

SHADOW PROTOCOL

Written by

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EXT. WAR-TORN COUNTRY - ENEMY COMPOUND - NIGHT

A full moon partially illuminates the rustic enemy COMPOUND surrounded by sand barricades. To the south, a MANHOLE COVER shifts slightly.

From the inky darkness below, JOHN MERCER (45, ruggedly handsome, muscular build, scar on his left cheek) emerges, scanning the area sharply.

MERCER

All clear. Let's move.

Out of the shadows, the rest of the TEAM surfaces.

CONRAD

Scrambling their comms.

The team moves forward - silent shadows in perfect sync, synchronized by training, trust, and an unspoken bond.

INT. ENEMY COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Mercer takes point, as the rest follow. Miller stays in the back, her fingers dancing on a miniature device.

MILLER

Radar clear.

MERCER

Jordan, Langstaff, you're with me.
Conrad, monitor our six.

They move with professional precision. A pulsating suspense hangs in the air - a mission just beginning under the cover of darkness.

INT. COMPOUND - NIGHT

The team scourges through the dimly lit compound. The air is thick with tension.

MILLER

We're running on borrowed time.

MERCER

I know, but we're close. I can feel it.

Amidst an array of dilapidated tech, Mercer's keen gaze falls upon a cache of HARD-DRIVES.

MERCER (CONT'D)

This could be it.

Conrad plugs in, and hacks into the device.

CONRAD

Confirmed.

Just then, Miller's computerized gadget starts to beep loudly - a sign of impending danger.

MILLER

We've got company!

The team quickly cocoons the drives and escapes, leaving the compound just in time as a fleet of armed men storm in.

EXT. ENEMY COMPOUND - NIGHT

The team emerges from the compound with haste. Mercer raises his hand, and they stop dead in their tracks.

John's eyes scan the area, attuned to this dangerous world.

MERCER

Something's not right-

BANG! Bullets tear through the air, originating from seemingly every direction.

CONRAD

Ambush! Take cover!

The team scramble to find protection, their composure replaced with chaos. Their extraction has turned into a fight for their lives.

Flames rage around the team. The sound of GUNFIRE echoes as they fight against an overwhelming number of ATTACKERS.

MERCER

Lay down suppressing fire!

Conrad and Miller fire their weapons, providing cover for John.

CONRAD

This is getting too hot!

Suddenly, a ROCKET WHISTLES through the air and SLAMS into them.

MERCER

No... NO!

Explosions RIPPLE through the compound. The team gets CAUGHT in the blast, flinging them in all directions. The dusty night air fills with the echo of the team's anguished SCREAMS.

MERCER (CONT'D)

NOOOOO!

John is thrown back by the blast-

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Mercer jolts awake, his rugged, scarred face glistening with sweat.

He runs a tense hand across his stubbled cheek. The room is barely lit by the morning dawn creeping in through the blinds.

The faint sound of birds CHIRPING serves as a cruel reminder of a peaceful world outside.

Swinging his legs over the side of the bed, his eyes land on a FRAMED PHOTO on the nightstand.

It's him and his former team, all smiles. He picks it up, studying it.

He sets the photo back down, sighing heavily. It's clear John lives in the shadow of his past.

He stands, and heads towards the bathroom, starkly avoiding his reflection in the mirror as he passes it.

EXT. MERCER'S CABIN - DAWN

The sun slowly rises, casting a warm golden hue over the vast expanse of untamed wilderness. Mercer steps out from his solitary cabin, squinting against the early morning light.

He takes a deep breath, the rituals of a defeated man, and heads towards a weathered STABLE.

Within the stable, THUNDER, a powerful horse, flicks an ear towards the sound of approaching footsteps. Thunder's intelligent eyes recognize Mercer, and he whinnies softly, shifting his weight restlessly.

MERCER
(softly)
Easy, boy.

Mercer fetches a brush and begins to gently groom Thunder. Each stroke of the brush is meticulous, a soothing rhythm that calms both man and beast.

He speaks in hushed tones, a private connection between the two. The bond between them, palpable. Unbreakable.

MERCER (CONT'D)
That's it.

The sun rises higher, scattering light onto the horizon. Mercer's day begins with purpose, the warm bond with Thunder a grounding start to the challenges that lay ahead.

