

# CHAPTER ONE

The small speedboat bobbed in the Caribbean waves as Elisa Hill anchored it to the small island via a large rock. She was dressed in a black tank top and khaki cargo pants. Her long, dark hair stayed out of her way by virtue of being tied into a tight bun.

There came a sound of metal scraping against something and Elisa sighed. She turned to the source and saw five men standing before her, wielding curved swords which she recognized as Middle Eastern scimitars. Each of them appeared to be of mixed ancestry, almost impossible to determine. Elisa's hands went behind her back, wrapping around the hilts of her own weapons she had holstered at the small of her back. She drew both blades at once. They were Nepalese kukri daggers, her personal weapon of choice. Curved blades which allowed for a more efficient stabbing motion.

One of them jumped from the rock formation he stood on, bringing the sword down in a large arc. Elisa defended herself, bringing the kukri together above her head as the sword clanged against them. She allowed his force to push her down a little, still holding on to her footing and then thrusting upwards, forcing him back. She crossed her arms

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in front of her and rapidly separated them, the kukri slicing open the man's chest. A quick kick to the head took him out of the fight completely.

Fighter number two came at her next, swinging his sword like an axe. Elisa bent backwards and the blade passed harmlessly over her torso. She used her hands to brace herself as she brought her legs around, kicking him in the jaw as she flipped over. When she got back to her feet, she brought a kukri down directly into his chest, sliding it between his ribs and piercing his heart.

She fought off the third and fourth men simultaneously, using her daggers to deflect their swords. She concentrated mostly on defense, bobbing and weaving where necessary. Elisa found herself trapped between them and as one of them thrust forward, she jumped, his sword impaling his partner. Elisa landed behind him and quickly slit his throat.

Only one left and Elisa eyed him carefully. Despite watching her take out four highly-trained assassins single-handedly, his confidence seemed to remain intact. He charged towards her and Elisa took careful aim, throwing one of her kukri daggers and it struck him right between the eyes. He made it a few more paces before he fell dead right at her feet.

She moved forward, to the reason for her trip. A short hike up the hill from the shore was an opening in the ground. Elisa took a few glow sticks from her pack and cracked them, dropping them into the cove. She anchored a rappel cable to the top and hooked the other end to her belt, then climbed over the edge. Due to the limited light, she moved slowly down the hole.

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Once she reached ground, Elisa produced a flare and removed the top, the sparks bursting on ignition. Carefully, she moved through the cavern, using it to illuminate the spaces a few feet in front of her.

The walls were covered with ancient engravings and scripture, which she barely even recognized and knew it would take some time to translate. Holding the flare in one hand, Elisa drew a digital camera from a side pocket on her pack and took a few photographs of the ancient scribbling. She checked them in the camera's display—the flash had illuminated them enough to see, so that much was good.

Moving deeper, the light from the flare fell on something in the distance. She moved closer towards it, hovering the flare over what she found.

A map of the world engraved into a stone tablet, affixed to the wall. And in the Pacific Ocean was an additional landmass she had never seen on any official maps of the planet. Beneath the map were more engravings and ancient writing she could not decipher. Elisa took a photo but when she checked the camera, she saw that it fell short of her expectations. The tablet was dirty, covered with grime and it'd be difficult to translate it just from the photo.

Her hands felt along the edge and she was surprised at how she could easily pull it loose from its mounting. It had a surprisingly light weight to it and she knelt down on the ground, laying it carefully on the stone floor. The pack was on the ground in an instant and she wrapped it in a cloth before sliding it inside.

The caverns began to rumble and quake. Elisa pulled the pack back on and ran to the hole she entered from,

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hooking the cable to her belt and began her ascent.

As the quakes continued, she pushed her legs against one side of the hole, resting her back against the other and gripping the cable tightly, waiting for them to subside. Once her window came, she pulled herself up to the opening, the warm sun bathing her in heat and light.

As she gathered her cable, she heard the sound of a helicopter up ahead. Her eyes went up and she noticed something come out of the side door, something aimed at her boat.

A grenade launcher.

“NO!”

Her cry came too late and all she could do was shield herself as the grenade launcher reduced her speedboat to flaming splinters. Elisa started to move towards it, but she heard the cocking of a shotgun behind her. Muttering a curse under her breath, she carefully raised her arms.

“That’s a girl. Now be a doll and drop those pig stickers of yours. Slowly, please.”

The voice carried tinges of a Mediterranean accent. One of the Greek islands. Elisa Hill cursed herself for not planning for this eventuality to begin with. Instead, she did as the gunman ordered, slowly drawing the kukri and letting them clatter to the ground.

