

Life Quest

Journey to second Earth



PRONGS



Life Quest

STORY BY

PRONGS & PADFOOT

Delhi. September 2030. The country has been at war five years, the enemy coalition had finally launched their attack and World War III took millions of lives. The bombings were launched from thousands of miles away, missiles crossing the oceans trying to hit the major cities of the world. The planet was divided into two camps: The Eastern coalition formed by the India and most Asian countries, and the enemy coalition which contained several extremist groups. Which for so many years had tried to control the world. World leaders never measured the consequences of a war of this magnitude. The enemy groups had joined military arsenals and joining the socialist governments in South Asia, the military bases in the region had prepared for more than two years the deathly blow against the city of Mumbai. The same day from China were launched long-range missiles against major Asian capitals, to start this war, the president and commander in chief of the Indian forces ordered to respond the attack, even at the risk of knowing that the enemies were in possession of nuclear weapons that could have serious consequences for humanity. The fate of civilization was foreseen. The third world war could destroy the planet if unleashed an atomic attack. Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such weapons had not been created, these were two hundred times more powerful, if one of the two sides launched a nuclear warhead, the other group would respond in the same way.

The coalition of India and Asian countries had easily mastered the Pakistan's. The bases in the South Asian territory had not been a big problem for the India Marines, the bad news came when dosely guarded stockpiles were found in the Arab Sea. Six nudear warheads. If there were such weapons, it was the confirmation that the enemy had managed to manufacture these weapons. The whole world was on alert number 1.

The phone rang on my desk, I had been looking out the window of my office in the commanding headquarters in Delhi. Only days ago I had returned from the battle. The call came directly from the Ministry of Defense. I had to go to the president's as soon as possible.

I picked up some papers on my desk, put on my vest which displayed my medals of Brigadier, walked into the courtyard of the base. There a helicopter was waiting for me. A something in my gut told me that something serious was about to happen. I remained startled for the two hour journey.

The Ministry of Defense was quiet, the wide hallways were desolate. I was received by an infantry general named Gupta. Without a word and with a simple gesture of his right hand told me to follow him, leading me to a small elevator that would take us to the bunkers in the basements. I arrived at the office there was the president himself waiting, I noticed his tired face, in his eyes you could see the several days without sleep, was taking a toll on him. He had a white shirt with rolled sleeves to mid-arm, it seemed he had not changed in days. There were also several generals, all with the same face of

concern. I did not understand why I was cited to this high-level meeting when I all took with me was my vest with my medals on it. With a military salute one of them ordered me to sit. Behind the table a screen reflected a world map, with different colors where I could see the territories that we had won and small spaces that were still dominated by our enemies. The deep voice of General Singh, military and counterintelligence adviser to the president, began the concerned meeting.

- Gentlemen, you have all been summoned to this meeting to give you extremely classified information. Our intelligence agencies have sent us a report informing us that the commander of the enemy force is launching the first nuclear attack on Asia and the India second. We are doing everything possible to avoid this catastrophe, but have not yet located the exact point where these weapons are hidden. If this attack happens life on the planet is at risk of disappearing. Now they will be taken to a secret facility of the department of defense, I think it is worth mentioning that what you are about to see is of extreme secrecy. You could see the faces of concern and curiosity everyone sitting at oval table. No one dared to utter a word. The president was at the table with his hands covering his face, General Singh had to let him know twice that the meeting was over. We all left from the opposite end to which we had entered, another elevator, this time bigger, with access to a courtyard of the Ministry of Defense unknown. There, a twin-engine Agni-42 plane was waiting.

We flew several cities over Mizoram to enter the territory of Tripura. At this time of the year, the snow had covered part of the ground like a big white blanket on the ground. Inside the plane were fur coats to protect us from the cold. The pilot, a master in admiration, managed to land on a firm frozen lake. I was surprised when, poking my head outside, I saw many dogs and several sleds. The silence was still ruling the environment, in the president's face increased signs fatigue and worry. We spent exactly 48 minutes traveling by sleds. A man who led the group in front, never showed his face, one because of the heavy clothing he was wearing and another because it was an order not to be seen, he stopped between two hills, so high that their tops were visible.

