

02:05

By Mohammad Khan

In a dark winter night above a dense forest, a plane comes crashing down.

“I’ll make it. I’ll make it.”, speaks Stephen reassuring himself. His plane glides above the canopy barely. The endless forest serves as his landing strip. Both his engines on fire and his wings damaged, Stephen struggles to control his plane as it crashes into towering trees below. He takes out his pocket watch. It’s 02:00. A faded picture is held in the cover.

As his wings break off, he becomes a bullet hurdling towards the earth.

The pain wakes Stephen. He’s still alive and trapped in a plane balancing precariously on tree branches. The metal plane creaks ominously as it teeters on the large branches. Stephen tries to move slightly and the metal groans beneath the weight. He sits back and plans his escape. The snow gently falls in the night. He hears the quiet cracking of the branches beneath the plane. Stephen peers over to the faded white snow-covered ground. The plane lurches as Stephen looks below.

The plane rolls to its side. Stephen feels the balance shift and curls into a ball as the plane plunges to the ground upside down.

02:05

A young soldier clad in blue gear with a rifle over his shoulder weakly trudges through the snow covered forest. Each step, he shivers. He rubs his chest. A slight orange hue illuminates the forest. He looks up and sees a burning plane crashing into the forest.

“Lazarian”, says the boy. He follows the plane as it crashes into the forest a mile in front of him.

The boy finds the plane unturned on the ground with the bottom of the plane facing up. He tries pushing the plane over to search for supplies.

The moon light reflected off the metal plane illuminating the nearby forest. The snow covered the ground in a blueish-white hue.

A muffled scream comes from beneath the plane. “Hey!” Someone bangs from beneath the plane. “Get me out of here.”

“Hang on!” Shouts the boy. “I’ll get you out.” The boy searches for something. He finds a large branch and drags it to the plane.

“I found a branch”, says the boy. He knocks on the metal. “If you roll it with me, we might be able to lift it.”

“Ok”, replies the voice tiredly. “When you’re ready.”

The boy removes the snow and dirt from beneath the plane and jams the branch beneath the plane.

“ready”, shouts the boy. “3..2...1 push!”

The boy pushes down on the branch and the plane moves slightly.

“Push!”. He pushes the branch again. The plane moves more and roll over.

A curled up man lies in its place. His limbs slowly sprawl outwards like an insect recovering from the cold. He stands slowly. The boy runs to help him stand.

“Easy. Easy”, says the boy. “What’s your name?”

“St-Stephen.” Stephen grabs his head in pain and looks around in blurred vision. “Wh-where am I?” He looks at the boy. “Who are you?”

“I’m Atarah. I saw your plane crash and came to see if I could find supplies.”

Stephen walks away from Atarah. He checks his pockets. He sees his pistol lying in the snow.

“I think we’re a miles out of the Bhagavad stronghold”, says Atarah. Stephen flinches slightly at the mention of ‘Bhagavad’. He slowly picks up the pistol with his back to Atarah.

"If we keep moving, we should be able to get out before they find us." Atarah sees Stephen holding a gun in his hand. Stephen's fingers tighten around the grip of the pistol. Atarah silently moves his hands to his rifle.

Stephen spins around and points his pistol at Atarah at the same time as Atarah points his rifle back. The two stand in dead-lock. A young boy inexperienced in the nuances of war and a man experienced in war.

"You're a Bhagavadian soldier", says Stephen. "How many of you are there?"

"Just me. Lazarian soldiers ran me into this forest."

"Throw me your supplies", says Stephen confidently. "And I'll spare your life."

"I don't have any", replies Atarah.

"very well then". Stephen readies his shot.

"wait, wait wait", shouts Atarah. "You need me to get out of this forest if you want to get to the Lazarian side safely."

Stephen looks at Atarah.

"And look", says Atarah pointing to the ground nearby. "Tiger tracks. We're in their territory. You won't survive without me."

A dark skinned boy wearing a fur jacket with similar hair as his own. Just a kid. And him, dressed in uniform. He lowers his gun.

"Ok. Where's the way out. I can hardly see a damn thing." Stephen walks to his pack, checking his pockets.

"We wait till dusk then move." Atarah lowers his rifle. He looks around the forest. "We should build a fire. Using- Hey! What're you doing?"

