Samson awoke to a white void and for a moment he thought he was dead, a notion he entertained until he felt the restraints cut deeper into his wrists and the pain from his numerous bruises seep back into his consciousness.
 He was not dead, he realized. He remained in Purgatory.
 Samson began to cough uncontrollably, the room was cold and despite the relentlessly intense brightness that assaulted his vision he could feel the darkness surrounding him. As he heaved he involuntarily cried out as the pull of the restraints met bruised muscle and bone.
 He heard a male voice, deep and conciliatory, as though a parent to a misbehaving child. “Welcome back Samson. I was afraid you and I wouldn’t get another chance to talk.”
 The wounded man’s only response was more coughing, with a heave he spat up fluid, it tasted of iron.
 The voice continued, unaffected by the man’s plight. “You amaze me Samson. You really do. Now don’t get me wrong, you gave us quite the chase for a while but it’s over and yet even now, when there’s obviously no chance of escape…” There was a brief pause interrupted only by the echo of footsteps. “Why do you persist when you are so clearly defeated?”
 Silence greeted his words.
 There was a sigh, and Samson could hear the voice approaching slowly but was too dazed to know from which direction. The footsteps began circling and the voice became louder, tension slipping into the syllables. “You were always stubborn.”
 Samson could feel someone approach and braced himself for the hit as it came like a phantom, striking like a dark bolt of lightning from the blinding glare. “Speak damn you! Don’t think I won’t hurt you! Why won’t you speak?” The voice roared and he felt a gut-wrenching pain as a blow struck his stomach.
 Samson recoiled as much as the restraints would allow; spittle and blood dripping down his battered chin. He coughed once again, his insides on fire with each discharge of air. The voice went silent and for a moment the sound of heavy breathing filled the chamber from both men.
 Finally, Samson spoke. “Because you will not listen,” he wheezed painfully.
 “And why should I listen to the words of a fanatic?” The voice inquired, still noticeably excited from the previous altercation.
 Samson waited for several moments, blinking several times against the harsh light before responding. “I am a fanatic?”
 “You are guilty of innumerable counts of conspiracy, terrorism, violence, and other such acts against the state for no apparent reason. I would say that constitutes you as a fanatic.” The voice stoically stated. “But that is not what I am here to find out. Your guilt has already been established and your life is forfeit. Now I have just one final piece of information I must obtain before you are allowed to face judgement: motive. Though personally…” The voice had grown almost painfully patronizing; the ignorance behind his words was growing too much for Samson to bear. “…I suspect to find it nothing more than a byproduct of simple ideological quarrels or misguided hate of some unfortunate event to which you blame on the efforts of visionaries who sought only to bring reason to our otherwise mad society. A goal we have all labored for so long to see come to fruition.”
 “You know nothing of my motives!” Samson sneered through blood-stained teeth.
 There was a light chuckle at the outburst and Samson chided himself inwardly for losing composure. “Well if that’s the case then why don’t you enlighten me? Call it personal interest if you will.”
 Samson could feel the man’s breath on his face and he struggled to keep himself from lunging for the source of the voice, the man he hated so much. Not so much for what he had done, but for what he stood for. “Why should I waste my breath? Your mind is closed to my words. Nothing I say will make any difference to you.”
 The voice laughed again. “If that were the case, would they have sent me, of all people, to waste my time talking to you?

The battered man exhaled deeply, wincing as broken bones shifted with his diaphragm. He knew it wouldn’t be much longer, he would indulge his tormentor. “Very well.”
 “Excellent!” The voice exclaimed.
 “Where would you like me to begin?” Samson asked forlornly.
 “I want to know why.” The voice responded expectantly. “The beginning.”

I had been on the verge of adolescence at the time of the great upheaval, though I had grown to liken it more to a great prosecution. It had descended upon us all before any had seen it coming; creating unity, order, and harmony at the expense of mankind’s soul. It had taken from me something much more dear; my family.
 As young as I was, I still remember my father’s handsome welcoming face and his warm voice. I remembered the deep rumble of a laugh when I had asked if he was going away. My father had looked me in the eye and told me those were just rumors. He told me that there were those in the government who were trying to do bad things, and that everything would be fine once he made them see what was really happening. Somehow, I had known that my father was lying, but I had wanted to believe that things would be ok. That night, when my parents had sent me to bed I could hear them arguing throughout much of the night. The next morning when my brother had asked where our father was our mother broke into tears. That was the last I had seen of my father.
 A year passed. I remember awakening to my mother weeping by the television. Though I didn’t understand at the time; my mother tried to explain to me that there had been a coup within the government, something she called the great upheaval. Soon, many of my friend’s fathers and older siblings began leaving. Then, one by one, my friends and neighbors began to leave until one day my mother decided it was time that we too join the mass exodus from the urban centers, fleeing to the nearest railway terminal with whatever we could fit into the two suitcases we owned.

I remembered the feeling of fear and tension that ran through the crowd as my mother guided me and my brother through the crowded terminal. There were uniformed men patrolling the walkways who were pulling people aside, they were large and threatening and I saw many taken away or beaten if they attempted to resist. I kept my brother’s head down as we moved towards the trains. As they neared the nearest car I felt my mother’s hesitation as she squeezed my hand. I remember looking up and seeing the reason behind her fear; guards stood at the entrances with the train porters, checking each potential passenger before allowing them aboard.

As we approached the front of the line my mother looked down at the two of us, her expression was stoic; telling me everything I needed to know. As we stepped up to the doorway one of the soldiers had held up his hand, moving between us and the entrance. The man looked grizzled and dirty, his face was thin and malevolent and he wore a dark grin as he saw the alarm on the refugees before him. My mother pulled me and my brother close to her, as though to hide us from the soldier in the protective shroud of the fabric of her dress.

The man exchanged a brief quarrel with my mother, telling her that she didn’t have the correct papers to leave the city and that the three of us would not be allowed to leave. I remember watching as my mother reached the breaking point; tears welling up in her eyes. Yet even in the face of my mother’s despair the spiteful man persisted; without the correct papers they would not be able to leave. There was a commotion nearby and I heard soldiers approaching. My mother looked down at us with tear soaked eyes, whispering that she loved us and that she would see us again soon. She told me that she needed to go away and that I needed to take care of my brother while she was gone. I was afraid but I knew that my family needed me to be strong so I nodded to her and grabbed my brother’s hand tightly. She hugged us both for what seemed like a blissful eternity before the halfheartedly porter pulled us apart. I watched as she handed the briefcases to the porter, weeping as the man led us aboard. I wanted nothing more at that moment than for my father to come, to rescue us from this man and to take us home, where we could be safe, but no rescue came.

