

Chapter 1—Fighting for the Alliance

“Come on, I’m tired of waiting out the snipers – let’s just make a run for it!”

“Are you mad Douglass?!” they chimed as gunfire shouted overhead.

“I can’t take this anymore!” Douglass said and jumped over the pile of cement, glass, and tires. As he made a run for the building across the street gunfire cut him down.

“What the hell is his problem?!” Wicks said.

“He never had any damn sense!” Callaghan said.

“Are those reinforcements ever going to make it?!” Reynolds said.

“Don’t worry,” Callaghan said, “they’ll be here.”

“Does it hurt?” Brooks said.

“No... the morphine shot took care of that,” Callaghan said then forcefully opened his eyes wide and breathed deep, fiercely determined to remain conscious no matter the blood loss. He looked over at Brooks, still fresh from basic training. “Brooks, we’ll make it. I fixed the radio, called them, they’ll be here. No soldier left behind.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“They always come, don’t worry. I am not dying out here, and neither are any of you.”

“Yeah, I’ll carry you out if I have to man,” Wicks said.

Callaghan smiled, heard helicopter blades cutting the air, gunfire, a *whoosh* of air, an explosion. He looked down at his right leg, the blood everywhere. Was it warm? He couldn’t feel it anymore. He felt fine though. Just like floating on a summer breeze. The chopper sounded closer, the gunfire had stopped, he looked up to look for it as his vision went away. He fell unconscious.

Adrian Callaghan awoke to the soft voice of a woman talking.

“You’re back so soon nurse Merced.”

“Time to redress those wounds Andy.”

“Grand, so.”

“You never mind.”

“Well, it’s messier than the time I took a bullet to the liver but it doesn’t hurt as much.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, less deadly too. And I’m just glad they let me keep the leg. When I woke up I had to ask the doctor if it was still there.”

“Oh, that’s awful.”

“Yep! Couldn’t feel a thing.”

“Well, you should have most or all of your mobility back in the leg eventually. Dr. Mulligan said the shrapnel didn’t cut any nerves, and the bullet fractured your femur, but it was a hairline fracture, and the bullet stopped at the bone.”

“Great so, when am I patched up enough to get back out there?”

“Back out there? You aren’t – you can’t. You’ve been given your discharge papers. They came through this morning. You’re a hero. They’re going to give you a medal.”

“What? I didn’t do anything. I mean, I just did what needed to be done.”

“What needed to be done? Sergeant Wicks said you ran back into a burning building with him to get the last wounded out, then ran back in alone under gunfire to get the radio equipment to call for help.”

“Yeah... what needed to be done. Hey, can you get me off the morphine? I think it’s making me sick.”

“No, you need that. Your leg is broken and cut up with shrapnel, you need it.”

“Maybe tone it down. I don’t believe in drugs you know. And it’s against Truthology and all.”

“Not right now Andy, it’s for medical purposes, give yourself a break.”

“I’d rather that... okay...” he said as he looked up at the I.V. uncomfortably.

“You guys really did great work out there. The rebellion is fast running out of places to hide.”

“Yeah, but they got fiercer after we drove them out of their caves. New infrared technology. They were forced to flee into the ruins of the city. We think they’re trying to get out of Afghanistan.”

“And go where?”

“We don’t know. They probably don’t know. But the infrared and sonar advances have rendered their caves and tunnels death traps for them.”

“Well, I couldn’t be happier to hear that,” she said as the firefight off in the distance picked up. They both looked off in the direction of the noise nervously. “So... how many years of the six-year service did you have?”

“I passed it last year. I’m on year seven now.”

“Really?” she said as she continued to work.

“They wouldn’t let me go, said I’m too valuable.”

“But you’re just a – no offense. But you’re just a messenger. Can’t they get someone else to work the radio equipment?”

“I’m fully trained, I have connections, the soldiers trust me. And I’ve been taking college courses when I could between active duty fights.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I just finished my bachelor’s before this latest deployment.”

“Wow, good for you. I’ve been thinking about it.”

“You should do it. There aren’t as many jobs for nurses in civilian life as there used to be.”

“Yeah, but once the food shortage and previous overpopulation situation is under control they won’t have to eliminate people anymore. The care for the elderly as they ail with old age will come back, even with the advances the Asian Alliance has made with stem cell research.”

“Yeah, the Chinese are way ahead of everyone, have been for years.”

“Don’t I know it?”

“Hey Callagahn!” a man said as he barged in. “Lazing about again? Getting some hot little number to feel you up?”

“Hey Mack, what’s the craic?”

