

FATE

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this is a story ive been putting together for publishing in Australia its not finished yet and the reason it is posted is to get some comments nad opinions on what needs fixing or improving. so i hope you like.

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Chapter 2 - Untitled

2

2 - Untitled

Someone once said that a human life is like a star, it is one in a billion and yet each one of those billion shines brightly enough to catch the eye and in an instant it is gone. We are like stars; we only get one chance to shine...

The halls of the monastery were almost quiet, bar the sound of servants going about their daily duties and the sound of fast footsteps clicking down the length of the grand hall. Victoria hurried along the stretching hallway of the ministry, intent to reach her seat at the council chamber. Maybe today they would finally see things from her point of view. The council chamber was massive; its stained glass dome almost a hundred metres high and twice as long, it always took her breath away. There was a sudden silence as High Marshall Jex took his seat. Victoria moved toward her seat. It was already filled.

"Miss Locks, please give your report on the breakaway faction as requested by the ministry and then you may leave. Your place in the council has been filled." One of the members said. Victoria took a deep breath. She wasn't angry. Victoria was used to the ministry's games. She stood in the middle of the room. Looking up, she saw the members seated around the higher chasms of the chamber. They peered down at her.

"Honourable Clerics, I, Victoria Locks of the Agency address you directly. I come before the ministry with my usual report as requested. The ministry has requested specific information regarding the Special Enforcement Agency Network also known as the breakaway faction SEAN."

Victoria Locks was suddenly interrupted by one of the council clerics who were sitting high above her in the chamber.

"We do not require information regarding SEAN, the ministry have uncovered all we need to know about this network of planetary alliances. We do not feel they are a threat to Earth. We do, however, feel that your agency is a threat to Earth."

"My agency is a collection of gifted youngsters who have pledged their life to protect Earth. They are a threat to your enemies."

"We do not see the need for a group of delinquents to gallivant across the stars under the pretence that they are doing good."

"The agency have protected your planet for the last ten years."

"For the last ten years we have lived under the protection of the Father."

"Oh please!" Victoria had grown impatient, "Wouldn't you like to be able to stand up and protect

yourself? The agency is your own personal army. How can you feel that your own army is threatening you?"

"Because the agency doesn't answer to the ministry."

"If you say jump, I assure you we'll ask how high."

"Your word, Miss Locks, counts for nothing in these halls. You are an informant, not a cleric."

"And why is that?"

"That is because you don't have what it takes. A Cleric must be wise, honourable and trustworthy. You are foolish and dishonest. Take her away."

Victoria spun around to see two of the guards walking toward her. She raised her hand and the two went flying, their long black cloaks flapping around in the air. They landed with a thud near the door. The council members erupted into a riot. Victoria sent two more guards flying away before crouching down and placing her hand firmly on the ground. A circle around her seemed to etch itself into the hard floor. As if by magic, the circle started to rise into the air with Victoria standing on it. The ministry was set so that the members sat high above the ground floor so that they could see and hear everything said. Victoria was now almost level with the highest members, she stood up shakily on the platform she had created and pulled her cloak around herself. Her hair was set in two large loops on the sides of her head. It then flowed down into two long ponytails. She was wearing a light blue cloak but underneath was a long pink dress that clung tightly around her middle. Her black hair was waving around wildly in the air. Victoria looked directly at the highest members.

"The ministry have clung close to the Father for too long. Join SEAN and you won't need to rely on old alliances for support. Join me and you'll be free."

"We are free, Miss Locks." Said one, "We have the Father and his army and he will not betray us. He will protect us. We do not fear the father."

"But do you fear what will happen if you break the alliance?" She asked. The members looked at each other warily. Victoria watched as one of the whispered something to another.

"I can help you." She told them.

"*Enough!*" A voice cried. Victoria lost her footing and slipped, her platform began to sink toward the ground. She leapt from it when it was just metres from the floor. The circle disappeared back into the cold, hard floor. Victoria looked at the owner of the voice. High Marshall Jex towered over her. Jex ruled the ministry and the ministry ruled Jex. He was a friend of Victoria's and he alone supported her agency.

"If the ministry can put forward ample examples to prove that Victoria's agency is not capable of protecting Earth and that SEAN is not a trustworthy alliance then we will dismiss the ideas and move on with business."

Immediately there was a response. A woman with shoulder length brown hair and a long red cloak stood

up.

“The agency recruits its members judged on supernatural gifting. Victoria herself even possesses powers that *normal* people can only dream of. Imagine how people would feel knowing that they were protected by a bunch of *freaks!*”

Victoria's hand shot into the air, the woman was slammed back against the wall.

“I am *not* a freak!” Victoria spat. The woman was released and slunk back into the shadows.

“A point has been made. People do not take kindly to differences. How would the people of Earth react if we told them that the people they have rejected were now protecting them? Society would crumble into nothing. I'm sorry, but my vote is against.”

Victoria watched as in one fluid movement the members all raised a red card in vote. One or two hesitated but the decision was unanimous.

“Very well,” Said Jex, “The ministry has voted. Earth will not join the SEAN alliance and Victoria's agency won't be appointed to protect Earth. Our alliance to the father continues.” **Chapter One**

Tarsalis: The Planet Of Beginnings

The view screen cast a nasty glow upon the interior of the ship. The cold of space was beginning to seep through the hull and chill everything that wasn't metal.

“What the devil are we still doing here?” hissed the synthetic android, “It's bloody freezing and were still messing around with co-ordinates and flight paths.”

The android slammed his iron fist hard on the computer panel only to find the thud echoing from bulkheads and armour plates as his complaint went unnoticed.

The silence began to take shape growing into the size of a man. Additional bulk seemed to come from nowhere as shadow moved, curled twisted and strangled, grasped and clawed at the inside of the ship, from within the dark arches glowed an ethereal light, and it began to speak,

“Dearest Cyrax, are we not instructed of our purpose?” Its words like a child, soothing yet disturbingly intelligent,

“I was just saying that-,” but before he could finish the shadow was upon him, cruel twisted fingers gripped the android's throat as a reaper's scythe burned intensely, only inches from his face, hissing as it cried for carnage.

“Fear not me but the wraith of my master, for my magic's are not yours to worry. My master's mind is sharper than any blade. Of the ends he has devised, I imagine yours to be,” he paused, bared a fanged smile and whispered, “Incredibly painful”.

“On the other hand if you've finished with the trajectories and calculations we can get back to the Hell Forge and be done with this freezing void”.

“I am finished, master Seth”, stammered the android. Cyrax banked the assault craft into a sharp turn where it pivoted for a moment and in a second was a thousand light years away.

Meanwhile away from prying eyes and the long arm of the law, Lord Abaddon, arch fiend, nemesis of enforcement agencies everywhere and the mastermind of three planet's sorry demise, intently studied the information gathered by his faithful subjects. Data slates, surveyor's transcripts and communications sheets were sprawled everywhere on the stone table that adorned the centre of his war room. Although he was by far the greatest threat that this galaxy had felt, he was no mere man.

Abaddon was cybernetically enhanced; his right arm could bend and revolve at any angle making him a fine swordsman. This was a handy thing seeing as many of the planets that manufactured projectile weapons had been completely decimated in the Clan War of 7666. Of course, blaster pistols and plasma rifles were completely useless against anyone who could wield a sword; a well swung parry could send any bolt of energy straight back at the head of the person who shot it. Upon his waist was his sheath; in it growled his ancient sword, predating even his own existence. Its blade forever glowed orange and the sun's reflection on its surface could cause blindness to any adversary. His left arm however had been lost at the wrist to a bitter and most hated enemy: his former comrade. This arm did not end in a stump but rather a cruel twisted nimbus of light resembling a hook.

In the darkness of the room a small grin crept across his face as the final puzzle piece fell into place...

