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## THE HAMMER FIVE

by

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## THE DAYS BEFORE

Sirens were all over, with the noise from the chanting crowds reaching all around the vast city. The chaos intensified as one got closer to the building which had hosted the hearing--the place Edison had unsuccessfully tried to clear his name.

Above the endless crowds of rowdy, chanting men and women, roared tens of police helicopters at low altitudes; keeping a bird's eye view on the protesters who carried posters that screamed their demands. Some of the 'cardboards' and 'metal' plates they carried read:

"EDISON MUST GO!"

"SICK AND TIRED OF CORPORATIONS!"

"ROBOTS TOO DANGEROUS FOR USE!"

“MONOPOLY ON MILITARY MUST END!”

On one of the streets closer to the building, hundreds of molotov bombs were flying across with trails of flames; exploding into huge fires close to the formations of anti-riot officers backing away. In the opposite direction, tear gas canisters flew from the officer's guns, spraying milky white, choking fumes all over as the crowds dispersed.

Through the back streets, several police squads were pursuing rioters on foot; crossing with each other as they cut through the narrow back paths, chasing them into the low cost flats, sprinting after them through the small supermarkets, and straight along the corridors.

On getting closer, some of the officers dived onto their 'targets', taking them down and wrestling with them--forcefully cuffing their hands behind their backs and forcing them on their feet.

On the same back streets, determined groups of rioters were also chasing the officers; grabbing them and forcefully snatching their weapons; stripping them of their protective clothing and beating the hell out of them.

Tires were burning on the main roads, warning shots being fired in the air to scare the crowds which persisted. More ambulances were pulling up all over as others were sped away; with paramedics attending to the casualties from both sides on the battle-torn streets

They were receiving officers with knives thrust into their chests, nursing teenagers whose limbs were broken, and carrying away the elderly who were suffocating from the tear gas.

Around the building itself, congested crowds were stressing the police line; struggling to push into the compound and get into the hearing. They had battled like that earlier in the year and successfully ended the rule of the exploitative corporations.

And this time, they would persist as well, until Edison and his company had fallen for good.

As the man himself walked out after the hearing session, the crowds intensified their efforts; causing the officers to cover him and wrestle to keep them back from the path--helping him make way towards the heavily guarded, black SUVs.

In terms of age, Edison was about sixty; a physically fit man who appeared deeply remorseful. On his head, was white hair which was well kempt, on his eyes clear glass spectacles, and on that day, he was dressed in a neat, two piece, black suit.

Towards him, the crowds continued to force their way; leaning into the path and forcing the sweating officers to draw their pistols--shooting close to their legs to scare them back--pushing Edison through the path, and into his vehicle, protecting his convoy as it drove him off.

#

"We cannot have these, machines, in our armies!" The congressman on the floor firmly stated as the members erupted; shouting and shutting each other down, vigorously discussing among themselves and dismissing each other.

"Order! Order!" The elderly speaker of the house tried to quiet them, as his voice drowned in the rising arguments which started to 'fade' as another congressman shot up and firmly spoke up.

"We cannot stop strengthening our forces because of an accident!" He stated; as about half of the members shouted in support--giving him an ear as he continued.

"We cannot have this as an excuse!" He added as the members rose again. "Did we stop using nuclear power because tragedies struck!" He questioned the congressman on the floor--as the members took the opportunity to once again rise against each other in total disagreement.

“Order in the house!” The speaker begged while violently striking the gavel close to breaking. “We would have order!” He continued to beg; as the members rose close to physical confrontation--threatening each other and cursing out loud.

Keenly and silently, The President watched as the chaos proceeded, supporting his head by the chin while sitting back on his chair. He was a serious, fairly slim man who had a strict, commanding look.

As the congressman on the floor swallowed a ball of saliva and took to the microphone ones again, the confrontations started to ‘fade’.

“Does anyone of you realize, that we are talking about armed machines that can operate themselves!” He asked them as they started again. “Dangerous robots, which have caused us the loss of thirty nine! Thirty nine innocent, young men and women who have served this country...” He proceeded through the rising chaos.

They were failing to agree on the ‘*Robotics Regulations Bill*’ - A document that sought to stop all advanced military robotics research and development--to stop their use in the armed forces, and to shut down the Armed Forces Robotics which was the biggest developer.

