Anti-Supernatural Assault Team

Book 2

The End of The World

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1 AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HEAP

**1.**

The History of the Seal

The Seal of Solomon was made by archangels after they had seen what demons do to humankind. It was made from a blend of iron and brass, placed on a ring and bore the symbol, later known as the star of David. Archangel Michael himself gave Solomon the ring and told him what the ring is capable of. With the ring, the owner can command or lock demons. King Solomon used the ring wisely. He was able to bring under his command seventy-two dangerous demons which he locked in the Seal. During the struggle with a powerful demon, Cizin, he lost the Seal. Cizin quickly became the king of Hell and no one could stop him anymore. Knowing that the Seal would be the only thing that can finish his reign, Cizin decided to destroy it, which he soon found to be impossible. His only option was to hide the Seal and to ensure no one will ever find it. He divided the Seal into six parts. Five parts were given to his children; Ayperos, Balan, Groth, Paymon and Shax. The last piece; the ring he kept to himself.

Ayperos entered Earth as the Roman Empire- Valens. He was tragically killed in the Battle of Adrianople in the fourth century and the Seal was lost in the ground. It was lying there untouched for over 800 years until it was found by one of the English knights during the crusades. It was taken to England where it was kept in the Tower of London till 1666 when the Great Fire of London occurred and many items were taken out to a safe place. It was then stolen by a thief and sold to James Maryth, an affluent businessman living in the south part of London. The Seal was kept safe in a necklace and passed from generation to generation. In 1750 a vampire attacked and turned the last descendant of Maryth’s Reiz. From that moment he kept the Seal on him.

Balan, many a time left Hell and did awful things to the humanity. His most famous character was Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century. He was tricked and killed during a game of chess by Bogdan Belsky on March 28, 1584. He took the Seal, knowing what it really was and had always had it on him, until it was stolen from him while he was in Kazan. The thief was a young woman called Laima who had learnt witchcraft. In the seventeenth century, she left for America and settled there forever. In 1705, Cizin visited her himself to take the Seal but she refused to do it and made a deal to keep it forever. She circled herself by an enormous labyrinth and made everyone stay out of her place. When people learnt where the Seal was, they tried to take it from her but none of them made it through the labyrinth.

Groth never used a host body. He came to Earth in the eleventh century as a pure demon and stayed in Norway all his life. During Napoleonic Wars, he left the country and moved North to the island of Svalbard. In 1910, Sweden settled a mine town there, Pyramiden, which was sold to Russian. Groth didn’t want to leave the place so he stayed there and became a local legend. He was later killed by a Draugr called Heith and became the holder of the third part of the Seal.

Paymon entered Earth only twice; once as Oliver Combwell, who wanted to take Catholicism out of England. After his death, he returned to Earth for the last time and decided to keep the Seal away from the others. He was sent to Attica Correctional Facility in 1930s and stayed there changing hosts.

Shax spent her whole life in Hell. She mastered the art of sorcery and became the goddess of creatures known as orts. In 1980, she left Hell to become a queen of Demons that were still wandering on Earth. When she learned that humans are after the Seal, she made deal with vampires and some humans, and locked herself up in a tower in Bangkok, turning the building into an impregnable fortress.

 Cizin, however, lost the ring during the great battle in Hell. The ring was kept by one of the demons who entered Earth in 1756. He was killed by the government’s special organization to deal with paranormal entities and the ring was taken from him only to be buried below the ground in Area 51 in 1941.

**December 19, 2012**

*2 days remaining*

**2.**

It was going to be a beautiful morning. Autumn had its last days but the air in San Francisco wasn’t so cold. The sun was slowly rising higher and higher above the city skyline. The shadow of the tallest tower of Maldito Castle was gliding along the water towards the western side of the structure, slowly uncovering the courtyard. The buzz of a helicopter’s propeller came from the mainland. It was getting louder and louder until a modern, black machine emerged above the hills. The helicopter was heading towards the Maldito island. When it was right above the castle it stopped and began the landing procedure.

**3.**

 It was not common for the briefing room to be operating at dawn but this day was different. Tokutei, Lian, and Surya were sitting in the front row. O.D. and Eye were sitting one row behind them. They had arrived from Bangkok only an hour earlier. And tired as they were, they were all chatting nervously about something. Arthur walked inside. As soon as he entered the room, the voices stopped and only his steps filled the room. He looked stressed, tired and full of thoughts. His eyes were swollen from the sleepless night. He walked towards the desk, turned on the computer and cleared his throat.

 “We have very little time, so I’ll be quick.”

Everyone listened with interest. Whatever Arthur prepared for the team, wasn’t a part of his big plan. It was supposed to be over by then but it wasn’t. The end of the world was supposed to be stopped. The Seal was supposed to be found and Dan was supposed to be with everyone else safe and sound. Nothing went according to plan and it was obvious. Every single mission they had been on so far proved it. There had always been some complications. Something unexpected always happened that made the team act spontaneously. But everything always started with Arthur’s plan. And this time, he had little time to prepare the last solution.

 “What happened yesterday was totally unexpected. You may think that what will happen next is obvious; the world will end, and there is nothing we can do. Wrong. I have always been prepared for the alternative. Even though we have lost one of us, we are still in possession of the Seal. And I will not let the Seal be taken again. In a minute you will know everything. I cannot say that what we have to do is easy or even possible, but this is our last chance before Cizin attacks and destroys everyone and everything.”

Having finished the sentence, he peeked at his watch and nodded his head.

 “He seems to be waiting for something,” Lian whispered slowly sipping her hot cup of coffee.

Arthur raised his tired eyes and directed them at the Asian woman.

 “They’ll be here any minute now.”

 “Who?” Jason asked turning around and glancing at the door.

 “Just wait and see.”

Tokutei heard steps coming from the corridor.

 “Someone’s approaching.”

Everyone turned towards the door and waited with astonishment and curiosity. The steps were getting louder and louder.

 “I can hear six people,” Lian said quietly, looking forward to seeing the owners of the steps.

And there they appeared. Six people emerged from the corridor and entered the room. The first man looked slightly younger than Arthur. He was wearing dark combat trousers and a similar dark uniform. His face looked as tired as Arthur’s. There was lots of white hair on his head and on his wide moustache as well. The second person was a woman with a light brown complexion, long, wavy, black hair and a long coat reaching the ground. She looked no older than twenty five. Another woman followed her with similar complexion and similar face, but she looked much younger though. Two men were walking behind them. One of them was a huge, very well-built, strong person. He was wearing a black uniform with a light, leather jacket on it. His head was shaved bald and he had trimmed beard and moustache. The next man was shorter, he had a bit longer, gelled hair combed to the back. He was wearing a black uniform and he looked to be in his late forties. There was one more person at the back. He didn’t look like the others. He was wearing a vast, round hat that looked like a combination of a cowboy’s hat with an Australian adventurer’s. He also had a long, dark coat. He was hiding his face in the shadow of the hat. And at the first sight he was beaming with mystery and darkness.

 “Please come forward,” the old man encouraged.

As soon as the six people reached the first row right in front of Arthur, they stopped one next to another. They didn’t say anything. They were just staring at rest casting furtive glances at everyone, filled with curiosity and amazement.

 “This is general Bishop, the commander in chief of the second ASAT unit.”

And now everything became more vivid. Those were the second unit of ASAT. Arthur had mentioned them back in October before their very first mission. He said then, *We’re not working alone.* That is what he meant. The second team. They look different so they must be special too.

 “It’s a pleasure to meet you all,” the general uttered warmly and friendlily. “Well not all of you. I have already met Arthur and Tokutei in person but I assure I know everything of the rest of the group.”

Having heard that, the Asian man raised his head and opened his eyes wide. Now he remembered. Of course they had met before. It was in late September. It was on the very same night he met Arthur, the very same night he lost his friends. He remembered the general being the first he was introduced to, right before he met Arthur. And then it hit him. Bishop was there to recruit Sato. That’s right. Sato was supposed to be in the second ASAT unit.

 “I’ll now introduce my team,” the general’s voice broke his thoughts. “This is Michael,” he pointed at the huge man right next to him. “And next to him there are Amanda, Patricia, Jack and Seith.”

Arthur stepped forward and pointed at his team.

 “And this is Lian Jason, Eye, Tokutei and Surya.”

They all slowly nodded their heads as a sign of greeting. No words, no handshakes, nothing more. Then out of the sudden, Lian boomed,

 “Why had we never been told about you!”

 “Yeah, and where were you on all our missions,” O.D. couldn’t stand it either

The taller woman made a grimace and stepped forward.

 “We haven’t been on any of your missions, because we had a different tasks to do.”

The general cleared his throat and joined the conversation.

 “Arthur’s team was far more qualified to take part in the Seal retrieving missions than ours. We would have probably failed. You see when ASAT was organized a few years ago, there were supposed to be three units. Each team was supposed to retrieve parts of the Seal but at that point we knew the location of two parts only; the witch’s and the one you took yesterday. However, when we learnt what was in that building, we realized that we would have no chance without a special team. We decided to form two units then. One for searching for the Seal parts, one for retrieving them.”

 “What about the third one?” Surya asked?

 “The Dragons,” Bishop continued.

On hearing that, Tokutei focused his full attention on what the general was about to say next.

 “They were originally planned to be the third team. A special team to deal with special tasks, not only the Seal problems but others as well.”

 “What went wrong?” Tokutei inquired curiously.

 “Your master disagreed. He only let two members go, but only one survived the skeletons attack.”

Tokutei got caught up with the memories from the horrible attack. He had lost there everyone who he could ever call friends, brothers or family.

 “Anyway,” the general continued. “We have two teams now, and we are facing the highest of the crises. The president introduced defcon 3 at the moment, therefore we must act as one.”

 “Actually, as two,” Arthur interrupted, stepping forward. “I will continue from this point. Please, everyone, take a sit,” he beckoned at the second unit and pointed at the chairs.

Everyone knew this was it. They would finally get to know what to do next. Only few days left, so Arthur must have prepared a plan.

 “I’m going to say it in as simple words as I can. Yesterday we managed to complete our goal. We retrieve the final piece of the Seal. Yet the Seal is useless without the ring itself. The ring had been kept in Area 51 for over seventy years. Shax’s prince, however outsmarted us and stole the ring… not mentioning that we lost Dan.”

On hearing this, Surya got caught up in her memories with Dan. She saw the moment they first met in an empty vampire nest, then the memory switched into their first kiss, then her run away from it, her disappearance. She also saw her first meeting with Arthur when he tried to convince her to join ASAT. He said then *If you join me, you’ll find not only home, but also acceptance among other members. And also*...then he leaned towards her and whispered the very words she wanted to hear. The words that convinced her immediately. He whispered, *Dan will be there*. The next was their first meeting in Maldito, when he tried to attack her taking her for a vampire.

 “How can we save him?” Lian asked snapping Surya out of her daydreaming.

The old man scratched his head.

 “You said yesterday that we had to go to Hell,” Jason added.

 “Yes, that is true, and that is the only way, I’m afraid.”

The well-built man from the second unit, Michael, cleared his throat and murmured,

“How can we get into Hell when it’s locked for mortals?”

Arthur turned towards him and continued,

 “Actually Michael, getting into Hell is not as difficult as you may think. Getting out of it is what you should be concerned with. And it’s locked for humans, not mortals. Remember that demons are mortals, too.”

Lian wide opened her eyes remembering something important.

 “We can get out of there.”

Everyone else looked at her. Lian seemed so eager and so sure about what she was about to say.

 “The key, the key is the answer.”

 “What key?” Tokutei asked.

 “They key Arthur hired me to retrieve in late September. It was the night I was recruited here. I got the key this key can...”

 “Open Hell from inside,” the old man finished.

 “And where is that key?” the younger sister from unit two asked.

 “It’s safe here,” came the answer from Arthur. “And we can use it any time we want to.”

Jason wanted to ask so many questions. He, like everyone else, had just been bombarded with such a huge amount of information that he failed to process it all at once, and when he tried to think of one thing, Arthur said another new one.

 “So who’s going to Hell?”

Arthur leaned against his wide desk, sighed and continued.

 “I’m sorry. I have so much bad news for you. We will have no choice but to split into two teams. We have to mix our two units.”

What was he talking about? What news what units? They worked fine as they were.

 “I have thought about it, and I have come to conclusion. I choose you, Tokutei, for you’re the finest martial artist. I also choose Surya, for your fast, efficient and a damn good hunter. You will need some muscles with you, so I choose Michael. I also choose Amanda.”

Patricia looked at her sister trembling with shock. She hadn’t expected her to be chosen.

“She’s too young,” she said under her breath, but Arthur didn’t hear it.

“And also you will need someone who knows Hell best so I choose Seith.

Lian, Surya and Tokutei immediately turned toward Seith. He was standing there, leaning against the wall, and his round hat was covering his face.

 “How on Earth can he know Hell?” Surya exclaimed.

Seith raised his head revealing his unshaven face.

 “Because I spent there over 300 years.”

On hearing this Surya jumped to conclusion.

 “B-But if you were there for so long that means you’re either dead...”

 “Or a demon,” Lian finished seeing his red eyes.

 “Bingo,” Seith smiled, but despite this he looked mysterious and dark.

Jason caught an eye of the reddishness of his eyes.

 “You have a demon in your unit? What the hell is wrong with you.”

 “Calm down Jason,” Surya said with a sad voice. “You have me here.”

Jason realized what he had just said.

 “I’m sorry. We all had a hard night, you see.”

Bishop stood up and started to speak.

 “I understand there might be a few conflicts between you. However, I hope you will all keep it professional and do the job right. The world is not going to save itself.”

When Arthur looked at him, he remembered the very day that changed his life.

It was late February of 1999. Arthur had just had his castle rebuilt. He was in his office reading some books when the phone rang.

 “West speaking.”

 “Arthur, this is Gregory Bash.”

 “Mr. President.”

 “My informers have found another passionate person who is as devoted to the 2012 case as you are. I think you two should meet. I know you like working alone, but please, Arthur listen to what he has to say.”

 “Sir, If he proves to be who you say he is, I’ll be more than welcome to work with him.”

 “If I could add one thing more, he’s a general in the army, so just imagine what benefits you both can have from this… hmm... fusion.”

 “I’m already doing so, Sir,” he replied with a smile.

**4.**

Dan opened his eyes and looked around. He could see nothing but the darkness. He could hear nothing but some noise in the background. He could smell nothing but something burning near him. Then his receptors woke up and he felt a terrible pain tearing his stomach. He tried to touch the place, but something blocked his arms with a sound of metal clinching.

 “Chains?” his mind raced.

Then it hit him. Everything that happened the night before popped up in his head. The fight with the princes, everything that Shax did, saving Surya and dying. The pain was filling his body spreading everywhere.

 “Am I dead?” he asked himself.

But how could he be if he still could feel? Then the pain was too unbearable, and he couldn’t stand it anymore, but to scream at the top of his voice. His shouts echoed in some parts of the room, from which he learnt that some walls were empty. It didn’t take much time before the pain won and his body shut down.

**5.**

Tokutei was in his room preparing for the departure. He was packing his Bo staff that Dan had made for him, when he heard knocking to his door. The screen next to it showed Lian nervously fiddling with her fingers. Then he realized that they hadn’t had time to talk about what happened the day before. On their way home they both fell asleep or at least they thought they did. After he had put the Bo staff next to the bag, he headed towards the door.

 “Lian, hi.”

 “Hi, Tok. I know you’re busy, and you’re leaving soon. B-But I just wanted to... um...”

 “Come on in.”

She followed him inside wiping palm sweat against her trousers. They went to the living room.

 “Do ya’ want some tea, coffee, juice?” the man offered.

 “No thanks, I must get prepared. You probably know why I am here.”

Tokutei sighed and sat opposite her.

 “I know. We need to talk about yesterday.”

 “You do understand it’s not an easy conversation, but there is no other way. You’re going… I can’t believe I’m saying that… You’re going to Hell, and I’m staying here. We both have important tasks to do, and there is a chance… I hope this chance is close to zero but still there’s a chance we may not see each other again, so I have to say what I must say.”

Tokutei was sitting there looking at her. He might seem look calm, but really he was nervous, maybe even more nervous than she was.

 “I’m gonna start, Lian, if it is OK with you?”

She said nothing, only nodded her head still fiddling with her fingers under the table.

