

# Friends and Foes

## Episode I

"Why does it always happen on the weekends?" Element asked himself with an inward sigh. He glances around at the group assembling near the APC. He knows each one, each a team member of the well-known "Pawns of Chaos" counter-terrorism squad.

"I'm just the odd man around here," he says out loud this time.

"That's enough of that talk, Element," says Jedi, the team leader, "We needed another squad member for this rescue and you're it."

"Well, I hope I can fit in enough to take Blazer's place. Where is he anyway?"

"He's still recovering from the last gig. He'll be alright in a few days," replies TK, co-leader of this merry bunch.

"What's the mission?" asks Mrs. Brutus. "Yeah, what's up?" Mr. Brutus adds.

"Plo has the specifics on this one," says Jedi, "I'll let him brief everyone. Plo?"

"It's simple really, " says Plo with his usual, casual attitude. "There are 4 hostages in a house in the canyon adjoining this one. They are being held by a group of terrorists we have had run-ins with before. We aren't sure of their numbers, but we do know several of those there. There's the one known as "Rabbit", a murdering psychopath with a real score to settle with us. There's Raven. An all-around mercenary with a quick eye and willingness to throw himself in harm's way that makes him even more dangerous. He defended himself in his last trial and got off with a hung jury. And then there's the Colonel. He calls himself Jammer these days. A good shot with a sniper rifle, we will have to watch him. And last, but not least, there is that female killing machine...Syn. She put the whole team in a hospital last time we met up with her."

"Syn! I thought she bought the farm on that Italian job we did last year," quips Element. "I have a bullet with her name on it."

"THIS IS NOT YOUR PERSONAL REVENGE TOUR!!" roars Jedi. "We need a teammate who can listen to orders and back us up. You go off on your own crusade and I'll shoot you myself. Is that clear?"

"Crystal," replies Element.

"Take it easy, John," says Plo.

"Don't use real names, Plo," Jedi interjects, "you know the rules. If any of us are captured, we won't have the information to give away."

"Sorry, pal. I have some more info to brief."

"Go ahead." Jedi responds as he takes a seat on a sawhorse.

"The following names are possibles for the remainder of the terrorist group we are facing," Plo adds as he hands each of us a sheet of paper.

Element looks over the list of names in the dim pre-dawn light. Jester, Ryan, Retro, and Wicked. Wicked had been a member of this same group not long ago. He was a cop gone bad and a very dangerous one at that.

"Wicked may be there?" asks Twisted.

"Man, he could be trouble," notes Firedrake, one of the youngest members of the group.

"Yeah, he could be there. Wish Sped was here," says someone behind Element.

He turns to see Skooter. The man who had talked him into this life and a person he worked well with.

"Hey, Skoot," he says.

"Hey yourself, Element. Good to see you here."

"I hate to break up this reunion, but do we know what kind of weaponry we're facing today?" asks Johnny.

"Well, Rabbit and Jammer are seldom without their AWP's so watch for snipers." TK responds. "They have grenades and body armor too."

"Headshots will solve that!" Plo says laughing. The CT's all join in the laughter. However, it's not just one whose laughter is a little strained and nervous.

Not far away, similar things are happening at the house where the hostages are being held.

"This waiting crap is really getting to me, Rabbit," complains Raven, cleaning his beloved pistol for the tenth time.

"Keep your shirt on mister! They won't come until daylight and they won't come until they have every contingency accounted for." Rabbit replies with not just a little irritation in his voice.

Raven has been through this before and Rabbit needs him to set a good example for the newer members of their little band. Jester and Ryan are both young and talented. Jester doesn't know that his death has been pre-ordained by Rabbit and Syn, but he would serve his purpose. Rabbit's mind dwells on the tragedy of wasting the young man's life for only a second... THE CAUSE is all that matters. That and getting his revenge on the CT known as Jedi. Jedi had killed his friend, Crimson, in that skirmish in Central America and Rabbit had sworn he would have the man's head as a trophy.

"What's got you looking all consternated?" someone asks.

Rabbit turns to see Syn, his second in command and possibly the deadliest member of the group. Absolutely no emotion ever shows from her eyes, except for the thrill of the kill. She could care less about THE CAUSE. She just hated CT's and with her skill at getting in the middle of a firefight and coming out unscathed had saved his bacon on more than one occasion. She had recently returned from Italy where word had come that she was dead. Well, she had been close but she had put an entire squad of CT's in the local hospital in a matter of 5 minutes.

"Just worried about the CT makeup this time. That's all." he replied to her question.

"Don't worry. The closest team to here is POC and they are undermanned thanks to yours truly."

"Don't get too cocky, little one," booms Wicked, "they have enough and one or two subs that can't be discounted."

"Your old friends better bring all they can, this is a very defendable location." notes Retro.

"They are no longer my friends, but don't underestimate them. They are smart and willing to die to get these hostages. They know these scientists are our key to making a tactical nuclear device to use for THE CAUSE." Wicked says.

"It's starting to get light outside, let's get Jester and one of the young guns out in the front." directs Rabbit, "The fireworks are about to begin."

## Episode II – Scene I

### Enter Mr. Smith

Two weeks earlier in a different part of the world...

Where is all that light coming from, he thinks. He turns his head and realizes he is in a bed of some kind. Is it a hospital? He swings his legs around in preparation to stand up. The effort almost makes him blackout. He steadies himself and takes a quick assessment of the situation. The bed is a standard full bed, wooden headboard and footboard, average mattress, white sheets and pillowcases. The blanket is the kind you could get at any Army surplus store, rough but durable and warm. The room is not that different from a hospital room or maybe a cell. The floor is stone as are the walls. No windows. One chair, metal and looking very uncomfortable. The light he had seen was from a bare overhead bulb hanging on a cord from the ceiling 14 feet away. There is one door to his right with a night table beside it. There are clothes sitting on it. A green shirt with khaki pants. Not really his favorite colors. Wait! What are his favorite colors? It suddenly dawns on him that he has no recollection of who he is, where he came from, or anything else for that matter. Maybe this is a hospital he thinks. Maybe he was in an accident.

"I hope a doctor shows up soon," he says out loud. His voice startles him. He doesn't recognize it at all. Suddenly, he leaps to his feet, landing in a defensive position as the door opens.

"I'm glad to see you're up and about, Mr. Smith. I am Dr., uuhmm, just call me The Doctor for now." says the tall man standing in the doorway.

"Is that my name? Mr. Smith? I don't feel like a Mr. Smith. And what happened to me? Why am I here?"

"All in good time, my friend, all in good time. Now let's see how those wounds are healing." The Doctor steps closer to Smith.

"What wounds?"

"Why those." says The Doctor, pointing to Smith's face.

Smith feels of his face for the first time. There are stitches running along each cheek and another set along his hairline.

"Give me a mirror." he demands.

"Certainly." The Doctor replies as he removes a hand mirror from a drawer of the nightstand.

Smith takes the mirror and gasps as he gets a look at himself. He looks as bad as the stitches felt. Only, he has no idea what he looked like before.

"Ok, who am I and what happened?"

"You are Mr. Smith. A very talented individual indeed and lucky to be alive."

"Why? And how am I talented?"

"Well, you have certain skills that are in great demand by my friends. You have made a great deal of money selling your "services" to the highest bidder." The Doctor laughs and then chokes as he is lifted off his feet with one of Smith's hands wrapped around his throat.

"It would serve you well not to laugh at me," says Smith lowering the larger man to the floor as easily as he lifted him.

"Of course." says The Doctor, rubbing his throat. He would have to have help with this one next time. He had not even seen the move that had gotten Smith across the six feet that had separated them. This man was truly remarkable. A walking weapon, but like any weapon, just as dangerous to the wielder as to the target. Operation Looking Glass was a success so far and the man known as White Rabbit would be glad to hear of the progress.

"Just sit here and I will explain everything to you. All your questions will be answered."

Smith seated himself on the bed as The Doctor pulled up the chair and began the story of Mr. Smith's recent history.

## Episode II – Scene II

### Smith's Story

"Maybe it is a good thing that you don't remember your past." begins The Doctor, "Some of us don't have that luxury."

"Get on with it." Smith says through clenched teeth.

"Alright. We don't know an awful lot about you. You came to THE CAUSE about a year ago. You said you had information that could help us reach our goals and make a truckload of money in the process. Our leader, White Rabbit, listened to what you had to say and then acted on it. It was risky, but it panned out. With the info you gave us we were able to retrieve approximately \$100 million. We never would have gotten into that vault with out the access codes that you had. It was mostly a bloodless operation with only a couple of dead hostages and some really messed up counter-terrorists. We only had superficial injuries to our team. Except for you. You took a bullet through the face and then fell from balcony in the lobby of the bank. Raven got you out of there with Jester covering. I know these names mean nothing to you, but I promise you were very grateful until you lost consciousness. You were brought to our facility here to have surgery and recover. It wasn't until yesterday that I realized that you have amnesia. I believe it to be temporary and you should regain your memory in a few days."

"You can't tell me that you didn't run a background check of some kind on me if I showed up like you said I did."

"We did. We did. But, like many of our number, your past is murky to say the least. You were trained in the US armed forces though we don't know which one. You were court-martialed for nearly beating your commanding officer to death. You escaped 2 months later and disappeared into the mercenary underground. You have been linked to numerous bank heists, using your apparent affinity for computers to crack some pretty sophisticated security. You have been known as Mr. Smith since your escape. All intelligence information on you has been "modified" shall we say. It appears you know even more than you have let on to us. I believe that you were a "black ops" specialist before the incident and our operatives have been unable to find any "living" person who can identify you as anyone other than Mr. Smith. Does any of this bring back memories for you?"

"No, nothing. You might as well be talking about some stranger. Tell me what THE CAUSE is and what I helped pay for with all that money."

