

## Chapter 1 The First Encounter

A beam of light broke through the boarded window, illuminating a cloud of dust like a flurry of fire flies. Standing amidst the brown cloud was the Shadowy Figure, rigid as a tree and lifeless as a tundra. Despite his small stature he was an imposing man. Muscles exploded from his black clothing like mountains, littering his body with bulging curves. Attached to his side was a curved sword with a black handle, marked from top to bottom with hieroglyphs. His boots tightly wrapped around his ankles like a snake clinging to its prey. Behind a black veil that covered his face was an imposing stare, glaring across the room. Speaking a language familiar to few, this living nightmare hailed from a distant and dark world...Sarnisia.

"Do you have the payment?" asked another dark, mischievous man. He stood across the room from the Shadowy Figure, surrounded by three other mysterious men. All were dressed in cheap suits with expressions of anxiety drawn across their faces. The man who had spoken glared into the Sarnisian's unseen eyes, sizing him up like a boxer analyzing his opponent. A trickle of fear dripped across his heart, but was quickly replaced with sour confidence as the man felt his gun through his coat pocket. It was all the reassurance he needed...that, and the protection of his three friends.

The Shadowy Figure stepped forward with a powerful pace, immediately tearing apart any confidence the slimy men held onto. Carefully, he redistributed his weight across his feet, allowing him to silently move across the squeaky floorboards. Small clouds of dust climbed into the air with each heavy step, choking the room like a swarm of locust. As he approached the four men grew nervous, trading worried glances with one another.

The Shadowy Figure abruptly halted two paces away from the small table and lifted a tiny suitcase. In the blink of an eye the case thumped on the table, throwing up a choking brow cloud. The four men coughed and waved the dirt from their faces as the Figure stood silently, watching them with some amusement.

Eagerly one of the men reached for the case and pushed his thumb over the small metal clasp. A tiny metallic ring bounced across the room as the lid of the case gently creaked open. The four men glanced inside, their eager eyes widening with anticipation as they searched for their reward in the black interior. Just as the briefcase opened halfway their expressions of joy melted, replaced with confusion and anger.

"There's nothing in here!" one of the men bellowed, slamming the lid of the case. He reached into the pocket of his jacket and drew a handgun. In unison his comrades followed suit, leveling their weapons on the Shadowy Figure. Each man pulled back the receiver of his weapon and loaded a round into the chamber, ready to fire at the drop of a pin. Each click of the loaded guns fell deaf on the Shadowy Figure's ears, failing to spark terror into his soul. He continued standing as still as a statue, refusing to display any fear, or for that matter, any emotion at all.

The man standing immediately behind the table reached into his coat pocket and drew a small disc, tightly clutching in between his grimy fingers. He held it up, showing it to the Shadowy Figure as if it were a shimmering trophy. "The only way you're going to get this," he said, "is if we get our payment!"

"Do you know what we had to go through in order to get this?" another man spoke with a dry and raspy voice.

The Figure stood silently, refusing to respond.

"We'll go to jail for the rest of our lives for this! You promised us two million credits. We want our money and we want it now!"

Still the Shadowy Figure remained motionless. Confused by his reaction the four men shot hurried glances at each other, subconsciously begging for an answer to the Figure's awkward silence.

"Will you give us our money? Or are we just going to have to kill you?" the man waited a moment for the Shadowy Figure to respond; several tense seconds passed...followed by gunshots.

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The door in the far wall blew off of its hinges, sending a shower of debris spilling into the room. Light poured through the decimated entrance like water through a dam, lighting up even the darkest corners. As small splinters of the frame rained down in a symphony of knocking wood a whirlwind of dust and dirt suffocated the air, choking it with a blinding hurricane of grime.

