The War For San Diego #1:

Let Loose The Dogs of War

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**Chapter 1**

 “He’s awake!” The words startled Henry out of his slumber. He was having a nightmare of his time at war, not for the first time, nor likely to be the last. War wasn’t something you just got over. It had a way of staying with you for the rest of your life, no matter how hard you tried to put it behind you.

 He shook the last vestiges of the dream away, focusing instead on what Nick had barged into his tent to tell him. The words that he had been praying for. The words that brought the news that he had started to fear would never come to pass, yet it had. At lost last, his god was awake.

 “Has he spoken?” Henry asked, shooting out of bed. He was hardly dressed, wearing nothing more than shorts he had stolen out of the trash.

 “He seemed confused at first, but then he asked for you.” Nick said. He was a few years older than Henry was when he first signed up to the military. Young, eager to show a world that rejected him, that he was worthy. Something that everyone at this camp aimed to do. Before Ares had entered his life, it had seemed impossible, now, it was only a matter of time.

 “Good, let’s go.” He finishes putting on his best clothes. Best for him, they were still in desperate need of a wash. But to be fair, so was everything else at the camp. It was to be expected in a makeshift homeless settlement.

 Nick led him out of his tent, where he found a great deal of his followers waiting outside. Ready for word from the god they had signed up to serve, the god they had never met, but were some how drawn too. Henry had met him. It wasn’t so long ago when the war god tore a whole in time and space and appeared before him. Almost at once Henry knew that he was destined to serve him, to fight and die for him if so called upon. It was an honor. One he had long felt he didn’t deserve.

 He had spent a few days showing him around San Diego before he was sent on his first task. Find him an army. It was while Henry was off recruiting people that Ares was hurt. Someone brought a whole building down on top of him. It would have been enough to kill anyone else. As it was, Ares had yet to wake up.

 Camp had been tense the night they brought Ares home. They placed him in a tent in the middle of the settlement and had guards outside 24/7 to make sure no one hurt him while he recovered. As the days ticked by, people had started to question if he ever would recover. A few took off, looking to find their own way in the world.

 Henry felt no ill will towards them. In fact, he felt a bit sorry for them. He had a purpose. A destiny. They had nothing but struggle in store for them. After all, it wasn’t easy being homeless. Not in America, home of opportunity and upward mobility. A nation that prides itself in its love of the military, spending a great deal of the national budget on it. A nation that held true to good old fashion Christian values.

 Only was any of that true? As Henry walked through the settlement, towards Ares’ tent, all he saw around him were people who fell from grace. A lot of them had jobs, good jobs that provided a nice life for them. Until it was ripped away from them. Sometimes through no fault of their own. Mergers seemed to be a big cause in the number of people being forced from their jobs. One mega corporation buying another and slashing their ranks to save a buck. How could there be upward mobility, when so many people were being forced down?

 As for the countries love of the military, well he knew from first hand experience that that was all for show. The people of America detest the military. Oh, you ask anyone and 99% of people will assure you that they have nothing but love and respect for the men and women who serve this country. But Henry couldn’t help but wonder where they love vanished to the second someone finishes their service. He could look any which way in the camp and see men and women who had proudly serve this nation, reduced to living in the streets. Begging for scraps of food.

 The country takes in the young and idealistic, uses them up and discards them like waste. The vast majority of Americans proudly support the military, but not the men and women who comprise the military. No, for them they have nothing but distain. It was enough to make your blood boil. Henry found his hands forming into fists. He forced them to relax as he neared Ares tent. He didn’t want to enter the tent angry. The war god always seemed to have a way of sensing emotions.

 Try as he might, Henry couldn’t keep the anger and bitterness out of his feelings. He had grown up going to church. Learning about god and how to be a good Christian. To love others, to be kind and compassionate. Where was that compassion? True, there were more than a few churches in the area that would give food and shelter to those that needed it, but the parishioners were another matter. They would cross the street rather than help you. The only thing they ever seemed to give the less fortunate were judgmental stares.

 The more you looked past the myth of America, the more you saw it for what it was. A soulless place that uses people to fuel it’s never ending need for more. More what? Well, more everything. The system wasn’t designed to let you move up. Just stay afloat until they no longer needed you. Then it would spit you out and forget about you. There was no loyalty to the men and women who serve, no real practice of kindness or compassion. Well, unless you could write it off on your taxes.

 Something needed to change, and Henry knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that his god, Ares, was the one to change things.

**Chapter 2**

 The tent was lit with candles. Leading him through a tiny hallway to the main room, where Ares was waiting for him. Henry felt a rush of excitement as he neared the being that had rejuvenated him. He was lost until Ares had found him. Now he was found. He knew who he was, why he was here and what he needed to do.

 And for one second, one terrible second, he thought he had lost it. He had gathered the start of the army that Ares had wanted and rushed to meet him. How he knew where he was, well that was a question he would need to ask his god. There was just a sense, a feeling of where he was needed to go. So, he followed it. He arrived just in time to see the college explode with Ares inside.

 Henry wasted no time in getting his new army together to dig him out. Only to find Ares, still in one piece, but unresponsive. They carried him out of there, just as the police arrived on scene.

 Henry had hardly slept since that night. Part of him was afraid that Ares wouldn’t awake, the other part of him worried that the police would find them. Would show up outside the tent city and arrest them, or beat them. It wasn’t anything new. The police in this city had made it crystal clear that they had no love for the homeless. Yet another thing that Ares would change.

 “You called for me my lord?” Henry said as he entered the main chamber where Ares was standing. He was looking at himself in a mirror. He wore shorts that Henry had placed on him and nothing else. All his clothes were destroyed in the explosion. Leaning against the bed where he was laying, sat his sword. It too had survived the explosion.

 “I did, where are we?” Ares said, not bothering to turn around.

 “A tent city put up by your army.” Henry said, not moving further into the room. He didn’t want to overstep. He could feel Nick’s eyes on him from the hallway. Nick, like everyone else, had been waiting for Ares to awaken and change their lives. They had no idea what was in store for them. Truth be told, neither did Henry. He only knew that whatever it was, it was for the best.

 “And how many men make up my army?” Ares asked, turning to face Henry. His glaze landing on Henry like a ton of bricks. If he didn’t know better, he would have been sure that they weight of it would crush him. Part of him still believed that to be true.

 “We have just under 3 thousand men and women, my lord.” Henry said. He felt like he should bow or look away and yet he couldn’t. He locked eyes with the war god and spoke in a clear confidant voice.

 “That’s it?” Ares asked, he seemed disappointed with the number. “Did you say women?”

 “I did, my lord, and we are getting more recruits each and every day. All ready to serve you, to remake this nation in the imagine that it presents itself to be.

 “Is that why you think I’m here?” Ares asked, picking up his sword and swinging it around, testing the weight in his hands.

