

Baby team six

Chapter one

After death a text window pops up: Welcome to new game+. You will begin you life anew, but retain all knowledge, skills, currency, and items you choose to carry over. The challenge and enemies will be adapted to your level accordingly.

Life was okay until I turned two. The body and brain can't utilize past knowledge much before then. But once I turned two, oh boy.

“Jerry somebody's broken in.” I heard my mom whisper to my dad.

What? I don't remember our house ever being broken into. And my parents would've told me about that at some point for sure. Our family didn't keep secrets like that.

“I told you I should've gotten that Glock.” My dad whispers back. I can hear voices downstairs now. Several of them, and several bolts being pulled back to chamber rounds in what sounds like are very large guns.

“We've got to protect the baby.” My mom tells my dad.

No, this baby's got to protect you. I roll out of my bed and hit the ground. Thankfully being a baby I am very light weight and therefore make very little noise. I run to the top of the stairs before my dad can open his door to sneak over to my room.

I move noiselessly to the base of the stairs and peak around the corner.

A normal person would be scared at a group of thugs stacking up on the stairwell like a SWAT team. A normal person would've probably begged for their life when they saw all the assaults rifles, shotguns, and body armor. A normal toddler would've wet themselves and passed out. But a normal toddler also didn't do three tours in Afghanistan.

“It's him!” The first one shouts, bringing his gun to bear. I'm too weak to fight him directly so I dive under him, pulling the pin on one of his flashbangs as I roll under him.

“Don't let...” I cut the second guy off with a strategic leaping punch to his solar plexus, and promptly fall to the ground and cover my head with my hands. Even with my eyes closed I still get after images, and even with my ears covered my ears are ringing when I come up. Several strategic palm strikes and a chokehold later, my opponents are subdued.

This is going to be an interesting childhood.

Life was rough enough as a SEAL team six member the first time around. This was going to be a challenge worthy of the world's deadliest toddler. The time for resting in my cradle and dreaming of Barney was over. The time for sleeping in safe houses and dreaming of bullets had begun.

Congratulations! You have unlocked your first live achievement.

30LS: Therapy, shatter your parents illusions of a cute innocent baby

That's, interesting? I guess someone is keeping score for me. I wonder if there's an achievement for a no-kill run through on life? Those are usually worth a lot.

I stood up and dusted myself off as I stepped over my last fallen foe. My parents were not made of the tougher stuff that I had been created from. They were still upstairs, no doubt wondering if they were being bombed. A flash grenade explosion inside is loud enough to damage your hearing. I stride through the aftermath of the handheld explosive and take note of my fallen foes.

They bear no insignia, but their equipment is a little too advanced for just a random group of thieves. I'd finish going through them later. My parents were probably terrified out of their minds right now.

There's still some smoke from the explosion whispering about me like a cloak when I stride into my parent's room. They're cowering underneath the bed. I can't blame them. They probably thought the Germans had come back for thirds from Uncle Sam.

I knelt down next to the bed, sticking my head underneath. I make eye contact with my quivering father and while the smoke continues to drip off me I tell him.

"Nobody's breaking in while this baby's onboard. Now come out here. You have to start cooking up a cover story. Nobody's going to believe someone in diapers could do so much damage."

"Well...." My mom mumbles.

"I told you the gas fire was an accident. I totally know how to sauté lobster. My fine motor function just hadn't kicked in yet." My mom shrugs, clearly not buying my story, but they both exit the bed.

They don't know about my skills. They can't possibly know. It broke my mom's heart the first time I left the military, and I had been eighteen at the time. It would kill her to send off her child before he turns three. And my dad, I wasn't sure how he would react, but I couldn't imagine having a son with lethal weapons for hands that still needed diapers some days could be good for his mental health.

Until tonight they had no idea of what I was capable of. Now they would have to learn fast to stay alive.

"What could we possibly tell the police about the men downstairs?" My dad asks.

"Gas leak maybe?" I provide. "We do have a gas stove."

"It's in the kitchen though, and they're in the hallway. At least, I think that's where the sound came from." She scowls, suddenly remembering how old I was. "What on earth was that anyway? And what's all this about a cover story. What happened? Why aren't you in bed young man?" She puts her hands on her hips in an attempt to give me a stern motherly look. It doesn't quite have the desired effect.

“Evil never sleeps, and neither should I.” I tell her. “I was defending this castle from the malicious men who lurk in the night. I am not what you think I am. I...” I’m cut off by the sound of the phone ringing. There are now sirens in the distance, but I expected sirens. I didn’t expect anyone to call at this early hour of the morning. We didn’t have any close friends or relatives nearby. Who could possibly be calling us?

“Hello?” My father asks. My mother is still trying to glare at me. Although her heart isn’t in it anymore. Her fists have slid off her hips and she keeps glancing worriedly over at my father.

“What? Yes, he’s here.” My father, looking as if lady fate herself has personally smacked him, hands me the phone.

“This is the doomsday baby. To whom am I speaking?” The person on the other end responds through one of those voice scramblers that makes your voice sound super low and intimidating. Hearing it makes me acutely aware of the fact that my own voice won’t change for at least another eight years.

“Who I am is not important. Who I represent is what’s important, and I represent some very powerful people.”

“Like Disney!?” I ask excitedly. I wish I could say I was faking my enthusiasm. My parents had used the Lion King to lull me to sleep.

“Umm. No.” The voice sounds momentarily unsure of itself. “I represent the combined power of the United Nations. There’s no time to explain anything. Those boys who tried to take you out tonight will have backup rolling in any second. We’re sending a chopper to you, but it won’t get there in time. You need to move your family. Now, and ditch the tracking device in your diaper.” Who would put a tracking device in a diaper? That was low. I reach down and locate the device, thanking my lucky stars that I hadn’t drunken any water before bed. I pull out the blinking red device.

How had my mom missed this thing when she was changing me? I must’ve taken every ounce of action hero out of them when I had come into the world. I throw it on the floor and stomp it until the light goes out.

“On it.” I tell the man on the other line.

“Good luck Rambo baby. We’ll see you on the other side.” The line goes dead, as does the power to the house. I look out the window and see that even though the sun is still down the streetlights are off.

They must’ve cut the power to the whole block. The sirens are real close now. I can see flashing lights in the distance. *Oh no, the police are going to get caught in the cross fire.*

“Get to the attic!” I order my parents, dashing for the stairs. “There are more coming!”

“Yes.....Dear.” My mom says. I have no time to verify that they are following my instructions. I run to the kitchen and dig through the cabinets. I know what I’m looking for has to be here. Ah, perfect. They won’t know what hit them. I take two bottles of chemicals and start filling some water balloons with their contents, making sure to memorize which water balloon holds which chemical. I fill about ten before I hear the police pull in out front. I’m not sure this will be enough, but I’m out of time. I throw the

water balloons into two small plastic buckets. The kind that are used to build sand castles at the beach, and make for the door.

The officers have just formed a preliminary defensive perimeter around my house. They're behind their cars. Their guns are out, and one of them is about to turn on a microphone.

"Get back in your cars!" I shout. "They're coming!"

"Just make it to us." The man with the microphone says, his voice booming through the small cul-de-sac. "We'll protect you from them."

"No you fools." I say, having almost reached the line of cars. "I'm here to protect you!"

Just as I say this I reach the line of vehicles. Two black vans come tearing up the street, jack knifing about ten meters from our position. The side doors roll open as the police turn to see who the newcomers are.

They're greeted with the rattle of automatic weapons as a couple of floor mounted belt fed LMGs open up on the unsuspecting officers. The men in uniform dive for cover as a hail of lead thunders down on their cars. Thankfully they're well enough trained to know that the engine block is their best protection, and a quick once over glance of the police response tells me most have suffered only minor wounds.

I place the two buckets of water balloon chemical bombs in front of the officer with the microphone.

"You need to throw these at the van!" I shout over the roar of the AK-47s that have now joined in with the LMGs.

"What!" He shouts back. "Kid this is no time for a water balloon fight!"

"These aren't ordinary water balloons!" I yell. "Besides, it's not like your troopers are throwing anything else at them!" It's true. All of his officers are still bunkered down behind their vehicles, waiting for a lull in the oncoming fire. I don't think a single retaliatory bullet has been fired. "You need to throw them because my young arms can't throw that far!"

"Alright kid." He reluctantly reaches down and picks one up.

"Make sure you throw them all at the same spot!" I yell as he pitches the first one. It splatters right in front of the LMG of the left vehicle to no effect. The LMG gunner notices him and sends a series of bullets right through the spot that the policeman's head had occupied moments before.

"It didn't work!" He yells. "And I nearly got my head taken off!"

"Just one more!" I yell, handing him a balloon filled with the second kind of chemical. "This balloon has a different chemical that the first one needs to react!" He stares at the balloon in his hand. I can tell he's wondering if it's worth it. The last one had nearly cost him his life. Why should he try again?

"How old are you?!" He asks.

"Two!" I hold up two fingers in the peace sign like my mommy taught me. That convinces him. He should try again because no ordinary two year old fills water balloons with deadly chemical agents.

The officer pitches the second water balloon right where the first one landed, and this time he's rewarded for his efforts. A large plume of orange smoke rises as soon as the second balloon splashes onto the remains of the first.

A cloud of the poison materializes, but the LMG gunner whose van the cloud is appearing in front of, doesn't notice until it reaches his face. He doubles over coughing after only inhaling a couple of breaths. The gun he was manning goes silent.

"Throw the rest!" I shout. The officer sitting next to me needs no encouragements. I hand him balloons, and he throws as fast as he can. It's a miracle he doesn't get mowed down by the remaining LMG, or the squad of troops who have taken up positions in the surrounding cars.

The entire section of street the two vans are parked in soon becomes blurry behind a haze of orange smoke. Enemy gunfire begins to die down, and friendly gunfire rises to fill the gap. The officers begin peeking over the hoods of their cars and taking potshots at the enemy.

"Run for it!" I hear one of the enemy shout. Many foes lay sprawled out on the ground, and when the vans speed off, they leave many of their comrades behind.

20LS: The baby we need, but not the one we deserves, score ten non-lethal takedowns.

A Batman reference? That was interesting, and it was good to know that these takedowns still counted as mine.

As the officers begin to cheer. I grab the nearest officer by the belt to get his attention.

"What is it kid?" He asks.

"That's a deadly chemical spill down there. You guys need to evacuate these houses and get those downed men to a hospital as soon as possible. The gas will soon dissipate and you need to get chemical response teams here to neutralize it." The officer looks confused that a two year old is telling him this, but one look at the downed men where the vans used to be kicks him into gear. Some of them are coughing, but if any of them are going to survive the police need to act quickly. They may be bad guys, but they're still people. They also happen to have highly valuable information about whose sending these hit squads.

As ambulances speed onto the scene, and the police begin resuscitating the downed hitmen, I hear a chopper on approach. The lead officer walks over to me as the chopper appears, circling overhead.

"Kid, who are you?" He asks. Now that his blood pressure was returning to normal after the firefight he was fully comprehending just how crazy it was that a little kid ran out of a house with chemical bombs and instructed pinned down officers in their use. Two year olds should be worrying about how to pronounce the word 'chemicals', not throwing them at people, and in semi-lethal doses to boot. To say nothing of the fact that this little kid had maintained a cool head under the withering fire of multiple assault rifles and a duo of high powered Light Machine Guns.

The chopper descends, and someone throws a rope ladder out of the side. I grab a hold of it and begin to be pulled skyward. I cast an eye on the remaining pockets of orange chemical fumes as I give my response.

"I'm the baby whose gas does more than just stink." The officer either can't think of a response, or I don't hear it over the chopper's whirring blades. I give him a salute as I ascend the ladder and pile into the waiting helicopter.

There are several highly armed men and women inside who throw me respectful salutes as I slide into my seat.

"You guys must really want me alive." I say over the headset that's handed to me.

"Yes sir." The man across from me barks. He's at least twenty times my age. The grey is starting to show in his stubble.

"So you're not going to believe I'm just some cuddly kid that was at the right place at the right time?" I throw on my most innocent face.

"Sir, we know you didn't need the police to handle those terrorists." The older man replies curtly.

"Terrorists you say?" I scratch my chin. "What would terrorists want with me?"

"HQ on the line." A female voice pipes in. It looks like it's one of the pilots.

"Patch them through." I say, tapping the appropriate button on my headset.

"Glad to have you with us Mr. Doe." A scrambled voice tells me over my headset.

"I don't know any Mr. Doe. You must have the wrong number."

"I'm quite certain I telephoned the proper top secret stealth chopper whose existence I am legally bound to deny. My mother taught me to always check the numbers twice." The scrambler isn't strong enough to mask the sarcasm.

Stealth chopper? This thing was loud enough to wake up everybody on the block. Then again, the non-stealth military choppers I was used to would've woken up everybody in half the town.

"Well you better check again because I don't know any Mr. Doe." I retort.

"There won't be, because you don't exist yet. We're in the process of changing your name to John Doe. It should be finalized within the hour."

"You can change my name?" I ask. "Who are you guys?"

"We can do many things Mr. Doe, or shall I call you Rambo baby? Well no matter. It would be quicker to list the things we can't do Rambaby. We are powerful people. It's not safe enough to discuss who we are over this radio connection, but all will be revealed as soon as you land."

"This is all a little sudden. You guys couldn't have called a few days ahead to my parents. Just a courtesy call, 'Hey, Mr. and Mrs. Rambaby what's your schedule like Tuesday? Free? Excellent, you're

going to be assaulted by some terrorists and you might want to make them snacks or something'. It's the sort of thing polite people do." My comment earns some snickers from the soldiers in the helicopter.

"Polite people don't use voice scramblers and send noisy choppers into the middle of sleeping neighborhoods to wake up people's dogs. We prefer the term professional Mr. Doe, and like I said, all will be explained to you as soon as you land. I'm surprised you haven't asked why we've changed your name for you though. That was what this call was about."

