

THE FIFTH RING
AKA
VAGABOND SAMURAI

Written by

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CHAPTER 1: EARTH

1 INT. ATLANTA HIGH RISE CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY 1

Staring out of the window upon Atlanta, THE DIVINE RULER, 50s, demented oligarch, inhales long and deep, with a disturbed wide-eye mania. The man may snap at any moment. He shakes his head in disapproval and sits at his desk.

Unsheathing a handled blade made from sharpened metal ruler, he inspects each measurement as if it was the only thing in the world that mattered to him. He notices a spot of blood and wipes it off feverishly with a wet wipe.

He removes a raw steak from a mini fridge and cuts it in pieces, devouring it with blood dripping down his chin.

THE DIVINE RULER
A nectar so sweet, yet so savory.

Without wiping his face, he makes a call.

THE DIVINE RULER (CONT'D)
Are they all gone yet? No? The
streets must be scrubbed of all
scum. Now, my boy! Now!

The Divine Ruler hangs up. He tosses steak fat behind him. Picks up a Rubik's cube. He tries solving it. Chucks it.

THE DIVINE RULER (CONT'D)
Fuck it! I'm above this bullshit
planet. Sick of wasting time.

The Divine Ruler stands and returns to the window, calm.

THE DIVINE RULER (CONT'D)
It's in your hands now, son. We're
waiting! Daddy's watching!

2 EXT. ATLANTA HIGHWAY UNDERPASS - DAY 2

Trying to meditate, SAM, 30s, long-haired, half-Native male, eyes shut, inhales twitches. Sunlight reflects on his face.

EXT. MUSCOGEE NATION RESERVATION - DAY - FLASHBACK

At the road entrance to the reservation marked with faded sign for MUSCOGEE NATION. YOUNG SAM, 10, scrawny with long hair, runs past the sign out of the reservation.

JOHNNY, 13, tough short-haired Native boy, walks beyond him, forced bowlegged, with a reed in his mouth, which he spits out and laughs. He pulls a finger gun out of his pocket holster and aims it dead-eye at the running Young Sam.

JOHNNY

Pew pew! Gotcha, punk. Be dead Sam!

Young Sam turns confused to face the scene and his proud lone brother blowing fake smoke from his finger. Sam refuses.

SAM

No. I can't be killed that easy.
Anyway, it's not fair. How come you
always get to be the cowboy?

JOHNNY

Because, I always win like them! My
Dad's an Irish cowboy like Billy
The Kid. Yours is a white Mexican.

SAM

Well, this game sucks, Johnny! I
wanna play somethin' else now!

GRANDMOTHER, 50s, Native American elder woman exits house nearest the street entrance, beckoning with a warm smile.

EXT. ATLANTA HIGHWAY UNDERPASS - DAY

MORTARS and GUNSHOTS echo through a dark screen.

Sam straightens with palms up.

Slouching in a wheelchair, MASTER SERGEANT, 50s, Asian-American man with long gray hair smokes a cigarette. He watches Sam deal with his manic tics. Laughs.

MASTER SERGEANT

You a monk now, Specialist?

SAM

Don't mind me, Master Sergeant.
Just tryin' to find some peace.

MASTER SERGEANT

Peace! Didn't you read The Book of
Five Rings? Next you'll want quiet.
How many times I gotta say it?
Peace can't exist here, son.

SAM

It has to. I can't keep fightin'.
If I hone my mind and body, I can
end this ongoing cycle of violence.

MASTER SERGEANT

You're a born warrior, Sam. Peace
comes by accepting our ugly lot in
life. Through owning our grim fate.

SAM

What war we fightin' again? Musashi
talks sword techniques. Useless
advice against any goon with a gun.

MASTER SERGEANT

There's so much you still don't
know. Read BETWEEN the lines, kid.

Master Sergeant throws his hands up. Taps finger to temple.

MASTER SERGEANT (CONT'D)

It's about wielding our nature. The
Spirit-of-the-thing-itself. It's
about destroying our enemy first.

SAM

Nearly everyone's my enemy. Gotta
be more specific, Master Sergeant.

MASTER SERGEANT

The REAL enemy hides. Most doubt
our enemy exists. But make no
mistake, Specialist. We are at war,
a timeless war for the streets, for
our freedom, our dignity. The days
of ignorant optimism are over. It
is US VS. THEM, Sam. We won't be
holding hands and humming Kumbaya
with those who seek to sacrifice us
like spent slaves on the pyramids.