 “You’re here to show us the way. To light the path.” Henry said. Feeling the truth of what he spoke. Ares smiled, suppressing a chuckle.

 “My dear boy, I am the god of war. I am not here to fix your life. Nor the lives of the others you have brought before me. I am here to conquer. To wage war on the armies of man and to carve out an empire for myself.” Ares said.

 “An empire I would be proud to serve.” Henry said, his heart swelling with pride as he said it.

 “I know, which is why you are my general.” Ares said, putting his hand on Henry’s shoulder. He then moved passed Henry and out into the tent city. “Come, show me the start of our new empire.

**Chapter 3**

 The camp wasn’t much. Largely just thrown together tents or loosely constructed structures that people had thrown together. Henry had been proud of what he managed to string together out of nothing, but now that Ares was awake and walking around, he felt a sense of shame. This wasn’t worthy of the great war god that stood before him.

 “I sense great pride in the men and women you gathered here.” Ares said, as they walked through the camp. Just about everybody had come out to witness their new god walking among them. The pride that Ares spoke of was clear as day on all of their faces.

 “They are proud to serve you, as am I.” Henry said. Hoping that Ares could hear the truth in his words.

 “But there is also a great pain.” Ares said. Henry didn’t need to look around to see that. He felt it in his bones. There was a pain that came with having the world turn it’s back on you. There was also an anger. “Pain that gives birth to rage.” Ares said, almost as if he was reading Henry’s thoughts.

 “Yes, my lord. Your followers have been wronged by this world.” Henry said. “We’ve been beaten down and discarded by the rest of the world.”

 “But not defeated.” Ares stopped and looked around at his new army. “There is great strength in surviving.” He said loud enough for all to hear. His voice booming across the settlement. “You all have taken much at the hands of people who think they your betters, and you have survived. You have found a new place for yourselves. Here, with me.”

 The crowd started cheering. Henry took it all in. This was the start of a new world, a world that would be better, be fairer. And he was a part of it. A key factor in the changes that were on the way. He couldn’t help but smile.

 “I have been gone from this world for many eons, and it seems that your race has taken the place of dominance in this world.” Ares said, his voice rising above the cheering crowd, but never sounding as if was shouting. He was calm. As he spoke, the crowd silenced themselves. They were listening to his every word. As was Henry.

 “But in doing so, they took none of the responsibility that comes with it.” Ares said. “They have built giant monuments in their own honor while subjugating their brothers and sisters to little more than drones. I have seen their great cities, filled with people performing pointless tasks. Wasting their lives in the pursuit of their overlord’s goals, with no time for their own happiness. Their own needs. I have seen them toss aside anyone who dares question their place in the new world.”

 “It was not always like this, not when my kind ruled this realm. People lived, yes, they worked. But they lived. They had time for their families. They built things with their hands; they cooked their own food. They enjoyed a nice summer day. They did for themselves, and for the community.”

 “As I’ve walked through your streets, in the mindless colony that mankind has become, I’ve seen not only a loss of self, but a loss of the whole. People waste away, working for this system that hates them, and yet they don’t feel apart of it. They are no longer individuals, nor are they part of a collective.”

 “How is it, that the modern world has taken both from you? A sense of self, and a sense of community? What is left? Other than empty vessels that live and die at the hands of their masters.”

 The silence that has overtaken the settlement is deafening, as Ares speaks thoughts that they have all felt to one degree or another. Henry himself had felt this way since he was a child, but he had never put words to the ideas. Never gave them the time they needed to fully form. After all, this was just the way the world was. You couldn’t change it. Couldn’t do anything to alter it. Could you?

 “The rulers of this world have broken the spirit of mankind. I intend to restore it.” Cheering once more erupted through the crowd. “I intend to give people back their lives. Let people once more feel the pride of not only their own accomplishments, but of their community. What lunacy is it for a people to believe that strangers who they have never met, know what is best for them. Know how they should live their lives? Your markets are owned by outsiders, who sit up in giant castles, reaching into the sky, who care nothing for you. And yet, you give them the little you have for their cheap goods. For their food, that is filled with poison, rather than growing it yourselves, or paying your neighbor for the same service. Men in suits buy and sell your souls and you do nothing. Meanwhile, craftsmen starve.”

 “The power in this world has become twisted. Little men, sit in their seats of power, exploiting those that give it to them. While the sheep defend them. I aim to break it all down. These corporations, your government. All of it. Crushed beneath my heels. Out of the ashes, a new world order, much like the old. Communities will come together and build themselves up. People, will once again understand their worth. And those that would seek to exploit you, will perish from the land.”

 Yet again, the followers that Henry had gathered for Ares break into cheers. They loved what he had to say. As did Henry, but he would have been lying to himself if he didn’t also admit that part of him was frightened by what he had heard. He knew, deep down, that when he agreed to follow the war god that war was coming. How could it not? He also knew that the system that they all lived in was broken. The sheer number of homeless people in America was proof of that, but hearing it said out loud, that made it real in a way that he wasn’t sure he was ready for.

 Ares turned to look at him and Henry smiled. Nodding to his new god to show that they were on the same page. But Henry couldn’t help but wonder if they still were.

**Chapter 4**

 After addressing the crowd, Henry took Ares to the makeshift command center they set up. It was right next to his tent. It had a large center room, designed to hold meetings with the war god and whomever he needed to speak with. Henry had been holding court in there since it was put up. Speaking with different people who handled things they needed addressed.

 It was a bit off putting for Henry to no longer be in the center seat. Ares had taken it over, as was his rightful place. Henry now sat by his side, as the war god spoke to each person in the settlement. He sat there and listened to each and every complaint, every suggestion. All the while building each and every one of his followers up.

 No matter who it was, Ares would find a way in and draw to light inner strength inside of them. In return they seemed to grow more loyal to their new god. Ares was the very definition of a leader. He could inspire confidence in even the most timid of men. It was a sight to behold.

 Henry couldn’t help but feel some shame in the fact that he had commanded the settlement for over a month and knew nothing of the men and women who followed him. The men and women in camp consisted of not only vets and druggies, but shunned teens and forgotten elderly. People who were down on their luck and people running in fear of their lives. He had known none of this. There was a man who taught 6th grade English, still got up everyday and went to work. He would get to the school early and wash up. The tiny income he brought in from school wasn’t enough to keep him off the streets. He had been driving Uber on the side for extra cash, but when a drunk driver hit him and ran, totaling his car, he could no longer afford his apartment. He tried to work something out with the apartments, but they didn’t care.

 The more Henry listened to people’s stories, the more it seemed like nobody cared. That the one truth in America was that nobody cared about anything but themselves. People were far too willing to let others fail if it meant they didn’t have to do anything to help. Even the tiniest bit of compassion seemed to be too much for most people.

As someone who risked his life to serve this country, it was disheartening to hear. He couldn’t help but wonder how people could be so careless. So heartless. How the suffering of others could move people so little.

