

Final Sanctuary Gaulon – Chapter Three

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Chapter Three

Twenty five years have passed and I can still remember the screams. I was six years old when the Infected devastated my village and the memories from that day still haunt me, memories so dark that they leave me second guessing my beliefs and faith in God. Yet, the bitter irony is that it was my faith that sustained me in the aftermath of that fateful day. It was my beliefs that gave me the strength to go on and rebuild. Ninety men, women and children died on that day. I was one of just four survivors. Why did I survive? Was it dumb luck, random chance or was my survival preordained by a higher power? All I know for sure was that I was rescued by a man with the same codename as my current superior officer; a man named Lazarus. His face was different, so very different, but his smile was the same. His comrades looked up to him and one of them, an Israeli man, had the same codename I now use: Vulcan.

After losing my family, it took me a long time to get back on my feet. I clung to two things; my faith in the Bible and my willingness to put an end to the pestilence that has ravaged the World. The people who rescued me left me at a Christian orphanage on the outskirts of the Gaulon Sanctuary. I didn't quite fit in there. I was grateful for their teachings and for taking me in, but it never felt like home. I spent my adolescence training myself up. I read as much as I could about the outside world, everything from politics to modern weaponry. I trained myself in martial arts and hand to hand combat. By the age of 16 I was ready to leave the orphanage and make my mark on the world. I ran away and spent the next six months moving from town to town, working freelance and struggling to make enough money for food. That was the worst six months of my life; things picked up after that when I hooked up with a group of scavengers. They called themselves Wolf Steel. Tough as nails, they were mercenaries for hire. We travelled across the remnants of the United States of America, pillaging anything of value from the ruins of the former superpower. Along the way we fought anyone who crossed our path; gangsters, the Infected and even a couple of terrorist groups.

I stuck with Wolf Steel for five years, when one day we heard rumors of an old military base loaded with experimental weapons. The best part was that the building had been inaccessible for centuries due to seismic activity. A recent earthquake had stabilised the area just enough for us to gain access to the base. When we got there we soon found out that there was

another reason why the base had been abandoned. The scientists at the facility had been working on a new kind of artificial intelligence. This A.I. had gone haywire, taken control of most of the technological systems in the base and was intent on killing anything that moved. It was then that Lazarus and his team, The Immortals, showed up. Lazarus had aged a fair bit, his hair had gone grey and his skin had dried and wrinkled somewhat but I'd recognise that smile anywhere. We combined forces but suffered heavy losses fighting against the A.I. Wolf Steel was all but wiped out, I alone survived. Lazarus and his second in command, a woman going by the codename of Vulcan, were both killed in the battle.

I returned with The Immortals to RavenCroft, where I signed on as a freelance operative accompanying the team on missions on an as-needed basis. The replacements they had ready for the Immortals were about as useful as a chair with the legs sawn off. The new Lazarus was an incompetent leader lacking confidence whereas the replacement Vulcan began to suffer from shell-shock after he was nearly killed by a sniper on his third mission.

Following two months of botched missions they offered me a place on the team. I took on not just the mantle of Vulcan, but also the same biosuit. Entirely unique, the biosuit boosts my strength eight times over. While wearing the biosuit I can lift cars or crush a skull with my bare hands. More importantly the biosuit protects me from most injuries and is almost completely impervious to bullets. Finally they provided me with a pair of titanium laced gloves and some heavy artillery. My weapon of choice is a Pulse Cannon, an energy based weapon with an organic power generator. Capable of firing an energy blast that can blow a man's head to pieces or alternatively punch a hole through an armoured tank. Man, I love that gun. By setting the power generator to critical I can also have it self destruct causing enough damage to incinerate anything in a ten meter radius. I also typically carry a small assault rifle, a 9mm sidearm, my trusty combat knife and a generous amount of explosives and grenades.

Twelve years on and life hasn't gotten any easier. I spend my days going on mission after mission, fighting everything from anti-corporate terrorists to crime syndicates and of course hunting the Infected. Two days ago my team was given a simple mission. It was supposed to be easy; just fly into a research facility and airlift out a scientist by the name of Doctor Addler. Also taking along with his research before it got overrun by The Infected. We knew the scientist had gone over to GenFourier and that they wouldn't hand him over without a fight. What we didn't know was that he had begun experimenting on human beings. GenFourier had even set up a whole town nearby, just so he would have plenty of test subjects. He hadn't gone easy on them either; he was infecting them with the Death Plague and was running various tests, trying out drugs and doing God knows what else to them. When the facility got hit by hundreds of Infected and the not so good Doctor was infected himself, we were forced to improvise. We were able to stop GenFourier from completing their evacuation plan, but the Doctor eluded capture albeit with one of his hands missing. Long story short; I had no choice but to stay behind and hold back the Infected so that my team could escape. With less than twenty minutes before the building gets blown three ways to hell I knew I had my work cut out for me. I had to clear the blast radius and get my hands on some signal flares to notify the rest of my team of my location.

