, Ramirez. We have to do this. It's our duty as soldiers. We might not like it... but we have to push through. And we might be backed into a corner... but we've got the entire US armed forces behind us. So lock and load."

And so even with their regrets the men under his command went forward with him to the armory to gear up.

Making sure to play each squad member to their strengths Stryker kitted out Ramirez as a sniper - giving him a finely tuned MK 14 Mod 0 EBR. Based around the 7.62mm x 51mm M-14 rifle, The EBR was the weapon of choice for the Navy SEALs when it came to medium to long-range engagements so it was already a force to be reckoned with but after Stryker's modifications it was truly a sight to behold. He began with a desert digicamo finish for minimum visibility in the Afghan conditions then kicked it off with new recoil springs aided in quick intense long-range skirmishes where putting multiple shots downrange was a life-or-death priority and between the customized ergonomic grip the rubber cheek rest and the Wilson Combat Ambidextrous Tactical Thumb Safety modkit he had swapped in the weapon was a breeze to use, and fit right into Ramirez' hands like it was custom moulded to his body because in essence was. But that wasn't all because the gun also sported an extended bipod and hybrid sniper optics which transformed it from a run-of-the-line battle rifle to a long-range threat suitable for scoping out enemies at extreme distances but also useful for up close work as the fast acquisition forward combat sights would soon prove.

Jenkins, on the other hand, was in a support role. He carried the necessary comms equipment and medical supplies for the squad as well as extra food, water and ammo. In addition to his rucksack of supplies he wore lightweight gear and customized steel-toed boots. But These weren't just any kind of boots you could find in a catalog somewhere - These were stealth-grade armor that muffled his footsteps and protected him at the same time. In this way Jenkins could keep pace with the rest of them but retain a low-profile and leave most of the tangos to Ramires and Stryker. Jenkins was a short man, a whopping 5'5 of Irish fury. He was a quiet guy, but don't let that fool you; he was a computer expert and could aim a Predator strike like nothing Stryker had ever seen. On top of that, he carried a fully loaded mil-spec Para LMG which was a truly fearsome weapon if stryker had ever seen one, it was a compact version of the SAW with a shorter barrel and sliding aluminum buttstock but also and quick-change barrel, allowing the gunner to rapidly replace an overheated or jammed barrel in the heat of a fight. He had also attached a custom tripod to the front instead of the standard bipod. Best of all though was the fact that the Para can be either belt fed or use standard rifle clips from M4s and M16s so he could share ammo with his squad if he needed to get out of a sticky situation and his gun was running dry so Stryker added a top mount sight and a lazer scope for quick acquisition but Jenkins had been on enough sneaks to know to keep the lazer turned off when he was sneaking.

Then, for sidearms, Stryker fell back on his old standby - the SIG-TF. The whole team carried them- they were based off Sig Sauer p226s, a full-sized, service-style tac sidearm. Chambered in punishing 9Å 19mm Parabellum, .40 S&W, .357 SIG, and .22 Long Rifle, borrowing the same design of the SIG P220, but developed to use higher capacity, staggered-column magazines in place of the single-column magazines of the P220. The P226 itself has spawned further sub-variants; the P228 and P229 are both compact versions of the

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staggered-column P226 design. The SIG Sauer P226 and its variants are trusted by both law enforcement agencies and militaries. But Stryker's sidearm was a specialty piece - not the kind of gun you could find in a catalog. Dubbed the SIG-TF, it was essentially a cross between the P226 Elite and P226 Tac versions. Chambered in .40 S&W, it boasts several preinstalled out-of-the-box Weapon Mods, including an ergonomic extended beavertail, forward cocking serrations, front strap checkering, custom moulded treegrip, adjustable combat night and low-light sights, and Short Reset Triggers. With truly top of the line specifications designed for the heat of combat, SIG engineers designed the SIG-TF to provide the same safety and action of the SIG DA/SA trigger with a reset that is 60% shorter for faster trigger return during high speed, up close and personal shooting, and tops it all off with an extended 127 mm (5.0 in) barrel and external silencer threading, giving the option for silent takedowns, TRUGLO Tritium Fiber Optic front sight, rear SIGLITE night sights, and a SIG accessory rail. With the Weapon Mods squared away, Stryker finished the job with mil-grade tac silencers, Surefire flashlights and a few extended mags as well as a quick-swap mag or two. For knives, Stryker carried a set of 20 mil-spec Damascus steel throwing knives, Jenkins a Ka-Bar, and Ramirez sported a full-length machete.

For gear, they each used standard Digicam on everything. They prepared their go-to-hell packs and put them inside their rucks. With all the gear laid out, Jenkins tried to come up with a load plan, and it wasn't easy. They were each carrying enough ammo for three people. Stryker had a bad feeling about this mission so he decided at the last minute to bring along some more spare mags loaded down with ammo just in case because he would need them but he didn't know that now for sure really - everyone knew that the situation could easily get hairy and they definitely didn't want to have to go guerrilla and give up their weapons.

Finally, with all their gear done, they got briefed.

His target was one Omar Khadr. He was known best for his four-hour hold out against U.S. troops in 2002 in the village of Ayub Kheyl, where he killed an American soldier with a grenade - and this was when he was 15.

Now, after escaping attempts to nab him for years, and many close calls, he was not anymore a child soldier but instead the de facto warlord of the region. He had garnered respect from all of the local insurgents and they viewed him as something of a child prodigy - an up and coming leader, even. Which meant Stryker was going to have to take him out before he grew into a bigger problem. So far, he'd been unsuccessful.

So far.

Chapter 5: "INFILTRATOR"

-----CHAPTER 5: "INFILTRATOR"

Stryker rifled through the thick dossier on his way to the drop zone. They had chosen to enter the region by helicopter - stealthier that way. The pilots - a bunch of guys from the 160th, as they bragged - all used NVDs, not floodlights, allowing them to fly stealthier - or, at least as stealthy as a fully loaded MH-60L Blackhawk helicopter can be. However at night in the pitch black desert environment, they were pretty much invisible.

The time was 4:03 AM - right in the sweet spot. Pre-dawn nautical twilight, or "Darkest Before Dawn". The darkest part of the night - that offered the best concealment to soldiers like Stryker. As a SEAL, Stryker always preferred stealth missions. He thought it was more skillful to never be seen than to just blow up everything. And, by God, Afghanistan allowed for very good stealth. With no light pollution, it was pitch black at night in the countryside, and aside from wind there was absolutely no noise. He could hear a target coming way before they could get the drop on him. That's why their entry point was right outside Kabul - the biggest city in this shithole of a country.

"We've arrived at the drop zone", the helo pilot announced. Stryker looked up at Jenkins and Ramirez. One look in their eyes and he could tell his squad was fully kitted out and ready for infil. He thumbed the tac-mic.

"Razor Mike, deploy" he yelled. His squad mates quickly opened the helo door and jumped to grab the fast rope, quickly rappelling down to the ground as they hung from the rope suspended 30 feet above the air. Stryker looked out into the barren desert, with the terrorist hub of all of Iraq - Kandahar - brightly lit up the dark horizon. He knew this was going to be a tough op...probably his toughest. And he knew he was going right into the belly of the beast. Nobody expected him to come out alive... and he was going to prove them wrong.

He sighed, cocked a round into the chamber and grabbed the rope. Down he went, grabbing the rope for dear life. He hit the ground on a hill, and tucked and rolled. The helicopter was already pulling away. He got his gear and stood up... "Im getting too old for this shit", he said hoarsely. Jenkins gave him a laugh and they proceeded to the base... It was going to be a long hike. The mountain ranges of Kandahar were deadly with sudden drops and nasty cliffs, but the last thing Stryker needed was to touch down in a hot drop zone. He was going to play it by the book, and he knew that by landing under the cover of night, well outside the "Area of Operations", he could approach silently before anyone knew he was on-site.

He looked over at Jenkins and Ramirez who were stacked up in a defensive position to cover his landing. He keyed his mic. "OK move out", he said. Jenkins and Ramirez formed up in a line and they set on their way across the rocky landscape.

"Someone must have heard that chopper", Jenkins said nervously. "Those bitches ain't quiet..." He gripped his gun tightly, scanning the horizon for threats.

"That's why we're SEALS. No fuckin' water in the desert to swim in", Ramirez joked back.

"Cut the chatter guys..." Stryker said. Man it was going to be a long night before they were safe.

Chapter 6: Eastbound

Chapter 6: Eastbound

"Our agency is fond of the saying that a single well-placed bullet can change the course of history. Today, it appears we were right."

"Most certainly, my friend", Omar Khadr said into the sat-phone as he paced around his safehouse. "My brotherhood extends its deepest gratitude. If it wasn't for your intervention, I wouldn't be alive. But what of Stryker?"

"We sent him right into Kabul, just like you said. Assuming you can handle your end of the deal, he should be taken care of soon enough."

A wolfish grin broke onto Omar's face. "That is satisfactory, Director. We'll take it from here." The scrambled voice at the other end was impatient. "What about our end of the deal?" Omar paused for just the right amount of time though, knowing just how to anticipate the Director's moves in this game of chess. "We will discuss that once Stryker is dead." The director sighed. "As you wish".

The phone disconnected, and Omar smiled again.

Chapter 7: AFGHAN SUNRISE

-----CHAPTER 7: AFGHAN SUNRISE

Stryker and his team had been on the ground for hours now. Their approach through the mountains was slow and steady and methodical with Ramirez scanning every possible ambush point with his EBR miles out. But at 0600 hours, just before sunrise, they ran into some serious trouble.

Stryker was leaping across the dangerous chasms and cliffs like a mountain goat, never stopping or even slowing down even though hed been doing it for hours. He was a natural climber and his fluid and precise parkour movements made him look like a natural on the battlefield of the cliffside. But Jenkins and Ramirez were not so lucky and Ramirez mis stepped, And almost fell a drop of 300 feet down to the bottom of the valley. Jenkins panicked and Stryker ran over just in time to catch him but not before most of his gear attached to his MOLLE pack fell down and was crushed. "SHIT!" Ramirez shouted and Stryker and Jenkins managed to pull him up. Thankfully Ramirez was a pretty leightweight guy but his gear still weighed a lot basically.

Dusting himself off Ramirez looked down and grimaced. "Shit, we're in trouble now cabron. There goes all our maps and comms..." "Looks like well have to go gueirllla" Said Jenkins. Stryker just looked up at the rising sun and said to himself. "MOLLE gear's plastic bits have been known to snap off or break when they are loaded down with lots of stuff, That is why I kept saying to command that we should get ALICE for mountain environments" To which Jenkins replid "ALICE? That stuff is old school, chief. We are better off using the new tech."

Ramirez, still panicking said "Both of you gringos shut the hell up! We got a mission to do!"

Stryker refocused and nodded to him. "Your damn right we do. But now the mission barely started and already we've fucked ourselves. We have to regroup and get back in touch with command. If we don't check in, they will assume we're KIA and send in reinforcements, and if that happens, we can kiss the element of surprise goodbye". Jenkins listened closely and followed Stryker as they set off, but Ramirez still stood there impatiently. With a Pissed off look, he said "And how the fuck are we gonna do that, chief? We're in the middle of nowhere with no comms and no maps, how are we gonna get in touch with command?"

Stryker ignored his hot headed attitude and kept cool and in charge. He flicked on his sunglasses and looked off at the distant horizon, noticing a radio tower in the distance that looked like it was probably occupied by enemy forces. "What will we do, Ramirez? W'e'l will do whatever it fucking takes." Locking and loading his M4, he strode off down the mountain trail, Jenkins and Ramirez in tow.

Chapter 8: Westbound

-----CHAPTER 8: "WESTBOUND"

Fawad Alsulani made his rounds across the radio facility. Lazily, and smoking from a pipe of traditional hashish, he was meandering the outside walls and checking for dirty pig spit Americans. The sons of goats would die in his sights if he came across them. Spec Ops or not, They were nothing more to him than future grave sites. Allah guided his hand, he could not lose against the Americans.

He wandered through the radio facility, it was about sunrise so he was one of the first ones awake, but he was on guard duty. It was still hard to see. He walked next to a bush.

Fawad thought of the next person he would kill in the name of Allah. It was a good thought. He was just walking around casually basically just smoking from his pipe and stuff looking when all of a sudden and before he even knew what hit him he was shot in the head with a silenced .44 magnum pistol. Then, two large arms in a bdu suit grabbed him and dragged his lifeless body into the nearby bush concealing it from sight. Three heavily armed Specop Soldiers emerged from the bush, guns drawn with silencers on and scanning for any threat as they tactically walked over to the fire escape of the building.

Stryker then took up his throat mic and subvocalized to his team silently. "OK guys let me handle it./Leave this one to the pros" Silently he then put his gun away and scaled the concrete wall of the building. He started running at it and used his momentum to launch himself upward, kicking off the wall with his feet to increase his upward motion, and then grabbed on to a windowsill. It was locked though. SO instead he threw himself off the window, running across the wall sideways to the fire escape and grabbed it. The fire escape must have been easily 15 feet in the air but Stryker had acrobatic ability.

Jenkins merely watched in awe. "Damn searge whered you learn those moves!" he said. Ramirez simply chuckled. "I can do that. Hold my beer."

"No need"stryker said and unspooled a rope which lead down to them and tied it so they climbed up very sneakily so they to not be spotted even by a passing sentry ebcause they had disabled the lights too so they had extra time before it was bright enough to even see them and then Colonel Stryker and the group all creeped to the nearby window and looked inside stealthily.

What they saw shocked them.

