

MATT FORBECK'S

BRAVE

NEW

WORLD

REVELATION





**MATT FORBECK'S  
BRAVE NEW WORLD:  
REVELATION**

# ALSO BY MATT FORBECK

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*Matt Forbeck's Brave New World* created by Matt Forbeck.



Dedicated to my wife Ann and our kids Marty, Pat, Nick, Ken, and Helen,  
who reveal all sorts of wonders to me every day.

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Huge thanks to all the readers who backed this book and the rest in the  
trilogy on Kickstarter. See the end of the book for a full list of their names.  
Each and every one of them rocks, and I can only hope that this book  
justifies the faith they showed in me.

# 12 FOR '12

This is the standard edition of a book first released as a reward for the backers of my first Kickstarter drive for [my 12 for '12 project](#), my mad plan to write a novel a month for the entirety of 2012. Together, over 260 people chipped in more than \$13,000 to successfully fund an entire trilogy of novels based on my *Brave New World* roleplaying game, a dystopian superhero setting in which superpowers have been outlawed for anyone that doesn't work for the government.

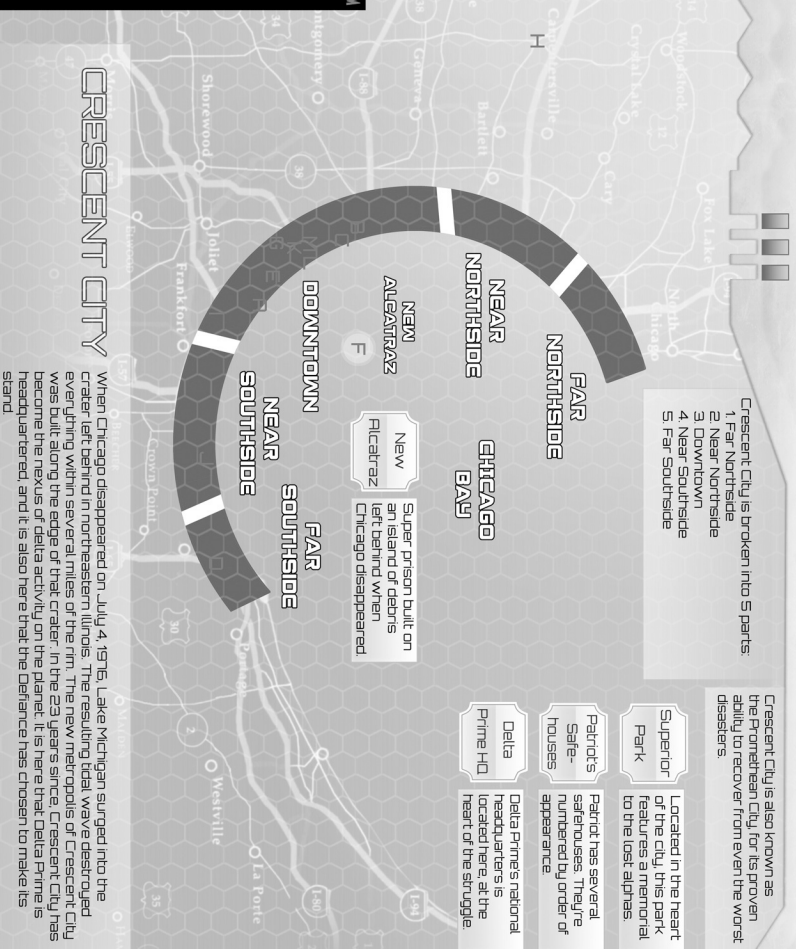
Thanks to each and every one of them for daring me to take on this incredible challenge — and for coming along with me on the wild ride it promises to be. And thank you to all my readers, whether you're backers or not. Stories have no homes without heads to house them in.



## Location Key

- R Crescent City Marina
- B Delta Academy
- C Delta Prime HQ
- D Finnegan's Irish Pub
- E Just Us
- F New Alcatraz
- G New Dearborn Station
- H PRK International
- I Safehouse #1
- J Safehouse #2
- K Safehouse #3
- L Superior Park
- M Triumph Tower

# BRAVE NEW WORLD



Crescent City is also known as the Promethean City for its proven ability to recover from even the worst disasters.

**Superior Park**  
Located in the heart of the city, this park features a memorial to the lost alphas.

**Patrol's Safe-houses**  
Patrol has several safehouses. They're numbered by order of appearance.

**Delta Prime HQ**  
Delta Prime's national headquarters is located here, at the heart of the struggle.

**New Alcatraz**  
Super prison built on an island of debris left behind when Chicago disappeared.

**New Flicatraz**  
New Flicatraz Chicago disappeared.

## CRESCENT CITY

When Chicago disappeared on July 4, 1976, Lake Michigan surged into the crater, left behind in northeastern Illinois. The resulting tidal waves destroyed everything within several miles of the rim. The new metropolis of Crescent City was built along the edge of that crater. In the 23 years since, Crescent City has become the nexus of delta activity on the planet. It is here that Delta Prime is headquartered, and it is also here that the Defiance has chosen to make its stand.



# CHAPTER ONE

*AUGUST 13, 1999: FRIEDA*

I was in the cabin's living room when I heard my daughter scream. We'd only moved into the mountains of Colorado a few months before that — Temple, her, and me — and the wildness of the place kept offering us up new surprises. The first few times I'd heard Tiara screech like that, I'd gone sprinting for her, ready to stand between her and any kind of threat, like a momma bear protecting her precious cub, but once she'd realized it, she'd started to abuse it.

These days, she screamed at the slightest excuse, and I'd become immune to the sound. I no longer felt the rush of adrenaline in my veins that sent my heart pounding and put my senses on edge. Instead, this time, I sighed with resignation and trudged toward the front door.

When we'd first moved into this isolated cabin, I'd been adamant about not letting Tiara wander about on her own. I'd grown up in a tough neighborhood just outside of Crescent City, and I'd never spent much time in the wild before. Since we'd been here, I'd seen all sorts of new things, but the hardest thing to get used to was the lack of black people like us, or minorities of any sort for that matter. Sometimes it seemed like the people of the Rocky Mountains were still as white as the tops of their snow-capped mountains.

We were miles away from anyone — that was the whole point — so I'd gone from worrying about human predators in the city to the

wilder kind out here. I knew the chances were tiny that anything would happen to us, but I'd read enough stories about mountain lions and other predators for me to take the threat seriously. After a while, Temple ran the numbers for me and pointed out that Tiara would have been more likely to be clipped by a speeding car in our old neighborhood than to get bit by any sort of wild creature.

That helped me ignore the screams for a bit — that and the frequency with which she let them loose. She'd literally cried "Wolf!" so many times that the words couldn't move me anymore.