Although efficient as the criminals were, their activities were not unnoticed. Behind the planet a mere fifty thousand kek away lurked another vessel, this one however was not of sinister intent but crewed by none other than Jonathon Sykes and Amy Morrano, two of the sectors finest anti-terror units. They belonged to The Agency, which belonged to SEAN, the Special Enforcement Agency Network. SEAN was the name of the massive Space Station that orbited Earth. Years ago, the space station launched off from Earth to seek out a safe hideaway for the Earth's population which were in massive civil war with several other star systems. When they returned bearing news of several newfound alliances they found that the attacks from their enemies had suddenly stopped. Earth's government, called the Ministry, decided they did not feel that SEAN should be allowed to land back on Earth and since then the space station has orbited Earth just beyond the moon.

“It seems they were up to something, you can tell just by the readouts from their ship” said Sykes.

“Well whatever it is Sean was definitely right, the Warlords are up to something and if we don't figure out what it is soon then more lives are going to be lost” Amy told him.

“We can't afford another sector-wide war, the last one's death toll was an entire continent's worth and the Sentinel worlds are still in civil war with each other”.

“Well,” said Amy. “Sean wants to see us when we get back so I'm sure we've a big day ahead of us.”

“Indeed.” answered Sykes. Amy smiled and turned back to her computer. She tapped in a security clearance code and soon her best friend's face lit up the screen. Megs Corporal was piloting a small space fighter.

“Amy, what's up?” She asked casually.

“Did you get orders to see Sean when you get home?”

“Yep, any ideas what he wants?”

“No. Maybe he's giving us some time off?”

Amy shrugged at Megs who was laughing loudly at the idea of Sean giving the group time off. In all their time working for the Agency, Sean had never given them so much as a compliment, let alone time off. Megs and Amy were inseparable; just like Liam and Sykes. Megs stopped laughing and fiddled with the controls of her fighter. Someone was sitting directly behind her.

“Who's your co-pilot?” Amy asked. Megs jerked her thumb over her shoulder.

“Liam Locks. You know, friend of Sykes.” Megs told her. Liam waved from over Megs shoulder. Amy nodded and turned to see Sykes looking at the screen too.

“Hey Liam, isn't Aunt Victoria scheduled to be visiting Earth right about now?” Sykes asked.

“Yeah, she wouldn't let me go with her. Says the ministry are fuming enough with her going, doesn't want them to get angrier if I'm there. I told her I could defend myself, give those old politicians a bit of the one-two...”

“You can't give the Ministry a bit of the one-two, we'd never be allowed back on the planet,” Megs spat back at him, “Victoria's been working non-stop to get the Ministry to let the Agency back on Earth.”

“If it weren't for people giving the one-two then we never would have been kicked off in the first place.” Amy added.

“We weren't kicked off. We chose to leave; the Agency made a decision and built the space-station so we could live in space.” Sykes argued. Amy ran a hand through her hair. Megs glared at Sykes. Liam's voice rang from behind Megs' shoulder.

“Earth was under threat, the Agency felt that the best thing to do was to build a space station and fly away. We took as many as we could into the space station and left for Abadonia. Earth survived the attack and the Ministry took over. They voted and decided not to allow the Agency to land. End of discussion.”

Megs and Liam shot toward SEAN. SEAN was a codename; it stood for Special Enforcement Agency Network. SEAN was actually a great big space station that orbited Earth; it had stood there in space for years and would stay there for years to come. Many believed that the engines no longer worked. It

wasn't the beautiful sight it once was. The windows were stained, several sections had been damaged, and an entire floor was even sealed off completely. Coincidentally, Sean ran the space station. Although Victoria ran the agency, Sean ran the network. Several planets had joined the network and it was Sean's job to make sure that the agency kept these planets safe. In return, those planets would offer their resources to the network. Megs and Liam stepped out of their fighter and began walking through the halls toward the briefing hall. Sean's office was directly off of the briefing hall and they were guessing that's where he would be. They were making their way along a narrow corridor. On one side was a wall with pipes running along it, on the other was a small balcony landing that overlooked the hanger. The balcony led around the hanger and then downstairs into the briefing hall.

"Should we take the shortcut?" Liam asked Megs. Megs slid a flute out of her sleeve and held it to her lips. Liam put his hand on Megs' shoulder. Megs played a few notes and almost instantly they both rose from the floor. They shot out over the balcony and over the hanger to land on the balcony on the other side. They hurried down the stairs and opened the double doors. The sight that met them took their breath away. Every agent in the agency was assembled before them. Sean was standing near the small stage toward the front. Megs tucked her flute back inside her sleeve and stepped into a line with Liam. Sykes and Amy hurried in from a door on the other side of the hall.

The briefing hall became quiet as the tall and ever confident Sean, commander and chief of all law enforcement agencies within a galaxy wide radius stepped up to the podium. His mind was racing; his heart was pounding in his chest. Sean had never liked giving speeches. This was one speech however that even Victoria, head of the entire agency, couldn't make without feeling nervous.

"Gentlemen," he started. On a softer note, he added, "Ladies."

There was complete silence in the giant room. The entire agency was assembled to hear the details of the next campaign.

"I have grave and urgent news. It would appear that our worst fears are confirmed. Our most recent scans by agents placed in the Ganglon Nebulae Cluster show a number of large heat signatures within the deep space nebula of Brimstones. You will all need to receive your data slates and objectives from your appropriate officers." The hundreds of agents assembled in rank below him appeared to shudder before him. Each one imagining what the heat signatures could belong too. Sean took a deep breath and continued,

"Within this place amasses an army of rebels, heretics, mutants and creatures most foul, and at their head the greatest evil we have faced. It is imperative that we stop this foul evil at the head. If Lord Abaddon should take this sector into another twenty-year-war, then the next generation will be reeling for years. Ready your ships and arm yourselves. If our faith in humanity and our faith in our armed forces prove strong then the enemy can be driven back into the caverns of hell where it came from. If we are found wanting we shall fail.

We must succeed; there are no others to take our place if we fall. We are the last of the warnings ...dismissed!"

There was much talking within the massed capillaries of the briefing hall as all twenty thousand officers dispersed and talked amongst themselves. Near the front the greatest individuals of all gathered to their mentor, Sean.

"Is it true sir are we really going to war," Sykes asked with wide-eyed interest.

"Is so much force necessary", implored a fiery red head.

"Hold on dear friends, all your questions will be answered, but first you must understand the situation."

"Have you seen the size of this, its almost a hundred thousand ships all carrying at least a squadron of deep space fighters." The red head spat furiously. She was flicking through rough plans for the attack.

"An offensive is the only course available at the moment." Sean replied. She looked sceptical.

"Hit them and hit them hard." He finished. She frowned and turned back to the plans. Sykes turned back to Sean.

"When does it start? The war, I mean?"

"That's not much of your business, Sykes. It will start soon, and time is short, we must be quick." Sean turned around and picked up a stack of papers. He handed one each to the red head, Megs, Amy, Sykes and Liam. The group quickly looked over their copies of the Mission briefing, each one an identical replica of the speech Sean had just given.

"Now if you're all finished with the interrogation, I need to see each of you in private. Sykes and Liam, come with me please, the rest of you can wait for me in my office." And with that Sean strolled briskly away. There was a nervous moment as each cast a glance at the other before striding off to keep pace with the determined Sean.

"Okay boys, I have a job for you. It's a bit low key but of terrible importance to our success. This requires a bit of truth on my behalf..."

"What do you mean sir?" Said Sykes.

"Well I am sending you to beat Abaddon's forward elements in a race to gain a prize of great importance."

"And what is that, sir?" puzzled Liam.

"Are you two familiar with the Tarsalis planet?"

"Yes, sir." They chorused in unison.

"On Tarsalis is our key research laboratory. We are not too worried about losing this facility; however

there are a few personnel we would like to make sure are kept quite safe. Our key scientist Rick Atlas is currently studying on Tarsalis”.

“I've heard the name, sir, but can't place a face... Rick Atlas...”

