



Turnscrew - a short story of DOOM

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For Luthor, my purpose.

Chapter 1

It's been in my pocket the entire time. Lending me a comfort the origins of which I had temporarily forgotten. I remember it now, and slowly, I begin to realize I might live.

Pulling it out of my pocket, I see how it reflects the strange, dim, purple light of the coffin like room I've been confined to. I almost put myself into a trance looking at it, and playing short films in my head of how I may employ it. The walls of this room are curved and feel like skin. I can feel a vibration thrumming throughout, like a distant, powerful, engine. I'm not sure how long I've been lying here, I'm not even sure how long I've been awake. It seems I just realized over time I was conscious and thinking. After what feels like 20 minutes of just staring at the reflected purple light I explore the walls of this room, looking for an opening, a handle, a puff of air telling me I'm not sealed off.

No air, no luck.

The purple light has no source that I can find; it seems to evenly emanate from the fleshy walls of my prison. I push on these walls, and find that one of them, the one on my right, has quite a bit of play, stretching out about a foot. This is interesting, but I still have no idea on how to open it. It looks like I'm going to need to break it - cut it, I mean - or puncture it and claw my way out.

I try to calm myself before I commit the act that's probably going to lead to me getting killed, or at the very least, tortured again. In making my bid for freedom, I can only imagine that the price of failure will be the only thing that I have left - my life.

Looking back at my hands, and once more at the item still unbelievably with me, I don't feel the least bit absurd asking for strength and courage from it. It's my talisman. We'll support each other in our escape from wherever this is.

Time to begin Step One - Lying on my side, using my left hand, I drive the blade of my screwdriver into the wall of the flesh-like substance which I found to be the weakest. Expecting to be soaked to the

bone by some vile fluid, I close my eyes to protect them, but it doesn't happen. I open my eyes, the lenses of my glasses still clean, and reverse my grip on my unlikely talisman. Stabbing at the wall once more, like a slasher in a horror flick, I drag the blade diagonally through the flesh, cutting roughly from my head to about my knees. The wall tears open uneven and jagged, and sags like a flag on a windless day. Without thinking, I roll out, and after a very short drop, land on my side on a metal walkway about two and a half feet wide. Looking up and along the catwalk where I spilled out, I see pods similar to the one I just rolled out of lining both walls. These go up to what I'm guessing is about thirty feet, and I'm briefly thankful I hadn't blindly rolled out only to be greeted by a thirty foot drop.

I need to be more careful.

At one end of the hallway there is what looks to be a doorway, and I almost start forward, toward this, before I decide to check behind me. I'm glad I did. One of *them*, standing at what can only be described as a computer terminal, seems to be intently manipulating some type of vertical interface... with its back to me. These unforgiving bastards will never allow my peaceful exit of their ship. I don't know how I know this, maybe it was the brutal way in which I was brought on board.

More memories returning.

Slowly they're coming back to me. I shudder when remembering their cruel, inhuman eyes and the way they dissected my hand. This last memory comes to me with a shock, and I pass the screwdriver to my left hand so I can inspect my right. The only evidence that it had been flayed open, was a thin, raised, white line, starting as a circle at the mid point of my bicep, then traveling down my inner elbow and continuing on the inside of my forearm – bisecting my leprechaun tattoo! At my palm, the scar splits off to travel down each finger. At each point and intersection, there is another small circle, like the one on my bicep. I don't need to roll up the sleeve of my hoodie to see this. Most of the sleeve has been removed, what's left falls to just above the circular scar on my bicep, almost even with the sleeve of my t-shirt.

I remember the pain.

I remember how I had fought against passing out because I was unsure if I would ever wake up again. These memories fuel in me a rage that has long been contained. Transferring my screwdriver, my talisman, back to my right hand, I know what I'm going to do. It's almost like I knew all along what I was going to do.

I started creeping closer to the short, grey, bastard that is too busy on his computer to realize that these are his last moments.

Chapter 2

I can't really say why I started carrying it with me. I can't even say why I bought it. I'm not a handyman, I'm not a mechanic, and the last thing I built was in sculpture class, in art school - a robot head. I used pieces of scrap metal I had found roaming around downtown Seattle, looking in trash bins. Definitely form over function, but even that didn't need a screwdriver. I guess the first thing I noticed was the colors of the handle, orange and black, caught my eye right away... but that wasn't it. The shape of the handle was interesting, it had a small pommel on the end, above that was the main handle, hexagonal, but with each side of the hexagon slightly concave. The four inch handle tapered near the top, then flared back out at the point where the stainless steel shank had been driven into the handle. Four inches of steel emerged from the handle, making my future talisman a total of 8 inches. The steel of the keystone shaped flathead still had its factory shine, and before I knew it, I had picked it up to see how it felt in my hand. It felt good. I guess it was that more than anything else - I liked the feel of it. I didn't even debate with myself as to why I was going to buy this. It was coming with me, and the price was .88 cents. I've always had a thing for the number eleven and multiples of it, and seeing the price just further affirmed what I had known anyway - it was mine.

After paying for it, I left the store without even getting what I had originally come for - a silverware basket for the inside of my dishwasher. I slid the screwdriver into the inside pocket of my fleece hoodie. The pockets are deep and wide so it didn't sit at an odd angle, and it didn't make any odd shape on the outside. Maybe I *did* get what I had come for. Anyway, I was already late for work.

Work... happened, as it always does and leaves me feeling soulless - as soulless as an atheist can feel anyway - and beat up. I would not wish a call center job on my worst enemy... well, I probably would.

That was a little over three weeks ago. I've carried the screwdriver with me since. I saw a *How It's Made* episode on screwdrivers, and even read up on their history. I found that they are called "turnscrews"

by gunsmiths and so I took to thinking of my screwdriver as that, but more like a proper name - Turnscrew. I can't say why I carried Turnscrew any more than I can say why I bought it. I definitely can't say why it made me feel secure. I had never been in any type of (non-videogame) situation that I felt I needed a weapon, and I was not prone to violence, well, not outside of my head anyway, but who doesn't think about hulking-out and destroying their cubicle... and every other cubicle in the building... and then the building itself... followed by the redneck trucks in the parking lot? Anyway, for some reason, I felt better when carrying it. When I didn't carry it (which was very rare, and only by accident), I thought about it. Sometimes I worried myself that Turnscrew was on my mind so much - but I never stopped carrying it.

I was on my way home from a friend's. It was late, maybe so late it was early. After work, we had put a serious hump in a bottle of Ketel, and I had to hang out at his house for a while before I was good for the drive home - I didn't want to crash on the floor. I'd like to think it was last night or the night before, but I can't. It could be two nights ago or twenty-two. I can tell you it was a Friday - September 26th - but my sense of time is completely messed up, and not from the vodka. My watch is no help since it's frozen at 3:33am - though the glow function still works.

Anyway, on my way home my crappy car started acting up, no surprise there, but then it stopped suddenly forcing me to coast to the side of the road, before trying to start it up again. No luck. I popped the hood and got out, I don't know why, I don't know a damn thing about cars. From what I could see everything looked normal, no smoke, no fire, nothing looked like it had exploded. I pulled out my cell phone to call my friend and see if I could get a lift home. I had a bike in my trunk, but I was feeling pretty lazy. That's what a 10 hour shift will do to you - suck your will to live, and any want you could ever have, to ride a bike. The Ketel didn't help either.

My phone was dead.

Sometimes it froze though, so I popped the battery, waited a few seconds then put it back in and hit the power button.

No go.

