

## **Breakpoint**

*a Patreon exclusive novel by Devin McTaggart*

### **Part Seven**

*Len*

“What the hell do you mean it may have skipped a bit?” Mira asked him. “You don’t just find new Nazi guns lying around.”

Len chuckled, offering a little shrug. “I mean, I told you, I killed a Nazi with his own knife tonight. He looked like he’d stepped right out of a historical documentary on World War 2. Here, take a look at the knife,” he said, holding out the sheathed blade to her.

One of the reasons he’d made her look at the gun first was so that it would open her mind a little when it came to looking at the blade. Historical bladed weapons were something of a hobby for Mira, at least they used to be, back on the outside. If she could remember it at all. The things they had lost were never really clear in advance. He hoped that some of that knowledge was still rattling around inside of her brain.

Mira took the knife in her hands and considered it for a long moment, flipping it over and over in her fingertips, examining it carefully before handing it back to him. “Definitely a Nazi knife, although I don’t know that I would call that all that unusual on this island.”

“Okay, take a look at the note that he had on him,” Len said, fishing the paper out of his pocket, holding it out to his partner.

She took the letter from him and glanced at it, examining the paper, lifting it to her nose to take a sniff of it. “*Now* I’m more likely to believe you,” she told him. “I don’t know German, so I can’t read the letter, but everything about that paper feels antique, and yet, it’s almost brand new. The handwriting is messy, but it’s still markedly legible, the way people tended to write back when they knew it had to be read by someone. But this ink hasn’t had time to fade. There’s something significantly incongruous about the handwriting and the paper. Tell me all about this Nazi you killed.”

For the next several minutes, Len told Mira about his time with Harry, and his time with Rin before that. He didn’t leave anything out. If he was going to trust Mira, he was going to have to go at it full force, and that meant keeping her abreast of everything he saw and did. He went over all of it – the warehouse that was there then wasn’t, the Holy See, the gold bricks, the Nazis – every weird thing he’d seen since arriving at the island.

And she didn’t call him crazy or constantly interrupt him. She just took the information in, nodding sometimes so it was clear she wasn’t zoned out.

“Yeah,” he finished. “So I’m thinking there’s some kind of time shenanigans going on here on the island, although I couldn’t tell you even the slightest how any of it works. Do you believe me?”

Mira grinned a little. “Of course I believe you, hon. I’ve been wondering how to bring up the fact that I thought I saw a German Spitfire flying over head very early on after I got here without sounding like a lunatic, but it turns out, I’m not crazy – the island is.”

“Wait, you saw something weird *before* I got here, and it wasn’t the first thing you told me about?”

“If I told you that I thought I’d seen a WW2 German airplane flying over head, would you have believed me?” she giggled.

He nodded. “Yeah, okay, I suppose that’s entirely fair. This sort of weirdness has to be experienced at least once in person to be really believed. What now?”

“Dunno, babe,” Mira sighed. “Maybe ask some of the people who’ve been around the longest if they know anything.”

“Assuming they’re not Management.”

“I’m pretty certain that you’ve already figured out at least a few people that are and aren’t management,” she told him. “You’ve always been good at sniffing out hidden motives. Who do you think we should ask?”

“I barely know most of the people on the island.”

“But of those you *do* know...”

“Let me sleep on it.”

The next morning, Len decided they needed to go talk to Tex. The man had clearly been on the island for some time, and if anyone would know his way around what was going on, it would be him. Len still hadn’t decided what to make of the man’s long-term plans and agendas, but he certainly seemed like he knew better than anyone else on the island that the entire place was a madhouse with funhouse mirrors everywhere and nothing reliably made sense for more than a few seconds.

“Len!” Tex called at him as they entered the bar. The man was standing behind the bar with a plate of what looked like scrambled eggs covered in hot sauce in front of him, a fork stuck somewhere vaguely into the middle of it, dressed in jungle camo pants and a button up shirt, with a brown leather vest on over the top, just for a bit of added flair. He was, of course, still wearing the massive cowboy hat. It seemed like he rarely took it off. “Welcome welcome! You want some of this huevos rancheros that Bonita whipped up a couple of minutes ago? Woman knows how to make a killer breakfast.”