“The name comes from the drives in all of our ships. Rick Atlas is responsible for many of today's scientific breakthroughs. Look,” Sean pointed to a space fighter as they passed. Liam and Sykes leaned closer and, sure enough, emblazoned on the side of the wing was the name Rick Atlas.

“As for his identity, that's classified.” Sean turned and began to walk again, Sykes and Liam struggling to keep up.

“We were quite pleased with the progress he was making at the laboratory, until sentry guns shot down a camera drone deep within the complex walls.”

“That means Abaddon knows where he is,” said Sykes quickly, “when do we leave, sir?”

On the stone floor of a twisted hall, twenty-four mangled broken bodies bled their final streams of blood as Seth gleaned the information his master so desperately required. He reached for the last living soul in the room and snatched it by the throat. The splinters of bone replacing its legs waved about furiously. Seth slammed it upon his table where each had been but moments before.

“What of you?” he hissed, arching his back to the nature of his voice, twisting his head to an unnatural angle almost toying with his prey.

“What delightful secrets do you hide, hmmm?” The man's eyes were struck wide with fear, his face a sea of blood, but his brow seemed set, as though he refused to speak. “A little help from you could get some help from me, so why don't we `run along.” he sniggered, tightening his grip upon his staff.

“Like my comrades I will not speak a word traitor,” uttered the man through gritted teeth.

“But you're wrong my pet. They told me many things, and then I killed them. But you, you refuse to speak. That requires true courage. Either that or you are incredibly stupid. For your courage, I will let you live. You can send me a message.” Seth told the man. If possible, the man's face seemed to contort with more fear than before.

“Well here we are.” Said Sykes with a sigh of relief. Liam stretched as they got off the Griffon-Class space-cruiser. Tarsalis was a snow-covered planet. In the distance they could see smoke wafting through the air. The sky was blanketed with a dark cloud. A blizzard was on its way. Sykes wrapped his cloak tighter around him and Liam pulled on his gloves.

“We have to find Rick and leave so let's make it a quick stop, Okay Sykes?” Liam pleaded. He needed no reply, for they were both focused upon what was required of them. They would give no quarter for

their enemy would give none in return.

Upon entering the complex some disturbing revelations became apparent, the communications shack was completely inactive and there were no guards. The thing that chilled them most however was the body that hung upon the front of a crashed battle cruiser.

Crucified upon the front was a torso, its legs broken off at the knees and with the ribcage laid open like an insane butterfly. The man was still living, yet how, neither Sykes nor Liam could tell. His eyes darted between them both, his lips slowly moving apart to reveal a blooded mouth, void of tongue or tooth. Around his neck hung a sign...

SURRENDER OR DIE

“Sykes, we better get to the lab soon, if the temperature keeps dropping...”

“I don't know about you, but I think we should head back to the Agency and notify Sean,” said Sykes hesitantly. There was no time for Liam's reply as a superheated bolt of energy ripped passed their heads. It was followed by a swarm of others. Running across the open ground they could only duck and weave, closing the distance between themselves and the main gate. More dirt crackled and sparked as the bolts missed the agents ducking into one of the craters that littered the compound. “Well this is officially and most certainly the most screwed up mission I've been on,” gasped Sykes. He was clutching a stitch in his side and was completely out of breath. Liam on the other hand lived for this. He peered around the side and saw a small figure huddled around the entrance to the lab.

“Okay, here's what we're going to do. There's someone in the doorway with a repeater cannon. It's one of the newer models and has some sort of modification on the barrel.” Liam's sentence was drowned out as the sky turned red with the passing of a high-powered laser charge.

“If that's a high-powered charge then that means they must have over-heated!” Sykes exclaimed. Without a second thought Liam was up and sprinting in a straight line directly towards his foe. All the enemy could do was try to restore power to the overcharged gun. In a second it was over. The sentry bot was completely severed from shoulder to navel as Liam sheathed his light blade. “I was right behind you all the way.” panted Sykes, “But I think we should get to the operations centre of this place and call Sean.”

“I agree.” said Liam his voice low as he slung the sentry bots gun over his shoulder.

Lord Abaddon was without emotion as he examined the data streaming across the screen. Text after text and number upon number flowed across the screen. It was here; it had to be; he would find it; he

must find it.

In silence he turned and strode to the far side of the room, where the commander of the facility lay, their small form nothing in Lord Abaddon's gigantic shadow.

Abaddon grasped the officer's neck and lifted him to head height, his cybernetic eye adjusting to accommodate the images it received.

"Well commander are you going to tell me where the GATE is, or am I to ask you in a different manner?" said Abaddon, his voice menacing.

"Your too late, traitor! One of your minions has beaten you here. Why search for what you already have?" The officer spat.

Abaddon propped the officer against the frame of the door and turned to study the computers readouts again. He was now more intent than ever to find out who had beat him here. As he did so the captain of the base crawled to a fallen guards slug cannon and hefted it with his one good arm onto his shoulder.

"In the name of Victoria Locks." He said. Abaddon turned around slowly.

"Now what?" he snarled at the officer, "Oh... I see." Abaddon watched as the man's finger tightened around the trigger and he let the rockets fly.

Explosive bolts ricocheted around the room; computer screens sparked in protest; glass shattered and weaved through the air like deadly needles. In the centre thousands of small explosions danced across Abaddon's armour.

As the smoke cleared and flames swept around the room the most prominent sound was that of heavy footsteps leaving and a slow grating laugh.

The dimly lit hallway stretched forever into the gloom that was ever present in the facilities corridors. Sykes was beginning to make something out amidst the long misty corridor. The shape of a pressure door became opaque in the far distance. He and Liam made their way forward with renewed vigour.

Abaddon was making his way along a set of corridors as well. Indeed, it was the same set of corridors that the agents had found so dim. Abaddon stopped as crackling static hailed the connection to one of his most trusted servants to his headset.

"Lord Abaddon," Hailed Lector a tinge of admiration in his voice, "Your fleet makes good progress and the children of Arbitrage are all but dead.

"Very good Lector, but what of the others, where are my finest?"

"They make good speed, my lord, and should be here in a moment's hour. I have taken the spaceport as ordered, but the last guards are dug in at the western wall." "Leave them to freeze in the failing light,

I am on my way. Stay put and don't let them counterattack.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

Lector groaned as yet another rocket slammed into his forces, sending men and blood everywhere. At this rate the enemy could take back the spaceport. Over the twisted metal that blotted the tarmac he could see no more than thirty of them, amassing for what seemed like a charge. Whether they were crazy or desperate the sight bought the corners of his mouth up in a delighted smile.

Lector wasn't your average man; he wasn't cybernetically enhanced like his colleagues, but what he lacked in technology he made up for in strength. He was seven foot tall having grown up on a high gravity world.

His physique was second to none, muscles rippled at his slightest move and he could break a man or droid's back with ease.

In his hands he held his home world's ancestral weapon, a long redwood stick adorned by pick heads facing adjacent directions, a deadly weapon to be wielded by someone with as much strength as he.

There was a cry from many men as the last guards charged across the dusty ground intent to take back their spaceport at any cost.

“Unfortunately for them they could not afford the price,” Mused Lector as he rose from the metal and faced his foes.

The enemy came in hard, firing on full-auto. Lector's men were torn asunder in the hail of so many shots, after such a brutal assault however the enemy found their guns had run dry, and Lector went to work with grim efficiency, his weapon flashed and impaled many, flinging them skyward as his arching blows struck many upon his weapon's ends. They could not take back their precious port for they were not worthy to oppose the forces of Lord Abaddon, and Lord Abaddons were a very powerful force.

Meanwhile on Earth

The ministry seemed to have calmed down enough for the meeting to continue. Jex

“Esteemed comrades, ladies and gentleman, I stand before you today as commander and chief of all our military's might, and I tell you it is not enough. In the gulf of Arbitrage an entire solar system has been completely massacred, not a life has been spared. Fifty six blood stained planets now hang in the stars completely devoid of life.”