The first to step through the demolished doorway was a creature that stood six feet six inches, weighing in at three hundred and fifty pounds. He was light brown in color, with powerful muscles dwarfing that of the Shadowy Figure. Extending from the sides of his head were two giant, bat-like ears. In the center of his face were enormous black eyes that cut through the blinding cloud of dirt, seeing heat rather than color. Behind a wire work of serrated teeth was a five-foot tongue, forked at the end like a snake's, with two venom sacks resting beneath it.

Emerging from the center of the creature's back was a set of gargantuan leathery wings which dropped down to his feet and climbed above his head. Although vestigial, these wings acted like natural body armor, capable of protecting his muscular mass from severe trauma.

Jetting from each of his elbows and knees were small, one-inch long hooks, sharpened to a dangerous point and ready for a deadly use. They dangled off his limbs like stalactites from a cave, threatening all who would dare oppose him. Adding to his threatening mass were long sets of claws erupting from each hand, each capable of slicing through solid metal.

This creature, powerful as a god, was a Helmechute known simply as Xeno.

Behind Xeno walked in a less intimidating, equally threatening man. Although the top of his head barely reached Xeno's shoulders, and his bulk was considerable less than his Helmechute friend, his skills in combat easily surpassed most special forces. His name was Mange, a Human in his late twenties.

Mange had a full head of brown hair and a rugged looking face with expressions carved from solid stone. His light-sensitive eyes were shielded by thick, dark sunglasses which he wore during all times of the day. Draped over his muscular body was a thick, black trench coat that dropped down to his feet. Commanding boots with spiked bottoms climbed his legs, securely strapped by enormous buckles. Across his waist was a thick black belt with two holsters on either side, each housing a pair of beastly .45 magnum revolvers.

These men, different in appearance but similar in objective, were but two members of the most powerful fighting force in the known universe; they were Queensmen, protectors of the Zintoniean Empire.

Xeno stepped through the entrance several feet, allowing Mange to move off to the left and get a clear look at the Shadowy Figure. Slowly Mange drew one of his weapons and aimed it at the Figure while Xeno took up a defensive posture. The Figure, who was standing in a sea of bodies, drew his already bloodied sword and held it vertically, ready to face the two Queensmen.

“Drop your weapon!” Mange ordered. As before, the Figure did not comply. Mange pulled back on the trigger of his weapon, blasting a powerful magnum round towards the Figure. As if he could see into the future, the Figure easily dodged the bullet and started running toward the wall. Mange took two more shots, both of which missed, blowing two massive holes in the back wall. Just as the Figure neared the wall he vanished into the choking brown cloud, disappearing without a trace.

Just as quickly as he vanished, the Figure reappeared behind Mange, catching him completely off guard. Lifting his weapon, the Figure slammed the wooden handle into the back of Mange’s head. The blow was powerful and stunning; Mange dropped to the wooden floor, scattering dust in all directions. He could feel the fingers of pain clawing through the back of his skull as he fell to the ground, nearly immobilized by the quick strike.

Xeno, having just witnessed the assault, quickly turned toward the Shadowy Figure and charged. Raising one of his huge claws he swung with all of his strength, aiming for the Figure’s face.

The Figure was too fast for him and easily dodged to the side as the Helmecute’s attack harmlessly flew past. Xeno lifted one of his muscular legs and tried to kick the Figure in the head. Again the Shadowy Figure evaded the attack with ease, leaving Xeno wide open for a counter attack.

With lightning speed, the Sarnisian stepped toward Xeno and tightly clenched his fist. He pulled back, flexed his muscles and forced his attack forward. The strike landed perfectly in Xeno’s side, knocking him off balance. Seizing the opportunity the Shadowy Figure leapt into the air and pulled back one of his legs. As if it were spring-loaded, he released, crushing Xeno’s face with his foot. The titanic Helmecute flew back onto the floor, shaking the wooden boards as he landed.

Meanwhile, the Shadowy Figure bolted into the doorway, grabbed on to the doorframe, and swung himself into the hall. With barely enough time to react Mange sat up and aimed his weapon. He pulled back on the trigger once more, blowing another colossal hole through the wall.