“Sounds great, but I wouldn’t want to take away from your meal.”

“You’d only be doing me a favor,” Tex laughed. “Bonita, can you dish out a couple more plates for our guests here? And shit, dish one out for yourself and come to join us. I’ll handle the clean up.”

The Spanish woman arched a suspicious eyebrow in his direction, but then dished out three more plates, bringing them over to the bar. Len had seen Bonita around Tex before, but couldn’t be entirely certain what their relationship was, although he’d have put good money on them sharing a bed every now and then. They had a certain level of comfort around each other, a natural rhythm that generally only people who’d seen each other naked or spilled blood together had.

“Thanks,” Mira said as Bonita pushed a plate down in front of her, while Len glanced at Tex.

“So, I have to tell you something, and I don’t want you to freak out about it,” Len said to the man as he settled on the barstool.

“You’re secretly an alien,” Tex guessed.

“No, but you’re not too far off,” Len chuckled, moving to saddle up to the bar. “Yesterday, I’m pretty sure I killed a Nazi who I think may have accidentally time traveled here from the 1940s.”

“Sure sure,” Tex said, nodding like Len had said something as obvious as ‘it’s hot outside’ or ‘it’s raining.’ It didn’t seem to phase him in the slightest. Len was almost disappointed by the lack of reaction. “Like you do. Now what don’t you want me to freak out over?”

Len felt his face take on a shape of confusion. He *really* hadn’t expected Tex to be so calm about the whole thing. “That. I didn’t want you freaking out over the fact that I killed a time traveler. A Nazi at that.”

“Shit, Len, I thought you were going to tell me something actually *impressive*, but time weirdness? Nazis?” He rolled his eyes with a sly sideways grin. “That’s par for the course ‘round these parts. Sheeee-it, I killed a dinosaur last month.”

“The fuck you did,” Len scowled. Nazis were one thing, but dinosaurs? That had to be Tex pulling Len’s leg. There was no possible w—

Tex lifted one of his legs up and propped one of his boots on top of the bar. It looked like it was made out of some kind of thick lizard skin, a sickly sort of green but the scaling was too big to be snake or iguana. “Wasn’t all that big, but I made a pair of boots out of the body, and kept a couple of the back plates and the skull. We cooked and ate the rest, which made for some mighty fine stew.”

“Lemme see the skull,” Len asked. Tex shrugged and pointed up, behind and above him, and sure enough, hanging from the wall was an elongated skull, like that of a giant bird or lizard, about the size of his torso. There were a couple of ropes holding it in place, in addition to the mounting beneath it to keep it against the wall. “You’re telling me that’s a genuine dinosaur skull.”

“Yep, had it up there about a year now,” Tex said. “Don’t think it was full grown, not by the size of it, anyway, but wasn’t a newborn either. Maybe the dino equivalent of a teenager or something. Came trundling out of the forest one day, so a handful of us put it down. Turned out afterwards that someone claimed it was a vegetarian and it might’ve been okay just being peaceable and the like, but none of us felt like it was worth the risk, ‘specially if it was gonna get to be a lot bigger. Didn’t want no dino to eat us out of house and home. Used a machete to take a swipe across the neck and then just ran out of the way until it bled out. Haven’t seen another one since then, but if you’re telling me there was a Nazi attacking you yesterday, who am I to say you’re lying? I’m just glad you’re okay.”

“Nazis, dinosaurs,” Len chuckled, shaking his head. “What’s next on this crazy island? Vampires? Werewolves? Wizards?”

“You told me you *weren’t* an alien,” Tex said as across the room the pneumatic tube system thumped, announcing a delivery. “I’m going to hold you to that. I find out you been lying to me, I’m coming after you with that machete next.” He headed across the room and opened the chamber to pull out the container before closing it back up again, leaving it empty in case something else came rolling in. He walked back from the tube and towards the bar again, opening the container, pulling a single sheet of paper from it.

