

# *HIVE*

by

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# THE MARKET

Alexander King stood tall, glaring down at the citizens that hurried along the muddy streets.

He had no interest in eavesdropping on their whispered conversations; their words were of no importance to him.

The market was built on dirt, but its upper layer had slowly transformed into mud over time, by the light rain. Wooden carts and stands, stacked with savory meats hanging on rusty hooks, ragged furs strewn atop the table, red wine in dusty bottles, and even delicate jewelry, were scattered throughout the streets; remnants of the Old World.

All the sellers acquired their merchandise using the same method: thievery. Prior to the Collective's occupation of the dead city, the citizens had raided all the abandoned buildings, later claiming that everything they had was their own.

"We have to get out of this soon," said Alex, fixing his obsidian mask, until only his brown eyes were visible.

"Nothing wrong with guard duty," countered Takeo, "It's what we've been asked to do, so we should do it properly."

Alex rolled his eyes at Takeo.

His partner stood a head taller than him, and was much more muscular, nearly double his size. Like Alex, he too wore the sleek grey jumpsuit and obsidian mask, of the Collective.

The two men not only differed in size, but weaponry. Takeo held

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a pump action R-90 shotgun, Alex an Ak-47; both weapons of the Old World.

“I’m just bored of doing nothing.”

“We’ve been given a great position.”

Alex snorted.

Takeo was never one to indulge in his valid complaints, never willing to speak an ill word of the Collective’s inner workings.

Tapping his AK-47, Alex scanned the busy market.

Eventually, his eyes turned to the inner city’s skylines, where gray clouds shrouded the tall buildings; it was the one place he wanted to be.

His eyes quickly turned back to the market, and he tightened his grip on the AK-47; something suspicious was underway. A young boy in his mid-teens, not far from Alex’s own age, handed off a steel case to the first man in a long line of buyers.

“3 o’clock.”

Takeo’s hazel eyes followed Alex’s stare.

“We should call reinforcements,” stated Takeo, as he pulled his shotgun closer.

Alex shook his head, not taking his eyes off the boy.

“Just follow my lead.”

“But, protocol--”

“Come on!”

Alex marched towards the stand, with Takeo following behind. He gestured to his partner,

and they both improvised a new position, forcing the common people to diverge.

“Move!”

Alex intervened within the line, cutting off the man whose hands were inches away from the case. The young seller retracted the object, and glanced behind in fear.

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Two figures stepped forward from within the confines of the stand; a middle-aged man and woman, both with the same fearful expression as the boy. The trio had loose brown hair and tan skin; a family.

“What are you selling?” questioned Alex, deepening his voice, as he glared down at them.

The citizens within the line scattered.

“Tell me!”

Alex descended on the family, while Takeo glared down at the bystanders.

The boy raised his trembling fingers in defeat, casting his gaze on the ground.

“We are selling nothing but our own goods. They’re not stolen.”

The father pulled back his son, ushering him back to his mother; Alex gave the son one final glare before focusing on the father.

“What’s inside the briefcases?”

Within the family’s stock, Alex spotted six cases of similar caliber.

Keeping his eyes on the father, Alex raised his AK-47 towards the boy’s head.

“It’s guns!” cried the boy.

“I’ll call for help,” chimed Takeo, reaching into his pocket.

And as Alex turned to Takeo, he saw the guns being drawn by the citizens surrounding them; all pointed towards them. Alex counted eight. All of them held measly pistols with the exception of a BN-10, where a blue plasma sphere glowed within its barrel.

“Drop your weapons,” demanded a tall man, whose face was hidden by his massive beard. His shaking voice gave him away; untrained in the art of authority.

Both men did nothing.

“If you do anything to harm us, I hope that you have a plan to leave the city because--”

“Drop!” screamed Takeo.

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Alex immediately fell to the dirt, just as a large explosion drilled to the core of the rebellion forces. Screams filled the air, as the villagers scattered, toppling over stands and pushing past each other.

Alex coughed, squinting through the dust; the outline of a Mecha suit floated in the air, propelled by sapphire flames on its back.

The duo quickly recovered; Takeo turned on the rebel family, while Alex sent a barrage of bullets towards the rebel holding the BN-10; the man collapsed, dead before he could retaliate.

The rest that tried to run were brought down by the rain of plasma bullets.

While Takeo continued at the rebels, Alex shifted his priority towards the initiator of the conflict.

The father withdrew a revolver from his dirty, brown jacket and aimed it at Alex, but with a quick shot from Takeo, he was slain.

“Father!”

“Grenade,” roared Alex, turning to Takeo.

His partner complied, tossing a grenade behind the cart. A plume of white smoke erupted, and the coughs of the woman was heard. But there was no sound of the boy; he’d escaped.