The grinning soldier took my mother by the hand, whispering things that made me clench my fists. I remember watching the soldier, searching for some sign of benevolence in his scarred, dark features, finding none. As the soldier led my mother away, the dour looking porter who had until now observed the interaction between the soldier and the rest of the refugees with a mostly neutral expression stopped the two of them for a moment, whispering something to the beleaguered woman that made her face flash at least momentarily with relief. It lasted only a moment but it was enough for me to know that I could trust the man. As I watched their mother disappear into the crowd the porter looked down at us both, attempting a weak smile as he ushered us onto the train. He told us that his name was Ira and that he would make sure that we would arrive safely. As he closed the doors to the train, moving out of the way of the sliding doors at the last possible second so that no more of the surging refugees could force their way aboard I remember seeing a silver crescent glint from the man’s sleeve. Ira must have seen the look on my face because he had cast me a knowing glance as he quickly covered the talisman, giving me and his brother a warm smile once he was sure no one else had seen. “Fear not children. We are under the watchful eyes of Allah now. No harm will befall us.”

Somehow, despite all that had happened, I knew that this man would keep watch over us. Suddenly, despite the fact that the world seemed to be crashing down around me that man allowed enabled me to hope that one day, things would as like they used to be, no matter the sacrifice required.

“Semantics.” The voice mused, “Why must you test my patience. We are both aware that I already know your past.”
 “You know of the past, but you do not understand it.” Samson growled, squinting against the light. “If you did then you would already know the reasons behind my actions."

“Get to the point, or I will make things very unpleasant for you.” The voice replied, agitated. “Now continue.”

 Samson shook his head, knowing that his words would fall upon deaf ears. “That day I saw my mother taken from me. We lost our home. It was then that everything in my life was taken from me. I had lost everything and everyone I had held dear… everyone except my brother.”

 “Many did during those times. The great upheaval was difficult for all of us.” The voice paused for a moment, as though thinking back to some past event in his own life. There was silence for a long time, leaving an uncomfortable air between them. “Those were hard times, difficult times.” The voice began again, “But they were not without reason.”

 “There was no reason behind their decisions!” Samson snarled. “No thought as to what they were doing. No regard for those who their decisions would affect! ”

 “You are wrong Samson; there was reason behind their actions. It is just that your own judgment has been clouded by the past. You refuse to let go of your beliefs and your anger; anger at having to suffer for the greater good of our race.”

 “And what would you know of the greater good?” Samson snapped, irate and frustrated. “What great change was enacted that led us into prosperity? What difference has occurred which has propelled humanity from a barbaric race into an enlightened people? I can tell you truthfully that since the great persecution I have seen not so much as the slightest improvement from our kind.” Samson stated solemnly, as fact.
 “The great persecution?” The voiced exclaimed sardonically. “That term betrays your predisposition. The great persecution as you call it was an unfortunate travesty. One that I assure you was not decided upon lightly. But there was no other choice; humanity needed to shed the shackles of its spiritual limitation, don’t you see? But people cling too closely to their old ways and change takes decades, centuries even! Just imagine what another hundred years of that backwards thought would have cost us? What was done was borne out of necessity, not preference.”

 “Necessity?” Samson uttered, livid at the justification. “You know nothing of necessity.”

There was an explosion followed by dazzling light. I awoke with a start, realizing that I remained huddled in the corner and relative safety of the church ruins with the rest of the refugees as the shelling continued. I felt the weight of my brother’s head pressed against his shoulder and watched as Belial’s head slowly rose and fell against my own chest. For a moment the boy looked peaceful and almost happy, a sight that filled me with the worst sort of sorrow as I recognized my mother’s face reflected in my brother’s sleeping features.

 The large room was bare, save the dozens of groups of refugees who had sought shelter in its confines over the past several days as the fighting grew more intense. The attacks had grown more frequent over the past weeks, driving many refugees underground as the inexorable shelling continued. At the time, I hadn’t known why there was fighting or which side was winning but every so often I recall having heard the rumble of war engines or the roar of bombers overhead. There had been whispers that the insurrectionists were being pushed back into the wastes and I had briefly allowed myself to wonder if my father was amongst them; leading a charge against those that had brought ruin to my life.

News travelled fast amongst the refugee groups as they migrated from one area to the next, each time further from large urban centers. They had all heard of the cleansings; mass internments for those stubborn ‘believers’ who would not renounce their destructive faiths. Reports from several infiltrators indicated that the internment centers in the nearest cities had reached populations well over a million. The majority of which had been rounded up from the mass exodus of fleeing civilians during the initial months of what became commonly known as the exodus.

 I remember on that particular night we’d received a large influx of refugees who had been sent to us by neighboring sympathizers. These battered wretches were an unwelcome sight to many in the shelter due to the tenuous strain we had been experiencing in terms of resources. The shelling had knocked out the power and water to the building long before Belial and I had arrived there and the food stocks were running dangerously low. Needless to say, these newcomers found themselves facing a stark reality in which their salvation had suddenly reverted to a living hell in the form of barred wooden doors. The dust smattered ivory angels that adorned the large wooden doorway indifferent as the refugees’ cries assailed them.

There were shouts of anger, fear, and confusion from the newcomers as the realization that there would be no accommodation for them drove them to desperation; mass hysteria that drove them into a frenzy of primal desperation and fueled the madness that ensued. Watching the doorway intently, my brother shouted out in terror as the first strike reverberated around the room, echoing off the church’s vaulted ceilings, overshadowing even the thunder of distant artillery. Several men closest to the wall ran to the doorway, throwing themselves against it, one even going so far as to curse the God who’s house they sought to defend. Their efforts were fruitless however; the next crash knocked many off their feet, and along with them was a considerable amount of the doorway fortifications.

When the final blow struck, it seemed to occur in slow motion. The impact resounded so thoroughly throughout the structure that the adjacent stained glass portrait of Saint Jude shattered, joining the thousands of splinters of aged oak as they shot across the ground at the feet of the stunned refugees. I watched in horror as the frenzied newcomers rushed the building, seeking safety which they would not find as they trampled all those who got in their way.

