

Colony Lost

By: Ryan Mussell

“I’m sure it serves as a disappointment to you that we were dragged out to this backwater world on such a short notice, but even if it is a break-away colony from the old empire, it is the oath of the Order’s to respond to any cry for help regarding an attack on one’s humanity, and if it is really too much for you to be assigned on this mission, we will leave you with the drop ship whilst we investigate the situation in the colony proper, Kraz.” Spat Cornelius, straightening his stance, and delivering a cold glare towards Kraz.

“You simply misunderstand me, I’m as excited as I ever am to provide fire support on any mission given to me, I just think it is a little bit hypocritical for a colony to break away at their first opportunity, then come crying for help the second something goes wrong.” Kraz responded, attempting to justify his poorly received remarks.

“Yes, well, even if they would so treacherously betray our old country at its greatest time of need, you may not have any oaths to uphold, seeing as you are part of the late Lord Nigh’s personal forces, but us swordsmen take our oath very seriously, and will answer any such cry for help in such special circumstances. There is no need to get ourselves riled up before the mission has even begun in earnest.” Intercut Frank, successfully lowering the temperature in the small ships even smaller hangar by finding and supporting a core piece of each man’s argument within the same stream of reason. After he finished reuniting the group, the ship suffered a light turbulence whilst descending through the planet’s atmosphere, the turbulence coming just a second too late to break the already broken tension. In the silence Niklas let out a small laugh, followed by a thought he deemed to be quite ironic:

“I guess it is human nature to bring about conflict between ourselves over any possible disagreement, no matter how small. Even after succumbing to abomination, this trait core to us being human is not lost.” After this, Niklas would resume gazing out the small heavily reinforced circular window in the hangar, watching as the system’s sun swiftly descended beyond the planet’s horizon. The rest of the six-man mission crew would soon follow his lead. Niklas, now absorbed by the shadowy terrain, quickly approaching the descending ship would shout out to one of the ship’s crew members in the ship’s only other room, and this mission’s Relay Commander. “Hey Lydia, I want you to prepare a solar flare, but don’t fire it until I give you the order, alright?”

“Yes sir, it will last the team four hours, but we have two extras, so if it fades before the mission has reached completion, we will be on standby to launch subsequent flares.” She said this all formally. Before Niklas could give a reply however, the ship reached the designated landing zone, and Lydia then added: “Alright men, it is time for you to disembark, remember: the orbital crew has given us just 16 hours to complete the mission before we leave the world, we won’t hesitate to abandon you here if even just one of you doesn’t return before the time limit is reached, unless of course you communicate to us that the threat has been dealt with accordingly.” And with that the men were silent as the hangar door slowly slid open, allowing the humid midnight air to slowly seep inwards; as each member of the crew of six exited the small hangar, they were forced to penetrate that thick wall of heat to begin their mission.

The men marched in silence along a twisting, poorly maintained, dirt road towards their target: the colony’s sole population center, a rather large city, and according to the hastily given briefing the crew received shortly before launch, held a modest population for its size. The crew was lucky that the landing zone was so close to that dirt road, even in its poor condition, it saved them the trouble of marching through the thick swamp that sat on both sides of it, but even though things could have been worse, the swordsman named Torben, and the lowest ranked member of this team, inquired as to the reason they had landed so far from their destination.

“I understand the threat of landing in or close to the city, but this twelve-mile march is going to cut our operation time nearly in half. Wouldn’t it have been a better strategy to have designated the landed zone closer to the city to allow us to immediately assess the situation, and respond as needed?”

“It is far more favorable to undergo this three-hour march than to potentially lose that ship to the enemy and become stranded.” Responded Raphael, the only other non-swordsmen on the team in addition to Kraz, and the teams designated marksman.

“Raphael is quite right I’d judge, and besides, we can ascertain many components of the situation just by the landing we’ve made.” Added Niklas before he went on, “On our descent, we weren’t contacted by any governmental agency, nor was any interception attempt made, as far as I can tell, the colony is completely unaware of our approach, they are likely too busy dealing with the threat to even bother confronting a potential enemy strike team, this means our true enemy likely doesn’t know we are here either; on our hands we have the perfect conditions for a sneak attack!”

