The Zone - A short novel

Chapter I

 Leo wasn’t the thinking type, but he just couldn’t help himself falling into the many traps of his mind, recollecting over the events of the last few months. It all happened so quickly, but also with a tendency to feel like a slow-paced, black-and-white movie.

 He sat on his favourite chair in the backyard. His German shepherd Max was laying on the freshly cut grass, inches away from him. The dog appeared tired but satisfied that his “Commander-in-chief” was finally home and well.

Leo had all the motives to feel tired, mentally and physically. He’d just been part of the most terrible conflict on Earth. The Third World War almost destroyed the entire world.

Between famine and despair, the world was in a desperate need for peace, after most armies ran out of not only fuel and military equipment but also human hands and land to fight on. The truth is, the war destroyed everything in its path, moving from one part of the Earth to the next. In the end, it was the Americans and the Chinese who put an end to the conflict, establishing a peace treaty signed by all 12 of the superpowers of the world.

After the war ended, the same 12 countries met in a bunker in the Nordic Sea, just under the island of Anholt, one of the few untouched by war pieces of land on a burning Earth. During one of the meetings that led to the peace treaty, Germany and the US proposed what was then considered to be a joke by most of the other 10 nations. The two powers imagined a neutral zone, a piece of land that can be constructed far away from any civilisation on the planet, deep into the Pacific Ocean, for example, which could serve the world as the one and only zone for military combat.

Regardless of the motives behind the dispute, if two or more countries were to be in a conflict and would like to openly and safely resolve it, they’d have to send their best troops on the island and have them fight there. The island proposal was first met with fury and concern by China and Russia, two of the countries that had to suffer the most because of the war. China had lost nearly 80% of its population, especially in the rural zones where every source of food and water was bombarded by the US and its allies.

Russia was simply devastated by the short, yet growling conflict. Its resources were nearly zero by the time the treaty was signed, and the country was in a state of extreme poverty and misery. Entire villages and cities were simply whipped off of the face of Earth, and most of Moscow was now under ruins.

Leo then moved its conscious attention to the day when The Zone was publicly announced in the media. It was a rainy Tuesday, which made the announcement even more dramatic. The news reporter was standing on one of the amazing beaches of the Norwegian island, telling the world about the solution that could’ve saved the planet its now disastrous state.

 “Following the events of the last three months, when more than 3 billion people were killed in the armed conflicts that destroyed most of our planet, the 12 nations that formed the peace treaty have now officially confirmed that the construction of an artificial island has begun. Formerly called The Zone, this island in the Pacific Ocean will serve all nations of the world who want to engage in military combat”

 The news reporter briefly introduced a US Army General by the name of Daniel Bone, who Leo remembered from one of his own campaigns in the China Sea.

 “The whole purpose behind The Zone is to never have to endure such atrocities we went through these past 3 months. We brought the actual hell on our own planet and frankly, the repercussions are dramatic. The Zone will be accessible to all nations of the planet, which can stay on with their allies or fight on their own, should they decide to go to war with another country. There will be no war zones anywhere else on Earth but there. Everything will be done by a scheduled program, and every single fight will be transmitted live with the help of the media. This way, the whole world can watch and learn why war is probably never a solution, but even if we see it as one, it can happen in a safe environment, far away from our kids and families”

 Max interrupted Leo’s thinking pattern with a short bark. He was clearly not feeling well. The dog stretched his left paw on his master’s knee, signalling he was in need for food. Leo calmly stood up and reached for the back of treats that was always near his spot in the garden. He greeted Max with a few doggy bones and then left the hound to play with the tasty morsels.

 Back in the house, Leo began remembering his last killing spree. As gentle as he was with his dog, Leopold Hot was simply a killing machine for the US Government. Over the past three months, he’d killed more people than he can remember, both in the China Sea missions, but also in shorter campaigns in South-East Asia and the Middle East.

 He was the total opposite type of person than one of his best buddies, Billy Tolls. Billy was a master of planning, advancement in combat, military equipment and tactical operations. Yet, he absolutely hated the idea to kill people, especially people who were most probably innocent.

 The Zone brought a dispute between Leo and Billy. As opposites attract, the two were basically best friends on the field, regardless if one was simply an observer to the fight, operating missions from within a control room, while the other was executing orders. While Billy was all for it and supported the idea of The Zone, Leo was totally against it, stating that countries that decide on going to war should also expect casualties and material losses of huge importance once they enter combat.

 Still, none of these conflicts between the two really mattered. In a few days times, both Leo and Billy were going to board a plane to The Zone, the one and only military conflict patch on Earth, in a mission of recognition and analysis.

 Little did they know this was about to be much more than a simple fly-in, fly-out mission.