

Silence

By Saul Robles

Too much blood had been spilt.

That was the sole thought running through a certain young man's head as he made his way through the darkened streets of Paradise City. As he continued onwards to his eventual destination, both thankful and confused about the lack of any streetlamps being operational, he thought about all the lives that had been lost over the past few weeks. It was immensely foolish to him, as it had all been for the pursuit of something that most thought to be an urban legend up until recently, and that made no sense given that there was still no proof of the legend being real. People were going crazy over nothing more than rumor and hearsay, which saddened the young man greatly. The general populace proved to be far too easily led on, and that would ultimately be the downfall of the human race if they didn't get their act together.

Thinking more and more about the rising body count almost had the man shake his head in shame, but he knew better than to start criticizing people. After all, he'd killed more than his fair share of folks since this all began. His reasons for killing were different, but it didn't make him any less of a murderer. He cared little for such a description of him, though. It was his job to be a killer; to be a sword of justice that meted out punishment to those who deserved it. Unfortunately, for the last year, he had been relegated to being no more than a tool for his bosses to use as they saw fit. His targets had become increasingly unlike any that came before them, and he long began to wonder just what the higher ups were doing. Something seemed off, but he had no way of getting the answers he sought. Any questions he asked just got brushed off, and those above him were starting to regard him strangely. He could tell that it was getting dangerous to be so vocal about his misgivings.

The young man was brought out of his thoughts by the sudden activation of the streetlamps, causing him to quickly sprint off the street and into the shadows around the many homes that lined the sides of the street. The darkness had been his ally, making his journey so much easier, but now he'd have to focus. Being seen around these parts was a death sentence right now, and he had no intentions of dying. Luckily, not all of the lamps had come on, and none of the houses seemed to have any power either. Even with the additional light, it'd be easy for the man to avoid detection. He was well known for being similar to a ghost in the way he got around; so much so that he soon became known as Ghost. It wasn't the most inventive of monikers, but it was apt. Aside from that, he had a way to render the lights useless, but there was no need to go that far yet. Evading them would do for now.

Ghost kept going, picking up the pace for fear of the rest of the lights coming back on, but soon came to a halt. There were two lights approaching, likely the headlights of a car. No one in their right minds would be out on a night like this, meaning that the vehicle coming his way could only be one thing.

Guess the Blackguard finally decided to start patrolling, Ghost said to himself. They're certainly cowards if they needed a little light to get out here and do their jobs.

Ghost ducked into a nearby bush and went still. The Blackguard jeep strolled by slowly, an officer inside moving a flashlight to and fro to try and spot anything out of the ordinary. The beam passed over Ghost's location harmlessly, the jeep's inhabitants failing to spot him. Once they had moved a fair distance away, Ghost arose from the bush and got moving. There was little time to waste now.

The Blackguard was the security force that kept the peace in Paradise City, ferreting out all of the troublesome denizens and arresting them before they could do harm. At least, that's what they were on paper. In reality, they were nothing more than a mercenary group that was hired to pretend like they were doing something for the good of the people, when they were actually just the muscle of Darren Scott, their employer. Scott was the richest man in the city, and also the most corrupt person Ghost ever had the displeasure of meeting. Scott controlled the city, much as people liked to believe otherwise, and he disbanded the city's original police force to replace them with the Blackguard. He insisted that it was in the city's best interests, but Ghost knew better. Scott's only desire was to get rid of any possible variables he couldn't completely control, and the police force contained more than a few officers who didn't trust him as far as they could throw him. With them gone, Scott was one step closer to being able to act without any chance of rebellion. The Blackguard helped him out by tracking down dissenters and troublemakers, then making them disappear. It wouldn't be long before there was no one left to oppose Scott.

That was where Ghost came in. He was one of many who operated out of the shadows and made a point of being massive thorns in Darren Scott's side. The few who knew of the existence of Ghost's group referred to them as assassins. They were much more than that, though. They were the harbingers of justice, warriors of truth, and soldiers of the darkness. They were Delta Shadow, and their sole goal was to rid the city of Darren Scott by any means necessary.

