

Charles slammed both fists down hard on the navigation terminal in front of him.

“Dammit!”

The nearby Gray Buccaneers on the bridge of the Henry Morgan glanced at him but quickly returned their attention to their own terminals. They were still in orbit of Huran 4, waiting for Charles to give them a destination.

Sam stood from the captain’s chair and approached his old friend. Charles rubbed his eyes, but stopped when he saw Sam coming towards him.

“There’s no way to narrow down where this Babylon actually is,” Charles said.

Sam nodded patiently.

“So we start checking all of the listed locations and see what we can find out,” Sam said.

“I’m tired of chasing Isaac Falkinburg’s shadow!” Charles roared.

Fay had been lost in thought nearby but perked up and listened closely now. Something about watching the usually composed Charles Bryant let through this much emotion interested him greatly.

“The man murders my wife and it takes me over a decade to learn his name.”

Fay’s eyes went wide and his heart started beating faster. He knew that Charles’ wife had died but didn’t know that Isaac Falkinburg was involved.

“It feels like he’s slipping through my fingers,” Charles said, pausing for a moment before continuing. “I don’t know that I can last another ten years, Sam. If I don’t get him now...”

His voice trailed off. Sam placed his large hand on Charles’ shoulder. He looked down at his friend but didn’t know what to say. Ten years was a long time to hold onto the kind of hate and violent intent that Charles had held onto. Sam had seen it at its worse, when the darkness had almost fully consumed Charles. Now as he stared at him, he could see the beginnings of it again. Keeping the darkness in check was a battle that few men could win and after ten years Charles was on the verge of losing.

A beeping sounded out from one of the nearby terminals.

“Sir, we have an incoming... ship? I think?” the Buccaneer manning the terminal said.

Sam turned towards the man.

“It’s either a ship or its not.”

The Buccaneer punched some buttons to bring the unknown object up on the screen, but at first nothing was visible.

“It’s as big as a small moon,” the man said.

After a moment of staring into what looked to be blank space, Charles was finally able to grasp the edges of the shape. There was a huge chunk of space that had gone starless, blocked out by a gigantic black shape.

“That’s no moon,” Charles said as he stood.

Harbinger approached from the back of the bridge. He stared at the screen for several moments before breathing a single word.

“Babylon.”

Just as Charles had learned on Huran 4, Babylon was indeed a city. Just not one confined to ground. It was a sprawling black cityscape, with some buildings jutting up hundreds of feet. An entire city, attached to a thick steel base. Everything was sealed for space travel, but there were even roads running through the city. Charles could just imagine the site of the people inside now, and how the city would come to life on the surface once it landed on a planet.

On the bottom of the base were thousands of thrusters, carrying the capital of the Four Horsemen wherever it needed to be in the galaxy. The scale of what they had created was hard for even a mind as intelligent as Charles’ to fully grasp.

“It looks as if Isaac Falkinburg has come to you,” Sam said.

Fay was standing directly in front of the viewport staring at Babylon as it floated ominously in place.

“Astonishing,” he said quietly.

The sight had them all transfixed for many long moments but finally Charles tore his eyes away and moved into action.

“Harbinger and I will take the Justicebringer and dock with Babylon,” Charles said. “Once onboard we’ll find Isaac.”

“The Gray Buccaneers will do everything we can to buy you time,” Sam said. “We’ll try to do a little damage while we’re at it.”

“Why only damage it?” Fay asked. “Why not blow it out of the sky?”

Both Charles and Sam gave him a blank, almost sad look.

“This is the most advanced craft in the galaxy,” Charles said. “Even a skilled group such as the Gray Buccaneers has only the slimmest of chances of surviving against Babylon.”

Fay nodded grimly, then spun around fast.

“Wait a second!” he said. “You want me to stay here even though it’s probable that the Gray Buccaneers are going to be wiped out?”

Without giving even a second for anyone to respond Fay spoke again.

“Well that’s not happening. I’m coming with you Charles.”

“It’ll be us against thousands of the Four Horsemen followers and we’ll be on their home turf,” Charles said. “If you’re going to come there can be no hesitation, you’ll have to be ready to fight.”