A young woman, couldn’t have been more than 17, told the war god how she was molested by the pastor at her church and when she told her parents they didn’t believe her. They even set her to him to seek forgiveness for lying about him.

She ran away from home and had been living with friends until her parents sent the police to bring her home. That’s when she went off the grid and started jumping from shelter to shelter. Not that she was treated any better there. It wasn’t easy for a young woman out on her own. It seemed there were predators everywhere.

More than once, the people running the shelters had tried to take advantage of her. Tried to force her to do something that she didn’t want to. She couldn’t find a safe harbor. Just thinking about it filled Henry with a rage. No one should ever be made to feel unsafe by the people who were supposed to protect them.

But that seemed to be a theme with a great many of the people they spoke too. People in power abusing that power and others suffering for it. A young man who was thrown out of his house because he was gay. A young woman thrown out for getting pregnant.

Another young woman who was kicked out by her parents for dating a black guy. The guy’s family tried to take her in, but her parents got the police involved. They told the police the family kidnapped her. The police didn’t bother asking questions when they ‘rescued’ her. When she tried to explain what happened to the cops, they beat her and threw her in a holding cell. Her parents never bothered to bail her out and the cops eventually let her go. Only she had nowhere to go.

There was a middle-aged man who came to speak on behalf of his family. He had a good job, a nice apartment. A good life that he had provided for his family. Until he angered the wrong person at work who knew about his immigration status. They reported him and he and his family had to leave everything behind to keep from getting deported.

Another family lost their home in a fire, but the insurance company refused to pay. They found a loophole to get out of their reasonability. The fire happened while the parents were at work. They both rushed home to make sure their kids were okay and the mother lost her job for it. Seemed the family home catching fire while the children were inside wasn’t a good enough reason to leave work.

They started living out of their car, while trying to save up enough money to get an apartment. At least that was the plan until the father’s job fired him. The company didn’t like the look of one of their sells people living in a car. They were one of the biggest janitorial companies in the state, if they didn’t want a sells rep living in a car, they could have put him up until he got on his feet. Instead they fired him.

Another man had his store burned to the ground by a bunch of red necks, because he ‘dared’ to open a store as a black man in their part of town. It would have been bad enough to burn down everything he had built with his own blood and sweat, but they did it while he was at work. They grabbed him, beat him and forced him to watch as everything he worked for blew away in the wind. When he reached out to the police, he was told there was no evidence that anything had happened. For all they knew, it could have been an accident.

One man, who seemed to be strung out, stumbled in. He had the look of someone who, once upon a time, had been a strong vibrant person. Clearly his life had taken a turn for the worse. When he stood before them, Ares looked him over and gave a sad nod before the man told them his story. He had been a college football star, being scouted by the NFL. He was going to be a star, everyone knew it. That’s when tragedy struck. One night, during training, he blew out his knee. He had to have surgery.

Luckily the surgery went better than expected. He was set to make a full recovery. He just had to get through therapy, and deal with the killer pain. The doctor prescribed him oxycodone to deal with the pain. It didn’t take long for him to become addicted. He started blowing his money on more. Before he knew it, he needed more and more of the drug just to feel normal.

His life spiraled out of control and he lost everything. He tried to get help, but the doctors wanted nothing to do with him. Even his family distanced themselves from him. He was the first one in the family to go to college and he blew it. They believed that he threw his life away because of drugs, that he should have been stronger.

He was kicked off the team and lost his scholarship. His dream was dead, and everyone blamed him. No one seemed to care that it was the doctors that had gotten him hooked on the drug. That’s not their fault. It was his, because that’s what society tells us. Those in power are never to blame. The people they hurt are. They shouldn’t have allowed themselves to be hurt, or taken advantage of, or cheated. We blame the weak and protect the powerful. Henry heard it in story after story.

A widower and his 3 kids told them about his wife’s fight with cancer. How trying to keep her alive had cost them everything. His career, their savings, their home. He hated that his kids were homeless and motherless, but he would do it again. His wife was worth fighting for. People were always worth fighting for, more so than any amount of money or belongings.

A 16-year-old orphan, whose parents died because the police raided the wrong house on a no knock warrant. He was at a friend’s house when it happened. Both parents died in an instant. When he spoke out against the cops who did it, his friends parents kicked him out. They proudly “backed the blue”, and he was “unamerican” for blaming them for what happened. That logic made no more sense to Henry than it did to the poor kid. He was deathly thin, as if he hadn’t eaten in weeks.

Henry always thought he was doing a good job of keeping everyone fed, but it would seem that he had failed. A number of people spoke about not getting enough to eat. And still others spoke about assaults in the camp. Not just thefts or fights breaking out, but rapes as well.

It would seem that before they could go out and do the work, they all wanted to get done, they had a lot they needed to fix at home first. How could they hope to help others if they couldn’t even help their own?

By time they were done, Henry’s blood was boiling. He couldn’t remember ever being so mad in his life. He had always been a proud American. He believed in his country. Both the leadership and more importantly, the people. That faith had not only been tested this night, but shattered. How could such a wealthy nation let so many suffer? How could “good” people do such harm to others? How could anyone sit by while others suffered?

America claimed to be a civilized nation and yet the way it treated its people was sickening. The hate that people threw at one another, there was no reason for it. No explanation for it. Race, sex, nationality, addiction problems, poverty, poor choices, all just excuses that people used to justify disposing of people.

There was no honor in that. No fairness. No greatness to be had. The system wasn’t in need of repair. You can’t fix something that seems almost designed to hurt people. To tear people down. You had to throw it out and start anew.

**Chapter 5**

“There is much pain in your people.” Ares said once they finished speaking with everyone in camp. Henry could do nothing but nod in agreement. So much of their pain and suffering had gone unnoticed by him. He had been so wrapped up in his own life, his own problems, that he missed it.

What kind of leader doesn’t see their people suffering? What kind of leader puts their own wants, their own desires above that of their people? He had failed them. That realization brought with it a great sense of shame.

“You’re young, it takes time to learn how to lead.” Ares said, getting to his feet. Once more giving Henry the impression that the war god could read minds.

“I should have known.”

“Yes. You should have. Yet you didn’t.” Ares turns around to face him, his face serious. “So, what will you do about it?”

“What?” Henry asked, unsure of how he was supposed to answer that. After all, he wasn’t their leader, he just filled in while Ares recovered.

“What will you do to fix your mistakes?” The war god said once more. His eyes never leaving Henry. He had a way of looking through him, into the very depths of his soul. “Knowing you failed is but the first step in making amends. What further steps will you take? Or do you believe that merely acknowledging you erred is enough? Is that the kind of man that you are?”

“No.” Henry said, wishing that the word had more conviction behind it.