It was then, from our corner of the church that Belial and I witnessed the mass savagery that could only occur from man in the most dire of times. The sheer number of newcomers had been underestimated and I was terrified their numbers far exceeded our own. In a rush of bodies the newcomers tore into the church like tidal wave of frightened human flesh. I did my best to keep Belial at my side and out of the way, watching as several other groups did the same. This strategy seemed to work at first, as the newcomers initially focused their attention on those who had been too weak or too foolhardy to withdraw from the doorway or otherwise make themselves appear threatening to the oncoming horde. However, after those who had stood up to the insurgent crowd had been put down they turned their attentions to us, herding the last of us into the center of the church dais with a variety of makeshift weapons.

As soon as the defenders had been overpowered the search for food had gotten underway; dozens of adults and children alike scrounging through belongings, desks, closets and even the pulpit itself for concealed food or supplies. When that search proved fruitless, the panicked mass directed their search to the prisoners; their desperation sending them to the breaking point as the prospect of not finding sustenance began setting in.

Somehow I already knew what was coming next as the tide of frenzied, pitiful humanity surged towards me. A frightened wretch of a woman lunged at a portly man to my left, clawing for a backpack he had slung over his shoulder. The man batted her aside reflexively, sending her to the floor with a loud crack. That was all that was needed to create mass hysteria amongst them; the woman’s peers began lashing out with their weapons at the beleaguered refugees who fruitlessly attempted to fend their attackers off barehanded.

Suddenly, I was struck by something, falling to the floor while calling out for my brother. I remember the shifting crowd, the screams, the scent of blood and sweat and fear as the church turned into a living hell. There was a shrill scream, loud enough to be heard over the chaos of the mêlée and when I turned to see what had caused it I came face to face with an emaciated figure leaning over the corpse of a small form, blood and flesh dripping from his chin down to the body. He stared at me with a look of animalistic fury, as though daring me to come between him and his kill. The smell of blood was all that was needed to set the ravenous crowd into a feeding frenzy.

As I tried desperately to escape from the ravenous horde I found to my horror that my brother was nowhere to be seen. In that place men were reduced to animals and all but the basest of instincts were forgotten in the face of death and starvation. I was about to close my eyes and accept my fate when I caught sight of Belial, unconscious and being dragged along the floor by a thin skeletal form of a woman. I ran through the carnage towards my brother, somehow managing to avoid the carnage that surrounded me. Then, just as I was nearly upon my brother and his assailant we were thrown to the floor by a massive explosion.

 Through the smoke I could just barely make out the sound of helicopter rotors and the glare of searchlights from above. I saw men in masks and armor rappel down from above amidst the shifting mass of people, some firing into the crowd as they descended. In the chaos I was barely able to rescue my brother and escape with my life. After that day I saw what your ‘greater good’ would do to our race and I swore to myself to bring those who had condemned us such a fate to justice, even if it cost me my life…

 “The refugee crisis during the early years were far beyond any government could handle, Samson. You know as well as I that there was no way that a newly formed government would be able to maintain total order during such a crucial time.” The voice stated matter of factly.

 “Perhaps,” uttered Samson, “but nonetheless the fear and chaos that followed the upheaval was responsible for the deaths of millions from starvation and famine alone.” Malice once again trickled into Samson’s voice as the conversation conjured images of human misery; “All of these atrocities, the millions of people who were killed in the aftermath, their blood is on all of your hands!” Samson shouted, spraying spittle and sweat as he shouted.

 Once again a silence filled the room, the faint sound of footsteps replacing the echo of voices in the chamber while the voice deliberated.

“Those were horrible times, times that none, myself included, shall never forget.” The voice spoke softly, perceptibly regretful. “But as I have previously stated, there were reasons behind such drastic actions. Their lives were given up so that humanity could achieve a greater purpose; one where we are no longer constrained by mysticism and fear of some nonexistent observer whom we must serve simply because it is what we are told to do. All from the alleged word of some arcane, irrelevant prophet who no one is sure ever even existed!” The voice declared, whatever previous repentant attitudes it had shown were replaced with palpable ire.

“So we replace the domination of one invisible tyrant for that of another, more tangible one?” Samson spat. “Things will be no different under your system than they were before. Your efforts will yield no more progress than was achieved under God.”

“Think back to the conflicts of the past century,” the voice urged, slowly but forcefully. “Of the blind hatred that has plagued our species, how much has stemmed from the blind ignorance and hate that accompanies the beliefs you fools hold so dear?” There was a silence for a moment as the question floated between them before the voice decided to continue on. “Humanity was proceeding along a path to damnation; we were a condemned species under the shackles of pious ignorance.”

“Whatever would have occurred under the cloak of faith would have been a less condemning path than the one you helped lead us down after the damn purge!” Samson roared, his voice quivering with emotion.

“What was done was for the greater good of our species.” The voice stated. “The end justifies the means.”

Samson nodded, for once in agreement. “I remember hearing that phrase in the past and believing it only to the slogan of hypocrites… an opinion I have found to this day to be accurate.”

Thou shalt not kill. The words echoed in my mind over and over as I gaped down at the lifeless form in front of me. The weapon in my hand nearly fell to the floor as my hands shook. As my comrades pushed past, moving down the hallway I could sense one stayed back with me, placing a hand on my shoulder.

“It had to be done, my friend.” Ira breathed. “Your actions are righteous; you are doing God’s work.” He looked down the hall we had just come from, apprehension visible on his face as the sound of gunfire and nearing footsteps began to grow louder. “Now quickly, we must leave this place.” He said as he ushered me forward once more. I began to sprint, running not from our pursuers, but from the corpse of the man who had gotten in my way while his death replayed in my mind along with the entire chain of events that had brought me to this place.

I had been contacted by Ira several years later whilst living amongst various refugee groups. He had appeared seemingly out of nowhere, like a ghost, offering me a chance to fight back against those who had started all of this. There was no question as to my answer and within months I had risen through the ranks of one of the most hunted revolutionary organizations in the world. Governments branded us terrorists, but we knew what we were, and this is why I now found myself at Ira’s side, a fresh recruit in his strike team.