I slowly open my eyes and the room comes into focus. For a few seconds it's a blur along with my memories of the mission. I recognise the ceiling, I've seen it more than a dozen times. I'm in the medlab at The Vault. My body feels completely numb, that's bad, it means the doctors have pumped me full of painkillers. I've been out cold for God knows how long. Don't know what time it is or even what day it is. I move my hand down my chest, it's bandaged up, flesh feels kinda soft underneath. I force myself to sit up, it ain't easy. I have to do it slowly, don't want to rip through any stitches I've got. Next to the bed is a pitcher of water and an empty glass. I pour myself a drink since my throat's dry as a desert. I try to gulp it down too fast, and choke on it when some goes down the wrong pipe. When I cough I feel the pain in my chest flair up in spite of the painkillers.

Doctor Fisk, the company's top physician hears me coughing up a lung and rushes in.

"Take it easy Malcolm, you're not fit enough to stand yet. You had severe internal bleeding, you're lucky to be alive. You should never have pulled out that piece of metal, it probably did more damage going out than it did going in. The good news is that your biosuit repaired itself almost instantly and prevented your wounds from getting infected. You should make a full recovery," he says as he checks my vitals on the machines I'm hooked up to. Fisk's a nice guy but I see him far too often.

"I've survived worse, remember last year when I was sent to the Ukraine, man I got shot up so badly it took me a month to recover, even with the Cellular Regeneration Unit running on full," I reply.

"How could I forget? It took me nine hours to yank all those slugs out of of you. Take it easy, you need your rest. I'll bring you a walking stick to help you get around in the morning," he replies as he turns to leave the room.

"Wait!," I call back. "What about the others? They get out alright?"

"They're fine, you're the only with serious injuries, get some sleep Malcolm. Your body needs time to recover," he calls back before shutting the door.

Every instinct in my body tells me to get out of here and find the rest of my crew, but I know better. I ain't risking it. Tried that once and it cost me an extra week in rehab. I close my eyes and slowly I start to drift off. I dream of missions long past, of my fights with the Infected. The images haunt me most nights. A part of me is grateful for them, the nightmares remind me that I'm human.

When I awake in the morning my body still aches from the mission. The doctors have me pumped full of pain killers, so I feel a little groggy but not much pain. I help myself to another glass of water, but this time I drink a little slower.

If there's one thing I hate it's spending days on end lying down in a hospital bed. I'm the kinda guy who has to be doing something constructive with his time. I made a vow to myself a long time ago never to waste my time sitting on my arse doing nothing. There's a clock on

the wall. It's ten past seven. I've been in hospitals often enough now to know that organic stitches take around five hours to strengthen and genetically bond to a patient. Since around six hours had passed I made the decision to check myself out. The walking stick wasn't around as promised. I hit the buzzer by the side of the bed.

Moments later one of the nurses walks in and sees me sitting up. I vaguely recognise her as one of the newer staff members.

"Hey! You're finally up. I'll go get Doctor Fisk," she announces from the doorway before going back the way she came.

A couple of minutes later Doctor Fisk comes through the door carrying that walking stick he promised. Just looking at it makes me feel old.

"Morning Malcolm. You still look like crap, but that'll pass once the burns heal up and the swelling goes down."

"Great. So how long you reckon I'll be benched for?" I ask not really wanting to know the answer.

The smile leaves the doctor's face. I know then that the prognosis ain't good. "Get used to that walking stick pal, you'll need it for the next couple of weeks. I've spoken with Graeves already. You'll be scrubbed from combat missions for the next month I'm afraid."

I felt that sinking feeling in my gut. I knew there wasn't a damn thing I could do about the doctor's decision. Still I had questions about the mission which needed answers.

"Aww. Hell no!" I say back in frustration.

"Hell yes!" Fisk responds. "And that's assuming your body heals up on schedule. If you want to be back on active duty in four weeks and not five I suggest you do everything the physiotherapist tells you. Oh and before I forget, Graeves started debriefing the rest of your team half an hour ago. If you leave now you can probably catch up with them. They're in the debriefing room on level two."