Fay nodded slowly.

“I just want to get home alive,” he said. “I’ll do what I must to make that happen.”

Charles nodded his approval, then turned to face Sam.

“If you tell me goodbye then I’m afraid you’ll leave me no choice but to punch you square in the nose,” Sam said.

Charles smiled and the two men shook hands.

“Give ‘em hell,” Sam said.

“You too.”

Before leaving the bridge, Charles looked upon Babylon once more. Thinking of the time and resources that must’ve been needed to conceive of and build such a thing told him that the Four Horsemen were more powerful than he had realized. For the first time it occurred to him that ending Isaac may not mark the end of the Horsemen threat.

He turned and left the bridge, running down the halls of the Henry Morgan. They gathered their gear quickly and met up on the bridge of the Justicebringer. Fay and Harbinger watched nervously as Charles slid into the pilot’s chair, their memories of the last time they flew with him still fresh in their minds. He began punching in commands to power up the ship.

“My men will try to draw fire,” Sam’s voice boomed over the ship’s speakers. “You just focus on getting to Babylon.”

Fay and Harbinger took seats at two of the terminals on the bridge as Charles undocked from the Henry Morgan. He turned the ship until Babylon was due center on the viewport. He punched the throttle and soon eight Gray Buccaneers fighter ships and two destroyers fell into formation with them.

Babylon grew more ominous the closer they got. Charles was growing nervous, as he couldn't figure out why the cityship hadn't launched fighters to intercept them.

"It's doing something," Fay said, pointing up at the viewport.

A tiny point of blue light was visible, then it grew in intensity. A thick blue beam fired out, piercing one of the destroyers. The ship pitched forward lifelessly, a giant hole cut directly through its center. Charles had never seen any weapon so powerful.

"There's another one!" Fay said.

Another tiny point of blue light was charging.

"Evasive action!" Charles yelled out over the communications channel.

The Gray Buccaneers spread out as the blue beam fired. It was aimed at the other destroyer, but only grazed its hull. Two more blue lights appeared, then fired, again aiming for the destroyer.

"Why aren't they targeting the smaller ships?" Fay asked.

"Because the smaller ships aren't a threat to them," Charles said.

Now that they were within range the Gray Buccaneers opened fire on Babylon. Just as Charles had feared, the smaller ships weapons had no effect at all on the massive cityship.

"Babylon is only focusing on the larger ships," Charles said into the communications channel. "They're the only ones that can do any damage."

"Well, let's give them some more targets then," Sam said. "All Gray Buccaneers advance and engage!"

Charles pulled up the rear view on the viewport and watched as the hundreds of Buccaneer ships gathered into formations and started moving into range. It was an impressive sight, but he had his doubts that it would be enough to take down Babylon.

The smaller ships continued to be ignored. Now that the second destroyer that had been with them was disabled, Babylon fell silent. The rest of the Buccaneers

were pulling into firing range just as Charles neared the hull of Babylon. Above them five hundred points of blue light appeared.

“Evasive maneuvers!” Sam barked.

Five hundred of the thick blue beams fired out at once, tearing into the Gray Buccaneers fleet.

“My lord,” Charles said as he watched the full display of Babylon’s might.

He had to tear his gaze away and initiated docking procedures. The magnetic clamps on the bottom of the Justicebringer engaged, connecting it to the outside of Babylon. Charles leapt out of the pilot’s chair and rushed off the bridge. He made his way to the airlock. After confirming that an airtight seal had been created he opened the heavy steel door. He was greeted by the imposing black metal hull of Babylon.

Charles turned to get the cutting laser but Harbinger was already there with it in hand. He gave it to Charles who immediately flipped it on and set to cutting through the thick black metal. Harbinger and Fay watched as Charles gave the task his all. The specially designed laser could cut through regular hulls in under a minute, but ten minutes later Charles was covered in sweat and only a little more than halfway done.

Fay was shifting his weight from foot to foot. He had added a second holster to his gun belt and now had two pistols. He stared straight ahead, his anxious hands touching the guns.