Chapter 9: Compound

Stryker entered the radio compound. through the ajar window. Inside he clambered down noisonly onto a metal desk and past some computers and office stuff. Looking into the large garage room he saw something unbelievable. He motioned for Ramirez and Jenkins to come in and have a look.

The room was dark, with only sharp stripes of moonlight coming in the windows, and you could barely see anything. The three of them swept the room with their weapons ready and only when they were sure there were no enemies did they turn their attention to the small wooden crates filled with opium and AK-47's.

"Looks like the sandrags were having a summer sale, huh?" Ramirez cracked.

"Damn right", said Stryker. "It's good we came when we did... this stuff was likely just about to be loaded on to a truck headed for Pakistan and sold for a king's ransom."

Jenkins eyed the gear nervously before whispering to Stryker: "Boss, what the fuck are these doing in an old radio base? There aren't supposed to be any supply caches this far north of Kandahar." Stryker took a knee and began to pry off the top of one of the boxes with aKa-Bar. "I don't know, Jenkins, but we're going to find out."

Jenkins nodded, and retrieved his Digicam from his utility pocket to begin taking pictures of the evidence. SecNav would want this. In the mean time, Stryker checked behind his shoulder one more time to make sure they were alone. Seeing a door right on the other end of the room, he motioned for Ramirez to guard the rear door, and Ramires nodded and filed out. Only then did Stryker take out his Surefire and begin inspecting the "cargo" in detail. But his squad weren't acting as professional.

"Pssst... Ramirez!!", Jenkins whispered.

"What do you want, you drunk?" Ramirez whispered back from the other end of the room. With the door slightly ajar, he was scanning the outdoors for potential threats with the barrel of his gun squeezed into the door. The room was so quiet the team could communicate silently and still hear eachother clearly. Perfect for stealth.

"Mind turning off your lazer scope before you get us all killed?" Jenkins said. Embarassed, Ramirez looked down to inspect his weapon. Sure enough in his haste he had left it on. He glanced into the night air and gulped when he saw the red beam clearly visible in the lightless countryside night.

Jenkins glared at him as Ramirez hurriedly closed the door and fumbled with his AimShot LS6332 Compact Pistol Laser Sight with Integral Picatinny-Style Rail Mount and Pressure Pad Matte Black until he could disable the light that had just potentially alerted a sentry. By the time he had done so Stryker had already stalked to the window and was surveying the yard with his SIG-TF. Sure enough, a short Arabic man was briskly walking towards the door with an AK47 in his hand.

"We've got company", Stryker said.

"Fuck" Ramirez muttered under his breath as he leaned back against the wall, bracing himself. Jenkins got into position as well.

Stryker hurriedly screwed the silencer onto his SIG-TF and looked at his team. "You know what to do."

Chapter 10: Liquidation

-----CHAPTER 10: LIQUIDATION

The squad crept into the shadows carefully, making no sound. Stryker found a set of crates with a small opening between them, positioned perfectly to cover the only entrance. Being a master of using pistols in close combat Stryker eased himself into a three-point shooter's kneel and braced his silenced Sig-TF pistol between the two crates right at the door, and prayed to a God he never believed in that the fight would be over quickly so he wouldn't have to rely on the flimsy wooden shipping crates for cover. Meanwhile, Jenkins and Ramirez were crouched in opposite corners nearest the door, their silenced Sig-TF pistols aimed squarely at the door.

Jenkins watched through the small window as a tall man in a shemagh and white robes approached the door, wielding an AK47-U on a sling. He grabbed the door handle with his left hand and cautiously peered inside, then swung the door open and stepped in sweeping the area for threats. Jenkins glanced over to where Ramirez was, but he couldn't even see him. The Latino soldier was a master of concealment.

Confused, the tango hit the light switch and glanced around again. Finally, he swore in Farsi, turned around, and headed back outside when Stryker seemed to leap out from nowhere from behind two wooden crates, landing on the soles of his feet as to make no noise at all, a maneuver practiced from a life of acrobatic training.

In the blink of an eye he was behind the man with a gun pointed at the back of his neck. A gloved hand covered the tango's throat to stifle a terrified scream as he was dragged back into the building kicking and struggling. Ramirez and Jenkins both emerged, guns drawn. Jenkins hit the light back off and closed the door, as Ramirez approached the tango with gun drawn, mouthing the words "Shut the fuck up" and raising his finger to his mouth in a "ssssh" gesture. Jenkins turned around to see Ramirez giggling to himself. He looked over Ramirez's shoulder to notice that in his terror the foreign man soiled his burkha in terror. Disgusted, Stryker grimaced at Ramirez, who immediately stopped chuckling. He walked over to the terrorist and tore off the shemagh covering his face, wadded it into a handkerchief and stuffed it into his mouth to prevent him from screaming. At the same time Stryker dropped him into a chair Jenkins had dragged over and Jenkins began zip-tying the man. It was all over in a matter of seconds, and the terrified Middle Easterner stood with three guns to his head unsure of which man to look at. Standing in the middle, Stryker said to Jenkins, "Translate for me". Jenkins only nodded.

"Listen up, fuckstick. We're taking over, and we've got a few questions. What's your name, kid?" Jenkins spat out a rapid-fire translation into Pashto, Farsi, and various tribal languages, until the man seemed to recognize which one he was speaking. Then he spoke and Jenkins translated back: "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad" Stryker considered that, then responded: "Good boy. Now that we're all friends, why don't you tell me where you got that sweet little shipment over there?"

Jenkins listened, then cocked an eyebrow as he translated the message. "...He says he got it from the CIA." The terrorist's face broke out in a grin as he watched Stryker's face. "He said your mother was a goat", Jenkins translated, just in time for Ramirez to pistol-whip the terrorist with the butt of his Sig-TF, breaking his jaw and knocking his head back into a rubberneck pose. He tried to scream, but all that came out of the handkerchief in his mouth was a muffled murmur.

Stryker stared at the man intensely, then his face broke into calculated anger "Looks like we're going to have to do this the hard way, huh?" He cocked his gun and pulled back the cocking lever, then aimed it between the

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man's eyes, punching him dead in the kidneys with his other hand, forcing his forehead forward to headbutt the gun barrel painfully. "Joke time's over, clown.", he spat into the terrorist's face. The terrorist terrified backpedaled and spoke again in Farsi.

"Our lieutenant, tells us steal from CIA convoys in the Northern Alliance, and use them, fight for Khadr's war!" Stryker looked to the others "I don't think he's lying, boss." Jenkins said "Only one way to find out" he responded, grabbing a car battery from a nearby crate "Tie his legs to the chair" Stryker said.

Ramirez looked confused, but then got it. Stryker took the two gator clips and walked up to the man, sparking the gator clips together for effect. "Are you ready, asshole?", he said. The terrorist stared, motionless, and Stryker took two throwing knives from his boot, stabbing them into both the terrorist's knees. He clamped the gator clips to the all-steel knives handles and slowly cranked up the voltage until the man was convulsing in agony, roasting in his chair. The man's entire body convulsed painfully and his spine arched back as thousands of volts coursed through his body. His muscles spasmed and tremored. Ramirez began to chuckle again, and Jenkins simply stared. "Serves you right, you motherfucker", he said, as he spat on the terrorist soldier. "This is payback for 9/11", he added.

Satisfied, Stryker toned down the voltage to 0. He grabbed Jenkin's sidearm out of his hands, took the two guns and pressed both barrels to either side of the man's head, and leaned in close enough to feel his breath on his face. He fired out questions at breakneck pace: "Where did you get the shipment? Who the fuck is Jackknife? Where is Khadr?"

The man's milky white eyes stared up at him quivering and Stryker backed away and the man responded barely able to stutter out his words: "Shipment from CIA base - Stolen - Jackknife is Khadr's right hand man.. They are in Khandahar - they send us courier - give troops orders from captured Russia radio tower."

Stryker stared at the man, listening intently as his hand rested lightly on the dial for the car battery. "Now that's something we can use. Now - I think we're done here. Goodbye Mahmoud." When Jenkins finished translating, the man's eyebrows raised in fear, and he tried to stutter out protest, struggling in the chair. It didn't last long before Stryker cranked him up to full charge, and the man was frying alive in front of him. Stryker leaned in close and whispered to the dying man: "When you get to hell, tell Allah to save some room for Omar and Jackknife."

The electricity charred the man to the bone and roasted him alive in his chair, dying a horrific and painful death. Satisfied, Stryker pulled out the two electrified throwing knives, stood back, and threw, landing them squarely in the corpse's head, sending it flying back and rolling out of the chair to the floor.

The body rolled over to Ramirez, who guffawed at the charred corpse. "Hey chief, did somebody order 72 virgins? 'Cuz I think we might have overcooked 'em a little."

Chapter 11: HARDLINE

CHAPTER 11: HARDLINE

"We need to hide the body", Jenkins offered, while Ramirez's eyes drifted lazily over to the cans of gasoline sitting near the backup generator. "Barbecue?" Ramirez asked, grinning. "Barbecue.", agreed Stryker. The men took the gas and poured it out around the freshly electrocuted corpse while Stryker carefully peeked out the window as he scanned the area planning their next move.

Outside, there was a mountain cliff that went down and opened up into a massive expanse of open desert, at which he could see Kandahar off in the distance. It would be a great overwatch artillery spot, but in daytime the radio tower would attract too much attention. Next to that on their right was the radio facility because it went straight up three stories surrounded by different gear and stuff used to broadcast messages all across Kandahar but it was a newer building not made of stone but out of newer materials, which struck Stryker as very strange indeed because in the desert landscape it was very unusual to see such a

modern-styled-structure poking off out of it

Curious Stryker checked his MTM Extreme Ops Black Seal Military Watch. The all-titanium water-resistant watch was specifically custom repainted in Afghan Digicamo for this mission to blend in perfectly with the rest of the gear Stryker was wearing; contrasting colors can draw enemy attention and any mistake no matter how tiny in your gear can silhouette you and give you away; for this reason Stryker also abstained from flashy paintjobs on his guns and stuck with the same digicamo pattern even on the mag release and safety switches which were normally heavily contrasted to provide the user with an easy visual indicator but however Stryker's team was so well trained every single part of the gun was ingrained in their muscle memory as an extension of their own body so all the high contrast would do would give them away to the enemy eyes something that could be the last mistake they would ever make.

The room was dark. Stryker was nervous about the next Salaat (prayer) time for the day, as he knew the guards would all wake up for their Salaat just before sunrise and into sunrise so he had to be very aware of when that would happen. During Salaat every stinking "soldier" in this entire base would wake up and kneel to Allah for about 23 minutes, totally ignoring everything else going on around them. Depending on when it happened it could be either a perfect distraction or it could totally blow your team's stealth and Stryker had to be aware of it at all times so with this caution he glanced down at his watch.

Even though the room was pitched black now the BLACK SEAL watch was designed for SEAL Team agents and checking the time was a breeze even in low-light environments thanks to its toggleable tritium gas filled tubes on its index and hands that glow continuously for 25 years without any external light. Even if there was light in the room the watch would still never give him away with its non reflective scratch-resistant sapphire crystal. In one way this was not a good thing as he could not use it as a signal but on the other hand it was great because it would never give him away by reflecting light at an enemy. It truly was manufactured to the strictest tolerances as was noticed by the ratcheting bevel so it was not easy to damage it but years ago Stryker had manually etched in the prayer times into the locking unidirectional solid screw-down crown of the 100% titanium case so he knew when the enemy would be distracted and preoccupied and had an easy reminder. He had been fighting Muslims for years enough to know that "Salaat" as they call it is the perfect time to catch them with their pants down and being aware of the prayer schedule saved his life many times. His old squad had a saying: they call it Salaat, we call it breach-and-clear time.

At first he was hesitant to damage the potential resale value of the \$1,950 watch with such carvings as he

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knew that valuables such as jewelry could be sold at any time and used as currency even in other countries. His US Dollars wouldnt buy him jack shit here, but if he was in a pinch and needed to bribe a border crossing guard during exfiltration, or buy a shipment of weapons to replenish his squad, he could always trade in his timepiece for a hell of a lot of Afgani's, the local currency, and hell a local would probably appreciate the carvingsâ but for a totally different reason than Stryker.

The watch had lasted him a long time and was one of the first thigns he had bought with his paycheck. As a SEAL he greatly appreciated both its waterproof casing that was submersable to 3300 feet water resistance and the fact that it was made in the USA. Its helium pressure-release valves also helped with that and its carbon-fiber dial allowed him to sync watches with his squad without fear of his gear breaking in combat.

But none of this matters now. Stryker looked at his watch and determined that he had only eight minutes until Salaat. They had to raid the compound and they had to do it now. "Truly time is ticking away", he said to Jenkins and Ramirez who both nodded on unison.

Chapter 12: EXPOSURE

-----CHAPTER 12: EXPOSURE

Stryker mosied over to the back end of the room where Ramirez was already cooking up a deadly IED from the combined mortar rounds and RPG-7 grenades. He placed his C4 satchel charge smack dab in the middle, making sure to wrap it with as much tape as he could because just as he learned in demolitions course the more tightly packed the bigger the boom he thought

Stryker just watched, planning out their next move. Jenkins was on watch. The plan was already in motion. basically they were putting a dead body bomb so when enemies found the body There were going to be fireworks sky high he thought. "Good distraction, in fact", Jenkins said. Ramirez nodded and said "Hell yeah! Best kind is the one that goes boom."