Looked to me like I was going to have to ride that effing bike anyway. As I was opening the trunk, I experienced one of the strangest things - all sound ceased. It was like my ears were stuffed with cotton, but stuffed perfectly, so as not a sound could leak through. I also felt

this immense pressure throughout my entire body, almost as if I was being pushed to the ground. I think I might have thrown up, had this weird pressure not been holding down my late dinner. I felt dizzy, and had to hold onto the trunk to keep upright. I thought I was having a heart attack, hanging there, with my arms draped over the open trunk, propping myself up at the armpits. I started seeing weird lights, and thought I was starting to pass out, but then I realized that these lights were separate from me. These lights were attached to the scariest thing I've ever seen, besides *The Phantom Menace*. It was a space craft. It had to be. It was descending slowly and all I could really make out was a ring of lights and a large partially obscured shape above them. As it was breaking through the low clouds, and heading in my direction, the pattern of lights changed. As a result, I could no longer see the craft through the glare, but as soon as the patterns of lights changed, so did the force keeping me dull and oppressed. I came out of my dizzy, nauseous, and deaf state in an instant, no longer hating my stupid bike.

I ripped the bike out of the trunk and started pedaling towards the woods that were about five hundred feet from the dirt road I had broken down on. I made for those woods as fast as I could, pedaling for my life. I'm not sure why my first instinct was to flee, perhaps it was because of the way the craft affected me – for I did not doubt for one millisecond that it was a spacecraft. If I did have any more doubts concerning the intent of the craft, they were soon put to rest as my car was slammed into the ground not three feet from where I was frantically pedaling, I saw my crowbar spinning through the air, free from the trunk. The way my car landed, it seemed as if it was thrown at me. Ahead of me, I saw large rock lurch out of the ground, pulled into the air, along with a shower of dirt and smaller stones. I risked a look over my shoulder at the ship. It looked like the boulder had been lifted upward by a translucent purple beam of light. The rock, which had to be at least three hundred pounds, traveled up this beam of light until it was about halfway between the ship and the ground, then with a speed I wouldn't have believed possible, the rock was launched at me. It reminded me of a pinball machine plunger blasting out a ball bearing. This ball bearing however was made up of over three hundred pounds of granite, and though it missed me, it struck the ground with enough force to throw me off of my bike and send me skittering over the dirt like a rag doll. I had also been pelted by a shotgun blast of the smaller stones and dirt that had been lifted up with the boulder.

My friends would say I'd been "fragged."

From the perfect vantage point of my back, I had a first hand account of another useful function of the purple beam. As it made its way toward me I could see the ground being compressed into perfect, shallow parabolas. These parabolas overlapped each other so frequently it looked like a path being drawn in the dirt by a finger. When the beam finally reached my breathless, beat up form, lying on the ground, I was to learn in a very painful way that these depressions were caused by a concentration of immense gravity, focused at the point where the beam met with the ground... or person.

I thought I was dead.

Chapter 3

I mean, that has to be what dying feels like, right? After my ribs audibly cracking, I could feel my eyes being pushed back into my skull, there was no way I could draw breath, hell, even my teeth hurt.

Then, for the first time in my life, I passed out.

When I came to I was in no pain. I was lying on a metal table, and I could smell antiseptic. My right arm was strapped to a section of table that had been rotated out at a ninety degree angle away from my body, so that my arm was perpendicular to the rest of me.

The room I was in was perfectly round, and about 10 feet in diameter. I could not tell how close the ceiling was because directly above me there was an intense light that glared into my eyes. Little by little I began to remember what had happened to me. The car dying, the chase, the car flying, the boulder, the giant's thumb pressing me into the ground, crushing me... then I began to notice that I wasn't nearly in the bad shape I should have been. I could breathe deeply and it didn't hurt. Nothing seemed broken, nothing seemed sprained, nothing seemed strained, or crushed. I was thinking that I had been repaired by these things that took me against my will, and that thought made me worry. Why do they want me in good health? What do they plan to do with me?

If I was worried then, I was definitely on the brink of freak-out when they started to file into the room from a doorway that irised open to my left. I could not move my head, but I could move my eyes and that was enough. There were three of them, and they seemed familiar, and not because we'd met before, but because I'd seen movies, and videogames, and illustrations - hell, I'd done illustrations of them - short, grey, big eyes, bigger heads. They were skinny, but looked strong, capable. I could see the muscles in their forearms move under their hairless grey skin. They had three fingers and a thumb per hand. These digits were long, in comparison to mine, but looked adept and powerful. Their skin looked dry; their faces, deeply wrinkled, with no noses, only two small elliptical holes. There were no ears either, just

small openings on either side of the head, slightly triangular in shape. Their mouths were a cruel slash, and their expressions seemed, to me, menacing with a dash of indifference. Their bulbous eyes, taking up third of their face, were heavily lidded and upward tilting. I was surprised to see they were not the total black I had been expecting, though the parts of the eye were so dark, and similar in color, I could see how that would be an easy mistake to make. I could just make out an iris and pupil, which gave these aliens a creepy sense of depth, and I could tell, looking into that depth, those eyes were void of any chance of empathy.

If these aliens seemed familiar, it was only because I'd grown up with their likeness all around me; I was a sci-fi fan after all, and these could only be -

"Greys." I mumbled to myself.

I noticed that they were not exactly the same in height, build, or facial features. They definitely had individual characteristics. What they wore was not cloth, but seemed to be some kind of sleeveless armor, close fitting, made up of small individual plates of purple metal. These plates overlapped each other, giving a scale-like effect. I would have expected it to shimmer, but there must have been a matte finish, making the metal of the uniforms non reflective. It stuck me as protective, without impeding their movement.

Once they were in the room the door irised closed and they gathered around my right arm, strapped to the smaller table. I was completely ignored. I started yelling question at them with a thick, sluggish voice: "What do you want?! Where am I?! What the fuck are you!?" Still, I was ignored.

"Let's see how well you pricks ignore me when I'm not strapped down." I said calmly, my voice slowly returning to normal.

The one standing next to me, in the right angle created by the two tables, slowly looked down. Maybe it was my tone of voice, or perhaps my look of defiance, whatever the reason, I was treated to a backhand that loosened my teeth.

My mom always said my mouth would get me in trouble.

The one keeping his pimp hand strong, no longer bothered with me, reached up and pulled the glaring light directly over my arm. I still couldn't see the ceiling since now I had huge spots in my eyes. One of the Greys, a shorter stockier one, missing the last two fingers on it's left hand at the second knuckle, moved a strange piece of metal,

triangular in shape, over my hoodie at about mid bicep, then it roughly jerked my sleeve, removing it.

I was just about to say something that would probably get me punched, when I notice another of the grey bastards closing in. It leaned intently over my now bare arm and moved, what looked like a pen with no tip, over my skin. I saw a circle emerge where this "pen" touched me, and I remember that area getting very cold. From this circle the Grey traced a line down my bicep to the inside of my forearm, right over my leprechaun tattoo, and I felt a little angry at that. A few times I thought the pen would go over my restraints, and I wondered, in a detached way, if a white line would appear on those as well, but whenever the pen got close to one, the restraint would retract into the table. I tried to move my arm, when I saw all the restraints had retracted, and though I had feeling in it, I could not even twitch a finger.

When the alien reached my palm it drew another circle, then a line branching off down each of my fingers and thumb. Finally he drew a circle at each of my fingertips. Finished with this sketching, the grey alien unscrewed the top of the pen like tool and removed what looked like a cap, revealing a small silver button.

I had really bad feeling as I saw its thumb hovering over that button, and just before I could prepare myself - as if you actually could prepare yourself for such a thing - he pressed it down.

My skin and muscle, down to the bone, split along the drawn lines! I know I screamed. I know those monsters didn't even flinch. I remember being surprised at how little I bled. I remember how hard I fought passing out, thinking I might never wake again.

I was wrong.

I woke up again - and they split my arm open at least two more times that I can remember. Each time resulted in me passing out. I'm not sure how much time passed between each operation. Like I said, my sense of time is screwed right now.

