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**CHAPTER NINE:**

Rookie

 *Augtober 9*

 Gabriel sat silently in the library, doing his best not to look suspicious. He tried pulling his jacket collar tight, but realized that would only make him look as if he were hiding something. Instead he decided pretend he was reading one of the books on the table. After a few minutes of waiting, he looked anxiously at the clock on the wall. “Dammit Fox, where the hell are you?”

 “Right behind you, Mr. Smith.” Gabriel jumped slightly in his seat as Fox walked to the other end of the table. “And, Mr. Smith, if you’re going to try to blend in, perhaps you should try reading something intended for a more *mature* audience.” Fox motioned at the children’s book in Gabriel's hands. “You nearly scared me half to death!” Gabriel scolded, in a low voice, “What took you so long?” Fox sat down across from Gabriel. “I had to make sure I wasn't being followed. Can’t be too careful, especially after I just got everything working again. Speaking of which-” he handed Gabriel a data pad, and what seemed to be some sort of earbud, but with no wires. “What’s this thing for?” Gabriel asked. “It’s colloquially known as an earwig. Its already permanently paired with that data pad, and will let you communicate with everyone discretely.” Gabriel shrugged, and put the ‘earwig’ in his right ear. “So, this is why you guys are always touching your ears.” Fox nodded, “Like I said, discretely.”

 “I get why you’re giving us these, but was it really necessary to make a whole new network? I mean, it was only Jess and Alex. How much damage could they have done?” Gabriel asked. Fox stared him down, his glasses perfectly framing his plain brown eyes. “In case you forgot, Mr. Smith, we had nearly a dozen unidentified agents shoot at us. Mr Baud and Ms. Ansi may have initially been the only ones to hack the network, but they opened the door for my *entire* network to be compromised.” Gabriel looked down at the picture book. “Sorry, I guess I forgot that part.”

 Gabriel inhaled deeply, and looked back up at Fox. “So, how are Jessica and Alex? Last I heard, they were barely even talking to each other.” Fox shifted in his seat, slightly uncomfortable with the subject. “Well, to be honest Mr. Smith, they are indeed talking… to some degree. Other than that, it seems they are getting along well. If you want to know any more, then you’ll have to ask them yourself. Now, back to the task at hand?”

 Fox pulled out a small photo, and handed it to Gabriel, who promptly looked at it. There was a heavy set balding human man, in a police uniform. On his jacket were a few medals. “He seems familiar. Doesn’t he work at the local precinct?” Gabriel asked. “Lieutenant Aaron Briggs, age forty five, single never married. He works as an adviser for your academy, and has been on the force for over twenty years. Though, he’s spent most of those years doing rather mediocre work.”

 Puzzled, Gabriel put the photo down on the table. “So, what do expect me to do?” Fox stood up. “What I need you to do, Mr. Smith, is make sure noting bad happens to Mr. Briggs. That is after all why I hired you.” “And how the hell am I supposed to do that?” “Try getting close to him. I heard your class is ready to start some real field work.” Fox began walking away, but then paused and turned around. “Oh, and Mr. Smith, try not to act like you think everyone is out to get you. It tends to draw suspicion.” With that, he left Gabriel alone at the table. “Well its not like anyone taught *me* espionage.” He grumbled to himself.

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 Gabriel knocked on the rich mahogany door. “Come in.” said a voice. Gabriel entered the small office. “Please, have a seat.” the lieutenant said, motioning to the chair in front of his desk. “Smith was it? What can I do for you?” Gabriel sat up in his seat, “Well sir, I’ve heard about your past, and since we need to prove we can handle the real world, I just wanted to ask-” “You want to come along with me on a patrol?” Briggs interrupted. “Yeah. If its okay with you” Gabriel continued. Briggs leaned back in his chair, and looked at Gabriel. “I’ll be honest, this is a bit of a surprise. Usually, you newbies ask someone more… interesting. Well, as long as you pull your weight, I don’t see why not. Just let me check a few things, and I'll give you a call when I have the go ahead.” “That sounds good, sir.” “If that was all, I'd best get back to work. The captain really hates it when we get behind.” The lieutenant put on his reading glasses, and turned his attention to a stack of papers. Gabriel stood up, and checked his new data pad. There was one new message from Fox, which simply said “Call me”. *But it hasn’t even been three days,* Gabriel thought to himself.