INT. BARN - LATER

John tosses some feed into a chicken coop. The rhythmic clucking of hens provides a calming soundtrack.

MERCER
Morning ladies . . .

He seems lost in thought, the action familiar and meditative. John sets down the feed and grabs a basket, as he crouches beside the hen house.

MERCER (CONT'D)
What have we got today?

He reaches in and pulls out a handful of eggs with a practiced grace.

MERCER (CONT'D)
Much obliged.

INT. MERCER'S CABIN - KITCHEN - MORNING

Mercer kicks off his boots and hangs his coat, revealing the rugged muscles underneath. He moves with a weary yet determined elegance, a dance forged from countless missions.

He sets down the egg basket next to the STOVE, and starts preparing breakfast.

The TOASTER comes to life with a slice of bread, and the KETTLE whistles softly on the stove, ready for COFFEE.

As Mercer cooks, the old RADIO on the counter adds to the quaint soundtrack of the morning - a faint hum of NEWS, interrupted by STATIC.

Mercer's hardened eyes glaze over momentarily, lost in distant memories, but shake off the melancholy as the EGGS start to crackle violently in the pan.

He plates the breakfast - EGGS, toast, and a cup of BLACK COFFEE - his humble morning ritual enacted like a silent prayer.

Mercer sits alone at the table, staring out the WINDOW at the untouched wilderness. The morning light reveals lines of experience etched deeply into his face.

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - DAY

The room, designed to cater to the unique needs of AMPUTEE VETERANS, is bathed in natural light that pours in from numerous windows. Hammock swing belts and uneven balance boards scatter across the floor.

MERCER assists JONI, a determined below-the-knee amputee, as she struggles to maintain her balance on a prosthetic leg. He steadies her, gaze focused.

MERCER

Breathe, Joni. Balance, not speed.
Remember?

JONI

Gotta walk before you crawl.

A moment of determination flares up in her eyes as she braces herself. She takes a tentative step, steadied by Mercer. There is a palpable sense of victory - small, but significant - in that single gesture.

JONI (CONT'D)

Why do you waste your time here?
This isn't you.

MERCER

What are you talking about?

JONI

The way you clock every sound, the
caution in your eyes... You scream
'special forces'.

Mercer is silent for a moment. He takes a deep breath.

MERCER

...not anymore.

Joni nods. They are silent for a moment, the tension between them palpable.

JONI

Whatever you're doing here, it's not going to make that look in your eyes go away.

Mercer's eyes, unyielding, meet hers as he helps her complete the last steps before she is able to rest.

MERCER

I don't want it to.

INT. JOHN MERCER'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Inside the shadowy house, Mercer moves with precision, like a covert operative on a mission.

From a wooden cupboard, he collects various ingredients and sets them on the counter. His gaze is focused, every movement meticulous and precise.

The sizzle of the oil drowns out the silence. Mercer sprinkles spices on the chicken, a practiced motion that reveals a hint of nostalgia. His face is masked with concentration.

He FLASHES BACK to the failed mission. The echo of gunfire, the feeling of cold sweat, the memories of desperate radio calls.

Mercer closes his eyes, the torment of the past squeezing his heart. The image of his comrade being gunned down fills his mind.

Suddenly, the sounds of gunfire are replaced with the sizzle of the oil. He opens his eyes, the haunting memories fading away.

Mercer clumsily drops a SPOON as he stirs a pot, the noise seemingly LOUDER in the tense silence. He picks it up, visibly frustrating.

Conrad stands behind him, riddled with bullet holes.

CONRAD

Ease up, Mercer. It's just a meal.

Mercer's movements become more forceful as he gets back to cooking. He neglects a section of the meal, resulting in it being overcooked.'

Miller stares over his shoulder, her skin burned to a crisp.

MILLER

You might want to check on that,
Mercer.

Overwhelmed and taking in the charred meal, Mercer accidentally knocks over a glass of wine. The crash reverberates across the room. His knuckles white, he clenches his jaw, struggling to keep his composure.

Langstaff has a hole blown through his head.

LANGSTAFF

Chin up, Mercer. We've seen worse.

MERCER

God damn it!