All I can tell you is that my beard is longer.

Chapter 4

So here I am, about to initiate Step Two of getting out of here: Driving Turnscrew into what I hope will be the brainstem of this abducting, torturing, prick, currently playing around in its extraterrestrial email account.

Step three: repeat step two until I find a door off of this ship.

As I start sneaking up on this creature I can't help but realize how lucky I am they didn't take Turnscrew. They *had* to have searched me at some point, right? Or were they just too arrogant to realize anything could cause them danger.

After that backhand, I'm putting my money on arrogance.

Not only did I still have my talisman, I still had my clothing – minus one sleeve - my glasses, wallet, mobile, belt, sneakers, and even this little plastic container I carry around that holds tea for work. Unfortunately, I have lost my trusty hat, probably while playing human pin-ball on my bike. I'm guessing I won't be able to sue for the cost of a replacement.

Consolation prize: I still have the hood on my fleece jacket, and I pull this up as I'm inching my way closer to my enemy. I'm not sure it actually does anything, but it makes me feel stealthier.

I'm about five feet away, and it must have sensed me. It's beginning to turn, so I lunge. With my left hand I grab it's armored collar and roughly shove it back, slamming its face into it computer. With my right hand I drive Turnscrew forward with all of my might, aiming at the bundle of nerves I'd be praying was there was I not an atheist.

Thank you *Anatomy for the Artist!*

Turnscrew punches through that grey skin with surprising ease and I have to hold on to that armored collar even tighter so this thing won't spasm all over the floor making more noise than I'm comfortable with. Eventually it goes still, so I let it slide off of the computer, and off of Turnscrew, and to the floor. Turnscrew has thick blue blood all along its stainless steel shaft, and even some on the handle. I wipe

this on my jeans without thinking - I'm looking for a bad-ass-alien-gun - no luck.

Great, so all those kooks crying on talk shows about the medical experimentation were right, but the laser blaster kooks are wrong? I look for anything I can use, but I find nothing in the way of weapons. The armor is way too small, and I'm not even sure I can get it off. There aren't even any pockets or pouches or anything. Looking at the corpse, I can tell by its slack face that this wasn't one of the ones that cut me up, but right now I'm feeling way too exposed and rushed to spend any more time searching this body.

I take a look at the computer to see if I can understand anything, and have to suppress a laugh. There is no way I can read this. It's all some kind of glyphs/symbols/pictograms in what I'm starting to think of as their signature purple light. My only choice at this point is the door at the other end of the hall.

Before I go I drag the alien body to the pod I was sealed in and stick him in there. Hopefully that will buy me some time before the alert is raised. As I get to the door I expect it to open, it doesn't. I look for a switch, a panel, a key card slot – there! To the right of the door, mounted on the wall, is a small metal plate with a symbol. The symbol glows a dull purple, much like the light of the pod I was in. It seems logical to me that this would open the door, but when I press it, nothing happens.

Discouraging, but I have played way too much *Tomb Raider* not to at least look for a matching symbol on the computer terminal in the back of the room. So I do, and I find one after about a minute and a half.

I press it.

I hear a far off hiss, and I turn in time to see the door iris open. There is a split second of petrifying terror as I realize it might be another Grey coming to hang out with the one I just put Turnscrew to, but the doorway remains empty, so I walk quietly towards it, taking what I hope will be my final look at these prison pods.

My conscience nags me. I can't help but wonder who or what else might be in them...

Chapter 5

The door is still open when I get to it, and I take care to listen before I stick my head out for a quick peek. Images of the door iris closing on my outstretched neck make me shudder.

The hallway is lit with that purple light I'm beginning to hate, but luckily, that's the only thing in it. A pod-less corridor stretches out to the left and right, and my decision to go right is based on nothing more than a mental coin toss. I check the ceiling, no ventilation or cables to climb up into. I don't see anything that looks like surveillance. I can only continue along this hallway, hoping to make no noise, until another option presents itself.

The angry part of me, the part that is wanting only revenge, is hoping I'll run across some more of those Grey bastards. I tighten my grip on Turnscrew. It's still streaked with blue, which is looking more black now that it's drying.

I realize I'm hungry, and very thirsty, they probably didn't even bother to hook me up to some saline while they were playing operation – common friggin' courtesy, come on! Hopefully, I'll be off of this ship soon, and when I do get off, I'm breaking my boycott of McDonalds. I'm seriously wanting a Number One right about now.

Another thing I'd like to get: something to cover up my arm. I'm pretty pale, and in this light it makes me stand out like a glow stick – not very helpful for one trying to stay stealthy. Continuing along the corridor I hear something new, and the light seems to be a bit brighter. I creep forward, my body angled so that my bare arm, a shining beacon in this purple light, is behind me. Turnscrew, tightly gripped in my right hand, is a comfort to me.

I see two of them in the hallway with their backs to me, they're facing a third. I can't hear if they're speaking, and I can't see much of them because of the curve of the hallway, but I can see that they have on slightly different sets of armor than the ones I saw in the operating room. This new armor has full sleeves and even higher collars in the back, covering that nest of nerves I was beginning to count on. I'm

guessing they are some kind of guard, or security detail. Maybe they'll have weapons. I'm happy to have Turnscrew, but with a screwdriver I really need to get close to ghost these guys. So, I'm still keeping an eye out for a bad-ass-alien-gun.

The group seems to be splitting up. The two with their back to me continue in the direction they were facing, the one speaking with them also continues on its patrol – toward me – effing perfect! I have nowhere to hide. All I can do is back up and hope to stay out of its line of sight. Frantically, I look around for anything to help, anywhere to hide. The ceiling is dark, the hallway is only about three and a half to four feet wide, a crazy idea begins to formulate, a desperate idea.

I remember how I used to climb the alley walls on my street in Philly. I would stand spread eagle, like the Vitruvian man, lift one foot and put it against the wall, then push with both my hands and the one foot, raising myself off of the ground. I would then raise the next foot and press that against the wall. Push once again with the higher foot and both hands. Voila, I was already a couple feet off the ground.

Rinse, repeat.

I had not done this in years, but panic and desperation gave me the strength and speed to get into the high dark ceiling of the hallway, above the source-less purple light. I had to put the pummel of Turnscrew into my mouth to free my right hand, all I need now is for the short grey humanoid *not* to look up... and he doesn't.

As he passes under me I feel the anger again. I *know* I should let him pass, I *know* I should silently lower myself down, foot by foot, and creep in the opposite direction, but I don't.

As he passes below me all my limbs, save my right arm, are trembling from holding myself up. I pull my right hand from the wall and take Turnscrew from my mouth, handle facing up towards my thumb, the steel shaft facing down. My other limbs take up the slack for the moment it takes me to do this - then I drop towards him. As I fall I swing Turnscrew down and it sinks into the top of the alien's skull with a wet crack. I land in a straddling position on the thing's shoulders, and the shock of damage to its brain makes it arch its back in a muscle spasm. It's actually bearing my weight for the moment. Instinctively, I rotate Turnscrew's handle in circular motion scrambling its brains. It feels like I'm stirring a bowl of pasta salad. The Grey doesn't make a sound as it drops lifelessly to the floor like a puppet with it's strings cut, me still riding its shoulders. The both of us hitting the metal grating of the walkway isn't the quietest

sound, so I lay silently for a moment, holding my breath, with my face pressed against the cold metal, waiting to feel the vibrations of coming footsteps. The only vibration I feel is that distant one I felt while still in the pod.