I had my right hand on the gun on my waist. There was nothing there, just snow and rocks and I was afraid it was an attack, but suddenly a big rock started moving revealing a tunnel out of the same stone. Nobody mentioned a word, the huge stone closed behind us as we entered.

I lost count of how many times we went left or right. Obviously we were in a maze of which we had to pass several checkpoints, General Singh showed the identification he carried on his left hand, and the soldiers opened the doors to clear our path. We reached the end where a thick metal door step stopped us. This time the General raised his hand and placed it in a hole in the stone. Typed a secret code and the double door opened. An elevator swallowed us all. I felt a strange sensation as we descended, 3 minutes and 27 seconds-long journey to the depths, which by my calculations and my military experience told me that we were more than 500 meters below ground level. At the end of the fall, we stopped and the elevator opened. Another corridor between the stone, but this time shorter, until I walked through a door that led us to an office. As my eyes adjusted to the light that attacked us in that room, I could see clearly that there was only a round table with only eleven chairs, against these,

eleven refractive monitors all identical in the air, on the wall to my right another monitor, but of a larger dimension, on the left a duplicate of the world map I saw at the Ministry of Defense, with the same colors marking territories, the only difference about this one was ten points of the same size were scattered throughout the map. In front of me, a very dense brown curtain covered the entire wall. This time it was General Bhatia who broke the silence.

- We're here because it's time to reveal our plan against possible attacks from enemy forces. If that were to happen in the next 72 hours, if our enemies were to activate all they're nuclear warheads, which at least we think they have about ten, the planet would not survive, the air would be unbreathable, all our species would disappear. The destruction would be complete. Our allies also have similar facilities like this one and also share our plan. Gentlemen, it's time to introduce to you NIRMANA 394, our newest Noah's Ark. The brown curtain opened. Behind this, a glass let our eyes look into at a huge hangar the size of the spacecraft for which it was designed, it was a floating city. Our view was lost, we could not figure out where it began or ended, it was a masterpiece of science and technology, we were in it, around the, a gate on the side of the ship swallowed trucks, with what I assumed was necessary supplies. Finally, after so many hours I heard the voice of the President.

- We have gathered together the efforts of all the scientists in our Allied countries, including this one, now we have 3 ships, ready to take off into space. We conducted a selection process, as we cannot save all our citizens. We cannot, do not have time. We have chosen mainly young ones. I want to make it clear that the economic status for this selection was not a factor, our lists are of the best students of each university, divided into specialties. Also as many children as possible, prominent figures of art and literature, scientists, doctors, all have been medically checked in depth. We want you on this ship, out of this catastrophe, we need to save the best of our society and nation, let this group of Indian men and women rebuild the nation or otherwise, start at another destination.

We also have a section of the ship where we will save at least a couple of copies of each plant and animal species, genetic laboratories, are cloning the process and will be determining the power of each to regenerate, depending on the time delay. We also have workshops with the latest technology, the highest level hospitals, technical and scientific personnel. In other words, this ship, has everything you need. I realized the seriousness of the matter. What I did not fully understand was why they had chosen me, what role was I to play in all of this, I am a young man, I'm 26 years old, although I had reached several Brigadier status, 14 search and rescue missions even in the most difficult terrain, the military were my endorsement, but I knew nothing of outer space, although I am a pilot, I knew nothing about the spacecraft. An elderly man in a white coat, entered the room where we were. He only greeted the president and he introduced him as Dr. Shetty, the most experienced of all the scientists who worked on this project. The man took a remote control from the table and all monitors were lit, images began to appear in front of us, while the scientist spoke.

- The risk of those ten warheads exploding are of incalculable damage to our planet and that would be irreversible, all our species would disappear, and life as we know it, the decomposition of the atom as a weapon of war reduces everything on its path in a field of thousands of miles around, any point on the planet would not be safe, oceans would reach unimaginable temperatures, it would destroy the ozone

layer, the sun's ultraviolet rays would not have anything in their path to stop them, in realistic terms, it would cook the surface. If this happens, and this is the best of forecast, we could not make it back to Earth until at least 15 years have passed, this hoping that the impact would not move the planet out of its orbit. If this were to happen, the option of returning would be out of the question. Right now our elite group of astronomers are looking into the nearest galaxies, a planet where we can start life over and settle our culture. But so far, we have not found anything.