“You both make fair points.” Torben surrendered the discussion, regretting asking his question in the first place. This was the only interaction between the members of the so-called strike team on their long three-hour march towards civilization. But once it concluded, though no one made an effort to express their gratitude out loud, each and every member of the strike team was glad to have emerged from the swampy roads onto the firm asphalt ones that surrounded the city. Just as the poor road ceded to civilization, so too did the surrounding swamp, which gave way to sprawling rice fields - the proper crop considering the terrain - that stretched outwards towards the darkened horizon for miles, though unfortunately with that darkness the strike team couldn’t appreciate the view. The one thing they could make out however, was a massive concrete platform sitting dormant in the fields with a massive anti-orbital cannon sitting - emerged - atop it.

“Quite odd, wouldn’t you say?” Judged Niklas.

“Not sure I follow.” Responded Kraz.

“Well, it isn’t unusual for cannons such as this one to sit rather far from the target it protects, you wouldn’t want a city block’s worth of glass to shatter every time you fire it would you? However, cannon’s such as these are designed to sit within reinforced chambers underneath their concrete platforms to prevent against targeted strikes when they aren’t in use.” Niklas explained.

“Ah, and it currently sitting in the exposed firing position suggests that it had a target to shoot at, right? The fact that no one bothered to put it away tells me that whatever they were shooting at wasn’t defeated.” Reasoned Frank, though hastily afterward he would add: “Though there are many other possibilities, perhaps this colony maintains a military ready standard, or it could even be up for maintenance” Frank sought to remove the potential thoughts from any of their heads that they might have to contend with an enemy that such a weapon couldn’t handle. Maintaining group harmony and morale was the core of what Frank saw his role of mission leader being, and he knew that this tendency of reassurance of his was what repeatedly landed him leadership positions in other such situations.

The strike team continued to walk down the straight asphalt road, passing a smaller hut, five of the six men would continue forwards, but the one who used to be second to the front of their small spearhead, slowly drifted towards the rear as they passed it, stopping and gazing thoughtfully at the house. No other member of the strike team took as much interest with the building as Niklas, and needed to call out to get them to stop, “Hey, wait up, let’s check out this house before advancing further.”

In response to this request, he was shut down swiftly by Cornelius, “State of emergency or not, you do not have any right to be barging into a poor farmers house at this hour, it would be illegal to do so to a citizen of our own country, and I don’t think it would look very good for you to have done it in another.” Cornelius’s advice wasn’t so much lost on Niklas as it was never received in the first place. Niklas simply opened the door with ease and walked in. As Niklas penetrated deeper into the small building, the others decided it would be best for them to back him up in case anything went awry. The house supported what appeared to be an aluminum sheet roof, though the walls themselves were constructed out of bricks, was only a single story, and lacked a basement. Niklas made about three sweeps of it in entirety before Kraz spoke up in protest.

“Why are we still here? Did you honestly expect to find anything out of the ordinary, dinner left out to get cold while the inhabitation disappeared? Signs of foul play? A secret room? It is just some local farmers house sitting next to the rice fields, and a messy one at that. We are leaving.” Kraz’s complaints were all fair, there truly was nothing suspicious about the house, but the clothes which were thrown about a corner of the central room as if a hamper had reached critical mass were a clue to Niklas, who was more concerned with gaining the information that the house was empty than anything else.

“I’d be willing to bet that most of the city’s inhabitants were recalled to the defensive shelters below the city, most colonies of this size are eventually forced to install them after all, and the poor state this place was left in is certainly emblematic of a hastily made evacuation, is it not?” Niklas was trying to defend himself with his hypothesis against the annoyed Kraz.

“If that’s the case, we should leave this shack and confront what ever made them shelter in the first place!” Kraz was trying his best to keep moving things forwards, as he couldn’t stand being idle in such situations.

“Kraz is correct, your hypothesis is a good one Niklas, but it is nothing we couldn’t have learned just by ignoring this stop all together, and just having stayed on our original path.” Cornelius now took the side of Kraz, and the group reached a consensus as Niklas conceded.