SAM

(opens eyes, alarmed)
You know somethin' you ain't
tellin' me, M.S.?

Master Sergeant shivers. Covers body with a sleeping bag.

MASTER SERGEANT

OK, enough lessons today. It's my
bedtime. You up an' at 'em?

Sam nods, grimacing.

MASTER SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Good. You're on fireguard.

SAM
You're -- my only non-enemy.

MASTER SERGEANT
Dad, mentor, and best battle buddy
all in one. I know it. OK. Night.

Master Sergeant snores immediately.

Sam twitches, gives up meditation. Opens a beer and a book.
Reads. Winces from migraine. Pops pills from a faded bottle.

Sam's eyelids fight gravity. He passes out cold.

3

EXT. ATLANTA HIGHWAY UNDERPASS - NIGHT

3

In darkness the THUDS of BLUNT FORCE correspond to GROANS.

Sam stirs, wakes to see three masked assailants staring at
him. One gives Master Sergeant one more blow. They flee.

Sam observes the battered and bloody Master Sergeant.

SAM
Oh shit. No. No!

Sam stands and stumbles back down, crawls to Master Sergeant.

MASTER SERGEANT
You-- you slept on duty, Sam?

SAM
I-- rested my eyes. For a minute.

MASTER SERGEANT
I trusted you. Now I'm-- I'm--

SAM
I-- I'm so sorry, sir.

MASTER SERGEANT
They broke-- the truce.

SAM
Who? What truce? Who did this?

MASTER SERGEANT
Man upstairs. Titan of the tower.
Sent Sergeant Hollis to do it.

SAM

Huh? Titan? Hollis? That ol' vet at
shares with the crazy hats? Why?
What can I do? Tell me! I'll-

MASTER SERGEANT

I'll- forgive. If you- avenge. Here-
Use my Tanto. I wasn't able to-

M.S. coughs blood. Unsheathes and offers katana dagger.
Frozen, Sam accepts the blade. M.S. dies. Sam wails.

SAM

Wait, please. I need you here M.S..

4 Sam kneels over the corpse, paralyzed. Unsheathes tanto. 4

SAM (CONT'D)

Whoever did it, I'll destroy 'em--
send 'em all to the heart o' the
void, leavin' nothin' behind but
empty bodies on blood-soaked soil.

Sam's tremors stop. Sirens sound. Police lights flash. He
grabs the blade. Flees.

5 EXT. TENT CITY - NIGHT 5

Wild-eyed with determined adrenaline, Sam searches the camp,
scanning residents and tents. He paces, muttering.

DAHLIA, 20s, woman shaved head natural beauty in a trench
coat, enters bearing a sack of fresh socks.

Dahlia hands socks out with a smile. Sam and Dahlia make eye
contact. She grins and waves at him. He panics and runs away.

6 EXT. KROG STREET TUNNEL - NIGHT 6

Sam walks, conceals the blade against his forearm. Scans each
face in the darkness. Shoulder-checks a man without apology.

Suddenly, he stops, remembering intel. Storms forward.

7 EXT. UNDERGROUND ATLANTA - ENTRANCE STAIRS - NIGHT 7

Sam races downstairs. CAPTAIN HOLLIS, 60, sways, dazed.

SAM

Why'd ya do it, Hollis? Why him?
Fuck you man. You're dead.

CAPTAIN HOLLIS
Huh? What? What I done did to who?

SAM
You murdered M.S. Please don't play games with me, Sergeant Hollis.

CAPTAIN HOLLIS
SERGEANT? I got my degree. Gots my commission. It's CAPTAIN HOLLIS to you. Put respek on my name, son!

Captain Hollis bows up to Sam. Sam retracts in thought.

SAM
You're Captain Hollis? Who the hell is Sergeant Hollis then?

CAPTAIN HOLLIS
Oh-ho. Best not even mention THAT Hollis's name 'round ME, boy. Nope.

SAM
Tell me who and where he is. Now.

CAPTAIN HOLLIS
Oh. He'll come to you, hang 'round here long enough. He loves it here.

Captain Hollis looks into distance. Salutes. Smiles at cops.

CAPTAIN HOLLIS (CONT'D)
In fact, here dem boys comin' through right now. Good luck!