"To protect my family right? The same reason why Batman doesn't go by his first name. Although now that you mention it, why didn't you just give me a codename? As I recall it was you who named me Rambaby."

"Because codenames are for people who go home to families. New names are for people who will be associated with us more permanently. Meditate on the meaning of that for the remainder of your trip." The headset switches back to the channel that the helicopter crew is using, and I can hear the tail end of a conversation they've been having about me.

"Like the grim reaper but in a family friendly package." The first female pilot says.

"And cuddly." The second one adds.

"You should set her up with your niece." The first one suggests.

I was married in my last life, to a woman. We had four children, all of them were biological, and all of them were mine. Intellectually I am acutely aware of the biological and emotional benefits of a close relationship with a female. However, developmentally, I still think girls are icky.

"What do you think about dinosaurs?" I ask the man with the stubble across from me in an effort to change the subject so I don't have to hear any more about girls. The adult type girls were fine, like the pilots. It was the ones closer to my age I didn't want to hear about.

"Coolest things ever to walk the planet." He responds without missing a beat. "Got a favorite?" He leans forward, propping his elbows up on the rifle that's laying in his lap.

"Velociraptor." I say. "They're so quick and smart. And those claws! Raptor claws have got to be the most awesome dinosaur fossils ever. I wanted one for my birthday but my parents said I was too little. I'd poke an eye out or something."

"Good old raptors, nice choice, but I think you have to go with the king." He presses his elbows against his chest and waves his hands around to simulate really short arms.

"T. Rex?" I ask.

"Absolutely." He says, returning to his leaned in position. "Baddest predator to ever walk the earth. I asked my wife for a tooth fossil for our anniversary but she got me a leather massage chair instead."

"Dude, you got ripped off!" One of the other men in the chopper chimes in over the comm channel.

"I know right." He says, turning to face the soldier who had spoken up. "I mean my call sign is Rex, and everything."

"Boys, you know this is an official military channel right?" One of the female pilots asks. "Every word that's spoken on here is heavily encrypted and sealed as top secret. You're supposed to talk about important stuff."

"T. Rex is important." The man with the stubble exclaims. "That's what I'm saying. T. Rex doesn't get enough respect."

"A bet a raptor could take down a T. Rex." I say, rejoining the conversation.

"Ouch." The man says, grabbing his side to illustrate that he's pretending my words physically hurt him. "That's a low blow kid."

"Well, maybe not any raptor, but the right raptor, in the right place at the right time. Don't get me wrong, T. Rex is super dangerous, but that's why the raptor might win. Things that are big and scary tend to underestimate the little guy." The stubbly soldier appreciates the not so subtle subtext of my words.

"I'm with you kid. It's why we've made such an effort to bring you in, but just remember." He sits up straight and gets serious for a second. "These people that are after you. They know what you're capable of, and you can't always count on your deceiving appearance." I nod appreciatively. It's solid advice. Not that I had really used that tactic this morning, but I would have to keep from relying on it.

The chatter dies down to quick bursts of military speak between the pilots and some far off control tower. I take the opportunity to observe the awesome view that the chopper affords. I have memories of sky diving from low earth orbit, and the 'me' in my memories isn't impressed by skimming the treeline in a chopper, but kid 'me' thinks this is the coolest thing ever.

My parents were planning on taking me to the county fair next week. The ferris wheel would've gotten me about as high as this helicopter, but it wouldn't have been even ten percent as awesome. This was a great way to experience heights for the first time.

"Hey." I address the stubbly soldier whose been keeping me company. "What's going to happen to my parents?" I feel kind of selfish for not mentioning them earlier. The immediate danger was dealt with, and the police had arrived. I think I even saw SWAT pulling up to my house, but now that I had a quiet moment I wanted to know what became of them.

"They're being escorted to a safe location. Don't worry. They'll be safe." The man assures me. "We're not going to let the world's most dangerous toddler become an orphan."

"Will I get to see them again?" I ask. A momentary surge in childhood emotion prompting me to express an uncharacteristically weak emotion.

"I don't know kid." The stubbly man says. A trace of a frown entering his face. "I just don't know." That saddens me, and I have to distract myself with the awesome view once again.

The sun is coming up, and it's not long before we fly into a landing strip on a military base. There's at least a hundred fully armed men and women in formation to greet us as we land. My escort

from the chopper exits first and fans out to take up defensive positions. It's just for show of course. Probably some tradition of this outfit. I liked it. It showed that these people took their missions seriously. Well, except for the dino talk.

"Greetings commander Francis Timothy Walker. Captain of the sniper detachment from red team of seal team six. Honorably discharged after twenty years of service to serve as contract advisor and instructor for the training of future SEALs. Died January 2nd 2013 in a hospital bed, surrounded by his family and loved ones." The man addressing me snapped to a salute. My jaw dropped, this was the first thing tonight to truly surprise me.

When I had accepted my mission to be sent back I had expected a lot of craziness. The late night intruders were obviously the upgraded enemies. The secret government outfit seemed kind of par for the course, but seeing my old spotter still alive was breath taking. I hadn't known he was still alive, and he had greeted me with my full name and rank. How had he known it was me.

"Ryan." I say, running forward and leaping up to hug him. The way he hugged me, spinning me around like a favorite uncle, was unprofessional, but somehow appropriate. He sets me down and ruffles my hair affectionately.

"We've been waiting a long time for you Francis." Somebody coughs that I don't see. "I mean John. We've been keeping track of you for a while John." He emphasizes the word John each time he says it.

"What do you mean? How did you guys know? Is this common knowledge?" We start walking towards one of the barracks as we talk. To a casual bystander it may have looked like a grandfather taking his grandson out for a walk. Not two of the world's most cunning special operations operatives discussing intelligence on a very important op, me.

"We've known for about 18 months. You remember when you were six months old and your parents thought you had cancer so they took you in for an MRI?"

"Oh yeah, I remember that, but the tests came back negative." I say.

"See that's weird." He says as he opens the door to the barracks.

"That the tests were negative?" I ask.

"No." He responds. "That you remember. You really shouldn't have that good of a long term memory yet. Anyway, the results from the test were, shall we say eye opening? Eye opening enough that they eventually made it to some of our boys who monitor these things. We had a devil of a time getting the medical community to bury the matter. We had to bribe a lot of people to keep that data under wraps, but as soon as we got the report we started watching you." We walked over to the bunk that was to be mine. He didn't have to tell me it was going to be my bunk. I don't think anybody else in the military was allowed to sleep with their teddy bear and a fuzzy power ranger's blanket.

"We did a lot of digging. We went through your parent's employment history, medical history, family history, and interviewed dozens of their friends and relations. That all turned up nothing. There was absolutely nothing about your parents that could have created that remarkable brain in your skull." He pulled back the blanket as if preparing to tuck me in.

“Then one of our boys had the bright idea to compare the MRI to other brain scans of soldiers. We didn’t think we would get such a close match to yours. We thought we’d get some correlations, maybe something to tell us what we were working with. When it turned out that your brain, I mean your current brain, was an almost exact match to your old brain, we didn’t believe it. We thought it was a coincidence, a fluke, a random chance.”

“What changed your mind?” I asked, sitting down on my bunk as Ryan sat on the bunk next to me.

“We bugged your room. It wasn’t legal, but I had a hunch, and we’re a black ops outfit anyway. Legal is more of a cautionary word than a hard rule for us. You talked in your sleep. Not much, just whispering a few words. Not many, and nothing too conspicuous, but we started cross referencing your night time rants with your old files, and every single word you spoke was a codename for an operation. Your parents would think they were meaningless, that you had heard them from a movie or from one of your friends, but we knew better. So we watched you. We didn’t know what to do with such a discovery so we waited. We waited for over a year until the people watching your crib’s camera feed reported the sound of a grenade going off.”

“Yeah about that.” I say, stifling a yawn. It’s been a heck of a day, and I was up too early. My two year old metabolism is telling me to go back to bed. “How did those people know about me? You guys I get. It makes sense, but they didn’t have access to my records or my brain scan. How could they have known?” Ryan shrugs.

“We don’t know John. We were hoping you could tell us.”

“Well I don’t know nothing.” I say. “Do you at least know who they are?”

“We’re working on it John, but for now you’ve got to rest. Go to sleep.”

“Sleep, I’m (Yawn) fine.” I cover my mouth in a vain attempt to hide my sleepiness. My bed does look awfully soft and warm.

“Sure you are. You may be a big strong navy SEAL on the inside, but on the outside you’re a two year old who missed his nap time, and you’re going to be very grumpy if you don’t go beddy-by.” He gently pushes me down into the mattress and I instinctively snuggle down into the covers.

“But I need to start finding bad guys.” I say, but my eyes have already closed.

“We’ll wake you up in a few hours John, and when you do we’re going to teach you to fight.”

“I already know....how.....to fight.” I say, beginning to drift into unconsciousness.

“You know how to fight like a man John, but when you wake up. We’re going to teach you to fight like a baby. Rest now, the fun begins when you wake up.”

Chapter two

“Wake up and smell the cocoa puffs John.” Ryan tells me. “Evil waits for no baby.” I snap awake expecting a delicious and well balanced breakfast. I’m pleasantly surprised to find that there’s no cereal. Ryan has instead prepared my favorite dish for me, victory.

I’m no longer in the barracks. I’m in a gym, laying in the middle of a wrestling mat. Ryan is sitting at a table with a clipboard. Next to him is a line of soldiers that stretches to the doors, and from what I can see, around the building.

“These boys don’t think you’re for real John. You’re going to be heading up this outfit, and it looks like you need to earn some respect so I organized this little meet and greet for you.” As Ryan turns to address the first hulking beast of a man in line I make a mental note that somebody changed my diaper and put me in some pajamas while I was asleep. Ryan still has his same old sense of humor.

“Sergeant Brooker, what is your military experience?” Brooker listed off an impressive list of accommodations, tours of duty, and tier one outfits he had served with. I didn’t pay much attention. His war experience was clearly readable in the many scars that crisscrossed his face. I mentally stored one of the countries he had served in for a future one liner.

“And this man thinks he can take me on?” I ask.

“Yes sir!” The man shouts, staring me down as he does so.

He addressed me as sir? Ryan must’ve told them my rank. I start sucking on my thumb and with my free hand wave at him for to approach. Sergeant Brooker looks at Ryan for confirmation.

“Are you really going to let me have a go at the little potty trained terror?” He asks.

“He’s not potty trained.” Ryan informs sergeant Brooker. “He’s wearing a diaper son. You might want to take that into consideration when you’re taking him down.”

“I am too potty trained!” I shout indignantly, thumb still in mouth.

I just think diapers are more comfortable is all. I only get to wear them without stigma for a few more months, might as well get the most out of them.

“Go get’em sergeant Brooker. Show your commanding officer what you’re made of.” Sergeant Brooker walks slowly into the circle on the mat that indicated the boundary for the fighting area. It wasn’t the confident kind of slow walk, nor even the careful slow walk of someone sizing up an opponent. It was the ‘Somebody is going to stop this any second now right?’ Kind of slow walk. He had challenged me not because he wanted a piece of me, but because he expected someone to decline the fight. He hadn’t anticipated actually getting pitted against a two year old.

Tier one military units are trained for a lot of things, but toddler combat was one of the few things they don’t teach you. He walked right up to me and just stared down at me. I continued sucking my thumb as I looked back up at him. He was obviously considering what the best way to take me down without hurting me was. I was burdened with no such worries.

He apparently thought picking me up would help somehow. As he bent down to pick me up I headbutted him in the throat, if I had done this as an adult, it would have likely caused permanent damage. As a toddler, it merely meant he had a little trouble breathing all of the sudden. I took

advantage of this moment to leap onto his shoulders and apply a chokehold with my legs. Sergeant Brooks tapped out after only 3 seconds.

20LS:Knuckle sandwich for breakfast, score a takedown within five minutes of waking up

“Next!” I shout, as I release sergeant Brooks. “You did alright son.” I tell him in my squeaky prepubescent voice. “I would’ve been worried if you punched a baby in the face without any kind of hesitation. They don’t make babies like me in Egypt do they son?” Sergeant Brooks stares at me like he’s seen, well, like he’s just seen a toddler take down an elite career soldier.

“No, no sir they don’t.” He croaks out through his bruised throat.

“Too right they don’t, now scooch to one side lad. I’ve got some of your friends to show off for.”

“Corporal Wallerstedt.” Ryan indicates the next gentlemen to step up, and once again begins his long list of qualifications for this individual. I try and crack my knuckles but it’s really hard to do with my under developed fingers. It’s hard to look intimidating as a two year old, and that innocent thumb sucking technique won’t work twice. These guys know I mean business now. I’m going to have to try harder with this next guy.

As Ryan finishes I wave the guy over and drop into a fighting stance. I’m probably half this guy’s height, and less than third his weight. This was going to take some doing, but I still had one advantage. My opponent had no experience fighting people my size, but I had plenty of experience fighting people his size.

As corporal Wallerstedt steps into the ring he also adopts a fighting stance, and he has enough respect to bow to me. It’s a sign he has respect for my skill, and I return the bow, and thus the respect. It’s not this guy’s fault he’s about to get owned by a two year old. They just don’t train people for that.

Wallerstedt tries to use his reach to his advantage by throwing out a sidekick. It’s a good idea, but he doesn’t count on me rolling under his leg and jabbing my shoulder into his knee. He is off balance and surprised by the speed of my roll. He collapses onto his front, and I pin his right arm behind him.

This is a mistake as he’s so much stronger than me he just pulls his arm away, but I correct quickly and throw another leg chokehold when he tries to stand up. I feel uncreative using the same takedown, but with my weak arms it’s really my only way of forcing these guys to tap out.