I couldn't blame Tiara much, after everything that had happened to her. We'd had a mostly quiet life until she'd had her awakening and we'd had to leave in the middle of the night like that, knowing we'd have Delta Prime hot on our trail the next day. But we couldn't let them take my baby away.

We'd abandoned our home, our friends, and the rest of our families without a word. That's a huge adjustment for a thirteen-year-old girl. It was hard on all of us, but worst of all for her.

So when I reached the cabin door, I didn't expect to find Tiara screaming about anything larger than a raccoon. I spotted her first, standing on the edge of the main yard, just about where it falls off the rocky knob on which the cabin sits and into the woods below. She was pointing down the hill, toward the tree line, which I couldn't see from where I was, and still screaming.

I called out to her in a weary voice. "What is it?"

She didn't answer. She didn't even look my way. That told me that this was different from all the false alarms she'd raised. Still, I didn't quite believe it.

I walked down the porch and onto the gravel driveway that ran in a circle in front of the cabin. The stones crunched under my feet.

"Tiara Diana Franklin!" Middle naming her like that got her attention, and she spun about to look at me, her black hair framing her face, terror painted in her wide brown eyes. I kept my voice even, stamping down my rising fear and trying to keep my frustration from tipping over into irritation. "What is going on?"

Tiara just screamed again and pointed back behind her. That's

when I spotted the man coming up behind her.

He stomped up the steep slope, growling like a wild animal. His hair hung long and tangled over his shoulders, black shot through with strands of gray. He was tall and muscular, his white skin smudged with dirt. He was wrapped in a camp blanket but nothing else. Even his feet were bare.

He stormed up the hill like a raging bull, and I couldn't see anything human inside of him. His eyes were wide enough to show whites all around their sea-blue irises. He snarled like a mad dog hopped up on rabies and speed.

"Temple!" I shouted back into the house. "Temple! Get up here right now!"

My husband had even less patience with Tiara's screaming than I did. He'd decided it making it my responsibility to deal with it first, only coming out to confront her if it became clear that I wasn't available to handle it. For me, though, I knew he'd come running.

Not waiting for him to respond, I sprinted toward Tiara. I didn't know what I could do to stop the man. I just knew I had to get between him and my baby.

My feet pounded along the gravel and into the grass, my lungs gasping for more of the thin air. My body hadn't fully adjusted to the altitude yet, and I often got winded just walking around the house.

I refused to let that slow me down now. I knew that Tiara's life might depend on it.

I leaped over a line of stunted brush like an Olympic hurdler, something I don't think I could have managed with a conscious effort. My fear had given me wings.

When I touched down on the other side of the shrubs, I knew I would never make it to her in time. "Tiara! Run!"

My daughter had been gaping at the man, but now she turned and launched herself toward me, her dark braids jangling about her as she went. We'd spent all morning working those into her hair, time that seemed like it had been wasted now.

We should have been getting ready for something like this. We'd

grown confident that no one would come after us. We'd become lazy. And now we would pay the price — Tiara first.

She got only two steps before her shoe slipped on the grassy slope, and she fell to her hands and knees. Then she looked back at the snarling madman bearing down on her and froze.

I knew then that he would rip her throat out and tear her to pieces right in front of me. He would stop only long enough to knock my skull in so he could finish with her, and when he was done with us, he'd murder my husband as well.

I had to make it stop. More than that, I had to go back.  
So that's what I did.

## CHAPTER TWO

*AUGUST 13, 1999: FRIEDA*

Time blurred around me. For an instant, everything froze.

I saw the man halted in midair over where my daughter lay on the ground, trying to scramble away from him on her back. She had her arm held up in front of her like a shield, but I knew he would knock it aside like a newspaper.

Or at least he would have, if I hadn't used my powers to intervene.

When I'd first awakened as a delta, I had no idea how to use my powers. I used to close my eyes and just wish that I could start everything over. And then, somehow, I could.

At first I'd thought I'd been given the power to wish all my troubles away. It wasn't until much later — when I was brave enough to open my eyes — that I realized that I had the ability to turn back time instead.

With my eyes wide open, I saw the man fall upward, away from Tiara and race backward down the hill. I felt myself be dragged back into the house. I watched my daughter stand back up, walk down the hill and start pointing at where the wild man had just disappeared.

And then I was in my house, with the door shut but the windows open, watching Tiara standing at the edge of the yard, not pointing at anything.

I'd reversed time about a minute, which is far as I've ever

managed it. You might think that's not a lot of time, and you'd be right, but at a critical moment, it can be an eternity.

"Temple!" I shouted. "Someone's attacking Tiara in the front yard. Bring the gun!"

Then I stormed out the door and down toward my daughter again.

I'd put every bit of effort I could into turning back time, and it had drained me good. I wouldn't be able to do that again for a while, which meant I only had one more chance to save Tiara from that wild man. That was one more chance than most people would have gotten, sure, but it also meant that I knew what was at stake if I failed.

"Tiara!" I said as I cleared the shrubs again. "Get back! Get back into the house!"

Just then she noticed the man coming out of the trees at her, and she started to scream, a long-delayed echo from a minute before. The man looked just the same as before, and why wouldn't he? No one but me would have remembered how it went the first time around. They'd just play their roles the same as before.

I was the only one who could change anything, who could intervene, and I was determined to make the most of it.

"Tiara!"

The appearance of the madman had shocked her for a moment, and she'd stood rooted to the spot. When I called her name again, closer than I'd been before, it jolted her, and she spun around and started running toward me. She screamed the entire way. This time, I could hear the real terror in her tone.

She came toward me with her arms wide open, hoping to take me in an embrace and hold me tight, but I couldn't let her do that. Not now. To slow down to comfort her might cost us both our lives.

As she grew nearer to me, I gave her a fierce shake of my head. "Get into the house!" I said. "Get in, and lock the door!"

She nodded, tears filling her eyes, and I raised my arm and swam past her, the way my father had taught me from back when he'd been a lineman for the University of Michigan. "The best way to get

to a quarterback," he'd said. "Swim right past the blockers."

That put Tiara behind me, which was exactly what I wanted. It also put me face to face with the creature who was chasing her down.

I'd been so busy trying to save her that I had to admit I hadn't thought much about what I would do if I managed it. I had no aim in mind other than putting myself between danger and my little girl, and now I had to deal with the source of that danger head on.

I set my feet and put up my hands, forming my nails into claws. I hadn't taken great care of them since we'd escaped into the mountains, and a few of them stood much shorter than the others. Still, they were all I had.

