

## Prologue

*“A Council was convened to decide upon the best and soundest means of withstanding the frequent and brutal raids of the northern peoples. Of their own free will, the Council invited in under the same roof the enemy they feared worse than death, the vile unspeakable Saxons, hated of God and man alike, and Vortigern welcomed them.*

*All the towns fell, their bishops, priests, and people mown down together while swords flashed, and flames crackled. Horrible it was to see, stones of towers and high walls thrown down with holy altars and human bodies covered with clotted blood as in some fantastic wine-press.*

*Some of the wretched survivors were slaughtered in heaps. Others surrendered themselves to perpetual slavery. Others emigrated overseas, wailing and singing beneath their swelling sails the Psalm, ‘Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for the eating and among the Gentiles hast thou scattered us.’*

*Afraid, others entrusted their lives to the rugged hills and thick forests in their homeland.”*

– Gildas of Clyde

476 CE.

The Second rested his hands on the hilt of his sword, silently watching the dawn reveal what he'd waited a fortnight to see. With a restless smile, he called over his shoulder, “Cymry, how are the men this morning?”

“Ready to do your bidding, Second,” answered the burly, war-hardened soldier as he and the Second's other two Generals walked over to stand beside him.

“Prepare the horses,” said their leader, and Cymry hurried off. “Aetius, gird the men for battle.” With a bow of his bald and battle-scarred head, the lankiest of the three turned to leave. “Cunneda, two columns to the south and wait for me.”

“Aye,” replied the General who didn't look the least bit like a soldier. His grandfather had been commissioned by the Roman Praetor of Londinium to be a sculptor at the forum, and his slight build and pallid features had found their way to his grandson. “At once,” and he left his friend alone to contemplate the breathtaking view.

During the night, a heavy mist had settled into the surrounding valleys. Beyond the edge of the meadow that crowned Mons Badonicus, the Second could see nothing but a blanket of white, tinged red by the dawn. By the fates, God's good graces, or merely nature's happenstance, a chance to end three generations of war with the Saxons had been handed to him.

And so, the morn would bring battle.

The unbidden warrior within him began to awake. His pulse quickened, and his muscles tensed. Everything around him became suddenly vivid, the sounds of his men hurrying about, the scent of cooking fires, the breeze on his skin, the rustling of the grass, and the hues of color in the eastern sky. He breathed in the cool, damp air and slowly let it out.

Yes, just one more battle...for the future of Britain. They could easily wait out this siege, but to what end? To fight another day? To reach a stalemate? To negotiate peace with their tormentors? To slice Britain into halves like a buck under the butcher's knife? No! Ambrosius Aurelianus did not die for a draw. He died so all of Britain could be free. He died to restore what once had been a civilized island.

The Second's right hand tightened on the sword's hilt as the other ran through his thick, gray-flecked hair. "A civilized island," he whispered bitterly as fragments of his island's history flitted through his mind.

Christ's apostles were spreading the Word, the Second Temple of Herod the Great brooded over Jerusalem, and the Jewish Diaspora had yet to begin when Britain became part of Rome. The Empire gave the Celtic warriors and druids of the island both peace and prosperity and nurtured their brutish villages into Mediterranean cities. The building of public forums, temples, theatres, bathhouses, amphitheaters, and villas provided good livings for builders, carpenters, mosaic layers, fresco painters, and potters. The growing population and trade with the mainland provided good livings for farmers and craftsmen. Roman galleys and roads brought wares and delicacies – wine from Spain, glassware from the Rhine, bronzes from Greece, olives from Palestine – from the four corners of the Empire and provided good livings for shopkeepers and traders.

Life in Britannia was life in Gaul or Africa or even Rome itself...until three generations ago when the Eternal City fell to an invader for the first time in eight centuries. Rome's great buildings were ransacked by the Visigoth-Saxons and her citizens were taken captive, ransomed, sold into slavery, or simply raped and killed. So shaken was Emperor Honorius that he called home his legions from the remotest territories of the Empire.

Once Rome was no longer able to protect Britannia, the Emperor granted her independence. With chilling rapidity, the pillars of her civilization collapsed. Peace vanished when Pict and Scot raids began along the northern frontiers, and nearly all memory of Rome's glories ended with the Saxon slaughter of Vortigern and the Elders.