 “Your first impression sucked.”

As soon as this message hit her ears, her eyes grew wide and she stood up. She thought it was over for her. Tokutei stood up, too.

 “You do know what I mean. We didn’t get along. That constant rivalry, boasting, proving who’s better. I hated that. I didn’t like you. You were always trying to prove me wrong.”

These were strong words to hear and they did hit her emotions. Tokutei noticed that her lower lip started to tremble as if she was about to burst out with tears.

 “Hey, hey, hey, I don’t want to hurt you, just stay with me. I did tell you that your first impression sucked but when I got to know you better, I changed my mind and I...”

The girl raised her eyes as all of her negative emotions vaporized.

 “And?”

 “Shax was right. She was right all along. Damn it, she could read people’s thoughts and feelings.”

He came closer to Lian and grabbed her hands. At first she wanted him to let go of her, because her hands were wet from sweat, but then she felt that he was also nervous, so she squeezed them tight.

 “I love Qiaolian Shu. I really do.”

Her pupils increased in size as she lowered her lower lip and noticed that her breath rate accelerated. Tokutei pulled her closer to him and looked her deep in the eyes, then glimpsed at her lips, leaned forward and kissed her. This is what she was waiting for, but what he had said earlier about her, messed in her mind. The kiss lasted for almost a minute, then she pulled back. She was in shock, and her body was trembling. She felt shivers and yet some sort of uncertainty.

 “I-I’ll go,” she stuttered and turned on her heel and next headed for the exit.

Now Tokutei felt this awkwardness, but he knew it was not a good time to let his feelings interrupt with his thoughts of the upcoming mission. Lian stopped at the door and turned back at Tokutei.

 “Don’t get me wrong, Tok, I-I...”

 “Lian, don’t say anything else. We’ll continue this conversation when I return, and I promise you I will try to get your brother back as well.”

The girl opened the door and left. Tokutei stood there for a while moveless, then went back on getting ready. His difficult childhood along with his thorough training made him who he was now. He was able to put his feelings and worries away, so that he could focus entirely on what was more important. Hence he was always alone.

**6.**

Arthur was sitting in his office at his desk working on his computer. Bishop was sitting on the other side, looking for something in his tablet PC. Arthur pressed some buttons on his keyboard and a sound of dialing came from the speakers wisely installed in the desk.

 “Whitehouse, how can I help you?” the voice on the other side asked.

 “This is Arthur West. The president is expecting my call.”

 “Ah yes, Mr. West. Please hold on.”

Bishop raised his eyes from his tablet and put the device aside listening to a nice and soft melody installed as hold music.

 “Arthur, finally,” they heard a strong masculine voice.

 “Mr. President, Sir. I’m here with General Bishop. After thorough consideration I must say…um…We have no other choice but to begin the operation.”

 “Just tell me the current details and we will start the operation ASAP.”

 “I fear we need to evacuate the city.”

 “You mean San Francisco?”

 “Not only San Francisco, but also the whole peninsula. So far we have obtained the information that they are going to hit us with everything they have, only to take the Seal.”

 “So why don’t you move the Seal somewhere else?”

 “You saw what happened to Area 51, which is said to be supermax. Maldito, on the other hand is impregnable to supernatural and paranormal entities. We’re on the island, a few miles from the land. They are going to hit us with everything they have, and I believe this place is much more suitable for the Seal to stay in.”

 “Alright then, tell me what you need.”

 “6000 men armed with the weapons we talked about. About 700 snipers and medics. Men with experience, no privates or corporals, but at least majors.

 “6000? Where would you put them?”

 “On the island and in Alpha Point. As far as I remember you have trained more than 7000 men for this particular job. I also need four tanks and a few Hummers. And Sir, I want the city to have their choppers and jets ready, just in case.”

 “What about the city itself? Do we follow the original plan?”

 “Yes, Sir. Everything just as we spoke of.”

 “What about evacuation?”

 “I don’t believe we should evacuate Oakland, just the peninsula.

 “Of course Mr. West. Everything will be provided.”

 “Thank you, Mr. president”

 “I’m not thanking you yet, Arthur.”

 “I’m sorry but we have a lot of things to do.”

 “I do understand that. You may expect everything you asked within one hour.”

 “Again, thank you.”

 “Goodbye and good luck.”

Arthur turned towards Bishop.

 “So what do you think?”

 “Of what?”

 “Of this whole operation.”

Bishop took a deep breath and stood up.

 “The castle will be heavily protected. However, you do understand that these 6000 men have no experience of fighting supernatural beings. They’re only humans.”

 “Yes, I know that. Hence was the course. They have been trained and prepared. And they have a lot of experience in combat. Killing a zombie won’t be a problem for them.”

 “What about stronger creatures like vampires, werewolves, orts, ghouls and so on?”

 “About 1000 hunters are coming here as we speak.”

 “Hunters?” Bishop asked surprised.

 “That is correct John. Hunters from all over the USA are coming here to help us. They all knew about the end of the world long before.”

 “Now you’re talkin’, West. Let us only hope we can withstand the attacks before they retrieve the ring from Hell.”

 “If they retrieve, John, if they retrieve.”

Bishop looked at Arthur surprised.

 “I’ve never heard or seen you doubting in your men, or in this very operation.”

 “I don’t know. I don’t know what will go out of Hell. No one has ever been there, and none of the demons gave any details. I fear that we may face something we may not be able to cope with.”

 “If it bleeds, it can be killed, our maxima, do you remember?”

 “Ghosts don’t bleed.”

 “But we have found a way to get rid of them.”

 “You’re right.”

 “Let’s gather everyone in the hangar and start this whole thing. This place’s gonna turn into hell of a fortress within next day.”

Suddenly, the door opened and Patricia walked in. Both of the men took a look at her. She was wearing the same coat as earlier, but her face seemed a little concerned.

 “What is it, Pat?” Bishop asked.

 “I’m here because of the mission. I don’t want my sister to go. She’s too young.”

 “I understand that, but I need you here in the castle.”

She took a seat on the nearby armchair.

 “John, I know, but you must understand. I’m the older one, I’ve always been protective about her. Let me go instead of her.”

Arthur was listening to every word they were saying.

 “She’s right. We can have Amanda here.”

Bishop smacked his lips.

 “Alright. So be it. I can’t believe I’m gonna say that, but go to Hell.”

“Go tell Amanda and get ready,” Arthur added. “We’re takin’ off in an hour.”

 “Thank you, thank you so much.”

**7.**

It was fifteen minutes before the take off. Surya was in a lift that was taking her down to the hangar. It had taken her a few weeks before she learned the whole plan of the castle and how to get anywhere she wanted. Many a time she and the others instead of going to the gym, they ended up in a swimming-pool or a ballroom. The lift stopped with a screech and the door slid aside. Surya grabbed her backpack, as well as the weapons she had just taken from the weaponry, and made for the entrance to the hangar. She could hear some muted voices coming from the inside. The door immediately opened as she got closer and she stepped in. The hangar, which usually was rather empty, now was full. There were about twenty soldiers carrying big boxes of ammo from some window in the north side. She also saw a few dozens of cars parked in the east side. Every private car had been taken from the garages in the courtyard down here. Just a precaution. There was also a large, greenish plane and she could see the demon guy standing on the stairs leading to the inside. As she was walking down the stairs she heard familiar voice.

 “Surya, hey, girl!”

She turned round with her head and saw Jason walking fast towards her.

 “Don’t you even think of leaving without saying goodbye.”

 “I wasn’t going to,” she replied.

O.D. could feel that she was worried about the journey. She was rather sad and didn’t say a lot of words.

 “I see you’ve got some second thoughts. I totally understand you.”

 “We’re going to Hell. We’re gonna fight on their territory. You, on the other hand, are in a better position. When they come out, they’re gonna fight on our territory.”

She adjusted her big backpack and went down the stairs towards the plane.

 “Just wanted to wish you good luck, S.”

She turned around and faked her smile.

 “You too, Jason, you too.”

Then stepped inside. As she was entering the cabin, she saw Tokutei standing silent at the window and Michael and Patricia sitting and chatting.

 “Sink or swim,” she whispered and went up to Tokutei

**8.**

 A few moments later, the wide, military plane was speeding along the sky. Arthur gathered everyone to instruct them what to do. The uncomfortable section they were in was far from the standards they were used to thanks to Arthur’s luxury. Surya, Tokutei and Arthur were sitting on one side while Michael, Patricia and Seith were sitting on the other one. Arthur sensed the difference and negative feelings between them, but he knew there was no other option.

 “Listen now.”

They focused on what he was going to say.

 “The vehicle in the back was designed and constructed for mountain terrain. From what we know about Hell, it would be perfect for traveling down there. It has a hard titanium armor, strengthened even more in the front. Unpuncturable tires, four mounted 50k guns, one for each side. What else… Ah yes, there is also weapon storage, food compartment and a self-cleaning bathroom compartment. The truck is actually divided into three sections. The cabin, the operating room, and the storage and the bathroom.

 “Where’s the food section?” Tokutei asked concerned after not hearing its location from Arthur.

 “In the storage.”

 “So what’s the plan?” Patricia asked.

Arthur took a glimpse at Seith and indicating at him with his head told them the next thing.

 “Seith knows Hell, he will take you to Shax’s palace. She definitely hasn’t recovered yet, so she would be vulnerable. The guards, however, are what you should be concerned about. As soon as you get Dan, Lian’s brother and the ring head back to San Francisco, once again, Seith will lead you to the portal, and get to Maldito castle ASAP.”

 “Unless we won’t have anything to get back to,” Michael said a little bit worried.

Arthur slowly shook his head.

 “If you keep that sort of negative thinking, you won’t succeed. Remember, success comes from determination and hard work.”

Surya was fiddling with her fingers. She was finally getting to take the love of her life back.

 “What about you, Arthur? How are you gonna keep the Seal safe?”

Arthur dropped his eyes and sighed.

 “Nearly 6500 of soldiers, hunters and private mercenaries are coming to the Castle as we speak.”

“That’s a good thing, right?” Michael said. “The more the better.”

“It’s not the number that counts,” Tokutei replied. “It’s their skill.”

“Tokutei is right. However, we would face a few million of enemies willing to do just anything to fetch the Seal back to Cizin and we would do everything we can to hold them off until you come back. I haven’t spent all these years vainly preparing for the end. We really are well prepared and I know we will not fail.”

“So we cannot fail either,” Tokutei said firmly.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Michael spoke. “How are we gonna get to Hell exactly?”

“We found a portal to Hell in Africa in one of my mines. The portal lies twenty two miles below the ground.”

Surya looked at him astonished.

 “Does that mean that Hell is not simply underground?”

 “No, Surya. Hell is another universe, another realm. There are many portals but most of them are deep underground… I don’t know exactly why, but my speculations are that the temperature is similar.”

**9.**

 Jason and Bishop were preparing the headquarters in the Maldito castle. They and several other soldiers were in a room about thirty six feet long and forty eight feet wide. There were already several black desks and a few computers. Another two soldiers brought a thin, wide cardboard.

 “Where should we put this LCD?” one of them asked.

Bishop turned towards them and walked closer.

 “Arthur wants them to hang on this wall, so just put them over there, Roger and…”

 “Miles, Sir,” the soldiers pushing the desk said.

 “Miles who? You know I don’t like using surnames.”

 “Arthur Miles, Sir.”

 “Roger and Arthur will mount them.”

Jason grabbed one of the twenty six-inch computer screens that had been brought a few minutes earlier and placed it onto one of the desks.

 “When did he say he would be back?”

 “In the evening. We need to have this room ready by then.”

Bishop walked towards a window on the right and looked at the ocean. He could see a dozen of helicopters flying towards San Francisco. That view jogged his memory and reminded him of the first time he met Arthur West. His mind travelled back to March of 1999. He was traveling by a limousine along the main road in Daly City. He didn’t look anything younger or different. He was talking on a large mobile phone with someone more important than him.

 “I’m almost there... I know, I’ll try to convince him to... No, absolutely not... Because he’s one of the richest individuals on our planet.”

He glanced outside the window and noticed that they were in some kind of a tunnel.

 “Sir, did you know there was an underwater tunnel leading to the island?”

A few minutes later the limousine went out of the tunnel and headed for the towering castle at the end of the road. Bishop hang up the phone and gave in to the magnificent view of the forest.

 “And it used to be a mountain one day,” he said under his breath.

The long car passed the gate and stopped in the courtyard. There was already someone waiting for him.

 “Mr. Bishop, I presume,” the young lad with medium, black hair said.

Bishop nodded and asked,

 “Where’s Mr. West?”

 “He’s in his office. Please follow me.”

A few minutes passed and Bishop was escorted to Arthur’s office.

 “Sir, general Bishop is here to see you.”

Arthur was burrowing in a pile of paper stuck on his wide desk. He immediately took off his glasses and stood up.

 “Ah yes, Mr. Bishop. Nice to meet you, Sir. I’m Arthur West,” he took out his hand and waited for the handshake.

 “The pleasure is all mine. It’s nice to put a face to a name I heard so much of.”

Arthur peeped at the boy still waiting by the door.

 “Bob, make sure no one interrupts us..

 “Yes, Sir” came the answer followed by the door shut.

Bishop had finally a chance to look around the room. Apart from the numerous files and papers stuck on the old man’s desk the wall was covered in a few yard-long corkboard that was filled with photos of men and strange creatures. There was also a drawing presenting the Seal of Solomon.

 “Please sit, Mr. Bishop.”

 “It’s John.”

 “In that case, I’m Arthur,” he said taking a comfortable seat on his armchair.

 “The president told me what business you wanted to discuss with me, and I agree.”

 “You do?” Bishop replied surprised.

He didn’t think it would be so easy to convince him.

 “When I talked to the President a few years ago, he wanted the government to help me organize everything. I didn’t agree then, which was a stupid mistake to make. Look at me, I got obsessed by those supernatural creatures, by the Seal and the whole end of the world in thirteen years. And what have I done so far? Apart from building the tunnel you had a pleasure to travel through, I haven’t done a single physical thing. I have been only gathering the information and even though it’s been a few years, I know nothing about the whereabouts of any of the pieces of The Seal.”

Bishop waited till Arthur finished what he was to say.

 “I know how much time is valuable, and how much it is spent on research. Hence, I am here to help. I have many a connection which will be useful. Also, I have much more experience in paranormalia than you may imagine and last but not the least I know the whereabouts of two pieces of the Seal.”

Arthur couldn’t believe what he had just heard. This was a perfect candidate to cooperate with. He accomplished much more than him and seemed to be more educated in the Seal matter.

 “H-How have you obtained such information?”

 “I’m in it for more than you can possibly imagine. I have my own sources. Together we may prevent the end of the world.”

 “I’m in,” Arthur replied without hesitation. “I’m definitely in.”

 “Good, let us start by putting everything together, shall we?”

 “If I may suggest anything,” Arthur said putting his glasses on. “We have to think about the future. And by future I mean technology.”

 “I think I know what you’re talking about.”

Arthur smiled.

 “I was planning to replace those pieces of papers and the corkboard with computers and screens. It will be easier to search and to store information.”

Bishop nodded eagerly.

 “What’s more we need to find people two form a team.”

 “No, Arthur. Two or three teams. One team is not enough, believe me.”

**10.**

Lian and Amanda were at the main gate. The courtyard was getting filled with military vehicles, and more and more of them were approaching along the main road. The sound of helicopters were heard getting louder and louder bringing in more equipment and soldiers. Another truck passed and behind them emerged a silver SUV with Colorado plates. As soon as Lian saw them, she beckoned to them to come closer. Then she walked towards the vehicle.

 “Hunters?”

 “Yeap,” came the answer from a short woman with a curly hair inside.

 “I need to check you on the list so please give me your names.”

 “Kelly Jackson, Peter Jackson, Tom Jackson and Susan Gorter.”

Lian ticked their names on the tablet she was holding. The numbers were showing; Arrived- sixty nine, to check four hundred thirty one.

 “A whole family, I see,” the Asian woman smiled.

“Family business.”

 “Unfortunately, we do not have enough space for the cars, so if you could ma’am park your car in Daly City or in Pacifica. You’ll be brought here by the soldiers again. The bus is waiting at each parking lot.”

 “What a shame. Alright,” she turned around. “You’re gonna take the stuff our and wait for me in the courtyard, OK?”

