



We Can Be Heroes

Scott Fitzgerald Gray

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"What Gray has done with this book is nothing short of astounding."

-- Colin McComb, author of *Oathbreaker*

Death and Friendship.

Love and Gaming.

Mind and Machine.

The Meaning of Life.

High School Graduation.

The End of the World.

That Kind of Stuff.

If you press them, anyone who games will admit to some variation on the idea of how they'd love to be the hero for real, just once. Just for one day. But right now, I'm on an empty street five hundred kilometers from home, barely able to walk. I'm soaked and shivering, wearing someone else's clothes, and with way too many memories of almost dying rattling around in my head. And right here, right now, all I can think about is what I'd say if anybody asked me how much I want to be a hero...

I try to focus. I need to bring the previous days into some sort of relief that will let me sum things up.

"Me and some friends of mine, we got caught up in something. We thought we were beta-playing a game. An online tactical simulation, but the game turned out to be... you know what, that doesn't matter. But none of it was our fault, and now we have something this guy Lincoln wants. A piece of tech. I want to give it back to him, but I can't trust him to leave things alone after that."

"What kind of tech?"

"A Soviet-era mobile weapons platform, whose heuristic on-board systems developed advanced artificial intelligence capability while it sat forgotten in a bunker in Smolensk." Saying it sounds just about as ridiculous as I expect it to.

"I didn't think you wrote fiction." Connor tries and fails to laugh. It's like he has some sort of esophageal deformity that routes all intent to guffaw straight from his lungs to his nose.

"Not fiction. This is the truth..."

WE CAN BE HEROES -- The new novel by Scott Fitzgerald Gray

EXCERPT

Malkov's grey eyes are black, his goggles high on his forehead where he stares through the screen. I'm not

sure what his view is through the link he's established to the Vindicator's comm system, but as I step up, I can feel those eyes lock to mine.

"This is a one-way feed," he says, "because you get to listen, not talk." In the recordings Carl made, in all the conversations with Lincoln, you can't hear Malkov's accent through his mil-spec inflection. Here, the hint of clipped Russian threads his voice like fine wire.

"Record the GPS fix you see on your screen," Malkov says. A series of coordinates flash up, but I don't bother reading them because I know where he is. As the camera shifts, one of the 99 Mile frontage roads comes into view, showing faded signage in the background. "You stand down all weapons systems. You keep all communications channels closed except this one. You leave the AI in core shutdown, just like it is now. Carl doesn't call the shots anymore."

When he says the name, something twists in Malkov's voice. Then he's reaching out of frame, grabbing something and hauling it into view.

Molly.

He's got her mouth duct-taped, hands bound likewise in front of her. Her cheeks are wet, eyes open wide.

Something cold and dark is rooting deep in my gut even before Malkov pulls the Glock from his holster, then sets it carefully to the side of Molly's head. Then that cold, dark something shunts to my brain to shut it down, and I can't recognize how Malkov has pulled the pistol so that none of his team behind him can see it. I understand what that means now when I watch it, but I don't know it in the moment.

All I'm aware of in the moment is that through the duct tape, through the static of the video link, even as she's fighting, pushing back against Malkov with everything she's got, Molly is screaming.

"These are the terms," Malkov says carefully. "No one sees you, no one hears you. Deliver the Vindicator to me at these coordinates in five minutes or your friend dies..."

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Jeremy Richards:

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Leslie James:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One particular activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition info. Even you love We Can Be Heroes, you can enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout people. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its named reading friends.

Jean McCallum:

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