As they spoke Stryker caught a glance of himself in the broken mirror on the far side of the room. He saw the familiar face with a military man, A spec op, who had truly a beard

Below under where his hat would have been, had he been wearing it, was a crew-cut style buzz where his hair was very close to his head. He had his BDU on, For Light Weight combat, and sharp, focused blue eyes that looked more eager than ever to put a stop to any thing else. What was new, newer than ever in this world, was the smirk he had. The smirk on his face that he could only get from the knowledge that his enemy's death was near and his victory was soon. HE looked like this also <http://imgur.com/6LzHilp>

Done with Glancing in his reflection ever so briefly, He turned away, As if seeing something he didn't used to see.. Or didn't like to. Ramirez guffawed: "Hey Searge, looking good for the beauty contest." Jenkins responded "...". and then Stryker broke the silence with "Cut the sarcasm, jackass. We've got a job to do." Ramirez said "Im just awaiting orders sir. Whenever you're done." Stryker said "Ok. When we lay this trap we are going to have to mobilize. We'll approach the building on the left side and hit the windows. Jenkins, you crawl into the airducts with your silenced USP." Jenkins nodded. "Ramirez, get to the toolshed roof, and set up a position to provide heavy fire on the second story. Just hit the heatvision and wait for my go. When i give the order, spray the whole damn second story with gunfire. Then I'll rappel in from the windows on the roof for a true surprise outing." "Finish the fight", Jenkins said, recognizing Strykers plan. "Finish the fight", Stryker replied.

Ramirez nodded because he was done with the explosives now so they began to set off and walk away. Stryker linked up the explosives to his remote detonator and they left silently through the door, scanning for threats and on alert the whole time they were outside because when your exposed in an environment like this

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you have to be keenly alert of alltime threats.

The radio building was a three story building but it looked new. There was a toolshed next to it. There was a cliff wall behind it. There was a green metal front door kinda like an entrance to a cafeteria or something that kind of door. AND of course on the roof was a large radio tower ready to broadcast.

Stryker glanced out and saw no threats so he stealthed out, with his two squaddies taking cover, and basically just tactically crouch walking around. Stryker spotted a tango to his left on a patrol. They looked in his direction so Stryker tac-rolled behind a nearby dumpster, taking cover. Ramirez and Jenkins were still crouched behind a car, also hidden. Because Stryker was in front. Thinking fast on his feet as the Irish man always did, Jenkins reached up and silently turned the side mirror of the car toward the terrorist to get a good view, making sure the threat didn't approach and potentially blow their cover.

Jenkins turned the mirror so Stryker could see, and Stryker gave a thumbs-up. It looked like the guard was actually just pissing in some bushes. No threat at all. Stryker simply retrieved one of his tac throwing knives from his boot, swung his arm back, and launched it into the back of the terrorist's neck. It must have been 25 or so feet away, but it landed totally silently, and the force of the knife propelled his dead corpse to land in the bush so it was even a hidden kill. Ramirez gawked in amazement at the skills he just saw, but then mumbled to himself "WOw" and then "Mama Mia" Jenkins nodded at the car.

The three were in front of the building now, with little difference now. So basically they executed the plan before. Ramirez attempts to climb up onto the tool shed, but cannot due to his large weight from his LMG. Lazily, Stryker saunters over and wall-runs up the toolshed, then helps him up, with complete ease, with Jenkins taking watch to make sure they aren't spotted so, The reason they were doing all this was one reason for once and all: To be able to acquire Airstrikes, And or other stuff and get in touch with command, They need to get a radio tower access. Also, Raiding an Enemy Base will be a very good way to extract intel and find Omar Khadr. Any base, Even ones that aren't related, are a good bet. Even if they don't get any data, Stryker thought, There will at least be one less terror base. But none of that mattered now. Because Everyone was nearly in position. Stryker looked around and checked his watch to make absolutely sure that it was Salaat tiem and it looks perfect. wall-ran up about 11ft, and grabbed onto the hinge of a window.

Chapter 13: WITNESS

CHAPTER 10: WITNESS

Aaliyah looked down on her troops from the balcony of the secret terrorbase underneath Kabulistan. There must be at least 100 of them in the massive foyer of the Islamic superbunker. As she watched the men do their drills, she lightly brushed her beautiful long brown hair to the side, and thought to herself. The young woman, just barely in her 20's, was the daughter of Omar Khadr, and for days on end, maybe weeks, she had been trapped in this hell her father had created. It was truly a paradise lost. And with Omar's supersoldiers below her, each and every one of them trained and equipped to his stringent standards. All of them could probably do serious damage to American soldiers. Aaliyah had never met anyâ€” but deep in her heart, she wished toâ€” anything to escape this placeâ€” she was alone. Each and every one of the men were perfect specimens in every way, guiding hands of Allah's mightâ€” but Alliyah was alone. Her aide, Farah, may be her only friend in the world. Depressed, She sighed lightly, and pushed off the balcony to return to her quarters. She heard footsteps in the hallway outside and hastily put her burkha back on. Someone began knocking on the door loudly, and she got it on just in time to pen the door. "Hello?" She said. as she peered out. It was Omar's face behind the door. "Daughter. It is Salaat time. Where are you?"

"Iâ€” umâ€” !" She stammered off. "You were what? What, exactly, pray tell, did you think was more important than the one true God?" Aaliyah avoided his gaze and looked at the extravagant sandstone floor, with the traditional Arabic rug. "I do not need any more audience with Allah. I needâ€” I need freedom, father."

Omar snapped, and yelled in her face. "Damnit, you insolent brat! Come to the madrasa NOW! Allah calls you now, and you will answer!" She recoiled, then opened the door, shaking. "Come, we are late!" he grabbed her arm and practically dragged her out. She passed by the two elite terrorist guards outside her door, armed to the teeth with their AK47's. Even behind their facewraps she could feel their eyes on her as the gorgeous young woman walked down the hallway and towards the madrasa.

After a long silence, Omar spoke. "I apologize, woman. But I do not take time out of my studies lightly. You will come with us, and we will teach you to know. I have not given up on you yet." Alliyah was silent as she entered the madrasa, already three minutes late. The Imam waited for her to take her place at the prayer mat. There must have been at least 300 people inside the church.

Aaliyah Khadr went through the motions, reciting the Salaat from memory for another twenty minutes of her life she would never get back, until it was finally over. After the prayers were finally completed, She looked up to see her father at the podium, next to the imam. He retrieved a small microphone from the podium and began a radio adress.

"Salaam alaykum, my brethren. Listen carefully. Allah has blessed you with this message, to heed his word and carry out his deed, peace be upon him. You will listen carefullyâ€” and do everything I say. Resistance will not go unpunished." Omar cracked a devilish grin on his face, before he gave out extensive orders for the different cells over encrypted radio freq's. The madrasa listened in as they were briefed on that months' activity. The SuperMadrasa acted as a nerve center for all terror strike activity, intel, and lies. Some years ago he was a nobodyâ€” but Omar's word of "God", and the propaganda center he had built, was directly responsible for most of the American soldiers that died in Iraq and Kabul.

Aaliyah snuck off back into the dim hallwayâ€” she wasn't required to listen so she didnt and jus theaded back to her quarters. Then she got there. Now only got sadder and more desperate as she knew these facts of the

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situation. She only had one hope to turn to. But now, worst of all, She knew Omar could not be stopped. Secretly buried underground, with living quarters, agriculture, it was nearly a fortress city to itself. The terrorist superbase, known as the Ubermosque, was nearly impenetrable to all soldiers. All soldiersâ except for one very special kind of soldiers. Spec Op Soldiers.

She retrieved a tiny torn photograph of Commander Stryker from the hiding place under her desk and stared at it as tears silently began to flow down her face. Just one more day in hell.

Chapter 14: CHAPTER 14: BURSTFIRE

CHAPTER 14: BURSTFIRE

Ok so basically the building was like this <http://imgur.com/Jt7BkvN> Except with muslims praying on rugs everywhere, and everything just not even ready for what was about to happen. When Stryker came into the building, it was from rappelling in a window. First off though, it was time for Jenkins to crawl into the air duct with his silencer-modded USP, which he did and then aimed at tangos, two of them. Waitign for the go-time, he heard Ramirez bullets burst through the windows at full speed towards the soon-to-be-shredded muslim flesh of the enemy soldiers inside of the base. Just at that same time Stryker's flashbang flew through the air like an American eagle as it exploded deafening the cowardly terrorists with its pericing eagle cry. When the inside of the base was perforated thoroughly Jenkins could immediately smell the scent of gunfire in the air when he hung down upside-down from the air duct in the middle of the room. He spun around in the air like Batman as he whipped his USP pistol back and forth across the room scoping out tangos down the barrel like there was no tomorrow inside the building he was in so bullets flew as terrified Muslims began desperately shooting back and in a panic, they dropped their Q'urans and picked up AK-47's and the entire room went from just peaceful praying to a hail of gunfire in every possible direction dude. However these Muslims were never very accurate with their shots and all but one missed. All but the one that hit Jenkins in the shoulder, and it hurt him and sent him dropping down to the ground. He landed in a breakfall three point landing safely, but he was wounded amidst a horde of muslims and corpses on the floor. In every possible direction he was surrounded and he knew he was neck deep in FUBAR. It was at this time in the chaos and panic that Ramirez burst in through the window. He saw Jenkins fall and he yelled "DUCK!" Jenkins glanced over just in time and hit the deck, as Ramirez filled the entire room with a chorus of automatic fire. He swept back and forth oscillating between each raghead as he sprayed the room with their blood. In the midst of the red mist Ramirez CQC'd his enemies with deadly precision and intentionality with Ramirez mowing down most of the horde but Jenkins was right in the middle of the chaos. He was set on all sides by Muslims mere feet from him and pinned down at the same perfect timing Stryker burst in.

Stryker shot the window, then frontflipped into the middle of the scenario with his pistol in one hand and a knife in the other and landed on a standing terrorist before sinking his knife into his head as he fell. He got up just in time to counter another enemy coming at him with an AK47 bayonet. Stryker pushed the gun to the side with his pistol in a clever gun kata move as he sunk his knife into the terrorist's throat to his surprise. By this time most of the living Muslims were either retreating to a defensive cover position to take out the squad either that or they had fled out of the building. After taking his knife back, Stryker looked back to Jenkins, who was being choked out on the floor by a disarmed Muslim. Stryker raced over, and within three bounding steps he kicked the Muslim off his fellow comrade, drew his pistol and ended the bastard's life. As he did so he holstered his knife and gave Jenkins a hand to help him up. Jenkins was wounded Stryker could tell, the AK47 bullet hit him in the shoulder. Stryker said "Get up! We're not done yet!" Jenkins choked out "Yes.. Commander!" as he coughed up blood. Stryker helped him get to his feet and supported him as the two took cover against a radio console. It seemed like all of the enemies were dead now. "Clear!", he heard over the radio from Ramirez. "Good. Now get in here for some medevac", Stryker ordered as Ramirez said "Waitâ ; we've got movement at the double doors right past you. Someone's knocking.". Stryker ordered him to cover the door, and then he grabbed his survival mirror from a pouch and peered around the corner with it. What he saw was bad news indeed.

The steel double doors to the transmitter room kicked open and a hulking silhouette stood in the doorway. There was a hulking terrorist boss just across the room. Seconds later the console that Jenkins and Stryker were taking cover behind was peppered with seriously intense automatic fire. Sparks flew everywhere and Stryker and Jenkins were in deep shit! "RAMIREZ!!!!" Stryker shouted desperately over the radio.

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But it was too late. By the time Ramirez swept his gun over and tried to open fire, he was already suppressed by the enemy boss. He was forced to take cover or get his head blown off. "*Mierda!*", he swore over his radio. "*I'm dry! Cover me, I'm reloading!*" Stryker grimaced. "Shit." He was truly in a sticky situation iv he'd ever seen one ok dude.

In the midst of the terror Stryker heard a Russian voice laughing evilly. The gunfire intensified and debris flew all around Stryker and Jenkins as they desperately tried to not catch a bullet. The ricochet made it even worse off the cement floor because each bullet had an even greater potential to kill them even worse which was super fucking bad news ok.

"FUUUUUUUUUUCK!", Jenkins drawled out as blood spat from his mouth. Stryker merely listened carefully and his mind worked like a detective to try and get himself safe. "That sounds like AK47 fire", he said. "Must have drum magazines to keep up a sustained rate of fire."

To his utter surprise, a Russian voice called out, muffled by his gas mask's built in voice modulator "You've done your homeworkâ JACK. Clever boy, aren't we?"

Jack Stryker froze. Seizing the moment he took out his hand mirror and peered again but this time he got a better picture of his enemy.

Jack was right. The boss was armed with two AK47's with drum magazines, he was a serious threat. Worse off he was armored head to toe in what looked like juggernaut armor. It was super-advanced US military armor that could withstand even RPG blasts. It was crazy to think these bastards got their hands on itâ And the first second Stryker recognized the armor he could tell from a glance that this guy was going to be troubleâ big trouble.

"Who the hell are you?" Stryker yelled in his most intimidating voice. "You're not working with the Muslimsâ you're Russian!"

"You may know meâ as Jackknife" the man said as he dropped one of his AK47's (because it was out of ammo) and drew a massive Ka-Bar knife with serrations. Jenkins watched in horror. Stryker only grimaced.