His final shot missed, and the Shadowy Figure escaped.

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Outside, the streets of Nicroniea were jammed packed with the afternoon rush hour. Dozens of small skyscrapers cast deep shadows on the busy streets below, engulfing them in darkness. Vehicles of all shapes and sizes meandered through the cramped roadways, fighting one another in the daily struggle to get home. Pedestrians

pushed by each other as they made their way along the bustling sidewalks, crowding like a mob. The already setting sun was starting to give way to an afternoon chill, which was only amplified by a slight breeze that wormed its way between the buildings. The light blue sky was beginning to pick up hints of purple as the day slowly faded to night.

The Shadowy Figure pushed his way along the sidewalk, moving between people as quickly as he could. He dodged from one side to the other, forcing his way through the endless wall of pedestrians. People shouted angry insults at the Figure as he barreled through them, weaving in and out of the massive crowd. The Shadowy Figure had run about three blocks before he finally came to a stop. Desperately he looked around, trying to locate any sort of protection. Although he couldn't see his adversaries, he knew he was being followed, and it would only be a matter of time before a confrontation would break out.

Across the street he could see the neon lights of a pub that had just opened for the afternoon rush. Without delay, the Shadowy Figure bolted into the street, running for the building. He leaped over the hoods of cars and dodged around vehicles as if he was an acrobat. More people screamed insults and blared the horns of their vehicles as he rushed past; however the Figure seemed unfazed and continued to move forward. Once he reached the far side of the street, he quickly pushed past a group of pedestrians and barged through the front door of the busy bar.

Inside the Sarnisian found a seat in the far corner and sat down. He looked cautiously around at the smoky room filled with neon lights and talkative people. His eyes vigilantly examined every inch of the room, scouring for anything that appeared out of the ordinary. Seeing only chattering people and clanking glasses of alcohol, the Shadowy Figure sat back for a moment and relaxed, satisfied with his security.

It would not last long.

The door to the pub opened again, letting in a chilling draft and two suspicious looking men. The first to walk through was named Lejquraed. He was dressed in a small brown coat, which was buttoned up and neatly draped over a pair of black slacks. His short orange hair and well-trimmed beard, which tightly clung to his face, shimmered in the neon light. Across his neck was a set of gills, a clear give away to his species. Strapped across his shoulder was a large black assault rifle that reflected everything off its perfectly polished frame. The massive weapon tenderly bounced on his back as he moved farther into the bar, scoping out the area like a scout.

Just behind Lejquraed was another man by the name of Harp. Harp wore a simple outfit of a black shirt and blue pants. Just like his comrades he sported spiked boots, serving as both a deadly weapon and a useful tool. Across his waist was a belt that carried three knives on either side. Each knife had a maple handle that shimmered with a deceptively gentle glow, radiating like a lighthouse. The six-inch blades were sharpened and polished to impressive edges, gleaming like rays of sunlight. They moved gracefully with each step Harp took, acting as if they were a part of his body.

Reaching into one of his pockets, Harp pulled out a small silver device and clutched it with a gorilla grip. He gently pushed his finger on the side, breaking the seal and opening the device. Harp lifted the tiny object to his mouth and began to speak. "Harp to Xenon, we have located the target. Moving to engage." Through the other end of the communications device, a deep rumbling voice replied.

“ETA one minute.” Satisfied with the answer Harp collapsed the device and replaced it in his pocket. By now the Shadowy Figure was already standing and ready for a fight, flexing his vast muscles under his deep black shroud. Although he had not drawn his sword, the Figure was still an intimidating opponent.

Harp slowly ambled to the right, gently forcing his way past a group of unsuspecting patrons. As Harp walked farther into the room the Shadowy Figure slowly began to rotate his hips, ready for an attack from either man. The situation quietly grew more and more tense as the three men locked eyes with one another, waiting for the first fatal move.

