

Charles dropped flat to the floor. As Harbinger went sailing over him he slashed downwards. The blade edge ran along Charles' spine but didn't pierce through the carbon stitching.

Rolling over onto his back, Charles pulled his pistol. Harbinger landed on his feet and whirled around and charged. Charles fired just as Harbinger was upon him. The manbeast kicked the gun as it discharged. The bullet caught him in the chest but his savage kick sent the weapon flying from Charles' hand. It sailed through the open door and clattered to a stop in the middle of the street.

With lightning quick speed Harbinger thrust down with his knife. Charles rolled out of the way and kicked Harbinger in the wrist. His grip on the knife didn't waver. Charles sprang to his feet. He knew that his chances of surviving the fight were diminished in such a confined space. Charles began the movements of a front kick, then broke it off and ran for the open door. He had hoped the maneuver would trick his opponent but Harbinger reached the door first and hit the keypad, causing it to close.

"Don't forget about the bracelets," Harbinger said. "Anytime you concentrate on something that hard I can hear your thoughts."

There was little time to appreciate the tip as Harbinger launched into a frenzied attack. His mastery of the blade was second to none and Charles leapt backwards to avoid having his throat cut. Harbinger was upon him again with another swipe. Charles dove into a forward roll under the knife but as soon as he came back to his feet Harbinger was within striking distance again. This time Charles had no chance of avoidance. He was forced to protect himself by throwing up his arm. The blade dug deep into it.

Charles leapt back, wanting to create some separation between himself and his foe. He could feel warm blood running down his arm and his eyes focused on Harbinger's knife. As long as it remained in the fight Charles knew he didn't stand a chance.

Knowing it was a risk, Charles pulled his black rifle off of his back. Harbinger charged, sensing the opening. He drove the knife forward with murderous intentions but Charles leapt out of the way, barely avoiding the killing blow.

Charles brought the rifle up to aim at Harbinger's head and pulled the trigger. Harbinger ducked quickly, just dipping out of the way of the bullet. Charles knew

the shot wouldn't connect, but now quickly brought the rifle swinging downwards. He slammed the butte into Harbinger's face, then used both hands to drive the gun down onto his wrist. Harbinger grunted with pain but even after such a blow his grip on the knife never wavered.

Harbinger rose to his feet, charging forward with the knife. Charles used the rifle to knock the blade off course, then again to deflect a second thrust. He continued to parry with the barrel of the rifle as he backed around the room. Growing tired of the exchange, Harbinger faked another thrust, but when Charles stuck out the rifle he turned the blade and slashed it through the outstretched weapon. The gun was cut clean in two, a jagged metal stump was all that remained of the barrel.

Charles shoved the ruined gun forward, driving the jagged end of it into an existing bullet hole in Harbinger's chest. Harbinger howled as he grabbed the weapon and wrenched it away, then threw it against the wall with such force that it broke into pieces.

Recalling what Harbinger had said moments before, Charles focused all of his thoughts onto his next attack. He concentrated hard on it, a snap kick to Harbinger's right knee. The probable defense would be a low stab with the knife.

At the first movement of the kick Harbinger immediately started a low stabbing motion. Charles broke off the attack and seized Harbinger's wrist. He was pleased that his tactic of focusing on one attack but doing another had worked but Charles knew this was the one time his opponent would fall for it and he had to make it count. He dug his fingernails into Harbinger's wrist and twisted as hard as he could, fighting with all of his strength to get him to drop the knife. It was his best chance of disarming his opponent, but Harbinger was simply too strong.

Harbinger roared and swung his arm upwards as hard as he could, bringing Charles off of his feet. Digging his fingernails in deeper, Charles was barely able to keep his grip. Harbinger repeated the move, flailing his arm violently over his head. Again Charles left his feet, but this time he couldn't hold on. He was flung across the room, crashing through a small desk.

Charles shakily got to his feet. Harbinger charged forward, knife raised high. Even though he couldn't focus on it too hard for fear of Harbinger reading his

thoughts, Charles came to a grim decision. He stood up tall, his eyes locked on the knife. Harbinger drove it forward with all of his might right at Charles' chest.

Knowing that the slightest miscalculation meant death, Charles waited until the last moment before dropping his left shoulder down and inching to his right. It was too late for Harbinger to adjust the aim of the knife, so he drove it forward, plunging it right where Charles had wanted him too. The pain was excruciating as the large blade ripped into his body. Harbinger's strength was incredible and he forced the knife all the way through until the tip was sticking out of Charles' back.

The blade had sunk directly into the small space between Charles' collarbone and shoulder blade. It dug into each of the bones, sending fiery waves of pain pulsing through every part of Charles. But he had accomplished his goal, as the knife was now trapped between the two bones.

Harbinger still held the handle of the knife, but found it stuck when he attempted to pull it back out. Charles gritted his teeth and then dropped to the floor. He screamed out in pain but by using his body weight he was able to rip the blade from Harbinger's hand.

The pain was debilitating and the only thing Charles could do was get to his hands and knees and attempt to crawl away. Harbinger grabbed him with both hands and lifted him up into the air. Charles felt like a small child as Harbinger held him over his head. The manbeast flung him across the room towards a large black table. The table splintered beneath Charles as he went through it, thudding painfully into the floor below. The impact caused the knife to move and Charles screamed out in pain.

Knowing that staying on the ground was death, Charles got to his feet. He was facing the door, his back to Harbinger, and he was swaying wildly, barely able to keep his balance. He heard his opponent running towards him but all Charles could do was tense up and prepare for the impact.

Harbinger speared him in the lower back but kept running, picking Charles up. He continued forward, straight into the closed door. The two of them crashed through it, ripping the metal door off and sending them tumbling into the street. Charles had taken the brunt of the blow and rolled to a stop. He was barely conscious. The savage impact combined with the waves of pain emanating from his shoulder was almost too much and he could feel himself fading.