“So, again I ask, what will you do to fix things for your people? How do you hope to lead them, if you can’t serve them? How do you hope to serve them, if you don’t know their ills?”

“I don’t lead them, you do.” Henry said.

“No, I am their god. They are to worship me and serve at my whims, as it was when my kind ruled this world. But I did not lead them. A man must lead men. I will show you the way, but you, you must do the work. For I can not know what it is to be mortal.”

Henry nodded, not sure what was being asked of him. This was all too much, too soon. He just wanted to help his new god carry out his war. He wanted to set things right for the people who have been stepped on time and time again. He didn’t want to be a leader.

“The fact that you don’t want to be a leader, is why you will make a glorious leader. No man who ever sought power, has ever done anything good with it.” Ares said, placing his hand on Henry’s shoulder. “I have many wars I wish to fight; you have but one.”

“Which is?” Henry asked, his heart pounding.

“To liberate your people. To right the wrongs done to you, and by you. I can see it in your heart. You’re a good man who has lived a hard life. You wish to do good; you just don’t think you have it in you.”

Henry nodded; it was as if the war god was speaking the innermost thoughts that Henry kept pushing down. He had spent all day watching the war god deal with others in this same fashion, but when he directed it to you, it was different. He now understood the power behind the war god’s words.

“But you do. You just need to have faith in yourself. Have faith in me, and I shall show you who you are meant to be.” Ares said.

“I do, my lord.” Henry said, quickly, wanting to leave no doubt to his loyalty.

“Good, for I have been away from humanity for far too long, and I fear my blood lust may get the better of me. I need someone to guide me as much as I guide them. I need a general who will put the needs of the men first, so that I may put my needs first.”

“I will do my best to bring you victories my lord.” Henry said, not having any idea what the war god meant.

“Victories will come. That’s not what I ask of you.” Ares said.

“What is?”

“As I said, I have many wars to fight. Your race has forgotten me, through my sword, I shall make them remember. To do so, I need to be focused. I need put my mind to the task at hand, I can not devote myself to the ins and outs of our empire. For that, I have you. You serve me, but equally, you serve them. If my wants and theirs are at odds, it is your job to find common ground.”

“To make them see things your way?”

“If my goal was to have mindless servants who followed me into war, I could do that without you. But that is not how you build an empire that lasts. You need to take care of the people who serve you. Who fight for you, isn’t that where your country did you wrong?”

“It is.” Henry said, the rage burning in his gut once more.

“I do not wish to do our people wrong; you are to hold me accountable.” Ares said. Henry felt a wave of fear wash over him. How in the hell was he supposed to hold a god accountable? A war god no less.

“And in turn, you need people to hold you accountable.” He continued. Henry looked up, shaking away his doubts.

“My lord?”

“You must put together a council, that may inform you of the needs of our people. I would gather people from all backgrounds, all ways of life. No person may know the struggle of another, but find people who share struggles. Give the people a voice and they can move mountains. If our people are strong, I am strong. If I am strong, the world is ours. Do you understand?” Ares said, his eyes seemed to glow, as if a tiny sun burned inside them. It hurt Henry to look at them and yet he couldn’t seem to look away.

“I understand.”

**Chapter 6**

The task that Henry was given was not an easy one. He was to go forth and put together a council that would hold him to task. That would decide the fate of everyone in the camp. Who was he to give that kind of power to a select few people? He didn’t even trust himself to be responsible for himself, let alone others.

Yet when your god gave you a task, you do whatever you must to complete it. To do otherwise would be blasphemous, and if there was one thing Henry wasn’t, it was blasphemous. He was going to put together a council. He would find the best people for the job, the people who will help change the camp for the better. To make up for the failures that Henry had made in his tenor as leader.

As he walked around the camp, his mind raced around all the people who had spoken to the war god. There were so many people, each with their own issues. How was he going to put together a council that would represent everyone? How many would he need to gather to make a legitimate council?

Ares had given him no instructions on the matter, trusting him to figure it out himself. It was flattering that the war god trusted him so much, but that trust made the whole thing all the more daunting.

The last thing he wanted to do was to let his new god down. The thought of it was overwhelming. Yet oddly enough, he found himself more concerned with letting the people of the camp down. Thinking back on the events of the evening, he couldn’t help but feel that he had already let them all down so much. If there was any justice in the world, he would leave the camp behind and let someone better than him pick up the slack.

For a moment, he thought about doing just that. But only for a moment. He couldn’t help but feel like that was the coward’s way out. He had already failed them once; he wouldn’t allow himself to do it a second time. He had to be better.

He forced himself to stop thinking about his own self regret. It served no purpose, just got in the way. His goal was to find a way to build a council that could represent everyone in the settlement, and yet still be small enough that real conversations and decisions could be made. It was no easy task.

As far as he was concerned, the USA had been attempting to do this for over 2 centuries and still didn’t have it right. Who was he to change the system? A man who skated by government class by the skin of his teeth.

The night gave way to morning as he walked endlessly though the settlement, his mind playing out different scenarios. Each one had strengths and weaknesses. He wanted to represent people from different races and religions. Men and women. Those who fell on hard times and those who were abandoned by those they thought loved them.

He couldn’t help but notice just how different each and every person was in the settlement. There was no way to lump people together while still being fair to everyone. He couldn’t help but think of the USA method. Breaking the settlement into sections and electing representative for each section.

There was a logic to that method, but it was also proven to fail the people it was supposed to protect. Anyone who paid attention in America could see it for themselves. There had to be another way. A way to give everyone a voice. Let everyone be the master of their own domain and yet contribute to the greater good.

He had one idea, but it was a bit out there. It was a way to give everyone a voice, give everyone power and yet keep his council small. He had no way of knowing if his idea would work or not, but it couldn’t hurt to try. The worst that would happen would be that he had to go back to the drawing board.

The idea was to break down the settlements into sections, much as the US does, but the difference is there will be no standing representative. Each section will have a council of their own. Made up of one member of each family. If someone is alone, they would be their own voice. Each group will select a representative for each council meeting, switching them up as needed. If the topic at hand is more important to one member than another, they can step up.

Henry had no idea if it would work, or if the people would want to be that hands on, but it was worth a try. It would be different. Would it be better? He had no idea. It was a plan. Maybe it would blow up in his face, maybe it would work. Only time would tell. He stopped at the edge of camp and turned back to look at it.

Now that he had the idea, it was time for the hard part. He had to sell the settlement on it. Get everyone on the same page. It wasn’t going to be easy, but he believed that he could do it. He had to. Ares had demanded it of him.

**Chapter 7**

Henry spent the day moving about the settlement pitching his idea for a government to everybody. The reactions were mixed. Some liked the ideas, others hated it. He got dozens and dozens of ideas of how to better represent everyone. It was overwhelming, but he stayed the course.