The answer to my stealth problem lies just beneath my face, I realize, as I look through the floor. I'm pressed against a dull metal grating with an octagonal pattern. These octagons are about a half inch in diameter, and repeat over the entire floor panel. Each floor panel is rectangular in shape and about two and a half feet long. Under this flooring is what looks to be a maintenance crawl space. So, this is where all the cable and ventilation I was looking for is hiding... I pull Turnscrew from the alien's skull, and see the gore that had dried on it was now gone, wiped clean from swirling around in the alien's brain matter, leaving just a clear film on the steel shank and some thick, saltwater-smelling, blue blood, on the handle, where it had been pressed against the Grey's skin.

I stick Turnscrew through several holes in the floor and pull up looking for a loose panel. I'm rewarded on my sixth try and pull the alien corpse in after me so I can give it thorough search. I carefully slide the flooring back into place above us.

I feel a bit more at ease now, down here – even if I am uncomfortably hunched over. No worry of patrols – I hope – and I like feeling a bit more enclosed, not so out-in-the-open.

I take a minute to look at the alien I just ghosted. I can't really believe this is happening... I always thought it would be zombies, not aliens, I guess I'll have to wait to put my crowbar to use.

Time to get serious, I need to cover my arm, I look at the alien's armor. The forearm piece is way too small, but I might be able to get the bicep piece to work. Playing around with the armor I eventually figure out it's a turn-and-lock type mechanism and I quickly disconnect the part I want from the rest of it. I slide my hand in through what used to be the hole for the alien's armpit. Pushing the rest of my arm through, my hand emerges from what was once the elbow. The plate that once protected its elbow now extends out over the back of my hand, ending at the first joint of my fingers, slightly protruding out over my knuckles when I make a fist. My arm could bend easy at the elbow using the joint that used to be for the Grey's shoulder. It seems like its going to work well, and I have to admit it looks pretty cool. The metal is like nothing I have ever seen, and as I turn my arm it seems to shimmer from black to a dark purple. There are also some thick black lines

making a technical design that never changes even when the colors do. The pattern reminds me of paths on a circuit board.

Looking over the alien once more I find no bad-ass-alien-gun, no food, and no water. I'm not sure I'll eat or drink anything I *do* find though. I guess it depends on how desperate I get.

Making sure the body is as out of line of sight as it can be I continue on the way I had been previously going, but now I'm under the bastards - and I can't suppress my humorless grin.

Chapter 6

Coming up to the place where the two or three patrols had previously met I made sure I wasn't in any kind of light. Looking around I remember how it was brighter here, and now I see the reason. There's a room off to the left, and luckily the service tunnel branches off that way as well. I move towards the new tunnel on the left, it has what appears to be a smaller version of the iris doors that seem common place on this ship. This door has a glowing symbol etched into a metal plate next to it. This symbol is the same one I pressed on the computer terminal to escape the pod room.

After looking around to make sure there were no aliens directly above me, as I've been studying this door and the symbol for at least a solid minute, I decide to go for it. Still holding Turnscrew in my right hand I extend my index finger and push the glowing character. The service door irises open in almost complete silence. The only sound is that hiss of metal sliding against metal. I go through the porthole and look up to see what kind of room I've snuck into - and have to stop myself from throwing up.

I was in the room where my arm surgeries took place... or at least one identical to it anyway. That's why it's so much brighter in the hallway, that glaring spotlight over the operating table is on. This bright light also shows me that I am not alone. Two of the three creatures, the ones that flayed me like a frog in 7th grade science class, were just turning to look at another one of those, ever present, vertical computer terminals. I was right under them. For a moment I could picture myself driving Turnscrew through the holes in the grating, perforating their feet... and then their necks, as they fall down, lying on the grating as I had done not ten minutes ago.

After that brief fantasy, I move past them as quietly as I can, and turn around to see if I can look at the terminal as they're using it, in an attempt to learn something.

All thoughts of learning are wiped from my mind as I hear myself shriek, long and loud. I clamp my hand over my mouth, but the scream

continues. Frantically looking around for an explanation I finally understand what's going on.

The aliens are watching a recording of the surgeries they were performing on my arm. I watch without choice.

I can't *not* watch.

One of the aliens reaches out and pushes a symbol, the recording jumps back to right before my arm splits open. They watch it again, I hear myself scream again, and see myself black out. I feel sick, but I keep watching, I'm now past the point of my own memories... and I need to know what's been happening while I was out.

Using a different tool now, they bend over my elbow, blocking the view of whatever was recording this. It looks like they're cutting again, and I can only see a bright flickering light until they pause, then move down to my wrist. Again the same type of motions, the same flicker of light, only this time, when they're done, they lift out the bones of my forearm! I can plainly see the radius and ulna, and their connective tissues, as they're cleanly removed from my arm, leaving behind what looks like a split-open meat tube. The aliens again rewind and watch. It looks like they are silently studying each segment of the surgery.

The next step in the procedure: The aliens, using the same cutting tool, remove the bones of my wrist, hand and fingers.

I become desensitized watching my own mutilation. Each step rewound and watched again, two, maybe three times. My arm is completely without a skeleton from the elbow down. They work fast, even with all the rewinding; it's only been about six or seven minutes. I can see the bones of my arm laid out on a luminescent metal tray – which looks to be in need of a wash – in the positions they use to have in my arm. I can even see how the radius bone has a little uneven bump from a break when I was fifteen.

I know I should move on, but I want to see them put my bones back, I can't stand the sight of them laid out on that dirty tray.

Instead of starting to replace my bones, they grab what looks like a metal string attached to a flat handle. The string comes out at the top of the handle in two places. They slide this string over what's left of my elbow and about three inches up my humerus bone. I think I know what's coming, and apparently the sound of a saw is universal. The metal string whirs around my bone and in a split second they're done. The detached knob of elbow and humerus is removed. The remaining stump of bone is swabbed with a thick red liquid before they

slide on what looks like a metal sheath with a cap on one end. I think I can make out electrodes or some type of electrical hookups on it.

Another tool, another noise, a wisp of smoke, and it looks like the metal sheath is now a permanent fixture. The me on video tries to shake his restrained head and moans.

This is, of course, ignored.

This entire time, two of the three aliens have been doing the work, and I have been so transfixed with my own mutilation, that I didn't realize the third one had gone until I saw him reappear, carrying a metal box the size of a saxophone case. This case, polished to a mirror shine, is carried with an air of importance, and laid on the luminescent metal tray with the same care they gave my bones. This alien, I notice, is dressed in a different fashion than the other two, though they were all wearing something similar in design, like uniforms denoting specific position or rank. On the metal box, this third Grey pushes small glowing glyphs in a complex combination, even hitting some of the glyphs more than once. Six latches successively blow free, each with a sharp crack. The lid is lifted off and set aside.

Inside the box is what looks like a robot's arm. Hooked to the arm at various intervals are wires and cables. These are attached to what looks like a small handheld device, lying inside the box, which the third alien now picks up. The Grey then says something to the other two in a creepy, raspy, language that made me realize I had never heard them speak before, and then starts manipulating the handheld. Whatever it's doing makes the robotic arm move. It looks like it's running the arm through all of its possible motions, like some kind of diagnostic. They confer once more when this series of movements has ended, and the third one begins disconnecting the cables linking the arm to the handheld diagnostic device.

By this time I've been watching for about 15 minutes, and if I want to make some serious headway before bodies starting getting discovered, I have to get moving... but I can't. I'm pretty sure I know what is going to happen - and I can't deny that in the past, while watching *Robocop*, I thought it might be cool to have a cybernetic arm - but as I watch the three aliens work together, maneuvering the robotic arm onto the metal cylinder that had been fused to my bone, I can't help but shudder. I hear the arm click into place over the metal sheath, completely covering it. Once this happens I see wires from the top of the robotic arm slide out, and work their way into the muscles of my bicep. Lying in the sheath of my hollow arm, muscle and skin are laid

over the robotic skeleton, back in their natural position. My arm is sealed with the same pen tool that had originally split it open, and now looks as my arm does presently, except for some redness and swelling along the incisions.