Stephen ties Atarah's hands with rope and seizes his rifle. "You're a fool to believe that there are tigers. Now", says Stephen. "Go over there." Stephen gestures to the tree 10 feet away from him.

Stephen sits beside the broken cockpit of the plane. He lays the rifle in between them.

"You don't know these forests like I do", says Atarah cautiously. "If we want to survive, we'll need to work together and stay away from them." Atarah continues to scan the woods.

Stephen ignores him. Stephen feels his pockets once more. He doesn't find it. He looks around frantically, digging in the snow. "where is it. Where is it? Where is it!" Stephen dives into the snow. He swims and makes his way through the wreckage.

Atarah looks around, seeing if he can find whatever it is. Something glistens in the moonlight and distant fire by a nearby tree. Removing the snow, he finds a pocket watch. He opens it. On the cracked watch face, it said 02:05 and a blurry gray photo of person lay in the other cover.

"Is this it?" Atarah held the watch in the air.

"Give me that!" Stephen snatches the watch and pushes Atarah away. He trips over the rifle and falls against a tree. In his haste, Stephen pushed his rifle closer towards Atarah. Stephen sits grasping the watch in his palms oblivious to where the rifle is.

Atarah stands in pain. "That's ok, I'll build a fire." He sees the burning wings in the distance. 20 yards, Atarah reckons. He turns to Stephen. "Why don't we-" Stephen's not paying attention, he's too busy cleaning the watch. "No, it's ok. I'll manage."

Atarah hears a faint beeping from beneath the snow. He wipes away the snow to find a strange rectangular device beeping. Two small antennae stick outside of the box. On the screen shows concentric circles emanating from the center. Stephen sees Atarah looking at the device. He walks over to Atarah.

Atarah hears the footsteps approach and merely holds up the device for Stephen to take. Stephen snatches the device back

and sits beside the broken cockpit, away from Atarah.

The small fire colors the nearby snow light orange. Atarah warms his hands by the flame.
“You look familiar.”, asks Atarah. “How long have you been serving?”

Stephen doesn’t reply. Atarah continues. “There were some soldiers in my hometown but I think the Bhagavad army killed them all.”

Stephen continues to stares at the broken plane as he rubs the pocket watch with his hand.

“You’ll see them again. Don’t worry.”

“This war’s taken everything from me.”

“You’re not alone”, replies Atarah.

Stephen scoffs. “How can you know. You’re a child. You would be dead if I didn’t need you.”

The two sit in silence as they stare into the fire.
Stephen takes out the device. The concentric circles appear on the screen. Stephen stares at the button contemplating. He looks at Atarah and pushes the button on the face of the device.
A word emerged below the concentric circle: Distress Beacon.

02:30

The fire crackles quiet in the winter night. The snow has stopped falling and the wind no longer exists. It’s absolutely still in the forest. Stephen reaches for a food ration in his supplies and quietly nibbles on the bread.

“You hear that”, says Atarah. He sits up alert. The fire crackles quietly in the night.

CRACK. A twig snaps. Someone’s walking through the snow.

Stephen places the watch in his pocket and grabs his revolver. He peers through the darkness.

“There”, points Atarah past the cockpit. “By the trees. From where you flew.”

A dark figure was approaching them slowly. The figure was barely visible as it walked closer.

Stephen looks for the rifle and sees it lying near Atarah, in the line of sight of the figure. He aims his revolver at the approaching figure. Stephen hides behind the cockpit. Atarah stays sitting unarmed and tied up. The rifle lies a foot from Atarah.

A faint sound can be heard from the figure. Possibly speaking a name, but too faint to tell. It approach faster. Kicking up snow behind it and swiftly growing larger in size. Both Stephen readies his revolver to fire.

The figure soon crosses the threshold of light created by the fire and stops.
“Atarah”, says the figure.

“Aaron.” says Atarah surprised.

Stephen looks at Atarah, but keeps his aim on Aaron. Aaron wore a rifle similar to Atarah’s over his shoulder and about the same age as Atarah.
The sincerity of their responses was alien to Stephen’s ears. He hadn’t heard such camaraderie since the war started.

“You’re alive”, says Aaron.

“I hid here when they chased me.”

The two of them continue their conversation like this. Aaron oblivious to Stephen and his deathly aim at his head. The combined size of the plane and bright light of the fire hides Stephen well enough that one would not see him without close scrutiny.