Alex swirled around, searching through the crowd; he finally spotted the boy, cowering in the shadows of the stand. He had ample time to escape with the chaos surrounding them; but he didn’t. He just stared at his dead father.

“Stay there,” yelled Alex, marching over to him. The screams were slowly subsiding, as the rebels lucky enough to escape, disappeared into the cracks and crevices of the market. “Raise your hands in the air.”

Unarmed, the boy advanced with the intent to defend his family’s honor, but Alex ended the sentiment, lifting him by his shirt collar and slamming him against the stand.

“This is what happens when you go against us,” shouted Alex.

Even though they disappeared, Alex knew the commoners were still around; he wanted them to hear his threats, and understand who truly

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held the power.

It wasn't the small sprout of rebels, but The Collective.

"Fuck you!" screamed the boy.

He kicked Alex, hitting him square in the stomach. Alex grunted; throwing him to the ground and smashing his boots into the boy's face. He ignored the cracking sounds, as he pushed down harder.

The others would look at this pathetic kid's face and learn; and as the rumors of his brutality spread, his aura of respect would widen.

"I will let you live today," said Alex, looking down at the boy's bloodied face, "Tell everyone what happened here."

Tears traveled down the boy's face, mixing with the blood.

"We just wanted to protect ourselves."

"From who? You're safe here," argued Alex, annoyed.

"You're an idiot," cried the boy, as he spat out blood, "I'm not talking about anything human."

Takeo joined; he was about to strike the boy, when the mother grabbed on to his jumpsuit, crying for mercy.

"Go, or you will have the same fate as your father," warned Takeo, pushing away the mother.

The boy struggled to stand; it was clear that he wanted to speak, but the mother pulled him towards her, and they both hurried away, casting one last teary look at the father.

As the market settled, the villagers appeared one by one, settling back into their routine; though this time it was disingenuous, as their eyes constantly slipped towards Alex and Takeo.

"That was awesome."

Alex turned and saw his unofficial protégé leaping towards them with boundless energy.

Patton was an eleven-year-old boy that had a smaller frame than others his age. A mop of ghastly orange hair and face filled with freckles, stood out against his deep green eyes.

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“Another day on the job,” replied Takeo, resting his shotgun at his side.

“That punk needed taken down.”

“Needed to be taken down,” scolded Alex, hitting him lightly on the head, “Remember your grammar or nobody will respect you.”

Patton nodded, unabashed.

“Why not kill him?”

“Why does this kid ask so many questions?” Takeo groaned.

Alex shrugged.

“What do you think we should do next?” asked Alex, gazing back at Patton.

The boy pondered; nose scrunched, and teeth biting lightly into his lip.

“We should go and make sure we record what he looked like, and also write down everything that he did.”

“Why?”

“I guess... it’s because if anything bad was going to happen with us, then he’d get away with what he did.”

Before Alex could evaluate the answer, he heard footsteps approaching; he turned around, and was suddenly face-to-face with their savior in the Mecha suit.

“Alexander, Officer Ives would like to speak with you.”

“Oh shit,” he thought, trying to keep his face straight.

Being requested by Ives meant that he had either done something terribly wrong, or exceedingly right.

“Congratulations,” said Takeo, as he slapped him on the back.

“Maybe.”

“No, if somebody calls you, it’s a big deal. It has to be good,” claimed Patton.

Alex smiled. He valued his innocence.

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“Can you take care of this sector alone?”

“Didn’t you just see me with a shotgun? You just took care of a 14-year-old. You’re the one who needs help,” Takeo jested.

“Take care of this old man,” Alex commanded Patton, who eagerly agreed.

He then turned and marched towards Ives, rifling through his memories, searching for a moment that he had failed the Collective.

There was just one incident in the past, where he attacked a citizen that he believed to be taken by the Hive. They spoke with the simple words of an alien, and green liquid spilled from their mouth. Alex called for backup, but it turned out to be a false distraction, conjured by the citizens, as they carried out a raid against his armory.

Guardians Gate separated the citizens from the Zone 6’s inner ring.

It was comprised entirely of wood, and was tall enough that one couldn’t vault themselves over it. It stretched far, but lacked any

proper defense. There were only crudely hammered signs with messages that warned it was off limits, and a pair of guardians who controlled the sliding gate.

The gate swung open as Alex approached. He walked in, nodding to the guardians as he passed them.

The city was a spectacle to behold

The stands of the market were replaced with the skyscrapers of the Old World, where outbreaks of greenery interrupted the flow of gray ground. Vehicles that had once taken up space in the middle of the road were now pushed to the sides of the street, creating an open mid-lane; and though each vehicle varied in type, with time, their exterior became the same- rusty, with broken or shattered windows.