Looking up at the man steaming toward me like a freight train, I knew that I didn't stand a chance. He had to be at least twice my size, and he didn't look like he had an ounce of sense left in him. But I wasn't there to stop him. I just wanted to slow him down enough for Tiara to get away.

If she got to the house, she had a chance. If she could get Temple and he could get his rifle, he might be able to take the man down. He couldn't be bulletproof, right?

Then I thought about my crazy delta powers, and I realized that maybe he could.

I raised my fingers high and steeled myself for his charge. He might knock me flat with one punch, but I was going to make him pay as much for it as I could.

Then Tiara grabbed me by the shoulder. "No, Momma!" she said. "You gotta come with me!"

The fact that she was still there stole my breath. I'd not looked back at her after I'd moved past her. I'd just assumed she'd do as I said: run into the house and get her father.

But she was here instead. As much as I'd wanted to save her, she hadn't wanted to abandon me either. And no matter how much I might love her for that, I felt like screaming at her.

I wanted to shout at her to stop being an idiot, to listen to me for once in her life, and to run, run, run. But we had run out of time

instead, and now it looked like we might both die for it.

I turned away from the man and managed to wrap my arms around Tiara just before the man hit us.



## CHAPTER THREE

*AUGUST 13, 1999: FRIEDA*

I'd never been hit so hard in my life, and I grew up with three brothers who were built just like my dad. They had never been all that gentle with me, and I'd served as their tackle dummy more than once. Still, they hadn't been trying to kill me.

The man laid me out flat with a single smash. My head cracked against the hard-packed ground, and stars flashed before my eyes. My only consolation was that the bastard hadn't managed to dislodge my death grip on Tiara. I still had my arms around her as we crashed to the ground, and that protected her from some of the impact.

She let out a cry as we smacked into the ground, and that went straight from there to a whimper. I wanted nothing more than to hold my little girl and tell her it would be all right, to inspect her wounds and patch her up, to give her a kiss.

Instead, I looked up to see the blanket-wrapped nut job standing over us, his eyes burning with fire.

That wasn't a metaphor. His eyes glowed red, the same kind of color I'd seen on TV in the faces of angry outlaw deltas — either on the news or on my favorite drama, *Delta Island*. From the fury on his face, I knew I only had an instant before the burgeoning heat building in his pupils burst out and burned me to death.

The only think I could think of, though, was protecting Tiara. We had no way to run, no way to get away from the man in time, so I

did the only thing I could think of. I threw myself over my daughter and tried to shield her with my body.

I had no idea how well that might work — or even if it would work at all — but if it held even the smallest hope of saving my little girl, I meant to try it.

I held my whimpering sweetheart as tight as I could, holding her beneath me as she tried to wriggle free. I wouldn't let her be burned. With what I thought would be my dying breath, I swore that to her.

And then I heard the flat crack of a gunshot ring out.

I knew the sound well. When we'd finally wound up here on the very edge of civilization, Temple had insisted that we buy a gun and that we all learn how to use it. Back in the city, we'd avoided guns, knowing that they were as likely to be used against us as to defend us, but out here we could see the need for them. They could protect us from animals and poachers or even — should worse come to worst — give us a little bit of a chance against Delta Prime.

That was a long shot, we all knew, but when all you have is a long shot, you take it. Temple picked up a hunting rifle at a gun show, and we set to training ourselves how to use it.

So I knew the sound of that shot from our time on the rifle range. I knew the echo well from the hours we'd spent practicing with it in our own back yard. When it rang out, it sounded not like death to me but like salvation.

I looked up and saw the man looming over us. He stood there like a statue, unharmed, waiting for something to happen.

"Get back!" Temple said.

I couldn't see him — I kept my eyes on the man instead, unwilling to turn away — but the sound of his voice made me shudder in relief. I felt Tiara sob.

"You step away from my wife and child, or I'll shoot you dead!"

The man stared at Temple for a moment, then glanced down at us like he was a stray dog that had been denied a meal. He bared his teeth at us. For a moment, I thought — hoped, prayed — that he might turn tail and flee.

Then he lunged for us instead.

Temple fired, and the bullet caught the man square in the chest. The impact set him back on his heels, and he tottered there for a moment, howling in pain. I couldn't help but notice that the slug hadn't left a mark on him, just tore a hole in his blanket.

"No!" Tiara pointed at the man. "No! Stop!"

The man cocked his head at her as if her screeching was pitched at a high enough register for him to finally be able to hear it. He staggered for an instant, then came toward us again.

Temple's rifle rang out again, and this time the man went down. His head kicked backward like he'd been hit with a baseball bat, and then he crumpled there on the spot, falling into a pile along with the fabric of his blanket.

Tiara tried to scramble to her feet then and race toward her father, but I held her down. The last thing I needed to see after all that was my baby standing up into the path of a bullet from her father's rifle and being cut down. I grabbed her and held her there until Temple reached us, the rifle still at the ready in his hands.

"Are you all right?" he said as he reached us. "Are either of you hurt?"

I'd never been so happy to see my husband in my life, not since the first moment I met him. He stood there strong and ready, the gun still trained on our attacker, his brown eyes wide and apprehensive, his soft lips pressed together into a determined frown.

It wasn't until then that I let Tiara go. She flung herself into her father's arms and sobbed against his chest without shame. He handed me the rifle while he consoled her, and I wrapped them both in a quick embrace.

Then I walked around and looked at the man my husband had shot down. I kept the barrel of the rifle pointed at him at all times, waiting for him to step up and charge at me like some kind of villain out of a horror film. I didn't think he would do it, of course, but I wasn't about to take any chances.

"I could have sworn I hit him with that second shot," Temple said. "I mean the first one missed, right? But the second one —"

I nodded as I knelt down to get a better look at the man. "You

didn't miss. Not once."

That second bullet had creased the side of the man's skull. The wound that ran along his temple oozed blood. I didn't see his brains spilling out, and the fact that I found this disappointing horrified me.

## CHAPTER FOUR

*AUGUST 13, 1999: FRIEDA*

“What are we going to do with him?” I asked as I followed Temple and Tiara into the house. He carried her in his arms like a baby and set her down on the pine-log couch in the front room.

My head was still spinning from the terror the man had caused me. “We can’t just leave him out there. I mean, he’s not even dead.”

“Be easier if he was,” Temple said. “It’s not like we can call the police to come pick him up.”

I nodded in agreement. We’d gone far out of our way to avoid having to deal with the police up until now. If they started asking questions about the man, they’d eventually start asking questions about us too, and our stories weren’t strong enough to hold up to any real scrutiny.

“He’s a delta too,” I said as I sat down next to my daughter and held her in my arms. “Just like Tiara and me. The cops figure that out, and these mountains will be swarming with Primers.”

