Project Unity

How Fear and Theory Combined to Create America's Constitutional Crossroads

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Chapter One

Fire from the Mountain

Blaze Montgomery gripped the leather armrests as orange flames devoured split pine in the stone hearth. War and Peace sprawled across his thighs, its pages forgotten while his attention escaped through frost-etched glass to where granite peaks pierced the Wyoming sky. Resin whispered through the cabin's rough-hewn walls. Paper rustled. A log collapsed in the grate, sending sparks spiraling upward.

Beyond the windows, wilderness consumed every horizon; no roads carved the white expanse, no power lines scarred the ridgelines. Wyoming's backcountry held its secrets close, buried beneath three feet of snow in December. Wind scoured the mountainsides clean while Blaze remained motionless in his chair, suspended between Tolstoy's battlefield and his isolation. The fire popped. The chimney's draft turned one page. His coffee had gone cold hours ago.

A sudden knock on the entrance caused Blaze to snap out of his thoughts. He went into action, grabbing the loaded Glock, which he always kept within arm's reach on the side table. Blaze approached the threshold and peered through the peephole. His heart skipped a beat when he saw the familiar face staring back at him.

With a swing, Blaze opened the portal wide. The roughness in his voice could strip paint from walls. "What brings a fine fella like you to my neck of the woods?" David Thornton stepped across the threshold, his polished Oxfords out of place against the rustic decor. "It's been a while, my friend. You're a hard man to find."

"I was trying to disappear. So cut to the chase." Blaze crossed his arms.

"Chicago. Intel says there's going to be an attack." David's expression darkened. The blood drained from Blaze's cheeks. His jaw slackened. The color fled his lips, reshaping his features into something hollow and gutted. "This is a tough call, partner. I told you I don't do that stuff."

"There are people in danger, Blaze. Innocent souls." Thornton's oculars bored into him. "I wouldn't be here if there were any other options." Facing away from David, Blaze shifted and tugged at one ear. He tapped his forefinger against his lip, remembering why he had left the CIA. Hanging over Chicago was an enormous threat he could not disregard.

With a single swift motion, he rolled up his sleeves. "Yes, let's chew the rag. For old time's sake." Thornton extended his hand towards Blaze and grasped his forearm. "Thank you, my friend. I'll see this doesn't go unrewarded."

Blaze drew a deep whiff through his nostrils, releasing it through parted lips. "Daylight's slipping through our fingers. Roll out." Blaze's hands smoothed his shirt, ensuring it was flat as he adjusted the sleeves and beckoned Thornton to follow. Blaze noticed David's hand as it rested on his shoulder. Settling into it, Thornton caused the threadbare couch to sag under his weight. Blaze settled into a worn armchair on the other side of him.

"Lay it on me. What's happening?" He tilted his chin down one degree. His eyebrows climbed while the corners of his mouth curved upward, each movement deliberate, rehearsed. The smile carved itself across his face, never touching his eyes. His head returned to the neutral position. A performance. Nothing more. To compose himself, Thornton swallowed hard after a lump formed in his throat. "Thank you, Blaze. A domestic terror cell based out of Milwaukee. They call themselves the "New Patriots." Blaze opened the file and examined the crisp photographs and official-looking papers, his keen observation absorbing every minute detail.

Simon Burr got involved with radical imams while in County Prison. "Since his release six months ago, he's been stockpiling fertilizer and diesel. The makings of a powerful truck bomb." Blaze's palm brushed his forehead, removing the sweat that had formed there. "What are we tangling with?"

"In Chicago, the Halloween parade is a celebration. Enormous crowds, families. Maximum casualties." David's arms gestured in swift sweeps, his mouth quivering with the effort to suppress the frown that threatened his face.

With a long, resigned exhale, Blaze closed the folder and rested his feet on the table. But now, as he stared at the case file before him, he knew he couldn't escape this dark world any longer. "When do we churn out the results?" he asked.

The corners of Thornton's mouth twitched, a stark contrast to the coldness in his pupils. "Wheels up in two hours." Blaze gave David a nudge as he stood up, a smile brightening his face. "I will be the death of the party!"



Blaze dragged his left leg across the warehouse threshold, favoring the phantom injury. Rust flaked from the corrugated walls. His trained eyes cataloged exit routes, weapon positions, and defensive cover.

"Bahir Mustafa" limped forward, channeling months of character development into each uneven step. The bitter veteran lived in this posture now, his shoulders hunched from carrying invisible burdens, his jaw clenched against phantom pain. During the fifteen-hour drive from Lost Springs, he had rehearsed the grievances, memorized the deployment dates, and perfected the slow burn of disillusionment. His left knee buckled on cue. Authentic enough to fool a polygraph.

From the second floor, Blaze heard muffled voices of passion as he climbed the creaky stairs. He could see the familiar faces of his fellow New Patriots members, who had gathered for their meeting. Simon stood near a stack of shipping containers, gesturing at three men in tactical gear.

Blaze took a seat as he crafted his persona to gain Burr's trust. "The system's rotten to the core. Ruled by corporate puppets beholden to their money-grubbing masters."

With a quick movement, Burr pushed his hair aside, his dark irises never leaving Blaze. Blaze rubbed his sweaty palms on his clothing, seeking to dispel the clamminess. The terrorist leader let out a low, approving grunt. Blaze observed a vulnerability within Burr's defense, yet breaching it demanded more than understanding.

"Big words from the new guy." Billy Stokes's mouth twisted sideways as he studied Bahir, threadbare collar, boots scuffed raw as if the man had shown up naked. "You talk a good game, but are you prepared to deliver when it counts?"