I carefully pull myself out of bed and grab the walking stick. I check the clock; it's around twenty past eight. Hanging up on the door are some of my clothes. "Sounds like a plan," I reply as I carefully walk towards the door and grab my clothes. Walking hurts like hell but I've endured worse in the past.

"I want you back here in three hours, I still need to run a few more tests," Fisk tells me as I start putting on my jeans.

When I get to the room on level two, the others are already inside getting grilled by Graeves.

"No, I think it's blatantly clear. If you had gone back none of you would have got out of that building alive," says Graeves.

"Wouldn't be so sure about that," I say as I push open the door and step into the room. "We've gotten outta worse scrapes. I just didn't think it was worth taking the risk. But don't be so hard on her, the gal had just lost her best chance of getting some answers after losing her husband."

"Ah, Mr Jones," says Graeves looking up. "It's good to see you up and about, I'll take your comments under consideration."

"Malcolm! It's really you?! We were beginning to wonder if you'd survived at all," said Claire appearing both shocked and excited to see that I'd pulled through.

"Really? As visits to the medlab go that was one of the shorter ones. Did I ever tell you about that mission in the Ukraine?"

"For the love of Jeebus please say yes! I've only heard that story a billion fragging times," butted in Nate.

Before Claire could answer Graeves cut in. "Mr Jones, take a seat. We've been going over the mission in greater detail, so that a complete account of the mission can be made and assessed. So far we have yet to hear what happened to you after you covered your team's escape at the research facility. Could you in your own words tell us how you got back to the team?"

"With great difficulty... Claire and Liam were going to the roof while I was holding back the Infected...." I reply as I ease myself into a chair.

I was in the corridor which led to the roof of the complex firing back at the Infected with my assault rifle. Their screeches of pain and suffering could barely be heard over the sound of the gunfire. My main concern was ammunition. I was running low on bullets so I switched over to manual and begun hitting them with precision shots to the head. When the hallway began to clear I made my way back down to the corridor. I had to find a way out of the building and back to the others. First though I needed to get my hands on some signal flares.

Anyone who has encountered the Infected in the field knows that they possess a surprising degree of intelligence. They are not the mindless hordes of zombie-like creatures that the media paints them as. I remember back in Istanbul last year, the mission with the business delegates who were held up in an embassy. The Infected had control of one half the building. Most of the people died in that area before we got there. Now what was interesting is that they kept some people alive. Not only that but they ripped through the wiring in the building and shorted out the power. The people they didn't kill, they used as bait. They'd set up a kill-zone and used the survivors to lure us in. The Infected are many things, but stupid ain't one of them. It's for that reason that I refused to take the elevator. If I had KillSwitch with me

things would have been different. The kid had access to all the systems in the complex. If someone was messing with the elevators he would see it on the surveillance cameras. With me not knowing what the Infected had tampered with, I decided to proceed with caution and take the stairs.

I ran towards the staircase on the left wing. After clearing my way through the corridor and disposing of the last of the Infected in the immediate area, I hit the stairs. More of the Infected were running up towards me as I ran down the stairs leading to the third floor. I grabbed an assault rifle from one of the GenFourier corpses and opened fire. That was when the lights went out. The sun had already set about an hour ago leaving the building in total darkness. I didn't have any fragging clue if the lights and the self-destruct mechanism were wired on the same system. My gut feeling was that the building was still gonna explode so I kept moving.

The staircase spiraled down through the whole building. As I approached the entrance to the third floor, I could hear the Infected moving towards me. It was too dark to see them and it was impossible to know how many of them there were blocking my way since the only lighting I had came from the assault rifle when it fired. I shot dead about seven of the Infected, but I could hear a lot more headed towards me. The problem was two-fold, I could only see the Infected when I fired my gun, which made it difficult to aim. In order to hit the Infected I had to use the rapid fire mode on the gun, but that quickly chewed through ammunition.

As I walked down the stairs firing short bursts from the rifle, I noticed a door leading to the third floor. I slabbed an explosive against the wall and dived through the door. The explosion lit up the area, as a colourful assortment of charred body parts flew through the air. The explosion set part of the staircase on fire. I breathed a sigh of relief as I walked into the lab room which I'd passed through earlier with the stasis chambers. I checked my watch, there were twelve minutes left on the clock. I had to pick up the pace.