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 “Mr. Fox? You wanted to talk?” After meeting with the lieutenant, Gabriel had headed back to his apartment. Luckily for him, one of his instructors had canceled class. “Yes, I looked into Mr. Briggs’ history, and it seems that there is some inconsistency in the ‘big bust’ he was involved in a few years ago.” “The one he’s known for?” “Apparently, there was another person involved, but I can’t seem to find a name.” “Do you think they might be coming after the lieutenant?” Gabriel asked. Over the line, he heard Fox pacing. “It’s hard to be certain, but I’ll keep looking into it. In the meantime, Mr. Smith, I've gone ahead and tuned into Mr. Briggs’ police radio. Not only will we be able to listen in to his calls, but as long as he has it on him, you should be able to hear all his conversations.” Gabriel was taken by surprise at this new development. “So basically, you hacked his radio? Is there anything you can’t do?” “Well, to start, I can’t read minds.”

 After a brief pause, Fox came back on the line. “Alright, I've gone ahead and ensured Mr. Briggs is your assigned officer. The next part is up to you.” “Thanks. I’ll fill you in if I find something.” “Very well. Good luck, Mr. Smith.” After that, the line went dead. Gabriel sighed, and proceeded to get a snack. Hopefully, he would finally get some interesting action. He just hoped it wasn’t anything like his time with Gregory and Jessica.

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 The radio crackled as a dispatcher called in a vandalism. It had been four hours and the most action they had seen so far was shooing some panther kits away from some messenger crows. “Mr. Smith.” Gabriel sat bolt upright. He still wasn’t used to this. “Is now a good time?” “Yeah, go ahead. Briggs is just grabbing a coffee.” He looked out the window to make sure Briggs was still in line at the food truck. Fox shared what he had found, “I did some digging into the bust Mr. Briggs was a part of. The other member I mentioned never appeared in any official documentation. For all intent and purposes, he was never there.” “Why would anyone leave him out? It’s illegal to leave a report unfinished. And, if he doesn't appear anywhere, how do you know about them?” “After the raid took place, Mr. Briggs did several interviews with various news outlets. In one of the interviews he briefly mentioned how he saved ‘Diego’ from being shot in the back. He later retracted his statement, and claimed he had misspoken.” Gabriel sat back as he came to a realization. “He had a partner.” “Exactly my thoughts. I’m looking into his work history to try and get a full name, but if he indeed had a partner-” “Then he may want revenge for Briggs hanging him out to dry. We have to find- hold on.” Gabriel looked to where the food truck was. Instead of a bustling crowd, the scene was completely empty. Food truck and all.

 “We… may have a problem.” “What is it, Mr. Smith?” “Fox, he’s gone. No sign of him.” “What do you mean, ‘No sign of him?’” “Dammit, I should have been paying more attention!” Gabriel kicked the side of the police cruiser, slightly regretting his decision half a second later. Fox came back on, speaking quickly. “I’m tracking his position as best I can, I should have an exact location soon. Hopefully, we can get to him in time.”

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 He drove as fast as he could, but didn’t turn on the siren to avoid tipping off whoever had taken Briggs. “Where are they now?” he asked Fox, searching for any possible sign of the truck. “Just ahead of you, it looks like they’re going to go under the bridge.” Gabriel thought for a second. “Can you get ears on what’s going on inside?” “I’ll see if he still has his radio nearby.” Fox said. A few seconds later, the telltale static of a radio came on the line, followed by a mans voice. “-You don’t know how long I've been waiting for this day.” After a few more seconds, Gabriel could see the truck. It was indeed under the bridge, parked by the riverside. “Please, you don’t have to do this.” Briggs pleaded. Fox said urgently to Gabriel, “Mr. Smith, you have to something right now!” The kidnapper spoke again, “Now you’ll get to feel the way I did for all those years.” “Mr. Smith!” Fox said again. Gabriel thought as fast as he could, trying to come up with a solution. “Screw it!” he said, blaring the siren and slammed on the accelerator.

 The cruiser hit the truck in the front, causing it to slide several feet. Gabriel heard a shot go off, and a struggle. He tried to get up, but the impact had done a number on the car. He heard the rear doors of the truck slam open, and he caught a glimpse of several men running out. One however, turned towards the cruiser. He raised his gun, and started shooting.