That was three generations ago.

Out of the dark years that followed stepped the great Ambrosius who fought to restore their once great island world. "A world our fathers' fathers lost by their own stupidity," cursed the Second, but then bowed his head with a resigned sigh. Travelers from the mainland had told him stories of the many Saxon conquests across the channel, and he knew it had simply been a matter of time before their keels sailed to Britain, regardless of what the Council had done.

"So be it." All that mattered now was today. The old world had to pivot to the new, and if the new became theirs to create, there'd be no ancient codex of laws or mainland

masters to frame their path forward. Every decision, every institution, every law, every right, and every freedom would be borne anew. They would make of their island whatever they wanted – a paradise, an Eden, a light for the world!

The thought of it was intoxicating.

But, again, all that mattered now was today...surviving today.

They were a 1000-man cavalry fighting against a 10,000-man infantry, the last vestiges of the Saxon army, led by the warlord Oesc. He'd stormed west from Kent towards the Celtic Sea four weeks earlier, hellbent on slicing Britain in two. But, before he'd reached Bath, the Second's cavalry drove hard into the Saxons' center, cut straight through, and kept right on going. As the Second had planned, Oesc gave chase all the way to Mons Baddonicus where the horsemen took the mountain's crest and the infantry laid siege at its base rather than attack and take heavy losses.

"The men are ready!" Cunneda called out as he hurried over.

"Very good," said the Second, strapping on his sword. "And my mount?"

"In front, as always."

The Second smiled and put his gloved hand on the man's shoulder. "Thank you, my friend. Shall we go and make peace?"

"Aye," replied Cunneda with a proud smile of his own. "For everyone." And together they walked to the waiting columns of mounted cavalymen clad in century-old Roman armor, dented and tarnished, and held together by fraying leather straps. Once astride his steed, the Second noted the rising sun's position in relation to the clouds, and then turned to ride back between the two columns.

"On this morn...on this day always to be remembered –" he proclaimed, "– we shall decide our people's fate for generations to come! Only one path lies before us...to honorably vanquish our foe, to restore peace, and to turn this isle of woes into a land of hope!" The soldiers cheered and raised their swords to the fading stars. "Into the breach one last time, my noble friends, and then home to our families!"

Another cheer went up as the Second returned to the head of his column. Sliding his sword from its sheath, he raised it into the air and looked east just as the sun crested the clouds. He gave his final war cry and plunged down the side of Mons Baddonicus into the swirling mist.

The cavalymen fell upon the Saxon camp with thundering hooves and slashing blades, striking fear into infantrymen stumbling from their tents to find the horsemen of the apocalypse riding out of the blood red mist. The Second led his column straight through to the outer perimeter of the camp and turned east as Cunneda's column turned west. Flanking the fleeing Saxons in both directions, the cavalymen deftly herded their foe around the broad base of Mons Baddonicus and into a deep hollow on the far side.

The horsemen circled the rim of the hollow, blades at the ready, and deathly silent. The quaking infantrymen huddled below staring up in dread. In that moment, the Second knew that murder or mercy, death or dishonor, was but a command away, and that his actions or inactions would color the future of his island and the peace to come. Urging his

horse forward, he descended into the hollow alone.

“Oesc of Kent!” he called out. “Come forward and hear me!”

Barely had the words left his lips than a massive brute with long blonde, almost white hair charged out of the horde at full tilt. Oesc’s gray-blue eyes were wild with bloodlust, his face crimson with rage, and his hodgepodge of animal skins were matted with filth and blood. Raising his sword, the warlord cried, “Attack and honor your fathers!” But none of his soldiers dared move an inch for fear of being sent straight to Valhalla by the horsemen.

The Second turned his horse slightly to the left, the sword in his right-hand dangling at his side. The warlord’s blade slashed through the air and just before it struck, the Second gripped his sword’s hilt with all his might and swung it up in one, swift flowing arc. It met Oesc’s with a thunderous clang, the force of its blow twisting the warlord’s torso away from the Second. Bringing the sword down, he struck the Saxon hard on the back with the blade’s flat side, knocking him to the ground, cursing with fury.