“Come back with me”, says Aaron. “It’s not safe in these woods. Too many Ghosts.”

“I’m sorry”, starts Atarah. “But no. I’m not going back. Not to him.” There was an almost inconspicuous snarl in Atarah’s tone.

“Why not?” Aaron steps closer to Atarah and Stephen. Anguish and confusion covered Aaron’s face. “We can deal with-” Aaron’s eyes catch the ropes tied around Atarah’s hands. He looks around the fire and towards the broken cockpit. Through the fire light, he looks at Stephen’s uniform and the revolver pointing at his head.

He shouts. “Get back Atarah!” Aaron grabs his rifle and readies his aim, but it was too late. Atarah dives towards the nearby rifle.

Stephen stands and shoots. Click. It didn’t work. The gunpowder must be wet from the snow Stephen thought. Stephen began to load his pistol as Aaron aimed his rifle at him.

BANG.

Smoke seeps from Atarah’s rifle. Atarah lies in the snow holding the rifle. Aaron lies dead In the snow. The blood seeps into the nearby snow.

Stephen walks towards him. “C’mon, We should move. If he came, more will surely follow.”

Atarah drop his rifle away and lies still. Stephen grabs the rifle and his belongings.

“Atarah”, Stephen says quietly. He places his hand on Atarah’s shoulder. “We need to go.” Stephen offers a hand up.

Atarah grabs his hand and stands.

With no intonation, no emotion, and no life, he spoke, “let’s go.”

03:15

A sea of stars cover the open night sky as Stephen and Atarah walk through the forest. The moonlight creates a light deep blue aura in the forest. The snow falls harder.

Stephen takes out his distress beacon. Still no sign of anyone nearby. The beeping ceased.

Atarah’s walks weakens. Stephen quickly grabs him. They’ve been walking for hours. They pass by fallen trees and dead tree stumps.

“Let’s stop here’, says Stephen noticing Atarah’s weariness. Stephen ushers for Atarah to sit on the log. Atarah plops down on the log and Stephen sits near him.

“Thank you. Atarah”, Stephen begins. “For saving my life.”

Atarah doesn’t reply. He keeps looking towards the ground. His hands tremble slightly.

Stephen sees Atarah’s entire shell tremble. Stephen leans in and puts his hand out. “I’m Stephen.” Atarah doesn’t shake.

Stephen leans back. “First time?” Atarah quickly glances at Stephen. “Can’t say it gets any easier. You become numb to it. The pain of taking a life.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of”, whispers Atarah.

Stephen reaches into his supplies and takes out a knife. He leans to Atarah and cuts the rope tying his hands. Stephen takes out a small piece of bread. He hands half to Atarah.

“How did you end up here”, asks Stephen. “In the forest?”

“Hiding from soldiers who were trying to kill me”, says Atarah reaching for the bread.

“Lazarian?”

Atarah shakes his head. “Bhagavad” He turns to face Stephen.

“They brought me along for a hunt”, starts Atarah. “For elk and moose. I hadn’t never hunted elk or moose or other animals,

but they told me not to worry. We kept walking until we were deep in the forest. I saw tracks and walked ahead of the group. Then I heard a gun click. I didn't see any elk or moose. They were pointing it at me. And they began firing. So I ran."

"Christ, why would they do that?"

"I refused to use the gun. I was afraid. Probably figured it was easier to kill me rather let me serve and hold them back."

"God", says Stephen overwhelmed. "Why are you in the Bhagavad army?"

"My entire family served. I'd be disappointing them if I didn't. But I've never taken a life before now. How long have you been serving?"

"I didn't initially. Like you, my mother and father served, so did my younger brothers. My father was discharged honorably, but suffered terrible bouts of shell shock. Oftentimes at home I saw him twitch in his sleep and fight as if he was reliving the war again. Sometimes he forgot we were his children."

"What made you join?"

"One day, I was standing with my younger sister at the sidewalk. I held her hand as we awaited the traffic to slow so we could cross and head to the park. The traffic cleared and I walked ahead holding her hand until it slipped from my grasp. A car had mounted the curb and crashed into my sister. By pure luck it missed me. I remember looking at my sister lying 10 feet away from me wondering why was she over there? She was just here a second ago. When I came to my senses, I ran over to her and carried her to the hospital. I didn't hear anything. If anyone already called an ambulance or if anyone was calling my name, I kept running to the hospital 3 blocks away. I didn't realize that she had died from the impact. I never wanted to feel that helpless."