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The white double doors leading into the noisy room opened outwards; with the two, serious young men in blue, official military uniforms saluting as the president walked out fast. With the president, was a group of advisors and officials walking at his pace.

To his immediate left, was a tall, older, physically strong man in a highly decorated, official military uniform; holding his cap under his arm as he walked with his commander in chief.

A step behind to the president's left was a "suited", attractive lady carrying piles of files--rushing her steps to keep up with the pace in her heels.

"With all due respect sir we cannot shut down this program, no matter what happens!" The military officer stated.

"It's out, of my hands General, Congress can't even decide on what to do, give me a break!" The President requested.

"He's right sir, we cannot lose the program? We just cannot!" One of the advisors wearing round spectaclad insisted.

"It's not, my decision to make!"

"It will have to be sir, sooner or later." The General added, as the President stopped at a door and turned to face them.

"We will wait until the voting is done..."

"But sir..."

"Then and only then will we decide on what to do!" He insisted to the officer, who had tried to interrupt him,

"Am I clear?" He asked all of them,

"Absolutely sir!" Several of them responded.

#

Inside his mansion, Edison was alone as he had always been; standing by the big window and staring at the huge, relentless crowd chanting just outside his compound.

He looked weary, his body shaky; not knowing what to think or what to do as he stared. Everything was coming down too fast. Everything he had worked for.

Everything he had become--falling down on him with a weight that threatened to crash him.

What would he do? What would he become? Edison thought about these things and more, hating to have the thoughts in his head but they were there; sticking to his mind like a leach on flesh, scarring him as he pondered all over the idea of losing his company, losing everything he had struggled for decades to build.

The nightmare started a few days earlier, after a successful mission in which forty soldiers had rescued three hostages from a heavily guarded, terrorist base in northern Iran.

They had carried out the then classified operation in the cover of darkness with the help of a *Hammer-4*--a highly advanced, military robot built by Edison's company. And as they were heading into an airbase to rotate home, a strange, unexpected, 'mysterious error' had occurred and given the robot instruction to self destruct.

The Hammer-4 suddenly had blown itself up and killed thirty six of the forty soldiers, together with all the three rescued hostages.

Families of the deceased had come forward and openly blamed the deaths on Edison's company which was responsible for building the machines--a move that had drawn enormous public interest and support.

Following the events and the relentless public pressure, investigations and hearings had been carried out--determining that the robots were indeed a danger. And that though their service was invaluable, they posed a security risk--a conclusion that had forced members of congress to put forward a bill that sought to completely shut down all military robotics development and use--a move that would directly eliminate Edison's company.

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A single, old, cracked and dusty road connected the city into the endless, dryness; extending from the sparsely populated residential area, from which one could notice as the city's structures gradually grew into the extremely tall, sky crappers standing in what was a misty sky. It was Edison's home city. The place he had lived all his life.

Straight through the hot earth, the road cut its way, and about two miles along its course, there stood a lone gas station at its side.

Its metal frames and surfaces were eaten away by rust, its dusty fuel dispensers licking, with the cracked windows of the shop and the office fogged with sand.

The dusty shelves inside the station's shop were almost empty, facing the counter in front of which sat a grey haired fat man reading the day's paper through his spectacles. One mile below the ground under the man's feet, through the barren earth under the gas station, stood the state of the art, well lit facility--a strong, ten stories, concrete and steel structure.

Through the centre of the entire structure, ran a cylindrical space, at the bottom of which the initials *A.F.R* were painted together with the *logo* on the white-tile floor.

All around the cylindrical space, ran a network of black, polished steel stairs; which connected all the corridors on the ten floors to the ground floor. Cylindrical, tinted glass elevators also ran vertically on the sides of the open centre; connecting the various departments and sections inside the building which was The Armed Forces Robotics--Edison's personal creation.

The smell of cables, steel, and machinery was traceable in the constantly purified air; which was being smoothly fanned into the offices and corridors, through which men and women in white coats and *identification tags* over their necks were rushing about busily.

While moving through the steel walkways in the corridors of the sixth floor, one could see inside the various, busy *sections* through the glass walls: as the tens of technicians moved miles of coiled cables and mechanical parts on big, steel trolleys into one of the huge *Assembly Halls*.

Inside the *Assembly Halls* were rows and rows of assembly lines, which had complicated, advanced machinery with which keen 'nerds' worked on the various, insanely complex, robot parts.