With a flick of his reins, the Second sidled over and placed the tip of his sword on Oesc’s chest. “Mercy shall be granted you and your warriors!” the Second proclaimed for all to hear. “You shall be free men in the lands of my choosing! Surrender, and my promises shall be as true as the steel now laid upon your breast!”

Oesc looked about at the beseeching faces of his soldiers who moments earlier had defied his order to attack, and realized he had but two choices – an honorable surrender or a noble death. Admitting to himself that he was hardly eager to see the great halls of Valhalla, he grudgingly accepted the Second’s terms.

And in that moment, three generations of war ended. Tears filled the Second’s eyes as his cavalymen cheered and began chanting his name. “Artorius! Artorius! Artorius!”

*“They stood alone in Europe, a new world, startling not only because it differed from the past, but because it differed from the rest.”*

*– John Morris*

## α

“Men yearn for the gleam of a golden age.”

– John Morris

“The association of men is founded on honor.”

– James A Michener

Pointing fingers and excited conversations followed the U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations across the lobby of the Les Ambassadeurs restaurant. He heeded the attention indifferently, though it was hardly unwanted, for he knew it had less to do with what he was and more to do with who he was...or rather who he was related to.

With the love of his life at his side, his daughter in his arms, and his close friends T.J. and Marion Makatu following behind, William Cameron MacCrarey walked up to the tuxedoed maître d' and explained in poor French that they were there to meet two English gentlemen. Following the maître d' through the archway of the dining room, Mac – his nickname since college – came to an abrupt halt.

“Holy–”

“–shit,” finished T.J., looking over Mac’s shoulder.

Twenty-foot high ceilings adorned with ornate chandeliers and colorful classic scenes of gods and saints in all manner of troubles, white plaster walls, Renaissance paintings, pale red marble floors, tuxedoed waiters, linen table cloths, fine silver and china table settings created a stunning ambiance.

“Don’t embarrass me,” T.J.’s wife Marion said a bit shrewishly while trying to suppress a smile. She was a graceful full-figured and bespectacled woman with gray hair and wore her best Sunday morning church dress.

“Moi?” smiled T.J., a 62-year-old African-American man with a slightly receding hair line, a bit of a paunch, and wore a dark brown off-the-rack suit and fedora. On Mac’s first day as Deputy Ambassador, the two had met in the UN offices in New York and quickly become fast friends.

Marion rolled her eyes and Genevieve giggled again.

“There they are,” said Mac, nodding towards the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Champs-Elysees. The causally handsome man with bright blue eyes and flecks of gray in his wavy dark brown hair started forward, his daughter Cameron still in his arms.

A wave of awed excitement followed him through the dining room as though he were

a ship cutting through calm waters.

As the five of them approached, Michael Abrams and the Clan Elders, Kyle Dunham and Merrill MaGeah, stood up from the table to welcome their guests. The taller and older of the three greeted Mac with an embrace.

“Lad, so good to see you,” said Kyle, Keeper of the Clan Camulodunum. He wore an earthy-brown Harris Tweed jacket, dark wool-blend pants, and shoes that seemed as old as his seventy-three years. Kyle’s silver hair was shoulder length and his piercing blue eyes exuded both warmth and the ability to take in all of a person with just a glance.

“And you, Keeper,” replied Mac before embracing the second Elder. “Hey, old man. Been too long.”

“Aye, it has,” agreed Merrill, a solid-looking, fifty-nine-year-old with thick salt-and-pepper hair long enough to tie in a short ponytail. He had a belly well-rounded from years in English pubs, and wore baggy, wrinkled trousers and a frayed and faded dark-green Harris-Tweed.

“This is Uncle Merrill,” Mac told his daughter as Merrill reached out for Cameron.

“Little one, y’are as cute as a button,” he declared, scooping her out of Mac’s arms. “Me Clan’s been wondering when you’re going to visit.”

Cameron smiled shyly and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Perhaps this summer,” answered Genevieve. In her mid-forties, she had luxuriant copper hair cascading over her shoulders, red full lips, a radiant smile, and an easy laugh. Her dark blue, knee-length dress accented her shapely figure and set off her light blue eyes.

“Gen, this is Merrill MaGeah and Kyle Dunham, Elders of my Clan.”

“So nice to finally meet you both,” she smiled. “Mac’s always telling stories about you.”