“Don’t be nervous,” Harbinger said.

Fay gave him a withering gaze.

“Chances are I’m going to die in there.”

Harbinger stepped closer and smiled.

“Want my secret to survival?”

After studying the manbeast’s face for a moment, Fay nodded slowly.

“If you kill everyone else, I mean everyone you see, then there will be no one left alive to kill you,” Harbinger said.

Once Fay realized that was the extent of the advice he again nodded.

“Thanks,” he said, afraid that not saying it would anger the harbinger.

Harbinger smacked him hard on the arm.

“My pleasure. Oh...”

He paused and opened a nearby storage space along the wall. He reached inside and pulled out a large weapon.

“It also helps if you carry a plasma launcher,” Harbinger finished.

Once he realized that the giant man wasn’t joking, Fay adjusted the strap on the plasma launcher and slung it over his shoulder. The two fell silent and watched as Charles completed the cut. A huge circular chunk of steel fell into Babylon, opening up a hole for them to enter through. Charles moved backwards and deposited the laser, then began gathering his weapons.

Harbinger stepped to the hole and stuck his head inside and sniffed.

“The Conqueror is here,” he announced.

“Are any of the other horsemen on board?” Charles asked.

Harbinger sniffed again, then shook his head.

“No, just Isaac.”

Charles finished strapping on his weapons, then nodded at the other two. Harbinger smiled wide and pulled out his knife, then dove head first through the hole. Fay swallowed hard, pulled one of his pistols, and followed. Charles also got his pistol in hand and then entered into Babylon.



CREATED BY PHILLIP HALL

WRITTEN BY A.C. HALL & PHILLIP HALL

EPISODE ELEVEN – “BABYLON”

Sam gripped the arms of the captain’s chair as a laser blast rocked the Henry Morgan.

“Damage report!” he barked.

“Minimal sir, it was a glancing blow.”

He watched the assault against Babylon unfolding on the viewport and gritted his teeth. Several of his ships had been destroyed and many more were badly damaged.

“Get in there and tow that cruiser to a safe range!” he yelled.

The larger ships of the Gray Buccaneers were landing some good hits on Babylon, but even their most powerful weapons didn't seem to do much damage. It didn't help that they had to spend most of their time taking evasive action instead of attacking.

“Sir, the Maxwell is reporting a loss of power to their weapons grid.”

“Get out of here, Maxwell!” Sam ordered.

He almost flinched as twenty of the blue beams arced right above his ship, narrowly missing what would've been a destructive shot.

“I hope you're moving fast in there, Charles,” Sam muttered.

An alarm blared at the radar terminal but the Gray Buccaneer stationed there stared at his screen dumbly.

“What is it?” Sam asked as he stood up and walked towards the man.

“Um, incoming ships sir, Dreadnought class, ten of them.”

Sam looked up at the viewport. Ten Dreadnoughts were more than enough to swing the fight all the way in favor of the Four Horsemen and likely spell defeat for the Buccaneers. He scanned space but saw no signs of the ships.

“Where are they?” Sam asked.

“Behind us, sir!”

Sam looked down at the radar and confirmed that the deadly ships were in fact closing fast on their rear. He began rushing through scenarios in his mind, trying to think of a single plan that didn't end up with the Gray Buccaneers being wiped out.

“Need a hand?” a voice crackled over the communications channel.

“Sean?!” Sam yelled out.

“Penelope and I thought you could use some heavy firepower,” Sean answered.

Sam laughed, feeling greatly relieved.

“Where in the hell did you get ten Dreadnoughts?”

Sam returned to the captain's chair and punched in a command. The rear view came onto the viewport, showing the ten Dreadnoughts. The ships were among the mightiest ever built, but were so expensive that the Galactic Council rarely approved new ones to be manufactured for the military anymore.

"Orion Industries is a big part of the Dreadnought program," Sean said. "With my dad gone the company's in chaos and nobody quite knew how to stop the CEO's grieving son from borrowing some of the company property."

Sean paused for a moment, then continued.