The lab room was much emptier than the staircase. There were four infected hostiles in the room, feeding on what remained of Addler's test subjects. The closest hostile to me was a woman in her thirties, chewing on a severed arm. There were also two males in their twenties, one a fat hairy slob of a man and the other a more muscular guy. Last and also least was an elderly woman who staggered because of her age. Their clothing had been reduced to rags and on the surface there didn't appear to be any traces of their humanity left, but that didn't make me feel any better about ending their lives. I reached for my 9mm revolver and took aim, at the younger woman. Shooting her through the head with a single shot. The other three headed towards me. I instinctively fired at the two male hostiles first killing them with single shots to the head. I aimed at the elderly woman who had staggered a little too close to comfort. My gun jammed when I pulled the trigger. I threw it to the ground as she took a swing at me with her left arm. I ducked and lunged back at her, grabbing her by the neck and pushing her to the ground. I snapped her neck with my bare hands and prayed to God that she was the last of them. Knowing only too well that I was most definitely not alone.

As I turned to leave back the way I came I heard a voice call out.

"Wait up! Let me go with you!" cried out the voice of a young male.

I scanned across the room until I landed on a young man crouched down and hiding behind one of the computer desks. He was in his early twenties, hadn't shaved in days and his clothes looked as ragged as those found on the Infected. He had armed himself with an assault rifles from one of the GenFourier troops.

"Name's Logan, Logan Ferguson," he added. "I was taken captive a week ago. From your clothes I'm guessing you're not with the company. Who the hell are you?"

"Forget you saw me and get out of the building kid. This place is wired to explode and I ain't running an escort serv..." I started to say.

Before I could finish, Logan raised his rifle and sprayed a round of ammunition into a couple of Infected behind me. I clenched my fist and swung around and smashed in the head of a third Infectee.

"Then again, a second set of hands could come in handy. Just don't fall behind and be careful where you shoot that thing, you almost took off my left ear," I told him.

"Umm... Sorry," apologised Logan. "I've never fired a gun before."

"Forget about it." I said as I helped him up. "Name's Vulcan. I'm part of a scavenger group, we were staging a raid on this place when the Infected hit. My team mates got out with me covering them. The plan is they pick up as many survivors as they can and come back for me."

I turned to go back down the stairs with Logan following behind, the flames out in the stairway having died down enough for us to continue.

"Great! What's the catch?" Logan asked as we heard the elevator approaching our floor.

"The power in the building is starting to cut out as the Infected tear into the wiring. The self-destruct system is set to go off in about twelve minutes. Communication between us and my crew are fragged to Hell thanks to the electrical storm and the signal flares are on the ground level which is swamped with Infectees. Any questions?" I asked as I took out a block of explosive and slid it across the ground to the elevator.

"Move! Move!" I shouted as we ran away from the door. As I heard the door opening I detonated the explosive by remote control. Not knowing if it was GenFourier troops or another group of Infected who were inside. We didn't look back as we ran down the corridor.

"We're fragged!" said Logan running beside me.

"It ain't over yet kid. What's your story anyway?" I asked as we reached the stairs.

"I'm part of an underground network exposing the shady business practices carried out by the Corporations," replied Logan. "We heard rumours that GenFourier were experimenting on human beings so we went in to investigate. My partner monitored things in the town, while I infiltrated the research facility. I went in posing as a scientist and found out things which would make you turn white, but before I could tell anyone, I was captured."

Thankfully there weren't any infected hostiles in front of us. The first explosion must've taken them all out. I switched to my assault rifle again, hoping I wouldn't run out of bullets before we could get out. As we quickly went down the stairs I noticed a lot of sound coming from the bottom of the staircase. I had no God damn idea how many Infected were down there, but I estimated their numbers to be somewhere between thirty and sixty and there was no way in Hell I could hold out against that many. I was almost out of ammunition and I had only three explosives and three grenades left. We could hear movement at the bottom and when we looked down over the side of the stairs we could see several infected humans lurking about. I got the impression that they were actually waiting, eager to ambush us with greater numbers once we got to the ground level. Worse still we had about seven minutes left to make our escape.

"Frag the flares!" I exclaimed. "Looks like we're gonna have to improvise and find another way outta here. Hope you ain't afraid of heights, kid." I said as I pulled the cap and tossed a grenade to the bottom of the staircase. The explosion blew apart the concrete stairs below us making it impossible for the infected to climb out and attack us. As an added bonus some of the Infected had been caught in the explosion.