“Don’t believe him,” Merrill chided. “I’m really a wonderful person.”

“I know you are,” she said and kissed him on the cheek, occasioning a blush. “I’m sure you both are,” she added, kissing the Keeper’s cheek as well.

“And this is Michael Abrams,” smiled Mac as T.J. and Marion shook hands with their hosts. “I didn’t know you were going to be here.”

“We have some things to talk about,” Michael Abrams replied, stone-faced.

“Hmmm...that doesn’t sound good.”

“No, it’s not,” answered the tall, trim impeccably dressed man with white hair, bold dark blue eyes, and the sun-bronzed skin of a well-to-do and well-traveled man of leisure.

Mac frowned before saying to Genevieve, “Michael met Kyle at university five decades ago and he’s been a friend of the Clan’s ever since.”

“I’ve never met a U.S. Senator before,” gushed Genevieve.

He shrugged and replied as modestly as a rich, powerful man could be expected to, “I was pleased to serve my country.”

“Don’t fawn over a former Senator, lass,” groused Merrill. “It only means he was over-privileged at the expense of your citizenry.”

“Ah, well,” Michael retorted, “I’ll remember not to use my over-privilege the next

time you come knocking on my door for a favor.”

“I’ve never asked you for a favor,” exclaimed the Elder with as much innocence as he could muster. “Tis me Clan that’s benefitted from the wealth you stole from the people.”

“I’ll always help the Clan,” Michael replied, “but you can fly commercial back to London.”

“Ah, but where are my manners?” Kyle smiled. “Please, everyone,” and he proffered the empty chairs facing the window.

As everyone sat, Merrill pointed out the window at the Place de la Concorde. “That tall, pointy thing is the Luxor obelisk,” he told Cameron. “Thirty-three hundred years old, made of yellow granite and once stood at the entrance of the Luxor Temple in Egypt. It’s 75 feet tall, weighs 280 tons, and on its side are funny-looking pictures called hieroglyphs that tell the story of King Ramses II, who ruled the oldest and grandest civilization of the ancient world. King Louis-Philippe of France brought the obelisk here two-hundred years ago when the rich people were being mean to us common folk.”

“Hey, Professor, maybe a bit too deep for a five-year-old?” said Mac.

“Never too young to learn, eh lass?” the Elder winked at Cameron who squeezed him even tighter.

“Ohhh, you’re going to pop me head off, little one!” he laughed.

She giggled and squeezed harder.

After a hearty laugh, Merrill waved an arm about the restaurant and said, “In 1778, this was the ballroom of the Hôtel de Crillon. Benjamin Franklin signed the first treaty between the United States and France right here. During the French Revolution, King Louis XVI was guillotined—”

“Merrill!” Marion gasped.

“—in the square out there. So were 1300 others, including Marie Antoinette, Danton, and Robespierre. It smelled so badly of blood that even animals wouldn’t cross it.”

“Merrill!” she cried.

T.J.’s chuckle over the never-ending sparring between his wife and old friend turned into a cough and a casual admiration of the ceiling frescos after one of her withering looks.

“The League of Nations Charter was signed here, too, which is important because the League eventually became the United Nations.”

“Where Daddy works,” she said shyly.

“Oh!” he said with feigned surprise, “you can talk.” She giggled and when he asked, “Do you like castles?” her eyes lit up. “Well, not far from here is a real-life castle called the Louvre.”

“Really?” she cried. “Can we go there, Daddy?”

“I was planning on it after we’re done here. Perhaps Uncle Merrill would like to come with us?”

“And play docent, undoubtedly,” T.J. said with a grin.

“Whether we want him to or not,” added Marion.

“Why, I’d love to go with you, little one,” the Elder said, “if you’ll hold me hand

while we're there?"

Giggles again.

"Why don't we meet you there, old friend?" Kyle told him. "You and Cameron could take a walk through the Touleries Garden on your way."

"Aye, Keeper," Merrill replied, setting Cameron down and standing up.

Marion stood as well. "I'll come with you," she insisted, not quite trusting Merrill to do what she believed was in her surrogate granddaughter's best interests.

Merrill sighed but didn't object. "Ever have a crêpe au blé noir, little one?"

Cameron shook her head.