He put his foot down and told people this was how it was going to be. He didn’t want to leave anyone out. He wanted people to take apart in the direction of their own lives. What surprised him most was how many people didn’t want to be bothered. They just wanted to leave leadership to other people. They had their lives stolen from them for one reason or another and they still didn’t seem to want to decide their own fate. Henry couldn’t wrap his head around it.

After he finished telling everyone in the settlement his idea for a new government, he returned to the command tent and told the war god his idea. Ares just smiled at him and nodded. He never spoke his approval of it, but he seemed to be fine with it.

Now came the time to put it to the test. He had to have his first meeting with his council. He sent out a message through the settlement to pick their first representative for the council meeting. He had broken the settlement into six even sections. Doing his best to make them all the same size.

The war god had retired to his own tent, leaving the command center to Henry to hold his first meeting. Henry set up a table, made mostly of cardboard that he had found around the camp. It wasn’t going to hold up, but with a sheet over it, it looked professional. He was proud of it.

He sat at the end of the table, waiting for the 6 representatives to show up. He wasn’t sure how the meeting was going to go, or what he planned to talk about. The truth was, he didn’t really want to talk, he wanted to listen. He was going to take a leaf out of the war gods book. He wanted to listen to what they had to say and if needed, they could come up with ways to fix things together.

Henry could hear foot falls nearing the tent. He felt his heart racing as they closed in on him. He couldn’t believe how nervous he was. He had been in charge of the camp since it started and never once felt nervous. What made this so different? The only thing he could think of, was that he was about to face his failures head on.

“This the right place?” An older gentleman asked, he was graying in the hair. His eyes betrayed a man who had seen things. Henry searched his brain for a name to go with the face but he came up short.

“Yes, have a seat, um?” Henry asked, attempting to not be rude.

“DeSanders.” The older gentleman said as he sat down.

“Nice to have you with us.” The old man nodded. Following after him was a young man, who seemed terrified to be there. He kept his head hung low, his eyes darting around the room. Henry asked him his name as he took a seat. “Marcus.” He muttered, so low that Henry almost missed it.

A middle-aged woman came in, she had an air of power about her. Henry recalled her from the meetings with the war god. She was an executive who at some high-powered company or other, at least until it merged with a bigger company and she was let go. The apartment she lived in, belonged to the company, when she was let go, they took it back. Add to that, most of her savings was spent trying to save her son’s life. He had cancer, the treatments, even with insurance were expensive. Her husband had left her years before and couldn’t have bothered to help pay for the son’s hospital bills. He didn’t even show up at the funeral. Samantha Stone was her name.

Another young man, who couldn’t have been much older than Marcus walked in. Proudly telling them his name was James, as he took his seat. He radiated arrogance, all the while trying to pass it off as confidence. He made eye contact with no one in the room, not because he was shy, or unsure of himself. But because he believed he was better than them. No matter how hard Henry tried to recall, he couldn’t remember him meeting with the war god.

Finishing up the council were Hector and Arial. He was the father who had lost his job because someone reported on his immigration status and she was the young woman who was tossed out for dating a black man. Henry couldn’t help but notice how many of the council were young kids.

Taking a steady breath, he braced himself for what was about to come. He couldn’t help but imagine that this was a meeting that was going to change the course of history. He rose from his chair and looked each member of the council in the face, doing his best to greet them each warmly.

“My name is Henry King, general to our god, Ares. He has tasked me to keep him true to his goal, and true to us, his subjects. He has further tasked me to form a council made up of the people of this utopia that we shall build, to hold me to task. That is where the 6 of you come in.”

They all nodded, taking in everything he was saying and looking amongst each other. There was a lot of unease in the room, not that it surprised Henry. He was uncomfortable with his new found responsibility, he couldn’t imagine that they felt any less so.

“The council will serve many purposes in the coming months. You will each need to make sure that your section of our new city is ready. That our people can serve our god at a moment’s notice. That being said, the first order of business must be to make this city the utopia that I know it can be. I wish to hear from each of you on changes that should be made.”

No sooner had he sat down than the council members started screaming out demands. Talking over each other. Some in agreement, others opposed. It was a nightmare, all but for Marcus who sat their silently, doing his best not to be noticed.

Henry allowed them to go for a few more minutes, in the hopes that they would tire themselves out. When he had had enough, he cleared his throat and stood up, calling for silence. At first, he was ignored, so he yelled louder the second time. They stopped bickering and turned to look at him. He motioned for them to sit down.

“That was a great example of what not to do. We will not have that again, am I understood?” They nodded. “Good. Now I wish to hear from the only member of this council who understands respect. I expect you all to listen to what he has to say.” Henry said, taking his seat, motioning to Marcus as he did so. “Marcus, the floor is yours.”

There were angry mumbles from others in the council but no one spoke out. They all just turned to look at Marcus, to hear what he had to say. The problem was, he didn’t seem to have anything to say. He just sat there, shifting his feet uncomfortably.

“Me?” He asked, when it was clear no one else was going to speak.

“You.” Henry said. “You were elected to represent a 6th of our population. What is you have to say?”

“Food?” He said, nerves clear as day in his voice.

“What about food?” Henry asked, not unkindly.

“We don’t have any. It always seems that by time the people in my section get to the food lines, it’s gone.” Marcus said.

“The food is scarce all over.” Ms. Stone said. Her voice firm, but kind.

“Food is important, no doubt, but the truth is, it’s a symptom of what’s really wrong. We need supplies, we need structure. If we want to be a utopia, we need to first be a functional city.” James said.

“This is true, but hard to do when your people are starving, is it not?” Hector demanded.

“Not to mention the harassment that the single women of this camp are facing.” Arial said.

“That is unacceptable.” Henry said, looking over at her. A pang of guilt ripping through his heart. How had he not known that was happening under his watch.

“A lot of things about all of this are unacceptable.” James said. “We need a list of priorities, work our way down them.”

“The first of which is some damn manners.” DeSanders said, standing up from his seat. Everyone, including Henry stopped and looked at him. “Mr. King gave the floor to this young man, and not a one of you let him finish. You should all be ashamed of yourself!” He turned to look at Marcus. “Go on young man. You were speaking of food.” Marcus smile and nodded.

“There’s not enough, and I understand that it is scarce. We might not be able to fix that problem right away, but what we can fix, is rotate the distribution of the food. Make sure that everybody gets a chance at food.”

“All that would be doing, is taking away from those who have access and making them suffer.” Ms. Stone said.

“My constituents would not like that.” James said.

“The kid has a point.” Hector said. “If we are to build a city together, we need everyone strong. Not just select groups. Otherwise how are we any better than the world that cast us out?”

“They never listened to us. They sit in their ivory towers and judge us. We can be different. That’s how we are better.” James said.

“So when will you start to listen?” DeSanders asked. James scanned the room, after noticing that he seemed to have no support, he sat down. He did not seem happy. Henry could already tell this kid was someone he was going to have to watch out for.