A contingent of Horsemen soldiers were gathered nearby and all of them rushed forward to see what was going on. There were ten of them and the one in the lead smiled as he saw Charles lying helpless in the street.

“The Conqueror will reward me handsomely for killing this nuisance,” the man said.

None of them paid any attention to Harbinger as he rose to his feet. They viewed him as little more than the dog of the Conqueror, able to do only what his master told him. Harbinger smiled, knowing this was true, but also knowing that right now all his master was telling him was to kill Charles Bryant. He wasn't telling him not to kill anyone else in the process.

The horsemen soldier placed his rifle against Charles' head and laughed as he started to squeeze the trigger. He didn't see Harbinger sailing through the air towards him until it was far too late. The manbeast crashed down on him with all of his weight, crushing him to death. The remaining nine soldiers reacted far too slowly, confused over seeing Harbinger kill their commander. He was among them in a flash, breaking arms and necks. He rolled as one of them shot at him. As he got back to his feet he tore the rifle away from the soldier and then swung it as hard as he could at the man's head, shattering the gun and the soldier's skull.

Charles battled back unconsciousness and tried to regroup, tried to develop some sort of a strategy. His body screamed out for him to stay down but he pushed himself up onto his hands and knees. He shook as he slowly got to his feet and it took a moment for him to steady himself once there. Harbinger was in the middle of killing the last two soldiers and Charles ran towards him. Striking while his opponent was distracted was an advantage he couldn't pass up.

Once he neared Harbinger, Charles jumped forward and extended both feet into a dropkick. He connected with Harbinger's knee. There was a loud pop and Harbinger dropped to the street, immediately gripping his knee with both hands. Charles slid to a stop. His vision flashed red momentarily as the knife touched against the ground and moved, but when it cleared he saw a glorious sight just ten feet away. His pistol, lying in the middle of the street.

He stood as fast as his ravaged body would allow and ran towards it. Charles heard heavy footfalls behind him and didn't need to look back to know that the Harbinger was back on his feet and in hot pursuit. He leaned down and scooped it

up just as Harbinger overtook him. The giant man used his momentum to grab the back of Charles' shirt and then throw him forward. Charles sailed into a nearby alleyway, crashing to the ground and rolling to a painful stop.

Again the pain threatened to overwhelm him, but Charles bit the inside of his mouth hard, willing himself to stay conscious. He briefly considered rolling onto his back and shooting at Harbinger but a distant sound caught his attention. Careful not to focus too hard and tip his new plan to Harbinger, Charles pushed himself to his feet and took off running down the alley.

Even with his injured knee, Harbinger was still faster than Charles and he was gaining on him fast. The distant whirring noise was growing louder and Charles pushed himself, knowing that timing was everything. Harbinger was almost upon him as they neared the end of the alley where it opened up onto the next street. Harbinger's arms were outstretched, inches away from grasping Charles.

Charles abruptly collapsed to the ground. Harbinger was running much too fast to immediately respond and Charles kicked at him, knocking him off balance and sending him stumbling out into the middle of the street. Harbinger looked up just as one of the hover vehicles slammed into him. It had been moving too quickly to stop and he was sent flying into the air from the impact, flipping awkwardly before hitting a nearby building. He crashed to the ground and lay motionless.

The vehicle powered down as it came to a stop. The three machine gunners leapt down and approached Harbinger.

"You're dead Vinnie, you just ran over the Conqueror's harbinger!" one of them yelled.

The driver was still seated on the vehicle and covered his face with his hands. The three gunners stared down at Harbinger's bloodied form and one of them prodded at him. None of them saw Charles stumble into the street and climb onto the vehicle. He approached the main machine gun and swung it around to aim at the three men. The weapon roared to life as he pulled the trigger. He swept it across the three of them, killing them quickly. The driver yelled out and reached for his pistol but Charles swung the mounted machine gun all the way around to point at him.

"Drive," he said.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Harbinger stirring.

“Drive!” Charles yelled.

The driver also noticed that Harbinger was starting to get up.

“Oh no,” the driver said.

“He’ll kill you and me,” Charles said. “Get us out of here!”

Finally the driver nodded and powered up the vehicle. As he pressed the accelerator Harbinger got to his feet. Charles couldn’t believe that he was up, and was even more surprised when Harbinger broke into a dead sprint after the fleeing vehicle.

The nervous driver clipped the side of a building as he tried to take a corner too quickly. The vehicle pitched wildly and slowed. Charles lost his balance and had to hold on for dear life to the mounted machine gun. It spun around, facing him forward, but he was able to stay on the vehicle and on his feet. Once he regained his full balance he glanced behind them.

Harbinger was two steps away and leapt into the air. Blood was pouring down his face from a wound on his forehead and he looked like a demon, come to drag Charles down to hell.

Charles pulled his pistol but Harbinger crashed into him before he could bring it up. Harbinger pinned him down, his massive weight leaving Charles no hope of escaping. With one hand Harbinger held Charles’ gun hand down and he wrapped the other around Charles’ throat.

With every bit of mental energy he had left Charles tried to will Harbinger to stop.

“Fight him!” Charles wheezed.

“I have been, Charles, this whole time I have been,” Harbinger responded.

“There’s no hope.”

He squeezed harder and already Charles felt a horrific burning in his lungs. He knew he wasn’t going to last long. He tried to get his arm free but it was pointless, he was nowhere near strong enough to do it. But he did still have the gun in his hand. Just because he couldn’t aim it at Harbinger didn’t mean he couldn’t aim it at something else.

“Do it,” Harbinger said, sensing Charles’ thoughts.

Charles adjusted the pistol and then squeezed the trigger, shooting the driver in the head. The man slumped onto the steering column and the hover vehicle turned

sharply. Its front edge dipped too low, digging into the street, and the vehicle flipped up into the air.

