

The Bottom Drawer

“All of them? You can’t be serious...” Miles looked down at the map as General Arrett moved the figures across to the front line. “You think you have nothing left to lose at this point.”

“Remind me if the unit I’m asking for has ever lost a battle.”

“Lost is a loose term,” Miles looked down at the line, “The Bottom Drawer aren’t regular people, that’s why they’re not enlisted military.”

“I know, and that’s the only reason I’m stood here and not just ordering them straight in.”

“If you want the Bottom Drawer, I’ll put the offer to them, you’ll need to sign the waivers and the pardons in advance.”

“Pardons...?”

“For whatever it is that they do while they’re out there.”

“Is what they do that bad?” Arrett leans back from the table.

“They didn’t get the name ‘The Bottom Drawer’ by accident if that’s what you’re thinking...”

“How bad could it be?”

“If you have to ask, you haven’t thought enough about it... They’re not a scalpel, General, you don’t ask for that unit if you want to keep something neat.”

“Alright, I’ll come back to you by tomorrow morning, can you have them ready to move?”

“I’ll keep them on standby,” Miles nodded, “Leave the deposit with me, if you don’t need them, we keep the deposit.”

“Acceptable...”

Miles woke early in the morning to the sound of the phone from the operations office. He paced out of the bunk and into the office.

He picked up the phone, “PB solutions, Miles”

“I need them on the border in four hours,” Arrett sounded like he hadn’t slept the entire evening.

“Are you nearby?” Miles opened his desk and picked out the contracts, leaving them on the top.

“I’m near the border myself,” Arrett said.

“I need you back here to sign for them,” Miles frowned, “I won’t release them until you do that.”

“I don’t have time to do that,” It was all but a growl, “Just get them here...”

“No...” Miles shook his head, “That won’t happen General, you sign or they stay here...”

“I don’t have time to get over there and sign for them.”

“Send someone with authority,” Miles shrugged, “They’re not leaving till they’re signed for.”

“I don’t think I’ve got anyone close enough.”

“Not my problem General,”

Why is it military types always try and get away with the responsibility side of things?

The phone went silent for a second and then there was a click as the phone was transferred again.

“Brigadier Graf here,” The voice was deep and calm, not a voice used to being refused, “I want those men here now and I don’t have time to mess about with paperwork.”

“Brigadier...” Miles sighed, “Perhaps I didn’t make myself clear enough to the General, no paperwork, no men, simple as that...”

“Do you realise who you’re talking to?” Graf’s voice got quiet

“Do you realise you’re being recorded?” Miles grinned, “And don’t bother with the threats General, you know what happens if something happens to me.”

A pause on the line

“Yes...” Another pause and then a sigh, “General Arrett will be with you in two hours.”

The line went dead...

Two hours later, General Arrett finished the paperwork and handed the originals to Miles, along with a set of co-ordinates for the drop point. Miles looked at the paperwork and checked over the request.

“Hold Perimeter one, collateral approved, no friendlies in the area.” Miles checked down the paperwork, “Why do you need us for this? You could use the regular army...”

“They outnumber us sixty to one,” Arrett looked down, “We just need something to hold the line while we get our people out of there.”

“We’re not a defensive unit,” Miles folded the paperwork and put it in the safe, “You know that.”

“We know,” Arrett nodded, “Are your people ready to move?”

“Stood outside,” Miles glanced to the window.

Arrett walked over to the window to look down at the courtyard where some twenty men and women were milling around in casual clothing.

“That...?” He looked back at Miles, “Is that what a hundred million dollars is paying for?”
“You’re not paying for how they look,” Miles shrugged, “You’re paying for what they can deliver.”

“And those...” Arrett looked back with a scowl, “Those will deliver what I asked for?”

“You wanted a forty mile line holding,” Miles made a show of looking at the paperwork, “They’ll hold it, you’ve specified that collateral is approved and there’s no friendlies, so if you have no other questions...?”