As fast as he could Lejquraed un-strapped his weapon and shouldered it, aiming directly at the Shadowy Figure. He held the Shadow III assault rifle with a perfect grip, keeping it as steady as he could. Lejquraed’s eyes peered endlessly down the scope, focused on one thing and one thing only, the death of the Shadowy Figure. Without hesitation or any hint of future regret, Lejquraed yanked back on the trigger.

The automatic weapon spilled brass casings across the floor in a waterfall of smoldering empty shells. Each bullet bawled like an explosion in the tiny bar, rattling the building down to its foundations. People dove for cover and screamed for their lives as each shot rang out. The muzzle flash from the end of the weapon was blinding in the smoke-filled room, brighter than a bon fire at midnight. The terrified shrieks of innocent people almost overpowered the endless drone of gunfire.

Lejquraed held up perfectly against the relentless kicking of the weapon, cushioning the fearsome recoil with his muscular shoulder. Despite the panicked crowd of people his focus remained set on the Shadowy Figure only feet away. Each blast of the weapon would bring him closer to his mission’s objective, or so he thought.

The Shadowy Figure drew his sword with mind bending speed and began turning it around in his hands faster than the eye could see. In the flash of a thought, the Figure was twisting and contorting so swiftly he had turned into nothing but a blur. A shower of sparks lit up in a brilliant display and spilled into the air from every direction around the Figure. A horrid sound of twisting and mangled metal grew from the Shadowy Figure’s position, scraping the air like sheers. The shimmer of the Sarnisian’s sword was almost as bright as the fiery sparks that fell from his body, blinding all who looked on.

Lejquraed ceased fire and lowered his weapon, blowing away the gun smoke that had built in the air. To his astonishment, and that of Harp’s, the Shadowy Figure remained unscathed. With a sword in his hand the Figure looked more threatening than ever before, standing with an imposing stance. Amazed by the sight Lejquraed could only gaze in wonder. “I didn’t do a single thing!” he exclaimed, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I will!” Harp responded. Clenching a knife in each of his three fingered hands he ran wildly towards the Shadowy Figure, twisting the blades in a fearsome display of his abilities. The Shadowy Figure lifted his sword in a defense posture and readied himself for Harp’s assault.

Harp leaped over a table with a downward thrust from one of his knives, aiming straight at the Figure’s face. He slashed and stabbed as fast as he could, swinging his weapons randomly. The Shadowy Figure blocked and evaded each attack sent against him as if it were child’s play. He moved with ease against Harp, defending himself successfully from the vicious onslaught.

Harp stabbed at the Shadowy Figure's head while simultaneously slashing at his stomach. Majestically the Sarnisian gracefully leaned back, dodging the blade by mere inches. As he did he lifted his sword and blocked the second attack against him. The Shadowy Figure spun around, propelling his boot off the ground and crashing his heel into Harp's face. The powerful blow was so painful that Harp, like Mange, instantly fell to the ground, nearly unconscious as each wave of agony stopped into his head and rippled through the his body. As Harp collapsed, the Shadowy Figure turned back around to face Lejquraed.

The Figure began running towards the Queensmen, leaping over tables and dodging around overturned chairs. The Figure made impressive time moving over the many obstacles, swinging his body in mind contorting ways.

Surprised by the Figure's sudden spur of motion, Lejquraed re-shouldered his weapon and began to open fire. Like before, each pulsing round ripped apart the air as it flew towards the enemy, burning a path through the dense smoke. The Shadowy Figure lifted his sword and began twirling it faster than ever before, splitting open the bullets as they flew towards him. Each clank of metal on metal caused a spark, each spark landed closer and closer as the Shadowy Figure ran towards the Queensmen. In the time it would take to form a frantic thought, the Shadowy Figure was standing in front of Lejquraed, ready for another fight.

The Sarnisian simply elbowed Lejquraed in the chin and kned him in the stomach, moving with the speed of a rocket. Each blow was so great that it brought Lejquraed to his knees, almost knocking him out cold. While he dropped, the Shadowy Figure kicked his weapon so hard a portion of the handle snapped off in Lejquraed's hand as the remainder of the rifle skidded across the bar floor. With no time to waste the Shadowy Figure sprang toward the door and disappeared, once again evaporating into the city streets.