Suddenly Charles found himself flying through the air. He could hear the horrific wreck but couldn't tell which way was up or down as he spiraled and twisted. He landed in the street on his back and went into a tumble that sent wave after wave of hellish pain arcing through his body. Every movement was agony, intensified a hundred fold thanks to the large knife still embedded through his shoulder.

He slid to a stop, unaware of exactly where he was or how far he had been thrown. It took him several minutes before he was finally able to stand up. Looking down the street he saw that he had been thrown almost fifty feet. The hover vehicle was turned upside down and below it was Harbinger.

Charles slowly made his way to the wreck, each step hurting more than the last. The vehicle was lying across Harbinger's legs, pinning him to the street. The manbeast was breathing, his face a crimson mask. He opened his eyes as Charles approached.

"Kill me Charles," Harbinger said. "It's the only way to keep your word."

Staring down at the man, Charles felt truly sorry for everything that had happened to Harbinger.

"You said that you would free me," Harbinger pleaded. "Killing me is your only way to do that now."

Charles slowly shook his head.

"I'm not going to kill you."

He kicked Harbinger as hard as he could in the temple, knocking him unconscious. Charles then took off the three control bracelets that he wore. He knelt down and slid them onto Harbinger's wrist.

"But I am going to set you free."

As the bracelets snapped into place Harbinger shook, almost as if a shock was running through him. Once it passed he resumed breathing normally, still unconscious.

Charles located his pistol nearby and picked it up, then slowly shuffled away before any soldiers showed up to investigate the wreck.



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WRITTEN BY A.C. HALL & PHILLIP HALL

EPISODE TWELVE – “THE SOUL OF A MAN”

Sean dropped the cutting laser and wiped the sweat from his face.

“Are we through?” Penelope asked.

He nodded and then stooped low as he stepped through the hole into the undercity of Babylon. They had docked right by the Justicebringer but saw no sign of Charles, Fay or Harbinger as they emerged onto the empty street. Sean turned back to help Penelope through the hole and saw that she was carrying a large machine gun.

“Where’d you get that?” he asked.

“It was on the ship.”

He looked at the heavy duty frame of the weapon, then at her.

“Are you sure you want to carry that thing around?”

Before she could answer two Horsemen soldiers jogged around the corner. Neither of them were prepared for a fight and as they went for their guns Penelope opened fire. After a short burst they were both dead and she released the trigger.

“I’m quite sure,” she answered with a smile.

Sean laughed as he led them down the street. He tried his communicator several times, but got only silence in return. There were some dead Horsemen soldiers further down the street and they moved in that direction. Sean knelt at the bodies and checked them.

“They’ve been dead a while,” he said. “The Professor could be anywhere at this point.”

As he got back to his feet the cityship shook. Penelope looked at him questioningly and Sean smiled.

“Sam’s got the Dreadnoughts into position.”

“Are the Dreadnoughts powerful enough to take down Babylon?” Penelope asked.

Sean thought about this as he looked up and down the street.

“It’s hard to say. They can damage it, but I don’t know that they could completely destroy it.”

He paused as Babylon shook again.

“Still, we should find the Professor as fast as we can.”

Penelope nodded her approval and the two of them continued on to the end of the street. Sean paused at the corner and peered around. The sound of a door opening nearby caused him to pull back. A single set of footsteps could be heard coming towards them and Sean put his pistol away and took a deep breath.

A Horsemen soldier stepped around the corner. He froze and his eyes went wide as he saw Sean and Penelope. Sean kned the man hard in the stomach, causing him to double over. He followed that up with a second knee, this one directly to the man’s face. The soldier pitched over backwards, unconscious.

Sean grabbed the man by the legs and pulled him around the corner and out of sight. He started checking him for any type of computer or information pad.

“Sneak around the corner and see what’s in the building he just came out of,” Sean said.

Penelope did as she was asked and crept around the corner. She moved quietly to the door the man had exited and peered in the small window on it. There were three soldiers inside, each of them seated at a computer terminal. She backed away and then rejoined Sean and told him what she saw.

“Let’s go introduce ourselves,” Sean said.

They made their way back to the door.

“Ready?” Sean whispered.

Penelope nodded. Sean hit the keypad and the door slid open. They rushed inside. The men turned to see them and went for their weapons. Penelope fired into the ceiling. The men froze.

“We don’t want to kill any of you but we will if we have to,” Sean said. “Drop your weapons to the floor, then slowly stand up and move to the back of the room.”

They dropped their rifles and pistols then stood from their terminals, glaring at the intruders. Sean and Penelope kept their guns trained on the men, watching them closely as they shuffled to the back of the room.

“Now have a seat with your backs against the wall,” Sean ordered.

The first two men sat but the third stood, a defiant look on his face.

“The Conqueror will have your heads for this,” the man said.

“Maybe,” Sean answered. “But if you don’t take a seat you’re a dead man.”

The man began to sit, but then pulled a small pistol from his boot and raising it with lightning fast speed. Sean fired, hitting the man in the head and killing him. He sighed heavily as the soldier’s body collapsed to the floor, wishing that the man had just done as he was told.

Penelope moved to the center of the room and kept her machine gun trained on the two remaining soldiers while Sean took a seat at one of the terminals. The screen flickered momentarily as Babylon shook, taking another barrage from one of the Dreadnoughts. Sean made his way through several menus, searching for any sort of map. Finally he found one and spent several minutes studying it. He kept looking until he was positive he memorized the route, then stood.

“Got it?” Penelope asked.

“There are four towers in the center of town, one for each of the Horsemen.”

Sean gathered up the Horsemen soldier’s weapons and he and Penelope backed out of the building. Once they were outside he shot the keypad, shorting it out and locking the men inside. He then tossed their weapons to the street and they jogged away towards the center of town.