“Come, Samson, hurry!” Ira whispered, shattering through my thoughts.

I followed Ira down the winding hallways of the administrative complex, seeing the handiwork of my fellow resistance fighters; gunfire, shells, and the occasional body. At a bend we came up on a pair of men, resistance fighters wearing all black coveralls wielding assault rifles.

“Hurry up, get to the stacks!” A man shouted at us, waving us down the hallway where another fighter holding the entranceway. As we ran by, escorted by the two flank guards, I noticed a blinking light plastered to the wall we’d just passed. I had just processed the information before the hallway behind us exploded, causing plaster and debris sprayed down the length of corridor. A good portion of the hall behind us had collapsed, effectively creating a barrier between us and our pursuers.

The soldier slammed the reinforced door behind us as we were thrown through the doorway, covered in dust and half senseless from the proximity of the explosion. “Thanks.” I managed to mutter to the man who had held the door as he bent down to help us to our feet. I couldn’t make out his response over the ringing in my ears.

Ahead, the men were already well on their way to searching through the ancient shelves for their quarry. I briefly questioned what would be so valuable that would compel a man like Ira to risk his life and the lives of his men to attain. After all, there were nothing but endless rows of dusty aisles filled with aged documents.

Ira ran past the aisles of shelves with me in tow, scanning the dusty placards on each as we passed dozens of huge, grimy glass windows. I couldn’t help but to catch a glimpse of the courtyard outside. Our insertion had been relatively swift; having disposed of the majority of the guards within the first two minutes of the attack and had reached the target in four. The sounds of sirens were audible in the distance but we had some time before anyone else would reach us. I prayed to God that was all the time we needed.

Ira came to a halt in front of me, turning into an aisle that looked as though it had been suffered an earthquake; papers and files littered the floor and several shelves had rotted through.

“These documents have been sealed for some time now, Samson.” Ira whispered, seeing the look of puzzlement on my face. “Nonetheless, they are very important,” he continued, barely glancing up from the rows of files as he spoke. “

I followed him as he moved down the aisle, tracing his hand down the line of papers. “What is so important? What could we possibly find here that would justify such a risk?”

Ira remained silent, pausing again at a warped shelf that held numerous black folders. He scanned them for several seconds before snatching one off the shelf. “This is it, we have it,” he shouted out excitedly.

Just as I was about to inquire as to what exactly it was there came a loud explosion from the courtyard and several of the windows exploded outward into a hail of razor sharp shards. Shouts and screams from injured men washed over my headset just as the sound of gunfire began. Ira ran back to the central walkway, motioning for me to follow just as machine gun fire turned the area we had been standing was into little more than scraps of paper and splinters.

“I believe we should leave this place, Samson.” Ira shouted over his headset in mid-stride down the walkway. I nodded in agreement as another explosion tore through a neighboring aisle.

At the end of the room we saw a group of men who had overturned several objects in an effort to create some makeshift, albeit rapidly disintegrating cover for their squad. Without breaking stride I followed Ira over the blockade, leaping over an overturned desk and a very surprised rifleman before landing in a heap.

One of the men, Captain Reynolds, pulled me to my feet before pushing me back down behind the relative safety of the desks. “Did you get it?” He shouted at Ira, barely audible over the sound of gunfire.

Ira nodded. “Indeed. It is ours.”

Reynolds grimaced, “you’re wounded.”

I felt myself go cold as I quickly patted myself down, looking for any sign of injury. It was only after I saw Reynolds gaze that I realized he was not referring to me, but to my friend.

I watched in a state of disbelief as Ira’s fingers moved down over the wound, his fingers grazing the smoldering flesh that the hell-round had created as it had passed through his stomach. The puncture was nearly the size of a fist and the men quickly moved to hold Ira down, lest he worsen his injuries.

“Corpsman!” Reynolds lieutenant shouted over the din, summoning his squad’s medic over to Ira’s side. I could tell from the man’s initial response that the situation was grave.

Fire tore past my head, shattering into the wall just behind me and sending a puff of plaster and dust over the crouched corpsman as he worked. I turned back to the fighting, picking up the rifle and began firing into the haze that had been the library. More fire traced back in response, a round clipping my shoulder pad. My armor in the pad held, the material underneath succeeded in stopping the bullet but the kinetic force of the round hurled me to the ground, prompting a flurry of curses from the medic as I nearly toppled him over.

Reynolds glanced over at me and then the medic. “We need to get out of here! Can he be moved?”

The look on the medic’s face was all the answer either of them needed. “If we move him he’s dead.”

Ira, still conscious, looked up at us, a glimmer of clarity in his eyes that demanded his words be heeded. “I am not meant to leave this place alive, Samson. My tithes have been paid.” Ira gurgled through mouthfuls of blood.

The rate of fire seemed to increase significantly as though to vindicate the dying man’s words as seemingly more and more enemies began pouring into the tattered remnants of the library. None of that was apparent to me; for a moment there was only me and Ira, sharing with me the last few moments of life he had. It was a dour event even amidst this stark and unforgiving situation.

I grasped Ira’s hand, standing over the doomed man who had given purpose to my life so many years ago. “What should I do?

“Persist, my friend.” Ira coughed, red liquid trickling from his nose and mouth as he spoke. “Never falter in the face of such odds, for you are ensuring God’s will. Let no fear take you, for even should you perish you could not hope for a better death than in his service.”

I nodded, trying to keep the sorrow from my features. “His will be done, my friend. No matter what.”

Ira smiled, as though entirely content for the first time. “Fear not, Samson,” Ira hacked, pulling the pins from a pair of grenades. “You will join me soon enough.” As the words passed his lips Ira’s eyes fluttered closed and his arm went limp in my hands.

The sounds of gunfire and screaming once again overwhelmed my perceptions and I could vaguely discern the medic pulling me to my feet. Suddenly, Reynolds’ squad broke cover, spraying the nearest stacks with rounds of automatic gunfire to dissuade enemy. We moved towards the exit hatch, blowing through it with several well placed rounds before diving into the darkened passage beyond, Ira’s lifeless body the last thing I saw before a flash of light enveloped the room.

 “Such is my resolve,” Samson spat to his interrogator.