"THE CAUSE is the name we give to why we do the things we do. The Western Commercial regime headed up by the Industrial Military Complex of the US caused us to spring into being. Their demise is our cause, the enlightenment of a world that will no longer be the personal chessboard for the rich countries of the world, and the death to all those that would keep the poor poor and the weak weak. Like a surgeon, we will remove the cancer that is the US influence and the surrounding dead tissue that are the little prattling yes-men nations vying for the crumbs from the US feast. True capitalism is not a mandate from the US or the UK. It is not the techno-economics of Japan. Capitalism would allow all nations to use whatever resources they have to raise their people to a level near to that enjoyed by the US and UK without having that unofficial arm of the US, the United Nations, employing sanctions to protect the "world's resources". What good are resources, if you die starving in a hut?"

Here The Doctor pauses to catch his breath from the tirade that he has issued. Smith could easily see that The Doctor believed in THE CAUSE even if he still wasn't sure what it was. He would play along until he knew more and until he knew who he was and who his friends were.

## Episode II – Scene III

### A Good Day to Die

“Damn it all to hell,” mutters Element to himself. Why do these things always fall to him? He eased himself back from his vantage point in the yard in front of the house where the hostages were being held. Using his parabolic microphone, he had been able to pinpoint the location of the 4 scientists. All were on the ground floor. Two were in the garage and the other two just inside the back. From the schematics sent from HQ, he believed they were near the door leading to the garage. As far as he could tell, there were between 5 and 8 terrorists in the house. At least 3 he recognized personally, Rabbit, Syn, and Raven. They were bad enough without help. That Raven had a knack for showing up after being “dead”. He thought back over the conversation he had overheard just before deciding to head back to the camp.

“Is everything in place?” asked Rabbit.

“They are ready to do the job. Jester and Ryan will take point defense.” Syn answered.

“What about Raven? Or do I need to ask?”

“He’s ready as usual. And so are the others.”

“What about Smith? My plan won’t work without him.”

“Ask him yourself. He’s right behind you.”

Element looked up from adjusting the mike’s reception to see someone standing behind Rabbit in the upstairs room at the front of the house. He couldn’t make out much, but the man was big.

“Don’t do that again, Smith.” Rabbit warned.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you,” replied Smith.

“Do you know what to do? Did Needles tell you?”

“Who’s Needles?”

“You know him as The Doctor.”

“Oh, yes. I’m to guard the hosties until I am radioed with the target’s location. Then I am to engage the target and eliminate him.”

“Right. Not from a distance either. It must be up close and personal. Understand?”

“Got it. Although, I’m not sure what the point is, the money is good.”

Element changed his position. He needed to get a look at this guy.

“Now, go take your post.”

Element had then raised his night vision binoculars just in time to catch the profile of Smith. “Darn near got caught then,” muses Element. What was this man doing in a terrorist camp? He was supposed to be away training or something. Those scars on his face looked new and distorted it some, but Element was sure it was Sped. Was he not being told something? Did Jedi

have a man inside and hold back the information? "Smith" sure looked comfortable and as formidable as a terrorist as he was as a member of the Pawns. Element continued to make his way back to the camp. Jedi was either going to come clean on some intell or he was going to be very mad. He and Jedi were friends now, he supposed, after the Crimson incident. Jedi had saved his life, but he had lost a close friend due to Jedi's orders. Element never knew if he would follow Jedi's orders from one moment to the next. It really made working on this team hard. Dark Knight had selected him to be here, not Jedi. He wondered if Jedi approved or not. The man was hard to read sometimes. Skooter said Jedi spoke well of him on several occasions, but Skooter was a good friend to both so maybe he was just being a diplomat.

By this time, Element had made it back to the camp. He motioned for Jedi to join him at the tunnel entrance. Jedi handed him a cup of coffee.

"Well, report."

Element told Jedi about the locations of the hostages and his estimate of the terrorist numbers. He took a deep breath.

"There's something else."

"Spill it."

"Do you have a man on the inside?"

"No, why do you ask? Do they think we do? We can use that maybe."

"No, I don't know how to tell you this. But, I saw Sped in there."

"What do you mean?"

Element related the details of what he had heard and seen.

"Sped is off training in Europe. He's been gone for six months."

"Have you heard from him?"

"The General has kept me informed of how he's doing. He knows Sped is like a son to me."

"Have you heard from him yourself?"

"No, I haven't. But that doesn't mean he's turned."

"Well, I believe it's him and he has a mission separate from the hostages. Someone is a target for him and it must be you. That's the only thing that makes sense."

Element could see that Jedi didn't believe him. The man was visibly shaken.

"You must be mistaken...there is no way that is what you saw!"

"I know what I saw. I don't make mistakes about stuff like that. It is what I do! If you can't face the truth, then that's your problem! Whatever this man once was, he is now going to kill you and from what I saw, he can do it too."

Element starts walking away and Jedi grabs him by the shoulder.

"Check again. I won't accept your intell."

"Take your hand off me or your new code name will be Lefty." (A knife appears in Element's hand seemingly out of thin air.) "Don't let this get to you. Think about the mission. The team can't have you only half here. You'll make a mistake and get us all killed! We're counting on you. He's not worth it!" Element walks back to the APC.

"I guess that makes this day **a good day to die.**" Jedi says, too quietly for any to hear.

Back at the house at his post guarding the hostages, Smith is reviewing the last two weeks. He had trained with these people, convinced that he did not fit in with them. The Doctor had hardly left him alone. Always spouting the rhetoric of THE CAUSE. After a week, he had been told about the secondary plan. The target was to be engaged by him alone and killed, but only after a physical struggle. This seemed like taking a real chance at failure to him. He knew he had the skills to accomplish it though. During training, he had disarmed four men at once and incapacitated each one. If they were surprised with his speed, he was too. The real surprise was his lack of emotion. He did all his tasks with no emotion and no thought. His skills certainly fit in with this group, but he still had doubts. His memory had not returned. He had only flashes of being in the bank where they said he'd been injured. He would wake in the morning, remembering a dream. A dream where a man's voice, a distinctly southern voice, was asking if he was all right and telling him to hang on. He felt like he should recognize the voice, but he couldn't. He had thought about escape, but no real opportunity had arisen. Now, he was on this path and couldn't get off it. If he did what was asked of him, he would be paid and go on his way. What did he care about some glorified cop? Once he had the money, he would get to a hospital somewhere and get his memory back. The life of a top-notch bank robber sounded pretty good right now. Well, he would deal with it soon enough. He didn't trust anybody except himself...and he doesn't even know who he is. It would be funny, if it weren't so tragic.

## Episode III – Scene I

### Agendas

Knock. Knock. The young man rapped on the door to the office.

"Come in, Ice." said a voice from inside the room.

Ice enters, "Sir, you sent for me?"

"Yes, yes. Sit down son. No need to be formal right now." replied the well-muscled, gray-haired man seated behind the military style desk. "I called you here to personally talk to you about your request to go on the current mission that Jedi and the Pawns are on."

"Sir, I'm ready. I could be a valuable member of that team. I..."

"Wait up there, fella. No one thinks you aren't ready for the assignment. It is just that I have other plans for you and a few others."

"Plans, sir?"

"Yes, I can't divulge those now but be prepared to leave on a moment's notice. You don't have a problem with that do you?"

"No sir. I have been waiting for a chance to prove myself to THE OUTFIT."

"Well, you'll get your chance. Now go back to your squad and tell them to have their mobility gear ready at all times. Dismissed."

"Thank you sir. You won't regret it." gushes Ice as he leaves the office.

These young men all so ready to die, muses the man known as Dark Knight. He has no plans for the squad. Not yet, anyway. This little tragedy had to play out first. Everything is going according to plan. He'd gotten Blazer replaced with Element. And his own man was now also on the squad. No wonder they called them "Pawns". He controlled them just as easily as their namesakes on a chessboard. Jedi was going to be a real problem though. Well, he had a contingency plan for that too. It certainly is good to be in a position of unquestioned authority. Dark Knight lit up a cigar and sat in his chair. Yep, even the brass above him had no clue to what was about to unfold at a house in a canyon far from here. Just a few more hours and the ball would be set in motion and there would be no stopping it. No stopping it indeed.

"I don't understand why we are waiting. Let's just go in there and get the hostages." The speaker was a young man of about 18. A "filler" as the Pawns called them. With the team being spread out all over the globe or recuperating in a hospital somewhere, they needed bodies to keep their numbers up. This kid's codename was Desperado, but everyone had been calling him Des.

"Hold your horses, Des. We'll get our chance. Jedi and TK know what they're doing. Watch and learn," replied Cowboy. The young Texan had also been added to the Pawns for this mission, but unlike Des, he had worked with them before. "If we go without intell, the mission is sure to fail. Element is good at recon and I just saw him talking with Jedi. So, drink your coffee and wait for Plo to brief us."

"What is the deal with Element and Jedi anyway?" asks another sub, the only female besides Mrs. Brutus in the group.

"Gossiping again, Auntie?" asks Des.

"Don't call me that! My codename is Anti-Social and you know it!"

"Well, I heard they had some kind of beef on that Aztec archeological dig in Central America. Only Jedi and Element made it out alive and then they came to blows in the hospital. It took six MP's to separate them. At least, that's what I heard."

"It was more like ten, " came from behind them.

Most of them kept from dropping their coffee. It was Element and Skooter appearing out of nowhere.

"I hope your senses are more keen than this when we go in," cautions Skooter.

"Aw, we were just relaxing here. The camp is safe," notes Cowboy.

"That's what Element and the team at the Aztec dig thought too. Before Crimson and his murdering buddies slit their throats," replied Skooter.

Element's eyes darkened with the pain of remembrance. "Keep your guard up at all times and you may live to see another mission," he said through clenched teeth.

Skooter and Element walk away towards the senior Pawns members.

"That Element guy gives me the creeps," says Anti.

"Yeah, I'm glad he's on our side," agrees Des.

Near the tunnel, Jedi is filling Plo in on Element's discovery.

"You can't be serious! Sped would never turn and you know it."

"Element wouldn't lie. He won't do anything to jeopardize the mission and **you know that!**"

"Are you sure? He was assigned after Blazer got hurt. By our dear General Dark Knight. I don't trust him or Element."

"I have reason to trust him."

"Oh yeah, the Crimson thing. From what you've told me, he could just as easily be setting you up. You were the reason Lowdown died. At least in his eyes."