 “Okey dokey,” came the eager answers.

Lian went up to Amanda sitting at the gate on a deckchair.

 “Hey, could you fill in for me for a sec, I need to go to the bathroom. Use your tablet if you can.”

 “No problem. Oh, and there’re comin’ another two cars,” she said spotting something in the distance.

**11.**

 Jack was on the highest tower situated in the western part of the castle. He was mounting huge sniper rifles every three feet. When he was checking whether one he had just mounted was movable he glanced at the beautiful view of the ocean and the land on the other side. The main road was full of traffic that from such distance looked like small dots. He had never seen anything like this. From one side a long queue of military trucks that were entering the underwater tunnel, on the other side thousands of cars were fleeing the peninsula.

 “The evacuation process,” he murmured to himself.

He bended to take another sniper rifle when he heard three more choppers approaching the castle. He stopped again for a while and spotted New York symbols of one of the choppers.

 The machine lowered its height above the courtyard and began the landing procedure. The metal bird slowly touched the ground, and the door opened. Seven people carrying backpacks jumped out and looked around.

 “So this is the famous Maldito Castle,” a woman in her late forties said tightening the grip on the handle to her suitcase.

Lian was at that time coming back and she saw the not-military chopper cooling down in the courtyard. She accelerated towards the people that were getting their luggage out of the machine, and raised her voice.

 “Excuse-me, are you those hunters from New York?”

 “Actually vampire hunters,” a tall boy with short, black hair replied.

Lian caught up with them.

 “I need to find your names on the list, one minute, OK?”

 “No problem. I’ll deal with it,” the woman replied wiping sweat of her tired forehead. “I’m Leonora Night, you should have the seven of us by the name of NYVHA.”

Lian looked at her with interest.

 “NYVHA, New York? You must be from Dan’s old team.”

 “I’m Danny’s aunt,” the women replied. “I bet he would be happy to see me.”

The boy with short, black hair heard this name and immediately ran closer to the women.

 “To see us. I’m Mike. The man in white originally wanted to recruit me,” he boasted.

 “Where is he?” the woman asked.

 “Arthur? He’s gone to Africa, he should be in the evening.”

 “Not him, Dan,”

Lian didn’t know how to say what happened to Dan. She couldn’t just say that he was killed by a demon and taken to Hell. She had to think of something.

 “Dan’s not here,” she said ticking the seven names on the list.

 “Where is he?” Mike asked with interest. “I haven’t spoken to him for two days.”

 “You have to wait for Arthur, I’m afraid. Anyway. Take your bags inside, there should be another person waiting to take you to your rooms.”

The woman sighed and beckoned to the rest to follow her.

 “I know you’re busy, keep doing your job.”

Lian smiled and went back to Amanda.

**12.**

 It was getting late in the evening in a small, Polish city of Boleslawiec situated in the south-west of the country. A tall, blond man finished preparing his supper and walked to his room cluttered with clothes and useless things. He put the supper onto his desk and sat on his falling apart armchair making a loud sound of relief. Gobbling one of the sandwiches he typed the Facebook address in the browser and logged into his account. Four unread messages caught his eye at once. Ignoring what was already displayed on his wall, he checked the messages. One invitation to someone’s calendar; a completely pointless application. However, as he began reading the next three messages his jaw dropped in disbelief. *They’re evacuating San Francisco*, was what he read in three of them. He looked at the wall and yes, people were talking about it. Some were speculating about a bomb, others about a possible disaster that might occur soon, yet some others were trying to connect it with the upcoming end of the Mayan long-term calendar. Instead of eating he opened one of the Polish main portals and read what media were saying about it.

**13.**

Two students were having lunch in a local café in Miami, when they heard bartender turning up the news.

“Something’s goin’ on, man,” he said to his mate pointing at a small TV screen hanged in the corner.

The smartly dressed lady was reading the latest announcements.

“Over eight million people are forced to leave their homes and offices. The government has announced this morning to completely evacuate San Francisco, Daly City, Pacifica, San Bruno…”

“Oh my God!” some of the curious viewers commented.

“It is not yet sure whether they will be able to return home for Christmas,” the voice on TV continued.”

“Terrorists,” some elder woman said with a squeaking voice. “They must have planted some bomb.”

“I hope it’s not nuclear,” some other man added.

Yet some other took out his cell phone and dialed a number.

 “Honey? Did you hear the news? Yes someone’s planted a nuclear bomb.”

And that is how the rumor started to evolve and spread.

**14.**

In Dubai, an eight-year old boy ran to the living room where his parents were gaping at the old-fashioned TV.

“May I play outside, mom?” he asked bouncing his ball against the floor.

The parents didn’t reply.

 “Mommy, can I play outside?”

He came closer to the screen and saw the feed from San Francisco bay.

 “Can I play, can I play, can I can I can I,” he asked repetitively.

 “Yes, go, go,” came the final answer not being even sure whether they were aware what they had just said.

 All around the world people gradually learned about events in San Francisco. All major networks booked the latest flights to send their reporters there. Other journalists were speculating their own theories; sometimes agreeing what the government was saying, sometimes not. The Internet community was also an active place with over half a billion active users online flooding message boards, Facebook walls, or just chatting privately with their friends on various communicators. The world was interested in the San Francisco taking their mind off the upcoming end of the world.

 It wasn’t for long, however, when people started to connect the Mayan final date with what was going on in California. And people stared to worry.

**15.**

In Kansas City one of the white-collar workers was in the middle of his work when he heard someone shouting from another cubicle,

 “They’re having some expert talking on TV.”

 “I need to see this.”

He then glanced and saw that everybody didn’t want to work, they wanted to learn more.

 “Are ya’ comin’ Pete?” he heard his colleague’s voice.

 “Yeap,” came the answer as he gave in and ran after the crowd to the lunch room where the big screen was.

 “What are they sayin’?” he asked.

 “Hush,” he heard as everyone focused on the interview with some well-known doctor.

 “… That’s very interesting. Why do you think people connect this, so called, *San Francisco Exodus* with the end of the Mayan Calendar?” the woman asked.

“You see, ma’am. For the last two years or for some others much longer, everyone has been exposed to the fact that the world may end on December 21, 2012.”

“Why this end of the world was so special for them?”

“I’m getting to that. The world didn’t end in 2000, neither did it later in 2011 when people tried to interpret bible, or any other time in the past. So why this one? Why is this very end so special and on everyone’s mouth? It’s not because people like to be scared in general, not so much this time. It’s the end of the world that had been foretold over three thousand years before Christ. People started to believe that such a long prophecy may be real. Mayans had nothing to do with the bible. Anyway after being exposed to all the news concerning the day after tomorrow’s date and when they saw that the whole peninsula in California is being evacuated, they somehow connected these two events.

“Do you, doctor, believe in this connection?”

“Of course I don’t. No one and nothing says that when the Mayan calendar ends, the world will end. It only indicates that something huge may happen… some change, you know.”

“What about the leap years? It wasn’t introduced during Mayan times, shouldn’t their calendar end some time ago?”

“No it shouldn’t. The Mayan’s didn’t have months and dates as well. They only used some circles that can be transformed into our time reckoning. And yes, the leap years has been counted by our scientists and there is no doubt about when it ends. I just don’t believe anything significant will happen then.”

“Do you believe in what the government is telling us?”

 “They are evacuating eight million people. But what is the true reason for it? I don’t know. It’s certainly not connected with the end of the Mayan calendar, for sure.”

 “You’re so wrong,” Jason said under his breath having lunch is his apartment.

He turned the TV off, grabbed his tray and walked towards the small gap in the wall. He placed the tray there and it immediately disappeared as a lift took it down to the kitchen.

**16.**

 The heat wave struck the country of Botswana like every other day. Arthur’s diamond mine was flickering in the distance through the hot air. It hadn’t changed much since the 90’s; a few new buildings had been built, the staff had been enlarged and the working conditions had been improved to be much better than in any other competitive companies.

Many a time Arthur’s face appeared in *The Times*. He wasn’t only well known for being one of the richest men in the world and a big contributor to charities, but also for treating his workers with special care. African mines were infamous and often compared to slavery. Arthur’s mine, named after his wife Alice, was nothing like that. Every worker had their office. The miners used hi-tech tools, not picks, to drill the diamonds off the walls, everything was safe, the tunnels were strengthened and there was an emergency exit every hundred feet. Of course the tunnels were air-conditioned and illuminated with natural-like light, so no one felt there like in a mine. Also the workers responsible for the polishing had sophisticated conditions. The mine also had a gym, swimming pool, vouchers for workers’ families and within its fifteen years there was no accident.

 The sun was dimmed for a second by the jet that slowly approached the mine. As soon as it landed, the back door opened and the vehicle rolled out. It looked like a truck; Ford F-650, but a bit longer and wider. It was painted black and looked more like a tank than a truck. After it, there went out Tokutei, Arthur, Patricia, Surya and Seith. Michael was driving the truck.

 “Was it supposed to be so hot here?” Patricia asked squinting her eyes.

 “Wait till you are in Hell,” the demon replied.

A black man wearing a bright suit was already waiting there.

 “Arthur, nice to see you again.”

 “Kubey,” the old man replied seeing his old friend who he discovered the diamonds ore with.

 “How long it’s been? Two? Three years?”

 “Five, old friend. It’s been five years.”

 “Five already?”

 “And I’m here for ten minutes only, I’m afraid.”

 “I understand. The crane is ready.”

On hearing that Tokutei asked not being sure whether he understood correctly,

 “A crane?”

 “That is correct. You’re going to be lowered twenty two miles down,” he turned around towards the group.

 “Seith, go for Mike if you may, gather everyone here. Just a few words before we say farewell to each other.”

Seith nodded and zoomed towards the vehicle to fetch Michael. Arthur waited for both of them to return, took a deep breath, and spoke.

 “I do understand that you have a very difficult mission to do. For others it may seem impossible, for you it’s not. Remember that you’re the best of the best. When you enter the vehicle you will be lowered twenty two miles down. Then it is all up to you. No surveillance, no assistance. Only you and Hell.”

He could see tiny tears appearing in Surya’s eyes. The words moved her.

“I’m not saying goodbye. I’m saying see you in two days.”

He then shook hands with Seith, Michael and Patricia, but with those who knew him for three months, he had a stronger relationship. Surya hugged him with tears in her eyes.

 “Don’t break my bones, Surya,” he said feeling her dhampiric strength.

Tokutei wanted to bow, and so he did, but then he ignored his code and hugged Arthur as well.

 “We will see you on Friday,” he murmured to the old man.

 “We will,” came a hopeful answer as Arthur turned around and made for the jet.

He then turned around for the last time.

 “Bring him home.”

Kubey walked towards the vehicle.

 “Alright guys, if you please follow me, I’ll show you where to go for the drop.”

The team exchanged glances and walked to the truck.

 “And remember,” Kubey continued. “Fasten your seatbelts, you don’t wanna fall onto the windshield.”

Everyone got in the truck and they headed to the point that Kubey showed them.

**17.**

 It was about three o’clock in San Francisco. The city was almost empty. The army were checking the streets and houses to make sure that every citizen left or was evacuated. One truck was rolling along the district filled with houses similar to one another. It was a typical military truck used to transport group of soldiers or people from one place to another. Two soldiers were sitting in the cabin while two were walking on both sides of the street checking the houses.

 “Did you get the orders for tomorrow?” the driver asked.

 “Nope, and I have no idea what they’ll tell me to do in an hour.”

 “I just hope it…”

 “Wait, look there,” he said pointing at one of the detached houses.

There was a woman standing in the drive, nervously looking left and right.

 “Fred, could you check it,” he said through the walkie-talkie.

Almost immediately the soldier walking on the right ran up to the woman.

 “Ma’am, you cannot be here.”

 “I know, I know,” the woman cried constantly brushing away her long, dark, curly hair. “I’m waiting for my son, Ben, he hasn’t returned from school yet.”

 “Ma’am, as far as I know every schoolchild was taken to the secure zone two hours ago. If you want me we can check whether he’s there.”

 “If you could be so kind.”

The soldier grasped his radio.

 “Gibbons, do you read?”

 “Loud and clear.”

 “This is Porter from second division. Put me through to the Shelter.”

 “One moment.”

The soldier turned towards the woman.

 “What’s his name?”

 “Ben, Ben Stuart. He’s eight.”

 “Shelter here,” came a female voice though the speaker.

 “Hi, this is Porter from San Francisco. We’ve found a concerned mother looking for her son; Ben Stuart. Is there anyone by this name?”

 “Let me check.”

The mother made one more step towards the soldier and listened carefully to the next message.

 “Porter, are you still there?”

 “Yes, did ya’ find’m?”

 “There are two Ben Stuarts. One is fourteen, the other one is eight.”

 “It’s the second one. It’s him,” the mother cried.

 “OK, it’s him. Thanks.”

 “He’s there safe, isn’t he?” the woman tried to find out something more.

The soldier peeped at her house.

 “Yes he is. You must go with me to the truck. You’ll be escorted to the Shelter. Is there anyone here apart from you?”

 “No, sir, only me. The others left hours ago.”

 “Good. Follow me, I’m gonna help you get to the truck.”

 “One moment please, I’ll just get my luggage.”

**18.**

 After Jack had finished mounting the sniper rifles on the tower, he had lunch. Next he went to the headquarters to ask Bishop what to do next. As soon as he got there, he was stunned by the look of the room. When he had been there earlier with Jason, there was only one desk in a large room. Now it was almost ready. The soldiers were mounting the last screen on the wall. There were already nine of them; five in each row. Each wide using technology better than HD. Actually much better than HD because it could display picture in resolution up to 5000p. In front of the screens there was one long desk, at least thirty feet long, on which two soldiers were assembling computers. Behind this desk there were literally one hundred small, wooden desks in ten rows. About one third was equipped with computers and joysticks. Jack knew exactly what they were for. Actually it was him and Bishop who planned the design of the headquarters. Not waiting any longer, he walked fast to the last row of the desk, opened a cardboard lying on a pile of similar boxes, and helped the others.

 “Jack,” he heard Bishop voice. “Keep an eye on everything, I need to go to check the zones.

 “Alright.”

Bishop wiped the sweat, took a sip of cold water from the bottle on the desk and went outside.

**19.**

 Meanwhile, in the eastern part of the island about fifty soldiers were setting up a camp. Some of them were building wooden towers out of the poles and boards that were constantly being brought in by large trucks. Others were setting up huge tents. Yet some others were carrying boxes filled with ammo, spotlights, guns and other things. The rest were setting up a concrete wall or rather a fence. The same was happening in all parts of the island. It looked as if a new town was slowly rising in front of the woods

 Deep in the forest, the camps looked a little bit different. Instead of building wooden towers, the army were setting up posts high on the trees that made them look like tree houses rather than military posts. The main tents, so called zone headquarters were set up on the borders between the zones. They were different from traditional tents for a few reasons. First of them was the materials they were made of, which couldn’t be flammable. The second were the poles. They were used as walls and were equipped with long, white lamps to illuminate the interior and the nearby surroundings.

 Cars and trucks wouldn’t stop coming and going. Marines, snipers, hunters and mercenaries were flooding the island. There were already more than four thousand people, and almost two and a half thousand were still supposed to come. The transporters left the soldiers, materials or the equipment and went back for more.

**20.**

 Unit one was sitting comfortably in the truck being lowered to the lowest point humans have ever dug. The lower they got, the darker it was and the temperature actually instead of getting higher kept the same level as on the ground. The walls were covered in pointy, brownish rocks. They could also see diamonds sticking out between the piles of rocks and stones. Michael was sitting at the wheel, Patricia on the right, while Surya, Tokutei and Seith were sitting right behind them.

 “Look!” Surya said astonished seeing a large, grey bone erecting from the wall.

 “A dinosaur?”

 “Yup,” Michael confirmed tapping his fingers against the wheel.

 “Half a mile to go,” they heard Kubey’s voice coming through the speaker in the truck. “As soon as we release you there will be no contact with us or any other person upstairs.

These words made them worry, but they understood the importance of their mission, and fear was not an option at that time. Neither was the fact that they would be the only humans down there.

Michael turned up the air-condition to keep the same temperature. He pushed his seat to the back and turned it round, then stood up and trying to keep his balance he headed to the next compartment.

 “And what are ya’ up to?” Patricia turned around confused.