Once this is done a series of injections are administered up the entire length of my arm and hand. These shots are spaced about every inch, vertically, from my shoulder to the back of my hand. My arm, still unrestrained, is rotated up at the shoulder so that they can inject the underside of my arm in the same manner, from armpit to palm – I'm glad I was unconscious.

Crouching in the maintenance crawl space I look at my hand in disbelief moving my fingers.

Nothing feels different... If not for the surgery markings, I think I could easily disbelieve what I have just watched, even with all the replays. I need to test my arm, but I need to get out of this room first. I look up at the two watching the surgery recording, and I feel a hate for them that I have felt for no other being before - except maybe Jar Jar Binks.

I want to kill them, and not just so I can escape, I want to kill them for what they've done to me. For torturing me. For scaring me. For imprisoning me. Why would they make me stronger? Why make improvements on me? What are they planning to do with me?

I'm going to get the answers, whether I have to beat it out of them or not.

I hope they make me beat it out of them.

It looks like there are no other ways in or out of this room except for the maintenance crawlspace, or the main door above me. The crawlspace travels around the radius of the room about half way, before stopping at what I'm guessing is a service panel. The floor under the operating table is not the octagonal grating, but solid deck plating, so I'm leaving the way I came in. I hate the thought of leaving my bones behind, but for all I know they were removed hours, even days ago. Hell, this might not even be the same room, but judging on the video I just spent the better part of twenty minutes watching, I bet it is. It even smells the same.

I press a glyph on the metal plate next to the closed porthole, it irises open once more with the now familiar rasp of metal on metal. I move back into the main maintenance crawlspace and make a left, continuing on my original path after leaving the pod room. Moving silently through this tunnel I pass several other rooms, but none as bright as the one I just left.

I need to make a decision; I can't keep wandering these tunnels. I've already passed two more Greys, lucky for me, they seem as deaf as they are ugly, and as far as I can tell, no alarms have gone -

An alarm just went off.

Must have found a body.

Now I *need* to do something. They're smart, this is their ship, and they're going to realize where I've been, where I am. The crawlspace branches off to another room a bit farther up on the right. I enter this room by once more pressing the glowing glyph. Once more, a door irises open. Once more, I sneak in. It's pretty dark. I wish I could find someone to shine my eyes for twenty menthol Kools. I almost laugh out loud at how nerdy I could still be in this situation, but wasn't it the Terminator that said: "Your levity is good. It relieves tension and the fear of death."

My fear of death is lessened - temporarily.

I listen for a solid minute, and there are no sounds above me. It takes me another two minutes to find a removable floor panel. I stick Turnscrew in to the pocket of my fleece hoodie, push myself up, and remain in a crouch as I slide the panel back in place, using both hands to ensure I make as little noise as possible. I'm glad I took the extra care. It looks like I came up into some type of sleeping bay. There are glass pods reaching from the floor to about 5 feet up the wall, most of these are empty, but there are four with Greys in them, sleeping. As if this wasn't creepy enough already, without seeing these things sleep standing up.

At the end of this room is another iris door, I move forward, towards the door and pass three of the four peacefully sleeping, abducting, bastards. As I get near the fourth, on the right side of the room, the glass front of the pod opens, sliding around and behind the main unit, out of sight. The alien is not yet moving, so I risk picking up my pace, I might be able to get through the next door before it completely wakes. I can't help but look at it as I pass by, moving in a half crouch. It's naked to the waist and wearing some type of cloth pants with attached feet, almost like pajamas for a little kid. I'm almost past when it opens its eyes and looks at me.

Damn! Turnscrew is in my friggin pocket!

Without thinking, I grab the thing by its throat - with my right hand - and I squeeze. If I thought it's eyes were bulbous before, they seemed to almost double in size at this point. My hand is easily crushing this alien's neck.

Correction: Not my hand, their hand, and I should really remember thank them...

I don't twist or jerk, or try to do any fancy neck breaking stuff that I've read about or seen in movies, I just crush the life out the damn thing, squeezing harder and harder, its flesh bulging out between my fingers. I know it's over when it slumps toward me.

Test of new arm complete. I'm silently thankful I hadn't crushed Turnscrew's handle in a panicked grip at some point.

I push the corpse back into the pod, and lucky me, the glass door emerges once again enclosing the alien. I can see my finger marks in its neck, which now looks like some kind of ergonomic tool handle.

I leave it to its permanent nap.

I reach the door quickly and with no more surprises. I pull Turnscrew out of my pocket, and hit the glyph to open the door. Another hallway - empty.

I'm going back to the crawlspace. I'm not going to win every fight, so I need to limit my encounters. I look on the floor for another service hatch, find one, and drop in. This new maintenance area moves parallel to the one on the other side of the sleeping bay, and seems the same in every way, except one. It makes a more pronounced curve than the previous crawlspace. I look up through the floor and see the hallway matches the curve.

Thinking... If these curves keep getting sharper, I must be working my way towards the center of the ship. Seeing as I have no other plan, I'm now making the center my priority. I'll make the first right I can, sticking to the maintenance crawlspaces, and hopefully the next hallway has an even more pronounced curvature. I feel rejuvenated, and more confident, now that I have a plan. Wandering aimlessly was getting old – and more dangerous by the second.

Chapter 8

I've now made a total of three right turns, each one taking me into a sharper concentric curve, bringing me closer to what I imagine to be the center of the ship. I passed through just one other room on my way here. I didn't even leave the maintenance crawlspace, just lifted the floor grating to look around. I didn't want to have to put Turnscrew back in my pocket, or in my mouth, when I lifted myself out. I didn't want it leaving my hand.

The small octagonal room was lined with situation specific gear for the Greys. Security armor, like what I earlier disassembled to scavenge my forearm guard. Another looked like an environment suit, or a HazMat suit, with a large clear face shield, and a hood and that sealed at the neck to the rest of the suit. I also saw EVA / space suits, one of these had huge black lenses set in a teardrop shaped, featureless helmet. I have seen this helmet before – in movies, on book covers – it's the blank, lidless, featureless face of my abductors.

I left as quietly as I entered, and did not encounter another Grey on my way to the maintenance door I'm now facing.

I'm not sure what I'm expecting, I hope it's more interesting than a broom closet.

I hope it's something that'll get me the eff out of here. I hope I can take a couple more of those torturing bastards out along the way.

I can't believe I haven't been caught. This better not be some kind of sick test. I haven't seen any more patrols or heard any more alarms. The first alarm shut off after I dropped back into the maintenance crawlspace after the sleeping bay. I think they're trying to draw me out. Give me a false sense of security, hope I screw up, and then catch me with my pants down...

The maintenance hall I'm now crouched in has such a tight radius I'm sure the door in front of me will bring me into the main room at the center of the ship. Not only that, I've been crawling over some serious cables, whatever it is at the center, is either generating or drawing hell of a lot of power, maybe both. It also seems like I'll find the

source of that odd vibration I first felt while in the pod room. It's been steadily growing the closer I move toward the center of the ship.

Judging by the tightness of the curve in the maintenance crawlspace, I'm guessing the diameter of the room on the other side of the porthole is no more than twenty-five feet or so. Facing the circular entrance I see there is an extra plate, with six glowing glyphs, I'm not going to bother telling you what color they are. This is mounted under the plate with the symbol I recognize as "open." I guess the lower plate is some kind of combination keypad that unlocks this final porthole.

Maybe they didn't lock it?

Maybe they don't generally keep it locked?