"We really have no choice. We have to get those scientists out before they can be transported somewhere and used to make a nuclear device. We go at dawn. What attack plans have you come up with?"

"Well, we send the Brutuses and TK with the subs through the sewer. The rest of us ease into the front yard like Element did. They will be expecting us and I think they will have Jammer and another sniper on the rooftop. We'll use Skooter to take them out or at least keep them off of us so we can get to the front."

"Do you expect much resistance in the sewer?"

"All intelligence points to a small force of terrorists covering the sewer. I predict two inside and then one or two camping the ladders. It will be tough and we should expect casualties. The one thing we have going for us is the fact that Rabbit needs the scientists alive. So no fiasco like that warehouse thing, where all the hostages were killed and Rabbit and Syn got away."

"How do you think they plan to get them out anyway? This place is pretty tight."

"It has to be by air. We have some helicopters from Interpol keeping an eye out. We'll know if they show up."

"Well, go brief the troops and tell TK that I want to talk to him."

“Right, and Jedi?”

“Yes.”

“If it is Sped, he’ll be hard to take alive. Conditioned or not. So, be careful.”

“I will. Now get going. Dawn is in ten minutes and I want to be ready in five. And I want them told to limit the killing. We need some to interrogate.”

“That wasn’t in our orders.”

“Those are my orders. We need to find out why we keep losing to these guys. I suspect a mole. And I want to find out who it is. Sped was not aware of this operation or the one last month, so I don’t believe they got the information from him. Tell them it’s to find the leaders and the moneymen behind these things. They’ll buy it. Now get going.”

“Jedi’s going to get himself and all of us killed,” complains Element to Skooter. “Sped is in there and he’s going to try to reason with him or some crap like that.”

“You don’t know that. Jedi will do everything he has to do for the mission. You saw that in Central America yourself. He...”

“Don’t rub salt in old wounds my friend. We got out of that, but Lowdown didn’t. And it was Jedi’s fault. He gave the order to rush that stronghold and we were captured and tortured. Lowdown died trying to keep Crimson from finishing us.”

“And Jedi killed Crimson with a blade through his ear, so what? This job has risks and men like Jedi have the responsibility to put people in harm’s way to complete the mission. That is exactly what you are saying you want him to do now, isn’t it? You can’t have it both ways.”

“Well, I’ll tell you this. If Sped comes out armed or attacking, I will take him down. I won’t kill him if I can help it. He just didn’t look right to me. But, I will complete this mission and I will get those scientists.”

“That’s all I ask, “ says Skooter as he moves to rejoin the group.

“The mission will be successful, one-way or another,” thinks Element, his hand going to the Eyes Only document in his breast pocket. He would do what had to be done, when it had to be done. That’s why he was here. It is what he did. Well, he had better get back to the briefing. Some agendas would have to wait a little longer.

## Episode III – Scene II

### Opening Moves

“Well, that’s all I have to say. So take your positions. We go in ten minutes,” said Plo, completing his briefing of the assault on the house. As Jedi had instructed, he had TK, Mr. and Mrs. B, Cowboy, Desperado, and Anti-Social going through the sewers. Johnny would be staying with the APC and serving as the “last man” if everything went bad. He had warned about the ladders being guarded and had briefed everyone on the “minimal force” order from Jedi. Everyone seemed to by the explanation except for TK, but he hadn’t let the others see the look he gave Plo. TK could handle Squad Two as they had been designated. Plo’s briefing on Squad One’s mission had been minimal in front of the other squad. Now, he would detail it to the members.

“This isn’t going to be easy,” Plo began. “They have at least two known good snipers and one of them is exceptional...Jammer. We will advance with Element and I leading in a modified zigzag formation that we have used before. Fire and Skooter will set up in the end of the tunnel and try to keep the snipers on the roof busy. We will signal when we can provide covering fire and the rest of Squad One can then advance to the yard. You all have seen Element’s drawings of the yard. There is cover, but not all of the house is visible until you are in their fire zone. We will regroup for the second movement with Element and I behind the rock wall and Jedi with Twisted behind the canyon wall on the right. You guys won’t be much help unless someone rushes from the house, but you’ll be the ones nearest to getting in when we get the go from Squad Two.”

“You’ll want Fire and I to move to that big rock and pick off the snipers or whoever then right?” asks Skooter.

“Yes, we will be carrying flashbangs and smokes as well as HE grenades, so be listening for the throws. We won’t be using the HE’s until Squad Two is at the ladders. The concussions from them can be pretty bad down in the sewers and they will have their hands full already. One of you should carry a Colt or something along with your AWP to give cover to the other when we go in. Just leave it at the tunnel entrance and get it after the terrorists snipers are cleared. Wouldn’t want you weighted down with gear. We’ve decided to leave you two out there to keep sniping and to cover us when we come with the hostages.”

“Okay, so if we make it that far, what’s the plan for getting in the house? They will have at least one man sitting with the hostages and another up in that attic. The others will be free roaming to throw a lot of firepower at us. Not to mention Syn. She’ll be all over anybody that gets in the compound,” pipes in Twisted.

“We have a plan, Twist, as usual. Element and I will go up the ladder to the roof. We will have to play it by ear from there. We may drop through a skylight or go to the back. Depends on Squad Two and how they’ve done. You and Jedi will take the ground level door. Be careful, don’t go in until Element or I give the clear. If it isn’t clear, take the fence gate to the back yard. Watch for hiding terrorists. That way has a lot of places could give someone a clear shot at you.”

“I’m concerned with the area under that porch. You know where the hot tub is located. Someone could get a drop on the two of you there,” said Jedi.

“Squad Two has the responsibility to break into two teams and Mr. and Mrs. B with Des will have that assignment. Firedrake, you haven’t been on as many of these as the rest of us. Remember that combat is a fluid situation calling for minute-by-minute adaptation to the changes that occur. Keep the radio clear and use it for pertinent information. That’s for everyone,” finished Plo, seeing the look on Fire’s face. “I wasn’t picking on you, I just needed to get that said without Jedi getting his jock all in a wad.”

Everyone chuckled. Plo was good at relieving the tension and they all needed it. These things were never easy and everyone knew there was something else going on. Plo looked at Jedi questioningly and Jedi gave him a nod.

“There’s one other thing. Some of you know, and now the rest will, that Element saw Sped in the house. He was not a hostage, but appeared to be a member of the team. We have reason to believe that he has been conditioned. Twist, Element heard Sped say he had a mission to take out one of us specifically and we believe that to be Jedi. Jedi wants him alive. If he has been conditioned, maybe he can be unconditioned. If he has turned, we need to know why. You will be in the line of fire while you are with Jedi so be alert. Maybe, you can incapacitate him before he can kill Jedi.”

“That’s saying a lot, Plo, “ replied Twisted, “Sped is strong and fast. As good as any of us, maybe better.”

“Just try my friend,” interjects Jedi, “Just try. For me and for Sped.”

“Alright, that’s it. Let’s get into position. TK should be ready too. Good luck,” concludes Plo.

Not all that far away, Rabbit was briefing his bunch on defending the house until they could be extracted. Smith was already in position and Jammer was on the roof acting as a lookout.

“I want Jester and Ryan to head for the yard as soon as the shooting starts. You’ll have cover from Jammer and Needles on the roof. If it gets bad, fall back to the kitchen. Raven, Retro and Syn. You will be in the sewers. There some surveillance equipment there and we’ll need you to keep us informed as much as possible. Don’t get caught there watching the monitors. There will be a team coming that way, I’m sure of it. Smith will babysit the hostages, while Wicked will watch the back yard and especially the sewer entrance near the garage.”

“I’ll set up on the back part of the garage roof, if that’s okay with you.” Wicked adds.

“Sure, whatever. That will let you watch Jammer’s and Needle’s back, in case those CT’s make it into the yard. And, remember, if you make out Jedi from where you are, radio his location. Some of you have seen him and the rest have seen his description. Do not engage him! I want him to make it to the back yard or even into the house.”

“That sure sounds dangerous to me, “ pipes in Retro.

“Leave that to me. He wants the hostages alive as much as we do. We need these scientists, so leave them alone. If the CT’s get them, try to get to the other end of the tunnel and recapture them. They are no good to us dead. Now gear up and get into position.”

The group filed out headed for the weapons in the bedroom. Needles remained, so Rabbit walked over to him.

“What is it? Is it Smith? I thought you said his conditioning was first rate? The best work you’ve ever done.”

“It is. It is. The conditioning works better on someone who already has great loyalty to some cause. I just redirected that loyalty to us. He will perform as expected and he will die after he completes his mission, as expected.”

“Then what troubles you. We’ve gotten out of scrapes worse than this.”

“I just don’t like sending those young believers out to a certain death. It serves no purpose.”

“Jester and Ryan will inflict great damage on the enemy and Jester is known to some of them and they have hesitated to kill him before. They will die for THE CAUSE and THE CAUSE will benefit from their deaths. Don't worry, my friend. Maybe they'll survive.”

“Maybe. Well, I'd better get into position. Jammer is an amazing shot, but he lacks the patience to let them all get into range before taking them out. We wouldn't want him spoiling Jedi's surprise.” With that comment, Needles also heads for the weapons stash.

All the players are in position as the dawn breaks over the canyons. Today would be a day to remember; either as a glorious victory or as a humiliating defeat. And for a few individuals, it might just be a little of both.

## Episode IV – Scene I

### A Game of Pawns

The sound of the AWP was deafening even from Element's position behind the rock wall. They had made it to their first positions without any problems, but the snipers were definitely there. Just before that first shot, Plo had gone ahead to a protected position against the canyon wall. He would need backup real soon.

BLAM! Another shot from the powerful rifle rang through the canyon.

"I'm hit!" shouts Fire from his position behind the boulder.

"How bad is it?" asks Jedi from his position against the other wall.

"Not bad. Must have been a ricochet. He can still cover me," informs Skooter. "They have us pinned down pretty good. I can't get a shot off."

"Give me cover fire, Ele. That guy is mine," radios Plo.

"There are two, Plo." Jedi responds.