On the monitors, while this man talked, we saw three-dimensional images of what could happen. In front of my eyes I saw the whole planet blow off and the blue areas were disappearing. The man was about to leave, justifying that he should continue to work, he walked to the door, one of the generals who was at the table, asked a question that stopped the scientist on his course.

- Why did we allow our enemies to build these weapons? The white-coated man took a 180 degree turn, staring at the general and answered.

- The permit was given to them the day the first bomb was built - He turned around and left.

The monitors remained with the frozen images of the earth completely destroyed, we only listen to the commotion of trucks entering the ship when the rubber of their wheels touched the entrance of the vast spaceship, a sound I will never forget. General Singh, chief operating officer of NIRMANA 394's secret plan stood up, walked over to the glass window standing with his back of the window, stared at me, and began to give me orders which explained why I was there.

- Brigadier Jay, you have 20 hours to choose among your troops 100 of your best top qualified marines, preferably the ones that are not married, or do not have children, it's hard to say but we cannot afford more people on the ship. I understand this serious and painful situation that I'm putting you it, but you must understand that it is necessary. You were chosen to command the NIRMANA 394's security. In your experienced hands we have delegated the responsibility of caring for the stability and tranquility of civilians chosen to board the ship. We are all here. We are supplying you with the floor plans of all levels of NIRMANA 394, we rely on your sole discretion. You need to come back tomorrow at 17:00. The routine is the same. Outside is a plane that will take you back to your headquarters, make sure upon your return you bring with you your men. I stood up, and with a military salute, walked up to the door opposite where the scientist had left minutes earlier. I felt behind me the voice of the president when he called my name, with just a twist of my shoulders to face the table. I saw in the eyes of the man in the corner of the table, not the president of the nation, this time, I managed to see the human being. His voice was strong yet painful.

- May GOD bless you. My answer was simple. It's almost with my back to everyone, with the metal door opened hoping and about to leave with concerns of my own, I replied.

- May GOD bless India.

CHAPTER 2

I was back in my headquarters in Delhi. I asked my assistant not to bother me for a couple of hours. My conscience could not bear the weight of the responsibility that was given to me. At my desk, I had more than 500 records, each of them had I had commanded, all young brave Marines willing to give their lives for this great nation. How was I to choose only one hundred? I was sure that this was the most difficult mission I had ever served in, would have preferred that the order was to fly to the very heart of our enemies and stop the madness that was coming, but choosing one hundred of my men was putting to death all the others. I could not take anything to chance. I also understood the seriousness of

the matter, I just wanted to think for a moment that everything was just a nightmare, I wished that at some point the phone would ring with the news that an elite group of soldiers had found the command center of our enemies and destroyed the possibility of a disaster. But I'm a career soldier I must follow orders, I only had thirteen hours for return, exactly five to choose and take the flight to take me back to the maze where salvation was only for a few. I started by separating women from men, I thought, at least, if I chose the same number of each gender it would be partial, or at least even, years of experience have shown me that there are times when women have more value, not counting with the fact that they are much more determined and organized by nature, I managed to separate the first fifty on merit and missions accomplished, then twenty more for their youth and their dedication. Of the remaining records I should take twenty, I looked name by name, I checked every history, personal details, if they were married or not, they're medical records, so I reduced the list to choose just three, I had already chosen ninety-seven good soldiers. At that time, the office phone rang, it startled me. I prayed that it was the call I had imagined, but no it was the military hospital that warned that Rohan Shinde's wife had just given birth to a girl. The soldier had failed to be there, because he was on duty. Do not know how or why I did it, I have never failed to fulfill an order, but something inside me drove me to call my assistant asking her to call soldier Rohan and present himself to my office immediately. It took only five minutes when a very young man, short red hair, appeared at my door. Standing firm said.

- Excuse me Sir.