Maybe it's not even a lock to begin with? I mean, who other than the Greys would ever try to get in... you know, besides me? I ignore the keypad, and using Turnscrew, press the glyph I recognize. The glyphs on the keypad turn red, and start getting brighter as I draw my hand back. The glyph I pressed goes dark. Red light from the keypad keeps increasing in intensity. I'm concerned this red light flooding the maintenance crawlspace will give away my position. I know I'll be seen by anything looking in this general direction. It's getting so bright I have to squint to see anything.

Then I stop squinting... and worrying.

An arc of red electricity flicks out from the center of the keypad and slams me against the wall of the maintenance crawlspace, knocking me out cold. The last thing I felt was my right arm spasm, my fingers going crazy.

Chapter 9

So, I guess they *do* lock that maintenance crawlspace.

This is my first thought upon regaining consciousness.

I'm on my side on the floor of a circular room about twenty-five feet in diameter. I'm not sure what's happening, so I just move my eyes, hopefully nothing notices I'm conscious yet. My skull is vibrating in time with the powerful, pulsing, vibration, that's been the background music of my imprisonment. This must be the source of the vibration, this room, the room I was attempting to sneak into. The walls are lined with the vertical computer terminals I've seen in most of the other rooms, and strange ergonomic seats are positioned in front of what looks to be the three main terminals. Above all the terminals there is 360 degree monitor – definitely HD.

This is currently showing an orbiting view of Earth.

My second thought is - Fuck me.

I roll onto my back and find myself looking up at three aliens, though they're not yet looking at me. They're conversing in that strange language that sounds almost like sandpaper on a piece of oak. If I had to make a guess I would say they were arguing about something.

One of them is holding Turnscrew.

I don't need to tell you my third thought.

I must have dropped it when I was hit with that electric arc. This Grey almost seems more interested in the screwdriver than in me. I hate the way it's looking at Turnscrew, holding my talisman close, almost protectively, keeping it away from the other two. I decide that if I'm going to die, it won't be on my back, and it won't be while watching this *thing* grope Turnscrew, so I sit up. This startles them and I have a moments happiness before the bad-ass-alien-gun I've been looking for this whole time is shoved against my right temple. I decide to use their own arrogant tactics and ignore the Grey with the gun to my head, instead I hold my right hand out to the alien with Turnscrew.

"Thanks for grabbing that for me. I'd be pretty bummed if I lost it. You know, not many people – humans, I mean - have a trusty screwdriver that they've used to perforate ugly bastards much like yourself." I smile at the Grey son of a bitch. "I'll have that back now."

The alien rasps at me and makes as if to slap my hand away, but at the last second I grab its wrist in my new Kung-Fu Grip. I whip the alien as hard as I can to the right swinging it at the one holding the gun on me. As I sling the alien around, I throw myself back down on the floor to increase the strength of the swing, and to avoid getting dematerialized, or whatever.

The alien holding Turnscrew slams into the one holding the gun on me, and they go down in an angry rasping heap. I'm up on all fours in a split second, scrambling for the gun still in the Grey's hand. To its credit, it didn't fire wildly as it was being bowled over.

The one with Turnscrew was now empty handed and holding the wrist I crushed.

Scrambling forward I snag Turnscrew with my right hand as I close in on the one with the gun. It looks dazed, but recovering fast. I slam Turnscrew through its unarmored forearm, and into its leg, pinning it, effectively stopping the gun that was slowing coming around to meet my face. Its shrieking hurts my brain.

I was never much of a fighter, and I'm not in the best shape thanks to an unhealthy obsession with books and Romero's zombie films, but among these three creatures, and thanks to my new arm, I was General Maximus Decimus Meridius, and I'm very angry, and I'm about to throw my weight around.

Using my right hand, I grab for the gun, roughly breaking its previous owner's fingers, as I liberate it from the grey grasp. I hear the third one coming at me. Still on all fours, I steal a quick look over my right shoulder. It's almost on top of me, so I kick out, low and fierce, and I'm rewarded with the dried wood crack of whatever they have that passes for a knee joint. This is followed by another sandpaper shrill scream that tortures my brain for the second time in three seconds. As I turn back to the alien I took the gun from he punches me in the jaw with its one free hand – the prick! - knocking my glasses askew. I think we're both surprised that the blow dazes me, especially coming from a hand missing most of its fingers, and for a second we just stare at each other. I realize I know it - the stout one that cut my sleeve. Then I raise the bad-ass-alien-gun and shoot it in the face, burning a

hole the size of a pencil just above its right eye. The only thing it's staring at now is the ceiling.

I get to my feet as fast as I can to drop the third one, with the blown knee, for good. The most vicious kick I can manage, to the chin, does the job. From its mouth spurts an arc of thick blue blood, which seems to cross the room slowly, landing with a splatter across a bank of computer terminals. The Grey stops screaming over his blown knee and starts drooling blue blood onto the floor.

I fix my glasses.

The one whose wrist I turned into gravel has been watching me ghost its comrades with wide eyes, while frantically scrabbling at its belt.

It stops when it sees me watching back. It doesn't speak, or scream, or try to arm itself, as I reach down and rip loose what it was trying so desperately to free –

The handheld diagnostic device from the operating room.

Not good.

Keeping my eyes on him I reach over to pull Turnscrew free from the alien who still has a smoking hole in its head. It takes a couple of tries to free it from bone, and the armor that was supposed to protect its leg. I'm grateful that Turnscrew didn't snap when coming up against that extraterrestrial metal. When it comes loose, blue blood oozes like syrup from the gaping leg wound, and pools on the deck plates.

After once more wiping my talisman on my jeans to get rid of the thick blue blood clinging to it, I stick it in my belt before looking over the diagnostic device. Holding it with my left hand I move one of the analogue sticks – and my right hand makes a fist. I move the same stick in the opposite direction and my fingers spring open.

This is definitely not good.

They can control me - my arm, anyway. As I put the device into the right inside pocket of my fleece hoodie, I see the alien grinning at the scared expression on my face. I ignore it as best I can, though it chills my blood. I pull Turnscrew from my belt. I really, really want to take my anger out on this alien that is defiantly grinning up at me, but I know I can't control this ship.

I'm not even going to try.

I'll get swarmed by Greys before I figure anything out, and that's saying I can even figure anything out to begin with. So, I'm forced to try communication. I now recognize the last conscious - or living –

Grey in the room as the one who ran the diagnostics on my arm. That actually makes me feel better. Makes me think this one might be the only one around with the ability, and device, to control my arm. The thought of any one of those bastards having control at any time scares the hell out of me.

Ok, back to the problem at hand: Getting off of this ship, preferably somewhere with an atmosphere. I know the alien in the room with me is smart. Hopefully it's also observant, and has been watching our little blue planet for a while. It might even know some English, such as:

Chapter 10

“Land this thing and let me off, or I’m going to burn a hole in you, just like I did E.T. over there.”

This doesn’t seem to affect it as it just keeps staring at me, so I try my next trick, which is slamming my armored, cybernetic, fist into its little, squishy, face. I also decided to make my language a little simpler to compensate for dazing the little shit:

“Earth. Now.”

I raise my arm in a threatening backhand gesture and it flinches, raising its own hand in a kind of warding off gesture. I didn’t strike it, but repeated my instructions once again in an even tone:

“Earth... now.”

The alien struggles to its feet, wipes blood from its mouth with the back of its only working hand, and staggers over to the consol directly opposite from the only door in the room. I quickly take my eyes from the alien and look at the door. To the right there is the familiar plate with the opening glyph, and below that, a security keypad, just like the maintenance crawlspace where I got my lesson in alien security. I’m guessing there is a similar setup on the other side of the door. I raise the bad-ass-alien-gun and fire a couple rounds at the blank wall to the left, hoping to trash the glyph and keypad that would open it from the other side. When I pull the trigger the alien, looking at the computer, and not at me, lets out a startled squeal. I laugh at it while looking at the resulting damage. Sparks shoot angrily out of two, red, glowing holes. Molten metal slowly drips onto the deck plates and sparks as it cools. I throw a third blast in there for good measure. I hope that’ll slow them down, at least for a bit. Turning back, I see the Grey at the computer terminal shaking, and working on some kind of star chart. It manipulates it with his uninjured hand, and though it doesn’t feel like we’re moving, the view on the 360 degree monitor is changing. Earth seems to be getting bigger, and for the moment it looks like I’m without any pressing business.