"Well, you're in for a treat!"

Mac kissed Cameron and promised they'd be along soon. After the three of them left, he looked from Kyle to Michael and said, "So, what's up?"

"The better question," said the Keeper, "is what's about to be up? Much is in motion and I fear something terrible is afoot, something that could bring about a conflagration of the world order. But," he admitted, "I have nothing but speculation to found that prognostication upon."

"I've never known you to be wrong, old friend," Michael said.

"Nor have I," added Mac.

Kyle gave an acknowledging nod. "The first hint of trouble was Johnny Swaywell bemoaning the evils of the UN and calling Mac the Antichrist in his Sunday morning sermons."

"That didn't amount to much...did it?" said Genevieve. "Just the ranting of a televangelist interested in ratings, right?"

"I'm afraid it's not that simple, lass," Kyle answered. "Your country's far right and fundamentalists are believers, not questioners, whose political views and religious tenets are shaped by men like Michael's grandson, Jack, and Johnny Swaywell."

"Swaywell is by far the biggest contributor to Jack's Senate campaign," Michael added, "so Jack bends over backwards to ingratiate himself with the religious right."

Kyle went on, "Believers all too readily accept half-truths and conspiracy theories as gospel, especially when they're cloaked in Christian imagery. And even if they don't believe Mac is really the Antichrist, they at least believe he's a threat."

"Jack and Swaywell met with Under Secretary-General Gerhardt Schoen on at least one occasion that I know of," Michael explained, "and Schoen doesn't do a damn thing without his boss's blessing."

"And Secretary-General Boujeau just made Mac the Commander of a mission to Brazil," Kyle said. "A most unusual mission. Never in the UN's history has there been anything like it in the Western Hemisphere."

"Mac's been on Boujeau's shit list," said T.J., "ever since he captured that maniac Zeda on Cyprus, became an international hero, and went before the General Assembly to call for a Charter Amendment Conference. Now, Mac's a threat to the seven people who control the United Nations – Boujeau, Schoen, and the ambassadors from the Security Council's five

permanent member states – the U.S., Russia, China, Great Britain, and France. Without their unanimous consent, the UN General Assembly can't enact resolutions of their own, and when the Security Council unanimously does say do something, the General Assembly has no choice but to do it. Mac wants to amend the UN Charter, make the Security Council merely an advisory body, and let the General Assembly be a true democracy – one nation, one vote. For the first time since 1948, all 193-member nations would be equal. They'll be able to set policies and establish missions that could benefit hundreds of millions if not billions of people. The Security Council's power would disappear overnight, and to get his way Boujeau would have nearly two-hundred countries to cajole instead of just five."

"The Security Council member with the most to lose is the United States," Michael added, "whose UN Ambassador is Jake Tanner, the man who exiled Mac to Geneva after his confirmation hearings six years ago. Now, the U.S. has an election coming up and an incredible amount of dark money is being poured into the campaigns of thousands of far right candidates."

"Dark money?" Mac said. "Citizens United?"

"Yes, that's right," replied Michael. "Money that's impossible to trace back to its donors."

"Why this election?" said Genevieve. "President Jameson's a first-term Republican with no serious contenders from the left, and the Republicans hold both houses and half the Supreme Court. Why spend so much on ideologically stubborn far right candidates who'll make Jameson's second term a nightmare, given how moderate he is?"

"That's precisely the point," said the Keeper. "There's a coupe coming."

"The far right can't take over the party," Mac said.

"Not today," replied Kyle, "but if something were to happen between now and election day, something devastating and traumatic that shifts voters hard to the right—"

"You mean like scaring people with talk of the Antichrist?" said Genevieve.

"Aye. And what does the Antichrist foreshadow?"

It took her but a moment to understand. "The Apocalypse," she whispered.

"That's the conflagration of the world order you fear, isn't it?" said Mac.

Kyle nodded. "Many in the far right are evangelicals, and anything that hints of the Apocalypse both scares and thrills them."

"International arms sales are on the rise," Michael noted, "already above Cold War levels, but my old CIA buddies have no idea why."

"The United Nations Foundation condemned the arms buildup," Mac reflected, "but Boujeau hasn't taken action on it."

"Neither will the Security Council nations. Their arms manufacturers are making out like bandits."