Len saw the man stop mid-stride most of the way back to the bar, a frown crossing his face. “What’s up, Tex?” Tex had seemed pretty unflappable so far, so to see him simply stop walking made Len a bit nervous.

“This message didn’t come from central processing, so I’m not entirely sure how it got into the tubes,” he said, his face showing a level of uncertainty that Len hadn’t seen on the man before. “You mind if I borrow you two for a little bit?”

“Always happy to help, Tex,” Len said. “What’s the message?”

“Says there’s something waiting for us outside of the mountain door.” He handed Len the slip of paper and it was written in text like from an old typewriter. “PACKAGE AT MOUNTAIN DOOR. COME COLLECT. -Mgmt”

“You ever gotten a message like this before?”

“Not for a long while. Got one a few times to tell us there was an incoming plane drop that was off schedule, but it’s been a while since we’ve randomly gotten one showing up. It matches with their usual style, though. Typed message. No handwriting. Signed Management.”

“What the harm in not going?” Len asked.

“Could be food. Could be sensitive machinery or whatnot. Who knows. Besides, management knows how to make you regret giving them guff.” Tex sighed, heading over to the coatrack, grabbing his jacket. “No need to piss them off needlessly.”

“Well then,” Len said as he and Mina hopped off their barstools, “let’s go have us a looksee.”

The three of them headed out of the bar and climbed into one of the golf carts out front of the bar, unhooking it from the charger before heading down the road. Len had walked to the mountain door before and it wasn’t that far from the main center of the village, but the drive was certainly faster. The path was a bit windy, but it was kept very clear and Len noticed it looked like there may be buried lines on either side of the path. He hadn’t noticed those things before Harry had pointed them out to him, but now he was starting to wonder if he could use them to draw a map of the reliable part of the village. If the buried line formed a barrier around the fixed portion of the village, separating it from the part that was constantly in flux, that could be extremely useful information to have.

The treeline receded and as they got close enough to see the door itself, the looming metal door build into the side of the volcano visible like an evil monolith. But that wasn’t what caught Len’s

attention. On the ground down the hill just a little bit before the door was a large pile of a naked human, a man rumbled up into a mound of dark-skinned flesh, covered in bruises and cuts. The man was clearly alive, as the heap of muscles shifted and groaned a little.

On the back of the man's shoulder, though, Len spotted a familiar tattoo. From it, he immediately knew who they were looking at, and found himself both more nervous and less simultaneously. It was the last member of his team, Mick. The tattoo was a distinctive Zulu war mask, and even against Mick's coffee-colored skin, the colors still popped, as they'd been touched up recently. Len remembered when they'd gone in to do it. They'd been in Amsterdam, and Mick said since he was near the only tattoo artist he trusted, he was going to brighten the shades.

Of all the members of his team, Len trusted Mick the most, had known him the longest, and in a world where nobody was supposed to trust anybody, he'd found Mick to be indispensable, reliable and in perfect lockstep with him. He was Len's co-founder of The Scarab Unit, eight years ago when an operation had gone tits up for both of them, they'd both agreed to disappear and come back as new people, but with all their information about the game and its players intact. Both of them had been forgotten and abandoned by their country, and as such, they had left all loyalty behind to anyone beyond each other.

Mick was Len's ride or die, although the rest of the members of The Scarab came close.

The Scarab was independent, off-the-grid and decentralized team of counterintelligence agents that kept themselves drifting from place to place, without so much as an office where they could be regularly reached. The digital revolution had been extremely powerful for them, letting them be anywhere, anytime, always able to be contacted but never traced or tracked. The motto for the squad was that they could be putting down problems anywhere in the world within 24 hours, if the money was right and the cause was decent. They didn't call anywhere "home." They didn't keep any possessions beyond what they could carry with them. They held no alliances or allegiances. They were, perhaps, the purest practitioners of spycraft living.