"Rule number 1"... Stryker heard Ramirez's voice pierce the awkward silence. Jackknife looked over trying to find the source of the noise but he couldn't. Until Ramirez appeared from the side door flanking Jackknife with his Para LMG. "*Don't bring a knife to a gunfight, puto!*"

Ramirez held down the fire button and screamed as Jackknife stumbled backwards. The bullets couldn't pierce his armor but they could sure as hell stun him. "You fool!", Jackknife shouted as he put a 3-round burst downrange at Ramirez. Ramirez ducked just in time and quipped as jackknives shots missed his cunning body. "*Try again next time cabron!*"

By the time this had happened, Stryker had already parkoured across the room, cartwheeled through the open space and was face to face with Jackknife. Stryker was running along the wall and was about to kick off the wall and spin-kick Jackknife, when Jackknife to his surprise caught Stryker's entire body in mid-air and threw him to the ground with a sickening CRACK as his body hit the ground. Stryker tried to roll to his feet but Jackknife was too quickâ and before Stryker knew it a heavy boot was right on his stomach. He looked up to see the barrel of a modded AK47 in his face with laser scope, acog sight, drum mag, pistol grip, extended M4 stock, bayonet, RIS handguard, all topped off with a red dragon finish with red paint and white painted image of a dragon symbol going along the side of the gun towards the barrel end. The gun also prominently featured a RD AK M4 stock adapter so that it could take an m4 stock which is actually more ergonomic for purposes of firing and such but does not contain an accessory case like the ak47 stock does but in a crucial danger

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situation you might not even need one in the first place so it is just extra weight really and with all the customization you could be forgiven for thinking maybe it was even an m4 not an ak47 because it was basically like a cross between the best of both of these worlds in the gun term of life. The ak47 also had 30 round Magpul-style clips which are detachable and double stack in design and constructed from proprietary aerospace polymers. This sets itself apart from other clips because they have purpose-built design and multiple unique features such as little ridges for the fingers to grip on better. The gun even featured an angled foregrip on the bottom of the new RIS handguard fitted custom to the barrel. This wasn't the kind of AK47 you could find in a catalog, Jack Stryker thought. But none of that mattered now. "Ready to die"? he heard Jackknife's voice say.

"NOT TODAY MOTHERFUCKER!!!" Jenkins screamed as he jumped off a console. Stryker saw the whole thing as if in slow motion as Jenkins soared through the air screaming, holding a Mossberg taken from a dead tango, and blasted Jackknife in the face at full speed. The force of the blast sent Jackknife reeling, off of Stryker's helpless prone body. The AK47 was knocked out of Stryker's face. He seized the moment and sprung to his feet and grabbed his SIG-TF off the floor. He was up just in time to see Jenkins get blasted by a full-auto spray of AK47 fire right in front of his very eyes. He sailed onto the floor and laid limp, a lifeless look in his eyes, but Stryker swore he was looking him right in the face.

"NOOOOO!" Stryker said!

"You MOTHERFUCKER!!!! AAARGH", Ramirez screamed as he charged towards Jackknife at full speed firing his Para on fully auto mode. Jackknife turned to Ramirez and Stryker knew it was time to strike. Distracted by the huge Mexican's fury and stunned by his hail of gunfire Jackknife never expected to feel Stryker's hands on his leg. Stryker grabbed his leg and threw him up in the air flipping the soldier boss over on his back as he brought his AK47 to bear and attempted to shoot Jack Stryker but Jack was too fast because he had already spin-kicked the gun out of his hand but not before taking a deadly knee to the groin from Jackknife. Stryker recoiled and hit the nearby console. When Ramirez went close to him he jumped on Jackknife, drawing his knife in the process and tossing his gun to the side. His skill in martial arts came to be useful as he entered a ground top mount position. The Swift Latino began swinging his knife at Jackknife trying to cut his helmet open but it was to no avail as Jackknife kept bobbing and weaving, deflecting and dodging his attacks from his ground position or deflecting the knife with his wrists. Stryker got to his feet, still wobbly, just in time to watch Ramirez's knife get knocked aside by Jackknife. "Toss me the axe!" Ramirez yelled in desperation as the two giants fought.

Thinking quickly Stryker removed his Tactical throwing hatchet and tossed it to Ramirez. Stryker had never been happier to see his high carbon steel 19.27" 1.9 lb. customised Gerber Downrange Tomahawk Tactical Throwing Axe with G10 handle and MOLLE compatible sheath. It was always Stryker's favorite weapon for both breaching and clearing and also armed combat because it was also Ramirez's signature trademark weapon as well for the following fact because it was good at both what it does as a tool and a weapon of deadly combat. The axe has a beveled head which can chop through entire drywall doors and walls just turning them to splinters in a few hacks and also has a rough surface backside usable for CQC hammer blows and nonlethal strikes to incapacitate an enemy soldier downrange whenever the opportunity may be necessary but it also allows the axe wielder to actually bash through locks hinges and doorknobs and pretty much anything else. On top of all that the handle is shaped like a crowbar pry thing with a cutaway grip at the axe head's built-in carrying handle design allowing crowbar tactics on the go. Truly he thought this wasn't the kind of axe you could find in a catalog, With all these tools in this 3 and one weapon of disaster Ramirez could enter any building and take out any enemy which Stryker made sure of when he would oil and clean the axe regularly making sure to use the diamond universal sharpener he had in his kit to give regular maintenance and keep the weapon a shining example of deadly ability in the arms of an actual soldier dude. That is why that when he saw the axe flying through the air he smirked to himself on the inside knowing that its deadly edge was perfectly tuned to battlefield conditions with sharpening ability passed down from other weapons

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experts to him in his tours of duty and armed with the knowledge of an axe in his hands that will soon be landing in his possession after he actually grabs it out of the air from Ramirez's throw that he said "Thanks" to him and knew in his heart that he was now able to actually take down the enemy dude

But none of that mattered now. Stryker grabbed the axe and used the hammer portion to bash Jackknife's helmet in. He broke the plexy glass on his helmet quickly and then turned the axe around to the sharp side. What he saw however shocked him because behind the helmet Ramirez wasn't even a Muslim he was actually American looking. "What's the matter" he said "Don't you know the Americans are the real terrorists dude." he said also as he was kneeling Stryker in the groin and lower body and stomach with punishing blows from his Olive Drab Blackhawk Advanced Tactical V2 Knee Pads. Their injection-molded flex cap design allowed Jackknife to rapidly plow into Stryker with a large amount of attacking motions and also protect his knees from injury or discomfort at the same time and the advanced flexibility was guaranteed almost by the padded side extensions (giving additional comfort) and improved strap positioning over other items. Okay because this wasn't the kind of knee pads you could find in a catalog. Jackknife would have probably slipped or moved the knee pads accidentally if it weren't for the contoured interior ledges, which actually kept the pads from slipping at all even when he was doing extremely intense motions. The elastic hook and loop straps also kept them faithfully attached at all hours and the closed cell foam padding provided such excellent shock resistance that Jackknife didn't even feel anything as he repeatedly and angrily kneeed Stryker's stomach time and time again like a deadly hammer blow to try and get him off him so he could continue fighting because he knew Stryker was actually an expert in MMA having read his dossier and knew the ground and/or pound tactics being employed against his life could only end in one way and that way was disastrous damage impending on him from relentless and punishing blows delivered with accuracy of a laserlike nature bitch.

Even if it was raining (but it wasn't the rain the caps had little or no moisture retention at all meaning that the weight of added retained liquids would not slow down this devious terrorist in his treks across the rain storms. This was bad news if he'd ever seen one Stryker that is. As the surface of the 600 denier nylon shelled knee pads burst into his stomach 1 by 1 Stryker grimaced knowing he was probably soon to face internal bleeding on this battlefield. "Cold day in hell" he thought to himself trying to withstand the amazing array of attacks that nearly broke his ribs but what one thing that could NOT be broken by knee pads was his spirit he thought as he took his axe and then moved himself up like kinda in a mount position and swung it down savagely. He screamed "JENKINSHINS" as he smashed the axe down in Jackknife's face like a Mohawk warrior from Assassin's Creed 3 or something he took the axe and hacked it down into Jackknife's throat with a sickening CRACK. He heard the spine snap and Jackknife's whole body turned into a limp dead body ok.

"Headshot" said Stryker as he unloaded his Sig-TF into the helmet and listened as the rounds ricocheted back and forth inside the helmet turning his face into a mushy red paste. Jackknife was already dead but hey he wanted to celebrate ok. "Hell yea man!" Ramirez said.

Immediately Jack took the AK47 and grabbed it. He didn't bring a primary weapon in to his mission because he knew he would find an AK47 or other weapon like this and with the customized potential of the weapon he held it like a trophy from his pride of taking it and silently he just took all the clips out of Jackknife's armor thing and put them in his clip holders on his armor knowing he would need extra AK47 ammo and at the same time he was like "Hey Ramirez. "Time to suit up.!" Ramirez he could tell had a huge smile on his face from seeing it, the smile that is. He was like "Hell yea man!" and looked at the armor. A few minutes later he had changed into the super advanced battle armor and was basically ranked up because of the super advanced gear he had now. "No offense boss but don't you want this shit? Hey it's your kill man finders keepers." Stryker merely glanced at him as he looked up from doing a medical check up on Jenkins just in case he could save him. "I'm an agile warrior Ramirez. I don't need that bulk slowing me down. You're the kind of huge Latino that could handle it but I'm not. Plus.. We have bigger problems to deal with right now dude" "Oh shit" Ramirez said. "Is he okay?"

"Hes deadâ lâ lâ lâ lâ !" Stryekr said

"NO!"""" ramirez screamed at the top of his lungs!!! But what he didnt know is that scream probably alerted all the enemy soldiers in the base to him!!

Chapter 15 coming soon

Chapter 15: LIBERATION

Stryker was truly about to get revenge. Jenkins death would not be in vain.

Thankfully the radio room was silent. It was professionally built, so it was muffled. Whoever was inside never heard any signs of gunfire and was totally clueless. Stryker pried open the door ever so slowly and looked inside, seeing a young man with a large black beard hunched over a radio speaking in Arabic, reading from a Qu'a'ran and quoting passages of violence to his brainwashed innocent followers. Stryker mentally translated it in his head: "And now, my brothers and sisters, it is time for Salaat. Please take out your prayer rugs and put the radio to volume." Coughing the man took out a CD and put it in the radio, putting on the muslim call to prayer. Stryker mentally blocked it out, resisting the music's subliminal effects. He knew he had to save all the nearby innocent villagers from this menace. These radio towers were built by the Russians but now they were being used to spread propaganda and dangerous brainwashing.

Knowing the perfect timing to take out the enemy soldiers, Stryker opened the door as silently as a cat and crept in with his silenced USP45-S. He waited until the Prayer call CD was in and the Muslim stood up to take a breakâ then he put it to the back of his neck, with one hand covering his mouth. "Prayer time's over" he said. "I've got a message for your "brothers in arms" and you're going to translate it for me." he explained. Then the man nodded in fear. Stryker could smell that he soiled himself

Throwing the man to the side with a wrestling throw, his shoulder impacted the table and knocked it over as he cried out in pain. Satisfied, Stryker looked, took out the Salaat prayer call CD, and broke it in half with a resounding crack. Millions of Muslims listening in were now confused as to what was happening until Stryker threw on the mic so they could hear. Then Stryker threw the CD on the ground as the Arabic man cried for him to stop that he was violating the Salaat ritual and that he was committing a crime against Allah. Stryker only smirked as he shot the CD with his USP45 several times, breaking it into tiny pieces. He went up to the man and brutally pistol whipped him with the USP45, then took the CD's pieces and jammed them into his mouth. "Eat it, bitch", he said, and grinning to himself. "You love your fucking god so much? Prove it."

"I do not fear the Americans!" the man tried to shout, before Stryker punched him in the jaw, the shards of CDs thrashing about inside his mouth and cutting open his throat as they impacted the wall. He began to bleed from the mouth and gurgling, about to choke on his own blood, when Stryker walked over to the radio. He opened the frequency to all listening Muslims, both simple farmers doing prayers, and terrorists waiting for orders on the encrypted frequencies. He took up the radio his voice raspy and said:

"Surprise, assholes." He shot the original radio conductor in the head to make a point that he meant business for real. "There's a new sheriff in town. A sheriff on the edge with nothing to lose. And his name is Commander Stryker. There's going to be some new rules in this hellhole, and I'm going to be judge, jury, and executionerâ so listen up and listen good."

Already, the radio phone line was getting flooded by calls from angry mosques. Stryker raised his pistol and shot the phone receiver. "Nice try bitch" he said. "But your time is up. You bastards killed my fucking squaddie and now your entire religion is going down in flames, starting right now. In this desert we're on a hell ride to the ends of the earth and I'm the conductor so strap yourself in mother fucker because it's going to get rocky." He took the Qu'a'ran from his feet, took out a lighter, and set it ablaze to the shock and awe of millions of Muslims.

"You got this loud and clear? Omar Khadr, I'm coming for you. Starting right now, a countdown is happening

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until your death, and once it hits zeroâ€”!" He took his pistol and shot it a few times for effect. "That's all I'll say. Stryker over and out" He closed the comms, took a grenade and stuffed it in the Muslims mouth, then walked out of the room. He closed the door to a resounding BOOM that was barely muffled by the now destroyed room, when he looked to his squad, their faces shock and awe.

"Holy shit, Searge!", ramirez added. "Every single Muslim in the world is going to be after you!" he said. Stryker merely narrowed his eyes. "I know. I'm going to have to go easy on them or it won't be fair."

Right at that moment more Muslims burst in the room from the other side of the room, hearing the explosion and Stryker's horrific apostasy against their religion. They tried to shoot Ramires but his juggernaut armor deflected most of their ammo and the rest of it missed. He just took his SAW and mowed them down 1 by 1. "This is for Jenkins" he yelled at them as he was killing them with his gun because of the fact that his friend was dead not a few feet from him but stryker said "Hell yea man!!! The Muslims died in droves as they fell to the ground of the bloody floor and their corpses were all over blood stained prayer mats. But at that very moment he looked outside.