In a restricted section somewhere on the sixth floor, was the *Testing Area*; a vast hall inside of which an army of technicians were putting seven hundred of the latest generation robots--*The Hammer-5s*--through their paces.

Each of the robots was about the height of a military truck, standing on their complicated 'limbs' in their designated spots across the hall as the technicians worked on them.

Their polished titanium frames were partially visible under their cream white, hardened steel 'covering'--with state of the art, black glass covering their Heads Up Displays (HUDs).

Firmly attached on their big, 'bodies', were all kinds of combat equipment and machinery--Everything from state of the art radar systems and radio jammers, to rocket pods and heavy machine gun cannons. They were complicated machines that looked both beautiful and very deadly, each with the name *Hammer-5* and the armed forces robotics *logo* clearly inscribed on the same spot on their right limbs.

Across the hall's floor, ran hundreds of cables, connecting the robots to the many huge, super computers inside the *Testing Control Room*, which was separated from the hall by a glass wall. And inside the *control room*, was another team of up to fifty technicians--who were very keen on their monitors as they repeatedly tested the software running the machines.



At one of the robots, a slim bodied scientist in plain glass spectacles and an unbuttoned lab coat was standing on a stool. Very carefully attaching small welds to a circuit board at the robot's, open 'head side' by the use of a small, welding tool.

In general appearance, he appeared 'humble', with short yellow hair on his head, and wide, almost flat shoulders connecting to his neck. Down to his left side close to the same robot's lower limb, was a technician by the name of Briton, who was re-wiring another complex circuit using the same type of welding tool. Taller than his colleague, Briton was a younger technician who wore black-framed spectacles.

Through its flickering, black tinted Heads Up Display (HUD), the robot attempted to scan their faces and everything else around them; it's HUD becoming clearer as the scientists continued to weld, and finally settling into a crisp, high definition, detailed display.

It ran quick scans of everything on its line of sight; including the scientist's identification tag--"Dr. Stephens" it displayed - a man who was about forty years old but looked a little younger.

"What do you think happened?" Briton asked Stephens while working.

"Had to be the circuit boards." Stephens relied, "Must have..." He paused his answer as he was carefully split a wire from the circuit board, "... sent some kind of charge into the control matrix." He completed after splitting the wire, "Which got an overload, and initiated self destruct, somehow."

"Maybe it was the software?" Briton suggested, "Either way, how could something like that just happen?" He wondered as he paused, "I mean, there's like, ten, hard wired reasons for a robot to do that? How does it just blow up without any one of them?" He wondered.

"Well, there's no way to find out now, the damn thing's wreckage." Stephens stated as he continued to work, with Briton thinking about it.

“Could it be DoD?” He asked cautiously after a while.

“Why would they do that?” Stephens asked him back while working.

“I don’t know, just came to me. Still can’t believe they’re going it all down.”

“We don’t know that yet.” Stephens reminded him.

“You really think so?” Briton continued, as Stephens paused and looked down at him,

“Look, we work until the last minute, until they tell us we got to stop.” He told Briton and then turned back to work, “That’s all I know.” He finished his answer as Briton shrugged and joined him.

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By mid-morning the next day, the voting on the bill was coming to a close. And having passed in the House of Representatives earlier that morning, it was now up to the senate. All over the streets outside, the citizens were following the proceedings on the big city screens; keen on the process that had to meet their expectations, failure to which they were more than willing to riot again.

Minutes later, the last vote was cast and the counting began; with a silence sweeping the streets as the speaker of the senate took to the microphone.

“Total votes cast, were one hundred.” He paused for some time, “Forty eight voted nay-,” most of senators and the crowds in the streets supportively affirming as he proceeded, “-and fifty two voted aye, the bill, passes.” He concluded.

By that evening, the president had signed it into law and it was all over; no more military robotics development. No more Armed Forced Robotics and by extension, no more Edison.

#

Helplessly, Edison walked slowly all over his large living room; almost breaking down in tears as his head started to ache. He could not bear the news; and in his mind, all that crossed was his falling. He had risen only to fall, committed decades of sleepless nights in back breaking work for it to end by some vote in a single day.

He hated it; hating his situation as he felt the feelings of frustration and rejection come back into his conscience. Feeling awful as they spread all through his nerves and consume him ones again.