His corneas rolled heavenward, and Blaze's head shook. "I'll defend my actions with blood if I have to." Blaze began, cracking his knuckles, the sharp snaps popping as he searched Billy's face. "Are you set to bring this corrupt system crashing down?"

Before Stokes's booming laugh, an uneasy silence descended upon the group. "I like this one's fire!" His hand swallowed Montgomery's shoulder in sausage-thick fingers. "Welcome to the brotherhood, my friend. We'll see just how intense your convictions are soon enough."

Beads of perspiration dotted Blaze's palms, crossed and then uncrossed his legs. Words evaporated against their suspicion. His soaked shirt at noon would persuade them by dusk. Oxygen flooded his system. Skeptics waited to catch him in a lie.

Blaze approached Burr as the meeting came to a close. "Brother, a moment? I have news from my contacts down south." Burr's retinas sparked with greed. "Of course, Bahir. What have you learned?"

"A ship with heavy arms is crossing the border soon." Blaze manufactured details no one could verify. "RPGs, assault rifles. If we intercept it, we could strike a mighty blow."

Simon gripped his shoulder. "Good work. Let's talk about this later." He glanced around before adding in a low voice. "Halloween will be a day these infidels never forget."

Blaze's pulse battered against his larynx while his mouth stretched into a smile. October 31st. The spooky night provided the perfect cover. His pupils dilated as the pieces clicked into place. Thornton needed to hear this. Now.

His diaphragm spasmed as he crossed the warehouse floor, each step deliberate despite the electric current racing through his nerves. The micro-transmitter lay beneath fabric and flesh in his jacket's interior pocket. His fingers found the titanium casing. One click activated the encrypted channel. Static hissed through his earpiece. Connection established.



Blaze kicked open the rusted warehouse doors, gripping his MP5 submachine gun. Crates stacked high around him, each marked with warnings of their explosive contents, enough C4 to level a city block.

As Burr and his men turned, Blaze's hand darted to his holster. In a flash, he brandished his weapon, eliminating two New Patriots before they could retaliate. AK-47 bursts, plank breaking, and screams saturated the warehouse.

Blaze hurtled toward the wooden crates as muzzle flashes erupted from the shadows. Rounds splintered beside his ear, exploding planks into jagged fragments. Wood shards peppered his shoulders. He dove behind an ammunition chest, muscle memory guiding his hands through the reload sequence, magazine out, fresh one seated, bolt forward.

The warehouse fell silent except for his breathing. Blaze swept the darkness through his iron sights, finger resting on the trigger guard. Movement flickered near the loading dock.

Stokes's arm arced through the smoky air. The grenade caromed off Corten steel, tracing a fatal arc homeward. Stokes scrambled backward, boots scraping concrete, but physics had sealed his fate. Between them, the blast consumed space. He crumpled, his left leg severed below the knee, arterial blood painting the floor in spreading crimson pools. His screams reverberated off the corrugated walls.

Blaze rose from cover and centered his crosshairs on Stokes's torso. The gun bucked once. Eliminating Stokes with one shot. Simon, the notorious leader, remained. Blaze approached the last box, weapon ready.

With an abrupt movement, he leapt from his hiding spot, tackling Blaze to the ground with a powerful force. As they grappled, his fist struck Montgomery's cheekbone, drawing blood. Blaze retaliated with quick jabs to the terrorist's sides. Burr clamped his hands, circling Blaze's throat, choking him. His complexion turned red as he struggled to breathe, his hand searching for a weapon.

His fingers grasped a screwdriver amidst the debris. With a primal scream, he plunged it into Burr's neck. Blood sprayed as the terrorist convulsed and then be-

came motionless. Disoriented and gasping, Blaze stumbled and walked over to the detonator on a nearby table. He smashed it with the bloody Phillips head, rendering the C4 harmless. Blaze's figure slumped against the wall, a grin spreading into shaky laughter. His breath came as the adrenaline ebbed.

A crumpled paper with a rabbit sketch emerged from his ripped jeans. Despite the bruises and cuts on his face, a faint smile appeared as he looked at his creation. Art was his sanctuary, the one thing that brought him joy and reminded him of the goodness in the world. It gave him the strength to keep fighting. Putting aside the drawing, Blaze reloaded his weapon and made his way toward the exit, exhausted and in pain but undeterred.

The heavy steel door creaked open, and Blaze squinted as bright sunlight flooded his vision. He stepped out into the street, shielding his eyes with one hand. Majestic skyscrapers cast shadows over him, reflecting the sun's rays in a dazzling display. He caught his breath and admired Chicago's vibrant energy, contrasting the tragedy that had almost struck. Observing the crowds, a sense of relief washed over him; this city had avoided disaster today. Oblivious of the near catastrophe, people carried on with their lives.

Blaze's chest tightened as muscle memory surfaced, burning villages in Ukraine, children's bodies scattered across Donetsk marketplaces, mass graves carved from Luhansk hillsides. Fanatics had wielded machetes and improvised explosives with surgical efficiency. Extremists had turned schools into slaughterhouses and hospitals into morgues.

But other images fought through the darkness. A medic shielding wounded civilians with her own body during Mariupol's siege, refugees sharing their final rations with strangers. A village elder stepped between the soldiers and terrified families, arms outstretched wide despite the rifle barrels trained on his chest.

These moments carved deeper than scars. Burned hotter and lasted longer. The courage required a witness. Humanity demanded protection. Someone had to guard these sparks, shield them from the wind, nurse them into conflagration.

While walking on the busy street, Blaze saw a tiny figure skipping. The young girl clutched a well-loved teddy bear and glanced up at him with bright, trusting eyes. The sight softened his weariness, replacing it with a sense of accomplishment.