Together, the foursome was *exactly* the kind of unit that the island seemed to be designed to manage, so once they'd intentionally gotten a little sloppy, Len hadn't been at all surprised that whoever was running the madhouse had started picking them off one at a time, bringing them here. That had been Scarab's *plan*. Make it look like they were distracted, making mistakes, and once one of them was picked off, let that seem to affect the concentration of the remaining members, allowing them to be taken easier. If anything, Len had been a little worried that whoever Management was, they wouldn't want all four Scarab members, for fear that they might be too much to handle as a united front. Of course, they might also want him to think somebody on the team had been compromised, try to plant some seeds of dissent among the group.

Len and Mira ran over to Mick's body as Len started to assess the damages that had been done to the man, thankful to find they were mostly superficial and definitely not life threatening, although someone had certainly beat the hell out of him somewhere along the way, and pretty recently. That wasn't what concerned Len. What he *was* bothered by was the fact that Mick hadn't arrived the usual way, via air drop on a regularly scheduled plane – he'd just appeared outside of this mysterious metal door that nobody on the island supposedly knew how to open. That meant Management had a way to get things on and off the island that was behind the volcano's door.

They helped lift Mick up, the man mostly still limp and unconscious, as Tex ran over to join them, the three of them dragging him towards the golf cart. They were halfway from the door to the cart when a loud clang sounded from behind them. They looked back to see that there was now a naked woman piled up in the space where they'd just lifted Mick up from. The door still looked as immobile as it ever had, but clearly it had opened and closed again quickly, because there was no other place the woman could've come from.

The woman looked to be in just as bad of shape as Mick was, her pale white skin blacker and bluer than cream. She was a tiny slip of a woman, but Len didn't recognize her. Who was she, why had

she come in with Mick and why had they arrived this way instead of via plane like everyone else on the island had?

After putting Mick's body on the back of the golf cart, they gave him a more thorough sweep, just to make sure there weren't any injuries that they might have missed. All the wounds were basically bruises, and it looked like the bruising around the wrists and ankles was from struggling against restraints designed to keep him in place. Mick had been chained up for a while at some point before his arrival here.

When they moved over to the woman, she had similar heavy bruises on her wrists and ankles, and her short hair was strewn to mostly cover her face as they carried her to the cart as well, laying her down next to Mick, trying to fit them both on the back of the cart while still having them semi secured.

"Now they're coming out of the goddamn door," Tex grumbled. "What's next, showing up through the goddamn pneumatic tubes?"

### Rin

Rin stood in the belly of the beast, the underground sorting room where all the pneumatic tubes came through. She'd never been in the internal hub room before, and it was a lot more chaotic than she expected it to be, with tubes pointing out in every direction, loops of metal and clear plastic all over the space of it, with erasable whiteboards hanging over most of them, although a handful of them just had worn sheets of paper with a word or two written on them taped to them. The tubes with paper were things like "Tex's Bar," "Canteen" and "Central Meeting Hall," all locations that didn't have residents in them that would change.

Like most things on the island, it was a system that worked without being immediately obvious to anyone who looked at it. It was jury rigged together, held functional by the constant efforts of its caretakers, who would update the signs. Some of the names looked like they'd been up a lot longer than others, and she spotted Harry's among the recent additions.

The woman staffing the tubes right now was an athletic black woman dressed in a green sleeveless t-shirt and green camo pants. She was reading a thick book, and with a little maneuvering, Rin could see it was a copy of Alexandre Dumas' "The Count of Monte Cristo," which made her smile a little bit.

"Hey friend," Rin said. "Got a minute?"

"Got plenty of them, but I bet it's answers you're looking for, and those I've got very little of," the woman responded, her voice tinged with an African accent from a region Rin couldn't quite place. "I'm Myo."

"Rin." They exchanged a handshake without Myo getting up from her seat at a table towards the center of the room. "It busy in here?"