“Crack?!” the nurse said.

“No, c-r-a-i-c, it’s an Irish word,” Adrian said.

“Oh, Andy, you and your Irish shit.”

“Yeah, Mack, and you with your American shit. Is that a bald eagle pin on your uniform? The U.S. doesn’t exist anymore you know?”

“But pieces of our culture live on man, and you know I love tradition. And hey, even Dr. Cheng said, you can’t know where you are if you don’t know where you came from.”

“True that, my friend. So how’s the team doing?”

“We’re all fine. I’m on light duty already.”

“Lucky bastard.”

“Me, lucky? You’re the one they’re going to give a medal too. They’ll probably let you leave to, that leg being in the state it is. Finally get to go home to that daughter of yours.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Adrian said, the gravity the possibility of actually getting to leave coming to him like a revelation.

“Yeah, you’ll be at home making coca-, ca-, whatever that stuff is you say your kid loves.”

“Cocada pudding, it’s Mexican, like her mom was.”

“Yeah, you’ll be making cocada pudding at home while the rest of us are still fighting for world peace man.”

“Maybe. But until then is there any radio equipment or anything—I mean, even if they mean to discharge me now they can’t move me yet.”

“Rest up man, you’re in no state for working. You’re pumped full of morphine for crying out loud. We can’t have someone on drugs working.”

“Hey, she forced me. I didn’t want the drugs.”

“So what do you think you’ll do after you leave?”

“I don’t know... I’d like to do security work or something but I don’t think my daughter will go for that.”

“Why’s that?”

“She worries, you know?”

“Why does she worry so much, you can take care of yourself.”

“Yeah, but it’s harder for her, she doesn’t have a mom. Most of our extended family had to be executed, they refused to give up their religion.”

“That’s a shame.”

“Oh, not really. I mean, it was for the greater good. And mine in Ireland were a tad racist anyways.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I never knew it until I had Rori. I was on the phone from North America as the war with the Southern Region was on, saying I wanted to get out of the region for the safety of my child, telling them how my dad and step mom had died and my step brother and step sister had died as well and the attitude they gave me for having a baby with a Mexican—it made me sick.”

“Jeez man, that’s rough.”

“Yeah, and that’s why I don’t judge gays. I made a mental note then never to judge someone for who they love.”

“Yeah, my brother’s gay,” the nurse said. “I was afraid the Alliance would make it illegal but they said, consenting adults. Hatred and discrimination aren’t logical. He can even have kids some day as long as they’re adopted and he lives with a straight couple.”

“Very cool,” Adrian said.

“How old were you when your daughter was born?” the nurse said. “Yeah?” Mack added. “16.”

“You were 16 when Rori was born? Wow, nowadays they don’t allow that,” Mack said.

“Yeah, I know. And don’t call her Rori, only I call her that. I thought she’d be a tomboy, being my kid and all, but she’s a girlie-girl, and that’s fine. Anyway, her mom died shortly after childbirth, I think because of all the pressure and religious shame her parents put on her, her caused her too much added stress, and they were never going to give up their religion so I knew they’d be killed at some point. I hated them but when I got away from my stepmom and hitchhiked back to Lodi I made them get custody of me long enough for me to sign up for military service, still at 16. How old were you when you joined?”

“I was 18 man, fresh out of high school and not a clue what to do. All the jobs were gone, no more logging, so I said ‘screw this town’ and left. I mean, it was their fault for not making plans of what to do if the logging stopped. The Alliance was coming, and changing everything, and everyone knew it.”

“And we must all embrace change,” they said together.

“Yeah, I mean...” Mack began then heard a commotion outside the MASH. “Hang on,” he said and ran outside.

Adrian strained to sit up but found it hard with his leg in bandages and a cast. He leaned back onto the pillows and looked up at the morphine drip. He knew it was because of the drug he didn’t feel worried about the drug but he knew it was poison he needed off of, though it felt so good. So fucking good, just like the last two times they’d put him on morphine because of injuries. And any time he’d been able to steal some from a stock supply. It was tightly controlled, but sometimes there was enough chaos for him to get away with it. It had to be taken quickly then, before they had time to get drug test kits out into the battlefields and test everyone. It was a huge risk, the chance he might be executed as a disgraced addict, but it was just so fucking good. And he was always clever enough and fast enough to get away with it.

He heard cheering and crying outside. What the hell was going on, he wondered. Was there a holiday? A new one? Not since Dr. Cheng declared Ascension Day on the official founding of the global network of governments known as the Alliance and its official acceptance of Truthology as a global Life and Belief System. Was it Ascension Day? It wasn’t June 9th was it, he thought. He’d lost all track of time between the life threatening injury, the unconsciousness, and the morphine.