"This is all about money?" cried Genevieve.

"No, lass," Kyle said ominously. "This is far more sinister than greed. Someone wants to control the United States and start a world war."

"Who?" cried Genevieve. "Why?"

“I can only speculate on who,” Kyle equivocated, “and the why has many possibilities. We can only wait and hope.” He turned to Mac. “For now, lad, watch your back, especially in Brazil.”

Genevieve gave Mac a pleading look as if to say, ‘Leave all this behind and live a nice, quiet, normal life back home in Traverse with your family.’

With an understanding smile, he squeezed her hand and turned to face Kyle. “I will.”

“Choose your team wisely. The Clan will watch over your family, but where you’re going, no one can watch over you.”

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Standing before his office window overlooking the East River, a satellite phone on hands-free sitting atop the credenza, Schoen said in German, “Calling for a Charter Amendment Conference sealed his fate.” The phone converted his words into ones and zeroes, beamed them up to a network of geo-synchronous satellites, and then down again to an identical phone to be reconstituted into words once more. “MacCrarey will arrive in Brazil the day after tomorrow. Your orders are to draw him into the jungle, General.”

“Ja, mein Herr,” General Adolph Heinrich Mendenberg replied. He stood at attention despite being alone in his office and four thousand miles away. “But is there not a danger of his discovering our home?”

“Bring him only close enough to strike,” Schoen ordered. Boujeau’s Under Secretary-General was a trim fiftyish man with blonde, almost white short-cropped hair, pale blue eyes, and the faint remnant of a scar running down his left cheek.

“The settlers?” presumed the General.

“Ja.”

“How many do you wish dead?”

“Enough.”

“Ja, mein Herr.”

“I expect to hear of the first attack by week’s end,” said the Under Secretary-General.

“Ja, mein—” and the satellite link ended. Mendenberg wrestled with a spate of indignation before locking the phone away in his grandfather’s old mahogany desk. “Captain!” he called to his Chief of Staff in the outer room. “Gather the heads of the families together in the Opera House at once!”

“Ja, mein Commandant!” the Captain called back.

Half-an-hour later, the General stepped through the doorway and onto the landing of his Bavarian-style villa. Cursing at the stiflingly heat and humidity of the afternoon, Mendenberg stretched the collar of his freshly starched white shirt. He despised having to wear a Shutzstaffel uniform in such a place as this, but he had to set an example.

The people of Viertes Reich were going about their business in the town’s square. A mother and her son passed by along the sidewalk crowded on either side by the untamed

vegetation that claimed every inch of earth not occupied by the hidden city's buildings, walks, and roads. The boy – perhaps seven years old, he guessed – gave a 'Heil Hitler' salute.

Casually returning the gesture, the General made his way to the waiting car, the steamy pungent air sapping his strength and magnifying the burden of his duties – duties he never wanted, duties of leadership forced upon him when Schoen, irony of ironies, left to join forces with Boujeau at the United Nations, an international organization founded to prevent the likes of the Third Reich from rising again.

Now it fell to the General to ensure the survival of the families and protect them from the impure outside world while treating them as the genetic superiors they were. They demanded to be waited on hand and foot, and so he also had to keep the Cuari perpetually enslaved as family servants, playthings, and breeding stock. He was mayor, slave owner, judge, arbitrator, CEO, and the procurer of billions of Euros worth of war goods he himself staged in places that were little more than names on a map to him.

His reflections began to overwhelm him, and he halted. His heart began pounding, his muscles tensed into solid masses, and feelings of helplessness and despair washed over him. Balling his hands into fists, he forced himself to conjure up the picture on a faded calendar hanging in his office. A picture of snowcapped Alpine mountains. A broad valley blanketed with evergreens. A grand castle surrounded on three sides by a clear blue mountain lake and on the fourth by a quaint Bavarian village.

How he wished to be there, but his was the third generation of descendants to live their entire lives in the perpetual dusk of Viertes Reich.

"Mein Commandant?" called the Captain.

The castle faded from Mendenberg's mind. His Cuari chauffeur held open the 1936 Mercedes staff car's rear door and the Captain sat waiting in the back seat.

"Another attack, Mein Commandant?"

"To the opera house," the General ordered the driver.