As the strike team emerged from the small house, they made swift progress towards the greater city. However, as they approached their destination, Niklas once again delayed the teams progress with an attempt to contact their escort ship. He pulled out a long antenna from their portable communication device, and stretched it high into the air. The ship, which now sat many miles away from them, deep in the swamp, protected from any attacker that sought to sabotage their escape, gave only radio silence which endured for a long minute before Lydia finally responded, putting the strike team at ease.

“This is relay Commander Lydia, I read you clear, sorry for the delay, we are trying our best to ward off the intense heat out here. Are you ready for us to fire the solar flare?” She asked.

“That’s the idea.” Niklas said into the com, before adding a secondary request: “I’d also like you to establish periodic communications with the ship in orbit, I’ve got reasons to believe that the cruiser up there might be in more danger than we realize, and I also believe that any risks posed by opening up continual communications with it are minute in comparison to losing our ability to coordinate.”

“Very well sir. We will launch the flare and check in with you again once we establish communications.” Responded Lydia. The strike team then sat in anticipation for a few short seconds until the dead of night was filled with an invasive screeching as a speck of blinding light arced high into the air, and after falling to a spot above the cities center, it expanded a great many times with a bang until it simply hung there – burning above the many buildings - illuminating the city and its surroundings. The night had given way to an artificial daylight, and now being able to see the landscape proper, the strike team absorbed the calm image of the expansive rice fields before breaking into a group sprint, which they held as they proceeded deep into the city.

The city streets were completely barren of life as the group ran through them, their long shadows dancing in their wake. Though the structures of the city’s many buildings themselves appeared relatively unharmed, the rest of the scene read as if a tornado had ripped through its streets; articles of clothing and loose garbage drifted in the low wind before them, and it wasn’t uncommon to see signposts or even vehicles in unlikely orientations. Only along the city’s streets appeared shattered shop windows, and the interiors of those stores resembled the close by streets, the windows owned by higher floors however, tended to remain intact.

“This place feels cryptic.” Was one remark which emerged anonymously from the group, everyone was preoccupied with the sprint or their own thoughts to have paid any attention to whom exactly it came from.

The anonymity however, didn’t prevent Frank from replying. “It is good to be on guard and attentive of your surroundings, but it is best to cull any seeds of fear from planting their roots. We are well equipped to handle any threat, be confident of that.”

The group now began to edge on the innards of the city, forcing Niklas to give the order telling Raphael to find an observation point. “Raphael, I’d like for you to split off from us now. With every step we take further towards the center of this city, we are more likely to engage in combat with the enemy, and I’d like for us to be thoroughly prepared. I’m not asking you to climb the nearest skyscraper, or exchange spire, but any of these taller office buildings which overlook the main boulevard functioning as this city’s main artery will meet our needs.”

“Very well sir, though I can’t break oncoming feeling about falling victim to the old cliché of someone going out alone and being the first to die.” Raphael responded dryly.

“Well, I for one am envious of your position, being allowed to stay upwards of 1000 meters from combat, in truth you are likely the safest amongst us.” Frank tried to keep Raphael’s fears in check, but would go on to add a more serious line, “If we do end up facing an

abomination like the beacon would indicate, we already know they would tend to target groups instead of individuals, and there is little in the way of tactics that would support the targeting of one of the only two members of the strike team that are most inefficient towards the meeting of the goal of their slaying. If abominations were known for their tactics of course. They also tend not to play with their food.”

With that Raphael would give a small nod, and proceed to split off from the group towards the line of buildings that rang across the sides of the city’s so-called artery. Kraz would then scoff at the implied suggestion that he was one of the two weak links of the strike team, “You swordsman sure seem to be full of yourselves, but when shit hits the fan, you will see just why they sent me along with you.”

The strike team would only enter into the city’s innards a short distance when Frank ordered them to stop. “Let’s halt our sprint, at this point I think we should create a plan that has more to it than just running through the city waiting for the enemy finds us. We need to discuss what our next target is, rather than it just being the city itself.”

“Frank is correct.” Stated Cornelius, “It won’t do us any good to just wander around until we are all killed, I suggest we head for one of the shelters below the city to check on the civilian population of the colony, we haven’t encountered a single foreign soul since we got here, we need a solid explanation for that.”