“Shelter is another concern. The further you live from the center, the less we seem to have. Tents, clothes, water. We are struggling just to stay alive. I’ll be honest, so far, this is no different than the shelters that we left behind to follow Ares.” Marcus said, his voice growing firmer as he spoke. DeSanders show of support seemed to have given him strength.

**Chapter 8**

The meeting went on far longer than Henry would have expected, but it was a promising start. After the rocky beginning, things seemed to smooth out. Marcus and DeSanders were the best finds of the night by far. They seemed to really care about people. More than they cared about garnering power. Those were the types of people that he needed to surround himself with.

After dismissing the meeting, he made his way back towards Ares’ tent. He wanted to report the success to the war god. He found Ares sitting in the tent, his eyes closed in deep meditation.

“My lord.” Henry said, standing in the entry way. The war god opened his eyes and smiled.

“How went the council?” Ares asked.

“It went well my lord. I entrusted the people to pick their leaders. They picked well this time.” Henry said. Ignoring his dislike for James and Sam Stone.

“Did they represent their people?”

“I believe they did.” Henry said. The war god smiled.

“Good. That’s all that is needed.” Ares said, getting to his feet. “Walk with me. We have much to discuss.”

Henry could feel his nerves on end as he followed Ares out of the tent. No matter how much the war god reassured him that he was his number two, it still felt weird to be so included in his decisions. How could a mortal, any mortal be so privileged as to be included into the thoughts of the gods themselves? Let alone a nobody who couldn’t even manage to keep his family? He wasn’t worthy. Of that he had no doubt.

“You served this nation, did you not?” Ares asked, Henry stayed a few feet behind him. He could feel the eyes of the rest of the settlement on them. Everyone wanted to hear their god speak. Henry couldn’t blame them.

“I did, my lord. I served proudly. Saw action more than once.” Henry said, no joy in his words. War wasn’t something he recalled with much fondness. When he thinks back to his time in battle, he was proud of himself and he brothers-in-arms, but it’s the kind of pride that comes from doing what is needed, not what something he wished to dwell on. War wasn’t an experience that he would wish on even his worst enemy. Those memories still woke him with screams in the middle of the night.

“You know their strengths?”

“My lord?” Henry asked, already knowing where this was going. He had known it from the start, he had just kept pretending that it wasn’t.

“I mean to take this city.” Ares said, stopping and turning to face Henry. “You are to help me plan my attack.”

It wasn’t a question; it was a statement. The war god aimed to take San Diego by force, and Henry, who had taken a vow to serve this land, was now tasked with planning it’s downfall. His next words were the most important he would ever utter. No matter what he said, he would forever be marked as a traitor. Either to his country or his god. To which was he more loyal?

In all his life, Henry had never been faced with such a dilemma. He didn’t want to let Ares down, a fact that he knew from the moment he met him would set him against everything he had ever known, but there was a difference between knowing that and coming face to face with it. This was the moment that he could no longer stand by the side lines. No longer play revolutionary. He would either become one, or go back to the life that America had given him. One where he was thrown out into the streets, forgotten, with nothing but his painful memories.

“Whatever you need my lord. I am yours.” Henry said.

**Chapter 9**

Over the next few days Henry broke down everything he knew about the military to Ares. He found he could suddenly recall things that he had drank away in the back alleys. It was if being around the war god just brought it all back.

Together they mapped out a plan. It was a reckless one, one that would cost countless lives on both sides. Of that, there was no doubt. Which is why the next few weeks became the most intense hell that Henry had ever experience. The war god’s boot camp was a thousand times worse than the one he remembered from his days serving the country he was about to enter into war with.

The meetings with the council continued, giving him new worries and concern. Almost every meeting had new faces replacing the old ones. With a few exceptions. Marcus, DeSanders, Sam Stone and James. No matter what the issue at hand, they always seemed to find their way back.

As the weeks had gone on, Henry had found himself turning to DeSanders for advice more and more. He was far too old to fight in the coming battle, but Henry was positive that his wisdom would be key in their victory.

Marcus on the other hand, had become a type of surrogate son to Henry. More and more he would bring him along on the meetings over the battle plan. The kid had a spark about him that could change the world if given a chance.

As for James and Sam Stone, Henry grew to hate them more and more. They were so full of themselves, seeming to care more about gaining power for themselves than about those they were supposed to serve. It filled Henry with a sense of rage that he could not get under control. He couldn’t help but feel that people like them would force their new found empire into the same mistakes that he was attempting to flee. He had to stop them, but he couldn’t become them in the process.

“I don’t know if I can keep doing this.” Marcus said, collapsing onto the ground. They had just finished the war god’s warm up. The real work out was still to come and yet Marcus looked as if he was on the verge of heat stroke.

“Rest. You can catch up with us when you are ready.” Henry said, putting his hand on the young man’s shoulder, attempting to make him feel comfortable. Ares was not one you wished to disappoint. A number of their followers had fallen during the training, working past the point of exhaustion to please their god.

Henry kept trying to get the war god to lessen the load, but he cared not. He was too consumed with the upcoming battle. A battle that had been consuming Henry’s mind as well. His status as a traitor to the land of his birth was rapidly approaching.

“What about Ares?” Marcus asked, his voice shaking.

“He’s over working us. My job is to hold him accountable. It’s time I get to work.” Henry answered.

Henry found the war god in his tent, working out. He may have been a god, but he was always trying to better himself. His body, his skills, his brain. He never seemed to tire. He had a drive that was unparalleled.

“My lord.” Henry said as he stopped by the entrance. Ares stopped his work out as he looked up at Henry and smiled.

“Is this the moment?” Ares said getting to his feet.

“My lord?” Henry asked, his heart pounding. He didn’t think he would be this nervous.

“Come now, don’t back down now. You came here with a purpose. I long to hear you finally confront me.”

“How. . .how did you know?” Henry asked, his voice shaking.

“It was only a matter of time.” Ares said, standing before Henry. “To be honest, I was disappointed that you waited this long. Your people were dropping dead and you said nothing.”

The words hit him like a ton of bricks. He knew he should have said something when the first of their number died, but he didn’t want to anger the war god. Which was his charge. He had failed.

“What changed?” Ares asked.

“It’s too much.” Henry said, finding his voice. “This settlement is here to help people, who have been cast out by society. Not to die in endless drills.”

“Sweet words, but they ring hollow.” Ares said. “Your apprentice can’t handle it, that’s the cause of your new found voice.”

“I. , .You’re right my lord.” Henry said, not wishing to lie to his god.

“The way you care for him, you must care for everyone under your command. That is the charge I have given you. Have you forgotten?” Ares demanded.

“No, my lord.” Henry answered quickly.

“Good, now do better.” The war god had never sounded so disappointed before. At least not to Henry’s ear. There was something about letting him down that sent a dagger through his heart.