“Looks like you just got baby sat.” I inform Wallerstedt from on top of his head as soon as he taps out. “I could do this all day. Keep them coming Ryan!” Ryan is grinning like a fool as he waves up the next soldier.

“I’ll set them up John. You knock them down.” After I had taken down sergeant Brooks a few of the soldiers in line had left their places and come to sit with their recently beaten comrade. After I had taken out the corporal Wallerstedt about a quarter of them left their spots in line. Half were remaining after I felled the third tier one operative, about a quarter were left after the fourth fight, and by the time I had bested the sixth person, who was one of the outfit’s female operatives, everyone had sat in a circle around the gym mat.

“Ladies and gentlemen.” Ryan announced. He put down his clipboard and began to walk around the group. I stood at attention and watched him as he made his way around the circle. “As you can see

the reports were accurate. You are addressing the nearest thing to the physical embodiment of martial prowess that has ever walked the face of the earth. This little baby, as so many of you called him the morning during the debriefing is in fact captain Francis Timothy Walker reborn. We don't know how or why, but as you've clearly seen, no other mind could've found a way to take down not one, but six tier one operatives each with several years of experience under their belt."

"Some of you thought this assignment was a joke. It isn't. It's deadly serious." I happened to be checking to make sure my diaper was still dry at this point. I quickly pretended to be dusting my legs off. "You were assembled because you come from the elite of the elite, the best of the best as the saying goes. We found that John Doe was the only man fit to lead you into combat. The mission this unit was assembled for is of the utmost secrecy and importance. Ladies and gentlemen, we're about go where no baby, and no tier one operative has gone before. Dismissed." The soldiers quickly and efficiently jog out of the building at the final order from Ryan.

"You seem to be in an inspiring mood." I tell Ryan as he joins me in the middle of the mat.

"I wasn't exaggerating John. There's been some troubling information that's come up through the intelligence community. Someone is planning something big, something bold. Something that is designed to cause so much chaos that someone very important will get an itchy nuclear trigger finger. We need your team to find out what it is."

"That's who those guys were that came after me this morning?" I ask.

"Possibly, we're still interrogating them, but they're not cracking. These guys are good. They very well could be behind it, but we can't know for sure. Walk with me John." He says, leading me into a nearby hallway. "We're going to get you kitted out for your mission." We go through a few security checkpoints guarded by more soldiers, and into what I can only describe as a cross between a toy shop and a gun store.

"What on earth is all this?" I ask pointing at a wrack of baby supplies such as diapers and pacifiers. Ryan being the learn by doing kind of guy picks up a light blue pacifier and hands it to me.

"Put it in and hold your nose." I'm perplexed, but Ryan and I have been through more operations that almost got us killed then most people have been to the dentists. Which I guess isn't much for some people, but the point is I trust the guy, so I put the pacifier in and plug my nose. Ryan throws something at my feet that produces a cloud of green gas. He has strategically taken several large steps back so the gas doesn't hit him.

"Take a breath through the pacifier." Ryan advises me. I oblige and to my surprise find that I haven't just inhaled a large lung full of ominous green gas.

"That will filter any gas that isn't corrosive enough to cause damage to your eyes." The gas gets sucked into the ceiling by some ventilation system. I remove the pacifier and inspect it.

"I'm impressed. I never would've guessed that this thing doubled as a partial gas mask." It looks exactly like an ordinary pacifier, and believe me, I've seen a lot of pacifiers. My mom has not understood which cereal I wanted to eat for breakfast so many times.

“It also comes in tactical colors.” Ryan informs me. “Not that we think you’ll want one of those. The whole point is to blend in.” He walks back to the table and picks up an ordinary looking bottle full of milk.

“I don’t suppose I can drink this?” I ask as he tosses it back to me.

“I don’t think you should, give the lid three good bites and then toss it that way.” He points towards a sealed steel bunker at the end of the room. I oblige him and give the lid a few good chomps. I’m somewhat mournful as I toss the bottle to Ryan. It’s past my breakfast time.

Ryan chuck's the bottle into the bunker at the end of the room. The bottle sails through the only open door, which promptly slams shut behind him. No sooner does it click shut then the whole stainless steel room lifts off the ground and comes crashing down into several different pieces.

“That room had walls of solid steel three inches thick and was cryo-welded to the floor.” It now looks like a giant stepped on it. Or like a very angry toddler kicked it over.

“So rambaby wasn’t enough. You had to turn him into 00diaper.” I comment sarcastically to Ryan. He was grinning like a fool again.

“You should’ve seen the faces on the government contractors when we asked them to design this stuff. We spent an entire two hour meeting convincing them that this wasn’t a joke and we actually wanted Kevlar footy pajamas.” Kevlar footy pajamas, the Navy SEAL in me rejoiced at the idea of fully body Kevlar protection. It would provide excellent protection from all manner of bullets and bladed weapons. The special operative in me loved the idea of having minimized weak spots. The little kid in me rejoiced at the idea of pajamas that would keep you super warm when you went to bed, and had those little plastic things on your feet that let you slide around on linoleum floors.

“Do they come with dinosaur designs?” I asked, hopping up and down, scanning the shelves for the mystical pajamas. “I really want raptor ones. My mom got me triceratops footy pajamas for my birthday and you know they were cool and all, so I couldn’t get mad because she really put a lot of thought into it, but I really want raptor pajamas.” Ryan put a hand over his heart like what I said hurt him.

“What kind of tier one operative walks around in triceratops footy pajamas? They aren’t even a predator.” He reached up onto a high shelf and pulled out a set of velociraptor footy pajamas that were just my size. “We also have T. Rex as a backup.” I give off a little squeak that would have very likely undermined my authority with the troops, and practically trip over myself taking them from his hands and slipping into them.

“Normally I would dramatically shoot you at this point to demonstrate their bullet stopping potential, but your skin is really sensitive to bruising and I’m not sure your bone structure can withstand a shot without fracturing. I mean, your pajamas will stop bullets, at least anything at or below a 5.56 round, but it’s still going to do a lot of damages.”

“So for now it would be best if I didn’t get shot.” I surmise. Ryan shrugs “If you can.” I spy something out of the corner of my eye. I slide over on my footy pajamas and point.

“Please tell me that those are real.” There on the low hanging shelf next to some ninja stars that are stained green is a box of my favorite O shaped cereal.

“Well, sort of, you remember that green smoke I threw at you when you first came in here? All I did to generate that cloud was throw a few of those at your feet.” I open the box and carefully pull out a handful of multi-colored cereal.

“Oh yeah, I was wondering about those.” I pick one up and twirl it between my fingers. Despite the fact that the last time I did this I was three feet taller the piece of metal flits easily from finger to finger.

“I’d be careful with those. They’re tipped with poison that’ll drop someone twice your size almost before they feel the pin prick, so be careful with them. I’m not 100% sure how your small physiology will respond to that volume of toxin. An adult will process it out of their system fast enough to avoid any lasting damage. I don’t know if the same can be said for you.” I carefully replace the ninja star and look around the rest of the bizarre armory.

“I’m noticing that there aren’t any guns.” I say.

“Yes, we did some testing and concluded it would be impractical to give you firearms for several reasons. First, they would draw too much attention. Footy pajamas are normal for a two year old, and even ninja stars aren’t an abnormal toy for little boys, but guns, even if we tried to make them look fake. They would be too obvious. Rifles were completely out of the question, and even if you paint it and stick on one of those orange pieces, a firearm still looks like a firearm. To add on to that, they’re too large for you to handle smoothly, we would have to give you lower caliber rounds, and very downsized pistols in order for you to be able to shoot them with any degree of accuracy. All in all, the take down power of the kind of pistol we might be able to give you wasn’t worth the attention it would draw. We thought it would be best to give you a number of light weight options for stealthy takedowns. After all, half the point of you being you is that people don’t check babies for dangerous weapons.”

During Ryan’s rather longwinded explanation about the lack of guns I inspect my footy pajamas more thoroughly. I notice that there are several pockets that look as if they were designed to hold some of the gear laid out here. There’s a compartment for the pacifier, one for the ninja stars, and one that looks just right for a cereal holder.

I fill up a container with cereal while he’s talking and stow it in the appropriate pocket.

“I know you’re eager to get on to training.” Ryan says. “But we figured we would start with Close Quarters Combat as it’s going to be the skill that has changed most with your new body.” “I agree.” I say, slipping a few ninja stars into side pockets. “I don’t expect to be training with these anytime soon as I am sure I’m still fairly skilled in their use.” I throw one of the ninja stars and it imbeds right in the middle of the forehead of a dummy that was setup about ten meters away. I had to put a lot of arc on it because my wrist is not that strong, but that just makes my point even more thoroughly. “However I do expect that those bad guys are going to come swooping in at any moment. If they’re half as deadly and well networked as you make them out to be then they’re probably staging an attack on this place as we speak.”

“You underestimate us.” Ryan says, slightly offended by my statement. “Still, you’re right. We learned a long time ago that you should always take your opponent seriously and not get too confident in your own power. Besides, everyone else on this base is either armed or could be armed in moments.” Ryan had been carrying two pistols on him the entire time. I stow the pacifier in the last available pocket and zip everything up.

5LS: Silent but deadly, acquire your new stealth gear

I wonder if there was somewhere I could go see my total score. “Ready for breakfast, I mean training, ready for training.” I correct myself. Ryan laughs.

“We’ve got you covered old friend. It is past your breakfast time isn’t it? Let’s go hit the mess hall.”

The mess hall is practically empty when we show up, just a few guys who were on duty during the morning meal grabbing a quick bite before heading back to their bunks for some shut eye.

Ryan grabs bacon, eggs, and toast. I’ve been thinking about milk and cereal all morning, and find that someone has conveniently left out a bowl with milk and orange juice on the side. I thank the chef who no doubt had the foresight to provide an age appropriate meal, and sit down with my old comrade.

“Are we still using that old deal?” I ask Ryan as I pour milk over my cereal and start stuffing my face.

Ryan is meticulously cutting up his food into bite size chunks.

“You mean the one where we don’t talk about current missions during meals? Absolutely, nobody else on this base is going to do anything but talk about missions. Both of us need someone to talk about other stuff with.”

“Awesome!” I’m relieved that it’s not going to have to be all fate of the world all the time with Ryan. “On that note, how did they drag you into this? You retired a few months before I did. You’ve been out of the game a while man, how did they get you back in?” Ryan takes a few measured bites of his eggs.

“Isn’t it obvious? I came back for you John. When they told me that they had created a new and exciting outfit I turned them down. It wasn’t until they mentioned you that I took them up on it. I knew you would want a friend in all of this, and who better than the man who remembered to bring the extra flashbangs on the smash and grab ops because he knew you tended to leave them behind.”

“That was one time alright? Can’t a guy make a mistake? And what about you, mister forgets to turn his safety off when he’s sighting his rifle? Besides, we were snipers. We weren’t supposed to get close enough to use flashbangs. Remember when we took down that African warlord? The one who was killing all of those babies? Didn’t need flashbangs then did we?” A few soldiers on a nearby bench hear me mention this op. One of them leans over to ask me a question.

“You guys were on the golden lion op? I heard that you had to crawl through a snake infested jungle for two days to get into location for the shot.” Technically speaking we probably shouldn’t be discussing classified ops, but my existence was probably officially denied by the government, and Ryan was old enough that most of his enemies probably thought he was dead anyway. What were they going to do? Fire us?

“You heard right soldier.” Ryan responds. “John here even had a python crawl over him.”

“And on top of that we had to take the shot with old Russian tech rifles from the second world war so they wouldn’t know it was an American job. Speaking of Russian tech, you remember the Siberian op Ryan?”

As we start swapping old war stories soldiers slowly start to congregate around us. I notice as more and more of them start asking questions that they are not just Americans. It seems most of the NATO countries and a few of the non-NATO American friendly countries have sent representatives here as well. I’m particularly glad to see some Swedish troops in the ranks. Winter warfare is my Achilles heel and there are none better than the swedes at doing black ops in the snow.

Me and Ryan talk about everything from basic training to selection for the tier one groups, to active duty, to retirement. I've had these memories swimming around in my head for two years and it's great to finally get to share them with people who understand and appreciate them. The other soldiers join in with stories of their own in a giant story swap that would probably make any intelligence officer pull his hair out. It's great to hear what the community has been up to since my retirement and rebirth. When the time for breakfast has passed and we have to head back to the gym for CQC training I'm feeling rejuvenated both body and soul. It's going to be a good day.

When we enter the gym I find that the mat is surrounded by six of the largest soldiers that I've seen yet.

"You did well against those guys this morning." Ryan says, taking up a position on the outside of the mat. "But there were two major problems with your fighting style. First, you were defensive and reactionary. If you had made the first move on those guys they would've thrown you around the mat. Second, you could only take them on one at a time. We're going to be dropping you into some hairy situations and you need to be able to handle yourself against large groups of combatants." He indicates the men standing around the mat. "We will start with just six today." Just six he says, any one of these guys was at least triple my body weight. If we were going by body mass the equivalent challenge for adult me would have been a crowd of 24 equally sized men. This was going to be fun.

"We'll start with two at a time and work up from there. James, Phillip, have a go at him. You saw what he was capable of this morning, you don't need to hold back. John, would you care to relieve yourself of your personal arsenal? This is unarmed combat." I remember the men breaking into my parent's house. How much easier would it have been to just throw a handful of knock out gas pellets at them. I'm loathe to relinquish my personal weaponry so soon after having acquired it, but I dip into my pockets and reluctantly pull out the equipment. It's fortunate that I did, at that exact moment there are a series of rolling explosions that shake the base. A siren wails and a voice comes over some loud speakers.

"Full alert, full alert, battle stations, base under attack. Repeat, full alert, base under attack, battle stations." The six men bolt for their weapons which they've left at the side of the gym and Ryan pulls out his pistol as he shoots a question I don't hear into a walkie talkie he's produced from a back pocket.