He guided them down the street, then up another. When they took the next corner they came face to face with a six man patrol. Sean reacted quickest, discharging his pistol and diving forward. He shot down two of the soldiers and tackled a third to the ground. Penelope gunned down the other three while Sean got the final soldier into a choke hold. He held it until the man fell unconscious, then got back to his feet.

“Nice work,” Sean said.

Penelope nodded grimly as she stared at the six dispatched soldiers on the street. The whooshing of a door sliding open grabbed her attention. Across the street three soldiers rushed out of a building and opened fire. Sean shot back, taking down one of them. Penelope pulled the trigger on her machine gun, but after a moment of firing it clicked empty. She had no clue how to reload it and recoiled as the Horsemen soldiers continued to shoot at them.

Sean crouched to steady his aim and shot, hitting another of the men. Penelope dove to the street as the final soldier fixated on her, firing rapidly in her direction. She crawled forward, bullets hitting all around her, until she was ducking behind the corpse of one of the Horsemen soldiers they had killed just moments before. With the man's focus on Penelope, Sean was able to line up his shot. He squeezed the trigger, shooting the man right in the neck.

He turned around quickly, a panicked look on his face.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "Did they hit you?"

Penelope shook her head as she got to her feet.

"No, I'm fine."

She sheepishly held out the machine gun.

"I didn't know how to reload it."

Sean took it from her. The weapon had one backup clip attached to the butte and he removed it. He ejected the old clip then slammed the new one into place. He held it out and Penelope took it back.

"Thanks."

He smiled before responding.

"Let's keep moving."

They continued deeper into Babylon, going down three more streets before running into another patrol. Sean and Penelope fled down an alleyway, but saw four more soldiers on the next street. He and Penelope were able to defeat them, then continued on. They passed an upturned hover vehicle as they moved down another street. Sean paused to inspect it before leading them ever deeper.

Ten minutes later they were covered in sweat and breathing heavily. They had fought their way through two more patrols. Penelope exhausted the ammo in the machine gun and was now carrying a Horsemen rifle.

"How much further?" Penelope asked as she struggled to catch her breath.

“We should be just about there,” Sean answered.

He took a few more deep gasps of air, then checked the ammunition in his pistol.

“Ready?” he asked.

Penelope nodded and the two of them stepped out of the alley onto another street. Sean stopped immediately. At the end of the street were two Horsemen soldiers. Unlike all of the other opponents they had faced so far, these two men were heavily armored and each of them held a large, shiny piece of square steel. Sean fired, but the bullet ricocheted off the steel shield, confirming his suspicion. He shot again, hitting one of the men directly in their helmeted head. Again the bullet had no effect.

The men began marching forward. They held the squares out in front of them. They gave off a loud noise as they extended. A moment later the two men were advancing behind an impenetrable shield that when held together was four feet tall and six feet wide. Sean and Penelope exchanged a worried look, but their anxiety grew as a six man Horsemen patrol exited a building and took up positions behind the slowly advancing wall.

Sean and Penelope retreated into the alley as the soldiers crouched behind the shield wall and opened fire. Sean leaned out and took several shots, but all of them hit the steel shield. The men were expertly staying hidden behind the wall, popping up only long enough to fire.

“Is there any way around?” Penelope asked.

Closing his eyes and recalling the maps he had studied, Sean tried to remember if there was.

“I don’t think so,” he finally answered.

They each leaned out and fired some more, trying to slow the advance of the soldiers. All six of the men returned fire, forcing Sean and Penelope to quickly return to the safety of the alley.

Sean looked down the alley, trying to piece together a plan that could get them around these soldiers. He was about to suggest a temporary retreat when he heard yelling. The voice was hoarse but loud. Sean peeked his head out to see Charles running down the street towards the advancing soldiers.

“My lord,” Sean said as he saw the shape Charles was in.

Penelope looked out as well and covered her mouth when she saw Charles. His shirt was soaked with blood and his skin was pale. His hair was matted down with sweat and he had a crazed look in his eye. There was also a large knife stuck through his left shoulder.

Sean stepped out into the street and waved his arms as Charles neared.

“Professor!” he yelled. “We’re over here!”

Charles completely ignored him and went racing past. He had his pistol in his right hand and a knife in his left.

“Professor!” Sean yelled.

Again there was no response. The Professor continued his charge, still yelling as he ran. The Horsemen soldiers were focusing their fire on him now. Sean cursed under his breath as he stepped out into the open and began firing rapidly, trying to draw some of the attention away from Charles. He got a lucky shot over top of the shield wall, striking one of the men in the head.

Bullets whizzed past Charles but it was a fact he didn’t even register. He was almost upon the shield wall now and opened fire with his pistol. He killed one of the men behind the wall and caused the remaining four to duck down. Charles jumped as high as he could, hurdling the wall. As he sailed over it he aimed down and fired, killing two more of the soldiers. He landed on the street and whirled around quickly, shooting and killing the remaining two soldiers before they could react.

The two heavily armored Horsemen who held the wall began to turn around. Their cumbersome armor made them slow and Charles lunged forward with the knife, plunging it through the lesser shielded back of one of the men. The knife severed the man’s spinal cord and Charles quickly turned his attention to the last remaining enemy. He placed his pistol against the back of the man’s neck and fired again and again. The first few bullets ricocheted away but the third and fourth ripped through the armor, killing the man. The two of them fell forward, sending their heavy steel wall clattering loudly to the street.

Sean and Penelope rushed towards Charles. He stood among the eight bodies, breathing heavily but otherwise unmoving.

“Professor Bryant!” Sean yelled as he neared.

Still there was no response from Charles. Sean slowed as he reached his Professor. Charles was holding the bloody knife at his side and his eyes looked glazed over and distant.

“Charles?” Penelope asked as she approached.

Sean grabbed Charles by his right shoulder and shook him. Charles snapped to attention, his eyes focusing on Sean.

“Sean,” Charles said.