There was a low clammer of voices as a murmur swept around the colossal chamber; he let the nature

of his message sink in before speaking again.

“I come before you with the latest reports as requested, a fleet of well over five hundred Executioner class ships is headed for Earth and all we have is the fifty-first fleet of the father”.

“From the star cluster that spawned this curse another thousand vessels make for our frontier, these are the facts, this is what you requested of me and I have set before you what we know.” It almost looked as though the High Marshall was going to leave it there, but he didn't. The Marshall had more to say.

“I have a proposal that may work, provided we have the councils permission. It is a long shot but I believe it is one the enemy will not expect”.

The last words of High Marshall Jex fell on deaf ears as quite suddenly the entire council's eyes fixed themselves upon the cloaked figure that made its way down the carpet between the long seats. Victoria gasped. She and many others knew what this could mean. The highest Echelons had found fault with Jex and he would be charged with heresy.

The hooded figure stopped but metres from the podium, its dark eyes revelling in the smell of fear that came from all in the colosseum.

“High Marshall Jex” It hissed, “Are you not prepared for the foe that approaches?” Jex swallowed hard as he brought all his wit to bear.

“Honoured cleric, I am prepared. It's just that the forces at my disposal are-”

“Marshall Jex I believe that the father has entrusted his own fleet to you, however they are not for you to “dispose” of. Am I correct in making the assumption that you are unfit for your position?”

Jex stuttered as he tried in vain to win the stranger over, but there was nothing he could do as the cardinal guards seemed to appear out of nowhere and approach him. There in the presence of all, Jex was executed as a heretic for blasphemy against the forces of the father.

As the cardinal guards dragged the two halves of Jex away, a new High Marshall was elected, someone they all new very well. Warrington.

Warrington was always a small man, even as a child he was scrawny and to the amusement of the other children he always `broke' easy. Although not a popular child he was quite the opposite on the democratic side, his father was a great missionary claiming many victories in the fifth world war, his mother also of great glory having defended the faith from heretics, traitors and the practice of other religions. Upon his shoulder was weighted the family heritage and now he had to make the name grand once again. Warrington's long greasy red hair was hung in a ponytail and he was wearing a long red cloak that swept along the ground behind him as he made his way toward the pulpit where Jex had previously been standing. He turned to face the council. The hooded figure was now sinking away into the corners of the room once more, a black-gloved hand still brandishing a sword matted with the blood of Jex withdrawing inside the cloak.

Victoria was so appalled by what she had seen that she stood up. She was even more appalled at the council's decision to elect Warrington as the new Marshall. Whilst she strode to the door Warrington took the stand. The focus of the chamber was now on Victoria as her footsteps were heard loud and echoed by the floor.

"High council of the father, thank you so much for this grand honour. I do believe that the only thing to leave this chamber today has been heretics."

Victoria paused as she realised what he meant. She could not do anything for she was just a member and now Warrington was more than a member, he was in charge. To make things worse Warrington had played upon the council's dislike toward her and one a mark for himself already. Victoria made for her ship. She would be better off in space with Sean and the agency, on the home they had made among the stars. Something caught her eye as she made to leave; on each side of the hall just outside the council chamber were prayer shrines. But what chilled her most was the sudden drop in temperature as the entire hallway turned a chilling grey. Out of the corner of her eye she could see a cloaked figure. It was the very same one that had slashed Jex in half but a moment ago.

"Victoria, why do you leave? You will miss High Marshall Warrington's sermon on the battle doctrine."

"I needed some air," She stammered, not turning to the stranger.

"Well if it is any consolation I shall keep a parchment for you to study," it declared. Before Victoria could speak she found the stranger was standing beside her, the darkness of its hood almost engulfing her vision.

"I hope that you have prepared your praises for the week," hissed the stranger, its breath stinking like charcoal, "I have also examined your latest report regarding the activities of breakaway faction SEAN. It is rather interesting. I never knew that your agency also went by the code name SEAN, in fact, I'm sure a lot of people never knew that SEAN was in fact code for the Special Enforcement Agency Network. Why would you divulge this information, surely you didn't want your enemies knowing that you also controlled SEAN?"

"I did as the council requested. I'm not attracted to the prospect of defying the council; we all know where that road leads. Although I regret acknowledging my control over SEAN and the agency, I still wish to address the Lord militants on the current situation," Victoria told him, her breath making small clouds of steam in front of her face.

"You wish to *address* the lord militants? Very well, I shall arrange it," rasped the stranger.

"And how will I *address* you in future, honourable cleric?" said Victoria, her question trying to ease the fear she felt in the stranger's presence. The grey hall suddenly seemed to grow even darker as the cloaked figure placed a gloved hand upon Victoria's shoulder. From behind her it leaned in close to her ear and whispered in its low and raspy croak,

“My dear, I am but a servant to the Holy Father. In person you may call me,” it paused menacingly...

“Seth...”

Lord Abaddon covered the length of the hall in a few seconds. As he neared the pressure door at the end the sword in his sheath began to rattle and hiss as it always did when the promise of blood was on the wind, he went to sooth it with a reassuring hand only to find the door suddenly opened and he was face to face with two young men. He recognized the badges on their chests as the signature of agents. One of them seemed familiar, almost as though Abaddon knew him from somewhere, but before he could recollect anything Liam lashed out his light blade and flung it at Abaddon's face. Abaddon stepped back, grabbed the agent by the shoulder and with a sickening crack gave the young agent the ability to bend his elbow both ways. Liam hit the floor with a thud whilst Sykes stood frozen with fear. Liam rolled to the side and hefted the gun he had taken earlier into his one good arm. He fired high and struck Abaddon on the side of his thick neck. Filthy black liquid sprayed out and the cruel man began to laugh. With one hand on his face, Abaddon advanced toward the injured agent. The gun was now empty and useless.

“How so very fitting that you should be the one to lay a scratch on me this day,” he said through gritted teeth. Abaddon lifted the agent high by the throat, all the while Sykes stood transfixed, his legs like cement and his throat dry as he watched the two silhouetted against the clear blast glass window on their side.

Liam's eyes met Sykes and in an instant Abaddon drove the agent's frail body through the wall. The smashing glass echoed all around the base but as it faded a new sound could be heard, Liam's long scream slowly faded away as he fell from one of the top most floors. He fell amongst the earthbound glass, smashing straight onto the roof of a concrete bunker. After the sickening pain of the fall came the falling glass scythe-like pieces as long as a meter. Sykes could hardly breath. He stood still, unable to think clearly, his head almost exploding as he tried to do something. Abaddon looked blankly at the agent's still body far down below them. Liam's blood was creating small rivers as it trickled to the edge of the bunker. Abaddon dropped a large piece of glass over the edge and watched it fall. He kept his gaze, however, fixed on the other agent. He was revelling in the fear of the other. Sykes was so afraid that Abaddon could taste the salt from his sweat in the air. His sword was vibrating with ancient enchantment, what little blood still coursed through Abaddon's veins was now pumping fast. Abaddon was giving Sykes a chance to save his honour by attempting to strike first. The strike never came.

Abaddon turned to the agent trying to think where he knew him from, he could kill him easily, but then he might never know whom he was.

“Who are you?” said Abaddon, trying not to intimidate any more then necessary, Sykes tried to gain some composure as he returned the gaze of Abaddon's cybernetic eye, the only feature he could make out whilst he stood in front of the broken window blocked by Abaddon's huge frame. The agent tried to speak but all he was able to do was drop the axe he held and let his jaw drop. Abaddon grew impatient; he disliked weakness and thanked the gods that it wasn't contagious.

"In future I suggest you don't waste my time," said Abaddon over his shoulder. His suit whined in protest at the gears powering up and he strode to the spaceport, Lector would be there soon with the promise of his finest warriors. Here on Tarsalis they would launch their strike on the sovereign planet of Earth.