But Plo goes anyway, making his way along the wall toward the ladder on the side of the house. Element and Jedi both lay down a barrage of bullets to keep the snipers busy on the roof. Plo eases to the ladder. Element, seeing this, moves left and then right tossing a HE grenade up toward the roof and dashing toward Jedi's and Twist's position. Skooter chose this moment to take shot with his AWP. His shot was even louder within the canyon walls.

"Enemy down!" radios Skooter as the sound of breaking glass can be heard from the house.

Plo makes his way stealthily up the ladder.

Inside the house, things are not going quite as well. At the sound of the AWP on the roof, Jester and Ryan make their way to the door into the front yard.

"Wonder if he got one?" asks Ryan.

"Probably not. He would've radioed it if he had." Jester returns.

"Well, we need to wait for the signal from Needles or Rabbit before we go out there."

"Yeah, I'm not afraid to die, but I'd rather not if I don't have to."

Meanwhile, on the roof, Needles swings to take a shot at the momentarily visible CT on the right. He never gets the chance. A bullet grazes his left temple and an explosion from a grenade disorients him. He crashes through the skylight into the living room. Still dazed, but mostly uninjured, he crawls around the wall away from the deadly windows.

"Needles is down in the house. Status unknown," sends Jammer.

"I'm alright. Just dazed. Heading downstairs."

"Alright, I'm on my way." Rabbit radios. He had waited in the back room just to cover the skylights. Now, he would have to give Jammer cover. "I'm coming up the back ladder."

“Roger that,” responds Jammer, “I have at least 3 in the yard. May have winged another.”

“Jester and Ryan, stay where you are. Jammer let them know when they make a charge at the door.”

“Affirmative. Holding on ground floor.”

“I’ll keep you informed on the yard. No positive id yet on the Smith target,” says Jammer.

In the tunnels, it is even more deadly. Squad Two had heard the HE go off and started to their positions at the first ladder. This ladder was about 20 feet down a leg of the sewer from their end and the next turn was another 20 feet further on. At the sound of the grenade, Desperado leaped forward past TK and around the corner.

“NO!” shouted TK, but it was too late. The sound of the Commando came just after the young man’s head snapped back and he sunk to the sewer floor with a groan. No time to wait for the signal now, thought TK.

“Teammate down,” TK voices on the radio. “Smokes and flashes at my signal,” he tells his squad.

Squad Two prepares the grenades as instructed. The two remaining “fillers” looked ready for revenge and maybe it would keep them alive. TK gave the signal and Mr. and Mrs. B tossed smoke grenades down the sewer. Two seconds later, Cowboy and Anti throw their flashbangs.

The CT had gone down easily from Raven’s Commando, but no others had shown.

“Enemy down,” he states over the comm. Just then, he sees two nades headed towards them.

“Watch out!” he yells to Syn.

“They’re coming,” radios Retro from the monitors back up the sewers. He can see what is happening from the cameras stationed through the sewers and around the house.

As smoke fills the tunnel, Syn rushes forward narrowing the distance to the CT’s. Two more grenades pass by her and she hears the distinctive sound of flashbangs, but can still see quite well. Raven is blinded and steps back around the corner so as not to be an easy target. Small things like this had kept him alive many times. He hears gunfire erupt from behind the smoke but he can’t see anything.

“Syn! Syn!” he yells.

A few more shots sound out. Pistols for sure, but he can’t tell what kind with the echo. A faint outline can be seen through the smoke as it clears, headed his way. He raises the Commando to fire.

Plo eases himself to just under the overhang of the roof. He had heard the report from the remaining sniper and knew he was alone and the one he wanted. Just then he hears the distinctive sound of an AWP being reloaded. He leaps up with his knife ready. The terrorist turns to fire, but Plo is too close. He tosses the rifle at Plo and grabs his knife. Startled by the tactic, Plo stumbles close to the skylight, giving the terrorist the higher position and an advantage. The man uses it and leaps at Plo, slashing in a kill strike. Plo parries the blade with his own, goes low, elbows the man in the back of the knee and spins to a crouch. The man goes down, but recovers quickly. Now Plo has the advantage.

"I see you bleed, CT," snarls the terrorist. "My name is Jammer and I'll be your killer today."

Plo feels the slash on his leg now. It isn't bad, but he had not even seen the move that had done it. This guy was no stranger to a knife fight.

"You bleed as well, Jammer. I'm Plo Koon and you'll be dying alone."

Jammer makes a feint to his left and jumps right switching the knife to the left hand, putting it nearer to Plo. The slash is fast and wicked, meant to strike across Plo's neck. But Plo had moved to his left and underneath the deadly blow. He plunged his knife into Jammer's unguarded chest and then up through the man's chin. Jammer spasmed once and was dead. Plo reached down seeing a necklace around the dead man's neck. CRACK! A shot nearly got him! Only the chance of bending at the right moment had saved his life. Plo leapt for the ladder while reaching for his pistol. A terrorist was just coming over the eave from the back of the roof. CRACK! CRACK! The distinctive sound of the AK47 rang out and Plo spun as he was hit. Falling he reaches out and grabs the ladder.

Element heard the AK and sees Plo fall and grab the ladder. Leaving his position and his Colt, Element rushes and throws a flashbang at the rooftop. Plo drops just as Element gets to the bottom of the ladder. The impact knocks both men to the ground, but Element is up fast and pulling Plo to the canyon wall. Plo stumbles along with him and they make it to the rock wall.

"How is he?" asks Jedi.

"I'll make it. Give me a moment."

In the sewers, at the sound of the flashbangs, Squad Two turns the corner making for the ladder.

"Unnhhh!" TK hears from one of the Brutuses. A terrorist is right there among them. He tries to fire his Aug, but they are too cramped for space.

"Arghh! I'm hit!" Cowboy exclaims and falls back around the corner.

The terrorist slams Anti against the wall of the sewer, knees her hard in the midsection and then neatly shoots her in the back of the head with a Glock. Mrs. Brutus fires while moving back and hits the terrorist somewhere in the upper body. It spins the terrorist around and TK can see it is Syn. She returns Mrs. Brutus' fire and moves forward. Having faced her before, TK spins low and fast using his Aug to hook Syn in the leg. She stumbles slightly and then leaps forward now with a knife in her hand. He sidesteps and gets caught up in Anti's now lifeless body. His head hits the wall hard as Syn plunges the knife at his ribs. He feels the blade turn slightly from the Kevlar and he falls further away from her. He crabs backwards fighting to stay conscious. Just as he seems about to pass out, he hears pistol fire from behind him and Syn ducks back the way she had come to avoid it.

"Get the others." TK says as the blackness eases some. "Need backup. Multiple members down," he sends.

Cowboy uses one arm to help pull Mr. Brutus back down the tunnel. Mrs. Brutus seems okay with a little blood from one arm. But TK had lost two and they all had been injured.

"Squad Two falling back to base," TK informs over the radio. "How's Squad One?"

"Falling back to base also. It's no good without the sewers." Jedi replies.

Squad One makes it's way back with Fire and Skooter providing cover. But no more shots come from the house as they back into the tunnel.

"I thought we were to take prisoners, Plo," says Element, helping the injured man make his way to the APC where Johnny had provisions and a med kit waiting.

"I guess I forgot."

"What is that?" asks Element, pointing to the necklace still in Plo's hand.

"I got it off that Jammer guy. It appears to be a silver bow...as in archery bow."

"I remember now. Jammer was the name of a well known sailboat of great beauty and power. I believe it won the Americas Cup."

"Well, I'll keep this to remind me of what a simple weapon can accomplish when it is used right."

In the sewers, the smoke is dissipating.

"I almost shot you Syn." Raven says as the female terrorists steps from the smoke in the sewer.

"Well, I killed one and hit each of the others at least once. Took one in the shoulder though."

"Let's get up and let Doc Needles have a look at it."

The two make their way back to where Retro has been on the monitors at the back end of the sewers.

"I saw a lot of that on the screens. That was some rush Syn, " comments Retro.

"Thanks. They'll think twice about doing that again. You keep an eye out here. Wicked can drop in from the back yard if needed. I'm going to get patched up."

"Yes, ma'am. Raven I see you are untouched again, but you did get one."

"If I didn't know you, I'd say that was a dig. But, you're right. I've been "dead" quite a few times."

"He was doing what I wanted, Retro. Let him be. Let's find the Doc Raven."

As the two make their way up the ladder, the sound of AK47 can be heard from the rooftop of the house. They instinctively take cover and draw weapons.

"Report!" demands Syn over the comm.

Smith reports he's with the hostages, Jester and Ryan send that they are on the ground floor, Needles reports from the ground floor den, Wicked is at the corner of the back yard near the target range, but no word from Rabbit or Jammer.

"Hold your positions." Syn sends. "Let's get up there, Raven."

A flash from the far side of the roof catches their attention as they move toward the patio steps at the back of the house.

"Rabbit! Jammer! You guys okay?" yells Syn.

"Rabbit here. I'm okay, just blinded. Jammer is down. I think he's dead. We need to regroup. Retro, you stay on those monitors. Wicked, you come up on the roof and keep a lookout. I'll meet the rest of you in the bedroom."

Rabbit bends to check on Jammer. He is dead. Damn! He should've sent Jester and Ryan out before the attack. Well, he'd hit the man responsible at least once. Time to make some contingency plans in case they are able to breach the house's defenses. Rabbit makes his way back to the ladder.

"Jester, Ryan come up on the roof and get Jammer's body off here. We don't want to have someone stumble over it while up here."

"Roger, on our way," responds Jester.

Rabbit makes his way into the bedroom where most of the team has gathered. Needles is patching up Syn. Smith is leaning against a wall. The rest are standing, looking expectantly at Rabbit.

"We are not going to have it this easy on the next attempt. I have a few changes to the defenses and a fall back plan. When Jester and Ryan get in here, I'll fill you all in."

This would have to work. He had to get the scientists out of here and he had to bring plan Looking Glass to it's successful conclusion.

Squad Two has made its way up the ladder and back to the APC to join the rest of the team.

"How's your squad, TK," asks Jedi.