“Cornelius has good reasoning behind his suggestion, but I think it the obvious solution for their disappearance. I suggest that we head for the colony’s capital, and if we have no luck there, towards the nearest military base. Those locations would surely have some record of what has conspired here.” Niklas put his suggestion forwards only before adding, “Though the fact that we haven’t seen a single straggler who was left behind, injured, or simply too drunk at the time to reach the shelters worries me. I think it unlikely that a one-hundred percent evacuation rate occurred, so perhaps it is in our best interest to split the group in two and head towards both objectives?”

“Absolutely not.” Torben would for once put his opinion firmly forwards, “If we split up, we give the enemy the perfect chance to pick us off one by one. It is bad enough we already sent Raphael away, we don’t need to give the enemy any more advantages over us.”

“Though I would usually be inclined to agree with you in circumstances such as these, I believe that splitting into two groups and working towards differing objectives is our best option, we must remember that we have limited time on this mission. However, this doesn’t mean that we should play into the enemies’ hands. If either group should come into contact with the enemy, they should immediately contact the other group, and advance away from the enemy until we can regroup.” As Frank said this, simply trying to reassure Torben in the case of the group fracturing, he had established the doctrine the strike team would utilize for any engagements during their time apart.

“Well then it looks settled, we will work towards investigating the situation at one of the colony’s emergency shelters, and the colony’s capital.” Niklas affirmed, afterwards posing the natural next question, “So, who’s going where?”

“Since we know an abomination is likely to target large groups, I will be heading for a shelter.” Cornelius stated, placing himself firmly within the “shelter” camp, he then went on to add: “Afterall, it was my idea, wasn’t it? I would think it best to go with it.”

Kraz was the next to volunteer, “I on the other hand, believe that any potential enemy – if they exist at all - would go after the structure of the colony if they were going to attack it, their most likely target would be the capital or the aforementioned military base, so I will join the capital team.”

It was at this point when the portable long-range communications device with fill the atmosphere of the group with a sudden onset fear as it began to let out a set of slow methodic beeps, signaling to the group that they were being contacted. With this development, Niklas would excuse himself from the group to speak with Lydia.

Frank returned the group to their focus by stating his alignment: “I will be heading towards the capital, being the leader of the strike team, I will act as a representative for Quinton while we are here.”

The group then sat in silence for a moment, waiting for either Torben to state his alignment, or for Niklas to return. As stated, the silence lasted only a moment before Kraz would interrupt it, “Well, what is it going to be Torben? You have got to make a choice.” But before Torben could report his decision to the group, Niklas would rejoin it, offering a summary of his conversation with Lydia.

“The Relay Commander has informed me that they have established communications with the cruiser in orbit, and that they will continue periodic check-ins with it every fifteen minutes.” Niklas reported to the group.

“At least we will be able to coordinate in an emergency, though I doubt this should make much difference regarding the end result of our mission, if we wanted to bombard the city into a sadder state than its already in, we could have simply started with that.” Said Cornelius.

“Have we divided ourselves into two teams yet?” Asked Niklas.

“Yes, Cornelius and Torben will be investigating the city’s bunker while Kraz and I investigate the capital.” Explained Frank.

“Alright, well then it looks like I’ll be going to the capital with Frank and Kraz, it is natural after all to send an equal number of swordsmen with each team.” As Niklas explained his reasoning, Kraz let out an aggressive laugh at the suggestion that he wasn’t equal in skill to one of the swordsmen, but no one took the chance to start yet another argument, instead Niklas would speak up once more, offering up a useful piece of information “Before we split apart, I thought it wise to share with you a bit of information that could be useful to the bunker team gaining access to their desired facility. Naturally it will be near impossible to gain access to the bunker from above, all entrances are likely to be completely sealed off, however, due to the necessity of continued military operations, it is standard practice for military planners to install large subterranean tunnels that run below their important infrastructure to protect supply lines in case of a siege or bombardment. It is highly likely that one of these rail lines runs by the bunker, so I would start your search with one of them.”

And with that the strike team would split apart and approach their now differing objectives. Frank, Niklas, and Kraz sprinted deeper and deeper into the heart of the colony, where Cornelius and Torben would instead begin to descend into the deep sub-terranean rail tunnels that ran below their feet.