"John!" He shouts. "It looks like your first mission is going to be a little sooner than we anticipated." I place my pacifier in my mouth and ready a handful of cereal.

"It's play time, let's go make some friends." The six gentlemen who were going to be my assailants moments before report back in full combat gear.

"Ready for orders sir." They intone in unison.

"You're up John." Ryan says, drawing a pistol and falling into position behind me. "Show these guys that all they've done by coming here is to wake a sleeping baby and fill him with rage." I ready a ninja star and take position at the front of the troops.

"Gas masks on, roll up this mat and you three take up positions behind it. You other three take up defensive positions on the sides of the gym. Ryan, you've got the door we just came from. Stay out of sight and take down anyone who tries to flank us. These guys are coming for me. You can bet they know where I am so you can bet they're going to be here any second. Let's roll out the welcome wagon boys." The troopers are good, by the time I've finished giving orders they're already in position. I take up position behind the mat with them.

"Tangos at the door." One of the troopers whispers to me.

“Copy, non-lethal shots if you can. We want live prisoners to get information if at all possible.”

“Roger.” The soldiers confirm with me silently. I toss a handful of pellets at the door so that when the enemy squad breaks in they are immediately dazed by the cloud of green smoke. The troopers are efficient as always. Quick controlled shots from the men behind the mat drop the door breachers, and the men on the side quickly close in to cuff them. The enemy is down before they ever get to fire a single bullet.

“Stow them against the wall and return to your positions. You can bet there will be more of these guys. See that Ryan?” Ryan doesn’t respond.

“Ryan come in.” Still no response. I turn around just in time to see two men in combat gear that is all too familiar to me at this point.

“Flank!” I shout as they bring their rifles up. I loose two ninja stars just in time. They drop, and their buddies behind them are so surprised that they don’t see the next two coming. I only brought four, so the fifth guy bringing up the rear gets a swift kick to the knees and a chokehold applied with more force than is strictly speaking necessary.

“Ryan!” I shout, ducking into the hallway where the five men have come from. Ryan is slumped against a wall, a half dozen other enemy combatants sprawled at his feet.

“Sorry John.” He croaks. He’s in a bad way.

“Medic!” I shout. “We need a medic!” I’m at his side in a heartbeat, trying desperately to apply pressure on his wounds, but there’s just too many.

“Medic!” I shout again. One of my own squad comes through the door already producing bandages and tourniquets.

“It’s alright John.” Ryan says. “I had a good run. You know I did.”

“Medic!” I shout a third time, even though the medic is already at my side and treating wounds as fast as he can.

“Got something to ask you old friend. Will you write the letter to my wife and kids? I want them to hear from someone who knew them, and who knew me. I don’t want some generic government goodbye letter. I want it to be personal. It’ll really help them pull through. Will you do that for me John?” His voice is so weak I can barely hear it. I grab one of his hands and hold on because it’s all I can think to do. I hear gunfire from the gym behind us, but I’m not paying attention.

“Absolutely, you know I will Ryan. I’ll. I’ll. I’ll write them the best last letter that ever was.” Ryan nods and closes his eyes.

“Go do what you do best John.” He says, and then his hand goes limp.

Life long friends 100LS: Be the best friend a man ever had

Little kids often only have enough space in their heads for one emotion at a time, and with those words Ryan kicks out all sadness and replaces it with a burning desire to go repay the fools who’ve done this to my oldest friend.

I rush back to the gym, ninja stars and gas pellets at the ready, to find that the men I left there have already cleaned everything up.

“To the door! We’re going on the offensive. Stack up!” The troops comply and within seconds we’re bursting through the door and onto the base. It’s a sorry sight with many buildings burning and casualties from both sides everywhere, but no guns are out. Teams are sweeping to the base perimeter,

but no one is firing a shot. There are no enemy helicopters and troop transports pulling in. The fighting is already done.

“No! No it can’t be done already!” I shout. My troops have dutifully take cover in nearby positions. They’re ready for a second attack that will not come.

“This isn’t fair!” I shout. There should be enemies for me to take my vengeance out on. It can’t be done already.

“Sir, it’s for you.” One of the troops hands me his headset.

“Thanks trooper.” I say, putting it on.

“Ready to take the fight to them?” A scrambled voice comes over the headset.

“Just tell me where they are.”

Chapter three

“They’re Canadians.” The intelligence officer said. I wasn’t in a laughing mood so I just stared at him. The meeting had been called immediately after the attack had wrapped up, and I had been called into a special debrief along with six other members of the outfit. There had been a breakthrough in the interrogations, and someone was finally spilling the beans.

“We aren’t sure what their motives could be.”

“I heard there was a maple syrup shortage this year.” One of the soldiers whispered to his buddy. If Ryan had survived the attack I might’ve laughed at that joke.

“The Canadian government is claiming no knowledge of this attack so for now we are still treating this group as a rogue team of terrorists, and not as trained Canadian operatives instigating an act of war.” ‘Rogue Canadian Operatives’, that might be the first time I had heard those words so close together.

“You were mentioning actionable intel?” I prompted. All of this motive stuff was fascinating, but I wanted to know where these guys slept so I could go fight them on their own turf. I had started writing the letter, and it had done nothing to give me closure.

“Right, so we’ve discovered that some of their cells are in Germany. Apparently these guys are targeting more than just the good old USA. We have the address for one of their safe houses, and we want you to gather some intel on them, find out what they’re up to, then call in the big guns to clean them up.”

“Did you see this guy earlier today? He is the big guns.” One of the other soldiers chimes in. I notice it’s the first guy I took down. Sergeant Brooker I think his name was.

“We understand John Doe has some rather impressive combat skill, but we will be sending other teams in to monitor him and provide backup if necessary. That’s why I’m debriefing seven of you, not just John. We want you to come down like lightning as soon as he gets the intel he needs.”

The soldier who made the maple syrup crack raised his hand.

“Yes Private Geoff?” The intelligence officer called on him.

“So we are to monitor John’s progress?” He asked. I could sense a joke coming.

“That is correct.” The intelligence officer replied.

“So one could say we were baby monitors.” That was a bad joke even by my standards. Still, I cracked a smile. This guy and I would get along.

“Private Geoff, this is a serious operation. Are you fit to carry it out?”

“Yes sir, my apologies sir, yes I am fit to carry it out, sir.” He was visibly giggling to himself, but he kept it quiet.

“Now then, John Doe, we understand you have a lot of... experience in these kinds of operations.” The intelligence officer had some difficulty bringing himself to say the word experience. “So I’ll leave the relevant materials here.” He shoved a briefcase down to me. “And leave you to your men. You will have two other teams investigating other safe houses nearby if you should need them. The rest of the outfit will be investigating other leads, but you’re the head of this operation, so if you need them you can call on the full strength of this unit.” I nodded to him.

“Thank you sir, I can handle it from here.” The officer saluted and left the briefing room to me.

“I’ll be honest gentlemen. I’d prefer to leave you behind on this operation.” I walk to the front of the group. “I kind of stick out from the group, and I prefer not handling other people’s lives besides my own. It’s why I retired as a captain, not a general. But this one’s personal, so I’ll be a team player for this one if it means we get the people responsible for this, just know that I’m going to be flying solo whenever I can. I was trained as a sniper. I work best by myself, or with at most one other person.” I like to make lots of eye contact during my briefings. It lets me get a read on the people I’m debriefing, but I have to look away as I say the next sentence. “My ‘one other person’ bought the farm yesterday, so that means I work best alone, and I will work alone whenever I can.” I open the briefcase.

“Since I have to work with all of you let’s take a look at your files so I can task you appropriately for this mission.” I pull out the roster and quickly scan the first file.

“Lieutenant Miranda?” I ask.

“Sir.” One of the two females in the group stands up.

“Miranda it is not clear what your specialty is from this file. Please explain why you are a necessary element of this group to me.” Without a moment’s hesitation, as if she had prepared this response in advance, she replies.

“Sir I am on snack duty.” I glance at the maple syrup guy. He snickers.

What was she getting at?

“Clarify please Miranda.”

“Sir, I wanted to get the breastfeeding jokes out of the way before this debriefing was over sir.” First maple syrup guy, Geoff was his name, now breastfeeding lady.

“Noted Miranda, I appreciate your sense of humor, now please. What is your specialty?”

“I am an undercover operative specialist. I am an expert at infiltrating groups like these. I will be responsible for retrieving you from the safe house once the intel is obtained. Ryan thought that a ‘mom’ would be useful for exfiltrating you.” She said.

“Ryan, is he responsible for putting you guys together?” I asked.

“Yes sir.” Sergeant Brooks said. “Before he passed he screened people for your personal team. We are it sir.” So these were Ryan’s handpicked men and women that he thought I would work best with. That brings just the hint of a smile to my face. These people are his final gift to me. It makes me feel safer knowing that Ryan is still a part of my team, even if he can’t physically be here.

I put Miranda’s folder down and scan the next one.

“Alexis.” I say, turning to the remaining female. “I see you are the demolitions expert.

“Is pronounced Alexee.” One of the men sitting next to Sergeant Brooker says. I take a closer look and see that someone has written a ‘s’ in pencil next to Alexi’s name. Someone whose handwriting I recognize. Ryan has just played his first posthumous joke on me.

“And yes, I am demolition expert. In old country I was Spetsnaz. I prepare joke for you, but it no make your friend laugh, so he tell me to just let you know I make your baby bottle and this will...how you say, get me in good with you.” At first I think this is a play off the breast feeding joke, but then I remember my high explosive baby bottle that took out a steel bunker.

“Oh yes, I am a big fan of your work. We will get along just fine Alexi.” So I got two wise crackers, and a Russian bomb maker. This was shaping up to be one crazy op.

“Good, I am signing up for this outfit because my mother she says I am bad with the babies. I need to prove her wrong so if I could get selfie with you later it would be much appreciated.” I’m not sure if this is a joke or not, but my smile widens just a little bit anyway.

“Sure thing Alexi, I’m glad to have you onboard.” He throws me a quick salute and I pull up the next file.

“Jennifer, I can see from your file that you are in fact an experienced sniper yourself, but since the other members have had an opportunity to introduce themselves, is there anything you’d like to say?” Jennifer remains seated as I address her. In other circumstances this might have been seen as disrespectful, but I liked the laid back atmosphere.

“Uh yeah, they want me to be your girlfriend.” I blush bright red and stare at my boots. The word ‘cooties’ flashes very bright in my head for some reason. “At least, they said they wanted me to

look at you from very far away through some kind of telescopic lens. Which I think at your age means I'm your girlfriend right?"

"Actually." Geoff chimes in. "I believe at his age being his girlfriend means he pushes you over in the sandbox and doesn't let you into his treehouse." Jennifer considers this.

"But the safe house we're going to extract intel from is in downtown Berlin. There aren't any treehouses or sandboxes." She replies.

"I talk with quarter master." Alexi offers. "He is having shovels I think, and maybe we can stop by beach to pick up sand so we can make sandbox. I mean is essential for operation yes?" There was a general murmur of approval. "Is settled then. I talk with quartermaster after meeting, and we stop by Caribbean on flight out."

"Alright then." I pull out the next file. "Private maple syrup, or Rogers as your file calls you. What's your story."

"Sir, sergeant Brooker and I are your breach and clear experts. We specialize in rescuing hostages. You point as at a building full of bad guys and we'll clear it for you before you can say Rumpelstiltskin."

A sniper, two close quarters breach and clear experts, a demolition tech, an infiltration and exfiltration expert, that left communications expert.

"Alright, that just leaves one man. Your specialty is communications correct?" I address the last man.

"Si señor, mi especialización es en comunicación. Soy del Gran Bretaña, pero no podrías saber eso porque no me veo como un gringo. Mi piel es muy moreno, verdad?"

Oh this guy thought he was funny.

"No hablo español, compañero. Tomé muchas clases de español, pero soy increíblemente estúpido. Puedes hablar Inglés para mí?" Brooker apparently spoke Spanish because both he and my communications specialist were chuckling. The other four were just nodding along as if they understood.

"Si jefe, para tí, podría hablar Inglés." He responded with a little salute.

"Gracias amigo. Que Dios salve a la reina." I checked his file before putting all of the documents back in the briefcase. He had served with the british SAS for several years, could apparently build a working radar dish completely out of parts found in the hood of a car, and spoke eight languages, including Spanish obviously.

"Right then ladies and gentlemen. Now that we are all acquainted, let's get down to business." Sergeant Brooker raised his hand.

"Sir you haven't asked me to introduce myself."

"I already know who you are Brooker. You were the first to test my skill during the morning's wrestling match, even though you had reservations about hitting a child, and you were the first to speak well of me during this meeting. Geoff over there already told you are a breach and clear expert, that

tells me you're going to be the first to have my back when we go through a door. That's enough to be getting on with, so let's start planning how to get the drop on these Canadian scum."

A half hour later we're on a flight to Germany, and it isn't longer before we're doing reconnaissance on the house. It was a little townhouse in the bad part of town. We spent a day digging up blue prints from local archives, scouting out sniper perches, and monitoring the comings and goings of the inhabitants. We slowly accumulated enough information to make our strike. When the sun went down Miranda approached the safe house of the terrorists.

"Do you really think they're going to buy this?" I ask from the car seat that I barely fit in. "There's no way they're going to believe I'm an infant."

"Oh really?" Miranda asks. "How many infiltration classes did you attend? What is your position on the five best ways to sneak a baby into a single family home?"

"What?" I ask, confused. "Why would you want to sneak a baby into a rock concert?"

"So what you're telling me is you're an amateur in such matters." She concluded. "Well fear not oh brave and glorious leader. I have spare diapers in the side compartment and have left them detailed notes on how to take care of your sensitive tooshie."

I'm spluttering at this. There are dozens of very unpleasant thoughts buzzing through my head, but I can't seem to string two together.