"Two dead, Anti and Des. The rest of us are wounded, but we should be able to complete our mission."

"What happened?" inquires Plo, from where Johnny is applying first aid to his wound.

"It was Syn and another. She charged us and then tore us up. She was hit though. I think we were lucky to get out of there when we did. The other one had a Commando, sounded like and he knew how to use it."

"Jedi, do you want me to call for reinforcements?" asks Twisted.

"They are here already, pal," the group turns at the voice coming from the blocked driveway.

"Man, am I glad to see you! When did you get here? Did the General send you?" says Jedi.

The tall young man walks toward them, grinning at the disbelief in the faces of the team. His movements are catlike and smooth. His confidence is as evident as if he wore a sign saying, "I am here. Everything will be all right now". Jedi knew this is what the team needed. Their spirits were rising already. He would have to get Plo to break the news about Sped to him though.

"Good to see you, Element," the man says.

"Good to see you up and around, Blazer. Welcome to the party."

Plo smiled as he started revising his plan for the next counter-strike against the house. The skills Blazer would bring to bear against the enemy were formidable. His stealth skills rivaled Element's and he was a full-time member of the Pawns to boot.

"Well, I'm going to need a little time to revise my plans, Jedi," states Plo.

"You've got ten minutes. Brief us then."

Element sat down a little away from the rest of the team. His personal orders were now in danger with Blazer's appearance. Had the General sent him? How would he take what Element would do if it became necessary to carry out those orders? Ten minutes to mull it over...ten minutes until the beginning of an action that might have irreversible and far-reaching repercussions, for Element, for The Outfit, and for the Pawns of Chaos.

## Episode IV – Scene II To Begin Again

“We are not going in to another ambush. This will work,” said Plo, the Pawns chief strategist. “We still send two squads. They found out very little about Squad One and Squad Two will have Blazer with them now. His sniping skills will be used in the sewers to prevent what happened last time. Our attack on the surface will be just like before, if Fire is up to it.”

“I’m good to go. It was just a graze. Plus, you killed that sniper.”

“Well, they have others, so don’t think we are just going to walk up to the front door and ask for the hostages. This will be bloody without a doubt,” says TK, still a little troubled by the loss of the two young members of his squad. “That Syn and whichever the other one was really kept us backed up down in the sewers too. Whoever it was they were good with the Commando.”

“It was Raven. I just know it,” interjects Blazer. Blazer had made the elusive terrorist a sort of project over the last couple of years. The man with the large namesake tattoo on his massive right arm had eluded death and the law so many times; he was a small legend within The Outfit. Blazer may be one of the few men who could identify the mercenary having seen his face during a hand-to-hand struggle in Rotterdam. A well-placed grenade had sent Blazer reeling and Raven had been launched beneath a moving train. But when the tracks had cleared, there was no trace of the big man. Blazer’s studies of the man had brought him to one conclusion. Raven was smart and lucky. And he would survive any situation if it were possible to do so.

“Don’t take his reputation for survival as a sign of cowardice. That man can and will kill each and every enemy of whatever cause he is supporting or has been paid to support.”

“So the plan is still the same. Since Jammer is dead, I believe he didn’t have time for more than a simple spotting report. I do expect Rabbit to modify his defenses though. There was no pressure from the front door and no one in the windows, that could be different this time,” concluded Plo.

“Well, get to your places. This will work or we will fail. Johnny got some intell on the closed-band that a helicopter has been spotted just outside the range being covered by Interpol. They will have to get them out soon. Let’s do this,” says Jedi.

“Yeah, those scientists are counting on us,” Blazer points out.

Element cringes inside at the enthusiasm of the man he had been sent to replace. In many ways, Blazer was a fanatic himself. The man was also an idealist with an idealist’s notions of right and wrong. Nothing was ever gray to that one. The two squads started for their positions. Hopefully, this time it would go better.

“Hey Blazer! I’m sure glad the General sent you to help us,” yells Plo as the squads head in different directions.

“No one sent me. I just came to join the party,” replies Blazer as he ducks into the short tunnel to the sewer entrance.

The General had not sent Blazer! Element’s mind starts running through the ramifications of this small bit of information. Blazer always told the truth, so he had come on his own. So, maybe Element’s orders were not in jeopardy after all. It would all be settled soon. But if he survived, he would have a hard time with these Pawns and an even harder time with Jedi.

"We got off lightly by just losing Jammer," begins Rabbit. "I want Syn, Raven, and Retro back in the sewers. I want Wicked to move up to the front roof with Needles. He can swing to the back if needed. Jester and Ryan, you two need to get out in the yard. Find a good place for cover and wait for them. Your fallback will be in the house with the hostages. Syn, Raven, and Retro can fall back to the bedroom or underneath the patio. Syn is in charge on that. I will be where I feel I'm needed. Smith, same as before, stay with the hosties until Jedi is sighted and then engage. You all know what to do. We have a ride coming, but they can't get us until we clear out some of these CT's. So go to your positions."

As the terrorists disperse, Syn approaches Rabbit. "Why haven't we heard from Cheshire Cat?"

"He'll be in touch. Looking Glass depends on us getting out of this as much as The Cause needs us to get these scientists out. Both goals can be met without hurting the other. He said he would take care of our exit and he knows I have contingency plans, if he double-crosses us."

"Do you really trust him? Does he really want this all to happen? I still don't see that he gains that much from our success."

"It's complicated. Smith would not be possible without his help. And he said he has a man on the CT squad who will be instrumental in our success also. Since he didn't tell us who, we may kill him or maybe we have already. Who knows? Anyway, pickup will be within the hour if all goes as planned and we have to get Jedi in here so that Looking Glass can proceed. If you blast through the sewer opposition, get to their base, kill everyone there and radio to me. We may need you to get us out to make the rendezvous."

"I will do it. That big Pawn that always carries an aug was in the sewers last time. I bet he will be again."

"Well, just be glad that one called Blazer is out of commission. Cheshire Cat's last report to me said he would be away and that there would be no reinforcements. They will be a little slower after what you did to them." Rabbit steps closer to Syn. "You're one helluva woman, Syn."

"Back off, Rabbit. You know I'm all business. And I'm going to it now. But, I will tell you one thing. If Cheshire double-crosses us, he will have more than your contingencies to worry about." Syn fixes Rabbit with her cold, dead eyes. "Much more," she says ominously as she leaves for the sewers.

"I would not want the one after me," thinks Rabbit. "That is one cold, hard human being there. I am just glad that she hates CT's and the Pawns in particular." His thoughts turned to Blazer and Cheshire Cat. He did not know Blazer's replacement, but anyone would be a step down from the young counter-terrorist with the soft step and the dead aim.

In the kitchen with two of the hostages, Smith was once again trying to remember the events that had tossed him in with these terrorists. He remembered the bank where he had been injured, but that voice he remembered. It had a distinctive southern drawl to it that he had not heard from any of his current "friends". He would know it when he heard it again. "Are you all right? Just hang on," it had said. It sounded friendly and the speaker had surely known who he was. Was it a member of his gang of bank robbers? Well, he would kill this Jedi person and then get out of here as fast as he could. He didn't trust these guys and he wasn't even going to stay around to collect his pay. What did a bank robber need with pay anyway? He would just steal what he needed, just enough money for shore leave. Now why had he thought that? Needles had said he had definitely been in the armed forces. Had he been in the Navy perhaps? No matter. He would figure it all out later.

## Episode IV – Scene III

### “Round Two!”

“Man, we could be sitting ducks out here,” said Ryan. He and Jester had deployed to the front yard of the house. There was a large crate to the left on the house side of the canyon wall near the garage. This is where he had decided to wait. Jester was against the rock wall near the ladder to the roof. Ryan thought this was a stupid idea at first. But now he had to admit Jester was hard to see in the shadows and he knew where to look.

“Those two are goners. Like sheep to the slaughter, I’d say,” Wicked noted to Needles.

“Who? Jester and Ryan? Don’t count those two out yet. They are both young, strong, and fast. They could come out all right,” Needles replied. He also thought they had slim chances of making it. But The Cause was all that mattered and some sacrifices had to be made.

“We had better be ready this time. They have some good shots in that group of CT’s and we need to keep them down until we get word on extraction.”

“Don’t worry, Doc. I’ve got you covered. We need to keep a watch out for Jedi though. I’ll know him in a second. He’ll be leading the squad on the surface with that pet of his, Plo, up here with him. TK will be in the sewers again with a small squad. Syn will take care of them I’d wager.”

“Well, we’d better be ready to let Jedi through then. We will have to let some go with him too. He wouldn’t make the assault by himself.”

“To save the hostages, he would. You don’t know how determined this man can be. But, I won’t kill them all. We’ll leave some for Smith and Rabbit.”

Syn, Raven, and Retro were back in position in the sewers. Syn and Raven at the house end of the tunnel with the ladder leading up near the fence gate. Retro was back at the monitors where the other ladder went up to the back yard.

“Ok, they will come again with that same group, I imagine,” said Syn.

“Yes, but wouldn’t they change something. It was not good for them last time. I would decoy two or three here and then make a full assault on the surface,” observed Raven.

“You are thinking like a terrorist and not a government stooge. They will follow the book no matter how stupid it is. We will deal with them a little differently than last time.”

“Really? How so?”

“Retro? Come up the tunnel to where we are for a second, “ Syn radios.

“Roger.” Retro responds.

“What’s up?” asks Retro as he joins the other two.

“Well, I want to change things some. I want you to set up in the fence corner near the target practice area. Watch the first sewer exit and pick them off as they come up. We’ll let you know when they start up.”

“Won’t that mean that you’re dead or wounded, if they make it that far?”

“Not if my plan works. I want them to go up and then when you have them dead or scrambling, we’ll get behind them.”

Raven took all this in with no outward appearance of emotion. Pretty easy really with his face masked all of the time. Still, he didn’t want to show his feeling of foreboding that Syn’s plan gave him. That little tingling was going on again in his head. The one that said to look for an escape route and be ready to take it. He would be very alert for what Syn was really up to. Very alert.

“Blazer, get that awp ready. I know those two will be waiting for us again, “ comments TK as Squad Two eases through the sewers.