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Stephen shrugs. "Some people are precious and need to be protected." Stephen nibbles on the bread. "Y'know, you're the first Bhagavad soldier who hasn't tried to kill me."

"And you're the first Lazarian soldier who hasn't tried to kill me", replies Atarah chuckling. The two of them laugh. "I'd be a sailor if there was no war. What would you do if there was no war?"

"War's the only thing I know how to do. This is my life. I don't know what I'd do." Stephen's pocket watch glistens in the moonlight.

"Who's the person in the photo", says Atarah.

Stephen smiles. "My wife. To whom I hope to return." He looks to Atarah. "What about you? Any family at home?"

"They died during the war. Lazarian soldiers invaded our town. I hid and the Bhagavad army picked me up."

"What town?"

"Noking."

"Oh." Stephen fell silent.

Atarah starts. "You —" BANG

Atarah fell to the ground in pain. Blood oozed from his shoulder. Stephen dived to the ground hiding behind the log. The shot echoed in the forest.

"Who was that?" Says Stephen ducking for cover. Short and quick whistling sounds can be heard surrounding them.

Atarah winces in pain as he speaks. "Ghosts." Atarah gestures for him to be quiet. The whistling quiets, not originating with the wind, but from people.

He grabs a rifle and peers over the log. Two figures walk in the dark of the night carrying rifles.

BANG. One of the figures fall. Multiple whistling sounds emerge from all corners of the forest. BANG. A bullet strikes the

log near Stephen. He can hear footsteps in the snow quickly approaching him. Stephen prepares to run. He sees Atarah on the ground in quietly winching in pain as he holds his rifle. Stephen sits and holds his ground.

Stephen scans the environment. A twig snaps to his left. BANG. A ghost fell beside Stephen. Atarah shot the ghost before Stephen could react.

Using the log as cover, Stephen begins to shoot at the approaching ghosts. They appear and disappear, wisps of humans vanishing under the cover of night. Stephen and Atarah are surrounded by higher ground. If the ghosts corner them here, they'll die.

Stephen continues to shoot as he speaks to Atarah. "Can you move?"

"yes."

"Follow me and stay low."

The two of them crouch and run towards higher ground. As the they reach the higher ground, bullets ricochet off the ground in front of the Stephen nearly knocking him backward. Stephen ushers for Atarah to wait as he looks for another place to hide. In the distance, he sees a patch of evergreens and dead trees to provide ample cover. They wait for the gunfire to cease. Then they took off.

Bullets wizzed past them as Stephen and Atarah run for cover. Blood dripped from Atarah's shoulder. The whistling grew louder and rapidly approached them.

Almost there, thinks Stephen. 100 yards away. Barks, moss, and snow was flying about from the impact of the bullets and the rushing through the snow. 50 yards away. A small gap can be seen between the bottom of the log and the ground. Large enough to slide through. Stephen runs faster and dives underneath the log.

He drops among dead logs and snow covered evergreens.

He waited for Atarah, but he never arrived. Stephen peers through leaves of the evergreen. He sees Atarah lying on the ground atop red snow. Two ghosts grab him and drag him off. The falling snow quickly covers the red.

04:00

Stephen struggles to follow the blood trail in the heavy snowstorm. He find a small campsite with 1 tent and a fire burning in the night. Atarah was tied to a dead log. Bruised and cut, the blood seeps from his shoulder.

Stephen waits in the shadows watching the tent. The distress beacon beeps in his jacket. Two ghosts emerge from the tent wielding rifles.

"What'd you hear", whispers one.

The other scans the environment. "Nothing." He looks at Atarah. "Only a few hours left."

"What'd you think Bhagavad would give for one of their own?"

"Look at him. Not much. But we need food." He douses the fire and the two ghosts return to their tent.

Stephen waits for them to return, but they don't. He quietly approaches their camp and unsheathes a dagger.

The fire embers glow in the night. Stephen approaches Atarah. The blood loss left him half-conscious. Stephen cuts the ropes holding Atarah and he stops.

He turns and walks towards the tent. The night is silent as Stephen stands outside the tent. He takes out his pistol, shoots into the tent, and rushes into the tent.