The young man eyed his Professor warily, but nodded.

“We’re here Professor. What’s going on? Are you okay?”

“Isaac has Fay.”

“What about the harbinger?” Sean asked.

“He’s out of the picture for the time being.”

Sean stared at the large knife stuck through Charles’s shoulder.

“Is that his knife?”

Charles glanced at it, then nodded.

Penelope stepped up tentatively. She gave Charles a nice, warm smile.

“Let me look at some of your wounds,” she said gently.

Charles stepped away from her. His face was contorted in a mixture of pain and anger and his body was tense. His dark mindset emanated from him.

“We need to find Isaac,” he said.

Penelope took a slow step forward and held out her hands.

“You’ve lost a lot of blood, Charles,” she said. “Please let me help you.”

“We need to find Isaac,” he repeated. “It’s time to end this.”

Sean and Penelope exchanged a worried glance.

“I know where he is,” Sean said. “There are four towers and...”

“Lead the way,” Charles interrupted, not caring to wait for a full explanation.

Again Sean and Penelope looked at one another. Sean thought he would feel relieved when they found Charles but now he was more anxious than ever.

“Follow me,” he said.

They moved quickly down the street, nearing the building where the Conqueror resided.



Sam stood in the middle of the bridge, watching the battle against Babylon unfold from his flagship. The Dreadnoughts were pounding the cityship, but Babylon had already destroyed one and badly damaged a second.

“Status report,” Sam barked.

“Babylon’s firing capacity is down by twenty percent but we’ve lost contact with another of our cruisers and one of the Dreadnoughts took a direct hit to their engines.”

Sam cursed. Even though the Dreadnoughts had provided them some much needed firepower they still weren’t enough to destroy Babylon.

“We need to do more damage,” Sam said.

“How do you destroy a ship that’s as big as a planet?” one of the Buccaneers asked.

Sam turned towards the man.

“That’s it!” he said. “The planet!”

He moved quickly back to his captain’s chair and typed in some commands. The planet of Huran 4 loomed large behind Babylon in the viewport but Sam zoomed all the way in on the planet until it filled the screen.

“If we take out some of Babylon’s engines we can force it into the gravity well of Huran 4.”

One of the Buccaneers spun around in his chair to look at Sam.

“Will that work?” the man asked.

“Let’s find out,” Sam answered.

He pressed the command to connect him to every ship and then spoke.

“Concentrate all of your fire on Babylon’s engines. Once they’re disabled we’re going to try to knock them into Huran 4.”

Sam readjusted the viewport settings so that he could see an overview of the entire battle again. His fleet quickly enacted the new orders, changing their tactics and focusing their attacks on the engines of Babylon. There were thousands of thrusters attached to the bottom of the ship. They were clustered in groups of ten with small laser arrays protecting each group. The casualties mounted for the Gray Buccaneers as they maintained their all out offensive against the engines. With each impact Sam gritted his teeth harder. On the outside he remained cold and

calculating, the perfect model of a good leader, but on the inside he flinched every time one of his ships got hit. They were good men on those ships, every last one of them, and it pained him to see any of them lose their life.

But the tactic was working. One by one the groups of engines fell dormant and within ten minutes they had all been destroyed.

“All ships, hit the port side of Babylon with everything you’ve got!” Sam yelled.

The fleet reformed and brought their combined might to bear on the side of Babylon. The cityship was rocked under the massive attack.

“Don’t let up!” Sam shouted.

The bombardment continued for five minutes until Sam finally called a temporary stop. He squinted as he looked at the viewport.

“Tell me that damn thing has moved further than it looks like it has,” he said.

One of the men on the bridge checked the calculations on his terminal then shook his head.

“Our weapons aren’t going to be enough to push it into the planet, sir.”

Sam looked down at the floor.

“What do we do now, sir?”

He didn’t respond. After a few long moments his men began exchanging puzzled looks, wondering what was going on. Finally Sam looked up. He pulled a digital pad from a compartment on his chair and began typing on it furiously. Two minutes later he finished and motioned to one of his men.

“Take this pad, then get on a shuttle and make your way over to one of the Dreadnoughts,” Sam said. “No matter what else happens, you must get this pad to Charles Bryant.”

The man nodded dumbly.

“Do you understand?” Sam asked.

“You can count on me, boss.”

Sam gave him the pad.

“Go. Now.”

The man ran from the bridge. Sam punched in some more commands into the terminal on his chair but paused before pushing the final button.

“All of you to your feet,” he said.

His thoroughly confused bridge crew stood up.

“Get to the shuttles and get off this ship.”

They all looked at one another, then back at Sam. He pressed the final button, completing the command. Sirens rang out through the Henry Morgan and a soothing voice instructed everyone on board to abandon ship.

A Buccaneer with no teeth who had been with Sam for many years approached him.

“Why would we abandon ship?” he asked.

“Because I’m going to ram it into the side of Babylon.”

“What?!” another of the men cried out.

“The Henry Morgan is the largest ship we have,” Sam said, his voice even and emotionless. “If I get it moving fast enough it should push Babylon into Huran 4.”

Sam pressed another button so he could again address the entire fleet.

“All ships fall back to my location,” he said. “Once everyone is clear I’m going to ram Babylon with the Henry Morgan.”

When he looked up he saw that none of the men on the bridge had moved.

“What are you all waiting for?” Sam asked. “I told you to get to the shuttles!”

One by one the men returned to their stations.

“Abandon ship! I’m giving you a direct order!” he raged.

His yells had no effect as his men completely blocked him out.

“Collision course with Babylon’s port side laid out, sir,” one of them said.

“Fleet will be clear in twenty seconds,” another Buccaneer said. “We’ll be ready to move then.”

Sam wasn’t sure if he wanted to kill these men or hug them. He was fine sacrificing himself for a greater cause, but taking some of his finest Buccaneers with him hadn’t been the plan. Watching them perform their duties in the face of certain death humbled him and he smiled beneath his bushy black beard.