He grabbed something from her pack and then shoved her forward. Elisa turned around and saw the shotgun wielder. Shaggy, sand-colored hair and green eyes. The sun reflected nicely on his olive skin tone and his face needed a shave. He wore khaki cargo pants and a black tank top with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder, the high-powered

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shotgun kept fully trained on his target. “I see you’re still relying on those ancient toys,” he said.

“Lucas Davalos.” She almost spat the name.

“Elisa Hill,” said Lucas with a smile. “When are you going to wake up and join the ranks of twenty-first century weaponry?”

“Why don’t you come a little closer and I’ll show you just how effective they can be?”

“I’m good.” He held up the tablet. “Can’t thank you enough for this. Promises to make me a lot of money. What is it anyway, Mayan?”

“You don’t even *know* what it is,” said Elisa. She looked at the dead assassins. “Were these men because of you as well?”

“Not entirely, call it a partnership,” said Lucas.

“I wonder if you’ll end up leaving *them* in the middle of the desert, too. Stone tablets aren’t really your style. Not shiny enough.”

“Still sour over that little misunderstanding, eh?” asked Lucas. “Listen babe, just so you know, that was nothing personal—just business.”

“Fine by me,” said Elisa. “And just so you know, when I tear out your throat, that won’t be personal. Just business.”

He placed the tablet inside the duffel bag and zipped it up. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a cigarillo and a lighter. “I’d offer you a smoke, but I’ve only got one left.”

“A gentleman to the end.”

Lucas lit the cigarillo and puffed on it before speaking once again. “Doesn’t have to be this way, Elsie. If this tablet

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is what I think it is, I could use a partner on this one.”

“No thanks, I’ve seen how you reward your partners,” said Elisa.

Lucas shrugged. “Your loss. The people I’m working for pay very well.”

Elisa slowly nodded. “Right, of course. Ancient artifact, skilled assassins, you’re working with the Order, aren’t you?”

“What can I say, they’re my biggest fans,” said Lucas. “By the way, I can’t apologize enough for what happened to your boat. But you know how these things go.”

“You’re an asshole, Davalos. Always have been. Nothing but a typical grave-robber.”

“Oh, and you’re so much better?” asked Lucas. “Don’t make me laugh, Elsie. You see, at the end of the day, we’re the same. We’ve both killed...” He glanced at the bodies. “...although, I think you’ve got me beat for today. And we’ve both used people to get what we want.”

“Difference is my ends justify the means,” said Elisa. “I’m helping people. What are you doing? Who are you helping?”

“Myself, who else?” asked Lucas. “See, I’m a believer of the pay it forward principle. I help myself and that in turn leads to other people being helped. If I’m a rich bastard, I buy a lot of things, I hire a lot of people. I’m helping people put their kids through college.”

“That’s some twisted logic you’ve got.”

“Helps me sleep at night.”

Elisa glared at him, her crystal eyes seeming to flash with anger. “Lucas, I am warning you.”

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“Oh no, she’s warning me. I just may shit my pants.”

“If you give that tablet to the Order, there’s no telling what sort of chaos you’ll unleash,” said Elisa.

“See, now you *do* have a point there, Elsie. But there is a simple flaw in your logic.”

“And what’s that?” she asked.

Lucas raised his arm in the air and the helicopter hovered closer to them. As it did, a rope ladder fell from it and Lucas caught it in one hand. “I just couldn’t care less. Enjoy the swim back to Tortuga.”

Keeping the gun trained on Elisa, Lucas started to climb up the ladder as the helicopter pulled away from the small island.

“Oh and Elsie? Better luck next time!”



## CHAPTER TWO

An older black man with salt-and-pepper hair and beard scribbled on the dry-erase board with a black marker. “Call them what you want to—call them myths, call them legends, call them religious beliefs, but whatever you call them, approach them with an objective eye.”

Professor Maxwell Finch turned from the board, examining the students through the narrow rectangular frames of his glasses. He adjusted his bow tie before his hand went to the pocket of his blazer.

“Now, we have looked at the mythology of various cultures over the past semester and whether it be from Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australia, what is something that links all these stories together?”

One of the students slowly raised her hand and Finch motioned to her with a smile. “Yes, Lindsay, please share with us.”

The young woman with red hair cleared her throat. “Well...they’re all pretty similar?”

“Exactly!” he said with an excited smile. “Many of these stories *are* similar. In some cases we know this is a result of one culture adopting the myths of another, such as the Romans did with the Greeks. Sometimes, it’s even done