

FIGHT & ACTION SCENE SAMPLES
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PATIENT ZERO

Chapter Three

(Flashback action scene)

Bucket-head sat beside me in the back and the other two sat up front, the coverman driving the big government Crown Vic. For all the conversation going on the others might have been mimes. The air conditioner was turned up and the radio was turned off. Exciting.

“I hope we’re not going all the way the hell back to Baltimore.” That was more than a three-hour ride and I had sand in my shorts.

“No.” That was the only word Bucket-head said on the ride. I settled back to wait.

I could tell that he was a leftie from the bulge his shoulder rig made. He kept me on his right side, which meant that his coat flap would impede me grabbing his piece and he could use his right hand as a block to fend me off while he drew. It was professional and well thought out. I’d have done almost the same thing. What I wouldn’t have done, though, was hold onto the leather hand strap by the door like he was doing. It was the second small mistake he made and I had to wonder if he was testing me or whether there was a little gap between his training and his instincts.

I settled back and tried to understand this pick-up. If this had something to do with the action last week on the docks, if I was somehow in trouble for something related to that, then I sure as hell planned to lawyer up when we got wherever we were going. And I wanted a union rep there, too. No way this was SOP. Unless it was some Homeland thing, in which case I’d lawyer up *and* call my congressman. That warehouse thing was righteous and I wasn’t going to let anyone say different.

For the last eighteen months I’d been attached to one of those interjurisdictional taskforces that have popped up everywhere post 9/11. A few of us from Baltimore PD, some Philly and DC guys, and a mixed bag of Feds: FBI, NSA, ATF, and a few letter combinations I hadn’t seen before. Nobody really doing much but everyone wanting a finger in the pie in case something juicy happened, and by juicy I mean career beneficial.

I kind of got drafted into it. Ever since I’d gotten my gold shield a few years ago I’d been lucky enough to close a higher-than-average number of cases, including two that had loose ties to suspected terrorist organizations. I also had four years in the Army and I know a little bit of Arabic and some Farsi. I know a little bit of a lot of languages. Languages were easy for me, and that made me a first round draft pick for the surveillance van. Most of the people we wiretapped jumped back and forth between English and a variety of Middle Eastern languages.

The Taskforce seemed like it would be pretty cool but the reality of it was that they put me on wiretap in a van and for most of the last year and a half I drank too much Dunkin Donuts coffee and felt my ass grow flat.

Supposedly a group of suspected low-level terrorists with tenuous links to fundamentalist Shias were planning on smuggling something in that we were told was a potential bio-weapon. No details provided, of course, which makes surveillance a bitch

and largely a waste of time. When we (meaning us cops) tried to ask them (meaning the big shots from Homeland) what we were looking for, we were stonewalled. Need to know basis. That sort of thing tells you everything about why we're not all that safe. Truth is that if they tell us then we might play too significant a role in the arrest, which means they get less credit. It's what got us into trouble with 9/11, and as far as I can tell it really hasn't gotten much better since.

Then this past Monday I caught a little back and forth from a cell phone we were spooking. One name popped up--a Yemen national named El Mujahid, who was a pretty big fish in the terrorist pond and was on Homeland's must have list--and the guy talking about him spoke as if El Mujahid was somehow involved in whatever the crew in the warehouse were cooking. El Mujahid's name was on all of the DHS lists and in that van I had nothing to do but read, so I'd read those lists over and over.

Because I rang the bell I got to play when the takedown was scheduled for Tuesday morning. Thirty of us in black BDUs with Kevlar body and limb pads, helmet-cams and full SWAT kit. The whole unit was split into four-man teams: two guys with MP5s, a point-man with a ballistic shield and a Glock .40, and one guy with a Remington 870 pump. I was the shotgun guy on my team and we hit this portside warehouse hard and fast, coming in every door and window in the place. Flash-bangs, snipers on the surrounding buildings, multiple entry-points, and a whole lot of yelling. Domestic shock and awe, and the idea is to startle and over-power so that everyone inside would be too dazed and confused to offer violent resistance. Last thing anyone wanted was an O. K. Corral.