“Get us moving,” Sam ordered.

Once he confirmed their collision course he again activated the fleet wide communications.

“It’s been an honor to lead you fine men,” he began. “Never forget the Gray Buccaneer code.”

They were picking up speed now.

“Never kill the innocent, never steal from the poor,” Sam continued, trying not to choke up. “And above all else, protect your brother Buccaneers.”

The instant he finished the ship shook violently. Sam had been watching the viewport and Babylon hadn't fired.

“What was that?” he asked.

The Henry Morgan shook again, this time worse than the last.

“What's going on?” Sam yelled.

“We're being attacked.”

Sam stood up.

“By who?”

The man typed for several moments before answering.

“The Gray Buccaneers.”

Sam punched in commands on his chair and brought up the rear view onto the viewport. Two of the Dreadnoughts and five Gray Buccaneer cruisers were attacking them. Sam slammed down on the communications button.

“What do you think you're doing?” he roared.

There was no response but the Henry Morgan shuddered as another volley hit it. Sparks shot out of one of the terminals and the bridge started filling with smoke.

“They're targeting our engines, sir.”

Sam froze, realizing what they were doing.

“Don't you dare do this,” he said to the fleet. “This is my task and mine alone!”

Another round of missiles was the only reply.

“Engines offline,” one of his men reported.

Three of the Dreadnoughts came racing forward and zipped past the Henry Morgan. Sam returned the viewport to the forward screen and watched as the massive ships flew in formation towards Babylon.

“Do we know who's captaining those Dreadnoughts?” Sam asked.

“Rodrigo is in charge of one of them,” the toothless Buccaneer answered.

“Rodrigo,” Sam said, addressing the fleet once more. “You and the other Captains turn those ships around. That's a direct order.”

There was no response and Sam felt rage and panic building inside of him.

“You won’t be remembered as heroes for this!” he yelled. “You’ll be remembered as traitors! Mutinous cowards!”

He was trying anything to get a response as the three Dreadnoughts neared Babylon.

“Sir,” it was Rodrigo’s voice. “The Gray Buccaneers need you, and it is our most sincere honor to die in your service.”

“Don’t do this Rodrigo!” Sam yelled.

“Besides,” Rodrigo said. “It’s not every day you get to wreck a ship worth a trillion credits.”

The laughter of Rodrigo and the other two captains filled the bridge of the Henry Morgan. The three Dreadnoughts hit the side of Babylon and the laughter stopped. A terrible, soundless explosion unfolded on the viewport as the three ships blew apart. They joined together into a gigantic fireball that sent wreckage and debris in every direction.

Sam was silent as he watched. A few moments later one of his men spoke quietly.

“That did it. Babylon’s going to hit Huran 4.”

Several moments passed before Sam responded.

“How long until impact?”

“Minutes sir. Five, ten at the most.”

Sam nodded slowly, watching as Babylon drifted ever closer to the planet and hoping that Charles and the others would have enough time to escape before the impact.



Charles stood before two ornately carved doors on the top floor of the Conqueror’s tower. Penelope and Sean were behind him, studying the mural carved into the rose colored wood. It depicted Armageddon, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse leading their armies in a pitched, horrific battle.

The fight to get to the tower had been brutal, but once there they found it unlocked and unguarded. It stood as an open invitation from Isaac Falkinburg, his

way of saying that he wasn't afraid of them, even if they were somehow able to get all the way to his doorstep.

Sean and Penelope watched Charles closely. He hadn't said much to either of them and they were just waiting for him to make the next move. Sean was growing anxious as minutes passed and Charles remained perfectly still, staring at the doors to Isaac's office. It had been some time since they felt Babylon shaking from the Dreadnoughts assault and Sean worried that this meant the Buccaneers had been wiped out.

He would have no further chance to worry about such things as suddenly all of Babylon pitched with the violence of many earthquakes. Penelope flew sideways into Sean, knocking him off balance and sending both of them crashing into the wall. Charles tumbled to the floor and screamed out as this caused Harbinger's knife to bite ever deeper into him. The lights in the hallway went off for half a minute before flickering back on.

As they all got back to their feet they could feel Babylon moving now. Sparks shot from one of the lights above them and the tower groaned as the steel shell vibrated.

After he was certain that Penelope was okay, Sean walked up to join Charles in front of the doors.

"I think that's a good sign we should be leaving soon," Sean said.

Charles was just staring darkly at the doors.

"Do what you have to do, Professor," Sean said. "But please, do it quickly."

For the first time since they had reached the tower, Charles looked at Sean. He slowly pulled his pistol, then his knife. His face was unreadable.

"Are you sure you want to go through with this?" Sean asked.

Charles' eyes grew distant for a long moment as he lost himself in a memory.

"Carrying through with a thing like this, it's not kind to the soul of a man," Charles said, repeating the words that had been spoken to him over ten years ago. "Murder, even justified murder, steals from the fabric of who you are, it robs you of your goodness."

Sean looked at Penelope, shaken by the dark words. When he looked back at Charles he saw that his eyes were re-focused and burning with rage.

"I think it would be best if the two of you stay out here," Charles said.

Without waiting for a response, Charles stepped forward and kicked the door as hard as he could, breaking it at the hinges and sending it crashing down. He stepped inside to find a spacious, plush office. Religious murals adorned the walls and sculptures of angels sat on ivory pedestals. There was an oak desk against the back wall and behind it sat Isaac Falkinburg. On his right were two men, both of them with rifles drawn and aimed at Charles. On his left were two more men, one with gun pointed at Charles and the other was holding a pistol to Fay's head. Fay looked like he had been roughed up pretty bad and was on his knees in front of the soldier.

Isaac slowly clapped his hands. He laughed softly as he continued to clap.