"Are you fragging insane?! You'll have us both blown to pieces at the rate you're going!" Logan shouted as un-clasped his hands from his ears.

"Sanity's a luxury we can't afford right now." I said as I planned my next move.

The explosion had broken away a chunk of the wall allowing us to see outside. The hole wasn't big enough for us to get outside, but I knew how to fix that. Using my titanium enhanced gloves to cushion the impact and the additional strength I gain from my biosuit. I managed to widen the hole making it big enough to pass through.

"I'm not jumping down there," Scoffed Logan as he looked out the opening I'd just made. "It's way too high and even if we somehow survive the jump, the Infected will be all over us."

I took a look outside and I realised that our problems were only just beginning. It was pitch black outside. The only thing I could see was a garage about thirty feet away, lit up by a single lightbulb. It was being heavily guarded by about fifteen Infectees. The garage most likely contained our only means of escape. I had to avoid using any of my explosives. No way in Hell was I gonna risk blowing up any vehicles. This was one battle I'd have to win with hand to hand combat.

"Oh, we're jumping." I assured Logan. "We've only got a couple of minutes before this building explodes. Now I'm hoping that there's a car or a truck in that garage over there. I'll head in, get out and pick you up. You just hang tight once we get to the ground and cover me. Switch your rifle to single shot mode and for frag's sake watch what you're doing."

Two minutes left on the clock, no time to second guess the situation. Have to go in I said to myself. I picked up Logan in spite of his protests and jumped to the ground. My biosuit absorbed the impact though I'm pretty sure I twisted an ankle. Couldn't deal with that for the moment. I put Logan down and ran as fast as I could towards the garage door, smashing through it and one of the Infected on my way through. I knocked him to the ground inside and punched his head at full strength, my fist smashing through his skull.

Inside the garage was a jeep, but I had little time to celebrate. The dozen or so Infected outside the garage were starting to run inside. Had to think fast. I took out my assault rifle and fired at the first few Infected as they ran inside whilst I backed up to the jeep. I'd taken out about seven of the bastards when I realised my gun had finally run out of ammo. The corpses; a mixture of young and old, male and female Infected fell to the ground. I punched a short bald Infected who was probably in his forties at full strength knocking him through the air and out of the garage. I grabbed a broom from against the wall and snapped off the brush section. I stabbed it through the chest of a younger Infected, a teenaged girl of medium build and one ear missing. The blow killed her instantly, I pulled it out and kicked her into the others. I then grabbed my combat knife and clenched the knife's handle as tightly as I could before quickly slashing it across three Infected, ripping through their stomachs. They shrieked out in pain and collapsed to the ground. I backed up and stabbed the blade down into their foreheads one at a time until the blade got stuck. It was at that moment that the facility finally exploded. The sound was deafening. I'll bet good money you could have heard it back in town. The explosion lit up the night sky as the burning rubble rained down.

The explosion distracted the remaining Infected, as some of the debris came crashing down in and around the garage, giving me the time I needed to get back to the Jeep and jump in. I prayed that the keys would still be in the ignition, but no luck today. I hot-wired the engine as the Infected began storming into the garage with greater numbers. I put the jeep into reverse and drove outside at full speed, ramming into three more hostiles on the way out and crushing some of the ones I'd killed moments earlier. The fuel tank was low but hopefully it had enough gas to get us back to town. I flicked on the headlights and spotted Logan.

Logan was outside with dozens of Infected headed his way. He'd taken out a couple by the look of it. A tall and well-built Infected, albeit shirtless and hairy, was about to get the jump on him. I pressed my foot on the accelerator and plowed straight into him, mangling the Infected body. The jeep was dented but still drivable; Logan jumped in and I sped off back down towards town. I found what looked like a road leading to Ragnus and we were on our way. The road ran through a forest on the outskirts of town.

"Now that I've got your ass out of there. How bout you tell me what in God's name they were doing to the townspeople?" I asked.

Logan looked spooked and he froze before answering "At first we thought they were trying to develop a cure to the Virus. Finding out how the infection process works, track every stage of the infection and find out what drugs if any would stop it. I guess that's why they took the townspeople, then I realised I was wrong. I don't think they were developing a cure. I overheard the other scientists talking but they never once mentioned a cure. It sounded like... like they were more interested in isolating specific traits from the Virus. What's the one thing that differentiates the Death Plague from other viruses that have shown up throughout history?" asked Logan.