- Come in, Shinde, have a seat.

- I took off my beret for the first time in hours, and by standing in front of the soldier in a military fatherly tone I said:

- Soldier, I have for you a very important task, you must fulfill and a mission of utmost importance and cannot have the slightest error.

- Just give me your order sir, he said, the boy standing firm and taking his right hand to his forehead.

- Take a military vehicle with the utmost discretion and go to the military hospital, pick up your wife and daughter and come back here, soldier, you have two hours to fulfill this mission.

The gleam in the boy's eyes and smile was evident of the happiness that felt, when he tried to ask me why that mission, before he was even finished, I did not let him talk and in a stronger tone I said:

- Remember that you are a soldier of this nation and you fulfill orders without question, go now, have two hours.

I decided the best thing for me and my conscience would not to walk again through the courtyards of the barracks, I could not bear to leave those facilities with the memory of the looks and greetings from many guys that for years had served this nation under me, I felt nothing but cowardice, and I kicked myself for that, though I tried to find courage to do it, I could not, I closed the windows overlooking the patio and I was alone with my thoughts, people think that military people are strong and never cry, in those last two hours I showed the world they were wrong. That time had come, I

washed my face, put on my beret, I went straight to the plane, my assistant had everyone sitting in their seats, as I entered the plane, my eyes were looking for soldier Rohan, I found him in half way in the right row, I breathed easy, I gave the pilot orders to launch, from the window to my left I could see Lieutenant Brigadier Ford, whom had left me in command of the unit with detailed guidance. I closed my eyes and left all my remorse behind the tracks.

Once in the air I decided that it was best to talk to my soldiers on the mission entrusted to us, I worried about Rohan soldier girl, but it was the only chance I had to survive, to stay in the hospital was to be sentenced to death for Anyway, if enduring the trip to the cave-hangar would be more likely that millions of human beings. I stood up and came, holding, central plane.

- Marines, - I said out loud to draw attention of all - is it possible that a nuclear attack can occur within a few hours, you were selected among thousands of soldiers to protect the safety of what's most precious to our nation, never in the years that you have served may lead you to such delicate mission, we are going to a secret facility where we probably may never return, there will be thousands of civilians for which our mission is to care for. We will flying into outer space on a ship designed and prepared by the best scientists of our land, the plan is to remove the best of our youth from a nuclear risk, we must watch that on that ship no unpleasant altercations occur that may endanger the life of any of its crew. Here are 100 chosen within our unit, I expect from you the utmost discretion and the highest sense of duty. With that, a murmur was heard on the plane, but for only a few seconds, after that silence had reigned the four hour trip. We got to the point of landing.

The journey we had previously on sleds, was not feasible this time, because we needed to take equipment with us, we had to walk. Besides, someone could be watching from a satellite, the journey would be three hours away, as calculated by the guide that we expected. We were forbidden to use any communication equipment, long weapons should stay on the plane and returned to base, the guide handed out special coats for the 12 degrees below zero that were hitting our faces, we were given some instructions and started walking. Though he was the head of my platoon through the snow, from time to time he would do a visual inspection of all the men behind, especially soldier Rohan's wife and daughter, the youngest Indian marine

When we finally arrived at our meeting point at the secret passage, it was the guide this time who put his hand in the stone and gave it the "open sesame" the first part of the mission was accomplished and there I was on time with my 100 soldiers and ready to begin the second stage.

After going down the elevators in groups of twenty, I was taken by the guide, who never said his name, with all my trained guys to a room where I would be given instructions and drawings of the ship entered Through a side door, entered General Singh, followed by the president, was saluted in unison, the two men walked the line of marines, checking that everything was in order and looking into the eyes of each and every one, I was two steps away from them when they came to where soldier Rohan's wife

and newborn daughter were, the General turned around to ask me, but before he could even ask me, I responded, and said:

- It's my 100th soldier, sir - The President, who was to At the right of General Singh and in front of me, could not nothing more than laugh. We all laughed and the General gave the ok and reaching out in a hand shake congratulated me on the timely efficiency and quality of the chosen men. He asked me to follow him to his office where we would discuss here the strategy of the plan. My men were taken to a room where they would be using computers, given new larger caliber rifles for accuracy. A portable intercom mounted over their ears, which linked with each other and receive direct signal from the command post. New uniforms equipped with antiballistic. The mission would be explained in specific details and the responsibilities they had. The chain of command, learn the ships floor plans and learn to move within the ship. All civilians chosen to board the ship were all in military barracks prepared for this purpose, in a restricted area of the underground facilities. The second step of my mission was to lead them into groups and housing them in the ship's south-west side, where six floors were divided in shelters, we decided to separate the men from the women, and put them up on the upper floors, minors and a few elders who were each selected for their knowledge and experience, all great doctors, in different fields of science. Each floor would have military command post, with ten of my soldiers. In the south-east side of the ship were the workshops, machine rooms, areas for the protection of animal and forest, a huge fish like pond with different species of marine life, one with fresh water species.

And cloning laboratories that ensured food for all crew. In the north Eastern part of the ship were grocery stores, hangars with about sixty exploration aircraft's, a military department with reserves for all the weapons available, drinking water supplies and oxygen tanks, tanks for fuel, in this case it was hydrogen in the six wings of NIRMANA 394, at the northeast side the main control rooms, main operating rooms, it was the only part of the ship that had large windows or skylights installed which allowed us to look into space. I organized my soldiers and began to move all civilians, with only five thousand remaining to board the ship. According to General Singh, we had enough time for the operation, but an alarm put everyone on alert, the General on radio told me we had to leave, according to the latest reports ten warheads could suddenly be in the air, the ground troops in the area of greatest conflict had captured an enemy commander's son who had gone mad. There were only fifteen minutes left to be in the air and through the atmosphere. I gave my soldiers the order to take all civilians left towards the ship, there was panic and despair, all in parallel formation marked the way for my soldiers to bring them to the barracks and through the main gate, someone with the force of their body struck me making me fall a few meters back, I pulled myself together and finished the operation, when I made sure that all of my soldiers were inside the ship, I pressed the button to close the huge gate, I immediately felt the gnashing of the powerful motors begin to run and again my body was on the floor when the vast mass of steel took off, my soldiers and I spent about 10 minutes trying to fight the inertia of our bodies, the belt of our uniforms had a button where we could press it and it would tie us securely to any side of the walls of the ship just by pressing the button, so we did and we merged with the walls of the immense Noah's Ark. When calm was apparent and we could standing and walk around, it was soldier Rohan saw blood on my right arm.

CHAPTER 3

It was just a scratch, it would not pose any concern or danger to me, I could not afford an injury at this time we were just passing through the atmosphere, just a few minutes before we reached outer space, I tried to finish organizing the last civilian who entered the ship, the young soldiers who had chosen lived up to my expectations of them. After takeoff and the impact we were able to stand, I resumed the task of organizing the remainder of the civilians, I was in control of the shelters and tried to maintain my crew calm.

Everything in order, I decided to go up to the command post, I needed to know the level of emergency the escape plans were still in, I found General Singh, sitting in the back of the room. From his position I could see all the different flight captains of operations, the front control panels took up almost the entire width of the ship, more than fifteen men were needed to work in the control system of this modern Noah's Ark, behind them were five captains of navigation, they worked in front of huge glass skylights able to see everything, it was the only place on the ship where you could see outer space, from where I was the General gave orders to detain the ship's hovering at a safe distance from where they could observe planet earth. I had the opportunity to see from a different angle parts of the world, two ships exactly like ours, were in the atmosphere communicating with our command post and asked for instructions, we all stopped to look at the planet, from where we were it showed how beautiful our planet is and at risk of disappearing, it now looks like a billiard ball light blue, with uneven patches of dark colors, but it makes it a perfect combination of blue dominating the picture.

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These moments that we were living were of incalculable value and power, you could see in the face of each and every one of the crew members, despair and uncertainty in they're faces, but nobody said anything, it was also the concern for friends and family members left behind, it's times like these that humanity emerges in humans. Most of the women were crying, I remember one of the captain of navigation, with tears running down her cheeks, but still doing her job with the ability and integrity required by the situation, many of the soldiers were also concerned, but followed orders without question. We were just waiting for the alarm of mass destruction on the planet, but it remained as just that, an alarm. I left the control room, I decided to tour the ship, I took one of the eight elevators available along each corridor, and began my inspection.