"Professor Charles Bryant," he said, his voice smooth as ever. "The Bounty Hunting Professor. My my, you have put on quite a show."

The lights in the room flickered off for a moment. When they came back on Isaac was still smiling.

"You could've just knocked, you know. It took a craftsman and his apprentice six years to carve that door, and you destroyed it in a matter of seconds."

Charles took another step into the room. The four soldiers tensed.

"I'm curious, did you really think you were going to march in here and kill me?" Isaac asked.

When Charles didn't respond the smile slowly disappeared from Isaac's face.

"I'm the Conqueror. One of the Four Horsemen. A single man, no matter how well connected, no matter how skilled, no matter how well supported, cannot hope to contend with me."

Charles took another step. His lack of fear was irritating Isaac.

"Do you know the things that I have done?" Isaac asked. "The galaxy altering events that I have set into motion? Soon the Four Horsemen will be the ones in charge. We'll purify this pathetic galaxy and then remake it into something truly worthwhile!"

Isaac paused as Sean and Penelope stepped into the room.

"Well, now we have a room full of people who hate me," Isaac said.

The lights flickered off. Charles rushed forward. The only light in the room came from his pistol as he fired twice, killing the two soldiers standing to the right of Isaac. Charles fired again, killing one of the soldiers to the left of Isaac. The

lights came on just as Charles reached the final soldier and slit his throat. The man dropped to the floor, grasping his neck as blood poured out of it. The entire attack lasted less than four seconds.

Fay looked up at Charles and smiled weakly. Charles grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled him up. Fay could barely stand, but stumbled along as Charles led him back towards the door. He gently pushed him towards Sean, who then guided Fay behind him. A few moments later Fay was out in the hall and everyone returned their attention to Isaac.

If he was worried about his safety he didn't show it. The smile was back on his face as he looked at Charles, Sean and Penelope.

"Let's see," Isaac said. "Penelope, it's obvious why you hate me. Aside from our sham marriage, I killed your father. Sean Varis, I believe your father was recently killed by my associate, War. And Charles Bryant, I must admit it took me some time to figure out why exactly you were so determined to track me down."

Charles walked slowly towards Isaac's desk. He held his knife out and blood dripped onto the desk. Isaac's smile widened.

"You have to understand, a man in my position sets up and gets involved in a lot of ugly situations, it's an unfortunate necessary evil on the road to making a better galaxy," Isaac said. "So you'll have to excuse me if I didn't at first recall the particular incident in which your wife was killed."

He sighed dramatically before continuing.

"Was she beautiful, Charles?"

The lights flickered again, remaining off for nearly ten seconds this time. When they came back on Charles was behind the desk, standing over Isaac, knife at the ready.

"He's taunting you Charles," Sean said.

"In a way," Isaac continued. "I made each one of you exactly what you are today. My actions molded you, created the path that you now walk upon."

"Let's just grab him and get out of here," Sean said, tiring of the man's rhetoric.

"I don't think I'll be going anywhere with you," Isaac said.

The lights went off again, and when they came back on Harbinger was standing in the middle of the room. He looked like he had been through hell and back.

What remained of his tattered clothes was soaked in blood and his skin had taken on a reddish hue from all of the dried blood that was caked on it. One of his legs was gnarled and twisted, broken in at least three places.

“It took you long enough, imbecile,” Isaac said. “I’ve been calling you for the past twenty minutes.”

Harbinger turned towards Isaac.

“Kill these fools and then let’s get out of here,” Isaac commanded.

Harbinger convulsed as he remained in the center of the room. His whole body was shaking.

“Kill them!” Isaac said.

Harbinger bared his teeth but remained in place as his body continued to tremor.

“No,” Harbinger said quietly.

Isaac’s eyes widened.

“You are the Harbinger of Conquest and I command you to kill them now!” Isaac screamed.

Even with such a severely injured leg, Harbinger moved with lightning fast speed. He rushed the desk and slammed both of his massive fists onto the surface, cracking it.

“I SAID NO!” Harbinger roared.

Isaac saw the three command bracelets on Harbinger’s wrist. Sweat started to pour down his face as he realized what this meant. Harbinger slowly came around the desk. He towered over Isaac, staring down at him with a lifetime full of hatred in his eyes.

“It doesn’t have to go like this,” Isaac said. “You don’t have to kill me.”

His smooth demeanor was long gone and now he was just a pathetic man begging for his life.

“Yes I do,” Charles answered.

“Professor, maybe he’s right,” Sean said. “Let’s take him in, let him face the justice system for all of the crimes he’s committed.”

Charles slowly moved the knife until it was hovering right above Isaac’s chest.

“This is justice,” he said.

“Wait!” Isaac cried. “What if I told you I could bring your wife back to life?”

Charles pulled the knife back a few inches.

“What did you say?” Charles asked.

“There’s a Doctor who’s developed a way to return people from the dead.”

This wasn’t the first time Charles heard of such a thing and he had even spent some time investigating it. Unfortunately he had found it to be nothing but a rumor.

“A fairy tale isn’t going to save your life,” Charles said, returning the knife to its place right above Isaac’s chest.

Sparks shot from the lights in the ceiling and they dimmed.

“This is no fairy tale, Charles, I assure you. I can take you to this Doctor. I’ve seen his procedure with my own eyes.”

“He’d say anything to save his own skin right now,” Sean said.

“You know nothing of the secrets this galaxy holds, boy,” Isaac snapped.

He then returned his attention to Charles, sensing that he may have a chance of bargaining for his life.

“You want your wife back. I can give her to you, Charles. I can make that happen.”

Charles felt his determination wavering. He had never entertained the thought of seeing his wife again and now that he was he found himself slowly pulling the knife away.