Mercer slams the pot down on the stove, sending ingredients scattering across the kitchen.

He storms to the cabinet, grabs a bottle of whiskey, and pours a glass.

Mercer gulps back the fiery liquid and throws the glass into the fireplace; the alcohol erupting in flames.

He closes his eyes, and chugs straight from the bottle.

INT. HIGH-SECURITY UNDERGROUND FACILITY - NIGHT

An imposing, fortified structure is guarded by vigilant ARMED PERSONNEL and cutting-edge SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS. A Reinforced vault contains the Nexus Disruptor, a dangerous beacon of high-tech terror.

A FIGURE dressed in black tactical gear and a mask enters the scene. Stealthy, silent, he navigates the complex labyrinth of security protocols with clinical precision.

Disabling cameras, evading motion sensors, the Figure is a shadow, blending with the darkness that engulfs the cavernous facility. His every move calculated, every breath measured.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Around a bank of monitors, GUARDS watch with bored expressions; oblivious to the figure approaching the vault in one of the feeds. Suddenly, the display scrambles.

The guards exchange surprised glances. One of them hurriedly works the controls. After tense moments, the feed STABILIZES.

The vault appears normal - untouched, with no one in sight.

The guards share a look, and one grabs his radio.

INT. VAULT DOORS - CONTINUOUS

Approaching the vault, the Figure's gloved hand hovers over a high-tech device, the only barrier between him and his target.

The device WHIRRS into action, lights flickering, evidently a hacking tool. The device interfaces with the vault's electronic locks, decrypting its complex systems.

The Figure's eyes, the only thing visible through his mask, are focused, intense. The room bathes in the green glow of the hacking device. The vault begins to unlock.

A final BEEP, the vault's electronic lock disengages. The Figure readies himself, the first step of the prototype retrieval underway.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Two SOLDIERS stand at attention near the main elevator, their gazes locked onto the doors with unyielding intensity. The faint crackle of a radio comes to life. Their COMMANDER's voice buzzes in with an urgent tone.

COMMANDER (V.O)

There's been a glitch in the vault feed. One of you check it out, immediately.

SOLDIER 1

Copy that, sir. Moving out.

With a crisp salute to his comrade, SOLDIER 1 strides off towards the vault. SOLDIER 2 remains, his gaze returning to the elevator, embodying unwavering vigilance.

INT. VAULT DOORS - INTERCUT

The Figure hovers over a secure chamber. A myriad of DIGITAL LOCKS seem impenetrable, but not to him.

A sophisticated array of instruments springs to life in The Figure's hands. Advanced lock-picking techniques merge with electronic manipulation, each lock yielding one after the other.

Finally, an audible CLICK signals the last lock's surrender. The chamber door creaks open, revealing the NEXUS DISRUPTOR, ominous in its silent potency.

Gloved hands reach for the Nexus Disruptor. The heavy device is carefully removed from its secure housing, proof of its dangerous ability.

The Figure places the Nexus Disruptor into a specially designed, high-tech case. The CASE seals with a hiss, enclosing the weapon.

CLINK

The Figure turns around-

The VAULT DOOR opens to reveal SOLDIER 1, who gasps and grabs his radio.

SOLDIER 1

Secure the area! Sound the alarm!

REVEAL the empty vault.

EXT. GOVERNMENT FACILITY - NIGHT

The Figure emerges from the shadows, the sinister silhouette of the NEXUS DISRUPTOR visible under his arm. He disappears into the night, leaving the facility under the red glow of the alarm's STROBE LIGHTS.

INT. MERCER'S CABIN - MORNING

Sarah Mitchell, a dedicated intelligence officer with a slender yet muscular frame, explores the booze-soaked destruction of Mercer's all night rampage.

She tip-toes through the chaos, and spots Mercer passed out face down and naked on the wooden floor, a bottle stilled clutched in his hand.

SARAH

Jesus...

She rolls her eyes and hastily turns to grab a blanket off the nearby couch.

Before she can turn back, Mercer lunges at her from behind, putting her into a chokehold. His eyes, though clouded with alcohol, gleam with a dangerous alertness.

JOHN MERCER

Who the hell are you?

SARAH

I...came... <gasp>...job-

Mercer releases his hold. Sarah gasps for air, massaging her neck.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Like I was saying, I came to offer you a job.