"Besides, most people without children can't really tell how old a child is or what developmental stage they are at. The note we've left hints that you haven't mastered any language skills. You'll be fine, now quite down. I've got to ding dong ditch now." She sets me down in front of the door and true to her word, rings the door bell and bolts for a bush half a block away.

"Looking cute and cuddly boss." Jennifer tells me through my earpiece. She's posted on the roof of a nearby parking garage with my fake Hispanic British friend. I never did catch his name. I made a mental note to go look it up in his file later.

Before I could make a retort to Jennifer, the door opened and a man poked his head out.

"Hallo?" He looked left and right. I made my best attempt at a cooing sound, and he looked down.

"Oi, somebody left a baby at the door eh. Come on you hosiers, take a look at this." He called back into the house. I can't believe people who sounded like that were conducting acts of international terrorism.

"Oh he's a little cutie pie eh." A second man appearing at the door said. I bite my tongue and put on my biggest fake smile. Fortunately, no one suspects a baby, or almost no one anyway, and these guys look completely taken in.

"He's so cute, let's take the little tyke in for a bit of pancakes and warm milk eh. We can put a notice out for his parents later."

"Or just drop him on somebody else's doorstep." The second man suggests. Without another word The two large scary terrorists take me into the kitchen. One of them starts reading the note, while the other looks at the diapers. I can tell they've guessed I'm still pretty young because they start talking in those voices that grown adults only use around people under the age of two. Those high pitched voices that make the words sound squished.

20LS: Lethal weapon? Use your powers of intoxicating cuteness to render your opponents harmless.

Even whatever other worldly force that controlled the achievement pops was taunting me. How was any special forces operative supposed to be taken seriously when...was that ice cream?

One of the two terrorists had opened the freezer to get out some waffles, and I saw, in all its glory, rocky road ice cream hiding just behind the waffles.

"Cweam! Cweam!" I shout, waving my arms crazily from the carseat. I only managed to add the baby inflection to my voice as the words were leaving my mouth.

"Now now, little baby needs his vegetables. How about some nice broccoli?" The terrorist with the waffles said.

"What are you? A Disney villain?" The terrorist without the waffles said. "He's not going to be on our hands much longer anyway. Let's give him some ice cream."

"Suit yourself." Captain waffles said as he put two frozen waffles into a toaster. I knew that guy was evil. Eating waffles, with maple syrup no doubt, and he had the nerve to give me broccoli. When the not quite as evil terrorist comes back with a bowl of rocky road I wonder, for the briefest of moments if I'm on the wrong side of this war.

They take me out of my seat and plop me down in the middle of the floor, since they don't have anywhere else to put me, and retire to another room to make plans.

I'm tearing through my ice cream with all of the fury of a wild bare using nothing but my bare hands.

"Enjoying yourself boss?" Jennifer asks through my earpiece. "I'm hearing a lot of satisfied smacking sounds down there." I swallow the baseball size mound of ice cream in my mouth and reply back as calmly as I can in my ice cream induced euphoric state.

"Copy that, just uh, maintaining my cover. Tangos have left me unmonitored and I'm moving to gather intel now." After stowing my ice cream safely in the freezer, which was no small feat since the freezer was five feet off the ground, I made my way to the door of the room the two terrorists occupied.

"Moving in tomorrow I here." The one I identified as being more evil said. "Supplies should be there from the Egypt facility in the early morning, and everything will be setup before lunch. Proper for an attack on Britain to be not long after tea time eh?" So they were going after something in Great Britain.

"Oh for sure, those hosiers won't know what hit'em."

"Are you getting this?" I whisper.

“Loud and clear boss.” Jennifer says back to me. “Hold position as long as you can. Our two breachers are in position so as soon as those guys start coming out give us the signal.”

“I think they’re coming now.” I whisper again, hearing footsteps approaching the door. I dash back to the kitchen, where the two terrorists soon join me.

“Did little baby finish his ice cream already?” The less evil one asks. Both of them have their backs to the front door, perfect. I start bawling my eyes out as loud as I can, and the two terrorists practically fall over their themselves bending down to help me. They’re in the perfect position to be surprised by the flashbang that comes through the door, and the two large men that come through after the flashbang.

Geoff and Brooker move through quickly taking down both terrorists, cuffing them on the kitchen floor. Miranda and Alexi come in to hold position in the kitchen while Geoff and Brooker sweep and clear the remainder of the house.

OLS: Cry baby, you know you could've taken those guys down without backup right?

“Oh no.” One of the terrorists says, making eye contact with me. “You’re That baby.” I smile my biggest toothiest smile.

“Read your briefs more closely next time boys.” I tell them.

“So what did we get?” I ask as we gather around the table in the back of the plane we flew here. We passed the prisoners over to an interrogation team for processing, and then searched the house for further intel.

“Not as much as we’d like.” Miranda said, papers scattered all around here. “There’s a good bit here on an Egyptian bomb making facility. We’ve got a location and building layouts. We’ll be heading out as soon as Alexi is done sweeping the plane for bombs, but nothing more on that Great Britain op we mentioned.”

“I’ve talked to some of my contacts in the UK.” The communications expert said.

I still don’t know his name, and now I don’t know where the file is. I really should just ask. Or maybe I should ask Alexi? I feel like he wouldn’t tell anybody I don’t know my own subordinate’s name.

“The SAS will be put on standby and they’re calling in reserves for the weekend. Whatever it is, you can bet they’ll be ready.” The communications expert said.

It feels so weird just calling him ‘The communications expert’. It doesn’t even sound right in my head.

“Let me have a look at those building layouts?” I ask Miranda.

“Of course sir. I was thinking we could take advantage of your size and send you in through the vents. I know it’s cliché, and most people wouldn’t fit, but that’s the beauty of having you on the team. We’ll send you in with a screw driver so you can bypass the fans, and you should be able to tell us what’s going on in there with minimal risk of being detected.” I didn’t see any dimensions listed for the air

ducts in the plans she handed me, but I believed she was correct. She was the infiltration expert after all.

"Looks good to me Miranda, I trust you'll go over the city plans with Jennifer and the two of you will setup entrance and exit points for the other teams. I'm going to go have a word with Alexi."

"Yes sir." She says, and slides over to Jennifer to go over the city layout diagrams.

Alexi has a flashlight out, and is inspecting one of the engines.

"American engines, it is like they want you to plant incendiary on turbine so it explodes during takeoff." He plucks something about the size of my fist from the engine and throws it aside. I stumble for a step.

"Alexi, what was that?" I ask, eyeing the small, vaguely metallic object.

"Is nothing, what you want boss? Inspection of plane is complete. We can leave as soon as you like."

I wonder how many other 'nothings' he's found on the plane.

"Alexi, I wondered if you could make some small modification to the baby bottle bomb for me." Alexi pulls one out of a pocket.

Did he carry that with him on the mission?

"Sure thing boss, what you want me do?" He twirled the thing in his hand like he was a magician flourishing a card, not a man playing with very dangerous high explosives which could kill my entire team if he dropped that.

"Not much Alexi, I was just wondering if you could rig up a timer for that. So in case I don't want it to blow up in five seconds I have some options." Alexi examined the bottle.

"Is easy, I will rig it so that one bite on the cap will set the timer for thirty seconds. Two bites will set it to 60 seconds, and so on. No problem. How many you want?"

"Just one I think. A little high explosive can go a long way."

"A lot of high explosive can go even further, but I understand. Bottle will be fixed before we land in Egypt." Alexi starts tinkering with the one in his hand.

"Thanks Alexi." I glance at the small metallic object still sitting on the runway. "I can always count on you. Oh, I almost forgot. What's the name of the communications specialist?" Alexi spills a couple drops of the 'milk' from the bottle onto the runway.

"Comrade walkie talkie? No idea, was hoping you could tell me." Well, at least I wouldn't be alone in my ignorance. Maybe HQ could send me another copy of his file.

"Baby in the vents." I call out, having just plied the cover off of the vent on the roof and slid inside. "I wonder if this is what a reverse birth would feel like."

“Thanks for the lovely mental image commander.” Jennifer calls in over the line. “I was the emergency midwife for one of my cousins. It’s not something I’d like to see twice.” This from the first ever woman to pass the Navy SEALs sniper selection course, I guess the advantage to being a sniper is that you’re very far removed from the action.

“Oh birthing isn’t so bad.” I tell her as I begin to army crawl my way to the first fan.

“That’s easy for you to say. You’re not a girl.” Miranda chimes in.

“Oh I don’t know. It was dark and cramped, and I kept getting pushed along, but all in all it wasn’t a horrible experience. Bright light at the end was a little bit stunning though.”

“I am planning on having lunch at nice local restaurant if comrades could please be keeping the conversation about the mission, and not about making me lose my lunch.” Alexi chimes in. I take out my screwdriver and start going to work on the first fan I encounter.

“Fine you big baby.” I say, knowing the irony will not be lost on him. “I’m starting to hear voices.”

“Your mic isn’t picking anything up except your vocals. Can you relay their chatter?” That was communication guy.

“Will do, one moment while I eavesdrop.”

I should just make up a name for him. I might accidentally call him my made up name by accident, but it’s better than just thinking ‘communications guy’ all the time. What about George? No, that was too British. Brandon, Brandon was a nice solid name. I’d call him Brandon.

“Tangos are discussing the cargo. As expected it is all high explosive bound for....”

“Bound for where?” Brandon asked.

“They’re not referring to it by name. They’re just calling it the target city.” I quietly pulled the last screw out of its threads and placed the fan down to one side.

“Moving in for a closer look. Breaching teams at the ready?”

“Copy.” Jennifer confirmed. “Alexi and Miranda are at the west entrance. Brooker and Geoff are at the East entrance. I’ve got the north side covered, so if you drop in on the south side of the building we can tie this thing up with a bow and send it to HQ.”

I loved working with talented people. It made you so much more confident about yourself. I knew that even if I banged on the side of the air vent and called out ‘Special Forces, don’t shoot the vents because we’re definitely not using them to get the drop on you.’ My teams would hear the commotion and break inside to neutralize the bad guys before they could take any shots at me. I would never do that, but it really took the pressure off.

I had the second fan down, and was now on the south side of the building.

“Rambo baby reporting in, I’m in position.” I call over the mic.

“Team syrup in position.” Geoff called in.

“Team lone wolf in position.” Jennifer called in.

“Team your mother in position.” Alexi called in.

“On my mark....3...2...hold on a second I’m going to try something.” Before any of my team members can objects I punch through the vent grating and drop to the ground.

“Everybody run for it I’ve got a bomb and I’m not afraid to use it!” I can see that I’m in the middle of a small warehosue that has a truck loaded up with suspicious looking packages. There are only seven or eight terrorists, and all of them are surrounding the vehicle.

They bring their guns up when they see me, but not all the way. The sight of a baby wielding what appears to be a milk bottle isn’t very threatening, even if he was making bomb threats. They start pointing at me and whispering things to each other. Their guns sink back towards the floor as they relax. It’s too easy.

I drop the water bottle and grab a handful of pellets with one hand, and two ninja stars with the other. I flind the pellets, and while they’re still in the air, throw the two ninja stars side hand. I’m diving for cover as the pellets and stars hit, taking down about half the terrorists, and scattering the other four.

“That baby’s crazy!” One of them shouts. “Take him down!”

I pick up my bottle and wave it from behind cover.

“I’m a baby who just took down half your team with some cereal and child’s toys. Do you really want to find out what I can do with a milk bottle? The most dangerous of all the toddler weapons.” I give the bottle one bite and throw it onto the truck where it starts blinking red. That’s enough for the terrorists. They run for the doors, the doors behind which my team are dutifully waiting to bring them down..

“That makes two no kill ops in a row.” Jennifer calls in over my mic.

“Let’s not add friendly fire to that now.” I say.

“Twenty-five seconds til this warehouse explodes!” I yell, running towards the east exit where Brooker and Geoff are. “Grab your hostages and get out of here!”

“What about the men still inside?” Brooker asks.

“The what?” I ask, forgetting too late that there are still more men inside that I knocked out with gas and stars.

“Everybody clear the knocked out terrorists!” I shout. “We’ve got twenty seconds move it!” I can see the milk bottle blinking ominously as we dash into the warehouse.

I can’t possibly lift any of these big guys, but I try and help load them onto Brooker and Geoff’s shoulders. Miranda isn’t large enough to firemen’s carry any of the large male terrorists so she’s dragging them one by one to the west exit.

“Ten seconds!” I shout. Alexi doesn’t seem phased. He had walked in when I had given the order to clear the terrorists, and now was picking up the bottle. He can’t throw it outside. The buildings were packed in close on this street and we couldn’t risk taking out some civilians by mistake.

“Alexi what are you doing? Five seconds!” I shout and start running for the door, praying I have enough time.

I glance back at Alexi for what I think will be the last time. I see he’s taken the top of the bottle and poured the liquid onto the back of the truck.

“Blasting cap is on lid of bottle.” He says. “Remove lid, no blasting cap, no explosion. Is perfectly safe.”

“Well, um, good job Alexi. You are certainly earning your pay on this mission.”

“I am paid in the loving affection of my dearly beloved wife. Who would love it if I stopped fighting with my mom. So maybe selfie now?” He says, pocketing the blasting cap in my children. I laugh.

“Yes of course Alexi. Everybody else, search this warehouse we’ve got to figure out where they were taking this stuff.” A quick snapped photo and it’s back to business.

“Sir!” Miranda calls from the back of the office. “They made enough material to fill another five trucks, and we know where they’re headed now. They’re going to London sir.”

There’s a UN security summit this week in London. It’s all over the news. That’s what they’re after. They wanted to take me down before this operation because they knew I would stop them. Now since I’m out and about they’re moving forward with their main plan ASAP. This is it. This is the big mission.

“Call in the other teams.” I order Brandon. “We’ve got to go help god save the queen.”