Cold air rushed to greet him as he left the complex and sought Lector out amongst the burning wreckage that littered the port. There was Lector, almost a foot deep in the dead guards. His body was covered in their slick blood. Abaddon smiled again for the second time that day, if those agents were the best that Earth could muster then they stood no chance against the tide of death that approached.

A far off, distant planet groaned as yet another pocket of deadly gas erupted sending searing hot chunks of dirt and slag into the sky. This was a dangerous place for anyone to live, but even deadlier were its inhabitants. The entire population consisted of three. Seth sat limp upon the rocky outcrop that had become a place to sit in the time they had spent on the dying planet. His android servant, Cyrix was standing nearby.

"Stinking planet," moaned Cyrix, he was, of course, the only android on the surface. "Why do you whine so much, is that all you know how to do?" Seth teased. Cyrix made to respond but his attention was drawn to the dark form that was hovering down the length of rock that spanned across a large mountain which lava flowed gracefully down. It was Seth's mistress. Seth bowed low in the ash that covered everything on the planet. He admired her, adored her. She was far greater than he, her dark shape came forward inches from the grovelling Seth.

"Rise my faithful servant, you have done well and I am pleased," croaked the hovering queen. Seth rose and stood tall before her, returning the stare of the glowing eyes she wore. Although there was no expression looking back at him she was as much alive as he, Cyrix had left to prepare the ship for whatever dirty work she was about to give them.

"I have another task for you, my Seth. Have you been following recent events? I can see a great many things about to come to pass," she croaked, "The nemesis of Earth has done what no one thought possible, and whilst our agendas are our own, his could very well see to the completion of ours. Do you know of the planet Tarsalis?"

"I do master. It is where Abaddon makes ready his finest warriors so that they may take Earth," Seth answered.

"Very good my pet, but he also seeks something from Tarsalis, and he is very close to finding it. It is something very powerful, far more powerful than you or I," informed the floating beauty. Seth could hardly contain himself at the idea of Abaddon being more powerful than his mistress,

"What would you have me do mistress?" Said Seth bowing low.

“I want you and Cyrix to go to Tarsalis. There you will find Abaddon. Somewhere on the planet is what he seeks but to find its location you must first find the wizened Koga. I have tracked his whereabouts to the Gulf of Arbitrage. There he does his work and writes the fate of all that Abaddon has slain and will slay, nothing is hidden from him so be of truth. Seek not deception, or deception shall find you. Seek truth and he shall deliver it to you. When you have found Koga he will join us,” Seth was puzzled and his mistress saw this, “Do not worry my child,” she purred, “He cannot harm anyone. Koga is an ethereal being; his sole purpose is to weave the fates. He knows of nothing but his purpose and it is his purpose which we seek.”

Seth turned to leave, intent to know more of this Koga, when his mistress abruptly spoke once more,

“Be nice my kin and he will tell you what Abaddon seeks and where to find it. Then we can beat him to it and hold ourselves a ransom.”

Seth bowed again and climbed the crumbling stairs to the rocky crag in which their ship nestled. He was always marvelled by how powerful technology was. Their ship was one of a kind, an illegal vessel because of the twin rail cannons it mounted. Regulation stated that they be powered electrically but they had modified the ship until it was no longer an inch within legality. Authorities needn't worry about the twin rail cannons it mounted or the massive repulser lift engines that were so oversized the ship required extra fuel storage, the spikes that protruded from the front didn't make agents soar after it in the sky, these infringements on the law were nothing compared to the one flaw that made it as illegal as possible. It was nuclear powered.

Cyrix was sitting impatiently in the pilot seat. Cords stuck out the back of his head connected to the various sockets and panels, he was able to fly the ship using his own cybionic brain. Everything was in order and Seth climbed in the back. The twenty thousand miles of space in front of him would be his home for however long it took them to find Koga. Without warning the craft lifted off of the rocky surface and sent dirt flying as it rocketed skyward, juddering and shaking as it defied all natural laws. It was this reason that it could defy all matter of gravity that the ship was hailed as the Phoenix.

Sykes felt a sickly feeling rising in his gut. He had let fear take control of his emotions and Liam had paid for a cowardice not his own. Sykes stood there staring at the broken window. He knew Liam was at the bottom but was too sick to look. Gathering what courage he had left he made for the operations centre. As Sykes continued to climb the stairs and ladders to get to the top floor he began to see more and more damage done to the building. It looked almost as though the facility had been attacked from the roof first. The thought was impossible, but a lot of what Sykes had seen in his short time working for the agency had seemed impossible. The first time he saw Liam fade into nothing had seemed impossible to him, now Liam was dead though, along with his incredible gift of invisibility. A door stood before him, the glass windows on it were stained with blood. This was the place. As he opened the doors he drew in a sharp breath. The scene before him was a grim one, bodies lay askew in estranged positions and blood decorated every inch of the room. Bullet shells and grenade debris rolled away from Sykes' feet as he knocked them away with his black boots. Sykes made his way through the chaos that used to be the nerve centre of the complex. He finally found the communications unit. Though it was

badly burnt, it still worked. He turned the dial and programmed the co-ordinates for SEAN. No matter how long Sykes waited, nothing but static blared through the headset. He glanced down at the body of an officer. His jaw had broken to accommodate the barrel of a slug cannon.

“Who could have done such a thing?” Sykes thought out loud.

“Sykes, is that you?” Came a familiar reply, finally he had raised SEAN,

“This is Sykes, I need to speak to Sean,”

“That's an affirmative this is Special Enforcement Agency Network, you're mission has been logged as a rescue mission to tarsalis, top secret. Have you completed your objectives?” Came the reply.

“I need to talk to Sean about it.” Sykes answered.

“That's an affirmative, this is SEAN HQ, what can I help you with?”

“No I need to speak with Sean, you know, the *actual* Sean?” Said Sykes impatiently. After much wasted time Sykes finally got to speak to Sean.

“Sykes what are you doing on this channel?” Asked Sean,

“We have a problem, sir. It's Liam, he's, well, he's pretty messed up” stammered Sykes,

“Are you okay?” Sean asked,

“Yes sir, I am fine,” Replied Sykes.

“It is of the utmost importance that you find Rick. I'm sending the girls; Amy and Megs will be there soon. Stay put and don't get into trouble. If I can sort out this mess on Earth before they leave then I shall accompany them also.”

“What mess?” Questioned Sykes,

“It's just the council. They have replaced Jex with Warrington,” Answered Sean,

“No! You mean Jex was executed?”

“We'll talk later I've got to go, Sean out.”

As the suns set on Tarsalis the night began to take hold. Its cold winds howled and the temperature dropped lower with every passing minute. Abaddon couldn't feel a thing; his armour plates and enhancements were the best defence against anything he had encountered. Lector on the other hand was almost frozen, his face looked almost like a snowman, thought Abaddon. The howling wind met their ears and a blizzard was making its way across the plains.

“Lector,” Abaddon started, “instead of standing there like a vibrating Popsicle, why don't you go and fetch Syfar from the hangars?”

Lector's expression was one of glee as he stomped off through the freshly fallen snow. What was taking Syfar so long anyway? Sure there were over thirty hangars to search but that should be nothing for Syfar? Maybe he had underestimated Syfar's efficiency, either way, Abaddon realized that Syfar should have been back by now.

Hangar number twenty-two stood tall and menacing over the pale figure. Syfar was a bald man who had small wires and microchips digging into his skull. He was decorated with electronic devices that seemed to glisten in the harsh sun of the planet. "Only another eight after this," thought Syfar as he gripped the handle of the fifty-foot door. Gathering all his strength Syfar wrenched the door, in a second it had burst its bracket and he flung it to his side. The door shot through the air and made its way toward one of the other hangars. It screeched in protest as it crashed end over end on the roof of the next hangar. Rick looked up from his work, startled by the sudden rush of cold air, which was now forming icicles of all liquid in the large hangar. Finally Syfar had found his objective. The frail human would tell him everything he wanted to hear. Rick casually stepped across to the weapons rack and slung two weapons over himself and braced another in his hands, Syfar could not make out what exactly they were but little mattered for he had an edge that few could match. All metal could be manipulated physically, but Syfar could manipulate all metals by mental encouragement. It was his gift.