Painfully, Harp stood up and stumbled over to his friend. With a helping hand he pulled Lejquraed to his feet, shaking off the vibrations of his defeat. "Are you okay?" he asked. Lejquraed nodded his head, still crippled from the devastating attack. Harp glimpsed at the door with an expression of pure confusion written across his face. The pain was still seeping from his head and drenching the rest of his body, begging him not to continue. "What was that thing?" he asked aloud. Lejquraed released a long sigh and shook his head, finding himself pondering same question.

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Xeno and Mange weaved through traffic as they rocketed along on two Queensmen standard motorcycles. Each of the massive bikes was painted deep black and clad with two thick wheels that spun widely as the Queensmen flew through the heavy traffic. The motorcycles were designed to the specifications of each Queensmen with engines capable of carrying the vehicles in excess of one hundred and fifty miles an hour. Their frames were extremely light and durable, capable of blocking small caliber weapon fire. The handlebars were equipped with several different switches, allowing the Queensmen more control over the vehicle as they moved.

Just in front of the Queensmen was a low flying craft, a Hellcaller. The Hellcaller had a small fuselage barely big enough for one pilot. Two wings protruded from both sides and folded back to make a perfect v shape; the edges of the wings were razor sharp, just like the Shadowy Figure's sword. The Hellcaller moved at mind boggling speeds over the tops of the vehicles in the road. It flew so low that occasionally the wings sliced off the top of a car waiting in traffic, melting through it like a knife through butter.

The Queensmen moved through the vehicles as they pursued the Sarnisian Hellcaller, dodging the obstacles at breakneck speeds. Cars, buildings and people shuffled by so fast they were nothing but a colorful rainbow to the concentrated Queensmen. Mange and Xeno drove so quickly, the smallest mistake, the tiniest miscalculation, would spell their doom; however, their objective was far more important than their lives.

The screaming engines of the motorcycles could be heard through the crowded city streets as they pressed on towards the Shadowy Figure. The Hellcaller on the other hand, was silent as it glided over the rooftops of the civilian vehicles.

Mange and Xeno missed cars by millimeters as they snaked their way around, following the Figure. The cold wind bit at their faces, chilling them to the bone as it pulsed over their bodies. Although neither showed it, the impossible turns and super speeds of the motorcycles sparked fear in the two Queensmen.

After traveling down the road several miles Harp and Lejquraed caught up on their own motorcycles and joined the pursuit. The combined humming of the motorcycles echoed through the cramped buildings of the city like the buzzing of a saw. By this time the Hellcaller was accelerating even faster, forcing the Queensmen to take on deadlier speeds.

The Hellcaller rushed into the entrance of a tunnel, scraping against the top as it flew along. The four Queensmen continued pursuit, twisting and turning in the thick traffic. By now the civilian vehicles were moving along at a steady pace, making maneuvers even more dangerous. Vehicles missed the Queensmen by mere inches as they raced along. Simultaneously, the Queensmen weaved through the moving lines of cars, never forgetting how close death was.

As the Hellcaller bounced against the walls and ceiling of the tunnel, it gashed the concrete and sprayed sparks over the cars below. The echo of each impact could be heard throughout the entire length of the tunnel like a gunshot. Despite the small amounts of damage the Shadowy Figure continued to press on, flying at one hundred miles an hour. In order to keep up the Queensmen had to move into oncoming traffic, dodging left and right as vehicles swerved past them. Glass sprayed out in every direction as cars impacted each other in order to avoid the four motorcycles, splintering like broken pieces of wood. The Queensmen, however, continued pursuit, never faltering or hesitating.