Temple gritted his teeth. He wanted to swear, I knew, but he’d been working on giving that up, especially in front of Tiara. He stood up and took the rifle from where I’d set it down as I’d entered the cabin.

“Where are you going?” I asked, even though I knew the answer.

“To finish the job.” He narrowed his eyes as he stared out the screen door. “We can bury him in the back of the lot. No one will ever find him.”

"You can't do that," I said, horrified at the man I'd married. "He's bulletproof."

"Really?" Temple checked the action on the rifle. "He didn't seem so much that way."

"The first bullet you fired bounced off his chest," I said.

"Then how did the second one —" He cut himself off there and glanced at Tiara, who refused to meet his gaze. He turned back to me. "She used her power on him? She snuffed his powers?"

I nodded. Tiara's power might not be all that flashy, but it came in handy against the right people at the right moments.

He grunted at that, then reached for the door. "Then maybe it's still working."

"Temple!" I barked his name at him. "You cannot be serious. That's cold-blooded murder."

"That man tried to kill you," he said. "He tried to kill Tiara too."

"That doesn't make us killers. We haven't crossed that line yet, and we're not about to start now."

He looked at me in disbelief. "I can't think of a better time or reason," he said. "Either we kill him, or he's going to wake up and try to kill us again."

"We don't know that," I said. "He looked like he was out of his mind."

Temple hefted the rifle. "And you think taking a bullet to the side of his head's going to fix that?"

"He might not be a bloodthirsty killer is all. It might be he's scared and lost, and maybe he just needs help."

Temple blinked to keep himself from rolling his eyes at me. "I just want to help him along to the next life, baby." I opened my mouth to protest, but he cut me off. "If I don't, then we're going to have to leave here, you understand that? You remember how hard it was for us to get here? How long it took us to find a place like this?"

I nodded. I did. I had just in the past couple weeks finally started to relax, started to be able to sit still without worrying that someone was hunting for me every second of the day. It had been a long time since I'd felt that way, and I didn't want to give that up.

"I can't do it, Temple," I said. "I can't trade a man's life for my peace of mind."

"I can." He spoke with emphatic confidence, but I knew him too well. We'd been married too long for him to be able to fool me with a glib lie. The thought of murdering even that dangerous man in cold blood set him on edge, and his eyes begged me to find a good and honest way to talk him out of it.

I patted Tiara on the shoulder and stood up. "No," I said. "You can't either. It's not the right thing to do, and you know it, or you'd have already done it."

His shoulders sagged at that, and he lowered the rifle so that the tip of its barrel rested on the floor. "What else are we supposed to do, Frieda? Take him in like a bird with a broken wing? Nurse him back to health?"

"Wouldn't that be the Christian thing to do?"

"It would be the stupid thing to do. He's not a broken bird. He's a wounded wolf. We get him back on his feet, you think he's going to show us gratitude? Or will he just try to kill us again?"

I shrugged, then went and put an arm around his broad and taut shoulders. "I don't know," I said, looking up at him. "But I do know that we cannot let a man — any man, even an enemy — bleed to death on our front lawn. Not if we can help it."

Temple gave in to his desire to curse then. I couldn't say I blamed him. I felt like indulging in that particular weakness myself.

When he was done, he gave me a hard look, picked the rifle back up, and then pushed his way through the door. I went after him. "Stay here," I told Tiara.

I didn't know if she'd listen to me or not. I wouldn't have blamed her for wanting to stay as far as possible from that man the edge of our yard, but I also wouldn't have been surprised if she decided that she didn't want to stay in the house alone either. Still, I knew the real reason I didn't want her to follow me. I wasn't sure I'd be able to stop Temple from killing that man, and I didn't want her to see her daddy do something like that.

She followed me anyhow, and I didn't turn around to stop her.

That would mean leaving Temple along with the man, and then he'd kill him for sure. A part of me wanted to let that happen. All it would take would be for me to spend enough time trying to calm Tiara down that Temple could do what he'd set out to do — and the problem would be solved — but a sin by omission is still a sin.

"Temple!" I called after him as he strode down to where the man lay sprawled on the ground. "Think about what you're doing."

He didn't answer me. He just checked the action on the rifle and kept walking. I hustled up behind him, taking care not to startle him. He was on edge enough as it was, and as much as I didn't want anyone killed today, an accidental shooting would have been even worse.

"Temple. You can't do this."

"It's for the best, Frieda." He couldn't bring himself to look at me. He focused on the wild man instead and brought the rifle up to aim it at him. "It's the simplest way."

"The road to Hell is wide and easy," I said. "Simplest isn't always right."

He grimaced at that. I reached out and put a hand on his shoulder.

"I can't rewind this," I said in a soft voice. "I did it to save Tiara once already. It'll be a while before I can do it again."

"Why should I care?" He sighted down the length of the barrel and brought it to bear on the man's head. He was only a dozen feet away from the stranger at this point. He could have hit him without aiming, but he took his time lining up the shot anyhow.

He didn't want to kill this man, I knew. He just thought he had to.

"Daddy!" Tiara said, her voice cracked and raw. "Don't do it."

He turned his head then just enough to see her, and I watched him cringe. "Get back," he said. "Go back in the house."

Tiara looked to me for guidance. Temple and I always backed each other up, at least in front of her. If one of us told her to do something, the other never objected. We refused to give her the ability — even the chance — to divide us. We were her parents, and we kept a united front.

Not this time though. There was too much at stake. I held Tiara to



my side and glared at my husband.

"You go right ahead," I told him. "You do what whatever you think is the right thing to do. Just know that your wife and daughter are going to stand right here and watch you do it."

He lowered his head over the rifle. "And how, then, are you ever supposed to be able to forgive me?"

I spoke to him in soft tones. "If it's the right thing, you won't need forgiveness."

He glared down the rifle then, and I watched his finger tighten on the trigger. He held it there for a long moment before his shoulders slumped and he let the weapon's barrel point at the ground.

He put his free arm out to Tiara and me, and we drew him into an embrace. "Thank you," Tiara said to him. I just squeezed him harder.

After a moment, he pulled away from us and pointed at the wild man with the tip of the rifle. "Well," he said, "what are we going to do with him?"

## CHAPTER FIVE

*AUGUST 13, 1999: FATHER Steve*

The phone rang just after the evening mass. I was removing my vestments in the sacristy when I heard it, and I had to rush to answer it. I was out of breath when I picked it up.

"Hello, this is Father Zwettler," I said, trying to maintain some sense of decorum. "How can I help you?"

I didn't know the voice of the woman on the other end of the line, but I recognized her desperation. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Father," she said. "I didn't know where else to turn."

"The church's doors are always open to those in need." I tucked the phone between my head and shoulder and finished hanging my robes. "What seems to be your problem?"