 “Let none question you are a determined foe, Samson. But you and your like are terribly misguided. You squander so much for your lost cause. You cannot hope to achieve your goals.” The voice paused for a moment, as though waiting for its words to sink in, “In fact, I’m still not entirely sure what you hope to achieve. A new order? To rule as though this renaissance had never occurred? Surely even those as zealous as you realize the futility of such desires. You live in a new world now; those days are long since passed.”

 “Perhaps they have,” Samson grunted, straining against the shackles that bound him. “But as long as I draw breath I will resist, for it is God’s will.”

 “Listen to yourself.” The voice uttered exasperatedly, to Samson it almost sounded as though it were pleading with him to see reason. “Who has spoken to you? You claim you are doing God’s will but who has told you that armed insurrection is the bidding of your God?”

 Samson felt his face contort into a deep frown as the voice spat its heresy to him. The others had told him about the interrogations, about how they would attempt to appease him with their reason once they discovered his will could not be broken. “For your crimes alone I would kill you, were it in God’s plan or not.”

 The voice exhaled deeply, it was the sound of a man witnessing the last vestiges of hope whisked away, the sound of near resignation. With those words, Samson wondered whether or not his life had just been forfeit.

 “Do you know of the old times, Samson?”

 Samson’s brow furrowed perceptibly, even with his cramped facial muscles which had become quite sore from squinting into the light. “The old times?”

 “Our history. Before you or I were born; the old times when nations and Gods ruled our people.” The voice inquired in a similar manner to that of teacher to student.

 “I do not…” Admitted Samson, realizing he felt uncomfortable with the idea that this man somehow had some advantage over him. “…but that is of no importance. It will not change anything.”

 “Oh but it does,” the voice assured. “There was a time where your kind had their reign over us. There are numerous examples: the tyrannical reign of the Catholic Church, the terrorism wrought by Islamic fundamentalists, mass genocides in all of Africa, countless conflicts have occurred in the name of myriad gods. Your God had the chance to set the world in his image, to his designs and it failed. Now we must take over before it is too late.”

 Samson remained silent. These words were new to him and yet they did not matter; regardless of how much ‘reason’ was entwined with this man’s heresy he would not be swayed. He was Samson, the Lord’s servant, and he knew his duty.

 “These blights on our past, they all came from a singular source; the belief that there is a power that overshadows sanctity of other human beings. That one could possibly carry out their whims in the name of a faceless force of the imagination. Think of all our race has already sacrificed for your beliefs and your gods, is that still not enough? ”

“You speak only of the negatives that such beliefs have on our race, yet you accept no blame for the boundless capacity for self-destruction that our race is capable of.” Samson replied.

“It is not that, Samson. I am certainly aware of our inherent lack of self control, more so than many. That alone should be reason enough to take away such a volatile and destructive possibility. It is for the good of all that we take such options away, such is your sacrifice.”
 The Spirit for the flesh, Samson thought to himself as he felt his blood begin to boil. “I will tell you of cost. I will tell you of sacrifice. I will tell you of how I lost my brother, Belial.”

When we had returned to our camp later that night I remember Belial coming to my room as I lay in my cot; his face was full of concern, fully aware that something troubled me. “Is there something wrong Samson?”
 I shook my head slowly; keeping my eyes on the ceiling in fear that I would betray what I had done during the operation to my brother should our eyes meet. Belial could sense something was wrong, and his inquiries grew more forceful.
 “What happened today?” He asked slowly.
 Silence greeted him. Belial sat with me for what seemed like hours, staring at me as though trying to peer into the very workings of my mind until suddenly, he rose to his feet. “Very well, brother. But remember, you are all I have and I will not sit by and watch as I lose you to this hell. I’m joining the next operation, if that is what is necessary for me to ensure your safety then I that is what I must do.” It was as though Belial knew his comment would be enough to goad a response out of me.
 “You will not.” I snapped at him. “You will stay here and do His work where you are needed.”

“And who is to tell me where I am *needed*, Samson?” Belial questioned. “I can be just as useful in the field as I am here. I am no longer a child Samson. Just because you are older does not give you the right to order me around as though you were our father!”

He stared at me in silence, blue eyes boring into me as though attempting to dig into my very soul. His teeth gritted together as though his frustration were fueling his adolescent anger towards being treated as though he were a child.

“You are not coming with us. I will not allow it.” I stated it as fact, as though daring him to question my decision.

He obliged. “You cannot tell me what to do, Samson. I will not be treated as though I am inept. I am coming with you and nothing you say or do will sway me,” Belial stated indignantly and in an equally firm manner.

I felt the anger frustration begin to boil within me and decided that if anything were to dissuade my brother from embarking on this fool’s errand it would be this: “Ira died today… you know that, don’t you? I had to watch him pass in the midst of battle.”

Belial’s features softened, genuinely distraught over what I had said. The youth had known of Ira’s passing once our team had returned, but the details had been withheld from him until now.

“Ira died a noble death, achieving his Lord’s objective, the schematics we have sought for so long… and even with his passing, he strengthened my faith, speaking to me of finding the willpower to continue His work even until the hour of our deaths.”

Belial maintained a grim, appraising look. As though there was something on his mind that he was uncertain he should say to me.

 “These things, as terrible as they may be, come as no surprise to me… we all take such risks in doing His work.” I said as the vision of Ira’s bloodied smile filled my mind’s eye. “There is something else though, brother… a weight that I am not quite sure my soul has been fully prepared for.”

 Belial looked at me, wheels turning in his head wondering what it could be that would trouble his brother; the man who had gone through so much heartache and endured so much suffering, and prompt him to act in such a way. “What happened today Samson,” he finally asked.

 “I killed a man today, Belial.”

 My brother stared at me. “This would not be the first,” he finally answered, a confused look on his face.

“Yes, but this man was an innocent! He was but a lowly janitor who stumbled upon us during his rounds.” I felt my face grow hot with shame as my brother stared at me, face stone. Whether he was hiding a reaction of outright shame or was simply apathetic I did not know. “I realize that there are those who must perish for righteousness to prevail, but what role did this man play in the great upheaval? Nothing! And now he is dead.” The words slipped off my tongue like flowing water, a river of shame that poured out of me, begging to be heard by the only one left I could trust.

My brother and I sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity, both of us staring at the dirt floor of our tent, deep in thought about what had just been spoken.