There was a Russian T52 tank just outside. With bristling firepower it wasnt the kind of thing you could find in a catalog because it seemed like these terrorists had probably stolen it just from the Soviets in 1984 during the war in afghanistan when they invadedBut now it was being used against them. Stryker looked down the barrel of the tank in panic and he took cover again. "Oh FUCK" he whispered to himself. It was the first time Ramires had ever seen fear in the mans eyes. "This is some shit ese!" Ramires said as he dove for cover just in time to dodge a tank round. "DAMN!" He said as it blew up the side of the room! Wow!

" There was also debris everywhere now." stryker

This is when, Stryker said "Okay, Cover me!" I have an idea"Then he went back into the radio room and tuned the controls to High Central Command. "Report in. Report in are you reading me. This is Tiberius."stryekr said "Yea, Loud and clear. Whats the callsign?"

"Bluebird Halo" Stryker said. The radio guy said "This is Panda Alpha Foxtrot. We are receiving loud and clear. What is mission status?" He said, Pressing the radio transmit button with his finger.

"Jenkins is dead but we took out the enemy base of the soldiers" he said. "Good work!" The radio man said. "I'm going to need some air support here. Danger close! There is a Soviet tank outside and we need some fucking airstrikes, stat! This is getting heated!"

"Confirmed. Airstrike inbound, ETA 1 minute. Get clear of that building now soldier", the voice said. "And Stryker?"

"Yes?"

"Good luck"

"I wont need it" he said as he slammed the radiop receiver to the floor and sprinted out of the room. He caught Jenkins just in time and dove to the floor knocking jenkins out of the way of a RPG missile that blew up behind them. They scrambled to their feet as the tank bulldozed into the building and an endless wave of Muslims followed. Ramires looked back. There must haev been 20 or 30 of them easily, on Jeeps and stuff. "We got to get out of here! We've got air support ready to blast this fucker to the ground, danger close and coming in hot!"

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"Shit searge you don' fuck around!" Ramires said. Stryker agreed with him, but He knew it was time to head out. "Theres no time! Follow my lead!" he said, grabbing Jackknifes AK47 and strapping it to his back. He wasnt going to leave a beauty like that.

"But sir, how are we gonna get out of here? We're pinned down!"

"Give me your grenades!" stryker said. "Do it now!" Ramirez took some flashbang and smoke grenades off his vest. Quickly and ingeniously Stryker unwrapped his paracord bracelet and tied the string around all of the safety pins in the grenades, making a necklace of them. Then he did the same with flashbangs. With 5 or 6 grenades in total he took the combined string of them and tied it all together. "This my friend, is what I call a multi grenade. 6 for the price of 1." Ramirez said, "Hurry up there MacGyver, we've got to get out of here!" Stryker knew he was right so he took the multi grenade, spun it around like a slingshot, and then threw it. As it soared through the air the string yanked out all the safety pins basically activating all of the grenades at once and they spread out in different directions in the air like a cluster bomb. In the next second, every Muslim in the room was DEAFENED and blinded by a massive explosion of flashbangs and the next second Ramirez and Stryker had covering fire with the smoke. Its two birds with one stone stryker said.

"NOW!" he yelled. In an instant Stryker dashed to his feet and kong vaulted over the console. Ramirez followed closely behind. The two tac-rolled to safety and then sprinted towards the window. There was a large drop below, a cliff that went maybe 200 feet to the plains below out of the huge glass window. Ramirez screamed as he fired at it with his SAW while sprinting at 25mph. The glass broke and him and Stykyer dived out of the window in slow motion side by side like two American eagles like in assassins creed or something when the guy jumps off the tower and everything. Just as they flew out they looked to the sky to see a trio of F-22 bombers flying above them, soaring right past them barely 50 feet from them as they unloaded their bombs into the building, reducing it and the entire surrounding area to rubble and killing an entire platoon of Muslim soldiers and a tank. As they free falled into the valley the air was showered with debris and broken glass and screams of "ALLAH SAVE US!". Just in time Stryker and Ramirez hit the buttons on their built-in emergency parachutes and glided down to safety. As they watched the sunrise they hit the ground and tac-rolled to safety in the middle of the terrorist poppy farms. They both landed in a three-point landing and rolled to their feet with catlike reflexes and stood up. As Stryker tried to regain his composure Ramirez just looked to the sky to see the smouldering ruins of what used to be an Islamic brainwashing center.

"Nothin like the smell of dead Hadjis in the mornin" he said, his voice muffled into a robotic tone by his blood-stained Juggernaut armor. Stryker chuckled, his voice hoarse and dry. "All in a good days work" he said, lighting a cigar with the supressed mussle flash of his Sig-TF.

Chapter 16: CHAPTER 16: BLOWBACK

CHAPTER 16: BLOWBACK

The two soldiers sat in the mountain cave, away from the prying eyes of the patrols, huddling around a fire and refilling their clips with scavenged terrorist ammo. Besides hand signals for stealth on the way there, neither of them had said a word to one another. They had found a hiding spot - a mountain cave - and they had hid there for hours, waiting for the nearby guards and sentries to leave. Now the sun was just finishing setting. Ramirez still refused to make eye contact.

Stryker spoke first. "He would want us to finish the mission."

"Sirâ  what happened back at the compoundâ  holy shit, I mean, I always knew it was possible, butâ  to see him die like that, right before our eyes?!? What the fuck are these people thinking?!" Ramirez's voice was choked with pain.

"He was a human being, god damnit!" His voice echoed as the sands whipped across the plains. "He didn't deserve this! No more than any of the civvies!" Quickly, his frustration turned to anger. "And the fucking news pricks people back home are going to talk about him like he's a monster, a baby killer. They'll never know his life. That's fucked up, Sarge! It's FUCKED UP!"

Stryker didn't say anything for a long time. He drew his customized Ka-Bar and admired its engraving, pondering. Ramirez yelled: "Say something, god damnit!" Stryker gave him a long sideways glance, sizing him up. His face betrayed nothing, but he had that look in his eyes that Ramirez knew too well. Eventually, he spoke.

"Sometimes, Ramirez, men's lives come down to decision points that they would have never guessed possible. One bullet, one squeeze of a trigger, and it's all over." He wiped the blood from his Tactical Tomahawk's edge on his trousers and sheathed it in his tac-boots. "We live on the razor's edge, Ramirez. It's not pretty, but it's what we fucking do. We'll give Timmy the burial he deserves laterâ   But for now, get your game face on."

Stryker's eyes narrowed, a mixture of both pain and determination. His voice was hoarse and tired. "Finish the mission, Ramirez. We've got a fucking job to doâ   And more patrols are going to be coming awfully soon."

"Why the fuck did you have to say that shit on the radio? Yo, that was fucked up! Come on man, too far!"

Stryker grimaced. "You haven't seen the things I've seen, Ramirez. That radio control tower wasn't just broadcasting prayer. It was broadcasting propaganda, and a form of mind control. Those "nasheeds" you hear them sing - they're battle cries. Not peaceful omens." He said, looking at the ground while he said that is. "What do you mean? Ramirez spoke. "Binaural beats. Here, Take a look." Stryker leaned over in the dark cave to show Ramirez his wrist-mounted tactical PDA. The PDA's full-titanium casing, 64gb storage capacity, Intel I5 processor and 2gb RAM provided more than enough hacking capability for a close-quarters infiltration job. It's holo-screen glowed brightly, but the two men's 5.11 Tactical Eyewear Series Burner Full Frame Polarized Sunglasses meant that they were not even briefly blinded by the bright flash of light emitting from his state-of-the art and/or top-of-the line wristpad with 5g and BlueTooth functionality. Combining a subtle and stylish aesthetic with superior vision enhancement, Burner Full Frame Polarized Sunglasses offer excellent ballistic protection and 99.9% polarization for maximum glare reduction in highly active environments. Built in partnership with Wiley X® Performance Eyewear, a global leader in Military Grade eye protection, Burner Full Frames provide 100% protection against UVA and UVB light without distorting the color spectrum. The Grilamid TR-90 Nylon frames are nearly indestructible, and a T-Shell lens coating

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provides enhanced scratch, crack, and craze resistance. Burner Eyewear exceeds ANSI Z87.1-2003 and EN 166 (F) High Velocity Impact Safety and Optical Standards, ensuring superior safety, durability, and performance in any setting. Includes a zippered, compression molded protective case, a SlickStick web platform attachment kit, a cleaning bag, and a neck strap designed to provide superior protection and vision enhancement in any environment. Armed with these sunglasses Ramirez and Stryker had the safety, performance, and reliability they needed to stay vigilant, and with the customized flame paint that Stryker hand-engraved on the sides of each of them (Red for Ramirez, and Orange for Stryker) they were stylishly deadly to the eye on all fronts. Ramirez was now looking at a screen with details and intel on Binaural Beats. This was recently released to spec-ops units and land warfare after SIGINT looked over Stryker's findings and theories and proved they were correct in the lab. The 12-page paper showed a longitudinal study where in patients were exposed to Islamic nasheeds at a variety of volumes, pitches and bitrates and the findings show that most Nasheeds produced after 1998 and encoded in bitrates over 128 do in fact contain binaural beats which are capable of indoctrinating the listener by prolonged exposure using subliminal messaging throughout the sound waves resulting in what many would call mind control in a state of form in which the viewer or listener in this case is exposed to a hearing sensation that could only be described as respect and awe; When listening to these nasheeds the patients expressed awe at the might of the Islamic art and began using the music's beauty as evidence of a greater God, (Allah). After Stryker explained this Ramirez was shocked. "Mama mia..> There's nothing to say Cabron. That's fucked up. That's fucked up. You discovered all of this yourself?" "Yes" Stryker said. "Back in the day. But that's another story for another time> And that, my friend, is why I had to destroy the satellite uplink back there." "To stop them from indoctrinating more people?" "No. To break their grip on the region. After this, the locals may have less respect for them. They might rise up. Some might even convert to other religions now. We've weakened their power base. A lot."

"Si, si. Good news for usâ€¦ but we were just here for a simple mission. Take out Omar Khadr, go home. That's it. And Timmy's dead, and we still don't even know where the fuck he is!" Ramirez complained again.

"We don't, but that's not for lack of trying" Stryker said. "He's a slippery bastard> He just hasn't given us a chance to track down his trail yet, but once we get on his trail, we won't get off until he's dead in the dirt, one way or the hard way dude. That is why we are Spec Ops Soldiers" he says. Ramirez nodded. "Yeah, that's right Commander. Spec ops. Hey, it's all part of the job right?" Ramirez said lighting up his Cuban cigar. "Yeah. It is. So keep those emotions bottled up for when we get back home because right now nothing we can do can bring Jenkins back. Now break's over, we've got to get the fuck out of here."

And with that, they were off. Exiting the mountain cave they emerged in a flat lowlands area, with low-grade farmland stretching for miles. It was a hashish farm, they were growing poppy seeds here. Thankfully for Ramirez and Stryker, this vegetation provided excellent concealment. Without a word the two snuck off and headed down. The farmland was not terraced, it went up a hill and towards the cliff they were near before, so the two made sure to use their high ground to their advantage in remaining concealed and marking upcoming enemy patrols for each other.

Chapter 17: Condition Zero

The two Specops laid prone in the thick foliage of the hashish farm. The Pakistani farmers were unorganized and placed the plants very closely together to maximise land efficiency, since they had very little growable land, they went for quantity over quality to hedge their bets. In the arid climate, it was very difficult for any agriculture to flourish. With the lack of proper terracing equipment, the farms were planted over rolling hills with jagged cliffs. The hashish farm took up approximately one square mile, sparsely spread out in between the badlands where nothing could grow, and occasionally broken up by a farmhouse or shed, usually built from old wood or masonry bricks.

The Hashish farm was about a mile away from the cliff with the radio tower on top of it. Ramirez and Stryker barely had enough time after they parachuted to run to a nearby cave near the hashish farm before reinforcements arrived to check out the scene. They had hidden there for hours, waiting for the reinforcements to comb over the area and eventually leave, only leaving a few men to guard the location which would be easy prey for Specops... but the enemy terrorist first responder recon team were persistent. Too persistent. Evidently, Stryker had pissed them off a little *too much* with that radio stunt. They were out for blood now and Stryker was happy to oblige, but it was going to be their blood, not his.

Stryker merely grimaced, with Ramirez at his side. Ramirez was still unhappy that they had to leave Jenkins behind in order to escape, but they both knew that this wasn't the time for it. "Boss this is fucked. Like, really fucked.", he whispered.

When Stryker and Ramirez finally emerged from the caves after hours of hiding, they were almost caught before Stryker had to take out a sentry. They'd tried hiding the body in the cave, but it was clear that they'd found the body by now. That was about a half hour to an hour ago. Since then, they'd been skulking around in the plantation, hoping to find some way out of the kill box that surrounded them.

After they hid the body, Ramirez gawked at the amount of foot mobiles in the area. The men could both hear trucks moving about carrying soldiers back and forth, barking orders to each other on their radios. These guys were much more organized and professional than the grunts they'd seen before and worse, they seemed to know they were fighting against Spec Ops, and they adjusted their tactics accordingly. Whoever was leading these new Muslim troopers was clearly a tactical genius to match even Stryker.

"It looks even worse than when we hid. They're fucking everywhere", he said. "I know!" Stryker said. "Are you sure we couldn't have just commandeered a jeep and blown this joint?" Ramirez said. "This double-tap doesn't seem like a good idea now.". The two crawled cautiously around, making sure to make as little noise as possible, zig-zagging between enemy patrols as they whispered back and forth. "Mind going over the plan again, boss?" Ramirez said.