“No, that was it, let me know when they’re finished.”

Arrett left without another word and Miles looked out of the window.

“I won’t need to.” His mouth quirked in a half smile.

The General was back on the line within the hour.

“I don’t remember authorising tactical nuclear weapons.” His voice was barely a whisper.

“I don’t remember you excluding their use,” Miles leaned back in his chair, “I’ve got here that you had no problem with collateral and there were no friendlies.”

“How can you be sure you didn’t get any friendlies with those nukes?”

“Well, two things to consider,” Miles pulled up the report from the first plane, “They didn’t hit anything on your side of the line, and they’re not using nukes, so you don’t have to worry about the fallout problem.”

“Not Nukes? How do you explain the amount of damage that got caused, I felt the impact from here...”

“I told you they weren’t a scalpel,” Miles shrugged again.

“And I was expecting a bit of a ragged slice, not something to take a scoop out of the earth, if they weren’t using nukes, what were they using?”

“That’s Classified,” Miles smiled, knowing the response that was going to be forthcoming.

“CLASSIFIED?” Arrett spluttered down the line, “There’s nothing you’ve got clearance for that I haven’t.”

“Well then, you shouldn’t have any problem in finding out what they were using.”

“I’ve got satellite imagery of the areas coming up in the next hour, I’ll be able to find out.”

“Well, good luck with that General,” Miles nodded, “If I were you, I’d be spending the next few hours making the best of the free space you’ve got.”

“We’ll be doing that...”

The Line went dead.

Miles stepped out onto the balcony and looked down towards the concrete strip outside as the figure in the air circled and dropped down, landing lightly on her feet and slowing to a halt. She looked up, zipping her flightsuit up as she trotted up the stairs, the name “Meteor” emblazoned on her shoulders.

“Are they happy?” Meteor looked up at him, “We’ve made a line of holes down the whole forty mile stretch.”

“Think we’ll need to keep it patrolled for the rest of the night,” Miles looked down at her, “I think the general’s got a little curiosity going.”

“Anything we need to stop?”

“Ask Copernicus to keep his eyes skywards,” Miles nodded, “If he so much as feels something looking at any of you, tell Gravity to bring it down.”

“You know Gravities not that accurate,” Meteor grinned at him, “Might get a bit messy if he picks too much out of the sky...”

“So get Flightpath to bring it down where we’re being paid to keep things clear,” Miles nodded and turned back to Meteor with a grin, “Do I have to think of everything?”

“Not at all Boss, just like to keep you involved with these things.”

“What makes you think I haven’t been?” Miles looked at her

Meteor rolled her eyes and floated upwards under her own power, “No worries Boss, we’ll keep things clear.”

It was five hours before the next call came in.

“You’ve got Prometheans on the ground,” Arrett’s voice was quiet.

“I’ve got what on the ground?” Miles kept his voice level

“Prometheans,” Arrett over pronounced the name, “Rogue leftovers from the Eugenics wars, you know what I’m saying...”

“Oh I know what you’re saying,” Miles smiled, “But if I had a team of Prometheans on the hook, the price you’d be paying would be fifty times what I just got from you.”

“And maybe that’s why you’re keeping the price as low as you are doing, to make sure that no one suspects what you’ve got.”

“Tell you what,” Miles leaned back in his chair, “You come to me with some proof that I’ve got rogue superhumans on the leash and I’ll be happy to talk to you, as it is, all I’ve got is some well targeted rocks and a very expensive satellite relay system with which to throw them by.”

“Yeah...” Arrett’s tone turned sharp, “I’m sure, I’ll be in touch...”

Miles leaned back as the line went dead, then brought down the microphone on his headset.

“Line, Did you get all that?” He kept his voice low.

“Yeah,” a quiet woman’s voice answered, “What do you want me to do about it?”