Delta Shadow didn't start out that way, of course. Originally, they were just a specialized and secret branch of the military that carried out the operations that even Special Forces or Black Ops couldn't deal with. They weren't particularly better trained than those other units, but Delta Shadow was special in the truest sense of the term. Every member of Delta Shadow had some kind of supernatural ability, like the type of things people thought were just fiction. That's what made Delta Shadow so much more special than any other military unit, and that's why there were things that only they could handle. Darren Scott was one of those things, though that wasn't widely known. Even Delta Shadow themselves weren't entirely sure what kind of power Scott had, but they knew he wasn't going to be stopped by normal means. This is why they directed most of their resources into harassing Scott at every turn. He couldn't be allowed to carry out his

plans. What those plans were was not fully known, but it wasn't anything good, or so Ghost had been told.

Scott's ultimate desire was also the reason Paradise City was in its current state, though Ghost had no idea what the man had to gain from it. He was the one that began spreading rumors about an old legend being true, and that's what got people started with their rampant murdering. The legend itself was nothing terribly special or original. It was your standard tale of a hidden artifact that could grant one amazing powers, and it was the kind of thing Ghost had heard many times before. For whatever reason, the city's populace got all riled up and began hunting the artifact down, which led to all of the killings. Greed was apparently powering their bloodlust, and it was horrific. Ghost wasn't convinced that the story alone was driving people mad, though. He had no proof, but he felt that Scott had done something more. There was the possibility that his undocumented power was to blame for the chaos, and if that was true, it made Scott a very dangerous man to face. Ghost wasn't scared, however. He was no slouch in the powers department, and had no plans to engage Scott directly. From the shadows was how he liked to work, and that was going to be the ticket to victory when the time finally came.

After traveling another two miles and avoiding three more patrols, Ghost arrived at his intended destination, taking cover behind some bushes yet again. It was a massive mansion, nestled in the hills of Paradise City, with enough security to make Fort Knox look like a joke. This was the home of Darren Scott, and it was where he would die. Ghost would make sure of that. All he needed to do was get inside and find the man, which was easier said than done.

At least, it would be for anyone who wasn't Ghost.

Taking a good look around, Ghost noted that the mansion's power was unaffected by whatever had plunged the rest of the neighborhood into darkness, due to the multiple spotlights that scanned the area. He surmised that it had its own power supply in case of emergencies, which was smart. Guards swarmed all over the place as well, armed with flashlights. It didn't faze Ghost, who had a plan prepared. He'd already memorized the layout of the mansion, including the areas outside, thanks to a map a fellow agent had procured for him. There was a path he could take through an underground tunnel that would lead him into the mansion and right to Scott. He simply needed to reach it. That was where his power came into play. With no worries at all, he stretched out his hand and pointed at the nearest spotlight. For several moments, there didn't appear to be anything happening. Ghost knew otherwise, and was not surprised when something black suddenly enveloped the spotlight, blotting out the light.

"Hey, what happened to that light?" rang out the voice of a guard.

"I dunno. Power failure, maybe?" another replied.

"That's not likely," the first said, skeptical. "I'd better go check the generators anyway."

Ghost watched as the guard went over to the front gates and pulled out something. Thanks to his enhanced night vision, Ghost saw that it was a keycard. The guard swiped the card through a card reader on the wall, which beeped in affirmation before the light on it turned from red to green. The gate then began to open, creaking loudly as if it hadn't been oiled in some time. Ghost watched him go, unconcerned with the front gate. He didn't need to get through it to get in, though having a keycard might not be a bad idea just in case he got into a bind of some sort. He made a mental note to try and acquire one before thrusting his hand out two more times and darkening two more spotlights. He could hear the grumbles of nearby guards, all of them confused as to why the power was going out.

Ghost just chuckled quietly as he strolled over to the high wall that surrounded the mansion's grounds, seen by no one. What none of the guards knew was that it wasn't a power outage that turned off the lights. It was merely Ghost using the darkness to block them out. That was his special ability; he could manipulate darkness. It was a somewhat vague description of what he could do, though. He could do far more than just black out lights. For one, he could turn darkness into something solid, to use as a weapon or create a platform to stand on. He performed the latter trick here, standing on a solid patch of darkness and extending it upwards to reach the top of the wall. Once above it, he simply leapt over and landed softly on the ground, safely inside the stronghold. Without missing a beat, he sprinted over to the location of a very interesting looking statue of an angel, making no noise by stepping on solid darkness as he walked. It made no noise and allowed him to move fast without detection.