My team had the back door, the one that led out to a small boat dock. There was a tidy little Cigarette boat there. Not new, but sweet. While we waited for the go/no-go, the guy next to me --my buddy Jerry Spencer from DCPD- kept looking at the boat. I bent close and hummed the *Miami Vice* theme and he grinned. He was about to retire and that boat probably looked like a ticket to paradise.

The 'go' came down and everything suddenly got loud and fast. We blew the steel deadbolt on the back door and went in, yelling for everyone to freeze, to lay down their weapons. I've been on maybe fifteen, eighteen of these things in my time with Baltimore PD and only twice was anyone stupid enough to draw a gun on us. Cops don't hotdog it and generally neither do the bad guys. It's not about who has the biggest balls, it's about overwhelming force so that no shots are ever fired. I remember when I went through the tac-team training the commander had a quote from the movie *Silverado* made into a plaque and hung up in the training hall: "I don't want to kill you and you don't want to be dead." I think Danny Glover said that. That's pretty much the motto.

So, usually the bad guys stand around looking freaked out and everyone bleats about how innocent they are, yada yada.

This wasn't one of those times.

Jerry, who was the oldest man on the Taskforce, was point-man and I was right behind him with two guys at my back when we kicked the door, hustled down a short corridor lined with framed inspection certificates, and then broke left into a big conference room. Big oak table with at least a dozen laptops on it. Just inside the door was a big blue phone booth-sized container standing against the wall. Eight guys in business suits seated around the table.

"Freeze!" I yelled. "Put your hands above your heads and---"

That was as far as I got because all eight guys suddenly threw themselves out of their chairs and pulled guns. O.K. Corral, no doubt about it.

When IAD asked me to recollect how many shots I fired and who exactly I fired them at, I laughed. Twelve guys in a room and everyone's shooting. If they're not dressed like your buddies--and you can, to a reasonable degree of certainty determine that they're not civilian bystanders—you shoot and duck for cover. I fired the Remington dry then dropped it so I could pull my Glock. I know the .40 is standard but I've always found the .45 to be more persuasive.

They say I dropped four hostiles. I don't notch my gun, so I'll take their word for it. I bring it up, though, because one of them was the *thirteenth* man in the room.

Yeah, I know I said that there were eight of them and four of us, but during the firefight I caught movement to my right and saw the door to the big blue case hanging loose, its lock ripped up by gunfire. The door swung open and a man staggered out. He wasn't armed so I didn't fire on him; instead I concentrated on the guy behind him who was tearing up the room with a QBZ-95 Chinese Assault Rifle, something I'd only ever seen in magazines. Why he had it and where the hell he found ammunition for it I never did find out, but those rounds punched a line of holes right through Jerry's shield and he went down.

“Son of a bitch!” I yelled and put two in the shooter's chest.

Then this other guy, the thirteenth guy, comes crashing right into me. Even with all that was going on I thought ‘Drug addict.’ He was pale and sweaty, stank like raw sewage and had a glazed bug-eyed stare. Sick bastard even tried to bite me, but the Kevlar pads on my sleeve saved my gun arm.

“Get off!” I screamed and gave him an overhand left that should have dropped him, but all it did was shake him loose; he blundered past me toward one of the other guys on my team who was blocking the door. I figured he was making for that sweet Cigarette outside, so I pivoted and parked two in his back, quick and easy. Blood sprayed the walls and he hit the deck and skidded five feet before coming to rest in a motionless sprawl against the back door. I spun back into the room and laid down cover fire so I could pull Jerry behind the table. He was still breathing. The rest of my team kept chopping the whole room up with automatic fire.