Chapter four

Brandon took the lead as we walked out of the back of the plane onto a London runway where some of Brandon’s old SAS buddies were going to get us up to speed on what was going on. The city had been cleared of all the VIPs. The British prime minister had nobly decided to stay behind and cover for the other heads of state. He was busy making public excuses for the sudden cancellation of the UN summit. I hoped his security detail was top notch. He was going to need it.

“Samuel!” One of the three approaching SAS operators called out.

“George! How’s it going?” He who I had referred to as Brandon called back.

“Huh, his name’s Samuel.” I mumbled to myself.

“What’s that chief?” Brooker asked me.

"I said it's good to be working with the Special Air Service again. Pleased to meet you lads." I extended a hand. They looked at me like I had four heads and was advertising denture cream.

"It's alright boys." Samuel said. "He may not look like much, but that man, boy, kid, person is one of the deadliest men alive." The SAS operators look at each other.

"You sure?" One of them asks Samuel.

"Let me see your weapon solider." I ask the nearest SAS operator. The operator looks at Samuel for confirmation. He nods, and reluctantly hands over his weapon.

"Standard issue Heckler and Koch MP5. Submachine gun chambered in 9mm." I press the mag release and examine the bullets in the top. "This operator is utilizing hollow point rounds, clearly anticipating close quarters combat against lightly armored or unarmored combatants. Lack of frangible ammunition suggests you are not worried about collateral damage from bullets passing through thin dry wall. Which means you're hunting for the enemy in the subways where the walls are concrete. Your lack of any explosives or flashbangs tells me you're looking for bombs. Which I already knew because of the intel I sent you, and the fact that there are just three of you, not a full team, tells me that you're breaking teams up to cover more ground. Which means you haven't found anything yet as splitting up teams is not tactically sound." I put the magazine back in the gun and hand it to the SAS operator. He looks a little stunned, but shoulders the weapon dutifully.

"Good enough for me." The SAS operator says. "Let's get you lads mobile, we've just had a break through and we want your input. Your other teams will be joining us shortly correct?" The lead operator asks as we make for the jeeps they've brought with them.

"Last we heard additional teams from our outfit should be making landfall within the hour." Samuel tells the operator.

"Then let's not waste any more time." I get into one of the jeeps with an SAS operator, Samuel, Brooker, and Miranda.

"So if I give you a car seat will you explain why you're a baby?" The SAS operator asks. I consider telling him the truth about being reborn, and he might believe me. It would be no crazier than what I had done earlier, but I figured the less people who knew the better.

"That's classified." I say, and in fairness, I'm pretty sure it is. "I'd love to throw around baby jokes all day, but we are in just a bit of a hurry, so care to give us a bit more of a debrief as we go?"

"Right." The operator says as we pull away in our jeeps. "Here's the skinny, we've been combing the city proper thoroughly ever since we got the intel, and for a while it looked like everything was clean. No strange comm traffic, no disrupted utilities or transport, and certainly no enemy personnel. Then about ten minutes before you landed we lost contact with one of our teams who was going through some underground service tunnels."

"He means subway service tunnels." Samuel clarifies.

"Yeah, so we lost contact with them and were about to head in after them when we get the call from HQ to wait for you guys to show up. We've got several teams in the area making sure nothing comes in or out, and it's been pretty quiet, but we've just been waiting on you lot to show up to get this

party started. The prime minister was informed just now and we're sending his security detail reinforcements." As he's talking Samuel begins handing out weapons appropriate for close quarters combat. My loadout doesn't change at all, but my comrades are stripped of their grenades and flashbangs, and change out their magazines from full metal jacket rounds to hollow points.

We pull into the entrance of the underground and to the surprise of everyone in the vehicle we find that it's business as usual. Civilians are coming and going in droves as if nothing strange was happening. "Bloody prime minister hasn't told anyone what's going on. He must want this to be kept under wraps." The operator swears, looking the crowd over.

"Well you can't blame him can you?" Samuel says. "If the terrorists catch wind of something going on they might get itchy trigger fingers if you know what I mean, and those fingers are currently resting on bomb detonators if I'm not mistaken."

"Still, doesn't sit right with me." The operator replies.

"Well regardless you guys need to get in there ahead of me." I say. "I can't be seen with you without causing suspicion. A baby accompanying Special Forces in tactical gear would cause a lot of questions to be asked. I'll need to sneak in on my own."

"No time mate." The SAS operator disagrees with me. "Who knows how long it's going be before one of these crazy yanks does something regrettable."

"Well they're technically Canadians, not yanks." Samuel says.

"Don't Canadians count as yanks?" The operator asks.

"Don't think so mate, yanks are people from the states." Samuel says.

"Not all the states." Brooker says. "I always thought Yankees were people from New England."

"Right, and New England borders Canada, so that makes them Yanks don't it?" The operator asks.

"Regardless of whether they're yanks or not, you've got to get in there now." I order. "I'll have to make my own way inside."

"I think not." Miranda says. "I've got an idea."

"Good thing I brought the eighty liter bag." Brooker says, opening the duffle bag as soon as we're far enough into the underground side passages that no one will see us. "Or else you might not have fit." Brooker had to ditch all the specialty breaking and entering gear that he normally stored in it before I could fit, but it was mostly useful for getting into houses in the suburbs so it was unlikely we would need it.

"I'm not so sure it's good." I say as I step out of the bag slightly light headed. "That bag smells like all the feet in the world. What do you store in this thing? It can't just be weapons."

"I may or may not have accidentally used it as my gym bag sometimes." Brooker says.

“Sometimes?” Jennifer asked. The other half of the team had been only seconds behind our jeep and had linked up with us as soon as we were past the crowds. “Please tell me that you have not showed up to a civilian gym with 80 liters worth of military grade breaking and entering equipment.” Jennifer looks accusingly at him.

“I have no specific recollection.” Brooker responds. “But I have noticed that people are really polite to me at that gym for some reason.”

“Is no big deal.” Alexi puts in. “I checked twenty pounds of plastic explosive onto a commercial flight to Disney world once. Airline lost my baggage. I tried for days to track it down with no success. Then one day I see little child feeding crumbs of C4 to birds. I trade him life size Mickey Mouse doll for rest of his Pidgeon food. I talk with him and find out he didn’t eat any himself so is happy ending.”

“Why were you taking twenty pounds of C4 to Disney world?” Miranda asks.

“And why did you use a commercial airline?” I ask.

“Mission is classified, very top secret operation. I can tell you that I use commercial flight because is game we played with other Spetsnaz teams.” Alexi claims.

“Game?” Geoff asks, seeming a little too excited by the idea for my taste.

“Sure, we see who can smuggle most illegal thing into country. I once had buddy who managed to smuggle whole surface to air laser guided missile system into country. He take it apart and claim it was gardening equipment.”

“We should be linking up with the SAS team keeping watch on the last known location of the squad we lost contact with any second now.” Our SAS operator says. Sure enough we round a bend in the passage and see six men pointing guns at an access grate in the floor.

“Baby Team Six reinforcements have arrived.” Geoff announces. “What do you guys have for us?”

For some reason the three operators who came with us are trying to pretend that they don’t know us and had just been casually strolling the tunnel because it was a good day for walking down tunnels.

“What’s with the baby?” One of the operators who has a weapon trained on the access grate asks.

“He’s an, uh, tactical.... element.” Samuel offers weakly.

So much for communications specialist. Shouldn’t he be good at making up excuses?

“Look we don’t really have time to explain can you guys just let us know what we’re about to drop into?” Brooker asks.

“Sure.” The lead operator covering the grate says. “As I’m sure the team that escorted you here informed you, we sent a team down here to sweep for enemy activity, and about fifteen minutes ago now they went through this grate and we lost contact with them. We haven’t heard any radio chatter or

noticed any suspicious activity of any kind. There's something down there for sure, but we can't say what it is. You boys and girls will be dropping into unknown territory."

"Well if it was easy we wouldn't have the job." I said. "Alexi and Samuel, you guys are going to lay out all equipment you have that might be useful for bomb defusing. Brooker and Geoff you're with me. Miranda and Jennifer you're our backup. Lock and load people." I pull out a handful of cereal knockout gas and ready my pacifier respirator. "This baby's about to have a gas attack."

Brooker and Geoff stack up on the grate as Miranda and Jennifer open it up. All four put on gas masks as I throw a handful down the grate, count to five, and then jump down into the cloud of smoke. I hit the ground rolling and immediately slide behind cover. I expect gun shots or shouted orders from surprised enemies, but there's no sound. Geoff and Brooker are waiting for my signal so I peak my head around my cover and look down the hallway.

There are no enemies, and for a moment I think the passage is clear, but then the green smoke drifts down the tight corridor a little bit, and I see it pick up the red glow of a laser. As the gas drifts further I can see that the whole passage is crisscrossed extensively with them.

"John, what do you have?" Brooker whispers down.

"Lasers." I whisper back. I notice that the gas is smoking around the red beams of light that are cutting through the air. "Looks like some kind of new lethal laser tech. Hold position, you two will be too big to fit through. I'll crawl underneath the beams and turn them off."

"Copy, good luck John." Brooker whispers back. I can see that the SAS team who was sent down here must have been right in the middle of the passageway when the lasers turned on.

Suddenly glad that I am considerably smaller than the rest of my team I ditch all of my gear except for my bullet proof footy pajamas and start mentally mapping out a route through the glowing red death field.

The beams are so numerous and so interwoven that it's more of a maze than an obstacle. After I've plotted my route it occurs to me that this is a very ridiculous and unnecessary means of defending a position. They could've set up claymores instead, or rigged lethal gas bombs to pressure sensors, or even just hooked up the lasers to an alarm system to notify the bad guys of intruders.

These guys clearly have a flair for the dramatic. I thought as I got on my belly and started humming the mission impossible theme as I wove my way through the deadly beams.

It was slow going. I had to wiggle my way through most of it because there wasn't even enough room to prop myself up on my elbows and army crawl along. I had to tilt my head sideways in places. In other places I had to stretch my arms out in front of me to bring my shoulders in closer to my body in order to reduce my sideways profile. Even then I still singed myself in places. Towards the end I actually lit a small piece of my footy pajamas on fire and had to frantically wriggle to the end in order to put it out, but I made it.

35LS: Baby impossible, you know why you're getting this achievement, way to make infancy look awesome!

I emerged victorious on the other side of the deathfield, and managed to locate the power source for the lasers. Thankfully there were no bad guys or further traps waiting for me.

“Clear.” I called back to Geoff and Brooker. They quickly dropped down and made their way to me, taking note of the positions the lasers had occupied in the wall and bringing me my gear.

“Blimey.” Geoff said. “It must’ve taken them a day or two to drill all the holes in the walls and wire everything up. Why would anyone possibly want to set that up when they could just lay some claymores?”

“I don’t know.” I told him. “Something is off about this whole organization. We’ll have to figure that out later. Come on, there’s a large steel door up ahead. Signal Jennifer and Miranda to move forward, and let’s go breach this thing. I heard that is what you guys are trained for isn’t it?”

“Yes sir.” Brooker says, quickly moving with Geoff to the door. The two examine the outside of the door, feeling around the edges, and looking around the frame of the door.

“Too thick for fiber optics to snake under, and there do not appear to be any nearby vents we could snake something through.” Brooker says.

“Right, we will have to do this the old fashioned way.” Geoff says. “You remember the first time we did this and completely caught the instructor off guard?”

“Yeah.” Brooker says. “He thought we were cheating.” With that the two highly elite soldiers pressed their ears to the door and went quiet. I had extensive memories of breaching doors. Not many breaches that I had participated in, but I had provided overwatch for more door knocking parties than most people provided overwatch for football games. Yet in all those breaches I had not seen this technique they were using.

They were completely still and silent, even holding their breath for extended periods on and off again for several minutes. It was strange for sure, but their presence on this team made them possibly the best in the world at what they do, and I trusted them, almost as much as I had trusted Ryan.

The thought of Ryan is unexpected. Things had been so hectic since his passing that I hadn’t taken any time to really think about it or mourn much. This was the slowest and quietest things had been since these terrorists had come knocking on my door in the middle of the night. I wonder if he would have coordinated this attack differently if I wasn’t here. As my spotter he had often seen things that I had missed. Maybe there was an alternate route into this room we were trying to enter.

My two soldiers exchange some silent signal between each other, and one puts a hand on the door.

Well, he’s not here, and I have to believe these men know what they’re doing. I’m only biting my tongue a little as I take out two throwing stars and take a position behind Geoff. No words are exchanged between Geoff and Brooker, but one instant I’m standing behind the door, the next I’m in the room and everything is noise.

The moment where I first get a chance to size up the room everything seems to slow way down, like one of those action video games, and I take a quick stock of things.

There are no less than eight terrorists. They are all behind cover with just their heads exposed, and their guns trained on us. There is no back entrance to this place. They expected this, they set the trap, and we walked into it. This does not look good.

I start flicking my wrist outward to throw my first star. It seems to move slowly, as if moving through water, and I know that I don't have anywhere close to enough time. I have to move my arm at least a foot to make an affective throw, and the bad guys just have to move their fingers an inch.

Then I notice that two of the bad guys are falling backwards, and two more are turning their heads sideways as if slapped. I still am only halfway through my throwing motion when two of the remaining four also start turning their heads as if slapped, by the time I release the star the last two have already started falling backwards from the invisible slap.

Years of training keep me moving forward to check the fallen terrorists. You don't rest until you have verified all targets are down, but inside my head I'm dumb founded. In less than a second, less than the reaction times of eight highly trained terrorists, my two breachers had managed to place four shots each, on target, to remove the threat.

Time is still moving slowly for me, and it's a good thing too, because I realize my breachers are even more skilled than I initially gave them credit for. As I reach the first guy I see he's not dead, he's just knocked over and clutching the side of his head. A micro second glance confirms that the other seven are the same, all clutching their ears.

