

Excerpt #3

Written by Vincent J. Shuta Jr.

Wednesday, 02 May 2012 03:04 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 March 2013 17:28

Chapter 67: A Life Lost

The Slouch walked into the store with his gun drawn. Out on the street, people were pointing and running. It made no matter to him. Most of them would be burned to a crisp by tomorrow. Besides, he was already wanted by every law enforcement agency in existence.

He looked around, and saw an older woman hiding behind the counter. Just her eyes and the top of her head were visible. "Alright, how's about you do yourself a favor and stand up. You'll make a better looking corpse that way. I can blow the top of your head off, but it's a lot more work for the mortician."

There was a flash of movement, and then a flash of light.

He could see the flame exploding from the barrel. A bullet was coming out of the barrel. He could watch it spin. It moved impossibly slow. He should easily be able to duck out of the way...except for the fact that he couldn't move.

The realization hit him: *I'm gonna die*. He felt the bullet barely touch his forehead—and then, strangely enough, it retreated back into the gun. He felt himself walking backwards out of the store...saw himself standing in the crap of the basement...felt himself tear a muscle pulling a body out of the trunk of the Caddy...

Great, even when my life flashes before my eyes I get it backwards...

There were flashes of black, and then he was in an escape pod that was stuffed back into a burning fighter. He watched energy beams shoot from the holes in the craft, and the ship heal itself, cruising backwards in time.

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He saw vomit on the floor, and felt it leap into his mouth. Felt the queasiness rise and fall, and felt beer pour from his mouth into a glass.

He saw scene after scene of the lifeless bodies of men and women being beaten into life. He saw burnt wreckage reassemble itself into buildings full of people.

He saw the Havoc Headquarters. He crawled back into a freighter to as a stowaway. He saw the boxes of fertilizer he slept on for weeks; felt the cold of a cabin not meant for people.

In a blink he skipped a decade and saw his father slap him for putting up with the kids in school...felt himself curled up in a ball as the bigger kids teased him and hit him...felt his mom slap him for no apparent reason whatsoever...

In another blink the rush of images stopped. He was tiny. He felt safe. He was warm and comfortable and happy. He was suddenly shocked to discover that it was probably the only time in his life that he felt that way.

He was in the womb.

Despair gripped him. *What could I have done different? My whole life down the toilet...nothing but crap and horror...*

And then the film started to roll forward again, skipping to very specific points in his life. Suddenly he was being hugged. It was the hug he got when he was sent to a foster home at thirteen. It was a hug he refused to return...even until today. It wasn't his father, so what was the point? There was Dr. Pompeon, telling him for the thousandth time that his biological parents had severe psychological problems, and Jack couldn't accept their rejection as valid. *Th e hell I can't...you try and brush that off...*

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In rapid succession, he saw every girl who was willing to try and fill the void I his heart. Every last one was a beauty. Every last was he ignored for fear of rejection. *I wasn't worth love. They were all so beautiful...they wouldn't love me...*

There was Mrs. D'Angelo, his guidance counselor, weeping the day he dropped out of high school. She always told him he had such great potential. *That's not what Mom said. That's not what Dad said. How could I believe you?*

There was Father Singleton, sitting on his adopted parents' couch, after they invited him over to talk some sense into him. "God didn't make your parents reject you," the kind priest told him. "They made mistakes. They went wrong. When they failed, he sent you other people to take their place. He won't abandon you." *But I didn't want THOSE people; I wanted MY people! Couldn't anyone understand that?*

There he was again the last time he ever saw the inside of a church; the priest trying to console him after his foster father died of a stroke, which he suffered upon finding out about Tom's new membership in Havoc Inc. "Your Dad is with his Heavenly Father now." *Wow. I hope he's not whipping his ass.* The word "father" meant only fear to him...

Fear; that's what he felt as the images reversed again. Once again nausea filled him as the movie was rewound, and started to play again.

This time as the scene moved forward, he was a different man.

He embraced his adoptive parents.

He worked hard in school.

He went to college.

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He got married to a beautiful woman.

Nothing different was given to him. He simply accepted the gifts that were given to him. He refused to internalize the suffering of his youth. It wasn't a part of him. He searched for the light no matter how dark it became.

And when he walked, he walked with his head held high. His back was straight as an arrow.

The scenes sped past and slowed. A woman in surgical scrubs was handing him a baby...

And the she took the baby away...and the scenes moved backwards. His despair grew deeper. *I could have had it all. I just threw it away on hurt and hate. I took the easy way out. I wouldn't try...*

Suddenly he was back in the womb, and for the first time perhaps in his entire life, he was praying. Praying to God—what God he wasn't sure but he wasn't about to be picky right now. He'd take anyone who would listen. *Please let me stay here. Don't make me go out again. Or let me do it over.*

The images started moving forward again...but it was *his* life, and it was moving very fast. *Please! Don't make me see it again!! I screwed up! I screwed everything up! I NEVER KNEW ANY BETTER!! OH GOD PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME WATCH IT!! I'D DO IT DIFFERENT!!! I'M SORRY!!! PLEASE GOD FORGIVE ME I'M SOR...*

The bullet drilled a tunnel through his head, and shattered the window behind him.

He crumpled to the floor.

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