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Mac sat quietly conversing with Lt. Sean Kelly and Taylor Johnson in the café of the San Baridiso Hotel. "Perry is stationed aboard the HMS Magellan just off the coast here," Mac told them, pointing at a map of Brazil unfurled on the table and weighted down at the corners by empty demitasse espresso cups. "Authorization codes have been loaded into GLOSAT. From deployment request to arrival at target, sixty minutes."

Sean Kelly, who Mac described to friends as a Greek god come down from Mount Olympus to walk amongst us mortals, said with the bluntness of a career non-com who'd only recently been promoted to Lieutenant, "With all due respect, Mac, is this assignment gonna be another pooch screw like Cyprus?"

Taylor let out something between a chuckle and a snort. A Cambridge-educated former Liberian diplomat, he was a tall, lithe man with a kind face and a talent for languages.

“Cyprus made MacCrarey a political and media superstar. So—”

“So, they’re gunnin’ for us.”

“So, let’s be on our toes,” Mac told them. Noticing a distinguished looking man walking over, he stood up from the table. “This must be our host.”

The Brazilian Ambassador to the United Nations, Don Octavio Bandos, extended a hand and exclaimed in heavily accented English, “Welcome to my country! I recognized you from the newspapers, Deputy Ambassador MacCrarey.”

“An occupational hazard, Ambassador,” Mac said with a smile and introduced Sean and Taylor.

“I appreciate your meeting me here, gentlemen,” the self-possessed Ambassador said. A bit on the heavy side and clad in an expensive Italian suit, Bandos had the classic look of a man from the Iberian Peninsula, though a bit darker in skin tone, with Basset hound brown eyes and streaks of gray in his slicked-back black hair.

Mac replied, “I just wish we were meeting under more pleasant circumstances.”

“I trust the Secretary-General has briefed you on our situation?” Bandos said.

Mac was about to say, “No,” when a throng of waitstaff accompanied by the hotel manager himself approached the table to fawn over their distinguished guest.

Mac turned the interruption into an opportunity to more thoroughly examine his surroundings. The nearly-empty café had subdued appointments and a retractable façade that opened out onto the sidewalk. There, several tables and chairs sat on the sidewalk beneath a green, yellow, and blue-striped canvas portico. Beyond the walk was a broad thoroughfare, and beyond that a treeless park that wrapped around the Square of Three Powers before continuing on to Lake Paranoá. On the square sat a massive building in the shape of an upside-down flower vase with dark translucent glass walls and more than a dozen cement arches curving gracefully upwards to join together in a circle a hundred-feet above the ground.

“How do you get in that thing?” Mac muttered to himself.

Bandos’s cooing entourage fell silent and followed Mac’s gaze outside.

“Ah!” Bandos exclaimed with no small amount of pride. “Stunning, isn’t it?”

“That it is.”

“Our city’s cathedral – seventy meters across and supported by sixteen concrete columns, each weighing ninety tons.”

“Kinda reminds me of the old Gemini launch pad at Cape Canaveral,” Mac mused. “In fact, the whole city has a kind of old futuristic look to it, as if the architects had watched too many sci-fi films from the 50’s.”

“They probably did,” chuckled the Ambassador. “It’s called Modernist Architecture. It was all the rage when the city was built from the ground up in the late 50’s. Visit all our architectural treasures while you are here. The Itamaraty palaces, the National Theater –”

“Perhaps on our return,” Mac interrupted.

“Ah, but of course. Business before pleasure, yes?” said Bandos and ordered entrees for everyone before dismissing his admirers.

“To answer your earlier question, Ambassador,” Mac said, “the Secretary-General has told us nothing of your situation.”

A consummate politician, the Ambassador acted as if nothing could be more natural. “Allow me to explain, then. You see, my country has great natural resources in her interior. For decades, we have attempted to exploit them in exchange for the investment capital we need to diversify our economy. But, our trek to prosperity has had a few...side effects, shall we say. Perhaps you have heard of our Amerindian problems?”

“There have been incidents since the early 1900’s of explorers, prospectors, and settlers being attacked and often killed by native tribespeople,” replied Taylor.

“The aboriginal peoples are called Amerindians?” Sean assumed.