“I swear to you that I will.” Henry said, and he meant it. He wanted to make his god proud.

“Good, because tomorrow we go to war.” Ares said, Henry’s heart missed a beat. He wasn’t ready for this moment, and he was sure that his people weren’t either.

**Chapter 10**

“Jackson, you ready yet?” His mother called from down the stairs. Jackson Travis, a 15-year-old kid, rolled over in his bed. Pulling the blanket over his head. He was still very much in bed. It didn’t help that he was up till 3 or so in the morning playing the newest Dragon Ball game, trying to unlock all the characters.

“So, help me, Jackson, if I have to come up these stairs, there will be hell to pay!” She screamed up at him. He let out a groan, pulling the covers down. He knew better than to make her ask a third time.

“I’m coming!” He called down as he got out of bed. He looked around his room, it was a mess. Jackson wasn’t a neat kid. His shit was all over his room, as if nothing had a proper place.

“Coming? You better be down here by time I get to three. Do you understand me!” It wasn’t a question. She was pissed. What a great way to start off his morning. It was bad enough that he was spending his Saturday at his little cousin’s soccer game, but now he was going to have to spend it hearing his mother nag at him the whole time.

“Yes ma’am!” He called down, jumping out of bed, throwing on some clothes and rushing out of the room. He grabbed a pack of gum on the bedside table. He didn’t have time to brush his teeth before she got to three.

“One!” She said, just as he started down the stairs. “Two!” He reached the bottom. “Three!” She said just as he stopped right in front of her.

“I’m here.” He said, trying his best to seem happy about it.

“Look at you, you couldn’t put something nice on?” She snapped at him.

“Why? We’re just watching Nathan play.”

“You know how your aunt Laura is. I’mma have to hear about this all week.”

“Do you want me to go change?” He asked, hoping it would give him the chance to go brush his teeth too.

“No! we don’t have time. As it is, we’re going to be late.” She said as she snatched the keys off the ring. Every Saturday it was the same thing. His mother and her older sister Laura never got along. They always completed with everything. It was annoying, but that’s how families were.

His aunt married his uncle Tim, who was in the army. She would brag about life as an officer’s wife, so his mom left her job working at some dinner in town and enlisted in the Marines. That was the way of things, between them. Always one upping each other.

Jackson didn’t mind it most of the time, after all, it was the reason they lived in a house now instead of the shitty apartments he grew up in. Sometimes shit worked out. It was a lesson that Jackson needed to learn after a lifetime of life shitting on him. His father having walked out on them when he was just 6 years old.

He had a girlfriend who got pregnant and he left Jackson’s mother to be with her and his new family. He wanted to be responsible and do the right thing. Jackson had never heard from him since. Every once in a while, he would look him up online and would see post after post about how much he loves his daughter and how much he sacrifices for her. Jackson never got so much as a postcard.

Life sucked. That was a simple truth of life, which is why his mom managing to get them this house all on her own meant something. He was proud of her, not that he would ever tell her that. It would just go to her head.

He finished putting on his shoes and jumped up, still feeling half asleep as his mother pulled open the door. No sooner did she open the door than an alarm went off somewhere in the distance.

“What’s that?” Jackson asked. He had never heard it before. It didn’t sound like any drill and it was only getting louder. His mother stopped in her tracks. She looked around, all around them, people were rushing out of their houses. A voice on the loudspeaker came on, telling them they were under attack.

His mother’s phone went on, she snatched it out of her purse and answered it. Her face was stone, he couldn’t read any expression from her. Jackson didn’t want to admit it, but he was afraid.

“Understood.” She said, getting off the phone. She turned to look at Jackson, “Stay inside. I’ll be back soon.”

“Where are you going?” He asked, she didn’t look back, just left, shouting at him to “Stay inside” as she closed the door.

**Chapter 11**

Hours had gone by since his mother left. Jackson tried to keep himself busy, but the constant alarm wouldn’t allow him to distract himself. He kept glancing at his phone, nothing. Well, nothing from his mother, he had dozens of missed calls and texts from friends. Most of whom lived on base, but he wasn’t in the mood to talk.

He was worried sick about his mother. He had never seen her look so unnerved before. Something was seriously wrong. He just didn’t know what.

He peeked out the window, not for the first time. By now the street was empty of service men and women. A few kids and family members were standing outside, trying to catch a look at what was happening. Jackson was tempted to go outside himself, but if his mother came home before he got back inside, well, he was already in enough trouble.

He picked up his phone for the millionth time and started going through the text messages. Most of them were just asking if he knew what was happening, it wasn’t until he found his ex’s text. She was the daughter of a Colonel, and liked to brag about always knowing what was going on.

He opened the text message, only to have his worst fears realized. The base was under attack, only what she said made no sense. She was telling him that they were under attack by homeless people. There was no way that could be right. He texted her trying to clarify.

Her reply told him that they had over run the base. No one had expected it. They were incredibly well organized. She went on to describe how they just seemed to swarm in from all directions and no matter how many were shot down, more seemed to appear.

He couldn’t believe what he was reading. She swore that the Marines were reacting slowly, falling out of formation. She sent him a video, showing a unit turn tail and run. He couldn’t understand it. He had seen drills his whole life. Spent more time around Marines than anyone else. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. None of it made sense.

He was still trying to wrap his head around it when her next text came. They were in her house. His heart dropped. He wrote her telling her to get out. No reply. He wrote her asking if she was okay. No reply. He found himself sitting on the stairs staring at his phone. He couldn’t even remember sitting down. Nor could he remember how long he sat there, but the sun had gone down outside.

The sounds of the fighting had come closer to his home. He slowly got to his feet, not sure what he was going to do. He made it half a step when the front door blew open. Standing in the door way was a tall man, dressed in clothes that hadn’t seen a washer or dryer in at least a decade. The man was more covered in dirt than not. He eyes had a wildness to them that chilled Jackson to his core.

He knew he should run. That standing there meant certain death, but his feet wouldn’t work. His mind was racing, thinking of everything he was never going to get the chance to do. His mind flashed to his mother; how mad she was at him just before she rushed out the door to confront all this.

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, the homeless man pulled out a gun. It didn’t seem to match him at all. While he was more dirt than man, the gun was spotless. It looked almost brand new. That was the last thought Jackson had as the trigger was pulled and life left Jackson behind.

**Chapter 12**

“On your knees!” an unruly man, dressed in what at one time must have been a nice suit screamed as he pushed Lt. Sasha Travis onto the ground in front of him. She was next to three other Marines, all with their hands tied behind their backs as they awaited their fate.

 She couldn’t believe what had happened. One moment she was getting ready for a day with her son, when suddenly the whole world turned upside down. She got called into duty as the base was under attack. She was sure that she had misheard. Who in their right mind would attack a US military base, on US soil?

