

Behind Enemy Lines

By

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“Sol, its time. They’re ready to see you now.”

There was no warning, no inkling of their purpose, just a dire sense of immediacy. But however bad things were, at least the waiting was over.

The faces along the corridor were friendly as Sol passed by. Maybe they were too friendly. This time he must have really rocked the boat because they showed him straight to the upper level, flanked by seniors who escorted him in silence. He’d never realised before that silence could be sinister.

Inside, the light was so bright nothing was visible. Light permeated everything, absorbing all shape and definition. One authoritative voice rode the air, sharp as a blade and clear as a note.

“We have a mission for you.”

It took a moment to register. So that was it; he almost felt relieved. How long had it been since the last mission? He couldn’t remember, aeons it felt like.

“We’re expecting great things of you this time....”

This time. Was that a hint of accusation? So, Sol asked his questions, just to show he was paying attention. A wasted effort if it was anything like the previous missions because no answers would be forthcoming. He didn’t remember a great deal about the last offensive – a design of the debriefing – but that particular recollection was vividly constant. It was always on a need-to-know basis, and they never needed him to know.

“What are my orders?” he wondered aloud, accepting his compliance as readily as they had.

“Re-establish communication lines. Determine what happened to the last contact.”

It was always defection, only no one was allowed to call it that.

“Specialist skills?”

“None required. This is simply a routine operation.”

Sol knew that wasn’t the case or they wouldn’t have sent for him, but he let them savour their secrets.

“What about local knowledge?”

“You’ll pick it up, along with the local dialect when you get there. Other agents will meet you when you’re settled. It may take some time though.”

A touch of remorse there, perhaps? Best prepare for an extended tour of duty, again, and tie up any loose ends on this side. How long had this state of

affairs existed? They get one of ours; we get one of theirs. It seemed like it had gone on forever, neither side budging, each asserting its right to the territory.

The training was brief, a recap of the fundamentals. Time was of no consequence. All attention was on the mission and what he would do when it was over – if he made it back.

They came to see Sol off before the big drop, wish him luck and all that. But only the trainer stayed for the final descent. They waited in the darkness, huddled together, mindful of the need for a precision delivery. Mis-time the descent and who knows where you'd end up. Not with her though, she was a professional. She'd trained numerous brave souls just like him. By all accounts she was something of a veteran herself. She never mentioned it though, and he respected that. He'd miss her, if that made any sense, given the short time they'd worked together. She was a kindred spirit; she understood the job.

The tension increased to a deafening silence and Sol knew he was over the drop zone. This was the worst part. So many missions and he never got used to this bit. She gave him the clear signal and he moved forward for the big push. There was no turning back now; he was committed.

Sol launched himself free in a last exhilarating rush of freedom. Then, he felt himself falling, falling, headlong to his destiny. That same, awful sense of constraint and helplessness gripped him as he struggled to stay conscious. The terrible realisation of the drop was almost too much to bear. The last thing Sol heard before the light blasted away the darkness was a baby's cry, as he was born into the world again.