Atarah hears scuffling and screaming as Stephen slaughters the ghosts.

04:30

The faint sunlight breaks through the darkness of the forest. Stephen woke up beside a dying fire. Atarah is fast asleep, his bandage is covered in blood. He wakes Atarah up.

"It's still bleeding", says Stephen. "Looks like they hit an artery."

"The cold'll take care of it.", says Atarah drearily. "Just let me here."

SNAP. Stephen hears a crack in the woods. He looks around for other ghosts for anything. Nothing. No whistling. The distress beacon begins beeping again.

Stephen ignores it. He picks up Atarah in his arms. "Which way to the clearing", asks Stephen.

"Head towards the sun."

Stephen carries Atarah through the forest. The blood drips through the bandage and down Stephen's arms leaving a trail. The beeping continues, now steady.

"How much further", says Atarah weakly.

"Not far", says Stephen. "I can see the clearing about 400 meters." The beeping increases rapidly becoming quite audible from Stephen's jacket pocket. He stops in his tracks. Something's following them. He hears scuffling nearby. He looks to his left. 1000 meters away from him is a tiger. It's orange and black coat contrast the white snow. It stares back at Stephen.

"They're hunting.", says Stephen. He walks faster towards the clearing. Another tiger appears on his right. It's white with black stripes. The white tiger is 800 meters away keeping pace.

Atarah sees the tigers. "I don't think I'll make it."

"No, I'm not losing you. Not again."

"You were there that night in Noking", says Atarah fading in and out of consciousness. "It was you."

"I'm sorry, Atarah. I can't bring back your family, but I can get you out of here alive."

Stephen begins running as fast he can while carrying Atarah. 350 meters from the clearing. He looks to his sides. The tigers are closing in, only 150 meters to the clearing he reckons. He takes out the distress beacon. Still steady beeping.

300 meters. Almost. "AAAH", Stephen screams in pain as he hits the hard forest ground. He tripped on a tree root. Stephen falls to the ground and Atarah, a foot ahead of him.

He looks behind them. The tigers are rapidly approaching. 500 meters and approaching fast like honing missiles.

He rushes over to grab Atarah. "ready? 3-2-1." He lifts Atarah and takes off for the clearing.

Atarah looks behind them at the tigers rapidly closing the gap. He looks at the clearing. 60 meters, 55. 50. 45. A tiger leaps at Stephen knocking him to the ground, 40 meters from the clearing. The distress beacon falls out of his pocket and lands by Atarah.

The 400 lb animal steps on Stephen's back and bares its teeth as it prepares to strike his jugular. It's claws dig into his back. Stephen couldn't reach for his pistol the weight of the animal is too great. The claws of the white tiger dug into his coat and drew blood. His entire torso was pinned to the ground. Under the weight of the tiger, his lungs feels like balloons ready to burst. He was at the mercy of the white tiger.

The other tiger runs to Atarah. Atarah flew forward once again this time rolling close enough to the clearing. Atarah sees the distress beacon. Through his blurry vision, he sees a figure rapidly approaching them in the distance 10 meters away before he blacked out.

The beeping increases as the figure approaches.

08:05

The sun sets on a large plain covered in Lazarian tents and filled with resting soldiers. People are being carried on stretches like ants traversing through their nest. Mess tents filled with soldiers and cooks.

A small house sits in the distance away from the tents and few soldiers ever ventured towards it.

A soldier walks into a tent to meet a large man with a bushy mustache.

"Colonel Lawrence", says the soldier walking in and saluting. "He's awake." Lawrence stands and follows the soldier out of the room.

They walk to the medical tent. 6 beds line both sides of the tent. Nurses and doctors tend to the patients filling the beds. They walk to the end of the tent.

“Christ”, says Lawrence. “Didn’t think you’d make it. Glad to have our best hunter back.”

“I’m sure you are”, replied Stephen indignantly. His face is half covered in cuts and his left leg is suspended.

“Right. Well”, says Lawrence. “I’ll leave you to heal.” Lawrence pats MacKenzie on the shoulder and walks away.

A nurse walks towards Stephen’s bed.

“How’re his wounds”, Mackenzie asks the nurse.

“Take ‘em about 1 months to heal up. Nothing major. He’s lucky the tiger didn’t crush his lungs as well.” The nurse checks Stephen’s bandages and walks away.