Stryker grimaced, he was now very stressed out that his plan didn't go as he thought. His heart was pounding in his chest. "Enemies were supposed to show up. That's the point of the plan. We cause a disturbance, we set off a few fireworks, then enemies show up to investigate and then we take out those enemies. We get the defensive advantage and we get to ambush and surprise them. It's called a double-tap, Ramirez. I planned this from the start. Guess I'd pissed them off a little bit too much" he said.

"You mind telling me about this shit before you do it next time, boss? No offense but I can't read your mind. I knew you had a plan, but..." Ramirez began to say, but Stryker cut him off. "Plan? I don't make plans, Ramirez, I make things happen. Plans are delicate. The enemy can find out your plan and out think you. I plan as I go." he explained. The huge Mexican paused as he tried to work out Stryker's words. "So you got an idea of how to capture Omar then?" he said tentatively.

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"Simpleâ we draw him out and hope he takes the bait. That's the whole point of the radio tower assault. I knew he was listening" Stryker said. "Now our #1 priority is to escape alive. If we can get any intel on Omar, great. If notâ then let's just cut our losses."

"These soldiers aren't like any insurgents I've ever fought beforeâ !" Ramirez trailed off.

The sun had just set, and the twilight sky offered a dim light. Stryker and Ramirez cautiously peeked their heads out from the thick underbrush of the hashish fields, rifles at the ready. The tall plants offered excellent concealment. Silent as hunting wolves, the two heard footsteps in every direction as militants searched the nearby area with flashlights mounted on their AK-47's. The militants were now coming in full force in every direction. The first responders knew Stryker was nearby the radio tower, and they were searching for him. "Alright, Let's start to move toward the enemy vehicles. If we can hijack one and get out of here, we're golden. If we can kill some enemies, even better." Ramirez nodded. "This Juggernaut armor ain't exactly good for sneaking, commander", the huge Mexican said. "Yeahâ shit, you're right." The two men sighed. "Back to the drawing board, eh ese?" The Mexican said. "Yeahâ fuck. We just keep digging our hole deeper, don't we?" Stryker admitted.

"It's what Spec Ops doâ !" Ramires said. "Keep pushing our luck... But our luck's ran dry, man. We gotta get out of hereâ !"

"SSSH" Stryker whispered hastily as a guard began to walk near them. The footsteps grew closer. The two men laid prone, holding their breath, clutching their combat knives and hoping to God they wouldn't have to use them. The guard walked right up to them, but didn't seem to notice them, sweeping his gun back and forth horizontally and never thinking to look down.

Stryker was relieved when he knew the guards were using flashlights. While they are useful in some situations, flashlights deaden your cone of vision to a very narrow area and ruin your natural nightvision, leaving you unable to use your full field of view. Worse, the flashlights give you away to anyone who might be in hiding. It's a beginner's mistake to rely on flashlights and other light sources, but a very common one. Even one brief flash of light is enough to completely destroy your nightvision and it takes another five minutes of black to adjust. Stryker's nightvision was almost blinded several times by distant flashlight flashes but thankfully his eyepatch was able to act as a back-up. In ancient days pirates used to use eyepatches because even if their nightvision was ruined on one eye by a flash, they could just take off their eyepatch and still have perfect adjusted nightvision on their other eye. It was like a back-up option in case of emergency. This is why Stryker always wore one on missions, just in case. As another bonus it looked pretty badass too, but that wasn't the point. Stryker always made sure to paint over the black leather eyepatch whenever applying his camouflage so that it didn't stick out and reveal his location.

But none of that mattered now. Eventually, after a long silence. the man walked past. Luck smiled on them once again, and the two hoped it wouldn't be the last time. "These are a lot of soldiers. Too many, if you ask me. " Stryker said. "I get the feeling we've really caught the enemy attention here." Stryker added: "I'm going to try to get a better viewâ cover me." he said. Ramirez merely nodded.

Stryker retrieved a snake cam from one of the pockets on his chest rig and plugged it into his wrist-mounted PC. Snake cams are a recon device consisting of a metal "snake" made of interconnecting metal rings, with the "head" of the snake replaced by a fiber optic camera. Originally designed for SWAT teams to look for enemies underneath doors, they were designed to "snake" underneath the door frames and provide live cam footage to the viewer so they could get visual on a room before clearing it. Stryker's was a custom-made piece, the kind of thing you couldn't find in a catalog; it's frame was retractable and could extend distances of up to 3 ft, allowing the user to peer through air vents, etc. Even better than a hand-mirror, these snake cams didn't reflect light, and therefore were much better to use without giving away your position to an enemy.

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They could accurately peer around corners, even through small air vents or cracks in walls without giving any indication or alerting the enemy. Stryker activated his snake cam on his PDA and used it to climb up the nearby hashish stalk. The stalk was about 4 feet tall, and after climbing to the top, the snake cam was able to get a visual of the surrounding area. However the snake "head" was so small and non reflective, nobody could see itâ but Stryker could see Through it with his Wrist-Computer. This allowed him to scan the nearby area.

Immediately he spotted a series of floodlights near the cluster of farmhouses about a quarter-mile to the west. The enemy had them rigged up to mobile generators and were using them to try and make it harder for the Spec Ops to hide. They seemed to have turned the farmhouses into a temporary base of ops and the large barn was clearly the HQ. Looking around carefully Stryker caught a brief glint of something in the farm house rooftop. He knew a sniper squad when he saw one. He cursed internally. When he glanced to the edges, he saw the situation wasn't any better. On all edges of the hashish plantation were guards patrolling the edges with floodlights hooked up. This meant that if Stryker and Ramirez tried to leave quietly they would surely be spotted and killed, if not by the patrolling guards on the edges of the plantation, than by the snipers.

"...Fuck", Stryker whispered, retrieving the snake cam again. When he looked back at Ramirez, he met a cold gaze from behind his Juggernaut helmet. His face was concealed entirely by the thing, making him appear inhuman. Since the helmet had no pathway to the mouth except a rebreather, the voice module was necessary for anyone to hear when the wearer spoke. One side effect was changing the wearer's voice to a low, robotic menacing growl.

"What if we pretend to give up? Or something?" Ramirez's voice croaked, letting out a dry, self-deprecating chuckle. "You really think they'd make it easy for us to escape? No offense sir, but I'd rather go down in a blaze of glory than rot in a terrorist prison camp for 10 years."

"Don't talk like that", Stryker said. "Nobody else is going to die today."

"The mission comes first, Boss", Ramirez said. "Let me stay." He said. "We both know you're a better ghost than me. You can sneak past 'em. I'll link up with you later."

"Link up with me? How? This is a fucking killbox. You're outgunned and outnumbered, and there's no way you can sneak out of here, even without that suit... you're a heavy gunner, not an infiltrator."

"Way I see it, either I survive, we both go home and link up at base camp for some beersâ or I don't, and we link up in hell, and it's on the house. Like you said, double-tap, right?" Ramirez said, his cold words muffled and distorted by the voice changer on his Juggernaut suit. "Hellâ if there's one thing I'm good at, it's starting shit, boss. I'll be the distraction. You head offâ and you finish the fight for me." Stryker began to hear footsteps in the distanceâ but his body was frozen. He was in shock. Unable to think straight.

Stryker merely stared at him, trying to conceal his emotions and remain professional. His sadness at knowing his best friend might not survive. His at the world for making this happen, his rage at himself for allowing it to happen like this. But there was no way for both of them to surviveâ Not like this.

"I won't let you die, Ramirez!" Stryker said, a little louder than he should have. "One man is enough for today!"

"Marines don't die, boss. They just go to hell to regroup" Ramirez said, laughing to himself again. And in that sentence, Stryker knew there was no way to talk him out of it. There was a clear path he could sneak down, and escape the situation, leaving Ramirez to die. As a commander, he knew it was the right option. But as a human being, he was terrified.

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For the first time in his life, he hesitated... just long enough for a patrol to approach the two. A second later, he was blinded by the flashlight mounted on an AK47. "I found them!" the Muslim shouted in Farsi, and leveled his gun at Stryker's head, standing tall above him as Stryker laid on the ground concealed. "Not so fast, gringo!" he heard a muffled voice cry out, as the 7 foot tall terror of a man stood up from behind the Muslim and rammed a huge knife through his chest, his blood spurting out right at Stryker. The knife pierced straight through his lungs, draining his breath before he could even scream. The body fell on the ground, and Ramirez stood tall before Stryker as he laid on the ground, paralyzed.

"RUN, YOU LOCO BASTARD!! RUN!!!" Ramirez yelled, his voice like a demon.

Stryker got to his feet as nearby alerted soldiers began heading toward their location, flashlights sweeping back and forth like car headlights about to run him down. He turned heel and ran faster than he'd ever run before. The Commander was at his limit. His body and mind were blank, the civilized part of his mind having just died. The only thing left in him was absolute terrorâ the two slowly mixing into an anger that burned like wildfire in his eyes. This was the beginning of the end.

Chapter 18: Chapter 18: Afghan Sundown

CHAPTER 18: AFGHAN SUNDOWN

Chapter Music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80XAJKqRU9k>

The night air was cold. Harsh winds howled in the desert as flashlights swept back and forth desperately searching any and all corners for signs of the enemy. There were nearly 100 men in the area, all of them with their sights on one man who was outnumbered and outgunned, miles away from home and with nothing left to lose. Whatever was left in Stryker was more akin to a cornered animal. With nowhere left to run, animals did the only thing they knew how. They fight to the last breath, with nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

He ran like he'd never run before. As if automatically, some sort of animal rhythm awakened within him as he zig-zagged back and forth between the plants whenever a flashlight swept near his position. Men were racing towards Ramirez's position, barely a few hundred feet behind him. All of a sudden, a booming voice noise pierced the chaos as Stryker threw himself to the ground and froze, hiding himself as a reflex.

"Commander Stryker. This is your worst nightmare speaking" said a megaphone in the distance. It was a megaphone hooked up to a radio broadcasting Omar's voice. *"We know you are hiding nearby just waiting to strike. That is the way you work. But it is your greatest weakness as well; you have nowhere to run, trapped like vermin in my maze."*

"Hahahaha! Vermin, eh? No, you motherfuckers! This is MY maze! You're stuck in here with ME!" Ramirez bellowed, leaving any trace of his composure behind long ago. He let out a roaring madman's laugh as he clutched his LMG greedily and panned it back and forth, just waiting for the inevitable enemy to walk into him. *"Come to papa, fuckers! Si, si, I got your 72 virgins right here!"*

Finally, he heard some footsteps, and looked to his left just in time to see two soldiers round a corner and emerge from some Hashish plants with AK47's drawn. They had clearly identified his position already. They barely had time to say "Hands up!" in broken English before he mowed them down savagely with his LMG. Bullets ripped through their bodies effortlessly like paper. *"This is for Jenkins, you bastards!"* With one hand, he grabbed an AK47 from one of the enemy's lifeless bodies, then broke into a sprint heading north. He barreled down the hill just in time for a third sentry to emerge. Without even slowing down, the 7'3 hulk of a man knocked the enemy out of his way as he sprinted towards a nearby supply shed. *"Don't get in my fucking way!"*

More men emerged. Every few feet he'd spot another, just in time he'd level his weapon and fire. He was duel-wielding now, with a SAW LMG in one hand and an AK47 in the other. Automatic fire alerted even more enemies to his position. With every step he sealed his fate. Just according to plan. "¡Mierda!" he shouted, as a sniper round grazed his shoulder. The Juggernaut armor made sure it didn't get too far, but it definitely broke skin. He was bleeding. The recoil was probably going to severely hurt his arms but he didn't care. He was going to die anyway. The only question now was how many men he could take down with him and buy his *compadre* more time to escape. He owed the loco bastard that much.

"The mission comes first," a voice in Stryker's head kept telling him. "The mission comes first". It sounded more desperate every time. "The mission comes first." The voice got quieter and quieter as Stryker tried to

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forget about the suffering Ramirez was about to go through. He hoped for his sake that he wouldn't survive.

He was crawling through the underbrush now, on all fours, stopping every time a sentry would walk past. He became a machine, less than human but so much more. His eyes and ears were more alert than they'd ever been. His movements became short, robotic, preciseâ perfect. With the civilized part of him ripped out like a still-beating heart, All that was left was his training.

Moving. Sight: Sentry at 9 o'clock, estimate 70 meters. Roll prone to the right. Switch cover to continue to avoid. Enemy passed by. Peek above plants. Getting closer to the shed now. Moving. Slow. Quiet. Move now, now nowâ Crouched, low profile. Pistol in right hand, knife in left. Noise, 3 o'clock, possibly footsteps? Too quiet. Small animal, not human. Keep moving. Check cornersâ Red dot, possibly sniper sight, 4 o'clock. Snipers likely scanning bushes. Haven't found me yet. Press the advantage. Keep moving. Sentry, 6 o'clock. Running towards Ramirez. Speaking. Farsi dialect - distorted by hand radio. "He's in there, find him damnit! Spread out!" Getting closer. Floodlights lighting up the field. Too much light. Stay low. Prone. Crawl. Gun out, scan for targets. No movement. Continue forward. Noise: 11 o'clock, Jeep, engine running. Keys in ignition. No driver. 200 meters estimated. Probability of escape: high.