A while later Mack walked in, his eyes wide, his jaw agape.

“What?! Did someone die?! Mack, are you okay?!”

“It’s... it’s... over,” he could barely utter.

“What’s over?! Who died?! What’s happening?!”

“No, Andy, it’s... it’s finally over. We... won.”

“We...” Adrian began, unable to finish. They paused in shocked silence for several minutes as it sank in for both of them. “The Seventy-Five Years’ War,” Adrian whispered.

“Yeah, Dr. Cheng said, when it was over...”

“To name it at the year,” he said and they paused again. Mack sat down at the edge of the bed, then after a minute he put his gun down, knowing he would no longer need it. World Peace had finally been won. He would never need to touch a gun ever again.

Adrian shuffled off the plane groggily and stepped onto a Dublin Bus. “Where you comin’ from?” the driver said.

“I just got back from military service in Afghanistan,” he said.

“Ah, very good. You be careful now in the city. It’s totally mad like right now.”

“What, why?”

“Well, the Alliance won. There’s no more drugs comin’ in, and there’ll be codes of behavior and codes of conduct comin’ in that everyone in the world is suppose’ to follow for the greater good of all, so everyone’s goin’ mad like, havin’ one last big row.”

“Oh... this should be interesting.”

“That’s one way a’ puttin’ it.”

As they approached O’Connell Street in the city center Adrian looked out the windows to see piles of tires, couches, chairs, and carpets on fire, people dancing drunkenly as Garda police shouted at them to go home, and everywhere in sight people were dressed in costumes, old revealing club clothes, and kissing against walls. Nearly everyone in sight looked drunk or high.

“I’m going to Abbey Street,” the driver said. “I don’t feel safe setting anyone down on O’Connell anymore.”

“Okay,” Adrian said.

Adrian got off on Abbey Street and walked south with his two suitcases of luggage, everything he owned. He walked to Mary Robinson University in Dublin 2 and buzzed at the gate to be let in, and walked to the registrar’s office.

“Musical theatre?” the registrar said. “Odd choice for a soldier.”

“Yeah, well, I used to do a lot of plays and recitals in school.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I ran track too. I wasn’t good at organized sports.”

“Me either.”

“Yeah, and a career in this area, well, it’ll make my daughter happy.”

“Oh, good man,” the registrar said as she handed him a tablet to sign digitally. “This is to say you agree to do these courses over one year, and then your theatre project over the summer next year, and the Alliance Soldier Bill will pay for your education, housing, and give you a stipend to live on for the duration of your studies here.”

“Sounds good,” he said and signed the papers.

“Great,” she said. “Now I’ll message you the map of the campus and you can find your dorm and your room, okay?”

“Grand, so,” he said as he pulled out his mobile phone and received the map.

In his single dorm room he tossed his suitcases and messenger shoulder bag aside, grabbed some cash from his wallet, threw off his jacket, and ran outside. He ran out into the madness and embraced its darkness, letting it swallow him for one last big party before he would finally have to fully grow up, with the whole world.

Four months later he lay on his futon staring at a TV screen. It was winter solstice break after exams. Although most of college was about attendance, participation, and class presentations there were still exams just to make sure written college projects turned in hadn’t been plagiarized and were in fact the work of the student in question. He’d done well in exams although he wasn’t sure how when he’d spent so much time out at clubs and pubs with all of his new casual friends. Meeting women, dancing, drinking, taking opiates where he could find them, going home with women and fucking like there was no tomorrow. He knew his daughter was safe in Lodi but it had taken longer than expected to get her electronic paperwork to go through to get permission to move her to Ireland. Everything everywhere in the world was experiencing delays as the new world order finally took total control, and the rules and regulations about moving minors were stricter in order to protect them and keep any human trafficking from occurring ever again. It was agony to continue to be separated from her but like so much else in his life he had to simply endure it.

The madness outside had died down and he, like so many others, were resting up with the most massive hangovers imaginable. He lay unmoving in a cold sweat feeling sore and sick all over in ways he couldn’t even begin to fathom. He just stared at the TV, watching the new documentary about Dr. Cheng that every channel was broadcasting at its debut.

His daughter would be with him some time in the next spring semester and he even had permission to let her live with him. Until then he’d had a room all to himself. He would be clean by then.

When his daughter finally arrived he was clean and fresh, without a hint of any of his previous problems. They rejoiced, then went together to put flowers on his mother’s grave.

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