They hadn't just landed four shots each in less than a second. They had landed four ear shots in less than a second. I quickly strike the guy with my ninja star to stun him, and throw two more at nearby enemy combatants. Geoff and brooker have already finished knocking out two more, and we rapidly converge on the remaining three to subdue them.

No one better 50LS: This one isn't actually for you, but we wanted you to know we do recognize the achievements of others.

"Clear." Brooker says. He says it calmly, like he's confirming that it's not raining, not like he's just performed a feat of superhuman speed and reflexes.

"You guys should have your own TV show." I say. "I've seen a lot of up close engagements before. I've seen SAS, GIGN, LA SWAT, Secret Service, Spetsnaz, Mossad, KSK, and teams I'm not allowed to officially acknowledge the existence of, and none of them have ever done something like this." I take a brief moment away from my rant to perform my leadership details. "Baby Team Six, room is secure, all personnel advance to my location." Having done my duty I return to raving about my troopers. They're leaning on the walls and clearly enjoying the attention I'm giving them.

"That's why you guys were listening at the door. You were doing some ninja bat echolocation craziness to figure out where they were in the room. Are you two human? I'm pretty sure normal human beings can't do that." I briefly consider that they might also be people who have started life over and

come back around for a second go, but they surely would have told me by now, and I'm sure it would've said that in their files.

"My doctor growing up did say I had some of the most sensitive hearing of anyone he'd ever met." Geoff offers. "But no, we are normal humans, just really, really good normal humans."

"Hey, you know we're the best in the world right?" Brooker says. "If you want that title you have to earn it." I look at the eight men on the floor. These unconscious men were soldiers who could go toe to toe with tier one warriors from around the world in the attack on the base. These were men who had known what they were up against, and had dug in to prepare themselves for the attack. If I had known exactly what was beyond this door I would've ordered my men to pull back and find another way. They had walked into the middle of a meat grinder, and come out the other end whistling Dixie.

"Bomb located." Alexi says into his mic as he walks into the room.

I turn around and look where he's looking. I hadn't even noticed the bomb. It was here, enough explosives to blast clear to the surface and take out whatever super important building was above us.

"Everybody clear out." I order. "Let Alexi and Samuel work in silence, no need to risk more lives than necessary." Samuel gapes at the scene as he enters the room behind Alexi, but the two dutifully walk up to the pile of wires and ominous looking powders wrapped in plastic.

"I would have a word with you before you left." A Canadian voice comes over a speaker somewhere in the room. I spin on my heel and search for the source. Next to the bomb is a speaker and headset. There's a note on it. Alexi picks up the note and reads it.

"Says it's for you boss."

"Everybody except Alexi and Samuel back to the surface. If this is a trick I don't want anyone suffering for it who doesn't have to." I walk over to the headset and put it on. Alexi and Samuel break out a box of pliers, clamps, volt meters, and other bomb defusing gear. I talk with the mystery figure while they work.

"To whom am I speaking?" I ask.

"Someone who knows more about you than possibly you know about yourself."

"I'll call you Ted since I don't know your real name. How's it going Ted?"

"And I'll call you Captain Francis Timothy Walker, or Captain For The Win as they used to call you." I froze. He couldn't know that. There was no way he could know that. "Yes that's right. I know all about that little thing you've been keeping secret. Don't worry, it's not because there's a leak in your group. They have been good little soldiers who haven't told me a thing, but that doesn't really comfort you does it? You thought your secret was safe. You thought no one else knew about the text box and the journey back. Well you were wrong friend. I know everything, and I've set up this whole party to draw you out, and it's worked marvelously." I jerk my head around to the bomb.

"Is there a remote detonator?" I ask. Alexi shakes his head.

"Is on timer, there is plenty of time do not worry. Even if there was remote detonation capability there was no way they would get signal down here without repeaters, and we saw nothing on way in. Is also button to make go boom." He points to a stereotypically red button on the floor. "But if you promise not to press it I will restrain myself from experimenting with it."

"This is not the party to which I was referring." The voice says. "Surely you've looked at the pile of explosives. Doesn't it seem a bit small to you? That's because the rest of it is in four more locations scattered around London. But that's not the best part. The best part is that those are just to stretch your forces thin. The real action is happening across the river from big ben. You know where. It's the safe house where the prime minister is hiding. The same prime minister who I am pointing a gun at right now. You have twelve minutes to get here and save him." The line went dead.

"Alexi how's that bomb coming?" I demand as soon as the mic shuts off.

"Is almost done boss, just got to find a few more wires."

"Do you need Samuel?" I ask.

"Little British man is helpful, but I can finish by myself." He says.

"Great, Samuel, start relaying orders to the SAS and the Baby Team Six operatives who've started to land. Tell them what they're up against and stay with Alexi. As soon as he defuses the bomb relay how he defused it to everyone else. Also" I toss him the head set. "Once you've done that see if you can get me any useful information on this headset. Where it's broadcasting from, how he managed to relay it down here. Anything that I could use, then report back to me as soon as you've got something." I start dashing for the exit as Alexi and Samuel shout confirmations.

"Miranda, Jennifer, I want a sniper perch overlooking the prime minister's current location. Brooker, Geoff you're with me." I burst out of the exit hatch to a waiting team and several very concerned members of the British Special Forces.

"What's going on mate?" One of the SAS officers asks me. "Didn't you defuse the bomb?"

"We defused this bomb. There are four more. Samuel will have orders for you momentarily. I've got to take the rest of my team and move quickly. Your prime minister got himself captured." The SAS operator touches a button on his mic.

"Papa team, papa team, this is bravo team come in papa team, requesting update on your situation over." The operator waits for several seconds. "Papa team, papa team, repeat, this is bravo team requesting update on your situation. Please come in over." Several more seconds of silence.

"Nothing, and those are our best guys. If they could've responded they would have by now." The SAS members were shuffling their feet uneasily. Americans had more president assassinated, and we had lost a president far more recently. The idea of the president being attacked was part of our national culture. There were at least three movies I could think of based around that premise. Britain did not have that same culture and the idea of someone taking out their head of state did not sit well with them. Especially if they were going to have to trust a bunch of people from other countries to save him.

"We have no more time to waste. Let's move boys and girls." Miranda, Jennifer, Brooker, Geoff, and me start sprinting for the jeeps. Things had just taken a turn for the worse and the chaotic. I had no

idea who this mystery man was, or how he knew about me. But there were only eleven minutes left until the prime minister was going to get a very solid vote of no confidence.

The joke was on the mystery man though. He may know me, but he did not know my team, and he was in for a nasty shock when he found out just what my boys and girls could do.

Chapter five

We had eleven minutes to travel several miles of congested London traffic. The underground had been shut down finally due to 'maintenance issues', something about large groups of combat personnel being needed in the service tunnels. So taking the tube was no longer an option. We couldn't run to the objective quick enough. That left PTSD inducing driving tactics.

Geoff, Brooker, Jennifer, Miranda and I all piled into one jeep and tore through the streets of downtown London. Sidewalks were mounted. Red lights were run. We even drove through oncoming traffic once or twice. We also had to wave off several police cars with assault rifles before the British emergency services started leaving us alone.

Miranda did the driving. She had taken several evasive driving courses that came in handy. I still wished on several occasions that I had diapers, but she got us there in one piece. Snipers aren't used to moving quickly. I would sometimes take days to crawl into a proper sniper perch. I considered myself a brave toddler, but fast speeds were not my thing. I distract myself by going over the floor plans of the building where the prime minister was being kept and making copies of the room where they were holding the prime minister.

Miranda drops us off in an alleyway that leads to a fire escape.

"Intel says they're on the third floor of this apartment complex." I tell them. "You and Jennifer proceed with all speed across the river to an appropriate sniper position and cover the windows. Call us when you're in position."

"Yes sir." Miranda says, and the two of them speed off.

"We've got four minutes gentlemen." I tell Geoff and Brooker. "Do what you do best, advance to the room where they're holding him. It's apartment number 307." The prime minister's security detail had put the prime minister here because they figured no one would think to the look for the most well protected man in great Britain to set up shop in an ordinary apartment complex. Clearly, they had thought wrong.

Geoff and Brooker moved fast, so fast that I struggled behind them. They ascend the ladder like natural born free climbers, and when I manage to get to the top they're already stacked up on the door.

"Breach team in position." Geoff whispers into his mic, putting his ear to the door alongside Brooker.

"Ten seconds." I hear Jennifer's voice over my headset. I dash into position behind Geoff, readying my ninja stars.

“Sniper team in position, but they have the curtains drawn. I can’t see anything.” Jennifer calls in. Geoff and Brooker don’t say anything for a few heart beats, but then both pull away from the door simultaneously.

“That’s okay.” Brooker pulls out the map I had drawn of the room. “We want you to take out two targets with leg shots at the following coordinates.” He then relays the position of several kneecaps using the maps that I had drawn for the two teams. “We are going to want you to take the first shot a half second before we breach, and the second a half second after. We’ll handle the rest.”

“Copy.” Jennifer says. “Spotter is crunching the trajectory numbers for a bullet that’s just broken a pane of glass. One moment.” A few more precious heartbeats of time go by. We are almost down to three minutes. It’s a lot of time though right? I mean it’s done as soon as we breach isn’t it?

“Shot trajectories ready, firing on your mark.”

“Sir.” Brooker whispers to me. “We’ll be taking down the remaining seven hostiles. We’ll be counting on you to stun the two downed by Jennifer and then proceed to knockout as many as you can. Copy?”

“Copy?” I say, holding six ninja stars in my fingers.

“Breaching in 3...2...1” I hear the sound of breaking glass as Brooker bashes in the door. More shots ring out, but I’m not paying attention to them. I remember the coordinates of the kneecaps that were given to Miranda and Jennifer, and am already releasing with knock out ninja stars before I even see them.

I hit the two men as they’re falling to the floor, and the turn throwing out more knockout stars like a B movie Ninja. It takes a grand total of four seconds to reduce a full squad of nine terrorists to unconscious rag dolls.

“Where’s the Prime Minister?” I ask. I had focused on the bad guys so hard it had given me tunnel vision. Now that the bad guys were removed, and Geoff and Brooker were clearing the rest of the apartment, I had time to take things in. I saw nine terrorists, and the remnants of the Prime Minister’s security detail, but no Prime Minister

“Where’s the Prime Minister?” I ask again.

Geoff and Brooker emerge from deeper in the apartment.

“He’s not here sir.” Brooker declares

“He’s with me Francis.” A sinister but familiar voice comes through one of the walkie talkies that the bad guys were carrying. He must’ve rigged up a video feed to the apartment.

“You have two minutes and fifty-eight seconds to reach us at the top of big ben. Just you Francis, leave all of your highly qualified team mates here. I’ve got a dead man’s switch that’s set to ignite enough C4 to take out that entire apartment complex. I have a video feed rigger to your location. If I see any of your buddies move, including your sniper element, I’m going to blow Geoff and Brooker sky high. If you manage to kill me, my finger will release from the trigger and blow Geoff and Brooker

sky high. I'll say again. We are at the top of big ben, and you have two minutes and fifty-eight seconds to reach us." There's no time to think, only react.

"Brooker, shoot out that glass." I order, pointing to the window that took two sniper rounds from Jennifer without breaking. Brooker is a good soldier, he doesn't ask why. He just turns and puts a three round burst through the safety glass, and then kicks it out, leaving an empty window for me to dive through.

And dive through I do. I get a running start and leap through the building, folding my hands like an Olympic diver and plunging through the window into open air.

10LS: Dolphin dive, now don't break your wrists when you land it.

The sidewalk below is mercifully only a few feet wide, and I just manage to clear it into the icy water.

When I hit it's like smacking my hands into concrete. I pull into a shallow dive that just barely clears the river bed, but my hands are stinging. Thankfully nothing feels broken, and I start furiously stroking across the river to get to the other side.

"John, what's going on John?" I hear Jennifer ask in my ear. "We saw the glass shatter and then you dove into the river. What's going on?"

"It's the mastermind behind all of this. He's got the Prime Minister at the top of big ben. I've got to make it there in the next two and half minutes. It's got to be just me if either you or the breach team makes a move he's going to blow up the apartment." There's a pause before Jennifer responds.

"He could be lying John. Miranda and I could get into an over watch position in maybe forty five seconds and very his claim." I had considered this, but ruled it out. It's hard to talk and still make effective strokes.

"There's no time. This guy is smart. He managed to find me as a baby, find our top secret base, and anticipate our steps to lead up to this point. I'll believe him when he says that he planted a trap on the very location he told us to go to. He also wants me. He's shown that in his repeated efforts to come after me. So either he gets me and this is over. Or I get him and it's over. Worst case scenario I don't make it and you and Miranda finish the job." Starting to feel a little out of breath I pull myself out of the river and start dashing for the clock tower.

"Understood." Miranda says. "Watch your back in there Baby Leader, we're counting on you."

"Show'em what a sniper can do up close." Jennifer encourages.

"Ryan only chooses the best." Brooker says in my ear. That strikes a chord. He's not patting himself on the back by saying that Ryan chose him. He's talking about me.

Snipers work in pairs, and they're not forced to work with team mates they don't want to. Not at my level anyway. At the very top, you got to pick your teammates. Spotters chose their snipers and snipers chose their spotters. Ryan chose me to work with, and Ryan only chose the best.

This guy was going down for what he did to Ryan. I entered the clock tower and raced up the stairs to the observation deck. I pause momentarily at the door to where the terrorist is waiting. I pause

to prepare a little surprise. This guy is smart, maybe smarter than anyone I had worked with. I didn't know if I could outsmart him, but I could fight intelligence with crazy. I could do something unexpected. I prepare myself, and then I open the door, slowly.