 “Too much stress, my ass’s gonna explode.”

Surya and Tokutei followed him with their eyes. On hearing this the girl gave Tokutei a strange look.

“He’s not a gentleman for sure,” she whispered.

Indeed, the situation was stressful and she couldn’t blame him for such words in front of two women. Tokutei shrugged his shoulder and went on fiddling with his shurikens. It was the only way for him to deal with his emotions.

 The vehicle stopped moving. They heard a metal sound of hacks being detached off the roof. Everyone looked through the windshield at what was behind them. Around was nothing special; rocks with diamonds. And that’s it. No door, no tunnel nothing.

 “And now what?” Patricia asked turning back to Seith sitting speechless next to Tokutei.

 “Do not be so impatient.”

Having said that the pebbly ground burst into flames covering the whole vehicle. Patricia threw herself at the wheel trying to start the engine and just drive out of the fire, but Seith gripped her shoulder with his huge fingers and gently pulled her back.

 “It will do no harm,” he spoke casually.

Tokutei and Surya were watching the whole situation not knowing what to do. They had to trust the demon sitting next to them.

**21.**

 Lian and Amanda were still dealing with hunters arriving to the castle. It’s been nearly six hours since they started, and there were still about over seventy hunters missing. In front of them marines were setting up camps. There were many towers in the woods and the walls were slowly raising turning the island into a fortress.

 “How can we lose when we are so well prepared,” Amanda pointed at the men before her.

 “We can’t, at least I think so. But we cannot be so self-confident, either.”

 “What do you mean, Lian?”

 “We don’t know what will come out from the pit. Let me ask you a question, do you know orts?”

 “Of course I do,” the girl nodded.

 “Have you ever fought any of them?”

 “Unfortunately, I haven’t.”

 “And I have. I fought them two days ago, and I must admit these are the most difficult creatures to defeat. If these soldiers aren’t as skillful as we are, they will fail.”

 “Don’t say that,” Amanda raised her voice. “I was there when Bishop and Arthur were preparing this plan. These are not ordinary soldiers. They do have experience and they have been preparing for it for a few months.”

 “At least Bishop told you more. Arthur always briefed us before the missions, and he said nothing about the doomsday.”

 “From what Bishop told us, Arthur has been so quiet since he lost his wife.”

 “He still keeps her photo on his desk.”

 “Lian, another car is coming,” Amanda directed her eyes at the road.

 “OK, let’s deal with them. Only few more hunters to go.”

As they were walking closer to the gate, a female voice came from behind.

 “Lian? Is that you?”

The Chinese girl turned around and saw no one else but Natalie who accompanied them in Pyramiden.

 “Natalie, I didn’t suppose you’d be here.”

Amanda notice that Lian wanted to talk to that girl.

 “I’ll deal with the hunters, go L.”

Lian nodded and walked closer to Natalie.

 “How are things girl?” she asked scanning her black uniform. “I see you’ve changed your hairstyle.”

 “Yup, I’ve had it cut. And things… well… not so good. After Clark’s death they haven’t found me a new partner so I was stuck up with paper work. At least till last week when Arthur called and asked me to come here.”

 “You did well in Pyramiden. It’d be great to have you here.”

 “Where are the rest? I only met O.D. inside.”

Lian dropped her eyes for a second.

 “They’re in Hell.”

 “Where?” she wide opened her eyes.

 “We’ve found all pieces of the Seal, but we lost some ring without which the Seal simply doesn’t work.”

 “That’s terrible. I do hope everything will end up well.”

 “Without hope we have nothing to do here.”

**22.**

Jason was in the hangar with hundreds of marines, snipers and hunters. Some of them were carrying boxes from a huge, military plane to two lifts on the left. The rest were carrying boxes piled up on the right to other lifts.

 “How do these boxes differ from those?” O.D. heard a thick voice behind him.

He turned his head round, and smiled.

 “You see what you brought are only silver and regular bullets. What we have here are clips with five types of bullets. You just press a button on your gun and select the type of ammo you need at the moment.”

 “Five kinds you say? So what do ya’ have there except silver and regular?”

 “Salt, poisoned and explosive. You’ll find the last one very useful if you’re assigned outside.”

 “I’m assigned to Hotel zone, so I think they’ll come useful.”

One of the soldiers came up to them and asked,

 “What are the poisoned bullet for?”

 “Vampires,” a hunter replied casually.

Jason took hold of another box and headed towards the lifts

 “They’re called poisoned because they were submerged in dead man’s blood for quite a long time.”

Their conversation was stopped by a tiny radio that someone had put on the table with bottles of water. When they got there they heard some interview with another specialist talking about the San Francisco Exodus. As soon as the soldiers heard it, they stopped next to the table and put down the boxes. One of them turned the volume up. Jason placed the box onto the floor and listened with the others.

 “So you’re basically saying that this San Francisco Exodus is to cover something else than an upcoming earthquake?”

 “That’s correct. Everyone now associate San Francisco Exodus with the Mayan last day of their calendar. I have been studying their history, their culture, and what has been happening in the world for about thirty years now and I don’t have good news, I’m afraid.”

 “What do you mean, professor?”

 “Whatever happens in two days will destroy our civilization completely. The species of homo sapiens will be no more.”

The soldiers were listening with interest and shock at the same time. Some of them began to develop doubts whether what they were doing was useful or pointless.

 “And where did you get such speculations from, professor?” the voice on the radio continued.

 “If we were to survive, we would develop technologically to such a degree that we would travel to other plants. If we achieve this, then time travel would be just a matter of time. And since we do not see any people from the future among us, it means humans will not exist for so long.”

 “We’re not gonna win this thing,” one of the marines said.

 “Hey! Don’t even think that,” Jason replied trying to comfort him.

 “You heard what he said, man. We’re not gonna survive this.”

 “He said some shit about the future. Firstly it doesn’t mean people will face extinction soon, and it doesn’t mean people from the future aren’t here. They may be, but they simply do not show themselves. Anyway, soldier. You have been trained to fight, and you can’t give up. I know humans will not die this time, Demons need us, Vampire need us, they cannot do without us.”

 “And where did ya’ hear it from, huh? Mr. wise guy?”

 “From demonic princess. I’m one of the ASATs and I’m proud of what I have done so far, and of what I’m gonna do and be doing for the next couple of days. And as far as I know I’m in charge here, so grab the box and keep on working. Time is running out.”

**23.**

 A ten-foot tall, empty tunnel curved in a rock began to shake as the ceiling opened and a black vehicle dropped onto the ground with a thud. Surya shook her head and looked out the window.

 “Is this…?”

 “Hell? Yes,” Seith replied. “At least the underground parts.”

Everyone took a good look at the world outside. It wasn’t so different; the walls were covered in rocks, some of them were sticking out tipped with a sharp top, others were lying freely on the pebbly ground. And that was it, no lava, no fire, nothing else.

 “What the fuck was that? Did that damn hook broke or what?” Michael yelled coming out of the bathroom compartment. “I almost landed in my own shit.”

 “Welcome to Hell, Mike,” Patricia smiled forgetting about the stress.

Tokutei leaned to the right and tapped Seith on his back.

 “Where is Dan and Shax?”

Seith turned his head left touching his wide hat stuck between two seats and replied firmly.

 “About one hundred miles from here.”

 “And our way out?” Surya asked still looking outside with amazement.

 “Every few miles there is a portal for demons to enter Earth in their incorporeal form. If they want to leave Hell as they are, they must use the main gate which will be opened by Cizin in two days. As you have been told, you cannot use any of the portals without the key for you do not belong here.”

Michael got to the steering wheel and snapped his fingers.

 “Quit talkin’ your freakish stuff, Seith and tell us where I must drive and what we must do.”

 “If you want me to guide you, I must sit in the front,” he beckoned at Patricia rocking on the front seat. “If everything goes smoothly we would be able to reach her palace unseen.”

 “Let’s move, we need to be there in maximum three hours,” came a strong suggestion from Michael, as he pressed the accelerator, and the truck moved along the dark tunnel.

 “Switch the light off,” Seith adviced. “We need to stay unseen.”

The lights went off as the truck reached the speed of eighty miles per hour. The tunnel itself didn’t seem to be ending, and there was no one in sight. Only the lonely truck speeding along the rocky road.

 After a few minutes they saw a reddish light at the end of the tunnel.

 “You shall see Hell in its true form now,” the demon spoke. “Have no fear.”

**24.**

 The Whitehouse, one of the most important buildings in the USA, busy as always? No. Everyone was on their toes running in circles. New data arrived which created new orders, new problems and new possible solutions. The president was sitting in a virtual conference room. There were several large screens on the wall, displaying faces of well-known leaders of other countries.

 “Thank you all for finding time for what I am about to tell you,” the president said without any hesitation in his voice.

 “How is the evacuation going?” one of the people asked.

 “Everything is going according to plan. The army is taking positions in San Francisco as we speak and 90% of the citizens have been evacuated.

 “What about the Seal? Since you, sir, have decided to empty one of your cities, I guess it will stay with Arthur West.”

 “That is correct, Mr. Prime Minister. Arthur has convinced me to keep the Seal in his castle. He assured me it is better protected than any other venue in the world. However, this is not the true reason for my contacting you.”

He stood their moveless for a second trying to gather his words as the leaders were gazing into the screens awaiting his continuation. The president took a deep breath and kept on going.

 “I do not trust Arthur completely in this. I gave him all resources he needed, but I have doubts whether he will be able to stop this. Hence here is my appeal to you all. Take precautions. Have your men ready for anything. If anything goes wrong, we must be ready not only to save our species, but also to fight for it. At the moment my country is working according to def con 3 protocols. If anything gets worse, I will raise the condition to 2.”

 “What do you want us to do? Put men around every cemetery like you did, Sir?”

 “With all due respect, Mr. president. I ask you to be ready for anything. I still do hope, it will start and end in San Francisco and our losses will be minimal.”

 “What about the media? How do your people want to handle them?” some other man asked.

 “I do not want to lie to my people any more. When this thing is over. I will tell them the truth. This will not be covered up.”

 “Do you realize, Mr. president, what will be the result of such consequences. People will panic.”

 “Better they panic over something they know, rather than over something they saw on the Internet. I must be going now. The next report will be tomorrow at 8:00. And please, do not underestimate this situation.”

**25.**

 A truck was slowly trundling through the Maldito tunnel. There were twelve soldiers on each side inside. Every single one of them was tightly holding their bags between their legs. They also had an assault rifle and a tablet PC.

 “Remember, soldiers,” the sergeant said who was standing in the middle holding something hanging from the ceiling. “You have been chosen to this operation because you’ve proved yourselves to be tough, to be good, to be able to deal with it. As soon as we get to the island, you’re gonna join the others in Charlie zone, which is the north-eastern part of the island. At the moment, as far as I know, they’re building towers and walls. You’ll gonna help them finish it quicker. Every zone must be ready till the sun disappears.”

The truck left the tunnel and stopped on the beach. The back door opened and the soldiers ran outside. They put their backpacks on, grasped their assault rifles and ran after their sergeant along the beach to Charlie zone. The beach was about twenty feet long before the wooden and concrete walls began. The island started to look like a military camp. As they were running they heard a jet flying low across the ocean. It was heading towards the castle, but they couldn’t see exactly where it would land, as the walls and tall trees covered the view.

 The artificial wall opened in the middle of the rocks on which the castle was standing. The jet slowed down and landed in the hanger. There were still soldiers taking boxes to lifts on each side. Jason was still among them. When he saw the jet landing, he selected other ASAT members on his tablet and sent them a message,

 “Arthur’s back.”

He looked around as fast as he could and saw four soldiers drinking water at the table with food and beverages. Not waiting any longer he walked towards them.

 “Excuse-me guys, could anyone of you take this box to the lift.”

 “I’ll do it,” a shorter one replied emptying the bottle.

 “Thanks, man,” came the answer as Jason let go of the box and ran towards the plane.

The metal side door opened and Arthur walked out. Straight away, he spotted Jason standing by the stairs.

 “How was it?” he asked the old man.

 “No problems, I suppose. It’s all up to them now.”

 “Everything goes according to plan down here.”

 “I’m glad Jason. Please meet in my office in fifteen minutes, tell the others will you?”

Jason activated the channel as he replied.

 “OK. Everybody, Arthur wants to meet us in his office in fifteen minutes.”

**26.**

The truck was tearing along the dark tunnel which was about to end. The reddish light was closer and closer and everyone was wondering what they would see when the tunnel ended. Michael slowly took his foot off the accelerator as he reduced the gear and let the car roll outside. Finally, they were out.

 “This is Hell,” Seith announced.

They saw huge mountains with tunnels, caves, caverns and lodges everywhere. The ceiling above spread about ten or twenty miles and was black as night sky, but it was obvious to be made of rocks. The mountains were steep with roads or paths winding along them. On the left, they saw a gorge and deep down, a yellowish river of burning lava. A few hundred feet higher there were empty paths leading somewhere along the gorge. On the right the view spread about thirty miles. A steep mountain wall in the distance went across the entire view. The whole ceiling was supported by thick poles of rocks and arched sides of the mountains and hills. About two miles from where they were, they saw a vast plain full of orts. However, they saw no more hellish creatures in sight. It all looked as if the whole place was empty.

 “Where are demons?” Patricia asked.

 “They are probably preparing themselves to enter the Earth. It never looked like this, I must say,” came the answer from Seith. “We must proceed this way.”

Patricia took a glance at the orts running freely across the plain below.

 “I’ve never seen orts in my life. They look much bigger than I expected.”

Michael pressed the accelerator again and the truck moved on.

 A few hundred feet further Michael suddenly pressed the break as he saw something in the distance.

 “Why did ya’ stop?” Surya asked alarmed.

 “Look there,” he pointed before him.

They notice about seven creatures walking along their road. They couldn’t see any details yet because they were too far, but they had no doubts what they were.

 “Demons,” Tokutei whispered slightly drawing his sword.

 “This must be some kind of a patrol,” Seith added. “We can’t pass them unseen. We must take them out.”

 “Cold steel or silencer?” Surya asked rubbing her cuffs where her blades were hidden.

Patricia scratched her head and replied,

 “If we use cold steel they’d have enough time to alarm the others and the whole Hell will know we’re here. Use the pistols with silencers.”

 “They’re too far to use the pistols,” the dhampiric girl replied.

Michael rubbed his eyes and turned the wheel.

 “I’ll park behind this boulder, and you may go there on foot to take them out.”

 “By you, you mean?” Patricia enquired confused.

 “All of you.”

 “I’m not so good with guns,” the Asian said feeling a little bit embarrassed. “I’m gonna stay here.”

 “OK, I’m gonna take three pistols and we may go along this side,” Surya sighed not being sure if it was such a great idea.

 “Hey, do regular bullets even kill them?” Patricia asked.

Seith raised his eyes and fixed them on her.

 “They are creatures made of flesh and blood, bullets will kill them.”

Surya stood up and headed to the second compartment of the truck where computers were and weapons were stored. She grabbed three pistols, opened the back door and went out.

No sooner had she stepped on the Hellish ground, than she heard millions of shrieks and screams echoing in the distance. It made her shiver and she stepped back instantly. Seith and Patricia were right behind her.

“What are those sounds? Patricia asked before Surya managed to open her mouth and ask the same.

“Tormented souls,” Seith replied without any emotions. “You shall get used to it.”

Surya’s body shook as her mind filled with images of what that could look like.

“I don’t even wanna know what they do to them,” Paricia said reaching out for the pistols.

“It’s horrible,” the dhampiric girl added sadly and concerned.

As soon as Surya handed out the weapons, she checked the type of ammo it was showing.

 “Why are there no holy water bullets? They should do the job.”

 “You are wrong,” Seith gazing into her white pupils. “They only work on possessed people. For those demons you need regular bullets or explosive ones.”

 “Since we can’t use explosive here, we must use the iron ones, which are the regular type of ammo,” Patricia added proudly.

Surya felt a little bit underestimated, so she tried to make amends for it.

 “Alright, regular it is. Try to keep up,” she smirked making a dart along the road to the next rock, using her dhampiric speed.

Within two seconds she was a hundred feet further behind a seventeen-feet tall boulder and waited for the others to catch up with her. When they finally joined her, Patricia leaned left to check how far the patrol was. The shrieks couldn’t make her focus, but she had no other choice.