"We were attacked," the woman said. "By a man with delta powers."

"I think you've dialed the wrong number, miss," I said. "You need to hang up and call 911."

"It's — oh, Father, it's not that simple."

"Who is this?" I asked. At first, I admit, I suspected a prank. It wouldn't be the first time one of my students had tried to pull such a joke on me.

"My name is Frieda Franklin," she said. "And I'm a delta too."

That was a new one, for sure. I took the phone back in my hand and began pacing the room, my footsteps soft on the burgundy carpet.

I heard her hush someone in the background who was trying to interrupt her. "Well, it hardly matters now, does it?" she said to whoever it was. "We're leaving here either way."

"I — I'm not exactly sure what I can do for you, miss," I said. "The Delta Registration Act is crystal clear on this. You need to call the police and report both your attacker and yourself."

The woman's voice sounded raw with emotion the next time she spoke. "I would, Father. I really would, but my daughter, she's a delta too."

"Ah." I nodded to myself. "In the eyes of the law, though, that doesn't change anything."

"There is a higher law than that of our country, Father, isn't there?"

"Of course." I could already see where she was going with this, and I grimaced with discomfort. "But we are also to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's."

"I'm not talking about paying my taxes here, Father. I just can't let them take my baby away."

"That is a matter between you and your conscience, miss."

"It's missus."

"Mrs. Franklin, then. The Catholic Church takes no official stance on these matters."

I could hear her exasperation growing in her voice. "Not even when it comes to the welfare of a child?"

I lowered my voice. I don't know why. I was sure no one in the cathedral could hear me. I'd already sent the altar boys home, and I wasn't due back to the rectory for a half hour yet. If anyone beside the woman — this Frieda — could hear me, it would be from the government tapping our phone lines, and I couldn't speak low enough to avoid that.

"I cannot advocate for you to break the law, only to follow your conscience. If you believe in your heart that the law is unjust, then you must act accordingly."

"You're saying we should run? Leave our attacker here and go?"

"In the end, the only one who will judge your actions is God."

"All right," she said. "In that case, we'd like to apply for sanctuary."

I choked. I had to put the phone down for a moment while I coughed. A part of me hoped that the woman would hang up while I struggled to breathe. When I placed the phone against my ear again, though, she was still there.

"Are you all right?" she said.

"We don't do that," I said. "President Kennedy has been very explicit about how he would look upon any church — even the Holy Roman Catholic Church — opening its doors as a sanctuary for deltas."

"I thought he was Catholic."

I chuckled. "The President has long made it clear that he doesn't take orders from Rome, I'm afraid."

"But." The woman's voice trailed off, and for a moment I thought that she might have hung up. Then she spoke again. "Then what are we supposed to do?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Franklin. It's out of my hands."

"Can't we appeal?" I had to admire the hope that she kept in her voice despite the long odds she had to know she faced. She believed that we lived in a fair and just world and that people could be reasoned with if she could only reach them and tell them the truth.

I'm sad to say I had long since lost that particular strain of faith myself.

"I don't think the Pope would take a phone call from you. Nor from me for that matter."

I stared out the window at the sun setting over the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies, painting the sky in streaks of purple and red. It was at such moments that I usually found it easiest to see evidence of the hand of God in the world, but not tonight. This woman's plight weighed on me instead, and that worldly problem pulled me back from the solaces of Heaven.

"Isn't there anyone else?" she asked. "Are you the preacher in charge of your church?"

I grunted. The woman clearly wasn't a Catholic herself. That

didn't matter though — or at least I knew that it shouldn't have. If she and her family was in need, it was my duty to help them — if I could figure out a way.

In the abstract, it was easy to see the right thing to do. If we were to follow Christ's teachings, we would take in those who had run afoul of the government by breaking an unjust law. But the concrete reality of the issue was far different.

"Although I do preach, men in my position are called priests, not preachers," I said with as much humor as I could muster. "And no, I'm not in charge here. I'm an, ah, associate. The leader of the cathedral — of the entire Diocese of Denver — is Archbishop O'Day."

"Well, can I speak with him?"

I looked around the empty rectory. "I'm afraid you've caught me here alone, Mrs. Franklin. I will be dining with the archbishop tonight though."

"Can you ask him to help us?"

"I'd be happy to broach the subject of your request," I said. "I have to tell you, though, that the archbishop has been asked to entertain such pleas before, and he has yet to give in to them."

"Please, Father," she said. "We don't have many other choices left."

"All right," I said. "I'll do what I can. I promise you that."

## CHAPTER SIX

*AUGUST 14, 1999: PATRIOT*

The ringing on my disposable cell phone woke me up. I didn't like the damn thing much, but Truth had convinced me that I should grab one of those pay-as-you-go jobs and give her the number, just in case of emergencies. Seeing as how I was sleeping in a different place every night, trying to stay one step ahead of Delta Prime, it made sense. It wasn't like I was going to check an answering machine — or own one, for that matter.

Of course, as soon as I put that phone in my pocket, it seemed like a lot more emergencies cropped up now than had ever managed to before. At first I'd griped about it to Truth, accusing her of abusing the ease of access to me the phone gave her. She pointed out that she'd often needed to get a hold of me before for emergencies but hadn't been able to.

Because of that, people had been captured by Delta Prime — some had even died — just because she hadn't been able to reach me when she needed to, at the point at which I might have been able to make a difference. Did I really, she asked, think that way was better?

I hated it when she was right.

She also pointed out that since we'd broken scores of rogue deltas out of New Alcatraz we now had a lot more potential for delta-related troubles than we had before. Because that had all been part of a plan that I'd worked up — one I'd benefited from a great deal, since I'd been incarcerated in that jail at the time — I should shut up

and be grateful that I could take the damn calls in the first place.

So I didn't grumble too much when I answered the phone.

"Yeah?"

"Who taught you your phone manners?" Truth asked. "How do you know who this is?"

"I checked the Caller ID?"

She snorted. "You don't think I block that? Try again."

"No one else has this number, Truth."

That surprised her. "Not even Lisa? Or Street?"

I smiled as I sat up on the cot on which I'd been napping. "They want me, they can find me through you, right?"

"And if I'm not available?"

I stretched as I stood up. "When does that ever happen?"

"Touché."

"What's this about?"

Truth hesitated. She only did that when she meant to dump something huge on my head. The last time that happened, I'd wound up in the gas chamber. Sure, I'd gotten out of it, but just barely. I didn't want to know what she had up her sleeve this time.

I had thought that I'd had enough troubles with the law before I'd escaped jail, but things had gotten so much worse for me since. Before this, I'd been able to walk around in public without being recognized too often. Sure, I was a notorious criminal, but most people don't bother looking too closely at people.