 Gabriel did his best to duck, bullets hitting the car. He drew his own gun, and waited for a pause in the shooting before returning fire. *BANG, BANG;* he shot several times, but he failed to hit the target. Caught out in the open, the man took off, running in the direction of the others.

 After a bit of effort, Gabriel manged to get out of the police car. “Lieutenant!” He shouted, as he ran to the back of the truck. He found the Briggs, blindfolded, cuffed and beaten on the floor. Luckily, he didn't seem shot. Briggs spoke, breathing heavily. “Eh, Smith, is that you? What the hell’s going on?” Gabriel helped to get Briggs put of the truck, and unlocked the handcuffs. Over his earpiece, he heard Fox speak. “Mr. Smith, is everything alright?” “Bit bruised, but alive.” “And Mr. Briggs?” “He’s still kicking.” There was an audible sigh of relief from Fox. Briggs however, was not satisfied. “Who are you talking to? Hey, you gonna answer me?” Fox spoke again. “Careful what you say, Mr. Smith. I understand the situation is tense, but we *cannot* afford a police investigation right now.” Gabriel took a deep breath, and began to explain the situation. “He’s… a friend. We heard that you might be in danger. Those men, did you recognize any of them.” “No, I didn’t. What do they want?” “I think it’s safe to say, to kill you.”

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 Under Fox’s directions, they drove to a safe house. Gabriel had continued to explain the situation as best he could, being careful not to give too much way. Fortunately, Briggs seemed to be focused on the current situation as opposed to worrying about who was helping him.

 “So, who is it that wants me dead?” Briggs asked Gabriel. “You remember your big bust, the one that made you famous for a while?” “The one where all the different cartels tried to kill me?” “Yes, that one.” “What does that have to do with all this?” “You once said that there was someone else there.” “No, no I don’t believe I did.” Briggs said quickly, as if he wanted to move off the subject. “Lieutenant, please. We know someone else was there. We also believe that they may be the one who wants you dead, so if you could just work with us-” “Wait, so you think Diego is behind this?” Over his earpiece, Gabriel heard Fox speak. “Diego Ruiz. He was Briggs' old partner for over a decade. He was discharged from the force for ‘tampering with evidence’.” “Diego. When did you last see Diego?” Briggs leaned back in his seat. “Last time we spoke, it was about… a few days after the take down. He barely even noticed me, looked like he was running.” Fox spoke again. “That’s around the same time he was discharged, but that doesn’t explain why he would return now. We need to know what exactly happened during that raid.” Gabriel pressed on. “I understand it’s been a long time lieutenant, but I need you to tell me everything that happened that night. What *actually* happened.” Briggs sighed heavily, and leaned forward. “All right, I'll tell you.”

 “He had just transferred in from the West, LA I think. Well, we’d been working together for a while now, and he said he’d gotten an anonymous tip about a major drug deal. I said we should tell the whole department, but he refused. Said we could handle it ourselves. He’d always been funny about calling for backup.”

 “Well, when we get there, there’s a lot of vans around.” “To transport the goods.” Gabriel said. “Yeah. So we could tell this was going to be major. We grab our vests, and a shotgun each. He says he’ll get the back, and I go in through the front. It was a small warehouse, out in Queens. A few minutes after being locked in a shootout, there’s only a few left. I see Diego, and he’s about to be got, so I shoot. But here’s the thing: he yelled at me.” “I don’t get it, you had just saved his life.” “That’s just it, it made no sense. He starts freaking out, and makes me swear to leave him out of the report. Then he takes off, says he needs to take care of some business.” “So you just went along with it?” “Hey, I didn’t like it either, but you weren't there. The look he had, it was as if his mother had just died.”

 Gabriel thanked Briggs for his cooperation, and got up and went into the next room. “So, get anything useful from that?” He asked Fox. “I’m looking into it now. What he said seems to fit with what the reports say, albeit without Diego, and as for the drug dealers- oh my.” “What is it?” Gabriel asked. “I think I may know why Diego is coming after Briggs.”

 “Well, what is it, then?” Gabriel asked, the anticipation getting to him. “Mr. Briggs said he saved Diego from being attacked by one of the fighters during the raid. However, after looking into one dealer’s history, I found something.” “Does this something relate to why Diego wants Briggs dead?” “I’m afraid it does. The dealer’s name was Francisco Chavez, but it had changed when from when his parents remarried.” “Well, what did his name use to be?” “He used to be Francisco Ruiz. His mother was Diego’s aunt.” “Seriously? You mean they were cousins?” “I’m afraid so, Mr. Smith. We need to keep Briggs safe until we can locate Diego.” “Agreed. What should I tell Briggs in the meantime?” “The truth, Mr. Smith.”