"Listen, these things are on auto-pilot. Can you get some guys over here to take command?"

"I'm dispatching crews now," Sam said.

"Where's the Professor?" Sean asked.

Sam's eyes locked on Babylon as he answered.

"He's onboard that monstrosity."

There was a moment of silence before Sean responded.

"Send a crew to my Dreadnought as well. Penelope and I are going to go see if Professor Bryant needs any help."

"That's the kind of thing Charles would try to talk you out of, kid," Sam said. "But I'm not Charles. I'll tell my guys that you and Penelope will be taking their ship once they dock with you."

"Thanks, Sam."

"Go back him up, kid."



Fay fumbled with his pistol as he tried to reload it as fast as he could. He dropped the replacement clip but picked it up quickly, hoping Charles hadn't noticed. He slammed it into place and then leaned back out around the corner.

"There's too many of them!" Fay shouted as he began squeezing the trigger.

They found that there were no hallways in Babylon. It truly was more city than ship, and they were pitched in a desperate battle on one of the darkened streets. When planetside, the Four Horsemen inhabited the surface of Babylon, but during spaceflight they all took residence here, in the undercity.

Charles shot twice, then paused to answer Fay.

“Just keep your head down and keep shooting.”

It was impossible to know where they were, what each building was for, and where Isaac may be. For now they stayed focused on repelling the wave of Horsemen soldiers who were rushing them from the far end of the street. Charles fired four more times, taking down three of the soldiers, before pulling back around the corner and reloading his own pistol.

He and Fay were on opposite sides of the street, each using a building for cover. Charles stared across to see how Gordon was faring and noticed the door near him that led into the building.

“Have you tried that door?” Charles yelled.

Fay stopped shooting and retreated around the corner before answering. He looked at the door, then at Charles.

“Should I?”

“Yes. Go in and see if there’s a computer that may be able to give us a map of this place.”

Fay pulled on the door and it opened. He stepped inside slowly, gun held at the ready. Charles could see through the windows and everything looked clear. Fay was in what constituted the basement of the building. There was a set of stairs that led up to the building which jutted out from the base of Babylon, but Fay found that like the other buildings they had checked, the hatch leading to the higher floors was locked. Seeing no computers, Fay returned to the street and continued firing upon the Horsemen soldiers who were inching ever closer.

“This isn’t good,” Charles said as he watched down the street.

The soldiers had been coming from around a corner at the far end of the street, but now there were scores more sprinting around it to join the fight. Charles immediately starting thinking about a tactical retreat, as there were now more than forty Horsemen soldiers coming towards them.

Then he heard the screams.

These new combatants weren’t rushing forward to join the fight, they were running away from something. They trampled into the back of their comrades with little care, clawing and fighting to get past them and away from the man that was chasing them.

Charles smiled as he saw Harbinger come into view behind the men. He held his bloodied knife in one hand and a rifle in the other. The street had broken down into complete pandemonium. Harbinger was driving the panicked soldiers towards Charles and Fay like a herd of cattle.

Both Fay and Charles stepped out into the open and began firing unceasingly. Each bullet brought down another of the Horsemen soldiers who had all but abandoned any pretense of fighting back and were now just fleeing for their lives.

“I’M GONNA EAT YOUR SOULS!” Harbinger screamed as he tore into the group of soldiers from behind.

There were less than ten soldiers left by the time they reached Charles and Fay. These men were so panic stricken that they had thrown down their weapons and were in a dead sprint. Charles and Fay stopped firing and let these last few men run past. Harbinger stopped as well, shaking his head and laughing as he watched the men rush away.

“I love it when they run,” he chuckled.

Charles reloaded his gun, then gave Harbinger a sideways glance.

“You’re going to eat their souls?” Charles asked.

Harbinger laughed.

“That’s a good one, huh? I’m pretty sure one of those guys peed his pants even.”

Charles just shook his head.

“Let’s keep moving.”

They made their way down the street, then turned the corner onto another. Once they were halfway down it, Charles stopped and turned towards Harbinger.

“Any clue where Isaac may be?” he asked.

Harbinger sniffed the air.