I heard gunfire coming from a different part of the warehouse and peeled off from the pack to see what was happening, found a trio of hostiles in a nice shooting-blind laying down a lot of fire at one of the other teams. I popped a few of them with the last couple of rounds in my mag and dealt with the third hand-to-hand and suddenly the whole thing was over.

In the end, eleven alleged terrorists were shot, six fatally including the cowboy with the Chinese assault rifle guy and the biter I nailed in the back—who, according to his ID was named Javad Mustapha. We'd just started going through ID's when a bunch of Federal types in unmarked black fatigues came in and stole the show, kicking everyone else out onto the street. That was okay with me. I wanted to check on Jerry. Turned out that none of our team was killed, though eight of them needed treatment, mostly for broken ribs. Kevlar stops bullets but it can't stop foot-pounds of impact. Jerry had a cracked sternum and was one hurting pup. The EMTs had him on a gurney, but he was awake enough to wave me over before they took him away.

“How you feeling, dude?” I asked, squatting next to him.

“Old and sore. But tell you what...steal me that Cigarette boat and I'll be feeling young and spry.”

“Sounds like a plan. I'll get right on that, pops.”

He ticked his chin toward my arm. “Hey, how's your arm? The EMT said that fruitcake bit you.”

“Nah, didn't even break the skin.” I showed him. Just a bad bruise.

They took Jerry away and I started answering questions, some of them for the Feds in the unmarked BDUs. Javad hadn't been armed and I'd drilled him in the back so there would be a routine investigation, but my lieutenant told me it was a no-brainer. That was Tuesday morning and this was Saturday morning. So why was I in a car with three Feds?

They weren't talking.

So, I sat back and waited.

PATIENT ZERO

Chapter Twenty-six

(fighting multiple attackers)

I stood by the door and looked them over. My nerves were still jangling from seeing that gun against Rudy's head and I don't know whether I believed Church would have killed him or not. I felt like there was this gigantic Big Ben-sized clock ticking right over my head.

The room was mostly bare except for a few folding chairs and a card table on which was an open case of bottled water, a tray of sandwich meats and cheeses and an opened loaf of white bread. Apparently the DMS budget didn't extend to decent catering.

The guy closest to me, standing to my left, was maybe six-feet but he must have been two-forty and all of it was in his chest and shoulders; his face had a vaguely simian cast to it. Next to Ape-Man was a taller, leaner guy with a beaky nose and a long scar that ran from hairline, through his right eyebrow and halfway down his cheek. Opposite Scarface was a black guy who looked like every Army top sergeant you ever saw: buzz cut, a boxer's broken nose and a lantern jaw. Behind Sgt. Rock was a red-haired kid in his early twenties who had a jovial face. In fact he was the only guy smiling in the room. To the Joker's right was a real moose of a guy, easily six-six, with ropey muscles and heavily scarred hands. Jolly Green Giant was the first to speak.

“Looks like we got another candidate.”

I walked into the center of the group.

Scarface grunted. “Make yourself comfortable. We've been in here for almost three hours trying to sort out which one of us should head this team.”

“Really,” I said and kicked him in the balls.

He let out a thin whistling shriek of pain that I ignored as I grabbed the shoulder of his windbreaker and jerked him hard and fast so that he collided with Ape-Man and they both went down.

I spun off of that and stomped down on the Joker's foot and then pivoted to bring the same foot up again, heel first into his nuts. He didn't scream, but he hissed real loud;

and I nailed Sgt. Rock with a palm-shot to the chest that sent him sprawling onto the food table, which collapsed under him.

That left Jolly Green Giant standing and he gaped at me in shock for maybe a half-second before he started to swing; but that was a half-second too long, and I darted forward and drove the extended secondary index-finger knuckle of my right hand into his left sinus, right next to his nose, giving it a fast counter-clockwise twist on impact. He went back like he'd taken a .45 round in the face.