“Yes...and no,” Taylor continued. “The term Amerindian is a generic reference to all of the indigenous peoples of Brazil, including millions of mixed-blood Brazilians. But, there’s only about half-a-million true Amerindians left.”

“Left?” said Sean.

“Left,” Taylor repeated. “In the five centuries since Columbus arrived, millions of Amerindians have been wiped out by conquerors, old world diseases creating new world epidemics, and mainstreaming – the purposeful mixing of races and destruction of aboriginal languages, customs, folklore, and land.”

“Mainstreaming is an act of compassion,” Bandos explained. “We have given the primitives an opportunity to join modern civilization.”

“Often by force,” Taylor said.

Ignoring the affront, the Ambassador went on, “To harvest our great natural resources, we had no choice but to claim large tracts of land, first for timber and now to clear cut for livestock, strip mining, and agriculture. In the 1950’s, Brasilia was purposefully located several hundred miles west of the Atlantic coast to encourage the development of our interior. Over the intervening decades, homesteaders, ranchers, lumber companies, precious metal extractors, and oil companies have pushed ever further inland. From time to time,” he added with a dismissive shrug, “they come across an Amerindian tribe whose way of life has remained unchanged for thousands of years. They’re given–” he hesitated, searching for an inoffensive word, “–a great...*opportunity* for change. But, the tribes are too ignorant to accept a better way of life, choosing instead to fight.”

“Who could blame them?” Sean muttered.

“The Amerindians are filthy, backwards people, young man. We have assimilated hundreds of thousands of them over the centuries,” said Bandos. “We gave them Catholicism, education, and countless amenities to make their lives more tolerable.”

“Mr. Ambassador,” Taylor said, “it’s still not clear to me why we’re here.”

“Yes...of course. In the far western territories of our country, homesteaders have reached the outer edge of the Amazon basin. The further west they’ve gone, the more vicious and numerous the Amerindian attacks have become.”

“Who’s attacking who?” said Sean.

“The Amerindians are attacking the settlers, of course,” the Ambassador answered

impatiently. “In the past few weeks, seven villages have been attacked and more than a hundred settlers have been killed. The media has grown increasingly critical of my government, claiming it is unable to protect its people. The attacks are close enough to the border that the Peruvian President has begun creating diplomatic problems for us. To resolve the matter, our Parliament has decided to make an example of the tribe responsible. By crushing them, we will *shock* the Amerindians into assimilation and secure our frontier once and for all.”

“Yeah, that’ll work,” Sean said irreverently. “They’ll watch the nightly news on their jungle TVs and see how their brothers and sisters are being slaughtered by you and say, ‘Gosh! We oughta be more like *white* people!’”

Mac held up a hand. “Sean, please. Mr. Ambassador, I still don’t understand what our role’s supposed to be.”

“Simply to be present,” he replied with a shrug. “The UN is respected for its peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts, and Brazil must do what’s necessary to protect her civilized people. My government simply—”

“—simply wants us to be present so the world’ll think the UN blessed your actions, no matter how reprehensible they may be,” Sean said.

Bandos drummed his fingers on the table. “Crassly put...but, yes. The Secretary-General and I have an understanding.”

“What are we,” Sean growled, “Boujeau’s lap dogs? A tiny Amerindian tribe defends itself from land thieves, the federal government decides to eradicate them, and we’re supposed to just watch and smile for the cameras?”

“I will not tolerate your insolence anymore, young man!” snapped Bandos, getting up from his chair. “I am the Ambassador of —!”

“We’ll be observers,” Mac stated as he too stood up. “We’ll be advisors, we’ll reach our own conclusions, and we’ll recommend whatever course of action ends the loss of life and fosters the long-term well-being of all involved. Am I clear?”

Bandos’s face reddened. “Quite,” he said, kicking his chair out of the way. “Your superiors will hear of this.”

“I would expect no less,” countered Mac.

The Ambassador gave a defiant snort and strode away.

“What now?” Taylor asked.

Mac smiled, remembering what the Dalai Lama had said when asked the same question. “First thing’s first. We eat,” and he sat back down.

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The smug Ambassador sat in the backseat of his BMW as it sped through the streets of the capitol. “The plan is proceeding just as you knew it would,” he said into his satellite phone.