Also, most people knew me by my mask rather than my face. That's why I wore a stylized flag wrapped around my kisser. When people were hunting for me, they tended to look for the mask, and that was easy enough for me to lose.

Since the mass breakout from New Alcatraz, though, both of my faces had been plastered across the front page of every newspaper in the nation. I was more famous than George Clooney. I'd even thought about trying out a different mask for a while, just to see if I could regain some of that anonymity the damned thing was supposed to lend me.

I'd decided to stick with what I had though. The media had

turned me into a symbol, and like it or not that meant a lot more to the Defiance than anything else I could offer.

"Do you remember that friend I told you about in Washington?"

"Braintrust? The Military Intelligence guy?"

"That's the one."

I opened the shades over the window in my room, and I looked out over the streets of Crescent City. I was high up in the Triumph Tower, in a tiny office rented out to a shell corporation Truth had set up for me: International Imports, Ltd. It was only a single room with a mail slot in the door, but that's all I needed. I'd lived in far worse digs.

"What's he got for us now?"

Truth switched to the efficient tone she used for mission briefings, and I knew that soon I'd be off and running. I was just glad that this time I had a clean change of clothes ready.

"You remember that meteorite that came down in the Rockies?"

"I've had a busy few weeks," I said as I slipped into a new shirt.

"Remind me."

"It was right after you busted out of jail," she said.

"And why do I care about this?"

"Because it wasn't a meteorite. It was a person."

That brought me up short. Nothing snappy came to mind.

"It doesn't seem possible," she said. "I know, but Braintrust smuggled me a reconnaissance photo of the impact crater. The thing lying in the center of it isn't a glowing hunk of iron. It's a human being: a man with long, dark hair."

I sat back down on my cot and contemplated this news. "That's — no one could survive a fall like that. Not even a delta."

"What about an alpha?"

"There aren't any left."

"Except the changeling masquerading as the President?"

"You telling me that's JFK lying in that crater?"

"I'm just saying that if there's one out there somewhere, there might be more."

I rubbed my eyes. "All right. Either way, we need to get someone



out there to figure out what's going on before the Primers get their hands on whatever or whoever that is. Ah, wait." I shook my head. "That was weeks ago. We have to be too late already, right?"

"Not according to Braintrust. He says the military scrambled Delta Squadron to scour the area, but they came up empty. Whoever that was in the crater is gone."

"He walked out of there?"

"Or was carried."

"And this Braintrust would know this? Are you sure he's not just snowing you?"

"I guarantee it."

Truth's delta power was detecting lies, and she was damned good at it. Made it hard to have a conversation with her sometimes, but it also meant she was an indispensable part of the Defiance. If she said Braintrust was on the level, then it had to be so.

Or someone was playing a game so deep I didn't want to think about it.

"So why are you telling me this now? The trail's got to have gone cold."

"I had the Denver chapter of the Defiance on it, but they came up empty."

I knew Glacier and his Mutant Force Five out there. I'd worked with them before, and they were as good as anyone in the Defiance. If they'd failed to find this guy, I didn't see how I'd be able to turn him up, but I knew Truth wasn't telling me everything. Not yet.

"Braintrust has been monitoring intelligence traffic in and out of the region. He just spotted a red flag from a phone tap on the cathedral in Denver."

I groaned. The fact that my government was tapping the phones of the Catholic church shouldn't have surprised me, but I had to admit it did. It showed just how far down the rabbit hole we'd fallen as a nation.

"What happened?"

"A woman called in to request asylum from the Covenant — sanctuary, she called it. She said her family had been attacked by a

delta roaming in the mountains.”

The Covenant was the Catholic church’s official delta organization. While the US citizens who were a member of it could technically be called to serve in Delta Prime, the President had given them a religious exemption. They were one of the most powerful delta organizations in the world, but they’d taken a determinedly neutral stance in the ongoing conflict between the Defiance and Delta Prime.

“And you think that’s our missing alpha?”

“Best lead we’ve had so far.”

“So why not send Glacier and his people after him.”

“They’re on another job down in Colorado Springs. By the time they finish up and get back up into the mountains between Denver and Boulder, Delta Prime will have this mystery man in custody. I need someone out there, fast.”

“I assume you’ve already contacted Street?”

She laughed at that. “He says yes much faster than you do.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

*AUGUST 14, 1999: FRIEDA*

"Is that who I think it is?" Tiara asked.

I groaned inside but kept my face a mask as I cleaned the wound on the side of the wild man's head. Temple had dragged him inside, and we'd put him on the couch in the living room, then tied him down there with a tow chain from the garage, fastened tight with a bicycle lock. As uncomfortable as that sounds, he'd slept the entire night and shown no signs of rousing.

"I don't know what you mean," I lied. It was a subject I didn't want to think about at the moment.

The crease along the side of the man's skull ran deep and had bled freely, coating the right side of his face with blood that had crusted there and turned black. I wiped it clean with a hot sponge and then squeezed the sponge out over a basin, watching the water turn red. I'd not wanted to touch the man last night, but after having spent half the night watching over him with the rifle on my lap, I'd gotten over my initial fear of him, and that wound needed cleaning.

"He looks like someone out of my history books." Tiara bent over the foot of the couch and peered at the man's face as I scrubbed away the blood as gently as I could manage.

"It's hard to tell what he looks like," I said. "He's shaggy and dirty and covered with blood. I don't know if I'd recognize you with this much filth on you."

Tiara giggled at that, the first time I'd heard her laugh since the

man had attacked us last night. That was my favorite sound, and it made me feel like maybe we might get through this intact. I just didn't quite know how.

Temple strode in then. He'd been busy packing the car. We didn't own too many things — not compared to what we'd had in our old place — but it still took a while to throw them together. We'd long kept an emergency suitcase by the door in case we needed to get away in a hurry, but I hadn't restocked the supplies in it in months, and it needed freshening. I'd taken care of that in the middle of the night, while I took my turn at watching over the man on our couch, but as the hours wore on, it became clear that no one would be breaking down our door anytime soon.

By the time dawn rolled around, I'd started to feel some semblance of safe again, even though I knew it was an illusion. The sharp panic of the previous evening had faded away to a dull itching to get moving soon.

"How much longer?" I asked.

Temple grimaced. "I have the essentials packed and ready. We're going to have to leave some things behind."

"Are we bringing him?" Tiara said. The amusement drained from her face. Watching the chained-up man sleep while her mother held a gun on him was one thing. Getting strapped into a car next to the man would be something far more frightening.

I shook my head. "We probably shouldn't have even moved him into the house," I said. "Better to have a paramedic look at him before he gets moved any farther."

"Shouldn't we have called an ambulance then?"