Myo shrugged. "Not generally. I suspect we get maybe a dozen messages a day coming through here, but some days it's better or worse. You thinking of taking up some shifts in the relay? If so, I recommend you bring a good book or three."

"You got a pretty good one there," Rin said. "This the only hub for these tubes we have on the island?"

"That we know about," Myo replied, "but we don't know everywhere the tubes go, so it's certainly possible some of the lines might have additional stops or entry points. Shit, we've got about two dozen pipes there down at the end that we just have marked with question marks, because we can't tell where they go or what's on the other end of them."

"Wait... you don't even know where they go?"

Myo shrugged again. "Maybe they're buried chambers we haven't found. Maybe they're places behind the mountain door. Who the hell knows? Until something comes from them, we're not really going to worry about them. You'll note we've got one marked 'Management' over there, which we've gotten messages from a few times before, although they never directly respond to anything we send to

them. Why, you looking to send a message to them?"

"Not right now," Rin replied. "I'm trying to figure out where a message came from. You sent it to me about an hour ago?"

Myo frowned, shaking her head. "No messages in or out going the last three hours. Whatever you got, must've come through a phantom depot. What was it?"

"Nothing I'd like to talk about, if you don't mind."

The woman shrugged. "No skin off my nose. It something that requires a response?"

"It deserves acknowledgement of some kind, sure, but I'm not just going to send it out along random pathways hoping it gets noticed," Rin sighed. "How long does it take a message to get through the tubes?"

"A couple of minutes or so?" Myo looked empathetic, but unhelpful none the less. "Nobody has a clock or a watch, so we're all just sort of estimating. If you drop something in a tube for your place here, it'll get there before you could get back there, almost assuredly."

Rin looked around the room, but it was clear she wasn't going to get real answers here, so she decided to head out. Just as she reached the door, there was the sound of a thump behind her, so she looked back and saw Myo opening one of the tubes to take out a capsule. The woman opened the top of it, looked at where it was supposed to be sent, then closed it back up, dropping it into another tube, closing up the chamber before it whooshed off quietly through the tubes once more.

She headed up the two flights of stairs from the basement where the mail service was situated, looking at the photograph that had been sent to her earlier that day. It was a photo of her and a man named Krieger having sex out in the jungle, having been taken last week, the only time she'd slept with the man, in an effort to get some information out of him, although it hadn't particularly worked.

Worst of all, Krieger and Rin's boss Len had bad blood that ran deep. She needed to find Len to let him know in advance that it was coming. The last thing she wanted was to be ambushed by it.

### Harry

The last day hadn't helped much, as Harry still found himself stuck in a pickle. Neither Calisto nor Stella was giving him any cause to wish ill upon them. Sure, Calisto was slightly crankier and less openly eager to be around him, but that wasn't any reason to wish harm upon the woman. Stella was quicker to push for affection, but the minute she and Harry started getting at all physical, Calisto would crawl right into the middle of it. He supposed since she was feeling it anyway, she didn't want to be left out, and was afraid that if she didn't participate, Harry would just choose Stella by default.

He and the two women had decided they needed to continue exploring the island together and had headed down from their apartment to head off into the jungle, away from the central building structures. The three of them were geared up, and moved away from the buildings and structures.

Once they got far enough into the jungle, Harry wondered what oddity they were going to come across this time. Between what they'd already come across, he fully expected it would be something radical and unnatural, but as it turned out, the wonder they discovered couldn't be any *more* natural, although it was still pretty radical.

They broke from the jungle to find the edge of the island, a little cove hook in with a waterfall dropping down what looked like about two stories above the waterline into the ocean itself.

"God, what a view," Calisto said.

"That's gotta be like a stream or something that runs down from up the mountain or volcano or whatever there is over there," Stella added.

"I'm less concerned with the water and more concerned with what's behind it," he said, pointing to the exposed cliffside behind the waterfall. There, glimmering in the faded light of the afternoon, was a wall of crystal like a geode, although the shade was a deep crimson red, shiny and reflective.

"Is... is that all ruby?"