"It frags you up and turns you into a cannibalistic killing machine?" I replied.

"Yup and it does that by rewriting chunks of the human genome. I'm betting that's what they're doing. I think that they're trying to find ways of isolating the part of the virus responsible for boosting the human healing rate," speculated Logan.

A feeling of dread washed over me. I wasn't keyed up on genetics but I knew enough to know that this was the kind of technology you didn't mess with.

"Even if they could do that, why would they? GenFourier makes billions each month through pharmaceuticals. If they found a way for humans to rapidly recover from illnesses and injuries, then their stockpile of pharmaceuticals would become worthless. They'd stand to lose billions" I said, still trying to get my head around the whole concept.

"Good point, I don't know. Maybe they want to reverse engineer the Virus so they can change other things in the human genome. Hell, your guess is as good as mine," speculated Logan as I turned the jeep on to a bigger road leading to Ragnus.

"With the facility gone we'll probably never know." I replied as my thoughts drifted to how Logan had escaped.

"So tell me, how'd you get out of there anyway? Thought you said they had you locked up?"

Logan sighed before answering. "I got lucky. I began hearing things outside about how they were evacuating the facility. It sounded like they were planning on closing up shop, taking their research and leaving me and the other test subjects behind."

"So how many other prisoners were there?" I asked.

"Not sure, my best guess was around seven excluding those who'd already been taken to the lab. I was in a cell at the end of a corridor which led to the lab where you found me. My room, if you can even call it that, was about the size of a mattress. There was a toilet in one corner and that was more or less it. The only way inside was through a single door which was electronically locked. Food was passed through a small flap on the bottom, too small for a person to crawl through. Near as I could tell, we were all kept isolated from one another, one person per cell. Then about an hour ago I heard a lot of commotion, screams and shouting as the Infected broke into the building," said Logan.

I switched the jeep over to cruise control as I turned to Logan "Can't have been easy being stuck in there, with no way out," I said.

"Tell me about it. I thought I was screwed for sure. Anyway as I was saying one of the guards closed the door to the labs and ran down the corridor until he was just outside my door. I pleaded with him to let me out, but he just ignored me. The Infected broke through the door and I thought I was fragged for sure. The guard was armed with a rifle and opened fire at the Infected. There were too many and because the corridor was so narrow, The Infected just used one of their number as a shield to take all the bullets allowing them to get in range of the guard. The poor guy was torn limb from limb and ripped to pieces. I got lucky, the Infected couldn't break through the door. Kind of ironic that I'd been wanting to get out of that room and escape and in the end it was being in there that saved me. After a few minutes of trying to get inside, they gave up and went back the way they came. Then when they started shutting down chunks of the power grid, the electronic lock was deactivated and I was able to get out along with the other prisoners who ran out while I grabbed the gun from the dead guard. I waited for five minutes, just to make sure the lab was clear before running into the lab which is where I met up with you."

As Logan spoke I glanced at his left shoulder and I noticed marks and blood seeping onto his shirt. I slammed on the breaks. Logan's head slammed into the window, but not hard enough to cause any real damage. The jeep screeched to a halt in the middle of a dusty road bordered by pine trees.

"What the Hell?!" snarled Logan as he rubbed his forehead and checked for blood. He wasn't bleeding and at that moment I couldn't care less.

I grabbed the kid by the throat and pressed him against the jeep door. "Those claw marks on your shoulder, when did you get them?!"

Logan dropped the gun and tried to break free but to no avail.

"When you were getting the jeep. I... I got jumped. Let me go!" he gasped.

I released my grip from his throat. As I looked into his eyes I noticed a slight discolouration. He was in the early stages of infection. I had two choices either kill him now or wait till the Virus drains out his soul. I wasn't happy with either of the two options.

"You're nuts! This is just a scratch, I'll be fine," he replied as he adjusted his shirt.

"If I was infected you'd have seen some side effects by now," he muttered.

I looked at the kid straight in the eyes before answering "You want side effects? Look at you! You're skin's as white as a ghost, your eyes are changing colour and those claw marks are already starting to heal. Don't take a genius to connect the dots here."

"You're imagining things. My skin's fragging pale because of everything we've just been through!" He shouted back.

I could see sweat running down his forehead. "Snap out of it! You idiot. You're changing and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it." I shouted trying to shake some sense into him.

Logan carefully looked at his hands before answering. His nails were starting to change into claws. "I'm not gonna make it am I? I thought if I kept it from you then, there was a chance I was just imagining things. If I didn't have to confront it then it was as if it wasn't happening. Only deep down I knew it was real and I couldn't stop it." He stuttered.