The barren street was occasionally interrupted by a passing car or group of military occupants donning identical grey jumpsuits, heading towards their jobs for the day; some had the privilege to leave the city’s mammoth walls.

As Alex neared the barracks, he smoothed his uniform, and became more watchful of suspicious activity; human or otherwise.



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It was an old building with many floors used to house guests of the city. When he first came, he was shocked by the quality of the bedding. He'd grown used to nothing but hard floors while finding slumber under the protection of a tent, but it didn't bother him. Men of the Collective lived important lives fueled by purpose, not comfort.

A flag waved proud at the front of the building; white with a blue circle in the center- it was the mark of the Collective.

Alex stepped into the building, illuminated by flickering light that ran on solar power, and continued down the hallway until he reached room 108; he knocked three times.

"Come in!"

Alex complied and entered.

Officer Ives's gray hair was longer now; once buzzed like most men of the Collective, he now styled it with the sides short, and the middle spiked.

"What happened in the market?" asked Ives, gesturing to an empty, wooden chair.

The room was bare except for a sleeping roll in the center, and two desks standing beside one another; one stacked with towers of paper --maps, diagrams, clippings, relics— and the other had only one item on it; a silver disk projecting a blue flickering hologram of a Hub, the surface cracked with vile liquid dripping down its side. The origin of the Hive's power.

"There was a family selling illegal weaponry, so I pursued them."

"Alone?"

"No, I had Takeo with me."

"Anyone died?"

"The father, but the wife and son lived."

"Good...," said Ives, as he scratched his coarse, un-kept beard, "You're being promoted to Commander."

Silence.

"Thank you, sir," he replied, humbly.

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He was finally granted the position that he deserved.

“Here.”

Ives handed him a small flat hexagon.

Alex took the object, and turned it over in his hand, inspecting it closely; it was a helmet, the gift given to all Commanders, which cemented their status.

“Try it,” urged Ives, rocking back into his chair.

Alex placed the hexagon on his neck, feeling a slight sting as its claws dug into his skin. Then he closed his eyes, willing the helmet to take its true form; black metal fiber suddenly sprung out from the origin point, and covered his entire head. The only visible part of his identity now, was his eyes.

Ives grey earpiece suddenly glowed green.

“Yes,” he said, clicking the earpiece, “The amount of radiation rises and falls all the time. I’m not a scientist. You’ll figure it out.”

Alex fiddled with the helmet, trying to give his superior privacy.

He didn’t have to hear the full conversation to know what they were speaking about; it was the restricted side of the city. An area riddled with alien radiation from the Hive, which prevented the landscape from being Collective soil.

“Any choices for your squad?” he said, as he hung up and turned back to Alex.

“Takeo. I would also like--”

Ives raised his hands, and Alex quickly fell silent.

“You get one choice. We have a new transfer for you from Zone 5.”

Alex kept his facial expression tight so that he wouldn’t reveal his disappointment. Patton would’ve been the perfect subordinate. He held great potential, but with another Commander, the boy would be raised as nothing but fodder.

“Your new private’s name is David Merlin. He’s in the armory. Meet him, and tell him from now on, you’ll be hunting Hubs.”

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And with those words, Alex was dismissed, and taken to the armory.

The armory was within the heart of the city, where Collective flags were placed in strategic locations, waving among buildings and checkpoints, as a reminder of who held control.

Some were transferred from the Old World, but many had been created anew. The new flags were made of looted materials where the circle of the Collective had been painted over. The flags of the old were created using machines; pristine and accurate in their designs.

Heaps of hard, gray substance sat in various areas, reminding all those who set their eyes upon it, of what had befallen the world: a failed invasion by an alien force.

The citizens had left nothing but chaos when they controlled the city. Skeletal remains were discarded on the ground due to petty squabbles; Death was the citizens' only legacy.

The armory had three wings.

Two extended to the left and right, and the third stretched backwards. It was a single floor with a flat roof; a simple external design which did not match the greatness within.

The inside of the building had been cleared for Collective activities.

Directly ahead was Research and Development; Alex's destination.

Within the building were many compartments. Some which remained unused, had been boarded by wood. The expansive weaponry of Zone 6 was guarded with lazy contempt.

This annoyed Alex, greatly.

He approached a man who was fast asleep in a chair. His shirt was unbuttoned, disregarding the Collective's expectation of it constantly being tucked in.

"Wake up!"

The man yelped in surprise, as his eyes flew open.

"W-Who are you?"

"A Commander," replied Alex, arms crossed, "You'd be dead if I were an enemy. Stay alert!"

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From the corner of his eye, Alex saw the other guards perk up; it made his wonder about what else he could accomplish with his efforts.