The section of the ship dedicated to saving marine species it managed to relax more than I expected, it was a good idea to start there, the tranquility of the tanks and fish moving managed to take my worries away for a while, the sound of the whales made me think, I stopped in front of them for about half an hour, the majesty of the species managed to capture me, their size and innocence, but above all the ingenuity in their eyes that made me feel guilty of others. How was it possible that humans were able to cause so much damage to animals on the planet? It's all our fault that today they are also at risk of disappearing. I also visited the cages prepared for the terrestrial animals, I was there for nearly half an hour, I don't know if it was just me, but each of the animals eyes concern. It was one of the men that was caring for them that mentioned to me that animals perceive danger much better than humans. The area of the warehouses, was all quiet and going well, the upper information floors were going well, the hangar where the air crafts were, was also fine, with surveillance patrols that were organized round the clock. Everything was going as planned.

The barracks where my soldiers rested, were all in order, as soon as I went in, all the soldiers stood up to greet me. I ordered the reports from the men chosen responsible to command each floor, they gave me all the information has requested. Everything was going as planned.

I revisited the upper control room. Nothing new. Then I went to my room, I needed to get some rest. What was expected to happen was unknown territory to me and I should be prepared for any eventuality, nothing better than a rested mind to make decisions.

CHAPTER 4

The shot was accurate, perfectly between the eyes. The man dropped upon impact from the bullet in his head and the knife he held in his right hand. The rifle barrel that soldier Suraj was holding was still smoking, the girl trapped in the hands of that mad man, was trembling with fear, the blade of the knife to her throat managed to break every nerve. We had only been in outer space for two hours and problems already began. I stood frozen in front of the scene I had just witnessed. We were all out of danger.

I immediately gave orders to have the personal file sent to my computer of the man that was now dead. In the hallway of the second floor, a pool of blood filled the bunkhouse door number 234. The girl was trembling while on her way to the infirmary, she was held by one of my best soldiers, the Shinde Sara Verma. Only two minutes had passed since the soldier Suraj had fired his rifle, on my right side appeared general Singh. He appeared nervous. He asked what had happened and I tried to answer his questions in just a few sentences. :

- Soldier Suraj radioed me reporting problems on the second floor. He was making his usual rounds, when he saw a man holding a girl hostage, threatening to kill her with a knife to her neck. Soldier Suraj pointed his rifle at him. When the man saw that, he tried to cut the girl and the soldier fired. We do not know the reasons, I just ordered the man's record and hopefully we can talk to the girl after she calms down, she's now in the infirmary.

-The General frowned, he approached the dead man's body and checked into his pockets, he found nothing, not a single document, no identification. He stood up, and ordered:

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- Brigadier, order the evacuation of this man's body, I need someone to clean this place up, I do not want to panic among civilians. You have five minutes to come to my office. We need to talk. - And he went through the same where he had appeared. I walked in five minutes the General had asked me, after I had walked through hallways of floors 3 and 4.

Everything was quiet. Then I came to his door. Door was open. I stood there, firm, hoping he gave me orders come in.

- Come in Brigadier, have a seat.

The office was small; little furniture, a metal desk coming out of the floor and was made to turn into a bed all the way to the left side of the room. Papers on his desk and a computer. Two metal seats of the same color in front of the desk and a larger one behind the desk. On the back wall a screen that reminded me of the one that I had seen in the secret government bunkers. I sat and waited for the general's questions.

- What about the attacker, Brigadier? – He asked the question without facing me. His back facing me, looking on the screen the image of planet earth. At some point I noticed the image had him concerned.

- One of my soldiers is transferring the files from the main control room to my PC. We could not talk with the girl at this moment as she is resting and asleep, she has been sedated. The incident shook her up. His back still facing me, his voice just told me he was not paying very much attention to me.