Almost instantly, it all started to come back to him. What he had battled to prove wrong and escape had finally caught up with him. And in that moment, he became sure that it was true; what his father had constantly told him, it had been true all the while.

It was true when the pressures of life took his mother's life by her own hand, when he was constantly rejected and abused by his peers throughout his school days, and when he got fired three times from the robotics firms he had begged to work for; living on charity before finding his footing and through a tough mental struggle, started his own company - Armed Forces Robotics. It was all true.

"You will never amount to anything you fool! And no one will truly care about you!" His father had repeatedly insisted to him from the time he was five, swearing while whipping him with their VCR's AV cables.

"No matter where you run, no matter what you achieve, no matter who you become, you will never, ever, be worthy, you hear me? You will remain the biggest mistake life has ever made, and no one will ever care for you." He had repeatedly crashed him with words all through his early years, sometimes slapping him around while forcing him to affirm them to himself.

And so that night in that dark room, Edison sat on the sofa with eyes red with tears; holding a glass of wine as he stared at the wood cracking up into the warming flames which rose into the chimney.

Deeply, he thought to himself; playing the events of his life as he hated them. Hating the fact that everyone else had rejoiced upon his suffering; and that somehow, the world around him always seemed better whenever he was in pain.

Enough, Edison finally decided. Enough with trying to make himself acceptable; enough of trying to hold on and watch as 'everyone else' celebrated and rejoiced his suffering. Deciding that 'they' had taken enough from him and perhaps, it was time that he took something back. It was time he hurt 'them' like 'they' had hurt him. That it was time he made 'them' realize that he too was a person; that he showed them who he truly was - a force more powerful than they could ever imagine.

The next morning, Edison was found dead on his sofa; with the postmortem indicating that a strange kind of poison had caused him to suffocate, something he had consumed in the wine he had served himself.

By the evening of the day, almost everyone had forgotten the news of his passing. He was a secretive man without a family and there was not much about him the public cared to know, except the fact that his now unwanted creations had taken thirty nine innocent lives which he paid with his own.

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Inside the clean, cold, Indian themed building was a faint smell of ash in the air; a building inside of which Edison's executors followed his reed casket as it made its way towards the lower, warmer, wider room.

Gently, the Indian attendants shut the thick doors behind as his casket was eased into the chamber. And when all was ready, all of them witnessed quietly as the box went up in flames, marking the end of Edison, at least for that moment in time.

#

## *K.I.A*

The orange, evening sun was fading over the few clouds, above which the giant, four-engine C-19 military plane was swiftly 'dropping' in altitude. Inside its bay was a special team of five soldiers was; members of a detachment that was part the 5th group of the Army's Special Forces Airborne, calling themselves '*The Brothers of Mercy*'.

Their heads were covered with black beanies; dressed in black, tight, thick fabric, short sleeved t-shirts, on top of which they were strapping heavily loaded, black utility vests - which matched their loaded, black utility trousers.

The Team Sergeant was a Master Sergeant (MSG) by the name of Simon, about thirty seven in age; a physically strong, serious, "hard" looking man who had a goatee, and back flowing hair which reached his neck.

His special team included: Sergeant First Class Smoky, an equally strong, serious man about thirty five in age who was gearing up behind him. Smoky was the team's weapons sergeant, who had a tattoo of a military knife on the left side of his neck.

Behind Simon on Smoky's side, was a thirty three year old Staff Sergeant by the name of Samson; who was the team's communications sergeant, standing next to a strong, bearded Staff Sergeant by the name of Rusty who was the medical sergeant. He was about thirty three, and also gearing up next to him, was his assistant Sergeant First Class Dante; who was a young soldier about twenty five in age.

After loading up, the soldiers quickly set the timers on their big, circular wrist watches, after which they picked up their enormous, black, bags--strapping on their backs as one of the pilots opened the bay door.

"Seven thousand feet and dropping! Go! Go! Go!" He instructed as the soldiers dived out the airplane in quick succession--spreading their arms and legs as they gracefully fell through the thin air in formation.

Quickly and smoothly, they 'fell' through the clouds; emerging under them and dropping through the clear air. And as they fell, a brown, hilly landscape gradually came into view very far beneath them; and from the altitude, they could make out the village with mud houses congested on top of a highly uneven, hilly terrain close to a small waterfall.

'Three thousand feet'--Their watches beeped at them; after which they deployed their parachutes and slowed and controlled their descent towards what was a depression just next to the village.