Police lights fill the peripheral. Sam runs downstairs. Flees deep into underground. Encounters dead end. Uses his robe to conceal himself on the ground along the wall.

8

INT. UNDERGROUND ATLANTA - UNDERGROUND SHOPS

8

Two police officers, OFFICER MUSA, 30, and OFFICER VASQUEZ, 30, patrol downstairs, wielding flashlights palming holsters.

OFFICER MUSA
Why not just detain the man right there? Now we're on a goose chase.

OFFICER VASQUEZ
Ya gotta leave the scene and come back as a hero. Didn't you learn about crime in Nigeria, bro?

OFFICER MUSA

I moved to Atlanta at age 10. Never learned proper lawbreaking protocol for cops, though no.

OFFICER VASQUEZ

You're no fun, Musa. That's why Hollis don't like you.

OFFICER MUSA

He doesn't like that I'm from Africa, Vasquez. I'm no dummy.

OFFICER VASQUEZ

Boo hoo. I'm from Miami. He also doesn't like me. I'm not whining. Just learn the ropes. Do the job!

They approach Sam at the dead end. Sam unsheathes blade.

OFFICER MUSA

This big operation he put together. "Curing homelessness". Africa did teach me what genocide looks like.

OFFICER VASQUEZ

A dirty job, but somebody's gotta do something about the streets. Let's start by finding this perp.

They notice Sam move under robe. They draw arms.

Sam sees shoes advancing. The radio startles them all.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (O.S.)

Yo Tweedle Dumb n' Dumber. Get 'em?

OFFICER VASQUEZ

That's a negative, sergeant. I reckon we're close though.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (O.S.)

Stop pullin' ya puds. He'll turn up. But we got metrics to hit tonight first. Meet at future HQ.

Officer Musa shakes his head in disgust.

OFFICER VASQUEZ

Don't gotta like the gringo. Just gotta work with him. Wanna end ATL crime? Gotta get rid of criminals.

The officers exit. Sam sits, shook. Upholds the blade.

SAM

I shoulda been up. I let the swine
take your life. This is my shame.

Sam raises to kneeling position for seppuku, ritual samurai
suicide. He raises the blade. Hears familiar voice. Drops it.

MASTER SERGEANT (O.C.)

I said: I'll forgive if you avenge.

SAM

M.S.? How? Against the law? I'm too
fucked in the head, and all alone
now. How can I win this war?

Master Sergeant appears, beaten and bloody in his wheelchair.

MASTER SERGEANT

I died like a dog. But you have a
chance to serve true justice. There
may be no winning in this war. But
there is a balance to maintain.

SAM

Sounds like a suicide mission.

MASTER SERGEANT

Life is a suicide mission. Your
spirit is strong, Sam. Wield it.

SAM

Yesterday I thought I could find
peace here, but I was a fool. You
were right. This life is hell.

MASTER SERGEANT

Always was. And you're still in the
outer circles. Stuck in limbo.

SAM

Is there a way out? Can there be
hope for a brighter day?

MASTER SERGEANT

Perhaps if you face it and fight to
carve a path of honor through the
rings. Slay the beasts they unleash
on you and execute the worldly
devil himself upon his tower
throne. Then, redemption is yours.

Master Sergeant is gone. Sam stands. Sheathes blade.

SAM
Meeting at Future HQ, huh?

9

EXT. WEELAUNEE PEOPLE'S PARK - PARKING LOT - DAWN

9

In the empty parking lot, SERGEANT HOLLIS, 30s, reclines across the hood of an unmarked car, arms folded. He smiles upon the forest. Frames areas with fingers.

SERGEANT HOLLIS
Wish ya could see this with your
own eyes daddy. The good work I do.

Sergeant Hollis spits. Breathes in the fresh air.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)
This'll be OUR city soon. Cop City.
They'll shoot big movies here. I'll
be famous. A leading man!

The arrival of Musa and Vasquez interrupts Sergeant Hollis from his excitement. They step out of the car. Approach as Hollis stands, parade rest. He spits too close to their feet.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)
Ya doofuses spent all night fuckin'
off? One dumbass bum shouldn't be
that hard to find, gentlemen.

Cringing, Musa stifles animosity. Vasquez shakes it off.

OFFICER VASQUEZ
Sergeant, y'know how many zombies
walk the streets. More every day.
He's a needle in a needle stack.