Finally, Belial sat down in the cot next to me, a troubled look in his eyes. “Samson, I know how close you were to our father… you knew him much more than I did. I realize how pious a man he was and why he left so it is understandable you feel it necessary to take up his mantle and continue in a manner befitting of his memory. But this is too far; I believe that you may become lost to me, that you may die needlessly in a crusade for our father’s legacy. You are my brother, the only family I have remaining, and I do not want to lose you to the same conflict that has taken both parents from me. If I must come with you to ensure your safety, then so be it, but as long as you venture out on operations I will accompany you. That is my decision.”

Seeing the look of determination in Belial’s eyes told me all that I needed to know: my brother’s mind had been made, and regardless of whatever else I said he would be accompanying us the next time we went out. I only hoped that the next operation was far off in the horizon.

 Less than a month after that night I found myself once again crowded in the rear of a half-track with half of Reynolds’ squad. True to his word, Belial had insisted upon joining us and had even joined combat training with new recruits during the time we had waited. He was a fast learner and had rapidly excelled beyond many of the recruits he had started his training with. I allowed myself a moment of pride at my brother’s achievements in spite of the fact that he had accomplished them against my will.

The rear compartment was filled with the noise of the engine and the torrent of apprehensive men attempting to hide their fears behind a wall of bravado while the more practical-minded veterans amongst the group chose this last opportunity to ensure their firearms were in working order. Belial and I simply observed the rest of the troopers, neither of us had spoken much to one another as of late.

There was a sudden clang and the half-track jerked as it met some resistance. There was a clanging of metal that must have been a guard fence of some sort. Regardless, the half track did not slow down. The impact had most likely been a perimeter fence and they were most likely making their way up to the laboratory complex.

Reynolds got to his feet, grasping for one of the restraints which dangled from the ceiling of the half-track for balance. “This is a snatch and grab op. Our target is this man, Dagon Sorek.” Reynolds shouted over the noise of the roaring engine, producing an image of an elderly looking man in a white lab coat. His gaunt face wore a tired smile, as though his age had become part of him. “Sorek has information deemed of the utmost importance. Sorek must be taken alive, the knowledge he holds will allow us to strike a crippling blow to these heretics. We cannot fail in our task, do you understand?”

There was a chorus of confirmations from the assembled men before the half-track began to decelerate. “This is it! Let’s move!” Reynolds shouted as the rear hatch of the half-track dropped downwards into the night, the hissing of the pneumatic pumps overshadowing all further communication as they strained to prevent the hatch from slamming into the ground.

Belial and I were the first ones off the half-track, glancing around at the other three vehicles that had come to a stop just a few meters from our position and were in the process of deploying their teams. Reynolds had requested additional support from leadership for this attack, and as a result they had nearly quadrupled Reynolds original force in the likely event that attempting to abduct such an important target would attract unwanted attention.

 “Hurry brother,” I called. “We mustn’t linger.” We ran towards the laboratory entrance, the building was a broad, short structure with an exterior that had been largely constructed from glass. Several guards were present but were just now taking notice of the large vehicles outside. They never had a chance to call for help; silenced rounds tore from our weapons, cutting clean holes through the glass and sending the guards sprawling. Belial looked at me with a look of abhorrence, but continued on to the doorway, shooting out the security cameras as he went.

 One of Reynolds’ men worked the security doors, placing a small isolated EM charge on the locking mechanism. The charge detonated with an electronic fizzle, there was a small clank as the locks disengaged and the doors swung open as though welcoming them inside.

We moved through the building quickly and quietly. Although the guards hadn’t had time to get an alarm off the authorities would undoubtedly be tipped off sooner rather than later when the scheduled check did not come in. With the outcome of the last operation still fresh in everyone’s mind, it was not surprising that everyone wanted to get out of there as soon as possible.

Reynolds ordered his squad through the hall to secure the laboratory floors, stationing two men at each of the entrances. Of the four squads that had been assigned to this operation, three of them were under Reynolds’ direct command, including Belial and I. They would serve as a buffer between the target and any possible hostiles as well as doubling as a search party. The final squad was kept to guard the half-tracks as they waited for us to return. We all knew what would happen should those men fail in their tasks; none of us would make it out of this alive. I allowed myself a quiet prayer that they should not fail in their duties.

Reynolds and his squad were stalking down the secured hallways ahead of us, searching the labs for our quarry when suddenly his radio chimed on, the voice of Lieutenant Keltos echoing off the otherwise silent hallways. “Captain, we have them.”

Reynolds took the radio, halting in mid-stride. “Confirmed capture, Lieutenant?” Reynolds asked expectantly.

There was a moment of static before Keltos replied. “Confirmed, sir. We have the target alive and well.”

“Excellent.” Reynolds said, trying to hide the relief from his voice. “We’re coming to you. Hold position.”

We tore down the hallways towards the lab block that squad Keltos had been assigned to search, somehow managing to navigate through the twisting corridors of the science building. When we reached the lab, we found Keltos along with the other members of his squad encircling a group of sitting men.

“We found the whole lot of them in here, doing experiments. Hadn’t even noticed we’d entered until we had guns in their faces.” Keltos muttered, shaking his head as though he couldn’t believe it himself. “Didn’t know if you wanted extras,” he laughed.

Reynolds looked the men over, peering at the picture every so often before coming to a haggard looking man with a thick white beard. “You.” Reynolds pointed, “You are Dagon Sorek?”

The man nodded. “I am.”

“You’re coming with us.” Reynolds stated, swinging the butt of his pistol to the back of the old man’s head. Dagon Sorek dropped to the floor in a heap. Reynolds motioned to Belial. “Carry him.”

Keltos watched us leave and started after us. “Captain?”

Reynolds nodded quickly, “Quickly, we don’t have much time.” He said, leaving the room as Keltos and his men began speaking the rites to the frightened men before them. The last thing I heard as the door closed behind us was the prayer of the unfaithful being uttered to the sound of grown men weeping. Ten paces further, I thought I could distinguish the report of silencers but could not be sure. Belial must have heard it as well because he looked at me with an expression of sheer disgust as he carried the unconscious man.

 Ahead of us, Reynolds’ radio chirped once again, this time filling the hall with the strained voice of Private Larsen, the half-track driver who had gotten us here. “Sir! We’ve got company coming fast!” Larsen was little more than a boy, not much younger than Belial if memory serves and it was fast becoming clear that he was not at all cut out for the stress of holding his own in battle.