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 Briggs had not taken the news easily, and had immediately asked for a drink. After he’d finished it, he asked for another one. And another, and then a third.

 “I killed his cousin? Why didn’t he ever say anything?” Gabriel sat down next to the lieutenant. “It’s possible he was embarrassed about his cousin’s choice of profession, and its possible he had hoped if it was just you two… well…” “No wonder he wants me dead. I’d want me dead after that too, if I were him.” Gabriel merely nodded in agreement. “We should stay put until Fox finds out where Diego is.” “I’m sending Mr. Wetzel to your location now.” Fox said over his earpiece.

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 After a few minutes, Greg arrived at the safe house. “Hey” Gabriel said. Greg didn’t respond immediately. He appeared to be distracted by something else. “Hey, Greg? You okay?” “Oh, sorry, guess I got distracted. You the lieutenant?” He asked Briggs. “Yeah. You Gabriel’s friend?” “Something like that. Look, Gabe, I need to talk to you about something.” He lead Gabriel away, before taking both their data pads and locking them in the microwave. “What the hell did you that for?” Gabriel asked, startled by Greg’s unusual behavior. “It acts as a, ‘Fahrenheit cage’, or something.” “O-kay? What is this about exactly?” “What do remember about the shootout?” “You mean… when we first met? Not much, that was ages ago. Why?” “It’s about Fox.” The way he said it, Gabriel could tell something was troubling Gregory.

 “See, *we’d* never encountered any of those guys before. That was the first time.” “But you talked about them as if you knew who they were, and you said something about, time running out?” “I’d heard about them, but I thought they were a myth. Alex had said something about agents from a mysterious organization, with advanced equipment. After he went missing, I assumed he had made it up-” “Until you saw them yourself. But what does that have to do with ‘time?’” Greg shifted, unsure if he should continue. “Fox has only recently begun talking to us. But that doesn’t mean we never did any digging of our own. I think something big is coming. See, he recruited you, but the question is why now? Why did he decide to show his face now? Unless something really bad is going to happen. He hasn’t told us directly, of course, but since I've started to help him rebuild the network, I've noticed certain things.” “Like what?” “He keeps checking this one computer. Portable, of course. We still don’t know where he spends most of his time. But he looks worried.” Gabriel gave out a huff, and sat down.

 “So, what are we supposed to do, exactly?” “I think we should continue as normal, but we should be prepared in case something happens. He may say he has good intentions, but I'm not sure I completely-” “Trust me?” Fox said, over their earpieces. “How did you- How much did you hear?” “Enough. I understand your suspicions, Mr. Wetzel. Unfortunately, there are things I can’t tell you; you’ve always known that. But as is the case more recently, it’s because even I don’t know some of the answers. The truth is, Mr. Wetzel, that although you may not believe it, I know almost as little as you about our mysterious enemy. Aside from knowing their main intentions, and that their employer is very powerful, we know almost nothing at all. That’s why we need to work together if we want to make it through this.” Greg stood silent for a few moments, considering what Fox had said. “Alright. But if you want us to trust you more, you’ll have to be more transparent.” “I can certainly try. Mr. Smith, you can tell Mr. Wetzel more on your way to find Diego. In the meantime, I’ll keep trying to find out who those ‘agents’ were, and who their employer is. If that’s okay with you?” “Yeah, fine…” He turned to Briggs. “You stay here, sir. We’ll come back for you after we’ve arrested Diego.” “Thank you. I don’t know what I would have done if it weren’t for you and your friends.” Briggs phone buzzed. He checked it, “It’s him. He says he want to meet.” “Let me see that.” Greg said. “Well, if he wants to meet, then let’s meet.”

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 They arrived at a run down neighborhood. There were not many cars, but those that were present had long since been striped of all their parts, and the remaining frames were rusty, their red brown color accentuated in the afternoon sun. “Keep your guard up, he could be anywhere.” Greg said to Gabriel. Nearby, they heard what sounded like a metal can scraping on concrete. Without saying a word, they both instinctively drew their weapons. Gabriel with his service weapon, and Gregory with a basic 1911 model. They heard the noise again, and this time they knew where it came from: a narrow alley, between two brick apartment buildings. Greg motioned for Gabriel to cover one side of the alley while he got the other. After getting in position, they could hear footsteps approaching. Once they were a few seconds out, they cocked their weapons, and got ready.