 Then word came that they were being attacked by a group of homeless people. She was sure it would all be over in seconds. She never once worried about the outcome. After all, the odds were so one sided, that it wasn’t even fair. At least that’s what she thought.

 She was quickly disillusioned of those beliefs. The homeless swarmed in from all sides, their numbers seemingly endless. Added on top of that, everyone on base seemed to be overcome with a sense of dread. It was as if all of their training had left them. She had no idea what she was supposed to do. She felt fear, overwhelming fear.

 By the looks of her fellow officers, she could see that she wasn’t the only one who felt this way. It seemed this sudden overwhelming fear spread throughout the base as if it was some kind of plague.

 “What do we have here?” A voice said from outside the room. Sasha looked up, just as a man with broad shoulders and a stern face walked in. He didn’t look homeless. He wore armor, carried a giant sword and had the air of a warrior. His accent was strange to the ears. Unlike any she had ever heard.

 “Prisoners my lord.” The man who pushed her to the ground said. His voice filled with equal parts pride and reverence.

 “Prisoners? For what purpose?” The leader said. Behind him another man walked into the room. He held himself with a certain dignity that she had seen far too often among the base. He was a veteran. One who had seen war if she had to guess.

 “To trade with and make demands.” He told the leader.

 “I need not trade to make demands. The name Ares alone should be enough to demand action from my enemies.”

 “You’ve been gone from this world a long time, my lord.” The veteran said.

 “You need not remind me, Henry.” Ares lifts his sword up, with an almost bored expression. “But it seems I need to remind them, that I have returned.”

 Sasha knew what was coming before it happened. This madman was going to kill her, kill them all. He was declaring war on the United States and for some reason started here, at this base. The base that she was stationed. The base where her son, the love of her life, was waiting at their house for her to come home. The son that she knew she would never see again.

 She spent the last few seconds of her life, praying that God would see him to safety. In a flash of movement that was too quick to see, her head separated from her body, along with the heads of the other officers that was with her. Her last thought was wishing for the safety of her son, who had already been shot and killed by the followers of Ares.

**Chapter 13**

The executions were more than Henry had been expecting. He wanted to stop them, but couldn’t find the words as his chosen god swung his sword and removed their heads. He wanted to scream out in terror, but caught himself. He quickly make an excuse to leave.

Henry walked through the remains of the base as if in a daze. The memories of the battle quickly fading from memory. Although it had just ended, it already felt as if the battle was decades ago. He could remember battles he fought overseas with more clarity.

Fuzzy as it was already becoming, he couldn’t shake the feeling of confidence he had when he entered the fray. It was almost as if he was a one-man army all himself. The men at his side seemed to be in the same form. He had no fear. There was nothing but the battle and he was determined to win, no matter the cost.

It was a far cry from the training he had tried to put everyone though leading up to the battle. No matter how hard he tried, he just couldn’t get them all on the same page. He was terrified that it was going to be a massacre. He couldn’t believe how they all came together. It made no sense.

What made even less sense, was the way that the enemy just fell apart in front of them. He had never seen service men break ranks and just flee like that. It was as if they were infected with a fear they couldn’t comprehend. They had no coordination, no teamwork. It was every man for themself, trust trying to survive.

He stopped in the middle of the square. Taking in the death in destruction. There were dead bodies everywhere. It chilled him to the core. For every dead homeless person, there was at least fifty servicemen. He knew what he was signing up for, what he was agreeing to, but he wasn’t ready for it. Not really. This, this wasn’t what he wanted.

“Sir.” Marcus said from behind him. Henry couldn’t help but smile, even amidst the horrid sight. His young protégée survived. He would have been lying if he said he wasn’t concerned. He hadn’t seen him since before the battle started.

“Marcus.” Henry said, turning around to face him. He was bloody, his clothes torn. It seemed he had seen hand to hand combat at some point during the battle. It was more than Henry had done. No one ever got near him and his unit.

“The war-god wishes to see you.” Marcus said, afraid to say the name of their chosen god, as so many among their number were. It wasn’t a fear that Henry shared, but then again, he was the chosen right-hand man.

“Thank you, I’ll be right there.”

“Yes sir.” Marcus said, there was an uneasy tone in his voice. Henry couldn’t help but feel a tinge of guilt. He had experienced the first hand horror of war, it had a way of changing you. No matter how strong you were. Henry took one last look around, wondering if he made the wrong choice.

Not that it mattered anymore. He had led an assault on the United States. He was locked into this course of events. There was no turning back now. Even if he wanted to.

It didn’t take him long to find Ares. He was on top of the tallest building left standing. Looking out over the conquered land. Leaning against the wall next to him sat his sword. Ares looked every bit the ideal warrior and king all rolled into one. Henry felt a swell of pride looking at him, reminding him of why he stood by his side.

“We won the day.” Ares said. A smirk on his face.

“We did. It was easier than I would have thought.” Henry said, giving words to the thoughts he was struggling with. To his surprise Ares smiled, he glanced down at his sword.

“We have my cousin to thank for that.” Ares said to himself, laughing at some hidden joke.

“My lord?” Henry asked. Ares picked up his sword, swinging it through the air, as if he was seeing it for the first time.

“When I decided to return to this realm, I knew I would need an edge. After all I was coming to a land that I had been gone from for time immortal. All memory of me reduced to little more than rumors and myths.” He spoke as if he felt betrayed by all of this. Henry decided that it was best not to speak.

“So, I traversed Atlantis to visit Mars. Just as obnoxious and full of himself as always.” Ares stopped talking as he looked at the blade, a tinge of regret seemed to grow on his features, but only for a moment. He swung the blade as if he was cutting them away.

“I caught him unguarded, his weapon not by his side and. . .”Ares trailed off. “We fought off and on for eons. I never thought there would be a time when he wasn’t around to annoy me.” Ares fell back against the wall, as if the weight of the memories were crushing him.

“My lord?” Henry said, not knowing if his concern was needed or wanted. Ares looked over him, almost surprised to see him. He stood back up, all signs of weakness vanishing from him.

“I claimed my prize. The famed sword of Mars. Striking fear into any army that faces you, while filling your own with a strengthen they never knew they had.” Ares said, and suddenly it all made sense. The god of war had a sword that aided their battle. With that weapon on their side, they could do anything. There was a real chance that they could win this war.

Henry looked down at the field of bodies down below. He couldn’t help wonder what the cost of that victory would be. How many people would have to die so that his people could finally be treated as human. Could have the warmth of a house, the comfort of a hot meal. Be able to go about their day without being spit upon.

“What next my lord?” Ares smiled at the question, he turned to look over the field. He took it in with pride, a stark contrast to the horror that Henry felt.

“We take this city, then this nation before I take all the world for my own.” Ares said, his voice so sure, as if it was already a done deal. Henry glanced at the sword in his hand, he couldn’t help but wonder if it was inevitable.

The End. . . Till Next Issue!