I pivoted again to see Ape-Man pushing his way out from under Scarface but he was only halfway to his feet and I swept his supporting leg out from under him and he fell hard on his tailbone, almost –but not quite- catching himself by planting his hand flat on the ground. I stamped on his outstretched fingers and then chop-kicked him in the chest before spinning off to face Sgt. Rock –who had come up off the collapsed card table with an impressive display of rubbery agility.

The other four guys were down and it was just him and me.

He held his hands up and I knew that I wouldn't be able to sucker him again, but then he smiled and turned his karate guard into a palms-out. Not a surrender so much as an acknowledgement of set and match.

I gave him a nod and stepped back, and edged away from the other four. Two of them were down for the count. Jolly Green Giant was sitting in the corner holding his face; if he had any kind of sinus issues that punch I gave him would likely become a migraine. Scarface was lying on the floor in a fetal position, hands cupped around his balls, groaning. The Joker was getting to his feet, but he had no fight left in him. Ape-Man was sitting against a wall trying to suck in a breath.

I heard the door click open and I stepped to one side as I turned, outside of everyone's reach. Church and Courtland came in. He was smiling, she wasn't.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "I want you to meet Joe Ledger, the DMS' new team leader. Any questions?"

THE DRAGON FACTORY (Book 2 of the Joe Ledger Series)

CHAPTER FIVE

(Multiple Attackers running fight)

The NSA guys had split into four teams, taking the corners of a big box with Helen's grave as the center point. Not imaginative, but not bad. I made sure they saw me checking them out, which in turn made them front me a bit more. They stood tall and tried to look tough as nails from where they stood. Believe me, I was impressed.

Even so, I play a pretty good hand of poker and the game's as much about what's on your face as what's in your hand. I got up and as I walked toward Agent Andrews I let my shoulders sag a bit and deflated my chest so that I looked a good deal smaller than I was. He'd already seen me up close, but there's a lot to be said for second impressions. Along the way I took a couple of sips from the water bottle.

"Are you ready to come with us, Captain Ledger?" he asked.

"Still waiting on a 'why' or a warrant."

Andrews's face was harder and I guessed he'd been in contact with his seniors. "Sir, we're here by Executive Order on a matter of National Security. We are not required to explain ourselves at this time." Andrews's partner shifted a bit to the right; I guess he wanted to show me how big his chest was.

I made a show of surprise at this pronouncement, stopping the water bottle halfway to my mouth and looking over the rim at Andrews. “You’re saying that the President himself ordered this pick-up?”

Andrews didn’t blink. “Our orders come directly from the White House.”

He was being cute, which told me that he knew about the Vice President’s little maneuver. He was being very careful in how he phrased things.

“Okay,” I said as I took a sip.

Andrews blinked, surprised.

I spit a mouthful of water into his eyes, then threw the bottle at the other guy –not that it would hurt him, but it made him flinch and evade. Before they could recover I was on them. I grabbed Andrews by the hair and one lapel and pivoted him around into a foot-sweep that caught him on the shin. My foot acted like a fulcrum and with his mass and the force of my spin he came right off the ground like he weighed nothing. I threw him into the second agent’s big flat chest and the two of them went down in a heap. I heard a huge *whoof!* and a cry of pain as the second guy fell with all of Andrews’s mass atop him. Andrews was no lightweight.

I wasted no time and sprinted for the parked cars. I had my Rapid-Response folding knife in my hip pocket and with a loose wrist-flick the blade locked into place. I ran past Andrews’s Crown Vic and did a quick jab job on one tire, and then knifed the tire of a second government sedan. But before I could run back to my Explorer, the Nose and the Surfer cut me off. Nose could run like a son of a bitch and he reached me eight strides before his backup. Dumbass.