“So are you just going to stand there?” Challenged Rick, “Because if your legs don't stop shaking then you might end up dancing, and I never really liked dancing,” He taunted. So the scientist was also a comedian.

“There are two ways we can do this,” Boomed Syfar, “You can come noisily, or dead.”

“Well I am afraid I approve of the latter,” Replied Rick as he calmly checked his weapons. Syfar's jaw twitched as it always did when he was agitated. This fragile human was to waste more of his time. Rick's attitude about it all just made Syfar more annoyed. Finally Rick stepped out from behind one of the many large pipes that snaked from hangar to hangar. Syfar's eyes bulged as he realised what the man held. It was a plasma minigun, an extremely dangerous and unstable weapon.

“Surely you are not going to use that in here,” Remarked Syfar,

“You know what? You're right, I'm terribly sorry, I should probably use this!” Rick said apologetically. Syfar had little time to react as Rick raised a rocket launcher that he had hidden behind the pipe. The rocket made a screeching sound as it flew past Syfar's head and detonated deep in the outside snow, Syfar turned his gaze back toward his foe only to have a wall of plasma fire slam into his metal chest tearing great holes and searing wires. In the face of so many shots, Syfar's huge frame was flung back into the crater that the rocket had made. The snow hissed and steamed as Syfar gazed skyward, luckily no critical damage had been sustained, and he rolled over in the muddy water that had formed in the bottom of his hole, if the human wanted to play with big guns then surely he needed something big to shoot at. Rick couldn't believe his eyes as his enemy rose to one knee and climbed from the crater, the

minigun was now empty and he only had one rocket to begin with and that was now littered in the snow. The gun he now held was a deadly short-range beam cannon. What Syfar did in response to Rick's feeble attempts to damage him was as terrifying as it was amazing...

Syfar closed his eyes and stood stock still, the only noise heard over the fifty meters between them was that of metal. Rick looked around him as the hundred foot hangar walls began to rustle, all around him the hangar groaned. Then came the popping of rivets and wires. Nails scythed past Rick towards Syfar, metal instruments and tools followed suit. The roof sheered off and buckled into a cylinder shape, metal bolts broke free from the concrete, steel girders and sheets of metal shot through the air. The entire hangar was gone and Rick now stood upon the concrete slab that had served as the floor. All around him metal screeched and howled as it bent, buckled and curled. The pile of metal just grew and grew as more uprooted itself from the snow, the earth heaved as more metal rose to the surface and joined the rest. The metal was writhing like maggots, interlocking and joining, each piece locking the other in a vice. The metal was beginning to take shape and form as it rolled over itself over and over. Rick's face went pale as he began to see what was happening, his enemy was able to control metal, how, he could never know but he presumed now would be as good a time as any to start running.

The snow seemed to get deeper as Rick ran from hangar to hangar trying to find some form of mobility. His legs were no matches for the masses of steel. Finally he found what he was looking for, it certainly wasn't a vintage Ferrari, but a snow cat was as good as any and he wasted no time climbing inside. Rick gunned the machine out of the hangar where it teetered on one track before coming to rest on both and sped toward the horizon, there was a strange feeling in the pedals as they began to vibrate, the steering also began to pick up with the same rhythmic beat, he nervously glanced at the panels. All the readings were clear but for some reason the whole cat began to pound faster. Maybe he was dragging something. Rick checked everything again and again, it wasn't until he glanced in the mirror that he realised the problem had become "larger".

Desperately Rick gunned the machine, and as he did so every ditch, rise and drift became hazardous. The clumsy vehicle jarred and coughed as it greedily guzzled fuel and frequently arched skyward. Rick's main concern wasn't the out-of-control snow cat but the galloping giant that pursued him. Syfar had added all the metal to his bulk, moulded it to his will, and now he stood a hundred metres tall. It was like some weird monster made entirely of metal with a tiny person somewhere above the shoulders. Syfar had the metal under his complete control. He moved as fast as the massive bulk would allow and although slowly, he was gaining speed and Rick was sure that soon he would wrench the vehicle from the ground and have his quarry. Snow and mud, trailed the pair in their wake, as did a great deal of exhaust. The craters left by Syfar quickly filled with water and each time Syfar's stride hit the earth the cat would jump. Rick checked the charts as he sped on, realising it was only a matter of time before he was caught. There was nothing ahead except for an old loading dock. Maybe he could make a stand there; it was a slim chance but far better than being captured. Rick would rather have died than surrendered information imperative to the agency.

Without warning, the cabin roof disappeared and Rick found himself swerving out of control, the snow cat went into a roll. Rick fell from the cabin almost immediately, the cat flipped and rolled almost ten

metres, as it flew across the ground and sprayed rich red fuel everywhere before stopping in the snow. Syfar came to a sudden halt as he reached down and picked up the snow cat. Looking into the empty cabin he could see no sign of Rick. Down in the snow Rick could see the metal behemoth glaring into the empty shell of the snow cat, as fast as he could, Rick readied his beam cannon. "Come out, come out, wherever you are..." Chimed Syfar, prying open the snow cat. Rick could see the top of the metal giant. At the top was Syfar, his small form interlocked and fused with all the other metal he had gathered. He had definitely grown to six times his size.

"Hey metal head! Down here!" Rick yelled. Syfar glanced over the top of the cat, realising his error. He made to dispose of the cat and tried to get out of the way of Rick's deadly weapon. The high-powered beam Rick had fired was almost as fast as the speed of light. Rather than hitting Syfar, the beam rammed into the cat just metres from Syfar's face. There was a horrific bang as the entire cat exploded into a huge fireball engulfing the top half of Syfar and sending red-hot fragments everywhere. The shockwave sent Rick flying across the snow, his small form bounced and rolled before it slammed into a rock that jutted from the snow. He watched Syfar's metallic monster crumbling to pieces and raining down into the white snow. Rick dropped the gun into the snow and let his drop back onto the rock. He lay motionless and unconscious among the falling debris.

Victoria stepped aboard her ship, she bowed to the guards and they closed the doors. She watched as Earth slipped away from her and once again she found herself in the endless chasms of space. The agency floated just beyond the moon in orbit of the Earth. The engines hadn't been fired up in years and many doubted whether or not they still had the power to propel the mass forward. Victoria watched tiny fighters and massive freighter barges moving around the agency. The agency consisted of a large space station shaped like a ring. It had two large engines at one end and a towering control room that poked out of the other. Victoria's ship, called the Informant, slid silently into a docking bay. Victoria stepped through the airlock and began to stroll quickly toward the control tower. As she entered she came face to face with Sean.

"Greetings come from the ministry." She bowed to him.

"And from I to you. How did Warrington take to his new position?" Sean replied.

"Like starving vultures to a dying rat. How is Rick Atlas?"

"We haven't found him yet. Sykes is on it. Your son... Your son is dead."

"What?" Victoria stammered, she clutched at her chest, "Liam? How?"

"He is missing on the planet Tarsalis. I sent him with Sykes to find Rick. I'm sorry Victoria." Sean reached out a hand to hold Victoria. She took it in hers and wiped her eye with the other.

"Who did this?" She whispered. Sean didn't answer. She looked up into his eyes, begging him to speak.

"Lord Abaddon."