Mercer, now intrigued, watches Sarah suspiciously, his brawny figure looming over her.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Mind covering that up?

She tosses the blanket at him.

LATER

A giant Holographic Display flickers to life. SARAH and JOHN MERCER stare intently at the Blueprints of the Prototype.

SARAH

This is what we're after.

The 3D image of a Complex, Cylindrical Device rotates in mid-air. It pulsates with a strange energy.

MERCER

What is it?

SARAH

The Nexus Disruptor. Inside is a miniature, supercharged black hole - the Nexus Core.

MERCER

You're telling me this thing harnesses the power of a black hole?

SARAH

Exactly. It was our answer to Big Oil. Unlimited. Affordable. Clean energy.

MERCER

And someone just walked off with it.

SARAH

Yes. And if it falls into the wrong hands, it could be weaponized. We can't allow that to happen.

A serious, determined look can be seen on JOHN MERCER'S face, revealing his readiness to face the challenging mission ahead.

MERCER

I get that. It's dangerous, it's bad.

(nonchalantly)

But why should that matter to me? I've been dead to that world for a long time.

SARAH

And I'm here to revive you.

A look of concern crosses MERCER'S face. The cogs are turning.

MERCER

So you can throw me back to the wolves. I don't think so.

SARAH

Let me be blunt, Captain. You've only got two choices here.

Sarah paces, the tension palpable.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Lead this mission, and retrieve the Nexus Disruptor...

Sarah turns, locking eyes with Mercer.

SARAH (CONT'D)
...or face indictment for treason.

Mercer laughs, a sound empty of humor.

MERCER
You remember why I was discharged,
right? Dishonorable. The Agency
suddenly has a change of heart?

SARAH MITCHELL
Someone had to fall on your their
sword, for reasons above my
paygrade. It was a necessary
sacrifice.

MERCER
Sacrifice? I lost everything.

SARAH
I know, and given the situation, it
may not mean much. But...the agency
is offering you a second chance.

Sarah reaches into her briefcase, revealing official PARDON
DOCUMENTS.

SARAH (CONT'D)
They need you back, John. You're
unmatched in covert ops.

Mercer looks over the documents, his face unreadable.

MERCER
I can't restore what isn't there
anymore, Sarah.

Mercer gets up, turning his back to Sarah as he leaves.

MERCER (CONT'D)
Excuse me, I've work to do.

INT. PHANTOM'S SECURE CHAMBER - NIGHT

Underneath the cloak of shadows, THE PHANTOM opens an
encrypted video conference.

THE PHANTOM
(distorted voice)
Greetings, comrades. The moment you
all have been waiting for has
arrived.

The Phantom dramatically unveils the NEXUS DISRUPTOR, a menacing device that hums with energy. It's displayed prominently on a secure platform.

ANTI-WESTERN COALITION MEMBER 1

That's...that's the Nexus Disruptor? You really have it.

THE PHANTOM

Indeed, it's the power to redefine the world order at our fingertips.

ANTI-WESTERN COALITION MEMBER 2

How can we trust you?

The Phantom presses a button on the side of the Nexus Disruptor. The menacing hum ascends in pitch, lighting up the room with a fierce glow.

THE PHANTOM

A demonstration.

He presses a sequence of commands. The Screen shows a bird's eye view of a major power grid.

Suddenly, the screen FLICKERS and the lights in the control room DIM.

INT. MERCER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The lights cut out as the ROOM violently SHAKES during a minor earthquake. Mercer and Sarah struggle to maintain their footing.

MERCER

What the hell-

SARAH

Earthquake?

MERCER

In North Dakota?

The RUMBLING intensifies. The radio cuts out-

Sarah taps at her smart-watch. The hologram displays a globe with red blinking dots expanding across every major city on the continent.

SARAH

In North America...

Mercer's eyes go wide, and they share a look of deep concern.

INT. PHANTOM'S SECURE CHAMBER - NIGHT

The Phantom commands attention. Around him, the faces of high-ranking COALITION MEMBERS are displayed. The Nexus Disruptor glows ominously in front of him.

THE PHANTOM

What you just witnessed was not an illusion. It's a revolution in warfare.