“We’re getting closer,” Harbinger answered. “But it’s a little hard to pinpoint his exact location without knowing the layout of this place.

Charles frowned.

“We need to find a computer,” he said.

Harbinger pointed to a large building at the end of the street.

“I saw terminals in there,” Harbinger said. “I looked inside when I was chasing those soldiers.”

“Okay, let’s go,” Charles said.

The three of them moved down the street. They hugged the buildings and Charles’ eyes constantly jumped around, noting all of the different places to find cover should they need it. They were fifty feet from the entrance to the building when they heard the sound of an engine.

“Get down!” Charles yelled.

He dove into an alleyway, followed closely by Harbinger as a vehicle came roaring around the corner. It was a hover vehicle with a large machine gun mount and two smaller machine gun mounts on platforms that protruded from each side. There were soldiers manning each gun and they opened fire.

Fay was lagging behind and was just reaching the safety of the alley. The first barrage of bullets swept across the road, chewing up the surface as the three guns tracked Fay. He dove, but let loose an ear piercing scream. When Charles looked down at him he could already see the blood.

“Gordon!” Charles yelled as he knelt.

Fay was lying on his stomach and Charles rolled him over onto his back. Harbinger returned fire on the vehicle with his rifle, trying to keep them from advancing.

“Gordon, look at me,” Charles said. “Where are you hit?”

“They shot me, Charles!”

His eyes were wide with panic and his face was covered in sweat.

“Am I going to die, Charles?”

Charles saw it then. Blood soaking through the sleeve of Fay’s shirt. He ripped the shirt open and saw two ragged bullet holes in Fay’s arm. As he continued to look over the fallen professor he also saw that he had been shot in the leg in two different places.

“No, you’re not going to die, Gordon.”

Charles tore the sleeve off of Fay’s shirt and then used it to tie a tourniquet on his arm. Gordon screamed out in pain when he tightened it.

“I could use some help here!” Harbinger yelled.

The hover craft was inching closer, trying to get a clear shot down into the alley. Charles stood up, wiped the blood from his hands and then pulled his pistol.

He leaned out and fired twice at the vehicle, but quickly had to jump back when all three machine guns opened fire again.

“Even I’m not fast enough to get to them before they take me down with those machineguns,” Harbinger said.

Charles nodded and looked down the alleyway, wondering if it might be time for them to give up on getting into the room with the terminals.

“Plasma launcher,” Fay said weakly.

They both looked down at him to see him holding the massive weapon. Harbinger smiled wide.

“I told you!” Harbinger said with a laugh. “You can never go wrong bringing a plasma launcher!”

Charles took the weapon and inspected it.

“It’s got one shot and it won’t be enough to take out the vehicle,” Charles said.

Harbinger dropped his rifle and pulled out his knife.

“You just get them rattled,” Harbinger said. “I’ll do the rest.”

The two men shared a glance, then Charles nodded. He got the plasma launcher onto his shoulder and ready to fire, then looked up at Harbinger.

“Go,” Charles said.

Harbinger sprinted out into the street. The machine guns came to life almost instantly. Their operators were crack shots and barely missed Harbinger. Within seconds their aim would be properly adjusted and they’d cut him down, but seconds were all that Charles needed.

With the focus on Harbinger he stepped out of the alley and aimed carefully. He squeezed the heavy trigger and the rocket blazed a trail of smoke down the street. His aim was true and it impacted the front of the vehicle, a brilliant blue explosion of plasma rising up and sending the vehicle backwards and setting it into an awkward spin.

Harbinger changed direction immediately and rushed the vehicle. One of the side gunners fell off into the street. Harbinger crushed his skull underfoot, then leapt into the air. Through the smoke from the impact he appeared, knife at the ready. Harbinger cut through the neck of the other side gunner and then moved quickly towards the main gunner. The man opened his mouth to say something but never got the chance as the large blade was shoved into his chest.

The only soldier left was the driver, who sat at the far back of the vehicle. He released the steering column and raised a pistol. Harbinger was fast, but as he dove for the man he knew he wasn't going to reach him in time.