 As the stranger exited the alley, Greg tried to grab him. Unfortunately, Gabriel had gotten a similar idea, except he had decided to tackle the figure. The three promptly fell to the ground, which resulted in a wild flurry of punches until the figure finally pleaded for respite, “All right, all right, take it easy!” They all paused, Greg getting up first. He pulled up the stranger, and forced him against the wall. “Diego, right? Waiting for someone?” Before he could answer, Gabriel interjected. “Yeah, don’t help me up or anything, I'm fine.” Diego, confused and scared about what was happening, tried to explain the situation.

 “Look, man, I don’t know who you are, but I'm just trying to take a walk, I swear.” Greg sighed impatiently. “Yeah, and I'm just supposed to believe you were out for a nice stroll in an abandoned part of the city? We know you wanted to kill your old partner Briggs. We’re not gonna let that happen. Now, you clearly have yourself a little posse, so why don’t you make this easy on yourself-” “Whoa whoa whoa,” Diego interrupted, “I’m not the one who wants Briggs dead.” “Then what was the message about?” “Okay, it’s true, I called him out here, but only because I wanted to warn him.” “Warn him? About what?” Gabriel asked. “The drug dealer. You know, the one he busted all those years ago?”

 Greg wasn’t convinced, “And you just wanted to do that in person, out here, especially after what happened to your cousin?” Diego sighed, “I don’t know what you know about what happened, but all you need to know is that yeah, he killed my cousin. But it was an accident. I asked him to keep me out of the reports because I was already under suspicion. I stayed away to keep him safe, but a few days ago the main drug dealer was released. Chico; He’s the one who brought all the different cartels together. I still had some old contacts, and so when I heard he wanted Briggs’ head,-” “Hold on,” Gabriel said, getting in nearer to Francisco. “You don’t look like you’ve been in a car crash recently.” “N- no. Why?” Gabriel punched the wall. “What is it?” Greg asked. “When I saved Briggs, there was this guy. He seemed like he was in charge, but he got away. I’m not sure how hurt he was, but he definitely had some scratches, which means-” “You’re not him.” Greg said to Diego. “That’s what I'm telling you! Wait, what do you mean you saved him?” Greg now let go of Diego. “And we left him all alone, with no way to contact us.” “You what?” “I’m sorry, how long have you been doing this?” Gabriel asked. “We can discuss that later, right now we have to get back to Briggs before anything happens!”

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 When they arrived back at the safe house, the drug lord was already trying to get inside. When he saw they had company, he promptly shouted at his lackeys to delay them, and proceeded to go inside.

 “What do we do now?” asked Gabriel. “We’ll distract them, you try to take them out. You good on all fours?” Gabriel shrank. Most sentient canines could fairly easily switch between being on two and four legs, but he’d personally always had trouble on all fours. “Not really.” Diego popped out to shoot a few rounds at the gang members. “Well then, you’ll have to get used to it quickly.” He shot a few more rounds, and Greg did the same, “GO!”

 He ran as fast as he could. Faster than he had ever run before. He heard bullets wiz by, and he charged one of the men, knocking him to the ground, snarling furiously. Panicked, the man got up and ran, prompting the others to follow him. “Huh. And just the other day Jessica said I was cute.” “C’mon, let’s go.” Greg said, after making sure the thugs weren't coming back.

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 They headed inside cautiously, taking down more thugs as they went. When they reached the panic room, they found that the metal door had been cut off its hinges. “Lieutenant Briggs, are you alright?” Greg shouted, never once letting his guard down. They headed in, and found Briggs being used as a human shield with a gun to his head.