Syfar clutched at his face as he teetered backward. The explosion had thrown him off balance and he stumbled and fell, crashing back into the snow. The entire area was painted with an air of silence. Syfar clawed in vain at his face, only to find it was gone, all that remained was the severed wires and ends that connected his vision and speech. Without these he could not find the scientist, let alone Abaddon. This was indeed a major set back. Slowly and purposely, Syfar began to extract himself from the colossal metal suit that he had made, wrenching and tearing he pulled himself free. His right arm had become trapped between the twisted metal. Without hesitation, Syfar pulled with all his strength and ripped his arm off at the elbow. He fell away from the mountains of steel and was finally free. Wires sparked and pistons groaned in protest but blindly he stumbled up the side of the dent his former body had made in the ground. The snow had melted and the entire area was now a quagmire of mud and wreckage. Rick rolled onto his side and rose to his knees, the gash in the back of his head began to bleed, its colour turning the snow a prominent orange. Dazed and shaky, he found his feet. The temperature was incredibly low as the suns finally set upon Tarsalis. Rick knew it wouldn't be long before the cold claimed his life. He staggered toward a piece of burning debris that lay in the snow. The fire was dying and if he didn't figure out a way to keep it alight he knew he would freeze to death. The blizzard picked up, swirling winds engulfed the pair, each now fighting a new enemy. The weather's iron clad hand began to grasp the life strings of Douglas Syfar and Rick Atlas.

Abaddon remained still as he watched the burning engines of his comrades descending from the sky. Their lights chased away the cold and blew a warm wind upon his face. The blizzard was still raging but Abaddon stood calmly at the landing pad and waited for the massive transport to land. The large transport landed followed by another two, each one lowering their ramps like the first had. Abaddon clumped up the side ramp of the space ship and ducked into the dark interior, where an all too familiar face met his gaze.

“Lord Abaddon” came the grinding remark, “I haven't seen you since I fought at your side but a millennia ago, my how the time flies”.

“You haven't changed either,” Mused Abaddon “You're still as ugly as ever and getting worse. I have called you all here for a reason,”

“What is it my lord?”

“We are going to take Earth.”

Chapter Two

A Love That Never Was

Sean was a tall man; he was relatively skinny and had red curly hair. He wore a long, flowing cape that was black on the outside and silver on the inside. He had blue jeans on and was wearing a blue jumper

over a black t-shirt. His brilliantly, curled hair was covered with his black baseball cap as usual and he was making quickly for the training arena. As he entered the room there was sudden silence. The Agents filling the large room stopped their training and turned to face Sean. Sean rarely ventured into the training rooms, he was a general and had his own private training room onboard SEAN. Megs and Amy were standing together,

“Typical,” thought Sean, “Those two are inseparable,”

“Can I help you?” Asked a girl with blazing red hair. Sean glanced quickly at her. Her name was Samantha but nobody called her that, people called her Seduca. Seduca was wearing a long black and red cape very similar to the type Dracula would have worn. Her red hair was set up in a high ponytail and she had tiny red pants and a red shirt on. Her black knee high boots tapped impatiently on the floor.

“I need three agents. Megan Corporal, Amy Morrano and...” Sean hesitated. He looked around the room. Faces stared up at him, some begging for the chance to fight, others fearful of being sent outside of the ship.

“Seducu. Follow me.”

“Lord Abaddon, why do you summon us?” Asked the man. Abaddon was thundering down a corridor, his footsteps pounded heavily on the floor. The men hurried along behind him.

“We have to find it, I *have* to find it.” Abaddon muttered. He wasn't nervous, nor was he excited or anxious. He didn't feel anything but the longing desire for what he sought after.

“Abaddon, please, tell us why we're here?”

“Ogel, you would do well to be quiet.” He replied. The man opened his mouth to reply but found he could not, or would not defy Abaddon. As Abaddon stormed along the corridors, Sykes crept along the rooftop.

Although the blizzard made it impossible to see anything he couldn't ignore the smell of engine fuel and laser fire. He grasped at the small concrete wall that ran around the edge of the building. There was a splintering sound, a crackling explosion and suddenly Sykes lost his footing. He could see nothing but the swirling white of snow. Almost immediately he felt himself fade into nothing. The white began to thin. He could make out pieces of stone falling around him. Part of the roof had collapsed with him standing on it. The white began to give way to a glowing orange. The orange swirled in and around him, he began to slow down, his fall stopped and Sykes found himself floating amongst a sea of orange ribbons. They snaked around, large purple planet-like objects floated far off in the distance. Sykes looked at his feet. He had come to rest atop one of the orange. It was carrying him across through the mess.

“I'm dead,” Thought Sykes, “I must be dead.”

"You're not dead." Came a voice. Sykes spun around; he felt the ribbon shoot away from under him. He grabbed at another one and felt it soar away with his fingers just grasping its tail end.

"Hold on now, boy," Said the voice again. Sykes pulled himself up onto the ribbon and stood up. No matter which way he looked he could see nothing but orange ribbons and purple planets. A ribbon wrapped itself around his face. The ribbons were warm and soft. Sykes pulled it away from his face and looked at it. As he let it go it swirled up around his wrist. The ribbon slowly twisted away.

"So you're Jonathon Sykes."

A man with grey hair set in a ponytail rose from beneath Sykes. The man stepped off his own ribbon and held out a hand toward Sykes.

"I am Koga." He said. Sykes shook his hand. The man had a grey beard and wore a purple cape. Koga had a medieval vest of armour on and black boots. He turned around and waved his hand toward one of the purple planets. Orange ribbons suddenly engulfed it. The ribbons wrapped themselves around it quickly and randomly until the purple planet could no longer be seen. The ribbons slowed down and began to continue their random floating. The planet was gone. Koga turned to face Sykes. He smiled and pointed behind Sykes. Sykes turned around slowly, he didn't really want to take his eyes off this strange fellow but willed himself to look at what he was pointing at. As soon as Sykes turned the massive purple planet shot up from below them. Koga stepped onto the top of it and beckoned Sykes to follow.

"I am Koga, the weaver of the fates." He said. Sykes' jaw dropped.

Megs, Amy and Seduca stood aboard a small space ship. Seduca piloted them around a large moon and then straight toward a planet. Tarsalis was alive with activity; the entire planet appeared to be in the middle of a blizzard. Megs let out a soft sound. Amy reached out and grabbed Megs' small hand.

"Sykes it out there," Megs said, "He's out there, in that!"

"It'll be okay, we'll find him, I promise." Amy reassured her. Megs turned around and reefed her sword out from its glass case. Amy slid her swords out from their case and turned back to face the planet.

"I'd grab a hold of something if I were you." Seduca told them. Megs moved over and held onto the railing; Amy grabbed the handle of a storage unit. The fighter suddenly shot forward. Amy and Megs fell onto their backs and shot toward the back of the room. The fighter swerved up and down until it finally slowed down almost to a halt as it pelted itself against the atmosphere. The front of the fighter burned with red until finally they burst into the planet. Seduca ducked around mountains and shot through snow rifts. She slowed the fighter right down. Megs and Amy climbed to their feet.

"Where's the facility?" Seduca asked.

"Sector twelve." Amy told her.

Seduca began adjusting controls. Megs looked up at the mountains. It was like the fighter was parked inside a canyon. Above, she could make out hundreds of tonnes of snow perched atop the canyon walls. Any sound could have upset the snow, making an avalanche. Megs narrowed her eyes I thought, wouldn't the sound of the fighter bursting through the atmosphere and shooting down into the canyon been enough.

"Seduca!" Amy screamed. Megs was startled form her thoughts. She looked at where Amy was pointing. The snow on the canyon walls was slowly sliding down toward them. It stopped again. Then after a moment started to slide once more.

"If we move, all hell will crash down and bury us." Seduca told them.

"I am the weaver of the fates, it is my job to make sure that the fates align and make sense. For instance, if a person is born a mortal, it is my job to make sure that one day they eventually die. It's fairly complicated." Koga explained.

"Why am I here? Am I dead?" Sykes asked inquisitively. Koga chuckled gently.

"No, you're not dead. You're far from dead."

"Why am I here?" Sykes repeated. Koga reached out and let a ribbon tie itself around his hand. He held it out to Sykes.

"Take it. This is why you're here." He said quietly. Koga's face beamed with a smile, his eyes crinkled with glee as Sykes cautiously reached out and took the ribbon. He barely closed his fingers around its end when it quickly flicked itself around his wrist. The ribbon curled round and round up his arm and then slowly began to unravel itself. Koga held out his hand and instantly the ribbon let go. It swished through the air and stopped in the air like a scroll. It stretched out and stood silent.