‘Don’t worry. Just don’t throw any flashes once I am set up. I can’t do much if I’m blind. I’ll keep them occupied at least. Then you guys can go up that first ladder and then I’ll follow. If you give me a small perimeter, I can pick off any on the rooftop from the back yard.’

Mrs. Brutus shook her head. Blazer was as confident as ever. It was good to see and made her feel better. They were nearing the turn in the sewers where the others had died. She could see the blood on the wall where Syn had blown Anti’s brains out with a glock. Maybe she would get another shot at that one. TK checked his watch. She knew he was synchronized with Jedi and both teams would start their assaults at the same time. TK gave the hand signal for one flash and then Blazer would try to get his shots in. She prepared to rush to the ladder on TK’s signal. This could be just as bad as before, but Blazer could keep that she-devil back with his awp and with TK using his good old aug. TK took out his flashbang and let it fly. “Here we go!” thought Mrs. Brutus.

Squad One was making it’s way through to the front yard. “Okay, standard tactics to the rock, then Twist and I will go right again while Plo you and Element go left. They need cover fire against any terrorists on the roof or in the windows, “ Jedi explained. He knew the defensive strategy of Rabbit would change this time, but there were only a few ways to defend the front yard.

“Alright, I’m ready this time. I want another shot at those guys,” said Firedrake. He seemed to be moving all right after getting patched up. “I’ll take the right side of the boulder and you get on the crates, ok Skooter?”

“Sure thing, kid. Don’t miss. Plo and Element will be easy targets for a second or two and we have to watch over by the ladder too. That’s where I would go after last time.”

“You’ll have to check that. I can’t see it from the right side. Waiting on your signal, Jedi.”

“Well, let’s...” Jedi trailed off as his radio signaled a transmission.

“Jedi, Johnny here. Do you copy?”

“Go ahead.”

“I just received a transmission from our Interpol friends. They’ve been called off the flight suppression mission. They said the orders came from their command. That helicopter sighted earlier will have a free shot in. What do you want me to do?”

“Shoot! What is going on? See if you can get in touch with their command and find out who gave that order. Then, dig out the para machine gun. We may have to provide our own suppression. Contact me then. If I don’t respond, be on the lookout for the helo and take it out. Good luck.”

“Roger, good luck.”

“Something is not right here,” said Plo.

“Yeah, something is really fishy about this,” agreed Twist.

“Well, “ began Jedi, “we still have to get these hostages. That’s the mission. Let’s get to it. The Pawns way.”

Squad One was now near the entrance to the front yard. Everyone looked to Jedi for the go signal.

“Okay, standard formation on my go, “ Jedi said. He watched as the squad took their positions and made last second checks to their equipment. Skooter and Fire had their sniper rifles ready, while Plo and Element both had M4 Colts in hand. He preferred the MP5 himself and Twisted also had one ready. Jedi checked his watch. TK would be starting in a few seconds and so he would have to go to. He raised his hand to get their attention, although they were all already looking at him. This was a good team and they would prevail. He was just not sure at what cost...in lives and, possibly, in friendships. Jedi dropped his hand. “GO!” And so began the final assault for this mission.

## Episode IV – Scene IV

### “Game Reset”

Raven turned away as the object came flying down the sewer. The muted explosion told him it was a flashbang. He motioned for Syn to move back down the tunnel with him. He expected the blinding grenade to be followed by some HE (high explosive) grenades and he didn't want to be too close when they went off.

Tink! Tink! Blam! He had been right. Now, he and Syn moved to the corner to ascertain the exact locations of the CT's coming through the sewers. Raven eased a peek around the corner. BLAM! Pieces of the wall flew at Raven's face. That was an awp! He had half expected an aug with that TK guy behind it.

“What now fearless one?” Raven asked Syn, who had been standing just a few feet further down the tunnel. “If you pull that rush of yours now, you'll get about 2 feet.”

“We need to lure them down the tunnel. Are you up to some cat and mouse to get them coming?”

“Sure, living is too easy anyway.”

“Did you get him?” Mrs. Brutus asked Blazer as the first report of the awp echoed down the sewers.

“No, but he sure is lucky. My hospital stay has me a little stiffer than I anticipated. I can keep them back though even if I don't kill them. What do you want me to do TK?”

“Well, keep them back and we'll push them around the corner with cover fire and then go up the ladder. We need to let Squad One know when in case they have made it to the back yard.”

“All right, boss. One big gun barrage coming up,” replied Blazer as he began firing in rapid succession at the corner where he had seen the masked terrorist peek around the corner. He didn't want the others to know that the sight of the mask had thrown him for a second. He knew Raven was supposed to be here, but seeing the big man for himself had made him pull his shot a little. Not very professional.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Blazer continued to fire at the corner. No target yet, but it was enough cover to allow the squad to get to the ladder. Blazer reloaded his rifle. “Now, TK, while I have a full clip,” he directed.

“Squad Two proceeding up first ladder,” TK sends over the radio link. TK held out a flashbang for the others to see and then threw it up the ladder. At the sound of it going off, they start up the ladder, guns drawn.

Blazer watched the others start up the ladder to the back yard. Suddenly, gunfire could be heard from above between his shots. What is happening up there? He needed an all clear to get up there with his awp. It was no weapon for close quarters or for climbing into an ambush.

“Need assistance!” someone sends on the voicecomm. Blazer fires one more round, slings his awp and draws his pistol. If he was lucky, he might catch one or two terrorists unawares.

In the front yard, Skooter and Fire had made it to the cover of the first rock formation, this time without any injuries. Jedi gave the hand signal for cover fire. Skooter took the left and Fire took the right. Skooter nodded and each made quick movements to their side, scoped and fired. BLAM! The two shots were so close together that they sounded like one. Skooter had a target for a brief moment just as he fired, but he couldn't be sure that he had scored a hit or a complete miss. Each man chambered another round as fast as possible and fired again. On this second shot, Jedi and Twist headed along the right canyon wall and Plo and Element went low and fast through the small opening to Skooter's left. Zing! A shot just missed Element's head as he slid left towards the freestanding rock wall just inside the front yard area.

“That was close, “ commented Element to Plo.

“Yeah. How are Jedi and Twist doing?” Plo asked.

Element looked through between the crate and the canyon wall. He could see Jedi and Twist making good time along the wall. They would be safe there out of sight of the house. Crack! Crack! Crack! What was that? It sounded like an AK47 and it had come from near the house at ground level rather than the roof.

Jester had seen the two CT's easing down the far wall. His field of vision would give him only a second or two to get shots at them. There! He fired quickly from a crouching position. Crack! Crack! Crack! A three round burst and one CT went down. The other quickly grabbed him and moved behind the crates near the end of the wall. Jester held his shot. One of them might be the man, Jedi. The order to let him through was really cramping his style.

“Enemy down in the front yard. Holding fire until special target is identified,” Jester radioed. Jester heard something to his right. Two CT's were rushing him, making almost no sound at all. Jester turned to fire.

“Twist is down!” exclaimed Element. “The shots came from near the ladder judging by the sound. What do you want to do?”

“Let's get Fire on him,” replied Plo. “Fire, can you get a shot on a T over by the ladder?”

“Negative. We’ve got snipers on the roof and I would have to be in the open too long. Any other ideas?”

“Let’s rush him, “ suggested Element, as his knife seemed to grow right from his hand.

“All right,” responded Plo. He radioed the information to the others, as he and Element started moving on the shooter. They moved quickly, but silently to the end of the rock wall. Plo looked around the corner. He could see the shooter and he could also see that his mouth was moving. He was on the radio to his terrorist buddies, no doubt. He gave Element the signal. Element moved out and past Plo almost before Plo could start toward the shooter. Element picked up speed into a full rush. As he neared the shooter, the man looked up and turned the AK toward Element. Element dove to the left, rolling and then kicking off the canyon wall to launch himself into the terrorist. This move should have knocked the rifle away and smashed the enemy into the ground. Instead, the man rolled to his left and spun to follow Element with the barrel of the rifle.

The CT moved like a big cat to the right rolling and then kicking off from the canyon wall. Jester immediately rolled left to avoid the tackle, just as he had been trained in Delta Force. He tracked the CT with his gun barrel and squeezed off a shot.

Plo had seen Element make the unorthodox but deadly move on the terrorist. It surprised him when the man easily avoided the swift CT and fired his weapon. Element twisted in the air just enough to avoid the shot, but now he was a sitting duck on one knee only a foot from the business end of the AK47. Thinking quickly, Plo threw his M4 rifle at the terrorist’s head with all his strength and leaped to follow it in.

Jester caught movement out of his left eye and turned slightly to check. Something was flying at him! He ducked instinctively and then something bowled him over knocking his rifle from his grasp. It was the other CT! They wrestled, each trying to get a death grip on the other. Then, blinding pain in his head and darkness.

When Plo hit the terrorist with the flying tackle, Element moved in quickly and grabbed the AK47. The two men were locked in combat, but as they rolled near him, Element reversed the gun and smashed the butt into the back of the terrorist’s head. He went limp and Plo rolled away. BLAM! Both men hit the ground.

“Skooter! We need cover!” Plo yelled out loud as he struggled to get his headset back on correctly.

“Negative. Scratch one sniper,” replied Skooter. “He was scoped on you guys for sure. All I had to do was put one into his head.”

“Hey, Jedi how is Twist?” Element yelled. His headset was still a few feet away.

“He’s out for the charge. He will sit here and watch the tunnel. I’ve got him bandaged up.”

“Yeah. I’ll be all right,” said Twist.

Ryan heard the exchange between Element and Jedi. “The target is behind the canyon wall to the left of the house,” he sent on the radio.

“Good. Go to your fallback position. Wicked is dead and I want Needles to cover the back yard,” Rabbit replied.

“Jester is down. Condition unknown,” relayed Ryan.

“Copy that. Don’t worry about him, just get to your position.”

“Affirmative,” Ryan replied. He moved quietly back through the gate to the back yard. He heard the sounds of steps on the ladder and turned to his right. POOF! A flashbang! He was blind! Ryan stumbled back and to his left, feeling for the crates that should be there. Gunfire was erupting near the sewer entrance. He had caught a glimpse of Retro high on the crates there, waiting to ambush anyone that came up the ladder.