SERGEANT HOLLIS
Whatever, losers, I don't care.
Just sayin' it sucks to suck. Ha.

OFFICER MUSA
We patrol up and down each street
downtown. How would YOU find him?

SERGEANT HOLLIS
I'd put out a lil' lemonade stand
that said "Free Crack and Meth".
The dirty hobo couldn't resist.

OFFICER MUSA
Not every single one of these guys
is on hard drugs, sergeant.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

That one sure as shit WAS in a drug coma. Couldn't even hear me kickin' his sugar daddy in the face. Ha.

OFFICER MUSA

OK. Sun's up. Enough shady shit. I go home now to my wife and my kids.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

Wife and kids. What a flex, family man. G'on Musa! You, Vasquez, take the rest of the day to relax. Fuck.

Officer Musa gets in the driver's seat of the car.

OFFICER VASQUEZ

Ease up on him, alright? You know I got your back here no matter what.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

Easy to say before goin' home for hot sex. G'on, Vasquez. I'm just gettin' my shift started. I'm fine.

Officer Vasquez gets in the passenger seat. They drive away.

Sergeant Hollis, paces, battling a panic attack.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)

So much stress. Maybe I need a nature stroll. Might even catch some hippie terrorist trespasser.

He walks toward the tree line. SCREAMS cause him to do a 180.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)

To hell with that.

More guttural screams. Hollis fires his gun into woods.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)

OK. Maybe I should get some shuteye myself. Out here, hearin' thangs.

Sergeant Hollis approaches his car. Makes call. Voicemail.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Hey, Lisa. Look baby. I love you. Ya know that. Let me come home. I won't do it again. I swear. Please.

Sergeant Hollis sighs. Gets in the driver seat.

10

INT. CAR - DAY

10

SERGEANT HOLLIS

Guess here's as gooda place as any.

Sergeant Hollis reclines his chair back.

Sam sits in the backseat, blade drawn to Hollis's brain stem.

SAM

Keep reclining and it's suicide.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

Hey what the fuck!

Sergeant Hollis scrambles to pull back and around, fumbling for his gun. Sam raises and presses the blade with enough force to draw blood. Sergeant Hollis collapses into seat.

SERGEANT HOLLIS (CONT'D)

What? Who are you, man?

SAM

A sharpened blade of vengeance.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

Oh, you're the runaway bum, huh?

SAM

I ain't no runaway. I'm right here.
Cause I need to know why? Why us?

SERGEANT HOLLIS

Think the zombie hunt was my genius idea? I wish! I'm just following orders handed down from God.

SAM

So I guess God deserves to die too.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

He's untouchable. So high above us.
It's the dawn of a new day. A clean city, a safe haven, free of crime.

SAM

What about your crimes? You aren't judge, jury, and executioner.
You're a pawn, a foot soldier.

Hollis reaches for gun. Sam slices his hand. Hollis yells.

SAM (CONT'D)

Was our crime living on the street?
As eyesore reminders of how our
system fails us? How our warriors
are used up to kill starving
children in occupied lands?

Sergeant Hollis rolls eyes, bored.

SERGEANT HOLLIS

You're doomed no matter what, but
we can't sit here all day. I hit my
squad alarm. Y'got two minutes max.

SAM

Huh. OK. Wanna know who I am?

SERGEANT HOLLIS

You're a dead man yappin'. So, I
don't care who ya think you are!

SAM

You should care. I'm your enemy.

ECU on SAM who plunges the blade in. Retracts. Blood spray.

Sergeant Hollis dies.

Sam sits in unsatisfied silence. Dull-eyed. Looks upon ATL.

The top of the tallest skyscraper reflects the sun, blinds
him. Sam takes this as a taunt.

SAM (CONT'D)

God, huh? The titan in the tower?

He tries to get out, but realizes both backdoors are locked.

He leans over Sergeant Hollis, but both front doors are on
some kind of auto-lock as well. He attempts to get the keys
from the front floorboard. Creeping SIRENS startle him back.

Frantic, Sam twists around to see the cop cars pulling up, as
red and blue lights flood the scene.

Sam grips the blade. Raises it slow, high above open abdomen.
Freezes. PULSING BLOOD syncs with red and blue lights
drowning view of the bloody blade suspended mid-air.

Sam exhales.

THE END OF EARTH