When he was three steps out I pocketed my knife and jagged out of my line of escape to drive right at him. He had a lot of mass in motion; he was coming in to sack the quarterback and he’d built up such a head of steam that there was no way for him to sidestep. I jerked left and clotheslined him with a stiffened right forearm across the base of the nose. There’s an urban myth that hitting the base of the nose can drive bone fragments up into the brain—even some karate instructors insist it’s true, but it’s not physiologically possible. However a smashed nose, especially at high speed, can give whiplash, fill the Eustachian tubes with blood, set off fireworks in the eyes, and generally make you feel like your head’s in a drum and a crazy ape’s beating on it with a stick.

The Nose flipped backward like someone pulled the rug out from under him and he was out cold before he hit the deck. He’d need a lot of work on that nose of his, but he should never have put his hand on me. Not ever, and especially not here at Helen’s grave. I take that shit very personally.

As he fell the Surfer closed in at a dead run and he made a grab for his gun, but I pulled mine and pointed it at him. He skidded to a stop.

“Pull it with two fingers and throw it away,” I ordered. “Do it now!”

He did it. Four other agents were closing on us, the closest nearly fifty yards out. I kicked the Surfer in the nuts then knotted my fingers in his short hair and used him as a shield while I back-pedaled to my Explorer.

I spun Surfer-boy around and gave a palm shot across the chops that would put him in a neck brace for a week and as he crumpled I popped the lock on the Explorer and dove behind the wheel.

From the time I dropped my human shield to the moment I roared through the exit of the cemetery they had maybe six separate opportunities to take a good shot at my vehicle or me. They didn’t.

I found that very interesting.

The Surf Shop 24-Hour Cyber Café

The innocent and inexperienced often die because they are simply too shocked when violence sets into their lives. The possibility of violence is so foreign to the day to day reality of most people that even if they possess good reflexes there is no built-in protocol for how to react. So they hesitate, they stand and stare.

And they die.

In the split second before the smiling killers with the AK-47s opened up, Top hooked an arm around Caleb Sykes and was already in motion, halfway through a brutal diving tackle, when the bullets exploded the glass.

Bunny and I were also in motion. He was diving left, I was falling right and dragging Ghost with me. As we fell, Top, Bunny and I tore at our jackets, pulling them open, grabbing for our guns.

We are not the innocents; and when it comes to violence and killing we, sadly, are not inexperienced.

The thunder of gunfire was impossibly loud. The huge picture window broke with a sound like all of the glass in the world shattering at once. Bullets tore into wooden desks and exploded the hearts of laptop computers. Chunks of plaster leapt from the walls.

I hit and slid toward the wall and floor, shoving Ghost with me, and I tried to cram us into the woodwork. Debris rained down on us. The razor edges of glass slashed at my clothes and skin. I could feel the bite as splinters sliced me. Blood was hot on my face and limbs. Ghost yelped and whined.

Then I was firing.

Firing.

Firing.

My rounds punched holes in the clouds of gun smoke and flying wreckage. Outside, one of the grinning killers suddenly spun away, but any cry of pain was lost in the din. Blood splashed the other killer and there was a momentary pause as the second figure turned to watch his partner fall.

In that moment, Bunny put four rounds into his chest and face and blew him apart.

There was a second of silence that was so deafening I couldn't even hear the echoes of the gunfire. My head felt like it was inside a drum. Ghost scrambled out from under me, his coat glittering with glass splinters, teeth bared in a snarl of pure rage.

Then someone else opened up on us.

Heavy caliber automatic fire, but muted. Distant. Bullets struck the front door, which disintegrated into meaningless fragments. The CLOSED sign was whipped around and seemed to dissolve into confetti as it was struck over and over again. I saw Bunny, who had begun to rise from the floor, suddenly jerk backward and fall as bullets struck him as other shooters opened up from across the street.

"Ghost –down!" I snapped, and I had to repeat the order to break through his shock and anger. Then he flattened to the floor, out of range of the bullets.

I dropped my magazine, fished for a new one and slapped it in place, praying that Bunny wasn't dead. In that heartbeat of time it took to swap out the mags I cut a look across the room and saw Top and the kid, Sykes, lying under a blanket of silver and red debris. Silver from the glass, red from blood that ran from dozens of wounds in each of them.