“Thank you, Mac. For saving me.”

“I was only able to do it because you had your damn beacon on the entire night. I couldn’t sleep”, says MacKenzie. “And you brought Lawrence a live one.” MacKenzie leans closer to Stephen and whispers. “I’m sorry Lawrence heard the distress call. I had to tell him.”

Stephen nods. “How’s the boy?”

“With Dr. Henry.”

“What?!” Stephen tries moving, but Mackenzie holds him down.

“You cannot go anywhere. or they’ll kill you. Colonel Lawrence was going to let you die. He only kept you alive because you brought Dr. Henry a live one. Just sit here and rest.”

“You shouldn’t have brought me here”, snaps Stephen. He lies back. “What now?”

“I’ll think of something.”

“Who knows?”

MacKenzie shook his head. “Only Lawrence, I think. Colonel Allen alerted Lawrence as soon as you defected. I was sent after you. You just need to rest. No one else knows why you’re here, they just know that you were injured. You make a ruckus and people will get curious. Can’t rely on Lawrence to avoid gossip.”

“Good by Mac.”

“Push the beacon again, and I’ll get you out of here. And we’ll get the boy out too.”

Mackenzie leaves Stephen in the tent.

09:00

It’s twilight, hours before sunset. Stephen walks with a limp around the hospital tent.

“Wow. In a 3 weeks, you’re walking. You’re healing rather well”, says the Nurse watching him walk. “A few more weeks, you’ll be as good as new.”

“I’m ready now.” Stephen picks up his walking pace, pushing himself.

“Careful”, says the Nurse. “You might reopen the stitches.” Stephen stops, tired from doing laps of the tent. He lays on his hospital bed and closes his eyes.

He pretended to sleep and waited for the nurse to leave the tent. Once the nurse left, Stephen’s eyes shoot open. He looks around making sure he was alone. He grabs his cane, distress beacon, and moves quietly out of the tent.

It's night time and mostly everyone is asleep. A faint yellow light emerges from the house. Stephen quietly limps towards the house. He knocks on the door.

A man in a white lab coat opened the door. He had short hair and wore round glasses and a named tag titled: H.H, scientist. "Ah, the man of the hour. Come in."

"What are you working on this late in the night, Doctor?" Dr. Henry walks ahead of Stephen leading him to a door.

"The boy", says Dr. Henry. "I've never gotten a chance to study a live one before. They're quite interesting creatures. Don't you think?" Henry turned to face Stephen.

"yes", replies Stephen quietly.

"You were in the presence of one. What are they like? Anything would help my studies." Henry continues to walk to the door. Stephen reluctantly follows.

"They're strong, resilient folk."

"Yes that would explain how long he's lasted." Henry opens the door to reveal two separate rooms separated by a wall. One room on the left entirely dark and the other had a bright light illuminating it with a glass partition viewing window. The illuminated room mirrored an operating theatre. Unclean syringes filled with chemicals sit on tables and drops of blood dot the floor. A young boy sits constrained in a chair breathing heavily.

"Atarah is quite resilient", says Dr. Henry. "I've discovered their pupil dilation is quite similar to ours and same with chemicals in their skin pigmentation. It's an interesting puzzle. What makes them so inferior and so easily corrupted. Surely, we're not that easily beaten, so there must be some biological difference."

Stephen and Dr. Henry enter the dark room and look at Atarah through the window pane.

"Why do you treat him here, not in the tents?"

"Oh I don't wish to disturb the other doctors with my experiments." Dr. Henry walks to the wall. "This room's soundproof." Dr. Henry walks back to Stephen. "What brings you here?"

"I wanted to see the boy", stammered Stephen.

Dr. Henry smiles and looks to the boy and walks to the operating room. "The Bhagavad people are quite vocal under duress. Under the influence of drugs or violence. He's told interesting stories of his life and experiences." Stephen follows behind him.

He speaks without looking at Stephen. "You don't think I know?" Dr. Henry grabs a syringe and studies its contents.

"I'm not sure what you mean", says Stephen.

"Why, you're here to take this boy", says Dr. Henry confidently. Dr. Henry spins around and stabs Stephen with the syringe.