 Reynolds and his men began running, motioning us to follow. One of the soldiers fell back to help Belial as he struggled to carry the comatose scientist. “Understood.” Reynolds replied evenly. “Hold position, we’re pulling out.”

 “Negative! They’ll be on us in minutes! It’s like they knew we were coming!” Larsen’s panicked voice filled the halls. “I’m going to try to fall back and regroup with the others, maybe if -”

 “Hold your position damn you!” Reynolds shouted, practically screaming into his radio. By now agitation had crept into his voice. “We have the target; all we need is a few seconds to load him for extraction!”

If Larsen was listening to Reynolds he showed no indication of it. He started to say something but the roar of what was either an engine or an explosion overshadowed his voice and the connection turned to a wash of static. None of us knew if we had simply lost connection or if more dire circumstances had silenced their driver.

 Upon reaching the entrance we could see the first signs of conflict; the halftrack crews were working feverishly with the few troopers who had been stationed to defend them in an effort to hold back the dozens of advancing enemy, establishing a perimeter just meters away from the vehicles they were desperately attempting to defend. From the bodies that lay sprawled across the ground it was clear that they wouldn’t be able to hold out long.

 We saw a driver appear near the back of the closest halftrack’s rear hatch, waving us over in ones and twos as we attempted to keep our heads down. All the while I remained acutely aware that we were just a short ways away from the pitched battle and therefore extremely vulnerable. Far down the line we saw the smoking remains of our halftrack, evidently the victim of a mortar or rocket. I followed the rest of the men inside the compartment, standing just on the edge of the half-track’s loading ramp.

The driver looked immediately relieved to finally be able to leave. Just as he was about to make for the front of the vehicle our comm. crackled loudly, Keltos’ voice just audible over the sounds of gunfire. “We’ve been flanked-” Keltos grunted over the comm. “-pinned down, requesting support.”

Reynolds grimaced but shook his head. “It’s no use, we’ve got to get out of here or we’re all dead. They’re on their own.” He nodded to the driver who didn’t hesitate gun the engine, even before raising the loading ramp.

Caught off-guard by the sudden jolt of motion, I struggled to hold on as my body fell backwards. I most likely would have managed it too if not for the glancing blow of what must have been either a mine or RPG. In either case, it wouldn’t have mattered since the vehicle I had been struggling so hard to stay inside was flung onto its side, smoke leaking from large rents in the side of its undercarriage.

I found myself several dozen meters away, half buried in a patch of smoldering grasses which were quickly catching aflame. I could faintly distinguish the sounds of battle nearby as I forced myself upright. Stumbling towards the wreckage I somewhat dazedly discovered that I’d happened upon a body. You could barely call it a body to be honest; most of what remained was a gnarled mess of flesh and bone. It was only because of the uniform that I discovered I was in fact staring at what was left of Captain Reynolds. I had barely enough time to consider what had happened to my brother before a nearby mortar shell impacted the earth nearby, the proximity of the blast bringing me to my knees only inches from the body.

Suppressing the urge to vomit I forced myself back to my feet, away from the fiery ruins of the halftrack back towards the complex. By now the other survivors would either in the hands of the enemy, trapped amidst the growing flames, or falling back to the more defensible laboratory complex. I focused my entire being into getting to the complex, tuning out the sound of gunfire, explosions, and screams that echoed amidst the crackle of flames.

It took me a minute to fully realize that some of those screams belonged to men I knew, Keltos’ voice was coming over my comm., which had somehow miraculously remained at my side despite the abuse I’d been put through. “-no use, we’ve been compromised! We’re gonna-” A wash of static temporarily covered the man’s voice and for a maddening second I thought the connection had failed. “-advised, withdraw from complex ASAP!”

Another voice came in over the comm. in response, his voice panicked. “Negative, we are falling back to your position! Do not detonate! Repeat, do not detonate!”

My cloudy mind didn’t register the man’s reference to our contingency plan until it was almost too late. By the time I had processed the information I had precious seconds to get away, barely managing to conceal myself behind a hill of tall grasses and forgotten construction material before a massive explosion rocked the area.

The force of the blast threw detritus hundreds of feet in the air, destroying much of the complex and changing the face of the valley for miles, triggering numerous small seismic reactions, one such was the destabilization of the area I’d chosen as my hiding place. It was only by the grace of God that the tumbling earth and debris did not crush me as the damage was such that it rendered search and rescue operations nearly impossible before cleanup crews could be brought in to evaluate the area.

“It was almost a month before I managed to meet up with a friendly contact. It was only then, upon reaching sanctuary that my fears were realized; I was the sole remaining operative from that operation. Everyone else had either died or was otherwise unaccounted for… and we knew what you do to prisoners.” Samson said bitterly. “Not only did we fail in our mission, a fact which cost the lives of over two-dozen men,” Samson continued. “But I lost Belial that night as well… my brother; my only family was taken from me. Taken by you,” Samson accused.

The voice remained strangely silent once more, not attempting to refute the prisoner’s words.

“From that point on I did all that I could to ensure that our sacrifices were not made in vain. Your attempts to withhold information about weapons technologies did nothing but forestall the inevitable and eventually we had the capacities to produce them en masse.” Samson whispered tauntingly, with a righteous fury that unsettled even his interrogator. “Even now, you and your soulless order are stepping nearer and nearer to oblivion and when that day comes; do not think you will be spared His judgment.”

“We are well aware of your attempts to obtain weapons of mass destruction,” the voice said, straining to keep the concern from his tone. “I can assure you, such plans will never succeed.”

“You are mistaken, we already have them.” Samson stated triumphantly. “Several are already armed and deployed. They need only the proper signal in order for detonation, a signal that can be given at a moment’s notice.” Samson stated darkly.

“I somehow doubt that, Samson. Otherwise why would you have waited this long to launch your attack? Your kind never were very prudent.”

 “Our reasons are our own, but believe me when I say your regime’s end will come soon enough.” Samson warned.