Temple clucked his tongue. "Bastard just wouldn't do us the favor of dying in the night, would he?"

"Language," I said.

Tiara stifled a giggle that made it impossible for me to be irritated with Temple.

"He's not coming with us," I said. "Once we're down out of the mountains, we'll call 911 and tell them that he's here."

"And then we just keep driving?"

Her face fell at that idea, and I gave her a sad but knowing nod. When we'd first gotten here, she'd hated it. She'd missed her friends and family back home, and the isolation of living up here in the middle of nowhere with her father and me had set her on edge. More than once she'd told us that she would have preferred being hauled off to the Delta Academy if it meant that she'd have been able to go shopping in Crescent City when she wanted to.

I'd refrained from slapping her, only just barely.

Over the months since then, though, she'd gotten used to the idea, and she'd come to love the mountains and the peaceful solitude they granted us. The thought that we now had to leave them behind, just in the way that we'd have to abandon our last home, disturbed her. I didn't blame her a bit.

"Where are we going, Momma?"

I shrugged. "I don't know yet. West, I think." I glanced at Temple, and he nodded.

"West and south, I'd say." He mustered up a game smile for us. "We keep heading that way and maybe we'll even wind up at Isla Delta."

Tiara's face brightened at that thought. "And we wouldn't be snowed in ever again?"

The man on the bed groaned then, the first sound he'd made since he'd been shot. All three of us jumped.

I'd been pointing the rifle at the ground, but I snapped it right back up to point it at the man's chest. How ironic it would be if I shot him then, after trying to take care of him, but I was ready to do it. My nerves felt like a hair caught on a knife's edge. There was no telling which way they might fall.

"I think that's our signal to get going," Temple said after a moment. He held his keys up in the air.

I nodded in agreement, then stood up and handed Temple the rifle. Then I took Tiara's hand in mine and headed for the front door.

As we reached it, I took one last look around and tried to soak in as many of the memories that we'd had there as I could. "So long, old shack," I said, my voice soft with regret. "Don't know if we'll be

back.”

“Momma?” Tiara grabbed my arm and squeezed it tight. “Is there another way down off the mountain? A secret way you and Daddy haven’t told me about?”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “Don’t be silly,” I said. “Why would you ask something like that?”

She pointed out the open doorway at the winding gravel road that led up to our soon-to-be-former home, and I stepped out onto the front porch with her to get a better view of it. A growing line of dust swerved its way toward us as it was kicked up under the wheels of a black van coming our way. I couldn’t see who was inside it through its tinted windows, but I didn’t think I’d be happy to meet them.

“Temple?” I called back into the house. “Is there another way down off this mountain?”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*AUGUST 14, 1999: LISA*

“Aren’t you afraid you might scare someone just racing up the road like this?” I asked. We’d been going all night, ever since Truth had lit our fuse, and I had to wonder if the guys weren’t thinking this through.

Street glanced over his shoulder as he came out of yet another hairpin curve that seemed to bring us right up to the edge of a several-hundred-foot drop before swinging us back up the mountain. “You think it would be better if we didn’t let them know we were coming at all?” he asked.

I ran my finger through my long blonde hair. I wanted a shower. “No, I don’t think we should surprise them at all. What would you do if you spotted someone racing up toward your house like this?”

“You have a good point.” Patriot swiveled around in the front passenger seat to get a better look at me. He hadn’t shaved in a few days, and he looked just as beat as any of us. Helping run the Defiance since the breakout at New Alcatraz had pushed all of us to our limits. He looked like he’d just charged right on past his.

“So why don’t we slow down a little bit then and take it easy?”

“Because we don’t have the time.” He scratched at the graying stubble on his chin. “Braintrust gave us as much of a head start as he possibly could — he threw a wrench into the Primers’ works — but they could have a team up here to greet us any minute.”

“What good is that going to do if these people we’re here to help

shoot us?" Charge said. He sat in the captain's chair next to mine in the middle row of the van.

In the rearview mirror, I saw Street grin. "You think a bullet could do any harm to my baby here? Nothing short of a grenade launcher is going to do much more than scratch her paint. She's built to last."

Charge grunted. I'd only seen him a few times since the breakout, and I was still getting used to him dressing in regular clothes rather than a Delta Prime uniform. He held himself like a soldier, no matter what he wore. In that respect, he was just like Patriot — and a lot less like Street, who exuded an easy confidence that came from his own genius with gadgets rather than any military training.

"I used to put a lot of faith in the vehicles Delta Prime put me in too," Charge said. "Right up until someone blew one of their choppers out from under me." He shot Patriot a hard look as he spoke.

"I seem to recall you survived that just fine, Eddie — and I got thrown in jail for my troubles."

"Wasn't that all part of your master plan though?" I asked.

Charge's equipment malfunction, as he liked to call it, had happened when Patriot had destroyed Charge's helicopter to make sure that Charge couldn't capture me. I'd not met either one of them before that. I'd later learned that Patriot had been hunting for me — or at least someone with my rare kind of powers — to help him break the delta prisoners out of New Alcatraz. The fact that he was captured while saving me and condemned to die only made the mission that much more urgent.

"I'm not saying it was, and I'm not saying it wasn't," Patriot said. I couldn't see his face then, but I could tell he was grinning.

"You really don't want to tell us?" Charge said.

"Hey, as a costumed hero, I have an air of mystery to maintain," Patriot said. "It's hard to do that with people you work with. I have to take every edge I can get."

It was then that the first bullet smacked into the windshield

Street's engineering had been as good as his bragging, though, and the bullet ricocheted off the windshield rather than smashing



through it and killing one of us. At first I didn't even realize what it had been. I thought maybe we'd hit a bird.

"Taking fire," Patriot said. "Coming from the direction of the cabin."

"Probably one of the residents," Street said.

"Or maybe the Primers got there first and are waiting for us." I hunkered behind Patriot's headrest. Despite the fact that I knew my delta power would bring me back from the dead should the worst happen, I couldn't help myself.

"Unlikely," Charge said in a clipped, professional tone. "If Delta Prime were already in place, they'd wait for us to get close enough that they could surround the van and take us alive. Or they'd blast us off the road with a rocket."

"But a single bullet fired into our windshield?"

"That's likely a lone gunman waiting for us on the top of the hill."

"There he is." Street pointed up the hill toward the house. "African-American, late thirties. Standard hunting rifle. Essentially no threat."

"Not until we get out of the van," I said.

"Or unless he's just testing us," Charge said. "Do we know what kind of delta powers these people are supposed to have up there?"

Street threw us around the last hairpin turn. I had to hold on to the strap over my head to stay in my seat.