Retro turned as the flashbang lifted into the air from the sewers. POOF! He was nearly blind, but could see a little. He fired where the entrance should be and moved left off of the crate. He could see something rush out of the sewer entrance and fired. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! The noise of the CT’s aug was deafening at this range. One shot hit him in the right arm and another ripped through his side. Everything was fading. “Injured! Help! First sewer hole!” he managed to send as the darkness closed in.

Ryan’s sight was returning as he heard the aug firing in front of him. He couldn’t see the shooter because Retro was in front of him. Suddenly, searing pain in his chest! He was hit. The shot must have come through Retro or he would be dead already. His sight dimmed. Man, he had forgotten how much this hurt. “Hope someone remembers to send my share of the money to my mother,” was his last thought as life left him.

Needles moved to a position on the back corner of the patio. From here, he could watch most of the back yard and still keep an eye on the ladder from the front. He knew Rabbit wanted him to get on the roof or near the back fence, but he wanted to cover the front too. He heard the calls for help and sound of the aug.

“Ryan? Retro?” he questioned on the radio. No response. They were either dead or just unable to answer. Either way, they were probably out of the picture. Ryan had said that Jedi was in the front yard. Smith would have to be ready to move soon.

“Smith, did you copy Ryan’s transmission?” asked Rabbit, seemingly thinking right along with Needles.

“Yeah. I’m on it,” came the reply from the big man. “I just need to know if he moves into the house or to the back yard.”

Just then, Needles sees counter-terrorists moving from the sewer area. “Enemy in the back yard,” he transmits as he levels aim where they should appear after rounding the house. A sound to his right makes him turn. Nade! He leaps back and raises his arms in defense. The grenade explodes right in front of him knocking him from the patio to the ground below. He tries to get up. Red hot fire shoots down his left leg and up his back! It is too much and he slumps to the ground, out cold.

“I’ll take the roof again, “ says Plo as Squad One regroups where Twist is now set up to watch the tunnel.

“OK, you go ahead. Element, you and I will take the front door and go for the hostages in the garage. TK sent word that they are in the back yard with two enemies down. Watch it, Plo. He also said he might have seen movement on the back patio, but he couldn’t be sure. They are hugging the walls now to keep out of sight.”

“Right. I’ll be careful.”

“OK, Jedi, I’m with you. They probably have someone watching the front door so we need to be careful also,” interjects Element.

“Skooter, you and Fire cover Plo until he secures the roof, then join us in the house.”

“Roger that, Jedi,” Skooter responds.

“Let’s move,” directs Jedi.

Plo moves quietly to the ladder and starts up. Jedi and Element move from behind the wall and make for the front door. Each one takes a side and Jedi signals Plo that they are going in.

“Enemy spotted on the back patio. Near canyon wall,” sends Mrs. Brutus.

By now, Plo has neared the top of the ladder. He slings his M4 over his shoulder and takes out a HE grenade and primes it. At the sound of the front door opening, he steps up and tosses the grenade at what looks like a person at the back corner of the patio. He ducks back as the person turns towards him and the flying grenade. BOOM! Plo leaps up the last of the ladder ready to fire. He can see the black soot from the explosion, but now no one is there.

“Enemy down. You got him with that nade. We’ll check him, but he sure went flying when it went off. Good throw, “ TK informs Plo. “Back yard appears clear. Moving to enter the house through the kitchen.”

“Thanks, lucky throw for me. I’ll take the upstairs patio entrance. Jedi and Element should be in the den by now. They...” Plo is interrupted by the sound of an AK and an

answer from an MP5 from inside the house. “Shoots fired in the house! Get in there!” Plo leaps to the patio and enters the door there rather than run to the back. “Entering the living room.” The shots stopped, but no messages from Jedi and Element. He hoped he wasn’t too late.

Raven and Syn had stayed just past the corner while Blazer had kept up the steady cover fire. When they heard him go up the ladder, they had moved past the ladder, ignoring the firefight going on above them. Raven wanted to go up and help, but Syn motioned him to follow her now.

“So, they’re in the back yard and Retro and Ryan are dead and I can’t get Needles on the radio either. Is this the “great plan” you had?” snarls Raven at Syn.

“Shut up! Now we move down the sewers and meet up with helicopter. By then, Rabbit will have the hostages and Smith will have killed Jedi and be dead himself,” answers Syn as she moves swiftly down the tunnel toward the CT’s base of operations.

“They will have one or more at their base, you know.”

“I have already anticipated that. When we get to their end of the sewers, the helicopter will come in and we will be able to catch them off-guard.”

“It just might work,” thought Raven. How Rabbit was going to get past those CT’s remained to be seen, but now they had a chance. He moved along with Syn to the ladder at the CT base.

“Now, I call for the helo,” says Syn, reaching into one of the thigh pockets on her camouflage military pants. “Talon One, this is Badger Two. Talon One, this is Badger Two. Do you copy?”

“Badger Two, this is Talon One. Copy. What’s the plan?” says a male voice from the walkie-talkie Syn is using.

“Buzz the first canyon at the end of the road. You should have one or two targets. Take them out if you can. We are numbering two in our party and will try to get them from this side. Then, lower a rope and pick us up. I’ll instruct from there. What is your ETA?”

“Two minutes. Be ready for pickup.”

“Roger. See you in two minutes.”

“How did they get past the air cover?” asks Raven.

“We have a friend that caused the air cover to be pulled back,” replies Syn.

“How convenient.”

“When we hear the helo, go up fast and make for the canyon. We should be able to take out any resistance quickly.”

“All right. You’re the boss.”

Syn looked hard at Raven. “Rabbit is the boss, I’m just an instrument of his will.”

“Yeah, right,” thought Raven. No one was going to impose his or her will on this woman. Not without a big gun and plenty of backup.

“What is that sound?” thought Johnny. He had been monitoring the radio chatter and things sounded like they were going well. But now he could make out a faint beating in the distance. It was getting louder and stronger. Helicopter! He had received no signal that one was coming in so it must be an enemy bird. Johnny moved to get the SAW from weapons storage. The M249 Para machine gun was heavy, inaccurate, and slow to reload. But, it carried 200 rounds and could shoot through most vehicles short of a tank. The helo was close now and about to come over the canyon wall. Johnny knew he had to send word to the squads.

“Base here, I’ve got one helicopter coming in, unfriendly for sure. Probably an extraction team for the terrorists.”

“Roger that, Johnny. We’ll get a welcome ready. Call Interpol again and ask for cover. Keep us posted,” Jedi responded.

“Roger,” sent Johnny.

Johnny sent the request for air cover on the Interpol frequency. But before he could get a response, the sound of the rotors grew very loud and dust began blowing into the open door of the APC. They sounded like they were landing here! Johnny had to relay.

“Helo at the base! Helo at the base! Need assistance!” Johnny shouted into his microphone. Johnny picked up the M249 and started for the door. The helo was hovering fifty feet overhead and gunfire erupted from it as Johnny stepped from the APC. TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! The big machine gun barked as Johnny returned fire. The pilot was no fool and pulled back up and toward the safety of the canyon wall. Johnny fired some more, definitely hitting the helo but nothing vital. Johnny felt something hit him in the leg, but no burn or pain flashed through him. He glanced down as the smoke from two smoke grenades engulfed him. He coughed once and began backing to one side of the APC. Those grenades had not come from the helo, so they must have come from his right toward the sewer entrance. He couldn’t see for all the smoke, but fired at the sound of the helicopter.

“Johnny! Get back to the tunnel entrance. The hostages are still safe. We’ll cover you!” Skooter yelled over the communications link. Skooter and Fire had come running at the faint sound of the big machine gun back at the base. Now they could see Johnny firing blindly at the helo with smoke all around him. Just then, two figures dashed from the short tunnel leading to the sewer entrance. Firedrake got one shot off with no scope, but missed. Skooter could just make out a rope from the helicopter. As Johnny ran for the tunnel, the two figures grabbed the rope and it started up as did the helicopter itself. Skooter fired at the cockpit of the helicopter as it moved away. He saw the flash of gunfire from one of the terrorists on the rope.

Syn rushed up the ladder with Raven close behind. They moved swiftly through the short tunnel to the next canyon. They could hear the M249, the AK47 return fire from the helo, and the heavy beat of the rotors as it circled the APC on the ground.

“I have one with a big gun on the ground near their APC,” radioed the pilot of the helo.

Syn and Raven peeked out from the tunnel. The CT could be seen near the APC, but he was moving around to get shots at the aircraft.

“Throwing smoke,” Syn sends as she removes a smoke grenade from her belt. Raven gets one also and on Syn’s signal they both step forward and throw. Both grenades fly true and one actually hits the man in the leg. Smoke billows around him and Syn raises her AK47. The man moves behind the APC before she can take a shot.

“He’s still firing. Dropping the line to you now,” the pilot says.

“Roger. Keep it moving. We’ll get it on the run,” says Syn, giving Raven a meaningful look. “NOW!”

The two terrorists run toward the line dangling from the helicopter. BLAM! A shot ricochets off the ground between them. Someone is firing at them from the large tunnel leading to the house. Syn leaps onto the rope and starts climbing to give Raven room. Raven grabs the rope as high up as he can. Smoke is swirling everywhere from the grenades and the rotor wash. The CT rushes from behind the APC with the smoke clinging to him like a cloak. Shots are being fired from the helo and another loud report as the sniper tries for the pilot. Raven one hands his pistol and snaps off a shot at the tunnel. The rope is being winched in and the helicopter is rising and he pulls his shot. He sees the CT go down in a heap with two more who had been at the mouth of the tunnel. Raven hears Syn tell the pilot to take it high and head for the house.

“Unnnhhh!” exclaimed Johnny, as he fell forward into Skooter and Fire. He’d been hit! Skooter checked him over as the helicopter went up and over the canyon wall toward the house. Leg wound, but not too bad. Skooter keyed his mike.