I decide to push my luck on the communication front.

I move close and raise my right arm in front of the alien's face, it flinches, but I only flex my hand and move my fingers. I grab a chair close to us and squeeze the headrest. Making a twisting motion with my wrist I bend the thing completely out of shape.

"Why?" I ask, once again holding my hand up, waggling my fingers in front of its face. I'm getting kind of tired of repeating myself. "Are you guys really so arrogant that you thought no one would use this against you if they had *half* a chance?" "Not that I'm complaining – I mean, except for the possibility of being controlled here and there – it's been pretty useful." I almost said handy - ha. Ok, I'm sorry.

"At least you guys weren't wasting my time with anal probes, or collecting sperm for some type of hybrid program... You weren't, were you?" OK, so now I'm being fatuous, but hell, I've friggin earned the right to be a tool for a minute. Guess that minute's up.

I take – what I hope – is a menacing step forward, pushing my hand so close to its busted little face that it leans its head back so we don't touch.

I'm not sure if it understood my words, or maybe just my inflection combined with the pretzel making demonstration on the chair. Whatever the reason, I don't really care, it starts to move backwards, never turning its back to me or breaking eye contact, and stopping only when it reaches the next nearest terminal on the right. It types on the vertical surface and after a few moments I see it has queued up a recording.

I'm not sure exactly what it is I'm seeing at first. It looks like a huge production plant, way too big to be on this ship, full of humans, hundreds of us, maybe thousands, working on assembly lines. I recognize the purple light illuminating the factory. Though this light is very dim, I can see that every humans' right sleeve has been removed about mid-way up their bicep.

Humans walk about only with armed Grey escorts, their right arms limply, heavily, hanging at their sides. Those not working are driven like cattle, throughout the factory, to wherever it was they ate or slept. Those unfortunate enough to be on shift are forced into strangely shaped chairs with formed backs. The backs of the chairs are shaped so that a person can be seated with their left arm behind them. They're restrained by a large, formed metal plate, which locks in at the back of the chair once it's lowered down over them. It makes me think of a rollercoaster lap bar, the kind you pull down over yourself before the ride begins – except in this case it's done at gunpoint, and your entire

upper body is locked down. This huge restraint, in the rough shape of a human torso, seals the left arm in behind the person, never allowing for any movement. The right arm is also restrained to the elbow, preventing these slaves – for that is what they are – from ever reaching up with their cybernetic hands and tearing their way out.

Once a person has pulled down their restraints an alien comes over and locks them into place. Each right arm, free from the elbow down, is positioned over a table. A Grey then pulls out one of the diagnostic/control devices, and activates the slave's arm, giving that person the ability to move it once again.

Each human is seated at some phase of an assembly line. Their strong cybernetic hands, with bleeding fingers, are creating things for the Greys. Bending metal into shape, assembling armor, weapons, ship parts, sleeping pods, EVA suits... I see human children scurrying around, apparently too young for arm implants. They're moving the pieces being assembled from adult to adult along the line, or welding things here and there... or being beaten by Greys. Their little right sleeves are also cut short. It must be some kind of slave class symbolism.

Grey alien guards are positioned at intervals among the humans, armed with bad-ass-alien-guns similar to the one I was finally able to claim. They're being kept slaves by the very weapons they're assembling.

Too often I see people being shot, right there on the assembly floor. Their right arms are quickly removed and their bodies are thrown into furnaces – by other human slaves.

There is no way traveling across a universe or two to enslave a species could be easier or cheaper than building robots to do the work. I've seen the arms – hell, I have one – I know they have the technology. No, the reason is definitely not economic for these bastards; they're enjoying what they're doing.

I had to find out where this was happening, there is no way I can let this go.

"Where?!" I yelled, pointing at the footage still playing. "Where the hell is that?!" The alien was backing away, it could tell I was not pleased.

"Where?!" I yelled and jammed Turnscrew into the moving image – which immediately changed to a view of a slowly rotating reddish planet. I paused, my mind working furiously. I pushed Turnscrew into the image of the rotating planet and the view changed once again, this

time becoming a star system of several rotating planets. I could still recognize the one I was so intent on locating, but my concentration was broken when the alien, which had been quietly backing away from me, suddenly charged while bleating out its sandpaper gibberish. It lowers its head and slams into my stomach knocking the wind out of me. We land in a pile, with the alien on top, straddling me, and raining blow after blow on my head. Only half of them hurt, as the fist with the broken wrist just kind of flops at me, it's kind of funny in a way. I raise my armored arm in an effort to get something between us. I'm still holding the gun, but it suddenly drops into my face as my hand spasms.

For fuck's sake! Our fighting must be hitting the analogue sticks of the diagnostic/control device in my pocket. I can't do anything with this alien flailing around on top of me! I see its eyes widen as the gun falls from my hand. The only thing I can do is push, so I put my forearm to its chest and shove with my shoulder, not very hard, but enough to give me a good opening for Turnscrew, which I drive it into its right eye. Its remaining eye widens once again, shocked, before it falls backwards, off of me, and just lies there. I'm on my back again, but get quickly to my feet. My right arm is back under my control. My left one is coated in a lumpy, blue tinged, viscous fluid – the remains of the alien's eye – nice. I flick my hand, still holding Turnscrew, trying to fling off what I can. I don't have much luck with it.

I can't believe no others have tried to enter the room yet, I don't even hear any alarms, or see any flashing lights except for the computer terminals, and I don't hear the sound of anything running in this direction. If the alarms are working, and there is no reason they shouldn't be, they haven't been triggered. I'm betting on arrogance again. When those three dragged me in here I bet they cancelled any outstanding alerts.

This ship is small, I crawled through what I'm guessing is most of it in just a couple hours, and that's even with taking in a movie. I jog over to the door, I still don't hear anything coming my way.

Maybe they're running a skeleton crew?

I pick up the bad-ass-alien-gun and look at the 360 display; Earth takes up the entire front half of it. Unless it's just a recording to trick me, I'd say that we're definitely getting ready to reenter the atmosphere.

I check out the two Greys I took out before convincing the third to communicate. I'm pleased to recognize them. They're the ones that butchered my arm – tried to make me a slave.

Chapter 11

I walk over to the terminal where my last fight took place. The star system is still there, rotating. It reminds me of a screensaver. I lay the bad-ass-alien-gun on the floor, pull out my phone, and flip it open.

Still nothing. I guess I'll try the battery trick once more: remove it, wait, put the battery back in, hit the power... and it starts booting up! I can't believe it! It plays through the oh so familiar booting up screen, and plays the oh so familiar annoying jingle, you know, just in case you forget who your service provider is. Obviously no signal, but I don't give a shit. I trigger the camera button and start recording a video of my own, starting with the terminal showing the star system. Turn-screw still in my left hand, as gory as ever, I point to the planet that showed the sweat shop vid with my index finger - it zooms back to a close-up view of the reddish rotating planet. I push on the image of the planet. This image fades and the factory video starts up, thought it's different now... I feel sick as I realize it's not a recording, but a streaming, live, feed! I record it for about 2 minutes then turn my phone off.