 “Don’t come any closer.” Chico warned, an audible click coming from the handgun. “Easy now, we just need our friend here, and we’ll be gone.” Wetzel said slowly, trying not to give the thug a reason to shoot. “Well that’s to bad,” he responded, “See, Lieutenant Briggs here has a lot he has to pay for.” “You can’t let him do this-” “Shut up! Now, unless you all want to end up dead, you’ll leave us.” Greg took a step forward. “Unless you didn't notice, you’re all alone. And we ain’t leaving without the lieutenant.” The thug shifted, fully aware that there was no easy way out of this. “Yeah, well you can have him after he’s dead. Fifteen years I spent in that hellhole, all thanks to you, and that goddamn traitor coward-” “You mean me?” Diego stepped out from behind Gabriel, moving slowly. “I knew something like this would happen. You were never one for letting things go, were you, Chico?” Chico, unsure of who to shoot now, shifted his aim between Diego, Greg, and Gabriel. “You and your damn cousin. Knew should've taken you both out when I had the chance. I’m not gonna make the same mistake twice!” “You don’t wanna do this. You’re not leaving here a free man, so you may as well give up.” “No. You should’ve been dead a long time ago. Tell your cousin I said screw you!” *BANG! BANG!*

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 “Nice shot, kid.” Briggs said to Gabe. “Y- yeah, thanks” Gabriel stammered. Greg went over to the fallen thug, and checked for a pulse. “Well, looks like he’s not going to hurt anyone now.” he said with a sigh, “C’mon, let’s get you back home lieutenant.” “Thank you, for everything. But- wait, what about Diego?” “It’s probably best if he explains it on the way.”

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 After Diego had explained everything to Briggs, Greg asked for Briggs to leave him out of the report. “Vigilantes don’t mix well with police.” Briggs had agreed, and as an added plus wrote that Gabriel had been critical in helping save his life, along with an old friend.

 “How you holding up?” Greg asked Gabriel. They were walking down Main Street after getting everything cleared at the station. “What do you mean?” “I’m guessing unless you have a side we don’t know about, this was your first shoot. Lethal, anyway.” Gabriel nodded silently. “It’s just… I mean, he didn’t give us any choice, but still…” “Hey,” Greg said, and stopped Gabriel. “You did what you had to. Now, I know it ain’t easy, but it’s something you have to learn to deal with. Our line of work, it’s inevitable.” “Yeah, I know. I thought it would be easier to… you know? Guess real life is different from fantasy. So, you think they’re gonna be friends again?” They started walking again. “Not sure. Diego disappeared without a word, and Briggs’ probably feeling guilty over the death of his cousin.” “At least they’re talking, right?” Greg gave out an amused huff.

 At this point, Fox came back on the line. “Have you resolved the situation with Mr. Briggs?” “Yeah, him and his partner are safe now. And from the sound of it, they have a lot of catching up to do.” “Indeed. Well, now that you’ve dealt with the threat, I have a new assignment for you.” “What is it, a new number?” “Not quite. I managed to trace the source of the initial hack on my network. The equipment used was made by Oppenheimer Electrics, located in The Wastelands.” “The Wastelands? Could this be a rogue uprising?” “Unlikely. The most probable explanation is that our enemy has taken advantage of the lack of regulation, and has set up there.” “We don’t even know who our enemy is, how are we going to fight them?”

 “That brings me to why I'm calling you. I had tasked Ms. Baud and Ms. Mantissa on attempting to acquire more information on our mysterious pursuers.” Greg stopped walking, “Why are you only telling me this *now*?” “You know both of them. They insist on being pretty independent from the rest of us. As a result, I only knew something was off when they both failed to check in at the designated time. I can only assume something has happened, but given the lack of any sort of emergency beacon, I can’t say what.” “Well, just give us their last known location, and we’ll start there.” “I’ve just sent you the GPS data, along with information as to your accommodations.”

 Gabriel spoke up, “Alright, so, when are we leaving?” “Actually, Mr. Smith, I need you to remain here. Ms. Ansi will provide technical support, should any new numbers come up.” “But I can help! We’ve only just started, and I'm fine, really.” “As much as I appreciate your dedication, we can’t risk your cover being blown. Besides, I'm sure you’ll be busy enough, seeing as you’ve already earned yourself a commendation.” “Fine. I’ll see you when you come back. But what about you?” “As I said, these are strange times. I’ll be accompanying Mr. Wetzel. Please try not to get into any tough situations while we’re gone.”

 Gabriel said goodbye to Greg, and headed back home. He didn’t like being sidelined, not when he had finally helped in making a difference. He just hoped he’d be fine on his own, but that more importantly, that *they* would. He had never given the gods much thought, but now that he had done what he did… he almost wished that there would be at least one, watching over everyone; protecting everyone. “Yeah right, like that would ever be a thing.” He opened the door to his apartment, stepped inside, and began to make plans for his graduation ceremony.