



**YOUR
HEROES
DISAPPOINT**

The main hallway in the downtown precinct is bustling with traffic, everyone moving quick and deliberate. No time for eye contact. Off to the side, Carter is loitering near a water fountain, hunched over while on a video call with his pregnant wife. She's more than a week past her due date. It's a boy.

"Trust me," Carter says, his voice hushed with his back to passersby, "I'll be fine."

"I just don't understand why you have to risk it."

Technically, he doesn't. His commanding officer had requested he sit this one out, on account of the imminent birth of his son, but Carter insisted that he join the team on this particular mission after hearing the location.

"Baby," he says, "I think this mission is my destiny."

"Carter, no. Don't be silly—"

"*Please*," he begs, "please don't belittle my faith. I really believe that God is offering me an opportunity here. I used to think that He gave everyone one shot at greatness, but He tested us with free will to deny it. When I never saw my shot get called—I'll admit it—it shook my faith a little."

She sighs. It's tiny, quite nearly imperceptible, but Carter notices, and it hurts. "Baby, I really think this is my sign from God. I've got to take my shot here."

Down the hall, his commanding officer pops his head out of a room and shouts, "Carter! Last chance!"

"Coming, sir!" Carter hollers back, then looks down to his screen and smiles, "Baby, I gotta go."

Her eyes droop and her chin wrinkles up. "But what if God's plan is for you to be here for the birth of your son, and *this* is just a test?" she asks, and, for a moment, she sees her husband's face contort in such a way that she believes she's gotten through to him.

“No,” he says, shaking off his doubts, “I’m pretty sure it’s my thing. Gotta go.”

He hangs up.

Carter sprints down the hall and just catches the door before it shuts, then weaves through a row of chairs to take his seat. The commander stares at him. “Seriously, Carter: are you sure you want in?”

“Yes. One-hundred-per-cent. I was born to be in it, sir.”

“Interesting choice of word there. *Born*. Maybe you’re a bit preoccupied?”

Carter gets serious about his destiny and pushes any thoughts of his son’s impending birth out of mind. “No, sir,” he says, stoically composed. “I am focused on the mission, sir.”

“Good. Then we may proceed.”

The lights dim and a projector displays a photo of Vince Laughton, a suspected terrorist that has seized control of a high-rise downtown. He’s taken hostages. “We don’t know why. There’s been no communication in or out of the building, as though something has jammed all possible signals.”

The frame switches to a blueprint and Carter sits up a little straighter and pays just a little more attention. “This is the Roark, the high-rise downtown that’s fucked up everyone’s commute for the last seven years, yet only just opened its doors to the public a few days ago. Strangely enough, we don’t have any records on its security system, so all we have to go on is this blueprint they submitted before breaking ground. I guess when it’s Erol Zane’s name on the application, you just don’t ask questions.” Carter’s face is flushed with excitement at the very mention of Erol Zane, and a few guys in the room notice.

The commander goes over the broad strokes of their mission: the helicopter will fly to the roof; they’ll breach the access door and make their way to the security office in the lobby, over eight hundred feet below; they’ll disable the security system to allow reinforcements to swiftly overpower

Vince and his people, thus saving the day; then they'll be hailed as heroes.

"We have to assume that we won't be able to maintain communication with you," the commander says, "so, you'll need to improvise any changes to the plan should obstacles arise. These are presumed terrorists we're dealing with here. You're all big boys, you know what to do."

The team is excused from the briefing and make their way down the hall to the locker room. Carter is ahead of the pack, the most eager of the group. He's already down to his skivvies when the others show up.

"Jesus, Carter," teases Cortez, "you're really going above and beyond to avoid seeing this baby be born."

"It's not that," Donovan interjects, "it's because he's got a hard-on for Erol Zane."

"That big bald rich motherfucker? What's he got to do with anything?"

"It's his building."

"He lives there?"

"Yeah, he lives there. He built it; he owns it. It's his building."

Carter is already dressed while the other men are still stripping down. "Of course I want to be there for the birth of my son," he says, "and no, I don't have a *hard-on* for Erol Zane. But I do find him fascinating. I mean, he *is* trying to correct the course to save our species."

"Jesus," says Washington, buttoning up his shirt. "It sure sounds like you've got a hard-on for him." Everyone laughs and Carter smiles it off.

"Now don't laugh," he says, trying to quell the levity in the air and bring the conversation back to a lower register, "but I think it's my destiny to be on this mission."

In that moment, everyone wants to laugh, but no one wants to be the first. Perry is the first to smile, and Lee is the first to make a sound, but Cortez is the first to crack up. Then everyone is laughing, except for Carter.

“Bro,” Cortez says, chuckling, “you think your destiny is to ditch your pregnant wife to protect your boyfriend’s building?”

Carter puts on his final accessories as the rest of his teammates remain in various stages of dress. “I told you not to laugh,” he says, then excuses himself.

At the helipad, Carter realizes that he’s vibrating. He pats at his pockets and utility pouches until he locates his phone, then reads a series of text messages from his wife. He skims over mentions of contractions, retractions of said mentions, then retractions of those retractions to reiterate those contractions. Then, after all that, is one message that simply says: dont be a hero.

The rest of the team shows up and they load into the helicopter, and within moments they’re en route to the highest point in the city. There’s tension aboard as Cortez stares at Carter, seated across from him. Carter looks out over the skyline to avoid his gaze.

“What do y’all think’s the motive?” Cortez asks loudly over the din of the chopper. He never takes his eyes off Carter.