Once at the statue, which Ghost vaguely noted was naked, he pulled down on the left arm, like he was informed he should do. The statue slowly began to move backwards, revealing a hidden hole underneath. A ladder descended into the dark, but Ghost saw no need to use it. He just jumped down, enjoying the thrill he felt from the drop. It wasn't too deep a fall, and he used the darkness like a pillow to soften the landing as well as muffle any noise he made. Up above, the statue moved back into place, hiding the fact that he'd used it. The plan was going well so far. All he had to do now was find Scott and end him. That should be just as easy as getting inside.

Ghost traveled down the tunnel, lost in his thoughts. Now that he was here, he couldn't stop thinking about what Scott's plans truly were. His superiors didn't know any specifics, but they knew enough to know the man had to be stopped. Ghost didn't think much of it before, but he'd been thinking on it a lot more of late. Why were they so sure that Scott was doing something heinous? Sure, the man was corrupt as all hell, but that didn't necessarily make him some kind of supervillain. If they were targeting him because of his powers, what did that mean for the members of Delta Shadow? Were they viewed as dangerous too?

Ghost shook his head as he approached a ladder leading back up. This was not the time to doubt himself or his assignment. He could worry about that later, when the deed was done. For now, his job was to eliminate Darren Scott and that's what he would do. Focusing on that goal,

Ghost lifted himself up the small shaft via a shadowy platform and found himself facing a hatch. Giving no real thought to what was waiting above, he opened the hatch and ascended up and out. He emerged in a large, circular room that was completely devoid of any kind of furnishing whatsoever. There were two doors on either side of the room that served as exits, and the floor was a glossy black marble that gave the room a slightly ominous feel. In fact, it felt like a small arena. The dim lighting was welcome, at least.

For the first time that night, Ghost was uneasy. This felt wrong, very wrong. He'd been in traps before, and this felt just like a trap. He was therefore unsurprised when both doors crashed open simultaneously and two burly guards darted in, guns aimed directly at Ghost.

"Don't move. You've nowhere to run," one of them said. Ghost didn't even bat an eyelid as he used his power to solidify the shadows around the room and send them flying at the guards. Black tendrils tore their weapons from their hands and bound them, rendering the two harmless. Ghost had to laugh at the poor trap that was laid out for him, even if it meant he was an expected guest.

"Two guys? Come on, even ten of you wouldn't make me sweat. This is what happens when you underestimate me."

"On the contrary, Mr. Ghost, I was simply reassuring myself that your powers were what I expected."

Ghost spun around quickly, preparing to use a shadow tendril to bind the owner of the voice that came from behind him. Before he could launch one, the lights in the room grew blindingly bright, removing all trace of darkness from the room and causing the tendrils holding the two guards to dissipate. Ghost groaned in annoyance, hating having to face his weakness. Too much bright light gave him little to work with, as there wasn't much darkness to manipulate. He could still use his shadow and the shadows of others, but he could perform no major acts with them. The light would simply banish the darkness if he tried to extend beyond the range of whatever shadow he was trying to utilize.

"I must say, you are something interesting indeed," Darren Scott said, walking towards Ghost and smiling dangerously. "You could've been quite the problem had I not known you were coming."

"If you don't mind me asking, how exactly *did* you know I was coming?" Ghost asked, genuinely curious.

"I've got friends in many places," Scott replied. "Even in Delta Shadow. Didn't you wonder how easily your little friend got you the information needed to get in here?"

"Of course," Ghost said with a sigh, "it was a trap. Why am I not surprised?"

“You clearly don’t know me as well as you think you do. I’m always one step ahead of the masses.”

Ghost didn’t bother responding to that. Though the thought of a mole in Delta Shadow was worrying, there were bigger issues to deal with right now. He needed to find a way out of this mess or his life would likely reach its end before the night was anywhere close to over.