I'm driven to bring with me as much evidence as possible. Anything I can show, to anyone who will listen, to make our planet as prepared as it can be. I run through a checklist: I have the video showing the planet and its star system; hopefully a match can be found on Earth in our own astronomical records. I have the bad-ass-alien-gun. I have the piece of armor I've been wearing. I have my arm - one of thousands like it - a way to brand us and a way to make us tools for these...tools. I'm thinking I need to bring a DNA sample back, besides my blood-soaked jeans, just to be thorough. I pick up the bad-ass-alien-gun, and walk over to the corpse of the stout Grey. A finger should do, and I can't help but feel a sense of justice as I blast the one remaining finger from the hand that cut my sleeve, marking me as a slave. I pick up this smoking finger and put it in the pocket of my jeans just as we finish our decent to Earth. I can feel its warmth against my leg.

Now to complete Step 3: Get the hell off this ship.

I was hoping something would happen automatically, but it looks like my luck in that department has run out. I look at the other terminals in the room. One looks to be monitoring a surgery, I can see another human, a young woman, being issued a slave arm – I have to fight down a wave of anger before continuing my inspection of the terminals. I can't do anything about it, I don't even know if it's happening now, or if it's a past recording. I can see what might be a time stamp in the corner, but there is no way I can read it. Just seeing that room makes me smell the antiseptic again.

Another terminal has a smaller view of earth with a strange grid overlaying it, breaking up the planet into unfamiliar regions.

Two other terminals show octagonal rooms, similar to the one I peeked into, lined with various suits. A terminal to the right of those shows the armory I was hoping to find, plenty of bad-ass-alien-guns, and some other things I would have no idea how to use.

I can't help but notice the lack of Greys. The only ones I see are in the operating room, and that might not even be real-time.

I finally see a terminal that I hope can be of use. It shows a cross-section of what can only be the ship I'm on. I walk over and push the image of the craft on the vertical display. It rotates to give me a top view. I push again and it rotates once more to show the underside. Each view has several glyphs superimposed over parts of the ship. On this particular view, there is a glyph in the exact center that I recognize. "Open."

"This can't be that easy..." I hit the symbol and hear something happening in the center of the room. The floor that I had been unconscious on, fought for my life on, and killed several aliens on is also one massive iris door, and it's opening. As the aperture gets wider the two alien corpses lying there fall out, and I hear them hit the ground after about a second. Screw the finger, that's what I call a DNA sample.

Now I hear some activity on the ship! I hear the sound of several pairs of feet hurrying toward the room I'm in. I walk to the edge of the iris, now completely open, and look down. We didn't land completely, we're hovering. There's no ramp, or tripod landing gear, no beam of light to travel down in, or any of the things I've read about or seen in movies. Luckily, it's only about eleven or twelve feet to the ground. I brace myself for the drop – and the door to the room explodes open, the metal of the iris door twisting inward at crazy angles. I feel a bit of shrapnel hit my right cheek, and warm blood trickles into my beard. A Grey is staring at me in surprise through the smoke of the blast. I

give him the v-sign with my left hand, the one holding Turnscrew, and burn a hole in him with the bad-ass-alien-gun before I jump.

I hit the ground hard, not knowing how to roll or whatever it was you did to lessen the force of impact, and the wind is knocked out of me – again – but I don't break anything. I look up, once more from my back and see five or six aliens looking down at me, I fire a few blasts in their direction, but don't hit any of them. Oh well, can't win 'em all. They quickly fall back and the floor starts to iris closed. I can see the craft plainly as they start to ascend back into space. It's circular, much like I had thought, but more of a cylinder than a saucer, which makes sense. It would have to be tall to accommodate the pod room that I started out in. The pod room – I can't forget those poor bastards. Row after row of pods, hundreds of prisoners, people – maybe even other alien species – being tortured, enslaved, murdered...

My brown study is interrupted as I look at the ship's hull. It's assembled from what appears to be several hundred plates of that purplish metal. Overlapping each other, and welded down, these metal plates give the craft a scaled look – much like their armor.

Around the bottom circumference of the ship was one huge track of lighting, what I'm guessing is its propulsion, and only because the light from this became more intense, and I felt a huge downward pressure as the ship started to lift off. The entire craft was studded with lights that constantly changed in intensity and slowly faded from white to purple to white again.

Approximately a third of the way up the ship was what looked like three or four spotlights. These spotlights were mounted on what appeared to be a rail system, and were free to move either vertically or horizontally along illuminated tracks that ran over the entire upper third of the scaled hull. As I watched, two of them moved into a position pointing directly at me. Thinking that (at least) one of these was probably the beam that chucked my car at me... then a boulder... then crushed me - I fire at it - three times. Two miss. One hits, does no damage that I can tell, but ricochets off the lens, back at me. I roll like crazy, coming up against one of the alien corpses. The blast hits a few yards away, and is gone, with nothing to show for it but a brief flame and a wisp of smoke. Funny – on the ship the blasts from the bad-ass-alien-gun had been blue; out here they were orange... maybe a change in atmosphere? If so, what the eff was I breathing on that ship?

Anyway, I stop shooting, and those beams never return fire.

After a few seconds the ship is out of sight.

I don't recognize where I am, but there is a road not too far from me. I stick Turnscrew into my belt and limp/jog over to a street sign. I don't recognize the street name, Gilbert, or even the design of the sign itself.

In the distance I see a city. As I turn back to collect the corpses, my two little DNA samples - which I am definitely not looking forward to carrying - I see a car coming down the road toward me. I hide the bad-ass-alien-gun in my hoodie and wave. The car pulls up beside me, and the driver's side window is rolled down, but when I bend over and lean on the door so I talk to the driver, I see he is on the other side of the car. I start to say something, but the driver, a guy about my own age, cuts me off before I can speak.

"Fucking 'ell, mate, you been in a row?"

Stunned by the car and the unexpected British accent, all I can say is "Yeah, well you..."

Then my brain kicks back in - "You should see the other guy."

Before I can ask him where I am, he cuts in again by saying "Shite, man, I'm sorry, where are me manners? Get in, and we can talk on the way."

"The way to where?" I ask, wishing for a second I had that accent.

"Well, we're going to the hospital, ain't we? I'll drop you at one when we get to London, man." He points to the city in the distance, the one I saw when looking for a street sign.

The Grey dropped me in another country - England - very close to London. Screw going back to Idaho, the anglophile in me couldn't have planned this better even if I did figure out how to fly the ship.

I don't need a hospital, but I could definitely use a strong black tea, and a meal. Glancing down at myself - I think maybe a wash and some clothes would be a good idea as well.

After that - back to the business of getting this evidence somewhere it will be seen by *everyone*, and then put to use - a plan of action. Waiting around, doing nothing, or pretending this never happened, will only lead to our inevitable slavery. I need to push this in the face of every person on our planet. So that means getting it out where the general public can easily find it, and see it, before some g-man d-bag disappears it - and me - away in some facility. This has *gotta* be seen world wide, so we're talking TV, (CNN, BBC - eff FOX News) the papers, YouTube and the rest of the internet - everything - if it's googled, I want it to say "Results 1 - 10 of about 52,500,000 for Abducting, Murderous, Slaving, Extraterrestrial, Pricks." No government cover-up, no information black-out, no Area 51, no men in black, no weather

balloons – no bullshit, no double-talk, no hiding. The governments of the world would be (unwitting?) participants in the slavery of our entire species were this evidence buried – so I need to move fast.

We are a defiant species, and definitely proud, we are not going to let some little grey bastards put a boot on our neck – not without a hell of a fight anyway... but we need to prepare, we need to know what's coming, and once our home world is safe, we need to see what we can do for the people in that factory – factories – I'm betting there isn't just the one...

"Yeah, thanks. London works, London definitely works." I said.

"Say man, would you mind popping the trunk – uh, boot?"

END?

Scott R. Davis

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