Raphael gave a quick glance over his shoulder back towards his comrades from whom he had just recently detached, and let out a short sigh before entering a tall office building which sat near the center of the city. The building housed a small reception area in the front with large glass windows running across the entirety of the room, all but one of which were shattered. Raphael looked around the room, seeking a passage deeper into the building, noticing first bloody clothes dispersed around the piles of broken glass, then long cables hanging from wire sockets in

the walls. Raphael deduced that they were once likely connected to monitors installed on the walls, but that they had been looted before his arrival. The bloody clothes that persisted without a body painted a dark picture in his mind that he didn't want to dwell on, instead his eyes locked onto a large steel door. It opened but a small amount, allowing only for Raphael to see a large structure of desks barricading the entryway.

Raphael wasn't stopped by the rudimentary defenses however, instead with a bit of effort he was able to push the door open, sliding the wall of desks in the process. He then maneuvered past the desk mound now blockading the hallway at an odd angle, and walked through the halls until he found a stairwell, which he then swiftly ascended, arriving at the top floor.

Again, he was forced to roam the hallways looking for passage to the roof, but he couldn't help but allow a feeling of complete exhaustion to overwhelm him, his breathing was rough and his legs felt hollow and empty, like a structure waiting to collapse. Raphael let out a soft quip, shaming himself, "How have you allowed yourself to get this out of shape, it almost doesn't even seem possible." And indeed, to him it seemed unlikely that such menial actions would so completely drain him, but as he found and entered a small balcony overlooking the main street, he forced himself to ignore his troubles and climb onto the buildings red shingled roof.

A long black rifle was lifted off of his back and its barrel placed softly upon the high ridge of the buildings sloping roof. He peered through the rifles scope and could see the strike team in the distance conversing in a circle, and once again began to breathe deeply, attempting to stabilize his form.

It had been only half an hour since the group had split apart, but already Frank, Niklas, and Kraz had arrived at their destination, but were met with the large overbearing twenty-foot walls that bordered the capital grounds. Niklas thought they had an industrial feel to them, and judged them to be made out of a steel alloy of some sort, but of course what exactly they are made of didn't matter to Frank or Kraz, they knew the only factor that truly mattered was how they were going to get through them.

"I don't suppose the capital grounds have a front gate?" asked Kraz.

"I would think such a feature would be essential to any normal facility enclosed in such a structure, but I doubt walls such as these are intended for any other purpose than to keep out unwanted visitors, they are likely a primitive defensive structure controlled from within the capital." Niklas hypothesized.

"Well, if there likely isn't a front entrance, it would be best not to waste any time attempting to find one by circling the premises, the wall's surface is completely smooth, and I doubt we will be able to scale it, what is our strategy for getting around it Niklas?" Frank walked the group through the situation, before asking Niklas for his advice.