A single shot sounded out from the alley and the driver's head blew open. Harbinger landed on his belly, then turned to see Charles, rifle in hand, at the front of the alley. Harbinger nodded his thanks and Charles returned the gesture.

"Okay Gordon, we have to move," Charles said as he returned his attention to the wounded man.

Fay shook his head.

"I can't stand up, not yet. Just give me a few more minutes to catch my breath."

Harbinger jogged back into the alley.

"There are more soldiers headed this way," he said. "If we're going to check out those terminals we need to do it quick."

Charles looked out at the street, then back at Fay.

"Can you watch the rear?" Charles asked. "If we drag you to the front of the alley, can you cover us in case anyone comes from behind?"

Fay weakly nodded. Charles didn't like the plan but felt like there was no choice. Fay cried out as they dragged him into position. His arm was in so much pain that he could barely hold his pistol, so he instead rested it on his leg and pointed it down the street.

"You're coming right back, right?" Fay asked.

Charles did his best to smile.

"Of course. If anyone comes, shoot at them and it'll alert us."

Fay nodded his understanding and Charles and Harbinger moved back onto the street. The building in question was dark inside, but the glow of many terminals could be seen through the small window on the door. There was a simple keypad keeping the door locked and Charles began keying in code possibilities as fast as he could.

Harbinger was sniffing the air, turning slowly until his back was to the door.

"Company," he said.

He sniffed one last time, then whirled around just as Charles was punching in the last digit of a code.

“Wait!” Harbinger yelled.

The door slid open to reveal ten heavily armored Four Horsemen shock troopers. They were standing in a line at the back of the room, almost invisible against the black steel wall, each of them with their rifle in hand and pointed at the door.

Charles froze, but Harbinger did not. As the shock troopers opened fire, Harbinger shoved Charles hard, knocking him to the ground and away from the door. Harbinger then dove into the room, slamming the interior keypad with his fist. Charles leapt back to his feet just as the door slid shut. He could hear screams and rifle’s being fired as he punched in the code again. The keypad wasn’t working now. He slammed his fist on the door. All he could see through the small window was a seething darkness and the muzzle flashes from rifles.

Gunfire erupted behind him and Charles dove to the ground as bullets sailed right past. Another of the hover vehicles was zipping down the street, the machine guns trained on Charles. He rolled as fast as he could, the gunfire ripping into the ground where he had just been. Charles got to his feet and ran around the corner, the bullets mere inches away from claiming his life.

“Charles!” Fay screamed. “Don’t let them take me!”

Peeking back around the corner, Charles saw that one of the gunners had dismounted and was dragging Fay back towards the vehicle. Charles took a step forward but immediately had to jump back as the machine guns opened up on him.

Charles looked over at the room Harbinger was inside, locked in a battle that may’ve been too much even for him to win. He then thought about Fay and desperately tried to piece together a way to save him.

The hover vehicle came speeding around the corner, making Charles’ decision for him. He could fight and die or flee and regroup. Bullets whizzed past him as he sprinted across the street and into another alleyway. He took turn after turn, alley after alley, until he was completely lost and sure that he hadn’t been followed. The sound of soldiers talking nearby caught his attention and he tried the door on the next building he passed. It opened and he rushed inside and ducked just as a patrol of soldiers went running past on the street.

Charles sat in the darkness for several minutes, catching his breath and allowing himself a chance to refocus his mind. He checked the ammunition in his

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pistol, and then in his rifle. When his breathing was even and his mind prepared, he put his ear to the door. Hearing no one on the other side he pressed the key to open it. Standing directly outside was Harbinger.

“You really are unkillable aren’t y...”

Charles’ voice trailed off. Harbinger was covered in blood, some of it his own, much of it not. But that wasn’t what had moved Charles to silence. The manbeast had his knife in hand but was shaking, a look of intense pain on his face, like he was fighting against something terrible.

Like he was once again under the direct control of the Conqueror.

“For what it’s worth,” Harbinger said, “I’m sorry.”

He dove for Charles, knife raised for a killing blow.

End of Episode 11

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