 “We can’t go this way. There’s nothing to hide behind. We must move up and take them by surprise.”

Seith looked up and saw a narrow footpath going along the wall.

 “There is a footpath, if we manage to reach that lodge,” he pointed at a small lodge about quarter a mile from them, “We may startle them.”

 “Actually not a bad plan,” Surya replied. “I’ll run there as soon as I can and wait for you on the lodge.”

 “Agreed,” the demon replied.

Soon the three of them were lying on the lodge watching the patrol walk beneath. They were only few feet above them and they could see what they looked like. The first three demons were shorter than humans, they had bigger heads than their thin bodies covered with short, thick hair. Their heads were leaned to the front with long ears and horns that arched to the back and then down. They also had small goat beards and sharp, teeth. They were wearing old, torn clothes and they moved on their four limbs. Behind them there were two humanlike demons. They were the same size, but their skin was pale and they had larger, black eyes and wider black mouths with nothing apart from blackness inside. Their skull was covered in brownish veins. These creatures were thin and they were wearing only old-fashioned trousers. At the very back was one large demon. He was much taller than a human and was very well-built. His reddish skin glittered in the dark light of Hell. He had a bald head with two massive horns coming to the front on both sides. They were as thick as human arms and looked really frightening. He had yellowish eyes that seemed to be burning and its mouth was full of sharp teeth. He was carrying a large two-side axe that was as long as him.

“They look…” Surya tried to say.

“Hideous,” Patricia finished.

Seith grasped the pistol and pointed it towards the biggest demon.

 “I’ll take the big one, you’ll take the possessors.”

 “Which are…?” the dhampiric girl asked baffled.

 “The ones with black eyes.”

 “What about the small ones in the front?” Patricia asked.

 “They mean nothing. Ready?”

An uncertain nod came from both girls.

 “On my mark. One, two, three. Shoot!”

Having said that, he squeezed the trigger and hit the large demon right in the head. Girls easily eliminated the two other ones and shot the small ones in the front. The demons fell numb onto the ground.

 “We’re done. Let’s hide the bodies and get back to the vehicle,” Seith announced slowly walking down.

The girls joined him and soon the three of them were walking slowly towards the rock where Tokutei and Michael were waiting in the vehicle. Surya put away her pistol and gave a comment,

 “I thought all demons looked the same.”

 “Wrong, there are many types of demons,” Seith replied. “We met three kinds of them; warthers, the smaller ones, possessors, the medium ones. Only they can posses a human body on Earth, and that big individual was a guardian.”

 “Wait, wait, wait,” Surya slowed down. “That means that you’re a possessor.”

 “Guilty as charged,” came the answer.

They were getting closer to the truck. Michael could see them through the windshield.

 “They’re back,” he said to Tokutei.

The Asian man raised his eyes. He was glad the rest were back, so they could continue the journey, but he could sense something looming.

 “Oh no,” he jumped from the seat and made a slash outside through the side door.

He had seen several small creatures climbing down the steep mountainside right at them. Two of the creatures threw themselves at Surya and Patricia knocking them down. Seith reacted quickly by drawing his large sword and cut through the one that was aiming at him. In the meantime, Tokutei rushed out drawing his bluish blade. He heard the souls’ shrieks for the first time, but he neglected them quickly and made a slash towards the girls. Surya kicked off the creature; it was one of the warthers. Seith zoomed towards Patricia and chopped another one. Meanwhile, Tokutei sieved through the rest.

 “Is it over?” Surya asked taking a good look at the ugly demons.

Hardly had she finished the sentence, when a loud sound of a horn spread across the area echoing in the distance.

 “They know we are here,” Seith spoke casually spotting three guardians up a head.

Tokutei turned towards them and waited for them to come down.

 “We must return to the truck,” Seith said. “Make haste.”

 “I wana fight,” Tokutei said through his gritted teeth.

 “No time for it, come!” Surya exclaimed running towards the truck.

They all hurried back to the truck, got quickly inside and spread. Michael and Patricia sat in the front, while the rest of them closed the back door.

 “Mike, drive!” Patricia yelled grabbing two joysticks beneath the monitor in front of her.

Surya and Seith rushed to the second compartment where the computers were.

 “Seith, take the left, I’ll deal with the right.”

Michael started the engine and they took off as fast as possible.

 “Shoot only if they get too close,” the demon announced.

The truck ran over the bodies they had just left and sped up. The weight of the vehicle was so large that they didn’t even felt the crushing remains under the wheels. Tokutei saw a great number of various kinds of hellish creatures running down the hill on their right. They were mostly warthers, and since everybody was inside these monsters could do little harm. Because warthers were small and moved on four limps they didn’t have problems with gravity. They easily climbed walls or even could walk along ceilings.

“Goblins on the road!” Michael shouted pressing the breaks after he had noticed several warthers running along the road towards them.

The first shots came from Patricia. The joysticks were connected to the computer that was responsible for two mounted, fifty caliber guns on the roof. The deadly bullets ripped bodies apart and tore off limbs and heads.

 “Don’t you even slow down.”

 “Are you using regulars?” she heard Seith’s low voice coming from the second compartment.

 “You bet I am.”

The truck headed forward along the road. More and more creatures were seen not only on their road but also on other roads on the mountainside and deep in a spacious gorge on their left. It seemed as if they all had gone out from caves as soon as the horn spread.

**27.**

Jason and Lian were walking up the stairs to Arthur’s office.

 “Wait for me,” Amanda shouted from a few feet behind them.

They stopped saying no words and waited for her to catch up. Seconds later they entered the room also in silence. Jack and Bishop were already there. Arthur was talking on the phone. When he hanged up, he cleared his throat and beckoned at them to take a seat on the empty armchairs. When they all were finally sitting, he walked around his desk and leaned against its front edge.

 “How many men are still missing?”

Lian grasped her tablet and answered his question,

 “At the moment we have exactly five thousand marines, six hundred snipers and four hundred seventy three hunters.”

 “So twenty seven are still missing. What about the specialists?”

 “Two hundred eighty nine.”

 “Only eleven are still on the road.”

Jason rubbed his chin and said.

 “Well, Arthur, you have your small army. The zones are getting ready. We need to distribute ammos and tell them what exactly they must do.”

 “At the sunset Bishop and I will talk to them. I want you to make sure each and every one of them has got a tablet and a life signs chips. Ammo and guns later.”

 “Anything else, Arthur?” Jason asked.

 “Yes. Work as hard as you can today, get a plenty of rest tomorrow.”

Having said that, he heard a knocking at the door.

 “Come in,” he raised his voice.

Everybody turned around to see who it was. They saw a woman with long, blond hair. Lian recognized her at once.

 “Arthur,” the woman said quietly.

 “Leonora, good to see you here.”
 “I’m looking for Dan. I was told he was somewhere else and I had to wait for you.”

Arthur sighed and thought for a while. He forgot that he had to deal with it eventually and tell her the truth.

 “That’s true, dear. There’s no easy way to say it. Dan’s been killed and taken to Hell.”

 “What!” she exclaimed almost losing her balance.

 “Please calm down. They’re rescuing him as we speak. Everything’s gonna turn out well. I’m sure.”

Leonora had little problem with processing that all information. She turned around and went outside saying no word.

 “She’s gonna be OK,” Bishop assured.

 “She will, as soon as she sees her nephew. Anyway. Lian and Amanda go back to the gate and identify all the remaining hunters. Jack and Bishop, please finish setting up the headquarters, and you Jason, I want you to stay with me, there’re still a few things we need to finish.”

**28.**

 Michael was driving the truck as fast as he could. The number of enemies didn’t decline and more and more creatures were trying to block the road, attack them from the mountainside or catch up with them.

 “Tok, take the back gun,” came a strong request or rather and order from Patricia.

The Asian man rushed to the computer compartment and sat next to Surya. The screen was already activated and the joystick was waiting for him.

 “What the…” he said spotting several warthers riding larger creatures right behind them.

They were slightly bigger than elephants, had strong legs tipped with three huge claws Their large heads had long mouths with a feet-long, razor-sharp teeth. Their skin appeared to be rough. Their tail had an altered, hard stone attached to their end, so the creature could be used as a weapon, too. Warthers were riding them in special baskets mounted on their backs.

Seith leaned over to Tokutei and shook his head disappointingly.

 “Gondars; not good, not good. Shoot their head they should fall immediately.

Tokutei pressed the button on the joysticks with his thumb. The bullet flew from the barrel and headed for the monster, but it hit its cheek only, and did nothing but pissed the Gondar.

 “Let’s switch places. I’m not a good shooter.”

 “Move,” Surya pulled Tokutei to her side and took his seat.

Having taken control over the back gun, she could easily take out the running gondars. Patricia was dealing with the front, Seith and Tokutei were in charge of the sides and Surya of the back. Five of such creatures ran down the hill to join the chase. Surya couldn’t keep up, but she did her best. Suddenly, the car was pushed to the left as a thud spread across the roof.

 “The roof,” Michael yelled.

 “Take them out before they break our guns,” Surya added eliminating another one.

Then they all heard a knocking on the glassy window in the ceiling. One of the warthers was trying to get in. Michael pressed some button making the roof open and immediately pressed again to make it close after he had made sure the warther got stuck in it. Patricia turned around and shoot it with the pistol Surya had given her.

 “There’s a tunnel,” Michael announced.

 “Just drive through it. We should be able to lose them there,” Seith replied.

Another three gondars appeared, so there were now seven of them chasing ASATs. They were moving much faster than the truck, and the distance between the vehicle and the creatures was getting smaller. Surya took out two of them, but before she could deal with the others, they got closer to the truck and the warthers jumped onto the roof. The tunnel was getting closer.

 “Faster!” Patricia yelled to the driver.

 “Hang on!” he replied pressing the brake.

The car dramatically slowed down from eighty to thirty miles per hour. Two warthers fell onto the ground before them. Then Michael hit the accelerator again. Yet he failed to consider the chasing gondars and two of them hit the truck from behind making it skid. He quickly regained the control and sped up towards the tunnel. One of the creatures tried to break in from the rooftop, Tokutei was constantly peeking at it and was ready to take care of the demonic creature as soon as it breaks the glass.

 “Just a sec…,” Michael murmured seeing the tunnel a hundred feet away. “Almost there… And we’re in.”

As soon as he said that, the truck disappeared in the tunnel. The warthers had no chance to hide because the ceiling was low enough to hit them off the truck. Surya killed another gondar when she saw three warthers’ bodies falling numbly onto the road and then being crushed by the gondars’ feet. These creatures were taller than the tunnel and as they were trying to stop they crashed into the rocky top. The tunnel was a perfect hideout and made her focus on the back and ignore the sides. It took her only a few seconds before all the gondars fell dead blocking the tunnel.

 “Done,” she exclaimed joyfully feeling pride filling her body.

Seith glanced at the screens.

 “The road has been blocked. They shall not chase us anymore.”

 “So we’re safe, for now,” Patricia added wiping her forehead.

Tokutei let go of the joystick and stood up.

 “Time for a snack,” he said under his breath heading towards the kitchen.

When he got there, he opened the fridge, took out a sandwich and put it into the microwave.

 “Really, Tok?” Patricia said confused. “We have a dead goblin hanging from the ceiling and you’re cooking?”

 “It’s his thing,” Surya answered. “Just ignore it.”

She rolled her eyes and turned her seat to face the windshield. Michael seemed to get lost in his thoughts. He turned his head around.

 “What now?”

 “We drive,” Seith replied.

When he heard the microwave door being opened, he asked eagerly,

 “Are ya’ makin’ food, Tok? Make me somethin’, too.”

Patricia turned her seat around again and fixed her eyes at the dead warther whose blood was dripping onto the floor.

 “Somebody clean this goblin before its stench sets in.”

 “It’s called warther,” the demon replied.

 “Whateve’ I can’t stand it anymore.”

 “So clean it yourself,” she heard Tokutei’s voice coming from the kitchen compartment.

**29.**

 There were already four large tents at the Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno. The tents were also made of illuminated poles with a black roof spread on top of them. Soldiers were taking ammo and weapons out of the trucks and carrying them to the storage area under one of the tents. Sergeant Major of the Army David Johnson; a tall, white man, with glasses on his nose and grey hair was overlooking the whole process. He was staring in a concerned manner at the left side of the cemetery when he heard a voice,

 “What’s the matter?”

He recognized it, it was his friend sergeant Harris.

 “Look, the entrance will be well protected, but I don’t like these graves here,” he pointed at a half a mile line of graves at the freeway. “They’re too close to the street and to the camps.”

Golden Gate National Cemetery was designed in such a way that many graves were put a few yards from the road. There was only a small fence between the freeway and the cemetery.

Harris looked at the satellite map.

 “There’re buildings on the other side of the freeway. Why don’t we place two snipers on each one.”

 “Do you think it would be enough?”

 “We may always place Hummers or tanks along the freeway. What do ya’ think?”

 “Hmm, maybe you’re right. Let’s put two more Humvees here at the fence. Um… Tell you what. That’s good we have buildings on both sides of the venue, then we can deploy snipers on every building.”

 “I don’t think it’s a good idea. We’d better protect the west side. We don’t want anything to pass to Maldito, do we?”

 “If you’re so wise, maybe you wanna take my place here, sergeant?”

 “No thank you,” Harris replied with a sarcasm, “I’m assigned to Alpha Point, and I’d rather stay there.”

**30.**

In the National Cemetery situated in north San Francisco, SMA William Smith was scanning the area and the map to plan the deployment of his men. Wilson, the first sergeant was with him.

 “Look, Wilson, we can’t make a camp at the freeway because there’re too many graves close to the road. We can’t make it on the other side, either because there’re too many trees. The only place for the camp is this small area between Golden Gate Club and Doyle Drive. What do ya’ think?”

Wilson took a good look at the map. National Cemetery was constructed in such a way that was surrounded by woods from three sides and a freeway from its north side.

 “Well, I think we have no choice but to do as you say. Then we would have a good view on the entrance to the cemetery as well as the majority of its territory. We also would take care of those graves close to the road. However, if we need to protect the southern parts we need to deploy snipers on every roof here in Nauman Road.”

 “Eh,” Smith sighed. “Whatever will happen in two days, we’re gonna be in hell of a position up here.”

**31.**

 In the meantime, unit one was driving along the hellish road. They had exit the long tunnel a few miles earlier and now they found themselves to be much higher than ever before. The ceiling covered with sharp stalactites was only a couple feet above them. There were no caves, no holes nothing, just the road winding along a steep mountainside that gradually disappeared in the abyss.

 “We’re half way there,” Seith announced.

Tokutei changed his seats and was sitting now on the left side of the truck. He was gazing at the outstanding view below when something caught his eye.

 “Guys, look down on your left.”

Michael took a glimpse there, while Surya and Patricia leaned to the left window. An uncommon sight met their eyes. Down, down below they saw a thread consisting of millions of moving demons. The threat was at least sixty miles long, and about one hundred feet wide.

 “They’re preparing to enter Earth,” Surya said under her breath.

 “At least we have a safe passage to the castle… I hope,” Michael commented.

 “There’re so many of them. If only there was a way to kill them all from here,” Surya tried to daydream.

 “That is, my fellow humans, good news,” Seith spoke rubbing his bony chin.

Surya stopped gazing out the window and turned round.

 “Why is that?”

 “There shall not be many guards in Shax’s palace. The other good news is that we are on the highest point in that part of Hell right now and it shall be much easier to get to the palace. I know a hidden passage.”

 “We should be there in less than an hour,” Surya said. “Of course if we don’t come across any difficulties.”

**32.**

It was almost eight o’clock in the evening. Arthur was nervously walking from one side of his office to another constantly thinking about what he was going to tell everybody. He glanced at his watch, then at the camera feeds from the courtyard and the island displayed on the screens on the right side of the office. Almost every soldier was waiting for the speech. Arthur finally stopped at his desk, typed something and started speaking.

 “Good evening everyone. This message is played automatically from your tablets directly to the earwigs you’re carrying. My name is Arthur West and within the next few minutes you are going to learn everything concerning the following days.”

He could see everyone listening with attention. After all these were some serious men and they were curious about the whole plan.