"I wish I could help you kid, I really do, but the only cure we have is a bullet to the head. You want to stick with me, for what time you have left, that's fine. But you got to understand you won't be you by the end of the hour." I told him.

I could see tears starting to streak down his face. "There's really no way out of this is there? Guess that means I won't be attending this year's Geek Pride Festival."

The Geek Pride Festivals dated back centuries as a celebration of all things associated with nerds and geeks. Every year the thing grew larger. I never understood the attraction of the event myself. Guess my upbringing didn't leave much time for comics, video games or sci-fi.

"Oh man! Tell me you're not one of those guys who dresses up in a spacesuit on one of those floats are you?"

"Guilty as charged," he replied. "I was a Cylon actually, but yeah I was in a float. You should have seen the Dalek float in front of us. That was awesome." Logan smiled with a look of fondness before he started to cough.

I looked down at the dashboard, the onboard positioning system showed that we'd travelled half the distance between the research facility and Ragnus. Getting this far had used up two thirds of our petrol in the gas tank. We'd run outta time, petrol and had no way of signaling the others. I drove the jeep off the road and pulled over next to a bunch of trees. The forest was denser out here which gave me an idea. I left the jeep headlights on so that we could see about three meters ahead of the car. The lights helped a lot but I was concerned as to whether they'd attract unwanted attention.

"Get outta the jeep. We ain't got enough petrol to get us back to town. We're gonna have to improvise," I said jumping out.

I had three timed explosives and two grenades left. I climbed under the jeep and attached one of the explosives under the gas tank. Though it took me a few moments to find it in the dark.

"Might be a good idea to step back," I said as I started to pull myself out from under the jeep.

I could hear the sounds of the Infected in the distance. They sounded close but it was difficult to make any shapes out in the darkness. I knew that the second I blew up the jeep, it would attract any Infected in the area.

As I stood up I heard movement coming from some bushes near the Jeep. As I looked a little more closely I saw three Infected hostiles stepping out into the open. Taking the lead was a skinny infected hippy with long hair. I slowly backed away towards Logan who had taken cover much further back. I prayed to God that this was it, that once we took out these three, we'd be safe. There were limits to how many we could take on. We only had one rifle and two explosives. As their eyes made contact with mine they began running towards me. Logan took a shot taking out the Infected Hippy leading the charge.

I detonated the explosive under the jeep prematurely. Big mistake. I hadn't cleared the blast radius. The explosion sent me flying to the ground. The heat was intense and my face was slightly burnt in the blast. My biosuit protected me from most of it but a large shard of metal managed to pierce the suit where it had been weakened from the heat. I couldn't be sure but I was fairly certain it hadn't hit any arteries. As comforting as that was, the sharp pain from having a large metal shard lodged in your ribs kinda took the joy out of knowing that I probably wouldn't bleed to death.

But we had a bigger problem, the explosion had alerted more of the Infected. The burning rubble from the jeep lit up the area. I could now see literally dozens of Infectees surrounding us. The good news was that the burning wreckage was bright enough to light up the forest. We could hear dozens more infectees running towards us. I was in absolute agony and I could barely stay conscious. I looked to Logan. His eyes were darkening and his veins were starting to become more apparent. He was shaking as he held the gun, reloading it as he backed up against a tree. I knew he didn't have much time left. Soon the Virus would take control and he'd turn on me like the rest of them. I tried to stand but the pain was excruciating. I collapsed squatting on my knees as I arched back and rested against a tree.

"I don't think I can hold out much longer! Agghh!! It feels like my body is burning from the inside out!" Logan screamed in agony.

"Fight it! Logan, fight it!" I shouted as the Infected came into sight. The Infected were circling around us preparing to strike, saliva dripping from their mouths. They snarled at us, taunting. Knowing that we had no way of escape.

I pulled the pin out of a grenade and threw it into the closest bunch of Infected. The grenade blew them to pieces but there were still far more than we could handle. They ran towards us their eyes filled with blood lust. Logan let out a howl like a wounded animal as he switched his weapon to rapid fire and started shooting at a group headed to the right of us. I could feel myself starting to lose consciousness. My only hope of survival was now Logan's ability to fight the infection until the rest of The Immortals arrived. Hopefully the exploding jeep had alerted them.