- Ok Brigadier, I need the report of what happened in my hands today by 22:00 hours. We already have enough problems. – He sounded serious and concerned. I wanted to inquire about Planet Earth, but it was not necessary. The General changed the subject, and immediately said:

- This is not why I called you Brigadier. I need to reveal information about the situation on the planet. I want you to know that the two ships that accompany us in this mission, two ships exactly like ours, are already here, one to our right and one to our left. To the right are the Asians ship named LOTUS, you need to make contact with Brigadier Fabien. He's French, but speaks perfect English. On the left are the Russians. It's distinguished by the red letters that adorn the ship on the top with the name XX MOSCOW. You may contact the Brigadier in charge of security is, he is Vladislav Pudovkin.

I gave orders for a communication chip be installed in your intercom, this way you can maintain communication with their personnel. You need to pass by where the engineers are to be installed. You need to be in constant communication with the officers of the other ships. If necessary these ships have a permit to transfer between them. Becoming between the three ships a humongous floating city.

But that's only if it becomes necessary. So far the situation on the planet remains the same. The threat is growing every second and our intelligence agencies cannot find where enemies have that nuclear arsenal. Just thirty minutes ago Kazakhstan was defeated, fiercest general, right now they are questioning him. Hopefully we can obtain important information and all this will be nothing more than a terrible nightmare. You may leave, Brigadier. And remember to have that report ready by, at 22 hours.

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I said nothing, I stood up, and saluted him firmly with my right in a typical military goodbye, thus letting the general know that his orders would be fulfilled. I went to my room and my body collapsed on the bed. I needed to go over what happened in the last two days. To recount the events in my mind. I had to reorganize my ideas.

Trees on the street painted the landscape of a dark orange, the sidewalk was barely visible through the dry leaves that covered it. I could feel the crunch of dry leaves under my military boots. I came to the front entrance of a gate, as I walked. I saw my father through the gate, sitting in the front porch. As soon as he saw me, he jumped for joy. He did not let me come to him, he came to me and gave me a big hug. It was exactly three years since I went back home to visit the home I was born in. Since being transferred to Delhi, I had not been able to return home, did not know what to do to show me his happiness.

We entered the house, I stopped to watch him sitting in the kitchen. He had gotten old. You could see in his hands that the strength of his youth was gone. Ever since my mother had passed, he was never the same again. From the refrigerator he reached for two beers. The stove was on, he was cooking a stew that now surely he would share with me. He checked the food on the stove, before giving me the beer, he sat next to me.

- Brigadier? Brigadier!

Soldier Verma's voice woke me up. I wished it had not happened. So I could continue searching for fresh memories of my father. I was surprised to have those memories so fresh in my mind.

- Come in, soldier. Tell me. - I ran my hands over my face, trying to finally wake up, because I was still half asleep.

- Brigadier, the records you requested of the girl and his attacker are already on your computer.

Sitting on my bed, I thanked Verma, and asked him to leave. Again alone and quiet in my room, I opened the files.

Aditi Mane, Mumbai, January 23, 1998. Just graduated from Harvard Law School. She lived in her hometown until the age of 14, her parents separated and she moved to New York with her mother, her father passed away three years later of an overdose, the separation was the reason for his depression.

Aditi never returned to Mumbai, her mother remarried and she decides to leave the house. She then moves to an aunt's house who lives in New York, spent her years studying and earns a scholarship to Harvard with very high grades. Her college years passed uneventfully again outstanding grades. Never has been arrested, never a problem in college, one known boyfriend, a guy from Mumbai only, the son of a India Congressman, who died in a car accident. Finished her studies in 2019 being the second best

grade in her class. She was hired by the firm Berner's & Associates. An attorney there, she worked 18 months, defending four cases, she won all. of them, the Jersey case is the most important one. She defended Karna Oberoy, son of one of the richest man in the country. Suspected murderer of 4 people. in Detroit, shot to death, is acquitted by Linda's. great defense. In other words, young, famous professional, no connection with crime. Clean, done, end of story. I closed the file and opened the girl's attacker's, file hoping to find some answers. Jamal Ahmed, South Mumbai, March 26, 2005, graduated from Chennai University. Doctor specializing in orthopedics. He lived until he was six years in South Mumbai. His parents moved to Chennai in September 2002. Lived in Thampal till he was 13, his father is also a Doctor, specializing in pediatrics. His mother, a renowned surgeon at Jackson, he graduated with honors in 2020 receiving his diploma from the hands of the state governor.