 “Let me start from the beginning. You have been chosen from the best. We don’t have some damn armatures here. We don’t have any privates or corporals. Those soldiers are to deal with other things. You all have proved to be suitable for this extremely important operation. I do not know how much you have been told so far. Some of what I am to say is not new to you, but I’m still gonna say it anyway. You all must know that the world will end in twenty eight hours and it is now up to us to make sure it won’t end completely. You all probably wonder what the end would look like. No need to wonder anymore. I will tell you. There’re not going to be any natural disasters… I hope. The end will look much worse. We fear that each and every dead will come back to life here in San Francisco. We may also be attacked by other creatures like vampires and werewolves. But they’re not the worst I’m afraid. The worst thing is that Hell will open and the whole peninsula will be flooded by millions of demons of all kinds. We know that before they head east, they all will try to get to the castle to retrieve one very important object. The object that can stop all of this. We cannot use it now however, for it is incomplete. We have our best men dealing with this as we speak, and before they return we have to keep everything not human away from the castle for all cost. Currently, we’re the only people in the area of 40 miles. There are 5900 soldiers on the island including 600 snipers and 300 medics. There are also 500 hunters from all states and 300 specialists like mercenaries, soldiers of fortune and so on. However, the island is not the only place that must be protected. We have over 2000 soldiers in San Francisco, Daly City and San Bruno who will do more than their best to keep everything away for as long as they can. They’re currently building camps around major cemeteries like National, Woodlawn or Golden Gate. There are also roadblocks every mile north, north-east and south from Alpha Point. The south area will be protected by 100,000 soldiers with heavy machinery spread along the Millbrae Avenue in Millbrae and the mountains to the West from this point. These are the only low rank marines in the region. The island is well protected, mainly because the only way to get it from land is by the tunnel. Thus, the first point to break through will be Alpha Point which is the entrance to the tunnel. The whole island is divided into 9 other zones, starting from Bravo and ending on Juliet which is the castle itself. Each of the first eight zones will have 500 soldiers, 50 snipers, 25 hunters, 20 medics and 20 individuals from other group. Each zone has a wooden-concrete, enhanced wall around. It also has a weapon and ammo storage, tents for medics, canteen as well as camp headquarters. One SMA will be in charge of one zone, and if you don’t get orders from me or general Bishop, follow theirs. If any zone is lost, withdraw to the next one. The map is available to see on your tablets. The tablets will be also your main device used to everything; location, live feed from satellite, communication with single persons or with groups. Every important message will be read by the inbuilt synthesizer or played. You all have been given enhanced weapons. Each weapon has a new feature which is a small switch between various kinds of ammo. REG means regular bullets made entirely from iron. These bullets will be used to eliminate zombies and some demons. EXP stands from explosive bullets. After hitting the target it explodes like a grenade. Good for anything big as well as in great numbers. POI are poisoned bullets with dead man’s blood. Used only against vampires. SLV are silver bullets used against vampires and werewolves. SHP are sharp bullets used against hellish creatures like orts. The last one are SLT. These are advanced salt bullets used against ghosts only. As some of you have seen the island is surrounded by salt blocks. Do not remove them as thanks to them we can make sure the islands will not be trespassed by any spirits. We will also be assisted by jets and bombers. You have probably noticed spotlights in every zones. These are UV spotlights which are perfect against vampires. You also have access to UV grenades, also used against these creatures. Now the most difficult part. Nothing will stay dead starting from doomsday. It means that in the event of any of you getting killed, the others must make sure you will not return as zombies or if they do, they must make sure you’re stay dead. If you see any of your teammates die, you must shot them in the head. I think that’s all I wanted to say. You may all have your dinner now in the courtyard. I suggest you all have enough sleep and rest. And remember, the future of all human race lies now in your hands. If you do have any questions contact general Bishop.”

That was it. He was done. He said everything he wanted to say. Now everyone knew much more what to expect or what to do. Tired as he was, he made for his room. On his way his mind wondered around thoughts concerning Leanore and Dan. Straight away he moved back to 2007. Arthur’s office was much modern than eight years before. The corkboard was replaced by two large screens. The desk got modernized and was much bigger with a wide monitor on it. All papers were scanned and segregated into directories with easy access to them. Arthur was sitting or rather lying on his armchair having his feet stretched out on a small settee. One of the screens was showing Bishop sitting in some office. There was an American flag hanged behind him and he was wearing his military uniform.

 “So what do you think of this ninja team, Arthur?”

 “They’re good. They’re really good. I’ve seen them in action. However, I wanted to show you someone I’ve discovered recently.”

 “Go on,” Bishop’s eager voice came back.

 “He’s only seventeen, but he has accomplished a lot. One of my fellow hunters was bragging about a boy from New York who’s a vampire hunter.”

 “Is he any good?”

 “Good? He’s genius, he’s an inventor. He’s the one who came up with a UV grenade; a deadly weapon against vampires.”

 “UV grenade, something rings my bell.”

 “It’s his invention. I’m going to observe him. I think he makes a perfect candidate for the team.”

 “I agree. Tomorrow I’m going to check out two girl hunters. They’re...”

Arthur found himself in his room. He hobbled towards his bed and fell onto it falling asleep immediately.

 Every soldier heard the speech. Straight away hundreds of question aroused as they began discussing everything with their teammates and friends. Most of them had been preparing for the final day for a long time, but there were still many of those who didn’t know as much as the others.

**33.**

Jack and Bishop were in the headquarters. The room was filled with soldiers gathering at the desks. Everything looked perfect; the wide screens, the computers, the lightening, hidden wires, the canteen. Jack glanced over Bishop’s shoulder holding his tablet.

“Any questions yet?”

“Yeah. Getting tones of them. You the speech. I need to provide them with answers,” Bishop replied walking to the right corner.

“May I have your attention please,” Jack raised his voice and after seeing everyone calming down, he continued. “Thank you. This room is the main headquarters. These screens will display life feed from Eagle Eye which will be shot tomorrow evening. The other screens will display life signs of each and every one on the island and on the land. Red dots will indicate someone’s death, green, they still being alive. The wide desk opposite the screens is for operators. They monitor everything, including messages, threats, deaths, ammo status and so on. Now, the hundred desks among you make turret operational centre. Each of you will take one desk and two joysticks. It’s similar to a computer game, you just have to point and press fire. The turrets are spread everywhere on the island, in the tunnel and around Alpha Point. You just select the turret from the menu. As simple as that. Any questions?”

A forest of hands shot up.

 “And I hoped I explained everything,” he said under his breath.

**34.**

 “There’s the Shax’s palace,” Seith pointed at the towering castle in the distance.

It was huge; at least half a mile tall and a mile wide. It was inbuilt in the mountainside in the back, so it could never be reached from the other side. The castle had twelve wide towers of different sizes, with the highest reaching the rocky ceiling. A moat of boiling lava circled the tall, thick walls. Right in the middle, there was an enormous gate through which a bulk of demons were marching east where they joined the dense river of hellish creatures.

 “We shall get in through a secret tunnel inside the mountain,” he continued. “Unfortunately, this vehicle shall not fit the entrance and we would have to leave it there.”

 “Luckily,” Patricia said, “There’s gonna be fewer of those things inside.”

Surya leaned towards Seith.

 “Do you think Dan is in there?”

 “It is possible.”

Tokutei stood up and moved to the back.

 “Guys, I don’t wanna urge you, but if we get ready now, we’d be faster inside.”

 “He’s right,” Surya replied standing up and heading to the back.

Tokutei moved to the weapon compartment and started to ramshackle his bag.

 “Where’s my…”

 “Did you lose anything, Tok?” he heard Surya’s voice.

 “I can’t find my Bo staff. I must’ve left it on my bed.”

 “You can totally do without it. Trust your sword.”

 “I know I can, I just wanted to have my staff, too.”

The truck was tearing along the road encircling the marvelous structure. When the vehicle disappeared in a dark tunnel, it turned right inside a small cave and stopped behind a slanting wall.

 “This is it,” Seith spoke. “Take your best weapons and I shall meet you outside.”

Surya went out first. She rubbed her ears as she heard the suffering screams coming from the distance.

 “I thought we wouldn’t hear these noises here.”

 “You shall get accustomed to them,” the demon replied seeing the others stepping out.

He took out a large, two-handed sword and walked back to the road.

 “What about the truck?” Michael asked circling the keys around his index finger.

 “It’s safe here. There’s no one in this part of Hell, as you can see,” Patricia replied.

Seith walked towards the tall wall. He started to touch it gently feeling for something with his fingers.

“It is somewhere here. At least, it always has been… Here it is.”

He tightened his grip on some lever and pulled it down as hard as he could making the door disappear in the fake wall. Behind it, there was a long, dark corridor from which a stench of rotten bodies was coming out.

 “Someone died there?” Surya asked covering her nose and waving her hand trying to make the air thinner.

 “Yes, why do you ask?” Seith replied indifferently.

 “Think, Seith.”

 “Many a demon tried to escape through this tunnel during the Great Rebel. Most of them were killed and left.”

 “I’m sorry,” Patricia interrupted, “A great what?”

Seith went inside beckoning to the others to follow him.

 “The Great Rebel took place in Hell in the fourteenth century during Black Death on Earth. Millions of souls rebelled and tried to overtake Hell. We prevailed by putting the highest punishments on the attackers. Each and every soul had been suffering in special torture chambers till this day.”

 “By we you mean demons or humans?” Tokutei asked making a step over a weird skeleton.

 “My sincere apologies. I meant the demons, of course. These souls shall never be released and they shall never become demons as well.”

On hearing that, Surya stopped.

 “Become demons?”

Michael laughed under his breath poking Patricia on her arm.

 “Ha, she doesn’t know. I guess Arthur taught you nothing about demons.”

 “And they were the assault unit,” Patricia added shaking her head.

Surya stood for a while and stared baffled. Then she glimpsed at another weird skeleton lying there and asked in wonder,

 “Demons have bones?”

 “These are creatures, evil for sure, but creatures made of flesh and blood. Their bodies and skin may be different and made of different elements, but still, they are creatures.”

Surya couldn’t help asking another question.

 “Hey, if they’re living creatures, made of flesh and blood, like you said, why so many of them have inhuman powers, huh?”

 “You see, there are very powerful demons called sorcerers. They taught the others different hmm how to say it… tricks. That’s why possessors can leave Hell or pure demons can summon others.”

 “Paymon did it in Attica,” Tokutei recalled.

 “For instance.”

The tunnel bent slightly to the right only to turn rapidly a few feet further.

 “The castle is right behind this wall. Shoot any individual you encounter. We must reach Shax’s chamber first before we start to look for Daniel.”

He pulled another lever as some loud rattle spread inside the wall. Everyone prepared to face whatever was waiting for them on the other side.

**35.**

 San Francisco and all the cities and towns around became empty. None of the street lamps was on, the buildings were dark and there was no traffic apart from Army trucks and choppers. On the other side of the bay, in Oakland City, the coast was getting filled by reporters from almost every network that was in the world. Hundreds of trucks filled the parking lots and the streets. Reporters were constantly telling the viewers what was happening on the other side, at least what they thought was happening .

 “Jack Johnson here for US news. As you can see the cities became dark now. We can’t see anything there, but our sources told us that the only people who are in the area are soldiers. The evacuation ended a few hours ago. Everyone who does not have any family in Oakland and in neighbor cities has been evacuated to a camp built west from Oakland City.”

 “Good evening Boston, this is Samantha Jobs reporting live from Oakland City. What we know for sure is that army has taken over the city. Nobody here believes in the earthquake or flood theory anymore. If it was true, everyone would be evacuated even from these areas. Many people gathered on Oakland streets with various transparent. Most of them concern the end of the world.”

**36.**

Arthur was making himself a coffee when he heard knocking on the door. He glanced at the small screen on the left and saw Bishop’s face. Straight away he walked there to open the door. Before him stood his friend, tired as never.

“John, what happened?”

“I just had to answer over two hundred questions.”

“Come in. Fancy a cup of coffee?”

“Yeah, why not. I could use one. The President’s going to tell the truth tomorrow.”

“That’s good, isn’t it?”

“I know what you think, Arthur. People do deserve to know. However, do you imagine the panic that this may cause? The economy is already suffering.”

Arthur filled two cups with hot coffee, put them on a small, silver tray and carried to the table where Bishop was sitting.

 “John, my friend. Imagine what would happen when people learn what is really going on here from other sources. Do you think they will trust the government again?. You worry about economy. Imagine what would happen to economy if we fail.”

 “If we fail there will be no economy in any country. But didn’t we agree not to mention the failure, Arthur?”

 “Indeed we did. Well, if I have you here now, I wanted to discuss one more issue with you.”

**37.**

 The Echo Zone in the middle of the island was far from being quiet even though there were only thirty people. Everybody was discussing what would happen the next day. Some of them wondered if this would be there last night, while others were talking about their families. Two soldiers were sitting at a table in the tent chatting. Four others were playing cards, while a few some others were trying to sleep.

 “Paul, come with me to the castle. I don’t wanna sleep here,” the Mexican guy with a short moustache said poking his friend who was playing some game on his mobile.

 “Paul…”

He paused the game and looked at his colleague.

 “I told I don’t wanna go there, Steve. I’m the First Sergeant, I simply cannot do this.”

 “Paul, com’on,” Steve insisted.

 “No. If you want to go there, then go. SMA Miller said there’s plenty of room.”

 “I’m goin’,” he replied standing up.

 “So I see.”

 “At least I’ll have a good night sleep.”

He was about to leave the tent, when Paul looked at him with a smirk.

 “Yeah, I bet you will. Especially when your mind fills with thoughts and worries.”

 “Shut up,” Steve turned around and left.

**38.**

The rough, rocky wall disappeared and Seith made the first step. They found themselves in something similar to a very old library. There were shelves curved in stone on which old books were standing. Books so old that their pages seemed to fall into dust when touched. Next to each shelf there were two large, extinguished candles placed on two long, brass candlesticks. On the other side of the room erected four chairs, also curved in stone. The only light was the beam of lava coming from behind one, wide window on the other side of the room. There was no one inside, only the humans and one demon. The only sound they heard was the moaning of souls echoing somewhere in the distance.

 “I hope the whole castle looks like this,” Michael murmured lowering his gun.

 “Follow me,” Seith beckoned making a dart towards the left exit.

Everyone ran after him trying to keep pace. Seith passed the exit which turned into a narrow corridor, then turned right into some other room with shields and swords everywhere. Next he made for another exit, down the steep steps into another corridor and right again. Still, they met no one.

 After a while Seith stopped at some door and turned round to the group.

“We are at her chamber. She has been badly hurt, thus she is recovering from it. Vulnerable as she is, she can be killed easily, but do not kill her yet. We need to know if Daniel is here.”

He made sure if everybody was ready and quickly kicked open the door, rushed inside and made for the bed. The rest of the team followed him swiftly. The chamber was a huge almost empty, circular room situated in one of the towers. The walls had nothing on them except a few drawings of various kinds. There were at least six doors leading to other corridors and rooms and one door opposite the bed leading to a small balcony. A huge chandelier was hanging from the ceiling filled with twelve massive candles. Opposite the door, there was a large bed covered with animal skin and fur on which a figure was lying; Shax.

 “You!” she said raising her heavy head.

Seith ran towards her holding his double-handed sword and pressed it to her throat. Shax said nothing. Her scared eyes had nothing to say. The others stopped in front of the bed and lowered their weapons.

 “Where’s Dan!” Surya exclaimed.

 “And the ring,” Tokutei added.

The female demon coughed and raised her shaky hand. She seemed to be very weak after the fight in Bangkok. She snapped her fingers and within a few seconds the room filled with tall, muscular guardian demons holding either swords or axes. Tokutei and Surya reacted immediately, The Asian warrior drew his bluish sword while Surya ejected her sharp blades from her cuffs. Tokutei managed to cut through one of the guardians when Shax held out her hand, opened her palm and straight away a magical force pushed them all to the wall. They tried to move but the force was too strong for them. She wasn’t so weak after all. To everyone’s amazement the force hadn’t touched Seith. Neither the guards did anything to circle him or to even stand near him. They thought that maybe her power didn’t work on other demons, but then Seith slowly removed the sword from her neck and stepped aside.

 “Thank you, Seith, for bringing them down to me. Did you also bring, what I asked you for?”

 “Of course,” the demon replied taking something from his coat.

The others were gazing in shock not only because they had just learned Seith betrayed them but also because they saw what they had never expected. The demon gave the small object to Shax and stepped aside.