"Your friend is in a lot of trouble."

As Koga said these words Sykes drew in a sharp breath as Liam's face appeared on the ribbon. Snow swirled around Liam, blood splattered all around his frail body. His legs were buried in the snow and his gloves were ripped from trying to dig himself out.

"This is why you're here. I couldn't let you die, not the way you were going to. I couldn't let Liam die either; the two of you must live. Or at least for now." Koga stepped toward Sykes and put an arm on his shoulder.

"Is he coming here too?" Sykes asked. Koga shook his head.

"I've interfered too much already. The weaver's job is not to change fate but change the course of fate. I cannot save you and Liam; instead I can send you to save Liam. Are you ready?"

"What?" Sykes jumped back. He looked at Liam in the snow; the blizzard was still fierce as ever. Koga

was summoning more ribbons toward him. They formed a small cluster and slowly drew apart. As they separated they revealed a small glass sphere. Koga plucked the sphere from the air and held it out to Sykes. Sykes took it.

“This is Liam's Laser Staff.” Sykes said slowly. Koga nodded silently.

“You will need it. Are you ready?” Sykes didn't have time to answer. The ribbon they were standing on suddenly gave way. Sykes began to fall amongst the ribbons. He felt them entwining themselves around him, wrapping around his legs and twisting over his arms. He tucked the sphere into his cloak and pulled his hood over. The wind rushed in his hair, it stung his eyes. Sykes shut his eyes against the cold air blasting into his face. He felt snow spattering against his body. As he opened his eyes he saw Liam huddled in a snow rift. His legs were buried underneath the snow. Sykes threw the glass sphere into the snow. It smashed and the laser staff erupted up into Sykes' palm. He swung the staff at the snow and it sparked and melted away. Liam looked up at Sykes, shivering against the cold. Sykes knelt down and dug the laser into the snow. In a moment, Liam was free. His legs were shaking and Sykes could barely carry him but slowly the two began making their way through the snow.

Abaddon and Ogel stood on the roof of the facility. A large section of the concrete wall around the edge had collapsed. Ogel wrapped his cape tightly around his small form.

“Koga is renowned as the weaver of the fates, his psychic abilities are incredible. He will be easily swayed.” Abaddon told him. From a distance, they heard a roaring crash.

“Sounds like an avalanche.” Ogel commented. Abaddon turned and strode back inside the complex.

“Amy, set the engines to maximum power, I'll get the thrust jets primed and ready. We'll blast off like a rocket, the avalanche won't be able to keep up.” Seduca said. Amy set about to adjust the computer.

“We can't gain any altitude, the blizzard is too strong.” Megs told them. Seduca flicked a switch.

“We'll just have to go through this canyon.” Seduca said.

“Ready.” Amy reported. Megs strapped herself into a chair next to Seduca. Amy sat on the other side.

“Lets go.” Seduca slammed her fist down hard on the control panel and veered the fighter away. With a great roaring sound the fighter screamed across the canyon floor. The snow above gave way and began to rain down. Cascades of snow raced toward them from both sides.

“We'll never make it!” Megs shrieked.

“We will!” Seduca spat back. They rushed along the floor of the canyon, snow melted underneath them from the engines; the roar of a thousand avalanches could barely be heard over the rushing of the engines. Amy looked fearfully at Megs. Megs pulled her flute out of her sleeve and held it close to her

chest. Amy pulled a small piece of paper out of her blouse pocket. She unfolded the picture of Sean and kissed it.

“Please let us get through this.” She whispered. Amy tucked it back into her pale green blouse. She was wearing long green pants and her hair flowed down to her lower back. She straightened her headband and grabbed onto the controls for support as Seduca shot to the left suddenly. Rocks and ice were belting hard against the fighter; Seduca pulled it sharply upward as the river of snow shot underneath them. They were barely inches above the rapids of sharp ice and snow-covered rocks. Ahead of them the canyon arched upward, Amy aimed the fighter's gun turret at the arch and let rip with a stream of gunfire. Huge boulders began to rain down into the icy river up ahead. Megs lifted her flute to her lips and began to play a quick melody. Like magic, the boulders began to roll through the snow and ice until they were forming an almost perfect line. The snow began to build up around the dam. Seduca pulled hard on the controls, the fighter was only rising inches from the snow. The winds of the blizzard had a tight grip on the fighter, no matter how hard the engines groaned they were nothing to compare to the force of nature. One of the turrets on the wing was suddenly ripped from the fighter by a large shard of ice. Amy and Megs fell to the floor as the fighter shook violently. The dam had stopped the avalanche ahead but the ice and snow still swirled dangerously below them. No matter how hard Seduca pulled on the controls the fighter refused to lift any higher from the deadly sea below them. Amy grabbed at the radio,

“Sean, we have a problem here.” She snapped. There was no reply. Seduca slammed her fist onto a large red panel and sent the fighter zooming ahead.

“Seducu? is this safe?” Megs asked cautiously. Seduca didn't answer. She bumped the controls slightly and the fighter suddenly moved to the side. They shot out over the makeshift dam and out into a large field of ice and snow. The immediate danger had passed. Seduca breathed a long, deep sigh of relief. Megs dropped onto the ground.

“I need to play something.” She said quickly. She began playing her flute and Amy and Seduca both turned to watch the walls of the fighter suddenly begin changing colour. From the end of Megs' flute came copious amounts of colourful light that danced across the inside of the fighter.

“So tell me, what is it with your flute. The mission brief said you could do anything with it. Is that true?” Seduca asked. Megs lowered the flute to the floor.

“I can do most things. It depends on my feelings. I can channel my deepest feelings into the music I play. If I use my emotions then I can do stuff. Like if I'm really angry then I can play something really sharp and feisty and make an explosion or something but if I'm happy then I can play something bright and chirpy and make everything float around the room. There are other things I can do too. Sean's told me about special pieces that do special things when I play. There's one called the Transportation that was written by my father and when I play that I can transport people across long distances.”

“Wow... Where did it come from?”

“This is called the Artisan's Flute. Sean said it belonged to my father; he was one of the first agents. Sean and Victoria both fought with him. My mother played too, she was incredible. My Mum and Dad both had the same gift.”

Suddenly there was a great crunch from somewhere outside. As the fighter sat motionless in the sky with the blizzard's swirling winds surrounding it, the boulders above lurched forward. Snow and ice rained down upon them, in an instant the fighter began to fall toward the ground with the torrents of water. Seduca reefed the controls upward and sent the fighter out of the falling wall of ice. A massive wave of icy water splashed up around the fighter. It swirled around them and began to rain down upon them. Seduca turned the fighter so that its front faced directly up. Megs and Amy fell to the back of the fighter, they slammed against the back wall. Seduca gunned the engines and they shot

"Megs!" Seduca cried, "Play something, quick!"

Just metres away was a large chunk of ice threatening to bust open the fighter and leave its inhabitants skewered upon its sharp surface. Megs lifted her flute and played a quick run. The fighter slowly began to move away. Seduca was pulling desperately on the controls but to no avail. The fighter groaned as it tried to pull away from the ice. There was no warning. Like a gruesome can-opener, the ice dug into the fighter's side. Seduca leapt from her seat and grabbed Amy and Megs around the waist each. As the roof was torn open she leapt into the air. Seduca soared into the air, her cape flapped about wildly. The blizzard blew hard against their bodies. Amy shut her eyes against the harsh snow that was now pounding against their bodies. Seduca flew them toward the canyon wall. Rather than flying against the wind, Seduca carried them with it until they landed roughly in the snow. Amy pulled out her radio.

"Sean, you freak, you sent us into the middle of a blizzard!" She screamed. Sean didn't reply, not because he was offended, but because even if he wanted to he couldn't have. The blizzard was blocking all radio communications.