The radio broadcast continued. Omar's voice was much closer now; it was deafening for Stryker, as he was only 100 meters or so away from the radio broadcasting it into the loudspeakers. *"Your resistance is pure folly. Even a Spec Op cannot stand alone against 100 of my personal squad. With no escape, before long, my men will find you. I will give you one final choice. Come out now, surrender, and submit to Allah, and you will not be harmed. You could be a great asset to the Muslim brotherhood, or you could be a US grave. The choice is yours, infidel."*

Ramirez burst into the supply shed hoping to use it as a last resort hold out position. Instead he found something better. On the shelves he spotted his salvation. There were 3 cans of gasoline, likely used to fuel the generator. Ramirez shut the door and approached them like a kid in a candy shop, then picked one up. Sure enough, it was full. *"Si, si, siâ Christmas come early!"*, he said, barely able to contain his excitement. He grabbed the three gasoline cans and hooked them to his belt, then ran back into the cover of the Hashish fields. Reinforcements hadn't arrived yetâ he had just enough time.

He scrambled to unscrew the cap on the first gasoline can, his hand shaking with uncontrolled adrenalin and terror, then began splashing it around as quickly as he could. He laid out a massive puddle, then kept moving, splashing plants as he went with his LMG at the ready just in case anyone interrupted him before his trap was set. He dropped the first canister, now empty, and sprinted to a new position as he opened the second canister cap. He could hear the engine of a big car getting closer, and looked around over his shoulder to see the headlights of a red truck filled with tangos barreling down a dirt path in his general direction. Without even pausing he unloaded a 10-round burst in the driver's side window, and the truck soon veered off the road and into the poppy fieldsâ toward Ramirez. A man poked his gun out of the passenger side window and squeezed off a few controlled bursts at Ramirez. Two AK47 rounds impacted his leg, and he dropped to his knees, shouting out in pain. Blood began to soak through his armor.

The man's roar of pain soon turned to crazed laughter as he braced the LMG on his knee, then fired another huge burst at the engine block of the truck. Within seconds huge plumes of smoke poured out of the engine and it rolled to a slow stop, just feet from him, as men emerged from the back and fanned out. *"You think I'm going to go down easy?"* he screamed, firing on the gas tank this timeâ to a roaring explosion that cloaked the entire nearby area in flames.

"What are you doing, you fool?" Omar's echoing voice demanded, clearly flustered.

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"What does it look like, puto? I'm having a fucking bonfire, and you're all invited!", he bellowed in response, laughing madly as the flames danced in the reflection of his black visor.

Stryker seized the moment, emerging from the plants in the split-second that the patrol's eyes were turned. He pressed himself up against the wall of the barn and peered inside a window.

The room had been cleared out of cattle long ago. It was now filled with dozens of bunk beds, clearly used by the underpaid farm workers.

At the center of the room was a wood table with a large radio setup. Long cables came out of it, which hooked up to a series of loudspeakers scattered across the plantation. He knew he'd found his target. Two tangos in the room, guarding both entrances, and a third right at the radio.

Stryker noticed many small-size bunk beds. These bastards were using child labor to grow these drugs. The civilized part of him would be disgusted at that. But that part was long dead. All he thought of now was the fact that they'd probably use the kids as human shields given the chance.

Many farm workers, including children, were huddled in the corner of the room. The radio operator, Mu'tamid, was speaking to them in Farsi. "I told you once. There is a manhunt going on. You stay here. Omar's orders."

"But.. I.. I need to use the outhouseâ€"!", one frail woman tried to protest. "Silence! I hear one more fucking word and I'm shooting you right here!", the man yelled in Farsi, leveling his AK47 at the terrified crowd as they huddled in the corner. "You cattle leech more than you're worth as it is!"

Walid Ahmedjihahad was guarding the barn doors. He tried to ignore the pleading of the slave workers as he scanned the horizon outside for threats. Stryker could approach at any moment, he knew better than anyone. He and the rest of his team had been given specific briefings on the man. Orders were to capture him alive if possible, kill otherwise. He was becoming too much of a thorn in Omar's side lately. But Stryker's weakness was that he was cocky. Too cocky. Walid knew to use that to his advantage...

Walid could not even finish his thought before his side of the room was plunged into darkness. He spun around to see the other end of the room shut off too, as he heard the sound of a silenced pistol. Someone had shot the lights out. Oh, no. The terrified scream of the workers only served to make Walid panic even more as he grabbed his AK47 from its sling and flicked on the flashlight. "**STRYKER IS HERE!!!!**", he heard Hashim scream.

He was too late. By the time he had his rifle to bear, the other end of the room was already lit up by a muzzle flash as Hashim was felled in a three-round burst of pistol fire. Walid's flashlight lit up the source of the pistol fire to reveal Stryker standing in the middle of the room standing above the body of Mu'tamid, the radio operator, who laid dead on the ground with a knife in his neck. Stryker was bleeding from a bullet wound in his shoulder.

But Walid remembered his training. In the midst of the chaos, he had grabbed a nearby child worker and was using her as a human shield. Walid remembered the basic English he'd been trained in, and spoke: "Don't fucking move, or I'll-"

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Stryker shot three times. The man and the child hit the floor together and Stryker turned away with cold, emotionless eyes.

"Mother, father, do not worryâ Ramirez will join you soonâ!" he roared to himself, barely able to breathe in the smoke of the fire. The flames surrounded him entirely now, and smoke rose from the pillar of fire into the night. Men were closing in on him, and his weapons kept firing at every possible one that emergedâ He took a shot in the right arm. Then another.

Omar's voice cried out to him. *"Why do you keep fighting? You can escape with your life. It is not too late. We have you beaten. Any sane man would do the same."*

"You are not dealing with a sane man, puto!!" Ramirez roared as he dropped his gun to the ground, his arm too hurt to even hold up his gun. The terrorists were all getting high now from the burning hashish, reducing their aim massively. Lucky, too, or Ramirez wouldn't have stood a chance. He collapsed on the ground as flames rose around him and grabbed his sidearm with his left hand, and began crawling away from the flames, firing at emerging silhouettes as pain seized up his body. *"...To the last breath..."*, he whispered to himself. He grabbed one of his high-explosive grenades from his vest and weaseled it into his hand, concealing it. He was about to finish the fight.

The Hashish slaves cowered in terror as Stryker plugged his wireless holo-PDA into the comms circuit. Easily destroying Omar's firewall with 128-bit security algorithms, Stryker began rapidly downloading data onto his local drive. He was specifically looking for the location of Omar's broadcasts were originating from. If he could trace that, he'd find his base - or at the very least, a good lead. Not only that, Stryker had managed to patch himself into Omar's comms network. They would switch channels immediately once they knew they were compromised, but in the mean time, Stryker had a window of a few minutes to piggyback off their signal and send a SitRep to command. A few moments later the download was completed. During that time, he had already rigged up a crude homemade explosive to the comms center.

"Run", Stryker said in Farsi, as he set the explosives to a timed delay. One old man protested: "There are armed guards outside! They will kill us!" Stryker hardened his gaze. "Your deaths will not be in vain."

"We areâ a distraction?" one woman asked, crying. Stryker responded by setting the fuse and running towards the nearby window, vaulting over it with ease. He shot one guard while running, and continued sprinting away from the area of operations without slowing down. As he ran off into the night, he heard terrified screams from the barn as he sprinted to safety in the darkness of the night. The hostages tried to escape the explosion. Rapid gunfire and confusion followedâ then a large boom. Then another, larger boom.

A flashbang soared through the air and detonated right above Ramirez, blinding and disorienting him. *"Move in, now! Shoot to wound!"* Omar yelled to his crack squad. In an instant, a squad of 10 well-armed and armored soldiers emerged from all directions and closed in towards him while he was disoriented. Ramirez blindly fired every round in his clipâ save for one bullet. He was saving it for a special someone. He took another round in the leg and his whole body went limp, nearly unconscious in a pool of his own blood as the flames gradually started to overtake his body, shepherding him on to the afterlife he'd earnedâ

The Terrorist squad approached him and began dragging him out of the fire, then they pulled off his helmet which was burning. The group of 10 terrorists gathered around Ramirez, pointing their guns at him. A young recruit drew his sidearm and pointed it eagerly at Ramirez's head. *"Sir, permission to execute?"* But before he could finish asking, the squad leader batted the gun out of his hand and responded: *"Get your medkit, Bassem."*

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We will interrogate the pig."

"*How come he isn't dead?*", one terrorist, Akeem, asked in Farsi. As if waiting for the perfect moment, Ramirez's charred eyes flicked open and stared the man right in the face, like a zombie. The men jerked backwards instinctively. "*Marines don't die, they just go to Hell to regroup!*" Akeem looked down to see Ramirez holding a live grenade and smiling through gritted teeth.

In an instant, it was all over.

Stryker sat atop a ridge, four miles out from the farm. He was fairly certain nobody had followed his trail at this point. He'd made it out aliveâ but he'd had to make a lot of sacrifices. And all of it was his fault. He watched through his binoculars the smoke rise as the growing wildfire lit up the vast expanse of desert wasteland.

Stryker flicked on his radio, and piggybacked off Omar's signal. "SecNav, This is Tiberius." The response was almost immediate. Clearly, the higher-ups had been waiting to hear from him. "*Tiberius? What the hell happened? We haven't heard from you since the mission began. Give us a SITREP. Over.*"

Stryker watched the flames rise higher and higher. He thought he would have felt anger, sadness, something. But all that was left was in him was a deep, empty feeling. A part of him had died. A part of him had grown stronger. But the only thing he knew was that he didn't really care about anything anymore. "*Hello? Tiberius, please respond, over!*", the radio chirped impatiently as Stryker watched the flames in silence. He slowly turned to it and held down the "SEND" button.

"This is Tiberius Actual. Badly wounded. Took a round to my lung. Jenkins and Ramirez KIA. Mission is a complete and total failure. Survivorsâ one too many."

"What? Tiberius Actual, report! We'll send a-"

"Don't bother. I'm past saving. I'm not going to have any more Marines die because of me." Stryker said. He took the radio, dropped it underneath his feet and crushed it under his boot.

He stared at the raging flames as they spread, consuming everything in their path in their merciless hunger. Something stirred inside him. A fire of his own was born in that hell.

Special thanks to Rob and Tavern Explorer for help with writing and editing this chapter.

Chapter 19: PARADIGM

CHAPTER 19: PARADIGM

Frank Williams nervously clutched the dossier in one hand and his thermos of coffee in the other as he walked through the claustrophobic halls of the Pentagon secret bunker. He'd already lost count of how many security checkpoints and armed guards he'd passed, and part of him admired the devotion to security, while part of him was all too aware that he was, frankly, in way over his head. Hell, he's already late, not to mention lost.

The fancy wallpaper on the walls hid the three feet of titanium behind them, insulating the most important wings of the United States armed forces from any potential bombing or attack, and the layout was like a fractal maze. The place was designed that way on purpose to confuse attackers, but those who were familiar with it could still get through the hallways easily. Frank approached a nearby guard, a 7" tall black man standing at parade rest. The guard was clad in sunglasses, an earpiece, and a perfect suit and tie that no doubt hid countless concealed weapons and a full suit of kevlar.

Clearing his throat to help with the awkwardness, Frank introduced himself. *"Frank Williams, CIA InfoSec agent. Hey, sorry, but I'm already late - could you point me to the situation room?"*

"Down the hall and to your left, sir" the guard said, remaining completely motionless save for his mouth.

Frank nodded and continued speed-walking, following the guard's directions. As Jack Stryker's handler and friend, he was responsible for the Khadr assignment, and had prepared a quick briefing on the situation to his boss. However, at the last moment the briefing was rescheduled to be at the Pentagon, Frank could never have imagined that people so high up would take an interest in this case - something wasn't right.

Sliding his ID card to access the door, he was patted down by a guard (again) before entering the Situation Room. Silence fell on the room as a full assortment of 11 men sat at the table. Practically the entire Presidential staff was there. He first recognized Adrian Welshire, the Deputy Director of the CIA, as well as James Amos, the Commandant of the US Marines, and Keith Anderson, Director of the NSA, and the Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, among others, including several members from the Joint Chief of Staff. Sitting at the head of the table, with his feet up on the table, was the President of the United States. For a moment, Frank could only stand in the doorway like a deer in the headlights. "Above his pay grade" didn't even begin to describe it, but he was chosen for the brief because after all, he knew more about Stryker than anyone else. He just had no idea why the President himself was involved.

"Ah, Frank. You're late", Adrian, the Director of the CIA said. Before Frank could respond, he continued. *"I was just bringing our Commander in Chief up to speed on the situation. Would you mind running over your presentation for us?"* Obama stared at Frank with keen interest. He waved his hand. *"Please, let's get a SITREP going here."*

"Of course, Mister President", Frank said, placing his thermos of coffee on the table and thumbing through the thick dossier. *"As you know, the last we've heard of him was that he was severely injured in the wilderness, and it's been three days. At the advice of the Director of the CIA, a decision was already made not to send search-and-rescue teams."* James Amos, the Commandant of the Marines, looked silently at the floor. *"So much for no man left behind"*, he muttered silently.

The Director of the CIA cleared his throat. *"With all due respect, Commandant, the man was already dead the*

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second he disobeyed mission directives and went off the rails. That radio station was never factored into the plan."

"No, sir, he was already dead the second you sent him on a damn suicide mission", James replied with anger. The Director started to reply but Obama cut him off. "Let's get back on topic, here." Obama cut in, slightly annoyed as he shot a glare at James. "Frank, you were saying?" "Of course, sir", Frank replied.

Frank cleared his throat. "Right now the status is officially MIA, but based on circumstantial evidence I believe it to be very possible, in fact likely, that he's gone rogue and abandoned his formal objectives." Obama raised an eyebrow while Frank continued. "I don't think him a deserter; his psych profile indicates he's too bent on revenge and determined to walk away from a situation like that."