What I see is something I should've expected, but didn't. There's another toddler, maybe three years old, holding a pistol to the prime minister's head in one hand. In the other hand he's holding down the switch on what is very obviously a detonator. I'm sure if his finger slipped off that switch I would be down two squadmates. I looked to the Prime Minister to help, but he was out cold on the ground.

"Hello Francis, you have twenty seconds to spare." The mystery child says in an adult voice. I turn around and scan my surroundings.

Is there an adult projecting his voice somewhere around here? There's no way that this little kid did all this.

"It's amusing to me that you find my existence so hard to accept. Did you really think you were the only one?"

"Why do you sound so adult?" I ask, starting to take small steps forward and letting my hands drift to my sides where some of my weapons were kept.

"That's far enough Francis." He says, firing a shot through the door behind me. "Go ahead and drop all those fancy little throwable things you brought with you. Then take off your headset and step on it. Go on." Slowly and deliberately I reach into my pockets and drop my stars and my gas cereal down at my side. Then, I take off my headset and break it. Without that I can't call for help. Now I'm even more alone up here than I already was.

"Good, now walk on over there." He gestures to the side of the clock tower, away from where I just dropped all of my gear. "Excellent, and now to answer your question. I sound like an adult because I'm not just like you. I was given more power than you. Firstly, certain points of my development were accelerated, vocal chords." He puts a bullet so close by my ear that I feel it pass by. "Fine motor skill control, knowledge of your existence, and other things. You see. I wasn't sent back just for the sake of playing the game of life on a harder difficulty, because I didn't win my game of life. I was sent back to finish it, to beat the boss that was sent to test my skill. That boss was you Francis." Boss? Me? Had I killed this man?

"I didn't kill anyone three years ago." I say. "I had retired by then."

"It was your team that did it Francis, and it's actually closer to four years."

"Who are you?" I ask.

"Oh come now Francis. Haven't you guessed? Who was the man Navy SEAL Team Six was sent to kill almost four years ago now? Who was the villain of the decade, maybe of the century. Who is the one person diabolical enough for you to be called back to fight?" Then it clicks. It all makes sense.

"Osama Bin Laden." I say. He grins like a wolf about to pounce on its prey.

"That's right Francis. I wanted to lord it over you. I took down your favorite spotter. I made you crawl on your hands and knees through lasers just because I could. I wanted you to feel how superior I

was to you, and to feel the loss of all the things you took from me. Have you started writing that letter to Ryan's family yet? Have you already written two more for the squadmates you're going to lose as soon as we're done here?" He takes out a role of duct tape and fastens down the switch on the detonator, dropping it to the floor and throwing the gun behind him.

"Come on now Francis, now that I've beaten you I want to feel it. Let's end this."

"My snipers are going to drop you as soon as that bomb goes off." I say.

"When I said end it. I meant all of it Francis. After you're gone, I don't care what happens to me. I don't have friends or family to go back to. I'll rot in a cell, or whatever your friends deem fit. I don't care. I came back for you, and now I shall have my revenge."

Osama takes several running steps forward and spins for a kick. I'm so surprised by his poor decision I almost don't step out of the way.

Is he crazy? I had a lifetime of training. I don't know what he's been doing for the last couple of years but it's not going to make up for the decades of practice I've had.

For about the next five punches I maintain my illusion of superiority, but he's pushing me around the bell tower.

"Remember those 'other things' I mentioned I got accelerated when I was reborn? One of them was combat skill." He then lands his first punch, right below my rib cage. I'm forced to exhale and it's only reflex that keeps me from being hit again. I deflect his second punch and take a step back to get some air.

"Your training won't save you Francis." He says, advancing toward me and throwing punches and kicks relentlessly. I'm backpeddling constantly now, just trying to keep from being pummeled. I can't stop him. He's too strong, too quick. Maybe if he didn't have a year and a half of growth on me. Maybe if I had more time to train in this life I'd be able to hold him off, but it's too much. He's got me beat.

I take the punches like a true soldier. I don't go down easily. I make him earn every shot that he lands. I even get a spark of hope when I land a shot or two of my own, but I can't match him. I can't even break away from the fight to run and grab any of the weapons on the ground. It's just a matter of time before he finishes it.

It's not even a long time. Osama lands one fatal kick to my knee. I drop to the ground, and he secures a chokehold before I can think twice.

"It's over now Francis." He says. "There's no way you can fight your way out of this. Any last words? I won't tell anyone but if you want to land a parting verbal blow I won't blame you. You certainly can't land any physical blows."

"That was always your problem." I wheeze out as I start to see rainbow sparkles in my vision. "You underestimated what we were capable of." I then bite down on the cereal pellet I hid in my mouth before I had entered the room and turn my head just enough to blow a lungful of knockout gas in his face.

“What?!” He shouts. “You’ve made me and you a martyr. We’ll just do this again next life....” He slumps to the ground unconscious.

The big baby can’t hold his gas.

“No, you don’t get to take any more friends from me.” I roll onto my back as my vision starts to go dark. “We got him Ryan. This time we really got him.” I then succumb to the gas myself, but not before I see a few words flash before my eyes.

100LS: Round two, complete your major life goal on hardmode.

100LS: Merciful master, complete your major life goal without killing anyone.

20LS: Fart breath, you know why you’re getting this.

200LS: Rest In Peace, avenge your best friend.

Then I slumped into unconsciousness too.

You dream when you get put under by knockout pellets. I didn’t know that. I guess no one who was rendered unconscious in such a way thought it was important, but you do.

I dream of Ryan. I remembered all the missions we had together, and all of the trouble we got into back on the base. I remember introducing him to his wife, and being there when his kids were born.

I also remember what his life was like when I met him the second time. How he was a friendly and familiar face in a chaotic and scary world. How he guided me onto my new path, and how I sent him off when he finished his. Truly, friendships can span lifetimes.

Then I dream of my parents, and how they had raised me the first time around. Learning to drive manual with my dad, learning to dance with my mom, learning to cook from well, neither of them. They were terrible cooks, but they tried, and I’d take a single cookie burnt with them over a hundred prepared by a three star chef.

I’ve hardly given my parents any thought since the mission began and now that it’s over, now that Ryan has been avenged and his soul has been put to rest, I think of those others from the life before. I don’t know if my parents from this life are my parents from the previous life. If they were also reborn when they died so they could raise me a second time, or if they are some new parents who were unfortunate enough to be saddled with me. It doesn’t matter much. If they are my parents reborn they do not remember, and if they are new parents they still gave me life and watched over me until I was big enough to fend for myself.

They probably thought the age where I’d handle myself was eighteen and not two, but they still watched over me, and I love them for it, and I want to chance to actually spend a childhood with them. As soon as I write that letter to Ryan’s family I’m going home.

"He's awake!" Somebody shouts. I sit up in a hospital bed to see my new best friends in the world.

"Not even a week in the position and you're already falling asleep on the job John? That's not very professional." Geoff says.

"Did we secure the bombs?" I ask.

"Not that we are allowed to be discussing secret operations in civilian hospital, but yes, with help of SAS and other Baby Team Six squads we made sure that nobody died that day." Alexi says in his typical Russian drawl. "It was how you Americans say, cake walk."

"Do people still say that?" Geoff asks. "I don't even know what a cake walk is." We quickly discovered nobody knew what a cake walk was, and returned the conversation to a more relevant topic.

"Hey, guys, I wanted to say before things went any further that I was really proud of you guys out there. I know I said I work alone, but you guys really pulled through for me and each other out there. I can honestly say that I'd trust you guys to have my back any day. Just like I trusted Ryan." Not even Geoff cracks a joke at that remark.

"We know sir." Brooker says, putting a hand on my shoulder. "You don't have to say it."

"Well, I think I do. I'm proud of you guys. I'm proud to call myself your captain."

"And we wouldn't have any other commanding officer sir." Brooker says. "Nobody but the best to lead the best."

"Alright soldier boys." A nurse calls as she enters the room. "It was nice of the make a wish foundation to send a squad of soldiers but he needs some rest. You can continue debriefing the new lieutenant later." The nurse winks at them as they leave. Geoff is snickering to himself. This nurse thinks that they are here to fulfill some little kid fantasy of being a soldier. That they were acting. Who would believe a little kid actually commanded a squad of the world's most dangerous soldiers right?

"Thank you soldiers. I'll finish the debriefing later."

"Yes sir." They salute. "Baby Team Six will be standing by for further orders." I return the salute and they leave.

"Baby Team Six." The nurse says as she starts writing down some things from the monitors nearby. "What a cute name."

"It's note cute!" I shout indignantly. "It's dangerous! Bad guys everywhere will tremble at the name of Baby Team Six."

"Of course they will dear." The nurse says, not even glancing over at me. Some people get no respect.

Not wanting to put it off any further I request a piece of paper and a pencil from the nurse. She gladly provides them, and I begin writing the hard letter to Ryan's family. I don't have to think about it much. I wrote his first letter to be sent home, and every year I would update it. This one is no different. I

had his last one memorized before I passed, so it's not difficult to update it, but the watermarks on the letter are not faked. Even without thinking about it much it's a hard letter to write.

I have to think about his kids and grandkids, his wife, and I have to detail exactly how amazing of a person Ryan was. I relive so many good memories with him and have to relive the pain of his loss again. I'm grateful that my last act of friendship to him is completed, and I'm thankful that he never had to actually send a letter home to my family.

It's done now. I can relax. Time to go home. Just then, a new text box appears in front of me.

Lower difficulty setting? Enemies and skills will be reduced to normal levels, and memories not in line with those difficulty settings will be erased until such a time where the difficulty level is increased.

I'm surprised to say the least. I didn't know that I would be given a choice. I figured that my decision to live life on hard mode was permanent. That my life would always be on a higher level, but now that I'm given the option I think of the letter I've just written. Do I want to have to write more for my squad mates? Didn't I write enough in the previous life? And my parents, now they could have their son back, really back. Not just the ninja baby superhero that he had become. They could have the childhood they had always wanted.

As I start to say yes I think of my teammates. They would be part of that difficulty change too wouldn't they? Would they get a new commanding officer? I didn't know. I tap the yet button, but with just a hint of regret. They'd be fine. They had to right?

"Wake up John your friends are here." My mom calls to me. I roll over in my bed and look at the dinosaur covered room to my door.

"But I'm still sleepy." I call back.

"Come on John they came here to see you and it would be rude to sleep through their stay. Now come on downstairs and say hi." There was no fighting a determined mother. Ever since her belly had gotten bigger you just couldn't win an argument with her. I asked daddy about mommy's belly. He just grinned and told me in a few months everything would be back to normal. He had then said 'well, not quite normal', but wouldn't tell me what that meant.

"Okay, just let me change out of my dinosaur footy pajamas." Mommy says it's not proper to see friends in pajamas. You had to wear big boy clothes. Big boy clothes with dinosaurs on them, but still big boy clothes.

I'm still rubbing the sleep out of my eyes when I walk down the stairs where my mom is waiting for me.

"They're in the living room waiting for you now. Go on, go say hi."

"Should we test if little one still has combat reflexes? Maybe just throw a kick and see what happens." I hear a Russian voice as I walk in.

"You can't kick a baby." A female voice hisses.

“Why not? Brooker tried from what I hear.”

“Hey sweetie!” A lady on the couch stands up and walks over to me. There are six adults sitting in the room. It’s weird to think of them as friends. Mom says that adults who aren’t your friends have to be called sir, but these adults actually call me sir sometimes. So I guess they must be friends. The lady picks me up and swings me around.

“How you doing sport?” One of the men on the couch asks. I think his name is Geoff. “Been eating all your cereal?” The man next to him, Brooker, elbows him. “What, it’s not like he remembers.”

“What do I remember?” I ask as the lady puts me down.

“Oh nothing sweetie.” The lady says again. I think her name is Jennifer.

“And that’s the point.” The man named Geoff says under his breath.

“Geoff!” The lady hisses at him. Geoff just shrugs and pulls something out of his pocket.

“Hey sport, got you something. You like ninja stars?” He leans down so he’s almost on eye level with me.

“Sure I do. They’re great for fighting dinosaurs!” Geoff smiles as he produces three plastic ninja stars from his pocket.

“Oh boy! Thank you Geoff thank you!” I rush in and give him a big hug. He ruffles my hair as my mom brings me in a bottle. When I take it from her and start taking a few sips the big Russian guy almost falls off the back of the couch. He seems fidgety. Mommy says that some adults are like that. Most of my friends are. They do weird things.

The nice lady who picked me up excuses herself to the other room with Brooker.

“So the tests have all come back negative. He really doesn’t remember anything?” Jennifer asks.

“They did everything three times. With something like this they had to be sure. He doesn’t remember a thing. The missions, Ryan, us, the terrorists, none of it, which is good I guess. I mean. It wasn’t right for him to be cheated out of his childhood like that.” Jennifer rubs her arms.

“It still doesn’t sit right with me. I mean we talked to him after he woke up and he seemed fine. Did they have any idea what caused this?” Brooker shakes his head.

“No idea. One minute he was our commanding officer. The next he was some little kid crying for mommy and daddy.” Brooker shrugs. “It was a twist of fate that made him what he was anyway. Maybe fate just untwisted.”

“And what about all the people who saw him working with Special Forces? What about all the bad guys that know this now defenseless little boy was behind their imprisonment? I mean, his archenemy Bin Laden still remembers everything. What happens when they decide to come after him? He won’t be able to defend himself.”

“That’s what we are here for.” Brooker says. “I think that if the need arises he will be our leader again, but if he doesn’t, we will be around to protect him. Come on, let’s go have some fun with our old Captain.”

At that moment the phone rings and Mrs. John’s mom picks it up. After a short interchange she starts leaping with joy and promptly hangs up.

“Everybody, I’ve got some great news.” She says, entering the living room.

“I just got off the phone with the doctor and the doctor says it’s a boy. I already had a conversation with John’s father and we have agreed we are going to call the baby Ryan.”

Co-op mode enabled.