Stephen stumbles to the ground. The contents of the syringe course through his veins, Stephen convulses on the verge of puking. Atarah's eyes lift slightly and his head lifts.

Dr. Henry notices Atarah's awake. "Ah good." He walks towards Atarah with a syringe and grabs his head. Dr. Henry restrains Atarah's head against the chair so that he faces Stephen. "Atarah", asks Dr. Henry kindly. "Are you awake can you see?" Atarah blinks.

"Do you know who this man is", says Dr. Henry pointing at Stephen. "Do you know what he does? He hunts Bhagavad people. Your people. And Brings them to us. Dead or alive. He's a Bhag Hunter."

Atarah couldn't speak. His eyes conveyed the betrayal he felt. He strained to keep his eyes open underneath the weight of marginally least half chemicals coursing through his veins. He stares at Stephen squirming in pain from the concoction.

"It'll take a few minutes, but you'll die. Just not as fast or painless as you'd like", says Dr. Henry. He leans towards Stephen. "I don't forgive defectors." Stephen straining to look at Dr. Henry with his blood-red eyes. Dr. Henry grabs another syringe

and walks towards Atarah. He prepares to inject Atarah with the syringe.

Stephen watches and musters the strength to tackle Dr. Henry to the ground before he could inject Atarah. The syringe falls out of Dr. Henry's hand and falls to the ground and rolls towards the partition.

Stephen beats down on Dr. Henry, but he's too weak. Dr. Henry easily overtakes him pushes him towards the portion. Dr. Henry grabs a beaker and hits Stephen across the head with it.

Stephen sees the syringe near his right hand. He struggles to reach the syringe, but Dr. Henry's weight holds him back. Dr. Henry shattered the beaker on the ground, grabbed a shard, and stabbed Stephen in the thigh drawing blood from his left femoral artery. Then Dr. Henry tries to slit Stephen's throat. He slashes towards Stephen's throat but Stephen catches his arm.

"You've gotten soft Stephen", says Dr. Henry slowly overcoming Stephen's dying strength.

Holding Dr. Henry's arm with his left, Stephen punches Dr. Henry with his right. Dr. Henry stumbles back allowing Stephen enough reach to grab the syringe. He lunged forward grabbing the syringe and jumping on top of Dr. Henry. Stephen stabs Dr. Henry in the neck and fully injects the contents into Dr. Henry.

Dr. Henry spasms from the injection and drops the glass shard. Stephen grabs the glass shard and stabs Dr. Henry in the heart.

"Luckily, I'm merciful doctor", says Stephen. Dr. Henry gasps his final breaths. His arms were flailing about trying to grab Stephen, but they drop dead.

Stephen stands as his left leg gushes blood. He uses the tables and moves towards Atarah who remains constrained to the chair. Stephen uses the glass shard and cuts open the restraints. Atarah falls to the ground tired and Stephen falls beside him. Stephen pushes his back against the wall.

The blood from Stephen's injury pools around him. Atarah stands and looks at Stephen.

"I'm sorry Atarah", says Stephen weakly. Stephen reaches for his pockets and pulls out the distress beacon. He tries to press the button, but his arm jerks and he drops the distress beacon. "Press-press- press th-the button." Stephen struggles to speak steadily as more muscles convulse. "Help will come and get you out of here."

Atarah pushes the button. The screen says Distress Beacon activated and the beeping began. "You're coming with me", says Atarah.

Stephen reaches for his pockets again and takes out his pocket watch. He clicks it open and places it on the ground. Blood and foam slowly seeped from Stephen's mouth.

Atarah sees the blurry gray photo. "Don't worry. You'll see her again."

Stephen's eyes struggle to stay open. Before they finally close, Stephen smiling whispers. "I will see her again."

The beeping of the distress beacon is slowly increasing. Atarah takes the pocket watch and leaves the operation room. Atarah wakes to the window and stares at the tents 400 meters away.

The moonlight shines brightly in the sky. The forest overshadows the tents casting them in a void of complete darkness and desolation as Stephen and Atarah head towards the moonlight. A figure is approaching the house. The beeping of the distress beacon is increasing.

Atarah takes out the pocket watch and clicks it open.

The blurry photo of Stephen's wife is barely visible. This is the first good look Atarah got at the photo. It was an old photo. Years old. Decades maybe.

He looked at the slightly cracked watch face. The time still said. 02:05

THE END