"Green Giant!" called Top, using Bunny's combat callsign. There was fear and desperation in Top's voice.

Bunny didn't answer. I raised my weapon and began firing.

Bullets chopped into the frame around the window, but there was enough of it left to give me a bit of protection. Enough so that I could stand and return fire.

They had assault rifles and they capped off a lot of rounds, but it was wild, the bullets sawing back and forth. They were hosing the place but not really aiming. I found the pattern of their gunfire and took my moment, leaned around the bullet pocked wall, and fired with every ounce of skill and precision that I've learned as a Ranger, a cop and a special operator. One of the guns went instantly silent.

But there were four more shooters.

They were arrogant because they thought we were nothing.

They walked toward the front of the store in a loose line, firing, dropping spent magazines onto the blacktop, reloading, firing.

Then I sensed movement behind me and Top was on his feet, cutting low and forward to take cover behind the other side of the ruined window frame. He carried a Glock 34 with a nineteen-round extended magazine. I swapped out my magazine again and gave Top a nod. Then we emptied our magazines into the four men. They had the numbers and the better weapons.

We had the skill.

Even as their bullets continued to chew at our protection, we aimed with precision, forcing down the panic, keeping our heads in the moment, letting all of our training carry us through the insanity. We conserved our ammunition, picked our targets, and killed them. Their bodies juddered and danced, blood erupting from terrible wounds. The slide on my gun locked back.

"I'm out," I said.

"Got this," said Top as he swapped in his last magazine.

But there was nothing left to do.

No one left to fight.

Outside the street was littered with the dead. Shell casings by the hundreds twinkled in the bright sunlight. Just as it gleamed from the bright blood that flowed out from beneath the bodies. A pall of gun smoke polluted the afternoon air of this quiet part of Brooklyn. In the distance I could see the heads and shoulders of people hiding behind bullet-riddled cars and benches.

Ghost staggered to his feet, furious for having no one to attack. He snarled and showed his fangs, but the only audience left was the dead.

With Ghost beside me, I stepped through the shattered window and scooped up a rifle that lay by the slack hand of one of the first two men I'd killed. I tore a magazine from his pocket, dropped the half-empty one and slapped the fresh one into place. The echo of thunder still hammered in my head.

Seven bodies collapsed in ugly heaps.

Smoke ghosts haunted the air above them and drifted between the store and the open doors of a now-empty white panel truck.

The first two shooters were on the pavement just outside the window. One lay in a twist, arms reaching toward the truck as if imploring for help that could never arrive. The other was splayed like a starfish.

All of the corpses were dressed in black hoodies.

All of them were young. Twenties. Late teens.

Kids.

Except for the smoke, nothing moved.

The only sound was the fading echo of death and the soft moans from Caleb Sykes.

Then I remembered Bunny and I wheeled around, but I saw Top helping him to his feet. There were two holes in Bunny's shirt, but the Kevlar had done its job. Even so, Bunny looked gray and sick and in pain. They stepped through the gaping window, fanning their gun barrels left and right, eyes tracking, looking for more targets.

But there was nothing.

This storm had raged and raged, but it now it had passed.

Slowly, almost reluctantly, we lowered our guns.

Far away was the promise of complications as sirens began to wail.

Top looked down at the shooter who lay dead at his feet, arms and legs splayed wide. With the sunglasses blown away, the revealed face was slack in death. It had been a pretty face. A woman's face.

Young. Asian.

"Mother Night?" murmured Top.

But I shook my head.

"I don't know."

Somewhere back inside the store my cell phone lay amid the debris, and I recalled the last text message I'd received. Nobody lives forever.

Maybe the woman on the ground wasn't Mother Night, but I was now absolutely certain who was sending me messages.

A police car rounded the corner at the end of the block and screamed its way toward us.