 “You stupid fuck!” Patricia exclaimed. “Do you have any idea what you have just done?”

They both ignored them. Shax slowly raised the object up towards the candles light and said with satisfaction in her low voice,

 “At last, the whole Seal is mine.”

 “How could you, Seith,” Surya cried, “How could you stood us up!”

Shax turned her head towards ASATs, smacked her lips and spoke,

 “I’m glad that you’re all here. I don’t have to wait till my babies kill you, and now I can play with you just as I am going to play with your friend.”

 “Seith, do something you son of a bitch!” Michael exclaimed, but the demon said nothing.

He was only standing there ignoring his former friends.

 “I have enough of you,” Shax spoke as her low voice rebounded from the walls.

Having said that she moved her hand down and the magical force that was holding everyone at the wall pushed them to the ground so fast that they all lost consciousness.

 “Take them to the dungeon. I shall deal with them when Arthur and the rest of these scumbags are sent here.”

The tall guardians lowered their weapons and grabbed the unconscious humans. A moment later they went out through one of the doors and disappeared as their heavy steps echoed in the stone corridor.

 “And you Seith, you’re banished no more. But that’s of course too small price for such an achievement. You shall be given a country, any country you choose it will be yours forever and you can do whatever you like with it.”

 “Thank you, my Lady,” he replied calmly while bowing low before the demon.

**39.**

 The president of the United States was sitting at his desk in the Oval Room. There were three generals in the office sitting on the sofas in front of him. It looks like the discussion had been going on for quite a long time. One of the generals seemed to be a little bit frustrated.

 “I don’t think your plan is a good idea,” he said almost crushing his hat.

 “It’s not what you think, Baker, it’s what is right to do,” the president replied.

 “I still believe we should evacuate our boys and use a nuclear missile.”

 “And have an inhabitable area for a few decades?” some other general replied.

The first one looked at the president.

 “Sir, I don’t trust either West or Bishop. They don’t know what they’re doin’.”

The president looked at him casually and replied calmly,

 “Both West and Bishop accomplished within a few years of preparing and only three months of acting something what we couldn’t for three decades, so don’t judge them.”

**December 20, 2012**

*1 day remaining*

**40.**

 It was almost noon in empty peninsula where San Francisco, Daly City, San Bruno and Pacifica are situated. Arthur heard knocking at his door, as his tablet was beeping and vibrating. He quickly sprang to his feet, made a dash for the tablet first and glanced it. The flickering name *BISHOP* caught his eye immediately, but what worried him was the time displayed in the top-right corner; *11:37*. Not waiting any longer, he inserted a small earwig to his ear and answered the phone.

 “What’s wrong, Bishop?” he asked stumbling towards the door to answer it afterwards.

 “What’s wrong? It’s almost 1200 and you’re not answering either the door or the phone.”

 “I’ve answered the phone now. Now waiting for the door.”

 “It’s me on the other side, so hang up and answer that damn door.”

Arthur opened the door and saw Bishop waiting there mad.

 “I’m sorry, OK? I’ve must’ve had a good night sleep.”

Bishop rushed inside grabbing Arthur by his hand and pulled him with him.

 “It’s not important now, we’ve got so many things to do. Put on some clothes and hit your office.”

He pushed him back to the room.

**41.**

 Five minutes later they reached the office. Lian, Jason, Jack and Amanda were already there sitting nervously on the armchairs.

 “Arthur, finally, we thought something was wrong with you,” the Asian woman said gladly.

 “No need to panic, I just failed to sleep enough during the last few days and now the tiredness won and kept me in my bed almost till noon.”

Bishop ran to the computer, pressed a few buttons and the left screen displayed a green earpiece dialing number to the president.

 “I told the president you would contact him as soon as you are reachable.”

Arthur smiled gently as the face of the president popped up on the screen.”

 “West, at last. Better late than never. I talked to my generals yesterday, and we came to several conclusions. Firstly, we’re sending a few Strykers and tanks to the peninsula. Secondly, we are going to use more bombers and fighters to assist you. Also, our men are preparing missiles in Los Angeles and our battleships are lining the coast approximately fifteen miles away.”

 “Why so many precautions?” he asked.

 “I do understand West that you managed to kill a couple of thousand vampires and ghosts or whatever you call them using only five of your men, but now we’re facing tens of millions of enemies. We must be prepared for it.”

 “If I could only ask, sir, if you chose to assist us with more power, please do not lure these things outside the bay. If they do so, they may spread further, and then we’re doomed.”

 “I do understand that. They are only to assist if any such help is necessary or to protect the borders if those things break out. I need to talk to the press now.”

 “Are you going to tell them the truth, sir?”

 “Not yet. I do not want people to panic. What if nothing happens? What if you… I mean we are wrong? We must wait for Hell to open, Arthur.”

 “I’m not wrong. I can’t be.”

The president ended the call. Arthur looked at his men.

 “Jason and Jack. I want you to go to Alpha Point and help them set up everything in the headquarters.”

 “No problem, Arthur,” the black man replied.

 “And girls, I want you to check whether everything is ready for tomorrow.”

**42.**

 “Tokutei, Tokutei? Tok?” he heard a familiar voice, slowly opening his eyes.

The picture was blurry, but it became sharper with time. Not only this. He felt dreadful pain in his right leg. He tried to raise his head to see it, but Surya touched his arm and added,

 “Don’t move. Your leg is broken.”

 “Not only his,” he heard Michael’s voice.

 “What happened?” he asked peeking at Surya and the room where they were.

Surya was crouching at him, while Michael was lying on the other side of a spacious room with Patricia at hisside. The room itself looked like a cave with sharp rocks pointing from the ceiling. The entrance was blocked by thick, metal bars and the only light was coming from two torches spread on two sides of the cell.

 “You don’t remember?” the dhampiric girl replied sadly.

Tokutei dropped his eyes for a while then raised them swiftly up and boomed,

 “Seith, that son of…”

 “Yes, he betrayed us,” Michael added rubbing his shin. “If I only see him, I’ll crush him like a bug.”

Patricia slowly stood up and limbed towards Surya.

 “I told you before, never trust a demon, but you Mike persisted that he was not like others.”

 “Not me, it was Bishop.”

Surya couldn’t stand it anymore.

 “Guys, please stop quarrellin’. We gotta find a way to break out.”

 “My sword,” Tokutei whispered trying to raise his body. “It can…”

 “They took all our weapons,” Michael interrupted.

 “Even your daggers?” the Asian men asked.

Surya nodded unwillingly walking towards the entrance. She tightened the grip on the bars and tried to pull them with her dhampiric strength, but they didn’t even move.

 “They’re too strong. This is it. We’re in Hell and we’re gonna spent our eternity here.”

 “Calm down, Surya!” Patricia walked up to her still limping. “Don’t even think to give up. The whole planet is depending on us. They won’t be able to win without the Seal, they simply won’t.”

 “Hush!” Tokutei whispered hearing some noise coming from the outside. “Someone’s coming.”

 “Don’t hush me,” Surya shouted. “We’re doomed anyway. I don’t have to be quiet anymore.”

The steps were getting louder and louder. Then they stopped followed by two sounds of sword coming through flesh and then two thuds. A moment of silence and the steps sounded again. Everyone was staring at the bars waiting impatiently to see who was coming.

**43.**

In every major city people were slowly gathering on streets where huge screens were placed. They were showing live reports from San Francisco bay talking about what was happening on the other side of the bay. Some of the people gathered before the screens were shouting different things about the end of the world. Others were praying. Yet some others came there only to watch. A reporter was talking about another issue.

“We have learned that many sects throughout the country are planning to commit mass suicide. The police are trying to identify these people and stop them.”

She touched her ear as if she received an important message from her producer.

 “Our reporters situated north to the Golden Gate Bridge have spotted snipers gathering on the roofs of major structures in San Francisco. The president is scheduled to make another speech today at three p.m. local time. Let us hope he would tell us more.”

**44.**

 The team was staring out the bars at the dark figure that rushed downstairs. It was no one else but Seith himself. He was standing there with his sword from which blood was dripping onto the steps. Hardly had Patricia recognized him, when she threw herself at the bars trying to grab his throat and squeeze it.

 “You idiot, you have any idea what you’ve done?” she shouted waving her hand a few inches away from his throat.

 “Hush. It was not what it seemed,” he whispered calmly.

 “Not what it seemed?” Michael rolled on his side trying to get up. “Well, it seemed to me that you fuckin’ betrayed us.”

 “How could you give her the Seal!” Patricia cried still trying to reach the demon’s throat with her hand.

Seith sighed as he made a step right gently tapping with the tip of his sword against the bars.

 “I could easily cut these bars and let you out, but you would kill me before you give me any chance to explain myself.”

 “Go to Hell!” Surya shouted realizing what she had just said.

 “Please, just let me explain, and you shall be free,” he assured.

Patricia calmed down a little bit, while Surya sat next to Tokutei.

 “If you have something to say for yourself then speak,” Tokutei said. “Everyone deserves this right.”

Michael lost his battle with himself, and realized he wouldn’t be able to get up. He rolled to the left and waited for Seith to say what he wanted to say.
 “At last, someone who follows his code,” the demon said under his breath inhaling quite a large amount of air. “Now be silent and listen. I fooled almost everybody. It was the plan all along. Many years ago Bishop and I invented a marvelous plan. He sent me back to Hell to convince Shax that even though I was working with humans, I was still secretly devoted to Hell. As a proof I promised her the Seal, but do not worry. It was a fake Seal we created. She believed me and sent me back to Earth where I continued my work. Originally, Arthur wanted me to be in first Unit, but killing other demons in such great numbers would simply not be right for a double agent. I decided to stay with you,” he pointed at Patricia and Michael, as they listened to every word in both disbelief and uncertainty.

 “Why didn’t you tell us?” Michael asked baffled.

 “Under no circumstances could any individual know the truth. Only me and Bishop. Shax can read minds, which you already know. Had I told you, she would have killed us all, and I would learn neither the whereabouts of the ring nor Daniel Night.”

Having heard that Surya’s eyes grew wide as she stood up and went closer to the bars.

 “What? You know where Dan is?”

 “I do know. I couldn’t come earlier as I was looking for both; the ring and Daniel.”

 “What about Lian’s brother?” Tokutei asked. “Did you find him?”

 “He’s too far from here to be taken with us.”

 “So where is the ring and Dan?” Michael enquired being almost thoroughly convinced.

 “Daniel is in this castle, not far from here. The ring, however is not kept by Shax anymore. It is in her chamber in a secret vault.”

 “I think he’s lying,” Michael said angrily.

 “Why would I bother come here and tell you all of that. I want you to come with me and we have a mission to finish.”

 “What do ya’ think, Tok?” Surya asked taking a glimpse at him.

 “To me, If I must be honest, he is telling the truth. I should… we should go and finish the mission. By staying here we’ll lose everything. By sticking with him, we might have a chance.”

Seith raised his sword.

 “You shall not kill me when I cut the bars?”

 “I will think on that,” Patricia greeted her teeth still being irritated.

 “Step away,” the demon spoke as he swung his sword diagonally right, then up again cutting through the massive bars.

He walked in watching everyone closely and then slowly, step by step walked to Tokutei and crouched at him. He touched his leg with his open palm and as he closed his eyes he gently exhaled some air through his nose. Next he stood up and walked towards Michael and did the same.

 “I am deeply sorry, my friend, that you had to go through this. Your legs are broken no more.”

Having finished it, he could feel their astonished eyes gazing at him, as he was walking towards Surya.

 “I’m fine,” she replied. “Patricia had something with her back,” she pointed at her teammate.

 “This is only a small percentage of what I shall do to make amends to all of you. But now it is not time for this for we must retrieve your weapons at once.”

 “What about Dan?” Surya asked.

 “With no weapons, we cannot head there.”

 “Where are they anyway?” came another question.

Seith turned towards the cut off bars and made for the exit.

 “Not far from here.”

The others joined him and ran after him upstairs. On their way they saw two bodies of guardians cut into half. A few yards further they saw another two bodies. When the stairs ended, they turned left into a dark hole illuminated by two rows of torches on each side. At the end of the hall, were large, iron door with two guardians standing on both sides.

 “What are you doing here,” one of them asked raising his heavy hammer.

Seith grabbed his two-handed sword with the second hand and rushed forward. At the same time a dozen of warthers crawled out from the small holes in the walls.

 “We’ll deal with them,” Surya shouted making a slash at the creatures.

Tokutei joined her immediately and the others followed them. Surya jumped into the air made a front flip and landed in such a way that she grabbed the neck of the warther with her thighs and crushed it. At the same time, she hit the other warther with her palm right into the eye. In the meantime, Tokutei made a spin and kicked off one creature, span back and kicked off another one. Meanwhile, Michael raised one of such creatures in the air and broke its spine against his knee. Patricia tried to do anything to help, but the others had taken care of them too soon.

 “Come on!” Seith said entering the chamber.

They rushed towards the door along the floor covered with bodies of warthers and guardians, and as they entered, they saw two sets of tables with their backpacks and weapons on them.

 “Quickly, take your stuff,” Michael exclaimed running to his backpack.

Patricia placed her watch on her wrist and stopped in shock.

 “Is my watch wrong or is it almost one in the afternoon?”

Michael found his watch, looked at it and answered baffled,

 “You’re right. We’ve been out for the whole night.”

 “Once again, my apologies,” the demon added.

Tokutei looked around anxiously raising his backpack and looking underneath.

 “Where’s the key?”

Seith dropped his eyes trying to recall.

 “Shax must have put it along with the fake Seal and the ring.”

Surya glanced impatiently at her watch.

 “So don’t waste time and go. The next stop is …Dan,” she said leaving the room first.

Seith accelerated towards the corridor they came from.

 “The number of guards is extremely low. Usually there’re ten thousand demons staying in the castle, today, there’re less than a hundred.”

Within a few seconds they were back in the corridor. Seith took the way up the stairs and then turned again, this time right, down the stairs, and left. The sound of moaning combined with suffering was coming from the corridor. When they entered there, they saw two rows of doors on each side going for a mile.

 “How are we gonna find him?” Tokuei asked making the first step.

Seith passed him and ran ahead.

 “I know where he is, just follow me.”

And they did, but to everyone’s surprise they met no guards. The corridor was empty. Every door they passed they could hear either strange sentences spoken in foreign languages or sounds of moaning. After a few hundred yards Seith stopped.

 “Behind this door.”

Surya was too thrilled. She couldn’t help herself anymore. She made a step forward. In her mind was only one thought; to meet him again.

 “What are you doin’?” Michael asked.

 “Openin’ the door,” she replied as two daggers ejected from her cuffs. She crossed her arms and drew a circle inside the door large enough for everyone to fit. Then she pushed the door and the metal shape dropped onto the ground. She didn’t turned off her blades, but entered first looking around. It was a torture chamber filled with various equipment. There was no one inside, apart from Dan who was lying on a wooden boards. His hands and legs were tied with chains against two wooden structures that were probably used to rip bodies apart. Having spotted him, she ran to him as fast she could, while the others followed her slowly.

 “Oh my god, Dan,” she said through the tears as she carefully examined his body.

His hands were bleeding, his chest was full of holes from the other day and his legs were covered in numerous wounds. The girl quickly cut the chains and slowly put his body on the boards below.

 “He’s barely alive.”

 “Let me handle this,” the demon said walking towards them.

He placed his palm on his forehead and muttered something. The wound disappeared immediately and the boy began to move gently. He slowly turned his head up as Surya stroke his blonde hair. His eyelids began to open and as he finally saw something, he whispered,

 “Natalie…”

Michael and Patricia gave Surya a weird look full of confusion. They didn’t know about her past. Neither did they know about their previous relationship.

 “Yes… I mean Surya,” the girl stuttered in astonishment.

 “S-Surya?” he looked around with his eyes only. “Tok? Who are these people?”

 “I’ll explain everything later. How are you feelin’?”

Dan tapped his chest and legs several times looking for wounds.

 “Actually, not bad,” he replied sitting up.

 “Now listen, there’s been much goin’ on for the last couple of days. So be all ears and listen up. It’s 1:24 p.m. on Thursday, 20th December.”

 “Wait, wait, wait,” the boy interrupted. “I’ve been gone for two days? I bet you’ve got somethin’ to eat in that backpack.”