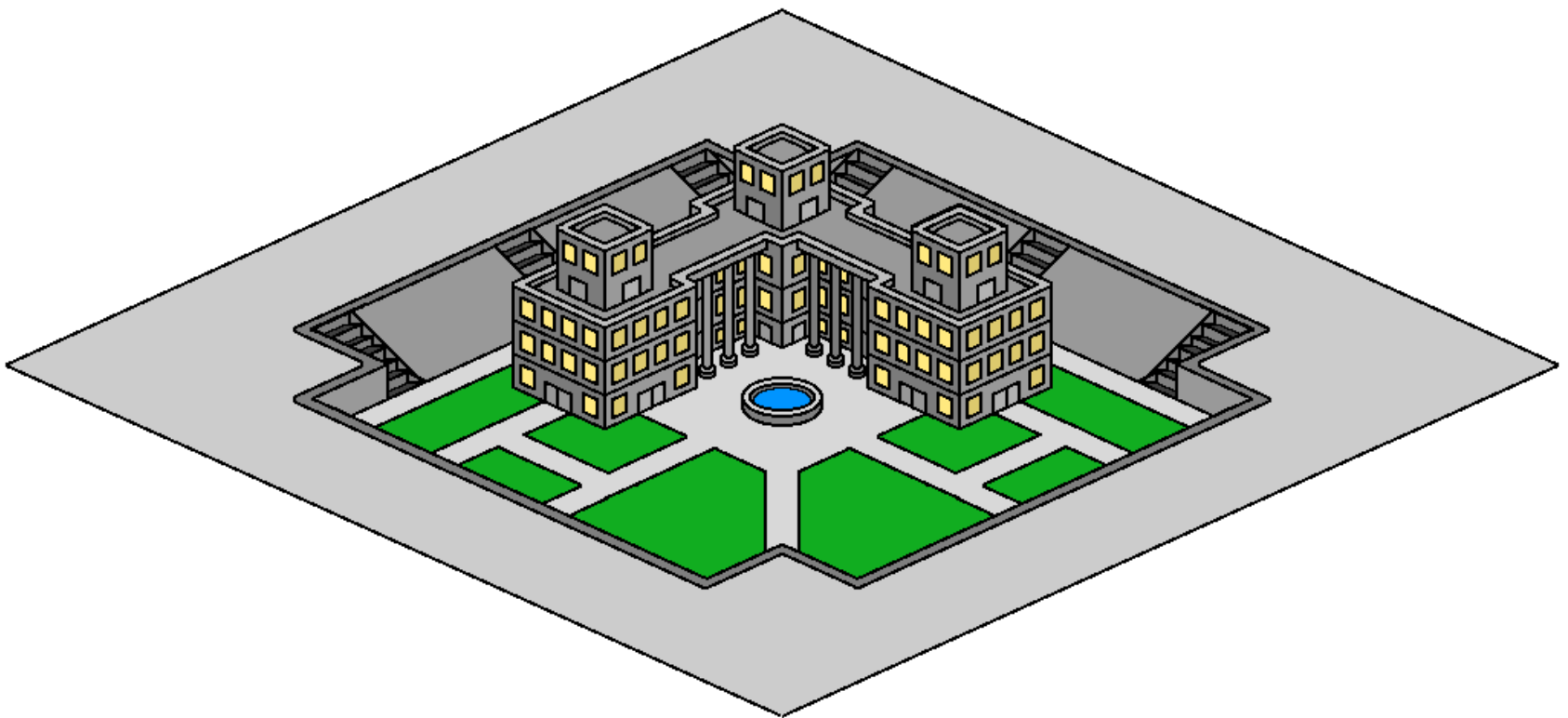
Before Niklas could start to ponder on the issue, Kraz spoke up: "I think you forgot to ask a member of the team about their thoughts on the situation, and it just so happens that that member has the solution to our problem." Kraz fell to a knee as he swung the medium sized pack off his back and set it on the street.

"Perhaps I was indeed mistaken." Frank apologized as Kraz pulled a long rope and hook from his pack before fastening it again to his back. Kraz didn't respond to Frank's concession, instead he took a few steps backwards from the base of the wall began to swing the rope and hook in circles with ever increasing vigor until he thrust it up and over the wall where it caught the edge created by the inner side of the wall and its surface.

"You won't be getting any praise from me until you prove that you can actually get to the top of the wall with that jury-rigged grappling system. You haven't even caught it around a pole or any secure surface for that matter, once it slips, you're going to be falling fast, and I don't plan on trying to catch you." Niklas critiqued Kraz's coarse methods, but his belittling didn't stop Kraz.

"Just you watch, and it doesn't matter whether it is secure or not, just so long as I keep good tension in the line, I will be fine." Kraz said as he placed a foot against the base of the wall before lifting the rest of his body to match it. And with that Kraz began to walk up the side of the wall. It wasn't a minute before Kraz had reached the top, but just as he was reaching his arm out to stabilize himself atop it, he allowed the line to slack just a bit, and the hook flew out of its unsecured position and into the air. Luckily for Kraz, he was able to hold onto the wall with his arm and subsequently swing his body until he could catch the top of the wall with his leg. From there he pulled himself up completely, and whilst standing atop the wall shouted down to his comrades, "Do you mind throwing that rope back up here, I'll help pull you non-believers up."

Frank let out a small laugh and threw up the rope while Niklas mumbled in disbelief. The rest of the trio were hoisted up, and as they all stood atop the four-foot-thick wall they turned around in unison to gaze at the capital's immaculate gardens which extended for acres around a large building which sat in one corner of the area, reaching outwards with two additional wings around a central plaza that housed beautiful tilework and a central fountain.