"Mother and daughter are supposed to be deltas," Patriot said. "No idea what their powers might be. Father's likely a reg — which explains why he's the one with the gun."

More bullets bounced off the van as Street pulled closer to the house, following the circular gravel drive that wound in front of it. "Bullets or blasts? Why does that matter?" I asked. "They'll kill us just as dead either way."

"Says the woman who's immune to death." Street grinned at me as he threw the van's gearshift into park.

"Why am I here again?" I asked out loud.

"Been wondering that myself," Charge said as he and Patriot reached for the handles on their doors. "Just sit tight and let the

professionals handle this.”

“What, like the way you tried to handle me?” I wanted to slap some sense into him then, but I didn’t care to do anything that might put me into the line of fire. Even though I could come back from the dead, I knew from my own experiences that getting shot hurt enough to make you want to die.

He ignored me and slipped out of the van, which stood between him and the man with the gun. On the other side of the van, Patriot pulled up his mask and got out, his hands held high. I could see his powers causing them to glow faintly in the early morning sun.

“We’re with the Defiance, sir,” he said. “We’re here to help!”

## CHAPTER NINE

*AUGUST 14, 1999: LISA*

The man's gun went off, and Patriot fell back into the car. I hate to admit it, but I screamed. I hurled open my door and scrambled over to where Patriot had toppled onto the van's front passenger seat. I thought I'd find him in a pool of blood, but instead I only saw a fresh hole poked through the front of his trench coat. He was already pushing himself to his feet.

Gritting his teeth, he grabbed me and put me behind him. "Don't worry about me, kid," he said. "I got this covered."

"Oh, my God!" a woman said from inside the cabin. "You shot Patriot!"

I stared over Patriot's shoulder at the man with the rifle. He almost dropped it, but then thought better of it and set it down gently on the porch instead.

"I'm sorry!" he said. "So sorry."

I heard Charge's fists crackling from around the front of the van, but Patriot waved him off. "It's okay," he said loud enough to make sure everyone could hear, including Charge. "I've taken plenty worse."

The woman — a petite, beautiful woman with chocolate skin and long, curly hair — stepped out from behind the man, her hands up in the air. "Don't shoot my husband!" she said, her voice shaking. "He's just an idiot!"

"Now, Frieda," the man said with a scowl. "There's no call for

that.”

“Temple! You just shot the one man who might be able to help us out of this mess,” she said, glaring at him. “What do you think’s appropriate?”

He bared a sheepish grin for an instant, rubbed his neck, and then shrugged at Patriot. “I’m an idiot. I’m so sorry. I — We’ve been waiting for damnation, not salvation.”

Patriot patted his chest where the bullet had hit him. It hadn’t broken his skin, as far as I could tell, but I’d seen him after getting knocked down by a bullet before. It always left a hell of a bruise.

“Don’t worry about it for an instant. Being able to walk away from something like that is one of the great pleasures my delta powers give me.”

Always the tough guy.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Temple asked. He glanced at his wife, then back at the van. “Not that I’m not happy to see you, but how did you now we needed help?”

“The feds are monitoring the cathedral’s phones,” Street said. He still hadn’t gotten out of the car.

Frieda scowled at that. “But you’re not from the government.”

“We have help on the inside,” Patriot said. “That gives us a bit of an edge, but it won’t last long. We need to leave here, fast.”

Temple pointed at a garage next to the cabin. “We’re all packed and ready to go.”

“I suggest you ride with us.” Patriot’s tone made it clear that this was a bit stronger than a suggestion.

Temple bristled at this for an instant, then relented. “If you think that’s right.” He trotted off toward the garage to retrieve his family’s luggage.

A girl emerged from the cabin then, about middle-school age. Although she was nearly as tall as her mother, she went straight to her and clung to her side. “It’s all right, Tiara,” Frieda said. “These people are here to help.”

The girl nodded. “What about the man who attacked us?”

Frieda gasped and put a hand to her mouth. “Dear God.” She

picked the rifle up off of the porch and dashed back into the house.

Patriot turned to Charge. "Help Mr. Franklin transfer their gear. I'm going in." Then he trotted after the mother.

I looked to Street, who shrugged at me. "I just drive the car," he said.

I sighed and followed Patriot into the house. I found him standing over a couch in the living room, staring at the man chained to it. Patriot had pulled his mask down around his neck. The color had drained from his face, and his jaw had fallen slack.

"What is it?" I came around the end of the couch to get a better look at the man, and I understood.

The Bicentennial Battle happened before I was born. I'd never had the chance to walk the streets of lost Chicago or shake the hand of an honest-to-God alpha. To me, all that was the stuff of history books — or maybe fairy tales. I think some part of me suspected it was all a worldwide lie, something older people told kids to let us know how much better the Glory Days really were.

So I didn't know the filthy man lying unconscious on the couch, wrapped in a blanket and chains. I'd only heard of him, read about him, seen old films of him.

Patriot, though, he'd known him. He looked at me with haunted eyes. "It's him," he said. "It's Superior."

"Or maybe someone who looks like him," I said. "Either way, shouldn't we grab him and go?"

Patriot glanced around, confused. "Someone shot him? How?"

Frieda stepped up, putting herself between her daughter and Patriot. "My husband did it. He was attacking us."

"But how did a bullet hurt him? That doesn't make any sense."

"My daughter," Frieda said. "Her power erases other people's powers."

Patriot nodded at the girl peeking out from behind her mother, something like awe on his face. "She's a snuffer," he said with a respectful nod. He spun on his heel then to look down at the man on the couch.

"We're not taking him with us." Frieda clutched her daughter to

her tighter. "That is not part of the plan."

"Plan's changed." Patriot knelt down next to the couch and looked down at the man. "Superior or not, we can't leave him here. Not unless we want him to fall into Delta Prime's hands."

Frieda pulled Tiara back as Patriot found the bicycle lock holding the chains together. He glared at it for a moment, and the power in his hands flared a bright orange that shattered it with a loud crack. He pulled off the chains, then slid his hands under the man in the blanket and hoisted him up and over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. The man didn't fidget one bit. He just hung there and drooled.

Tiara yelped then. At first I thought the sight of Patriot toting Superior around like that had scared her. Then I saw that she wasn't looking at them. Instead, she had a finger pointed out the room's side window.

"Do you have more people coming to help us?" Frieda said, her voice low and forced calm.

I shook my head. "It's just us. Why?"

She pointed in the same direction as her daughter. "Then who's that?"

I came around Patriot to stand next to them and spotted what they were staring at. Off to the south, coming in over the tops of the nearest mountains, a black helicopter zoomed straight toward us.

"Oh, God," I said.

"We need to move." Patriot readjusted Superior on his shoulder and headed for the door. "Now!"