(beat)

Western tyranny is at an end. A new era is upon us. It's time to reclaim this world for our own.

The room fills with complex EMOTIONS.

THE PHANTOM (CONT'D)

To ensure its use is wielded correctly, the Nexus Disruptor will be awarded to the one who values it most.

The COALITION MEMBERS exchange glances - a boiling pot of tension, anticipation, and trepidation.

THE PHANTOM (CONT'D)

You may start the bidding, now.

The Phantom's display cuts out, and is replaced with an encrypted private auction interface.

INT. SECURE FACILITY - DAY

Sarah leads Mercer into a high-tech briefing room.

SARAH

John, meet the team.

One by one, the TEAM MEMBERS turn around to study their new leader. First is MISHA who carries the scars of a seasoned warrior, ETHAN, with a clean-shaven head and a steely gaze, and finally, RAVEN, with her shaved head and intelligent eyes.

John nods to the group.

Sarah casually leans against the room's massive holographic display table.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Each one of them is the best in their field.

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

Misha is our demolitions expert, Ethan handles engineering, and Raven... well, let's just say there's no system she can't infiltrate.

SLICK

What, you go with Raven, but I'm stuck with my Christian name?

SARAH

Ethan is Hebrew origin.

SLICK

So was Christ.

The team groans with laughter.

SARAH

Knock it off, Slick. We've got work to do.

SLICK

I love work. Let's do it.

Mercer studies the team, taking a moment to assess each of them, then nods in agreement.

EXT. SURVEILLANCE FACILITY - NIGHT

The team's BLACK SUV pulls up to the heavily fortified surveillance facility.

MERCER

(VO)

To locate the Disruptor's activation point, we must access various global networks.

Misha stocks up on his gear and makes his way toward the facility, passing by security lasers as if they were mere disruptions. The other members of the team unload the rest of their gear from the vehicle.

MERCER (CONT'D)

(VO)

Our first step is to disarm certain firewalls, but we have to be discrete.

MISHA

Do not worry, Mercer. By end of
this night, they will not even know
we were here.

Misha disappears into the shadows towards the facility. The team waits in anticipation as the night engulfs them in its darkness.

Through thermal night vision goggles, Misha surveys the high-tech surveillance facility ahead, his face a grim mask of determination.

MISHA (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Too many security, da?

Mikhail approaches the facility, his hands busy preparing a compact device that sparkles with a menacing energy.

MISHA (CONT'D)

Shluha vokzal'naja...

With a swift motion, he throws the device. An EXPLOSION lights up the night, cameras and drones frying in an electric firestorm, the surveillance facility now an inferno.

Mikhail watches the destruction, his expression one of grim satisfaction.

Back at the vehicle, the elite team feel the ground shake underneath them, reacting with stunned silence as the facility is consumed in raging flames. The blare of distant alarms begin filling the night.

Suddenly, floodlights snap on, casting long shadows and illuminating the team. They've been spotted. Security personnel start pouring out from different exits, weapons drawn.

MERCER

(Pre-lap)

Dammit, Misha! You just lit up a
beacon for every security force in
the Eastern hemisphere!

INT. TEAM'S SECURE HIDEOUT - NIGHT

MISSION Chaos is unfolding on TV screen. MERCER intently watches the live feed, his fists balling up with frustration and anger.

MISHA

Back in Spetsnaz, we call this
smoke screen.

RAVEN hunches over a computer. A flurry of code and symbols
fill the screen.

RAVEN

As reckless as it was, Mikhail
destabilized enough networks for me
to sink my claws in.

She taps a few swift touches onto the tablet and a map pops
up on screen.

RAVEN (CONT'D)

I managed to geo-locate the source.
This could be a game changer.

Mikhail raises his arms, sweaty and arrogant. He's still high
on adrenaline.

MISHA

That was a blast!

MERCER

This is not a game, Mikhail! You're
reckless. That's a liability I will
not tolerate.

His smirk fades, replaced by a sober frown.

MISHA

Going to dishonorably discharge me?

MERCER

If you threaten the safety of my
team, I'll kill you myself.

Mercer stares into Misha's soul, and barges out. Misha
glances at the rest of the team, and the live chaos on TV,
the gravity of his actions sinking in.