Niklas judged that the entirety of the complex must have sat at least twenty feet below street level, adding up to forty feet below where they currently stood atop the thick walls surrounding the immense gardens. Kraz's rope was just longer than the outer walls were tall, but it wasn't a straight drop down, at the elevation where the wall's base met the street, the land gradually sloped in, so sliding down its surface wouldn't have been any problem, this, Niklas judged, would likely be their method of descending, but as he analyzed the wall, he noticed that the inner surfaces weren't smooth like the outer ones, instead they had little indents running from the top to the bottom of the wall forming ladders in certain places.

"I think that we can say now with certainty that the threat is an abomination" stated Frank as they trio descended the wall's long ladder.

"What reasoning leads you to claiming that?" asked Kraz.

As Frank reached the bottom of the ladder he stepped aside and after taking another long look at the capitals unoccupied grounds, stated: "first of all, they raised the defensive walls, yet haven't positioned any personal to man them. Even if the walls were raised to defend the capital against the public, it just doesn't make sense to leave them to be scaled without further preventions. If the threat is indeed an abomination, regular soldiers would be ineffective in the first place, so why bother putting them in a forward position where they would simply get themselves killed, instead of in a rear position where they could at least make a last stand."

"I hope you don't intend to compare me to any regular soldier that you claim would be ineffective against their kind Frank. I also don't see any reason to conclude that the worst-case scenario is upon us, I won't believe it to be a real threat until I see it with my own eyes, and if it just so happens to be realized, I could kill it single handedly." Kraz said, growing tired of the sentiment that he would prove inefficient in a swordsman's fight.

"That attitude is going to get you killed Kraz, you are not here to be the star of the show, you never were, you were assigned here with us as support just like Raphael, and it would be a damn shame to see you go out in such ironic fashion on your first such mission." Frank's sudden switch in tone gave both Niklas and Kraz whiplash, which only highlighted to them his seriousness of the situation. Kraz wouldn't speak up again, and as a result the group was silent as they walked through narrow paved pathways through the capitals gardens towards its large marble doors.

Cornelius and Torben walked slowly down the steep sloping rail tunnels, now several hundred meters below the surface of the colony. The intense heat of the tunnels was beginning to wear down on Torben, and he asked Cornelius if they were approaching the resupply depot, "Cornelius, just how much deeper do we have to go before we arrive as the bunker's resupply station?"

Cornelius redirected the beam from his flashlight away from the tunnel proper, and down towards a large paper map that the pair had acquired from a military office they had passed by while entering the tunnels. Cornelius then pulled out a bronze military issue pocket watch and said, "We passed the rail intersection that led up towards the heavy munitions storage facility just over twenty minutes ago, so I would expect us to arrive at the resupply station relatively soon, but the extra time required to walk down these steep tunnels with control has certainly taken a toll on our speed."

Cornelius leveled his flashlight with the tunnel once more, and the pair continued forwards. As they continued to penetrate deeper and deeper however, the heat continued to dig away as Torben's will, and he could swear that he heard footsteps trailing behind the pair. They were always near exactly in sync with either Torben or Cornelius's footsteps, but occasionally they would trip up for a moment or kick some noticeable amount of gravel about. Several times Torben would swiftly stop in his place, hoping to catch their illusive follower off guard as he followed Cornelius's walking pattern, but every time he failed. Torben knew he couldn't ask Cornelius to stop, or it would tip off their follower as well. The few times that he raised his concerns with Cornelius he was dismissed as being on edge, and when they shone the bright beams of their flashlights up the steep tunnel, they would appear empty, but Torben knew that this was an impossibility.

Torben's hand would begin to cramp as he clutched the hilt of his blade, and could swear he hear their pursuer tapping on the steel rail lines that ran along their feet. As he looked towards Cornelius to judge his reaction, he could only see a face filled with annoyance, and thought it best not to bring up the issue again, though he knew he would regret not pushing the subject further if the pair would meet their end in these

tunnels. Droplets of sweat fell from his face and down towards the cold rocky ground below his feet, and he was beginning to feel nauseous with the ever-increasing heat of the tunnel. It wouldn't be long before his knees would give out and he himself would fall to the ground.