“Helicopter with at least two, I repeat two passengers headed for the house. Johnny is down, but all right. We’re coming back to assist. Do you copy?”

“I copy, but I haven’t heard anything from the house,” replied Twisted, still propped up with a view of the tunnel. “I can see the helicopter. It is hovering pretty high out of rifle range.”

Skooter and Firedrake ran back up the tunnel. Skooter hoped the rest of the team was still all right.

Rabbit heard Syn call for the helicopter. He made his way from the den to the kitchen where Smith was with two of the hostages.

“Our ride is almost here. You take these two and I’ll the other two and we’ll use them as shields to get on the helicopter. Those CT’s will have to let us because they can’t take a chance on killing the hostages.”

“What about my primary mission?”

“Well, we will have to...,” Rabbit dove to his right as Smith raised his AK47 to his hip and fired. Realizing that Smith wasn’t firing at him, Rabbit turned as he made for the door to the garage. He saw a CT returning fire with an MP5 from behind the stove and another moving diving over the bar for cover. He dashed through the door closing it behind him and headed to the garage. Not bothering with cover, he addressed the two scientists standing where they had been told next to the SUV.

“Get in the back seat and buckle up. Hurry!”

Jedi held his fire as the big terrorist dropped his rifle and grabbed each hostage by the throat, one in each hand. It was Sped! Just like Element had said. He saw no recognition in the eyes at all. He had to make Sped realize it was him!

“Easy there. No one has to get hurt. It’s me, Jedi. Don’t you recognize me Sped?”

It was his target! Smith now had to fight the urge to leap at the man. It didn’t make sense, but he could barely fight back the impulse. Why did this man call him Sped? Did he know him? Had he been altered to look like this man Sped? The man’s voice was familiar, but he did not recognize him at all.

“The name’s Smith and these two men will be feeling no pain at all if you and your friend behind the bar don’t drop those guns.”

“All right. All right. Element, drop that Colt,” said Jedi, dropping his own weapon.

Just then, the back door opened and TK stood there startled by the drama unfolding in the kitchen.

“Tell him to drop that aug. I’d hate to teach you the sound a neck makes when it snaps.”

“Do what he wants. Please,” croaks one of the hostages as Smith tightens his grip.

“Sped! What are you doing?” asks TK.

“Drop that weapon, TK. Our friend here doesn’t remember us and he will kill those hosties if we don’t.”

Suddenly, Smith launches one hostage at TK and the other at Jedi. He could no longer hold back the urge to get at his primary target. TK was forced out the door by the weight of the hostage and Jedi was slammed back into the counter. Element rushed from behind the bar, but Smith kicked a chair in his direction and the CT had no room to dodge it and went down. Smith moved swiftly and lifted Jedi by the throat with both hands.

“I must complete my mission. You must die!”

Jedi slapped both sides of the big man’s head hard with his hands. Smith’s grip loosened and Jedi twisted and was freed. He shoved the man hard to separate them.

“Clear!” yelled Element, taking aim with his now drawn pistol.

“No!” screamed Jedi, launching himself between Element and Smith. Element held his shot as the two men now struggled. He heard something on the radio about a helicopter in the front yard, but he had no time to worry now. Smith now had the upper hand and TK was still struggling to get the clumsy hostage off of him. Element drew his knife, took aim, and threw it. There was a thud and Smith slumped to the floor.

“NO! What have you done?” yelled Plo, arriving from upstairs and seeing Sped drop to the floor.

Suppressive fire from the helicopter had kept Skooter, Fire, and Twist from doing any real damage to the aircraft. Twist had to get their help and be moved to the tunnel. He had been a sitting duck out there wounded.

“Can anyone get a shot on that helo?” asked Skooter.

“The rock wall is hiding it from us out back,” replied Blazer. He scoped in to where the aircraft had shown for a split second earlier. It flashed by again and Blazer fired. No hit, but he had seen something in that short moment. Raven was on that helicopter, he was sure of it. That tattoo was pretty hard to mistake. CRASH! A loud noise came from the front of the house and the team members in the back could hear an engine gunning.

Element leaped through the door to the garage grabbing an AK47 off the floor as he heard the engine fire up and then the crash as the SUV backed through the closed garage door. He ran after the vehicle as explosions sounded in the front yard. Someone was throwing grenades from the helicopter. The SUV’s front left tire suddenly blew out and

steam and smoke rose from the engine. Skooter and Fire had done what they could with their sniper rifles. The vehicle screeched to a halt and three figures bailed out on the side nearer to Element. Several rounds hit near him forcing him to take cover behind the wall. He looked out and saw three figures grab the rope and hang on as it was winched up and the helicopter started to lift. Element dropped to one knee and fired. CRACK! CRACK! The AK47 barked as he fired two shots. Both of his targets tumbled from the rope as the helicopter lifted away and took off at speed. Suddenly, he was slammed to the ground! He instinctively rolled and kicked out, sending his assailant flying off of him. He spun to face his attacker.

“You killed him! And now, you’ve killed those hostages! What is your problem! I will rip your throat out myself!” screamed Jedi. His rage was apparent and Element crouched ready to defend himself.

“Wait! Wait! Stop it, Jedi! He’s not dead. He’s just unconscious,” exclaimed TK running from the garage.

“What? I saw Element throw that knife.”

“I did, Jedi. But I reversed the blade so that the hilt would hit him. I couldn’t let him kill you and I kill him. It is obvious that he has been brainwashed or something.”

“I’m sorry. I really believed he was dead. Good work,” said Jedi, “But the hostages, why did you do that? There will be an investigation and some tough questions.”

Element reached into his breast pocket handing Jedi his secondary protocol orders. “Secondary protocol,” he said. “I was authorized to take whatever action I deemed necessary to ensure that none of those scientists left with any members of The Cause.”

“These are from the General,” noted Jedi.

“Yes they are. So if you have any questions, he is the one to ask.”

“Oh, believe me I will,” said Jedi, coming close to Element. “I will. And one other thing, thanks for the help with Sped. I owe you.”

“No, now we are even,” replied Element. “Now let’s get in there and see how Sped is doing. Did we meet any other objectives? Did we take any alive?”

“Yes, “ answered Mrs. Brutus. “We have the one called The Doctor out back and the one you knocked out in the front yard. The Doctor has what looks like a broken hip and maybe a back problem, but he will live.”

Rabbit watched as the two scientists fell to the ground below, obviously dead. Darn that CT! Now they had to find more scientists to help with the nuclear weapon The Cause

needed to meet its objectives. Rabbit looked around the helicopter as they moved fast and low to avoid radar. Syn, Raven, Talon – the pilot, and one other.

“When did you decide to get involved, Jon?” Rabbit asks the young assassin sitting in the jump seat.

“Call me Pookie, man. I was sent by Cheshire Cat, as promised.”

“He said he had a man on the Pawns, not a back-up, has-been assassin.”

“I love you too, Rabbit,” says Pookie, laughingly. “I see we will need new scientists. And they have Needles and one of your other men. Needles could spill a lot of information that could hurt us. Are we going to get them out?”

“We’ll see. We’ll see. Let’s get to the safe house first and then we will decide how to continue. This isn’t over yet.” Rabbit takes the co-pilot’s seat, watching the ground speed past. He would get what he and The Cause needed. And he would get his revenge on the rest of the Pawns. And if he had to neuter a certain Cat to do it, then so be it. No matter how protected he thought he was.

The two squads had now made it in to the den where Sped had been moved to the couch. He appeared to be coming around. Sirens could be heard in the distance as police and ambulances were coming now that the assault was over.

“I think he’s waking up, “ said Mr. Brutus.

“Is he going to be all right?” asked Skooter as he and Fire entered the room.

“Yeah, he’s going to be fine. He will need some deprogramming though,” said Jedi as Skooter moved close to Sped’s head.

“Are you ok, Sped? Just hang on, the ambulance will be here soon,” said Skooter.

Smith’s brain was in a fog, but he recognized those words. The same voice as in his dream, the same as he had heard during the bank robbery. The man’s name was right on the tip of his tongue, if he could just remember it.

“Skooter? Is that you? What? What is going on? I feel funny and my head hurts,” mumbled the man the terrorists had called Smith.

“Sped! Hey, that’s good. That’s real good,” said Skooter. “Hey everyone, he recognizes me.”

“Who is Sped? That name sounds familiar. Who is he? Do I know him?” asks Smith.

“You are Sped, my friend,” informs Jedi. “And you are a member of this group, the Pawns. Now, rest. The paramedics will take good care of you.”

The paramedics placed Sped on the gurney and began wheeling him to the waiting ambulance. The best doctors The Outfit could find would be there to help him get his mind back. This had been a successful mission as far as preventing The Cause from getting the scientists they needed to construct a nuclear device. But, the cost had been high, in lives and in intangible. Things didn't always turn out as expected. Especially, when friends and foes are the same people.

## Epilogue

“How's Sped doing?” Plo asked Jedi. The two were in the game room adjacent to the Pawns' barracks where they stayed during training and campaign preps.

“He's doing great! He remembers who he is and some of the details of his “orientation” are coming back also. It seems that Rabbit wanted revenge for Crimson's death. So, they abducted Sped and reprogrammed him to hate me above all things. It almost worked too, if Element hadn't knocked him out and saved mine and probably Sped's life.”

“How is that investigation going?”

“Element is cleared of all charges and the General has assigned him permanently to the Pawns.”

“Well, I guess that all the questions were answered after all, “ notes Plo.

“Not all of them,” says Jedi. “For example, “ Jedi begins, “if Element could make such great shots on those hostages, why didn't he kill Rabbit. And, secondly, who ordered Interpol to stop the air cover? Rabbit, Syn, and Raven all got away because of it. Blazer is on Raven's trail again, but there has been no luck finding him or Syn or Rabbit.”

“Those are good questions,” says Plo as he walks out into the light of a beautiful day.

“Very good questions, “ thinks Jedi, “questions that would require an answer.” This was not over yet. And Jedi swore to himself that he would not rest until those who had pulled the strings were brought to justice. Or met with the kind of justice reserved for those that compromise the safety and well being of others. Especially, when those others were friends of his.