“I find it interesting,” the voice responded. “That you can somehow justify the wholesale slaughter of thousands of innocents in your suicidal efforts to bring the same discord and anarchy which you so detested in your childhood. Furthermore, your collusion with illicit organizations in order attain such weapons is even more surprising. If I recall correctly, we managed to trace several of your associates back to certain criminal organizations” The voice inquired scathingly. “Not surprising really, given the company you’ve so foolishly thrown yourself into. You’re an embarrassment, Samson. Do not lecture me of right and wrong when it is obvious how far you yourself have fallen.” The voice jabbed accusingly, anger easily detectable in its voice.

“Indeed times have changed me, but then so has the world. Such actions have regrettably become necessary in order to do His work, but do not for one second think that my actions were for anything but administering justice upon God’s enemies.” Samson countered.

“These times have changed us all, Samson.” The voice agreed, “most of all myself. However, do not delude yourself with as foolish a notion as’ holy righteousness’. Look at yourself,” the voice spat with disgust. “Father would have been ashamed by what you’ve become.”
 Samson felt his insides chill as a wave of realization washed over him. “Belial? It cannot be…” Samson stammered in disbelief.

“Yes, it is I. *Brother*.” Belial replied, placing a threatening emphasis on the word. “It sickens me to see how far one who is tied to me by blood could fall to such dismal lows, even before I was liberated from the blind mysticism that blinds you even now.”

Samson looked visibly pale beneath the lights, very much convinced that he was in the presence of a ghost. “But that night… how did you? The explosion… they said you were dead. They said you were all dead!” Samson spluttered, utterly failing to disguise the shock in his voice.

“And the fools were right in a sense.” Belial replied, aversion palpable in his voice. “The fool inside me that said to trust in you, to attempt to guide you did die that night. I learned of how you and your like would throw us all to the jaws of hell on your fool’s errand.”

“But how… how did you find yourself amongst these monsters? The ones who did this to us, the ones who caused us all this suffering? How could my own brother find it within himself to betray me?” Samson asked, half-pleadingly.

“I betrayed you?” Belial scoffed incredulously. “You have the gall to accuse me of betrayal? To place blame others for the suffering we have felt? Let me tell you something *brother*, it was the fanaticism to a lost cause that doomed us to this fate. Our father was a stubborn fool who chose the well-being of his soul to that of his family and it is because of him that all of this came to pass. He was so set on sacrificing himself to his God that he nearly took us along with him and yet you followed in his footsteps!” The voice steadily rose in volume as it spoke, speaking in a manner that, to Samson, displayed sheer fanaticism and zealotry surpassing some of the most pious men he’d recruited during his time in the resistance and for the first time he felt his brother’s words sting his very being.
 “You cannot truly believe that…”
 “Oh but I do. In fact, I know it to be true. Our father was a fool of a man who sacrificed us all so that he could feel good about maintaining a false belief in something that doesn’t even exist!” Belial shouted. “But he’s not the worst, you were given a chance to escape; to help us, a chance you spat on and discarded. Our mother gave her life for us to escape the horrors of this conflict and you simply drew us back into it, dragging me alongside you and yet you remain completely blameless. You’re no brother of mine.”
 Samson was speechless, the turn of events replaying over and over again in his mind. After just discovering that his long-lost brother was very much alive he would now have to accept that Belial was lost to him. As the dreadful realization crept through him he could not help but marvel at the cruel irony of the situation. Despair filled him, and for the first time his eyes threatened tears as he became momentarily indifferent to the consequences of showing weakness.
 If Belial was affected by his brother’s sudden surge of emotion he showed no indication of it. Instead, he swung the lamp away from Samson’s face, waiting for his captive’s vision to return before continuing. “You’re pathetic. Get a hold of yourself before I kill you.”
 Samson’s mind raced, working through all the options he could take, searching desperately for one that could convince Belial of his mistake before it was too late. “You can still change my brother; you can still make a difference.” He pleaded.
 Belial laughed contemptuously, “and why should I do that? After all, your God is all-knowing is he not? Why would his plans require my willing cooperation in order to come about?” Belial mocked, leaning on the tray at Samson’s side. “No, I’ve had enough of this. I have orders to gather a confession of guilt pending your execution. You will confess to your crimes against humanity and denounce your faith as a façade for insurrectionism or I will kill you myself here and now.”
 It was then, in his ultimate despair that Samson knew what had to be done. “No.” He rasped.
 “No?” Belial asked, tone betraying no surprise at Samson’s response. “I’d figured as much.” He said, brandishing a scalpel menacingly. “This is your last chance.” Belial stated, motioning towards the sinister red glow of a nearby tripod-mounted recording device. “Recant or die.”

Samson felt his heart pounding, his breath short, and mouth dry yet he forced himself to speak. “You are mistaken Belial, my fate is already sealed. Only yours has yet to be decided. This is your last chance, not mine.”

Belial’s face grew dark as he calmly placed the scalpel down on the tray, replacing it with a syringe. “We shall see.”

Samson grimaced slightly as he felt the needle pierce his neck, disgorging its deadly cargo into his veins. Then, in a second it was done and surprisingly he felt at ease despite the sorrow that he had failed in his task. “I am sorry brother… I have failed you.”

The vengeful look on Belial’s face faltered for a moment at his brother’s apology. “What?”

Samson could already feel the effects of the powerful toxins which were now coursing through him. “When I leave this world I will take with me all of the darkness your kind have created. It is from the ashes of this corruption that a new world will grow… one which will promise a freedom from your corrupt regime.”

A twinge of uncertainty tugged at Belial’s face as his brother spoke. “What are you saying? Tell me damn you!” He shouted, fear filling his voice.

Samson felt his eyes growing heavy as his pulse slackened. “I am afraid I have not been entirely honest with you brother. I arrived here with an important task, and as a result I had set about ensuring that His will be done with or without my survival. None can escape His judgment Belial; you should know that by now.” Samson managed blearily. “Goodbye my brother.”

At that moment, nearly a dozen nuclear warheads each dispersed amongst the most important governing sites detonated simultaneously, one of which had been located in abandoned truck just miles outside of the internment compound.

A chill filled Belial as he realized what he had done; the wailing sound of klaxons filled the room just enough to overshadow the distant rumble of a far off explosion. It was then, as the deafening roar grew so loud as to overshadow the already deafening alarms and the ground began to shake that he realized Samson had been right all along. Belial closed his eyes; suddenly remembering the words of his brother and as his world began to crumble he felt the first and last pangs of doubt tear through him.