To arrest their momentum, the soldiers ran for a few meters as their boots hit the ground; before stopping and quickly disconnecting the parachute sections from the backpack sections of the bags--Folding and stashing them before rallying close to Simon at the edge of the depression.

From their bags, they pulled out the parts and assembled their heavy, automatic, personally customized riffles; loading up and cocking them, carrying their back packs and filling up all their pockets with ammunition.

"Command do you read? Over?" Simon whispered through his earpiece into the communication network (*Comm.*).

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“Copy that Team Sergeant, we read you loud and clear.” confirmed a strong, forty year old officer in a two star combat uniform--a Major General by the name of Rod Powers, who was personally supervising the operation from a busy control center inside MacDill Air force Base.

“We should have you on our satellite right about now!” He added, as the technicians ‘brought’ the high definition, well labeled satellite image of the area on the big screen--which helped the other monitors to light the otherwise dark room.

It showed positions of the team with that of the very many serious men in dresses and head wraps; who were mostly armed with customized, Hungarian AKM-63 assault rifles, and carrying RPG-2 rocket launchers on their backs. They were spreading out and taking ‘look out positions’ all over the village which was dead empty.

“Is that him?” The Major General asked - referring to the bushy haired man heading towards a big hut at the village centre. He had just exited a truck from which pairs of similarly dressed men were unloading weapon caskets and following him under the cover of darkness.

“Positive. Its him.” assured a female officer from her station.

“Team Sergeant be advised, we’ve got visual confirmation that Mr. Sharif himself is in the area. We’ve got heavily armed lookouts taking positions all over the village. You are cleared hot. Get in and find that weapon. Powers out!” He instructed; getting off the *comm.* and picking up a cup of coffee as he looked at the screen.

#

The highly uneven ground on which the village sat rose and fell very irregularly; with the many, empty mud houses almost following the pattern throughout the landscape.

On the rooftops, were the lookouts spreading apart; taking positions and establishing defense perimeters in what appeared to be lines--which intensified towards the centre of the village at which was the big hut housing Mr. Sharif.

Aiding them in the fast falling darkness, were the old and dim flood lights, which were tied to uneven posts spread all around the village; the same posts on which the speakers of the hand-cranked alarm were also tied while facing different directions.

At the outermost perimeter, were four of the lookouts almost evenly spaced on the rooftops; very seriously scanning the dark area as they started their watch.

One of them slowly walked towards the edge of the roof and stopped--seriously observing the darkness for any suspicious movements--and as he was slowly turning back around, Simon's strong, tattooed left hand quickly emerged from the dark and capped his mouth. As he sent his big, shiny knife right through his throat and pulled him down.

The second lookout at the other side was just turning around, away from the darkness while lighting a cigarette, when Smoky also capped his mouth and sent a knife through his chest--taking him out in the same fashion and pulling him down into the darkness.

The other two had moved around and were about five meters apart--watching the area keenly. One of them was closest to the edge, and as the other slowly turned and looked away, Dante's two hands holding a wire quickly emerged over his head; as he tightened the wire around his neck and choked him while pulling him off the roof top.

As his colleague quickly turned around and realized his fellow missing, a big knife flew in from the side and went straight through his throat; causing him to choke while collapsing towards a wooden roof of a small shed below. And just as he was falling, Rusty quickly sneaked out of the darkness and grabbed him--pulling him into the same darkness he had sneaked out off.



"Watch it Dante." Rusty advised through the comm.

"Rodger that." Dante replied; as they sneaked towards the second defense perimeter while still several meters apart.

"All right guys," Simon whispered through the *comm.*, "There's too many of them" He observed. "We'll have to make some noise. Patrols! Up ahead! Coming towards us!" He quickly noticed from his position at the side of the congested huts. "Take positions and pick targets." He instructed as they positioned themselves in the shadows; each of them aiming at one of the many foot patrols coming towards them while keenly checking the area.

"Smoky?" Simon called in a low tone.

"Ready." Smoky responded while still laying flat next to the wall of a hut, with his big gun aimed at the guard approaching him.

"Dante?"

"Standing by."

"Rusty?"

"Locked and loaded."

"Samson?"

"Just say the word."

All of them confirmed as they waited for the orders to execute the patrols.

"Get ready." Simon advised as the patrols got closer; keenly looking towards them but unable to make them out in the darkness.

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