Research and Development was the largest compartment in the armory. The theory of its existence was that the structure had not been completed when the world fell, leaving it empty prior to the Collective's reoccupation. A perfect state to create new weapons using remnants of old ones.

Some who worked within it structured inventions together, others acted independently. Sparks, fires, paper charts, holographic images, and hustling bodies all played a role within the palace. They centered around large tables, acting as bases where technology could be taken apart and reassembled, forging new creations. Most of them though, led to nothing useful.

To find David, Alex had only a physical description; a middle-aged man with dark skin.

"I can help you with anything you need," a high voice from behind offered.

The man matched the dark skin that was required, but the skinny frame and old age left him worried. His brown eyes communicated kindness, a useless asset in their upcoming missions.

"You looked lost."

"I'm looking for David Merlin."

"That would be me." David extended a gloved right hand, and shook Alex's with a limp grip.

"I'm Alexander King. A Commander. You're joining my squad."

"I didn't think that I'd have to join one," muttered David, confused.

"You're not military?" asked Alex.

Alex couldn't hide his disappointment; he wanted the strength of Takeo on his side, not the uncertainty of a Private.

"I--well, yes. I technically work within it, but came here to do this," stated David, pointing to the innovative events within the room. "I am

best suited here.”

“The Collective sees things differently.”

“And I’m not questioning their judgment. I’m just conveying information.”

“The amount of resources put into all this is a waste,”

“I don’t mean to offend, but you’re incorrect,” David replied.

He led Alex down to a table with nothing on it but a blue circle, confined within metal claws; a worthless artifact.

David’s eyes darted around the room before pressing a button at the center of the object. Nothing came from it, but a spark.

“That’s supposed to impress me? That will do nothing in a firefight.”

“I’ve kept it a secret for a reason. If I can develop it further, I--”

“Forget about it.”

“I-If you saw the next s-step-”

David picked up a glowing blue crystal from an organized tool box at the far end of the table, “An impulse crystal.”

Alex was unimpressed.

“It’s the source of power for EMP’s.”

“Focus on learning combat. It’s all that matters now.”

“What makes you sure?” interrupted a voice from behind, “The Collective thinks human development is of importance.”

Alex turned to see that the eavesdropper was an elderly man. His deep green eyes were filled with dangerous curiosity.

“My loyalty belongs to the Collective. I want what’s best for us all.”

“Should belong to yourself,” the man replied.

“Who are you?”

“An engineer. Innovator. Many things.”

“I’m asking for your name.”

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The man paused. He squinted and coughed as a reaction to the simple question, “Connor East. Officer.”

“Oh--I’m sorry I shouldn’t have been--”

But Connor turned away, released a second cough, and returned to the sea of diverse workers in a rushed exit.

“Have you seen him before?” asked Alex, his eyes still on Officer East.

“The only information I’ve acquired is he’s a new transfer from Zone 4.”

“It makes sense then that he doesn’t understand. Zone 4 is in the middle of nowhere. Here we’re constantly under the threat of attack. You need to learn how to protect yourself and our squad.”

“I’ll be sure to find a way.”

“How many times a week are you training?”

“I’ve spent the majority of my time here.”

“Well now you’ll spend it there.”

“Noted,” replied David, turning back to his pathetic invention.

“What are you making?”

Alex was becoming irritated by David’s lack of focus towards his message.

“Shields.”

“That’s it?”

“They’ll exceed anything that came before. I believe they’ll cause an enemy’s weapon to turn off.”

“Does it work?”

“No, but--”

“Your lack of progress will be reported.”

“It would be best to wait.”

“Why?”

“These impulse crystals... They’re rare and it’s not well known that

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I have one within my inventory. Once my invention's complete, no one will be bothered by the fact that they were used."

"You're not allowed to use these?"

"No, but--"

"Come with me."

"Wait--"

Alex marched forward, eyes ahead, too disgusted and angered to look at the dishonest rat given to him as an underling.

Footsteps hurried behind him.

Officer East hadn't gotten far as he walked between the lines of innovation on the tables, making small compliments to the creators.

"Officer East!" called Alex.

"Yes?"

"Tell him of your crimes."

Unwillingly, he turned back to David and gestured at him, to confess.

David staggered forward with a reluctant stride, "I've been working on a secret project--but it's for the overall benefit of the Collective."

"Tell him what it is."

"It's a shield," admitted David.

"Innovation. Impressive."

Officer East's positivity encouraged David to continue speaking, "It uses impulse crystals to--"

"Impulse crystals? Illegal. Confiscate them."

"Of course. And how should he be punished?"

"Your subordinate. Your choice."

"I want you on the training ground 7 days a week. That's what will save us. Not your inventions."

Not bothering to wait for a response, he turned and made his way to the exit, his mind settling on one detrimental thought; if the Hive did arrive, nothing would save them.