The Commandant of the Marines, James Amos, scoffed while others stared at Frank with disbelief. "You really think he's still out there?" Adrian, the Director of the CIA, offered. "Frank, the man's been out in the middle of a warzone with an entire army hunting him, and he has no support, not even food, water, or shelter. I think we can call a close to this situation."

Frank quickly countered, thumbing through his dossier and sliding several pages over to his Director. "With all due respect, sir, Stryker is a high-value target. ISIS would have jumped at the chance to issue a ransom, or at the very least publicize his execution. We've seen nothing to indicate this so far, and all of our HUMINT sources within ISIS indicate that the manhunt is still ongoing. Furthermore, there have even been unexplained murders of ISIS supporters within the greater Afghanistan region."

"It's a third-world country, Frank. Crime, infighting, vigilantism, honor killings, anything could explain those murders", the Director offered, but Frank was prepared. He'd spent many sleepless nights late at the office, looking for any sign of Stryker still being alive, and he'd gathered quite a bit of evidence. "Criminals don't have this level of tactical precision. I know Stryker's work when I see it", he said, retrieving a black-and-white photo and sliding it over to the President. "Take a look for yourself", he said. Obama studied the photos with a careful eye.

The autopsy photo showed three Afghani corpses with bullet holes right between their eyes. "All three men were executed in broad daylight, in the middle of a city, with no sign of a struggle from a massive distance. Afghani police picked them up first, and the CIA intervened in the investigation after the killings continued." The men's faces were shredded like cabbage, nearly unidentifiable with the level of damage from the round's impact. "Large impact wounds suggest a high-caliber sniper round, likely hollow-point. We still don't know where the sniper was or how he pulled it off."

Obama had an unreadable expression as he slid the photos back. He remained silent. The Director of the CIA spoke. "If this is all you've managed to gather with three weeks of radio silence, I'm not impressed. I know you're sad to see him go, but he's an asset. We all knew the risks." Frank tried to interrupt, but the Secretary of Defense cut him off. "If you're going to make a case that this man is alive, I expect more substantial evidence. Adrian, I suggest we officially close Stryker's case effective tonight and declaring the op a failure." "Seconded", Adrian responded. Frank looked at the floor and sipped his thermos silently. Perhaps the Director was right. Perhaps he was chasing a fairy tale, or living in denial. Maybe it was time to move on.

Obama nodded, breathing a sigh of relief. "About time", he said. "Now we can get to work cleaning up his little "militia" before they cause any more chaos." he said, using air-quotes for emphasis. "Alexander, what can we do about this problem?"

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Alexander nodded. *"We have a plan prepared already, sir."* Obama nodded. *"Walk me through it"*, Obama said, casually gesturing as he reclined in his black leather chair.

Alexander cleared his throat. *"The first prong of attack begins with Stryker's militia, 'Deagle Nation', being condemned by the media as a domestic terrorist cell. We'll publicize a mix of fabricated and honest evidence to achieve this end. Then we'll send National Guard peacekeepers to Massachusetts in force."*

"Can't we just drone strike them?" Obama offered, impatiently. *"They've already shown more than enough anti-government sentiment to warrant such an action."* Alexander responded: *"Unfortunately, HUMINT suggests the militia possesses anti-air capability, and if we fail and they manage to spin it against us, we'll have a media shitstorm on our hands. Attacking them with force would only martyr them, and prove their anti-government beliefs."* Obama sighed. *"Alright, then what do we have on them? We need something for the press."*

The Director of the CIA eagerly responded, sliding over a press statement he'd already prepared. *"As of right now, we have evidence to suggest hate crimes, drug growing and trafficking, several counts of suspected murder, possessing illegal assault weapons and weapon mods, weapons trafficking, using child soldiers, operating vehicles with suspended licenses, and treason."* he said. Obama took his feet off the table and began rifling through the dossier with interest. When the Director was finished listing off charges, Obama nodded with approval. *"Good work, as always"*, he praised the Director. *"Thank you, Chief"* Adrian responded, nodding.

Frank gulped and spoke to challenge his boss. *"...And how much of that is actually true?"*

Obama's eyes whipped straight up to Frank before he even finished the sentence, locking on like a homing missile. *"Enough of it to stir up the liberal news media into a frenzy"*, Obama said, staring right at him. *"And speaking of that"*, Obama said as he casually turned to the Director of the CIA, *"we're going to need you to engineer some more false-flag shootings. Think Sandy Hook sort of thing"*, he said as he sipped from his bottled water.

"Sir?" Frank asked. *"What's the endgame for this?"*

"It's the oldest trick in the book, Frank", the Director said. *"We've been doing it for years. We make the public think that guns equal mass shootings, then we legislate to take away the guns. Deagle Nation is just a symptom of a greater problem. If we disarm the populace, we can ensure that none of this hillbilly uprising bullshit ever happens again."* he said. *"What about the Second Amendment?"*, the Commandant of the Marines, James Amos, asked.

Obama responded tiredly. *"Having a rifle to protect your home is fine. Installing a jury-rigged anti-aircraft gun in your backyard is another thing. These people are a powder keg waiting to happen."*

Frank's hands were balled into a fist, his whole body tense with fury, in absolute shock and disbelief at what he just said. He tried to compose himself before he spoke. *"Mister President, with all due respectâ just to be clear, you're going to engineer the deaths of innocent civilians to further your agenda?"*

Obama stared at him again with piercing robotic eyes, totally expressionless. If he was pissed, it didn't show. The cunning black man was a master of acting professional to hide his emotions. *"I think we have all the information we need on Stryker, Mr. Williams. Thank you for your time."* The room stared at Frank with silent condemnation.

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In that moment, Frank realized there was nothing he could do. The last fire of hope died in him. He stared at his feet and spoke, deliberately averting his eyes from the President: "*Of course, Mister President*", grabbing his thermos and silently exiting the situation room.

Chapter 20: WASHOUT

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Jack Stryker limped carefully up the wooded mountain path, admiring the sweeping expanse of the northern Afghanistan mountains. The wasteland rolled onward in every direction, as if it was infinite. As he looked around to the enormous mountains, Jack felt like a tiny insect caught in the wind of outer space itself. He carefully stepped along the path, making sure to check for traps everywhere or any indication that fighters were nearby. He was in no condition to fight, or even sneak—both physically and mentally. His stomach was still aching from a hit he'd taken a few hours earlier. He'd stopped the bleeding, but until recently he'd been pursued too closely to really attend to it. His feet were sore from days of hiking and running, and he was running low on food and water.

While the badlands of Afghanistan were mostly bare and lifeless, some parts of the mountains were oddly beautiful, in an out of place way. Coniferous trees were scattered in bare terrain with small patches of grass here and there. There were just enough little streams and brooks in between the trees and caves, for life to grow. It was the best survival environment Jack could have hoped for in such a hellhole—for Afghanistan, anyway. But none of that mattered now. Because now, it was time to stop and rest. His muscles were burning too much, and he felt muscle failure beginning to set in as his steps became wobbly. His stomach was howling at him. He kept walking a little bit longer, looking for a spot to sit down...

With Jackknife's AK47 slung over his shoulder, he'd already spent most of his ammo fending off terrorist search parties in the last three days; he had three rounds left, and he was saving them for game right now; he was starving, having already exhausted his MRE's. The insurgents had gone after him, laying multiple ambushes.

It'd been a back-and-forth of hit and runs between him and the mountain fighters. Just like he'd learned in escape-and-evasion training, Jack would zig-zag to a different location, snipe a few targets, and then get out of there before the cavalry came running. He was constantly mobile and unpredictable. It was a confusion tactic, to keep them guessing as to his location; try to drill it into their heads that he could strike at any time. But it wasn't working. They were beginning to change their tactics, react quicker to him. His time was running out.

Even though Jack was an incredible stealth agent, these Terrorist fighters lived in these mountains, breathed them, and understood every little thing about them. He'd left a trail, even when he tried to cover his tracks. It wasn't much of a trail, but it was enough.

It didn't help they were using attack dogs. It was a new method, something unique to Omar's specialist squad. While Omar was affiliated with Al-Qaeda, ISIS was comparatively more prevalent in the region now, and both groups were obviously not something he wanted to run into.

While the dogs weren't much in a fight, they were damn good hunters, and they could smell blood a mile away. The dogs were followed by small groups of 3-5 skirmishers, lightly armed. The tables had turned—Jack went in to kill Omar, but the hunter had become the hunted. He looked around to the wide horizon and thought. It was strange that, as open as these mountains felt, he was completely trapped inside them. Looking to his left as he climbed the mountain trail, he finally found an area to sit and rest. It was a small alcove bordered with a rocky wall, with some decent concealment right next to a large tree. As good as he could hope for, really.

These last three days, Jack had survived entirely on adrenaline. Not a single thought had crossed his mind outside of basic survival. He was actively shutting out all his emotions, all his higher mind. There was nothing

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of "Tiberius" left in him, just a wounded animal that stubbornly refused to die.

Jack sat down, breathing a sigh of relief and wincing slightly as his shoulder rested against the hard rock. His position allowed him a decent view of the setting sun. It was time to take stock of his injuries. He took the AK47 off his back, and placed it on a nearby tree stump. It was getting heavy, after all.

His shoulder wound throbbed, a sinking pain in his left shoulder that surged throughout his entire body every time he even reached his hand up. It was an AK47 round impact from back in the poppy fields - sure, the armor stopped his entire arm from being blown off, but AK47 bullets hit *hard*. He was pretty sure the bullet hit near the bone, maybe fractured it a little. But that wasn't the real problem. He unbuckled his ballistics vest and put it to the side, and raised his BDU shirt to reveal a wound that was covered up with a big patch of medical gauze, held on by some medical tape.

His tan skin was criss-crossed with various scars and wounds. The blood from his most recent wound had already soaked through the gauze and stained his shirt a little. He'd already ditched most of his armor, save for a ballistics vest; it was weighing him down too much. The rest of his gear (survival stuff, medical kit, spare ammo) had been used up, and he'd ditched them too. He was running bare-bones now. In this particular situation, survival and mobility were much more useful than armor. There was an old saying in his squad: *"If your plan involves taking a bullet, think of a new plan."*

With the blood soaking through his shirt, he'd sure he was suffering blood loss by now, but they were too hot on his tail that it would have been suicide to stop and treat the wound before now. Hell, even now was taking a great risk. Being caught in the middle of self-surgery is NOT an ideal time to defend yourself against an ambush, he thought to himself and winced at the thought.

He grabbed his throwing knife from his boot, and began to cut away at the medical gauze until his wound was exposed. The bullet went straight into his gut, maybe a quarter-inch deep past the skin. If it had been an inch higher, it would've taken out his right lung. Right now, he needed to extract the bullet and seal up. He'd run out of anesthetics long ago, but battlefield instincts had taught him a backup plan.

Jack reached into the mag-pouch on his ballistic vest and grabbed a few nugs of weed that he'd clipped off the Hashish farms while he was there - "Never know when you need some of the green grease", Jack thought aloud, as he took a 20\$ bill from his wallet and rolled it into a joint. Using his survival skills, he struck a fire with his Flint and/or Steel and light the weed joint, inhaling sweet, sweet smoke. It wasn't nearly as good as the shit he was used to from back in the States, but it would take the edge off the pain for what he was about to do. That was the important part.

The dollar bill burned very quickly, and the smoke was harsh in his lungs. He finished smoking and stuffed the rest of the Hashish back in his mag-pouch for later; it was about a half-ounce worth, and on a mission like this, Jack was sure it would come in handy.

Jack grabbed some antiseptic from his medkit, grimaced, and poured it over his wound. He bit into his shirt to stifle the pain and stop himself from yelling. After it was finally done burning, he grabbed his Tac-Knife and began digging the bullet out. He had no tweezers or anything of the sort. It was not pretty.

By the time he was done, he had covered his abdomen in blood, but he had managed to suture the wound shut for the time being with some thread. It was the best he could do. He didn't have any more gauze or medical tape available, so he just took off his shirt and tied it around his chest as tight as he could, hoping it would at least slow the bleeding. Most of the bleeding was over by now, but still.

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Jack put back on his body armor vest, now with nothing on his upper body but his ballistic vest and mag pouches. He was nearly passing out now from a combination of blood loss, exhaustion, and pain — and he had hoped it was only a hallucination when he heard the telltale pitter-patter of a dog's steps on the path nearby.

Jack's first instinct was to freeze completely. Then, a second later, he realized the dog could smell his blood anyway. Fuck — FUCK!!! He was done! There was no way he could hide — and the dog was getting closer by the second, its heavy breathing masking a deep anger. There was no way he could fight off the search party with three fucking rounds, and there was no chance of running in his condition — It was over. It was over. That's what he kept telling himself

In his pain and weed-induced delirium, the best he could hope to do was reach for his rifle — and maybe end his own life, before they got their hands on him and tortured him... "It's not my fault", he said, as if bargaining with something, anything, to save him — "IT'S NOT MY FAULT"... he screamed internally. He lurched towards it and reached out towards the gun, his only salvation — and then fell to the ground. "It's THEIR FAULT!", he tried to tell himself. Anything he could say — anything to make the guilt, to make the voices go away.

Jack's head impacted the dry dirt with a THUD. He wanted to cry. This was not how it was supposed to end. *THIS WAS NEVER SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN!* If the AK47 was just one foot closer — if he hadn't made those mistakes — NO — — — — —!!! He — couldn't even die with dignity...

In his final moments before passing out, Jack opened his eyes on the ground to see the face of a huge mountain wolf cautiously approaching him — and then everything went black.

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