As the Queensmen dodged back and forth they could feel the roadway starting to tilt upward, a clear giveaway to the end of the tunnel. Looking ahead, Xeno could see the heat of sunlight nearly a mile away. The Helmechute pressed down on the accelerator, rocketing himself forward into the oncoming traffic. He quickly turned the motorcycle left and right in order to avoid collision with civilian vehicles. His three

comrades followed suit, pressing their vehicles faster and faster until they were riding beside him.

The Hellcaller emerged from tunnel and continued flying straight forward, hovering just above the road like a vulture drifting over the dessert. Inches behind the Sarnisian craft, the four Queensmen flew out from the tunnel, catching air as they broke past the exit. Upon landing they immediately weaved their way through the thick traffic and courageously continued their pursuit of the Shadowy Figure.

Lejquraed clutched onto the handlebars with one hand, gripped his rifle with the other. He aimed at the Hellcaller and pulled back on the trigger, letting loose a hail of deadly fire. The empty shell casings littered the street, glittering in the afternoon sun like diamonds on an empty field. Small sparks bounced off of the exterior of the Hellcaller, chipping away at the deep black paint. Occasionally, Lejquraed saw a tracer round bounce off the armor and disappear into the city, streaking away with the speed of a meteor. Although he was focused on hitting his target, Lejquraed was still able to maneuver his way through the traffic, a testament to the training Queensmen endured.

The Hellcaller made a sudden left turn down a side street and continued on. In this part of the city the buildings were not so tall and traffic was very light. This was the kind of break the Queensmen were hoping for. They pushed on their bikes harder and faster than ever, gradually overtaking the Hellcaller. Seeing the result of his mistake, the Shadowy Figure began to tilt the Hellcaller left and right, making wild turns in a futile attempt to lose the Queensmen.

Xeno began to accelerate faster and faster until he was just below the Hellcaller, ducking under the low flying craft. Taking his life into his own hands, Xeno let go of the handlebars and stood up on the motorcycle. He swung wildly at the Hellcaller until his hand finally caught it, scraping away the metal as he gripped onto its frame. Using every ounce of strength, the Helmecute pulled himself upward and hung onto the Hellcaller, throwing himself onto its fuselage. His motorcycle quickly lost balance and crashed into the street, disintegrating before disappearing into the distance. Fire, smoke, and small bits of debris rained across the other three Queensmen as they passed Xeno's tumbling bike.

The Helmecute hung on for dear life as the Hellcaller wildly bobbed up and down, attempting to shake its unwanted passenger. Xeno pulled himself upward, taxing his strength to its limits...and beyond. After a moment or two he managed to tug himself on top of the Hellcaller, barely holding on. The Helmecute dug in with his claws in order to support himself against the while turns and unpredictable maneuvers of the Shadowy Figure. Structures and vehicles below flashed by with every second as the Hellcaller continued to speed through the corridor of buildings. Just as Xeno felt he couldn't hold on any longer help finally came.

Mange pulled up below the Hellcaller, dodging all the vehicles on the roadway below. As a Queensmen, the maneuver proved to be a simple task of balance and reaction to the never ending obstacles of the curving road. Mange looked up at Xeno and made eye contact with him, sharing Xeno's fear of the situation. Without a single word the two exchanged ideas for a plan, conversing through a makeshift body language. However risky the plan was, they knew their objective had to be reached at any cost.

Mange reached down and unzipped a small pouch on his saddlebag, holding to his bike with one hand. Forcing his free hand inside, he gripped a small bomb and pulled it from the bag. With everything he could muster, Mange tossed the explosive up to Xeno, who scarcely caught it with his overextended arms. The force of the wind against his body was so great that Xeno hardly maintained balance, let alone perform small miracles. Despite the difficulties he somehow triumphed, and the Shadowy Figure was at his mercy.

Xeno thumped the small bomb against the fuselage of the Hellcaller, locking it in place with a small magnetic latch. Just as Xeno was about to set the timer he felt the Hellcaller drop from under him. Moving on pure instinct and adrenaline Xeno pushed off the fuselage as hard as he could and folded himself up into his wings. Everything went dark as Xeno fell towards the ground like a fleshy stone to the unforgiving earth.