**45.**

 Lian and Amanda reached Alpha Point by Lian’s white Porsche Panamera. There was no room in the parking lot outside the houses, so they decided to leave the car parallel to the street, which, moreover was not used by any cars. As soon as they got out, they saw a large number of soldiers and hunters wandering around setting up posts, tents, weaponry and so on. They went up to the highest in rank men there, which was Sergeant Major of the Army Charles Williams; a 41 year old black person with no hair on the head apart from small beard and moustache. He was checking something on his tablet as the girls approached him.

 “Charles Williams, I presume,” Amanda asked.

 “You must be those two ASAT girls. Bishop let me know that you were coming to help us finish the headquarters.”

 “That’s right. Where is it?”

 “First building on my right on the second floor. Our boys have done almost everything except the connections, of course.”

When they heard the order, they walked swiftly to the building, passing several soldiers in the drive.

 “I’ve never seen Alpha Point being so busy,” the Asian girl commented.

 Two minutes later they entered the room that served as headquarters. Lian knew that room pretty well, it used to serve as her resting room when she wanted to take a break from everything in October and November. Now everything was changed. The wall where paintings used to hang was covered with three large screens. Opposite them, there was a table with two computers and some device used to communicating. There was also a coffee maker at the computers. The western wall where two doors were; one from the stairs and one to the rooftop, had numerous weapons and clips attached. The main table was moved further to the northern window, and on the table there were eight laptops and three hunters around connecting them to the whole net. One of the hunters; a tall woman with long, black, straight hair and round glasses was plugging in some wire into the USB port at one of the laptops. When she noticed the girls, she stopped what she was doing and came up to them saying,

 “Dorothy Lednicky from Ohio.”

 “Qiaolian Shu, and this is Amanda Brown. Nice to meet you.”

 “Nice to meet you, too. We’re having some problems with the feed from the rifles on the roof. Could you help us?”

 “Let me look at it,” Amanda replied, while Lian moved towards the computer connected to the large screens.

There was a soldier sitting at the desk typing something on the computers, but the screens were showing nothing.

 “Need help?”

 “Actually not,” a short man with curly hair replied. “I’m trying to… and… great, done,” he clapped his hands as one of the screen displayed a picture showing green dots of everyone assigned to Alpha Point.

**46.**

 Back in Hell, Dan had been listening to what Surya and the others had to say. They had introduced Michael and Patricia, they had told him what was going on in San Francisco, about Bishop, the soldiers, about Seith’s plan and how he had fooled everyone. But even though, Surya hadn’t dared to raise the topic of their common past nor their feelings. It took Dan several minutes to process all the information, but he quickly come round and behaved as a usual Dan; a positive, cocky dude.

 “So, basically, we gotta take the ring, get back to your vehicle, travel fifteen miles to some portal and we’re back in San Francisco, right?”

 “Right,” Patricia replied.

Tokutei drew his bluish sword and looked at the blade.

 “There’s still one matter to be discussed.”

 “I know, I know,” Michael replied. “Killing Shax.”

Dan was watching them speak so freely among themselves that he couldn’t believe that they had established such a strong bond within one day.

 “And how are we gonna do this?” Surya asked. “She has still a lot of power within herself, so she can throw us against the wall or out of the window.”

Seith put on his hat that was lying on his laps.

 “It doesn’t work on me. She cannot use her power on a demon within a human body.”

 “What’s more,” Patricia added, “She has only two hands, and there’re six of us, so we can attack her from all sides.

 “OK, sounds good to me. So can we go and leave this horrible place?” Dan asked grabbing a pistol from someone’s bag.

 “Hey, hey, hey, man. That’s my gun,” Michael noticed it and got frustrated straight away.

 “As you haven’t noticed I have nothing with me. Only my torn uniform. By the way, you have still a few of those guns left in your backpack.”

 “J-Just don’t scratch her,” came the answer.

 “Oh another gun lover. You should talk to Lian or Jason. They are like sleeping with guns.”

 “Follow me,” Seith said taking the lead and leaving the chamber.

The rest ran after him to the corridor.

 On their way they met very few guards. Fighting them was now much easier when they had their weapons with them. The way to Shax’s chamber was long. When they finally reached the familiar corridor, Seith stopped at the entrance and said,

 “It is of the highest importance that we attack from all sides. There are six doors, as you remember, so it shall be right if each one of you enter through each door. Tokutei and Daniel, you go this way, and we shall go that.”

 “OK,” Michael replied. “In exactly…um… sixty seconds we enter and bring Hell to them… or rather Earth to them.”

And so they did. Everyone went along the circling corridor and stopped at each door. The time was ticking and they were waiting for the sixtieth second to pass. Everybody made sure their weapons were reloaded and the right ammo is active. When the time was up they all broke through the metal door inside the chamber they had known from the previous day. Shax was alone sleeping in her bed regenerating. The noise however, woke her up and as soon as she regained clear vision, she reacted as a reflex swinging her hand left and pushing Dan and Tokutei towards the door and the wall. With her right hand she pushed away Surya and Seith. Michael and Patricia stopped for a second having spotted that her force works on Seith as well.

 “Seith, you traitor,” the demon princess said through her teeth and threw him against the floor.

Next she noticed Michael pressing the trigger, so she released Tokutei and Dan and pushed him and Patricia away causing them to let go of their weapons.

 “Guards!” she shouted with her low voice so loud that the walls shook and several fractures appeared on the ceiling and the floor. Dan raised his pistol and began squeezing the trigger, but the demon was quicker and released Surya only to push Dan hard against the wall hoping he would lose consciousness.

 “Guards! Guards!” she shouted again making a few parts of the ceiling fall.

One of the rocks hit a torch putting out the fire which immediately dimmed the room. Surya wanted to use her dhampiric speed and throw herself at the demon, but she heard heavy steps coming from the corridor outside. Within a second she had to make a decision, either to take a chance at the foe or save Seith who was still lying on the floor. She chose the second option and made a dart at the door at two guardians that had just entered. Tokutei got up and jumped into the air, made a frontflip pointing his mighty blade towards the enemy’s head. Shax was able to stand up on her feet and dodge the stab. She let go of Michael and Patricia and threw Tokutei towards the open balcony. At the same time, four guardians entered through the door where Michael land Patricia were lying. The girl quickly straightened her hand to take a grip of her assault rifle. Hardly had she felt the cold barrel, when she realized that the large guardian had raised his heavy hammer and was aiming down at her. She swiftly rolled away as the iron hammer made a vast hole in the floor. Patricia aimed her gun, but Michael was faster and had killed the guardian. Not waiting any longer, she directed her weapon at the other two demons and took a series of shots. In the meantime, Surya cut through demons with her sharp daggers and helped Seith get up. Tokutei however, tried to stop himself from falling out through the balcony, but the force he had been pushed by was too strong. He flew over the edge and was sure he would fall down into the boiling hot lava, but he straightened his hand with the sword, stabbed it into the very edge of the balcony with the sharp edge facing up and hanged. If he had turned his blade other side, the sharp edge would have gone through the wall and he would have fallen. Dan crawled to his pistol and was determined to take Shax first. Yet, he felt a strong kick on his stomach from some other guardian who had just rushed inside. The force from the heavy leg made him fall across the room towards Seith and Surya. Shax was constantly pushing away those who tried to do something to her. Every push made her weaker and she couldn’t stay focused enough to trust her eyes or senses. She even failed to omit her guard, so they sometimes were pushed, too. Tokutei crawled barely up the edge of the balcony. Shax was too busy with the others to notice him, and in her mind she was sure, he had fallen out. He raised his sword and made a slash at her. As he was only few feet away, he jumped and aimed at her head. In the meantime, Shax pushed away Surya and Dan and as she was turning to deal with Michael and Patricia, in the tail of her eye she noticed a bluish blade approaching right at her. There was no time to use her force, so the only option for her was to dodge out of the way. Tokutei cut down, but the demon moved away with her body. Too slow. The edge of the blade went through her arm where elbow was and cut it off. The others took a glimpse and reacted quickly.

 “She can’t use both hands anymore!” Michael shouted pressing the trigger.

A series of bullets went at her as Tokutei moved away. The demon swung her other hand to knock everyone to the walls and screamed out of pain. Surya found herself the closest and took advantage of the situation. She zoomed towards the demon and kicked her as hard as she could. Shax flew towards the balcony and landed on the very edge. Next Surya quickly rushed forward to finish her off. She could hear others following her. She raised her leg to throw an axe kick from above straight down. The demon grabbed her leg by the calf and threw the dhampiric girl out of the balcony. At the same time Patricia and Tokutei caught up with them. Tokutei quickly grabbed Surya by her hand before she fell down and pushed her in, while Patricia hit the demon on the hand to let go of the grip. She did.

“You fools, I have the Seal, you’re worthless without it.”

Patricia made a spin to kick the demon out of the balcony, but the opponent managed to take hold of her leg, and as a result they both fell out and started to gain speed directly towards the lava. The others couldn’t do anything, but to watch them fall down.

 “You’ll die with me.” Shax whispered.

Patricia stumped on the demons fingers to make her let go of her leg. She felt the grip being slowly loosen, so she looked deeply in her eyes.

 “I won’t. Oh and the Seal Seith gave you… was fake,” she finished with a strong kick and released herself from the clutch.

Shax froze in shock trying to process everything that had just happened. The distance between them began to increase as Patricia activated the side wings in her suit and glided away from lava. The body of demon hit the moat with a splash and sank burning completely.

 “She’s alive!” Michael exclaimed with joy seeing his teammate land freely and safely outside the moat.

Tokutei glanced at the colossal army marching a few miles away.

 “Quickly, find the ring and let us head back.”

 “We’ll meet at the truck!” Surya said to Patricia through the earwig, then turned round and followed the rest inside the chamber.

Seith went first and stopped at the bed only to pull it aside.

 “The ring should be here,” he pushed away a few rocks revealing a hole inside the wall where two brownish objects were lying. There was also one more object. Seith grabbed them and placed them onto his hand while everyone stood around him in circle.

 “The key,” Tokutei murmured. “I knew that bitch stole it from us.”

He took the key and handed it over to Dan. Then everybody focused on what Seith had on his palm.

 “So this is the fake Seal,” Surya said raising the object up.

 “It is out of importance,” the demon replied. “The ring is of great matter and I suggest you,” he beckoned at Tokutei, “to hide it in your sword’s handle.

 “It’s called tsuka.”

 “Just place it inside and guard it with your life.”

 “What ‘bout the fake Seal?” Michael asked, while Tokutei placed the ring inside the tsuka of his sword.

Seith took a glance at the object.

 “We shall bring it either. We do not know when it may become useful.”

 “All in all,” Dan put away the pistol inside his backpack. “Shax’s dead, the ring is ours. Can we now go to the truck and back on Earth?”

 “Aye,” Seith nodded turning around and walking towards one of the doors. “But remember, there’re still demons in this castle so be on your toes.”

**47.**

It was almost eight o’clock in the evening. Every soldier, hunter, sniper, mercenary and so on was on their positions waiting for the final hour. People were beginning to gather on various squares in every large city and towns. Those who couldn’t leave their homes watched the news reports on TV. Many restaurants, pubs and schools were also displaying the news reports from San Francisco Bay. Arthur was in his office overlooking the last details. Bishop was with him.

“Launch Eagle Eye,” he said to Jack, who was in the headquarters.

“Launching Eagle Eye.”

The roof of the north-western part of the castle opened only to eject a small racket. It caught eye of everyone on the island and as one they were gazing at the rocket raising into the air.

 “Eagle Eye,” Leonora whispered from her room in the northern part of the castle.

 “Four hours to go,” Bishop muttered, then rested on the armchair.

 “Four hours, John, for hours, and everything will change.”

Bishop closed his eyes for a while and moved back with his memories a few days earlier. It was December 14 and he and the second unit had just landed on Attica baseball pitch. The chopper turned off the engines, and everybody got off. They were wearing ASAT uniforms and were heavily armed. There were lots of police and army people outside the prison making sure no one would disturb the operation.

 “Follow me,” Bishop said running towards the door.

The yard was full of dead bodies in orange suits. Michael outran Bishop, opened the door and rushed inside. The others were just behind him.

 “What a cemetery,” Amanda commented seeing lots of blood stains spread around.

 “They sure spared no one,” her sister added.

As they were moving along the corridor leading to the main hall, they heard some growling noises.

 “Hush,” Jack raised his fist as he turned his head left trying to overhear something.

They slowed down and watched the corridor. The moaning got louder as two figures limped out of the cell on the right.

 “Target sighted,” Michael said as he raised his gun and pulled the trigger quickly ripping their heads apart.

 “So we are the clean-up team, now?” Patricia commented moving further.

 “At least they saved us some fun,” Jack added.

Bishop cleared his throat and slowly shook his head.

 “You’re not the main assault team yet. It’s gonna change when the Seal is completed. Now shut up and let’s make this place clean.”

**48.**

In Oakland, a large number of reporters from almost every country were showing the world what would happen at midnight. A short woman with long, curly hair was standing on some street, from which the panorama of San Francisco spread. Thousands of people gathered around to watch.

“I’m standing here in Oakland waiting like everyone around for midnight. Within four hours we will know the answer to the question of the era; will the world end on December 21st? Government hasn’t changed their statement about the upcoming earthquake, but if it were true, the whole bay would have been evacuated by now which has not been done yet. Stay with me America for more news.”

**49.**

 Everyone from unit one managed to reach the vehicle. Patricia was already waiting for them.

 “Any problems on the way?” she asked.

 “No, none, you?” Surya enquired.

 “A few goblins. No big deal.”

Dan walked out of the tunnel and saw the truck for the first time. He immediately ran to it and examined it carefully.

 “Wow, this thing is huge. Arthur thought well.”

Michael opened the driver’s door and got in. Dan went inside through the back door and immediately headed for the weapon storage.

 “You do have a spare uniform, don’t you?”

 “There’s one below the assault rifles,” Patricia replied stepping after him followed by Surya and Tokutei.

 “So, Seith, tell me where now?”

Seith sat comfortably in the back seat.

 “The portal for us is near their portals. However, theirs cannot be opened by no-one but Cizin himself. As far as my mind goes, Cizin casted a spell on the portal to open exactly on 21st December, 2012. Ours, on the other hand can be opened by the key anytime someone wants to cross to the other side.”

 “No time to lose, let’s go.”

**50.**

 After about half an hour of driving along the hellish roads, they got closer to the massive army marching towards the portal.

 “We have no choice, but to take the parallel road and hope they won’t see us,” Michael said nervously slowing down. “To remain unseen we should take the one over there,” he pointed at a road going much higher, right above the marching army.

The truck reached the higher road and slowed down not to be heard by the demons below. A steep mountainside was on their right towering up to the rocky ceiling, the army was marching about two hundred feet below on the left along a deep and wide gorge with river of hot, boiling lava at its bottom.

 “Just a few more miles,” Seith said with his casual, emotionless voice.

But something gave his impatience and nervousness away. He couldn’t help rubbing his palms against his coat. Demon or no demon he was sweating; natural reaction to stress. Not only him, everyone was waiting impatiently for the road to end, so that they could leave Hell forever. Surya and Dan were watching the army on the left.

 “So many demons are about to walk on Earth,” the girl said impatiently.

No sooner had she said that, than something jumped onto the roof of the truck.

 “Goblins!” Patricia said seeing one climbing down the window.

Surya reacted quickly by drawing her blades, running to the second compartment and cutting the creature into two. At the same time, a couple of orts shot out from a cage on the right side hitting the vehicle with their massive heads. The back wheel lost the ground and the vehicle turned with its back towards the precipice.

 “Hold on!” Michael shouted pressing the accelerator hard to bring the truck back on the road, but another ort ran down and pushed the vehicle so hard that it fell out and rolled down towards the road with the army.

It was rolling like a snowball, gaining a higher speed. Almost all of the windows broke and the momentum threw some of the glass out.

The demons noticed it and spread making a way for the vehicle. Everyone inside was trying to remain on their seats, apart from Surya who was in the second compartment rebounding from the walls, the floor and the ceiling. While rolling, the vehicle reached such a high speed that it crashed into the demons below and knocked them like a bowling ball. There was nothing to stop the truck. No rocks, no stones, nothing. Because of the momentum, the back door didn’t withstand it and smashed opened. The machine acted like an avalanche and took several demons with it falling right into the deep gorge with a river of lava.