

Prologue

Felians heart was pounding, as if it would burst from his chest and splatter on the ground before him at any moment. Cold sweat covered his face and hair, fogging up his helmet. With pale, shaking hands, he reached for the panel, slamming on a useless button. He looked around the dim hall in desperation, before giving the panel a final go. The blast doors stayed shut.

Stepping back, a dreadful realization overcame him. He would have to find another way to the escape pods. Making sure his rifle was loaded and his sword was loose in its scabbard, Felian walked back the way he came, desperately trying to balance speed and silence. Every so often he would hear the echoes of a scream, followed by overwhelming and absolute silence.

They had been boarded, and the horrors of the void beyond were coming for anyone who remained. Everyone knew the dangers, of the countless disappearances and empty vessels. But they were background stories, the type one would never picture happening to them.

Another scream, followed by running. Then silence. Felian felt terrible shivers radiating down his spine, causing his hairs to rise. The deck lights flickered several times, before ceasing to provide light. It took longer than usual for the emergency generators to start, and a dim red light flooded the deck. Felian peered into the long hall, praying the horrors had not found their way to the upper levels of the vessel.

He made his way down the long, dim hall, his eyes bulging with every creak and groan of the ship. Arriving at the halls end, he was faced with a choice. He could go right, and take his chances through the mess halls and barracks, and then face another blast door, which might also be sealed. Going left would be faster, but it would take him to the lower levels. His rational thoughts told him to go left, for passage would be certain. But *they* were down there...

Felian closed his eyes, and breathed in. *He was a warrior of the Kordiol Empire, a standing example of mankind's conviction and bravery. Shuddering cowards did not colonize the stars. Warriors not afraid to face what laid beyond*

did. Making sure his rifle was loaded, and feeling his sword's handle once more, Felian went left.

His helmet did little to filter out the iron smell of blood coming up from the lower levels. His legs trembled with each, careful step. Felian froze as another, terrible scream traveled up from below. *Perhaps it would be better to turn back, try his chances in the opposite direction...* He shook his head, and forced his legs to keep moving him forward. A few steps forward, and then a few more. The closer he got to the dark stairway, the harder it was to move. The sound of someone's rifle releasing multiple rounds filled Felian's ears, and he froze. A low, rumbling roar echoed up from below, and the shriek of a dying man followed. Felian took a knee, and raised his rifle. Something was crawling up the stairwell. His rapid breathing clouded the interior of his visor. Coupled with the dim red lights of the hall, he felt like he was staring through the foggy glass panes of a shower.

A horrible, disembodied voice filled Felian's head, and he yelled, pouring the air from his lungs “*...it comes and goes....it looks and knows...its victim it will seize....for men fear me.....they cry and plea....oh emperor...save me.....*” Felian's finger pulled the trigger, releasing a spray of ammunition into the darkness. When his clip was empty, he rose, pulling his blade from its scabbard. Looking up, he spoke, his voice weak with fear and desperation.

“May the blazing sun guide me.... emperor save my soul...” The dim, red lights of the hall flickered, and faded away.....