Never been involved in any crime, medical examinations reveal that never drugged, did not smoke, never seen drinking alcohol. When he began medical school his parents choose to live in Mumbai.

Three girlfriends known, all medical students with him. All with clean records. Before being chosen to come aboard, he was directly working in implanting limbs amputees. In other words, friendly, young, prominent professional, no link to crime, nonviolent, clean, done, end of story.

I closed the file puzzled, nothing in the file told me what could have happened. I decided to visit Linda in nursing and see if I could speak with her. Maybe what she told me, could give me details and I could determine what happened. I needed to find out details, my report was due on the General's desk before 22 hours. I had exactly six hours to do so.

The hospital was in one of the upper floor of the ship, the busy medical staff meeting with the wounded and beaten caused by the civil stampede to board the ship from land. Aditi was still sleeping. A doctor with last name of Jadhav, name on her medical gowns badge, was determined to check the wound on my right hand, while I waited for the girl wake up. She took me to one of the private nursing cubicles, where return she withdrew the band that hours earlier I put on to stop the bleeding. She was a woman of about 25 years, tall, maharashtrian features, black hair up to the middle of her back. Light eyes, very beautiful. She treated me as if the wounded arm was a small child's. The tenderness of her movements immediately caught my attention. She crossed eyes with mine every time I she tried to suture the wound, as if looking for signs of pain. She kept looking into my eyes for signs of pain. I saw uncertainty in her eyes. The doctor completed the work on my arm about the same time that a nurse let me know that Aditi had awakened. I found the girl on her bed, she was quiet, but her eyelids still had signs of having cried. I sat by her side after formally introducing myself and started to ask her questions.

- Hello, Aditi how do you feel?

- Thank you. I feel much better. She replied getting up from bed, waiting for my next question.

- I need you to tell me what happened, why this man wanted to kill you?

Life Quest

- I was in my room. – The girl told me, and decided to walk to one of the dining rooms looking for something to drink. By mistake, I went towards the right bunker and found this man trying to open with a knife panels on the right. If you look there you will find marks. I realized he was not a technician, because he did not have tools with him. I asked him what was he doing, he got scared. He took me by the neck, threatening me and pointing the knife at my throat. He started to say a few phrases in a language unknown to me, it was like a prayer. I cried for help before he covered my mouth. Apparently, my cry for help was heard by the soldier. You know the rest of the story.

- Can you remember any phrase that this man was saying, I need you to make an effort.

- He repeated various times, something like: Rows Jan you viladi kueli join.

Upon hearing this phrase, my whole body was by swept with shiver. I thanked her and told Aditi I might need to see her again.

Back in my room I kept thinking the sentence that the girl had repeated. My experience as a soldier and three missions in Arab territory had taught me a little of their language. The translation of the phrase was simple but very dangerous. For Allah is my revenge.

That was what the man repeated. Before going to my room I decided to check again and check the panels that what Aditi said was true. I took a picture with my phone and loaded them to my laptop, which the pictures were seen clearly, I saw the marks produced by a sharp object. Apparently the girl was right. The scratches she mentioned were there, the question that was spinning in my head was why the panels? What was there that could be of interest to him? Because of the seriousness of this matter I decided to write the report and submitted to the General Singh before 22:00 hours. I sent for one of the main engineers of the ship, I needed to know every detail. It took only minutes for the engineer to arrive, in the meantime, I went ahead and wrote a short report to send the other two ships that accompanied us notifying them of the incident.

It was necessary for them to be on alert, it was alarming to even think that our enemies had penetrated was alarming in my head. I spoke lengthy and in detail with the engineer. I asked him to explain to me what kind of connections were passing through the panels, and ordered him to review each one of them. If Baman wanted to open that panel, it was because something in them had caught his attention.

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