The Hellcaller plowed into the pavement below, ripping up chunks of asphalt and spraying them into the air. Smoke and fire bellowed out in every direction as the Hellcaller skipped along the street like a stone on a lake. People on the sidewalks scattered in fear as the Hellcaller destroyed itself on the asphalt. Windows in the buildings surrounding the accident were blown out by pieces of debris, shattering like precious pottery. Concussion blasts pushed and pulled at everything near the wreckage, flipping vehicles and carelessly tossing pedestrians to the sidewalk.

Behind the Hellcaller, Xeno smashed into the pavement, going over one hundred miles an hour. Although he was folded up in his wings' protection, Xeno still felt the roadway scraping against his skin. He tumbled and turned continuously, bouncing off the side of a building and landing face first in the street a few hundred feet behind the smoldering Sarnisian vehicle. Small trickles of purple blood poured out of numerous cuts covering his body. He lay helpless for a moment, attempting to regain control over himself. Xeno could feel pain tugging at every inch of his nervous system, locking his muscles in place. His body screamed at him to stop... his mind pushed him to go forward.

Just as Xeno pulled himself to his feet he heard the hum of three motorcycles behind him. The Helmechte slowly turned around and looked at his comrades as they decelerated, climbing from their vehicles. "Are you okay?" Lejquraed inquired, rushing to Xeno's side. Xeno let loose a small grin, showing off his sharp teeth. They were coated in a thin film of blood, but the Helmechte didn't express any amount of pain, and Lejquraed dropped the subject.

"I'll be fine," he answered. Mange climbed off of his motorcycle and started walking towards Xeno. He placed a comforting hand on the Helmechte's shoulder and looked towards the Hellcaller.

"Well. That thing won't be going anywhere."

"Guys!" Harp said with a terrified voice. The other Queensmen drug their eyes over him as he pointed to one of the rooftops of a nearby building. Standing on the edge of the building, silhouetted by the evening sun, was the Shadowy Figure. He stood unharmed and waiting for battle, taunting the Queensmen with his imposing stance.

"There is no way that is possible!" Mange exclaimed. He turned towards Harp and began to bark orders.

"Harp you're with me. Xeno, Lejquraed, we'll need you for backup!" Mange turned toward the building and began running as fast as he could. Harp closely followed,

drawing his knives as he ran. The Queensmen charged through the front of the building and scampered towards the nearest staircase. Their ten story climb would take them less than a minute.

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The Queensmen broke through the door to the roof and were instantly greeted by a bolt shot from a crossbow. Mange dove to the side in order to avoid the incoming fire, rolling like a gymnast. As the bolt flew past it left a tracer lingering in the air, illuminating its deadly path. The black, arrow like missile, splintered on impact with the door, shattering like glass. Mange looked up at the Shadowy Figure and saw him standing with his left arm extended, rigid as the limb of a tree. Attached to his wrist was a small crossbow that Mange had not seen before; it, like everything else on the Shadowy Figure, was deep black with almost no distinctive form or lines, perfectly blending it into the Sarnisian's uniform.

The Figure stood on the edge of the building, which was about fifty feet away from the Queensmen. Between them, a network of small pipes and air conditioners dotted the rooftop. Petite white pebbles littering the ground reflected in the evening sun, shimmering like crystals. By now the sky was rapidly turning dark blue in preparation for the night. The small breeze had grown into a chilling wind, tugging and pulling at the Queensmen.

Mange slowly pulled himself off the ground and drew one of his revolvers, clenching it with a white-knuckle grip. Harp held onto his knives even tighter and shot a worried glance over to his comrade. Mange looked back up at Harp and slowly nodded; giving him the signal he was waiting for. With each Queensmen ready for battle they turned toward the Shadowy Figure and began their assault.