Though the gravel was coarse and sharp, and his palms and face now torn and bleeding, he was brought back to his senses by the refreshing coolness of both the blood running down his face, and the cold ground he lay against. He was also brought back to his senses by being aggressively pulled up to his knees by Cornelius, followed swiftly by a hard slap across his face.

"Get it together Torben! And for the love of God stop gripping the hilt of your blade so hard, all the rattling it's doing in your sheath is driving me insane!" spat Cornelius as he let Torben go again and continued walking forwards through the tunnel. Torben, though having been raised to his knees, would fall back onto the palms of his hands on the gravel floor, it took everything he had to stop himself from collapsing again. Torben didn't believe he had it in him to continue, he was ready to surrender his soul to their pursuer, this was until Cornelius informed him of what lay ahead, "Look at the tunnel Torben, it is beginning to flatten out, and I do believe I can see the rear end of a rail car, we must be arriving at the resupply station now." That was all that Torben needed to hear, he got to his feet and allowed a small smile to grow across his face as he thought about entering the heat-controlled bunker, and getting away from whatever elusive being was seeking after them in the dark.

The pair entered the resupply station proper, it was a long rectangular room, and a junction of sorts for the underground rail system. Several rail cars sat static on the loading docks around the room. Cornelius and Torben were unconcerned with the greater intricacies of the station, instead they headed for the far wall of the room, which housed a massive door, which would lead into the bunker proper. To the side of the that door sat a complex control panel, and as Torben anxiously analyzed it, a gunshot shattered the welcome silence of the station, followed in quick succession by a "ping!" sound formed by the collision of a bullet and a wall.

Torben, unsure of what was happening sprinted for cover behind one of the rail carts, while Cornelius took swift, decisive action. Thirty feet before him stood the silhouette of a frail, old man, and in less than a second, Cornelius's unsheathed his blade, grabbed the man's arm which held the gun, pushed it away from both himself and Torben, and proceeded to pin the man against one of the rail cars.

The man was unprepared the quick counter-assault, and found himself quite immobilized with Cornelius's blade stuck through his forearm, and into the thick metal walls of one of the military's rail cars. The gun he was holding was taken from him, and he fell to his knees, shortly thereafter he suffered a brutal impact caused by the quick striking of Cornelius's knee against his face.

"Who are you? Why did you fire at us? Why are you outside?" Cornelius shouted the flurry of questions towards the frail old man, but the man's eyes would never meet his. Cornelius could feel something was off about the man, his arm had been skewered and his nose broken from his strikes, but he didn't appear to feel any pain, in fact he was smiling to himself. This enraged Cornelius, and resulted in the man being struck again. "What the hell do you have to smile about?" Cornelius spat.

"It's just like she said! I'd find the men walking in the tunnels! She was right! Fate smiles upon me! I was designated to survive! I live!" The man continually muttered to himself, and it was made clear to Cornelius that the man was deranged.

"Is it over?" Asked Torben.

"Yes, let's get that door open." Answered Cornelius as he removed his blade from the man's arm, and began to drag him along.

Cornelius and Torben wandered through the empty lower halls of the bunker, in an even more confused state, the hallways were filled with rifles, body armor, jackets, fatigues, and other equipment. Torben now lead the charge, as Cornelius was forced to drag the man behind them, he still hadn't come to his feet, he just mumbled to himself about how loved he was by fate. Torben moved forwards with a great haste, he wanted to ascend from the depths as quickly as possible, even after entering the bunker, the heat of the underground

Eventually the three would come upon the first civilian section of the bunker, a massive commons area filled with long lines of tables, covered with every style, size, and assortment of clothing.

"What on earth is going on here? Where is everyone?" Asked Cornelius, befuddled, and dropping the man.

The man would, for the first time since entering the bunker, raise his head and analyze his surroundings, and in response to the scene would begin to freak out, "Take me away from this place! I was promised to be spared from this fate! I don't want to die! She promised! I am loved! Loved by fate! Take me away!"

Niklas took the initiative in entering the building, followed by Frank, and lastly Kraz. The group would continue to walk with a new caution through the empty halls of the capital building.