Using what remained of my strength I threw my last two explosives in opposite directions and detonated them. The combined explosions were deafening. A section of the forest had now caught fire and was burning out of control, not to mention some of the Infected.

At that moment I heard the Valkyrie approaching. I looked up and I could see our ship in the distance making a swift approach.

"Just need to hold on a little longer!" I shouted to Logan.

Logan's rifle ran out of ammunition or maybe it jammed. I'm not certain. Kid put up a real good fight. With his last ounce of humanity intact he tossed the gun aside and started mauling the Infected with his bare hands. He now possessed all the physical benefits the Virus grants its victims but had yet to be taken over. First he went after the weaker ones. Using only his bare hands and what I can only describe as a determination of iron, he made the decision to go out fighting. He clawed out the eyes of an elderly man who'd been infected before biting into the neck of a woman.

I saw glimpses of the kid in action and I gotta say, any doubts I had about the him dissolved when he went hand to hand. He grabbed a large narrow twisted piece of metal wreckage off the ground and used it as a makeshift sword. The metal was razor sharp at one end but blunt enough to carry on the other. He ran towards a dark skinned Infectee who stood one foot taller. Logan rammed the piece of metal straight through the stomach of the Infectee and then yanked it directly up ripping his chest right open. He next swung his makeshift blade to his right hacking it into the chest of an Infected, before going hand to hand with another one. The Valkyrie was so close now that it's engines blotted out the sound of the Infected. Using the last of my strength I threw my last grenade at a group of five infectees running towards me. Blowing them to pieces and leaving me defenseless.

I had to fight to stay conscious, I could see the bright lights from the Valkyrie as it hovered overhead, descending closer to the ground. I remember Lazarus calling out to me as he jumped to the ground. He pulled out his guns and started picking off the Infected as he ran over to check my condition. "How are you hanging in there Buddy?" he asked as he looked me over.

"I'm just peachy," I replied sarcastically. I looked back at Logan. His eyes had turned completely black now and he stopped fighting the Infected. He growled like a wild animal and turned his attention back to Lazarus and myself.

"Friend of yours?" asked Lazarus as Logan began running towards us.

I felt sick as I answered the question. "Not anymore. Hope your batteries are powered up."

I yanked out the piece of metal from my ribcage, the pain was unbearable but I held on for a few moments longer. I stabbed it directly into Logan's stomach as he made a lunge at us. Lazarus grabbed hold of it and charged it with electrical current setting Logan alight, after which he fell to the ground. As I started to pass-out I heard the sound of Lazarus' gun going

off and I knew it was over.

When I came to, I was back on board the Valkyrie lying on the ship's stretcher. I could no longer feel any pain. My body had been pumped with pain killers that dulled my senses. I was too weak to move or even speak. The biosuit protected my injuries, serving as a makeshift bodycast. Even so my health didn't look good from what I overheard.

I haven't had time to talk things through with Lazarus, I know that they've kept me away from the others so that we can't keep our stories straight. My gut tells me Graeves is hoping he can get me to slip up and say something that Lazarus would want to keep hidden. It took me a while to figure it out and then it clicked. When I was rescued twenty five years ago, I wasn't taken back to RavenCroft. The Immortals back then dropped me off at an orphanage. They never told their superiors about the survivors. They were on a different mission. Wouldn't tell me what it was, only that they stopped by the town purely by accident. They just happened to fly overhead and decided to look for survivors when they saw that the village had been hit. During the brief instances when I did regain consciousness I noticed that there were a lot of passengers on board. Lazarus was piloting it and my injuries were treated by one of the civilians. My guess is that he was a doctor, but it's hard to know for sure when you're semi-conscious and possibly bleeding to death from internal injuries. Instead I told Graeves what he would want to hear and hope that I didn't contradict Lazarus' report.

You all know the rest of the story. The Valkyrie docked in our landing bay and I was taken to the medlab. The Doc says I should make a full recovery. The metal shard caused some internal bleeding but that's been repaired and the injury is healing up fast. The burns will fade after a few more treatments with the C.R.U, or the Cellular Regeneration Unit if you want to be more specific, but other than that I should be ready for active service within the month.

"It's just as well you didn't come after us on foot. We were in the air when the sensors picked up the explosion. You've got more lives than a fragging cat," commented Lazarus with a smile on his face.

"Cats are stuck with just nine lives. We on the other hand are blessed with immortality," I reply feeling a sense of satisfaction that I came through the mission in one piece. I might have been battered, burned and stabbed, but I made it out alive.