“Send Glass,” Miles nodded to himself

“Glass?” The woman’s voice rose, “Are you sure?”
“I’m sure,” Miles said, “Message only, wait for my call.”

Another two hours went by, the call came in again, this time from a different line. Miles flicked his microphone down.

“Be ready,” He picked up the phone, “PB Solutions, Miles...”

“We’ve got footage of people walking around in those craters,” Arrett sounded smug,

“Seconds after the explosions went off...”

“Yeah, you do,” Miles nodded, “And that’s why you moved to another location before calling me, let me guess, nice shielded bunker to stop me doing anything to stop you?”

“That’s right...”

“Alright, what’s your play then General?”

“Well, we’re going to start with names.”

“Thought you had one.” Miles rubbed his forehead with his other hand, “I can think another one up for you if you like...”

“Cute,” Arrett’s voice turned smug again, “We’ll start with the names of all those you’ve got working for you, and when we’ve got those, we’ll keep going to all the people who’ve used them before.”

“Now...” Miles said, then paused a second, “General, you need to consider what you’re threatening here, and ideally *before* you really start threatening...”

“You can’t get to me here...”

“Me?” Miles mused, “No, I can’t...”

The sound of something scratching in the room down the phone echoed and the line was silent for a second.

“Glass, on the other hand,” Miles nodded, “Glass can get anywhere he likes, and he’s not the most sensible of people in the first place.”

“The Glass...” Arrett’s voice has lost all its smugness, “It’s making words on it...”

“I’d read them if I were you...” Miles flipped the phone on to loudspeaker as the sound of scratching glass continued.

“We....Can....See....You...” Arrett’s voice read the words as they appeared on the screen in front of him, “We....Do....Not....Get....Paid....To....Be....Threatened....”

There was a commotion of people in the room on the other end of the phone.

“Oh General,” Miles called, “General?”

“I’m here.” Arrett’s voice had a tremble to it now.

“If you go outside, you’re dealing with the one called Meteor, not the one called Glass...”

“You can’t get away with this,” For a second, Arrett recovered some of his composure, “We know where you work from.”

“And we know where you are now and where you live...” Miles said, “General, you wouldn’t believe how many times I’ve had this conversation and with how many leaders of nations. We’re not loose cannons, you’re dealing with professionals that just happen to be able to break the world if the mood took them...”

“You understand that we can’t allow that sort of threat to exist,” The sound of glass being scratched echoed down the line again.

“And you understand that if I’ve had this conversation with the President of the United States and he backed down, I’m not likely to be cowed by you, am I?”

“Back....Off....Or....We....Get....Creative....” Arrett read the words on the glass.

“He’s just saying what I was thinking,” Miles rocked back and forth on his chair, “Do we have an accord General? I’d like to recall my people before you end up paying them overtime.”

“Overtime?” Arrett’s shock was apparent down the line.

“You hired us for an Eight hour window, we’re on seven and a half hours now, much more and you’re paying overtime for us.”

“I...” There was the sound of angry and scared voices in the background, “No...No, we’ve got all we needed from this. I...Thank you for help in this matter.”

Sounded like he nearly choked on those words...

“You’re welcome General,” Miles kept his voice light, “Glass, Call, come on home, and General, I trust we won’t be getting any more nasty phone calls in the night?”

“No...” the voice was Brigadier Graf’s, “You won’t...”

The phone went down and Miles listened through the down receiver as Call kept the line open a short while longer to hear the General’s Rebuke.

“I don’t think we’ll be getting any problems from them,” Call said, “But we’re going to run out of clients if we keep upsetting them like this.”

“We’ll never run out of clients,” Miles said, “Simple rule of gardening, when you’ve got a big problem, you don’t use a small tool, and when you haven’t got the strength to do it yourself, you send for those who can.”

“Reckon?”

Miles sat up on his chair and looked at the in tray overflowing with requests for work to be carried out.

“Well, I don’t think we’re going to be short of landscaping work for a while...”