“Got to be money,” Washington shouts in reply. “Take over some rich motherfucker’s building and demand a ransom. Shit’s basic.”

“Sounds plausible. Anyone else have a guess?” No one speaks up immediately, and Cortez’s jaw clenches as he begins to lose patience waiting on Carter to take the bait.

Without looking away from the evening sky, Carter hollers over the whirring blades above, “It’s not money.”

“Yeah? How are you so sure?”

“It’s too public. Too high profile. I mean, you’d have to be the dumbest terrorist in the world to take over a sixty-six-floor building in the middle of a workday if all you wanted was money, and he can’t be *that* dumb if he managed to pull it off. It’s got to be personal.”

“With Erol Zane?”

“Obviously,” says Carter. “It’s just a big spectacle to show how Erol’s building can be seized by a handful of goons. They can’t win a fair fight against him, so they’re settling for a sucker-punch to give him a black eye.”

“And how does your *destiny* fit in? Your wife is about to give birth any second, but you’re out here on some Costner shit, like you gonna swoop in and save your billionaire man crush. And for what? An autograph?”

Carter turns to face Cortez. “What’s your fucking problem?” he asks.

“Man, I’m just sick of all this hero worship bullshit for billionaires. I say fuck billionaires, and fuck Erol Zane.”

“So, your problem is his money?”

“No, my problem is people like you who’ve got a fucking hard-on for him *because* of his money.”

“I don’t give a fuck about that. I *do* give a fuck about his plan to colonize Mars, though. I give a fuck that he’s funding research to cure disease and hunger. I give a fuck that he’s steering humanity back toward its potential—”

Cortez cuts him off and leans in as the rest of the team awkwardly tries to ignore them both. “More of that hero worship PR bullshit. That’s all fucking talk, man. Erol Zane ain’t done shit but make himself rich on promises that never come true.”

From the cockpit, Lee radios for everyone to shut up and focus, and Carter meets him halfway as he quietly ruminates on the world his son will inherit. His pocket vibrates and he knows that it’s his wife calling, no doubt with news on her progress, but he pushes it out of his mind as the Roark comes into view. He lowers the visor on his helmet.

The helicopter touches down and everyone disembarks and gets to work. Cortez and Washington trot ahead to assess the door, while Lee and Perry hang back and gather tools. Carter and Donovan raise their guns and inspect the perimeter of the roof.

“A hundred bucks says this terrorist has the same warped bullshit view of Erol that Cortez does – they just see him as a

billionaire, like that's somehow evil in itself. They ignore all the good he does and just reduce him to how much money he has.”

“Maybe,” says Donovan with a shrug.

“We do it with rich people, we do it with poor people, and the rest of us that fall somewhere in between try to pretend like money doesn’t define us.”

“Uh huh.”

“You can’t have it both ways, you know.”

“Sure.”

“It doesn’t make any sense to try.”

“I hear you.”

Donovan takes note of a peculiar strip running along the short wall around the roof, about knee-high. It looks like some sort of lens. “What do you think this is?” he asks, but Carter is staring out over the city, lost in his own thoughts. He doesn’t hear him.

“I’m naming my son after him,” Carter says. “Zane Carter. He’s my hero, Donny. You know, for all the bullshit that people say to deny his accomplishments, he’s actually leaving the world a better place than he found it. That’s supposed to be what drives us, right? The destiny of all righteous men?”

Donovan has no idea what he’s talking about. “What?”

Their conversation comes to an abrupt end when they realize that the others aren’t having any luck breaching the access door, so they head over to assist.

“I’ll give it to him: your boy Erol sure knows how to make a fucking door,” says Cortez, handing a hydraulic tool to Carter as he approaches. “Be a dear and swap this out for some ballistics.” Carter jogs back to the helicopter, muttering to himself.

He climbs inside to retrieve a blast charge but is briefly distracted as his phone begins vibrating incessantly. He pulls it from his pocket and sees a couple missed calls from his wife and a half dozen text messages, the last of which simply says: ITS TIME.

Then the world goes sideways.

Over the whirring of the chopper blades, Carter doesn't hear the anguished cries of his teammates from the roof. He doesn't see them squirm or die on their bellies. He's too concerned for his own safety as the helicopter drops hard, its feet severed by a lattice of lasers that bite effortlessly into the cabin as gravity drags it down. He catches hold of a rail alongside the door and pulls himself up to buy a few more terrifying seconds.

The cabin melts below him as it continues to descend into the laser grid, and Carter is horrified to notice his teammates disassembled in various parts, loosely piled by the door that remains proudly intact. There's some movement, though, and Carter makes out a severed torso pulling itself out from the gore, below the crisscrossing beams.

“Donny!” he shouts as the cabin tilts downward, the chopper’s blades crashing into the roof with deafening force. He briefly locks eyes with Donovan before a blade crushes his skull.

Carter pulls himself up to wrap his ankles around the bar, but the effort is wasted. The helicopter tips over and he loses his grip, and in that final moment he doesn't think to his son entering the world, or his wife giving birth. He doesn't think of failing his destiny, or whether destiny exists, or an afterlife, or a god. He thinks *oh, shit*, and that is all.

Your Heroes Disappoint begins just prior to Chapter 18 of *The Roark*. It follows the events of *In Death He's Briefly Kevin and Cash Only*

Confused? You won't be after ~~this week's episode of Soap~~ reading *The Roark*, available digitally at some point in August!*

*or September? I don't know. My daughter will be born any day now, and that'll take some attention away. Maybe October? Certainly by November or December. 2022 at the latest.