“Make the right decision, Charles, and I’ll give you back the thing you love most in this galaxy. I’ll…”

Harbinger reached over and grabbed Charles’ hand. He then shoved it forward as hard as he could, causing Charles to plunge the knife directly into Isaac’s heart and stop him mid sentence. Charles was silent as he watched Isaac die, unsure of what he was feeling now. The last man who had been responsible for the death of his wife was now dead, taking his boasts of being able to bring her back with him to hell.

Slowly, Charles looked over at the Harbinger. The manbeast’s hand was still closed around his, both of them clutching the knife that was stuck into Isaac’s heart.

“It was time for him to die,” Harbinger said.

A hundred emotions moved through Charles in the matter of seconds, but soon they were gone, leaving him with little more than pain.

Babylon rocked violently and the lights went out in the room. Only a few of them turned back on. Sean pressed a control panel on the wall and hit a command to open the windows in the room.

“We have to go,” Sean said as he saw what was outside.

Huran 4 loomed large outside the window, growing closer every second.

“We have to go right now!” Sean yelled. “Harbinger, can you carry Isaac’s body?”

Harbinger nodded.

“Then let’s move!”

Sean stepped into the hall and helped Fay back to his feet. He draped the injured professor’s arm around his shoulders and supported his weight as they began rushing down the tower. The lights went out for good in the structure, slowing their escape. By the time they reached the street Babylon was shaking constantly as it entered into the atmosphere of Huran 4.

The five of them fled through the city streets, pushing their tired and battered bodies as hard as they could. Charles was numb all over and it took every bit of his mental capacity to keep running in a straight line. Sean led them down streets and alleyways, using his memory of the map he saw to take them on a direct route back to the Justicebringer.

Babylon was shaking so violently that it was difficult for them to stay on their feet.

“Almost there!” Sean yelled.

They turned down another alleyway and when they emerged at the end of it Sean saw the hole in the wall that led into the Justicebringer. Babylon pitched suddenly beneath them, knocking all of them down. The cityship rocked violently and they couldn’t get back on their feet, but Sean crawled forward, determined that none of them would be dying. Penelope followed along, as did the others. The shaking was so terrible that several times it knocked them off their hands and knees and onto their stomachs, but finally they reached the Justicebringer.

Sean pulled himself onboard and immediately got to his feet and ran for the bridge. He dove towards the navigation console and slammed the power-up commands into the keypad.

“Airlock secured!” Penelope yelled from down the hall.

Sean got into the seat and shoved the throttle all the way forward. The docking clamps ripped off the bottom of the ship as it tore away from Babylon. They were within Huran 4’s atmosphere, its many spaceports just a hundred feet below them. Sean angled the ship straight up, climbing as fast as he could towards open space. He knew that if they were too close when Babylon hit the surface they’d be caught in the explosion.

Charles stumbled onto the bridge and made his way to the captain’s chair. He punched in a command and the rear view appeared on the viewport. Just as they exited Huran 4’s atmosphere, Babylon made contact. It was like a moon crashing into a planet, only this moon was powered by some of the most technologically advanced and unstable matter in the galaxy. As the power cores blew, the resulting explosion was a thing of magnificent and unparalleled force. In an instant, half of Huran 4 was vaporized.

There was a blinding blue flash as the shockwave from the explosion threatened to overtake the Justicebringer.

“Hold on to something!” Sean yelled.

Everyone had made their way to the bridge now and they all held on for dear life. The Justicebringer quaked beneath them, the intensity growing every few seconds until it felt as if the ship and all of reality were being ripped to shreds.

And then they were clear.

Sean let out a long held breath as the empty blackness of space stretched out in front of them.



The bridge of the Justicebringer resembled a makeshift hospital. With the help of Harbinger, Penelope had removed the knife from Charles’ shoulder and done her best to tend to the gaping wound it left behind. He’d need a doctor soon, but for now he would live. She also dressed Fay’s bullet wounds and other various

injuries. Harbinger set the bones in his own leg and Penelope helped him dress some of his other many wounds.

Little had been said as they slowly approached the remains of the Gray Buccaneer fleet. The atmosphere on the bridge was heavy, with everyone thinking about the recent events and the repercussions they would have. Several times Sean had started to speak, but thought better of it. Finally he couldn't take it anymore and he stood up and smiled.

"Can you believe what we just pulled off?" he asked.

Penelope was sitting on the floor and she offered him a weak smile but no one else seemed to appreciate his enthusiasm. It did get them all thinking and Harbinger cleared his throat.

"Thank you Charles, for keeping your word," Harbinger said.

Charles gave the man a slow, respectful nod.

"Professor Bryant," Fay said quietly. "I'd also like to thank you for your heroic actions. While your crazed attack upon my captors easily could've gotten me killed, it turned out not to be the case. So thank you."

Sean laughed and Penelope had to cover her mouth not to join him. A moment later, she spoke.

"Once we turn in Isaac's body I'll be off the hook for his crimes. I know that each of you came for different reasons, but thank you for all of your help. You've given me my life back."

Sean sat down on the floor next to her and she laid her head on his shoulder. Another long silence settled on the bridge and several minutes passed.

Charles looked upon the assortment of people around him. He knew they probably expected him to say something, to offer his own reflection over what had happened. He closed his eyes and tried to think of something positive to give to these people that had earned his trust, had risked their lives and futures for him, had helped him so much during these dangerous times. But all he saw when he closed his eyes was death. First his wife, then the uncountable number of deaths since, the bodies that lined his long road towards revenge.

He thought about the words spoken to him by the Bounty Hunter in the mirrored devil mask, all those years before.

*You'll still dream of her death every night, you'll still live every day of your life with an empty hole inside of you.*

In the time that he knew the strange Bounty Hunter he had found him to never be wrong, but Charles had long hoped he was wrong about this one thing. He had hoped and wished that the emptiness would disappear once all of the men who had killed his wife were dead.

But the emptiness remained, as gnawing and intense as ever.

End of Season One

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