Mange lifted his revolver and took two powerful shots, fighting back the recoil with his muscular wrists. Each explosion rained through the city streets and echoed far in the distance, rattling like thunder. The powerful bullets exploded out the end of his weapon, leaving only their empty cases behind. The Shadowy Figure lifted his sword and spun it around, snapping the magnum rounds in half.

As Mange fired, Harp charged toward the Figure, running as fast as his legs would allow him. He pushed himself faster and faster until he was standing face to face with his adversary. Harp thrust upward with one of his knives, hoping to land it in the Shadowy Figure's chest. The Figure simply caught Harp's wrist and twisted, disabling the Queensmen. With his free hand the Shadowy Figure slammed his fist into Harp's face, sending a shower of green blood spilling into the air. Harp dropped to the ground holding his face in pain, allowing the Figure a clear line of sight to Mange.

The Sarnisian sprinted towards the helpless Queensmen, moving so quickly Mange barely had time to react. He drew his second weapon and started to fire, pulling each trigger as fast as he could. His weapons sounded again and again, kicking back in his hands each time he fired. The deafening shots rang out like distress signals, blowing out his eardrums. The Shadowy Figure simply dodged and evaded every incoming

bullet, moving left and right at lightning fast speeds. The stray shots bounced off the white pebbles, scattering them like small grains of sand in a windstorm.

The Shadowy Figure closed the distance in no time at all, leaping towards the door Mange stood by. The Figure threw his entire body weight forward, forcing his feet on the door and pushed off as hard as he could. Like an acrobat, the Shadowy Figure flew through the air, back flipping over Mange and landing behind him. Before the Queensmen could react, the Shadowy Figure elbowed him in the back of the head, simultaneously kicking down into the center of his back. Each devastating impact drove shockwaves of pain through Mange's body.

Mange crashed into the ground so hard he bounced back from the sudden impact, rattling his bones with pure misery. Filled with adrenaline Mange quickly turned around and found himself staring up at the Sarnisian. The Figure held his sword high above his head, ready to end Mange's life with one solid strike.

Just as the Figure began to swing downward a series of shots rang out, rippling through the air. The Figure leapt backwards and lifted his sword, deflecting rounds as they ripped open the evening sky. Just as before, a shower of sparks ignited from his body as he moved in a blur. Mange sat up and looked back towards the door to find Lejquraed and Xeno standing perfectly still. Lejquraed had his assault rifle shouldered and aimed at the Shadowy Figure. A small plume of gun smoke leaked out the end of the barrel, marking Lejquraed as Mange's savior.

Upon landing, the Shadowy Figure slowly backed away from the four Queensmen. He held his sword vertically in a defensive posture, ready to defeat any attack sent his way. Mange and Harp leisurely crawled off the ground and stood ready for yet another round of combat. Lejquraed steadily aimed his weapon at the Figure, waiting for another chance to open fire. However, the Shadowy Figure continued to back off, opening a large gap between himself and his adversaries. He backed away until he stood on the edge of the building, teetering with perfect balance.

Suddenly and unexpectedly the Shadowy Figure lifted his left arm as if he was looking at a watch. He pressed a small button attached to his wrist and lowered his arm. The Figure whipped his sword around and returned it to his side, never taking his eyes off the four Queensmen. Only a second later the Hellcaller, which had been destroyed, reappeared behind the Shadowy Figure, hovering carelessly in the air. The Shadowy Figure examined the Queensmen one more time and vanished into thin air, leaving behind a lingering black mist. Just as he did, the Hellcaller turned away and disappeared into the distance, leaving its four enemies staring into the sky.

Confused by what they had just seen the Queensmen watched helplessly as the Hellcaller climbed into the air, vanishing into the afternoon sun.

"What was that thing?" Mange asked in astonishment. Xeno slowly shook his head, afraid of the answer.

"A Sarnisian Eloth'Naka."

"What does that translate to?" Xeno turned his head towards Mange and looked at him with piercing eyes.

"Shadow Warrior."